

In the Beginning

by Ray C. Stedman

It hardly needs to be said that the place to begin reading a book is at the beginning. Still, many people have the habit of reading the last chapter of a book first. But if you try that with the Bible, you will become very confused indeed. The best place to begin with it is at the beginning.

- There are, however, many who find it difficult to begin with Genesis. They are thrown off by the language, which they find to be a bit stiff and somewhat antiquated, especially if they are reading one of the older versions.
- Others are discouraged because they bring to the study of this book certain infantile concepts about God and the Bible, which have been retained from their childhood. I call these “Teddy Bear” ideas. Most of us slept with a Teddy bear when we were little, but discarded it when we grew up. But unfortunately we have not discarded many of the “Teddy Bear” ideas we had as boys and girls about God and the Bible, but instead have carried them over into adult life. When we impose these Teddy Bear ideas upon the Scriptures we discover that the Bible has a tendency to turn us off, and that the book becomes dull and uninteresting to us, and understandably so.
- Still others come to Genesis rather prejudiced by the widespread rejection of this book as unscientific or primitive in its concepts. So they read the book, especially the first chapters, with a sense of distaste. They read it simply to be informed about a book that is as widely known as this. But they are already prejudiced

against it, and consequently they never really see what is here. They never really hear the words of this book.

Therefore, I would like to suggest that in this present series we attempt to read this book as though we had never read it before, to carefully note what is said here, and what is not said. We must remember, as we study, that Genesis is the first chapter of the story that ends with the presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the declaration of the way God has found to obtain the release of human life from despair and death, and to bring it into power, excitement, and grace. In other words, the God of Genesis is the God of the rest of the Bible.

It is a completely false idea, and one that is essentially infantile, to assume, as many do, that the God of Genesis is different from the God found in the rest of the Bible that he is an austere, stern, harsh, rather remote Being – a Creator only – that his attitude toward humanity is quite different than that found in the New Testament. But this is not true at all. The idea has come into being only because people have taken isolated texts from the Scriptures and used them to build a montage of God which presents him in this aspect. But you will find the grace of God shining through the book of Genesis as much as it does in the New Testament. The love of God, the compassion, the tenderness, the sweetness of God, are manifest as much in Genesis as they are anywhere else in the Bible.

If we read this book carefully, noting what it has to say, we will discover that the God of Genesis is undoubtedly the God of the rest of the Bible. In the New Testament he is the Father of the Lord

Jesus Christ and the Father of all those who believe in him; he exercises a father's heart. But our first glimpse of this same God is as the Creator. That is the way we are introduced to him in this beginning chapter of this beginning book of the Bible.

The word *Genesis* means "beginning," so it is a very apt title for this book. We shall content ourselves with looking only at the first verse, and this will serve as an introduction to our whole series.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. {Gen 1:1 RSV}

That has been called one of the most profound statements ever made in the hearing of men. If you think about it a bit, as we propose to do, you will see that it is true. Surely this statement is exactly where the Bible ought to begin. It gathers up in ten English words (seven in Hebrew) the answers to the four fundamental questions which every person faces when he really begins to think seriously about his life and the universe in which he lives.

Each of us began life as a baby and as such we paid little attention to what was going on around us or to what the world was like. But as we grew older we started to take note of the world – the sky, the sea, the winds, the birds, the flowers, the animals, the trees, and all of life around us. As we became aware of the world, we inevitably asked some questions about it. It is those questions which are answered for us in very brief compass here in these opening words of the book of Genesis.

What are the questions?

1. First, we ask ourselves, "What is all this?" Driven by an insatiable curiosity, man has been attempting to answer that question ever since he first appeared on earth. He seeks to explore the universe and the world in which he lives.
2. Second, we ask, "How did it begin?" The question of *how* is the question, primarily, which occupies science.
3. Then we ask, "When did it begin?" When did it all start? How long has the world been going on like this?
4. Finally, we come to the great philosophical question, "Who is behind it?" Who is back of these strange and remarkable processes?

These four questions are answered here in this verse, and thus it serves as a tremendous introduction to the great themes of the Bible.

Take the first question, the one most obvious to us – the wonder of the universe itself. "In the beginning," we read, "God created the heavens and the earth," {Gen 1:1 RSV}. There we have them – the heavens and the earth. Someone has said that this phrase is the beginning of true science because a fundamental part of the task of science is to observe and classify all that can be observed in the makeup of the world of nature. Here is a very early attempt at classification. What do you see around you? You see two great classes of things – the heavens and the earth.

One of the marvels of the Bible is that it uses language that communicates with people of the most primitive and limited understanding, while at the same time it still has significance, and inexhaustible meaning, to the most erudite and learned of men. It addresses itself with equal ease to all classes of mankind. No other book that I know of has that distinction.

This universality is evident in this phrase, "the heavens and the earth." It has meaning for a savage in the jungle, simply perceiving the land in which he lives and the sky over his head. He notes the earth, with its yield of trees, plants and animal life, and he notes the heavens with the birds flying and the wind blowing, the clouds, and the stars. That may be all he is concerned about but he describes it as 'the heavens and the earth.' On the other hand, a modern astronomer, looking out into the far reaches of the universe through a great telescope, would also use the phrase, 'the heavens and the earth,' i.e., the planet on which he lives with its relationship to the solar system in which it moves, and beyond that the illimitable reaches of sidereal space, involving vast galaxies almost unimaginably removed from one another. But either is described by this simple phrase, 'the heavens and the earth.' That is the beauty of Bible language.

The Bible completely avoids the utter ridiculousness of some of the early myths about creation and origin, found in other religions. In this creation account there is nothing that needs to be laid aside as man's knowledge increases. This is true of the entire opening chapter of Genesis – a most remarkable passage in that respect. Later, the Bible takes

these two words, the *heavens* and the *earth*, and expands both, disclosing a remarkable knowledge of nature which anticipates by many, many centuries the discoveries of modern science. That is another proof that this book is not of man. It comes *through* man, but *from* God.

It was the Bible that first said that the number of the stars is beyond computation. It declares that God “stretched forth the heavens” {Isa 51:13 KJV} into limitless expanse which can never be measured, and filled it with stars which are as numerous as the sands upon the seashore {cf, Gen 22:17}. Yet to a primitive observer looking into the heavens, the visible stars are not uncountable. They are a vast number but they do not seem impossible to count. But the Bible flatly states that the number of the stars can be compared, literally, to the number of the grains of sand upon the seashore. Modern science has now established this to be true. Man cannot possibly begin to assess the number of the stars.

It was also the Bible that said the earth is hung upon nothing {cf, Job 26:7}. In that poetic way it describes the mysterious force of gravity which no one even yet understands but which keeps the earth suspended in its relationship to the sun and the other planets. The earth literally hangs upon nothing. It was the Bible that said that “things which are seen are made of things which do not appear,” thus predating by many centuries the discoveries of modern science which finally recognized that all matter is made up of invisible energy, and that matter and energy are interchangeable.

At this point we must make crystal clear a truth that is of supreme importance in our study, and to which we will return again and again as we go through Genesis. We must recognize at the outset that it is not the intention of the Bible to be a textbook on science. If it were, the book would be much thicker than it is, much less comprehensible. Rather, the Bible is intended to be a book of redemption:

- Its purpose is not to tell us how the heavens go, but how to go to heaven.
- It declares the way out for a troubled, bewildered, and bedeviled race, and it is the only book that speaks with authority in this realm. And

- It constantly uses the physical and material to illustrate and to reveal truth that is on a higher level – the spiritual.

The supreme concern within God’s heart in giving us the Bible has been, through the centuries, that we might understand what goes on in the human spirit, affecting everything we do. He has deliberately made the physical to correspond to the spiritual in such a way as to illustrate to us what is going on within.

Let me share with you a very helpful quotation on this subject from Dr. F. A. Filby, who is the Senior Lecturer on Inorganic Chemistry at an English technical college. He says:

The material world is designed to produce parallels – parables – of the spiritual. There is indeed a spiritual law operating in the natural world, and God put us on a planet where light is separated from darkness for our spiritual education as well as for our physical needs. There is a spiritual, as well as a physical reason, for the pattern of creation and he who divorces science from true religion will never be able to come to a real understanding of the world.

Granting this to be true, then it is evident that the physical heavens and earth are used to illustrate the fundamental difference which exists between human and divine life. God is not man. He operates quite differently from man. But it is his intention that man should share his life, and live as he lives. Obviously, then, we must learn a wholly different way of living. That is the supreme subject of the Bible: how to live on a different level of life – the level on which God intended man to live.

This is declared very specifically in Isaiah 55:8 and 9, in which God says,

**“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, says the
Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the
earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”**
{Isa 55:8-9 RSV}

The Apostle Paul represents the same distinction in writing to the Corinthian church. He says,

For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. {1 Cor 2:11 RSV}

If we are ever to understand ourselves, and life around us, we must understand the lessons that are illustrated by the physical universe. The universe was designed to teach these.

Let us now look at the second great question about life answered in this verse. We have not only the wonder of the universe, but the mystery of its origin is also disclosed. "God created the heavens and the earth," {Gen 1:1b RSV}.

Here we are wrestling with the great question, "How did all this come into being?" How did life appear upon it? Those who love to erect monuments on battlefields should raise a huge one on this verse. For here the armies of the evolutionists and the beleaguered hosts of the creationists have marched and wheeled and thundered and blasted away with considerably more noise than skill, producing more heat than light, to a victory that both insist they have won.

With respect to the origin of life, Darwin claimed that he knew the answer. He said it was all by evolution from a single cell existing in the primordial ooze which, by a process of division and mutation ultimately resulted in the many groups and forms of life we find existing today. But many scientists now confess great uneasiness about this theory. Some even flatly admit that it is no longer tenable, as Darwin envisioned it. Consider, for instance, these quotations:

A. S. Romer writing in the book, *Man and the Vertebrates*, says,

We have no certain fossil record of lower chordates [animals with backbones] or chordate ancestors, and very possibly never shall have. The oldest ancestors of the vertebrates are unknown and they may always remain unknown.

A scientific reviewer, G. S. Simpson, writing in *Science Magazine*, reviewing the book, *The Origin of the Vertebrates*, says,

As for the ancestry of the chordates all is left in darkness without even the dream of sixty years ago.

In an article on animal evolution appearing in the *Quarterly Review of Biology*, Austin Clarke says,

Thus, so far as concerns the major groups of animals, the creationists seem to have the better of the argument. There is not the slightest evidence that any of the major groups ever arose from any other.

These words are rather startling, when we face the widespread allegiance to Darwinian evolution that exists in the popular mind today. But the Bible even at the beginning faces this great question of the mystery of origin and proposes a solution that no science can contravene: God created the heavens and the earth.

The third fundamental question, relating to the great mystery of time, is closely tied to the second. "When did it all begin?" Says the Bible, "In the beginning," {Gen 1:1a RSV}. What a wonderful answer! We humans seem to be fascinated by this question of "When?" We are always asking one another, "How old are you? When were you born?" If we are denied an answer we become highly curious, especially about the age of women. So it is with this question of the age of the universe. Here again a fierce battle has raged. Those who say the earth is very, very old have many arguments they advance to substantiate their claims, based on physical evidence from observation of the universe. Others claim, from other lines of argument, that the earth is relatively young. On the basis of certain Biblical statements it is even printed in some Bibles that the creation originated in 4004 B.C. Some have even traced it further to October 26th, 4004 B.C., at 9:00 a.m. But, the fact is, the Bible does not say anything about the age of the earth. It simply makes no comment. It is important to remember that Bishop Ussher, who is responsible for that 4004 B.C. figure, was an Irishman who lived in the 17th century and was neither an apostle nor a prophet – his word was not inspired.

The Bible suggests in many places that time is an elusive mystery to man, and modern science is beginning to confirm that. The 90th Psalm says,

“For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past,” {Psa 90:4a KJV}. And in Second Peter we read, “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day,” {2 Pet 3:8b RSV}.

The Bible puts this whole matter of time and of the age of the earth beyond man’s knowledge. Jesus said to his disciples. “It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority,” {Acts 1:7b RSV}. This suggests that all the clocks with which we try to determine age may be really basically wrong, whether they are scientific clocks, or those supposedly derived from Scripture. We do not know, and increasingly we are discovering that we do not know how old the earth is. But that is exactly what the Bible says.

We come to the last big question. “Who is behind all this?” The Bible answers with but a single word, “God.” There you have what is essentially the boundary of life and thought, as far as man is concerned – God. Man can never escape the thought of God. There has never been a society or civilization discovered on the face of the earth that does not have a concept of God and of worship. Man is an irrepressibly worshipful being. He must worship something, and the reason for this is very simple. It is because everything around him and within him speaks of the existence of another personality, a Being of great intelligence, power and wisdom who must exist somewhere. Man can never escape that thought.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning puts it very beautifully:

Earth’s crammed with heaven
And every common bush aflame with God
But only those who see take off their shoes:
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

It is only by the power of rationalization – that evil power of self-deceit that man can ever rid himself of the idea of God. That is why it is usually those who, by virtue of learning, have trained themselves to a high degree of skill in rationalization who adopt an atheistic position. Man left to himself, observing the universe as it is, comes to an inescapable conviction that God exists: that behind all the design, the marvel and wonder of the universe, lies a great mind and personality and heart.

Even when we rationalize it all away, exercising the strange and evil capacity of the human mind to invent rationales to support the desires of the will, and thus eliminate God from our thinking, nevertheless we encounter experiences and times when suddenly he breaks through again. That is what the Soviet Union is discovering. They cannot legislate God out of existence for he keeps breaking through into the life of that nation from time to time, even though they seek to deny it.

Robert Browning expressed this phenomenon perhaps as well as it has ever been put. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones recounts that in one of Browning’s poems there is a young journalist who comes and tells a bishop that he has decided to put aside all the things he has been taught about God and think the whole matter through from the standpoint of his knowledge, his education, and his observation. The bishop tells him that as a young man he too had tried the same thing. He had categorized all the knowledge he possessed and had worked out a philosophy that seemingly encompassed it all. But then, as Browning puts it, the bishop said,

Just when we’re safest, there’s a sunset touch
A fancy from a flower bell; someone’s death
A chorus ending from Euripides,
And that’s enough for fifty hopes and fears
The Grand Perhaps!

Browning’s reasoning is that you can plan it all out, categorize everything, and come up with a philosophical system that accounts for everything you see. Then perhaps you will take a walk in the country and see a sunset that moves you to the depths of your being in a way for which you cannot account. Your philosophy does not cover it. Or, someone’s death strikes with shattering force and you are left with nothing but the crumbs of your philosophy. The Grand Perhaps that is God, breaking constantly into human life.

Man lives out his days, the Bible says, within the boundaries of God. God stands at the end of every path on which man is, and also at the beginning. As Paul said to the intellectuals on Mars Hill in Athens, “In him we live and move and have our being,” {Acts 17:28a}. He is the Inescapable One:

- Men of science explore the atom and come at last to a realm of mystery, where everything is

In the Beginning

reduced ultimately to pure energy, and man does not know what to do with it or even what to call it.

- The astronomer probes into space. He discovers the great galaxies whirling in their courses. He sees no observable limit to it but finds that it all is permeated with tremendous power and energy. He does not know what to label it.
- The doctor holds a newborn baby in his arms. He cannot explain where that life came from, what made it develop in the way it did to produce this little creature.

It is all a mystery. We are surrounded with mystery on every side – The Grand Perhaps! We do not know even a tiny fraction of a percent of what there is to be known. We hardly can put the relative amount of our knowledge in terms small enough to express it.

But who is behind all this? As Paul said to the men of Athens, “The God whom you ignorantly worship, whom you have labeled ‘the unknown God,’ him we proclaim to you,” {cf, Acts 17:23}. This is the God whom most of science attempts to eliminate from its planning and its thinking today; whom the vast majority of people take no cognizance of and try to rule out of their lives. The God whom men ignorantly worship, the unknown God, the God whom men will not name and cannot name. “Him,” Paul says, “we declare unto you.” We know his name. It is Jesus of Nazareth. “Without him was not anything made that was made,” {John 1:3}. “All things were created by him and through him,” {cf, Col 1:16}. And one day, as Paul writes to the Philippians, all creation and all things within creation shall bow the knee, and shall confess with the tongue that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father {cf, Phil 2:10-11}. Is it not strange that though

- we cannot feel beyond God,
- we cannot think beyond God,
- we cannot move beyond God, and
- there is no way to eliminate him from our lives –

nevertheless we constantly attempt to live as though he did not exist? He is **the greatest fact of all**, yet

- we do not want to mention his name,
- we do not want to talk about his work,
- we take no cognizance of his mind, his thinking, and his wisdom.

How this shows the ignorance, the superficiality, the shallowness of human thought and life! Let us begin where the Bible begins, at the only place to begin, in order to understand the world in which we live and the life we live within it –

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. {Gen 1:1 RSV}

Prayer

Our Father, we pray that as we go on in these studies we may recognize that this book is designed to unfold and reveal to us the greatness of your Being, the love of your heart, the grace with which you deal with us who are sinful, rebellious human beings. We pray, Lord, that we may submit ourselves to these great truths – learn them, understand them, live by them – that we may come to know you, whom to know is eternal life. We ask in your name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Out of Darkness

by Ray C. Stedman

The first verse of Genesis begins with the greatest observable fact known to man: the existence of the universe, “the heavens and the earth,” {Gen 1:1b}; and it links to that the greatest fact made known by revelation: the existence of a God who creates. There is thus brought together in this simple verse at the beginning of the Bible the recognition of the two great sources of human knowledge: nature, which is discoverable by the five senses of our physical life; and revelation, which is discoverable only by a mind and heart illuminated and taught by the Spirit of God. These things “are spiritually discerned,” says the Apostle Paul {1 Cor 2:14}.

Both of these sources of knowledge are from God, and each of them is a means of knowing something about God. The scientist who studies nature is searching ultimately for God. One great Christian scientist declared, “I am thinking the thoughts of God after him.” That is an excellent way to describe what science basically is doing. Also, those who seek to understand the Bible, to grasp its great themes and to understand the depths that are revealed there, are likewise in search of God. Nature is designed to teach us certain facts about God, but revelation is designed to lead us to the God about whom nature speaks. So the two are complementary. They are not contradictory in any sense, but complete one another.

A young nuclear physicist, Dr. John McIntyre, came to know Christ in one of our home Bible classes. He now serves as Professor of Nuclear Physics at Texas A. & M. University. In an article which was printed in *His Magazine*, he told how he came to Christ and what it was that reached him. In the article he recounts the experience he had as a conventional Christian, of assuming certain things that he had been taught, without any basis in the Scripture or from experience. Then he says,

And then, my eyes were opened. I began to attend a home Bible class where the Bible was studied in the same critical manner that I was accustomed to in my daily work in physics. The class assumed the Bible to be consistent and understandable, just as the scientist considers nature to be consistent and understandable.

We wrestled with portions that were difficult to understand or to reconcile with other parts of the Bible and compared them carefully with other pertinent Bible passages. We considered a Scriptural difficulty a challenge to the understanding and an opportunity to modify our present incomplete ideas, rather than consider that the Bible was in error.

This approach to studying the Bible closely parallels the scientist’s attitude toward nature. He expects, even welcomes difficulties, and finds persevering study rewarded by deeper understanding. In brief, a person should investigate God’s Word, the Bible, with the same methods, even excitement, that he would use in investigating His handiwork, the physical world around us.

These very cogent words from Dr. McIntyre will set the atmosphere for our examination and exploration of this book of Genesis. As he points out, we have two revelations from God, designed to do two different but complementary things. If so, then it is wrong to study the book of Genesis as though it were merely a textbook on science. It is wrong to insist that everything in the first chapter of Genesis provide detailed explanation of how God did things. That is not the purpose of the book; that is not the emphasis it wants to make. It has a quite different purpose in mind, and the chapter and book must be read with that purpose in view. On the other hand, it is equally wrong to view it as merely teaching religious truth. It does speak about nature and physical life, and it is accurate in those

areas. What it says is exactly true. The two revelations will ultimately be brought together in clear understanding when man enters the life to come, and then he will see that there is absolutely no contradiction whatsoever.

Perhaps a further observation will help us a bit in resolving the many problems that arise over the supposed conflict between Genesis and science. We must all remember as we come to this book that both scientists and biblicists (Bible students), are continually proposing theories to explain and amplify the facts they observe in the realm they are studying, whether it be nature or revelation. In both cases some of these theories prove to be true; some are partially true and partially false, needing further understanding; and others prove to be utterly and completely false. For instance, we Christians are quick to point out that scientists have never really proved the theory of evolution. It remains but a theory and there are great gaps in the attempted proof for it. There are many areas which scientists simply cannot explain as to what happens, why it happens, or how it happens. A considerable number of scientists today feel very uneasy about the theory of evolution because it does not explain many of the facts as they are being observed in the exploration of the world around us.

On the other hand, there are also theories in the study of the revelation of God, the Bible. One of these theories concerns the second verse of Genesis 1, to which we come today. Verses 2-5 say,

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

And God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. {Gen 1:2-5 RSV}

In reading these verses certain questions immediately come to mind, and, in attempting to answer these questions, as I have suggested, various theories have been proposed. One theory that has found considerable acceptance among many Christians is that between Verses 1 and 2 there occurs a great gap of time. Therefore, this theory has been called *the gap theory*, because it suggests an un-

explained and unrecorded catastrophe which occurred between the original creation, referred to in Verse 1, and a re-creation which begins in Verse 2. According to this theory, God created the heavens and the earth in an unrecorded epoch of time, and filled it with inhabitants. Perhaps it was even placed under the authority of Lucifer (later Satan) who, as an angel of light, was the highest of the angels of God. It may have been inhabited by man-like animals, a pre-Adamic race, the relics of which we find as fossils in the strata of the earth today all this is part of the theory. But then something happened to that original universe, perhaps connected with the fall of Satan. When Satan fell the whole universe including the earth fell into chaos. It is the calling again out of chaos into an orderly arrangement which we have recorded in Genesis 1. God is re-creating the earth, in that sense, and the rest of the chapter is a record of the six 24-hour days in which God called it out of the chaos into which it had fallen and re-created the earth.

That is the theory and it is supported by certain claims. For instance, there is the claim that the word *was*, in Verse 2, should properly be translated *became*: "The earth became without form and void." It is true that this is a possible translation of the Hebrew word, though it is not translated that way very frequently in the Old Testament. There is also a verse in Isaiah 45:18 which says that God did not create the earth void as it says in Genesis 1:2 that it "became," or "was." This seemingly supports *the gap theory* so that many have regarded it (the original Scofield Bible takes this position) as the explanation for all the geological ages. This was an attempt to kill two birds with one stone. It endeavored to explain the signs of death and violence and other marks of sin in the primitive world before the fall of man, and, at the same time, to account for the long geologic ages that scientists insist the earth records.

There is something quite attractive about *the gap theory*. It seems at first glance to provide a means of solving many problems; and its greatest advantage is that it apparently solves these two knotty problems which the Christian faces in his contact with the scientific world. But it really goes a bit too far, and becomes actually a kind of cosmic garbage dump. It is, of course, very advantageous to have such a place, for if you have any problems with science you can simply dump them in the gap, and it will take care of everything. There is ample

room there for all the geologic ages and all fossil discoveries of whatever kind they may be. Of course, as Dr. Bernard Ramm points out, if we take this way out then we really have no way of ever coming to any kind of reconciliation between what science discovers and what the Bible says. It must all be left in the realm of ignorance and inconclusiveness.

For that reason, I personally feel that the theory is insupportable. Others may disagree, but we must remember clearly one thing: It is at best but a theory. If we Christians insist that science has not proved evolution as a fact, but it must remain an unproved theory, so must we also insist that theories like the gap idea that deal with the Biblical record are also unproved theories and not facts. We must not treat them as though they were final and proved facts.

All we actually know from this verse in Genesis 1:2 is that the earth began as a planet covered by an uninterrupted ocean, which was itself wrapped in darkness. With that picture science fully agrees. Revelation says that it was "formless and empty," i.e., without life. There was no land, there were no promontories, nothing to catch the eye, it was simply one great vast deep of water covering the whole world, with no life in it. It was empty. That is exactly what science says. The earth began in that fashion. But revelation adds a key factor which many scientists stubbornly refuse to acknowledge. Revelation says, in addition, "the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." God was at work in his universe, interacting and interrelating with it. The presence of God at work in that original primeval creation is in line with the great declaration of the entire Bible, that there is purpose and meaning behind the universe. It is not merely a great machine, clanking away in remorseless fashion, catching us up as victims of forces greater than we can control; it is under the control of the wisdom and power of God. God intends an end, and he moves to accomplish it. That basic fact is the explanation for all change that has occurred in past, present, or future history, and for all events in human lives: God is moving in history.

But you cannot detect purpose and ultimate meaning in rocks and fossils and sand and stars. That is why science, studying these things, cannot explain life by observation alone. Its field is too limited, too narrow. It does not involve other great and powerful factors in man's makeup which are as

real as anything physical. This is why science, which limits itself completely to observation of events and processes, can never discover God. God moves in invisible ways to accomplish his purposes. To find him by the methods of science would be like looking for love with a steam shovel, or like trying to find intelligence with a telescope. You are using entirely the wrong instrument.

Every now and then some scientist comes up with the statement that there is no God, and he never seems to see the utter ridiculousness of such a position. We laugh at the Russian cosmonaut, Gagarin, who, after circling the earth, came back to announce that he had not found God up there. We think that is childish, and it is childish. But unfortunately, many learned and otherwise highly intelligent men make similar remarks because their thinking, Scripture says, is darkened and clouded, incomplete in many areas {cf, Rom 1:21, 11:10, Eph 4:18}. Someone has well pointed out that if Mr. Gagarin had simply stepped outside his capsule without a space suit he would have found God immediately! That fact rather highlights the ludicrousness of his announcement.

The purpose of God is revealed in Gen 1:2-5 in the direction events take. Notice that, in these verses, there is a moving toward order out of disorder, and form out of formlessness, something comes out of nothing. The Spirit of God is moving to what end? To bring light out of darkness, to bring shape out of shapelessness, form out of formlessness, moving to accomplish. The first step God took, according to the records, is to create light. "Let there be light," he said, and there was light. Light, as we know now, is absolutely essential to life of any sort. Without light there can be no life.

In the creation of light it is important to note that there is no mention of where this light comes from. It is not that the sun and the moon were not yet created (we will come to an explanation of that when we come to the fourth day) but because this is not the point which Scripture is attempting to make. Again, it is not trying to give a scientific explanation of where light comes from. It ignores that entirely at first and later seems even to put it out of order. Scripture is after something else; it desires to underline for our understanding the fact that light is from God. Light is a symbol of God. That is the point Scripture seeks to make.

This is why the moment God makes light, he pronounces it “good.” Why is anything good, as opposed to bad? What is it that constitutes goodness, as contrasted to evil? Goodness is that only which relates in some way to God himself. God is good, and only that which is of him, or from him, can be called good. That is why God said light is good, because it is from him and is characteristic of his nature. We read in First John, “God is light and in him is no darkness at all,” {1 Jn 1:5b}. John does not say, “Light is God.” That would be pantheism. We do not worship light. But the Scripture says God is light, because the characteristics which we observe in light are also true of God.

This suggests something very important. We must learn to understand that truth is found at various levels, but is always equally true at any level of meaning. Basically, there are three levels at which man can understand truth. If you like to think of it this way, truth, or life, is like a chocolate layer cake. You cut it through and find there are three layers:

1. There is a bottom layer, the physical;
2. There is a middle layer, the soulish or psychic, dealing with our mental and emotional reactions;
3. Then there is a top layer, the spiritual.

Light can be viewed from these three levels.

There is first physical light, which is now filling this room and by which we can see one another. There is a beam of light originating, the scientists tell us, in the atom. When electrons, performing their incredible dance up and down between various energy levels, drop from a higher level to a lower level, they emit a beam of light. We call it a beam though no one knows what it is, but it is light. That is the physical level of light.

There is also a psychic level of meaning for the term. For instance, we speak of light as knowledge, or truth. Someone says, “Could you give me a little light on this problem?” He does not mean by that, “Turn on a lamp.” He means, “Explain the nature of it to me.” We say, when someone has explained something to us, “Oh, yes, I see.” We use the same term a blind man would use if suddenly his eyes were opened – “I see.” So light occurs on the level of mental or emotional reaction.

Moral knowledge is light, and God intended the term to be used in this way.

There is still a third level of meaning, the spiritual level, which deals with the nature and character of God himself. As I quoted to you, John says, “God is light and in him is no darkness at all,” {1 Jn 1:5b}. That light is equated also with the very life of God. When you open John’s account of the years he spent with the Lord Jesus, and read the simple eyewitness account of what he saw and heard (you will find in the preface) which reflects the opinions, attitudes, and conclusions to which he came about this One, these amazing words, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men,” {John 1:4}. Jesus said of himself, “I am the light of the world. If any man follows me he shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life,” {cf, John 8:12}.

Whatever way you take the word light, it is equally true at any of these levels.

This phenomenon will greatly help us as we come to this book of Genesis. We must understand that truth is not to be viewed only on the physical level. That is the problem of many in approaching this book. We have sought to understand these great and luminous revelations at the level of their physical meanings alone. But all of them have a trilogy of meaning, a three-fold level of understanding. To limit them to the physical is to miss the major point of revelation. Paul uses the psychic meaning of light in Second Corinthians 4, when he says, “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ,” {2 Cor 4:6 RSV}. There is both the first and second level of meaning of light, clearly brought together with reference to the first day of creation.

There is a second step which God took on this first day. He created light, and then he separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. {Gen 1:5 RSV}

What does this mean? Let us apply the key we have just discovered. Take this declaration at a three-fold level. At the physical level, the material

level, this clearly indicates that God began the process of rotation, for it is the rotating of the earth upon its axis that makes night and day, darkness and light. When an astronaut goes up and zooms around the earth in orbit, he passes through alternating periods of night and day because both he and the earth are rotating. What is this strange function? It is an intriguing problem in science as to why everything in the universe revolves or rotates. Science has long been seeking the explanation for this motion, which they call angular momentum. One of the difficult problems of science is not only to explain why everything rotates but also to explain why occasionally they find an object that, in an apparently perverse way, rotates the wrong way, as some of the moons of certain planets do, and as even some of the planets themselves. Retrograde motion is what the scientists call it. Within matter there is a force, somewhat akin to gravitation, which compels two bodies that approach one another to revolve around a common center. On the physical level that is what produces light and darkness. It is true of everything in the universe, without exception, whether it be the great blazing suns of space or the electrons in the atom.

At the psychic level, the level of the soul, the mental and emotional level, this declaration about God separating the light from the darkness implies the beginning of the cycles of the ages. Time seems to have a rotary motion as well, and ages come and go, both within the reckoning of man and even before man appeared upon the earth. There is suggested a possible rotation of the ages, each one having a period of moral light and darkness. It is not physical light we are speaking of, but moral, dealing with knowledge in some way. In Paul's letter to the Romans, in Chapter 13, he says to Christians, "... you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep" {Rom 13:11b RSV}, "... the night is far gone, the day is at hand," {Rom 13:12a RSV}. He is referring to the approaching nearness of a new age, the morning of God's eternal day when there will be night no more.

Then, on the spiritual level, there is the recognition of the existence of both good and evil. God says the light is good, i.e., there is something in the universe, he says, which comes from me. Whatever it is, it is good because it is of him; it partakes of his character and nature. But there is also in the universe that which is not of him, that which is the

opposite of what he has given. That is "not good," that is darkness. These terms, light and darkness, are constantly played against one another all the way through the record of Scripture, and all the way through the record of man. This does not refer, of course, to a duality of gods, though it appears so from man's point of view. But there are not two gods. The devil is subject to God, though, from our point of view, there is an apparent standoff between these two forces.

This play between two forces gives us our key to the last thing to note in this passage, the phrase, "there was evening and there was morning, one day." One of the questions everyone asks about Genesis is, "How long are these days of Genesis 1? Are they 24-hour days during which God created the earth, i.e., actually one literal week? Or do they represent long and indefinite ages of time, as science would suggest today, at its present level of knowledge?" It is interesting that, if we apply the key that we have just discovered, we will see that all three levels could be involved. We are all familiar with a 24-hour day which includes an evening and a morning. There are also ages of time which, even in the reckoning of man, would include what could be regarded as darkness and light – times of ignorance and relative knowledge. Even in our own day we speak of "the Dark Ages." And there is an ultimate spiritual meaning which involves the realities of heaven and hell – that which is of God and that which is opposed to God, that which is light with no darkness at all, and that which is nothing but darkness with no light at all. Since the material or physical level is usually the symbol of the others, I would think that, just as in the case of the Sabbath, the 24-hour day is intended to be a reminder to us of the great ages during which God created the heavens and the earth. The present recurring 24-hour day is a symbolic microcosm of past ages, just as the Sabbath day was given to man as a symbol to remind him of a spiritual and emotional rest that could be his. If that be the case, then we do not have 24-hour day periods in Genesis 1, but rather an indefinite length of time much more descriptively termed an age, or an epoch, of time.

But each is to be characterized by an evening and a morning. Note the order of that. The evening comes first. We Westerners, with our penchant for compromise, have divided the day so that it is a sandwich, beginning with a period of darkness, then

a period of light in between, and finally another period of darkness. We begin our day at midnight. But in the Eastern world the day begins at sunset so that each day starts with an evening and ends with a period of light. That is in line with this revelation of the way God works. No matter whether it be man's day upon earth, an age of time, or a 24-hour period, each begins with a period of darkness, and then a period of light. As the Apostle Paul says in First Corinthians 15, "first that which is natural, then that which is spiritual," {cf, 1 Cor 15:46}. That is the invariable order.

What meaning does that have for us, as Christians? Can we not trace the fulfillment of this in our own experience? Did we not all begin our lives in darkness, in the grip and bondage of death and darkness? Through the glorious redemption of the cross of Jesus Christ we have passed into a period of light which is, as the Old Testament says, "increasing more and more unto the perfect day" {cf, Prov 4:18} we have entered a period of growing and ever-expanding light. You can see this order in the work of the Lord Jesus himself. There was the darkness of the crucifixion, passing very shortly into the glorious morning of the resurrection

when he stepped forth into the glory of a new day and a new life. An evening and a morning, one day. Scripture also makes clear that if we have never gone through the darkness with him there is no morning to come. We must live constantly in the darkness. The testimony of Scripture is that those who cling to the darkness, who refuse to be brought into the light, become at last, as Jude describes them, "wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved forever," {Jude 1:13b RSV}.

This even links with the celebration of the Lord's table. What is this simple supper we celebrate? Is it not a symbol to remind us of the one eternal event which is able to separate us from darkness and bring us into light? When God separated the light from the darkness he anticipated the great separation of the cross of Jesus Christ, when light would be eternally separated from darkness. Any of us, passing through that event with him, will also be separated from the darkness and brought into the light. Thus this simple table links directly with the words of our text. We too have passed from darkness into light.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Invisible Kingdom

by Ray C. Stedman

It is interesting to observe the reactions when one mentions Genesis in a mixed company of Christians and non-Christians:

- From the Christians, a note of mild terror is evident on their faces. They appear to be troubled by this passage and grow a bit panicky. This nervous reaction develops because many Christians are embarrassed by Genesis 1 and feel that it is best to leave this skeleton rattling in the closet rather than bring it out and discuss it in the presence of those who are not Christians. This is largely because Christians, under the onslaught of pseudo-scientific approaches, have come to regard Genesis as a kind of Achilles heel of Christianity. They feel there are more positive Christian truths which we ought to be declaring, so there is a tendency to slur over Genesis 1.
- Non-Christians, on the other hand, tend to assume a rather patronizing smile when you bring up this passage. They manifest a tolerant air of patient superiority. They look at us almost as though they were saying to themselves, "You Christians can get to us when you talk about sin and forgiveness, or guilt and grace, because we feel a need along this line, but when you get on Genesis 1 we've got you cold. You are way off base in this area. Science is a much safer guide to an understanding of life, the world, and the universe around us than these ancient myths."

Both of these attitudes are profoundly wrong. Non-Christians usually assume far too much about

what science teaches about the universe and this accounts for their patronizing air in approaching Genesis 1. On the other hand, Christians assume far too little when they become nervous and apologetic over Genesis 1. For the truth is, Genesis 1 is the key to nature and to science, and science today stands in desperate need of the teaching of this passage in order to understand properly the physical universe in which we live. As I have been trying to bring out in these studies, the two revelations from God need each other to complement one another.

Those scientists who are willing to acknowledge that this passage is from God and contains accurate and authentic information about the beginnings of the universe will find that they have been provided with a wonderful framework within which the discoveries of science can provide endless confirmations of the wisdom and the power of God. I do not know anything that can add more zest, color, and excitement to the search of science than an understanding of the teachings of Genesis 1. What I am really saying is that you do not find God through nature. Anyone who attempts to find God through the study of, or exposure to, nature will never find him that way. The truth is quite the other way around: you understand nature through God. Nature begins to unfold its full meaning only if you approach it first with a knowledge and understanding of God through Jesus Christ. It then provides the devout student with a thousand and one confirmations of what the Bible reveals about the natural world around us.

We have already discovered in this passage that revelation adds an element that science can never find out, the element of purpose in the universe. Even in the second verse of Genesis 1 we were told that "The Spirit of God was moving over

the face of the waters,” {Gen 1:2b RSV}. That note on which the Bible opens its revelation of the relationship of God to his universe is characteristic of all that follows throughout the rest of Scripture, and is confirmed by the study of the universe around us. God is moving in history. God is accomplishing an end; he is moving toward a goal. There is a goal which God definitely has in mind, and toward it all the physical universe is moving.

The steps God took to accomplish this are recorded as several great creative acts occurring in certain progressive stages which logically succeed one another. It does not all happen at once. This is very clear from this first chapter of Genesis. God did not bring the world and the universe into being with a snap of his fingers or with one sentence from his lips. He could have, but he did not. He chose to do it in stages, and these stages are very clearly evident throughout this passage.

Furthermore, these stages, as we have already seen, are unrelated to any time sequence or time scale. There is nothing in this passage that tells us when God created the heavens and the earth, nor how long he took in the process of it. As we have seen, the *days* that are mentioned here seem most likely to be references to indefinite periods of time which are symbolized by our 24-hour days. Each one encompasses an evening and a morning. That is the primary truth which is declared in the Genesis passage. I will say more of this as we go along in these studies, but it is important that we hold this clearly in mind as we cover this first chapter in Genesis.

Then we also noted that the physical things which God has made are reflections of an inner and greater reality. Do not turn that around. It is not that the things that take place in the inner life are shadows or reflections of the physical universe around. It is quite the other way. The physical universe was made to correspond to the inner reality. It is the inner truth, the truths that affect the soul and spirit of man, with which God is primarily concerned. He made the physical universe in order to reflect these so that, as we look around us and observe and assimilate with our senses, we are constantly reminded of the great things that are taking place within us, and around us, in the invisible kingdom that surrounds us on all sides. It is very important that we remember that, for otherwise we turn Genesis 1 into an attempt to explain how God made the universe on the physical level

only and forget the greater thrust it is designed to teach, i.e., not how the heavens go, but how to go to heaven – and how to live on earth until we do.

As we saw, Step #1 involved the creation of the heavens and the earth, formless and empty, as the Scripture says. It was one great featureless globe covered by an ocean wrapped in darkness. That was the way it began. There was no life upon it; it was void, empty of life.

Step #2 was the creation of light and its separation from darkness. On the physical level this involved the rotation of the earth, and thus the separating of the light from the darkness. But this has implications also in the moral and spiritual realm. All this was done on day one – not necessarily in 24-hours, though it could have been – but, and this is the primary emphasis, in a period of evening followed by morning. As we have seen, this means, metaphorically, a period of ignorance out of which comes growing understanding, or, which is probably more likely because at this time there was no human life on earth to understand, it can also mean a period of incompleteness which grows at last to the full perfection and completeness of God’s idea. This is what this phrase, “evening and morning,” means in Genesis 1.

We come now to Step #3, occurring on day two, found in Verses 6 through 8:

And God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. {Gen 1:6-8 RSV}

Much ridicule has been poked at this passage. We are told that the Hebrews were a very primitive people who believed that the sky was like a great inverted bowl over the earth to which the stars were glued on the inner side, that the firmament was a solid body over the earth. Certain of the early stories of creation from Babylonian myths do reflect something of that idea. But if you carefully look at the Hebrew word which is used here for firmament, *raqia*, you will discover that it cannot be interpreted in that way. This is a word which comes from a root that means, “to pound and thereby ex-

pand,” as gold, for instance, is beaten until it expands to an almost infinite thinness. The idea of this word is “to make thin,” or “to stretch out,” so it is a beautifully descriptive word for the atmosphere. Time and time again throughout the rest of the Old Testament you find the prophets referring to this phenomenon, and they almost invariably use the term, “God stretched forth the heavens,” {cf, Isa 51:13}. Isaiah repeats that many times.

This is a beautifully accurate description of the atmosphere which indeed is stretched out over a hundred miles high, gradually thinning out until it merges with the emptiness of space, and is also stretched completely around the earth, forming a great blanket of air which serves to protect us from the lethal rays of the sun, and to provide a medium in which the birds can fly and the clouds be carried. It also preserves the warmth of the earth, thus equalizing the temperature, and in many and varied ways making possible life upon this earth. It is all accomplished by the stretching out of this amazing blanket of air called the *atmosphere*.

It has been pointed out by scientists that the atmosphere of our earth is unique in the solar system. Other planets have an atmosphere, but they do not have one like ours. No other planet has an atmosphere composed of the same gases as earth’s and able to support human life as we know it. This does not mean that the Creator could not form life that could exist in an atmosphere of methane or ammonia as some of the other planets have. But none has an atmosphere which contains immense quantities of oxygen and also great quantities of nitrogen, so necessary for the soil.

But the primary purpose of this firmament or expanse of the atmosphere, according to the Bible, is not to support life. That is what we would say was its primary function, but that is not according to the Scriptures. It is interesting here, that, in Scripture, the primary purpose is to provide a platform for suspending billions of gallons of water above the earth, “that the waters might be separated from the waters,” with waters above and waters below. As a matter of fact, the ability of the atmosphere to support animal life did not develop until later when the plants were formed and began their centuries-long process of taking carbon dioxide out of the air and replacing it with oxygen. It was this that made the support of life possible. But the atmosphere’s original function and its primary purpose, according to the book of Genesis, was to

provide certain gases that would support the cycle which suspends billions of gallons of water in the atmosphere in the form of water vapor, to condense and fall later in the familiar phenomena of rain and snow.

Again, like light, this is absolutely necessary to life. If it were not for this amazing ability of the atmosphere to sustain water above the earth in great quantities there would be no plants, there would be no animals, there would be no human beings, there would be no life on this earth. The continents would be great barren deserts, arid and utterly devoid of life of any kind. Part of this is due also to the miracle of water. Our planet is unique in that we have thousands of times more water than would be expected in comparison with our neighboring planets, and that water is distributed completely around the earth in great quantities. It is this enormous amount of water that changes the character of earth and makes it different from the other planets. Water has an amazing property. It is able to appear in all three states of matter within a very small range of temperature, as a liquid, a solid, and a gas. It is this ability to change from vapor to liquid and then to form ice which makes life possible upon this earth.

There is an interesting Biblical and scientific theory that suggests that all of this was highly intensified in the primitive earth; that perhaps, before the Flood, the earth was surrounded by a water vapor canopy which enveloped the earth in thick clouds, much as the planet Venus has today. This canopy created hot-house conditions all around the earth. Thus it was possible for tropical regions to exist at the poles, as we know actually did exist from the fossil remains that are discovered in those areas. It was, perhaps, the collapse of this great canopy of vapor (or even ice), which caused the flood and was the reason for the sudden death of thousands of mammoths, rhinoceroses and other animals which were suddenly entombed in ice in the polar regions and are today dug up from time to time, their flesh still well enough preserved for animals to eat, though they are thousands of years old. This is one of the amazing facts which science has to wrestle with and which it finds great difficulty in explaining.

Now this canopy idea is but a theory. I stress that again, because we need to be careful that, since these theories seem rather attractive to us, we do not assume they are facts. Like certain scientific

proposals, they are nothing but theories. But it has certain possibilities for explaining the conditions that prevailed on the primitive earth.

Regardless of this, it is still true that we have an atmosphere capable of suspending billions of gallons of water above the earth – the waters separated from the waters. That is the physical level. It is a wonder all in itself, but we must never read these passages in Genesis without asking ourselves, what does it intend to teach us on the moral or spiritual level? What inner reality is reflected in this ability of the atmosphere to suspend water above the earth? The key is found in what God called this firmament. God called it “Heaven.” There were heavenly waters and there were earthly waters. Water is used very frequently in the Scriptures as a symbol of life, of human life. For example, in the book of Revelation (17:15), John was told that the great harlot which he saw sitting upon the waters was a picture of the false church and that the waters were peoples and nations and multitudes gathered together. Thus the waters here in Genesis are a picture of human life.

What God is saying by this beautifully symbolic description is that there is earthly life and there is heavenly life; and, further, that we are surrounded by an invisible spiritual kingdom, just as with an invisible atmosphere. That spiritual kingdom is as real as anything we can see or taste or touch or feel. And from it, just as from the atmosphere around us, comes blessings which make human life happy and even possible: blessings such as joy and love and peace, hope and trust and power. Without that invisible spiritual kingdom human life would be mere animal life devoid of joy, blessing, peace, and power and all other qualities that make life worth living. Furthermore, as the rain falls upon the just and the unjust alike, so do these blessings come to the good and the bad equally all over the earth.

Paul speaks of that in the book of Romans. He reminds us that all these mercies come from God upon the just and the unjust alike, in order, he says, to lead men unto repentance {cf, Rom 2:4}; to make them stop and look and think, where does this come from? Why is it that we are granted the ability to love and to have our family around us and to share companionship with others? The apostle tells us that all these blessings come from the loving heart of a Father who pours them out even upon those who are resistant to his will, as well as upon

those who fall in line with his purposes. He loves mankind and he blesses mankind throughout the period of this life in order that we might come to a change of mind about ourselves and about God, that we might remember where these blessings come from, and open our hearts and lives to the influences of God’s gracious kingdom. For the unbeliever these blessings become less and less as life goes on because of his resistance to the grace of God, but for the believer they come in increasing abundance, pouring into the life that recognizes the spiritual atmosphere around us.

Also, just as the waters upon the earth are invisibly drawn up and disappear into the higher ocean above, so the human spirit, as it comes to the end of its journey on earth, quite unseen, leaves this earth to join the invisible kingdom above, whether for good or evil depending upon the attitude shown in this life toward the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ. All this is beautifully symbolized in the creation of the firmament and the operation of the atmosphere in its physical manifestation. It is all designed to teach us that there is a life to come as well as a life now.

Someone tried to convey this in an epitaph written on a tombstone:

Remember, Friend, as you pass by,
As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, you too shall be,
Prepare for death, and follow me.

Some wag had written underneath,

***To follow you I 'm not content
Until I know which way you went!***

Of course, this is the whole impact of this teaching – not only that there is a life to come but that there are possibilities of good or evil in that life, depending upon the choices made now.

But there is something else interesting here. Just as the waters around us invisibly evaporate to become water vapor in the skies, with no visible demonstration or display, the Scriptures indicate that it was never God’s intention for death to be the means by which man would pass from the realm of earthly existence into that wider and greater realm of heavenly life. I say that because, as we will learn later on, death is regarded as an enemy, an alien invader, which comes in as a result of the rebellion and sin of human life. It was originally in-

tended for human beings to pass without struggle, without any sense of separation or darkness, from this life into the next. You see this exemplified in that amazing story of the Lord Jesus who took Peter, James, and John, and going up onto a high mountain was suddenly transfigured before them. His garments began to shine with light, his fleshly nature was suddenly transformed {cf, Matt 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:22-27}, and he passed easily from the conditions of earthly life into the conditions of heavenly existence, and then back again, in the very presence of the disciples. I believe that was God's intention for man, as the Scriptures make clear, but death comes in as the great enemy, linked with the sin and rebellion of the human heart.

Thus we come to the end of the second day with its period of evening and morning, i.e., a period of incompleteness, merging at last into the complete manifestation of the intention of God at this stage of earth development. There was, evidently, a period of gradual gathering of the gases of the atmosphere, and the gradual saturating of them with water, until the earth reached the phase that God desired at this stage. It was covered with a blanket of air in which water was suspended and mists covered the earth. Thus the earth was prepared for the emergence of the land, which occurs on the next day.

What have we learned thus far in this account? What are the great lessons that God has deeply etched in nature in order to remind us of the corresponding realities in our lives which the physical processes are designed to picture?

1. First, we learned that there was light and darkness, i.e., there is both good and evil. God calls the light good. There is good in the universe but there is also that which is not good, that which is the opposite of good, that which is darkness.
 - This means that throughout our life there will be a need for discernment to be exercised, the need to tell the difference between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error.
 - And there will need to be choices made. Life will be constantly filled with demand for choices between these two opposite poles.
2. Furthermore, we have learned on day two that there is a life now and a life to come – that human existence is not completed by fulfilling this earthly process here. The two lives are tied together with invisible but very real links and one merges into the other as the atmosphere merges into the waters of the sea, and the sea into the waters of the air.

I would like to submit to you that the sickness of our day is being caused by man's forgetting of these two great facts. Isn't this what lies behind the outbreaks of violence and the moral decline which we are facing in our day? What causes these separations

 - between nations and individuals,
 - between the classes of society,
 - between husbands and wives,

these divisions in all these areas?

Isn't it directly traceable to the fact that we have forgotten these two great truths? We do not want any longer to distinguish between good and evil, between light and darkness. We are being assaulted today by a tremendous barrage of propaganda that says there is no evil, that all things are good, everything is right, everything is natural and wholesome and good for us, and there is no darkness. We are told we do not need to make these distinctions. But God has implanted it within nature, emblazoned it in the universe, built it into the very structure of the world, this reminder of the fact that there is light and darkness. Every 24-hours these reminders come to us. There is good and there is evil, and distinctions must be made.

It is also very evident today that we no longer want to think about a life to come. We want everything now. Instant happiness – that is what the world is seeking. We do not want to go through times of discipline or struggle, but we demand everything now, immediately, this present moment. We do not want to anticipate a future, we do not like the idea of preparing for something to come, of finding our fulfillment at a later day instead of now. All this is indicative of the fact that we have forgotten what God has imbedded in the universe, symbolized in the firmament around us, the idea that this life is a preparatory life. We can have much now. God in his wisdom and love has provided "all things richly for us to enjoy," as Paul so beautifully expresses it to Timothy {cf, 1 Tim 6:17b KJV}. But life has its disciplines. Life has its preparatory

periods – times when we must forego something now in order that we might have it in abundance later. Life will find its culmination and its fulfillment, not now but then, when conditions will be right and all God's great provisions for man will be available to him. Then there will be

- no more sorrow,
- no more death,
- no more tears,
- no more parting.

We need to remind ourselves of the truth of Browning's great words which, perhaps, have greater meaning for us than even he intended:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life,
for which the first was made.

This is what God is teaching us in day two.

Prayer:

Grant to us, our Heavenly Father, that these lessons so vividly and so powerfully manifested in nature around about us might not be lost upon our unthinking hearts. How many days have we already lived without hearing what the whole creation is shouting to us from every side. Forgive us, our Father, and help us to remember that every common bush is aflame with God and heaven is speaking to us in everything. Give us ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to ponder, to meditate, and to remember that all these things are but confirmations of the great themes that run throughout the whole of the Scriptures – your redeeming love, your unchanging grace, your redemptive heart – which seek and woo man in his lostness, man in his ruined condition that he might find again that which he has lost. We ask that these things may be true to us in experience as we open our eyes by faith to receive them from your hand. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

To Bring Forth Fruit

by Ray C. Stedman

Our study in Genesis 1 now takes us to the third day of creation. In this great opening chapter of the Scripture we are learning something of *how* God made the world, but more primarily *why* God made the heavens and the earth.

And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day. {Gen 1:9-13 RSV}

Notice that this section falls very naturally into two major divisions. There is,

- First, the emergence of the land from the oceans; and
- Second, the first appearance of life upon the earth in the form of plant life – plants, trees, and vegetation.

In this passage, as throughout this entire first chapter in Genesis, there are provided for us certain clues which indicate something of the scientific processes which may have been involved in the formation of these things and which reveal to us the extreme scientific accuracy of this account. It is

not that science is the final test of Scripture – I do not mean to imply that – but where science has discovered fact, Scripture, if it be the revelation of God, must certainly be in accord. It is fascinating to go through this chapter and follow these clues to see how they bring out the large and general agreement with the factual discoveries of science.

Learn to investigate the Scriptures in this manner, utilizing clues much as if you were Perry Mason tracking down a criminal. This is what makes the study of the Scriptures fascinating. It can even have its aspects of horror and fright. If you like to be frightened by a mystery story there are passages in Scripture that will accommodate you. But here I would urge you to track down some of these amazingly interesting scientific clues:

1. For instance, we are told that God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” The waters were to be gathered together into one unbroken unit. If you put yourself in the place of a human observer in the day when Moses was given this revelation, you will realize that it would be most difficult for an observer of that day to know this to be true. He might have had occasion to visit one or more areas where he could see the oceans but it would have been almost impossible for him to have known that all the oceans were together into one place. Yet anyone with a modern globe, or a knowledge of the earth, knows this to be a fact.
2. Second, we are told that the continents were once submerged beneath the oceans. The words of the 104th Psalm remarkably describe this:

**Thou didst cover it with the deep as
with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At thy rebuke they fled;
at the sound of thy thunder they took
to flight.
The mountains rose, the valleys sank
down
to the place which thou didst appoint
for them. {Psa 104:6-8 RSV}**

In this very beautifully poetic passage we have an extremely accurate scientific statement. Science has long ago discovered that the earth has indeed been under the oceans, and in certain places this has occurred many times. Further, there is considerable evidence that all of the land was once one great undivided mass.

I remember sitting in grade school as a boy, dreaming away the hours and waiting for school to be over. There was a large map of the earth hung in the front of the school room. I had a lot of mental fun in trying to piece together all of the continents like a jigsaw puzzle. Even that early in life I noted an evident conformity in the coastlines of the continents and that they did fit together.

The theory of continental drift holds that once they were one great mass, but were later divided and drifted to their present locations. This original unity is suggested here, and the drift theory is confirmed by other Biblical and scientific evidence. I only mention this in passing to show again the remarkable agreement here with much that science has discovered.

3. A third scientific clue in this section is the statement that God called the waters *Seas* – not *sea*, singular, but *seas*, plural. It meant that though the ocean was one connected body of water, so that sea level is approximately the same anywhere in the world, yet the oceans themselves were divided into large bodies called *seas*; and this we know, of course, to be true. But I point this out again because we are commonly told that Genesis 1 is a primitive document, and reflects mythological legends and ideas. Yet, when you actually investigate what it says, you discover that the knowledge that is revealed here is not primitive at all. It is very up to date. Genesis 1 is thoroughly rele-

vant today and is as meaningful and accurate in its scientific aspects as it is in its moral or religious views.

The act of God in calling the land up out of the oceans seems to mark the period of evening in this third day. Remember that each of these days of creation consists of an evening and a morning; an evening which is incomplete, imperfect, unfinished, merging into that which is perfect and complete according to the phase that God desired for the earth at this time. During this period we have the rising of the continents, the weathering of the rocks and the soil forming gradually to make preparation for the plant life that is to follow.

But remember too that all this on the physical level is but a manifestation of a parallel spiritual and moral reality. If we do not study Genesis with that well in mind we will miss the great purpose of this book. This first chapter is designed to introduce and lead us into the great themes that run all the rest of the way through Scripture. So it is not a mere spiritualizing allegoricalism to find a spiritual meaning in these things. It is clear from the entire presentation of Scripture that God has designed the physical world to represent the unseen world to us. Every view of nature ought to speak volumes to us about who God is, what he does, and what he intends. These things are at once real and visible and, at the same time, the picture of something unseen which relates to our inner life.

- We have already seen that light and darkness picture the existence in the universe of good and evil. God calls the light *good* and he leaves the darkness undesignated. But if it is not called good then it must be the opposite – not good. Light and darkness, therefore, are the picture of good and evil.
- We saw also that the firmament of the heavens and the earth beneath manifest in spiritual import a life in heaven as well as a life on earth. Both of these are realities and man is terribly deprived if he does not understand this to be true. There is a visible life on earth, now, to be lived in time, but there is an unseen, invisible life as well. It is very important to keep that in mind.

- We learn that this human life on earth, between the period of birth and death, is itself divided. This is pictured for us by the rising of the land out of the ocean. As we saw earlier, the waters are a picture of human life. Rising up out of that ocean of humanity is land, which has the capability of producing fruit. Thus there exists that which is capable of producing fruit and that which is totally incapable of doing so.

This is the truth God wants us to know.

There is an old humanity which, by nature, is incapable of fulfilling what God desires; and a new humanity, called out of the old, which is capable of producing the fruit God envisions. The old humanity is all one fallen race – blinded, darkened, confused, bewildered, restless, and, as the ocean is one yet divided, so fallen humanity is separated into divisions: nations, peoples, and tongues. The prophet Isaiah says, “the wicked are like the waves of the sea when they are troubled and cannot rest, and their waters cast up mire and dirt,” {cf, Isa 57:20}.

You are asking perhaps, “Do you mean that all who are not Christians are wicked?” Essentially, I do mean that. We need to bear in mind that there is a respectable form of wickedness as well as a notorious form. You can be knowingly wicked, and you can be ignorantly wicked. If a human being is exposed to the knowledge of God’s purpose and God’s love and the program he has for the deliverance of humanity from its bondage, and that individual is resisting God’s work, as far as his own life is concerned, rejecting the Savior whom God has sent and refusing to yield to his gracious call, that person is clearly wicked. He is opposing God’s will. He is raising his fist in a defiant act against his Creator and Redeemer. That is also why he is restless. The world of our day is increasingly turbulent, breaking out constantly into violence and riots. The restlessness of our age is directly due to the fact that our age is wicked. It is pictured by the ocean with its wild surging waves that are never still.

But out of that ocean there comes a new humanity, the earth, a fruitful race of men in Jesus Christ, all one originally in him as the continents were once one, but now divided and fragmented by the forces that have come in since to separate us from one another. Yet there is an ever present un-

derlying unity which we discover when we come together.

I attended this past week a meeting in Wheaton, Illinois, which provided a wonderful example of that unity. We were from various denominations and backgrounds, various theological commitments and disciplines. Yet there was evident, as we met together, a wonderful sense of harmony. We were one in Jesus Christ. We were divided on the surface but one underneath. We had never met before but we were not strangers to each other the moment we met. This is the new humanity, and it alone is capable of producing the fruit that God desires, manifesting the life of God.

This is a truth that runs all the way through Scripture. Psalm 1 says:

**Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the un-
godly,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and in his law does he meditate day and
night.
He is like a tree
planted by the rivers of water,
that brings forth his fruit in his season.
{Psa 1:1-3a RSV}**

But then the Psalmist says,

**The ungodly [the wicked] are not so,
but are like chaff which the wind drives
away. {Psa 1:4 RSV}**

The wicked are restless, tied down to nothing, insecure, like the chaff driven before the wind. But the redeemed are fruitful – these are the two divisions of humanity.

You can see them also in the parables of our Lord: In the parable of the barren fig tree, he began with a man who owned a garden in which there was a fig tree planted – a tree expected to bring forth fruit. But when the owner came three years in a row and looked for fruit he found nothing but leaves, so he said to the gardener, “Cut it down. Why does it cumber the ground, why is it using up the soil? Cut it down,” {cf, Luke 13:6-9}. Remember, the gardener intervened on behalf of the tree, saying, “Let me have it for awhile, let me give it what it takes to bring forth the fruit. If it won’t

bring forth fruit then, cut it down.” In that incisive parable the Lord Jesus speaks of himself as the great Gardener of humanity.

Every one of us is like a fruit tree in the garden of God, and God is expecting fruit from our lives. That is why we are here. He puts us here for a purpose, since everything on earth is here for a purpose. What is the purpose God has for you and me? It is to produce fruit. We will say more in a moment as to what that fruit is. But remember also that closing scene of the Bible, in the 22nd chapter of Revelation, where John sees the new Jerusalem, the new city of God, coming down from heaven. Through the city flows the river of life, and on each side are trees which bring forth fruit twelve months out of the year – continuous fruit. That is what God is after. Here, in the very first chapter of Genesis, and there, in the closing chapter of the Book, there is one great connected theme – the fruit that God desires from the human race. It is made possible only through that which is represented by the earth.

For the moment let us return to the physical and material level for the rest of this passage, and look at certain other significant clues as to the scientific processes that may be involved. In Verse 11,

... God said, “Let the earth bring forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.” And it was so. {Gen 1:11 RSV}

You will notice that the earth is commanded to bring forth the fruit. That is highly significant. I do not know that I am capable of analyzing what it means, but it is evident that God did not make life *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), but, rather, commanded that which was already there to produce the life.

It is clear, therefore, that plant life arises from the earth and has some vital connection to it. It suggests, at least, that there was a combining of matter into a new and radically different form, which resulted at last in the highly complex organisms, in a vast range of species, that we are familiar with in the world of botany. But this was not done by chance as science so frequently tells us. It was by divine choice, by the word of God, that a rearrangement of that which was already there took place. But, if it was a rearrangement, it at least

suggests that it is subject to some degree of scientific investigation.

I know there are many today who are asking, “What if science produces life in the laboratory? These scientists are cooking up strange concoctions in their laboratories and no one knows what’s going to happen.” Many Christians seem to be trembling in fear against the day when that might happen. Let me try to allay your fears, if I may. If they do produce life – and they may – it will only mean that science has done what it has always been doing: simply retraced the steps that the Creator took. It will certainly not prove, as many think, that there is no need for a God in order to have life. It will, in fact, prove quite the opposite: it will show that you cannot have life without the intervention of some intelligence to put things together. Therefore we do not need to fear. Scientists today can synthesize the chemical makeup of plants in their laboratories, but, as yet, they are unable to infuse these with that mysterious quality called “life,” which makes them grow and reproduce, and act as living things.

Also, I will hastily add, this account does not suggest that Darwin was right about the origin of species. Darwin suggested that all life came from a single source, and, through a pattern of infinite modifications, came at last to embrace all the forms of life we know upon the earth today. But this account rather suggests that there were many simultaneous sources which were followed by creative leaps that developed within rather wide but very rigid boundaries. This is also what science is learning. It is interesting that the explorations of geologists have uncovered fossil oak trees said to be over a hundred million years old, and yet those oak trees are approximately identical with oak trees that grow here in California today. There is no change in a hundred million years. It is exceedingly interesting to note that the Bible tells us that plant life developed within very rigid patterns and did not overleap their bounds. Dr. F. O. Bower, in a book called *Evolution in The Light of Modern Knowledge* says,

It is quite gratuitous to assume that all life sprang from a single source. Many doubt whether, for the kingdom of plants at least, there was ever a single trunk or common source for all. Others assert most definitely that there was not.

A second scientific clue in this section tells us that there were three simple divisions of plant life recorded: vegetation (which includes moss, lichens, and other plants that do not propagate themselves by the use of seeds, e.g., ferns); seed-bearing plants (all the grasses and grains, etc.); and fruit (with the seed inside, i.e., pulpy-fruit fruit trees and other plants which produce fruit). This is a very helpful division for scientific purposes, but scientific knowledge is not the purpose of the Bible. In a moment or two we will see why the Bible divides the plant world into three divisions and that such division is in line with its major purpose.

But one other thing first – a word about this phrase, *according to kind*. I have already commented somewhat on it, but I want to point out that no one knows exactly what this means. It is becoming clear that it does not agree with any of the scientific divisions of life, such as species, family, order, or phylum, but certain facts are clear:

- One is that there are vast armies of fossils which show us that there are modifications of both plants and creatures within a commonly recognizable group or family. Dogs are an example. There are many kinds of dogs, from big St. Bernards to tiny Chihuahuas that you can hardly believe are dogs at all. Yet these both belong to the same family. They are equally dogs, strange as it may seem when you look at them. But these dogs, of whatever variety they are, never graduate into cats or horses or donkeys. They remain forever dogs.
- Furthermore, it is quite evident that all living things possess this amazing power to reproduce true to type. It is incredibly difficult to produce real deviations. If you turned all the dogs loose and let them run together, in a relatively short time they would revert to a common ancestral type which would probably be very much like a wolf. The strains which we produced by careful selectivity would simply disappear. Thus modifications are contained within the limits of *kind*.

In a fourth scientific comment on this passage, we read, “God saw that it was good,” and this, of course, means that it was in harmony with his nature of love, and in line with his ultimate purpose to produce man at last upon the earth. It aimed in the

direction God was going. God called it *good*. Today when men are concerned about the rapid utilization of physical resources we find ourselves very much in the same position of Mother Hubbard, who, when she went to the cupboard to get her dog a bone, found that when she got there the cupboard was bare. Increasingly today we are finding an empty cupboard. But here is the record of God’s love and concern stocking the cupboard for the appearance of mankind to come upon the earth.

All of this, as I have earlier suggested, is a reflection of truth on the spiritual level. All of this is designed, not merely to satisfy our scientific curiosity, but in a most remarkable way is designed to teach us something about ourselves. We are the end-products of God’s purpose in earth and all this finds its purpose and culmination in the human race. What is it designed to teach?

The very fact that this occurred on the third day is significant. In the Bible, the third day is the day of resurrection, the power of a new life. Here is a suggestion, a hint, this early in the Bible, that it is only that which takes place in the power of a new life, a new birth, a resurrected life, that can produce a fruitful humanity. It was on the third day that God called forth fruit upon the earth.

Further, that fruit is produced only by the life of God at work in man. Just as God said to the earth, “Earth, bring forth fruit,” so he says to the life of Jesus Christ in every one of us who know him: “Bring forth fruit.” The only thing that makes the fruit possible is the fact that there is a life from Christ within. If you do not understand this, then you do not understand what it means to be a Christian. If your concept of a Christian is that of being a religious person who goes to church and sings hymns and tries to live a good life, then you will not know what I am talking about, because you do not know what it is to be a Christian. A Christian is a new being, produced by a new life that has been imparted to him. It is only when he possesses that new life that there is any chance at all that he can be what both he and God desire.

What does God want you to be?

- You women (it is always proper to start with the ladies first), what does God want you to be? Could you put it in one sentence? The Bible does. There is a very beautiful phrase in First Peter, in which Peter says that women are to have “a meek and quiet spirit,” {1 Pet 3:4

KJV}. I know that word *meeek* is throwing some of you right now. If you think of it as a kind of simpering obsequiousness in which you must give in to anything anyone wants, then you are quite right in throwing it out. But meekness is really “strength under control.” What God wants in a woman is a gracious, disciplined character whose chief quality is gentleness; strength controlled by gentleness, that is beauty of spirit. That is what God wants in a woman. It is simply impossible, no matter how many charm courses you take, how many bottles of lotion you buy, how many tons of cream you smear upon yourself, to produce that kind of beauty. It is possible only through a sharing of the life of Jesus Christ.

- What does God want in you men? He says very plainly in the closing chapter of First Corinthians, “quit you like men, be strong” {1 Cor 16:13b KJV}, be courageous. That is what God wants in a man. Strength of character, strength and courage, united. That is the essence of manhood, as beauty of spirit is the essence of womanhood. What does it take to produce it? The life of Jesus Christ. You cannot be a man without Christ. You never will be the man you want to be without Jesus Christ. If you shut him out of your life your manhood will increasingly deteriorate till you yourself are aware of what everyone around you has known for some time, that you are not a man, not anywhere near the man you want to be. This is what God is teaching us here. Fruit can only be produced by the earth, and the earth, rising out of the seas, is a picture of the new humanity, the new race of man in Jesus Christ.

You will notice also that Moses divided this into three levels. We spoke of this earlier. Why does the Bible divide plant life into three major divisions? Because throughout the Scriptures you can trace a three-fold division of the fruit that comes from humanity:

- Jesus said that when a sower went forth to sow, he spread his seed upon the wayside. Some fell on hard, rocky ground, some on the thorns, some where the sun would burn it up, but some fell on good ground and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundred-fold: three divisions.

- John, in writing his first letter, describes Christians in three ways: little children, young men, and fathers. There are thus three divisions of manifestation of the life of God, the fruit of the Spirit.
- There are also three kinds of food mentioned in the Scripture for the spiritual life. There is:
 - the milk of the word,
 - the bread of life, and
 - the strong meat of the word.
- There are three divisions of reward awaiting those who fulfill the life of faith: praise, honor, and glory.
 - Every man shall receive praise, says the apostle {cf, 1 Cor 4:5b};
 - but the Lord Jesus said, “If any man will serve me, him shall my Father honor,” {John 12:26b KJV}.
 - And there will be those who will share with him the fullness of his glory, when he comes {cf, 2 Th 1:10}.

There are other three-fold designations like this found elsewhere in Scripture.

Finally, God looked at this wonderful world, filled with the beauty of plant life, green, lush, ready for the animal life that was to be introduced into it, and said, “It is good.” It pleased him. Thus when God looks at a humanity which once was self-centered, concerned only about its own desires and its own ways, living for itself in willful self-indulgence, and sees it turned and headed in another direction, and made to live for others and to be concerned about other matters than “what is happening to me?” When the big “I” fades into the background, and there comes a warm compassion and an outgoing spirit, and a willingness to serve and help others, God says of that: “It is good.” It pleases him. It is a life pleasing unto the Father. It is to this we are called. This is in line with his purpose, and he has provided everything it takes to produce it. As Peter says, “His divine power has granted to us all that pertains unto life and to godliness,” {2 Pet 1:3a RSV}.

I am finding that everywhere I go today there is an increasing hunger for this kind of life. There is a great unspoken, mute plea visible in the eyes of young men and women all over the world today to learn the secret of life, to discover how to fulfill their manhood and their womanhood, how to be what God wants them to be.

I walked about the campus at Wheaton College the other day. They were preparing for their Homecoming Game and there were the usual crepe banners hanging from the buildings and trees, and on the sidewalk certain displays and signs, containing sometimes statements of Scripture from a modern version and, in other places, epigrams. One of these struck my eye as I walked about. It declared, "We see the things that are, but who are we?" That seemed to me to be very expressive of what is in the heart of everyone today.

This question is producing the surging agony of restless humanity in our day, a cry for a God whom men seem unable to find and yet when he makes himself known they resist his call and do not want to yield to his loving ministry. That is what creates the tension of life. God calls us to be fruitful, to produce the same fruit which our own heart hungers to have. Why then, when he makes known to us the way this fruit is produced, do we rise up and push him back and fight for our own self-interests, clinging constantly to these withered, decaying bits of self-life which render us so barren?

Why is this?

Why do we not yield ourselves to the fruit-producing qualities that God has called into being in the new man, Jesus Christ?

When we do, we discover that it is all true – the old life begins to fade and all things become new.

Prayer:

Our Father, there may be some here who are ready to give up trying to produce true humanity in any other way than by the way you have determined. We pray that in this very moment they may open their hearts to the Redeemer, to the Savior, to the Lord Jesus, that they will welcome him and cease their resisting. For our part, Lord, who have already done this, we pray that we will recognize that we are only cheating ourselves when we do not give full reign to Christ's rule over our lives. We are only inhibiting our own lives and the glory that was intended for us. Our Father, we pray that you will help us to open our hearts and minds to hear anew and afresh, and that, here and now, we may produce on this earth that which is the hunger of your heart, a humanity that is strong in the courage and greatness of manhood, and winsome and gracious in the beauty and the glory of womanhood. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Signs and Seasons

by Ray C. Stedman

On Tuesday night of this past week our area experienced an eclipse of the moon. I would like to ask you, “Were you able to interpret the message of that eclipse? Did you understand what God meant to say to humanity when he arranged the orbits of the earth and the moon so that the earth would come between the sun and the moon periodically and eclipse the light of the moon?” If you did not, it was because you did not know the significance of the fourth day of creation. In the events of this fourth day, recorded in the first chapter of Genesis, Verses 14-19, we have the key to the ultimate meaning of such phenomena as an eclipse of the moon:

And God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and for years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day. {Gen 1:14-19 RSV}

In coming to this fourth day of the creative week we must face a problem that is often raised

and which bothers many people: Why is it that light is created on the first day, but the sun, moon and stars are not made until the fourth day of creation? There have been several solutions suggested for this difficulty:

- There are those who feel that the sun and the moon were actually made on the first day but they did not shine directly upon the earth until the fourth day; that something obscured their light – heavy clouds, perhaps, or some other cosmic phenomenon – and on this fourth day this obscuration is taken away; they are permitted to shine directly upon the earth, and certain functions are assigned to them by the Creator. This does, perhaps, solve the difficulty, but it always strikes me as forcing the language of this section. There is nothing said about the obscuring of light, or the clearing away of clouds. The language does not even suggest it. The same terms are used as those describing the other things God did. He “made” the sun and the moon, the greater light and the lesser light, and he placed them in the firmament (in the sky), that they might perform certain functions.
- There are others who suggest that perhaps the earth was really made first before the sun and the moon. They take the passage as it literally reads, that God made the earth before he made the sun or the moon, that the sun and the moon were not actually made until much later. There

is some evidence that the moon was made later than the earth. In fact, there are some scientists (and I think there is some Biblical evidence for this as well) who theorize that the moon was made from the earth; that it was torn from the earth and the area that is now the Pacific Ocean was once filled with the material that now makes up the moon.

It is interesting that the Surveyor V lunar probe has sent back from the moon the information that the surface on which it rests has the chemical composition of a type of rock which is widespread on earth. (That disposes of the green cheese theory.) This rock type, basalt, forms the crust of the earth under the ocean basins and underlies the continents at depth as well. Thus it is possible that the moon did originate from the earth in some fashion. It is also interesting that this could tie in with the continental drift theory. Perhaps the removal of the moon from the earth led to a breakup of the originally unified land mass and the continents began to drift away from one another toward the vacated region of the Pacific basin. There are many difficulties in these speculations, but, at any rate, there is some evidence that the moon was created after the earth.

But it is very difficult to imagine how the sun could be made after the earth was formed. It is particularly difficult to imagine how plant life could develop upon the earth before the sun was shining in the sky. This seems almost incredibly difficult from a scientific point of view, and, therefore, this idea seems not to fit the facts very well.

- The best explanation, and one which I personally adopt, is what we have been saying all along: that this passage is not trying to teach a consecutive series of developments. Chronological time is not primarily in view of Genesis 1. The great question of Genesis 1 is not, "How long ago did these things happen?" or even, "How long did it take in the process of making them?" despite the fact that we continually bring these questions into this passage. It is not so much the question of *How*, but really the question is, *Why* did these happen.

There is a remarkable sequence that has been noted by many in Genesis 1. If you take the fourth,

fifth, and sixth days of creation and lay them alongside the first, second, and third, you will notice a very remarkable parallelism. The first and fourth day both deal with the bringing of light to the earth. The second and fifth day are both concerned with the ocean and sky. And the third and sixth day deal with the land and its life, animal and plant life. So here is really a series of three, repeated twice, during these six days of creation: light, ocean, sky, and the earth. In the second repetition there is a further development and enlargement of that which has been given before, a recapitulation in more detail. Therefore, these are not six consecutive days, but they come in a sequence of three. The events of Day 4 occur at the same time as the events of Day 1, but further detail is given.

It is interesting to note a similar structure in the book of Revelation. Many people cannot understand Revelation because they try to read it chronologically. They get confused by the sequence of sevens there – seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven vials of the wrath of God – which do seem to follow one another. The events are confusing if you read it that way. But take these as recapitulations, with one series overlapping the other, corresponding in time, and you will find a wonderful harmony develops and it all fits into place beautifully. I am suggesting that this is the way we ought to read the first chapter of Genesis.

It is interesting that the number three is stamped upon this chapter of Genesis, as the number seven is upon the book of Revelation. Anyone who is acquainted with Eastern languages knows that numbers are very significant in the East. Here, in Chapter 1, the number three is repeated many times. Three times it says, "God created," three times it says, "God made," three times it declares, "God named," three times it reads, "God divided," and three times it says, "God blessed." So throughout the chapter the emphasis is on this number three. But the book of Revelation focuses upon the number seven. This is highly significant, for three is the number standing for the essence of Deity – the Trinity, the Three-in-one, the very essence of God – and that number is stamped upon the created world. Seven, too, is the number of deity, but deity in its full manifestation – deity unveiled, deity fully revealed. It is quite understandable, therefore, that you would find Genesis at the beginning of the Bible and Revelation at the end. I

mention that in passing only to stir your minds to understand and explore some of these things in Scripture.

If it be true that Day 4 occurs at the same time as Day 1, then we have a remarkable accord with some of the proposals of science. For instance, this explains without any difficulty or forcing, the source of light on Day 1. It comes from the sun and the moon, as we might expect and as everything in science indicates. Further, this would show that life began first in the sea and not upon the land, for Day 5 and Day 2 are simultaneous. Life begins in the oceans, as recorded on Day 5, rather than upon the land as recorded on Day 3. This again is what science has discovered. Furthermore this idea would reveal that animal life and plant life began together. Since, in many cases, one is dependent upon the other, this is in exact accord with what the fossil record reveals and what science has discovered. That may help us in trying to reconcile this with some of the facts which science has uncovered in its search for truth.

But, as I have suggested, the great question is never “How?” but “Why?” The answer to the question, “Why did God make the sun and moon and stars?” is given in a three-fold way here in this passage. Notice the three divisions:

- They exist, first, to give light upon the earth, both during the day and at night. They separate the day from the night.
- Second, they exist to measure the process of time, “for days and for years.” says the Scriptures. They are the means by which we measure time.
- Third, they are designed to mark significant events; they are “for signs and for seasons.” The entire record of human history confirms the truth of this. This is exactly what the sun and moon and stars do.

We all know that the sun makes the day. One of the hardest questions I ever heard was the question of a little boy who asked his father: “Daddy, why does the sun shine in the daytime when we don’t need it, and not at night when we do?” That was a keenly observant question, but its answer is very difficult. Yet it is obviously true that the sun

makes the day, and separates the day from the darkness. But the darkness is not entirely dark, for God has provided light in the darkness: the light of the moon and the stars. (By the way, the stars referred to here are thought by most Hebrew scholars to be more likely a reference to the other planets of our solar system. They are not the distant stars of sidereal space, but the other planets which shine brightly within our solar system and which we see as stars.)

We know also that the rotation of the earth is what determines the length of the day. The speed of the earth as it rotates on its axis determines the 24-hour-day we have. Yet that speed is regulated by the moon which acts as a brake upon the earth, raising and lowering the tides. It restricts the speed of the rotation of earth to the exact time that makes possible the 24-hour-day, which is the length of time best adapted to the needs of man. Is that not remarkable? Other planets have entirely different lengths of days. On some of the planets a day would occupy months and even years of our time. On others they go much more rapidly. On Jupiter, for instance, the day is only about nine of our hours long, though it is the largest of the planets. But God has designed a 24-hour day for our planet because it precisely fits the need of humanity.

The orbit of earth around the sun determines the length of the year, which, again, is just right for human needs, providing a harvest once every 365 days, the right length of time needed to preserve human life upon the earth. The orbit of the earth around the sun is determined by two factors: the gravitational pull of the sun, and the velocity of the earth. No one knows what determines the velocity of the earth, what strange force hurls us through space at about 1100 miles per minute. We do not know what causes it. But here we are told that God has ordained the sun and moon to provide measures of the time which mark off the segments of life we call days and years.

Then, as suggested here, the heavenly bodies are also for special signs. We are all aware that eclipses, for instance, are like mileposts in human history, marking off certain dates. We can study events in ancient history because the eclipses have been recorded. Anyone familiar with the Bible at all knows how the sun and the moon have served as great signs. There is that strange occurrence called Joshua’s long day, recorded in the book of Joshua, when the sun stood still and the moon stayed its

course for about the length of a full day. There is that other strange story in Isaiah, during the days of King Hezekiah when God turned back the shadow on the sun-dial so that Hezekiah would have a sign that God was at work in his life and his kingdom.

We are all familiar with the story of the star of Bethlehem, which caught the attention of the Magi in the East and brought them to Bethlehem. It announced the birth of the greatest person ever born in the history of our globe. There is also the strange darkening of the sun at the time of the crucifixion; an unexplained darkness that lasted for three hours. It was not an eclipse of the sun, as some versions say, because no eclipse lasts that long, but it was an especially remarkable darkness. There have been other times like this. Many of you have read of the "Great Dark Day" in New England in the 1780's, when the whole New England region passed through a period of darkness that no one to this day has been able to explain. And through the Bible there runs a repeated refrain, beginning in the early books and running through into the New Testament, which says there is coming a day when the greatest even the world will ever know, the return of Jesus Christ to earth, will be heralded by the darkening of the sun and the moon turning to blood. These bodies are provided for signs and for seasons.

But it is when you turn from the physical level to the spiritual level of these functions that you come to a full understanding of why they act as they do. What is the spiritual significance of the sun and the moon? In the Scriptures we find the sun repeatedly used as a symbol of Jesus Christ. Malachi closes the Old Testament with the promise, "the Sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in his wings," {cf, Mal 4:2 KJV}. In the symbolic visions of Christ that appear in Daniel and Revelation, his face shines with the brightness of the sun. Again and again the figure of the sun in its glory is used to describe the greatness of the Son of God.

Then, what is the symbolic significance of the moon? It does not take much thought to see the relationship between these two. If the sun is Christ figured for us, then the moon is the people of God. Again, you have interesting references to this. In the Song of Solomon, which describes the relationship of the Lord and his people, you find the bride described as "fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army with banners," {Song 6:10b

RSV}. Recall also in the New Testament that the Apostle Paul tells us that Christ and his church are seated together in the heavenly places. As here we are told that the sun and moon were placed in the firmament to perform functions upon the earth, so in the Epistle to the Ephesians we learn that Christ and his church are seated together in heavenly places to be a testimony to the universe of the great truths God desires his creatures to learn.

As you think this through you can see what a beautiful picture this is. The moon has no light of its own; it shines only by the reflected light of the sun. So the church has no light of its own to give; it has absolutely nothing to say to this world, except to reflect the message which God has given it. The knowledge of that is helpful in answering the question that is plaguing many today, "What is the purpose of the church?" "Why are we here?" "What are we supposed to be doing in this world?" The answer is: reflecting the truth, the light that comes from God. That is the major purpose of the church in the world.

You recall that Jesus himself said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world," {John 9:5 RSV}. But, speaking to his disciples, he said, "You are the light of the world: a city which sits upon a hill cannot be hid," {Matt 5:14 RSV}. Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun, so the church (or the people of God in any age), are to reflect the light of the Son of God.

Further, we are told here that the sun was designed to shine in the day, but the moon to shine at night. That is very significant. We learn in the New Testament that the Lord Jesus Christ shines in his fullness only for those whom Paul calls, "the children of the day" {1 Th 5:5b KJV}, i.e., only believers in Christ. The world cannot see him but he shines for us. He illuminates our hearts and lives. He shines into the darkness of our souls. He captures our imagination and wins the love and affection of our hearts. But this is only for those who have come to know him, who have become children of the day and not of the night. It is for them Jesus Christ shines.

But the light of the church is for the darkness of lost humanity. It is in the moral darkness of this age that the church is to shine, reflecting the light of God. God, in a sense, hides himself in his people. That is why we say, and say quite rightly, "The only Christ this world can see is the Christ they see in you and me," the Christ who is reflected

in the attitudes and reactions of his people. That is why it is so extremely important how we live. The apostle writes to the Ephesians and says, "You must no longer live like the Gentiles live, in the darkness of their minds," {cf, Eph 4:17}. You must begin to live in the light. In that same chapter he says, "Walk as children of the light, and not as children of the darkness," {cf, Eph 5:8-11}.

Over and over in the New Testament you have such exhortations. We must not be like the world around in its blindness, its darkness, its hostility, its obscurity, its failure to understand, its ignorance. We must walk as those who understand what life is about, reflecting truth for the world to see, that there may be some light in the darkness in which they live. Only as the church does this is there any light in the world. That is why the Lord says of us, "You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine among men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven," {cf, Matt 5:16}.

That brings us to the meaning of eclipses. Why do we have eclipses? They are not inevitable in the pattern of nature. It would have been possible for the Creator to design the orbits of the sun and the moon in relationship to one another and to the earth so as to have eliminated eclipses. But he did not. Why do we have them? In each of these natural events there is a great and important lesson taught. There are two kinds of eclipses, that of the sun and that of the moon:

- When the moon is in eclipse it ceases its shining as the earth comes between it and the sun. So the church loses its light when earthly values and earthly aims obscure the face of Jesus Christ. This is what has been wrong with the church many times, and what is wrong today. The people of God forget the fact that they are not a worldly people but begin to live for the same aims, the same purposes, and the same standards and values as the world around. When that happens, the light of the church goes into eclipse. It loses its light and the world around plunges into darkness.
- On the other hand, the sun stops its shining when the moon comes between the earth and the sun. If you follow the figure through you will see what it means. When the church becomes more important than its Lord, then the

light of the sun is blocked out and all is in darkness. This too has happened again and again. People have forgotten that the great aim and object of the church's concern is its Lord. They talk only about the church and what it can be and try to draw the attention of the world to the church. They are concerned about denominational values and denominational prestige in the eyes of others. When the eyes of Christians and the world are focused upon the church and not its Lord, then the church obscures or eclipses its Lord, and the light ceases to shine.

We are told that the sun and the moon, depicting the Lord and his church, are put in the sky to serve as measures of time. Is it not interesting, when you turn to the Bible, that the people of God determine the onrush of human events and how long those events last? There is that remarkable passage in Daniel 9, familiar to many, called the vision of the 70 weeks, wherein Daniel is told that 70 weeks of years are marked off in relation to Israel, 490 years. He was told that 483 of them would lead to Jesus Christ. As time ran on its course the nations of earth were unaware of this and carried on their affairs in complete ignorance. But in the reckoning of God, those years were being clicked off on God's chronometer until the moment came when the Son of God was to be presented as King to the nation of Israel. At that precise moment, 483 years after the beginning of the predicted period, the Lord Jesus mounted a donkey on the Mount of Olives and rode into the city in the so-called "Triumphant Entry," offering himself as king in fulfillment of the promises. The people of God are the measure of time.

We read in the Olivet Discourse and in other places in Scripture that the gospel is first to be preached unto all the earth "and then," the Lord says, "the end shall come," {cf, Matt 24:14}. Peter, writing to the church, exhorts them to be diligent and exemplary in the way they live, in order, he says, that they might "hasten the coming of the day of God," {cf, 2 Pet 3:12}. Again, see how time is related to the people of God.

Furthermore, the sun and moon shall be for signs and seasons. I think it is most significant that no one has yet been able properly to write a history of the world without relating it to the church, to the people of God. For as the church goes, so goes

society. Next Sunday we celebrate the 450th anniversary of the day when Martin Luther strode up to the castle church of Wittenberg and nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door and thus began the Protestant Reformation in northern Europe. He was not the first of the Reformers for there were others before him, such as John Huss of Bohemia, and others. But you cannot read the record of those days without seeing that, as great theological truths began to break out upon men again, they also had an immediate effect upon society around. As the Reformation came into being, the Renaissance was born.

There is no other way to explain what happened in 18th century England in the days of John and Charles Wesley, when England was saved from the terrible riots, violence, and destruction that the French experienced in the French Revolution, except to note that the Evangelical Awakening broke out in England at that same time. As the Evangelical Awakening swept through the British Isles, economic conditions were changed and society was adjusted.

Ask yourself, "Why we are going through this present decline in morals, this breakdown of law and order?" The answer is, "The church has been languishing, sunken in spiritual poverty and darkness." We must remember that we are the church, and that, as the individual Christian shines, so the church shines. But when individual Christians turn their backs upon their Lord and walk in the ways of the world, the light fades from earth, the nations are plunged into darkness, evil conditions break out in society, and tumult, violence, riot and immorality come rushing in. This is the invariable record of history. This is why God has provided a people

who might shine and give light; who might be salt, arresting the corruption of society around. If ever there was a day which calls the people of God back to an earnest facing of these things, and a turning away from the values, standards, attitudes, and outlooks of the world, to give themselves once again to fulfilling their calling and reflecting the glory and light of God, it is the day in which we live. May God grant that we will, each of us, earnestly, individually, face this question and ask ourselves, "What am I doing about this? How am I failing to reflect the light of God in my life, in my home, in my family, in my situation? When am I doing what the sun and the moon never do, defying my Creator, refusing to fulfill the function for which he has placed me here?"

Prayer:

I thank you, our Father, for the lesson of the sun, the moon, and the stars. Write it upon our hearts that we will not forget. As each day in its unchanging course reminds us of these events; as the sun rises and the moon sets, and the stars come out, as the light of the night is brightened by the shining of the moon, so help us to remember that this is the picture of your intention for your church: to shine in the moral darkness of this world and lighten it until the Day Star shall arise once again, "the Sun of righteousness, with healing in his wings," to bring light, in all its fullness of glory, to a troubled and darkened world. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Heights and Depths of Life

by Ray C. Stedman

On these Sunday mornings we are trying to search out the wonders God has hidden in this magnificent first chapter of Genesis. One of the Proverbs says, “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings is to search it out,” {cf, Prov 25:2}. God delights in hiding truth, not because he is trying to keep us from it, but because he wants to stimulate us to seek it out. In the first chapter of Genesis there is a great deal of truth hidden and it is exciting to find it.

I hope that, from Sunday to Sunday, you are trying to anticipate the hidden things of these passages. They are recreating for me something of the lure of my childhood games of hide-and-go-seek. Would we not lose half the glory of Christmas if the gifts that are put under the tree were not wrapped up and thus hidden from us? It adds to the lure and mystery of Christmas to have these gifts concealed behind wrappings. And what we are trying to do with Genesis 1 is to take off some of the wrappings and see what God has hidden here.

You will recall that we have found a hidden structure in this chapter; that the days do not follow one another in consecutive order, as we often take them to do, but we have found an overlapping, a recapitulation, a series of threes repeated twice. The first series is Days 1, 2, and 3, and then it begins again with Days 4, 5, and 6. These correspond in time and end with the seventh day on

which God rests from all his labors, a day without evening and morning. All this helps us to understand the correlation of this passage with what science has discovered in the world of nature around us. It adds to our excitement to see how God has recorded truth in this structured way.

If this structure be true, then Day 5, to which we come now, links very closely to Day 2. Days 1 and 4 also occur at the same time. As we saw last time, in Day 4 we have the account of the creation of the sun and the moon. It is striking that our week, which is based upon this creative week, begins with Sunday, the first day of the week. If we are right about this structure this would help explain why the name of the fourth day, which would properly be called Sunday, is given to the first day of the week, with Monday (or Moonday) following it. It is also helpful to note that the first of these series of three deals with realities, i.e., the existence of certain fundamental, basic realities of the physical world – light, the ocean and sky, and the land – while the second series of three deals with relationships, which are tied somehow to the first three:

- The sun and the moon explain how light came;
- The fish and the birds occupy the ocean and the sky; and
- The animals and man appear on the land.

But now we come to Verse 20 and the account of the fifth day of creation:

And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.” So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day. {Gen 1:20-23 RSV}

There are here certain very interesting scientific points brought out in this brief passage. In Verse 20 it sounds as though we have the same kind of occurrence as that recorded in Verse 11, which reads, “And God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation,’” {Gen 1:11a RSV}. We saw that this suggested that perhaps there was a link between plant life and the lifeless matter which was there beforehand; that plant life in some sense came out of matter by a creative act of God. It looks as though this is also what we have in Verse 20, but that is the fault of our English translation. Actually, it is not the same structure in the Hebrew. Verse 20 does not say, “Let the waters bring forth...” as though there were a link between marine life and the waters. What is literally said in the Hebrew is, “Let the waters swarm with swarmers...” The verb and the noun are very similar to one another and come from the same root. “Let the waters swarm with swarmers, and let flyers fly,” is what God said.

This divine word produced marine life and the birds, and the form of it suggests no connection with any preceding material. This is strengthened by the very next verse where, for the second time in this entire passage, we have the word *created* appearing. “God created the great sea monsters and every living creature” ... and the birds. The first use of *create* was in the very first verse of the chapter. It is significant that again we have this particular word brought in. God now does a new thing. There had been no animal life of any kind before, but now it is created in the same way he

brought the earth, in the beginning, out of nothing. It strongly suggests that animal life did not evolve from lifeless matter.

The interesting thing is that this is also what the fossil records suggest. One of the many puzzles to scientists has been the total absence of missing links, intermediary bodies, between inorganic matter and the first appearance of life, as well as between the earliest forms of life and some of the more complex structures we know today. Where are these missing links? There are not only one or two missing, but millions and millions. The fascinating thing is that, according to the fossil record, life in the seas appears suddenly and fully developed. Science has puzzled much over this. The major divisions of animal life as we know them, except vertebrates, appear nearly simultaneously very early in the fossil records. And in those fossil remains the crustaceans, for example, are found to be fully developed crustaceans much as they are today; the mollusks (shell fish, etc.) are fully developed shellfish, varying only slightly from those we know today. This is thus in accord with this Genesis record which says that God produced marine life suddenly. He created this kind of life.

Also in Verse 20 we have the first appearance in Scripture of a very remarkable and important word. We are told that God brought forth in the waters “swarms of living creatures.” “Living creatures” is a translation of a single Hebrew word *nephesh*, which means “soul.” Here we have the first appearance of creatures with souls. Perhaps you never realized before that animals as well as men have souls, but they do. The soul marks the major difference between animal and plant life. You can observe that for yourself. Trees and cabbages can grow and reproduce, which shows they are alive, but they do not fall in love with each other! You might see two cabbages putting their heads together but that is no sign a romance is developing. Nor are they able to remember the past, nor do they suffer from a bad conscience. These are all the faculties of soul. The mark of animal life, even marine life and bird life, is that animals can think and feel and decide. Those are the three major functions of the soul – the rational, the emotional, and the volitional functions.

These are rather highly developed in some animals. Any of you who have paid a visit to Marineland and seen the educated dolphins there know how intelligent creatures can be. They even

put some of us human beings to shame. If you have ever had, as I have had, an interesting conversation with a Mynah bird, you will realize how intelligent even birds can be. (I will admit that he changed the subject very frequently, but we had an interesting time talking together.) But the use of *nephesh* indicates that God has done something new in bringing forth animal creation into the world.

Notice also in Verse 21 that among the marine life were what is called here “great sea monsters.” That is surely a more accurate rendering than that found in the King James Version, where these are called “whales.” They are not necessarily whales. The Hebrew word here is most interesting; it means, literally, “long-extended things,” whatever they might be. It is tempting, I admit, to link these with the age of reptiles when long-extended things crept around on the earth and swam in the seas, but it is only speculation to do so and I will not indulge it. However, it would be a rather ironic divine joke if the steadily increasing evidence would confirm the existence of such a long-extended monster in Loch Ness, over in Scotland. God has a wonderful sense of humor and it is just like him to pull a trick like that.

In Verse 22 another interesting point is made. We read that God not only pronounced all this good, as he had done before, but he does a new thing as well. When God pronounces something good, we have come to understand that this means it is in line with his divine purposes, and in accordance with his divine character. Everything good comes from God and only that which is good comes from God. But now for the first time we read, “And God blessed them, saying ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’” This blessing of God seems to be linked somehow with the function of sex. “Be fruitful” he says, “and multiply and fill the earth.”

It is interesting to note that plants and trees also reproduce. There is a type of sexual function within the plant world, but it is without the qualities of volition and emotion. There is no sense of choice – plants reproduce haphazardly, at random, as it were; and there is no emotion involved as far as we can detect. Plants lack entirely the emotional faculty. But both qualities are involved in animal reproduction. There is in the animal kingdom the addition of desire and choice to the function of sex,

and this seems to be the meaning of the blessing of God. We find this in its highest zenith in man, and God blessed the man and the woman in similar language. We shall look at that more closely when we come to the sixth day of creation, when man appears. But it is interesting here to note that even in the animal creation the blessing of God ties in somehow with this remarkable divine function of sex, and includes the qualities of pleasure and of choice.

So much for the physical level of understanding of this passage. It is very fascinating and we could follow some of these leads even further. But, as we have seen all along, it is a mistake to get tied down to the physical only. That level is not the reason why this chapter was written. It is not designed primarily to inform us scientifically. We have seen all along that the physical is a projection into the visible realm of that which is true, in a deeper and more crucial sense, in the spiritual kingdom which surrounds us on every side. That is where the truest reality lies. The physical world around us is but a faint reflection of the unseen, invisible reality of the spiritual. We tend to think of it the other way around. We think that what is seen is clear, real, and important. But the longer we live and understand the revelation of God, the more we see it is the other way about. The physical is but the faintest reflection of the real. This truth forms the basis for an understanding of the physical world and the great lessons it teaches us concerning the unseen kingdom. Since it is invisible, we need the visible in order to remind us of it.

Milton, in one of his poems, asks this question:

What if earth be but the shadow of heaven
And things therein each to the other like.
More than on earth is thought?

What if, indeed? That is exactly what we are discovering here. Since this is so, then, as we have already seen, the physical is a constant reminder to us of the spiritual – once the key is found! You cannot start with nature and find your way to God. Men have found this true throughout many centuries of endeavor. Nature is not the key to the world of revelation, the unseen realities of God. It is the other way around. Once we have the revelation of God we can understand the reason behind nature; we can probe the mystery of nature. And nature without revelation is a mystery. No one can un-

derstand why it operates the way it does. Scientists can puzzle out, to a limited degree, how it operates but they cannot discover why nature does things in a particular way. It takes the revelation of God to do that. That is why these two sources of knowledge about life are so important to read together; one unfolds the other.

If that be the case, then Genesis 1 is kind of a table of contents, if you like, to the rest of Scripture. This is what we have been finding. It introduces the great themes which are amplified throughout the rest of this amazing book. Let me review briefly what we have found and you will see how this is true. Take the four days we have looked thus far:

1. Light and darkness was a picture for us of the existence in the universe of good and evil, and the necessity for continual choices to be made between these two. This is a basic, fundamental theme of life which runs all the way through Scripture, and all the way through human life.
2. Then we saw how the ocean and sky, divided asunder, are a picture for us of the reality of both physical life and spiritual life:
 - a seen, visible, life; and
 - an unseen, invisible, life.
3. Then the separation of the land from the seas became a picture of the two divisions of physical humanity; that which is barren, pictured by the ocean; and that which is capable of producing the fruit God desires – a regenerate humanity, the new humanity, in Jesus Christ.
4. We saw also that the sun and the moon figured for us the Lord and his people:
 - the sun shining in brightness as the light of the world, as Jesus said of himself, “I am the light of the world” {John 8:12b}, and
 - the moon, reflecting the brightness of the sun, shining in the darkness of the night as a picture of the church shining in the moral darkness of this world, the only light the world in its darkness has.

But now we come to this fifth day. What does it mean that God created the fishes and the birds and told them to be fruitful and multiply, and fill

the ocean with fish and the sky with birds? Let me ask you: Would it not be unthinkable that such a remarkable table of contents as this would omit the truth which occupies more space than any other in the Bible, and which is one of the chief goals toward which God’s redemptive love moves? It is impossible to think so. I am speaking, of course, of the great truth of the possibility of living in continual victory over an alien or hostile environment. This is what the Bible continually aims at. It is trying to teach us how to live in the midst of pressures, problems, dangers, and perils, and to live, not at a mere subsistence level, but triumphantly, victoriously, “more than conquerors,” as Paul puts it in Romans 8 {Rom 8:37}. Is that not the great truth toward which all of revelation moves? That we might be triumphant; that we might echo with the Apostle Paul, “Thanks be unto God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph and spreads abroad the fragrance of his presence everywhere we go,” {cf, 2 Cor 2:14}. That is the truth that is figured for us on this fifth day.

Genesis 1, we must remember, was written from humanity’s point of view, since only man could ever get the point of all this. If it has spiritual significance it is intended for us. We are the only creatures on this earth that could possibly grasp this kind of information. And, more specifically, it is written for the Spirit-taught man, the one whose mind and heart is open to the teaching of the Spirit of God and to whom the Spirit of God can open the “deep things of God” that Paul speaks of in First Corinthians 2. If that be the case, then we must look upon this whole record from the standpoint of what it means to us. As man looks at the ocean around and the sky above him, he sees that which is essentially an alien atmosphere, an alien environment:

- The ocean, in and of itself, is hostile to human life. We can swim in the ocean, yes, but not for very long. If we should suddenly be cast into the midst of the ocean without any means of support we would not last very long. It is absolutely alien to us.
- The air above, though it is that which we breathe to sustain life, we have found to be an alien realm as far as transportation is concerned. It is interesting to read through ancient

records and see how long man has dreamed of flying.

In Greek mythology there is the story of Icarus, the young man who dreamed of flying like the gods. In order to escape their prison, his father made wings of feathers and wax. Although cautioned not to fly too near the sun Icarus did not listen, and as he soared up into the sky the wings melted and he fell into the sea and perished.

Man has been dreaming of flying for centuries, but he has never been able to do it, of himself. So there are two realms in the natural world in which man as man is unable to operate effectively.

We must now come to an attempt to understand this on the spiritual level:

- We have already seen that the oceans are a picture of unredeemed and barren humanity, the world without Christ, the world of organized society with its systems of values, its power structures, and its methods of operating. You and I, as Christians, know well that if an individual believer attempts to live in that kind of a world on his own resources he is doomed. It is not very long before his spiritual life is suffocated and he finds himself unable to live spiritually. If he tries it on his own, he is doomed and he will drown.
- On the other hand, the atmosphere is a picture of the spiritual life, “the heavens” Paul calls them in Ephesians {cf, Eph 1:3, 1:20, 2:6, 3:10, 6:12}, the place where we live, in the realm of divine reality, a life that is pleasing to God. Here again, if an individual believer attempts to operate in this realm on his own resources he will not die, but he will find he gets nowhere. Trying to live the Christian life in the energy of the flesh, in a dedicated, sincere effort to do that which is pleasing to God apart from a dependence upon the life of the Spirit of God within, always ends up in frustration and bafflement. This is what Christians discover as they go along, that they are not made for this realm; they cannot operate in and of themselves. They find themselves like a man trying to fly through the sky with his own arms, frustrated, baffled, impotent, unable to function.

But here is the picture of this fifth day: By a direct impartation of divine life, on which man learns to depend, a believer can live in the hostile environment of the world around as a fish lives in the sea – gracefully, powerfully, abundantly. He can learn to operate in this realm and live in this hostile atmosphere effectively; that is the picture here. Also, in that rarefied atmosphere of the spiritual life where a fall would be fatal, a believer, depending upon the life of God within, can fly like a bird, free to roam at will. In fact, Isaiah puts it that very way:

... they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run, and not be weary, they shall walk, and not faint.

{Isa 40:31 KJV}

Is this not also the reason for the blessing of God that comes at this point?

Here is the exercise of a divine gift. But, like the gift of sex that was given to the physical realm of animal creation, it is not automatically exercised. It requires volition and choice. Translating that into the spiritual realm, you do not live in the world as a Christian and automatically experience the divine help that makes it possible to survive and to enjoy your circumstances. You must choose this. It is a moment by moment choice. And it results in emotion. It is glorious, exciting, enjoyable. It is challenging, demanding, vitalizing. That is why you have at this point the blessing of God mentioned, because it describes a new and exciting function imparted by the divine life.

“But,” someone is saying, “Look, man has found a way by which he can travel in the sea and in the air. We have ships and even submarines which can go into the very depths of the sea, we have airplanes that can fly through the sky, and we do it all the time. Man has learned how to survive in these environments.” Ah, but look more closely at that. Man has learned to imitate the fish, and imitate the bird, but he is as unable to do it in and of himself as he always was.

The significant thing is that every now and then these imitations crack up. When they do, they prove themselves to be what they are – a mere imitation of the real thing:

- A submarine, when something goes wrong, is immediately in terrible danger, and the inhabitants of it become frantically aware that they were not made for the sea. When the forces on which they were relying cease their function for any reason whatsoever they are as exposed to danger and death as if they were naked.
- When something goes wrong with an airplane it comes crashing to earth to reveal itself to be only what it is: a clever but unreliable imitation of the real thing.

See how this is all designed to picture for us these great and marvelous truths? You would never understand them by reading the first chapter of Genesis alone; it takes the whole Bible to make this clear. But the wonder of it is, once we understand the message of the Scriptures, we can come back and see that it is all here right from the beginning, thus marking this amazing book as coming from a divine mind – revealed to man and coming through man but envisioning all the divine wisdom and understanding given to us by the Spirit of God.

What a lesson there is in this fifth day for us. The next time we watch a bird fly, or a fish swim, I trust the lesson will come home to our hearts. You and I cannot live in the world, this satanically governed society, apart from a moment by moment dependence upon the imparted divine life which alone makes survival, victory, and triumph possible.

Nor can we exist of ourselves in the realm of the spiritual. The flesh, with its sleazy imitation of the real thing, may make us look as if we are able to fly in the spiritual realm – for a while. But sooner or later we will come crashing down, to expose ourselves as the phonies we really are. Nothing but the real thing, nothing but a genuine dependence upon an imparted life, can make it possible to fulfill what Isaiah envisioned, to mount up with wings like eagles, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint. What a glorious experience this is!

I do not know how to put this in terms that will really capture your imagination. I do not know how to say this in such a way that young people, particularly, will see that this is what God intended you to experience. It is not the dull, dead, defeated life that is so often characteristics of Christians, making them look as though they were soaked in

embalming fluid for half an hour a day – but it is the adventure of a life that meets every problem by reliance upon the God who dwells within, who is adequate for every situation, and who makes it possible to survive miraculously despite a hostile environment.

Is this not what you see in the New Testament figure in the incident of Peter's walking on the water? There is a man doing an unnatural thing. How was it that Peter was able to walk on the water when Jesus bade him to come? Peter never understood the process, he never solved the problem by himself. He did not conduct a series of scientific researches until he finally understood how to make water bear human weight, and then step out upon it. No, he simply obeyed his Lord and in dependence upon him, walked on the water. Of course, when he got his eye off his Lord he began to sink and he had to cry out to the Lord to save him. Then the Lord lifted him up and the two walked back together. That is a picture of the spiritual life, the life God intends to be lived:

- It is to be *in* this world, but not *of* it; and
- In the realm of the heavenlies, in which the natural man is not made to survive and the flesh has no power to function, and yet
- To be able, in both cases, to manifest the triumph of divine wisdom and live in victory over every surrounding circumstance.

Now translate that into your life at home. There is where you run into the rough friction of life. That is where you get right down to the blood, sweat, and tears – the nitty-gritty of life. There is where you experience the hostility of the world, and the frustration of not being able, in your own strength, to meet the problems that come to you. But that is exactly where divine life is intended to operate. As you learn to lay hold of this continual impartation of the life of Jesus Christ in you, given by a divine creative act, you will discover that you can, moment by moment, hour by hour, meet every problem in the fullness of his resources and live in victory over the hostile environment of your life.

Is that not what Scripture promises?

These glowing wonderful promises of God are intended to be translated into daily experience.

Prayer:

Thank you, our Father, for the lesson of the fish and the fowls. We pray that this lesson may not be lost upon us the next time we see birds flying in the air, or fish streaming through the waters. Grant to

us, Lord, that we may be reminded thereby that you have made adequate provision for us to live in the hostile environment in which we find ourselves, alien to us as men and yet open to us as believers in the Spirit of God. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Born to Reign

by Ray C. Stedman

There is a sense of heightened anticipation as we come to the sixth day of creation for it is on this day that man makes his appearance. In Christmas plays, when the little children are performing, and little Johnny or Laurie appears on the platform, parents eagerly anticipate this and crane their necks to get a better view. It is because when someone to whom we are related is involved we feel immediately involved ourselves. Thus when man makes his appearance on the creation scene, our interest is bound to be heightened.

The sixth day of creation is parallel in some respects to the third day, and like it, is a double day. It has, as do all the days, an evening and a morning, and during the evening (which always comes first in the order of Scripture) we have an account of the creation of the land animals.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. {Gen 1:24-25 RSV}

There is little that is new in this account. It merely repeats the language we have had before which suggests to us an indefinite period of time during which animal life appears upon the earth. But the order given here is first the larger beasts appearing, then the ones which later were to be domesticated (all subsumed under the title of "cattle," which would include goats, sheep, camels, etc.) and then the smaller animals, including even insects and reptiles those that creep upon the face of the earth.

This order may be listed in reverse of its actual occurrence, for it is recorded, evidently, in respect to man who appears at the end. It is all pointing toward man. The category of "beasts of the earth" would certainly include the apes and the monkeys, as the animals with bodies most nearly like men. That perhaps explains why the order appears somewhat in reverse to that in which science maintains animal life appeared on the earth. But it is also apparent that we have again suggested strongly that life appeared in creative leaps and within the rigid boundaries that Scripture designates as "kinds." This is not a scientific term, but it certainly indicates boundaries beyond which variation was not permitted to spread, and thus is considerably different from the claims of Darwinian evolution.

The language also suggests that each creative leap that occurs would indicate that the combined forces of light, darkness, the weather, plant growth, and other natural forces had produced a climate which is designed for animals more and more like man. It is quite obvious, as you read this account, that all of it is aiming toward man. He is the climax of the creative week and now, on this sixth day, all is ready for him to make his appearance. In exact accordance with the fossil record man comes last in the order of life appearing on the earth. Thus we read in Verse 26,

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." {Gen 1:26 RSV}

I shall stop reading there because there is far too much in this record of the sixth day to try to

cram into one message. I will hold the rest of this account for further studies, even leaving to our next message an investigation of what is meant by these fascinating and mysterious terms, “the image” of God and “the likeness” of God. We will have a great deal to learn from those as we look at them in our next message.

But there is one thing that is immediately evident in this brief account of the appearance of man upon the earth, and that is: **The origin of man is strikingly different from the origin of animals.** Animal life appeared much as plant life did, and as the fish and birds appeared. It is all described in very much the same language and was evidently following the same manner of emergence. But now a different note is struck, and a completely different atmosphere prevails. You notice, for instance, that man appears only after God has held a divine consultation about him. God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” The question immediately arises, to whom is God speaking? Who is the other party or parties to this conversation?

There are some who suggest that he is talking to the angels; that since man was not yet made, the only other creatures with whom he could converse would be the angels. But this is impossible, in view of the very next verse which says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God” {Gen 1:27a RSV}. He is not therefore talking to the angels when he says “let us make man in our image.” The only other possibility is that here is the first major revelation in the Old Testament of the fact that God is not a single unity but that there are other Persons within the Godhead, and he is talking to the other Persons involved.

You know, perhaps, that the word for “God” which is used throughout this passage is the Hebrew word *Elohim*, a plural word. Now that means more than when we say a thing is plural. The Hebrews also had another form called the dual form, and if the dual form had been used it would have meant that God consisted of two Persons. But it is the plural that occurs which means that the Godhead can consist of not less than three persons. It is this plural word that is used throughout this passage, a plural noun but with singular verbs. It is remarkable that here on the very first page of the Bible we have more than a strong hint of the Trinity, the triunity of the Godhead. “God said, ‘Let us

make man in our image,’” and “So God created man in his own image.” This play back and forth between the singular and the plural is strong confirmation of what the rest of the Bible tells us, that God exists in a strange three-fold unity, three-in-one – not three Gods but only one, yet subsisting eternally in three remarkable Persons.

That is about as far as we can go in defining God, but we can accept the definition as true. There are many examples often used for the Trinity but most of them are rather confusing because they do not really illustrate a Trinity. I do not want to go into this any deeper at this particular point, but it is interesting that the idea of a Trinity only appears in connection with the emergence of man upon the earth. It is only man, among the creatures of God, who can understand and enter into an experience with a triune God. So when man appears God also reveals himself as existing not as a single unit, but as a triunity.

Notice also in this account that man stands as the link between God and creation. He is a mediator. The Lord Jesus Christ, when he appeared as the second Adam, the perfect man, is also said to be a mediator, but between God and man. Here the man, Adam, is created as the mediator between God and all animal life. He is made in the image of God which links him with God. In Psalm 8, David cries, “... thou hast made him little less than God,” {Psa 8:5a RSV}. That is an accurate translation. The King James Version says, “a little lower than the angels,” but the word is literally *Elohim*, the same word that is used here in this passage for God. Man is also said to be the governor of the created world, to have dominion over the fish and birds, over the cattle, and even over the creeping things upon the earth.

At this point we must deal briefly with man’s relationship to the animal world. Here we must part company entirely with the theory of evolution. Mr. Darwin said that man is the end product of animal life, that he is the highest of the animals, is linked to them and descended or evolved through interminable ages, from animal life. The impression received from his ideas is that man is not really very far removed from the animals, that there are close links which tie man to the highest of the animal life, especially the apes, who are most like us in the animal creation.

Ever since Darwin every monkey in the zoo has been asking himself, “Am I my keeper’s brother?”

That accounts, of course, for the discouraged look on their faces.

If you take a walk through a museum of natural history you will see dioramas that picture the descent of man. In these you will see ungainly creatures with huge slumping shoulders, a slouching gait, protruding jaws and heavy eyebrows, who are said to be the links between the apes and man. Anyone visiting such a museum is almost driven to the conclusion that this is all very well substantiated, that science has established the fact that man does come from the animal world. But the actual truth is that there is no evidence whatsoever that links man to the animals – none whatsoever. Actually, the gap between man and the highest of the apes (and scientists themselves admit this) is at least as great as the gap between the ape and the amoebae. There is no close connection whatsoever. Science is at a total loss to account for the sudden appearance of true man, with his amazing faculties not found in the animal creation. Through the decades since Darwin, scientists have been looking for the links that would establish a connection, but these links do not exist in fact – only in imagination and plaster of Paris.

Let me give you a few quotes from evolutionists themselves to indicate how true this is. I do not want to dwell long on this, but I know there is considerable interest in this. Jacobs and Stern, who issued a college textbook called *The Outline of Anthropology*, admit:

The most decisive changes away from a Dryopithecus level [a supposed ape ancestor of man] occurred, not in the later periods for which fossils have been found, but in the middle Pliocene to the late Pliocene periods for which not an iota of evidence is available.

Now these men are evolutionists. This quotation does not mean that they cast aside the theory of evolution. But they do admit that there is no ground for this particular claim other than certain educated guesses, and that the fossil records do not contain any missing links, though they have been presumed to have occurred before the fossils were formed. But there is no evidence for this at all. Also, one great authority, A. L. Kroeber, says,

That great mysterious “X” of a generation ago, the famous Missing Link, has become quite outmoded. The story leaves him

stranded and forgotten and its path is all the more intricate and dramatic for it.

Just one more reference along this line: Dr. J. M. Gillette, writing in *The Scientific Monthly*, presented an article entitled *Ancestorless Man – The Anthropological Dilemma*. All this is simply to make clear that science itself finds little or no evidence to link man with the animal world. It is all mere speculation as a result of projected guesses, based upon the theory of evolution.

But there are even some Christians who feel that perhaps God did make the body of man through evolution from the animals, but put in it a soul and spirit, and it is these that makes man different. His body evolved from the animals but his soul and spirit are a unique creation of God. There are some who feel that there were certain hominoids, or hominids (manlike animals), that existed at the same time Adam was created. Now it is very likely that this was true, and this would account for the discovery of certain bones that have been reconstructed in our museums. But from the Biblical record we must insist that Adam, the progenitor of the present race of man on earth, was not one of these hominids. The reason is that all the Biblical evidence points to the fact that Adam was created an immortal being.

- That does not mean someone who cannot die, because Adam did die.
- That means someone who need not die.

Jesus Christ was also an immortal being. He did not need to die, and he did not die by any effort of man. He said, “I have power to lay down my life and I have power to take it again,” {cf, John 10:17-18}. He did not die because of the effects of crucifixion – he died because, on the cross, he dismissed his spirit by an executive act of his own will. He laid down his life in that way.

The first Adam was also an immortal being. His body did not need to die. But if his soul had been placed in a mortal body, then the second Adam is not like us. According to the Scripture, the second Adam came to become man as man was made in the beginning, entirely like us. He became one with us. The writer of Hebrews says,

he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, {Heb 2:17a RSV}

Thus the Bible denies that men evolved, as some scientists would tell us, that he was created directly by the hand of God. We will say more on this as we come to other studies, but I want to point this out here:

- Man is now being redeemed by the grace of God, and
- To be redeemed means that he has fallen from what he once was.

Redemption is a process of restoring him to what he once was. We know from the Scriptures that when the redemptive act of God is complete man will stand before God, body, soul, and spirit, all made in the power of an endless life. Thus this record strongly suggests that the body of Adam did not come from the animal world.

That brings me to the final point here in Verse 26, which is **the purpose for which man was made**. He was given dominion over all the created universe. He was made to govern and to master the world in which he was placed. Even though man has fallen he has never forgotten that command, and this accounts for his unending persistence in trying to master the forces of earth, to climb the highest mountain and explore the deepest sea and to utilize the animal creation for his own purposes. But also, the effect of the fall is seen in the amazing fact that the man who was placed in this world to govern it is now on the verge of destroying everything.

If evolution be true, and man is, as the evolutionists tell us, the highest achievement of evolution, then what kind of progress is it where man, who represents the zenith of evolutionary achievement, is found to be crueler than any animal could be and whose obdurate madness is threatening to bring the whole thing down in total collapse, destroying all animal life as well as himself? Yet, despite the fact that man has lost his ability to master, the desire to do so still remains as a kind of racial memory within us. And that desire in itself is a picture, on the physical level, of what redeemed man is called to be on the spiritual level. Here we come to the great purpose of this passage. It is not

here to teach us what our instincts already have informed us, that we are made to govern. It is here to illustrate to us that when we become redeemed we are called to reign in life, to master life.

Let me give that to you directly from the pen of the Apostle Paul. In Romans 5:17 he says:

If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. {Rom 5:17 RSV}

Reign in life – not in heaven – in life, now, at this present time. That means to control, to govern the effects of life around us, to be in control of events, though fulfilling the program of the Father, and moving in the direction God determines. Redeemed man is never to be a helpless victim of circumstances. It was not meant for the world to make havoc of the church, but for the church to make havoc of the world.

If you read the events of our Lord's last week in Jerusalem you will see exactly what I mean. There he is, moving toward the goal which the Father has ordained, that he should die upon a cross. He sets his face like a flint to go up to Jerusalem and is constantly aiming at that moment he knows to be the Father's program for him. But notice how he goes toward it in full control of every circumstance. He sends out the disciples to do the work that leads to his arrest. He dismisses Judas to go out into the night, telling him when to leave to accomplish his betrayal. When the soldiers come to take him he rebukes them and they fall to the ground in fear. He could easily have turned and fled, but he waits quietly for them to take him. The only untroubled person in all that troubled account is the person of the Lord Jesus as he walks in solitary majesty through all those tumultuous events. He was reigning in life. And that is what the Christian is called to do. The circumstances of our lives are sent by the Father, they are the program God has picked out for us, but our attitude in them is to master every event, not being taken by surprise but reigning through them all.

This brings us to **the matter of prayer**. What is prayer, this mysterious power placed in the Christian's hands? Primarily, it is a means of communication between God and man, but second-

darily, it is a means of control of the events of earth. Have you ever seen prayer in that light? Look at First Timothy, Chapter 2. Paul says, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions. [Why? Why pray for kings and those in high positions?] that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way," {1 Tim 2:1-2 RSV}. That will be the result of prayer, the ability to lead a quiet and peaceable life. That means that when riots, tumults, and outbreaks begin to occur, prayer can have a very vital effect upon these things. Prayer can quiet these social outbreaks that threaten the peace of our time. Christians have no idea what is committed to them in this ministry of reigning over the events of life. This is evidenced by the fact that we really have very little confidence in prayer, as is seen in the attendance at prayer meetings.

Lambert Dolphin was telling me this past week about a circumstance that occurred when the Beatles came to Kansas City recently. The women in the Christian Women's headquarters there became concerned about this because they knew that the Beatles exercised a strange magic over young people. They whip up youthful enthusiasms and create mesmeric forces that lead young people to see life in a distorted fashion with the ideas and values of the world greatly exaggerated, and spiritual truth diminished to a minute degree. So they organized a prayer meeting to counteract the effect of the Beatles when they came into town. And when the Beatles came, they were very disappointed in the response. They did not find the enthusiastic reception they had had in other places. And the young people seemed to experience no aftereffects from their visit, but went about their business, enjoying life quite free from these influences. When this same group heard of the riots breaking out in Detroit they gathered for prayer. The next day the riots took a different turn and quietness fell upon the scene again.

Well, you say, that is just coincidence. Perhaps, perhaps, but the scriptural record and the testimony of 2000 years of church history speak otherwise. When the people of God are faithful in prayer, wonderful things can be accomplished.

I was just with John Noble in Tyler, Texas. This man had the cruel experience of being incarcerated for nine years in a Soviet slave labor camp

above the Arctic Circle. His father was there with him, and was placed in solitary confinement for three years. He had no one to talk to and was almost driven out of his mind by the silence. But he had been led to Christ by the sufferings of this labor camp, and he began to pray that God would send him a Bible. What could be more unlikely than to have a Bible be given to a prisoner in solitary confinement in a Russian slave labor camp? But he kept on praying that God would give him a Bible. He asked the guard one day if there was any reading material he could have. The guard said "No, of course not!" – that even if they had some they could not give it to him. But the next day there came a summons from the commandant to appear before him. When the prisoner was led in, the commandant said to him, "The guard tells me you've asked for reading material. I know what you want, you want a Bible." And he turned around and reached on the shelf in back and handed him a Bible. He said, "We didn't have a Bible here and we had to send to West Germany to get this for you." What moved him to get that Bible, no one knows. He had to send outside of Soviet controlled territory to get it. But God moved that man to get a Bible and that Bible sustained Mr. Noble's father all through the long months of his imprisonment.

That is reigning in life.

Why is it that the United States has been unable to disengage itself from Vietnam? It is my personal conviction that much of it is because Christians, who ought to know better, are wasting their time in political demonstrations and protests on a physical level, and ignoring the spiritual weapons which God has placed in their hands by which with concerted prayer this thing could be brought to a close. That is why Paul says in Second Corinthians 10, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal," {2 Cor 10:4a KJV}. They are not fleshly. They are not the means which worldlings use to accomplish their results, but, he says, "they are mighty ... to the pulling down of strong holds ... and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

What fools are we to lay aside these mighty weapons of spiritual power and waste our time in futile outward demonstrations which only serve to inculcate more resistance and more violence. We are called to reign in life, to have dominion over the things of earth and the forces of it. This is why James, writing to the Christians of his day (because

they had the same problems that we have), says to them, “You have not, because you ask not,” {cf, Jas 4:2b}. Oh, the authority of faith!

This theme runs all the way through Scripture and traces for us the accomplishments of men and women who learned to utilize the weapons of spiritual power God had placed in their hands and to speak with the authority of faith. The account of it is given in Hebrews 11. I suggest you read that through to learn how thrones were toppled, kingdoms changed, armies repelled, and many other events of earth, the things which were reported in the papers of that day, were affected by the power of men and women who learned to reign in life through Jesus Christ.

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray that you will rebuke us by this word, and turn us from the empty, foolish things with which we engage ourselves so frequently, to become once again men and women of vision in the realm of the spirit which lies as an unseen reality behind the events of history. Grant to us that we may learn how to move in this realm, how to become a powerful force to accomplish thy will and thy purpose in human life, through these weapons. We ask in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Glory and the Misery of Man

by Ray C. Stedman

We are examining now the sixth day of creation, the day when man appeared upon the earth. In looking into the meaning of these verses we are attempting to discover the nature of man. You will, of course, recognize how important that is. We will never understand what is going on in human life – in the world or in our private individual lives – unless we understand the nature of man and ask ourselves the question, “What is man?”

The German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, used to love to take long walks of a summer evening, meditating and thinking. On one occasion he was seated in a park when a suspicious policeman noticed that he had been there for several hours. The policeman came up to him and said, “What are you doing?” The philosopher replied, “I’m thinking.” The policeman said, “Who are you?” Kant said, “That’s precisely the problem I’ve been thinking about. ‘Who am I?’” It was this same philosopher who proposed that life could be reduced to four basic questions:

- What can I know?
- What ought I do?
- What may I hope?
- What is man, or Who am I?

This is the question that comes before us as we look at this sixth day of the creative week in Genesis 1: What is man?

The other day I saw a drunken young man. His hair was mussed and in disarray, his eyes were wild and bleary, he walked with a staggering step, and his speech was thick and blurred. When I saw him, two quotations flashed into my mind. One was that very well known one, “There, but for the grace of

God, go I,” and the other was a fragment from the poem by Edwin Markham, *The Man with the Hoe*:

Is this the thing the Lord God made, and gave
To have dominion over sea and land,
To trace the stars, and search the heavens for
power
And feel the passion of eternity?

You cannot look at man in his degradation but that you are struck immediately by the contrast between what man could be and what man is. As G. K. Chesterton (who was a kind of 19th century C. S. Lewis) once said, “What ever else is true of man, it is certainly true that man is not what he was meant to be.”

What was that? What was man meant to be? What were you meant to be? In the fulfillment of God’s intention for you, what was meant to be? Let us look at it in Genesis 1, Verses 27 and 28.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” {Gen 1:27-28 RSV}

The heart of that pronouncement is the words introducing the verse, “God created man in his own image.”

... God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness;” {Gen 1:26a RSV}.

The key phrase is, “the image” and “likeness” of God. Notice that this was never said of any other creature, never said of any animal, bird, fish or plant. This is the glory and the dignity of man, that at the beginning he was made in the image and likeness of God.

The first question that suggests itself to any thinking mind at this point is: What is that image?

- How does it appear in us?
- Of what does the image of God in man consist?
- Is it visible or invisible?
- Is it physical or immaterial?
- Is it the body, the soul, or the spirit?

The Mormons (among others) teach that the image of God in man is the body of man; that is what is made after the image of God. They base this upon certain anthropomorphic expressions in the Scripture, those expressions which seem to impute human features to God, e.g., the eyes of God, the fingers of God, the hands of God, etc. The Mormons take these literally and say they prove that God does indeed have a body like our body. This is fundamental to the teachings of the Mormon faith. They fail to see that they are really turning the whole issue around and saying that it is God who is made in the image of man.

If, in this sense, man is in the image of God, then it is also true that apes and monkeys are made in the image of God, because bodily they look very much like us.

I know some people I could refer to who are proof of that!

But if we are saying that God has a body, we also must ask, what kind of a body? What does it look like? What color eyes does God have? What kind of hair? Is it long, like a man’s hair, or short, like a woman’s? What is the color of his skin? Is it black or yellow or brown or what? What does God look like? You only need to ask questions like this to see how absurd is this whole proposition that God has a body like ours. Anyone who is acquainted at all with the Scripture in depth knows that it specifically denies this about God. He does not have a body.

Then what is the image of God in man? Is it the soul of man? Is it because we are able to function on the level of the rational that we are like God? Is it because we are able to feel, to sense, to

have emotional reactions? Is it because we have the faculty of volition and can choose and make decisions? These are the functions of the soul; and it is true that God also does these things. He thinks, he reasons, he feels, he reacts, he chooses, he decides. But if this is also true of God, it is likewise true of the animals. As we have already seen, they function in the same way though to a lesser degree. There is nothing distinctive about his soul that marks man as different from the animals. We cannot find the image of God there.

The last choice is the spirit of man, and here we do find something unique. No other creature of God, in this earthly realm, has a spirit, or more accurately, *is* a spirit. We are told specifically by the Lord Jesus in that remarkable account of his meeting with the woman of Samaria at the well, “God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth,” {John 4:24 RSV}. Here was a poor, worldly woman, who had no education and evidently was not trained in theological matters, yet to her he imparted this great truth. Again, after the resurrection, appearing to his disciples, he identified his resurrected body as the one that had been crucified and laid in the grave, then he said to them, “a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see me have,” {cf, Luke 24:39}. That is, a spirit can exist without a body, and God is Spirit.

Thus it is this that marks the image of God in man. Man, likewise, is spirit. This is the basic, fundamental nature of man. I have a body in which I live, much as I would live in a tent or house. When the apostles speak of leaving the body they speak of departing from it as one would from a house. I also have a soul by which I function on the levels of rational, volitional and emotional experience. But I am a spirit. That is the fundamental me, the fundamental you, we are spirits. Because we are spirits, dwelling in bodies (at least in our present stage of existence), it is a mistake to identify ourselves with our bodies, or even our soul’s reactions. Fundamentally, we are spirits, invisible, unseen by one another, and yet expressing ourselves through the avenues of the body and the soul.

I personally am delighted that you brought your body with you this morning and that you did not come in spirit only, as some people say they attend church. It is comforting to me that you came enclosed in a body, but fundamentally you

are a spirit, an invisible spirit, and that spirit is the image of God.

Now what is Godlike about our spirit? The spirit is made in the image of God, and, if so, then it can do things that God can do but no animal can. What are those faculties of spirit? Let me suggest three of them, at least. Perhaps there are others but I want to mention three:

1. First, there is creativity. Throughout this chapter we have been reading, “God made... God created... God formed... God fashioned.” That kind of activity involves imagination, the ability to think in conceptual terms, i.e., abstract thinking, the ability to see a thing with the eye of the mind and then fashion it with whatever powers are available. This great faculty man shares with God. Man too is creative. Not to the same degree that God is, for we cannot make things out of nothing, as God does, but we can fashion things, make things. Man can compose a symphony or design a computer, he can paint a picture and plan a building, he can even devise a new recipe. A baby can stack blocks on the floor and make a playhouse and, in imagination, enter it and live in it. No animal can do this. Man has the function of creativity because he is made in the image of God. This is the dignity of mankind that separates him, by a vast gulf, from the whole animal creation.
2. Second, God communicates. He speaks, and so does man. Man is the only creature that can talk. Perhaps some are saying that animals also can communicate with one another. Animals do make sounds, but they do not communicate, they do not speak, as we use that term. They do not use language. They have certain signals which they utter and which are mutually understandable. But they do not convey ideas, they do not discuss matters together, they do not talk over an issue as we do. This ability is reserved for man.

Again, throughout this whole section, we have found that the universe sprang into being because God speaks. It is the word of God which forms the ages, says the writer to the Hebrews. God uses words as power, which alters, changes, and affects events and people. This too is the way man speaks. We alone of

all created beings on the earth are able to appreciate the power of a word and to use it to alter lives or to shape history. Someone once asked, “What are the three sweetest words in the English language?” To this he received three replies. A married man said the three sweetest words were “Home, sweet home.” A banker said the three sweetest words were “Enclosed find check.” But a young man said they are, “I love you.” We appreciate that story because we understand the power of words. We know how words can affect us and change us. Words can wreck lives, they can heal and harm, injure and restore. What an amazing faculty is speech! It is part of the image of God in man.

3. Third, in this chapter, we have found that God is always pronouncing things good. He is therefore a moral being, and man shares that character as well. Man, too, is a moral being. He has the faculty of being able to distinguish between evil and good. Remarkably enough, even in societies where there is a denial of morals, as in the relativistic society of today, men still go on pronouncing things good or evil. The standards may vary but the result remains: some things are called good and other things bad. This practice is found universally among men. Everywhere man has a consciousness of moral values. We feel the gnawing of a bad conscience when it sits in judgment over us. Even though we try to stifle it, it keeps insinuating itself upon us and we cannot get away from it. We recognize moral choices and moral values, and this marks us as having been made in the image of God.

Now with these three remarkable faculties: the ability to create (with all man’s wonderful inventiveness involved in that); the ability to communicate (to share ideas which affect, and infect, others), and the divine ability to treat certain things as bad and others as good, man was told to do two specific things. The command came,

- “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (that is one command, given in three different ways).

- Second, he was told to subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.

Man was given the task of filling up the earth; and second, to rule it, to govern it, by exercising dominion over everything within the earth; to subdue its forces, to master them and bring them all under his control and direction. The whole course of history is simply the record of man's attempt to fulfill these divine injunctions. As a race we have never forgotten these commands and have been engaged in doing them ever since.

But what have been the results? The interesting thing is that the fulfilling of these divine commands, given man at the earliest dawn of history, has produced results which are utterly disastrous. To illustrate, this past month there appeared in the papers the accounts of two remarkable speeches given by Stanford professors. Both of the men were reporting on the prospects of the 21st century and both were fearfully pessimistic, though they were writing from two quite different points of view:

- One of them, Prof. Ehrlich, pointed out that there is no solution in sight for the population explosion. Speaking on this very matter of multiplying and filling the earth, he declared that this has essentially been done, the earth is filled. If we go much further we shall only succeed in destroying man from the face of the earth. He saw no hope for the solving of this problem.
- The other man, Dr. North, commented on the situation now prevailing in the realm of international events and international morality, especially in view of international warfare. He, likewise, could see no hope in the matter of man's commission to rule and govern the earth. Everything has gone a-kilter and Dr. North painted a dark and pessimistic picture.

Both men, in one way or another, were saying, "We don't think there will be a 21st century."

What has gone wrong with this image of God in man? Man retains the image of God, but now the creature who is called "God's glory" has be-

come God's shame. Men behave as children, without reason, irrationally. As someone has well put it, "Our problem seems to be that we're suffering from a prolonged adolescence merging into a premature senility."

Why is this? For an answer let us examine the second word that is used in Verse 26: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." God made man in his image but also after his likeness.

Well, you ask, what is the difference between image and likeness? Aren't these the same thing? No, they are closely related, but they are not the same thing.

The image, as we have already seen, is the existence of man as a spirit. It is the equipment that God has given us, the capacity to be godlike. The likeness is the proper functioning of that equipment. It raises the question of whether man is actually godlike or merely has the capacity to be so. As he was made in the beginning, man was both in the image and after the likeness of God. Thus when Adam was formed by the Creator he stood before God as a spirit dwelling in a body, exercising the functions of a soul. He had the ability to be creative, to communicate, and to make moral choices. But he not only had the ability to do so, he was actually doing it. He was exercising the function of godlikeness.

You may have a watch which has the ability to keep time, but the question is: Does it actually do it? In many cases, the answer is "No, it doesn't." It has lost its proper functioning.

So man retains the capacity to be godlike but has totally lost the ability to actually manifest godlikeness. But man was not only made to be godlike, he was Godlike, in the beginning.

The secret, as we learn from the rest of Scripture, lay in an inner dependence that continually repudiated self confidence. This is the hard lesson for us to learn. How confident we are in ourselves. How sure we are that if we set our mind on something we can do it. If we are motivated enough to obtain a thing, all we have to do is to mobilize our resources, set our jaws, clench our fists and move to it and we will get it done. That is the false self-confidence that has been the ruin of the human race. But the principle of godlikeness is the repudiation of that self-confidence and a resting on the working of Another who dwells within. That is what Adam knew. That is the way he functioned,

and thus fulfilled his manhood and manifested the likeness of God.

If you want to see this in history, read the record of the Gospels concerning the Lord Jesus. See him stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee with but a word, "Peace, be still," {Mark 4:39}. See him walking on the water in the middle of the storm, to the concern and fright of the disciples. Watch him changing the water, instantly, into wine. How does he do these things? Is it because he is the Son of God? Is it because he is the Creator that he can do this? No, he himself denied that. He said it was not because he was God the Son that he did these things. He said, "The Son can do nothing of himself," {John 5:19 KJV}. "The words that I speak unto you," he said repeatedly, "are not my words. The works that I do are not my works." "The Father who dwells in me, he does the works," {John 14:10 RSV}. All is done out of a reliance upon the work of the Father indwelling him. He knew the secret of manhood, the lost secret of humanity.

What this world has forgotten and is vainly groping and seeking after, what every course in psychology is hoping to find, what every self-improvement program is attempting to realize but never can, this lost secret of how man was intended to operate, he knew. The likeness of God is lost. That is why man can create, but everything he creates has a twist toward evil. That is why he can communicate, but not only does he communicate truth and beauty, but also lust and hate and filth and bigotry and death. That is why, though he still knows moral values, he denies them and rationalizes them to exalt evil, just as the last verse of Romans 1 describes; men who not only do evil things but delight in watching others do the same things {cf, Rom 1:32}.

It is here where the gospel comes in. Let me read you one wonderful verse in Colossians, where the Apostle Paul shows us the plan of God to counteract the fall of man. In Chapter 3, Verses 9 and 10, he says to the Christians,

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. {Col 3:9-10 RSV}

There is the likeness of God, being restored in man. The image of God has never been lost, for

man still retains the capacity to be godlike but he has no longer the ability – until Jesus Christ is restored to the human heart. When he enters there begins a process which, little by little, step by step, day by day, through trial and heartache, sorrow, disappointment, and judgment, through glory, and blessing, and thrilling experiences of grace, is changing us so as to reproduce in us the likeness of God once again. Thus we not only have the capacity to be Godlike, we are actually becoming Godlike. Is that not glorious? That is what God is after. Being renewed in knowledge is the restoration of the likeness of God.

This is why Jesus said to the woman at the well, "God is Spirit, and they that worship him must worship in spirit [in the image of God] and in truth" [in the likeness of God] {John 4:24 RSV}. Remember also that verse in Second Corinthians where Paul says. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord [that is, seeing the face of the Lord Jesus through the experiences of our life, in the nitty-gritty and hurly-burly of life, through the humdrum routines of life, in the high points and the low spots], are being changed from glory to glory [from stage to stage] into the same image, by the Spirit of the Lord," {cf, 2 Cor 3:18 KJV}. That is the process of restoring the likeness of God in man.

Finally, do you remember that verse in First John 3, "but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is," {1 Jn 3:2b RSV}.

There is a wonderful picture in the Old Testament book of Malachi. In Chapter 3, Malachi says that God sits as a refiner and purifier of silver {see, Mal 3:2b-3}. He puts the silver in the firing pot and builds a hot fire under it. As the silver melts the dross begins to float to the surface. The silversmith sits and skims it off throwing away the dross as it arises. From time to time he bends over and looks into the pot. What is he looking for? The reflection of his own image. When he can see his likeness in the silver he knows that it is pure.

Does that not explain something about life to us? This is what God is doing with us.

Why do we go through these crushing disappointments, these wrenching heartaches, these hard trials, these pressures, these tribulations, these temptations, these times of failure, as well as times of joy, blessing, glory and ecstasy in the Lord?

The Glory and the Misery of Man

What is he doing to us? He is refining the silver until he can see his likeness again.

Remember that the dream of God has been to have a world filled with little Christs, each of them like his Son. Through all the Scripture we have this hope set before us. We who have come to Jesus Christ are predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son {Rom 8;29}, to bear his likeness in whatever degree we permit him to work in us and through us now. Let us hold that in mind as we face life and face these realities. That which was God's glory became God's shame. But that which is now God's shame, which is about to bring the

world crashing down around him, like Samson in the temple at Gaza, can become and is becoming, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, step by step:

- First, God's child,
- Then God's partner,
- Then God's friend, and
- Finally, God's glory!

May God grant that this will be the experience of each of us.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Sex and Food

by Ray C. Stedman

We have been seeking light on the world's greatest mystery – the mystery of what is man. I am sure you recognize that the root of all our troubles, both internationally and individually, is our ignorance in this matter. We do not know what man is intended to be. We are blind to our own purposes, almost totally ignorant of why we are here upon the earth. Because we have lost our sense of direction, we are involved in amazingly intricate problems and are making the most atrocious blunders, both individually and internationally. Therefore it is especially important that we give ourselves to a clear understanding of what this passage teaches us about man. It is especially essential that we know this, as Christians, for if we know what we were meant to be, then we know what, in Christ, we actually can be. This is why this passage is of such tremendous significance to us.

Let me review briefly what we have previously learned from this sixth day of creation:

1. We learned first that man did not arise from the animal creation. Contrary to the now-fading theory of evolution, man did not arise from the animal creation but was created directly by God as a distinct and separate new beginning in creation. We will see more of this as we come into Chapter 2, and especially more reasons why this is true. But it is evident that there is a fundamental difference, psychologically and spiritually, in the makeup of man from that of the animals.

Though the theory of evolution contends that man has arisen from the animal creation, nevertheless science does not provide any evidence to contravene the implication of Scripture that this is not so. As we have seen in previous studies, such a concept is purely a

scientific guess which is without any adequate evidence to support it, and therefore it is perfectly proper for us to maintain the position of Scripture and to recognize that both scientists and biblicists proceed on the basis of faith, in this area.

2. We saw that the basic difference in man is that he is made in the image of God. This image is the spirit which is in man – not his body or soul, the possession of which he shares to some degree with the animal creation. God loves to generalize and the body of man is part of that generalization. But the spirit of man is something quite unique, something quite different from anything the animals have. It is this spirit which renders man creative, communicative, and moral. These qualities are the reflection of the image of God in man. Man can create and invent. All man's marvelous inventiveness is involved in that one word, creativeness. Man can also communicate; there is the possibility of the free flow and interchange of ideas among us, vocally, which no animal possesses. We also are moral beings. Though there may be wide differences as to what constitutes right or wrong, there is never a man or woman made who does not have a sense of right and wrong. Therefore we are all moral beings. God has imparted his image to us and we thus share these faculties.
3. We saw also that man, having these godlike capacities, has been commanded to rule over nature, to be in dominion over the animal kingdom. But his authority and position, which is one of great prestige and dignity, is a derived authority. Man is only able to exercise his authority over the animal world and the world

of nature to the degree that man himself is subject, in turn, to the authority of God. This is inherent in every passage of Scripture that deals with the relationship of God to man. It is man's departure from this obedience to the God who indwelt him which renders him unable to fulfill his function of dominion over the world around. Whenever man does fulfill this, then he is godlike, as well as – to coin a word – God-able. Man has the capacity to be godlike (that is the image of God), but the likeness of God, the actual manifestation of godlikeness, has been lost and is found again only in the new creation. Without godlikeness, man becomes the most dangerous animal on the face of the earth.

Some time ago it was reported that the New York Zoo had a sign on a cage in the ape section, headed, "The Most Dangerous Animal in the World." As the passersby would look into the cage they saw their own image reflected in a mirror.

There are two more factors on this sixth day which we must comment on, and then we shall bring the study of this day to a close. They are: the difference between the sexes, which is mentioned here, and the provision of food for the entire created world. **The subject of sex** is brought to us in Verse 27.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. {Gen 1:27 RSV}

It is significant that at the first mention of man, both sexes are named. This means that sex is no afterthought with God. Nor is woman an afterthought.

As you know, there exist two widely different versions of the creation of woman. The man's version is that God created man, and then he rested; then he made woman and neither God nor man has had any rest since! The woman's version is that God made man, and then he looked at him and said, "I think I can do better than that" – and he made a woman!

But regardless of which view you hold, it is significant that Chapter 2 tells us that woman did not appear as a separate entity from the man until somewhat later in the creation scheme, coming

along after the completion of Adam's task of naming the animals, and after God had accomplished the work of growing a garden in which man was to be placed. We cannot determine from the Scriptures just how long this was, but Adam was, for awhile (and this is the point that is significant in the phrasing of Verse 27), a male/female being, incorporating in himself (not physically, but psychologically) the characteristics both of man and woman. This is highly significant.

Lambert Dolphin and Carl Gallivan have recently written a very interesting paper entitled *Sex Through the Looking Glass*, which is to be published shortly. It is based upon certain little-known passages of Scripture (i.e., little known to the general reader), such as the Song of Solomon and passages in the book of Proverbs. In these they discover that Scripture indicates that every male has within a female "shadow," i.e., the female characteristics are held as recessive traits within each man. Correspondingly, within each woman there are male recessive traits, so that she has a male shadow – self. The relationship between these two factors is very, very important. There is a "battle of the sexes" going on within each one of us, and the struggle of each individual is to live properly in this inner "marriage" relationship. If we learn how to live in a proper relationship in this inner marriage we will be able to handle an outer one without any difficulty.

There is a great deal of helpful matter in this paper, and I would commend it to you when it is published. It indicates, as does this passage, that sex pervades our whole being. We are essentially sexual.

"Oh," you say, "are you going to drag in sex emphasis, the way Freud did?" Well, in a way Freud was right, because the Bible confirms that behind all human life is this strange and mysterious element called *sex*. However, Freud did not go far enough. He never got beyond the psychological and physical; he could not, because of the limited knowledge he had in these matters as an unregenerate man. The Bible goes much further. The Bible indicates that we are sexual at all three levels of our being: body, soul, and spirit. It suggests that this strange force, which is such a powerful drive in human society, manifests itself at all three levels in three different ways, but it is the same force behind all. Science has discovered that x-rays, light waves, and radio waves are all manifestations of a

single law, visible at three different levels. So we have here a reflection of a similar thing; the law of sex is manifest in three different ways:

- On the physical level it is manifest by the familiar act that is the subject of so much discussion everywhere today.
- On the soulish (or psychological) level it is manifest as an urge to communicate with or to share the thoughts of another, thus it is manifest largely in terms of friendship, or close companionship; the need for acceptance by other individuals.

We are all familiar with the fact that sex involves both these two levels, physical and psychological.

- But there is also a third manifestation of the strange power of sex, and that is the function we are exercising at this moment: the power or function of worship. Worship, too, is sex; but sex manifested at the level of the spirit. It is a strange and mysterious hunger to interchange with the divine Being, to become part with him, to share his nature and experience the ecstasy and joy of that union.

Thus this strange force operates at every level of human life.

The significance of Adam as a male/female being becomes apparent when we remember that the Lord Jesus Christ came as a Second Adam. He was all that Adam was. "It behooved him," said the writer to the Hebrews, "that he be made exactly like us, except for sin," {cf, Heb 2:17}. He became the second Adam, and therefore he, too, was a male/female being. I stress the fact that this duality was not physical – he was not a freak, a hermaphrodite but psychologically he combined within himself all the elements of male and female characteristics. It has been often noted, in reading the Gospel accounts of Jesus, that he combined in himself the sternness and strength of the male, with the tenderness and gentleness of a woman. He manifested both in perfect balance and in equal degree.

This is why men, viewing the Lord Jesus Christ, see in him the man, the manliest of men; while a woman, viewing the same remarkable person, sees in him one who thoroughly understands

and empathizes with a woman's nature, able to enter into all her feelings and reactions.

We know from the Scriptures that all the races were in Adam. The different colors and all the distinctions which we say mark race are merely superficial distinctions which were all derived from one source, created by various forces playing upon a single race of man. As you trace mankind back to its source in Adam they all disappear. All races were in Adam, and thus, all races are in Christ. He shares the characteristics of every race on earth. This is why he is such a universal figure, why, wherever Jesus Christ is preached among various people, they culturally identify with him instantly. He combines their cultural distinctives in himself.

Likewise both of the sexes are in Christ, so that Christian character is exactly the same, whether it is found in a man or in a woman. The tenderness, the gentleness, the softness of Christian love is exactly the same in a man as in a woman. The strength and sternness and sturdiness of Christian courage is exactly the same in a man or in a woman, it makes no difference. This is why Paul could write to the Galatians and say to them, at the close of Chapter 3, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus," {Gal 3:28 RSV}. All this is wrapped up in these amazing words in the opening chapter of Genesis where we are told that Adam was created a male/female being. Thus we have a key to the makeup and character of the second Adam.

This brings us to the last thing about the sixth day, which is **this matter of food**. In Verses 29-31, we read,

And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. {Gen 1:29-31 RSV}

Here we learn that the intended food for man is the seed plants (the ones we call the grains), and the fruit of trees. I was somewhat startled this week while eating breakfast and after having worked on this passage somewhat. My eye was caught by the breakfast cereal box in front of me. It declared that this particular cereal was made up of a combination of rice, corn, wheat, and oats (the major grains of the earth), and suggested that it would taste best if it was eaten with peaches or berries (the fruits of the earth). I realized that we were not so far away from this sixth day of creation as many of us have imagined.

The animal world was given as food the whole kingdom of plants. But here we have something of a difficulty with the fossil records. This passage suggests that originally all the animals were plant-eating animals, herbivorous. But according to the fossil record many of the early animals were carnivorous, meat-eating animals. If you have seen any fossil skeletons of these you will recognize that their teeth certainly indicate that they were very likely carnivorous animals. Perhaps the most ferocious and formidable beast that has ever lived on earth was the Tyrannosaurus Rex. Along with the Triceratops, who was also fearsome-looking, these terrible animals were very likely meat-eating animals. There is some difficulty here in understanding this passage, although it is clear from the book of Isaiah that when the curse is removed from creation in the millennial scene, the carnivorous animals will eat plants again. "The lion shall eat straw like the ox," says Isaiah {Isa 65:25 RSV}. If a meat-eating lion can be reduced to that kind of forage, certainly God could have changed the habits of the Tyrannosaurus and the Triceratops and all the rest. I do not wish to enter into controversy in this area. However, it is instructive that the animals upon which carnivores feed are, in turn, plant eating animals. The basic food yet today of all life is vegetable. Even in the oceans the basic food of the swarming animals of the ocean is the diatoms, and algae, which are really microscopic plants and which make up, in incredible quantities, the "pastures of the sea" upon which ocean animals feed.

The point of this whole narrative is that God has made a marvelously complete provision for his creation. The world of nature is full of the most astonishing evidences of the care of God, and it is

ridiculous to attempt to explain these things by the formula, "the survival of the fittest."

Not long ago a couple of Christian men were seated in a park together observing the squirrels as they were busily gathering nuts and furiously looking for suitable places to bury them. One man said to the other, "Isn't it amazing how these squirrels hide these nuts? Do you know that the Indians would observe the activities of the squirrels in the fall, and thus they would know whether the coming winter was going to be severe or mild." He added, "I think it is a most remarkable thing that God has made these animals to know what the coming winter would be like. This is a wisdom we don't possess. How ill-equipped we are in comparison to the animals, in this respect." His friend nodded his head, but said, "Do you know that the squirrels forget half of the places where they hide these nuts? It's a pity God did not give them better memories along with their remarkable ability." The first man was rather disconcerted about this and tried to rationalize it. He thought that perhaps God made the animals to hide twice as many nuts as they needed in order that they might conveniently forget half of them, but that seemed like too strong a rationalization. He finally had to face the fact that the animal kingdom seemed to be somewhat remiss in the area of memory. But a few weeks later his friend sent him a clipping from a scientific magazine in which there was a paragraph that pointed out that certain research had been made and it was found that squirrels plant 17,000 trees per acre, by forgetting the nuts they had buried. This man suddenly realized that the lack of memory on the part of squirrels was really a proof of the greatness of the wisdom of God, who utilized these animals' forgetfulness to provide them a continuing harvest in the years to come.

There are many instances like this in nature. How is it that certain birds can fly with an unerring instinct halfway around the world, and find a tiny pinpoint of land in the middle of the ocean, though this is the first time they have made the flight? How is it that bees can maintain the temperature of their hive within a variation of a few degrees, regardless of whether it is a hot summer's day, or a cold winter's morning outside? How is it that certain varieties of spiders have learned how to capture bubbles of air and build nests under water, bringing those bubbles down from the surface, and thus creating tiny diving bells in which they rear

their young? Who taught them to do a strange thing like that?

How is it that certain hunting wasps are able to provide fresh meat for their larvae by seeking out a certain species of beetle and stinging it so as to paralyze but not to kill, making it possible for the meat to remain fresh though the beetle remains immobile until the larvae are hatched? That has deep freezers beaten all hollow! By the time the larvae emerge the mother is dead, and yet the larvae repeat this whole procedure, without error. Who has taught the animals to act like this and has made such abundant provision for them? It has been calculated that if every ant on the face of the earth were to be exterminated except for one pair, they would soon be able to reproduce all the skill and wonders that are present in the ant world. They would have lost none of the knowledge of ants.

But look at men. Look how apparently ill-equipped we are, with basically no instincts at all. We must be patiently taught everything all over again in each generation. If children are abandoned to the wilds, as sometimes through accidents they have been, their lives will be more beast-like than the beasts. They cannot even talk to one another. After the age of 12 or so, they can only learn a very small minimum of knowledge. Is it not humbling to realize that we could solve the problems of earth by removing one species, *Homo sapiens*? If something happened tomorrow to remove man from the face of the earth, it would not be long until the skies would clear and the stars could be seen at night; the waters and rivers would run clear again, the forests would grow back on the denuded hillsides, and the earth would be restored to an orderly, balanced, beautiful kingdom once again.

What is the problem? Man is the problem. It is man who pollutes the water and the air, ravages the forests, strips the ground, and exhausts the resources of earth. Now he threatens to bring everything down to a smoking nuclear ruin, destroying all animal life along with himself. What is the reason? It is because we have lost our way. We have no understanding of how to handle the commission given us to rule and reign in the natural world. We are out of step with nature. Man is now opposed to nature; he is like an orphan in God's universe.

Why is this? The Lord Jesus put his finger right on the answer when he said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God," {cf, Matt 4:4}.

When God provided bread as the basic food of man, bread made from the grains of earth, the seed-bearing plants and the fruits, he intended, as we have seen all through this account, that such physical bread would be a picture of the bread desperately needed at the psychological and spiritual level of man as well. This analogy has been true in everything we have seen so far. The physical is the picture of that which is more vital and more necessary behind it.

That "bread" of the spirit is the understanding of God's will. It was said of the Lord Jesus by the Apostle John, "The Son of God has come and has given us an understanding." "I am that bread of life," said Jesus {John 6:35}. "He that eats of me shall never hunger." He will never walk in darkness, will never be at a loss to know what is the next step to take to solve the problems with which he is confronted, will not be left, like a naked homeless orphan, wandering blindly through a mysterious universe whose forces he does not understand, but he will know where he is going and what he is doing, and how to do it. The Son of God has come, and he gives us an understanding.

Is not this essentially the meaning of those remarkable words of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 6? Jesus said,

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" {Matt 6:25-26a RSV}

"And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field; which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your

heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.” {Matt 6:28-33 RSV}

Not yours – in the same way that God provides for the birds and the animals and the flowers – automatically, without their thinking. But when we begin to put first that which is of first importance, there is imparted to us an understanding by which we can see how to supply, through the normal faculties given to us as men, all that mankind needs in terms of food and shelter and clothing and supply, so that no one will starve, no one will go naked, no one will go hungry, no one will lack.

Is this not the promise of the Great Society? But it comes only at this point – “seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” Then God promises that you shall be again part of that kingdom for which full and ample provision is made, and in which the least needs of life are understood and provided for. You will experience once again the care of a heavenly Father who knows how to provide all that his creation needs. “I am that bread of life,” {John 6:35} said Jesus, and entrance into that kingdom comes only by a response to him. That includes not only that initial response which brings us into the kingdom of God, taking us out of the cold and darkness and lostness of life outside God’s kingdom and outside of nature, and putting us back in to operate as we were intended to do; but also there is to be a continuing response by

which we go on to learn more and more of him, and thus learn how God intended human life to be. As we do, the inner problems, the inner turmoils, begin to disappear. These strange tensions that tear us apart, these fears that hinder us and keep us from being what God wants us to be, these destructive habits that seize us in an iron grip and will not let us be free, all begin to disappear, to lose their power over us, and we are set free to be men and women as God intended men and women to be. “If you continue in my words,” said Jesus, “you will be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,” {cf, John 8:32}.

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray that we may come to know your word and to know it in its fullness of revelation. How blind we have been, how lazy we have been, who will not learn that which is set before us so freely, so fully. Bring us back, Lord, to this book, to search it, not only in public meetings such as this but in private hours that will make us masters of this revelation, understanding the greatness of the truths that are here set before us. Make us ashamed to be anything less than thoroughly conversant with your word. We ask it in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Seventh Day

by Ray C. Stedman

Today we come to Genesis 2, and one of those unexplained and unexplainable misplaced chapter divisions which we find so frequently in the uninspired division of our Bibles. The first three verses of Chapter 2 really belong with Chapter 1 and complete the record of the creative week. We must now consider the seventh day of creation.

Yesterday, which was the seventh day of the week, my wife and I attended a Bar Mitzvah service for a Jewish neighbor lad, to hear him conduct the service much as a rabbi would. He read, for the first time, from the scrolls of the Torah, the first five books of Moses. It was very impressive to see the rabbi unlock the ark in which the Torah is kept, bring out the scrolls, unroll them on the table, as Jews have done for centuries, and hear this thirteen-year-old boy read in Hebrew from the scrolls. Then he gave thanks for two things which have been the treasure of Israel for centuries, the Law and the Sabbath.

As you know, the Sabbath is one of the oldest institutions in the world, dating, as the Bible makes clear, from the very earliest appearance of man upon the earth, when God blessed and hallowed the Sabbath. Later, it was part of the Law given to Moses and Israel. Many Christians today are troubled – considerably at times – by the question: “Should we be observing the Sabbath yet today?” There are certain Christian groups who feel that this is the case; in fact they insist that we are not genuine Christians unless we observe the commandment of God to keep the Sabbath continuously. It is those claims that I want to examine now as we look at this record from the book of Genesis for the seventh day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation. {Gen 2:1-3 RSV}

We must try to unfold the riddle of this passage, the hidden mysteries which God delights to hide within these simple words. We will look together at seven facts which will open to us the remarkable truth that is hidden in this strange institution of the Sabbath. It seems strange that after 2000 years of Christian teaching the Sabbath is still little understood, though its true meaning is of crucial importance to us.

1. The most outstandingly noteworthy thing that this passage indicates, which differs completely from the other days of creation is the absence of any reference to an evening or a morning. The record of all the other days of creation closed with the words, “and there was evening and there was morning, (a first, second, etc..) day.” But there is no reference to evening or morning in this passage. This helps to confirm what we have already seen in these “days” of creation: that these “days” do not primarily emphasize time, but development. The evening and morning were indicative of a developing process, beginning in a rather incomplete state and moving toward light. But on this seventh day there is no evening and morning. In fact, twice in this brief passage we find the word, “finished,” occurring. “Thus the heavens the

earth were finished” {Gen 2:1a RSV} and “God finished his work” {Gen 2:2b RSV}. Obviously there is no need for development, no place for it. The work of God is complete on the seventh day, and therefore no evening or morning is mentioned.

Therefore, whatever the Sabbath is (which we will see as we go along), it is a perfect thing. It is always the same whenever we experience it. It is not something to grow into; it is something to step into and to discover it to be exactly what it always is perfect, finished. That is our first clue.

2. Let us now look at the second. It is obvious from this passage that the supreme meaning of sabbath is rest. In fact, the word “seven,” the word “sabbath,” and the word “rest,” are all the same basic word in Hebrew, *Shabat*, seven, sabbath, rest. Therefore, the heart of the meaning of sabbath is rest. That is its primary significance.

Let us not misunderstand that. That does not mean rest as we often think of it. When we have been working hard and are weary and tired we need rest in order to restore our strength. But this is not the significance of the word here. It simply means the ending of activity, the cessation of effort. God was not tired by his creative work, he did not need to rest to restore strength. He did not stop because he was fatigued; he stopped because he was through. The Hawaiians have a very expressive word for it, *pau*. It means finished. He is *pau*, finished; and so he stopped. That is what we do when we are through with something, we stop. And this is what God did. He stopped because he was through. He had done all he intended to do and he rested in the midst of a perfect creation. Therefore the true sabbath, we will learn from this clue, is not the keeping of a special day but the ending of a specific effort. That is what sabbath means.

3. As a third point here, the specific effort from which God rested was creation. The text says, “So ... God rested from all his work which he had done in creation,” {Gen 2:3 RSV}. This is the last account of any creative activity. Man was made and then God rested, and there has been no creation since. Man is the last effort

of God in creation, on the physical level. Therefore this sabbath, this rest upon which God entered, is still continuing today. God is not creating physically today. God is ceaselessly active in many, many ways, but not in creation. In the fifth chapter of John, when Jesus was in the synagogue the Jews were very distressed because he had healed a man on the sabbath day. The Pharisees accused him of breaking the Sabbath and Jesus answered them by saying, “My Father is working until now, and I am working,” {cf, John 5:17 RSV}. His argument was that it was proper for him to do a deed of mercy on the sabbath day because he was simply imitating his Father who was ceaselessly active in mercy and love on his sabbath day, his long rest. God had stopped creating but he was still busy in a thousand different ways. Thus the sabbath means that God’s creative activity has ended.

Even evolutionists acknowledge this. Interestingly enough, many evolutionists admit that man is the end of the evolutionary ladder, and that nothing further has been evolved since the producing of man. We cannot agree with them as to how man came into being, but it is interesting that they agree at this point that there is no further evidence of development beyond man.

4. As a fourth point we must therefore recognize that the weekly sabbath, i.e., Saturday, is not the real sabbath. It never was, and it is not now. It is a picture or a reminder of the real sabbath. The true sabbath is a rest; the Jewish sabbath is a shadow, a picture of that rest. All the Old Testament shadows pointed to Christ. They were predictions, foreviews, of the coming of the One who would fulfill all these remarkable things. Every lamb that was brought as an offering was a shadow of the work of Christ. Every burnt offering, every bit of incense that was offered, was a picture of the fragrance of Jesus Christ. The tabernacle was a shadow of him. The high priest, in his garments and his office, was a shadow of Christ as our High Priest. Read the book of Hebrews and you will see how beautifully all this is brought out. These Old Testament shadows were looking forward to the coming of the One who would fulfill these and thus end them.

When the work of Jesus Christ was finished the shadows were no longer needed.

We behave very similarly today. Some twenty-two years ago when, as a much younger man, I was in Hawaii, I found myself engaged to a lovely girl who lived in Montana and whom I hadn't seen for three or four years. We were writing back and forth in those lonely days, and she sent me her picture. It was a beautiful picture and I showed it to all my friends dozens of times. I propped it up on the desk and I would look at it at least three or four times a day. It was all I had to remind me of her and it served moderately well for that purpose. But one wonderful day she arrived in Hawaii and I saw her face to face. I didn't spend much time with the picture after that, nor have I since. The other day I was cleaning out the garage and ran across the picture. It was still a beautiful picture, and I noted that she had not changed very remarkably since those days, but I found that the picture was quite incomplete and unsatisfying. When the real thing came there was no longer any need for the picture.

This is exactly what happened with these Old Testament shadows, including the Sabbath. When the Lord came, and his work was ended, making possible the true fulfillment of God's intention in the Sabbath, the picture was no longer needed. The weekly sabbath ended at the cross. Paul specifically says this. In the letter to the Colossians he confirms it to us. In Chapter 2, beginning with Verse 13, he says,

And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it [not *him*; *it*, the cross].

Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the

substance belongs to Christ. {Col 2:13-17 RSV}

That should make it clear. This is why the claims of the Seventh Day Adventists, the Seventh Day Baptists, and other groups, that Christians changed the sabbath, are absurd, ridiculous. They claim that the Pope changed the sabbath by a papal edict from Saturday to Sunday, and that around the third or fourth century Christians began to celebrate Sunday rather than Saturday, out of obedience to this papal edict. But nothing could be further from the truth. History does not corroborate that in any degree. The Sabbath has always been Saturday and it always will be. It is the seventh day of the week. Sunday has always been the first day of the week. It has never been a sabbath, and it is pure legalism to call it a sabbath or to treat it as one. It is not a day of rest or restricted activity and it is not designed as such. It is the first day of the week; to Christians, the Lord's day.

The shadow-sabbath ended at the cross, as Paul has made clear. The next day was the day of resurrection, the day when the Lord Jesus came from the tomb. On that day a new day began – the Lord's day. Christians immediately began to observe the Lord's day on the first day of the week. They ceased observing the Sabbath because it was ended by the fulfillment of its reality in the cross, and they began to observe the first day of the week. This is what you find reflected in the book of Acts. Justin Martyr, who writes from the 2nd century, says,

But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, when he changed the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ, our Savior, on the same day, rose from the dead.

5. A fifth fact about this: Though this shadow-sabbath, i.e., Saturday observance, ended at the cross, the true sabbath, the rest of God, God's ceasing from effort, continued and still continues today. That sabbath, in its application to us, is defined for us in Hebrews 4, Verses 9 and 10:

So then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God [it is available to us now]; for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his. {Heb 4:9-10 RSV}

That is what the true sabbath is, to cease from your own labors, your own efforts, your own activity; to cease from your own works.

“Well,” you say, “if I did that I would be nothing but a blob, an immobile inactive piece of flesh.”

Exactly! Of course you would. But the implication is that you cease from your own efforts and depend on the work of Another. That is the whole import of the book of Hebrews, another One is going to work through you. This is why Paul cries, “Not I, but Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me,” {cf, Gal 2:20}. This was also the secret of the life of Jesus, as we have seen. He himself said, “It is the Father who dwells in me who does the work,” {cf, John 14:10}. “The Son can do nothing by himself,” {cf, John 5:19}. This is the secret of the Christian who learns “it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure,” {cf, Phil 2:13}. So the secret of true Christian life is to cease from dependence on one's own activity, and to rest in dependence upon the activity of Another who dwells within. That is fulfilling the sabbath, the true sabbath.

That true sabbath, we read in Genesis 2, God blessed and hallowed. As we have already seen in this series, blessing is connected with fruitfulness and dominion. God blessed the animals and said, “Be fruitful and multiply.” He said to man, “Be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over all the earth.” That is what blessing means, to make possible both fruitfulness and dominion. When God “hallowed,” or “sanctified” {KJV}, the sabbath, he assigned it a specific function to perform. That is what sanctification always is – to put to a proper or intended purpose. Thus God designated the true sabbath to the function of producing blessing (fruitfulness and dominion) for man. This is why the Lord Jesus declared, “the sabbath is made for man; not man for the sabbath,” {Mark 2:27}. So the true sabbath rest is to rest on Another, and this is

the divine provision to produce fruitfulness and abundance of victory in a Christian's life.

6. Let us look at that a little closer because that is God's provision for living adequately today. Are you adequate? Do you find yourself able to cope with the situations in life into which you are thrust day after day, moment by moment? Are you confident? Are you capable? Are you panic-proof? Are you filled with fruitfulness, fragrance, abundance? God's rest is designed to produce that. God said it would. He makes it available for that purpose and it is the only thing that will do it; there is no substitute.

I'm afraid most of us fit the self-description of someone who said he was a mouse studying to be a rat. By our best efforts we can rise to a high level of mediocrity – inadequate, unable. Why? Simply because we are depending on our effort. We are either extroverts, confident that we can do things and therefore frequently falling flat on our face; or we are introverts, so afraid to try anything that we don't even dare show our face. It is all because we are looking to ourselves as our resource; our background, our training, our gifts, our talents, our education, etc. It either results in feeling that we have what it takes and can be confident, able, and powerful; or, as we look at ourselves we say, we don't have what it takes and therefore we can't take it and we won't even try. So we become either over-confident and under-equipped, or under-confident and overworked, trying constantly to make up by activity what we lack in results.

God knew that this would be our problem. He understands us. Nothing is hidden from him; he knows exactly the way we operate. Therefore he has designed an adequate provision for our weakness, teaching us how to operate on an entirely different basis, to no longer look to oneself but to look to the one who dwells within; to expect him to do something through you, using your mind, your will, your emotions, your feelings, but it is he who does the work. But unless you begin to count on his working you will never experience it.

7. Right here comes the seventh factor, the one serious problem which remains. Christians say again and again,

- Why is this so difficult to do?
- Why do I have so much trouble?
- Why is it that Hebrews 4:11 goes on to say, "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience."
- Why must we work at this?

Some seem able to learn it, and from time to time we see someone virtually come alive and their Christian life is simply transformed by learning to operate on this principle. They lose their egotism, as extroverts; or they lose their introverted feeling of self-consciousness. They begin to do things and to enjoy them, experiencing the blessing and excitement of Christian living.

Others say, "I see all this, and I want to do it too. I know what is said about how to rest, but I try it and it doesn't work. Why? Why do we fail?" The answer is given, I think, in a word of the Lord Jesus, recorded in Matthew 11, words we well know:

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." {Matt 11:28-30 RSV}

Notice that twice in that passage is the word *rest*. One rest is *given*, the other is *found*:

One is experienced when we first come to Jesus Christ. He *gives* us rest. Do you remember when you came to Christ? You simply believed what the Scripture said, that on the cross of Calvary he took your place, he died for you; he bore the punishment for your sin; he was wounded for your transgressions, he was bruised for your iniquity; and you believed that. Immediately there was a sense of peace flooding your heart, a quietness. You felt no more guilt, no more fear of death, no more need for painful efforts to win Brownie points with

God. You were resting on the work of Another. Christ paid it all; you were freely forgiven. What a sense of rest that was! He gave it to you.

But as you went on as a Christian you found that problems began to return and failures came. Your Christian life became boring and dull, barren and uninteresting. You knew something was wrong and you resolved to try harder, to give yourself more fully to Christian activity, to throw yourself into it with more zeal and effort. This you did, and for awhile things went better, then it seemed to ebb out again into the same old thing. You ended up bored and disillusioned, disenchanted, discouraged. What is the answer? Well, it is what our Lord said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and you will *find* rest," {Matt 11:29-30a RSV}

Back in the days of the old West the oxen teams that came across the prairies were yoked together with a great, wooden yoke, made to fit over the necks of two oxen. A yoke is always made for two, never for one. Jesus was a carpenter, and in the carpenter shop in Nazareth he often made yokes. From this he draws this very apt simile. "Enter into the yoke with me," he says, "you on one side; I on the other." A yoke is also a symbol of servitude, of controlled labor and activity. It means the end of self-service. When an ox is yoked, he is no longer free to do what he wants to do. He is under the direction of the owner, the driver. To be yoked means the end of running his own life and seeking his own way. This is what Jesus means. He did this. "He learned obedience by the things which he suffered," the writer of Hebrews tells us {cf, Heb 5:8}. He learned to do what he did not want to do, because God wanted him to do it. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me," he says {Matt 11:29a RSV}.

When you enter into the yoke with Jesus you expect the Father to take over the program of your life. You may be surprised what he does with it. You no longer have the right to decide what you are going to do with your life. It does not make any difference what time of your life you enter into this yoke, whether you are a youth at the beginning of your adult life, or whether you are a man sixty years old, with a great business depending upon you as the ex-

ecutive head. It does not make any difference. When you enter into the yoke with Jesus Christ you give up the right to determine what your life may be. You expect him to direct you.

It is his job to give the orders, it is his job to make you know what he wants you to do. He may make some dramatic changes, or he may not. He may leave you right where you are, doing what you are doing now, or he may tell you to stop it all, at great cost perhaps, outwardly, and leave it and go some place else to do something else. But one thing is certain, one thing he surely will do, no matter if he sends you some place else or leaves you right where you are – one thing he will certainly do: He will remove you from the spotlight, out of the center of things, he will enroll you in school. And do you know what the curriculum will be? “Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart,” {Matt 11:29b KJV}. He will begin to teach you humility – how not to be the center of attention, how to be content with letting someone else get all the credit. He will enroll you in the school that cancels out ego satisfaction. That is the principle by which the world lives, in its delusion. It is the thing that is destroying human life; the desire to be a god, your own god; to run your life to suit yourself. This can never be for those who are called to be Jesus Christ’s – “you are not your own, you are bought with a price” {cf, 1 Cor 6:19b-20a}.

The reason why you cannot enter into the joy and glory and excitement of the rest which God has provided in ceasing from your own activities and resting upon his, is because, in some way or another, you are protecting some area of the ego, the self-life, saying, “This is mine; keep your hands off.” As long as you do that you cannot have rest.

“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone; but if it die, it brings forth much fruit.” {cf, John 12:24 KJV}

Rest is the secret of human fruitfulness.

As you consent to this, a wonderful thing will begin to happen. You will find rest. Jesus said you would. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find

rest.” {Matt 11:29 KJV}. Rest, with all it implies in terms of fruitfulness and dominion; reigning, ruling, producing that which is worthwhile and satisfying in life. That is the secret of life. This is why Jesus said, “If any man will save his life, he shall lose it. But if he shall lose his life for my sake, he shall find it,” {cf, Matt 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24}. He will find rest, he will fulfill the sabbath for that is what the sabbath is. It is God’s divine provision for us.

This last week I was in a meeting in San Jose with a group of college kids. We were discussing together various aspects of the Christian life and after the meeting closed I was standing with a young man by the fireplace. The room was buzzing with conversation all around us but we were talking quietly together. With great earnestness he told me of the emptiness of his Christian life, despite the fact that he was doing all the things he knew he ought to do. I believed him, too. Yet he was not finding anything of the electric excitement that belongs to a Christian, or of the joy of daily adventure of faith with Jesus Christ. He had no sense of the glory of Christ’s presence in his life, or of the peace that floods the hearts of those who are resting on his activity in them. As we talked together it became apparent that he had made his own plans for his life, had determined what he ought to be, along the lines of his gifts, and was pursuing that program. I said to him, “Perhaps that’s your problem. You see, you don’t have the right to tell God what you ought to be; whether you’re going to be an engineer, or what it is. You don’t have that right any more. You have only the right to come to him and say, ‘Lord, here I am. Now you tell me what you want me to be. You set me in the direction you want me to go.’” Very honestly, he said, “Well, if I did that I’d just end up a drifter. I’d become nothing, I’d just go from place to place. My life would never be worthwhile.” I asked him, “Do you know what is the most worthwhile life that was ever lived on earth? It was that of Jesus of Nazareth and he said that the secret of his life was, ‘I do always those things that please the Father. Where he sends, I will go.’ The program is in his hands, and I am simply fulfilling what he wants me to do. It is up to him whether my life ends up worthwhile or not.”

I do not know what this young man is going to do, but I know that is the secret of finding success in life, a success which is not measured by the

empty standards of the world. In the only judgment that is ever worthwhile, the judgment before the assembled hosts of heaven, when every life is reviewed as to whether it was worth the living, whether it hit the target or not, the secret of a success that will merit the words of Jesus, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," is to learn the rest of God. Anyone who learns that (and to the degree that you learn it) is keeping the sabbath as God intended the sabbath to be kept.

Prayer:

Speak to us, our Father, with those living words which individually suit the message to each heart. Make us to understand ourselves and our relationship to you. Help each one of us to say, with all our heart, "Lord, I acknowledge it. I surrender. I give to you the direction of my life, and I look to you to indicate to me what it will be. Lord, I'm ready to follow, depending upon you to produce in me what you want." In Jesus' name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Was Adam for Real?

by Ray C. Stedman

We have now finished the great narrative of creation, found in the first chapter of Genesis and traced for us in seven mysterious segments which the Bible terms “days,” of which our common week is a perpetual reminder. We saw that this introductory chapter is a kind of Table of Contents to reveal the major themes of Scripture and of human life. We come now to Genesis 2, Verse 4, where we begin a new series to be entitled *Understanding Man*. In Chapter 1 the whole universe was in view. We were there looking at the stars in their multitude, the sun, the moon, the plants, the animals, and finally man. But here in Chapter 2 the record narrows its focus to the human family alone. Like a modern zoom lens the record focuses on the scenes in the Garden of Eden in Chapters 2 and 3. To introduce this section we shall read a few verses beginning with Chapter 2, Verse 4:

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up – for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground – then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. {Gen 2:4-7 RSV}

It is no slight exaggeration to say that there are no chapters more important for the proper understanding of history than these two chapters of Genesis. Here is hidden the secret of man’s sinfulness, that terrible mystery of evil and darkness which continually confronts us in this modern

world. In this section is the key to the relationship of the sexes, the proper place of man and woman in marriage, and the solution to the problem of mounting divorce rates and other marital issues that abound in modern society. Here, also, is the explanation for the struggle of life, and here great light is thrown on the problems of work and of leisure. In this section is the first and most fundamental revelation of the meaning of divine redemption and grace, and here the essential groundwork is laid for the understanding of the cross of Jesus Christ. This whole section is simply unprecedented in importance in the Scriptures.

But, just because it is so important, it has been greatly under attack. These two chapters have often been rejected outright as simply repugnant to modern man:

- There are cults which reject them as being utterly inconsistent with what man wants to believe about himself.
- Sometimes the passage has been dismissed with contempt as merely a collection of ancient myths or legends with no significance for modern minds.
- And sometimes it has been treated as containing important truths, but needing to be – in the favorite word of many today in theological circles – “demythologized.” To quote one of the writers of this school:

“There is truth of great vitality and power in many passages of which the strictly historical accuracy may be questioned. It is our job therefore to find the truth that may be buried under some layers of legend.”

Before we go on in this series to explore the meaning of this passage, with its intensity of significance, we must take some time to dispose of these objections. I must ask you to be patient with me if I seem to be a bit pedantic, but there are many who are bothered by these problems. Lest we seem to ignore these, I want to deal with them somewhat now, and in subsequent messages we will come to the actual meaning of the passage. There are two general lines of attack upon this story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; one is an attempt to destroy the literary integrity of the text; the other attempts to deny the historical accuracy of these accounts:

1. The first approach is based upon the claim that this section of Genesis (and probably the whole of the first five books of the Bible) were not written by Moses, as the Bible claims, but that they were actually composed by an unknown editor (whom these scholars call a redactor), who lived long after David and Solomon, and who may have lived even as late as the Babylonian captivity, only some 500 years before Christ. The critics claim that the redactor was not writing down things that were revealed to him by any divine process, but was only recording certain tales of the women who gathered around the wells and talked over various legends of their past. They claim he collected the tales of travelers and others, and thus recorded for posterity these early legends of man.

The support for this idea arises out of certain changes of style in this passage, and the use of the divine name in a different form. If you look at your Bibles closely you will notice that in Verse 4 the name, "LORD God" appears for the first time. Previously in Genesis there has only been the name, "God," which is a translation of the Hebrew, *Elohim*. But here we have the "LORD God," or in Hebrew, *Jehovah Elohim*, and all through this section that name is used. It has been suggested therefore that this passage is written by another author who has simply collected together certain tales and that you can identify the various stories by the use of the divine names.

Now, fully developed, this has evolved into what is called today *the documentary theory of Genesis*: Some unknown editor has collected

from various sources certain documents which can be identified by certain marks within them, and has put them all together, using excerpts from here, and excerpts from there, and blending them together into the books that we now know as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses.

This whole idea has been supported by certain piecemeal evidence taken from the Scriptures. This is always the case with this type of study. Scholars go through the books and extract certain ideas or passages that seem to support their theory, but they ignore others that would contradict it. This documentary theory gained a wide support, and many of you have perhaps been exposed to it. It has long ago been fully answered by both Jewish and Christian writers. I am not going to dwell on it now, but if you are interested in it, there are books that will fully expose the total inadequacy of this theory. Remarkably enough it still persists, even though it is increasingly difficult to hold.

Forty years ago, Dr. Lyman Abbott spoke at the University of California at Berkeley. He was, at that time, a noted liberal scholar working in this field of the origin of scriptural books. He said something like this:

Young gentlemen, I feel that perhaps I am as qualified as anyone to speak in this field of the origins of the books of the Bible, and I want to warn you against going too far in basing your conclusions upon the so-called 'assured results of modern scholarship.' As one of these modern scholars, I know that these results are not always as 'assured' as they seem to be. My careful conclusion is that the first five books of the Bible were either written by Moses – or by someone else named Moses!

Perhaps that is about as far as we need to go in laying to rest the documentary theory of the Scriptures.

2. The second attack upon this section is more frequently pressed today. This is the idea that there are great truths about man here in these opening chapters of the Bible – his fears, his

evil, his hungers are all given to us in a remarkable way, and we can learn much about ourselves from these passages – but these truths are conveyed deliberately to us in the language of myth. Perhaps Moses did write this, they say, or some other unknown writers. But, at any rate, the authors were attempting to convey to us great and mighty truth, important truth, but doing it through the language of myth – adopting a kind of parabolic vehicle in order to convey these truths to us. There was, of course, no literal tree in a literal garden; there were no actual beings named Adam and Eve, and, of course, there was no talking serpent or forbidden fruit.

It is all somewhat like the myth of Santa Claus. Everyone today knows that there is no real Santa Claus, but the idea behind Santa Claus, cheerful jollity, a reward for good behavior and a universal kindness of spirit are all true. If we forget the myth of Santa Claus we still have left a core of truth which is conveyed to us by the story of Santa Claus. Thus we can treat these opening chapters of Genesis much in the same way. You can take the story of Adam and Eve, they say, and throw away the form by which it is conveyed and you still have a germ of truth about the human race.

But have you? What do we say to this kind of an approach?

We must say that we reject the whole approach as biblically untenable, scientifically unsound, and in the end totally destructive of truth and faith.

Let me give the reasons for this:

- A. First of all, this approach of myth violates the integrity of the book of Genesis. Where does myth end and history begin in this book? Where is the line of demarcation? If Adam and Eve is a myth then so is Cain and Abel. And if Cain and Abel is a myth, then so is Noah and the flood. Since the record moves right on without a break into the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; are we to assume that these, too, are myths? If so, where does history begin? How can you detect the place where myth, fantasy, and legend ends, and actual human history begins?

We have already seen in our first series that the first chapter of Genesis (which is likewise termed myth) is not a myth at all. It is in accord with the true discoveries of modern science, and, in fact, anticipates and corrects much of modern science. We have found that it is definitely not myth. When you begin this process of finding myth in these Old Testament stories you will find that it is impossible to draw the line anywhere except where you, for some emotional reason, may choose to draw it. Such a process carries right over into the New Testament and the story of the virgin birth becomes a myth, and even the story of the incarnation itself. The Christmas story which we are celebrating at this Advent season becomes nothing but a beautiful parable designed to express truth, but not true in history. Also the stories of the miracles of Jesus and the resurrection and the crucifixion.

Where do you stop? Well, the answer is that you do not stop. All these stories have actually been termed myth, and so support this contention that we make, that there is no stopping place when you interject this kind of a theory into the Biblical records. Of course, if you treat the Bible that way, then you must in all good conscience treat any other ancient document in the same way. If you carry this out to its logical conclusion we are left without any knowledge whatsoever of the ancient world, nothing that we can trust. The theory destroys too much, it teaches too much, to be acceptable.

There is myth in the Scripture. There are legends which are reported to us in various places in the Bible, but the significant thing is that they are identified as such. They are said to be myths, and are treated as myths and legends. You can find them both in the Old Testament and in the New Testaments, but the writers of the Scriptures were aware of the nature of them as myths and recorded them as such.

Another significant thing is that there are passages throughout both the Old and New Testaments which warn against believing in myths or taking them seriously. Peter warns against this, saying that the stories he and the other apostles told were not “cleverly designed myths” {cf, 2 Pet 1:16}, but were actual his-

toric occurrences. Paul writes to his son in the faith, Timothy, and warns him against being influenced by godless myths and “old wives’ fables” {1 Tim 4:7 KJV}. The apostles were aware of this kind of danger to faith and warned against it even in the early days of our Christianity.

- B. Second, this approach of myth contradicts the usage of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the apostles themselves. If you believe that the story of Adam and Eve is a myth then you immediately find yourself clashing with the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Matthew 19 it is recorded that our Lord, facing the questions of the Pharisees about divorce, said, “In the beginning God made them male and female,” {cf, Matt 19:4, Mark 10:6}. If you accept that as a statement from One who declared himself to be the truth, and who told only the truth, then you must accept this story of Adam and Eve as actual.

The Lord Jesus constantly referred to Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, and said, again and again, that what Moses wrote he, himself, fulfilled. In that wonderful scene in Luke 24, he walks with two along the Emmaus road after the resurrection, and they do not recognize him. He asks them why they are so downcast and sorrowful, and they tell him of the strange events that have been occurring in Jerusalem, how One was crucified, a Jesus of Nazareth. Then we are told, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself,” {Luke 24:27 RSV}. Later on he appeared to them and rebuked them because they had not believed Moses and the prophets in the things written concerning him {Luke 24:44}.

Never once did our Lord suggest that anything in the Old Testament was to be questioned, as to its historical veracity. He refers to most of the miracles that are the source of problems to critics today, and speaks of them in such a way as to confirm and attest the fact that they were historical events, including Jonah and the fish, and other stories.

Remember that the Apostle Paul reminded Timothy that Adam was made first, and then Eve {1 Tim 2:13}, just as the story in Genesis tells us. He says further that Adam was not

deceived, but Eve was {1 Tim 2:14}, and thus Adam went into sin deliberately, but Eve was blinded.

In Second Corinthians, the eleventh chapter, the Apostle Paul refers to the serpent {2 Cor 11:3} and is afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve, so the thoughts of his readers would be led astray by Satan’s cunning.

In Romans and in First Corinthians he compares Adam and Jesus, and indicates they are both individual men, the heads of two separate races.

- “As by one man sin entered the world,” he said (by one man), “and thus passed upon all men” {cf, Rom 5:12 KJV}, so by one man redemption came. If Jesus was an individual, then Adam was an individual too.
- Again in First Corinthians 15 he draws a comparison between these two, pointing out that we were all born in Adam, and, if we are born again, we are all in Christ {1 Cor 15:22, 15:45}. He puts the two on an individual basis.

Therefore if we approach these early chapters of Genesis with the idea that these are myths, legends, not really historical events, we are thus holding that the Apostle Paul knew less than we know about such matters.

- C. Third, the whole idea of myth is ultimately destructive of the teaching of Scripture, of biblical theology. Why do men invent these suggestions of myth? If you investigate their reasons (though they may seldom admit this) it is obviously because they want to square these stories of Adam and Eve with the teachings of evolution. They do not want to admit that there was a couple named Adam and Eve that began the human race, but that there were, rather, a group of hominids who ascended from the animal kingdom and became men. In accordance with the theory of evolution you cannot trace the race back to but a single couple. But if evolution as the explanation of man’s origin is true then there never was a fall of man. Either man was created perfect – body, soul, and spirit – as Genesis tells us or he has been

Was Adam for Real?

slowly developing from the animal kingdom, and was never perfect. It is either one or the other. Either man fell from perfection, or he never was perfect. And if he never has been perfect, then what is the point of redemption? If all we are doing is moving toward an ultimate goal of perfection, then what was the value of the work of Christ upon the cross? You see certain fundamental issues come in immediately, certain fundamental questions arise:

- Do we really need salvation?
- Are we not moving steadily toward a goal which will ultimately be reached, whether Christ died or not?
- What is the purpose, therefore, of his redeeming grace?

The minute you interject mythical ideas into the opening chapters of Genesis you come into an immediate clash with the doctrine of atonement and of the redemption of man.

D. Finally, this mythical interpretation denies the scientific evidence which does exist to support the historical truths of these events. It has been almost humorous to see, during the last 40 or 50 years, the many, many times the pompous claims of the higher critics have been completely demolished by the archaeologist's spade. Archeology has turned up again and again evidence which has proved that what the Bible says is true and what the critics claim has been false. In fact, there has not been one instance of the reverse, in which a Biblical event has been proved to be false by archeology – not one but scores of instances where the Bible has been substantiated.

- There is, for instance, considerable archaeological evidence that Nimrod, who is mentioned in the 4th chapter of Genesis, existed as an historical person. Further, Lamech, and Zillah, his wife, and Tubalcain, their son, are supported as historical characters by archeology. In fact, their names have passed into the language, de-

scribing some of the activities in which they were engaged.

- In the 4th chapter of Genesis there is a statement that Cain (this is the son of Adam, remember) went out and built a city and called the name of the city after his son, Enoch. Interestingly enough, in the ancient cuneiform writings there is reference to a city named Unuk, which is clearly related to this name, Enoch, and it is called every place simply, "the city," just as we refer to San Francisco as "the city." Further, this name Enoch later passed into the language as the word for *city*. Through a process of philological transliteration (with which any linguist is familiar), this was changed from *Enoch* to *wark*, and later to the word *perg*, and then to the word *burgh*, and it is still present in our language today in that form, such as, Pittsburgh.

Here, there is evidence that reaches clear back to the very beginning and suggests that these were all historical characters.

It is not unscientific to believe the opening chapters of Genesis: that Adam and Eve were actual human beings, individuals, that Cain and Abel were likewise historical personages, that there was a Garden of Eden, and a tree in the midst of it. There is nothing unscientific about these stories and no scientific evidence in any way gainsays them. To claim so is simply an attack upon this record to try to destroy the historical accuracy of these accounts, and thus to undermine the great and central teaching of the Scriptures concerning the redemption of man.

When you get through analyzing this you stand where Christians have always stood, face to face with a choice: whether to take the subjectivity of human wisdom, or the authority of the Son of God. It is one or the other. Was Jesus right, or were the critics right? It is either Christ or the critics. It always has been and always will be. I, for one, do not think there is any reason to even debate the matter. I believe the Lord Jesus Christ stands as authority in every realm in which he speaks. When we consider the extent and nature of his authority, his knowledge of the world in which we live and of the human race and the mind of man and contrast

these with the puny, finite knowledge of struggling, sinful human beings who “see through a glass darkly” {1 Cor 13:12 KJV}, and who understand little of what they see, I find there is no real comparison at all. This is why we must take these passages literally as they are, and treat them as historic accounts which are given to us to open to our understanding the problems we are daily facing. When we do, we discover they unfold to us great and marvelous truths that help us to grasp and understand life, and to rise in victory over the problems that beset us, and the forces that oppose us.

May I therefore urge you, in reading these passages, to do as the Lord Jesus reminded us, to take the place of a little child who is simply listening, carefully, quietly, to what he is told, thoughtfully investigating these things, and not questioning whether they are right or wrong, whether they are historical or unhistorical. There are no minds capable of establishing that today and there is no evidence capable of disproving it. If we settle that, we can come to these accounts, read them carefully through, and open our minds to the teaching of the Holy Spirit so that we might grasp these great and hidden things, remembering that as we come to know the truth about ourselves and the world in which we live, that truth will increasingly set us free.

This is what is so glorious about Christmas, the truth of the coming of the Son of God. It is the truth of the babe in the manger of Bethlehem, the truth that here was God wrapped in flesh, incarnate Deity, God become flesh. What has this done to the world? What hope it has brought into despair, what light it has brought into the somberness of life, what joy and peace it has brought to the human heart as we have understood by that simple story that God loves us as a race, fallen as we are,

despicable as we are; God loves us and has come to be one with us that he might through the process of redemption, at great cost to himself, draw us back to himself to divest us of all our errors, our weakness, our folly, and our shame, and to clothe us anew in the proper garments of humanity and make us what he intended man to be in the very beginning. That is what truth does.

May God grant therefore that we will come to these stories, whether in the Old Testament or the New, understanding that here is truth that can set us free.

Prayer:

We thank you, our Holy Father, for these stories. We pray for a childlike mind which will trust and believe and be always ready to be instructed, which will quietly listen with an open responsive heart, ready to obey as truth becomes apparent and applicable to our situation. We thank you for the One who has come to speak the truth, who declared himself to be the truth, and who came to reveal One with whom there is no deceit, no lie, no variation, no changeability, through all the passing centuries. What a great foundation our faith rests upon in this Holy One. We pray that at this Christmas season, any who have never found him as an individual Savior, as a Lord, as a Redeemer, as the One who can buy them back and put them back into usefulness again, may allow him to enter their hearts and to disburse in that heart the love, warmth, grace and truth that is his alone to give. We ask in his name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Making of Man

by Ray C. Stedman

Last night I sat in the airport of Guatemala City, working on the final stages of this message. Facing me on the wall was a large mural, depicting life among the ancient Mayan Indians. As I sat in that fascinating country, under the shadow of great volcanoes which had been rumbling, muttering, and threatening all afternoon, and thought of the history of the Mayans – that strange race we know so little about – I felt anew the mystery of history. Civilizations have risen and flourished for centuries and then in a strange way, often for unknown reasons, have died and are now buried in humid jungles, forgotten fragments of ancient history. The question came to me again as it comes to any who think long about the past:

- Where did this race of ours begin?
- How did this strange race of beings of which we are members come into existence?
- For what purpose?

These are questions that have forever fascinated men. There is only one book, to my knowledge, that gives us a reliable answer to these questions. Scientists, of course, are trying to discover facts from the ancient past, but even they admit that their efforts are but a kind of feeling around in the dark after a few fragments. But this book of God, bearing upon it the seal of authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, has revealed to us all man needs to know to solve the riddle of life. I wish I could impress upon young and old alike the truth of that statement. Here is all we need to know about hu-

manity, revealed in the pages of Scripture, especially designed that we might know the facts about life.

When we move from Genesis 1 into Genesis 2, it is obvious that we come into a different atmosphere. Genesis 1 is a very simple narrative of the creation of the world; the heavens and the earth, the plants and animals, and finally man. Simple, yet majestic in its beauty and profound in its depth. But when we come to Chapter 2 we find a kind of recapitulation of the main event of Chapter 1, i.e., the creation of man. Here we are given much greater detail of the story of God's making of man.

Here, also, we are focusing upon other ideas that are introduced in the biblical text for the first time. For instance, it has been pointed out often that here the name of God appears in a different form than in Chapter 1. We have for the first time the great name of God that appears in so much of the rest of the Bible, *Jehovah Elohim* (or in the Hebrew, *Yahweh*), translated in our version, *LORD God*. There is a special reason for this change. In Chapter 1 we are dealing with the making of things, and God is presented to us under the name of *Elohim*, i.e., the Creator. But when man appears on the scene God appears also in a different character. He now appears under the title of *Jehovah*, which means essentially the covenant-making God, the God who keeps a promise. It is particularly significant that when God first reveals himself to this race of ours, it is as a God who intends to keep his promises.

In this section of Chapter 2 there are several fascinating references in a number of fields of human thought. But the supreme aim of the chapter is unquestionably theological. It is the desire of the writer here to bring us to the tree of the knowledge

of good and evil in the Garden of Eden, and thus to the testing of man. That is one of the most important revelations made known about our fallen race.

But let us begin with a **chronological note** in Chapter 2:

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plants of the field was get in the earth and no herb of the field had get sprung up – for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground – then the LORD God formed man ... {Gen 2:4-7a RSV}

You will notice the emphasis here is upon the time word *then*. Undoubtedly this rendering of the Revised Standard Version is the most accurate translation of the Hebrew. It is somewhat different than the King James text, and may even create more problems, but it is certainly more true to the original text. The amazing thing is that here we have the creation of man linked to the *third* day instead of the sixth. The verses describe the third day of creation when the land emerged from the seas and plant life began to appear.

We have already seen, in a previous series, that the third and sixth days of creation link together in a most unusual way. This present text lends credence to the theory of a recapitulation: Days 1, 2, and 3; then, in a strange and rather remarkable way which no one fully understands, Days 4, 5, and 6 come in as linking with the first three days (Days 1 and 4; 2 and 5; 3 and 6). I point this out for your own intellectual challenge. I do not know quite what to make of it myself, but it certainly encourages us to view these accounts of creation in a different light than the conventional six-day approach.

It is also obvious that different conditions prevailed on earth in those early days than prevail now. There was no rain upon the earth, but a mist watered the ground. It is possible that this condition continued until the Flood so that it may be, as some have suggested, that the rains that fell during the days of the Flood were the first rains to occur upon earth, though modern geology would suggest

otherwise. At least it is clearly apparent that conditions have been greatly different in the distant past.

Now in Verse 7 we come to the second note struck, which is strongly **anthropological**, i.e., it has to deal with man. In one verse we have a most remarkable unfolding of the make-up of man.

then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being [or, literally, a living soul]. {Gen 2:7 RSV}

Here is a wonderfully condensed account of some tremendously significant things. I do not think we need to quibble over just how God formed the body of man. Did he pile dirt together, wet it with water to make a kind of a mud-statue, and then breathe life into it? No one knows. Certainly when we consider the miracle of conception and birth, when two tiny, almost invisible, cells meet together and begin to grow and divide under a rigid interlock of controls, developing at last into a human being such as we see ourselves to be, we need not ask about the ability of God to make man in his own remarkable way. Perhaps the event occurred along the line of the development of birth. I do not think we need to be concerned over some of the questions which people in the past have beat each other over the head with. Whether Adam had a navel or not is of little significance to me. What we are told here is that there are three divisions of man.

God first made the body of man and he made it of the dust of the earth. Certainly it is true that the same elements that are found in the dust of the ground are found also in the body of man. It is shown to be a fact because it is to dust that we return.

You may recall the story of the little boy who came in some excitement to his mother and said, "Mother, is it true that we are made from the dust and that after we die we go back to the dust?" She said, "Yes, it is." "Well," he said, "I looked under my bed this morning, and there's someone either coming or going!"

We may not fully understand all that is involved in these pregnant sentences about the formation of man's body, but it is important to notice

that though the body of man was evidently formed first, yet the text itself does not say the body but it says God formed man of dust from the earth. I rather think that has significance. Man is more than a body. He is not merely an animated piece of beef steak, a hunk of meat with a nervous system. He is more than body; he is soul as well as body. The functions of the soul are wonderfully linked to those of the body in ways that we have not even begun to fathom.

For instance, the functions of the soul (largely reason, emotion, and will), are also in some most remarkable way functions of our physical life. Reason is related to the brain, for it is only as the brain operates that reason occurs. Glands have great power over our emotional life. The hormones which they secrete directly affect us emotionally. Thus the functions of the soul are tied most remarkably to the body, and no one fully understands the mystery of it. In the forming of man God made body and soul together, with the capacities for function of the soul lying dormant within the body of man.

Then, into this body with an inactive soul, the account says he breathed, through the nostrils, a living spirit. The phrase *breath of life*, in the Hebrew, means “a spirit of life.” The word for *breath* and *spirit* are the same, both in Hebrew and in Greek, so that this is more than simply a picture of God breathing into man’s nostrils. This is not face-to-face resuscitation: it is the impartation of a spirit into man. As we know from other Scriptures, the spirit is our essential nature. It is this that distinguishes man so remarkably from the animal creation. Thus as man comes into being, he comes full-orbed, as a threefold being, existing in body, soul, and spirit. It is the joining together of spirit and body which activates and galvanizes the soul, so that it begins to function.

Perhaps you can see something of the same principle in the operation of an electric light bulb. By itself a bulb is simply some wire and glass, rather commonplace, but with a remarkable potential. Add an invisible substance, electricity, and pass it through that visible wire, and a third function is born: light. Light is different from the wire, and different from the electricity, but comes streaming forth from that bulb. It is very much the same way with man. God made a body, with its possibilities of function as a soul, and breathed into it a spirit, and the union of body and spirit pro-

duced the activity of soul, as light is produced from the union of the wire and electricity.

When the spirit passes from the body, the life of the body ends. James tells us, “the body without the spirit is dead,” {Jas 2:26 KJV}. We bury the body, and the spirit returns to God who made it, the Scriptures say. Whatever portion of the soul (or the life of man – that part of us that has functioned within this time and space continuum) which has been saved, also returns with the spirit to God. I think it is most significant to note that, in the Scriptures, it is the spirit which is regenerated but the soul is saved. There is only one place to my recollection, in which it ever mentions a spirit being saved. It is the soul, the life that we are living now, that needs to be saved. That part of it which is lived in the power of the Spirit of God, functioning in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ as God intended man to live, is saved. Our souls are thus being saved as we live day by day in relationship to the Son of God. That “saved” soul is what we have left after this life, and only that. All else is wood, hay, and stubble, to disappear in the judging flame of God.

In fallen man the spirit that is given to man is dead. This is what the Scripture means when it says man is “dead in trespasses and sins,” {Eph 2:1 KJV}. His spirit does not function as it should. Therefore the soul, which reflects like a mirror the activities of the spirit, reflects a dead and lifeless nature. This is what creates the intense, worldwide restlessness of our race, the inability to be satisfied, the unending search for answers that are never found. It is all an expression of a wasted spirit, lying ruined within us because of the fall of man. But in the beginning as Adam came perfect from the hand of God, he was a lamp – and a lamp that was lit – alive in ways beyond anything that we can conjecture.

The third note of this passage is **geographical**:

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became

four rivers. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. {Gen 2:8-14 RSV}

Here is the account of man placed in a garden. In passing, I might point out that the name of the garden is never given to us. The name of it was not Eden; it was a garden placed in the land of Eden. The region in which the garden was found is called Eden, but the name of the garden itself is not given. There is no suggestion here that the whole earth was a garden, as sometimes we mistakenly conjecture. God marked off a certain division of it which he turned into a garden, and there he placed man. The task of man in that garden was to learn there the secrets that would enable him to turn the rest of the earth into a garden. But because man failed in the garden, he was unable to discover those secrets and, instead of turning the world into a garden, he is turning it into a garbage dump.

The proof that this account is no myth is that two of the rivers mentioned can still be identified. We have certain geographical landmarks given to us. Remember this account describes something that existed before the Flood had undoubtedly widely changed the surface of the earth. Yet, certain of these rivers can be identified. The Hiddekel River is the Tigris, and the Euphrates, of course, still bears that name. The other two rivers are perhaps identical with certain streams which still flow, one into the Black Sea and the other into the Caspian Sea, both arising out of the mountains of Ararat in Armenia, where the ark rested after the Flood.

There is an interesting reference here to the gold of the land. You who are familiar with Greek mythology know that the story of Jason and the Golden Fleece has its setting in this same area. It was to this part of the earth that Jason went in his search for the Golden Fleece. Thus the idea of gold has been associated with this land for a long time. The account is not myth but it is grounded in history, as is all of Scripture. We need not think of these accounts as mythological. They are symbolical, but they have roots solidly grounded in history.

The final and most important note is **theological**:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." {Gen 2:15-17 RSV}

We must now take a look at these trees in the midst of the garden and their fruit. Once it was the fashion to deride this whole account as being ridiculous. The idea of Adam and Eve partaking of an actual fruit that had an evil effect upon them has been ridiculed and derided for many years. Yet in these days of LSD and marijuana we should hardly expect such disdain to be exhibited any longer. Now we well know that there are drugs, chemical agents, such as are present in fruits and other plants, that can have this effect upon man. We know that LSD has a most powerful effect, not only upon the human mind, stimulating it in strange, mysterious ways, and even dangerous ways, but we know also that LSD and other drugs can even affect the chromosome structure of the body and pass along defects in heredity to children yet unborn. This is exactly the story of the Garden of Eden.

How strange that in these days we are facing again the lure and attractiveness of psychedelic experiences, drawing young people just as Eve was drawn to this strange and mysterious fruit that hung before her in all its luring power, offering to do strange and wonderful things to her that would satisfy and fulfill her, but which, in the actual partaking, would destroy and injure and damage the whole race that would follow. We hardly need to struggle with the literalness of this account, in these days.

It is interesting that after this account in Genesis 2, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil disappears from Scripture. We do not find it mentioned after that, largely because its effects have become commonplace. But the tree of life reappears again in the book of Revelation. This tree seems to have had the power to convey immortality to man, and as such is used in Scripture as a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the book of Reve-

lation the tree of life appears as a symbol of the person of Christ. Paul wrote to Timothy and said of Christ that he “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,” {2 Tim 1:18 RSV}. As we come to the Lord Jesus Christ, and are related to him, we experience that which was the capability of this tree of life in the Garden of Eden, from which man was ultimately excluded. We will see more of that in Chapter 3.

But what is this “tree of the knowledge of good and evil”? That is the question that looms before us as we look at this chapter. After all, what is wrong with knowing good and evil? Surely it is a good thing to know the difference between good and evil. Many Scriptures encourage us to become mature enough to be able to distinguish between good and evil and one mark of immaturity in a Christian is that he cannot tell the difference. He is like a child, like a worldling, he does not know how to distinguish between good and evil. But, if it is a good thing to know the difference between good and evil, why did God forbid Adam to partake of this fruit?

We get a little more light if we look ahead to Chapter 3 where, in the story of the fall of man, we have in Verse 5 the words of the serpent to the woman. He said to her,

“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” {Gen 3:5 RSV}

Everything the devil says is not a lie. He uses truth, or, rather, misuses truth, in order to draw us on until we become the victims, ultimately, of his lie. But he baits his trap with truth, and here is the truth from the lips of the devil. “You will,” he says, “have your eyes opened when you eat of this fruit, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” That suggests a clue as to what this fruit was and what it did. How does God know good and evil? Think about it for a moment and you will see that God knows evil, not by experience because he cannot experience evil, but he knows it by relating it to himself. That which is consistent with his character and his nature is good; that which is inconsistent with it is evil. That which is out of line, out of character with himself is evil, destructive, and dangerous; but all that is in line with his own

nature is good. That is how God *knows* good and evil. He relates it to himself.

But God is the only one who can properly do that. God is the only Being in all the universe who has the right to relate all things to himself. When a creature tries it, he gets into trouble. The creatures of God’s universe are made to discover the difference between good evil by relating all to the Being of God, not to themselves. When man ate of the fruit he began to do what God does – to relate everything to himself. Yet, as a creature, he has no real ability to maintain this kind of relationship and thus he is constantly interjecting an unbalanced element into life. When man began to think of himself as the center of the universe, he became like God. But it was all a lie. Man is not the center of the universe, and he cannot be.

But as you trace the course of human history you can see that this is the seductive lie that the serpent has whispered into the ears of men ever since: “You are the center of life. This is your world, everything relates to you. What you like is right; what you don’t like is wrong. What you want to do is right; what you don’t want to do, then don’t let anyone make you do it. You are the center of things.” You can find this idea throbbing and pulsating throughout the philosophies of men, that man stands at the center of things. That is the curse that fell upon man when he ate of the fruit in the Garden of Eden. In a psychedelic way his mind was twisted, and he thought of himself as God, and related all things to himself. But when man does this he introduces an eccentric element into life, into creation. The problem with our unbalanced world today is that we have an earth filled with about four billion eccentrics. That is why everything is always going off in wrong directions.

But the glory of the gospel is that when men are redeemed, through faith in Jesus Christ, they resume once again a balanced life, and everything relates once again to God. God now becomes the center of things. Though we may struggle to learn this, eventually all the thrust and purpose of the gospel is here, to put God back into the center of his world and relate everything in our life and in the lives of others to him and not to us. It does not make any difference how things affect us. The important thing is, what do they do to God? What is his relationship to these things?

Let me illustrate that, in closing, with two stories I heard only yesterday. Doug and Winnie Deith, Conrad Hopkins, and I were driving about Guatemala, visiting the old capital city, Antigua, with its lush tropical vegetation and its marvelous setting at the foot of three volcanoes. As we were going about the city they told me these two stories:

1. Some of you may remember Dick Jones, the son of Dr. Clarence Jones, Founder of HCJB. Dick and his wife and family were here in PBC for a while – a wonderful young man with a great possibility of ministry for the Lord. You recall about two years ago he was killed in an automobile accident in Florida. Word came to us of his death and it brought great sadness to our hearts at the time. But Winnie Keith had been talking recently with the widow of Dick Jones, and she had told her the story of Dick's death. She was not with her husband when he was killed, but she came to the death scene and saw how the car was badly torn and mutilated in the accident. As the highway patrol examined the car they saw that the two men in the front seat, Dick Jones, who had been driving, and another man named Victor, had not fastened their seat belts. One of the investigators, an expert in this field, made the comment that if these men had fastened their seat belts, Victor would have been killed and Dick Jones would very likely have been spared. Mrs. Jones said that when she realized that, the question came home to her heart, "Why did this happen? Why was it Dick that was chosen, why did he have to die?" Then, as she watched the other man, Victor, in his ministry and saw how he was used and what a blessing he was to so many, even though she knew her husband was equally gifted, she faced this question and found that there was only one answer: God. It was God's choice, God's will. She said, "Who am I to tell him whom to choose? God has the right to make these decisions." Thus she related the most tragic event of her life to the central Being of history and found peace for a troubled heart.
2. The other story concerns Cameron Townsend, who is the founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators. He is a wonderful man – in my judgment one of the most remarkable men of our day.

Many of you know that Cameron Townsend began his work with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Guatemala 50 years ago. He came as a young man of 21 into the high mountains near Lake Atitlan and there began his translation work. From that simple beginning the worldwide ministry of Wycliffe Bible Translators has come. This year they had the 50th anniversary celebration in Guatemala and Cameron Townsend was there. He was highly honored by the government and people of Guatemala, and all of Central America. They had banquet after banquet in his name and he was given the highest honors of which those countries were capable of bestowing. Everywhere he went he was feted and honored and his work exalted. But Winnie Keith said that, typically, Dr. Townsend turned every occasion into an opportunity to speak of the Lord Jesus Christ and of his work everywhere he went. Refusing the honor for himself, he related it to the One to whom it belonged. He put God back into the center of things and maintained the balance of life. Those of you who know him will be interested, as I was, to learn that, at 71 years of age, he is now studying Russian because he heard that there are several dialects in Russia that are not yet translated.

This is what the Scripture means when it says that all of life must be built around the Person of the Lord Jesus in order to make sense. There is coming a day when every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Then the destruction, desolation, and heartache of the Garden of Eden will be reversed, and men shall once again acknowledge the centrality of God in life. Then the world shall be filled with glory and righteousness from the river to the ends of the earth. Everything shall be what God intended it to be.

But the glory of the gospel is that this can happen in human hearts right now. This is what the gospel message is all about. Have you ceased your rebellion against the will of God? Have you stopped trying to be a little god, trying to run things in your own home or office the way you want them to be? Have you crowned Jesus Christ Lord of his empire, where he belongs, and invited him with gladness to sit upon the throne of your heart and rule there? Have you stopped your grumbling and

complaining about all the things that come into your life, that are his choice for you, and begun to rejoice as the Scriptures exhort us, “giving thanks in all things, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” {cf, 1 Th 5:18}?

Prayer:

How we need, our Father, this exhortation to remind us of the one great theme of life

– that life can not, will not ever make sense, will not cease its endless friction, until it be related to the Person of Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant that every heart here, young and old alike, boy and girl, man and woman, may each in his own way on this first Sunday of 1968, crown him anew Lord of Lords, King of Kings, and mean it – to live each day in that holy relationship. We ask in his name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Making of Woman

by Ray C. Stedman

In a series on *Understanding Man* it would be folly to omit a study on understanding women. Yet as a man who lives with a wife, four daughters, and a mother-in-law, I understandably approach this subject with considerable timidity. In our home I am even grateful for a mailbox out front! But for our consideration of this subject I do not turn to experience but to the wonderfully helpful words of Scripture. In the latter part of Genesis 2 we have this theme brought before us, the making of woman. I have covered this section in a previous message dealing primarily with the matters of sex and developing the four great facts about sex which God wants everyone to know. I shall not dwell on that aspect of this subject now but our theme will be the role of woman in marriage, for when God made a woman, marriage was born.

In these latitudinarian days we read occasionally in the papers of the “marriage” of homosexuals. What a pathetically shabby imitation of what God intended marriage to be! Marriage involves a man and a woman, and this passage reveals to us three very helpful things in relationship to women and to marriage. In the first part we shall deal with the intent of God in making woman; then there follows a description of the process which he followed, revealing some very interesting things; and then the qualities of true marriage that result from the making of woman.

Let us first turn to **the intent of God.**

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. {Gen 2:18-20 RSV}

1. It is obvious that the first thing clear from this passage is that woman was made to be man’s companion. “It is not good that the man should be alone.” We know today that one of the most shattering emotions of which human beings are capable is that of loneliness. When God pronounced a sentence of “not good” upon man’s condition it was the interjection of the first negative element in the story of creation. Up to now everything had been pronounced “good” and on the sixth day of creation God said that everything he had done was “very good.” But now we read that it was “not good for man to be alone,” indicating that it never was God’s intention for man to be alone, that from the

very beginning he intended to make two sexes in the making of man.

For a human to exist, whether man or woman, in loneliness is always a shattering threat to the happiness and welfare of that individual. Loneliness is now reckoned to be the single greatest cause of suicide in this country, and it is undoubtedly the most widespread source of human misery in the world today. Yet it is a perfectly human experience. Each of us has felt at times the need for human companionship. There is nothing wrong with that; God made us that way. We need one another. We were not made to exist in loneliness.

I heard John R. W. Stott point out from the close of Paul's second letter to Timothy how lonely Paul was. Mr. Stott described the apostle as he sat in his tiny dungeon in Rome, with a circular opening in the ceiling above him as the only access, and how he informed Timothy that all had forsaken him and begged the young man to come to him soon, before winter if possible, and to bring with him certain articles of clothing and books and parchments, because he was cold in body, bored in mind, and lonely in spirit. Mr. Stott brought out what a perfectly human reaction this was. Despite the fact that the apostle could look beyond to the fact that his departure was near at hand, and he was about to join the Lord in glory, and though he was thrilled with the possibilities that opened before him, yet this did not cancel out the human element of loneliness.

God knows that we need one another, and he provides others for us. It is clear from this passage that the chief, although not the sole answer, to the loneliness of man is the making of woman; man and woman together in marriage. One of the primary purposes of marriage is to provide companionship, a sharing of life together.

I read recently that one of the famous actresses of the stage, the skilled and popular Gertrude Lawrence, once announced to her friends that she would like to get married. They said, "Why? You have everything that anyone could want. You have fame, close friends, abundant social life. What could marriage add to you?" She said, "It is because I want so desperately to have someone to nudge." Thus she highlighted the need for

companionship and the fact that this is an elementary hunger in human life.

2. The second intent expressed here on the part of God was that woman should be a helper to man, someone to share not only his life as a companion but his work and responsibilities as well. It is interesting that this has been true from the very beginning of man's existence: men and women designed to work together. Perhaps there is nothing more destructive to marriage than the attitude that commonly exists in many homes which regards the man as having his area of responsibility, his realm of life, such as his office, his work, etc., and the woman having hers, the home, the children, etc., and there is little or no sharing together in these areas. It is always a destructive element in any home or marriage, for either mate to feel that they have a private realm to the exclusion of the other. The man has nothing much to say around the home; the woman has nothing to do with her husband's work. This is terribly wrong.

It is clear from this passage that God made woman to be a helper to man and to share with him a mutual concern and responsibility, though necessarily they might have different assignments because of the nature of their work. The nature of the work that supports a home and the level of living is to be primarily determined by the husband, but the decisions by which these are carried out and the labor involved, is shared equally by the wife. This is made clear in this reference to woman as man's helper. But it is made even clearer by the remarkable verse that follows, Verse 19.

Here we have what logicians call a *non sequitur*, something that apparently has no relationship to that which has gone before, it does not seem to follow. In Verse 18 we see the declaration of God that he intends to make a woman, "a helper fit for him." Then in Verse 19 we read,

So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. {Gen 2:19 RSV}

What has that to do with making a woman? How does that follow God's declaration of intent to make a helper to man? Obviously there must be a connection here. God set Adam to the task of studying the animals. He gave him a project to work out before he was ready for marriage. Doubtless it was in order to show him that his wife was to be quite different than the animals. Many men have not learned that yet, but it is clear that this was the intent of God in setting man upon this search.

Now what did he learn as he examined the animals? I have pointed out in a previous message on this passage that Adam could not possibly have given names to the animals without knowing the character of each, because a name always reflects a characteristic. In the giving of a name to each of the animals Adam had to understand, whether by a revelation from God or by searching and examining on his own, something of the character of each animal. Now what did Adam learn by this? There are several things immediately evident:

a) Perhaps he learned first that woman was not to be a mere beast of burden as so often she has become in the history of the race since. There are societies where women are treated exactly like animals, where the price of a woman is approximately the price of a cow, and where women are sometimes traded for cows. But this is a violation of what Adam learned in the beginning, that woman is not like the animals. Adam did not find in the animals a helper fit for him. His wife, when she appeared, was quite different. Therefore woman is not to be treated as a slave, there to do so much work in a household.

One of the most devastating things to feminine personality is to have a man treat his wife as though she were but a servant or housekeeper, there only to keep everything in order. Perhaps the most frequent cause of complaint from women in marriage is a variation on the theme: "He looks upon me just as another thing around the house. I'm like part of the furniture." This is terribly destructive to a woman's psychological make-up.

b) Second, Adam unquestionably learned in his search that woman is not to be merely a biological laboratory for the producing of children. Obviously it is women who bear children, but they are not to be like the animals who bear progeny as almost their sole reason for existence. Women are not to be like that. Sex has a much higher function in human life than the mere reproduction of children. Again, one of the most destructive ideas that has been spread among mankind has been this essentially Catholic teaching that the first and primary reason for marriage is the production of children. The Bible does not reflect that at all. There is in the Bible ample justification for birth control when circumstances warrant, and man has come to understand this under the terrible pressure of an exploding population that has made him face up squarely to the fact that woman was never intended to be merely a biological factory for the producing of children.

c) Third, Adam probably learned, in his search, that woman is not a thing outside himself to be used as he sees fit and then disposed of, as man uses animals. Women are not beasts of burden, they are not simply for producing children, and they are not something to be used at the whim of man and then disposed of. They are to be a helper fit for him, corresponding to him. The philosophy of *Playboy Magazine* reflects the idea that woman is nothing more than a plaything for man – disposable women – you use them like you would a Kleenex and then toss them away. Wring out the juices and then on to another. But this passage directly contradicts that. Woman is to be a helper and a companion, fit for man, corresponding exactly to his needs, and continuously so, constantly able to adjust to the changes that come in him. She is therefore not to be treated as some mere disposable thing.

That gives us a look at the intent of God in making woman.

Let us move on to **the process which he followed** in this. We will not dwell long on this, but in Verses 21 and 22 we have it set before us.

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. {Gen 2:21-22 RSV}

This is a most interesting account. It has been derided and laughed at as being crassly literal, yet those who deride it forget that they are reckoning with an almighty God. A scientist told me once that it is quite possible for any cell of the body potentially to reproduce, not only itself, but the member of which it is a part and even ultimately the whole body. I have not looked into that further, but, if that is the case, then there is certainly no problem involved in God actually taking a rib and using it to make a woman. It is absurd to argue, as some have, that this could not have happened because men have the same number of ribs as women do today. After all, if you cut off your finger it does not mean that your children will be born minus a finger.

But there are two things about this that are very significant:

1. First, there is the revelation that man was caused to fall into a deep sleep and during this period of unconsciousness woman was made. These things are reported to us not only because they actually happened but because they also are suggestive of certain continuing relationships that obtain. This period of unconsciousness strongly suggests what modern psychology also confirms – that the relationships of marriage, the ties between a man and his wife, are far deeper than mere surface affection. They go much more deeply. They are a part, not only of the conscious life of man, but of the unconscious, the subconscious.

This explains what any marriage counselor soon recognizes: why it is that men and women are so puzzled by one another's reactions at times. They know that they themselves are often upset or angry or hurt at something the other one has done, but they can't put their finger on the reason. It is, of course, because the

other person has violated a basic drive which God himself has built into the feminine or masculine nature and which are thus rooted in the basic nature of each individual. Though we cannot put our finger on what it is that is bothering us, we know there is something wrong. This is why in First Peter the Scriptures exhort the man to dwell with his wife "according to knowledge" {1 Pet 3:7 KJV}. The responsibility of the man in marriage is to understand what the Scriptures teach about women, and to help his wife to understand herself as well as to understand him. She will have a much easier task understanding him than she does herself.

2. The second revelation here is that woman was made from a rib. Again, as we have seen, skeptics laugh at this, but God knew what he was doing. It is most significant that a rib was chosen from which to make woman. I know it is dangerous to teach from a metaphor or an allegory because it can be abused.

For instance, it might be suggested here that because a rib is one of the few bones in the body that is curved, this is why women have more curves than man. Someone has pointed out that it is much better to dwell with 200 pounds of curves, than with 100 pounds of nerves. But I rather think that is pressing the figure a bit.

There are, however, two matters connected with the rib that are genuinely applicable here:

- a) One is that it emphasizes the essentially emotional nature of woman. Ribs are the bones nearest the heart, and are thus closely linked with the heart, which is always throughout Scripture the center of emotional life. You know that this emotional character of woman is confirmed by psychology today. Tears, fears, and cheers come more easily to women than they do to men. It is designed to complete man for she is to be a helper fit for him, completing him. It is this very emotional nature which adds color and warmth to life. How drab life would be without it. Anyone who has visited a bachelor's apartment knows what I mean.

- b) The second thing that is brought out here is that a rib emphasizes the protective instinct in women. It is the rib which protects the vital organs of the chest and notably the heart. In fact, the Hebrew word for “helper” is the word *azar*, which means “to surround.” Just as the rib cage surrounds the heart and protects it, so there is in woman an instinctive reaction of protectiveness. Anyone who has tried to come between a man and his wife, or to abuse a man to his wife, knows what I mean. C. S. Lewis has pointed this out in asking the question, “If your dog has bitten a neighbor’s child, would you rather face the mother or the father to discuss the issue?”

So we have the process of God in making woman. She is to be a companion and a helper, and does so by utilizing to the full her inherent emotional and protective instincts.

Now we come to **the qualities of marriage** that result from the union of man and woman:

Then the man said,

**“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”**

**Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.
{Gen 2:23-25 RSV}**

This is a very remarkable passage because it gathers up in very brief compass (as so often happens in Scripture) the great concepts of marriage that run throughout the rest of the Bible. They are all condensed and encapsulated in this brief account here. When God had finished making woman and Adam had slept off the deep unconsciousness into which he had fallen, God brought the woman to Adam. What a scene that must have been! Here is the first of a long, long series of boy meets girl stories. Out of this highly condensed account of this encounter there emerge four factors that are essential to true marriage.

1. The first and most fundamental of all is that marriage is to involve a complete identity. The

two are to be one. Adam’s first reaction when he saw his wife was, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” i.e., she is one being with me. This is strengthened in the latter part of Verse 24 where it adds, “and they become one flesh.” It is not without reason that this has become part of the marriage service, this recognition of unity. As someone has well said, the one word above all that makes marriage successful is “ours.” Things belong to “us.” “Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Thus, as the New Testament so wisely points out, the man who hurts his wife is hurting himself. He may not feel it directly, but down the line the result of it will show in his life, because she is really, genuinely, and factually sharing one life with him. They become one flesh. This is not poetry; it is reality.

While I was working on the closing phases of this message yesterday in my study there was a marriage going on out here in the auditorium. I was struck by the fact that as I was studying this matter, the miracle was occurring, to the tune of Lohengrin’s Wedding March. Two people were becoming one. As their life went on together, it would become more and more experimentally true. There is a blending of psyches, a merging of lives, and the creating of a single history. It is for this reason that divorce is such a terrible thing, especially after years of marriage. It is the severing of a person. It is butchery, the dividing up of a single life, much as you would take an ax and split a body in two. No wonder it is so terribly painful, much more deeply felt than those who experience it understand at the time.

2. The second thing that is brought out here is the Biblical principle of headship, which is developed at much greater length in the New Testament. “She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Paul enlarges on this in his letter to Timothy, to point out that man was not made for woman, but woman was made for man. It is the man who is ultimately responsible before God for the nature and character of the home. It is the man who must exercise leadership in determining the direction in which the home should go, and must therefore answer for that leadership, or its lack, be-

fore God. The woman's responsibility is to acknowledge this leadership.

Again, in my judgment, one of the most serious threats to marriage and one of the reasons that is producing this terrible incidence of divorce in our day, is the fact that men are abdicating the role of leadership in the home, leaving it up to the wife to raise the children. They are refusing to be fathers to their children and husbands to their wives, wanting rather to be sons to another mother and to have their own needs ministered to.

3. Then the third factor indicated here which strongly characterizes true marriage is permanence. "Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife." This is a strong word. In the Hebrew text it is the word *dabag*, which means "to adhere firmly, as if with glue," to be lovingly devoted to a wife.

In the days of Henry Ford (the first) and the Model T, someone asked him to what formula he attributed his successful marriage. He said, "The same formula as the making of a successful car: stick to one model."

That is exactly what is said here. A husband is to cleave to his wife. He forsakes all others and adheres to her. Whatever she may be like, he is to hold to her. He is to stay with her, and she with him, because marriage is a permanent thing.

4. Finally the fourth factor is set forth in Verse 25, "And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed." This speaks clearly of openness between man and wife, literally, nothing to hide. They have no secrets, nothing that they do not share with each other, an openness. It is the failure to achieve this kind of openness that lies behind so much breakdown in marriage today, the utter breakdown of communication, where two sit and look at one another and say nothing, or talk about merely surface trivialities, reporting what happened to the children, etc., but with no discussion of their problems, or what they are thinking on various issues. Oftentimes this is why they are so judgmental with one another, each one trying to get the other to agree and not being willing to allow differences of viewpoint to exist. But openness does not mean agreeing

or feeling the same. It means a readiness to share with one another, completely, without insisting that the other reflect the same attitude. There is room here for ultimate decisions and the submitting of a wife to the leadership of the husband. Openness does not cancel that out. But there is to be a complete freedom of communication, one with the other. Marriages shrivel, wither, and die when this is not true.

What is the result of all this? In Eden these four principles were at work. Adam and Eve were united as one. There was the recognition of the principle of headship. Adam had the right to make ultimate decisions in all matters. They intended to be together permanently and Adam was responsible for this. There was an openness between them so that they hid nothing from one another. What was the result? The text says, "they were not ashamed." Well, if they were not ashamed, what were they? What is the opposite of being ashamed? It is to be relaxed. We would use the term well adjusted. They felt at ease with each other. There was no strain in their marriage. They were fully at ease with one another. Is that not what we strive for in marriage? Then here are the principles that produce it.

Let me share with you some helpful words in this respect from a recent magazine article. These words are addressed to a husband and wife, and they reflect these principles from the Scriptures:

To a husband and wife:

Preserve sacredly the privacies of your own house, your marriage state, and your heart. Let no father or mother or sister or brother ever presume to come between you, or to share the joys or sorrows that belong to you alone. With mutual help build your quiet world, not allowing your dearest earthly friend to be the confidant of aught that concerns your domestic peace.

Let moments of alienation, if they occur, be healed at once. Never, no, never speak of it outside, but to each other confess and all will come out right. Never let the morrow's sun find you still at variance. Renew and renew your vow; it will do you good and thereby your minds will grow together, contented in that love which is stronger than death, and you will be truly one.

There is God's design for marriage. As we hold it before us we can see by contrast the reasons why so many marriages are failing in California today. What we need desperately is to return to this Biblical pattern, for here are revealed the secrets of happy married life.

Prayer:

As always, Father, we feel the searching quality of your word as it seeks us out and exposes to us the weakness of our lives and the wrongness of our attitudes. But it sets before us also, so beautifully, the great

possibilities of our lives, the potential that awaits us when we are willing to submit ourselves to the wisdom that is reflected in your word. Grant to us now submissive hearts and restored confidence in one another. Make of this church, Lord, a community of happy homes, where children are delighted to stay home and share times of fellowship with their father and mother, where friends look forward to coming, where peace, harmony, and joy prevails, and grace is manifest in every day's activities. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Enticement of Evil

by Ray C. Stedman

We come to Chapter 3 of Genesis with a heightened sense of anticipation. In many ways this is the most important piece of information ever conveyed to man. Here is the ultimate explanation for the tensions this morning among the nations over the Korean incident, or the war in Vietnam. Here we have the answer to the eternal “Why” that arises in our hearts in times of tragedy or sorrow. Here is the explanation for over a hundred centuries of human heartache, misery, torture, blood, sweat, and tears. Here is the reason for the powerful fascination that LSD and marijuana hold for young people today; for the passion for power and the lure of wealth and the enticements of forbidden sex, to young and old alike. Here is the only reasonable answer for the existence of these things in the world today.

Remove this chapter from the Bible and the rest of it is absolutely incredible. Ignore the teaching of this chapter in history and the story of humanity becomes impossible either to understand or to explain. The most striking thing about this chapter is that we find ourselves here. You can't read through this story without feeling that you have lived it yourself, because, of course, you have. This account of the temptation and the fall is reproduced in our lives many times a day. We have all heard the voice of the Tempter. We have all felt the drawing of sin. We know the pangs of guilt that follow. This is why many call this story a myth. In the sense that it is timeless truth, perhaps, that word has certain rationality. But there are

other implications of the term myth, which make it unsuitable to apply to this account. It is timeless in the sense that this is always happening to mankind, but it is timeless only because it is also fact. It actually did occur. It happens continually because it did once happen to our original parents, and thus, we, their children, cannot escape repeating it. In that sense there is no chapter in the Bible that is more up to date and more pertinent to our own situation than this third chapter of Genesis.

The first person we meet in this story is not Adam or Eve, but the Tempter. Up till now in the story of Genesis we have had only two people brought before us, but suddenly now we are introduced to the Tempter. We will have some very important things to say about him in this study. Then the story of the temptation follows, revealing to us the strategy which the Tempter uses – that which he used in the Garden and which he still employs with everyone today. Then the chapter goes on to trace the results that followed the fall and the ultimate fate of both man and the Devil.

Let us first look at **the Tempter himself** and the first point of the strategy that he employs. The Tempter is introduced in the first sentence of Verse 1.

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. {Gen 3:1a RSV}

I am sorry that this word in the Hebrew was ever translated “serpent,” because it has given rise to a very false idea about this story – that there was in the Garden of Eden a talking snake. I have no doubt in my own mind that if God chose to make a snake talk, he could. I accept fully the other account in the Bible of a talking animal, when God opened the mouth of Balaam’s ass and spoke to the prophet through the donkey. I have no problem with this. Even man can teach animals to talk, and surely God can do so. But the interesting thing is that this account does not really say that there was a snake in the Garden of Eden. The Hebrew word here is *nachash*, which means literally “to shine,” or in the noun form here, “a shining one.” If you read it that way, an entirely different being emerges.

Now the shining one was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made ...

Thus, the first description that we have of the Tempter is that he appeared to Eve as a shining one. Undoubtedly, as is true about other animals, snakes were created to represent this being who appeared in the Garden as the shining one.

For instance, in the rest of Scripture we can see that wolves were deliberately designed by God to represent and symbolize rapacious human beings, vicious people. Sheep, I believe, were designed deliberately by God to represent believers. If you ever get to feeling proud of yourself, go study some sheep for awhile. I come from Montana and feel somewhat of an expert in this area. It is clear from the Scriptures that pigs were designed by God to symbolize unbelievers, unregenerate people. They are used consistently in this way throughout Scripture.

It is no wonder then that snakes have become the universal symbol of Satan. When I was in the Orient a few years ago, I was struck by the number of times that snakes appear in pagan temples as representative of Satan. But here it was not a snake that appeared but a shining one, of whom snakes have become symbols. You will recall that Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians speaks of the serpent that tempted Eve and then goes on to speak of him as “an angel of light” {2 Cor 11:14}. So it was the *Nachash* that appeared, the shining one. He is also called in the Book of Revelation

that “ancient serpent” {Rev 12:9 RSV}, i.e., the original serpent, the Devil. There is thus no question about the identity of the one who suddenly appears here. It is the Devil in his character as an angel of light, a shining being, all glorious to behold, who now confronts the woman in the Garden of Eden.

We are also told here that he was “more subtle than any other wild creature.” The word subtle means “crafty or cunning.” He had a craftiness about him greater than any other living creature (literally, rather than “wild creature”), any other being that God had made. This shining one was far more subtle, more cunning or crafty.

Here then is the being whom Jesus Christ called “the ruler of this world” {cf, John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11}, and whom Paul refers to as “the god of this age” {cf, 1 Cor 1:20}, the malevolent being who is behind the philosophy of men, who dominates the thinking of the world, who has the ear of humanity and whispers into it a lie, an outrageous but very attractive lie, that makes men drool with desire. Here is the introduction of that being into the history of man.

This is the one of whom Martin Luther properly said, “On earth is not his equal.” No man is able to outwit the Devil. He has defeated the greatest saints of God at times throughout all of history, except for the Son of God himself: “On earth is not his equal.”

His craftiness is evident right from the beginning in that he sought out the woman to make his play to her. As we saw last week, woman was created with a greater “emoter” than man. It was a desire to play on this emotional nature that led the Devil to seek out the woman and to begin his temptation with her. He comes, as he always does, in disguise. He never appears with horns and hoof and a tail, announcing that he is Satan. If he came that way, everyone would reject him. No one wants to be evil, in that defiant open sense. But the devil appears in disguise as he does here, as an angel of light, appearing not to be bad but good, a shining being of wholesome character and benevolent purpose.

Let us move on to consider **the strategy which the Tempter employs**. This is most instructive because it is exactly the strategy he employs when he appears as an angel of light to us – not that we shall see visions of shining beings but the personal-

ity that he exemplifies, the character in which he appears, is the same now as then. He is an angel of light. Scripture makes clear that the Devil can also appear as a roaring lion, i.e., he can strike in tragedy, in sickness, in physical evil, as he did to Job or to the Apostle Paul with his thorn in the flesh which Paul called the messenger of Satan. He can appear as a lion too, and strike fear into our hearts. But his most effective strategy is to appear as someone good, someone very attractive, something or someone who appeals to us as an angel of light. When he appears as such his strategy is always the same.

This is an encouraging thing. If you learn how to recognize the strategy of the Devil, you will find that he invariably employs the same tactics. There is a sense in which he is very limited. He doesn't vary his tactics widely. Sometimes we feel as if we shall never learn how to anticipate the Devil. But we can learn. The Apostle Paul said that he was not ignorant of the Devil's devices {2 Cor 2:11 KJV}. If we learn how he works, we can easily learn to detect him in our lives.

As a matter of fact, the Apostle James has described this strategy very plainly in one or two verses. In the first chapter of James, Verses 14 and 15, he says,

... each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death. {Jas 1:14-15 RSV}

There is the strategy of the Devil. It is his strategy here in the Garden of Eden and it is his strategy in your life and mine. The only difference between us and Eve in the Garden is that, for her, the Tempter stood outside. She was innocent and he stood outside attempting to reach into her mind and thoughts. Since the Fall, the Tempter is within us and has access to us, so that we are never out of reach of temptation; we are always exposed. This is why we cannot run from it. We can go a thousand miles away but we will never thereby avoid temptation. We carry a tempter within us wherever we go. He has access to us continually.

Yet he always approaches us in the same three stages and those steps are outlined clearly in this text. Let me show them to you:

- As James has told us, his first tactic is to arouse desire. James says that every man "is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." The first step the Devil takes with us is always to arouse desire to do wrong, to create a hunger, a lure or enticement toward evil.
- The second is to permit intent to form and an act to occur. This is what James describes as "desire when it has conceived bringing forth sin." Notice that the symbol he employs is that of conception and birth. There is a gestation period in temptation, for once desire is aroused there occurs a process within which sooner or later issues in sin, an act that is wrong.
- The third stage is that the Devil immediately acts upon the opportunity afforded by the evil act to move in and to produce results which Scripture describes as death – "Sin when it is full-grown brings forth death."

This is the Devil's ultimate aim. Jesus said that he was "a murderer from the beginning" {John 8:44}. He delights in mangling, smashing, twisting, destroying, blighting and blasting. He delights in this. We can see his activity present everywhere; it is going on around us, in our own lives and in the lives of others. These are "the works of the devil," says the Scripture {1 Jn 3:8}. He brings them about by the process we see in this story.

We shall only consider today the first stage of this.

Let us watch now how the Tempter cunningly moves to **arouse desire** within Eve's heart.

He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." {Gen 3:1b-5 RSV}

Step #1 is to make the woman want to sin.

That is not very difficult with us. We respond quite readily to these desires, these urges within us to do wrong. But it was quite a different story with Eve, for, remember, at this time she was innocent – she trusted and loved God. She felt no wrong desire springing up from within her, such as we must wrestle with. It is the task now of the Tempter to awaken a wrong desire in her heart. The opportunity that he has to do so is provided by the gift of free will which God has given to man. This helps to explain the question that many ask at this point in this story: “How is it that the Devil was ever allowed access to the Garden of Eden in the first place? Why does the Tempter appear in this story? How did he get into the Garden?”

The only possible answer, of course, is that God allowed him to come in. He was permitted to come. He came with the full knowledge and consent of God because it is necessary that man be tempted. He must be able to respond voluntarily to God. The greatest gift God has given to us is the ability to make moral choices; we have the right to be wrong if we insist. As you well know, God himself does not violate this. He does not coerce us. He does not force us to be right. We have the right to reject his love, and the right to turn off his grace, refuse his mercy, and to go our own stubborn way. God allows that to be. It is the greatest dignity given to man.

Many people struggle at this point. They say, “Why does not God make us behave?”

Well, if he did, he would have taken away the greatest gift he has given. These same people are the ones who say, “I don’t want anyone telling me what to do. I want to make up my own mind.” But you can’t have it both ways. Because God is a God of love, and love never coerces, never forces someone to love in return, it is absolutely essential that man be given the chance to choose whether he wants to continue to love God or to go another direction.

So the Tempter comes into the garden, and, on the basis of the gift of free will, he is given the opportunity to tempt the woman. Free will is that which makes us men, but it is also that which makes us temptable men. Even the Lord Jesus lived in this same relationship. He was temptable. He was given the gift of free choice too, when he came as a man, and, therefore, he was exposed to the power of Satan to tempt.

Notice that in trying to arouse desire in this woman that the Tempter follows a threefold plan. This again is very instructive to us, because it is the same way in which he will move with us:

1. His first step was to implant distrust in her heart, a distrust of God’s love. He raised the question, “Did God say you shall not eat of any tree of the Garden?” He means by this, obviously, “Could God have said a thing like that, really? Do you really know God that well? Do you think that a God who loves you would say that kind of a thing? To ask you not to eat of a tree of the Garden?” With that question he plants a seed of doubt in the woman’s heart. He is seeking to alter the image of God in her thinking. He is saying, in effect, “Either you misunderstood him and he didn’t really say that; or, if he did say it, then obviously he is not quite the kind of a God that you have imagined him to be.” With this single question he casts a small cloud of doubt over Eve’s trust in God, and the response of love in her heart. Could God have really said a thing like that?

Have you ever heard this question? Does God really love you enough to forbid something to you? Can a God who loves you forbid anything to you? Is it really love if he forbids something? The question hangs over the whole human race and has done so ever since this first occasion in the garden.

You will notice that the woman’s answer is perfectly forthright, without guile. She says immediately,

“We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” {Gen 3:2b-3 RSV}

There are some who have attempted to accuse the woman of adding to God’s statement when she says, “Neither shall you touch it,” because that was not part of the prohibition given in Verse 17 of Chapter 2. I do not think we need to view it that way. Doubtless the woman is giving a fuller account of what God had said. Very likely he did say, “You shall not touch of it.” God is thereby saying, “Look,

this tree is harmful and therefore don't get near it. Don't expose yourself to its temptation."

Most impressively in the Lord's Prayer we are taught to pray, "Lead us not into temptation" {Matt 6:13, Luke 11:4}. Notice the prayer doesn't say, "lead me out of temptation once I have gotten into it." No. By the time we have gotten into it we are already half lost. When we feel the raging of desire within us, it is no time to start praying. The Lord teaches us to pray beforehand, "Lead me not even into the realm of temptation. Don't let me come to the place where I shall feel this tremendous arousing and awakening of desire within."

It is instructive also to notice that temptation always comes to us at this point. God said to the man and the woman, "Here is something in which I must limit you. There is only this one place. The whole world is yours, the whole planet. You may eat of any fruit, any tree, anywhere, except for this one tree." This is highly significant because we discover that God is forever saying this to us also, in one way or another. Have you noticed this? In this sense, the tree of good and evil is still right in the midst of the garden of our lives. Wherever we may turn we are confronted by the fact that we are limited in some way. The testing of our humanity is whether we are willing to accept and abide by the limitations God puts upon us.

This is always the nature of testing. Are you willing to accept your limitations? As a child, are you willing to accept the authority of your parents in the home? Are you willing to be a child under the authority of your father and mother? As a student, are you willing to accept the fact that you are a student and not a mature person yet? That you can't make the rules of life for you are still learning them? You are not yet in a place to dictate what is the curriculum or what is the body of knowledge that you should be taught. You don't see that plainly. You can't. As a married woman, are you willing to accept the authority of a husband in your life? Are you willing to recognize that God has made a distinction between the sexes and that the man is given a role of leadership that the woman does not have? That is the testing place in your life. As a man, are you willing to accept the fact that you are a man and not God? That there are things you cannot

know and mysteries which you can't yet explore? You are not an infinite being; you are a finite creature. You don't know everything. You must sit at the feet of God and listen to his voice and learn from him. You are not equipped with all that it takes to explore life adequately. You are a man. Are you willing to accept that limitation? Throughout the whole history of our race the violation of this limitation has brought sorrow, heartache and misery.

2. Now see how the Tempter moves in quickly. He now dares to deny openly the results that God has stated will occur. "You will not die," he says. He openly substitutes a lie for the truth, but he does it in the realm of the future where you can't check the results. Notice his cleverness here. "It is not going to happen as God says. Don't take God so seriously. Surely these issues are not that important. If God is a God of love, then this can't be a life or death matter. After all, don't make a federal case out of this! It is really rather trivial. It can't be that important."

Do you see how this is repeated in life today? "These things are simple matters which have to deal only with secondary issues of life. This is not what the Bible says it is – a life or death matter – at least you can't take it that way if you believe in a God who loves you." So the Devil cleverly uses the great truths about the being and character of God to plant a doubt in this woman's heart and to support it with an outright lie, declaring that what God had said would not happen.

3. Then notice the third step. Quickly he moves in to support his lie with a distorted truth. At breakfast this morning some of us were discussing one of the cults of our day. One of the men at the table said, "It is always true, isn't it, that every false faith is made up of a certain amount of truth? Ten percent error and ninety percent truth, mixed together, but ultimately it is the ten percent of error that leads men astray." Notice that this is exactly the Devil's tactic here. He said to Eve,

"God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will

be like God, knowing good and evil.”
{Gen 3:5b RSV}

Now that was perfectly true. Look at Verse 7 of this same chapter: “Then the eyes of both were opened.” And look also at Verse 22, “Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.’”

This is exactly what the Devil said would happen, but with this difference: Their eyes were opened and they did become able to know good and evil as God knows it, as we saw in a previous message. They learned to relate everything to themselves. They used, as the measurement of good and evil, their own feelings. That is what God does. But what the Devil didn’t tell them was that this would be the most disastrous thing that could happen to them. For man to be like God, in that respect, is to interject an element of sheer disaster into human experience. It all proved true. They thought that the Devil meant something wonderful, something expansive, something glorious, would happen. But when their eyes were opened it was shameful and sordid and sad.

“Oh,” you say, “how diabolically clever.” Exactly! That is the way the Devil always does it. That is the story of LSD today, isn’t it. It appears to offer something wonderful, something exciting, something far beyond anything the person has ever experienced before, something that will open the mind, expand the whole of one’s senses, and give a wonderful experience, yet when it is actually experienced it is something else entirely. Eyes are opened but not to what is expected.

But now the Devil is through with the woman. This is all he is after. He has succeeded in arousing desire, and that is all he wants. The other two stages will automatically follow, and they do. All that he wishes to do is to leave Eve standing before the fruit, watching it in all its luscious fascination, hanging there tantalizing her, offering her an experience she never dreamed would be possible. When he has done that he has planted the seed he wants in her heart. He has caused her to slightly distrust God’s love, to believe a lie, and to expect an unwarranted result. That is all he needs to do. Now she stands aroused and deceived in the presence of the fruit and the Devil can safely leave her even

though she has not yet sinned. He is fully certain that the desired results will follow.

What went wrong, you say? How could she have avoided this? Where was the battle lost? As you look through the account you can see that the battle was lost right after the first sentence, when the Devil raised the question, “Did God say...?” When she accepted mentally the idea that God was not fully to be trusted, from that moment on she was whipped, she had lost. Notice that immediately after that the Devil becomes bold and comes right out in the open to lie to her blatantly, openly, boldly. And she believes him from then on.

Have you experienced this kind of thing? This is the process that is followed when the Tempter tries to get you to have an affair with another man’s wife or another woman’s husband. This is the process he follows when he wants to get you involved in a shady business deal, or to cheat in an examination, or simply to tell a lie in your relationships with others, or whatever else it may be in the manifold ways by which temptation comes.

The interesting thing about this is that there was nothing wrong in arousing desire in this woman’s heart, because God does that too. God is at work also to arouse our desires, to make us want things, to stimulate us and activate us, to move us out. The difference lies in the way he does it. If we don’t get anything else out of this story we will have learned a tremendous lesson if we learn the difference between the way God and the Devil arouse desire in the heart of man.

How does God do it? Well, it is always the same way. Let me quickly give it to you. It is a threefold process again:

- First, he demonstrates his love to us. That is always God’s first approach. He comes and touches us somehow, blesses us, pours out upon us his sunshine and his rain, all the blessings of our lives. He comes in Christ and moves in among us and lives with us, touching us, blessing us. He gives himself. He demonstrates his love. That is the first step.
- Second, he declares a promised result. He gives his word to us. He declares what will happen. He opens to us a new and vast vista of what life can be like.

The Enticement of Evil

- Third, he offers us his presence to bring us to that promise, to bring about its fulfillment. Jesus said, “Come unto me,” {Matt 11:28a KJV}. “If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him,” {Rev 3:20b KJV}. God offers to enter life personally and to be with us. This leads on to fulfillment, to blessing, to joy and oneness.

Do you see the contrast between the way God works and the way the Devil works?

- The Devil first implants a distrust of God’s love. The Lord demonstrates his love.
- God declares a promise to us. The Devil declares a countering lie.
- God strengthens it by offering himself, the truth itself to us. The Devil distorts that truth and makes it look like something else, makes it vague, hazy and undefined.

That is the way you can tell the difference.

Let me ask you a question as we close this message. You are being tempted, some of you, right now. Young and old alike, you are being tempted to do wrong, take a course that is wrong, make a decision that will lead to death or disaster down the line. How do you know whether it is from God or Satan? It all looks so good, doesn’t it? It always looks like it will offer you something worthwhile. Well, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I feel cheated, deprived, or limited right now? Do I feel as though God is somehow holding out on me, that I am not being given all that I ought to have, that my rights are being violated, that I am being cheated of something life should give me? Well, then you are listening to the voice of the Tempter. That is his first approach. “Did God say this? Would a God who loves you say a thing like that? Would he hold out on you? Would he postpone the blessing he wants you to have?”
- Then ask yourself, does what you want contradict the truth that God has revealed? Can

you find in the Scriptures that what you are after, what you are seeking, is wrong, yet all the world is telling you that it is right and that it will bring you blessing? Does the Word of God stand in opposition to what you are after? Then you are listening again to the Tempter’s voice for he lies, outrightly, blatantly, lies. He says that it will all turn out differently than the revealed word says.

- Finally, ask yourself, “Is the promised result rather vague, rather uncertain, unspecific? Is it just a general promise of blessing or happiness; or is it specific, is it clear, is it precisely defined?” If it is unspecific and vague, you are listening again to the voice of the Tempter. This is why the Scripture comes back again and again to this simple thing, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding,” {cf, Prov 3:5 KJV}.

You are but men. You are human. You don’t know all there is to know about life. You can’t know. There isn’t anyone who knows. You desperately need the revelation of truth which can come from God alone. No one else can supply it. No other book will give you the answers. There is no other place where you can find out what life is all about except in the Word of God. Therefore,

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your path. {cf, Prov 3:5-6 KJV}

Prayer:

How long it has taken us, Father, to learn the truths that are declared to us in this passage. How ignorant we have been. What dupes, what stupid victims we have been of the Devil’s lies, so many times in our lives. How foolish we have been to distrust your love, to believe that you who love us could tell us a lie, how foolish we have been to be impatient, to want everything now, to insist that all your blessings be given to us now, to fall victim to the delusion that it all must come in this life, life is short and we must grab what we can

while we can. Father, open our eyes, help us to see that the only place of fulfillment, the only place of happiness, the only place of joy, is in a heart that trusts and com-

pletely rests with quiet acceptance upon your love and grace. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Heart of Temptation

by Ray C. Stedman

In our present series on *Understanding Man* we have gone back to the very beginning, to the Garden of Eden, and there we are seeking to understand the mysterious power which we call *temptation*.

Yesterday I found myself tempted to steal. I was in a mountain cabin at Forest Hills Conference Grounds in Southern California, and I saw a little coffee carafe that was provided in each room for coffee. It was a very nice little container, and, when I looked at it, the thought flashed into my mind, "It would fit very neatly into my suitcase." Immediately I rejected the desire to put it there, and I confess (with perhaps a certain amount of pride), that it was not because the first thought that occurred to me was: "What would people say if the speaker of the conference stole something out of his room?" I resisted on the ground that it was not right, it was not pleasing to God.

You may be surprised to know that I have temptations like that. I also have many others. I am tempted to pride. I am tempted to lust. I am tempted to bitterness. I have been tempted often to envy. I am tempted to laziness, and to a great many others just like you!

The process of temptation is always the same with me, as it is with you. It is that process we are looking at in this third chapter of Genesis. This is why this passage is so wonderfully relevant to us for it speaks right to our situation.

As we saw in our last study together, temptation occurs in three stages or steps, which James clearly and plainly describes for us. He says that

... each person is tempted when he is lured or enticed by his own desire. [Stage 1] Then desire when it has conceived gives

birth to sin; [Stage 2] and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death. [Stage 3] {Jas 1:14-15 RSV}

We have already traced Step 1: We watched Eve in the Garden of Eden being assaulted in mind and will by the Tempter in the form of a Shining One who appeared to her and sought to arouse a desire in her for the forbidden fruit. This pointed up the basic nature of temptation. It is always a pressure upon us to exceed the limitations which God has placed upon us. It is an urge within, a desire aroused, for us to move out beyond the limits which God has established for us. God has placed these limitations upon us, not out of cruelty or unkindness, but out of love and grace. They are necessary to our humanity. But the character of temptation is to utilize this limitation to make us restive and discontent and to move us out beyond the limits. We saw also that the Tempter actually accomplished this with Eve.

- He aroused a desire by first creating a sense of unfairness in her. This is most revealing in the light of the situation we find so widespread today, when many are seething in a ferment of discontent and restlessness, suffering from a sense of being treated unfairly (oftentimes justifiably) but allowing that resentment to take over control of the thought and mind.
- The Tempter's second step is to deny, blatantly and openly, the truth that God had declared. He can only do this after he has created a sense of unfairness, for then the mind is prepared to receive the thought that God is not trustworthy and does not really love.

- The third step was to present to her an incomplete and misleading statement of truth – to twist it, distort it slightly.

Thus her desire was aroused for the forbidden fruit.

We closed our study last time with Eve standing before the fruit, aroused and deceived, drooling before the tantalizing mystery of it.

Now **Stage 2 in temptation** occurs. In many ways this is the most important of all. Before this stage was reached it was quite possible for Eve to resist the temptation that had been aroused within her, but after Stage 2, it becomes even more difficult, in fact, practically impossible. This stage is given to us in one verse:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. {Gen 3:6 RSV}

The picture that James gives us of this particular stage of temptation is one of conception and birth. The seed of an aroused desire has been planted in the heart, and there follows then a process of growth and development. The mind now must come into play. Up to this point the Tempter has worked upon Eve's feelings and aroused a strong desire within her for the forbidden thing. But now the mind must come into action. It is the function of the mind to pass upon the logic of the situation.

Our mental faculties are a tremendous gift from God. Basically they are the ability to reflect on circumstances and facts, and relate our attitude or activity to these. There is a logicity that must prevail. The question of the mind is always: Is the action about to be taken, or the attitude about to be formed, a rational one? Is it consistent with the facts? In many respects this amazing ability to reason, to exercise rationality, is God's supreme gift to mankind. Rationality demands that the whole man become involved, that one acts as a total being. Irrationality, or insanity, is the action of a person based on only part of his being – only his emotions, or even the direct activity of the will, apart from the exercise of mind or emotions. But

rationality insists that the total man be involved, therefore the mind must come into play.

So it is at this point that the mind of Eve is engaged. But already a terrible thing has happened to her. She does not realize it, but it is evident from this account that the arousing of her emotion, the strong desire to have this fruit, which hangs there in all its tantalizing mystery and lure, has already prepared her will to act. Even before her mind comes into play she wants the fruit, and, secretly, has determined to have it. Thus, when her mind comes into action, it can no longer do so rationally. It cannot now consider the facts as they are, but must act on the facts as they appear to her. Since it can no longer act rationally it must rationalize. That is the deadly power of the mind in man. It has an amazing ability to rationalize, to twist the facts so that they accord with desire, to satisfy the urge that is springing up within by justifying it, even though it must slightly distort the facts of the situation.

Notice the process here:

1. The first thing is that Eve looked at the fruit and said to herself, "It is good for food (i.e., it is profitable). It is something that will help me; it is physically profitable. Never mind the long range effects – I'm not interested in that – it will satisfy a present and immediate need, and what can be wrong with that?"
2. Secondly, she saw that it was "a delight to the eyes," which means it was pleasurable, it satisfied the esthetic sense. It titillated her senses and was a pleasurable experience.

This element is always present in temptation. Each of us is well aware, because we are all experts in this, that sin is always fun – for awhile! It has an element of pleasure about it and there is no use trying to blind our eyes to that fact. It is the pleasure of sin which makes it so enticing and alluring to us. The desire to have that pleasure, at whatever cost, is really the essential element of temptation. You know this is true. It feels good to indulge myself. I love the feeling of splurging, of doing something that gives me pleasure. It feels great. That is why I do it, even though my mind may be telling me that it may be ultimately harmful.

It feels good to act on pride. It satisfies me in some way. It feels good to lose my temper.

Have you ever had the perverse delight of telling somebody off? Oh, how good that feels – for awhile! It feels good even though you do not do it to someone’s face, but go out in the woods to do it. Even that relieves the pain for a bit. It feels good to hurt my wife when she has done something that displeases me. There is pleasure in sin.

Howard Butt, a well-known Christian layman, puts it this way:

It’s my pride that makes me independent of God. It’s appealing to feel that I am the master of my fate. I run my own life. I call my own shots. I go it alone. But that feeling is my basic dishonesty. I can’t go it alone, I have to get help from other people. And I can’t ultimately rely on myself. I’m dependent on God for my very next breath. It’s dishonest of me to pretend that I’m anything but a man, small, weak, and limited.

There lies the deceitfulness of sin. It offers pleasure. As Eve saw the fruit she said, “It is good for food, and it is a delight to the eyes. It gives me an esthetic sense that is pleasant.”

3. Finally, she saw that it was “to be desired to make one wise.” It ministered to the ego. It was an ego-satisfying thing. Again, in the book of James, we have a reference to the wisdom that is in view here, (“desired to make one wise”). Yes, says James, but there are two kinds of wisdom. There is the wisdom that is from above, from God: and there is a wisdom which is from below, which, he says, is “fleshly, sensual, devilish,” {cf, Jas 3:15b KJV}. Notice the threefold division there: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes (sensual, pleasurable), and the pride of life (the Devil) {cf, 1 Jn 2:16}. For the snare of the Devil is pride of heart, the ego in man.

This is what Paul calls in another place “the wisdom of the world,” {1 Cor 1:20, 2:6, 3:19}. It appears to be alluring, satisfying, giving tremendous results. How much of the philosophy of the world around us is based upon this. We must discover ways of building ourselves up, enhancing self, taking special courses by which we can develop the powers of our personality or going to school to develop

charm or poise – a Dale Carnegie course, or a Powers school. All of this is ministering to that pride of life, the satisfying of the ego.

When Eve felt all this she did not realize that her mind had played a trick upon her. It had taken the apparent facts which the Enemy had set before her and had justified them, so that they looked reasonable, rational. The thing to do then, of course, is to give in. After all, anything that is good for food, pleasurable to the senses, and ministers to the satisfying of the ego, what can be wrong about that? But this is nothing less than the prostitution of the mind! It is reversing God’s order.

Perhaps there is no element in the fallen nature of man more revealing than this single thing – in fallen man, you have man operating in a different order than God intended him to operate. In man as God made him, the order is to be,

- first, an appeal to the mind,
- then, out of that, the stirring of the emotions based upon the facts presented to the mind, and
- then the two working together, the mind and emotions, to move the will.

This is why throughout the Scriptures, you invariably discover that the appeal of the gospel, the good news from God, is addressed first to the mind.

The first appeal of the gospel is never to the emotions, it is always to the mind, to the understanding. It is a presentation of certain historic facts which have significance, and the significance of those facts is what constitutes the good news. Paul says, “this is the gospel which we declared unto you, how that Christ died for our sins,” {1 Cor 15:3}. He died (the fact), for our sins (that is the significance of it): and he rose again, to be a living Lord imparting himself to us. This is what constitutes the good news, that Christ died to solve the problem of our rebelliousness and our estrangement from God, and he rose again, to minister to us constantly of his life, of his grace, and of his strength. Upon these facts we can then make a decision. These facts move us and stir us – they ought to, they are designed to. But there must constantly come first the appeal to the mind. That is why any evangelism which does not begin with teaching is a false evangelism. Any evangelism which moves directly to an appeal to the will to act,

or to the emotions to feel, is a distorted evangelism and results in abortion instead of birth.

This technique of reversal prevails throughout the world:

- This is the technique of Madison Avenue and the advertising business. Thumb through a magazine and notice that all the advertisements are designed to arouse desire first. There sits a beautifully designed and painted sports car, displayed in living color. You cannot look at these beautiful advertisements without beginning to drool a bit. There is a color TV set, the color so real it is unbelievable. Then you look at your drab, black-and-white set over in the corner, all covered with dust, and you think, "How can I put up with a thing like that any longer?" All showrooms and windows of stores are designed to short circuit the mind and appeal first to the will through the emotions.
- This is the technique of politicians and propagandists of every school. They too seek to arouse an emotional reaction first. They cleverly and carefully think through what will make appeal to the emotion first and they start on that note.
- Someone wishes to move students, so they begin talking about war, the draft, or Vietnam. When the emotions are properly stirred then they present their plea for action, whatever the cause may be.
- With Negroes, there are certain emotional words that immediately arouse them, civil rights, black power, etc.
- To white middle classes, the propagandists talk about property values, free enterprise, and the "American way of life."

By this sloganeering they attempt to arouse emotions first, with the realization that when the mind comes into play (as it will), it will not think rationally but will rationalize, it will take facts and distort them to justify the desire that has been aroused.

This explains why the propaganda which has appeared recently about the hazard of cigarette smoking has been relatively ineffective. Cigarette smoking is not based upon rational observation. If it were, no one would smoke. Who wants lung cancer? But the only way by which the effects of cigarette advertising can be counteracted is by fighting fire with fire – by arousing emotions in the opposite direction. That is why we are now seeing so many articles on the terrible effects of throat and lung cancer, these vivid descriptions of what it feels like to have no throat, to have the larynx removed and to feed yourself through a tube. All this is with the hope that the emotion of fear aroused will turn people from the dangers of cigarette smoking. But why do people smoke? Why do boys begin to smoke? I remember my own boyhood and my attempts at smoking. Why? Because I thought that in some way it made me a man. It ministered to my sense of pride and my desire to be a grown-up individual. That is the reason that most boys smoke. You can see how this kind of thing permeates society.

It would be entirely wrong to get the idea from this account that everything that is pleasurable is wrong, and everything that is right is boring, dull and flat. That, of course, is what the Enemy would like to have us believe about God; anything God wants for us is very dull, uninteresting, and lackluster, and the only exciting things are the things that are wrong. But nothing could be more mistaken about that. After all, it is God who designed our emotions. He made us to have feelings, and he intends to satisfy them. There is nothing wrong. Desire is wrong when it is contrary to the facts, and thus prostitutes the mind, and subjects it to a rationalizing process, trying to justify facts in terms of that aroused desire. That is what is wrong.

See this in the Lord Jesus Christ:

- He, too, went through a time of temptation and notice how he handled it. He experienced the same order of attack that Eve did – not in the garden this time, but in a wilderness, in a barren place removed from all the comfort, luxury, ease, and pleasantness of a garden. There in the barren wilderness, after forty days of fasting, he was tempted like Eve. The first temptation came on the same level as it did to her. She was tempted with regard to food, and the Tempter also came to the Lord and said to him,

“If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread. You need bread. After forty days and forty nights your body is crying for bread. Surely God wants you to have bread; therefore turn these stones into bread,” {cf, Matt 4:3}. But Jesus’ answer was, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone’” {Matt 4:4}, i.e., bread is not be used for spiritual satisfaction. If you try to use it for that you are distorting the way God made man. That is not the purpose of bread. It is better to starve to death than to use it for a purpose God did not intend. So he used the facts of the situation, the way God made man, and rejected the Enemy’s appeal, saying, “It’s not right, and I won’t do it.”

- Then the Enemy took him to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, in all their pomp, glory, and majesty {Matt 4:8}. This dream has entranced men for centuries. Some have caught a vision of even part of the kingdoms of the world and have fallen in love with the power, majesty, and glory of it. But Jesus was shown all the kingdoms of the world in their alluring glory, with the suggestion that if he would fall down and worship the Enemy he could have all this. This was clearly a delight to the eyes, something to titillate the senses and give a feeling of power. But our Lord rejected it because it was not in accordance with the facts, {Matt 4:10}. The facts are that man is made to worship God and God alone.
- Then the Devil took him up to the Temple and suggested he cast himself off in order to display the power he had. When the people saw that he could do this without physical damage, they would acclaim him as a divine being and he would gain popular appeal, the pride of life. Again he rejected it on the basis of the facts. He said. “No, no. It is written, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’ God is in charge of life, and I will not allow anything to enrich me but what comes through his hands,” {cf, Matt 4:7}.

Thus he rejected the temptation.

Now at this point it is important to note that Eve had not yet sinned. Even though her desire is aroused and her mind has justified it, still it is pos-

sible for her to recover herself, though it would be very difficult. But, as James tells us, desire when it conceive gives birth to sin. And at this point it is recorded that, when she saw that it was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that it was desired to make one wise, “she took of its fruit and ate.” She acted on a lie, and thus fell into the sin of becoming her own god, of making up her own rules in violation of her humanity.

But now notice something else: Adam had not yet fallen, only Eve. There was still hope for the race. Thus the scene now shifts to Adam because it is not in Eve that the race fell. It is in Adam that the responsibility ultimately lies. A battle has been lost, but the war has not yet been lost. But then we read that, after she took of the fruit and ate, “she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.” The ease with which Adam fell is dreadfully hard on the male ego. Think of it. Here is this whole account of the struggle of the Tempter to reach through to Eve, and but one little line about Adam, “she gave to him, and he ate.” Yet in those innocent but ominous words, “and he ate,” there begins the darkness of fallen humanity. The fatal twist now appears as mankind is transformed by this psychedelic drug (the forbidden fruit), and all men become the victim of a reverse psychology, mastered by emotional urges, no longer rational beings.

The lie is apparent in that man thinks himself to be rational. Because we can put our minds to certain tasks and think them through, we believe we draw logical conclusions from them that are based upon the facts, but it is not true. The record of history is powerfully to this effect – that man operates from what Paul calls “deceitful lusts” {Eph 4:22 KJV}, urges, emotionally aroused urges within, which twist the facts by rationalizing and distorting so the mind is prostituted to false purposes.

In the next account we shall trace the meaning of the fall and the results that come from it. This is the third stage of temptation, the death that follows when sin completes its full growth. But we must close this study by asking ourselves: What is the value of this for us today? The answer, of course, must be that we see here that what Jesus says of the race is true: It is the victim of a distortion and twist which it is helpless to remedy by itself. We cannot change our basic natures. The fall has rendered us victims of emotional urges, and we cannot

change that, no matter how desperately we try. We try urgently to be rational about things, but we cannot see the facts rightly. We do not even see the whole range of facts, and, ultimately, we find ourselves the unconscious victim of emotional twisting.

What can we do about it? If anything points up the absolute necessity for the new birth, it is this. As Jesus said, there is no other way out for humanity except through him. "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me," {cf, John 14:6}. There is no way to see reality apart from Jesus Christ. It is he who opens the eyes, it is he who restores balance to life, it is he who redeems my humanity, and helps make it possible for me to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong.

My little six-year-old daughter put it very plainly the other day. She said, "It's good that we've got God, because otherwise, how would we know whether we were doing right or wrong." Is that not the basic question here?

How would we know, if it were not for God? How do we know how to look at life except we look at it through the eyes of Jesus Christ? How do we know which is right, among the welter of voices that call to us today from every side, unless we judge them all by the voice of Jesus Christ? How

can we find our way through the morass of this present day, through the swamps of relativism that abound on every side, unless we are listening to the voice of the one who loved us and gave himself for us, that he might redeem us by destroying the works of the Devil?

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray that we might see once again, plainly and clearly, that there is no hope for us apart from the Lord Jesus and our following of him, trusting his love, and yielding ourselves to his redeeming grace. We pray that any who have not begun with him may begin by saying to him now, "Lord Jesus, save me. Come into my heart and life and begin your redemptive work with me. Make me different. Deliver me from the distortions of a fallen nature and grant that I, too, can see things as they really are." For those of us, Lord, who have already begun, grant that we may now resolve anew to follow him, to obey him, to trust him, to day by day listen to what he says and follow him. We ask in his name, Amen.

The Package Deal

by Ray C. Stedman

Our task in this series of Genesis studies is to find clues to the greatest mystery novel that has ever been written – the story of man. We are seeking to understand ourselves, both as men and women “in Adam,” and also as the new men and women we have become if we are “in Christ.” But we must begin with the first Adam because what he was we are. As one German writer put it, “I am delving into Adam in order to unriddle him, and myself.”

In this series on *Understanding Man*, we have come to the last of the three stages of temptation. We have been watching the Tempter, as the Shining One, dealing with Eve in the Garden of Eden, and later, through her, reaching Adam as well:

We have already noted that the first thing he does is to light a flame of desire within her for what God has forbidden. This is the first step of temptation; it is yet today. No matter how many thousands of years have rolled by since this account in the garden took place, it is still repeating itself in this 20th century hour.

Then we noticed, in Stage 2, that when the mind was engaged, as ultimately it must be, it did not rationally consider the facts but it rationalized the desire. It made the doing of wrong look profitable, pleasurable, and even necessary to human fulfillment. How familiar we are with this process! How easily we rationalize what we want to do and make it look reasonable, and even necessary. If you question that, listen to your own excuses, the reasons why you do things:

- You can't help it;
- Your whole family does it;
- Your ancestry demands it;

- You are Irish,
- or Latin,
- or something similar.

Thus the evil act was finally accomplished in the Garden of Eden. We read “she took of its fruit and ate: and she gave to her husband and he ate,” {Gen 3:6b RSV}. When desire, conceived and rationalized, issues at last in ultimate form, it becomes an act or a settled attitude of the heart.

Now we come to Stage 3 in the process of temptation, which the Apostle James tells us is: “sin, when it is finished, brings forth death,” {Jas 1:15b KJV}.

Remember that God had said to Adam and Eve in the very beginning, concerning the forbidden fruit, “in the day that you eat of it, you will die,” {cf, Gen 2:17b}. But the Tempter had said to Eve, “You will not die,” {Gen 3:4b RSV}. He openly and defiantly challenged God's pronouncement. He said, “your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God,” {Gen 3:4b RSV}. The way he said it made it sound like something glorious, exciting, and adventurous. He was saying to them, by implication, “When you eat of this fruit you need no longer depend on this old Lord of creation: you will be lords in your own right. You can make decisions like God does, and do what you want to do.” This has been the subtle lie that has hung over the whole human race from that day to this. But now the deed has been done, and we come now to the moment of truth.

Which view is right? Will they die? Is the Devil right? The answer is given in Verse 7:

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they

sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. {Gen 3:7 RSV}

At first it is the Devil who seems to be right. He said they would not die, and when they took of the fruit they did not drop down dead. He said their eyes would be opened and it is true that new knowledge was immediately granted to them. They saw things they had not seen before. Does that mean then that the Devil was right? No, because from the moment they ate they began to die – exactly as God had said: “In the day that you eat of it you will die,” {cf, Gen 2:17}. Romans 5:12 says, “As sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death passed upon all men...” This was the moment at which that occurred.

In this present passage we shall discover what we might call *the signs of death*. Death is not simply the moment when the breath leaves your body and you become a corpse. That is not death in its totality: that is simply the end of death. It is the end of a process which has been going on for some time, the beginning of which was so subtle that perhaps you did not even recognize it. It is this beginning of death which is traced in this Genesis account. The proof that this story of the Fall really occurred is found in the four things which this account reveals as marking the beginning of death. They are found in every person in this room, without exception, and every person in the world, without exception. These things are present in the whole race. We all know that when we yield to temptation we experience pleasure. We enjoy the pleasures of sin. But what this account forces us to face is that with the pleasure comes an undesirable accompaniment, a fall-out of sin, which we cannot escape. It is all a package deal. If we choose to take that momentary pleasure, we cannot choose to evade the accompaniment that comes – death. Here is spelled out for us the four things which mark the beginning of death.

1. The first one is this, “they knew that they were naked.” Now they were naked all along. God did not make Adam and Eve with clothes on, any more than he makes human beings with clothes on today. We come into this world naked. They too came into the world naked, but they did not know they were naked until the Fall. Why not? Because they had never looked at themselves – their interest was not in this di-

rection. They were self-less. Before the Fall they were concerned about the animals, for Adam had the task of naming all the animals. They were concerned about the garden, and about the work that had been assigned to them. They were concerned with each other, one about the other. But now suddenly they saw themselves. This awareness of self-nakedness is a symbolic way of expressing the fact that this was the birth of what we call self-consciousness. They saw themselves and the immediate effect was to bring shame and embarrassment upon them.

I would like to submit this to you for the testing ground of your own life. Is this not your most serious trouble; this fact that you are conscious of yourself? Is this not where you struggle the most? We all know that when, for a moment or two, we can forget ourselves, we do fine. We can speak, we can act, we can do many things well – if we can forget ourselves. But then the sense of self comes flooding back over us; we remember ourselves, and we begin to fumble, to stammer, to blush; suddenly we are all thumbs and left feet. Why? This is the effect of self-consciousness. But God did not make man that way. Man was never made to be conscious of himself. His interests were to lie outside himself, he was to be self-less.

This accompaniment of self-consciousness dogs every one of us every day, and the amazing thing is that, to this very day, we discover that clothing helps us. Adam and Eve, when they discovered they were naked, immediately made rough clothing out of fig leaves. They made themselves aprons and covered themselves. Here is the explanation for the fact that the whole human race finds it psychologically necessary to clothe themselves. In mankind’s fellowship and intercourse with one another, clothing helps. It helps to make us feel more secure, more adequate, more able to face life.

This is why women, when they get blue or discouraged, find it very uplifting to buy a new dress. One lady said, “Whenever I get down in the dumps I get a new hat.” And her husband said, “I wondered where you got them.”

So, like Adam and Eve, we reflect the same thing; we find ourselves making clothes to cover our self-consciousness.

We find this true at the psychological level as well. This is what lies behind the universal practice of creating an impression, projecting an image of ourselves. That is a form of psychological clothing. Physically, clothing is a way of changing our appearance so that we look different than we actually are. So it is with the matter of projecting an image. It is a way of trying to get people to think of us as different than we really are. This is why, at one time or another, we all find ourselves struggling with the matter of being honest, of being open. We find it difficult to be so. We do not want people to see us, or think of us, as we are. That is why we avoid too close contact with one another. We do not want to spend much time with any one person because we are afraid he will see us as we are. You can see how this idea simply permeates the race, and has ever since the moment self-consciousness was born in an act of disobedience.

2. The second thing this account shows us, present among us because of the disobedience of man, is found in Verse 8:

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. {Gen 3:8 RSV}

Hiding is an instinctive reaction to guilt, and reveals the fact of guilt.

When one of my daughters was a baby she had the habit of sucking her thumb. It carried over into late babyhood and we tried to help her with this. She began to feel very guilty about sucking her thumb and we often found that, when we would catch her doing so, she would take it out of her mouth and hide it under her dress. Now, who taught her to do that? No one. No one needs to teach us such things; these are instinctive reactions. She hid because she felt guilty.

Thus here in Verse 8 is the first description of a human conscience beginning to function; that inner torment we are all familiar with which cannot be turned off, no matter how hard we try. In fact, often the harder we try to ignore it, the deeper it pierces and the more ob-

durate it becomes. Psychologists agree that guilt is a universal reaction to life, that, without apparent reason or explanation, all of us, without exception, suffer from guilt. This sense of guilt haunts us, follows us, makes us afraid. We are afraid of the unknown, of the future, of the unseen, just as Adam and Eve discovered themselves to be.

But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked: and I hid myself." {Gen 3:9-10 RSV}

That is the heritage of the Fall, this sense of guilt. It is death at work in human life.

3. But there is still a third aspect of this death revealed here:

He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." {Gen 3:11-13 RSV}

There is much in these verses which we will pass by for the moment, to return to in our next message, but I want to focus now on the first playing of the oldest game in the world, the favorite indoor sport of the whole race – passing the buck. The Lord said to them, "What is this that you have done?" And Adam said, "Well, the woman that you gave to me, she gave me the fruit, and I ate. It's her fault." The woman said, "Well, it's not my fault, it's the serpent's fault. The serpent beguiled me, and I ate."

This is the first human attempt to deal with the problem of guilt. Interestingly enough, it is exactly the same way by which we 20th century people also try to relieve guilt. See how these factors are all related. It is self-consciousness which is the basic, fundamental wrongness about human life. That is what produces guilt. Our awareness of self makes

us ashamed, embarrassed, and guilty. Then in order to evade this sense of guilt, we do what Adam did. We say, “Well, it’s not my fault. I’m but a victim of circumstance.” He took it like a man – he blamed it on his wife. And she passed it along to the serpent. But behind both excuses is the unspoken suggestion, very clear in this account, that it is really God’s fault. “The woman whom Thou gavest me,” says Adam. If you had never given me this woman I would never have fallen into this sin. The woman immediately passes it on and says, “It is because you allowed the serpent to come into this garden, that’s the trouble.” Both are pointing the finger ultimately at God and saying, “It’s all your fault.”

This is where blame always comes. Ultimately it points the finger at God and says he is at fault. Men are simply helpless victims of circumstance. This is what lies behind our urge to blame each other and pin the blame for our actions or attitudes upon some outward circumstance. When my children were little, one of them was engaged in a fight with her cousin. I said to them, “Who started this?” And the boy said, “She did! She hit me back!”

That attitude pervades the whole of society, and the whole of history. It is what I find married couples saying to one another all the time. The predominant problem in solving the tangles of a marriage relationship is to get the two to stop blaming each other. That is the hardest thing to do. But if they do it, the battle is two-thirds won. This is what races are doing today, and is the primary cause of racial strife. Each race is pointing a finger at the other and saying, “It’s your fault!” This is what nations are doing in the international scene. We find ourselves universally yielding to this tendency to blame another, and, thus, ultimately, to blame God. Of course, we do not say that. Very seldom do you find a man coming out openly, outrightly, and blatantly saying it is God’s fault. But that is what lies beneath the surface; we are blaming God for the whole thing, trying to turn guilt into fate and to make of ourselves mere innocent victims, suffering from a breakdown in creation for which God is responsible.

4. The fourth result which this account reveals is found in Verses 16 and 19:

**To the woman he said,
“I will greatly multiply your pain in
childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth chil-
dren,” {Gen 3:16a RSV}**

To Adam he said, Verse 19:

**“In the sweat of your face you shall eat
bread
till you return to the ground, for out of
it you were taken;
you are dust, and to dust you shall re-
turn.” {Gen 3:19 RSV}**

Pain, sweat, and death. There are the limits of life. These are the prison walls that hem us in, and mock all our hunger and yearning after freedom and fullness. Is it not clear that the whole race suffers from a sense of loss, a sense of limitation?

Each one of us, individually, knows this feeling. We know there is more to life than we are experiencing – and how we crave it. How we long to find it, somehow, some way. We pore over travel folders. We read about new opportunities for work. We join a club, or seek a new relationship with other people. We adopt a hobby. We try desperately to find some way to enter into the fullness which we feel life ought to present to us. We know it is there, but we have lost the way to it. You can hear this panting after life in the present-day revolt of youth.

They are fed up with the materialistic hollowness of the previous generation. They know that happiness, obviously, does not lie in things – in television sets and freezers and new cars. But they do not know where it is found. Every effort we make, every step we take, every channel we follow to find it, we are flung back constantly by these three things – pain, hard, grinding toil, and the black wall of death.

Why is it that we all have a sense of needing to hasten at our work? Why are we forever saying, “Let’s make the years count, let’s use time to the full?” Why do we use calendars and clocks? It is because we realize that we must die. Our time is limited. We have only so much time and we must

use it to the full. We are set around by walls we cannot break through. Every effort we make, if pressed too far, results in pain and struggle and death. That is what happened when the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened. They were indeed opened, but this is what they saw. They learned the hard, cruel facts of life lived apart from dependence upon God. They immediately knew that from which we all suffer: a sense of self-consciousness, an awareness of guilt, an urge to blame another, and that terrible, empty, hollow feeling of limitation, a sense of loss. What a cruel and dreary world these factors have produced. They are what the Bible calls “the works of the devil” {1 Jn 3:8}, works which he is free to accomplish because man has given him opportunity in the disobedient act of his heart.

Well, we cannot leave the story there. We must remember that, if there was a first Adam from whose misdeed we all suffer this morning, the good news is that there is also a second Adam, a Man who came to reverse the works of the devil – to free us, to loose us from their evil control. We cannot close this study without asking ourselves: What does Jesus Christ do about these things? I only wish we could take the time to open this meeting up for testimony so that you, yourselves, could say what he does. But yet I know I speak for the majority in this room when I review these things.

- What does Jesus Christ do about my self-consciousness? What does he do about this sense that I must depend upon myself? How does he change the accompanying guilt, embarrassment, and sense of inadequacy that immediately floods me when I realize that I must reckon on myself to meet the demands of life, but I do not have what it takes? What does he do? He turns my eyes from myself to himself. I learn to say, as Paul learned to say, “I am crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I but him. He lives in me and what I do, I do not do out of dependence on myself: it is he at work in me and he is the adequate One,” {cf, Gal 2:20}. Immediately that I believe and act upon that, I lose myself-consciousness. I become self-less. There is manifest in my life the outgoing givingness of the self-less Christ. Any moment I am doing that, that will be the nature of the life I live. That will be the nature of the life that you live in Christ. He completely destroys

that tormenting self-consciousness which creates the embarrassment of life.

- Well then, what does he do about my guilt? Ah, here is a glorious word! He comes to me when I stumble, when I fail or falter, when I find myself doing what I don’t want to do and I loathe myself because of it, and he says to me. “If any man be in Christ there is no condemnation. You don’t need to worry, I know that you will do these things. I know that you have given way, and that you will give way; I know this. I know that you don’t easily choose good and repudiate evil. I know that, but I love you, and I accept you. If you will look at this wrong thing and simply regard it honestly, as it is, immediately there is no condemnation. You are as loved as you ever were, you are as much mine as you ever were. Don’t look back at the past, start right here, now, and let’s go on.”
- What does he do about my urge to blame another person? He helps me greatly at that point. Jesus says to me, “I will give you the formula by which you can work out the problems of your life with other people. First, remove the beam that is in your own eye, then you’ll see clearly how to help the other.” When I find that in my relationships with another I do not know how to help him, that I know what he is doing wrong but I don’t know how to help him stop it, then I know that I am failing to remove first the beam that is in my own eye, I’m not following Jesus’ directions. But if I will, if I sit down and say, “What is it I am doing that makes him (or her) act that way to me, what is it I am doing?” then the situation wonderfully changes and I find that everyone begins to act differently to me, the whole world is different. The problem did not lie with others, it lay with me. This is what Jesus helps me see. Openly, honestly, forthrightly, he tells me where the problem is.
- What does he do about my fear of pain and sweat and death? Oh, so many of you could answer that, if you had the opportunity. You know what he does. He does not remove you from these things. In fact, you will often times find yourself more frequently in them than perhaps you would have otherwise. The pain is

still here, the need for toil, for hard, grinding labor is still there. I know – and you know – that there will come a time when we must face the fact of death. I won't be here always. I cannot stand in this pulpit forever. I cannot carry on my work forever. I, too, must come the place where I fold my hands and my spirit leaves this body and I am dead. What does Jesus do about this?

In each circumstance he goes with me into it, and I discover that that which was to me a grievous cross where something within me is put to death and which I fear, becomes a doorway into a new and greater experience than I could ever have dreamed. It is the old story of the cross and the resurrection. You never can experience the glory of a resurrection unless you have first experienced the death of a cross. Pain is transmuted into something different, a quiet peace which, though the pain is still there, makes it all worthwhile. Then, like you, I look back on the painful experiences of my life and say, "Those were the hours when I learned my greatest lessons. Those were the times when God spoke to me as at no other time – thank God for them." Then I can look at the demands of life for labor, sweat, and toil, and know that those are the moments, too, when I find myself the happiest, engaged in that which produces a great sense of gladness, peace and joy. And, at last, when I cross the river of death, it is but an incident. I know it will be so. It is but an incident, a momentary flash, and then all the greatness of God's glorious promise will begin to unfold in its shining actuality. "O death, where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory?" {1 Cor 15:55}.

That is why Jesus Christ came. He finds us as people, human beings, involved in the nitty-gritty, hurly-burly of life, the struggle, the heartache, the grief, the sweat, blood, and tears of life, and he transmutes those things into patience and peace and joy. Christianity is not something to be experi-

enced only in a religious service on Sunday – that's merely the whipped cream on top – but the wonderful body of it is mingled with the flow and flood of life itself. That is what makes it all so glorious. Jesus reverses the devil's activity; he releases us from the works of the devil.

What happens when, as Christians, we choose wrong? Well, we experience death. This is inevitable. "The mind of the flesh is death," says the Apostle Paul {see Rom 8:6}. If we deliberately choose to disobey our Lord we will experience the four-fold death that follows inevitably in the great package deal of life. It is the law of inevitable consequences which Paul describes so clearly when he says, "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap," {Gal 6:7 KJV}. But the glory of the gospel is that the other side is true, as well. "If you sow to the Spirit, you will of the Spirit reap life" {cf, Gal 6:8b} – and life as you have never known it before. If you sow to the Spirit; if you obey and walk in fellowship with the Son of God, then in this life there comes the sure reversing of all these evil things we have been looking at and in its place will be the fellowship, the joy, the glory, and the riches which are in Jesus Christ. I find myself struggling to put this in adequate terms. I do not rightly know how to say it – I only know that it is gloriously true.

May God help us to cease our disobedience, to stop challenging the authority of the Word of God, to cease our apathetic lethargy that refuses to venture on the facts that Jesus Christ reveals to us.

Prayer:

Father, help us to understand ourselves and to understand how clearly and relevantly these things speak to our lives and our situation. Grant to us, Lord, the courage to begin right where we are – now. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

God at Work

by Ray C. Stedman

It always strikes me as strange that anyone can deny the reality of the story of the Fall of man, especially when the very man who denies it is himself repeating it, perhaps dozens of times a day. As we have discovered already, temptation follows the same pattern with us that it did with Eve in the Garden of Eden. Always there is first the arousing of desire; then the mind, seizing upon that desire, rationalizes it to make it seem reasonable, proper, and profitable. Then the will acts – and immediately confusion, guilt, blame, and a sense of limitation follow without fail. The process is absolutely relentless. We may think that we have hidden this from the eyes of man, and oftentimes many of us are deluded into thinking that because no human being knows about our guilt, nothing has happened. Yet within us, whenever we yield to evil, a darkness falls and death tightens its grip upon our throat.

We come now to the same passage we looked at last time together, but to look this time not at man but at God. For centuries there has been a dirty lie about God making the rounds which suggests that at the Fall of man God ruthlessly lowered the boom on guilty Adam and Eve, that he gave them no chance to explain but simply tracked them down, sternly rebuked them (my children would say he yelled at them), began cursing everything around in blazing anger and ended by booting Adam and Eve out of the garden and slamming and locking the door behind them. Nothing could be further from the truth! We must trace very carefully now the actions of God in this account because, of course, this is the same way God will treat us in the many times we fall in temptation.

God begins his dealings with man with **three questions** which will occupy us today.

The **first one** is found in Verses 8 and 9:

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” {Gen 3:8-9 RSV}

It is most striking to me that all religions, apart from Christianity, begin on the note of man seeking after God. Only the Bible starts with the view of God seeking after man. That highlights an essential difference between our Christian faith and the other great religions of the world. Furthermore, this first question here in the Old Testament is matched by the first question asked in the New Testament. Here it is God asking man, “Where are you?” and in the New Testament, in Matthew, the first question that appears is that of certain wise men who come asking, “Where is he?” {Matt 2:2}.

If we take this account in the garden literally (as I believe we must), then it is clear that God habitually appeared to Adam in some visible form, for now Adam and Eve in their guilt and awareness of nakedness hide from God when they hear the sound of his footsteps in the garden. This indicates a customary action on God’s part. He came in the cool of the day, not because that was more pleasant for him but because it was more pleasant for man, and he habitually held some form of communication with man. We know from the rest of Scripture

that whenever God appears visibly in some manifestation it is always the second Person of the Godhead, the Son, who thus appears. If that be true then we have here what is called a theophany, i.e., a visible manifestation of God before the incarnation. Thus the One here who asks of Adam and Eve, "Where are you?" is the same One of whom later men would ask, "Where is he who was born King of Jews?" {cf, Matt 2:2}.

Notice the importance of this question, Where are you? When a man is lost this is the most important question he can ask: Where am I? Suppose this morning the telephone rang here and you answered it to hear a voice ask, "Is this the Peninsula Bible Church?" You say, "Yes," and the person on the other end of the line says, "I'd like to come to your church this morning. I thought I knew the way, but I find myself very confused. Can you help me?" What is the first question you would ask? "Where are you?" That is always first. "Where are you?"

Today we are seeking to find a way out of a very confusing situation that prevails in our world. We will never do it until we start with this question which God first asked man, "Where are you?" Where am I? Perhaps the reason many are unable to be helped today is either because they cannot or will not answer that question. Ask it of yourself now. Where are you? In the course of your life, from birth to death, moving as you hope you are moving, to develop stability of character, trustworthiness, integrity of being, all these qualities which we admire in others and want in ourselves – where are you? How far have you come? Until you can answer that, in some sense at least, there is no possibility of helping you. What do you say?

Perhaps many of you will have to say, "I don't know where I am. I don't know. I only know that I am not where I ought to be, nor where I want to be. That's all I can say." If that is all you can say that is at least an honest answer, and, therefore, it is the most helpful answer you can give, and, in that sense, is the only right answer. "I don't know, I only know that I'm not where I ought to be."

God's **second question** to man is even more significant:

And he [Adam] said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He

[God] said, "Who told you that you were naked?" {Gen 3:10-11a RSV}

Let us be sure we read that question rightly. God is not asking Adam, "Look, who let the cat out of the bag about this? What rascal has been telling you tales out of school? Has the CIA been here, too?" He does not ask, "Who told you that you were naked, in the sense of, 'What person has come in to inform you of this?'" No, this is a rhetorical question. God does not expect a direct answer, but it is a question designed to make Adam think.

Who did tell him? That is, "How do you know this? You say you're naked; you didn't know that before. How do you know this? From what source has this knowledge come? Something has happened, a change has occurred; where did your knowledge come from?" The answer, of course, is: "No one told him." Well then, how did he know? Something within told him this. It did not come from without at all, it came from within. A change had occurred within him, and, instinctively, he senses that change and knows something that he did not know before. An evil knowledge has come to man, just as God said it would. The tree of which he partook was the tree of "the knowledge of good and evil," and, by partaking, man gained immediately an evil knowledge. From where did it come? From within. This is what God wants Adam to see.

In order to sense the full significance of this we must link it with the first question. That was, you remember, "Where are you?" and it had but one proper answer, "I'm not where I want to be. I'm lost, hopelessly lost, hidden. I don't know where I am." Well, why don't you? Why is it that we have such difficulty pinpointing ourselves in our progress and relationship to the world around us? Why? It is because of something within, isn't it? Remember that Jesus said, "It is not that which enters a man which defiles him, but that which comes from within," {cf, Matt 15:11}. "For from within," he says, "out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, fornication, murder, adultery, covetousness, licentiousness, pride, foolishness, all these evil things come from within and defile a man," {cf, Matt 15:18-19}.

It is what I am within which makes me ashamed and guilty, and sends me scrambling for fig leaves to cover myself up.

I have often wondered what would happen if we had at the entrance to the church every Sunday

morning a television camera able to read people's thoughts without their knowing it, as they came in the door. What if every one of us, passing by, had our thoughts recorded and then we announced that next Sunday morning we would play them on a screen up front? How many would be here to see the show?

Someone has said, "If the best of men had his innermost thoughts written on his forehead, he'd never take his hat off."

We know this is true. It is that which is within which defiles us. Something has happened within. The basic fundamental issue of humanity is not what is happening outside, but what is happening inside, within.

Now God moves to his **third question**, and it is in two parts, one addressed to the man and one to the woman.

"Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." {Gen 3:11b-13 RSV}

There is something very interesting here. God asks both the same question, essentially. He is saying to each, "Tell me, what is it that you did? Specifically, definitely, clearly; what is it that you did?" But there is an exquisite touch of delicacy and grace here, which I hope you do not miss. He does not put the question in the same form to each. To the man he is forthright and blunt, "Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" But to the woman he puts the question much more softly and gently.

Every married man knows that his wife does not like a direct question. A man may say to his wife, "Where did you buy this meat?" Her answer is not, usually, "At Safeway," but perhaps, "What's wrong? Why do you ask?" or, "I bought it where I always buy it." If he says to her, "Have you seen so-and-so lately?" she says, "What's happened?" Or perhaps she says, "Well, I never get out to see anybody – you know that." Or, "Why would I want to talk to her, anyway?"

It is comforting to me to realize how fully God understands women and to see him put the question

to her very gently. He says, "Tell me in your own way now, what is this that you have done?"

In their answer it is significant that both of them come out at the same place. Each blames someone else (we now call this *human nature*, it is so widespread, so universally true) but when they come to their final statement they both use exactly the same words, "and I ate."

That is where God is wanting to bring them. That is what the Bible calls *repentance*. It is a candid statement of the facts with no attempt now to evade them or to color them or clothe them in any other form. It is a simple, factual statement to which they are both reduced, "and I ate." This is the point God has been seeking to lead them to. Notice how these questions have followed a designed course. God has made them say, first, "We're not where we ought to be – we know that. We ought not to be hidden here in the garden. We ought not to be lost. We ought not to require a question like this, 'Where are you?'" Then God has made them see, "It is because something has happened within us." They have seen that they are where they are because of what they are, and that it all happened because they disobeyed, because they ate the forbidden food, they sinned. God has led them gently, graciously and yet unerringly to the place where each of them, in his own way, has said, "Yes, Lord, I sinned; I ate."

That is **as far as man can ever go** in correcting evil. He can do no more than that. But that immediately provides the ground for God to act. This is where he constantly seeks to bring us, because it provides him with the only ground upon which he can act. You can see this throughout the whole Bible, in the Old and New Testament alike. When God is dealing with men he seeks to bring them to the place where they acknowledge what is wrong.

Remember Jesus' dealing with the woman of Samaria at the well? After they have been involved in some discourse about the meaning of the water wherein he awakened her curiosity and interest by offering her living water so that she would not have to come to the well to draw, then he forthrightly puts the demand, "Go and call your husband," {cf, John 4:16-18}. That elicits from the woman the only answer she could honestly give. "I have no husband," she says. Then Jesus lays it right out before her. "That's true, you have no husband.

You have had five husbands, and the man you are living with now is not your husband, in this you said truly.” He commends her for speaking the truth and from that point on he moves to open her eyes to the character of the One who stands before her.

This is what God is wanting to do with us. He finds us in our failure, our estrangement, our guilt, our sense of nakedness and loss, and immediately he moves to bring us to repentance. We misunderstand his moving. We think he is dragging us before some tribunal in order to chastise us or to punish us, but he is not. He is simply trying to get us to face the facts as they are. That is what he does here with Adam and Eve. It is the same thing we say when we quote First John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Notice in this account that as soon as Adam and Eve say these magic words “and I ate,” there are no more questions from God. There is no more prodding or probing on his part. God begins now to speak to the serpent, to the woman, and to the man. And what he declares now is not punishment. We shall look more closely at this in our next message. What he says to the man and the woman is not punishment, but grace. How badly we have misread these passages in Genesis. And when he gets through we read these wonderful words in Verse 21:

And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them. {Gen 3:21 RSV}

Here is the beginning of animal sacrifices: God sheds blood in order to make clothing for Adam and Eve. He made them from the skins of animals and therefore those animal lives were sacrificed to clothe Adam and Eve. This is but a picture, as all animal sacrifices are but pictures – a kind of kindergarten of grace – in order to teach us the great truth that God eternally attempts to communicate to us as men and women. Ultimately, it is God himself who bears eternally the pain, the hurt, and agony of our sins. As John the Baptist said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away [who is continually taking away] the sin of the world,” {John 1:29 RSV}.

Paul uses a wonderful phrase in Ephesians, “accepted in the Beloved One,” {cf, Eph 1:6 KJV}. When we have acknowledged our guilt, when we have acknowledged that what we have done is contrary to what God wants, and we stand there with nothing to defend ourselves with, and no attempt to do so, but simply in honest acknowledgment of our own doing, then, Paul says, we are “accepted in the Beloved One.”

Growing up as a boy in Montana we had many sheep farms in our area. Spring was the lambing season when the little lambs were born. But spring in Montana is not like it is in California. Sleet storms can come whirling down out of the north, and snow can still be three or four feet deep on the prairies. Often there are long, protracted seasons of bitter cold during lambing season. Of course, when the sheep must bear lambs in that kind of weather, many of the lambs and ewes die. As a result, sheep farmers have many mothers whose newborn lambs have died, and many newborn lambs whose mothers have died. It looks like a simple way to solve the problem would be to take the lambs without mothers and give them to the mothers without lambs, but, if you know anything at all about sheep, you know it is not that simple. If you take a little orphan lamb and put it in with a mother ewe, she will immediately go to it and sniff it all over, and then she shakes her head as though to say, “Well, that’s not our family odor,” and she butts it away and refuses to have anything to do with it. But the sheep men have devised a means of solving this. They take the mother’s own little dead lamb and skin it, and take the skin and tie it onto the other little lamb, the orphan lamb. Then they put the little lamb with this ungainly skin flopping around eight legs, two heads, in with the mother. She pays no attention at all to the way it looks, but she sniffs it all over again, and then she nods her head. The little lamb goes to work at the milk fountain, and all is well.

What has happened? The orphan lamb has been accepted in the beloved one. There came a time when God’s Lamb lay dead on our behalf and God took us orphans (he does it all the time) and clothed us in his righteousness, his acceptability, his dearness and nearness to him, and thus we stand “accepted in the Beloved One,” received in his place. That is where repentance brings us.

But **repentance is not only for the beginning** of the Christian life. It is the way you start as a Christian, it is true. You come to God, like Adam and Eve, and say, “Yes, Lord, I’m the one, I’ve been running from you, I’ve been hiding from you, I’ve been estranged from you. It’s because of what I’ve done. No one else is to blame but me.” Then immediately God says, “I’ve taken care of all that. My Lamb has died for you and you stand in his place, acceptable to me.” That is the way you begin the Christian life. But if you think that is where it ends, you are terribly wrong. Repentance is the basis upon which the whole Christian life is built. We must be continually repenting of those areas where we fail or fall back upon a way of living which God has said is not right. I find that, as a Christian, I am repenting far more than I ever did before – about things I never dreamed of repenting of before – because I am learning more and more that the Christian life is lived on a totally different basis. I find I must repent of my self-dependence – and so must you.

If tomorrow morning you businessmen go back to your office, after counting on God and depending on him to help you to teach your Sunday school class, or whatever it is you do on Sunday, and then you step across the threshold of your office on Monday and say to yourself, “Aha, now I’m back where I can handle things. I’ve got everything under control now,” you will need to repent of that. You cannot handle things any better there than you can here – without him. “Without me,” says the Lord Jesus, “you can do nothing,” {cf, John 15:5}. If you attempt to do anything apart from that sense of dependence upon him to work through you, you need to repent, to change your mind, to accept again the covering of God, the clothing of his grace, the cleansing of his love.

This can, and perhaps will, occur dozens of times a day until we learn at last, little by little, to walk in this way, to count on his working. He is ours, and all that he is belongs to us. This is Standard Operating Procedure, not just emergency treatment.

We shall come back to this next time to look at those very remarkable words that God addresses to the serpent. But for the moment we leave Adam and Eve standing before God, having acknowledged their sin, having said the same thing about it that God said, having admitted that they did the thing God said was wrong. Immediately his whole relationship to them changed and he is on their side; he is *for* them, as Paul tells us, God is “for us” (Rom 8:31). He has been this way all along but Adam and Eve could not enjoy it until they repented. But now it is all clear.

Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you that we can echo with the Apostle Paul these words, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” If his love is made available to us then nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ. What can man do unto us? What is man that he can harm us or hurt us? Who can separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord? We pray that this may have meaning for us not only on this Sunday but all through this week, as we learn to repent of our self-dependence and to cling consciously and helplessly to the continual flow of grace and strength from our loving God. We ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Devil's Burden

by Ray C. Stedman

In our present series in Genesis 3, we have come to one of the most encouraging passages in all the Scriptures. It is the word of God to the Devil, after the Fall of man. It is a word for those times when we feel that the cause of righteousness is absolutely hopeless. Who of us has not experienced times like that? There are thousands of Christians today who are privately reflecting the philosophy in the limerick we often quote,

Our race had a noble beginning,
but man spoiled his chances by sinning.
We hope that the story
will end in God's glory
But at present the other side's winning.

This passage we are looking at is a very clear denial of that, and, as we look at it, we shall see why the limerick is untrue. We have already seen that immediately following their Fall, God took Adam and Eve, as it were, by the hand and lovingly but firmly led them, protesting their innocence, back along an examination of what had happened, until they faced their disobedience and each one confessed the specific words, "and I ate." We saw last time that this is what God does with each of us. He brings us back, sometimes gently, sometimes more vigorously, to the place where we will take a look at what we have done, or what we are, or what our attitudes are, and say, "Yes, Lord, it was wrong; I did it." This is the only ground of help. Only there can God's redemptive love begin to heal us.

When Adam and Eve acknowledged their guilt we saw that God immediately became their defender. His first word is to the Tempter, and it is

one of scorching judgment. This is exactly in line with the promise given us in the first letter of John. John says, "but if any one does sin, we have an advocate [a defender] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;" {1 Jn 2:1b RSV}. As long as we defend ourselves, his defense is of no avail to us, but when we are ready to stop defending ourselves, we have a perfectly adequate defender with the Father. It is this same glorious defense you find exhibited here in this scene – the Friend of sinners stood that faraway day in the Garden of Eden.

Now the LORD God speaks to the Devil.

**The LORD God said to the serpent,
"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all cattle,
and above all wild animals;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life."
{Gen 3:14 RSV}**

We have already seen in this series that this is not a snake he is addressing, but a Shining One, which is the literal translation of the Hebrew term. Later on in the Scriptures the word is used of snakes and serpents as well, but we have seen that its primary meaning is that of "a shining one." Paul reminds us that the serpent appeared to Eve as an "angel of light" {2 Cor 11:14}, and it is this one of whom the snake has become a symbol.

Thus these words addressed to the Tempter are not a reference to the fact that snakes go around on their bellies. True, they do that, but they do not literally eat dust, as the Word here says. This is figurative language, as we have found used so

many times through these accounts in Genesis. The words depict and describe humiliation and utter degradation. To this day one of the most humiliating things that anyone can be forced to do is to lie on his belly in the dirt. It means pride has been brought low; he is humiliated, shamed. This has forevermore entered into the language as an expression of humiliation.

These are most significant words to the Devil. In Isaiah 14 is a passage that describes the fall of the Devil. Most Bible scholars feel that these are words that describe the Devil as Lucifer, the Day Star, Son of the Morning, the angel who was created first among all the angels of heaven. In the pride of his heart he began to say to himself, "I will be like the Most High, I will act like God," {cf, Isa 14:14}. You can see how identifiable this is with the Shining One who appears in this account in the garden, for it is this same thing that he suggests to Eve. "If you eat of this fruit," he says, "you will be like the Most High, you will be like God, knowing good and evil," {cf, Gen 3:5}.

As far as we can judge, the fall of Satan occurred a long time before this scene in the Garden of Eden. But it seems strongly suggested here that when Satan fell there was an immediate result in his own person which transformed him into a being of malevolent hatred against God, and perhaps there was later a time when repentance was possible, though it seems likely that at this period of the history of our planet the Devil had passed beyond that stage, yet it is apparent that judgment had not yet been pronounced upon him. The significant thing about this is that here we have the divine announcement to the Devil of the ultimate judgment that would befall him. Here he learns, perhaps for the first time, that his judgment would occur on this planet, that here in this scene where he had so successfully derailed humanity through its first parents, he was to be put under an eternal curse, and the nature of it is to be continual humiliation and repeated failure.

The next time you are watching a TV western and you hear the hero say, "All right, you snake, crawl out on yore belly!" or perhaps, "Jest give me a chance and I'll make him lick the dust!" you'll know that you are watching a Sunday school lesson in action! At least this incident may help us answer the question that many have asked, "What is it that keeps these westerns going? Why are they so popular?" They always have the same plot, they

have the same basic characters, and they invariably have the same ending; why then do people love to watch them so much? Is it not because they dramatize the eternal battle of the ages, the unconscious struggle that goes on in each of us? We want the good guys to win because we believe what God has said here, that it is the Devil's due to end up always in humiliation and defeat.

"But," you say, "that may be true in westerns, but that's not true in life. In life it's not the good guys that win; it's the evil ones." In life you find ruthless power triumphing over good, while the good end up as victims; victims of senseless tragedy and of brutal might. What about those six million Jews who died under Hitler? What about the Negroes and Mexicans and other people of darker skins who have been persecuted, hounded, smashed and killed, in so many places in our world today? What about the looting and burning of villages in Vietnam? Is this an example of the Devil's ultimate humiliation? What about the rape and murder of women and children in so many hell-spots of the world? You say, "All this is evidence that the Devil's defeat is but a fairy tale. It works out in fiction, but it doesn't occur in fact."

Yet the declaration of this passage is that it does occur in fact, it is true. It is the Devil's burden that he shall always end up as the defeated one, the humiliated one, fallen on his belly in the dust, eating dust in degradation and humiliation. The problem is, we don't wait till the end of the story. We do on television, because it only lasts a half-hour; but in life we turn it off before it gets through. But look on and see how this account tells us exactly how God proposes to accomplish the Devil's humiliation.

**"I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."**

{Gen 3:15 RSV}

This is surely one of the most remarkable verses in the Bible. It was called by the early church fathers *the Protevangelium*, which means "the first preaching of the gospel." It is the clearest promise, first appearing in the Bible, of the coming of a Redeemer. There are several unusual features about this remarkable verse which reveal the divine hand.

First, you, notice that it predicts an unending enmity to exist between two classes of humanity. Here is the beginning of the two divisions of humanity into which the Bible consistently divides the race throughout its whole course. Its first manifestation is that of enmity between Eve and the serpent, between the Tempter and the woman. "I will put enmity between you and the woman," says God. This is certainly understandable. We can see why Eve would detest this one who had betrayed her by his lies, and as the effects of the fall would become more and more evident in her own life she would feel a continuing abhorrence against this one who had so cleverly and ruthlessly led her astray. On the other hand, the enemy would surely hate her because she was now the object of God's love and his hand of protection was around her. But also, you will note, it was not enmity merely between the woman and the Devil but between his seed and her seed, i.e., the Devil's seed and the woman's seed.

Without a doubt we have here a most remarkable prophecy of the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are those today who tell us that the virgin birth is an unimportant doctrine, but it is one of the most important doctrines concerning our Lord. Here we have a most remarkable prophecy which cannot be explained in any other terms than that it finds fulfillment in the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus. This concept of the seed of the woman is unique. Nowhere else in the Bible do you find such an expression occurring. Everywhere else in Scripture descent is reckoned through the male line. It is the seed of the man that is the line of descent and all the genealogies of the Bible trace the line of descent through the male. The father's name is given and when the mother's name is given it is only incidental, as referring to the wife of so-and-so.

We continue this in most societies today. Even today families bear the man's name. When a couple gets married, it is the woman who drops her name and takes her husband's name, and the name of the ensuing family is the man's name because it is the male's seed which is the line of descent. But here we are distinctly told that the one who is to bruise the serpent's head is the seed of the woman. Now in all of human history there is only one who can fulfill that condition, Jesus of Nazareth.

Remember the opening words of Matthew's Gospel where we are told that when Joseph found that Mary was with child, even before they had

come together, honest man that he was, gentle man that he was, "he determined to put her aside privately," {cf, Matt 1:19}. That was the kindest thing he could do, the most gracious way he could handle the situation, because he knew the child was not his. But an angel appeared to him to tell him that "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit," {Matt 1:20 RSV}. That passage is clearly part of the original Gospel of Matthew. Luke has a reference to the virgin birth as well. Thus in the Gospels it is clearly established that Jesus was born of a virgin, of a woman but not of a man, the seed of a woman.

So the seed is Christ. Here is this most remarkable prophecy, most impressive, which looks across the centuries to the day when Jesus would be born of Mary in Bethlehem. Paul makes an oblique reference to this truth in his letter to the Galatians where he says of Jesus that "he was born of a woman," but all of us are born of women; there is nothing remarkable about that, if that is all he meant. But there is a clear implication here that this was an unusual condition, that Jesus was born of a woman and only a woman. All this is confirmed in Genesis 3 by the masculine pronoun which follows the statement, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; *he* shall bruise your head." That masculine pronoun definitely indicates that the fulfillment of this promise, the seed of the woman, would be a man, born of a woman.

From our vantage point of twenty centuries away we understand what this meant. In Old Testament times they could not see what was involved in this, but now we know it meant the humble birth at Bethlehem, the silent years in Nazareth, the darkness of Gethsemane, the opposition of Jerusalem, the hatred of Judas and Pilate and Caiaphas and Annas, the blood and death of a cross – all that was the bruising of the heel. Then there came the bruising of the head of the serpent in the glory of the resurrection morning. This whole promise is clearly fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

But it is not only Christ, for now we know that "the seed" was not only an individual, but a people, against whom the enmity of Satan would continue throughout the whole of the age, for the whole history of the race. Thus the seed is not only Jesus but all who are "in Christ" as well, both Old and New Testament believers. The division here between two classes is not along racial lines or physi-

cal lines (there is no physical paternity of the Devil) but it is along spiritual and moral lines. In the next chapter we learn that Cain was the first of “the seed of the Devil,” but the Pharisees of Jesus’ day were Cain’s brothers, because Jesus said to them, “you are of your father, the devil, and the works of your father you will do,” {cf, John 8:44}. The Pharisees of our own day belong to the same classification or division. On the other hand, Abel, Cain’s brother in the flesh, was the first of “the seed of the woman,” redeemed humanity. You and I who trust in Jesus Christ today are the brothers and sisters of Abel, members of that divine family who have, by faith, become part of the seed which is Christ.

Paul undoubtedly refers to this verse in Romans 16. In writing to the Christians in Rome, he says to them, Verses 19 and 20:

For while your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, I would have you wise as to what is good and guileless as to what is evil; then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. {Rom 16:19-20a RSV}

There is the bruising of the serpent’s head, to be accomplished not only by Christ but for those that are “in Christ.” Again Paul unquestionably refers to this passage in the very first verse of Second Timothy where he says,

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus, {2 Tim 1:1 RSV}

In Verse 9 he amplifies that. He speaks of God,

... who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our own works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, {2 Tim 1:9 RSV}

The phrase *ages ago* is, literally, “before the age-times.” He here refers to a promise that God gave of life which would come through an individual, and which was given before men began to count time. This could only refer to this promise in the Garden of Eden of the coming of a Redeemer

who would be the seed of the woman and the source of life to men.

Paul uses a similar phrase in the opening words of the letter to Titus. He speaks of those who “in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago [before the age-times] ...” {Tit 1:2 RSV}.

The situation then is clear. All those who have come into this race through the normal line of procreation from Adam, as the seed of Adam, were born into the control of the Devil. But God is calling out a seed of promise. Any who exercise faith in this promised One, whether it be faith before he came or faith in him now, are “in Christ” and are also the seed of the woman. Between these two (the Devil’s seed and the woman’s seed) is enmity – unending enmity.

We can see it even with us who know Jesus Christ and are Christians. Even in us we find this enmity breaking out. Scripture describes it as the flesh warring against the Spirit and who of us has not felt it? Perhaps even now you are sensing this unending struggle. We know what God wants of us, we are learning how to walk in the Spirit, and yet oftentimes we desire to walk in the flesh – and we do. There is an unending enmity between these two, and therefore we are constantly exposed to attack and temptation because of it.

It extends to individuals as well. Galatians speaks of “the children of the flesh” who persecute “the children of promise.” We well know that the world hates the truth of God, and seeks to ridicule it and to stamp it out; the world bans the Bible and burns the saints. But then a remarkable thing happens – this is the great thrust of this passage. The Devil’s burden is that the victories which he achieves become also his defeats. There is this strange twist by which the victories that the Devil accomplishes are turned by God’s power and wisdom into the place of his utmost defeat. He succeeds in bruising Christ’s heel; but that bruised heel is what finally crushes the serpent’s head. You can see this so clearly in the cross. It was the bruising of the cross that made possible the smashing triumph of the resurrection. You can see it also in the events of our own lives, and in the events of world history.

Take the matter of the dying of those six million Jews under Hitler. That is a terrible thing! We can hardly contemplate such a hideous thing occurring in our world. Yet it was that event,

ghastly as it was, that made possible the birth of the nation Israel today and set the stage for the fulfillment of promises which had lain unanswered in the Scriptures for century after century. The attempt of the enemy to stamp out the people of God, this strange nation, marked out by God as peculiarly his own among the nations of the earth, was turned into defeat and is now used to establish them in the land of promise.

You know how the distortion of truth in the stupid rituals and empty ceremonies of the medieval church in Martin Luther's day, in a most remarkable way prepared the hearts of Europe for the blazing glory of the Reformation. People were so disgusted by what they were seeing, their hearts were so empty, they were so fed up with materialistic indulgences and external approaches to God, that they were simply crying out in desperation for a note of reality. When Martin Luther nailed the ninety-five theses to the door of the church at Wittenberg, he struck a spark that caught fire throughout the tinder of Europe, tinder prepared by the Devil. It was the Devil's efforts that made possible the blazing fires of the Reformation.

We look back thirty or forty years and long for the days when youth were content with getting an education, finding a job, making money, going to church every Sunday, and fulfilling the moral demands of life. We think "Oh, those were the good old days before youth got so wild and rebellious and so uncontrollable, etc." But we are blind to the frequent hypocrisy of those days, to the empty materialism, to the blurring of human values that was so common and so widely accepted. True, the Devil has used this rebelliousness to push youth into revolt, but that is not the whole story. The glorious fact is that because of the rebellion of young people today there is a growing spirit of honest searching after truth that will not be denied. Young people are fed up with superficial answers, and they will have nothing to do with the shallow, empty, materialistic gas they have been fed by a previous generation, but they look desperately for reality. Surely this is the greatest hour our nation has ever known to talk to young people about Jesus Christ. I remember those dark days of the depression when the Christian cause was regarded with scorn in intellectual circles. You could hardly bear a Christian witness on campus without being labeled a militant fundamentalist and turned off by everyone. But now the campuses are wide open to

hear what Jesus Christ is saying to men. There has never been such an hour. And who set it up? The Devil did!

I always rejoice in that account in Philippians of Paul's arrest by the emperor, Nero. Paul is in prison, chained day and night to a Roman guard. I can never read that passage without having to laugh with joy at the skill God demonstrates in turning that situation to his own glory. And Paul catches it. He says, "These things that have happened to me have really served to advance the gospel," {cf, Phil 1:12}. What had happened? God had chosen the most wicked and monstrous emperor the Roman Empire ever knew – the wretch, Nero – and had appointed him to head the Committee For the Evangelization of the Roman Empire! He set him to the task of searching out the Empire to find the finest young men of the land and bring them to Rome, then, every so often, he was to pick out one of the finest of these and chain him to the Apostle Paul for six hours. You can predict what the result would be. One by one these young men were coming to Christ – the finest young men of Rome. It is undoubtedly from this band that many of the young men came whose names are recorded in the New Testament. When Paul closes this letter to the Philippians he says, "All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household," {Phil 4:22 RSV}.

I do not think there has ever been an hour such as we are living in today in which the truth of this passage is more evident. God is turning the tables on the Devil. Satan is overreaching himself today as he always does. It is his fate to end up as those villains used to do in the old western melodramas: having trapped their victims and thinking they're on the very verge of success, the hero arrives and saves the day, and the villain stomps off, muttering through his mustache, "Coises! Foiled again!" This is the Devil's burden.

We are concerned about Vietnam today, and yet, in my judgment, if this nation stands a chance of recapturing its honored and favored position before God and being blessed again as we once were blessed, it will be because of the war in Vietnam. I do not mean military conquest. I mean that the bloodletting going on there, the ghastly things that are taking place there, are sobering this nation as nothing has for a long time. We are beginning to face again what this world is like, and to listen once again to the voice of God speaking through our

confusion and darkness. It is the fact that we find ourselves unable to disengage ourselves from that conflict, though we cannot put our finger on the reason why, that is making us once again listen, stop, think, and hear the words of God. If anything can save us in this late hour of American history, it will be that conflict that is raging out there – perpetrated by the Devil but overreaching himself, like always does, to see it turned into an instrument by which God would dispel the darkness and confusion of a nation.

You can see this principle in your own personal lives. Which of you has not had some experience similar to that of the Apostle Paul who had that nagging, wretched, thorn in the flesh given to him, prodding him and probing him. How he hated it, and asked God to take it away. But God said, “No, I won’t. My grace is sufficient for you,” {cf, 2 Cor 12:9}. As Paul pondered that, there came a realization of what God meant, and he writes it down for us. He says, “I see now that it was given to me by God. It was the ‘messenger of Satan.’ True. Yet God allowed it to come and God permitted it to remain. in order that I might be kept from becoming proud and thus no longer useful to God. It is this that humiliates me, humbles me, makes me depend upon God and not myself, and therefore,” he says, “I will glory in my infirmities, for out of weakness I am made strong,” {cf, 2 Cor 12:7-10}.

That is the Devil’s burden. Do you know anything more encouraging than that? The God we serve is the kind who is continually taking the worst the Devil can do and turning it into glorious victory. You will find that principle running through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, and especially in Genesis and Revelation. This is Christianity, entirely different from the principles by which the world seeks to work out its problems. Perhaps it has been best expressed to us in the words of the poet, James Russell Lowell:

Though the cause of evil prosper,
yet ‘tis truth alone is strong.
Truth forever on the scaffold.
Wrong forever on the throne.

It does appear that way, doesn’t it? It looks as though truth is pinned down, crucified; and wrong sits forever on the throne. Evil seems to rule and reign and walk with unhampered tread across the lives and hearts of millions of people. Yet the poet is right, “Yet that scaffold sways the future.” It is not the throne of evil that ultimately succeeds, it is the cross, the place of apparent despair and defeat, the place of poverty and emptiness and nothingness.

Yet that scaffold sways the future,
and behind the dim unknown
Standeth God amid the shadows,
keeping watch above his own.

That is the Devil’s burden. Aren’t you glad you’re not on his side – or are you?

Prayer:

We pray, Father, that you will take the scales from our eyes that we might see life as you see it, that we might look at the events of our day, not from the puny viewpoint of the flesh, but rather from the viewpoint of these great and eternal visions which allow us to see things as they really are. Help us to remember that no approach of the enemy needs to succeed, that we are called to be victors in Jesus Christ. “Sin shall not have dominion over us, for we are not under law but under grace.” Let those thundering words strike our shackles off and set us free, Lord Jesus, we pray in thy name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Love's Disciplines

by Ray C. Stedman

In our previous studies in this series we have seen that the matter of pain, toil, subjection, and death are the inevitable consequences of human disobedience to God. They were in the beginning, they are yet today. These are what the Bible speaks of as "death," in its widest and largest sense. When Romans 6:23 says "the wages of sin is death," it is not talking about a corpse; it is talking about this kind of death, the sense of pain, sorrow, toil, and subjection.

It is true that with these things we receive a temporary pleasure. Indulgence in sin is an ego-satisfying thing, and therefore we engage in it because we like the temporary pleasure it gives. But, as we have already seen, it is all a package deal. We cannot omit the bad parts and take only the good. It all goes together, and, thereby, contributes to the sense of loss familiar to all, a sense of emptiness within, the restlessness of our race.

Now we come to God's word to Adam and Eve after the Fall. We must now give closer examination to these four factors of pain, subjection, toil, and death, to see what they involve and why they were given to the race. We need greatly to understand this, because to understand it properly is to change us from grumbling, complaining critics of life to grateful, thankful optimists, fulfilling that definition of Christians we have so often quoted: completely fearless, continually cheerful, and constantly in trouble!

Let us **listen to God speak to the woman:**

To the woman he said,

**"I will greatly multiply your pain in
childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you."**

{Gen 3:16 RSV}

There is something very interesting here. God's approach to the woman is always different than to the man, and certainly than to the serpent. Notice that he says to the serpent, "Because you have done this," and, in Verse 17, to Adam. "Because you have done this," but to the woman he makes no such charge of responsibility. This is very significant. There are consequences that follow sin in her life, but he does not charge her ultimately with being at fault and we shall see why when we come to the word to Adam.

In each of these cases, the serpent, the man, and the woman, there are two consequences that follow for each. The serpent was to experience humiliation and defeat – continual humiliation and ultimate defeat. In the case of the woman the consequences are pain and subjection. These are factors arising out of her nature and we need to look more closely at them.

First, there is the factor of **pain**. Undoubtedly this verse does refer to the pain and danger of childbirth which women alone can experience. No man knows what a woman goes through in the birth of a child, but every mother here understands. But the word refers to more than mere physical pain; it is basically the Hebrew word for sorrow. In Hebrew there is no word for *pain* but *sorrow* is the word universally used. It comes from a root which means "to toil," i.e., "heart-breaking toil." This is perhaps why there has come into our language a description of birth pains as "labor," toil of a heart-breaking variety. It is evident, in view of the way the whole context has been developed, that this means more than simply physical pain; it refers also to the heartbreak associated with having children. This is woman's primary experience as a result of the fall, the presence of heartbreak in rearing children. It means that a mother's sense of

success or failure in life is related to her children. A threat to a child is pain to a mother's heart.

Perhaps every mother feels more sharply than the father does any sense of danger to or failure in her children. Mothers' hearts are bound to their children. We know this from experience, and it is in line with what this passage suggests. The mother becomes so involved in the life of her children that what they feel, she feels; if they fail, she feels the heartbreak of it particularly strongly.

All this helps to explain a very troublesome passage in the New Testament which has bothered many at times, found in Paul's first letter to Timothy, Chapter 2, beginning with Verse 12:

I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. {1 Tim 2:12-15 RSV}

You can immediately see how difficult the passage is; no wonder many have struggled with exactly what it means. We will need to correct a few things in the translation of it, but if we lay the corrected passage alongside the passage in Genesis 3, we are immediately helped to an explanation:

- In the first place when First Timothy speaks of the woman being *saved*, it must be clearly understood that this has no reference to her being regenerated, or born again. It is not talking about the entrance into the Christian life. Women and men alike are saved in that sense on the same terms, by faith in Jesus Christ. "In Christ there is neither male nor female," {Gal 3:28}; all come on the same basis. This is clearly not talking about that but rather about how a woman finds fulfillment, a sense of satisfaction in life, the area of her fulfillment. You find the same use of this in First Timothy 4:16, where the apostle says to Timothy, "Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers," {1 Tim 4:16 RSV}. Obviously here he is not talking about redemption, in the sense of regeneration, he is talking about saving his life, i.e., making it worth-

while, rendering it useful and purposeful. This is the sense in which it is used in the second chapter about women. Women will find their lives fulfilled through bearing children.

- Then it is not "if *she* continues" but, as it is literally in the Greek, "if *they* [the children] continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty." That is in exact accord with what we find in Genesis where it is suggested that a mother's heart is wrapped up with the life and career of her children. She lives in and by her children. The meaning of her life is revealed in them, and if they succeed, she has succeeded, but if they fail, she has failed. Every mother here will understand fully what I mean.

But this is not all that is part of woman's experience as a result of the fall. We read further,

**"yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you."
{Gen 3:16b RSV}**

The phrase *your desire*, is interesting. It comes from the Hebrew word, *leg*, and means, "to run after." Her desires run after her husband. This is not primarily a reference to passion but to the hunger for approval. It is speaking of the fact that a woman finds her fullest sense of satisfaction in gaining her husband's approval. No other person can approach his approval in its significance to her. There can be no substitute for it. Others can be pleased and happy with her, but if he is not, she is distressed. He can be happy with her, and she doesn't care a fig what others think about her. Her desire thus finds its fulfillment in her husband – she longs to be important to him.

I want to point out that this desire is not in itself a consequence of sin. This relationship of woman to man was present before the Fall as well. The headship of the man was a fact from the creation. It is the latter phrase of the sentence that marks the result of the Fall, "he shall rule over you." If, in imagination, we can put ourselves back with Adam and Eve before the Fall, in that blissful scene in the Garden of Eden, then we can see that the relationship of the woman to the man consisted of a natural desire to follow. She came out of man and was made for him, to be his helper and to work

toward his goals. It was a natural yielding to which she opposed no resistance, but found herself delighting in the experience of following the man. But now as a result of the Fall, a perverse element enters into this. A struggle occurs, a tension ensues, in which the woman is torn between the natural God-given desire to yield to her husband, and at the same time, the awakened desire to exert her will against his, a perverse urge to rivalry or domination. This is what creates tension in women, as a result of the Fall.

It means that in order to exert proper male leadership, men must sometimes do so against the will of their wives. This constitutes *ruling*, in the sense intended here. The struggle and tension produced in women's lives creates what sometimes ensues in marriage, which we call tyranny, where the man rules with an iron hand. This is never justified in Scripture. Husbands are exhorted to love their wives and to deal kindly with them, as the Lord Jesus does the church. But in fallen man it results in the tyranny of man over woman, as a result, often, of the struggle within her.

Perhaps a woman herself can describe this most accurately. I have here a quotation which describes this very reaction, written by a woman. She says,

Millions of words have been written on how a man should love a woman. I would like to give you my reflections on the things a man should not do in loving a woman. First, don't yield your leadership, that's the main thing. Don't hand us the reins, we would consider that an abdication on your part. It would confuse us, it would alarm us, it would make us pull back.

Quicker than anything else it would fog the clear vision that made us love you in the first place. Oh, we will try to get you to give up your position as number one in the house—that's the terrible contradiction in us, we will seem to be fighting you in the last ditch for final authority on everything, for awhile, but in the obscure recesses of our hearts we want you to win. You have to win, for we aren't really made for leadership. It's a pose.

Would you like to know who wrote that? Judy Garland.

This is why a woman can never find happiness in marriage until she takes seriously the words of Scripture:

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands in everything as unto the Lord. {cf, Eph 5:22, Col 3:18}

One of the two major factors producing the terrible breakdown in marriage in our country today is this failure of women to understand this principle: that it is their privilege, under God, to find fulfillment in submission to their husband's leadership. They are not to resist it, or try to rival him in this matters.

I am continually amazed at how much this needs to be asserted these days, especially so among Christians. I heard recently of three Christian wives who raised the question in a discussion: If a woman feels the Lord wants her to do certain work at church or something else in connection with the Lord's work, and her husband objects, doesn't want her to do it, what should she do? They answered by agreeing that she should go ahead anyway and if the husband objected, or raised a fuss, it could be interpreted as "suffering for Christ's sake."

I don't think I could think of a more classic example, repeating the pattern of temptation found here in Genesis 3. There is the same subtle desire for an ego-satisfying activity, coupled with a rationalization that, in effect, cancels out the Word of God, thus permitting an activity that is contrary to what God wants. It is God who said. "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands for the Lord's sake" {cf, 1 Pet 3:1}, therefore he cannot be, and is not, pleased by wives who will not do so. No amount of justifying this on the ground of the nature of the work being done will cancel out that disobedience. It usually results from a subtle form of desire for domination.

I would like to bring, in that connection, another interesting quotation, this time from the then Governor Mark Hatfield of Oregon (now Senator from that state) who, in a very interesting article, recently gave some of the inside story of his own marriage. He tells how surprised the newspapers were when they reported his marriage, that his wife had included the word *obey* in her marriage vows. He went on to discuss how he and his wife had come to the conviction that this word should be used and he says this,

I can recall the very evening that Antoinette first broached the subject. We had been invited to spend an evening at the home of married friends. Because we were considering marriage ourselves, perhaps we were sensitive to the relationship between this couple. At any rate, something about them puzzled us. Then, driving home, we suddenly put our finger on it. The wife, and not the husband, had taken charge of the evening. "Charles, dear," she had said as we came through the door, "won't you take their coats to the bedroom?" And later, "The phone is ringing, Charles." And still later, "Charles, don't you think it's time for some refreshments?" And each time Charles jumped up from his chair and dutifully did her bidding. Oddly, Charles is not a Mr. Milquetoast: he is an aggressive businessman with a reputation as a go-getter. Nor is his wife mannish or overtly bossy. They are normal, average, likable people. In fact, I think it was the normalcy of the situation that alarmed us. The wife was the head of that household and nobody, least of all Charles, saw anything wrong with in it.

As I drove home that night, Antoinette suddenly said, "When I get married, I want a husband, not a partner." I looked at her in surprise. "What do you mean?" "Perhaps I mean that I don't think there can be a real partnership in marriage," she replied. "It's like this car. We're traveling along together going to the same place, but you're driving. Both of us can't drive. And I don't think there can be two drivers in a marriage either. One person's got to be at the wheel, and, when, it's the woman, I don't like what it does to her – or to him. But it hurts her most."

Those are wise words, reflecting exactly the position of Scripture in this matter.

Some of you women are saying, "What a raw deal we've been handed. Talk about cruel and unusual punishment, this is it. "But is it? Is this intended to be punishment? This is a question I wish to face as we look at these verses, because oftentimes these words are interpreted as though all this is a punishment dealt out by God upon the race, and woman's lot is the heaviest of all. But it is not punishment and was never intended to be punishment.

If you will wait a moment until we can **look together at Adam's word**, you will see why.

And to Adam he said,

**"Because you have listened to the voice
of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of
your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth
to you;
and you shall eat of the plants of the
field.**

**In the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."**

{Gen 3:17-19 RSV}

In these verses we learn for the first time the nature of the sin that caused the Fall of the human race. It was not merely that Adam ate the fruit in disobedience to God. There was something before that, and God records it, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife." That was the sin that began the Fall of Adam and brought the misery of death upon the race.

Now, there are times when the wisest thing a man can do is to listen to the voice of his wife. Many a woman gives excellent advice to her husband, and a man is foolish who does not pay attention to what his wife says. Surely Pontius Pilate would have saved himself uncounted grief if he had listened to the voice of his wife when she sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with this just man for I have been greatly troubled in a dream because of him," {cf, Matt 27:19}. But he ignored his wife's voice which would have saved him.

But here Adam is charged with guilt because he listened to the voice of his wife when it was different than the voice of God. That is the point. It was wrong for him to take his leadership from her. It was a denial of the headship which God had established. Paul gives us the order of headship when he says, "Christ is the head of the man, the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ," {cf, 1 Cor 11:3}. It was also the Apostle Paul who tells us that Adam was not deceived in

the Fall. The woman was deceived. She was deluded, for she believed the Enemy. She thought he meant it when he said they would become like God if they ate the fruit. But Adam was not fooled, he was not deceived. He knew that if they ate the fruit the Fall would follow; that they would lose their relationship to God, and that death would occur. He knew it, but he deliberately disobeyed God and set his wife above God. He denied the headship of Christ over himself and surrendered his own headship over the woman. This has been the major failure of man in marriage ever since.

The second major cause producing chaos in marriage today is right here – a man who refuses to lead, a man who turns over to his wife the ultimate responsibility of the family, how the children turn out, what their problems are, etc. He views his sphere as that of making a living and gives to her the job of making a life. He refuses to make decisions, refuses to give direction or to show concern over the way the family is going, or to enter into the problems of child discipline and training. All this constitutes failure and the breakdown of the headship of man over woman and of God over man.

There are basically two false concepts in marriage which this highlights for us:

- One of them is that man, when he gets married, is to please his wife by doing whatever she wants to do. Usually this results in the chinless, spineless, supine Casper Milquetoast kind of individual. But it is a widespread approach to marriage today, and sociologists are telling us it is rapidly producing in our country a matriarchal society when boys, raised at home, do not have a male image to relate to; they do not know what a father is supposed to be, they never see one, so they relate to their mother and the mother becomes the dominant factor in the family. This turns society upside-down and produces the weakness, conflict, and violence we are seeing so widely today.
- The second major false concept in marriage is for the man to regard himself as the head and to interpret this to mean he is to do whatever he wants; that he is to run the home to suit himself and his pleasure is the determining factor of what occurs. What he likes, that's the important thing. He becomes a tyrant, a dictator. This is equally wrong as the first view and

equally contrary to the Word of God. The truth is, he too is under authority. He is to submit to the headship of Jesus Christ. He is to follow him. If a man refuses to do that, then his home is bound to go on the rocks one way or another, either in internal conflict or in the actual outward breakup. He is to follow the Lord Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the Word of God and by prayer. Man is to follow him whether he, or his wife, feels like it or not – that's the whole issue. He is kindly but firmly to insist that they are to do what God wants.

Because Adam refused to do that, and listened rather to the voice of his wife, letting her determine the course of the marriage, the Fall resulted. Two things came from it:

1. First, toil: "The ground was cursed," we read. Thorns and thistles were to appear and to cover the ground. This suggests an immediate lowering of fertility.

Nature produces only in response to God's continuing manifestation of power. All God needs do to change the course of nature is to reduce the flow of power to it and lower fertility results. Nature then goes out of balance, and the result is an increase in strong plants, such as thorns and thistles. The presence of these, on a widespread scale, indicates that nature is out of balance. It is a reflection of the eccentricity which has come to man: Nature is out of balance because man is out of balance.

This is why we must struggle so to make a living. Man is reduced to unending toil and sorrow. It is interesting that the word toil is exactly the same word in Hebrew that is translated pain for the woman: It is heartbreaking sorrow, caused by labor and toil. This is the reason for the so-called rat-race of life, why we are constantly under pressure to get more out of a reluctant nature.

Work is not the curse given to man; work is a blessing. It is toil that is the curse. If you do not have work to do, you are of all people most miserable. Work is a blessing from God; but hard, grinding, toiling work is the result of the Fall. It is sweat, anxiety, and pressure coming constantly upon us to create the endless rat race of life.

2. Then the second factor which resulted from Adam's failure to observe his headship is death. God said, "In the sweat of your face you will eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Is it not this sense of death, lurking at the boundaries of life, that gives us a feeling of futility about life?

Remember what God said to the rich man who built barns and filled them up and then said to himself, "Soul, take thine ease, for you have all you need." God said to him that night, "You fool! This night your soul shall be required of you," {cf, Luke 12:19-20}. Then he asked this question, "Then, whose shall these things be?"

Yes, that is the question death forces us to face. You struggle to amass property, all the good things of life, and then what a sense of futility there is in having to pass them along to somebody else, someone who didn't turn a finger to gain them.

Years ago a young friend of mine said to another, "My uncle died a millionaire." The man replied, "He did not." The young man said, "What do you mean? You didn't know him, how do you know he didn't die a millionaire?" "Because," the man said, "no one dies a millionaire." The young man said, "What do you mean?" And the older man replied, "Who has the million now?" The young man said, "Oh, I see what you mean." No, we never die millionaires.

Naked we came into the world and naked we shall leave it. We have nothing that we can take with us but must leave it all behind. We are dust, and to dust we shall return. There is the sentence of God – pain, subjection, toil, and death. Is this punishment?

I promised to face this question with you. **Is it punishment?** Is this the result of our folly for which we must grind our teeth and struggle with all our life, a curse for what Adam did? No, it is not.

It only appears to be punishment when we refuse it and resist it or rebel against it. But these things were never intended to be any kind of punishment. They are instead intended to be helps to us, means by which we are reminded of truth, means intended to counteract the subtle pride which

the enemy has planted in our race which keeps us imagining all kinds of illusory things, things that are not true at all –

- that we are the captain of our fate and the master of our soul;
- that we are capable of handling and solving all the problems of life; these arrogant pretensions we constantly make,
- that we have the knack and know how to make gadgets that can solve all the basic problems of existence.

But we are constantly being reminded that these things are not true. Death, pain, toil and subjection are limits that we cannot escape. They are there to cancel out constantly our egocentric dreams and reduce us to seeing ourselves as we really are. We are dust. We are but men. We are limited, dependent. We cannot go it alone – we desperately need other people, and we desperately need God. The hour of greatest hope in our lives is when our eyes are opened to this basic fact and we say, "Lord, I can't make it without you. I need you desperately." These are the things that remind us of that.

Who of us has not had a loved one suddenly pass away and in the presence of death we sensed that we were facing a hard, stark, naked fact which could not be explained away or covered up or shoved under the rug? There it was, facing us every time we turned around. It was to remind us of what we are, and where we are. You will find this principle running all through the Bible:

- Jacob limped upon his leg for the rest of his life after wrestling with the angel at the brook of Peniel. It was to remind him that he was a man, nothing but a man, dependent upon God; it was to turn him from reliance upon his own craftiness and the cleverness of his own wit.
- Moses was denied the right to enter into the land, because of his failure. It was a reminder to him, who had been given great prestige and power before God, that he was nothing but a man and he must live within the limitations of God.

- A sword came upon David's house because of his sin. It was a reminder to him, constantly, that though he was the king he could not do his own will, or act as he pleased. He was a man, dependent upon God.
- Paul had a thorn in the flesh given to him, and he cried out against it. But God reminded him that it was given to him to keep him humble in order that he might be a useful instrument in God's hands, dependent upon his love and grace. Out of that experience comes the great, triumphant cry of the apostle's heart, "I will glory in my infirmities." I am glad of these things. Thank God for them. "For out of weakness am I made strong," {cf, 2 Cor 12:9-10}.

Remember the closing words of the 23rd Psalm:

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for ever. {Psa 23:6 RSV}**

Some quaint commentator has said that those two words *goodness* and *mercy* are God's sheep dogs. This is the Shepherd's Psalm. David wrote it when he was but a lad, keeping sheep. In referring to the goodness and mercy of God, he is referring to the sheep dogs that nip at the heels of the flock and keep them in line, driving them into place. "Surely Goodness and Mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," nipping at my heels, humiliating me, turning me back from that which looks good but is really evil, keeping me from getting

what I think I need, and what I think I want. But in the end we must name these what God names them – goodness and mercy!

No, these things are not punishment; these are *the disciplines of grace*. They are what Paul refers to in Hebrews 12. If you are not chastised, disciplined by God, you are not a child of his. These things are given to bring you into subjection, for God loves you, and he wants you to be what he made you to be – and what your own heart longs to attain. Your pride needs to be crushed, humiliated; your ego smashed; your dependence upon yourself broken; your reliance upon your abilities, your background, your education, pulled out from under you – until you depend upon the God who made you and who is able to supply all that you need. When you do that, you will discover that "he who saves his life shall lose it; but he who loses his life shall save it," {cf, Matt 10:39, 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, 17:39, John 12:25}.

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray that we may take seriously these words. How much of the time we have ignored them, to our own despair and folly. But Lord, you have called us to listen to them, to heed them, to regard them as truth and to act upon them. We pray that you will help us to do so, not only in this quiet moment when our hearts are touched by your Spirit, but also tomorrow, and all through this week. That we may learn to walk in this way and thus to understand what life was intended to be-as you designed it. In Jesus Christ. Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Exit from Eden

by Ray C. Stedman

In our present series on *Understanding Man* we have been attempting to discover the principles of true psychology and true anthropology, i.e., the study of man. It is by these biblical principles that all secular studies ultimately must be measured, for here is the revelation of things as they really are with respect to mankind. Also, counseling on problems which may arise in marriage or in the home must ultimately be governed by the principles found in this passage.

Beginning next Sunday we shall start a new series with Chapter 4, entitled *Understanding Society*. In these next chapters we shall be looking at the fundamental principles of sociology, the science of society, trying to grasp the biblical basis for understanding civilization and history. These should prove to be fascinating chapters. But now we shall take the last few verses of Chapter 3, the exit from Eden. We must see these verses and the incidents related in connection with the whole story of the Fall. Otherwise we shall miss the true significance of these incidents.

We have already seen that this whole story of the Fall is a prototype, an original pattern, of the process of temptation, of yielding to temptation, repentance and restoration, of any individual who has ever lived since that time. In other words, we all live in this third chapter of Genesis. We who know Christ are continually reproducing this process in our lives. All men, without exception, are reproducing it in its initial steps of temptation and fall, and the subsequent death that enters in. This universal experience is proof of the biblical claim that we are all children of Adam, descendants of the pair who opened the story of humanity in the Garden of Eden.

We need to see this whole process very clearly in order to understand this last scene. We can gather up what we have learned so far in a few words, if you will bear with me in a moment of review:

1. So far we have looked at the process of temptation, which consisted of the arousing of desire, the rationalizing of that desire by the mind, and thus the moving of the will to an act of disobedience. This is always, and forever, the process that temptation follows.
2. Then we saw how the account immediately records the fact that death entered the scene. What the Bible means by death is far more than simply the ending of life, becoming a corpse. Death, in the sense this account reveals, is first a very vivid feeling of self-consciousness. We are made immediately aware of ourselves, and this brings with it an accompaniment of shame, guilt, and fear. Along with that there is a sense of defensiveness, a desire to blame somebody else, and then a great sense of loss or limitation, an enslavement, follows. These were inevitable after Adam's sin, and they still are, just as this story outlines.
3. The next step is that of repentance. Recall that we traced through how God, in grace, skill, and tenderness, leads this guilty pair back along the path they have come, and helps them to see what they have done. Repentance consists of two things.
 - First, the awareness of the course of temptation. It comes from within. God helps Adam to see that – that it arose not from anything outside him but from something within.
 - Second, the pair acknowledge the fact of their disobedience. They both come to the place where they say, "Yes, we ate."
4. The next step is that of the manifestation of God's grace, a promise given of grace. There

is the announcement of defeat for the Tempter and judgment upon him; then the provision of certain helps to the man and woman to keep them clinging in dependence upon God – which is the only place of safety, the only place of security and strength in life. These helps are pain, subjection, toil, and death.

That brings us now to the last three steps of the process traced in this chapter, and these three are extremely significant. What happens after God acts in grace to give a great promise and to set (as we saw last time) “sheep dogs” nipping at the heels of mankind to bring individuals into the place of blessing?

The first thing, we will note, in Verse 20, is **an act of faith on Adam’s part:**

**The man called his wife’s name Eve,
because she was the mother of all living.
{Gen 3:20 RSV}**

In order to understand that we must link it immediately with Verse 15, where we have God’s statement to the serpent about the woman: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” That is dealing with the woman’s issue, the seed of the woman. Verse 20 deals with the same. The woman is to become “the mother of all living.” In response to this promise of a seed to come through the woman, Adam changes his wife’s name. In the beginning, her name was not Eve (is it not strange that we never refer to her as anything but Eve?) but Adam called her *Ishsha* which is the Hebrew for “woman.” In Verse 23 of Chapter 2 you will note this was the case.

**Then the man said,
“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called *Ishsha* [Woman],
because she was taken out of *Ish*
[Man].” {Gen 2:23 RSV}**

He called her, “Out of Man,” and that was her original name. Now he changes her name to *Chavah*, which means “life.” He first called her “Out of Man,” but now because of God’s promise, he calls her “Life,” which is the meaning of the word

Eve. Our English word, *Eve*, is simply an anglicization of this Hebrew word, *Chavah*.

Ordinarily Verse 20 is taken to indicate Adam’s understanding that a race of men and women are to come from Eve, thus, she is to be the mother of all living. But that was rather obvious from the beginning. Adam and Eve knew that they were to be mother and father of a race, because God had told them to multiply and fill the earth. But here, you will notice, this verse immediately follows the announcement that the ultimate doom of man is death. God has said to Adam, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return,” and Adam understands, from that, that he is now to become the father of a doomed race, that, because of his sin, that which he begets is doomed to death from the moment of birth. How certainly we know the truth of this. We begin to die the moment we are born, and the process goes on until it results in the inevitable conclusion of the grave.

I am always faintly amused by the optimistic reports of the medical profession about the present increase of life span, though I am sure this is progress and is something good. But there is always the implication that ultimately we are going to win this battle. Yet the interesting thing is that though we have won great victories in the medical field, the death rate has remained exactly what it has been for centuries – a flat 100%.

Adam realizes that this is true. But if you read carefully here you will notice something important: Adam changes the name of his wife because Eve has heard God’s promise and believed it. This is the only possible explanation for Verse 20. When a human being, guilty in sin, believes the promise of God, truly believes it, he or she passes immediately from death unto life. In recognition of that change, Adam calls his wife’s name, “Life,” because she has passed from death unto life. “Therefore,” he says, “she is the mother of all living,” i.e., the first of a long line of those who would pass from death unto life. This ties in exactly with the promise of the seed of the woman which would ultimately come and which would bruise the serpent’s head. All those associated with Christ become part of this redeemed humanity, which is the seed of the woman, and Eve was the first of that line. If we could see the roster of the redeemed it would be interesting to note that it is not in alphabetical order: Adam is not first; Eve is.

All this is exactly in line with the significance of a change of name throughout the rest of the Bible. Have you noticed how many times biblical characters change their name, and always with this same significance? It means that a person has also changed his nature, changed his character. He has become a different person:

- A bit later in Genesis we learn that God changed the name of Abram to Abraham, and the name of Abram's wife, Sarai, to Sarah. These names are significant.
- Later, also, he changed the name of Jacob (which means a supplanter, a usurper) to Israel (which means a prince with God). It is always God who changes these names.
- In the New Testament, our Lord changed the name of Simon, the brother of Andrew, to Peter, because he said he would become like a rock, which Peter means.
- He also changed other names. Saul of Tarsus becomes Paul, which means "little." He lost his conceit and became little in his own eyes and so his name was changed to Paul.

Thus you have all through the Scriptures this significant change of name. It always refers to something which had occurred within, which has changed the whole nature of the person. So this is therefore not a promise that Eve was to become the mother of a race of literal human beings; this is the promise, rather, that she is to be the mother of those who would find life through Jesus Christ.

Thus the immediate response to the promise of God is an act of faith on Adam's part. After all, this is the only proper response to a promise: to believe it and to act on it. And that is what Adam did.

Throughout this whole account in this chapter there are only two things that man can, and does, do, with regard to the problem of sin – he repents, and he believes. That is all. He exercises repentance and faith. Throughout the rest of the Bible, repentance and faith are the means by which the problem of human evil is handled – repentance, an acknowledgment of the facts – and faith, a laying

hold of the promise of God by an act of the will. It is thus that man lays hold of God's grace.

Now the divine activity begins again. **The next step** is found in Verse 21:

And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them. {Gen 3:21 RSV}

We have already noted the significance of this in part. We saw that this was a sign of God's redemptive activity. With the sacrifice of another's life, he clothed Adam and Eve. In Paul's beautifully expressive phrase in Ephesians, it is a picture of how we are "accepted in the Beloved One," {cf, Eph 1:6}. We are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. We are given his standing before the Father. All this is beautifully pictured by this account.

But notice why the clothing is required. Clothing is not required for God's benefit. It does not make any difference to God that Adam and Eve are naked. In fact, as Hebrews tells us, we are all always naked before God – everything is naked and open in his sight {cf, Heb 4:13}. It is not God who requires this clothing, nor is it Adam and Eve, though it may have bothered them to be naked before God in their fallen condition, but it is because of the others who would see them that they are clothed. Clothing is for public appearance. God desires that the mark of his acceptance and acknowledgment of them be manifest to the whole universe. That is why Adam and Eve are clothed, and this is the primary purpose of clothing.

We are concerned about clothing today, because it makes us acceptable in the eyes of others. We feel that we look better, and others think so too. Remember that in the story of the prodigal son, in the New Testament, the first thing the father did when the son returned home was to clothe him with a new robe. It is a public mark of acceptance, a public demonstration that he was back in full favor with his father. Also, in the story of the healing of the demoniac of Gadara, we are told that the Lord cast many demons out of this man, a legion of devils. When the disciples returned to the Lord they found the former demoniac sitting at the feet of Jesus, "clothed, and in his right mind," {Mark 5:15, Luke 8:35}. That clothing is a significant expression of his return to normalcy.

The importance of clothing in its symbolic significance was underscored to me only the other day. I was driving down the street near here just as the youngsters were getting out of high school. I passed by three boys who were walking down the street (at least I thought they were boys). They had long hair down to their shoulders and rather grubby clothes on. Two of them were not so bad, but one of them was in a terrible state. His clothes were filthy, his hair was matted and dirty, and it was, I confess, revolting to me to look at him. But it set me to thinking. What makes these youngsters dress this way? Why are they so fiercely determined about it? Why is it so important to them that they must defy authorities and customs and traditions in order to dress in this fashion? As I thought on it (I had just been working on this passage) I recalled this story of when man was clothed by God. I saw immediately that what lies behind the fierce desire of young people to dress in these weird fashions is that clothing reflects the inner condition of the heart. We want our clothing to be expressive of what we are. Hippy dress is therefore an attempt, in some sense, to be honest.

When I thought of it that way I could see that perhaps we are a bit superficial in our attempts to correct these conditions by outward legislation – although I think there is a place for legislation of these matters. But if clothing does reflect an inner condition then it does not help much to force an outward change. Clothing is very significant. The proof of that is that, whenever any of these young people (as I have seen happen several times now) become converted, and their inner rebellion ceases, the first sign of it is that their clothing changes. Often they get a haircut as the first thing. Their whole outward look changes because the inward attitude has changed.

Now notice that God clothed Adam and Eve. He killed the animals, he made the skins, and he clothed them. They did not even clothe themselves, but he dressed them. It is important that we let God do this to us.

Not long ago a young man came to me, burdened by a moral failure in his life. He was heavy with guilt and he talked it all out with me. Together we went through the Scriptures. He said to me, “Yes, I know these things. I know that God has forgiven me, but I can’t forgive myself. I feel unclean, and I can’t look at myself as being anything but unclean.” Then I retold him the story of

Peter on the housetop in Joppa {cf, Acts 10:9-30}, when he was waiting for a delegation, unknown to him, to come from Cornelius. God prepared him for that encounter by letting down a sheet from heaven, filled with unclean and clean animals, and said to him, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat.” Remember that Peter protested and said, “No, Lord, I have never touched anything unclean in my life.” But God immediately rebuked him, “Peter, don’t you call unclean what I have called clean.” I said to this young man, “Isn’t this what God is saying to you? The Scripture says, ‘If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ Now don’t you dare to call unclean what God has cleansed. That’s an insult to God’s grace.” He was tremendously helped by that and immediately saw the point.

Thus, following the act of faith on Adam’s part, there is the cleansing and public mark of acceptance by God, so that it is clearly demonstrated to every being in the universe that Adam and Eve are now received of God and owned again of him.

Well, then, if that is the case, **how shall we explain this last section** which seems to be totally inconsistent?

Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever –” therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life. {Gen 3:22-24 RSV}

God seems to have drastically changed his attitude, hasn’t he? He had just accepted Adam and Eve, dressed in the new clothing which he himself had provided, and suddenly now he banishes them from his presence, drives them out, slams and locks the door behind them, and sets a guard in the path to keep them from coming back in. Is there not something wrong here?

If we read this passage that way, we have surely misread it. It is important that we note carefully exactly what it does say. Notice that

Verse 22 is one of the few unfinished sentences in the Bible. God acknowledges that man has fallen into a condition of self-centeredness. He says, “the man has now become like one of us.” Man knows good and evil by relating it to himself. This is the basic problem with mankind. We have no right to know good and evil by relating it to ourselves, but that is what we do all the time. It is recorded in the book of Judges: “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes,” {Judg 17:6, 21:25 KJV}. That is the formula for anarchy. It means we are relating and judging everything by the way it appears to us. This is the way God does it, for he is the measure of all things, but it is wrong for man. God acknowledges this condition and, having done so, he now faces the problem of the other tree in the garden:

This is not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, now, but the tree of life. God says, “What if man, doomed now to guilt, shame, limitation and loss, should now reach forth his hand and take and eat of the tree of life, and live forever.” It would mean that man would never physically die but would go on in his evil condition forever. Notice that God leaves the sentence hanging in the air as though the result is too terrible to describe. What if man should do this? Then God’s loving solution follows. He says, “Drive him out, cast him out of the garden, and put at the gate of Eden the cherubim [throughout the rest of Scripture cherubim appear; these are what we might call angelic animals, related to the holiness of God] and a flaming sword which turns every way [but now notice] to guard the way to the tree of life.” It does not say. “to keep men from coming to the tree of life.” That is not what the barrier is for. It is to guard the way to the tree of life, so that men come the right way and not the wrong.

We usually read this passage as though God has barred man from the tree of life – and there is no way to get back in. But that is not true. There was a way in, but it is no longer a physical way. That is what this text is telling us. Man must be kept from trying to come through some physical way, but must be forced to find the right way back. That is what the cherubim and the flaming sword are for. They absolutely cut off any other way to God than the right way. There is no other way, only one.

This is why what you do with your body, religiously, is of no importance whatever unless it be a

genuine reflection of what you do with your spirit, religiously. This explains why you can come to church every Sunday morning, sit in the pews, nod your head, pray, stand, sit down again, genuflect – anything you want – but if the heart is not doing the same thing it is an ugly, distasteful thing in God’s sight, and he has no regard for it at all. There is no way to come to God by doing something – none at all. The physical approach to God is completely cut off.

But here, read the words of the Lord Jesus in the 14th chapter of John, Verse 6. What does he say?

**“I am the way, and the truth, and the life;
no one comes to the Father, but by me.”
{John 14:6 RSV}**

That is the only way there is. That is not only the way to begin the Christian life but it is also the way to continue the Christian life.

Do you know the way to the tree of life? In the passage read for us from the book of the Revelation we heard that the tree of life is for healing. Do you know how to find healing, do you know the way to the place of healing? When your spirit has been torn and broken, or you are pressed by despair, or wounded by sorrow or grief, heartache or guilt, whatever it may be, do you know the way to the place of healing, to the place where the living waters flow? Have you learned not to go but once, but many, many times; to drink again and again of the water of life? Do you know what that means?

Do you know what Jesus meant when he said to the woman at the well, “I will put in you a well of living water, so that you do not need to come to this well for satisfaction. You will find it within you, and you can drink any time you want to,” {cf, John 4:7-15}. Have you learned to drink of this well within when the pressure is on you; to retreat from outward circumstances for the moment and come again to that living fountain of water, springing up within you? To take by quiet faith his promised supply, to partake of his patience and his power, and so to meet the circumstances with a mind at ease, relaxed, trusting, no longer fearful. Do you know what that means? That is the function of the tree of life.

This physical exclusion from Eden is why the body of man must die. The Apostle Paul tells us that is so, even for Christians. He says, “we were

crucified with Christ in order that the sinful body might be put to death,” but that we might live with him in the realm of the spirit and soul, {cf, Rom 6:5-8}. This is why our bodies are dying and we cannot come to God physically. We cannot find our way visibly into his presence. We cannot until the problem of the body is resolved in resurrection. But the glorious truth is, as Hebrews declares to us, that the blood of Jesus Christ has opened for us a new and living way into the holy place {cf, Heb 10:19-20}, and there again we live in the presence of the tree of life in the garden of Eden. Spiritually and psychologically (in the realm of emotions and mind) we are to live in the presence of God because a way has been opened back to the tree of life.

There you have the teaching of this passage. Let me recap it for you in closing. Look at the whole process.

- a) First, *temptation*: How familiar we are with that!
- b) That is followed immediately by *death*, which grips us and casts a gloom over our lives, bores us and frustrates us, and makes us feel despairing, discouraged, and defeated.
- c) Then the place of *repentance* where we admit the facts as God sees them.
- d) Then the flowing of *grace*, the promise of victory and of restoration, accompanied by those helpful measures by which we are made to see our dependence upon him.
- e) Next the response of the spirit in *faith*, when we believe what God has said and are changed and strengthened, we are remade again, in what the New Testament calls “the renewing of the mind by the Holy Spirit,” {cf, Rom 12:2, Tit 3:5}.

- f) Then the *public acknowledgment* on God’s part, clothing us with Christ’s peace, Christ’s righteousness, Christ’s power and poise. so that we become panic-proof, no longer disturbed by the circumstances around.
- g) It ends by *finding our way back* to the place of the healing of our mind, heart and spirit – spiritual health!

Is that not also what the New Testament develops for us? Can you see this pattern developing and have any questions left as to whether this book is from the hand and mind of God? It is all there, is it not, given to us in order that we might live in this world, amidst all the problems of today.

God grant that we might know it in daily experience.

Prayer:

Thank you, our Holy Father, for the way back that is open to all of us, the way to the One who himself is the tree of life, the way, the truth, and the life. We must live by him. We have no other place to live in these days. We pray that each of us, young and old alike, may grasp anew how vastly important it is that we learn to live by the Lord Jesus, by a constant communication with his life, his grace, his strength, his power. Lord, open our eyes to understand these things that we may be men and women who so conduct ourselves as to be mysteries, puzzles, to those around who cannot understand from whence we get this amazing strength, this unflappable poise, this amazing ability to handle life at its worst, without failing. We ask it in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Why do men Hate?

by Ray C. Stedman

History, as we know it, is the story of the wars, battles, and bloodshed of mankind. History is the space in which Cain's ax ultimately becomes machine guns and napalm, hydrogen explosions and guided missiles. Why is this? Why has humanity throughout the entire space of its history wrestled unendingly with this terrible problem of human hatred and bloodshed? There are many shallow answers which have been given, but these superficial answers – economics, adventure, greed, power politics – all have long since been shown to be insufficient, though you still hear them echoed from time to time. But Scripture says that the key to our 20th century dilemma lies in this story that took place at the dawn of history, the story of two brothers, Cain and Abel.

Let us read the account, from Genesis 4.

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very

angry, and his countenance fell. The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. {Gen 4:1-8 RSV}

Here we have what is obviously a highly condensed account. This story undoubtedly covers a span of many years – perhaps a total of more than thirty or forty years, or even as many as a hundred. We are not told how old the two were when Cain slew Abel, but undoubtedly they had grown into manhood and most likely were in their early thirties. The story begins with the birth of Cain and the joy of his mother, Eve, and it centers on three highly important matters:

- the naming of the boys,
- the offerings which each presented, and
- the reaction of Cain to God's rejection of his offering.

Let us begin with this **name**, Cain. It is a very significant name because, as the account tells us, it means “gotten,” and comes from the Hebrew word *qanah* which means, “to get.” You will recognize it as the derivation for our English word, “begotten.” We speak of begetting our children, and this comes from the name *Cain*. The text says Eve named him Cain because, as she said, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.”

That latter phrase is a bit weak in translation. It is not merely “with the help of the LORD” (which is true of every birth), but what Eve probably said was, “I have gotten a man, even the LORD.” By that she was unquestionably referring to the great promise that had been given wherein she was told that she would bring forth a seed who would bruise the serpent’s head. She seemingly understood from that that the seed would be a divine Being, so when her first child was born – a male – she felt perfectly justified in naming him, *Gotten*: “I have gotten a man, even the LORD.”

This is very characteristic of predictions in the Bible. They do not often include a time element in them – most of them are indeterminate as to time – and it is apparent that Eve had no idea how long it would be before this promise would be fulfilled. Remember that Jesus said to his disciples, “The times and seasons are not for you to know for the Father has put them in his own power,” {cf, Acts 1:7 KJV}. We never can know precisely when these great events are going to be fulfilled, though, as the Scriptures indicate, we often can know when they are approaching fulfillment, as in the case of the second coming of the Lord.

But now when the second child is born an ominous element begins to enter the story, for the name of this child is Abel, which means “frail.” This suggests that already the physical effects of sin were becoming apparent in the race. The second child born into history was a frail, sickly child and so bore the name *Abel*. But, regardless of whether this was physically true or not, it is certainly suggestive that there was a difference in the attitude of the parents toward the children. Adam and Eve regarded these boys in two different ways: Cain was the strong one; Abel the weaker. It would be very natural for them to favor Cain as the firstborn, the stronger of the two, and born as we would say today, “under a lucky star,” a child of destiny, one designed perhaps to fulfill great promise. Perhaps this strong hint of favoritism, found here at the be-

ginning, offers an explanation for what follows in the story. Already, here at the very birth of these two boys, the seeds of arrogance and conceit have been planted in the heart of Cain by his unsuspecting parents, simply by the way they treat their children.

How significant that is – and how frightening! Sometimes seeds can be planted in early childhood that will come to fruit many years later, and bring heartache and despair to parents. (The interesting thing here is that it is not the neglected child that suffers most, but the favored one. I will leave that for all amateur psychologists to chew on.)

But now the scene shifts to a much later time. The boys are grown and are supporting themselves. Cain is a rugged farmer, a tiller of the soil. But that work is obviously too hard for Abel, and he becomes a keeper of the sheep. This is interesting because it indicates that from the earliest dawn of history mankind has understood and been involved in agricultural and pastoral pursuits. He was not, as sometimes we gather from dioramas in our museums, originally a hunter only.

We are now told that in the course of time **both Cain and Abel brought an offering to God**. There are two things strongly implied by this account:

1. First, it is clear that there was a prescribed time indicated for the bringing of an offering. The phrase which in our version is translated, “In the course of time” is, in the Hebrew, *At the end of days*. This is a strong suggestion that there was a definitely prescribed period. Perhaps it was once a year, at the end of days, i.e., at the end of the winter season, just before spring.
2. Second, it is clear from this account that a prescribed place existed for this offering. They were to bring it before the Lord, a definite place where they were to appear in the presence of the Lord.

If you link this with the closing words of Chapter 3, there is a clear suggestion that when God set the cherubim and flaming sword at the gateway to Eden, he thereby created a mercy seat. It is most interesting to note that in the making of the tabernacle, many centuries later, when the di-

vine pattern was given to Moses it included a mercy seat with cherubim, whose wings would meet over the mercy seat. There was the place where offerings were to be placed. The Day of Atonement was consummated at the mercy seat when the high priest brought in a lamb for all the people, once a year. Perhaps this traces from this earliest account of an offering. Thus it is very likely that at the gateway of Eden was a mercy seat, where once a year Adam and Eve and their children were to come with an offering for the Lord.

This is indicative that Adam and Eve had passed on to their boys what they knew and had learned of God, and had trained them to worship. Man, in his primitive condition, was not, as we are sometimes told, groping blindly after God, seeking through centuries of patient endeavor to find his way to an understanding of divine truth. Mankind began on that level. Paul makes this clear in Romans: Man, who *knew* God, who *knew* who he was, departed from that *knowledge* and turned to idolatry {cf, Rom 1:20-23}. Thus he traces the degeneration of the race.

Now, the offerings Cain and Abel bring to God reveal a significant difference between the two men. Cain's offering of fruit was instantly rejected; but Abel's offering of a lamb was instantly accepted. How that rejection and acceptance were indicated we are not told, though perhaps we might find a clue in the story of Gideon, and, later in the Scriptures, the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel. Remember that, when these men offered to God, fire came down from heaven and consumed the offering, and this was the indication of its acceptance by God. We can, of course, make much of the fact that Cain ought to have known better than to bring an offering of fruit unto God. He surely knew from Adam, his father, that God had cursed the ground, and to offer the fruit of a cursed ground to God was obviously to insult him. Also I think we can justifiably say that unquestionably Adam and Eve, and Cain and Abel, knew the most basic truth which the Word of God labors to get across to us, and which runs through the entire length of Scripture. It is given to us in Hebrews: "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins," {cf, Heb 9:22}.

Why is that so important? Primarily because it is designed to teach us something crucial. All these symbols of the Old Testament are designed to teach

us important things. What is it that this teaches us? – "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." It is designed to teach that the problem of sin is no light matter. It cannot be handled by a good resolution or an earnest resolve. It is not settled by simply deciding to turn over a new leaf, or to change one's attitude. It is something that is embedded in the race and touches the springs of life. It can only be solved by death. That, of course, is what ultimately explains the cross of Jesus Christ; why, in his coming, he could not merely teach us good things but he had to die to deal with the problem of sin. But I do not want to dwell on this now because it is not the heart of this story, although I think it is clearly here.

The account says that **Cain was angry at God's rejection of his offering** and his countenance fell. Obviously he came expecting God to accept his offering. Perhaps he was very pleased with himself. Perhaps he felt that his offering of fruit and grain was much more beautiful, much more aesthetically pleasant, than this bloody, dirty thing that Abel put on the altar. But when the smoke rose from Abel's offering and his own remained untouched, Cain's smile changed to a frown. He was angry and resentful, and the whole appearance of his face altered.

How well we know this feeling! And for the same reason, jealousy. He was jealous because his brother was accepted and he was rejected. As the New Testament tells us, he was angry, "because his own deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous" {cf, 1 Jn 3:12}, and so he was filled with jealousy.

Is it not amazing the things that make us jealous? We are jealous because our neighbor has a bigger car than we have, or his child plays with a doll that can talk, while our children have to play with some cheap little doll. Our fellow worker has a desk that is nearer to the window than ours. Or perhaps he gets a longer notice of commendation in the company paper than we do, or his picture is larger. We get angry if his name is in larger print, or he has softer carpets on the floor, or has two windows instead of one, as in our office. It is amazing how petty these matters are that cause us to be filled with jealousy and resentment and to rankle with a feeling of envy.

Basically behind it is exactly the same reason why Cain was angry. He did not like the way God

was acting, that is the whole point. He did not like what God had chosen to do for Abel. With him it was not a question of being upset, theologically, because fruit was not as good as a lamb. There is no implication of that in this story. Looking at it later we can see such implications, but that was not what was troubling Cain. What bothered him was simply that God did not conform to his idea of rightness. When God presumes to cut across the grain of our expectation we are all offended, aren't we? We are quick with the question, "How can God do a thing like this? Why does God permit this?" It is all because we want our thoughts to be the program on which God operates. When he presumes to do anything else, how angry we get with him! Oh, it is true that, in a church service, we can all nod our heads at Isaiah's words, "God's thoughts are not our thoughts nor his ways our ways," {cf, Isa 55:8}. But when he actually begins to act on that basis, how upset it makes us. We feel that he has betrayed us, played us false in some way.

But notice God's grace. He does not flare back at Cain with thunderbolts of judgment. He simply asks him a question, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?" That is the best question to ask a jealous, resentful individual. "Why? Think it through, now, why are you so angry? Why are you filled with resentment against this person? What is it?"

I have learned that when men and women ask me, as they sometimes do, "Why does this have to happen to me? What have I done that I should have to go through this thing?" the only proper answer is, "Why shouldn't you? These things happen to everyone, and to anyone; why shouldn't it happen to you? Why should you escape? Why should you resent it? Why should you assume that you have special privilege or an immunity to the normal problems, injustices and trials of life?"

That is a hard question to answer, isn't it? But notice that God goes on to light a lamp of warning before Cain. He says, "If you do well, will you not be accepted?" Do not read into that the idea that God is simply saying, "Well, Cain, just do your best. Try hard to please me, and everything will be all right." It has a specific meaning here. It means, "If you bring the accepted offering; if you will go to your brother and trade some of your grain for one of his lambs and bring that lamb, whose blood is to be shed for the remission of sins, indicating

that you understand at least something of the problem that sin proposes, then you too will be accepted. It is not too late. I'm not going to judge you now. You can go back and repent, you can change, and, if you so do, well, you will be accepted, just like Abel, for I am no respecter of persons." "It is truth that I deal with," says God, "and I don't care what kind of a past a person has who determines to act in truth and honesty, I will accept him." But if not, then look out! Beware! "If you let this moment pass," says God to Cain, "if you refuse, now that it has all been made clear to you, to repent, to go back and bring the right offering; if you proudly refuse to do that, watch out, because sin is couching at the door of your life like a lion, ready to jump on you, to seize you and destroy you." Thus God is saying to Cain, and to us, "Don't treat jealousy or resentment lightly, because it is not a light thing. Let it fester and soon you will find yourself in the grip of a power greater than you can handle, and you will do things that you didn't ever think you would do."

Have you found that out? How often have I found it to be true! Let resentment against God fester in your heart, get upset because of what he does or allows to happen in your experience, get angry or jealous at some other individual, stuff it all down inside and fondle it and play with it, and, sooner or later, you will say something that you didn't intend to say, or do something that you didn't intend to do. You will go farther than you ever thought you would go, and will catch yourself doing things that you never would have otherwise done.

This is what happened here. Cain disregards God's warning, he refuses to repent, he nurses his jealousy and soon his mind conceives a diabolical plot, a way to get even. How powerfully it makes its appeal to him. "Ah, now I've got him," he thinks, "that brother of mine who thinks he's so good, thinks he's so holy, now I've got him!" With a disarming smile he comes to Abel and says, "Brother, let's go out into the fields and talk." And there the murderous ax rises and falls, and Abel sinks to the ground with a smashed skull, murdered by his brother's hand.

What makes a man kill his brother? During the Vietnam war, a national magazine published a photograph of a Vietnamese officer executing a captured Viet Cong. When that picture appeared someone wrote a letter to one of the editors com-

menting on it. The writer said, “What a terrible thing! What a brutal thing! There stands that turtle-headed little man, pointing a pistol at this man’s head and shooting him in cold blood. How can a man do a thing like that!” In a few days a very provocative and perceptive reply appeared. Someone wrote in to say, “The reader asks, ‘How can a man do a thing in cold blood like that. What causes a man to act like that?’ The answer is: the same thing that causes someone to call another person ‘a turtle-headed little man!’” It is true, isn’t it? It is the same thing!

Do you notice how often Scripture links these two together: insult and murder? There are those scorching words that come from the lips of Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount,

“You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” {Matt 5:21-24 RSV}

John tells us that if we hate our brother we have murdered him in God’s sight {1 Jn 3:15}. And that is really true. What it is really telling us is that we refrain from killing the ones we resent only because we fear the reprisal that would come to us.

It was a very frequent thing in the days of the Old West that when someone took a dislike to someone, or felt a momentary irritation he simply drew a gun and shot him. Why? Because there was no law to take reprisal against him. He could immediately express what he felt in his heart. Where there was no law that would cause him to think twice about it, he simply expressed it immediately by killing another individual.

See how far removed are our thoughts from those of God? What we regard as trivialities, as peccadillos, trifles, he sees as monstrous, terrible things threatening our peace, our health, and life

itself. So he tries to warn Cain. “Cain, you don’t know what you are doing. Let this thing rankle in your heart and before you know it you will have killed your brother.”

Remember, in the New Testament, in the letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul says, “Do not let the sun go down upon your wrath, and thus give the devil an opportunity,” {cf, Eph 4:26b-27}. There he is, waiting like a roaring lion, couching at the door, ready to spring on you if you give him an opportunity. What is the opportunity? Allowing your wrath to last beyond the setting of the sun, to carry it over into another day, to form a grudge, a permanent dislike for an individual. When you do that then the door is wide open and nothing can stop Satan from seizing you, gripping you, and beginning to poison your life and destroy you, either suddenly or secretly.

“But,” says the New Testament, “be at peace with one another,” {cf, Mark 9:50}. Do not even let your worship delay you in making peace. If you bring your gift and there remember that your brother has something against you – or you have something against him – leave your gift and go to your brother, be reconciled, then come and settle things with God {cf, Matt 5:23-24}.

That judges me! Does it not judge you? In the light of this story, how much of the evil of our day springs out of these seeds of dislike for one another and of refusal to repent when the grace of God warns us of the power we are dealing with?

How about you, here in this place? Are you angry with someone?

Do you harbor a grudge in your heart? Are you holding resentment against another individual?

Are you seething with hurt feelings because of something someone has said – perhaps years ago, or even weeks ago? What about it? If you do well, if you bring the offering that God has provided, if you offer the forgiveness which he makes possible, you will be accepted. Peace will flow again into your heart and life, and with it, health and strength. But if you allow it to fester, to lie there unsettled, it will master you.

Prayer:

Our Father, you who know our hearts, deal earnestly among us that we will not lightly put these things aside and treat them as only a Sunday morning message which

Why do men Hate?

stirs us a bit but doesn't really change us. Help us, Lord, to realize that the wolves are now howling in the cellars of our nation's soul because of the unjudged dislikes of Christians toward one another, the unsettled resentments that have grown into family feuds that have gone on for weeks and months and years. God grant to us

grace to deal with this matter in the way that has been so abundantly provided by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on our behalf, so that we may be tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us. We pray in his name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Mark of Cain

by Ray C. Stedman

In our first study together of the story of Cain and Abel we examined the causes for human hatred and warfare. We saw what the New Testament confirms – that wars and murders spring from seeds of unreasoning jealousy and envy which are allowed to lie unjudged in human hearts. When they are small they are left unjudged and not faced. Men kill because they hate; they hate because they will not accept God's ordering of life. They want their own way, they want God to act as they want him to act (or perhaps I should say, as we want him to act).

Today we examine a very closely related problem, that of race relations, of human brotherhood. In this story of Cain and Abel it is highlighted for us by what followed the cold-blooded murder of Abel.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" {Gen 4:9 RSV}

Cain's insolent and arrogant response to God's question is a sign of his inward, unacknowledged guilt. This is always the way of guilt – to disclaim responsibility. Cain replies, "My brother? What have I to do with my brother? Am I my brother's keeper? Is it my responsibility to know where my brother is?" The hypocrisy of that is most evident. Though Cain could disclaim responsibility for knowing where his brother was, he did not hesitate to assume the far greater responsibility of taking his brother's life.

We hear much of the same thing today. When Martin Luther King was murdered, many were saying these same things. "Well, it's not our fault that Dr. King was killed. Why should we suffer for

what some fanatic did? It's not our responsibility." Soon some were saying, "He ought to have known this would happen. After all, if you stir up trouble, sooner or later you will pay the price for it." No one can deny the logic and truth of a statement like that. Yet it is very obviously incomplete. There is nothing in it of facing responsibility, and no honest answering of the terrible question from Cain's lips, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Two or three decades ago, Dr. Carl Henry wrote a book called *The Uneasy Conscience of Fundamentalism*, which bothered many people when it first came out. In it Dr. Henry pointed out that the isolationism which many Christians adopt, the isolationism which removes us from contact with non-Christians, has also successfully removed us from grappling with some of the pressing social questions of our hour. We have oftentimes been quite content to sing about going to heaven, but have shown very little concern for the sick and the poor, the lonely, the old, and the miserable of our world. Isaiah 58 is a ringing condemnation of such an attitude on the part of religious people. Other passages from the Scriptures make clear that God is infinitely concerned in this area of life, and those who bear his name dare not neglect these areas. Let us be perfectly frank and honest, and admit that this is a manifestation of Christian love which we evangelicals have tended greatly to neglect. The evangelical church, therefore, has largely become almost exclusively white, middle-class, Protestant, and Republican.

Now I don't have anything against any of these designations, except that their preponderance indicates that something is wrong with the church. The church was never intended to minister only to one segment of society, but is to include all people, all classes, all colors, without distinction. Both the

Old and New Testament alike are crystal clear in this respect. These distinctions are to be ignored in the church; they must be, otherwise we are not being faithful to the One who called us and who himself was the friend of sinners {Matt 11:19, Luke 7:34} of all kinds. We must be perfectly honest and admit that this has been the weak spot of evangelical life, this failure to move out in obedience to God's command to offer love, friendship, forgiveness, and grace to all people without regard to class, color, background, or heredity. We believe that the gospel is salt, to preserve society from corruption, and that in calling out "the mystery of godliness," God is forming a secret society which constitutes the church to be a counteraction to "the mystery of lawlessness" which is also at work. These are opposed, one to the other, and when lawlessness surges to the front as it has today, and seems to flow unchecked through the cities of our nation, it is because the mystery of godliness has been thwarted and held back, contained, and not turned loose in the midst of society.

If we still are reluctant to face some of the things this passage brings before us, perhaps we need to look on to Cain's punishment, given in Verses 10 through 12:

And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." {Gen 4:10-12 RSV}

God uses a very vivid figure here to describe his knowledge of Cain's deed. Cain thought he was acting in secret, but of course everything is open before God. God said, "The blood of your brother is crying to me, shrieking to me, from the ground!" Abel's blood shouts at God. It makes demands upon his justice and his love.

Hebrews speaks of "the blood of Jesus, which," says the writer, "speaks of better things than the blood of Abel," {cf, Heb 12:24 KJV}. We know what he means. The blood of Jesus is crying out before God for forgiveness. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," said Jesus from the cross {Luke 23:34 KJV}. The blood of Jesus is crying constantly for mercy, for grace to all who

take refuge under it, and thus it does speak of "better things" than the blood of Abel.

But the blood of Abel speaks too. That is what God is saying to Cain. "Your brother's blood is crying something to me that I can't ignore. It is shrieking to me from the ground. It is crying out!" For what? For redress, for vengeance, for justice, for the righting of wrong. It cries to a God of justice and says, "Do not let this deed go unavenged. Do something about this."

Now notice carefully that it is crying out for vengeance from God, not man. "Vengeance belongs to me," says the Lord {cf, Heb 10:30, Deut 32:35}. It never belongs to man. It is not man's task to avenge these things. In fact, when man assumes that role he only makes it worse. He unleashes a vicious cycle which escalates rapidly into all-out anarchy, and sometimes civil war and revolution. But nevertheless, God is driven to act. This is what this ancient story of Cain and Abel tells us. God cannot allow these things to occur and nothing happen as a result. His sense of justice is appealed to in the murderous act.

What then does he do? He sentences Cain! He assigns a punishment to him, and the nature of it is very significant. Notice, there are no thunderbolts of wrath here. God does not seize hold of Cain and take his life in vengeance. What happens is what writers sometimes call "poetic justice," i.e., a strangely fitting result. Cain was a man of the soil, a tiller of the ground; in this work he took pride and found joy. A man's work is always his pride. Cain was a farmer, who delighted in producing beautiful crops of fruit and grain. But now he has poured the blood of his brother upon the ground. So God says, the ground, the arena of your pride, will now be cursed toward you. It will no longer yield you its strength. You will find, in your attempts to work the ground, nothing but frustration, sweat, tears, and toil.

Cain, in other words, has lost his "green thumb." The ground will no longer release its fruitfulness to him; his working of the ground will result in fruitless labor. He would therefore, be forced to wander from place to place as the crops failed wherever he went. He would find himself unable to extract a living and this would turn him into a wanderer on the face of the earth.

I wonder if we are not still hearing echoes of this strange sentence upon Cain today. What is the pride of America? It is not in our great American

cities – these great showplaces of wealth and power, these planned communities, which we intended to be models of knowledge, wisdom, and happiness, where all the problems of life would be happily solved? Well, what has happened? Because we would not answer God’s question, “Where is your brother?” and we replied, as Cain, in arrogance and defiance, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” today our great cities are dying. The pride and joy of America is severely threatened, and we have not seen the worst of it yet. But to me, the ultimate fate is not the physical violence which threatens our nation, but the fact that America has lost its way home. American families no longer know how to have a home. We have become wanderers, lonely, empty, restless; a nation on wheels, driven and homeless, vainly seeking to find something to satisfy, fugitives from a pitiless fate.

But the account closes on a hopeful note,

Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me.” Then the LORD said to him, “Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod [which means “the land of wandering”], east of Eden.” {Gen 4:14-16 RSV}

It is obvious from this account that Cain fears the vengeance of his other brothers.

You say, “What other brothers?” In the very next chapter, in Verse 4, we are told plainly that Adam and Eve “had other sons and daughters” beside the ones that are named in the Scripture. This is the explanation for the question many have asked out of a kind of naive ignorance, “Where did Cain get his wife?” The answer is, he married one of his sisters. This was yet a common occurrence as late as the days of Abraham, who also married one of his sisters, his half-sister.

But Cain knows that his life is in danger wherever he goes. Wherever he is he will run into his relatives (can you imagine anything worse?) who

will be motivated either by fear or vengeance to take his life.

Cain now is obsessed with his guilt, haunted by it. He knows he can go nowhere in human society without constantly wondering if the attitudes manifest toward him are subtle, sinister ones, or whether they are friendly and can be trusted. He is a man obsessed and haunted with guilt, and so he says to God, feeling the weight of this, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. I will live in constant danger of reprisal.” But God said, “No, you won’t.” And God put a mark upon him (which has now become a proverb) by which, as he says, “Anyone who sees this mark will know that God himself protects Cain, and whoever takes this life will be avenged sevenfold.”

I do not know what the mark of Cain was. It is impossible to tell whether it was some physical mark, some sign in his body, which indicated that he was God’s property, or something else. I do not know. I think perhaps it was a hopeless, pathetic look, something that would stir pity in any individual’s heart, so that Cain became (as man is, basically, everywhere in his guilt), an object of universal pity to those who saw him. But the point is, even the guilty man is still God’s property! God throws a circle of protective love about Cain and says, “Yes, he is guilty. He’s a murderer – but he is still my property, and don’t forget it in your dealings with him.”

Thus the mark of Cain is not a mark of shame, as we usually interpret it. It is not a mark to brand him in the eyes of others as a terrible murderer, to be shunned and treated as a pariah. It is rather, a mark of grace, by which God is saying, “This man is still my property. Hands off!” Thus the heart of God is always ready to show mercy.

There can only be one reason why God thus protected Cain. It was in order to give him time to think and to repent. This is always the way of God. Peter says, in his second letter, “Do not ever make the mistake of regarding the longsuffering of God as weakness,” {cf, 2 Pet 3:9}. You who say, “Twenty centuries of Christian life have gone by and nothing has happened; God will never do anything to right wrongs” – don’t make the mistake of thinking that indicates God’s impotence. “But,” Peter says, “it is rather his mercy, it is his grace, giving men time to repent in order that none may perish but that all may come to repentance,” {cf,

The Mark of Cain

2 Pet 3:9}. But don't presume upon his patience – utilize the time to repent and change.

Thus God gives even Cain a moment of grace, space to repent.

Prayer:

Forgive us, our Father, for the many weeks and years in which we have failed to judge ourselves in this particular area. How many times we have glossed over our prejudices and treated them as unimportant trivialities, never realizing that our silence

shouts, and our refusal to act speaks volumes. Lord, we pray that in this late hour of our history we may be faithful to you in every direction and manifest more fully than we ever have done before the saving love that is without prejudice or respect of persons. Thank you for this sharp word from the Scriptures to our own hearts helping us to understand what is happening in our nation today. May we face it in realism and in truth. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Too Much, Too Soon

by Ray C. Stedman

In this present series in Genesis we are like explorers who have traced a mighty river to its sources and who are now beginning to grasp the character of the land in which they live. We have already traced in this chapter the causes of war, crime, and prejudice to their roots in the hearts of men who refuse to be honest before God. In this story of Cain and Abel we have a kind of human cameo of history, a microscopic picture of the entire scope of human history. That, of course, is why the Bible is always so contemporary; it deals with elements of human life that never change.

Today we will take a closer look at what is called *culture* or *civilization*, and especially the part that city life plays in the shaping of human society. This is introduced for us in Verse 17 of Chapter 4:

Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. {Gen 4:17 RSV}

In an earlier series we indicated that we have archaeological proof of this as an actual occurrence, for archaeologists have found that the word *enoch* is the earliest word for city in any human language. In the ancient area of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the oldest inhabited cities known to man were called *enoch*. This was much as we refer to San Francisco as “the city,” so they called this first town, “the city,” *enoch*.

It is interesting that it was Cain who built the first city and generally turned the family into the state. He thus introduced the social and political problems that in this 20th century are screaming at us for solution. It is very suggestive that the first city was built by a condemned murderer.

Now, it is clear from the 21st chapter of Revelation that it was ultimately God’s intention for men to live in a city. The dream of the city which God intended for man runs throughout the whole of Scripture. Remember, we are told in the book of Hebrews that Abraham “looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” {Heb 11:10}. So, from the earliest dawn of history, men were looking forward to the coming of a city. You will find references to it in the Psalms and other places. But everywhere in Scripture there is a contrast drawn between the city of God and the cities of men.

God withholds his city and it has not come even yet. He withholds it for a very good reason: He is waiting until men are ready to live in a city. God first goes about solving the fundamental problem of humanity – its self-will and defiance of authority – and then he puts men together in the close life of a city. But we have reversed that. Man, in his arrogant pride, has assumed that he is quite able to live in close relationship with his fellow man and has clustered together in cities throughout history. The result has been all the violence, intrigue, social injustice, and long unending record of bloodshed which history records.

Here is the supreme mark of the fallen man, clearly evident in this passage: He wants everything now! That is the trouble with man as he is today; he wants everything, right now: Instant luxury, instant comfort, instant relief, everything, now! To accomplish that, man ignores the problem of evil. He treats it as though it were nonexistent, dismisses it with a wave of his hand, regards it as merely trivia – and goes ahead to build his city on the ground that is already red with the blood of his brother. That is the story of history.

Now, it is a most imposing city he builds. The technical brilliance of man is evident even this early in the history of our race:

To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech. And Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe [It is from this we get our word, *jubilee*]. Zillah bore Tubalcain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubalcain was Naamah. {Gen 4:18-22}

Even the names here are highly suggestive. As you study your Bible, learn to look up the meaning of Bible names. Sometimes there are differences of opinion as to what they mean, depending upon the root from which the name was taken, but these names are very significant:

- Irad, for instance, means “the city of witness,” i.e., in this context, “witness to the glory of man.” Already the idea of the exaltation of man is coming in and it will culminate soon in the tower of Babel, erected to the glory of man.
- Mehujael means “smitten of God,” which is suggestive, perhaps, of a rather defiant attitude: “God has smitten, yes, but we’re going to make a success of this anyway,” is man’s attitude.
- Methushael is most contemporary; it means “the death of God.” You can see how far back in history that idea goes!
- Lamech means “strong” or “powerful,” and again reflects clearly the boasting of man in his fallen state.
- Jabal means “traveler;”
- Jubal, “trumpeter;” and
- Tubalcain, “metalworker” – especially with regard to jewelry and ornamentation.

Now that is most remarkable. We have here all the ingredients of modern life – travel, music and the arts, the use of metals, the organized political life, and the domestication of animals. All of this is admirable and progressive, and, as we have indicated, ultimately intended for man. Nothing that fallen man longs after was to be denied him, as far as God was concerned, but it was to be when man was ready for it. The whole tragic story of civilization is that man insists on it anyway, before he is ready for it. You know how often in history we have said that the story of some human event was “too little, too late,” but here it is obviously “too much, too soon.”

These things look impressive, and it is desirable to have these comforts, luxuries, and advances, but what this passage so clearly brings before us is that it is all built on shaky ground. I do not think I could put that any better than to quote the words of Helmut Thielicke. In a study on this very passage, he says:

The strange thing is that the closer we come the more clearly we see the red thread that runs like a pulsing, bloody artery through the myriad figures of the world. This motherly earth, on which even the greatest of men walked, on which they erected cities and cathedrals and monuments, has drunk the blood of Abel. And this blood of the murdered and abused appears in stains and rivulets everywhere, including the greatest figures. Cain, the “great brother” and progenitor of mankind, betrays his mysterious presence.

Somewhere in every symphony the tone-figure of death is traceable. Somewhere on every Doric column this mark is to be found. And in every tragedy the lament over injustice and violence rings out.

That is what we are trying to forget. We point boastfully at our great skyscrapers, our manicured gardens, our beautifully public avenues and parks and say all this is the mark of human ingenuity, human ability. But we cover up and try to ignore the tragic areas of abuse and privation, of darkness and injustice, of violence and intrigue that go along with man’s accomplishments. But see how honest, upright and frank the Scriptures are. They make us face right up to this. The account goes right on to interject two more elements that must be included in an evaluation of human culture.

**Lamech said to his wives:
“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
you wives of Lamech, hearken to
what I say:
I have slain a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
truly Lamech seventy-seven fold.”
{Gen 4:23-24 RSV}**

In this passage you have the first mention of polygamy in the Bible. Someone has said that polygamy has its own punishment – it means more than one mother-in-law! But perhaps there is not even that here, for we know from the story of Cain that Lamech may have actually married sisters who had the same mother. Whatever the case was, at least here is the beginning of polygamy.

It occurred to me that perhaps he was simply trying to do research into the nature and character of womanhood, studying it from A to Z, from Adah to Zillah!

If you will forgive me that, we’ll come back to the text and note that, whatever this is, it marks the unflinching accompaniment of civilization – a sexual excess coming in which is openly tolerated. It traces back to this early Cainite civilization.

The second element that is always present and necessary to properly evaluate culture is reflected in this oldest song in the world. Notice that these verses about Lamech are put into poetic form. They represent an early song, a kind of taunt on Lamech’s part, in which he is justifying his violence. He boasts to his wives, “Listen to what I have to say: I have slain a man for wounding me.” Evidently, a young man had assaulted him and, in self-defense, he says, “I slew him.” He boasts of this to his wives and justifies it, saying that if God avenged Cain sevenfold for taking the life of his brother without any justification whatever, then, surely, “I will be avenged seventy-seven fold for having acted in self-defense.”

Here we have the first clear instance of a pattern that has repeated itself a thousand times over in human history – the justifying of violence on the ground of protection of rights.

Now there is a picture of civilization:

- Technical brilliance, producing comforts and luxuries;

- The substitution of the state for the family;
- The trend toward urban over rural life;
- The increasing toleration of sexual excess; and
- The passionate vindication of violence on the grounds of the protection of rights.

Sound familiar?

Has human nature changed in the thousands of years of history recorded since Cain? Not a bit.

Does this sound familiar?

Our youth now loves luxuries. They have bad manners, contempt for authority. They show disrespect for elders and they love to chatter instead of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants, of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up their food, and tyrannize their teachers.

So said Socrates, 425 BC!

Well, what is the problem? It reduces to the clamant cry of the human heart for everything, now! Men do not want to get ready for anything. They do not want to face the fact that perhaps they are not ready yet, that they need certain changes in themselves first before they are ready to move into close companionship with one another and live together. It is a refusal to acknowledge the glaring problems of human life.

It is manifest in the superficiality of our lives, the fact that we make trivial things sound like they are horribly important. Have you been listening to the toothpaste ads on the TV recently? If you believed the ads, you would think that a certain brand of toothpaste could change your whole life. Those ads are intended to be taken at least in a quasi-serious way. The things that do change life we treat as mere trivia, only for religious people, those few people who can’t keep their minds off the mystical. They are the ones to whom this change of life, this born again experience, makes its appeal.

How clearly the Scripture puts its finger on the problem of human life – this refusal of human beings to be healed first before they begin to claim the blessings God intends for the race. The cleansing of grace must come first, and then the seeking of

God's city. This is why man has never been able to find what he has sought for in city life, because he is forever building his cities upon ground that is red with the blood of his brother.

A father told me recently of the struggles of his son. It was the old, old story of the prodigal son who felt that what his father taught and believed was boring, uninteresting, and useless. Life made its adventurous appeal to him and he succumbed to the lure of new things and exciting adventures and relationships and refused to stay with his family. He got involved with drugs, women, and evil friends, and, finally – almost wrecked in health and broken in spirit, so tortured and tormented within he was on the verge of suicide – he realized what was happening to him, and, at the last moment, repented, came back, and found peace of heart and grace in the father's house. The father said to me, "I don't know why it is that he had to learn the hard way."

Well, why is it?

It is because men refuse to face the facts about life. For those who refuse to face the facts, there is no other way to learn than by hard experience, the grinding tribulation and tumult of having to live with facts we will not recognize. But it is not necessary. Even this early in the human race it was not necessary.

Notice Verses 25 and 26 here, which close this chapter:

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, for Cain slew him." To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD. {Gen 4:25-26 RSV}

Once again these names are most suggestive:

- Seth means "appointed." Eve said, "I will call him 'Appointed' because God has appointed another son to take the place of Abel."

When the man of faith is taken out of the world, God's work does not end; he raises up another. I have been so impressed by the epitaph on the tomb of John Wesley, in Westminster Abbey in London. I stood before it some years ago, and I have never forgotten it: "God

buries His workman, but He carries on His work."

And here too the work of God is going forward. He appoints another son, another man.

- The name of Seth's son was Enosh, which means "mortal."

Here is suggested very clearly the idea that in the midst of this Cainite civilization, with its proud refusal to recognize the canker eating away at the heart of humanity, and its desire to achieve the luxuries and comforts that God designs, but on a false basis, there were yet those who recognized their mortality, and, thus, their dependence upon God.

There were those who took God's appointed way, and, as the account goes on to say, "they began to call upon the name of the LORD." They recognized that God must heal our hearts before we can have all the things that our urges cry out for, that the cancer within us must be dealt with before we can begin to live.

This has been the story of the Scriptures from beginning to end. All the way through, the Scriptures have been at pains to point out to us that there are only two ways to live. Jesus said so. There is the broad way, which many are taking, which looks so logical but which leads to destruction; and there is the narrow way, which begins at the point where an individual stands alone before God and must make a decision, the narrow way that leads unto life, as God intended life to be lived {cf, Matt 7:13-14}.

Which way are you taking?

You young people here, you are facing the siren call of the world, with its appeal to luxury, comfort, ease, achievement, and acquisitiveness. It is not that Christians cannot use these things. The Apostle Paul tells us we are to use but not abuse the things of the world {cf, 1 Cor 9}. But throughout the Scriptures we are warned "Love not the things of the world, neither the things that are in the world," {cf, 1 Jn 2:15 KJV}. Do not make these the center around which you build your life. If this is all-important to you, you are doomed. You will not find life. Jesus said, if you try to save it on these terms, you will lose it, but if you lose your

life for his sake, you will save it, {cf, Matt 16:24-25, Mark 8:34-45, Luke 9:23-24}.

Let God heal the sickness of the human heart with its hunger for self-centeredness, self-exaltation, its desire always to be in the center of attention; let God heal that through the working of the gospel, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, then you can begin to live. It is the way that leads to life – life as God intended it. It may be that this life will not include in it luxuries and comforts, but they are down the line somewhere. God has these in mind for all his people. All that the heart hungers after will ultimately be supplied in Jesus Christ. This is why the Apostle Paul cries out,

For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all [things] are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's, {1 Cor 3:21b-23 RSV}.

But it is only available to those who begin with the healing of the heart and the cleansing of the life in Jesus Christ.

Prayer:

How foolish we have been, our Father, to try to satisfy our hearts with these empty things of culture and civilization. How foolish we have been to think that a man who is made to be satisfied by nothing but God shall ever find heart satisfaction in anything else. How often history has taught us the lesson that those who try to satisfy themselves with something less will end up by repudiating that thing itself, and finding life nothing but a weary desolation of spirit. How long, Father, before we begin to believe you. How long before we begin to take seriously the truth you have told us out of love for us, and turn from setting these secondary things first in our lives to make life count, not now but for eternity, that we might enter into life as you intended it to be lived. We pray in your name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Adam's Book

by Ray C. Stedman

In Genesis 5 we come to the first of the familiar genealogies of Scripture. These have proved to be a stumbling block to many who seek to read the Bible through. They start well, but they soon get to the desert of genealogies and give up their reading. These genealogies are somewhat difficult. I am tempted to handle them in the fashion of the old Scottish minister who was reading from the opening chapter of Matthew. He started reading,

“Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat Judah, [and he looked on ahead and saw the long list to follow and said,] and they kept on begetting one another all the way down this page and half-way into the next.”

But it is a mistake to ignore these genealogies because they are very fruitful, very suggestive, and very interesting.

This one begins with a brief introduction and continues, in a standard formula of presentation, throughout the chapter. Look at the first five verses:

This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made them in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters: Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred thirty years; and he died. {Gen 5:1-5 RSV}

Now it is important that we take careful note of the title of this chapter. The phrase, “This is the

book of the generations of” occurs only one other place in Scripture. Perhaps you have already guessed that it occurs the second time at the opening of the New Testament, the first verse of Matthew, “This is the book of the generations of Jesus Christ.” Here in Genesis it is, “This is the book of the generations of Adam.”

We are told here that God created man in the likeness of God. This is a recapitulation of what we have seen before. “Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man,” or literally, he named them *Adam*. Notice, he did not name them “The Adamses;” it was “Adam.” I think the revisers are quite right in translating this *Man*, because it is clear that we have here the story of a race, not merely an individual.

- There is only one man in the Old Testament, and that is Adam.
- There is only one man in the New Testament, and that is Jesus.
- There are only two men who have ever lived in history, Adam and Jesus – the first Adam and the last Adam; the first Man and the Second Man.

Thus these two books are introduced by this same phrase, “The book of the generations of ...” The phrase does not describe ancestry, but characteristics; it describes the nature of these two men as they develop into a race.

We are told further that it was God who named Adam. When Adam named the animals we saw that it was necessary that he understand their character, their nature. The name reflected the character. Therefore this suggests here that only God understands man. Only God can name man because

he is the only one who understands him. This is why we so desperately need the revelation of man that comes from God, and this is why psychology cannot be realistic or accurate unless it takes into account what we read in the Scriptures about man. God knows more about man than man does and this is strongly implied here.

The first thing said in Adam's book is that Seth was made in the image and likeness of his father. He was the exact duplicate of what Adam was, and so every son and daughter of Adam has been since. Again, this is why the Bible is so contemporary – it is dealing with us. We find ourselves here because we too are sons and daughters of Adam and share the same characteristics as Seth, the son of Adam, one generation removed. When the account uses this phrase, “in his own likeness, after his image,” it is referring to the hidden, inner pattern of man, and the actual outward characteristics. Seth was what Adam was, both in his inner life and his outer life. He was, therefore, a fallen man.

There then follows a chronology that runs through the rest of the chapter. There are several factors of great interest in this to which I will call your attention as we run through it:

- First, it is evident, if you study this carefully, that this chronology was not intended to be a time schedule. This was Bishop Ussher's mistake. He is the one who is responsible for the date that appears in some of our Bibles, 4004 BC, as the date of creation. He figured this all out (without the aid of a computer) back in the 17th century by using these Bible chronologies and thus came up with the date, 4004 BC. But scholars have since pointed out that this is not what they call a *tight chronology*. It does not trace an unbroken linkage of individuals. It highlights certain individuals. The son that is mentioned for each man is not necessarily the firstborn son. It says of each of them “he had other sons and daughters.” Out of that family one is selected, not necessarily the firstborn, and included in this genealogy.

Thus the intent of this is not to give us a tracing of time. This is underscored by the fact that the versions of this account in other languages have different numbers of years for the people involved. The Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, has a quite different period of years involved, as does

the Syriac Version. The obvious intent of the genealogy is to highlight certain selected names, and the reason for that we will note a bit later.

- Now the second factor to note about this account is the exceedingly long length of years these men lived. Most of them lived about nine hundred years. Perhaps there are times, as we read this, that we might wish we could imitate them. At other times we feel they were the most cursed of individuals to have lived that long. But the record remains and has raised a problem for many. There have been several attempts to explain this account.

Certain scholars suggest that what we have here is not individuals, but clans, family groups. The years given are the extent in which that family group held together as a single unit, much as the clans of Scotland have. But this is very difficult, because it is clear that several of these names are clearly individuals. Enoch, for instance, “walked with God.” That cannot refer to a clan; but to an individual. Seth, the son of Adam, is clearly an individual.

There are others who seek to explain this longevity by taking the years as lunar months, i.e., each “year” would approximate our modern month.

- If you figure out these men's ages on that basis, it does come out, rather interestingly, in the upper limits. It would make Methuselah probably about eighty-five or ninety years old, which would certainly not make him the oldest man living, but it does give him a reasonable length of years.
- But at the lower limits this system becomes absurd. It would mean that Seth became the father of Enosh when he was five years old, which is most remarkable!

Some of the miracles that are required by these explanations are far more incredible than to take the account in its natural rendering.

We must conclude, therefore, that this account indicates that conditions on earth were widely different before the Flood. We have had other confirmations of this. It was doubtless true that men lived much longer before the Flood than they do today. There have been a number of interesting scientific suggestions

made as to why this is true. I will not go into those, but if you care to pursue it they are very interesting. It is suggestive, however, that perhaps the years of a man, intended by God, were approximately a thousand years before a change took place that would introduce him to a different mode of existence. But, of course, all this was changed by the Fall of man.

- There is a third factor in this of great interest and that is the repeated occurrence throughout this account of the phrase, “and he died.” Every individual’s mention ends with the phrase, “and he died,” “and he died,” “and he died.” Like the tolling of a great bell, this phrase resounds throughout the passage. Eight times it is recorded “and he died,” contradicting the lie of Satan in the garden when he said to Eve, “If you eat of this fruit you will not die,” {cf, Gen 3:4}. But here is the factual record. Everyone who came along lived so many years and then he died.

This suggests also that all the forms of death, as we know them today, prevailed then. There was not only physical death, you did not have to be killed on a freeway back on those days but death took other forms. There were also present the incipient forms of death that we recognize in our lives today, things like malice, jealousy, hatred, meaninglessness, despair, and emptiness. All these are forms of death. They are the absence of life, as God intended life to be. That is what death is – the absence of life. These, too, prevailed back in those days, so that, as we saw last week, life before the flood was very much like it is today: a generation seeking after comfort and luxury, brilliant in its technological achievements, banding together in cities and thus creating an artificial form of life. Yet, in other ways, life was vastly different then, as is clearly evidenced by the length of life they lived.

But now in this account there is found one exception to the tolling of the bell of death; one man of whom it is not said, “and he died.” This is evidently the highlight of this chapter, the reason why all this is given to us:

When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. Enoch

walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. {Gen 5:21-24 RSV}

Evidently this is designed to focus our interest. The whole passage rolls on almost like a movie film until suddenly it stops and focuses on one man. Instead of saying, “and he died,” it says, “and he was not, for God took him.” Now the book of Hebrews, in the eleventh chapter, recounts the story of Enoch and tells us that this phrase, “and he was not, for God took him,” means that he was “taken up [or translated] so that he should not see death,” {cf, Heb 11:5}. In other words, here is one of only two men in all history who never died. Enoch is one; Elijah is the other. Enoch did not see death but he was taken up.

Twice it says in this account that, before he was taken up, “he walked with God.”

I love the story of the little girl who was telling her mother the story of Enoch. She said, “Enoch used to take long walks with God. One day he walked so far God said, ‘It’s too far to go back; come on home with me.’”

That is what happened to Enoch. Obviously, the intent of this passage is to focus our attention on this phrase, “he walked with God.”

What does it mean to walk with God? Here is a man who, in the midst of a brilliant but godless generation, walked with God. What does it mean? Well, it is exactly the same today as it was then. To walk with God is accomplished now in exactly the same way. Enoch did not literally walk with God, this is unquestionably a figurative expression, but a figurative walk involves the same thing today as it did then:

First, it means **he went in the same direction** God went. He was moving the way God was going. God is forever moving in human history. He is moving right now to accomplish certain things in human life, and he has been doing so for centuries. The man who walks with God is the man who knows which way God is going and goes the same way. Now what is that?

What direction is God moving? Perhaps we cannot indicate it positively, but we certainly can negatively: God moves always in unswerving

hostility toward sin. He is opposed to that which destroys and wrecks human life. No matter how good it looks, no matter how attractive it seems, how luridly it is painted, God is against it.

And the man who walks with God is the man who walks in unswerving hostility toward sin in his own life and refuses to make up with it or permit it to rule or to reign. That is the first thing in a walk with God.

Second, it means **to keep in step**. You cannot walk with somebody if you do not keep in step with him. Sooner or later there comes unbalance and you bump into him, or he bumps into you. Therefore there must a keeping in step.

Now it is most interesting that in the New Testament a walk is described this way. It is a series of steps. A walk is not like moving on one of these endless belts. It is not smooth; it is a repetition of almost falling.

Have you ever analyzed your walk? Every time you take a step you almost fall. You allow your body to go off balance and then you catch yourself with your other leg. Then you shift to that and you almost fall again, only to catch yourself. That is what a walk is; living on the verge of a fall all the time.

And the man or women who walks with God is the man or woman who lives on the verge of a fall. That is an adventurous life. That means if God is not there to support and strengthen you, down you go. You are counting on him to come through and to keep you steady. That is what a walk with God involves. It is always a walk of venturing out. It is never satisfied with the status quo, never content to remain in a quiet state, doing nothing, waiting, enjoying one's self; it is forever venturing out. It is forever moving at the same pace God moves. It means taking a step when God insists.

I have discovered in my own life (and see it reflected in many others) a tendency to want to sit down after I have taken a step and rest awhile. We all feel God pressuring us to do something – take a new step, stop this, start that, or venture out in a new direction – and after God pushes us awhile, we do it. Perhaps we have been resisting for quite awhile before, but then we take the step and we feel good. We have accomplished something. Then God comes along and says, “Now I want you to take another step.” And we say, “Oh, no, Lord. I had a hard enough time taking this one. Just leave

me alone now for awhile. You walk on for a bit and then come back.”

But the worst thing that can happen to us is for God to do exactly that.

That is what he did with the children of Israel when they came to the edge of the Promised Land. He said, “I want you to walk with me into the land.” But they said, “No, not us. You go by yourself but we're not going.” So God said, “All right, then you will wander for forty years in the wilderness until you come back to this same place. I'll leave you alone. If you don't want to go in, you don't have to go in.” But that is the terrible thing about God, he gives us what we want. If we want it badly enough he will let us have it, and it will be the worst thing that ever happened to us.

But Enoch was a man who had learned to move as God moved, and to walk in step with him.

The third thing is that **there was no controversy between them**. They were in agreement. “Except two be in agreement, how can they walk together?” says the Scriptures {cf, Amos 3:3}. They must be in agreement. And this is how we must be. There must be no controversy between us if we are going to walk with God, but we must agree with things as he sees them.

What changes this makes in our lives! In our Sunday School class some of us were wrestling with the problem of the Christian view of war. I could see people struggling with having to change their mind about certain things they thought were true but which the Word of God corrected. It was a severe, difficult struggle. But if you want to walk with God you must see things as he sees them.

Enoch did. For three hundred years he walked with God, and this is the same activity to which we are called. We are to walk “as children of light,” {Eph 5:8}. We are to walk “in the Spirit,” {Gal 5:16, 5:25 KJV}. We are to walk “worthy of God” {1 Th 2:12 KJV}, through the midst of a godless generation, exactly as Enoch did.

But notice that Enoch did not always walk with God. The first 65 years of his life were quite another story. Evidently, he reflected for 65 years the same godless attitude as those around him. You ask, “Well, what started him walking with God then?” And the answer is given to us here. It was not receiving his Social Security payments when he reached 65, but it was the birth of a son, a boy

whom he named Methuselah. It says so. "Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years." So it was the birth of this baby that started him walking with God.

Surely there is more to this than simply the fact that he became a father. I have noticed that becoming a father has a profound effect upon a young man. It makes him more thoughtful, makes him more serious, more sober in his outlook on life. It does have a very beneficial effect, but there is more to it here than that and it is revealed by the name that Enoch gave to his son. Methuselah is a very interesting name. It means, literally, "His death shall bring it," or loosely translated, "When he dies, it will come." What will come? The Flood!

Enoch, we are told in another passage of Scripture, was given a revelation from God. He saw the direction of the divine movement, looked on to the end of the culture, the comforts, and the mechanical marvels of his own day, to the fact there must come an inevitable judgment on the principle of evil in human life. He saw the certainty of destruction of a world living only to please itself. When he saw it his baby was born, so, in obedience, evidently to God's word, he named the baby, "When he dies, it will come."

This revelation to Enoch is given in the next-to-the-last book of the Bible. If you want to see what a unit the Bible is, notice how Jude and Revelation tie in with Genesis. In the 14th verse of Jude we read, concerning certain godless men who would be present in any age but especially in the last age:

It was of these also that Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own passions, loudmouthed boasters, flattering people to gain advantage. {Jude 1:14-16 RSV}

That was the world of Enoch's day, and Enoch saw the end of it. He saw that the Lord was coming to execute judgment on it. Now I know there are those who take that passage in Jude to refer to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in

a secondary way it does refer to that. But its primary reference is to the judgment of the Flood. Enoch saw the coming of the Flood and he named his child, "When he dies, it will come." If you figure out the chronology of this from the life of Noah, who was six hundred years old when the Flood came, you will find that the very year Methuselah died, the Flood came. It happened exactly as God had predicted.

But the grace of God is revealed here in the fact that this boy lived longer than any man ever lived, nine hundred and sixty-nine years! That is how long God waited before he fulfilled the threat implied in the boy's name.

Can you imagine what a fascination this boy must have been to his family? How they watched him every time he went out!

But God let him live longer than anybody else to reveal the heart and compassion of a God who dislikes to bring judgment but does so because of the moral demands made upon his nature of truth. Now we see the reason for this table of genealogy:

1. First, it is given to highlight the supreme purpose of revelation, to teach us the possibility and importance of a walk with God. That is what men are called to do, to walk with God. The greatest glory that can come to any human being is to learn to walk with and be a friend to God. Enoch was the friend of God.
2. Second, this genealogical table is given to warn us of the day when evil shall ultimately be stopped. God cannot allow human evil to increase endlessly. He restrains it, but when it reaches a certain limit, he judges it. That is the repeated story of history. This is the whole message of the book of Jude. It happens again and again in history. But, as Paul tells us in First Corinthians 10, there is always a way of escape provided; that way of escape is indicated again in a most fascinating way in this chapter by the meaning of the names listed. There is some difference among authorities as to the meaning of these names, depending upon the root from which they are judged to be taken. But one authority gives a most interesting sequence of meanings:
 - The list begins with Seth, which means "Appointed."

- Enosh, his son, means “Mortal;” and
- His son, Kenan, means “Sorrow.”
- His son Mahalalel, means “The Blessed God.”
- He named his boy Jared which means “Came Down,” and
- His boy, Enoch, means “Teaching.”
- Methuselah, as we saw, means “His death shall bring;”
- Lamech means “Strength,” and
- Noah, “Comfort.”

Now put that all together:

God has Appointed that Mortal man shall Sorrow; but The Blessed God, Came Down, Teaching, that His Death Shall Bring, Strength and Comfort.

Is this book from God?

God has given you and me a life to watch just as Methuselah's generation watched his: **It is your own life.**

God has written *Methuselah* on each one of us. “His death shall bring it,” or “When he dies, it will come.” How far is it till the end of the world for you? When you die, that is the end of the world. That is the end of man's day. Is it fifty years from now? Ten? Tomorrow? Who knows? But at any moment, when he dies, it will come.

Is it not foolish how we try to escape the inevitability of the end? Yet everything hangs on that.

It will be for us the end of Adam's Book, when all that Adam is in us is at an end, there is nothing more to be recorded in it. Then only what Christ has written in us will survive. You have heard the little motto,

Only one life, 'twill soon be past.
Only what's done for Christ will last.

That is a pithy expression of what we find in this chapter. In Revelation when John saw the dead standing before God, the books also were opened ... What books? Adam's book, and Jesus' book. The book of the generations of Adam and the book of the generations of Jesus Christ.

Now one question lingers: What are you doing today in this godless generation?

Are you walking with God? Have you learned to keep step with the Almighty? Have you learned to trust what he says and walk in his direction and to keep step with him, in agreement with him?

That is the only basis for any hope of escaping the judgment of death, as Enoch did. Jesus said, “Because I live, you shall live also,” {cf, John 14:19b}. “He that believeth in me shall never die,” {cf, John 11:26 RSV}.

For the believer in Christ death loses its character, its fearfulness. Death is but a momentary transition into the life God has for you.

Prayer:

Thank you, Father, for helping us to view reality, to see through the tinsel, the glitter, the sham, the illusion of life. How helpful it is to see the possibilities of a walk with you as Enoch walked with you, and to believe you and trust you. Teach us so to walk that we may overcome the world, and one day you will say to us, “Come on home, it's too far to go back.” We thank you in Jesus' name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Signs of Collapse

by Ray C. Stedman

In this present series we have been looking at the great principles that govern human society, those principles which produce straining social problems, such as war, crime, poverty, unequal distribution of food, improper use of leisure, and urban blight. These all arise when men who are made in the image of God, but have lost the likeness of God, seek to fulfill the original command of God to master the earth and fill it, but without the Spirit of God within. As is so evident in our day, man succeeds only in darkening the skies, ravishing the ground, poisoning the water, setting men against each other in violence and cruelty, and in spreading death, fear, and hatred throughout the earth. But all this is done in the midst of increasing comfort and luxury and the technical brilliance that builds impressive cities and produces astonishing gadgets of incredible complexity and power. The seeds of all this are found in the first five chapters in Genesis, as we have been seeing.

Now no house built upon such a shaky foundation can long stand, therefore the record of history has been the collapse of one civilization after another. Arnold Toynbee has indicated there have been in the past some twenty-one or more different civilizations, each one in turn collapsing and giving way to another. Therefore we should not be at all surprised to find here, in this definitive passage of Scripture, a description of the signs that accompany the imminent collapse of a civilization. Since many of us feel that we are living in such an hour today, it is easy to see how contemporary this is.

The Bible, as you know, speaks of “times and seasons” in the affairs of men {cf, Dan 2:21, Acts 1:7, 1 Th 5:1}. *Times* are those major divisions of history which are marked by a special character. The Bible speaks, for instance, of the “times of ignorance,” {Acts 17:30} and by that it is referring to the ages before the coming of Christ, when men lived in relative ignorance of the understanding of

God. It speaks again of the “times of the restitution of all things,” {Acts 3:21 KJV} in the future when God would work out all his purposes and unite all things together in Christ. We use language somewhat similar. We speak of the Dark Ages, characterized by widespread ignorance and moral darkness. But *seasons* are those divisions of time in which certain events come to the fore. I do not think I can do better than to quote Archbishop Trench, from his Synonyms of the Old Testament, in this respect:

The “seasons” are the joints or articulations in the times; the critical epoch-making periods, ordained of God, when all that has been slowly, and often without observation, ripening through long ages, is mature and comes to the birth in grand decisive events which constitute at once the close of one period and the commencement of another.

Remember that Jesus said to his disciples after his resurrection, “the times and seasons are not for you to know,” {cf, Acts 1:7}. They will unfold as history goes on its way, but we cannot predict when they will occur in the span of time. It is very important that we recognize these divisions when they do occur, and especially to understand what our Lord meant when he said, “As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the coming of the Son of Man,” {cf, Matt 24:37}. Now we are studying the days of Noah. Our Lord linked these two epochs together and said that one is the parallel of the other. If we are living in the days immediately preceding the return of Jesus Christ we shall find similar conditions to the days of Noah. So in Genesis 6 we have the real story behind the headlines of history. Here we find three steps traced for us that mark the signs of the imminent collapse of civilization.

The first one is given to us in Verses 1 through 4 and, as we shall see, it is that of a demonic invasion:

When men began to multiply on the face of the ground and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose. Then the Lord said, “My a spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh, but his days shall he a hundred and twenty years.” The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown. {Gen 6:1-4 RSV}

Interest immediately focuses on the question, Who were these sons of God? What kind of beings did these strange things?

- One suggestion that we must take note of is that here we have the blending of two lines; the line of Cain, and the line of Seth (which have been followed briefly in previous chapters); and that here is the intermarriage between these two lines, that of the godly (the line of Seth), and the ungodly (the line of Cain). But there are several severe objections to this idea. One, of course, is that this would make the line of Cain the “sons of God,” and that hardly seems fitting in view of the character that is given to us in the Bible of Cain and his descendants. It seems much more likely that that description would be applied to the sons of Seth, rather than those of Cain. Then, too, it appears that the ungodly have only sons, while the godly have daughters.

Now that is a perfectly acceptable view as far as I am concerned, since I have four daughters. But it hardly seems possible to accept such a view.

It is all too clear that this theory does not take account of all the factors evidenced.

- There is an alternative view that takes note of the fact that in Scripture it is only by a specific divine act of creation that any being can be termed *a son of God*. God is a Spirit, and man is flesh, and in the New Testament we are told

that “that which is born of the flesh is flesh, but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” {John 3:6 RSV}. So you cannot have men of the flesh termed *sons of God*, except a divine creative act be performed. In the New Testament, Adam is called *a son of God* because he is the direct result of divine creation, Jesus Christ is called *the Son of God* because he is eternally begotten of the Father; and believers are called *sons of God* because they are born again by faith in Jesus Christ, in a divine creative act.

- Also, in the Bible, angels are called *sons of God* for they came directly from the creating hand of God and are not reproduced sexually, as men are. It is interesting that in the Old Testament every other use of this term *sons of God* refers to the angels. You will find in the book of Job that the angels are called sons of God {Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7}.

Now we learn from Jude and Peter in the New Testament that there was a fall of angels, and the time of that fall is given as “the days of Noah.” There are two very interesting passages that link up with Genesis 6. In First Peter, Chapter 3, we have a passage that has been a puzzle to many but which does directly apply to this account:

Peter says of Jesus that he went “in the spirit” and preached to “the spirits in prison,” {1 Pet 3:19}. Now there has been much controversy as to what this meant.

Some have thought it meant that Jesus descended into hell and preached to the spirits in hell during the three days between his crucifixion and resurrection. Personally, I do not ascribe to that theory at all. I think it means that it was through the Spirit that Jesus preached in the days of Noah, speaking in the person of Noah. Noah, we are told, was “a preacher of righteousness” {2 Pet 2:5}, and the Spirit of Christ preached through him. But, at any rate, that is somewhat beside the point.

The passage goes on to say that these were spirits in prison,

... who formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. {1 Pet 3:20 RSV}

Also in Second Peter, Chapter 2, Verse 4, Peter recounts a fall of the angels:

For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to the pits, of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, {2 Pet 2:4-5a RSV}

Note that he links this fall with the days of Noah. Then in the book of Jude we have another reference to this event:

And the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day; just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. {Jude 1:6-7 RSV}

There Jude gives us the nature of the sin of the angels. He said it was like that in Sodom and Gomorrah; it was “unnatural lust.” This you can see is directly in parallel with the statement in Genesis 6, that the “sons of God” came in to “the daughters of men” and married them, taking wives as they chose. This is evidently regarded in the Scriptures as an unnatural act. Thus we have the picture of fallen angels joining in sexual intercourse with the daughters of men and producing a strange race.

There have been those who object to this idea by pointing out that Jesus said that angels are sexless. In Matthew 22, Verse 30, he does say that those who are in the resurrection “will neither marry nor be given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven.” It must be noted, however, that he adds the words, “in heaven,” as opposed to the angels in hell. Some have suggested that perhaps there was a time when angels did have sexual powers, and this, of course, would permit the kind of thing recorded here. However, it seems more likely that the explanation is given to us by Jude when he says of these angels that they “left their proper dwelling” {Jude 1:6}, and presumably took up improper dwelling places. Now bodies, in Scripture, are called dwelling places. The very term Jude

uses is, elsewhere in Scripture, applied to the body. Its use here implies that the angels took up residence where they did not belong. This, therefore, is suggestive of what we have in the New Testament in the days of our Lord, in the many, many cases of demonic possession recorded so frequently in the pages of the gospels. Evil spirits, fallen angels, possessed the bodies of men, and these demon-possessed men married women and produced a race of strange beings called here in Genesis 6, “the Nephilim.” They were a race of giants. The word *Nephilim* is confirming of this whole idea, because it means “the fallen ones.”

All this strongly suggests that demonic possession has the ability to affect genetic structure. The chromosomes are changed so that the progeny are markedly different; a sort of mutation takes place, and the result is a pronounced change in the children of such a union. We know today that LSD has this kind of an effect upon the genetic structure. Chromosomal changes take place and children can be malformed and mentally deficient because of the use of LSD by their parents. It is interesting that, in the book of Revelation, the Bible links drugs with demonism and suggests that drugs are a means by which the human spirit is opened up to the control of demonic beings.

Time Magazine reported a new theory to the effect that “a genetic abnormality may predispose a man to antisocial behavior, including crimes of violence...” A normal male baby has an XY chromosome pattern, but occasionally one is found with an XYY pattern. According to an all-woman team of researchers in Scotland, this “may be a super-male, over aggressive and potentially criminal.” It was further noted that “the XYY (males) averaged 6 ft 1 inch tall whereas the average (for others tested) was 5 ft 7 inches.”

It is clear that the result of this union of demon-possessed men with women was a race of mighty men, “men of renown.” Here, I think, is the explanation for the stories of mythology with which many of you are familiar, the demi-gods – half man and half god – such as Hercules, and others. Mythology is no mere invention of the mind of man; it grows out of the traditions, memories, and legends which were a corruption and perversion of primitive truths. We are told in this passage that this occurred “also afterward.” This “also afterward” means that after the Flood a similar incursion of demonic beings took place.

This second invasion resulted in the presence in the land of Canaan of certain gigantic races which are called in our Bible, the Canaanites. Many of you who have stumbled over those long lists of “ites” in the Old Testament are familiar with these various races – the Jebusites, the Geshurites, the Hittites, etc. All of these are divisions of the Nephilim (they are also called the Rephaim in the Old Testament) who were already in the land when Abraham came to the promised land. They represent an attempt on the part of demonic powers to derail the divine program of bringing a Redeemer into the world through the human race.

It is interesting that archaeologists have now discovered the giant-cities of Bashan, and they confirm the fact that there did exist in this area races of gigantic beings whose beds are ten, eleven, or twelve feet long. (They had king-size beds in those days, but only because they needed them.) It was these people that the Israelites were commanded to exterminate completely. It was these giant cities they were to wipe off the face of the earth; to exterminate the whole populace and their animals.

When this invasion of demonic powers into mankind takes place, notice that God, in his governing grace, immediately limits it:

Then the LORD said, “My spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.”
{Gen 6:3 RSV}

That is sometimes regarded as a reference to the length of life of man before the Flood, but in this context I think it is clear that it means, rather, the number of years before the Flood, the length of time in which God would permit this kind of thing to go on in human society. The one thing the Bible makes clear everywhere is that God controls human society; he restrains demonic forces and only permits them to operate to a limited degree and for a limited period of time. Here we have clearly suggested the idea that he marked off before the Flood a hundred and thirty years, which would be the time when Noah would be permitted to preach the grace of God and extend an invitation to the people of his day to turn from their wicked ways and revive the promise of salvation. This First Peter confirms. Noah was indeed a preacher of godliness, of righteousness, and the people refused to

hear his word during the one hundred and twenty years of the preaching of grace.

Dr. Charles Malik, who was for a long time President of the United Nations and delegate from Lebanon, once said,

... we are still living, as the Germans say, *zwischen den zeiten* (between the times) when demonic forces can quickly soar very high and can take possession of the world in very short order.

There is a word from a world statesman confirming the fact that demonic forces are at work in human society. The first mark of an imminent collapse of civilization is this appearance of demonic powers at loose. They manifest themselves primarily in open and unchecked wickedness.

We shall see that this is **the second mark** given to us in the first part of Verse 5:

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, {Gen 6:5a RSV}

Unusually intense (that is the meaning of “great”) and very widespread (in the earth) wickedness – that is the second mark. The whole of the world of that day was involved in this. This wickedness is described in detail in various portions of Scripture. Wickedness is always the absence of the life of God at work in human society. It is always opposed to the things of God. Perhaps the most vivid, most accurate and detailed description of wickedness given to us in the New Testament is in the book of Galatians, where the apostle describes the works of the flesh. It is the flesh that is “enmity against God” and produces wickedness. He says,

Now the works of the flesh are plain [i.e., they are easy to identify; they are obvious]: **immorality, impurity, licentiousness** [notice how he begins on the sexual level], **idolatry, sorcery** [witchcraft, or anything to do with the occult], **enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like.**
{Gal 5:19-21a RSV}

That is wickedness. It is very noteworthy that in every listing of wickedness you will find, first, sexual wickedness. In the gospels it was “unclean”

spirits that were possessing the bodies of men. This word unclean is used elsewhere in the New Testament as the word for lust, therefore these were lustful spirits, i.e., sexually twisted and distorted spirits. Their presence in society is always marked by outbreaks of sexual perversity. This is what Paul describes in Romans 1, where he is tracing the decline and fall of a society. He gives there, as the ultimate sign of imminent collapse, the turning of men to unnatural lusts with other men, and women to unnatural lusts with other women, and the breakdown of society at this sexual level. Thus we have clearly, as the second mark, a widespread and unusual manifestations of sexual wickedness; not sporadic, but continuous; not localized, but everywhere. Naturally there have been occurrences of this sort in every civilization at some time. But here, it has a double character; it becomes a continuous thing and is everywhere taking place.

Now in the second half of that same verse we have **the third mark of the imminent collapse of civilization**. It is what Moses calls here, evil (debased) imaginations.

The Lord saw ... that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. {Gen 6:5a, 6:5c RSV}

The outward wickedness rested upon a deeper corruption within. The “imagination of the heart” are the desires and urges for ever more stimulating experiences, what Paul calls in Ephesians “deceitful lusts,” which constantly urge men and women, boys and girls, to try to find something more exciting; what in modern parlance we call *kicks*, something that satisfies and is exciting. Now this urge for kicks constitutes debased imaginations. They would find expression in any society in the creative arts, those which depend upon imagination for their motivation and expression, such as literature, art, and drama.

It is most significant that more and more today we are finding this area given over to the expression of the salacious, the lewd, and the sensual. Recently I heard of a teacher in public school who refused to teach literature anymore because of the salacious content of what he had to teach. He simply gave up his training and professional background in order to avoid having to teach this kind of stuff.

All of this is summed up for us in two words in Verse 11:

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. {Gen 6:11 RSV}

Corruption is inward pollution, the polluting of the mind, the heart, the imagination, the inner nature. The inner kingdom becomes extremely sensual and is polluted. The result is outward *violence*, destructiveness, the outbreak of cruelty and violence on every side.

There you have the marks of an impending collapse of civilization. Rather sobering, isn't it?

When civilization reaches this stage then the Bible clearly implies that **judgment** is certain, by divine fiat. We read on in Verse 6:

And the LORD was sorry that he had made men on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. {Gen 6:6-8 RSV}

When the account says, “God is sorry,” it is really the word, “God *repented*.” We know from other Scriptures that it is impossible for God to repent. He does not change his mind like man does. But this is a powerful figure to express in a vivid way the anger and determination of God. When society reaches this stage of dissolution and deterioration, God's anger burns. It appears that he has changed his mind completely even though he is but acting on principles that are entirely consistent with his own being.

Yet, in the midst of this, we read that it grieved him, and grief is always the activity of love. What we finite human beings do not understand is that God's love and wrath are exactly the same thing. They are two sides of the same coin. What entrances us and warms us about God, and draws us to him, is love, the manifestation of his total being. He is the God of love, who loves regardless of merit. This is what attracts us. But it is because we respond that he appears to us in that way. To those who reject his love, the same quality in God

becomes wrath and it seems to be a wall of fire, burning and consuming everything.

We can see this also in ourselves. It is our love that causes us to be angry at anything which injures what we love. You injure a mother's child in the mother's presence and watch her love flame out in wrath and anger against you. Thus we have here clearly described a time when man, in his rejection of God, passes beyond the place of seeing God as love, and begins to experience his love as wrath. But it is exactly the same thing.

With mankind goes the whole creation because the creation is linked with man. The animals were made for man, so when man goes, the animals must go as well. But always there is the shining of grace, Verse 8:

But Noah found favor [or, literally, *grace*] in the eyes of the LORD. {Gen 6:8 RSV}

God was calling throughout this whole age, just as he is calling in our age today, pleading with men to turn from their ways, to resist the widespread lie of Satan. One man and his family turned and found grace in God's sight. He did not deserve it, and he could equally have turned and gone the other way, but he responded to the wooing and pleading of God and found grace in his sight.

That same grace is why we are here this morning. Bring this down to this 20th-century hour, and draw the parallel between the days of Noah and the days in which we live. You can see it plainly everywhere. We must remember that if we are delivered from the wrath to come, if we escape the judging hand of God upon society, it is not because of anything we have done; it is the manifestation of God's grace.

Remember the Christian who saw a drunkard staggering down the street wallowing in his own vomit, and turned to his friend to say, "There but for the grace of God go I." We can all say that.

What has kept us? What has brought us to the truth? Was it any goodness on our part? No, it is God's grace.

It is that he loved us and called us, he wooed us and won us, seeking us out and, through many influences upon us, bringing us at last to see that the age in which we live is an age under the bondage of a lie. He has opened our eyes, partially at least, to the truth, till we have turned to the Lord Jesus and rested under the grace of God.

As our age deteriorates, as other ages have done before us, and our civilization nears the point of utter collapse, we can thank God that we have been snatched away as brands from the burning, like Noah and his family, if our hearts are responsive to the appeal of God's grace.

The Way of Escape

by Ray C. Stedman

Surely interest quickens as we come to the subject of the Flood, but I am sorry to note that it is probably interest aroused by the possibility of controversy. Whenever the Flood is mentioned a dozen questions come rushing to our minds. Did the Flood really occur? How widespread was it? Was it universal, or only partial? Was there really an ark, and was it large enough to hold all the animals? Where did all the water come from? These, and a dozen more like them, seek an answer when we come to this subject.

But we must note right away that Scripture does not focus on these things. We shall try to answer these questions as we go along, but we must not miss the emphasis of Scripture. Doubtless Hollywood would turn this story of Noah and the Flood into an extravaganza of terror. The cameras would zoom in on weeping mothers, crazed animals, crashing buildings and other fantasies of horror. But, in Scripture, the Great Flood is not the center of attention; it is the story of one man and his family. This is not an account of world disaster, essentially, but it is the story of survival. Why did Noah survive the Flood? That is the supreme question, not why or how did the Flood occur, but why did one man and his family survive?

Thus the account of the Flood opens with an answer to that question, given to us in Genesis 6:

These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. {Gen 6:9-10 RSV}

Here is the sort of man whom God reckons worthy to survive a world disaster. Let us remind ourselves at this point of the words of Jesus, "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the coming of the son of Man," {cf, Matt 24:37, Luke 17:26}. Every one is well aware of the imminent possibility of worldwide destruction that hangs over our present society. We know that our human race has come to the place where it is trembling on the verge of self-extinction. The more we go on in time the more the possibility looms, and the less likely it seems that we can find some way to escape it.

If this be true, then we are living in days similar to the days of Noah, the days before the Flood. At such a time the eyes of God are not upon Washington, or Moscow, or Peking. Not that these cities are outside the scope of God's interest, but they represent events which are mere finger exercises in the divine providence. But Scripture tells us, "The eyes of God run to and fro upon the earth to show himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is right toward him," {2 Chr 16:9}. That is where Scripture focuses its interest.

So the center of attention of this whole story is the man Noah, and the family that accompanied him into the ark. Now there are three things given here about Noah that we must note:

1. First, he was said to be *righteous*. Whenever we say that, most of us read it as though it said, "Noah was good." We are tempted then to say, "Well, that explains everything. God saw that Noah was good and therefore he chose him to be saved." Obviously, you choose the

good man to be saved. But that is not what it says. The actual fact is that God made Noah righteous and then he became good. It was because he was first righteous that he became good. God made him righteous because he believed.

This is what the book of Hebrews tells us, that Noah “by faith” was “warned of God” of things not yet seen, and he believed God, “constructed an ark,” thus “condemned the world and became the heir of that righteousness which comes by faith,” {Heb 11:7 RSV}. That is the only kind of righteousness the Bible knows anything about. It is a righteousness which is not a result of our working, not a result of our best efforts put forth to try to please God, but a righteousness which comes by believing God. That is the kind that Noah had.

Once when I visited a college fraternity house, a boy asked me what he considered to be a difficult question: “If there are two men who do the same deed, exactly the same thing, but one of them is a Christian and the other is not, are not the deeds they do equally good in the eyes of God?” My answer of course was, “No, they are not.” He anticipated that answer, I think, and went on to point out that Christianity therefore must be unrealistic and impractical. It presumes to judge the quality of identical deeds as being different in their character and thus is totally unrealistic. I tried to point out to him that it was he who was being unrealistic, for he was merely judging from the effects the deeds had upon the persons benefited, but that he was taking no consideration of the effect the deeds had upon the persons who performed them, or that the motives of the heart would make considerable difference.

I have known many deeds that were good in the common usage of the term, but they were really very evil deeds because of the motive from which they were performed.

We are told that, “Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart” {cf, 1 Sam 16:7}, not only in the realm of motive, but also, more precisely, in the realm of the origin of deeds. Who is acting within the individual? God knows that man is incapable of doing anything in himself; he can only give himself to another power to operate through him. God’s great question of mankind is:

Whose power is it to which you give yourself to operate and to work?

I went on to point out to this lad that Jesus had said to the rich young ruler, “Only God is good,” {cf, Luke 18:19}. Therefore the only good deeds in God’s sight are those which he himself does. God’s great question of man is as to the origin of his deeds, whether they are the result of the activity of God in human hearts, or some other power. That is the question we are facing concerning Noah. Noah believed God, and because he believed him, God was at work in Noah. Therefore he was righteous because only God can be righteous. Noah had received that righteousness which is God’s righteousness, not man’s which is imparted not by works, but by faith, by believing the Word of God. The first chapters of Romans speak much of this.

2. Second, we are told that Noah was *blameless* in his generation. The nearest English equivalent to the Hebrew word translated *blameless* is the word “whole.” To borrow a book title from Dr. Paul Tournier, Noah was, *A Whole Person In A Broken World*. How descriptive that is of this man. He lived in a world filled with violence, with cruelty, with sexual perversions. When these are evident in history they are always signs and manifestations of inner turmoil, of tensions and frustrations within, of fears, anxieties, worries, wild urges and impulses. In what way, therefore, was Noah blameless? Why was he whole when the rest of society had gone to pieces? The answer is, because he was righteous. God always begins at the heart of the matter. Surely this is the problem with society today. It is because we refuse the righteousness which God offers by faith, the basis of human operation which he alone can give, that man cannot be good. But the man who receives that righteousness becomes good. This again the Apostle Paul makes clear in the opening chapters of Romans. So Noah found the secret of control. It was an inner peace imparted by the indwelling of God, the righteousness which comes by faith. Therefore he was blameless; he was a whole person, well adjusted, able to handle the situations that came his way, at peace with himself internally.

3. Third, as a result of the first two factors, he walked with God. This means a daily experience of contact with God. Noah did not look back to his conversion and rely on that as his contact with God. He had a daily contact. He was in continual communication with God. He talked with God about the building of the ark. Not only did he get the original blueprints from God, but I am sure he discussed with him the whole detail of the building of the ark as to just how it was to be constructed. He walked and lived with God from day to day. This is the secret of a man who survives the disaster of his age. This is the life that wins.
4. Now there is a fourth thing mentioned concerning Noah here, interjected into this account, but not without reason: "Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth." He was head of a family. He did not turn aside from the normal enterprises and occupations of life; he was a normal individual. Here is the first of many passages in the Bible which speak of the relationship of a head to his family. It is apparent that, through Noah's faith, these three also were saved. I do not want to press this unduly, but there are other passages in the New Testament that describe how the faith of the head of a family affects the whole family. I do not mean to imply that Shem, Ham, and Japheth did not also believe in God. I think they did. But the point that is suggested here is that they believed in God primarily because their father did, and that a head of a family exercises a unique relationship and control over the rest of his family in the eyes of God.

There is much more that needs to be explored in this respect. Certainly we Americans have lost many family secrets. We do not understand how families operate. We need to learn again how God views a family, and the unique responsibility and control that a head of a family can employ. It was not due to Shem, Ham, and Japheth that they entered the ark; it was because of Noah.

The second major emphasis in this account moves from focusing upon this man, who is a picture and prototype of the kind of people who can survive a world disaster, to emphasizing **the character of the age** in which he lived:

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth." {Gen 6:11-13 RSV}

Note the number of times throughout this account we have the diagnosis of an age given: corruption and violence. We have already seen the detail of this corruption and violence. They are always the mark, in any civilization, of an impending disaster. When they become widespread and intense in character, they mark the imminence of collapse. History confirms that this is always the way God acts in society. Here is the pattern man follows. Man is by nature and creation a fully dependent being. He must depend upon God for his life, his breath, his activity, his intelligence, his power of choice and everything he does. He is the most dependent of creatures, even more so than the animals. He lacks even the instincts which animals have. Yet, fallen man denies this most important point of his life and is forever trying to assert his ability to do everything himself. This is even reflected in our television ads. "Please, Mother! I'd rather do it myself!" That is the slogan of humanity and always has been. But when man attempts it, he soon has everything in such a terrible state that it can no longer be controlled. He lacks the rationale, the intelligence, the knowledge to control. He deludes himself into thinking that he has the ability to control his life and, as a result, it soon gets into a state beyond control. Nature (including human nature) goes out of control. The delicate balance of life is tilted beyond the critical point, and then a collapse occurs. This has proved again and again to be true in the history of civilization and, occasionally, as we have in this account, of nature itself. It may well be that the Flood was brought about by man's intemperate misuse of elemental forces, that he misused his power over nature and tripped the balance in a delicate scale, which resulted in the collapse of certain elemental forces that brought about the Flood.

This, of course, is exactly what is threatening today. It is in line with the Apostle Paul's revelation of the way God moves in human affairs. He

revealed that God gives man over, gives him up to exercise the folly he insists upon, in order that he might see from the results how foolish he has been. I do not think this has ever been put better than by Helmut Thielicke in his book, *How The World Began*. I would like to quote a paragraph or two from that, because he has put it so well.

The powers of destruction are still in the midst of creation. The atoms – did not God create them? – need only to be split, the bacteria let loose, hereditary factors monkeyed with, genes tampered with, and poisons need only to be distilled from the gifts of creation – oh yes, the powers of destruction are still with us and the heavenly ocean is still heaving and surging behind its dams. We live solely by the grace of God, who has fixed the bounds of destruction. The dreadful secret of the world revealed in the first chapters of this old Book is that man is capable of renouncing and cutting himself off from this very grace which holds in check the power of destruction.

No sooner does [man] worship his own power – no sooner does he regard flesh or atomic power as his “arm” and surrender to the illusion that he can hold the world in order and balance by military potential and political intelligence [how appropriate that is to this day] – then he has already renounced God’s grace and breached the dam that holds the heavenly ocean. When he imagines that he can free men from need and fear by means of the welfare state he is already declaring himself independent of this sustaining grace and pressing the buttons which set off the secret signals of catastrophe.

Above all, when we are people who calmly tolerate the routine business of the church’s baptizing, marrying, and burying, but otherwise go on stubbornly worshipping our anxieties and succumbing to prosperity and its self indulgence and superficiality; when therefore we are people who do not see their neighbor in his need and thus lose our souls, then and precisely then, we too are playing fast and loose with that grace which guards the dikes of rum.

And therefore this world, which we think we govern by our own power, may one day come crashing down upon us, because the thing we play with so presumptuously has gotten beyond our control, and because God is not to be mocked. He may suddenly cease to

hold the ocean in check and the unleashed elements will sweep us into their vortex.

Those eloquent words describe exactly what happened in the days of Noah, and we face the same chilling possibility in our own day.

The third emphasis in this account is therefore most timely. God moves immediately to present to us a description of **the way of escape**. It is found in the description of the ark.

Make you an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make a roof [or window] for the ark, and finish it a cubit above; and set the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. {Gen 6:14-16 RSV}

Obviously this is not a mythical account. The instructions that are given here are precise, matter-of-fact, and explicit. This whole account is of that character. There is nothing vague, nothing mystical about it. There was an ark and it did save Noah and the animals, and all of Scripture is confirmation of the fact. We may discount the rumors that still exist that the ark is still somewhere around. Perhaps it may yet be discovered high on the shoulders of Mt. Ararat, for there have been some rather strange accounts of men who have allegedly seen it there. But our faith does not rest upon rumors. We can discount these rumors, at least until they have been established as facts, but the historicity of the ark remains unimpaired. This story of the Flood is also supported by flood legends from primitive peoples all over the earth.

But God’s way, as we have seen before in these stories in Genesis, is to hide wheels within wheels. Not only was the ark a literal boat which was literally used in that early day to save a civilization, but it is also a symbol or type, pointing to something else. The Apostle Peter hints very strongly that the ark is a type, a shadow, of the Lord Jesus Christ. See how every detail of the ark checks in that direction. We are told:

- First, that it was made of gopher wood. I do not know what gopher wood is and apparently

no one does. The nearest guess of Bible scholars is that it is cedar wood. But the word *gopher* is an interesting one. *Gopher* and the word *pitch* which occurs in this passage, (and also the Hebrew word used later on in the books of Moses for “atonement”) are all from the same basic Hebrew root, which means “to cover.” Thus the ark was made from “atonement wood,” “redemption wood,” and it was pitched, made water-proof, with “atonement.” This word for *atonement* speaks of expiation of sin and oneness between God and man. It is the prominent feature of the Bible and its use here hints strongly of the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus who was sent as an ark of safety for the people of God, to carry them through the floods of God’s judging vengeance. You can see how beautifully it fits.

- Furthermore, Noah was told to build rooms in the ark. Now, this is the common word for *nests*, such as bird nests, and it is strongly suggestive that the ark was intended to be not only a place of safety, but of rest and comfort. Thus in Jesus Christ we not only find safety against the floods of vengeance, but also rest and comfort in him.
- Of further significance are the dimensions of the ark: three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high. A cubit is a little short of two feet. This would make the ark something like four hundred and fifty feet long, and therefore a very large vessel. No wonder it took almost one hundred and twenty years to construct. It was built on dry ground, a long way from any lake or sea, and built in obedience to the command of God, and, to be sure, against the mockery of the age in which Noah lived. These dimensions are pointed out by St. Augustine to be, “the dimensions of a man.” Of course, no man is three hundred cubits long, but Augustine means the ratio between length, height, and width is exactly that of a full grown man. So again we have a picture of a Man, our ark of safety, the Lord Jesus Christ, the second Man, who came to redeem us.
- There is also a window in the ark, but it is not placed in the side where Noah can look out upon the destruction around him, but in the top,

where he can only look up. If this is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is suggestive of that upward look which he manifested throughout his lifetime. He took his orders from his Father. His eye was forever fixed upon him. He came to do the will of his Father and walked in obedience to him. He did not take his motivation from that which was occurring around him but from that which came from above, as he himself said again and again.

- There is only one door in the ark as there is only one way into Christ, by faith. There is not a door for the elephants and another door for the mice, and another for the insects; they all come in one door. It is placed in the side of the ark. It is suggestive of the very words of Jesus, “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved,” {John 10:9 KJV}.
- Finally, we are told there were three decks to be built in the ark. I do not want to stress this unduly, but this is highly suggestive of the humanity of our Lord – body, soul, and spirit. The whole man was given up for us. Also there is provision in Christ for the completion of the whole man – body, soul and spirit – we are to be redeemed in him.

It is this ark, then, that is to bear us as the ark bore Noah, through the flood of judgment that is to come. Yet I think there is more here. God not only is picturing for us the crisis that comes upon history, but also those mini-crises that come in all our lives from time to time. Remember in First Corinthians 10:13 the Apostle Paul tells us, “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will make a way of escape [an ark, a place of refuge] in order that you may be able to bear it.” This strikes me as greatly needed in this day.

I am occasionally reminded by some that I have not been available when they needed me. They had tried to reach me and could not locate me when they needed help. I am always desirous of being available when anyone really needs help, but I never feel bad when someone tells me that. I know that oftentimes that is God’s way of turning our eyes away from human help to the only help that is always available and which we so frequently fail to

avail ourselves of – the way of escape that is in Jesus Christ.

This is what he is for. He is a refuge, a place of safety. He is a place of security, of rest and comfort in time of pressure. The whole of Scripture urges us to avail ourselves of him, not some other human being. In the greatest floods and testings of life human help is unavailing anyhow. What real good does it do? We must eventually turn to this ark that is provided for us, our way of escape. I am convinced that more of us would find ourselves living stable, sensible lives in the midst of the most amazing pressures if we would but find our way to the ark of safety, the way of escape which is in Jesus, and take refuge within him in the hour of pressure.

Now **the final emphasis** of this account is given:

“For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons” wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you, to keep them alive. Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.” Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him. {Gen 6:17-22 RSV}

We shall leave until our next message the question of the extent of the Flood. The emphasis here, again, is not upon that; it is upon the fact that, when Noah came into the ark, God said to him, “I will make my covenant with you.” It was not merely the ark that saved Noah. That was the means by which his salvation was accomplished, but what really saved Noah was God’s agreement with him. The word of God, the promise of God, that is what saved him. Therefore we too must look beyond the means by which we are saved, the cross and the resurrection, to the great motivation

that brought Christ to earth, to the promise of God which underlies everything else and makes covenant with us, a covenant, a new arrangement for living. Whenever you see this word “covenant” in Scripture, do not think of it as a contract that God makes with man. It is that, in one sense, but it is primarily a new basis for life, an arrangement for living. This covenant here goes further than simply saving Noah; it is to govern his life and the life of the world after the Flood is over. It requires but one attitude on Noah’s part, that of obedience.

The reason I bring this out is because I am disturbed today by the ease with which many – young people especially – seek to use the Lord Jesus as a Savior to save them from going to hell when they die, but they have no intention of allowing him to govern their lives while they live. But here the story of Noah is very clear. It was not merely the fact that God brought Noah into the ark that saved him; it was that Noah was obedient to a new arrangement for living. Noah obeyed God, he did all that was commanded. God undertook therefore to regulate his life on a totally different basis.

This is what saved Noah, and this is what saves us. It is not the fact that we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, thus agreeing that we belong to him and will be saved when we die. I do not believe that for a moment. It is the fact that we have received him as Lord. We recognize his rights over us, his right to rule, his right to regulate, his right to command us and for us to obey. The heart is to respond immediately in obedience to all that God commands, as Noah did here. That acknowledgment of Lordship is the basis of salvation. That is the basis on which we not only will survive the disaster that hangs imminently over our age, threatening to strike at any moment, but also the individual disasters of every life, that can cut the ground out from beneath the house of life and demolish it, washing away the sands upon which we build.

We must, rather, establish it upon a rock which cannot be moved, which rests upon the most unshakable thing in all the universe – the Word of God. After all, that is what created the universe. That is the most solid thing there is. There is nothing more dependable than the Word of God. Ultimately, everything that is present in this room and in all the universe around us has come from that source. When we rest, therefore, upon the word of God, the covenant of God, we rest upon the most certain and sure thing the universe knows

anything about. "Heaven and earth," Jesus said, "shall pass away, but my words shall never pass away," {cf, Matt 24:35}.

Prayer:

Thank you, Father, for turning our eyes from transitory and ephemeral things, passing things, unto the permanent, the sure, the unshakable. What a restive world we live in. How uncertain and confused is

the generation around us. How restless are the voices we hear on every side. But we thank you, Lord, that you turn us to that which remains solid, secure, and unshakable. You invite us to enter the place of safety, the one Person who can take us through all that life can throw at us and bring us safely out on the other side, the ark of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The End of the Old

by Ray C. Stedman

We return to the story of the Flood from the seventh chapter of Genesis, to set this Old Testament passage in the light that streams from a New Testament passage. The Apostle Peter, in his second letter, says that scoffers will appear in the last days raising doubts about the return of Jesus Christ, and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming?" {2 Pet 3:4}. That is, what grounds have you to expect this to be fulfilled? The basis for their scoffing will be that "all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation," {2 Pet 3:4b RSV}. Their claim is that Christians have no right to expect a supernatural intervention of God in the physical operation of the earth.

This is nothing more nor less than what we call today the theory of uniformitarianism, i.e., the scientific theory that what exists in the natural realm has been produced by laws that have operated in the past as they are observed today, and that these have never varied. Certainly much can be explained in this way, though not all, yet rigid uniformitarianism is the basis, as you know, for much of the approach of physical science to the study of the earth today. The Apostle Peter says that those who argue on this basis deliberately ignore a contrary fact. The essence of science is to deal with facts, but Peter's charge is that those who claim that there can be no supernatural intervention into the affairs of nature have deliberately ignored a fact, the fact of the Flood. Here is the way he puts it,

They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. [Then he goes on to show how the past points to the future.] **But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.**

(2 Pet 3:5-7 {RSV})

As Christians, who believe that the apostles of Our Lord Jesus spoke by divine inspiration and were given a special word of authority about matters beyond human ken, we must read the story of the Flood in the light of this declaration. From this word of Peter there are three things very evident to guide us in our study of the Flood:

- First, this was not an ordinary flood, involving the ordinary forces that produce floods in our day. It involved unusual and distinctive forces which had perhaps never been employed before, and (we have been given great assurance of this in Scripture) have never been employed since.
- Second, its effects were literally world-shaking, for the whole structure of the earth was altered by this Flood.

- Third, it points to a future physical disturbance of the earth, this time not by water but by fire.

It is clear that the whole point of Peter's argument is that God does intervene dramatically in nature as well as in human affairs. He does so to produce sudden and quite abrupt changes in natural affairs, unanticipated, except by revelation. He did this before, and he will do it again. As we read Chapter 7 of Genesis we must note the parallels that occur between the Flood and the judgment which Peter says awaits this present world and which will be similar in many ways to the flood, but different only in the agent involved, fire instead of water.

Now, in Chapter 7 we notice first that this section brings before us **the basis on which salvation occurs**. After all, that is the heart of this whole story in Genesis. It is not attempting to give us scientific aspects of the Flood, although what it says is scientifically accurate. What it is trying to get across is a picture of something which is also happening in your life and mine, and which involves an important issue – that of salvation, deliverance from an overwhelming judgment. This is what we must emphasize in this account. It is brought out clearly in the first five verses:

Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. Take with you seven pair of all clean animals, the male and his mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate; and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive upon the face of the earth. For in seven days I will send rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living thing I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground." And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him." {Gen 7:1-5 RSV}

Notice that this account begins with an invitation. The RSV is certainly wrong in rendering this word of God to Noah, "Go into the ark." The Hebrew word is, "Come into the ark" with the clear implication that God is waiting in the ark. God will be with Noah in the ark, so Noah and his family are invited to join him there. We can hear in this *come*,

anticipations of the invitation which the Lord Jesus continually extended unto men. The whole thrust of all that God has to say to men finds its focus in one invitation. "Come unto me," Jesus said, "all you that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest," {Matt 11:28 KJV}. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me," {John 7:37b KJV}. That is always the word of Christ to men: "Come unto me."

The answers to all the vexing problems of life will find the beginning of a solution at that place. "Come unto me." Christ is our ark to carry us through whatever judgments, floods, or catastrophes await us, both now and in the age to come. That is the whole teaching of this section.

The basis upon which this call was extended to Noah is given here, "I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation." It is important to notice that Noah was not only righteous, he was seen to be righteous. He was made righteous by believing the Word of God, as Hebrews 11 tells us. He believed what God said about a flood and he began to order his life in terms of that coming event, even though there was little evidence around him to support it. He believed God, and "became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith," says the writer of Hebrews {Heb 11:7b RSV}. But he not only believed, his subsequent actions demonstrated his belief. He *believed* God and therefore he *obeyed* God. You never can say you believe God unless you obey him, because that is what belief really is. It is our motivation to obedience, to activity.

Noah demonstrated his faith in his day and generation by constructing an ark in obedience to the word of God. He made an ark against the ridicule and contempt of his age. Imagine the mockery that greeted this dear old man as he built his ark on the plains, far away from any adequate river or ocean in which it might float. Imagine the reactions of his ungodly neighbors to the construction of the ark by this old saint, covering the one hundred twenty years that it took him to build it, with all his resources invested in it and the labor of his sons as well. How they must have poked fun at him and the stories he told of a coming judgment. And he was building it for animals, as well as men! You can imagine what was said.

It was not easy for Noah to obey God. There were no physical signs of coming judgment. The skies were clear overhead, the sun was rising and

setting, as it had for generations. As Jesus said, "Men were marrying and giving in marriage," {cf, Matt 24:38b}. Business was going on as usual and there were no signs of impending judgment. Yet Noah believed God and constructed an ark, thus condemning the world.

Now, is that not the test today, as it is in any age? The thrust of Scripture is always in this direction. Christians are not to be conformed to this world. They are to be different in their attitude and their reactions. The demonstration of our faith comes right at this point. How much have we believed God? It will be evident in the way we refuse to reflect the deluded attitudes of the world around us, in the way we refuse to give way to a hungering after things, the urge for materialistic gain; in the way we refuse to retaliate when someone abuses us or takes advantage of us; in the way we refuse to lie to one another, even with the so-called "white lies" which are the blackest of all, for they permit people to go on offending others for years because we do not love them enough to tell them the truth. Here is the test. Noah was seen righteous, his faith was genuine, and therefore he was called into the ark.

Notice that this salvation was linked with the animal creation. It is wonderfully comforting to me to realize that God cares for cats and dogs and elephants and wrens, all the animals, the birds and the insects – the whole world of nature. We sing of it sometimes in a hymn that has unusual claim upon our affections. I sense a response in the hearts of God's people every time we sing it. "Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature." I love that picture. There at the manger scene, there were the ox, the ass, and the sheep. The angels did not say, "Drive those animals out of here." They belonged in the picture, for God is Lord of all the earth, and all the things of earth are his, and he cares for them. As Jesus said, "not even a sparrow falls to the ground without your Father," {cf, Matt 10:29}. I don't know how many times I have been helped to belief by that simple little rhyme some of you have on your walls at home:

Said the Robin to the Sparrow,
"I would really like to know
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so?"

Said the Sparrow to the Robin,
"Friend, I think that it must be
That they've no Heavenly Father
Such as cares for you and me."

We have here also divisions between clean and unclean animals. It is interesting that this occurred and is recognized long before the Law was ever given. This distinction is not only a part of the Law of Moses, but was made as early as the days of the Flood. It is a distinction which is essentially temporary and artificial. Actually, as the New Testament makes clear, there are no clean and unclean animals, for all the creatures of God are clean. But this artificial distinction was drawn in Old Testament days in order to teach men a needed truth, as all these physical things are intended to teach spiritual truth. As soon as the lesson was clearly evident in the work of Christ, the distinction disappeared. We are not to observe such distinctions today. It was intended to teach, by certain functions of the animals that were designated as clean, corresponding spiritual qualities that God loves; while the absence of these functions in the unclean animals was intended to teach that God disapproved of these in the life of men. Obviously these seven of the clean animals were taken into the ark in order to provide the sacrifices which Noah performs as he comes out of the ark.

Now the second great thing in this chapter is **the thoroughness of the Flood:**

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth. And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark, to escape the waters of the flood. Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps upon the ground, two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God commanded Noah. And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of heaven were opened. And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. {Gen 7:6-12 RSV}

It is difficult to see how anyone could read this as a myth, for it has such a precision about it. This eleventh verse seems to be copied right out of the log of the *Good Ship Grace* of Noah's day. The precise day upon which the rains came is recorded here by Noah. It came upon a precisely appointed day in the calendar of God, a day which was chosen in relationship to the man of God:

- It was in the six hundredth year of Noah's life that the Flood came. What does that suggest? Well, it suggests that this is the way God appoints his calendar. It is not on the basis of certain arbitrarily selected days in the future, as we do – "on the 12th of June, I intend to do such-and-such a thing," – but rather, on the basis of what has happened or not happened in the life of a certain person, or people. When the chosen ones have reached a certain prescribed point, then another event takes place. God sets up his date book by the progress of the people of God. When Noah's appointed task was completed, then the Flood descended.

We see this also in the New Testament: There are certain indications there that, when the church fulfills its appointed task and comes to the place of understanding the truth which God has determined upon, then it will be removed in the twinkling of an eye, and judgment will come. This is what Peter means in this second letter about, "hastening the day of God." He says, "the way you people live will determine how soon this event will occur. You can hasten the coming of the day of God," {cf, 2 Pet 3:12 RSV}. Remember that the Apostle Paul, preaching to the Athenians, said, "God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, and he has given assurance to all men in that he raised Christ from the dead," {cf, Acts 17:31}. That is the guarantee that a day has been appointed and the time of it is linked to the people of God, just as Noah's appointed day was.

- Notice also in this account that earth and all its peoples are involved. The very structure of the earth seems to be altered. "On that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened." Here are two forces at work which have not been

employed since. This is what Peter refers to when he says that certain events have occurred in the past which are not reflected in present day activity, in the natural realm.

First, the fountains of the deep were broken up. That seems to suggest the raising of the level of the oceans, and possibly the breaking up of the floors of the oceans so that waters of the sea inundated the earth with great tidal waves that swept across the land.

Second, the windows of heaven were opened and the rain poured out – not merely for a few hours as we see in our day but for forty days and forty nights. There is here far more rainfall than can be accounted for by the normal process of evaporation and precipitation. From somewhere there came vast quantities of water upon the earth, both from above and from below. This has given rise to several interesting theories about the Flood:

There is, for instance, as I suggested in an earlier message, the "canopy" theory – the idea that the earth at one time was very much like the planet Saturn today, surrounded by rings, forming a canopy over the earth. Many astronomers believe that the rings of Saturn are made up of ice particles, which would of course be water, suspended in vast, thick rings around the planet. If something like that were true of the earth of that day, then perhaps the Flood represents a collapse of that canopy of vapor, water, or ice. This may account for what has been a puzzle to scientists for generations; the sudden death of large numbers of great mammoths and other animals imbedded in ice. They are now being discovered by the thousands, and some estimate even millions, in the Arctic regions. Evidently at one time the area was tropical but it was suddenly plunged into sub-freezing temperatures of such intensity that animals immediately perished, frozen in a quick deep-freeze that has lasted through the centuries since. They are discovered now with bits of grass still in their mouths, unchewed, so sudden was their death.

Another theory says that all these events were brought about by the near approach to earth of a heavenly body. A few years ago scientists were watching the approach to earth of a heavenly body, one of the asteroids, a miniature planet called Icarus, which was nearing the

earth at great speed. There was a time when scientists were saying that if Icarus deviated less than one percent from its course, it would have collided with the earth. But scientists long knew of this asteroid and were carefully watching it. There is a possibility that a near approach of a planetary body to the earth in Noah's day upset the whole gravitational equilibrium of the earth, raised the ocean levels, created tides both of water and possibly of the solid earth itself, and thus caused the Flood. Now I must hasten to point out that all this is theory. Such scientific and scriptural guesses are but theories. The Bible does not teach these but it simply implies that something like these is indicated.

- Verse 16 of this passage adds another significant thought:

And they that entered, male and female, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in. {Gen 7:16 RSV}

Noah did not slam the door shut, God shut it. He shut it seven days before the first rain-drop fell. While the sun was yet shining and the sky was blue, while the people around were still convinced that nothing was going to happen, God shut Noah in so that he could not get out. You can see how this pictures so beautifully what Paul calls, "the sealing of the Spirit," in the Epistle to the Ephesians {Eph 1:13, 4:30}. Those who enter our ark, the Lord Jesus Christ, are sealed by God, kept by the power of God, safe in Christ.

The **third emphasis** of this passage is given in these last verses,

The flood continued forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming

creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. And the water prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days. {Gen 7:17-24 RSV}

What a striking thing, the extent of the judgment of the Flood! Many today raise the question, was the Flood universal, i.e., did it cover the entire earth? It is very difficult to answer that. We have a suggestion in the next chapter, which I have already commented on, that the nature of the Flood was to produce huge tidal waves which swept across the earth. Perhaps this may account for the fact that the mountains were covered (occasionally, at least) to a depth of fifteen cubits deep when these gigantic waves swept in. I think it is necessary to point out that when it speaks of "the whole earth," the Hebrew word can also be translated "the whole land." This is what has made many wonder if perhaps this was more or less a localized flood. Certainly it was wide in extent, covering half or a quarter of the earth, but perhaps not all of it. Certainly, there is no theological necessity for a universal flood. It is not necessary, from a theological point of view, for the races as we know them today have descended from Noah. What is taught in the Scriptures is that we are all united together as descendants of Adam. So, theologically, there is perhaps some reason to view this as in some ways a limited flood.

But one thing is certainly clear: The Flood destroyed the civilization of that day. "the world that then was," says the Apostle Peter {2 Pet 3:6 KJV}, "perished." The civilization of that day came to an abrupt and sudden end. The Scripture warns throughout its whole extent of the suddenness of God's judgment. Every day bears testimony to the suddenness with which death can strike in individual lives.

This was underscored for me once when I had a near-fatal accident. Driving down the highway north of Davis, I was about ready to enter the freeway at Highway 80 when a man in a blue pickup truck, waiting by the side of the road, suddenly pulled into my path when I was traveling about 65

miles an hour. Without warning and only fifty yards away, he pulled across the road in front of me. My immediate thought was, "Well, this is it. I'll not get through this," for it looked impossible. But, by God's grace, I was able to swerve around him to the front, and he stopped enough so that I was almost able to get by him. Had he not stopped, he would have rolled me over, but as it was only the rear end of my car was damaged. None of us were hurt and we were both able to drive on after the accident. But it was a very close shave. I didn't have time to pray, just to act.

That sort of thing, the Bible says, can happen to an age as well. That is the whole meaning of this passage. The fabric of our society can grow so rotten it can no longer support itself. Like a sail in a tempest, a tear appears which rapidly rips open and soon the whole thing is in tatters. A total collapse follows once the process begins.

That is **the lesson of the Flood**. It is clear from this and every account in Scripture that the great and fateful questions of faith are addressed to us privately and almost inaudibly. Seldom does God confront us with dramatic moments of decision. These people before the Flood surely would have wished that the thunder would have rolled a week ahead. That would have tipped them off. But the skies are clear, and Noah is shut into the ark, while there is no physical sign of impending judgment. They are shut up to believing or disbelieving the offer God made them through Noah.

Is not that the lesson of our day?

Remember how Jesus said that no one would return from the dead to witness to the five brothers of the man who was in hell. No, that will not happen. "they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them," {Luke 16:29 RSV}. Thus we are right now facing the decisive events of our lives, in this word from God. We do not have to wait until after a second heart attack; we must make the decision now on the basis of what is set before us now. We cannot demand to wait until some tremendous catastrophe occurs.

A lady handed me a note from her son the other day in which he said, "When I see the world burning, in obedience to the prophecies, then I'll believe." That is too late.

That is also what these people said. When we hear the rain coming and the thunder rolling, we'll

believe. But God had shut the door and it was too late.

Do you take that seriously? You may die tomorrow, who knows? The great question of Scripture is, if so, if life is that uncertain, why not live now? Not in the empty death of the world's delirium, but in the full swing of the Spirit's power, knowing that all that is truly vital is kept safe in the ark of Jesus Christ – "kept by the power of God, unto salvation yet to be revealed in the last time," says the Apostle Peter {1 Pet 1:15 KJV}.

Whatever comes upon the earth, the word of the Lord Jesus to us is, "When you see these things begin to come to pass, lift up your head and rejoice," {cf, Luke 21:28}. Why? Because you know that what destroys others is, in the wisdom of God, compelled to bear you up, as Noah and the ark were borne up by the waters that destroyed the earth. If your relationship to God is right, the very things that destroy others and tear them apart will but add to your faith, bear you up, and keep you safe whatever that tribulation or testing may be.

Let us sit in quietness for a moment, each one occupied with his own thoughts before the Lord. Tell me:

- Does it frighten you to remain quiet before God?
- Do you know him well enough to welcome it?
- Do you get restless, nervous, eager to be away?
- This One who is the most important Being in the world, with whom you must reckon, are you afraid of him?

If so, it should tell you volumes about yourself. Where are you, in respect to the ark which moves through the deluge of our present generation?

- Are you in it – or outside it?
- Do you know Jesus Christ, really know him, so that you demonstrate it in your life?
- Are you outside, perishing, drowning?

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for this look again of realism. What a wonderful function it is of your Word, to strip off veils, remove illusions, take away deceit from our eyes. Let us look at life as it really is – how dark

it is in many ways and yet how light it is, as viewed in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth. Thank you, Lord, for the hope that is set before us, for the promises that undergird us, for the love that surrounds us and calls us by his power in this day and age, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The New Beginning

by Ray C. Stedman

Today we emerge with Noah from the ark into a new world and a new beginning. We have already seen in these series that though these stories in the Old Testament are actual history – that is, they are not myth but actual historic occurrences – they are also prototypes of the spiritual history each of us can experience. In other words, we reproduce these stories in the course of our spiritual pilgrimage. Since this is so, then every detail of these stories is highly significant to us. Learn to read the Old Testament in this way. It is deliberately designed to illustrate to us what is going on in our own lives.

The Flood, as we have already seen, is a picture of a new creation, a new beginning, and for us, a new birth. Paul describes the new birth in Second Corinthians, “Therefore, if any one is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come,” {2 Cor 5:17 RSV}. But the Flood is also a picture of smaller events of our lives which involve a crisis of judgment and a new beginning. Such events occur all the time in Christian experience. This reduplication is the way nature functions also. We know that the smallest atom is built along the general pattern of the whole solar system. God reproduces in miniature in the atom what he writes large across the great wheeling canvas of space. So in these stories of the Old Testament are reproduced the great crisis experiences of our spiritual pilgrimage, and also the miniature crises that occur. Every experience of forgiveness is like a miniflood wherein we miraculously survive a possible spiritual disaster and are brought safely through to repentance and cleansing, and the possibility of beginning afresh on a totally

different basis. If you have experienced that you have also experienced in some degree what Noah did in the Flood.

Throughout Chapter 8 of Genesis we will note the alternation of the activity of God and Noah. God acts first to create a certain situation, then Noah reacts to that situation. This is the way it is in the Christian life as well. As always, **the initiative is taken by God:**

But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated; and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat. And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen. {Gen 8:1-5 RSV}

We are told that “God remembered Noah.” Wherever Scripture uses the phrase *God remembered*, it marks the activity of God on behalf of these whom he so remembers. God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. This is a charming way of saying that God thought constantly about them. He was concerned about Noah and also the dumb beasts that were with him. I think quite justifiably we see here a picture of God’s concern also for the

church and the world. Noah represents the people of God in any age – the church in our age – and, though this is not very complimentary, the dumb beasts in the ark represent worldlings. The unregenerate, in their blindness and their incapacity to help themselves, are frequently compared in Scripture to dumb, irrational beasts. These characteristics are manifested in history in the constant blunders made by a secular society, and by the impossible problems that arise out of secular thinking.

How this is being called to our attention today when the thinkers, the philosophers, the statesmen of our age are confessing with embarrassing frequency their bewilderment and bafflement at the problems they are facing and their utter incapacity to solve them. We read so frequently of these things in the news reports today.

But God saves the world for the sake of his people. He preserved the animals in the ark for Noah's sake. He *remembered* them for Noah's sake. The Word of God alone gives us the true picture of the structure of society. God deals with the secular world on the basis of, and for the sake of, his people. What his people are will determine what God does with the world. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world," {Matt 5:13a, 5:14a RSV}. Far too little has been said about this from the pulpit. The business of preaching is to help Christians see that they are responsible for the way society goes. We must learn this, for history and Scripture both unite to confirm it.

So God moves to save the beasts and cattle because of Noah. The result is, the wind blows upon the earth. As you know, the wind is throughout Scripture a picture and symbol of the Holy Spirit in his sovereign activity. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound thereof, but you cannot direct its activity," {cf, John 3:8}. You cannot predict where the wind is going to blow; it is sovereign. And you cannot understand it; it is mysterious. It is amazing that even in this day of advanced meteorology we still do not understand much about the blowing of the wind. It is an apt symbol of the Holy Spirit whose sovereign, mysterious activity is essential to mankind.

As the wind blew, the account tells us, the strange forces which produced the Flood were reversed. The fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed. Thus these two unique

forces, which have never been active in earth since that time, were reversed and the waters began to subside. The waters apparently flowed back into the ocean basins, the floor of the ocean subsiding to its present level, and the hills and mountains changing, rising and falling in various places. This perhaps accounts for much that scientists are finding in nature today. It may explain the great bone yards where great numbers of bones of animals and birds, mingled together, are found, especially upon hilltops. These may well be the direct result of the Flood. As the account tells us, the waters receded; and in the Hebrew it is made clear they receded in tides, "going and coming," which is translated in our version "continually." It indicates great tides washing around the earth.

What is particularly significant in this section is the date when the ark grounded on the hills of Ararat. This is given very precisely. It was the first sign to Noah and the inhabitants of the ark that a new world was about to appear from the waters. It was their first ground of confidence that the judgment was abating and the flood waters were receding. They felt the ark ground itself upon on the mountains of Ararat, and the date of that is given. It is a very significant date. You will, perhaps, be amazed to learn that it is the exact day of the year when Jesus rose from the dead. In Exodus Chapter 12 we are told that, at the giving of the Passover, God changed the seventh month to the first month. He made Passover the beginning of the year, though previously the beginning of the year had come in the fall. On the fourteenth day of the first month (which was formerly the seventh month) the Passover was to be eaten. We know from the Gospels that on the day the Passover was eaten our Lord died in Jerusalem. Three days from the fourteenth would bring us to the seventeenth, and on the seventeenth day of the first month Jesus rose from the dead. That would be the same as the seventeenth day of the seventh month in the old reckoning of this passage in Genesis. It is most significant that the ark grounded upon the mountains of Ararat on the same calendar day on which our Lord rose from the dead, thus signifying that life in the new earth for God's people was to rest upon resurrection power. I do not think we could possibly have a clearer picture given us than this portrayal of the basis for our life in this present world.

Now, **Noah is expected to act upon God's activity.** So the Christian life is not to be a passive, lazy experience, but a continual response to God's activity. We read in the next section:

At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made, and sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; but the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put forth his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. Then he waited another seven days, and sent forth the dove; and she did not return to him any more. {Gen 8:6-12 RSV}

What shall we make of this strange story of the raven and the dove? They are clearly symbolical, even though also historical:

The raven is listed in Leviticus as one of the unclean birds, forbidden to the Jewish people to eat. It is the first bird that is released from the ark. According to the Hebrew it flew to and fro, never returning to the ark, evidently feeding upon carrion and resting upon floating carcasses that were there in abundance during the Flood. As the account makes clear, the raven is no help to Noah whatsoever. The release of the raven tells him nothing about the condition of earth. Noah sees it flying to and fro above the waters, seemingly quite satisfied with the conditions it finds. It does not return to the ark but rests upon floating carcasses and feeds upon them.

The dove, on the other hand, is a clean bird. It did not fly abroad and remain, but returned to the ark. It rested only in the ark until a new world was ready for it: On its last return it brought an olive leaf in its bill as a symbol of life and peace.

Now what does this all mean? It clearly pictures facts with which we daily must relate. In our present life, according to the Scriptures, though we are redeemed, there are two natures present within us. One is truly ours; the other is an imposter

which is no longer ours, as Paul puts it in Romans 7, but with which we must contend until we are released from its presence by the resurrection of the body. One is called "the flesh" and the other "the spirit." The whole struggle of the spiritual life arises out of the conflict of the flesh with the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. One is evil, unclean; the other is clean, and good. These are symbolized by these two birds. It is God's way of telling us that in the present age, like Noah, we must live with two natures: one which is truly ours, and one which is an imposter.

One is like a raven: it rests and feeds on anything. It finds delight even in carrion, in foul and filthy things. But it is of no help to us. If we rely on it we will learn nothing worthwhile about ourselves or the world around us. It is useless, as far as any profit in life is concerned. That is the flesh. Scripture is utterly consistent in these things, teaching us all the way through of the worthlessness and emptiness of the flesh in its apparent ability to think, reason, and act. It is all worthless, and God pronounces it so in the cross. That is the offense of the cross. The natural man does not like to be told that all that he can do apart from God is useless, yet that is exactly what the Lord Jesus says. He told his disciples, "Without me, you can do nothing," {John 15:5b KJV}. It is not that they would not be active, but there would be nothing worthwhile, nothing of any value, nothing that would enhance or bless or strengthen, or prove at last to be gold, silver, or precious stones. It would all be wood, hay, and stubble; an imposing facade, but nothing behind it.

I was privileged to have part once in a bacca-laureate service held at Stanford University Memorial Church. It was a strange mixture of truth and error. The music was great, consisting of great hymns of the church, but much of what was said was directly contrary to the Christian position. Here, in part, is a responsive reading which was used in place of Scripture: "The whole nature of man must be used wisely by the one who desires to enter the way. Each man is to himself absolutely the way, the truth, and the life. Seek it by plunging into the mysterious and glorious depths of your own inmost being." There is the raven flying. It is so much humanistic gas! No wonder our present generation looks in vain to the secular wisdom of the world to guide it. How can it when it feeds on that kind of carrion?

In contrast to that is the dove, our true nature which can only find rest in the ark, in Jesus Christ, until a new world is made ready for it. This is exactly the experience we are going through now, isn't it? We have a new nature within, a nature imparted by Jesus Christ; his life joined with our life, his Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, born again, waiting in the ark for a new world to arise. That new spirit bears witness within of life and peace in Jesus Christ. It brings to us the olive leaf. This is truth we need to know to cope with the world in which we live, just as this was expressive of truth Noah needed to know to live in the world of his day.

Now **the next step is God's:**

In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. Then God said to Noah, "Go forth from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring forth with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh – birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth – that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth." So Noah went forth, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families out of the ark. {Gen 8:13-19 RSV}

Again, the date of this act of Noah's is significant. We are told it was the six hundred and first year (of Noah's life), in the first month, the first day of the month. Those of you who are familiar with the Scriptures and its use of numbers know that the number six is the number of man. Noah spent his six hundredth year in the ark, as symbolic of what man alone produces – nothing but a hiding from judgment. But at the very beginning of the seventh century of his life (seven is the number of perfection), the first year, the first month, and the first day, he left the ark to go out into a new world, a new beginning.

This is symbolical of the beginning of a Christian life. It marks the end of the old; the end of our dependence on man, on ourselves, and the beginning of our dependence on God. It is to be lived in a world which is yet a mixture of good and evil, truth and error, but it is a new beginning. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold, all things become new," {2 Cor 5:17 RSV}.

Then comes God's command, "Go forth from the ark." It is striking throughout this whole story the way God directs the activity of Noah. He is the one who says, "Make an ark for the saving of yourself and the animal world." He is also the one who says, "Come into the ark." Now he is the one who says, "Go forth from the ark." The timing is God's, and the initiative is God's. For Noah there is nothing but simple acts of obedience. Safely, securely, through all the difficulties and problems, God's word leads him to do the right action at the right time.

Isn't this exactly what we are called to? We make the ark, like Noah, when we learn of Jesus Christ. We are commanded to learn of him. When we expose ourselves to the Christian message we learn of Christ, and thus make an ark for ourselves. We come into the ark when we trust the grace of our Lord Jesus, when we trust his Word, believe him, and rest upon what he said. Then we go forth from the ark when we act as redeemed men and women in a lost world, when we act as forgiven sinners, living by the grace and constant presence of God in our lives, in the midst of an ungodly generation.

It is fitting, therefore, that the chapter should close with **a scene of thanksgiving and of promise:**

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." {Gen 8:20-22 RSV}

The striking thing is that the first thing Noah does when he leaves the ark is go give thanks to God. Wouldn't you think he would at least have stopped to build a fire and cook a meal? No, this man knows how to put first things first. The first thing he does is to give thanks to God. What a scene, as they knelt down in the mud and gave thanks!

It is the constant call of God to man, "give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you," {1 Th 5:18b KJV}. It is because, of course, giving thanks means we recognize reality. When you give thanks you are recognizing the undergirding of God, the presence of God, in the midst of life, and his control over the affairs of life. Thus you cannot give thanks without recognizing the situation as it really is.

In Romans 1, God's charge to a false and godless world is that, "although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him," {Rom 1:21a RSV}. They did not recognize the basis upon which their life depended. Though they would not hesitate to thank someone who so much as picked up a handkerchief for them, they could find no time to stop and give thanks to the God upon whom their life depended.

But Noah built an altar and he gave thanks to God for his deliverance.

God said, "Never again will I send a flood upon the earth, because the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." There's nothing that a flood can do to change the heart. Destruction does not change it, so God does not send a flood again. Another means must be found to change man. Thus God lays the groundwork for a fresh proclamation of the message of redemption to a new world. We read that Noah's thanksgiving was a sweet savor in the nostrils of God.

Do not read this crassly. It does not mean that God smelled a barbecue over the fence, as you do sometimes, and his mouth began to water.

Some of the old Babylonian accounts which parallel the Flood story say that the gods had grown ravenous because of the lack of men's offering during the days of the Flood, and, when Noah offered his sacrifice, the gods gathered like vultures above it. That, of course, is myth, but it does catch one great note of truth: that God delights in man's thanksgiving and praise. It is a sweet savor to him of Jesus Christ.

That is the point of this account. God saw, in this act of Noah, the total givingness of Jesus, the fact that here was One who, like these sacrifices, yielded up his life for the sake of what would be accomplished thereby, without reluctance, but gladly, willingly. As God saw that reflected in sacrifice, it was to him the fragrance of Christ. That is what God is after in our lives. How do you glorify God? How do you live for his honor? By giving yourself, that's the way. That is what true love is.

The world is constantly talking to us today about rights. "Claim your rights, demand your rights, stand for your rights." That is exactly the opposite of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. "If you lose your life, you will save it," he said {cf, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24}. If, in selfishness and greed you demand your life and try to hang on to it, you will lose it. God has written that across the pages of history, and he writes that across the page of every individual life. "He that saves his life shall lose it, but he that loses his life for my sake shall find it," {cf, Matt 16:25}. To "lose" your life is a sweet savor of Jesus Christ.

God's response is to give man a promise. We read, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." The revolution of the earth around the sun, the rotation of it upon its axis, will never stop again, God says. The laws of nature will remain steady and dependable. If man plants seed there will come a harvest later. It all rests on the faithfulness of God. God's word declares this, and thousands of years of human history testify to the truth of this verse. Never again has God allowed these things to cease. This verse implies that part of what caused the Flood was some hesitation in the revolution of the earth, or in its rotation. But never again, God says, shall that happen. It is because that does not change the nature of man. World catastrophe will not change man. There is only one thing that changes man: the grace of a living God revealed in Jesus Christ. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," says Jesus. "No man comes to the Father but by me."

Prayer:

We are sobered, Father, as we think how our very lives depend upon your faithful word; how the existence of this planet, its

place in the galaxy, its revolution around the sun, its rotation around its axis, the production of flowers and grain and food and fruit, all rest upon a faithful God. We praise you, Lord, that our redemption, our deliverance from the sin that eats away at the vitals of humanity, also rests upon that same faithful word. We pray that as we come to this Lord's table there may be a sweet savor of Christ going up to you from this place; that here you may sense a will-

ingness of men and women to give themselves – husbands, to give themselves to their wives; wives, to give themselves to their husbands; parents, to give themselves to their children; children, to give themselves to their parents; friends, to give themselves to each other; men and women to give themselves for their enemies; to love, to honor and to obey your word. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Who Needs Government?

by Ray C. Stedman

The ninth chapter of Genesis records one of the major covenants of the Bible, a covenant God made with Noah immediately following the Flood, but, beyond Noah, with all humanity. This covenant is the basis for all human government today. Therefore, it is very necessary that we clearly understand what are the provisions of God's ordering of human life and of human government as revealed in this passage. The provisions of the covenant God made with Noah are intended to govern life in the world following the Flood. As the Apostle Peter makes clear in the New Testament, we live in that same world. It continues until the great day when fire judges the present world.

These biblical covenants are not agreements with God arrived at a bargaining table. God is never forced to come to terms with the rebellion of man. He is always in control of history, always has been, and always will be. Man is never a threat to the government of God. We must learn to understand that or we will never have any comprehension of the course of history. Therefore, these covenants must never be thought of as bargains that man makes with God. These are, rather, rules of the game, under which all humanity must live. We do not have any options. It is God who deter-

mines them, and man obeys them – whether he likes it or not.

It is impossible to break the laws of God; you can only illustrate them. If you jump from a 30-story building you will not break the law of gravity; you will but illustrate it. (That is what's called jumping to a conclusion!)

It is important for us to bear this in mind as we discuss the covenants with mankind made in the Old Testament.

Now here the covenant is not only made with Noah, but, as Verse 17 of Chapter 9 indicates, it is made with "all flesh that is upon the earth." Therefore, it is a covenant that governs human life, wherever and whenever it is found. We shall go through this covenant together, and, as you follow in the Scripture, you will see that what we are discussing is reflected there.

Let us look at the eight specific provisions which God put into force with the whole of the earth at the time following the Flood. These are specific things which God desires to take place, and which are taking place, in human history. They have been in effect since that day and no man can evade them.

Who needs Government?

This covenant actually begins in Chapter 6, where we have the first mention of it in Verse 18. The first provision of the covenant is **God's intent to preserve mankind through Noah**. This has already been fulfilled, as we have seen:

“But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.” {Gen 6:18 RSV}

Thus mankind was preserved through the Flood. That is the first thing in the agreement God made with Noah.

The second feature is found in the closing verses of Chapter 8, which we have also looked at briefly. This second provision establishes **the dependability of nature**:

And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.” {Gen 8:21-22 RSV}

Today we look back upon thousands of years of testimony to the faithfulness of that promise. God has made nature utterly dependable. This predictability is the basis of all modern science and investigation. God has created a nature that is dependable and upon which men can rely. The only mistake that scientists make is that they rule out the possibility of any divine intervention in it, and that, the Bible makes clear, is always God's reserved right. He can interfere in his own nature anytime he chooses, and has done so in the past.

Also in this verse we learn the fundamental reason why God makes covenants with men. In this first of the biblical covenants we learn the reason for them all. It is given in Verse 21: “Because,” God says, “the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.” That is the fundamental truth which God is forever seeking to impress upon men. Man, who was made in the image of God and to share the glory of God, has become enslaved and distorted and twisted by the invasion

of an evil principle which enslaves the mind, will, and emotions of men. Therefore, fallen man is a victim of evil imaginations from his youth on. That is the most basic and fundamental fact that the Bible declares, but, also, the basis for all the wonderful story of God's love and redemption. If this declaration is not true, then the story of Jesus Christ is not true, and the need for God's redeeming grace is denied.

Therefore, God labors to impress this fact upon men. It is the fundamental fact we must learn. In order to teach it, God established human life in such a way as to make men face up to this overwhelming fact. It is the one fact above all others which man most strongly resists. He does not like to admit it. Read the analyses of the world's thinkers, and everywhere you see how they cling to the big lie that man, at heart, is decent and good and loving. Thus, every panacea man proposes is unworkable to start with because it is based on a false conception of humanity. You can see this in the letters to the editor column in any newspaper. There proposals are made for the solutions of the problems of mankind and invariably they are based upon the idea that man is basically good; just give him a chance and all that is within will work out to the benefit of all. The difficulty of changing man's mind on this is reflected by these words of Philip Mauro, a very astute Christian lawyer:

Among the strong delusions of these times there is none stronger than that Man's Day is a day of glorious achievement, successive triumphs, and continuous progress, and that by the forces operating in it, mankind is eventually to be brought to a condition of universal blessedness and contentment. The writer knows full well that those who are under the influence of this delusion cannot be freed from it by arguments, however cogent, or by statistics showing the appalling increase of crime, accidents, suicides, and insanity, or by the open and flagrant manifestations of corruption, lawlessness, and profligacy. To all these appeals they resolutely close their eyes and ears, not willing to recognize the real drift and the certain end of what is called civilization.

That is well put. In order to impress this truth upon the reluctant heart of man: God orders human life in such a way that we cannot escape exposure to this fundamental revelation of the heart of fallen

Who needs Government?

man, “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” Every provision of this covenant made with Noah, and the whole human race, is designed to drive him to the love and grace of God. Only God can save man. That is the whole point of history. God begins by making nature stable and dependable, so that man cannot blame his evil on the capriciousness of nature. We will note, as we go through, how each feature of the covenant stresses and underscores this fact of human evil.

The third provision, found in Chapter 9, Verses 1 and 2, is **to disclose man’s rule over the animal world through fear:**

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered.” {Gen 9:1-2 RSV}

Why do animals fear man? Oh, I know this fear can be overcome by patient training, but it is only by such patient training that it is eliminated. There is an instinctive dread and fear of man in the animal creation, and there are some animals which man has never been able to tame. Why? Well, it is all designed to teach us something. If we would only look thoughtfully at nature around us, we would learn some great lessons. God is thus seeking to impress upon us that man is not what he once was – lord of creation, made to have the animal world in loving, obedient subjection to him. But now he finds the animals fearing him, hiding from him, and running from him. It is the way God has of impressing upon us how the image of God in man is twisted and distorted, and love has been replaced by fear.

Now the fourth provision of the covenant is **to provide a life that comes from death:**

“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.” {Gen 9:3 RSV}

Animal life is now made the proper food of man. It is all designed so that every meal should remind us that life is made possible only by the

death of another creature. We are alive only because other creatures have died on our behalf, to sustain our life. If not animals then, at least, plants. We do not live in and of ourselves, we live by virtue of feeding upon other life. Now this seeks to impress upon us a fundamental rule of life, that we are not dependent creatures, going our own way, master of our own fate. We are the most dependent of creatures. We have no life force of our own, it is all borrowed. That is why Jesus said, in fulfillment of the truth toward which all this points, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. But whosoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,” {cf, John 6:53-54}. He did not mean that literally, but symbolically, spiritually. We are to feed on him, and draw from him all that we need. He is designed for life, and without Jesus Christ we can never fulfill the humanity that throbs in each one’s being.

The fifth provision of this covenant teaches **the sacredness of human life:**

“Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.” {Gen 9:4-6 RSV}

There is tremendous significance in this passage. Here we are told that man may eat the flesh of animals, but not the blood. Why? Because, says God, the life is in the blood, and life is God’s property. It is never man’s property. Man does not impart life; he does not originate it and it does not belong to him. Therefore, he has no right to take life. That is what this teaches. Life is God’s property. Even in the proper taking of animal life (which is permitted man), he still must recognize the sovereignty and authority of God over life. Therefore, says God, do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life of the animal.

Man is not an absolute monarch, as he so fondly imagines, but he must live his life under God, in relationship to God. There are things which God says are off limits for him. This is particularly true of the life of man. The text goes on to tell us, “For your lifeblood I will surely require a

reckoning.” The life of man is peculiarly sacred to God; only God has the right to take it. If anyone else violates this, God says he will require a reckoning, and it is a terrible price that God extracts. We will see what it is in a few moments. It is always paid. There is never escape from this. God says, “I will surely require a reckoning.”

Now, it is not merely retribution; it is not the taking of vengeance upon another for the murder of a man. Some have read the Scripture as though it justified blood vengeance, and there have erupted terrible feuds that have run on for centuries in which one murder is avenged by another, and that by still another, until whole families are ravaged. But God, all through the Scriptures, reserves vengeance unto himself. Remember how Paul puts it. He quotes the Old Testament, “Vengeance is mine, says the Lord, I will repay,” {cf, Rom 12:19b, Deut 32:35}. You have no right to take vengeance into your own hands, says God. It is my task. You don’t know what will happen and you can’t control the evil effects. Leave it up to me, he says: “Vengeance is mine. I will repay.”

But I do think there is justification for taking this verse as a basis for capital punishment. “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.” This is the instruction God gives to government for the taking of life under certain conditions. As the Apostle Paul makes clear, government acts as the instrument of God. It is the agent of God. As we read in Romans 13, government is the servant of God in this sense, {cf, Rom 13:4a} and it “does not bear the sword in vain,” {Rom 13:4b RSV}. It is thus God who takes human life, when it is done through proper governmental channels, and therefore it is not murder, as many are calling it today.

Furthermore, it is clear from this passage that capital punishment is not necessarily intended to be a deterrent to crime. There is much we ought to learn from this by studying it carefully through. I am sure that capital punishment is a deterrent to crime, despite many of the articles which appear which attempt to prove the reverse, but it is not intended to be that alone. If so, why would God require, as this passage makes clear, the death of an animal who killed a man? Later on, under the Law, if an animal accidentally or deliberately killed a man, the animal’s life was forfeit. God required that the animal be slain, as he says also here, “Of every beast I will require it.” What is the point of

that? Surely not to deter crime among the animals. No, the purpose for this taking of life as an instrument of God’s justice is to teach us something. It is to teach us that human life is off limits. Only God has the right to take it. It is to be taken only under the conditions which he prescribes. If even an animal touches a man he must be slain, to impress upon us that God highly values human life. Could anything be clearer than this?

We can hear in this the echoes of God’s words to Cain after the murder of his brother, Abel, “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground,.” {Gen 4:10b RSV}. Murder makes a claim upon God, upon his justice and his power. Injustice, violence, and bloodshed all cry out to the justice of God for correction, and God cannot ignore it. Remember that God set a mark on Cain to teach men that they must not take vengeance into their own hands, that even an outright, acknowledged murderer is not to be prey to any other human being who desires vengeance. But man, before the Flood, in his evil, twisted that restriction to his own advantage, and used it to justify violence (as you see in the case of Lamech, in Chapter 4{:23-24}). The result was the spreading of violence throughout the earth which resulted at last in the judgment of the Flood. The earth was filled with violence in those days.

Now, after the Flood, God is reinstating this prohibition against taking human life, but he controls it by another tactic. He says he will extract a price for any blood that is shed: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.”

That is more than the process of justice. Human justice does not always do the job; it sometimes fails. But notice what God says just before this: “of every man’s brother I will require the life of man.” God does not look at humanity as we do. We look around and see so many isolated individuals. We say we live our own lives, we have our own programs. We think of ourselves as separate from one another. But God never does. He looks at us and sees the ties that bind us together, the ties that unite us to the past, and to the past beyond that. In God’s sight, the human race is one vast body of humanity, a brotherhood; a brotherhood of one flesh “in Adam.” God says that he will require of this entire race a price for the shed blood of a single individual. Murder will be avenged against the race, not merely against the guilty indi-

vidual. A price is extracted from the whole vast race of mankind.

We are touching now upon a principle that has been active in history and which is extremely important to understand in this present crisis. It is that violence begets violence. God has ordained it so. The price of bloodshed is more bloodshed – and still more – until the fact of man’s evil looms so large that people cease their delusive, naive ideas and recognize the stark, naked fact of human evil and turn to the God who alone can deal with the problem. Since man is a brotherhood, it means that the innocent can suffer as well as the guilty. The innocent individual will be struck down as well as the guilty, because we are all tied together and the blood price is extracted against the race.

When men resort to violence to gain their ends in one area, they may justify it as being peculiarly needed to accomplish their specific goal, but what they don’t see is that, though God apparently does nothing to correct it in that one area, soon a war breaks out or the accident rate increases, or a senseless murder occurs, or violence sweeps a city, or a public figure is assassinated. Men are then forced to learn that God does not take lightly the distorting and despoiling of his image in man. He says he will not, and he never has. That is why violence inevitably breeds more violence, until man at last, in horror at what he has loosed in society, faces up to the fundamental fact that he is infiltrated with evil. Only God can cure it. Only the cross of Jesus Christ can smash this evil in any one of us. That is what God wants us to learn.

Now the sixth provision of this covenant is to **instill a desire to multiply and populate the earth:**

“And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it.” {Gen 9:7 RSV}

In the light of what we have just seen, that seems a strange thing for God to say. Recognizing, as he does since he is a God of realism, that man is the slave of an evil principle within him, why should he want the earth to be filled with this? Why should he command that the earth be populated by means of human reproduction? The answer is, because it helps accomplish the purpose he is after. In isolation, man finds it easy to maintain

the illusion of his basic decency, and his independence from God.

I was raised in Montana, where we had a very low population density. It was my opportunity to know certain aloof individuals, recluses, who lived out in the hills by themselves. I knew perhaps half a dozen of them, but I never knew one who didn’t feel that he was a very good, lovable and kind individual, though the rest of the community did not share that opinion. It is because, in isolation, we do not have to look at ourselves. But as the world fills up, and we can no longer move away from those that irritate us, we are forced to face our own sinfulness.

As the cities increase in population, the earth fills up, the continents overflow and there is no place to run, men discover what has always been true – that, under crowded conditions, the thin veneer of culture disappears fast, and all that is hidden underneath breaks out. Winston Churchill once commented on the fact that men labor under the delusion that man is basically decent and good. But, he said, given sufficient stress, put under the proper pressure, he said, “Modern man will do anything, and his modern woman will back him up!”

The seventh provision of the covenant is to **guarantee that there will never again be a universal flood:**

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every living beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” {Gen 9:8-11 RSV}

God has kept that promise. There have been many local floods since that time but never a universal one, never again a flood to destroy all flesh. The reason for this promise is to indicate that God has changed his method of judgment. It is not that there will not come a judgment of humanity again. The New Testament tells us there will be one, but this time it will not be by water but by fire {cf, 2 Pet 3:7, 3:12}. God is thus saying, I will not judge

in this way again, by water, which is accumulative. It is only when water backs up, builds up, and comes in vast quantities, that it becomes a danger to human life. Such accumulation permits a time of fancied safety before the judgment suddenly strikes. That is the nature of a flood. But judgment will come, God says, by fire. The amazing thing about fire is that it is latent everywhere. Strike a rock and fire leaps out. Fire is everywhere. It is God's symbolic way of teaching us that the judgment he will bring is one that is occurring right now, in a limited degree, at least. We can see immediately what the results of human evil are. We do not need to wait until some final catastrophe; we can see it now. There is no excuse, therefore, for being caught napping, even though some will.

Finally, the eighth and last provision is **to give a sign of assurance:**

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth." {Gen 9:12-16 RSV}

That is wonderful. It is the longest section of this covenant, for it is where God puts his emphasis. He repeats it again and again. He sets a rainbow against the darkness of the clouds and says, "That rainbow, that sign of glory, grace and hope, is my guarantee to you that there will never come another flood like this." How peculiarly appropriate a rainbow is. As you know, it is produced by the very elements that threaten. It is set in the midst of storm and darkness as a sign of God's grace. There are some who think perhaps the rainbow never appeared before in human history, and

this is its first appearance. That may be true. Or, it could mean simply that this is the first time it is invested with this significance. But it is a beautiful sign of glory and of grace. It is love's light, breaking through the darkness of man's evil, in an evil world.

Let me close by asking you: Do you get the message?

God is speaking to us. He is speaking on the dependability of nature, upon which we rest; in the fear the animals have of us; in the meat that is on our table; in the violence that sweeps the world in this hour of history; in the teeming misery of our crowded slums and ghettos. God is speaking through all these things, driving home one fact and one alone: "the imaginations of man's heart is evil continually from his youth," {cf, Gen 8:21}. There is nothing you can do about it yourself. You cannot change the picture alone. All your best efforts to correct this will only make it worse. God has provided a Redeemer, a Savior, and there is no escape apart from him. That is the whole message. Are you willing to face the facts of life and give up this insane struggle to make yourself what you cannot be apart from Jesus Christ? Will you receive the offer of God's love and grace to lead you to the rainbow of fulfillment, of promise, of glory, all that he wants to make of humanity? I am not talking about heaven, I am talking about life, now. God loves us. He is grieved by the distortion of humanity which he sees on every side. He wants to make us men and women living in peace, blessing, strength, glory and grace, as he intended us to live. It can only be done through the One who came to set us free from the octopus-grip of evil that resides in each individual heart. That is the message. God has ordained all of life to keep thrusting that in front of you until you see it and are willing to turn, repent, and believe the grace of God.

Prayer:

Open our eyes, Father, to life around us. Help us to understand ourselves. Above all, help us to see the love which is behind every activity of yours on our behalf, love that wants to set us free, love that pleads for a chance, love that seeks a thousand ways to break through our stubborn pride and to bring us to the end of ourselves, to

Who needs Government?

trust in the One who is designed to be the way by which we are to live. “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” “He that does not eat my flesh and drink my blood has no life in him.” Lord, we

pray that we might learn these lessons of life, that every one here today, even right now, who has been struggling against the will and word of God will turn and repent and receive the gift of grace and of life in Jesus Christ. We pray in his name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Three Families of Man

by Ray C. Stedman

In our present series we are attempting to understand society as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures. Perhaps no passage of the Scripture is more helpful and significant to aid us in this than the latter half of Chapter 9 of Genesis, the passage we will look at now. Here we shall learn the true divisions of mankind and also of the existence of a very dangerous trait that infects society, breaking out in sexual perversions from time to time and place to place. This will help us greatly in understanding what is happening in our own time.

In the eighteenth verse of Chapter 9 is a brief summary of the passage:

The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled. {Gen 9:18-19 RSV}

We moderns tend to categorize people by their skin color, their language, or the color of their hair or eyes. These rather superficial distinctions are the basis for our division of mankind. We speak of the white race, the yellow race, the black race, and so forth. But here in this passage we shall learn that there is only one race, as we have seen from the beginning in the Scriptures, but there are three families of mankind. In Chapter 10 we will go on to trace the spread of these families, headed by Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and learn to which division of mankind each of us belongs. But here in

Chapter 9 we learn the distinctive contribution that each family group is intended to make to the human race. Each contribution is different, unique, and it can be demonstrated in society that this is why God has divided the race into three families. This is a secret that sociologists have largely lost sight of, and, therefore, many of their ideas and concepts about society are faulty. We need very much to return to an understanding of this passage.

These divisions have been already hinted at in the order of the names of the sons of Noah. It is remarkable how much significance Scripture hinges upon apparently trivial distinctions that it makes, and especially so in the matter of order. The way things are listed is often very important in the Scriptures. In Verse 24 we are told that Ham was the youngest son of Noah. In the normal Hebrew listing of the names of a man's sons they would be given in chronological order, beginning with the eldest. It seems likely that Japheth was the oldest son, so the order ought to be, Japheth, Shem, Ham. But the remarkable thing is that every time these three sons are referred to in Scripture together, it is always, "Shem, Ham, and Japheth." It is important to notice that in Scripture this order is invariably found: "Shem, Ham, and Japheth." The explanation is found in the prophecy that is given a little further on in this chapter.

Notice also in these opening verses of the passage that we are told a specific thing about Ham – that he was the father of Canaan. This is Scripture's way of turning the spotlight upon a highly

significant episode in the life of Ham, an incident which has impact upon society even yet to this day.

It is essential to the understanding of society that we explore and discover what is involved in this incident recorded for us:

Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said,

**“Cursed be Canaan;
a slave of slaves shall he be to his
brothers.” {Gen 9:20-26 RSV}**

There are four things in this passage of great interest to us: *the drunkenness* of Noah, *the strange act* of Ham, Noah's son, *the filial respect* that is shown by Shem and Japheth, and *the cursing of Canaan*, Noah's grandson, in place of Ham, the son that was involved in this incident.

Notice that this is a condensed account of this event, as is evident by the fact that Noah's drunkenness occurred some considerable time after they had left the ark. There was time to plant a vineyard, time to allow it to grow to fruitbearing (anywhere from three to five years), time to harvest a crop, to gather it and extract the juice from the grapes, time to allow it to ferment into wine, and then, at last, Noah drinks of this wine, becomes drunk, and lies uncovered in his tent.

It is difficult to know what to make of the drunkenness of Noah. There have been some scholars who suggest that it means that fermentation had never occurred before on the earth; that the conditions that prevailed before the Flood were quite different from today, and that probably there had never been fermentation before. Therefore Noah would not know what was going to happen to him when he drank so much wine, and this explains his drunkenness.

Now, there may be something to this. It is impossible, however, to be dogmatic about it. It may have been an act of innocence, or of self-

indulgence. Certainly there is no blame expressed toward Noah in this account, even though, afterward, drunkenness is everywhere condemned in Scripture and regarded as sin.

Noah evidently felt warm because of the effect of the alcohol, took off his clothes and fell asleep in his tent, or, as we say of drunken persons, “he passed out” and lay exposed in the tent. Just exactly what his son did to him is also very difficult to determine. There are some Bible scholars who link this episode with the account in Leviticus 18, where, under the Law, this phrase, “to see the nakedness” of an individual is a euphemistic expression for a sexual act. There are some scholars who feel that this involved some homosexual activity on Ham's part. This may have been true. If we take the lesser implication, it is clear that Ham looked upon his father in his exposed condition, and obviously did so with a leering glance that had a sexual connotation to it. So whether or not there was outright homosexuality, or only latent, it is clear that some form of sexual perversion is present here, either in thought or in act.

In order to understand this incident we must recall the conditions that existed before the Flood and which produced the Flood. Recall that in Genesis 6 we are told that there occurred a demonic invasion of the human race very similar to what we see also in the New Testament in the days of our Lord. The result of this was a widespread outbreak of sexual perversion. Remember that in the New Testament, Jude says, in referring to this time, that it all began with a series of unnatural acts. It is linked also in Jude with the unnatural sexual life of Sodom and Gomorrah. Recall also that Shem, Ham, and Japheth grew up in this kind of an atmosphere, that Noah and his family were an island of righteousness in the midst of a sea of perversion that had possessed society before the Flood. Though Ham perhaps is no pervert himself, nevertheless it is clear from this account that he regarded this whole matter of the exposure of his father in a lurid way, and took it lightly. He was ready to take a lewd delight in joking about this episode, even with respect to his own father. This, of course, reflects how much impact the sexually distorted society in which these boys grow up had upon them at least upon Ham.

It is also noteworthy here that Shem and Japheth would have nothing to do with this. They did not respond to their brother's implications and

suggestiveness. They exemplify in action the verse in the New Testament, "Love covers a multitude of sins," {1 Pet 4:8 RSV}. Literally, they covered their father and refused to look upon his shame, thus they honored their father and won the approval and blessing of God.

But perhaps the strangest thing in this whole account is that, when Noah awoke and learned what had happened to him, what Ham had done, he does not curse Ham, but rather settles the curse upon Canaan, the youngest of Ham's four sons.

The question that leaps out as we read an account like this is: Why does Noah curse Canaan instead of Ham? We cannot take this as mere caprice on Noah's part. There is some reason for this. The discovery of that reason is an open door into further understanding of society. If we are right about what we believe is the answer here, it reveals that Noah knew a great deal more about human society than most people do today.

Noah evidently knew that sexual perversion is linked with parental influence. That is one of the things that psychology is telling us today. Psychologists, who have made a study of homosexuality, say that most homosexuals come from homes where there is a distorted parental influence. Usually a dominant mother and a weak father produces a homosexual son, or the opposite produces a homosexual daughter. In these days, when this perversion is widespread and generally accepted, we need to understand this.

As we saw in Genesis 6, there is a suggestion of an outright genetic link, an inheritance factor is involved. If this be the case, as I strongly suspect it is, then Noah knew that Ham's tolerance of perversion, his delight in it, would break out in an intensified form in at least one of his children. Thus, guided by divine wisdom, he unerringly selects the one boy of Ham's four sons in whom this perversion will find outlet and expression. So the curse is pronounced upon Canaan.

We must realize that the Bible understands us much better than we do ourselves. The one area in which we consistently fail to understand society is in recognizing the links between human beings, and especially between parents and children; the effect of one generation upon another. This the Bible views most realistically, therefore it is made clear here that Noah knows that, though in Ham this may not manifest itself in any more open way than a mere tolerance and acceptance of this sort of thing,

yet in his son it will be greatly intensified. Therefore the curse rests upon Canaan.

Now all this is proved in the book of Joshua (and also in First Kings) where we are told that the Canaanite tribes are all descendants of Canaan. They are listed for us in Genesis 10, Verse 15:

Canaan became the father of Sidon his first-born, and Heth, and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Gergashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. {Gen 10:15-18a RSV}

You who are familiar with the Old Testament know how many times the names of these tribes appear throughout Old Testament history. These were the inhabitants of the land of Canaan when Israel came up out of Egypt. It was because of the moral turpitude of this people, who lived in sexually perverted ways and became a moral cancer upon society, that God gave command to the children of Israel to exterminate them when they came into the land. This bothers a great many people when they study the Old Testament. They ask, How can God order a whole people wiped out? Well, there was good reason for it. These people were a moral blight upon society, and it was necessary for them to be totally eliminated in order to preserve society from the deterioration and degradation that they represented. When Israel failed to do this, they became, as the curse of Canaan here suggests, "hewers of wood and carriers of water," a servant of servants to the people of Israel, as recorded in Joshua 9:23.

All this answers a very widespread distortion of this passage that has been accepted for many, many years which says that the curse fell on the Negro people. The mark of it was a black skin, and therefore they are destined to be servants among mankind. But the Canaanites, as far as we know, were not black-skinned people. The curse was wholly fulfilled in Joshua's day when these descendants of Canaan, morally perverted through this evil strain which had survived the Flood and now breaks out again in human history, were left alive by Israel. Thus there was loosed in society an evil element which has spread throughout the entire race since, and breaks out in sexual perversions from place to place. This is the biblical explanation for these things.

There is, however, a grain of truth in applying this passage to the Negro people. Most powerful lies gain their power from having at least a modicum of truth about them. It is true that the colored peoples of the earth are descendants of Ham, Hamitic people. They come in varying shades: the yellow of the Chinese, the brown of the Indians, the black of the Africans, and even including some that are white-skinned.

Now we must turn to the prophetic words uttered by Noah about his sons as to the destiny of their descendants.

He also said [notice how he deliberately sets this apart from what he said about Canaan],

**“Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.
God enlarge Japheth,
and let him dwell in the tents of
Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.”**

After the flood Noah lived three hundred and fifty years. All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died. {Gen 9:26-28 RSV}

Here we have the three families of mankind. The family of Ham is represented by Canaan, although not limited to his descendants. In certain of the old versions, in these two verses referring to Canaan, the account reads, “Ham, the father of Canaan,” which is probably the more accurate rendering. Now this is a most important passage. We can hardly overrate its importance in understanding the world of our day. I can only touch upon it now but we will go further into it in looking at Chapter 10.

Notice that Shem is given religious primacy among mankind. The Semitic people, the descendants of Shem, were responsible under God to meet the spiritual needs of mankind. That is their role in humanity. It is most striking, isn't it, that the three great religions of earth, which can properly be called religions, all come from the Semitic family: Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity. There is much distortion of truth in these, granted, but the sense of mission by the Semitic families of earth is very evident. This family includes the

Jews, the Arabs, certain ancient peoples, as well as other modern groups.

Japheth was promised enlargement. The Japhetic people are, in general, the peoples of India and Europe, the Indo-European stock, with which any demographer is familiar. It is largely from this family that we Americans come. It is most interesting that history has recorded their geographical enlargement. The entire Western hemisphere of our globe is settled by Japhetic peoples, and the Indians (Hindus) are of the same stock. But there is much to suggest in history that the enlargement that is promised here to Japheth is also intellectual. Historically, all the great philosophers are Japhetic. The Greeks, who began modern philosophy, are descendants of Japheth, as we will see in the very next chapter, also the Hindus. The Greeks and the Hindus are the two truly great philosophic races of earth.

Some of you may say, “Well, what about Confucius?” He was a Hamite, but Confucius was not a philosopher; he was a teacher of practical ethics. Anyone who studies him will realize how true this is.

There is a very astute Christian scholar, whose writings are privately distributed, who has been a great help to me in various fields of Bible study. His name is Dr. Arthur Custance, from Toronto, Ontario, to whom I am greatly indebted for some of these concepts. He takes the phrase, “let him [Japheth] dwell in the tents of Shem” as predictive of the Cross, when the spiritual guidance of humanity passed from the Jews to the Gentiles, i.e., to the Japhetic family. To Shem was given the primacy of religious teaching, but there comes a time when Japheth enters that field (“dwells in the tents of Shem”), and philosophy (which is essentially Japhetic) was married to theology. This has been the case since the dispersion of the Jews around the world.

There is much more we will say on this as we go on into Chapter 10, but let me speak briefly about Ham. Ham is given the role of a servant in relation to both of these other families of earth. But, notice carefully, not a servant in the sense of enslavement. That role was limited to the descendants of Canaan. “A slave of slaves,” is the Hebrew way of emphasizing, of intensifying a statement. Canaan was to be that, but not the rest of the sons of Ham. However, they were to fulfill a servant relationship, not in the sense of enslavement,

but as the practical technicians of humanity. If you study ancient history and technological achievements which were in many ways the equal of, or superior of, much that we have today, were founded and carried to a high technological proficiency by Hamitic people. This is the role in history given by God to the descendants of Ham. The Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Mayans, the Aztecs, all were Hamitic people. They were the great inventors of mankind.

It may come as a shock to some, who boast in Aryan superiority, and think of Americans as the most inventive people on the earth, to know that almost every basic invention can be traced to the Hamites, rather than to the Japhethites, which we represent. All that Japhetic people do is to develop the philosophy of science and apply technology, but the discovery of these are largely traceable to the Hamitic peoples of the earth.

Now, to bring this introduction of the subject to a conclusion, all of this is reflected most interestingly in the New Testament. We have, for instance, the so-called Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), which are very similar to one another and quite different from the Gospel of John. Yet Matthew, Mark, and Luke are not copies of one another but they represent differences of approach. It has often been pointed out that they are aimed at different types of people. The interesting thing is that, when you inquire who these people are, you find that they are Shem, Ham, and Japheth, in that order:

- Matthew is aimed at the Semitic people. It is the Gospel for the Jews, above all others.
- Mark is clearly the Gospel of the Servant. This is stressed by Bible teachers whenever they teach Mark; his Gospel is profoundly the presentation of the servant, the practical mind, the Hamitic mind.
- Luke is clearly aimed at the Greek, or the Japhetic mind.

It is also interesting that three groups are recorded in the New Testament as specifically coming to seek the Lord Jesus. They are the shepherds,

the wise men, and the Greeks. Here you have again the order: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

- The shepherds were Israelites, Semitic.
- Most Bible scholars feel that the Magi, the wise men from the East, were really not from the East (that was a general term) but from Arabia, and represent the Hamitic peoples.
- The Greeks are clearly Japhethites.

So there again, always in the same order, we have Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Also, the gospel was first preached in this order:

- In the book of Acts we are told that, on the day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and said, "Ye men of Israel," and addressed the gospel to them.
- Then in the next section we find Philip called to leave a revival in Samaria and go down to preach to a single individual in the desert, who is a Hamite, an Ethiopian, the treasurer of Ethiopia.
- Then, a little bit later on, Peter is sent to the Japhethites, preaching the gospel to Cornelius, a centurion of Rome.

Furthermore, all three of these groups are represented at the crucifixion. Each branch of mankind took part in the crucifixion:

- The moral responsibility for it fell upon the Jews. It is they who said, "His blood be upon us and upon our children," {cf, Matt 27:25}.
- The physical burden of bearing the cross fell upon a Hamite, Simon of Cyrene, a stranger in Jerusalem who was impressed into the task of bearing the cross for our Lord on the Via Dolorosa.
- Finally, as you know, executive responsibility for the crucifixion rested with the Romans, who gave the official order for the death of our Lord.

Now, we shall see much more of this in Chapter 10, but I think this is enough to show how accurately the Bible previews history, and how it deals realistically with these matters. There are often hidden in these biblical passages amazing truths which, when we one begin to trace them, carry us into vast and exciting fields of discovery. We have looked at enough to confirm to us this fact: that the race, the whole race, is but the individual written large. There are three divisions of mankind, as there are three divisions in man, in you. To each of these divisions is given the responsibility for meeting one of the basic needs of man: spiritual, physical, and intellectual.

In each one of us these same three divisions are found:

- We each have a capacity to worship;
- We each have a capacity to reason; and
- Each has a capacity to create.

These are the things that distinguish us from the animals. This is the image of God in man. Each of them needs to be held in perfect balance. The world is in a state of confusion, uncertainty, and despair because the balance God intended has been left unfulfilled, so, in your individual life, you are in a state of confusion, despair, frustration, weakness, or whatever it may be, because you have neglected to fulfill the three-fold capacities of your own nature.

You can only do so as they are kept in perfect harmony, one with the other.

It is wrong to think of man as essentially spiritual. He is also intellectual and physical. It is wrong to think of him as being essentially physical, and to develop the athletic abilities to the neglect of the others; he is also spiritual and intellectual. The interesting thing is that, in the Bible, the intellectual is put last. If the order of Scripture obtains for the individual as well as for the race, the order within us is also Shem, Ham, and Japheth: First the spiritual, then the physical, then the intellectual.

In that order mankind finds its complete fulfillment. If we understand ourselves we will also understand the world around us. The glory of the gospel is that it addresses itself to mankind exactly on those terms. We find ourselves entering into fulfillment, into excitement, into a dramatic sense of being what we were intended to be, when we

open our lives to God through Jesus Christ, making that our first priority; then developing the physical life, taking care of physical needs, physical demands; and through these two working together, developing the intellect to an understanding of ourselves.

Surely we can echo these words of David in the eighth Psalm:

**O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is thy name in all the earth!
Thou whose glory above the heavens is chanted
by the mouth of babes and infants,
thou hast founded a bulwark because of thy foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.
When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which thou hast established;
what is man that thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man that thou dost care for him?
Yet thou hast made him little less than God,
and dost crown him with glory and honor.
Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands;
thou hast put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the sea.
O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is thy name in all the earth! {Psa 8:1-9 RSV}**

Man is to fulfill that as he finds fulfillment in the Son of God.

Prayer:

Thank you again, our Father, for instruction from your word. The Word of God is given, we are told, to instruct us in righteousness. Now we pray that we may be open to this instruction and understand life and ourselves because of its revelation to us. Make us to realize how essential it is that we begin at the beginning. "The fear

The Three Families of Man

of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”
We pray therefore that we may bow before
you, our God, our Maker, our Redeemer,
our Friend, our Savior, and let our hearts

respond in love and gratitude to you who
desire to make us exactly what you in-
tended us to be. We pray in Christ’s name,
Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

God's Funnel

by Ray C. Stedman

We come now to Genesis 10, a very difficult chapter. I shall ask you to be patient with me as we look at it together. Some of you may not find it quite what you feel you may need, for it is a fascinating chapter to study but exceedingly dreary to read. Perhaps you may say, "Why should we spend time with a passage like this?" In answer, I would say that it is extremely important that we understand God's movements in history. This helps us realize and accept the fact that what we read in Scripture about eternal life and the things of the Spirit is realistic and true to life around us; that we are dealing with the Word of God and therefore with life as it really is. Perhaps we can see this most clearly in a chapter like this.

Chapter 10 of Genesis is a record of how mankind fanned out over all the earth, like spokes in a wheel, radiating from a center which both science and Scripture place in the Middle East. The Middle East has been called, "the cradle of civilization," or "the cradle of mankind." "We are now dealing with the days immediately following the Flood, when the sons of Noah became the heads of three major divisions or families of mankind. In this chapter we learn how they spread throughout the earth. We have already studied the prophetic utterance of Noah concerning the contribution his three sons and their descendants would make to humanity.

- We saw that to Shem was given the religious primacy of mankind. The Semitic peoples are responsible, under God, to develop the spiritual life of mankind. It is not surprising, therefore, that from the Semitic peoples have come the three major religions of earth: Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity.

- To Ham was given the art of technical proficiency. The Hamitic people are the technicians of mankind, showing an amazing adaptability to the world in which they live.
- To Japheth was given intellectual enlargement, and the widest geographical distribution of the three families.

History has long since confirmed abundantly this distribution of mankind, exactly as the Bible says.

Now we could spend hours in Chapter 10 tracing the development of these families, but a Sunday morning sermon is not quite the place for that kind of treatment. This is the kind of chapter that requires careful and exhaustive study, but I shall merely attempt a quick survey, pausing where Moses, the author of Genesis, also pauses to make comment on certain names that appear in this section. These are important comments and we need to understand why Scripture suddenly turns the spotlight upon certain individuals.

The division begins with **Japheth** and his descendants,

These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth; sons were born to them after the flood.

The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. From these the coastland peoples spread. These are the sons of Japheth in their lands, each with his own language, by their families, in their nations. {Gen 10:1-5 RSV}

This division of the chapter, centering on Japheth, is the shortest, yet to us in many ways it is the most important, because it is to this family of mankind that most of us belong. We are Japhethites and we find this of intense interest, although the Scripture spends the least time with it.

Those who study races and peoples are known as ethnologists, and one of the tools of ethnology is to trace the persistence of names through history. Some of these place names and names of individuals persist for a long time through the course of human events, and form a kind of peg or nail upon which we can hang certain important movements in history and by which we can trace certain developments. We can do this with many of the names in this passage. Letters may be transposed, endings added, prefixes taken away or added, but there is a basic root which persists for years and even centuries of the time, and these give us a way of tracing the spread of the peoples of earth.

The family of Japheth is essentially what we call the Aryans. Hitler made much of the Aryan race, claiming that the Germans were pure Aryans and the rest were mongrels. Of course, the Jews were of a completely different family. He was right about that, for the Jews are Semitic (from Shem) while the Aryans are from Japheth. But where Hitler made his mistake (and where many people today make a mistake) is to fail to differentiate between differences which exist between people and a supposed superiority. Because people are different is no sign that they are inferior or superior. This is one of the basic things we need to understand in studying the peoples of the earth.

Early in the history of the world, the Japhethites, or Aryans, split into two groups. One group settled in India and the other group in Europe. Together they form what is known as the "Indo-European" family of nations. Any ethnographer is familiar with these divisions, but they are the same basic stock. The next time you visit India you should realize that you are visiting your cousins in the same basic family. The interesting thing is that both of these divisions, the Indian and the European, trace their ancestry back to Japheth. This is not from the Bible, but from history:

- The Greeks say that their ancestor was a man named Japetos, and you can see in that the resemblance to Japheth. They regarded him as

not only the father of their race, but the father of all humanity.

- The Indians, on the other hand, have an account of the flood similar in many respects to the Biblical account. The name of their hero is not Noah, but Satyaurata, and he had three sons. The name of the oldest was Iyapeti (you can see Japheth in that, very easily), and the other two were Sharma, and C'harma (Shem and Ham). The interesting thing about the Indian account is that C'harma was cursed by his father because he laughed at him when he got drunk, a certain echo of the story we have in Genesis.

You see from this how this chapter is embedded in history. The Word of God is dealing with realistic matters when it traces these divisions.

We learn here that Japheth had seven sons, but only two of them are traced for us in any detail:

1. The first son was Gomer. From this word, Gomer, by a process of elision and transposition of letters, there came the word, Gaul, or Gallic. These are the people, interestingly enough, to whom the New Testament Epistle to the Galatians is written. The Galatians were Gauls. Most of us have a Gallic or Celtic (or Keltic) ancestry, and the Gauls and Celts (or Kelts) were descendants of Gomer. They migrated to the north and settled in Spain, France and in Britain. From these Gauls come most of the early families of Western Europe and, consequently, of the Americas as well.
 - a) The oldest son of Gomer was Ashkenaz. He and his descendants first settled around the Black Sea and then moved north into a land which is called Ascenia, and which later became known as the Islands of Scandia, which we now know as Scandinavia. You can trace a direct link between Ashkenaz and Scandinavia.
 - b) Another of the sons of Gomer was Riphath. Although we do not know too much about Riphath, we do know that he located in Central Europe, and some scholars feel that the word, Europe, itself comes from this name, Riphath.

- c) Another son is Togarmah. This name is easily traced. He was the ancestor of the present-day Turks and Armenians, who also migrated northward into Southern Germany. Certain scholars have felt that the word, Germany, derives from the word, Togarmah. If you drop the first syllable you have the basic root of Germany.
2. Two others of the sons of Japheth were Madai and Javan. These are easily recognizable in history:
- The Madai became the Medes, of the famous Medes and Persian Empire.
 - Javan is unquestionably the ancestor of the Greeks. His name, Javan, is still found in Greece in the form of Ionia. The Ionic Sea and Ionian Peninsula all derive from this word Javan. His sons were Elishah, from which we get the Greek word, Helles (the Greeks are still called Hellenes), and Tarshish, whom most scholars associate with Spain; Kittim, which is the Island of Cyprus; and Dodanim, who settled around the Black Sea, and still finds a modern parallel in the word, the Dardanelles. These can all be traced by the geographical titles and place names they left behind.

Next is the family of **Ham**, which is the family gifted with technical proficiency. Because of the great adaptability of these people to primitive conditions, the Hamites became the great pioneers of mankind. All the early civilizations were Hamitic: the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Mayans, the Aztecs, the Sumerians. These were the people most able to adapt themselves to the conditions they found wherever they settled. We owe a great deal to the Hamitic nations. Later on, these lands were occupied by Japhetic nations, and at the present day the entire Western hemisphere is peopled by Japhetic rather than Hamitic nations, though it was once the other way around.

We shall take the family of Ham in two sections, briefly commenting on certain items:

The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca.

The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. Cush became the father of Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar. From that land he went into Assyria, and built Nineveh, Reho'both-Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. Egypt became the father of Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, Casluhim (whence came the Philistines), and Caphtorim. {Gen 10:6-14 RSV}

The four sons of Ham are relatively easy to trace in history:

1. Cush is associated with the peoples of Southern Arabia and Ethiopia. Ethiopians still trace their ancestry back to Cush. Egypt is self explanatory.
2. Egypt (or Mizraim in Hebrew, an ancient name for Egypt) became the father of the Egyptian Empire, settling in the Nile Valley.
3. Put is associated with Lydia, on the west of Egypt, in North Africa.
4. Canaan centered largely in and around Palestine, though the Canaanites later became much more widespread, as this account tells us further on.

The account zooms in on an individual named Nimrod, who is called a great hunter. He is a rather mysterious figure, of great importance in ancient history. He is the founder, as we are told, of both Babylon and Nineveh, the two great cities of antiquity which ultimately became enemies of Israel. The prominent thing said about him here is that he was a mighty man, "a mighty hunter before the LORD." Now it was the work of kings in those ancient days to be hunters. This was a time when civilization was sparse and wild animals were a constant threat to the peoples. Kings, having nothing much else to do, organized hunting parties and acted as the protectors of their people by killing wild animals. Nimrod evidently gained a great

reputation as such a hunter, but he was more than a hunter of wild animals. The Jewish Talmud helps us here, for it says that he was “a hunter of the souls of men.” By the founding of Babylon and Nineveh we have a hint given of the nature of this man. We are told here that he was “the first mighty man on earth,” i.e., after the Flood. That phrase, “mighty man,” takes us back to Genesis 6 where, in that strange story of the invasion of the “sons of God” into the human race, there resulted a race of giants called Nephilim. We are told that, “these were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.” This was evidently a demonic invasion of the race, with sexual overtones, which brought into being a race of giants that were morally degraded. These also appear later on in the Canaanite tribes. We have found this suggestive line of thought running through the Scriptural account up to this point. It now suggests that Nimrod was one of these “mighty men,” and therefore introduced a perverted, degraded form of religion into the world. It began at Babylon, spread to Nineveh, and can be traced in history as it subsequently spread throughout the whole of the earth. Thus, in this man Nimrod, we have the seed of idolatry and false religion coming in again after the Flood.

If you drop the first consonant of Nimrod's name and take the others – M, R, D – you will have the basic root of the god of Babylon, whose name was Marduk, and whom most scholars identify with Nimrod. In the Babylonian religion, Nimrod (or Marduk) held a unique place. His wife was Semiramis. (Some of you who have been at Cairo have stayed at the Semiramis Hotel, which is named after her.) Marduk and Semiramis were the ancient god and goddess of Babylon. They had a son whom Semiramis claimed was virgin-born, and they founded the mother and child cult. This was the central character of the religion of ancient Babylon, the worship of a mother and child, supposedly virgin born. You can see in this a clever attempt on the part of Satan to anticipate the genuine virgin birth and thus to cast disrepute upon the story when the Lord Jesus would later be born into history. This has been the effect of it.

This ancient Babylonian cult of the mother and child spread to other parts of the earth. You will find it in the Egyptian religion as Isis and Osiris. In Greece it is Venue and Adonis and in Hindu it is Ushas and Vishnu. The same cult prevails in various other localities. It appears in the Old Testa-

ment in Jeremiah, where the Israelites are warned against offering sacrifices to “the Queen of Heaven.” This Queen of Heaven is Semiramis, the wife of Nimrod, the original mother of the mother and child cult. The cult has also crept into Christianity and forms the basis for the Mariolatry that has prevailed in Roman Catholic Church, where the Mother and Child are worshipped as joint redeemers.

If you would like to read more on this, there is a book by Alexander Hislop, a very authoritative writer in this field, called *The Two Babylons*. I am sure you will find it of great interest if you desire to pursue this further.

This idolatrous religion culminates at last in the Bible in the book of Revelation. You remember the “great harlot” that appears there whose name is “Mystery Babylon the Great,” the originator of all the harlotries and false religions of earth. The essence of Babylonianism, as we understand from Scripture, is the attempt to gain earthly honor by means of religious authority. That is Babylonianism, and it has pervaded Christian churches, Hindu temples, Buddhist shrines, and Mohammedan mosques. Everywhere it is the element that marks falseness in religion, this attempt to gain earthly power and prestige by means of religious authority. That is Babylonianism. That is what Nimrod began and what God will ultimately destroy, as we read in the book of Revelation.

The land of Shinar, mentioned here, is also the land of Shunar or Shumar, from which we get the word, Sumeria, and the Sumerian civilization, with which scholars are familiar. The city of Resen was founded by people who later migrated into the north of Italy and began the great Etruscan Empire, which again is familiar to any who study ancient history.

We also have here the countries that came from Egypt and are associated with it here, all of which are countries of North Africa.

One further note on this section: Note that the Philistines, which appear frequently elsewhere in the Old Testament, are linked with the Egyptians. This is significant, for Egypt in the Bible is always a picture of the world; the Philistines are a picture of the flesh in its religious aspect, religious flesh or Pharisaism, if you like. These are forever typified by these two nations.

The second section of the sons of Ham centers on the descendants of Canaan,

Canaan became the father of Sidon his first-born, and Heth, and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the families of the Canaanites spread abroad. And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. These are the cons of Ham, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations. {Gen 10:15-20 RSV}

In a previous message we saw that these constituted the Canaanite tribes which occupied the land of Palestine at the time of Abraham. They were a morally degraded people, and were that as a result of demonic invasion. That does not mean that every individual was demonically possessed, but there was considerable experience of this among these people. We must note certain individuals in this listing, but not all:

- Sidon is mentioned as the first-born of Canaan. He founded the city by the same name, located near Tyre, on the coast of Phoenicia. Since there is no mention of Tyre here we can see how early this account is.
- Heth is the father of the Hittite nation. The Hittites were once regarded by archaeologists as a biblical blunder. Archaeologists said the Bible was absolutely wrong when it mentioned the Hittites, for there was no such people. But since that time, Hittite relics have been discovered in abundance, and scholars are now well aware of the great civilization that flourished under the Hittites. The Hebrew form of this word, Hittite, is *Khettai* and from this comes the word *Cathay*, which many of you will recognize as an ancient name for China. Certain of the Hittites migrated eastward and settled in China.
- Also, another name in this list, the Sinites, is linked with China. It derives from a presumed son of Canaan whose name was Sin. The Sinites migrated eastward until they came into Western China, where they founded the ancient

Empire of China and gave their name to the land. There is a direct connection between the word *China* and the word *Sinim*, the biblical name for China. (I remember reading as a boy of the Sino-Japanese War, showing how the ancient name still persists.) They pushed eastward and toward the north over the land bridge into Alaska. The Sinites are the people who settled the Americas in prehistoric days and became the ancestors of the Eskimos and Indians who, to this very day, betray their Mongoloid ancestry.

Now the third family that is traced here is **Shem**:

To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. The sons of Shem: Elam Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. Arpachshad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. To Eber was born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan. Joktan became the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobah; all these were the sons of Joktan. The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east. These are the sons of Shem, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood. {Gen 10:21-32 RSV}

The noteworthy thing said here is that:

- Shem was the father of the children of Eber. Actually, Eber was a great-grandson of Shem, but from Eber comes the word *Hebrew*. Abraham, who was really the founder of the Hebrew nation, was six generations beyond Eber. Yet Eber is of such note that Abraham is identified as an Eberite, or Hebrew.

- Elam, the next son of Shem, is associated with Southern Mesopotamia. Archaeologists have now found that the earliest inhabitants of this area were Semites, not Hamites, as they once thought.
- Asshur is the one who gave his name to Assyria.
- The genealogy closes with Eber's two sons, Peleg and Joktan:
 - The tribes listed as from Joktan are all associated with Arabia. The boundaries of Mesha and Sephar given here are both within the Arabian Peninsula.
 - Our main interest, however, centers on Peleg and this cryptic comment made about him, "in his days the earth was divided."

What do you think that means? *Peleg* in Hebrew, means "Division," but in Greek it means "Sea." We get our present English word archipelago from this: *archi-pelagos*, the first sea. The Greeks called the Aegean Sea "The Archipelago," the first sea, drawing the name from this man, Peleg.

There is some evidence to link this with the scientific theory of continental drift; the idea that once the continents were bound together in one great land mass, but sometime in the past they separated and began to drift apart until the Americas came to their present location, Australia slid down into the south, Antarctica still further south, and the continents assumed the present distribution of land mass on the earth. Some have suggested that this may have occurred as late as the days of Peleg, immediately following the Flood. Perhaps the great rift valleys of Africa and Asia had not yet formed, and, in Peleg's day, these drew apart so that the seas broke into this inner world and formed the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Dead Sea. This would be the formation of the first sea, from which we get the word *archipelago*.

There are many geologists, of course, who would raise questions about this, for they would say this is far too late in history for anything like that to have occurred. The account here is much too brief for us to be dogmatic about this, but it is very suggestive.

If this were the case, it may well have been that the American continent was still in view of Europe and Asia in those days, and that as it moved westward gradually disappeared from the horizon. This gave rise to the many myths and stories about a lost continent called Atlantis which disappeared beneath the Atlantic. There are many interesting threads here that we would love to follow.

Now we must come to the explanation of the title I have chosen for this sermon, *God's Funnel*. A funnel is an instrument or device for narrowing a flow of liquid or powder from a wide expanse to a narrow one. That is what God is doing here in Genesis 10. Shem is put last of the sons of Noah because God is narrowing the flow of sacred history down to the Semitic races. Shem is the neck of the funnel. God is restricting the stream of humanity that he will deal with personally and directly down to one family group, the family of Shem. In Chapter 11, Verse 10 on to the end of the chapter, he takes this up again and narrows it still further to one man, Abraham. From there it begins to broaden out again to take in Abraham and all his descendants, both physical and spiritual. The rest of the Bible is all about the children of Abraham, physically and spiritually. Here we have then one of the most important links in understanding the Bible.

Why does God do this? He has been accused of showing favoritism in picking the people of Israel for his link with humanity. But it is not that. God is no respecter of persons, as we are told. He does this because it is necessary in view of the limitations of our minds, not of his. No one man can grasp the whole widespread, varied, world of mankind. We cannot do so even today. At election time we take polls to determine what people are thinking, because we cannot grasp or assimilate in any way what the entire mass of a people are thinking. We must take polls, samples. God is doing this with Israel. Israel becomes the sample nation, the sample people. Through the rest of the Bible, whatever is true of Israel is true of everyone; their story is our story – your story and my story. Their stubborn rebellion is the same rebellion that we display, and their spiritual blessing under God is the same kind that we can expect if we open ourselves to respond to the grace of God. One fact comes drumming through all this otherwise dry genealogy: that is that God is seeking somehow to

break through into our hearts and wills. He presses upon us in great historic sweeps and in the minor incidents that happen to each of us.

The great question we must raise in a service like this is: Are you listening? Are you getting the message God wants you to get?

He writes it large upon the landscape of history, and also he writes it small in the incidents of your daily life. But in every case it is the same truth pressing through to us. God is essential to us. We cannot live without God. You cannot fulfill yourself, you cannot find yourself without him. He loves you, is seeking you, wants you, and is drawing you to himself. Forever this finds its confirmation in all of life around us.

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray that we might respond to the approach you have taken such great trouble to bring about, having written it so large upon the canvas of history that we cannot miss it if we have eyes to see. Yet how little we have paid attention to this. Lord, make us serious about these matters. Make us, young and old alike, to take seriously your desires for our life and the inescapability of your presence in history. Lord, we pray that we may live with these truths, and act upon them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Controlling God

by Ray C. Stedman

In Genesis we have the only realistic explanation I know of for the straining forces that twist, heave, and pull at the plastic mass of society as we know it in our day. If we hope to understand life and handle it properly, we must understand what is going on in human society by understanding these issues that are presented here. We shall, in the passage that we look at on the tower of Babel, find the answer to one of the great mysteries of life, the mystery of a race that hungers after unity and is forever seeking to be one, but is also ending up splitting itself into fragments and dividing into splinters, schisms, and cliques.

Why should this be so? Well, we shall attempt an answer as we look at this passage together.

We begin in the days **when the race was yet one undivided entity.**

Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated in the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." {Gen 11:1-4 RSV}

When this account says, "the earth had one language and few words," it literally is saying it had one language and one set of words. It is not "few words," as we have here, but "one set of words," i.e., "one speech" as the Authorized Version puts it. It is this that is the noteworthy feature of the humanity of that day: They were still one undivided people.

The atmosphere of Chapter 10 is one of movement, migration. People are thrusting out from a center, like spokes of a wheel, radiating out into the corners of the earth. This chapter opens on the same note. As men moved about they came into the plain of Shinar, an alluvial plain lying between two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. The name, Shinar, indicates to us that these people were Hamites, descendants of Ham, because in Chapter 10 we were told it was the Hamites who settled in the land of Shinar of Babylonia (Mesopotamia, as we know it today). It was a branch of the Hamitic family that migrated into the Tigris-Euphrates river valleys and found a level plain there upon which they settled.

Immediately, the inventiveness of the Hamitic people becomes evident. Remember that these were the technicians of humanity – technologically gifted people. Their native inventiveness becomes evident in the way they adapted to the environment in which they lived. This is always characteristic of Hamitic people wherever they have gone. They

did not find rocks and stones to build with, such as they had in the land where they had previously lived, so they made bricks out of dirt and clay. Later they discovered the process of burning them – first in the sun, and then in a furnace – until they became hard and impermeable brick such as we know it today.

All this is given to us in one sentence in the Bible, but we know from history that it occupied a period of time. Man did not discover all this at one time but learned how to make bricks and later how to burn them. They also lacked lime for cement so could not make mortar, as we know it, but some inventive Yankee among them discovered a tar pit which was filled with natural asphalt (these are common throughout the Middle East). They discovered that the tar was sticky and they used this natural bitumen, this asphalt, for mortar. They had then a substitute for stones and cement. They made bricks and used asphalt for mortar and thus demonstrated how adaptable they were to the situation they found.

Now their success in doing these things fired their ambition. This almost always happens. When they discovered that they could use other than natural materials for building, but could invent their own, they were fired with desire to put these to work. They began to talk excitedly about building a city and a tower. The two things they mentioned are very significant, very revealing. The appearance of the first city was back in the story of Cain and Abel, when Cain went out and built a city. It illustrated the hunger of humanity to huddle together for companionship, even though they were not really ready to do it (as they still, obviously, are not ready to live together successfully in cities). God's final intention is to build a city for man. Abraham looked for "a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God," {Heb 11:10 RSV}. But man was not yet ready for that. Now here they are, again ready to build a city to satisfy the desires of body and soul. There is nothing that does this better than for human beings to live together in cities. Cities are centers of commercial and business life where all the needs of the body can best be met. Also, cities are centers of pleasure and culture, where all the hungers of the soul can be satisfied: hunger for beauty, art, and music and all the ingredients of culture. The tower, on the other hand, is designed to satisfy the spirit of man. Here we see, reflected in these two things, a fun-

damental understanding of the nature of man as body, soul, and spirit. All are to be satisfied in these two elementary needs, the city and the tower.

A number of years ago, digging in the plains of Shinar, archaeologists discovered the remains of certain great towers that these early Babylonians had built. Some archaeologists have felt that they may even have found the foundation of this original tower of Babel. That is very hard to determine. But they did find that the Babylonians built great towers called *ziggurats*, which were built in a circular fashion with an ascending staircase that terminates in a shrine at the top, around which are written the signs of the zodiac. Obviously, the tower was a religious building, intending to expose man to the mystery of the heavens and the greatness of God. That, perhaps, is what is meant here by the statement that they intended to build a tower with its top in the heavens. They were impressed by its greatness architecturally, that is, it was a colossal thing for the men of that day to build and they may have thus thought of it as reaching into heaven. But they also unquestionably were thinking of it as a means of communication with God, of maintaining contact with him. God is not to be left out, you see, in the city of man. He is there, represented by this tower.

However, the heart of the matter is made clear in these words, "let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." Already a haunting fear had set in. They were conscious already of a disruptive influence in their midst, of a centrifugal force that was pushing them apart so they could not live too closely together and which would ultimately, they feared, scatter them abroad and leave them unknown, unhonored, and unsung, living in isolated communities where they would be exposed to great danger. The fear of this caused them to build a tower and a city. The ultimate motive is expressed in these words, "let us make a name for ourselves."

From that day on, this has been the motto of humanity, "let us make a name for ourselves." I am always amused to see how many public edifices make a plaque somewhere on which the names of all the public officials who were in power when it was built are inscribed: the mayor, the head of public works, etc. "Let us make a name for ourselves," is a fundamental urge of a fallen race. It reveals one of the basic philosophies of humanism: "Glory to man in the highest, for man is the master

of things.” That is the central thought of humanism, glory to mankind.

The fact that this was a religious tower – and yet built to make a name for man – reveals the master motive behind religion. It is a means by which man attempts to share the glory of God. We must understand this, otherwise we will never understand the power of religion as it has pervaded the earth and permeated our culture ever since. It is a way by which man seeks to share what is rightfully God’s alone. This tower was a grandiose structure, and undoubtedly it was intended to be a means by which man would glorify God. Unquestionably there was a plaque somewhere attached to it that carried the pious words, “Erected in the year xxxx, to the greater glory of God.” But it was not really for the glory of God; it was a way of controlling God, a way of channeling God by using him for man’s glory. That is what man’s religion has always sought to do. It is a way of making God available to us.

Man does not really want to eliminate God. It is only sporadically, and then only for a relatively brief time, that men cry out for the elimination of God. Atheism is too barren, too pessimistic, and too morally bankrupt to live with very long. The Communists are finding this out. No, we need “dear old God,” but let’s keep him under control. Do not let him get out of his place. “Don’t call us, God; we’ll call you.” This is the fundamental philosophy of society. It is the tower of Babel all over again.

Now, in the next section we get **the reaction of God** to all this. It is a section of exquisite irony.

And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do now will be impossible for them.” {Gen 11:5-6 RSV}

I know that in certain circles the idea of a God who comes down to visit earth is regarded as an expression of a primitive concept of God – that God lives up in heaven somewhere but is cut off from direct communication from earth and is dependent upon certain messenger boys who travel

back and forth to keep him informed. Somehow a message reaches God about man’s tower and he decides to come down and investigate. But this language is not a primitive concept of God. It is impossible to read it that way if you read it in the light of what has already been said about God in the book of Genesis. Already God has been presented as the maker of heaven and earth, the One concerned about the minutest details of creation, the Omnipotent, Omniscient God who knows everything, sees everything and is all-powerful.

No, this is not a primitive concept of God at all; it is an ironic expression. It is a humorous expression, if you please, designed to indicate to us, in a very clever way, the ridiculousness of this whole situation. Here is this tower that men erect, thinking that it will take God’s breath away, it will threaten him. Men think, “Here we are, we wild Promethean creatures; we’ve dared to invade the heavens! You had better watch out, God!” But up in the real heavens this tower is so little that God can’t see it. It is so tiny that even the strongest telescope in heaven does not reveal it. So God says, “I’ll come down and investigate.” It is language designed to set in contrast the ridiculousness of the suppositions of men, and the greatness of the Being of God. He “came down” to investigate this tiny tower that men had erected.

Then, in all seriousness, we are given the divine analysis of the situation. There are three things that God took note of:

- First, man’s unity: “And the LORD said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language.’”
- Second, he noted their creativity. “This is only the beginning,” he said, “of what they will do.” This creativity is part of the image of God which he conferred upon man; this inventiveness, this ability to think and reason, to deal in concepts and put them together and to come out with very practical applications. The nature of it is suggested here.

Notice that God does not suggest that man does everything at once; he builds gradually. One man discovers an idea, another man improves it, and a third man links it with another idea. So gradually there takes form inventive solutions to the technical problems of life. God

took note of that fact, that man is an inventive creature, and he is a united creature.

- As a result of these two factors at work in society, God comes to a startling conclusion: “Nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible to them.”

That sounds rather up-to-date, does it not? That is exactly what man has thought about himself and what he is saying in a thousand ways today. He loudly announces continually, “There’s nothing we can’t solve, nothing we can’t do.”

The startling thing from the Scriptures is that there is truth in that. God himself acknowledges it! He says it is true; if man puts his genius to any given, specific task, then his native creativeness and his persistent spirit will solve the problem eventually. Nothing will be prevented him.

Now look at **God’s action**:

“Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. {Gen 11:7-9 RSV}

That is startling, isn’t it? Here these people had built a tower and a city in order that they not be scattered abroad over the face of the earth. But the net result is, because they built the tower and the city, they were scattered abroad throughout the face of all the earth! They ended up doing the very thing that they feared.

What is behind God’s actions here? Is he jealous of man? Is God threatened after all by this tower of mud and slime that these men have built? Does it mean that he is afraid that men will master all things and that he cannot any longer control them so that the very foundations of the universe will be threatened by this inventive man? No. That is the way man wants to read this. Forever we have been telling ourselves that we can do anything

we want, if we want it badly enough! Therefore, we don’t need God; God is optional in human life. We are ready to dismiss him, or at least to remove him to a quiet corner of the house where he won’t bother anybody except when we need him occasionally to run some special errands.

It is true, as we have already seen, that God admits that man can do things if he puts his mind to them. He can *do* anything, but what about *be*? That is the question. You see, there is a fatal flaw in man’s thinking. What does he actually purpose or propose to do? The final answer is, to glorify himself,

- to be the center of things,
- to be the master of the universe,
- to be God, in other words.

God knows that man is incapable of this; he is a creature. He is a dependent being; he always was, and always will be. The very forces he thinks he can manipulate to accomplish his aims are forces that are part of his own life which he did not make and upon which he continually depends. Therefore, he is constitutionally incapable of being the God he attempts to be.

It is always the old, old story of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice. Remember the story in mythology of the boy who hired himself out to a sorcerer to be his servant and to carry his water for him? Like all boys, tiring of the work, he looked around to find some easier way of getting the job done. One day when the master was away he prowled around among the sorcerer’s magical paraphernalia. He found certain books with magic words, incantations, in them. He learned a few of these and tried them out on the broom. To his amazement he found that he could command the broom to carry water in buckets. He sat back, opened a magazine, and read while the broom carried in the water, bucket after bucket. But after a bit he detected a little moisture on the floor. To his consternation he realized that the tubs and basins were all full and the broom was still carrying in the water. He decided he had better do something about it. He arose and uttered the magic incantation, but the broom kept on carrying in the water, dumping it on the floor. As it began to rise around his ankles the boy panicked. He didn’t know what to do. He cried out every magic word he knew, but nothing worked, and the broom kept on carrying in the

buckets and dumping them on the floor. Soon the water rose around his neck, and he began to cry out in anguish, realizing that he hadn't learned enough. He was saved at the last moment by the return of the master who, in a few words, cleared up the whole situation.

That is a parable of the tower of Babel. Man, in his inventiveness, thinks he can master the earth. But the very solutions he works out become the bigger problems which he can no longer encompass. The whole vast scheme of things eludes him; he is not able to put them all together. Thus, for man's sake – (this is the heart of it) for man's sake – not because God is afraid of man, but for man's sake, to protect him from himself, God says, "Let us go down and confuse their language." Let us stop man, in his mad folly, from destroying himself off the face of the earth, because he is not God enough to handle it."

So God came down and suddenly, as the workers gathered for work one morning, they found they could not communicate with each other any more. What a scene this must have been! The foreman would give orders, but the men would shake their heads; they didn't understand. The foreman would yell, but they wouldn't get it. They would try to explain but he couldn't understand them. You can imagine what fist-shaking, table-pounding, and yelling went on here. It was utter confusion.

The Bible plays upon the name for Babel, and links it with the Hebrew word for confusion, *balal*. It says this was a veritable Babel of confusion. It is interesting that the name *Babel* means "the gate of God." That is what man named the tower. But in the ultimate outcome, Babel became the place of confusion. "The gate of God," in man's eyes, becomes confusion in the eyes of God. Since that day men have been divided by this confusion of tongues.

It is most striking that the confusion of tongues is most evident, even today, in the Hamitic families of earth. Linguists know that most of the languages of earth can be gathered into family groups (e.g., the Indo-European family of languages), and in the Japhetic line and the Semitic line they are quite closely allied; it is not difficult to group those various tongues. But in the Hamitic languages all is utter confusion. Tribes of people, growing up close by one another, have completely different languages. It still persists into this day, and it still divides mankind. We are all aware of the attempts

to overcome this with awkward devices of translation. The United Nations cannot even meet together without mechanical gadgets of translation by means of which they can understand one another.

We think we have solved this confusion by translating one language into another, but any linguist knows that language is much deeper than words; it is a basic, fundamental element, reflecting the thought of life and cultural pattern of a people. Merely to know the words of a man's language by no means guarantees that you can communicate with the man. This confusion of language represents a loss of basic understanding between peoples, the loss of the ability to communicate at the deepest levels of thought. I was struck by a quotation taken from a world traveler recently who said,

On my trip to Asia, the word *Coca Cola* was the one word I understood in every language. It sprang out familiarly from signs written in the most alien characters. What is wrong with a world in which this is the only word that has survived the Babylonian confusion of tongues? We can still talk to one about *Coca Cola*, but not about freedom, not about God, not about what a neighbor is.

Is that not striking? The impressive thing to me is that man is still haunted today by the lack of unity. He feels the need for it. He feels that if we can only get together, then, with our technological abilities, if we can just cooperate, we can do anything. Is that not the dream that hangs over humanity? If we can merge – this is the day of the merger, corporations are merging, nations are merging, companies are merging, churches are merging – if we can just become one great community again, then, with our technological excellence we can master the earth. The dream still endures, but God still scatters. God yet continues the confusion of tongues.

This may be hard for the Wycliffe translator who is seeking to put Scripture into the various languages of the earth, but, nevertheless, it is the kindness of God that confuses the speech of men. It is God's way of preventing the ultimate catastrophe. When man at last gets together again, and, under the illusion of technical ability, thinks he can master all the great and intricate mechanisms of life, we will have achieved the ultimate disaster.

This is why God continues to humble men everywhere, to scatter, to humiliate, to bring low the proud. Why? Because, as Jesus said in the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit [the man who has nothing, the man who has lost everything upon which he can depend, outside and inside himself] for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” {Matt 5:3 RSV}

When you no longer depend on anything in you, then God is ready to give you everything he

possesses: That is the basic message of the Christian faith.

Prayer:

Who has been thy counselor, Lord? Which of men has instructed thee? How we need to quietly listen and remember that the “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;” that without your mind we will only make a continual mess of things, both individually and as a race. Teach us this, Lord, above all else. We ask in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Beginning of Faith

by Ray C. Stedman

There is a simple secret that ties together the Old and the New Testaments and makes the study of the Old Testament a never-ending delight: The Old Testament is designed to be a picture book, illustrating with fascinating stories the spiritual truths presented in the New Testament. This is especially true of the books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and the book of Joshua, for in the life histories of men like Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, we also have a symbolic representation of the progress of spiritual growth.

One of the most convincing proofs of the inspiration of the Bible is the facility with which the Spirit of God takes simple history – facts as they were lived out day by day – and recorded them in such a way as to weave together a totally accurate pattern of the development of spiritual life. In other words, what took place physically in the Old Testament is a picture for believers today of what takes place spiritually in their own growth in grace.

It is not imagination to view the Old Testament in this manner; ample proof is found in the New Testament itself to indicate that God planned the structure of his book in this manner. In the tenth chapter of First Corinthians, Paul refers to many incidents in the history of Israel and concludes the account with these words:

Now these things happened to them as a warning [literally, type], but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. (1 Cor 10:11 {RSV})

And in Romans 15:4, he says,

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. {Rom 15:4 RSV}

The letter to the Galatians, as well as our Lord's own use of these stories, further indicates clearly that they were regarded as a type, depicting by accurate analogy the course of intended spiritual development.

There is need, of course, to be on guard against wild and fanciful interpretations. We must move with care, so as not to overstep the laws of interpretation. But it would be a pity to miss, for example, the Old Testament illustrations of the great truths of the Christian faith reflected in the book of Romans and elsewhere:

- Abraham's life beautifully portrays the truth of justification by faith;
- Isaac is the man who teaches us what it means to be a son, a child of God;
- Jacob's life is designed to show us how God works in sanctification to deliver us from the reigning power of sin; and

- Joseph is a most beautiful picture of what it means to be glorified by resurrection and thus enter into the challenging and exciting task that awaits the day of the manifestation of the sons of God.

Perhaps the clearest and most helpful of all these Old Testament portraits is the record of Abraham's life, beginning in distant Ur of the Chaldees, and ending at last in the cave of Machpelah near Hebron, in Canaan. Abraham is clearly the pattern man of faith. Again and again, in the New Testament, he is held up in our view as the example of how God works in the life of a man to fulfill his promises of grace. He is obviously chief of all the heroes of faith recorded in Hebrews 11, and in addition to the Christian faith, two of the great religions of the earth hold him in high esteem.

Therefore, we may well begin the study of this man's life with a sense of excitement. In Abraham, we will find ourselves reflected. In tracing his life's story we shall discover the very secrets by which the Spirit of God intends to transform us from faltering pilgrims to men and women of stalwart faith, worthy to stand beside the heroes of Hebrews 11.

Abraham is first introduced to us in the closing verse of Genesis 11, and the opening verses of Genesis 12. His name was originally Abram, and it was not until years later that it was changed to Abraham. The reason for this change was highly significant, and we shall examine it in due course, but for the present let us get acquainted with young Abram. The Spirit of God passes over his early life in Ur of the Chaldees with but the briefest notice, and begins the sacred record with his encounter with God. This is where life truly begins!

We know from Stephen's great speech, recorded in the seventh chapter of Acts, that this call came to Abraham when he lived in Ur of the Chaldees. It was once thought that Ur was a very primitive city. I have read several books which attempt to depict Abram as an ignorant, unlettered nomad of the desert who lived in a very primitive mud-walled village. We could hardly expect to find in such a man much more than the primitive searching of a barbaric man struggling to discover God. But the spade of the archaeologist has since turned up the ruins of Ur, and we have learned that this was a city of great wealth and considerable

culture, containing a library and a university. The city was devoted to the worship of the Moon Goddess, and it is almost certain, that Abram was an idolator, a worshipper of the moon. The book of Isaiah more than hints at this.

Stephen declared that the God of glory appeared to Abram there in Ur. We have no knowledge of the form this appearance took. But whatever it was it is important to note that the initiative was with God. This is true throughout all human history. Man may think he is feeling after God, but that feeling itself is the drawing of a seeking God. Here was God, then, suddenly breaking into the life of the man Abram, as he lived in Ur, worshipping the moon and kneeling before his dumb idols.

In this meeting Abram came face to face with a command and a promise; he was commanded to go, and he was promised a land. There is no question but that the land to which he was to go was a literal place, and the promise to make his name great and to make him the father of many nations has been literally fulfilled. I stress this now because I am not going to mention it hereafter in this study. I believe in the literal fulfillment of these promises as history has already amply confirmed them. The study of how God literally fulfilled these to Abram is an area of truth that is helpful and illuminating, but our concern here is to discover another dimension in this historical account. We will follow the warrant given to us by the New Testament (in the Scriptures already quoted), and make spiritual application to our own lives of what we see here.

Above all, we must not make the mistake which is so common today of taking these literal promises of the Old Testament and applying them literally to the believer today. When Israel, for instance, was told that they were not to intermarry with other races, God meant that literally. But when we try to apply that literally to nations today, we get into all sorts of absurdities. Some of the false concepts on which the doctrine of racial segregation is based come from an attempt to apply the literal instructions of God to Israel in a literal way today. All these things were written for our *spiritual* instruction. As we read this great command and promise to Abram, we may see ourselves here. For this is nothing more nor less than what God says to every person today, in a spiritual sense.

Abram was commanded to do three things; leave his country, his kindred, and his father's

house. This is exactly the command that comes to every person who hears the call of the gospel today:

1. We are called to leave our country – the place where we have been living, our residence since birth. That is not, of course, our physical residence, but rather the old life with all its ambitions, its loyalties, its worship of money and fame and power, its imagined independence which is really slavery – all that we have been by nature since birth. There comes a command in the gospel to leave our country. This is clearly a picture of the world – organized society with its satanic philosophies and value systems.
2. Abram was also told to leave his relatives. In the spiritual sense these are the moral forces that shape our lives. Just as blood relatives affect us greatly on the physical level, so these moral forces at work today change our lives constantly and color all that we think and do. The opinions of others, the traditions of men, the pressures from family and friends, the attitudes of our employers and others around us – these are the kindred we must be willing to forsake when we hear the call of God. When God confronts us with his call, these are not to count any longer. We are to renounce this concern about what others think and be preeminently concerned about what God thinks.
3. The third thing Abram was to leave was his father's house – that is, the ties with the "old man." Our father, in this sense, is Adam, the father of us all. What theologians call our "Adamic nature" is the father's house in which we all live. We are called to leave this, no longer put any dependence upon our looks, talents, or any of our normal resources, but to begin to walk in dependence upon another to do through us what we cannot do ourselves.

This is where a man stands when he first hears the gospel. He may have grown tired of the land of Ur, for it is a land of darkness, of weariness of soul, of spiritual hunger and death. Yet when the call of the Word of God comes to him, there is much that seems desirable in the old life. He hesitates to leave, feeling the pull of these things upon him. Undoubtedly, Abram felt this hesitancy. The

land to which he was called was unknown. It could not be known until it was experienced. But he could not deny the reality of God, and he could not evade the clear command: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."

Have you heard this command of God in your own life?

Have you heard the Living God, the God of glory, say to you,

"You must no longer depend upon what you have been depending on – the opinions, the attitudes, the philosophy in which you have been reared. These are wrong. They are based upon the lies of Satan and you must not live on this basis any longer. You must learn to accept the truth reflected in the Word of God, though it cuts right across the philosophy of this world. You must, above all, leave your father's house, that is, dependence upon yourself."

It is a simple but vital decision – you cannot stay in Ur and go to the land at the same time.

Now, with this command comes a **mighty promise**. It too is three-fold:

"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." (Gen. 12:2-3 {RSV})

- The first promise, that God would make of Abram a great nation, was literally fulfilled in Israel. But what does it symbolize spiritually, to us? What is a nation? It is simply the life of a man expanded and enlarged to great proportions.

In our modern times, a nation may be made up of a thousand strains from many different family groups, all living together in a heterogeneous society. Such is not the biblical nation; in the Bible, every nation begins with a man; then there is the family, and as the family grows and expands, there is finally the nation. Every nation is but the continued, expanded life of a man.

This promise, then, becomes for us a picture of eternal life, which is in fact the first promise of the gospel. “The wages of sin is death,” (that is the old country of Ur), “but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord,” (Rom 6:23 {RSV}). Leave your country, your kindred, and your father’s house, and what happens? “I will give you eternal life,” God says. “I will make of you a great nation. I will make your life one of constant expansion and enlargement – life will take on universal proportions for you.”

- The second promise, “I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing,” meant several specific things to Abram. As we trace the story of his life, we find it meant he would have riches, he would find honor, and he would be a blessing to others, i.e., he would become influential and effective.

Now this is exactly what God is offering men today. Of course, if you are thinking in terms of dollars and cents, you are on the wrong track; this is never promised to a believer.

- a) God never commits himself to make us wealthy when we become Christians, but he does promise us the riches of Christ. Paul says. “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Rom 11:33 {RSV}). These are, indeed, wonderful riches. This is the adventure the world is striving for more than anything else. Men are earnestly looking for something that will satisfy them within, and change them without, and they will pay any amount of money for it. But money cannot purchase it. Only in Jesus Christ can you find the possibility of being what God intended you to be, of fulfilling the beauty of your womanhood, or the glory and strength of your manhood. These are the riches of Christ.
- b) Then God offers honor, but not the honor of men. If you are looking for big crowds and excitement and the praises of men, you might consider running for political office,

but if you are looking for honor, genuine honor, then listen to the words of Christ: “If any one serves me, the Father will honor him,” (John 12:26b {RSV}). The honor he will give makes you the very nobility of earth; your name will be listed with those in Hebrews 11:38, “of whom the world was not worthy.”

- c) Then God offers this, the choicest of all: “I will make you a blessing.” This is the glory of being used to bless others, the joy of a fruitful life. There is nothing more wonderful than that. It has been my privilege on a few occasions to have God use my life in a way that has opened up and blessed the hearts of others, and I tell you there is no other joy like it on earth. It is the most thrilling experience to feel that God has used you – the words you have spoken, the things you have said – to solve someone’s desperate problem, to make life begin to unfold for them, to see homes reunited, and hearts brought together again and problems solved. This is what God offers every believer in Jesus Christ; all these – riches, honor, and blessing – are part of the second promise of the gospel.

- But there is yet a third part: “I will bless those who bless you and him who curses you I will curse, for by you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” What is this but the truth of identification, of sonship?

It is what every parent thinks of his child: “I will bless those who bless him, and those who curse him I will curse.” We are wrapped up in our children. They are the apple of our eye, and whatever touches them touches us. So John writes, “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God” (1 Jn 3:1 {RSV}). God says, I will identify myself with you. What concerns you, concerns me. But listen to this again, “I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse.” That is, we will be identified with God in the eyes of the world. We will be, like him, a creator of crises. Everywhere you go, you will be either a blessing or a curse, but no one will ignore you. God will make your life to be so vitally in touch with himself that

you will have the effect he has when he touches human life.

It was so with Jesus of Nazareth. No one ever came into contact with him and remained neutral. This is what God says to each pilgrim in the life of faith: "If you will leave your country, your kindred, and your father's house, I will make you into this kind of person, so that you will affect every life you touch for better or for worse. They will bless you, or they will curse you." Surely this is what Paul means in Second Corinthians 2:15-16:

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? {2 Cor 2:15-16 RSV}

This is God's design for the Christian. Your life will be vital with that vitality that God himself possesses. Then all the families of earth will be blessed through you. That is universal usefulness. God will take any one human being and touch the world in some sense through him. This is a vast and marvelous promise, is it not? Perhaps now you can see that in these brief words to Abram of old, God has encompassed truth about life that is written in the pages of Romans, Ephesians, Galatians, and Corinthians – in all of the New Testament. It includes all God offers to do in us through Christ.

Note that it is all of God. Abram was to do nothing except obey, God would do everything else. If Abram would but set his face toward the land, leaving the old things behind, God would do the rest.

Now, **what is the land?** This we must recognize, for we are going to meet this land of Canaan throughout the Word of God.

Perhaps you have heard it described as heaven. It is not heaven, except in the sense that heaven begins here on earth. It is not some state that we must wait until we die to enter. It is intended that we should, like Abram, enter it at the beginning of our Christian life, and live in it all our days.

What is the land then? It is simply life in Christ. It is what the New Testament calls the fullness of the Spirit. It is life controlled by the Spirit of God, reflecting the glory of Christ. We enter it by conversion, but we do not experience the fullness of its blessing until we learn, like Abram, to adjust ourselves to its peculiar demands. But it is the land of promise, the land of fulfillment, the land of God's blessing and power. The whole of the Bible is written for no other purpose than to bring the people of God into the land of God. This is where he called Abram to go.

At this point in the record there comes a little interlude which we must consider. We are told that Abram obeyed God and started out for the land, but he stopped along the way. The record of those wasted years at Haran is found in Genesis 11:31-32:

Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran. {Gen 11:31-32 RSV}

As far as we know from the record, Terah never heard the call that Abram heard. He left Ur, not in order to enter the land of Canaan, but simply to get away from Ur! The call of Abram made him recognize that Ur did not offer a life that was satisfying to the heart, and when he saw that his son was determined to leave, Terah said, "I'll go along." So, as the father and head of the family, he went out, but only as far as the land of Haran, half-way to Canaan.

How clearly this pictures those who attempt to gain the promise of the gospel by leaving Ur (the world and its ways), but who never enter Canaan.

There are thousands today who have left Ur and come to Haran and settled down there, who will die there. The word *Haran* means "parched," and it is indeed a parched and barren place to live. Many, like Terah, have left the world and its ways; they have joined a church. They have got religion. They live moral lives while they sing the songs of Zion and go through the outward motions of faith. But they will never go farther than Haran. They

are dying there; they are religious, but not born again. What a parched experience that is.

But Abram was there, too! He had left Ur by faith and was on his way to Canaan, but he wasted many years of his life in Haran. While he was there, there was no discernible difference between him and his father. In New Testament terms, he was converted, but he was not yet regenerated. He was not yet ready to fully obey God, for he had not left his father's house – dependence on his own resources – as God had commanded. As a result, he wasted seventy-five of his one hundred and seventy-five years in Haran. Finally Terah died, and when the old man died, Abram was then free to go on into the land of Canaan.

I hope you follow the typical significance of this. If we depend upon our own resources to be acceptable to God, he must take them all away. He will let us go on for a long time so that we may learn the weakness and folly of such a life, but, finally, he will take them away. When he does, we think it is a dreary day for us, but it is the greatest day of our lives, for then we are free to enter the land where we may learn to be dependent upon God alone.

Now as Abram comes into the land, we have a **revealing description of life in the land:**

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions which they had gathered, and the persons that they had gotten in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. Thence he removed to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb. (Gen 12:4-9 {RSV})

This is more than just a record of what happened to Abram when he first entered the land. It is also a very accurate picture of the conditions of a Spirit-filled life.

- The first thing we are told is that Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. These names are most revealing. *Shechem* means "shoulder," and the shoulder is to the Hebrew a symbol of strength. We think of the shoulder of a mountain in the same way. The name *Moreh* means "instruction," and when we combine these two words, we get our first glimpse of what it is like in the land. Only as we are taught the Word of God by the Spirit of God do we find strength to live.

Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation; (1 Pet 2:2 {RSV})

- The second picture we have here is that life in the land is to be a life of constant conflict. We read, "At that time the Canaanites were in the land." These Canaanites were the pagan tribes which afflicted Israel all through their history. When Israel came back into the land after their stay in Egypt, God ordered the extermination of these tribes, but Israel failed to carry it through. Therefore, these people hounded and bothered and afflicted Israel as a thorn in their side the whole of their history. They are thus an accurate picture for us of those manifestations of evil we live with and continually wrestle against. They are named for us in the New Testament in many places: lust, envy, jealousy, impatience, intemperance, irritability, touchiness, etc. They are our daily enemies – these manifestations of self which make our existence a life of continual conflict.
- Thirdly, it is also a life of continual cleansing, for we next read, "So he built there an altar to the LORD." We think of an altar as a symbol of worship, which it is, but that is not the essence of its meaning. An altar is first a place of cleansing, which provides the basis for worship. The reason for a daily altar is the urgent need for cleansing in the pilgrim life. Every pilgrim needs the cleansing of blood, the cross

of Christ, to which he can come and judge self as it exhibits itself in his life. So many Christians seem to feel they need the cross only at the beginning of their Christian life, but we need it every day, for it is the word of the cross which is the power of God in daily life. This is why Paul cries, "I die every day," (1 Cor 15:31b {RSV}). Therefore, this life of the Spirit's fullness must be a life of continual cleansing by the cross of Christ.

- The fourth point is that this is a life of unending choice. Abram pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai. *Bethel* means "the house of God," *Ai* means "ruin." This is just where we must live the Christian life, ever looking either to the things of God, or to the ruin of the flesh. We can choose to go to Bethel or to Ai, to Christ or self – it can never be both. I am either pleasing myself, or pleasing him. I am either at Bethel, the house of God, or at Ai, the place of ruin. I must continually choose.
- The last characteristic is represented by the tent. What did Abram do when he got to the land? He journeyed on! He never stopped for long. He lived in a tent because he was a pilgrim in the land. He could never settle down; he could only sojourn for awhile. All through the New Testament the Christian pilgrim is exhorted to walk in the Spirit. Walk, walk, walk! When you have learned a lesson from God, that is not the end. That is just another step. Tomorrow there is another step to be taken, and another the day after that, and another the day following.

How the flesh resents this. We are always delighted when the Spirit of God drives us to

the place where we achieve some victory, overcome some habit, take some needed step. And then we want to settle down there. We say to the Lord, "You go on for awhile and leave me here. I want to enjoy this for a bit."

But he will not let us stop. Life in the land is a life of continual progress, a never-ending journey.

Everyone is living in one of three places – Ur, Haran, or Canaan.

Where do you live? What a question to search the heart!

- Ur is the land of death and darkness, the land into which we were born.
- Haran is the half-way house where we gain the outward appearance of being religious but where there is no inward reality.
- Canaan is the land of power and blessing, the place of the Spirit's fullness.

Have you entered the land?

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray you may use these lessons from Abram's life to lead us out, that we may rise up to go into the land of the fullness of blessing in Christ. May we fully realize that every word you say here is true and that every promise can be fulfilled. May we hear your voice saying, "Arise, get up, go out from your country, your kindred, and your father's house, into that land which I will show you!" We ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The High Cost of Letting Down

by Ray C. Stedman

It is a refreshing experience to meet a pilgrim in the midst of our secular, security-loving age with its continual emphasis upon comfort, convenience, and compromise. We can identify pilgrims by two invariable symbols: a tent and an altar.

- Not that such people actually live in tents, but their whole outlook is that of one who lives in a tent. They hold material things loosely, and are conscious of the fleeting, ephemeral values of what the world thinks important. There is a discontent with what the earth offers and a hunger for something more. This is the tent.
- The second characteristic is the altar, the place of self-judgment where true worship is found. It means having a low opinion of one's own abilities and a high opinion of God's. It is an awareness of the constant need of cleansing and a dependence upon a power greater than self.

The story of Abraham is the story of such a pilgrim. It takes us back two thousand years to the other side of the cross; but the spiritual history of this man is as up-to-date as if he were born in the 20th century {A.D.}. With his tent and his altar, Abram sojourned in the land of Canaan; i.e., he had no permanent home, but moved about from place to place.

The land of Canaan, as we have seen in our introductory study, is a picture for us of the Spirit-

filled life. It is not a place of special privilege, as many think. It is not a place to which only the great and the favored few can come. The land of Canaan is where God expects every Christian to dwell every day of his life, 24 hours a day!

Though Abram is now in the land, he has not yet learned the conditions of life in the land. He stands in the same place as any new Christian who is now "in the Spirit" {Rom 8:9}, but has not yet learned to "walk in the Spirit," {Gal 5:25 KJV}. And, as so often happens at this stage of the Christian life, as we pick up the story of Abram in Genesis 12 we find it is the story of the failure of faith. What new Christian has not discovered what it is to lose his sense of joy and his awareness of the presence of Christ in his life? We shall find the reasons for this perplexing experience traced here in three movements:

- The famine in Canaan,
- The folly of Egypt, and
- The fullness of God in the land.

The account begins in Chapter 12, Verse 10:

Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. {Gen 12:10 RSV}

The land of Canaan was much like parts of California – wonderful land with a magnificent climate, but dependent upon the limited rainfall for

water. But there are times when there is no rain and the land experiences a drought – the land becomes parched and dry and the grass withers. In a pastoral economy this is a dangerous time. Abram was a man with flocks and herds, and when the rains failed these were severely threatened. He saw his immediate source of sustenance endangered, and it must have seemed increasingly impossible to remain where he was. As the scarcity of food grew, he felt driven to leave, even though God had called him to be there.

There is not a word here about asking God's permission to go down to Egypt. Abram took counsel, not from God, but from his fears alone. To use a contemporary expression, he "pushed the panic button," and down to Egypt he went. It was fear that drove him.

Now, if the land is a symbol for us of the life of fellowship with a living Christ, then a famine in the land is any circumstance that threatens our dependence upon him. It is any circumstance that makes faith difficult to maintain.

Have you ever experienced such a famine? Have you been living in the full joy of fellowship with Christ, and the strength of God is your portion, and suddenly some circumstance beyond your control makes it difficult to maintain that fellowship, and there is a famine in the land?

- It may be a new boss who turns out to be an ogre.
- It may be neighbors who throw their garbage over the back fence; or a tiger of a mother-in-law who comes to live with you. It is always some difficult circumstance of life that makes it hard to maintain fellowship with Christ.
- Perhaps it is hard and demanding labor that leaves you little time for cultivating the spirit.
- It may be a bitter disappointment that crushes you and your heart aches so you can hardly find strength for prayer and fellowship.
- It may be depressing surroundings which are hard to rise above, which continually oppress you.

- It may be misunderstood motives – you meant to do good and someone took it wrong, and you have been cut to the quick.

In short, it is any temptation that seems more than you can bear, which threatens to cut off your very strength, your fellowship with Christ.

When this occurs, the temptation is to flee rather than to stick it out. We do not enjoy trials like this, and we try to get away – physically, if we can. We move to another neighborhood, change jobs, take a trip, or go home to mother. If we simply cannot flee physically, we try to run away mentally. We escape the unpleasant reality by a flight into unreality. There is so much of this being done today – some retreat into a mental Egypt where life seems much more pleasant than it is in reality.

Once, perhaps, it was a simple problem of daydreaming, but now we can have it done for us electronically by way of the television set. *Dr. Parker's Fourth Wife* is brought to us in picture as well as sound. Many live in that realm of fantasy all day long. Or maybe you begin to haunt the movie theaters for distraction from your worries. Of you find you need a continual din from the radio pouring into your ears to keep you from disturbing thoughts, or from a quiet, thoughtful facing of life as it really is. Perhaps the retreat you choose is a constant round of social life a period of activity, or the overloaded weekend. Far too many Christians are demonstrating that the spirit is willing, but the flesh is ready for the weekend! With some, there is a retreat to alcohol, or even to over-eating, forgetting that an overhang is perhaps as bad as a hangover. Whenever we attempt to satisfy the spirit by the same resources that the worldling has at his command, we have gone down to Egypt.

There is a vast difference between this escape and the occasional need for recreation and rest which God himself recognizes: "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while," (Mark 6:31 {RSV}).

Nor is Abram's flight into Egypt a warning to us that we should have nothing to do with worldly people. We are expected to live our lives in the midst of the world and its ways. But going down to Egypt means adopting the attitudes, the expectations, and resources of the world. It is to try to slake the thirst of the spirit at some dry cistern once more.

Abram's experience here is given to teach us **the unutterable folly of Egypt:**

When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account." When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, he-asses, menservants, maidservants, she-asses, and camels.

But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her, and be gone." And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him; and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had. (Gen. 12:11-20 {RSV})

Now let us see what happens in Egypt:

1. First of all, the pressure is off! Abram found the release he was seeking, there in Egypt. There was a famine in Canaan and he felt the pressure of it and ran away from it, and immediately he found the pressure relieved. There was plenty to feed upon in Egypt, and it is far more comfortable and relaxing to live in a house in Egypt than in a tent in Canaan. But this is not the whole story.
2. What else happened in Egypt? It is most evident that when Abram lost his faith he also lost his courage! Even before he got into Egypt he grew afraid and descended to cowardliness and falsehood. He told a little white lie; that is what we would call it today. He said to his wife, "Look, dear, I know these Egyptians. I read about them in the library in Ur. They are

all wolves, and you are a beautiful woman. I know what will happen when we get down there. They will want to take you, and if they know you are my wife, they will kill me. Let's play it smart with a little strategy. You tell them you are my sister."

This was not wholly a lie. Sarai was Abram's half-sister. She was the daughter of a woman who married Abram's father after Abram was born. So this was a half-truth. But a half-truth is also a half-lie, and a lie in any proportion is intended to deceive. The nearer it is to the truth, the more perfectly deceitful it is. Abram's intent was clearly to deceive. Doubtless he justified it on the grounds that it was needed to protect his beautiful wife. Perhaps this is the most startling thing about this story. Sarai was sixty-five years old at the time, yet so remarkable is her beauty that Abram is afraid he may lose her, and when the Egyptians see her they immediately take tales of her beauty to Pharaoh. Abram feels cast upon his own resources to defend her, and his only recourse is to lie.

This is the first result of moving out of Canaan, and out of fellowship with Christ – out of the land, away from the tent and the altar, old self comes to the fore and assumes control. The immediate manifestation is hypocrisy and deceit.

Have you found that to be true? The minute you begin to move away from the control of God, your old self, with its defensive mechanism against being hurt, comes to the surface and you stoop to falsehood, hypocrisy, and deceit.

The outcome of this lie was that Sarai was put into a place of real danger. The king claimed her for his harem, and the lie Abram told opened the door for him to take her. The danger he thought existed had no power to harm her until he made it possible by his lie! This is the second folly of Egypt – our loved ones suffer because of our cowardice and deceit.

Abram was trying to protect himself, but in protecting himself he exposed Sarai to ignominy and danger. This is the trouble with Egypt. It is true the pressure we fear is relieved there, but, when we try to live on the resources of the world, we lose our own strength,

and endanger those who look to us for help. Not only was Sarai endangered, but Lot also. Abram's nephew, Lot, went down to Egypt with him. Later on, when the allurements and enticements of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah cast their spell over Lot, we are told that he saw the land as though it were the plain of Egypt and the lust for comfort and worldly glory that was born during this stay in Egypt almost destroyed him then.

Remember, when you flee to Egypt, your loved ones are being hurt, as well as you.

3. The third factor about Egypt is that Abram was made very rich.

You say, "What's wrong with that? This is not an evil, but a blessing."

Perhaps, but it was Jesus himself who used the phrase, "the delight in riches" {Mark 4:19b RSV} referring to one of the things which could choke the Word in a person. In Egypt, Abram was given sheep, oxen, he-asses, men-servants, maidservants, she-asses, and camels. This is the wealth of the oriental world. But when he comes back into the land, the first thing we hear of is strife between his herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen over the riches they got in Egypt.

Furthermore, we are told he was given maidservants, one of whom was named Hagar, with whom Abram later conceived the child, Ishmael, the father of the Arab nations, who have been ever since a thorn in the side of Israel. The price of living in Egypt is a fearsome price to pay.

4. But this is not all: Abram became a curse to the worldlings with whom he lived. "The LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife." He was called to be a blessing, but when he got into Egypt, he became a curse instead!

A Christian out of fellowship with Christ is of no help to the lost people around him. Instead, he is a hindrance. His life of hypocrisy and weakness is a stumbling block and a plague upon the hearts of those who are watching him.

In God's name, if you are not walking in the fullness of the Spirit, do not attempt to wit-

ness to anyone about Christ! You will become a curse to them if you do.

5. Finally, Egypt is a place of rebuke and humiliation.

What a scene this is! Here is Abram, the man of God, standing before this pagan king who has better morals than he has, being publicly rebuked for his folly.

Years ago, when I was a young Christian living in Denver, Colorado, I took on the job of soliciting advertisements for a small church paper. The pastor felt that some of the businesses with which the church dealt would be willing to put an ad in our little paper. I was to call them on the telephone and solicit the business. Among others, I called the woman manager of a prominent restaurant nearby and opened the conversation by telling her I was calling for Mr. Hewitt, the pastor of the church, as he had given me permission to do. Evidently she misunderstood and thought that I was Mr. Hewitt. Throughout the conversation she addressed me as Mr. Hewitt. It took me off guard at first, and I did not correct her at the time. She placed an ad, and the next month, I called her again to renew it. It had worked so well to be mistaken for Mr. Hewitt that I thought I would tell her it was he calling again. So I got another ad. The third month, I tried it again, but this time her voice grew cold and distant, she said, "I don't know who you are, but you are not Mr. Hewitt, for as I sit here in my office I can see Mr. Hewitt and his wife eating lunch. I don't know what kind of church you run, but if this is the means you have of getting business then don't bother with me anymore." And she hung up the phone. I can still feel the shame and humiliation of that moment as though it were yesterday. What a terrible place of rebuke and folly is Egypt.

But now God terminates the painful lesson of Egypt in Abram's life. At the deepest moment of his agony, crushed with humiliation and sick at heart, Abram comes out of Egypt, tarred and feathered and riding on a rail, back into the land of Canaan. We read, "Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had." "Good riddance, Abram,

we're through with you!" What a price to pay for the release from pressure that Egypt affords.

But once back in the land, he finds the fullness of supply that he could have had all along!

So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him into the Negeb.

Now Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. (Gen. 13:1-4 {RSV})

As soon as Abram is back in the land, there is the tent and the altar again. There is no tent or altar in Egypt. That is, there is no pilgrim character, no place of worship or cleansing, no fellowship in Egypt. But even back in the land, Abram must come back to the place where he had made an altar at the first, and there Abram calls upon "the name of the LORD." In other words, time spent in Egypt is wasted time! There was no growth in grace in that land. He had to come right back to where he was when he went down to Egypt. He had material gain to show for the time in Egypt, but nothing but barrenness and weakness spiritually.

Have you discovered how true this is? When you forsake the pathway of faith, when you refuse to walk in fellowship with God, when you depend upon the resources of the world to satisfy the empty hunger of the heart, these are wasted years! They may literally be years. I know Christians who have lived almost all their Christian lives in Egypt and all they have to show for it is a barren, wasted, empty, dreary, boring existence.

When Abram at last returned, what did he find? There is no mention of famine when he returns, but I think the famine is still going on. Remember, Abram was driven out of Egypt. He was not yet ready to leave it of his own choice, and this would indicate the famine was still raging in Canaan. Also, the quarrel which developed with Lot's herdsmen over the pasture land suggests there was still a severe shortage of feed. But, though the famine still continues, Abram is no longer troubled about it. Why not? Because, when he reached the land, the first thing he did was to call on the name

of the LORD! This is what he should have done, and could have done, when the famine first struck.

The "name of the LORD" stands for all the resources of God. When we cash a check we are calling on the name of the man who signed the check. When Abram calls on the name of the LORD he is discovering the resources of God. He discovers that God is able to meet his needs despite the famine, the trial, or the circumstances. Just as Paul proclaims, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus," (Phil 4:19 {RSV}).

In the closing days of Hudson Taylor's life, the Boxer Rebellion broke out in China. Every day reports were coming to missionary headquarters of the death of national pastors, or the persecution and imprisonment of missionaries. It seemed that all that Hudson Taylor had given his life to was crumbling before his eyes. One black day, after some particularly distressing news had come, Hudson Taylor's associates wondered if it would be too much for the old man. He spent the morning in his house, alone, and when they came to see him in the afternoon, they trembled at what they might find. But as they approached the house, they heard him singing to himself:

Jesus, I am resting, resting,
In the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness,
Of thy loving heart.

Thou hast bade me gaze upon Thee,
And thy beauty fills my soul,
For by thy transforming power,
Thou hast made me whole.

Are you in a time of testing and trial that makes it difficult to hang onto God?

Do not think for a moment you will find what you need by running down to Egypt?

You will find a kind of relief, but the price of Egypt is a terrible price.

For the soul that says, "It's all right, Lord, I'm looking only to you to see me through," there is yet waiting the sure and full supply of God – that inner strengthening of the heart that makes it possible to meet whatever trial may come, in the joyfulness and glory of faith.

Prayer:

Our Father, how many times must we confess to you we have been down in Egypt. We have sought to quiet the hunger of our hearts by indulging in some of the things to which the world turns in its desperation, and we have found nothing but emptiness, and more hunger. Help us to see that only in you, the Living God, is there an abun-

dance of supply, and you wait to reveal that supply to any heart which will give up its wanderings and searchings and cast itself upon you and rest there. May we, like Abram, learn that in Egypt there is nothing but heartache and sorrow and danger for our loved ones, but in you is all we need to meet our deepest cry. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Letting God Choose

by Ray C. Stedman

Someone has pointed out that life seems to be arranged backwards. We are called upon to make our most important choices at a time when we have the least amount of experience to guide us. Because of this, we so frequently hear expressions of regret like, "If only I had known," "If I had it to do over again," etc. But it is this very quality of life which reveals the inability of man to handle life by himself. It is a wise person, indeed, who learns this lesson early and gives heed to the Biblical admonition,

**Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
(Prov 3:5-6 {RSV})**

After the temporary failure of faith which took Abram from Canaan into Egypt, we find him once again in the land, with his tent and his altar, enjoying the fullness of divine supply. As we saw earlier, however, life in the land is a life of continual conflict; we must go from victory to victory. Furthermore, it is a life of unending choice.

We are now given a very illuminating account of what happens when strife and trouble break out in the Christian life. Who has not stood at this place?

And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites dwelt in the land.

Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between

your herdsmen and my herdsmen; for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left." (Gen 13:5-9 {RSV})

We have been reading of this man, Lot, all through the story of Abram. He was Abram's nephew, and he came with him out of the land of Ur. The whole story of this man is told in one brief phrase in Verse 5, "Lot, who went with Abram." That sums up Lot's whole life. He went with Abram! Wherever Abram was, Lot was. When Abram stopped, Lot stopped. "With Abram" – that is all that can be said of him.

Many of the commentators seem to feel it was wrong for Abram to take Lot with him out of the land of Ur. There is no doubt he was a continual weight around his neck. But Scripture never implies that it was wrong to bring Lot along. Lot evidently responded when God spoke to Abram and called him to go out into a land which would be shown him. Lot wanted to go along, and Abram, wishing to help him, agreed. The trouble is not with Abram, but with Lot.

Lot seems to be a picture of those Christians who depend upon others for faith and inspiration to act. There are many Lots around. They never seem to learn to walk alone with God, but lean on another's faith for strength. As long as they have a strong church to lean on, or a close friend who is a faithful Christian, or they can listen to a gospel radio station all day long, or they have a Christian magazine coming regularly, then all goes well. But where the prop is weak, they are weak also. When Abram's faith failed, Lot's faith failed. Lot just leans on Abram all the way. He is clearly a second-hand Christian. Although his own faith is genuine (and the New Testament makes it clear that Lot was indeed a righteous man), nevertheless, he

depends wholly upon Abram for the effectiveness of his service.

This works well as long as the pressure is on. As long as things are a bit tough, Lot will stay with Abram for he senses his need for the strength of the man of faith. Lot feels his weakness to act upon his own faith. There are so many like this. As long as things are a bit difficult, they lean hard upon their Abram, whoever or whatever it may be. But there is one kind of test that this type of Christian cannot stand – the test of prosperity, when all goes well. Material prosperity, especially, will always show up the Lots in our midst.

So we read here that when their possessions were so great they could no longer dwell together, strife came between them. Today, we would call this a conflict of interests. There are many parallels to this in modern life.

Here are two men, for instance, who are partners in business, both of them Christians. For the stronger of the two, the man of faith, this business exists for only one purpose: to benefit the work of God. He knows that God expects him to take his normal living from it, but that is not why he is working. His real reason for working is that he may use the strength and wisdom God gives him to invest and make money to advance the work of God. At first, the other partner goes along with him and agrees that this is a worthy basis for the business. But prosperity comes! They make a little money, and the second man raises his standard of living and gets his eyes on the material things of life. He becomes more concerned about building up the business and making a big thing of it than about anything else. When that happens, there is only one thing to do. As with Lot and Abram, there comes a time for a dividing of the ways, and it is the man of faith who takes the initiative.

Lot would have let this thing fester until it broke out into some serious conflict, but Abram says, "There is only one thing to do. We must separate now before there is any further difficulty."

Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen; for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left." {Gen 13:8-9 RSV}

Note the reasons Abram gives for suggesting this separation. Every word here is instructive:

- In the last part of Verse 7 we are told, "At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites dwelt in the land." Why are these mentioned here? Is it not a warning to us that whenever strife looms between Christians, the enemies of the Lord are ready to take full advantage of it? These Canaanites and Perizzites, dwelling in the land, are clearly representative of the evils of the flesh that lurk in every Christian heart – jealousy, envy, resentment, bitterness, malice, etc. They are always ready to spring into action if there is any dissension or grievance between Christians. Abram acted before these could be awakened, for he knew they were in the land. There is that in each of our hearts which, if allowed to fester, will come to the fore, and we will be possessed by the spirit of jealousy, resentment, or bitterness. Abram acted before this could happen.
- The second reason is found in his words, "Let there be no strife, for we are kinsmen," i.e., "brethren." We are brethren! That means we are tied together in the same bundle of life, and if I hurt you I am hurting myself. If you hurt me, you are hurting yourself. Brethren cannot have strife without injuring one another. Whenever strife develops between members of the body of Christ, it always has this result. It is a case of cutting off your nose to spite your face. If you hurt your brother, you are surely hurting yourself.

Abram, in his God-given wisdom said, "Let us not have any of this. We are brethren, so do not let this become an issue between us. Let us calmly settle the matter now before it breaks out in open conflict." Then Abram did a magnificent, God-honoring thing; he gave up his own rights without a murmur. He was the older man of the two and the acknowledged leader, Lot's superior in every way. Yet he said to him. "Lot, you take the first choice, I will give up my right to first choice. If you want to go this way, I'll go that way." How evident it is that the tent and the altar have already done a work of grace in this man's heart!

I once heard Dr. H. A. Ironside tell of an experience in his early life when his mother took him to a meeting where two Christian men almost came to blows over a disagreement. One man finally stood and pounded the desk and shouted, "I don't care what you do, but I will have my rights!" At that, an old, partially deaf brother, who had been sitting near, leaned forward and cupped his ear in his hand and said, "Eh? What's that? What did you say, brother? Your rights, is it? Is that what you want? Ah, brother, if you had your rights you'd be in hell! The Lord Jesus didn't come to get his rights – he came to get his wrongs, and he got them." And with that the belligerent fellow flushed and sat down, saying, "You're right, you're right, settle it any way you like." Soon there was perfect agreement. It was this same spirit that moved Abram to give Lot the first choice.

Now we learn what happens when Lot chooses:

And Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw that the Jordan valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar; this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley, and Lot journeyed east; thus they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, while Lot dwelt among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD. (Gen 13:10-13 {RSV})

Evidently Lot and Abram went out on a promontory overlooking the valley and Lot lifted up his eyes. What did he see? It is quite obvious he only looked in one direction. He had been out looking around before! Without hesitation now, he looked to the east and saw the well-watered plain below like "the garden of the LORD" in the midst of the desert. He saw the Jordan River cutting through its great gorge, the deepest point on the face of the earth. On either side of the Jordan, the lush green grass was growing, and the variety of palm trees made the whole place a veritable garden, and he was greatly attracted to it; it was a modern real estate developer's dream!

Then he saw the cities of the plain. They were like Egypt! Lot remembered Egypt well as a place where one could get rich quick, with its vast com-

mercial enterprises and its blind materialism. This is what Lot saw as he looked across the valley.

But the passage suggests there were some things that Lot did not see. Although the Jordan valley was there before his eyes, he did not see the significance of its name. The word Jordan means "death." The river descended out of the living waters of Galilee, dropping far below sea level into the Dead Sea, from which there is no outlet. Outwardly it was fair to look upon, spiritually it meant the place of death, and this Lot failed to see.

Then it is specially pointed out here that "the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD." Lot saw the profitableness of these cities, but he did not see their moral corruption. The name of Sodom today is linked to a most disgusting and revolting form of sin. Though the life of the city was morally rotten, it was hidden beneath an attractive prosperity.

We have our Sodoms today. Moral corruptness has permeated our social life and is one of the consequences we must take into consideration as we face the choices of life. This Lot failed to do.

We are told yet another thing that Lot missed: "This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah." Here is a mention of the judgment that was to come. Again, Lot saw the prosperity and the beauty, but he did not see that this was a place marked out for judgment; it was all to be swept away forever. You may say there was no way for Lot to know these things. This is true. Neither Lot nor Abram could foresee the death, the rottenness, the judgment that life in Sodom would bring. But the whole point of the story lies right here. Lot, presuming to run his own life, "chose for himself," and, deceived by what he saw, stumbled blindly into heartache and judgment. Abram, on the other hand, was content to let God choose for him, though it meant apparent second-best. And long before the true nature of Sodom became apparent to Lot, Abram saw it in its true light.

When will we learn that the inner nature of things as they really are is only revealed to the man with the tent and the altar? It is only as we take the pilgrim character and remember we are not to have our final dwelling place here on this earth, and we hold lightly the things of earth, that the Word of God begins to unfold to us and we see something of the judgment, the moral corruptness, the deadly character of what otherwise looks so attractive and is highly regarded on every side.

So we read, “Lot chose for himself.” What a descriptive term that is! As he looked out, Self said, “Ah, this will advance you, this will make you prosperous, this will give you status and position.” So he chose for himself, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. That is, every time he moved his tent, he moved it constantly nearer Sodom. We shall see more of what this meant to him in a later chapter.

But now, what happened to old Abram? How did it go with the man who was willing to let God make the choices for him?

The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your descendants for ever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your descendants also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.” So Abram moved his tent, and came and dwell by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the LORD. (Gen 13:14-18 {RSV})

Lot had lifted up his eyes and chosen for himself; now God says to the man of faith, living in his tent on the hillside, “Abram, lift up your eyes.” Where? Everywhere! – to the north, the south, the east (the portion Lot chose), and the west. All the land is his!

This land is consistently the symbol for us of the fullness of life in the Spirit of God; the life of joy, power, love, and glory; the life of refreshing ministry to others. Surely this is what Paul longs for us when he prays that you “may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God,” (Eph 3:18-19 {RSV}). This is all yours, if you are willing to let God make the choices of life for you.

Lot will never know this! Nor will we, if we make our choices on the basis of what we see, relating to the materialistic, commercial standards of those about us. But if, like Abram, we are content to have what God gives us in life, all the fullness of

Christ will be ours. Paul says in First Corinthians 3:21-23:

For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s. {1 Cor 3:21b-23 RSV}

Then God said to Abram, “Not only do I give this land to you, but I will fill the land with your descendants.” That is, “I will make you fruitful beyond belief. I will make your life one of such blessing that after you are gone there will be those who will stand up and say, ‘I received my spiritual life through that man; there came to me strength for my journey through him; he has been a great blessing to my heart and life.’”

Then he said to Abram, “Arise, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.” The land is all that Christ will be to us through the eternal ages to come. But God is saying to us, “Don’t wait for it. You don’t have to wait until you die to enjoy this. You can have it now, if you will possess it in Christ. Walk through the land. Set your feet upon it. Possess it – now!”

If we, seeing Abram walking up and down the land, had said to the Canaanites and Perizzites, “Do you know who this man is? This is the owner of all this land!” They would have looked at us with pity, laughed, and continued on their way. But it was true! Wherever Abram wanted to move in that land, God opened the door for him. The whole land was his. He could go where he wanted. He could live where he chose. The Canaanites and the Perizzites had to move out when Abram came in. Thus the Spirit of God declares to us in Romans 6:14:

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. {Rom 6:14 RSV}

Whenever you want to be free from the weakness and ruin and power of sin, you can! The land lies open before you. Possess it!

So we read, “Abram moved his tent and came down to the oaks of Mamre.” Mamre means “fatness,” the place where the soul is made fat with the fullness of supply. And there at Hebron, which means “fellowship,” he built an altar to the LORD. In the place of fatness and fellowship, Abram con-

fessed again by the building of an altar that he was nothing but a fallible human being, without strength in himself, needing that constant supply of the cleansing of God. It is a wonderful picture, isn't it?

Everyone dwells in a world exactly like that of Abram and Lot. A world in which material values constantly clamor for us to make a choice. We have only so much time to invest, so much life to spend, and we are pressured to try to grab the best for ourselves while we can. We can say with Lot, "I want what the world can offer me now, I want the cities of the plain." Or we may wait with Abram, content with our tent and altar, enjoying the blessings of the land by faith now, and waiting for God's fulfillment of all his promises in that wonderful age yet to come. The Christian who is

content to let God make his choices finds it easy to fulfill the New Testament word: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you," (1 Th 5:18 {RSV}).

Prayer:

Our Father, we understand now something of the shortsightedness of human choices. How many heartaches we have chosen by insisting that we choose for ourselves! Give us grace to let you make these choices for us. Create in us a hunger for the fullness of the land. Make us discontented with our present possession of it but lead us into the full knowledge of the love of Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

When you Need a Friend

by Ray C. Stedman

To many, the Christian life appears prosaic, dull, uneventful. It is anything but that! If it appears to be so, it is almost certainly a life out of focus with true spirituality; in other words, a carnal Christian life. We have seen already that whenever Abram is found with a tent and an altar in the land of Canaan, he is a wonderful picture of a Christian living in the power and enjoyment of his pilgrim life, in this world but not of it, daily judging self by the cleansing of the cross. Lot, on the other hand, is a picture for us of the carnal Christian, flesh-governed, living for self. He has forsaken the place of fellowship with Christ. Lot left Abram up on the hillside and moved down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of the plain. He was drawn by the allurements of the world and began to live for himself and for the pleasures of life. He pictures a Christian who is born again, but enmeshed in the enticements of the materialistic, commercialized world around.

Now, suddenly, a shattering experience breaks into Abram's quiet, pleasant existence. Life in the Spirit is like that. We are never permitted to rest beside the still waters very long, nor would we want to, for life there soon grows dull and uninteresting.

In Genesis 14, we are introduced to the first war ever recorded in Scripture. It is a stirring account, vividly contrasting the blustering armies of earth with the quiet, overcoming power of faith. We get our first glimpse of these earthly armies in the first three verses.

In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal the king of Goiim, these kings made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). (Gen 14:1-3 {RSV})

The spade of the archaeologist has amply verified the historic existence of the kings named here. Long before the rise of the Babylonian Empire, these kings made a military foray into the land of Canaan, perhaps to defend their trade routes with Egypt, or to subdue the warlike tribes of the area. The account here could have been taken from the daily newspaper of Sodom; the city was aware of the threat to its welfare and liberties, and was much alarmed.

As the account progresses, we learn that Chedorlaomer is the chief of the invading kings. Historically, he is identified as the Elamite dictator, from the land east of Persia, which is now known as West Pakistan. He came with his satellite kings against the confederacy of five kings from the cities of the plain.

His coming in this manner is representative of the world's power to harass and enslave Christians. But more than one type is required to portray the whole aspect of the enmity of the world. Sodom, for instance, is a picture of the world in its lust for sensual pleasures. In contrast to this, this invasion from the east is a portrayal of the world in its naked power to enslave and tyrannize and take away

the physical liberties of man. These forces are often found opposed in history. Our own beloved nation of America is already enslaved to the forces of materialism, greed, and sex. These forces are dominant throughout our national life. But it is also threatened by an outside force, Communism, which ruthlessly seeks to destroy our physical liberties and reduce the nation to literal slavery. Here are two differing forces, yet both arise out of the fallen nature of man:

- One is a desire for material gain, economic advancement, luxury, ease, and sensual pleasure.
- The other is sheer naked tyranny, threatening our very physical existence.

This is exactly what confronted the cities of the plain, and Lot especially, as he now dwelt in Sodom. Lot is already enmeshed in the blind commercialism of Sodom, but has kept himself free from the sexual degradation of the place. Now he is threatened by a circumstance that would deprive him of his basic liberties.

In terms of our experience today, this might be some form of legalism, or perhaps some vicious habit such as alcoholism or self-abuse. It might even be a sickness that renders one a bedridden invalid – although, all such sickness is certainly not of this nature. Whatever may be the difficulty, it is some outward circumstance that threatens physical or spiritual liberty. Here is Lot, a carnal Christian, caught between the jaws of vice – the materialism of Sodom and the tyranny of Chedorlaomer.

Verses 5-7 reveal the apparent invincibility of this enemy:

In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and subdued the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, and the Horites in their Mount Seir as far as El-paran on the border of the wilderness; then they turned back and came to Enmishpat (that is, Kadesh), and subdued all the country of the Amelikites, and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazazon-tamar. {Gen 14:5-7 RSV}

Rephaim and Zuzim were families of giants. It is from this group, later in Israel's history, that Goliath came, whom David decapitated with his own sword. These were men eight to ten feet tall, a mighty race who were greatly feared by the people around them. Yet the invading kings swept even these giants before them.

The territory mentioned here is quite extensive, covering from the north and west of the Sea of Galilee, down the Jordan Valley, all the way south to the Red Sea. Here, then, was an enemy, seemingly invincible, relentless, unstoppable, striking fear into every heart as they carried all before them.

At this point we have the first mention of Lot in the story. If it were not for him, we would know nothing at all of these events, because the Bible never takes any cognizance of human history except as it relates to the peoples of God.

Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim with Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five. Now the valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits; and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the mountain. So the enemy took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way; they also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. (Gen 14:8-12 {RSV})

It is specifically called to our attention that in the valley of the Dead Sea there were many tar or bitumen pits, filled with natural asphalt.

If you have visited the La Brea Tar Pits in Los Angeles you will know just what is described here. These open pits of asphalt would be covered over by the desert sand as the wind blew across them and they would appear like the surrounding ground. But anyone venturing into such a pit would be held by the tar and his body would be imprisoned for centuries. The bones of dinosaurs and other beasts have been found in the La Brea Tar Pits, having been encased in tar for many centuries.

Evidently the five kings of the confederacy felt that this area would be the best place for battle, as

the pits would be a natural defense. But instead, they turned out to be a trap. As the tide of battle turned against them, they fled to the mountains in head-long haste, and many of them, falling into the pits of tar, were destroyed. In the ensuing capture of Sodom, Lot and his family and all his goods were carried away by the invading army.

Perhaps you have had an experience of falling into just such a circumstance as this. You have tried to fight back but nothing seems to avail. The very defenses upon which you rely become threats against you. You have the choice of capture or falling into the slime pits, one or the other. And perhaps, as Lot, you have found yourself captured against your will by some evil habit or power that enslaves you.

Then notice what happens! The Holy Spirit shifts the scene to Abram up on the mountainside, so that we might see the overcoming power of faith. All hope for Lot now lies in Abram's hand:

Then one who had escaped came, and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner; these were allies of Abram. {Gen 14:13 RSV}

A messenger comes to Abram, doubtless sent by Lot. At the last moment before his capture, he must have hurriedly sent this man out to slip through the lines and find his way to Abram. It is likely that he barely escaped from the clutches of the enemy with his life. He finds Abram in Hebron, the place of fellowship. With him are three men who are his allies.

Mamre, as we have noted before, means "fatness or richness." *Eshcol* means "a group or bunch," and *Aner* means "an exile, one who withdraws himself." Taking these three names together, I see a prayer meeting here! Here, symbolically, is a group of people, living in the richness of fellowship with Christ, who have withdrawn themselves from the ordinary demands of life for a specific purpose. This is exactly what our Lord bids us do, in Matthew 6:6a: "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father ..."

Abram, the Hebrew, is leading the meeting. Since this is the only place in Scripture where Abram is called a Hebrew, it must have some special significance. The word *Hebrew* means "passenger" or "pilgrim." The Spirit of God would

highlight for us the character of the ones to whom Lot looks for rescue. They are led by the man who holds lightly the things of earth, the man of the pilgrim life.

To this band on the hillside comes the message that Lot is in trouble. When Peter, in the New Testament account, was put in prison, we are told that the church prayed for him without ceasing. As a result, the doors of that prison were flung back, the iron gates were opened, the shackles fell off and Peter was led out by an angel. When a child of God through ignorance or selfish folly has fallen into something that enslaves and grips and holds him, the only answer is the believing prayer of the people of God. That is what we have here.

Now let's see how victory is achieved:

When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. And he divided his forces around them by night, he and his servants, and routed them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. (Gen 14:14-15 {RSV})

Here is the key to victory – three hundred and eighteen men trained for warfare! This was not his entire battle force. There were other men belonging to Abram's allies, but this is the hard core of trained, disciplined men he relied upon to lead his little army into battle. He had only three hundred and eighteen, but that was all he needed! It might have seemed a pitiful handful beside the vast armies of those four kings who had come out of the ancient east, sweeping everything before them as they came. But if we will learn the lesson taught us here, and all through Scripture, we need never be discouraged by overwhelming numbers again. The lesson is simply this: God's victories are never won by force of numbers! Never! "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the LORD of hosts," (Zech 4:6b {RSV}).

I tell you, if three hundred and eighteen people were to gather to pray, that would be a red letter day indeed. And if those three hundred and eighteen people knew how to pray, were trained in the warfare of prayer, they would shake the powers of evil around the world! Three hundred and eighteen would put to rout all the vast armies of the enemy.

Our world is threatened by the tremendous power of Communism, and many of our brothers around the world are grievously threatened by fear if they stand firm in their faith. I fully believe God is showing us that the whole secret of the defeat of this terrible enemy will lie in a relative handful of people, who here and there will faithfully get together and recognize that victory does not lie in the might of weapons, of nuclear missiles, or diplomacy, but in men and women of faith who are pilgrims and strangers here in this world, and who will regularly separate themselves from the demands of life and seek the mind and face of God concerning this evil. Then the forces of tyranny will be lifted in many places, and men and women who are now enslaved by the pitiless, ruthless chains of Communism will be set free.

Note the careful strategy Abram employed. We are told he divided his forces by night. The march of Abram and his tiny band is one of the most remarkable forced marches in history. They traveled the whole length of the Jordan River, coming upon the enemy considerably north of the Sea of Galilee. As was the custom with armies of that day, when the pagan invaders had withdrawn to a place they considered safe, they made camp for several days and indulged in a time of carousing and reveling in celebration of their victory. It was at such a time and place that Abram and his allies found them, and during the night, they divided their forces and surrounded the drunken camp. Abram sent one part of his army one way and one the other, one group perhaps with spears and the other with swords for close combat. At a signal, they sprang upon the surprised host and there was a general rout and a great victory.

This division of Abram's forces into a two pronged attack is suggestive of the Christian's weapons in spiritual warfare. In Ephesians 6, we are reminded that we possess two effective weapons – the Word and prayer:

And take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication ... for all the saints. {cf, Eph 6:17-18 RSV}

Many a Lot has been delivered from the slavery which bound him by the helpful counsel of the Word of God given through some fellow-believer, and the prayers of the men and women of God who

have prayed for him. Thus Abram divided his forces, and using a twofold approach, he set the enemy to flight.

Notice yet a third incident. Abram pursued them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. Hobah means "hidden," and therefore signifies a complete victory, even to the point of the enemy hiding himself to escape. Abram never let up. He kept on till the forces against him were demoralized. He pressed his advantage to the utmost. He did not quit fighting, he did not stop praying, at the first little break, but pressed on through until he won a great and tremendous victory. In Verse 16, we see the extent of the victory Abram won:

Then he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his goods, and the women and the people. {Gen 14:16 RSV}

Now, in all this, the Holy Spirit would drive one thing home to our hearts. We do not lead our Christian lives in isolated seclusion – we are members one of another, and in circumstances of this nature, one Christian can often be the means of deliverance to a weaker brother. There was nothing Abram could do to deliver Lot from Sodom. Sodom represented an inward choice in the heart of this man. Lot chose to live in the materialistic, sensualized atmosphere of Sodom. If a child of God chooses to be materialistic, sensual, commercial, greedy for things of the world, not much can be done for him. Only Lot could take himself out of Sodom. But from this circumstance that threatened Lot's very life and liberty, Abram's resources were amply sufficient.

James 5:16b tells us, "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects." There is a Chinese translation of that verse which is excellent: "The earnest, hot-hearted prayer of a righteous man releases great power." That is certainly the case in this incident.

"The prayer of faith," we are told in the same chapter of James, Verse 15, "will save the sick man and the Lord will raise him up;" {Jas 5:15a RSV}. Many have been puzzled by this verse, but if we read the context, we see clearly that the affliction here is one that has come because a child of God has permitted himself to be involved in deliberate sin. Such a one is to call the elders of the church together and confess his faults, and then the prayer

of faith will save the sick and the Lord shall raise him up again, and he will be delivered from the thing that has held him captive. It is a wonderful experience, this power of prayer for someone else.

The history of the church is replete with instances of such deliverances through faithful prayer. Recently, a wise and experienced missionary leader, speaking to a group of us on the subject of prayer, took up this matter of some overwhelming sin that so grips the heart as to enslave the life and frustrate all activity for God. He gave some very wise words of advice. "Perhaps some younger

Christian," he said, "may find himself in such a circumstance, and the thing he is doing is so shameful that he cannot bring himself to confess it publicly; then let him seek out some older man of God, someone he can trust, and lay the whole matter before him and ask him to pray concerning this." It is wise counsel, indeed. When Lot could not possibly help himself, Abram, separated in heart from the Sodom-like attitudes that rendered Lot so powerless, was able to lay hold of God and effect a great and mighty deliverance.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Peril of Victory

by Ray C. Stedman

Following Abram's great victory over the invading kings from the east, the 14th chapter of Genesis relates a curious incident with a strange and mysterious king named Melchizedek. The book of Hebrews makes so much of Abram's encounter with Melchizedek that our curiosity is awakened and we are stimulated to find out more about this man of mystery. We may be sure that the deliberate interjection of this account at this point in Abram's life is designed by the Spirit of God to unfold to us blessed and needful truths.

Abram is now on his way back to Sodom with all the goods of the city and much of the population, including Lot and his family. It is a time of victory for Abram, and therefore a time of peculiar peril. In our spiritual life, the enemy loves best to strike when we are relaxed and off guard after some spiritual victory or period of great usefulness. His approach then is never open or frontal, but subtle and insidious, taking full advantage of our relaxed defenses. We shall see, then, how Abram is suddenly confronted with a subtle temptation on his way back to Sodom, how, by a strange interlude, deliverance comes to him, and, finally, we shall observe the sensible attitude he displays concerning others who are involved in this incident.

After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). (Gen 14:17 {RSV})

Our special attention is directed to the place where the king of Sodom met Abram on his way back from the battlefield. It was a valley right outside the little village of Salem. In later Israelite history, Salem became transformed into Jerusalem, the capital of all Israel. The valley outside the city, even then known as the "King's Valley," was none

other than the Valley of the Kidron, the little brook that ran down along the eastern side of Jerusalem, separating the mount of Olives from the city. It was into this valley that our Lord went with his disciples on the night he was betrayed, crossing over to go up the slopes of the Mount of Olives to Gethsemane's Garden. In this strategic and historic spot, the king of Sodom met Abram.

Skipping down to Verses 21-23, we read:

And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thing or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'" {Gen 14:21-23 RSV}

Here is the subtle temptation which suddenly came upon Abram. He was met by the king of Sodom, who had somehow escaped capture and was in the city when news came of the triumphant return of Abram with the spoils of war.

On the surface, the king of Sodom's offer seems a perfectly justifiable reward. Abram had fought his great battle not, of course, on behalf of the king of Sodom, but for the sake of Lot and his family. Nevertheless, the effect of his victory was of great benefit to the whole of that wicked city. For this reason, the king was there to meet him. A special welcoming committee had been appointed, headed by the king himself, to confer upon Abram the usual reward for a conquering hero. The king simply asked for the return of the residents of the city; the goods and riches he gratefully offered to Abram. The wealth of Sodom was all to be Abram's!

Now notice the subtlety of this temptation. It appeared to be so right and proper! Abram could well have said. "This is certainly only what I deserve, and after all, it is the custom to do this. Everyone does it! There are no strings attached. I can take the wealth and go my way back to my tent and altar and never go near Sodom again." Who of us, standing in Abram's shoes, would not have thought like this?

But it was exactly in the apparent freedom of the gift that the peril lay. To a man of Abram's character, it is impossible to accept this kind of a gift without feeling an obligation to the giver. If he had been required to sign some kind of contract, he would have found it easy to say "No," but to accept this gift without strings would be to make it exceedingly difficult to say "No" to anything later on. From that day on the king of Sodom could say, "Abram is indebted to me. If I ever need any military help, I know where I can get it. My man is up there on the hillside." The gift was an insidious threat to the independence of the man who took orders from no one but God. If Abram yielded, he would never be wholly God's man again.

Note the timing of the temptation; it came when he might well be off guard, enjoying the popularity of the hour. He had earned a few moments of relaxation after the strain of battle, and at this quiet moment in his life the subtle offer came.

Have you experienced something like this? I have seen young Christian college students who are surrounded throughout the school year by subtle and perilous dangers to their faith and fellowship with Jesus Christ, and who maintain proper safeguards, keeping alert, aware of the peril that confronts them. But when they come home on vacation, they let down their guard and there comes some sudden and appalling failure. Satan has chosen that moment to attack.

There is no doubt that the pressure on Abram to accept this gift is very great. It was an expression of gratitude on the part of the king, and I am sure that Abram felt the king would have been hurt if he rejected this sincere offer. I have found that many Christians, myself included, have been trapped by the fear of offending someone if we say "No!" We are troubled about what they will think, and so often very little troubled about what God will think. We fail to realize if we cannot say "No" now, how can we ever say "No" after the offer has

been accepted and we are indebted to some degree. The easiest time to say "No" is now!

This is what the Apostle Paul means when he says, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything," (1 Cor 6:12b {RSV}). That is, the only one I wish to serve is Christ. The only power to which I will yield my life is his. Anything else that threatens to control me or limit me I reject! It may be lawful, it may even be in good standing all around, but if it makes any demand upon me that is not his demand, I do not want it! This is what Abram is so beautifully demonstrating here.

He replies to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'" Note the positiveness of that decision. He says, "I will take nothing; not a thread, not even a shoestring! I do not care that you offer me. I want nothing: No thing. Period. That settles it!" More positive language is simply not possible.

And note the solemnity of what he says. This is tremendously important to Abram. It is not some mere passing whim. He says, "I have sworn to the LORD my God." This touches the deepest thing in his life. He takes a solemn vow that he will not touch anything of Sodom's. And how perfectly frank he is: "lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'" In other words, he is saying, "I want you to know why I have done this. I can serve only one king at a time, and I want you to understand that I am not concerned for my own enrichment, least of all through you. If God doesn't give me something, then I don't want it. If it doesn't come to me through my God, to whom I have committed my life and from whom I have determined to accept whatever he offers, then I don't want it."

It is a bold and positive declaration, is it not? What a clear-cut victory! The subtle trap of the enemy has been uncovered and the danger is safely past. The Lone Ranger escapes unscathed again! Ah, but why? This is what we are interested in. How is it Abram saw through this subtle thing so clearly, and so stoutly resisted the almost overpowering pressures to which he was exposed?

Now let me put it to you bluntly: If you were in Abram's shoes that day, knowing your own heart, would you have offended the king by rejecting his grateful offer?

I am sure my own devious heart would have viewed it as an added bonus from God, as a result of my great faithfulness to him in battle, and I would have accepted Sodom's gift. Well, Abram did not! Yet he was a man like me, of like passions and heart.

How, then, could he pass this test so easily? The answer lies in this strange interlude with Melchizedek which we have passed over till now, Verses 18-20:

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. {Gen 14:18-20 RSV}

Before the king of Sodom met Abram with his wily offer, Abram had already met with another king, the mysterious Melchizedek. He steps suddenly out of the shadows, ministers to Abram, and just as suddenly disappears from the pages of Scripture, and we never hear another word about him until we come to the 110th Psalm, where David declares that the Messiah to come is made a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Then another thousand years roll by, and in the book of Hebrews we have another extended reference to this strange individual.

Who was Melchizedek? The guesses range from Shem, the son of Noah, who, according to some chronologists, could have still been alive at this time, to an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ in human form. All we are positively told of him is that he is the king of Salem (which afterwards became Jerusalem), and that he is the priest of the Most High God (Hebrew: *El Elyon*). His own name means "king of righteousness." He appears suddenly in the Scriptural record without any mention of his father or mother, no birth date, and no subsequent account of his death. These omissions from the record are seized upon by the writer of Hebrews to indicate that since we have no record of his genealogy, this man is a type of the eternal priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ who, in actuality, has no beginning nor ending of days, but who

ever lives to make intercession for all those who come unto God by him. Thus, the Melchizedek priesthood is a ministry of help to those who face a time of trouble.

Here, then, is a man who is evidently a Gentile king. The original knowledge of God as the maker and possessor of the heavens and the earth, passed along by Adam to his descendants, has evidently come down to Melchizedek unchanged. He is a worshipper of the true God, and a priest to that true God. In this sublime presentation of Scripture, the record shows him in such a way that he becomes a type of our Lord Jesus who is our heavenly Melchizedek, ready to minister to us in our need. His specific ministry is to reveal *El Elyon*, the Most High God, the One who owns everything in heaven and on earth. He is the one perfectly adequate to meet any human need. This is what Paul declares to the Philippians 4:19 {RSV}: "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Now we can see why God led Abram back to his home by way of the King's Valley. The king of Sodom is coming to meet him, but Abram knows nothing of his approach, nor of the subtle offer with which he plans to put Abram in his debt. Had he known of it, he would have seen nothing wrong with it, for Abram is not different from you and me. The peril is too subtle to detect; it looks too innocent and attractive.

So God sent Melchizedek to meet him! His first ministry to Abram was to remind him of the character of the God he served. Doubtless he warned Abram of the subtle trap awaiting him in the offer of Sodom's wealth, and then perhaps he said, "Abram, your God is the possessor of heaven and earth. He made it all. He owns it. He holds all its wealth in his hands. There is nothing that he cannot give you. This is the God to whom you belong."

And then we are told he served him bread and wine. We need no interpreter for this. These are the symbols of love. They speak eloquently of strength and joy flowing out from the passion of self-giving love. All this is recorded in the Old Testament, yet as we read it, we can see in this historical incident a beautiful picture of the need of our own lives. There is nothing that has such power to motivate the Christian heart as to partake, with the people of God, of these symbols of the

suffering of our blessed Lord. He gave himself in the fullness of his life, poured out all that he was, and as we feast by the Spirit upon the symbols of his life, that life strengthens the inner man, lends sinew to the resolve of the soul, and makes us able to meet all that comes our way. This is the only power sufficient to make us reject the world's offer and maintain our independence as servants of Christ. The love of Christ constrains us!

In the intimacy of this fellowship, under the ministry of Melchizedek, Abram worships his God. The record says he gave him a tenth of everything, that is, he gave him tithes of all he had. The tithe is not a debt paid to God – it is rather a symbolic representation that everything belongs to him. The antitype in the New Testament is not that we continue to give a tenth, as under the Law, nor, as in this case, in patriarchal days, but to recognize that all we are and have is to be given to God in worship. In Second Corinthians 8:5, Paul writes of the Macedonian Christians, “but first, they gave themselves to the Lord and to us,” {2 Cor 8:5b RSV}. The whole of our life is to be focused on the one aim of serving God.

Here in this place, the King's Valley, where centuries later a greater Melchizedek would sweat in bloody agony in a garden, Abram enjoyed by faith the high priestly ministry of Christ. His heart ravished with the love of Christ, and refreshed and strengthened in spirit, he saw that God alone could satisfy his heart. There was no other place where he could find the deep-seated heart satisfaction that makes the rivers of living water begin to flow. Here he swore to the Lord his God he would not touch a single thing that Sodom could offer him, and in the strength of this encounter, he rose up and went out to meet the fair and innocent-appearing trap. Now he was ready for it!

Have you ever found yourself trapped by some subtle appeal that looked innocent enough on the surface and seemed to be the popular thing to do? Too late, you realized its true nature, when the damage had already been done, and all you could say was, “I didn't realize...”, “I never dreamed...”, “I meant right...”!

You may remember an account of an unfortunate young man who perjured himself some years ago in connection with a TV quiz program. Everyone wondered at his apparently endless knowledge of difficult subjects. When he was finally exposed as having been given the right answers beforehand,

he explained to the court that it had all looked so innocent to him. He justified his deceit to himself on the basis that he was advancing the cause of intellectualism and education. He felt that as people saw him give these almost impossible answers, they themselves would be stimulated to learn more. He knew some would regard it as cheating, but it was justifiable as advancing a good cause. Then, at last, there came a realization in his own heart of what he had done, and he confessed it. He said, I was deceived, deluded. I couldn't see the way it really looked until it was too late.”

This happens to many of us, doesn't it? Life is full of subtleties like this – little decisions, little problems, incidents that seem so innocent on the surface. We find it easy to rationalize and justify our choices. Why is it we fail? It is because we do not go to our Melchizedek! We give him no opportunity to minister to us and open our eyes. We do not come to the throne of grace, as we are bade, to find grace to help in time of need.

We are like poor, troubled Martha, stewing over her pots and pans in the kitchen until, out of patience, she comes storming into the parlor to blame the Lord Jesus for all her problems! Luke gives us the story in his gospel, Chapter 10:38-42: Martha meant to make the Lord welcome in her home, she intended to fix him a delicious meal, yet she ends up so frustrated and bewildered that she insults him and accuses him of causing the whole mess. In contrast, the Lord suggests to Martha that she needs what Mary had found. What was Mary doing? She was sitting at Jesus' feet, letting him open her eyes to truth as it really is. She was letting him possess her heart, and, as she did, she found life falling into place, the right things were being emphasized. She saw things in their proper perspective and focus.

Abram would never have passed by this subtle trap unscathed had Melchizedek not met him, and, in the intimacy of that fellowship, he saw what he would not otherwise have seen – that the values on which the world sets great store are but baubles compared to the glory of fellowship with a Living God, Maker of heaven and earth. When the king of Sodom came, Abram could say, “Take your little toys and run back to Sodom, I want none of it. I want no man to say that he has made Abram rich. If anyone makes Abram rich, it will be God.” What a victory!

One more incident is brought before us in this story. It is the very sensible attitude Abram displayed toward the others who were involved with him in this affair. He says to the king of Sodom,

“I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me; let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.” (Gen 14:24 {RSV})

Abram, do you mean to say that it is right for these young men to have what is wrong for you to take? Is it possible to have a double standard of right – one for you and one for them? What a lesson there is here for us!

These young men had not yet come to the stage of Christian living and maturity that Abram had achieved. There is no Melchizedek for them, or, if there was, they did not enter into the same depth of comprehension that Abram did. Abram is content to let God deal with them directly in these borderline areas. He is not going to force others to walk in the light of his conscience. Somehow, Abram has learned the truth of Romans 14, that we are not to judge our brother in these matters, Verse 5b {RSV}: “Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind.”

I have had Christians tell me that God had spoken to their hearts and told them it was wrong for them to drink coffee, and they have tried to persuade me to stop, too. But I am still waiting for word from the Lord on this!

I recall hearing of a dear old Nazarene evangelist called Uncle Bud Robinson. He spoke with a bit of a lisp and was well-known and well-loved by Christians throughout the West. Among certain groups these borderline issues are frequently raised, and whenever anyone would say to Uncle Bud,

“How can a man drink coffee and be a Christian?” he would say, “Juth bring me a cup and I’ll thow you.”

It is a great lesson to learn that there are areas of our Christian life where we must walk alone before our God, and cannot force our views on others. So Abram says, in effect, “Let the young men have their share. It is not right for me to take anything, but they are not standing in my place. Let them have their share.”

Now, life lies ahead of us with all its possibilities of peril and danger, both spiritual and physical. How we need to go on in the strength of the Lord our God, Maker of heaven and earth. Nothing that the world offers can fully meet our hearts’ need. All that will really satisfy comes from him alone. We are in this world. We are expected to live in it. We are expected to use the world, but not to abuse it. We must not love it, nor demand anything from it.

Like Abram, we must lift up our hand and say, “I have sworn to the Lord my God, I will not touch anything that you have to offer.”

Prayer:

Our Father, how gracious you are to send us that blessed, heavenly Melchizedek to strengthen us in times of peril, and to enlighten our hearts. How clearly we see now the need for fellowship with Him. How dare we face the perplexities and complexities of this subtle world apart from daily fellowship in the King’s Valley with Him. What easy prey we are to the snares of Satan without this. Deliver us daily, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Faith Conquering Fear

by Ray C. Stedman

The opening paragraph of Genesis 15 strikingly illustrates for us what is commonly called in Bible study, “the law of first occurrence.” By this is meant that the first time a word or phrase is used in the Bible, it is used in such a way or in such a context as to highlight the basic meaning of it throughout the rest of Scripture.

Four such phrases appear in this paragraph for the first time in the Bible, though they are repeated many, many times afterward. See if you can recognize them:

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Behold, thou hast given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir.” And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir.” And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:1-6 {RSV})

1. Did you catch the first one, in the very first line? – “the word of the LORD came ...” The recurrence of this phrase many times afterward in Scripture emphasizes the God-breathed character of the Bible. The “word of the LORD came” to many men, just as it came to Abram, and they wrote as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit, and then actually sat down and

studied their own writings to learn what God had said, (cf, 1 Pet 1:10-12 {RSV}).

2. The second phrase is the word that came to Abram, “Fear not!” How often this is God’s word to man, throughout this book.
3. The third phrase is, “I am your shield.” In a thousand wonderful variations, we find this thought repeated frequently: God is our refuge and our strength; God is a tower of refuge; God is an overshadowing rock; blessed is he that hides under the shadow of the Almighty. This is the first intimation of this character of God in Scripture.
4. And then there is that familiar word in the last verse, “And he believed the LORD; and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.” The fires of the Reformation were lit from that ringing phrase!

The heart of this passage does not lie in its great phrases, however, but in its connection with the preceding events of Abram’s life.

God appears to Abram in a vision, but when he comes, his first words are, “**Fear not!**”

This reveals what is going on in Abram’s heart. He was having a sleepless night and the trouble was that he was afraid. Coming, as this incident does, after Abram’s return from his battle with the four eastern kings and his encounter with the king of Sodom, we can see why he is so fearful. He is afraid of this man, Chedorlaomer, the great king whom he had conquered. Abram had publicly humiliated him by overthrowing his vast army with but a handful of men. Dictators do not take this kind of treatment lightly!

We can easily understand the justified fear that Abram felt as he faced the possibility of Chedorlaomer's return. No doubt he said to himself, "What have I gotten myself into now? I am almost sorry that I won this battle, for when he comes back what am I going to do? I won't be able to catch him off guard another time." So fear fills his heart.

Perhaps also there was fear because he had turned down the king of Sodom's offer of a fortune. He did it, of course, in the strength of the fellowship he had enjoyed with Melchizedek. With his heart aflame with the love and grace of God, Abram had said to this king, "I want nothing of all that you have. I don't want you saying that you made Abram rich." So the king went back to Sodom with all his riches and now Abram is back in his tent, experiencing a very human reaction. After the wealth and luxury of Sodom that tent must have looked awfully shabby. The wind was howling around it, and the sand was sifting through its cracks. Doubt begins to rise in his heart as to whether he did the right thing or not. And doubt is a form of fear!

If all this sounds familiar to you, take comfort from the fact that it is a very natural reaction and all the great saints of God suffer from it. If there has been a time when you have taken a stand for God in the strength of his grace, supplied to you at that moment, and yet later, you wondered if you did the right thing, that is only what you might expect. In Abram's heart there was this clutching fear as to what would happen when Chedorlaomer came back, along with a probing doubt as to whether he had made a wise decision or played the fool by throwing away the wealth of Sodom.

Still further, deep down in his heart was a lurking loneliness, a gnawing fear that he had somehow misunderstood the promises of God. It had been ten years since God had said to him, "Abram, I am going to give you a son. His descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth, and you shall become the father of many nations." Ten years of waiting had passed. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick," says the proverb {Prov 13:12a KJV}. The sickness was beginning to creep into his soul a little.

We may gather from his words that he was beginning to wonder if perhaps the Lord had meant he would give him an heir, but it would not necessarily be his own son. Perhaps it would be a foster

son, even a servant such as Eliezer whom he had bought in Damascus. On this sleepless night, I think the old man was trying to adjust to this possible solution, but he could not quiet that sense of loneliness and disappointment within. So he tossed and turned in a mounting spiral of fear and doubt and loneliness.

I am sure if this had happened to us, we would have taken a couple of aspirin or tranquilizers and gone back to sleep. If he had, of course, he would have missed the whole marvelous revelation of God's love! There are times when Christians are perfectly justified in using tranquilizers, but there are also many times when to do so is to miss God's purpose in trial. To run to the drug cabinet whenever anything goes wrong, to be unwilling to allow any unrest or bit of tension, to insist that life must maintain a steady, even keel at all costs, under every circumstance, is to thwart and miss the very purpose for which God sends difficulties into our lives. He only desires to create an atmosphere where he can manifest his glory.

Now suddenly, as Abram tosses on his bed at night in his tent, there comes a sense of a presence with him. In his heart, he hears that mysterious word of the LORD. Sometimes the LORD spoke audibly to these Old Testament men; sometimes it was in the heart, with a quiet, deep conviction that God is speaking. Every Christian who has ever walked in fellowship with Jesus Christ for very long knows what I mean. We are not told how God spoke to Abram, but in the midst of his fear and doubt and loneliness there comes a sense of relief and the word of the LORD says, "Fear not, Abram. I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward. I am the sufficient answer to all your fear!"

Of course, God is the answer! If God be for us, who can be against us? If God is our shield, whom should we fear? I love that verse in Hebrews, "He has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you.' Hence we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13: 5b-6 {RSV}).

"I am thy shield," {Gen 15:1b KJV}. That is what comforted Abram's heart there in the darkness. It was all he needed to settle his worries about the return of Chedorlaomer and the loss of his fortune in Sodom.

Have you learned yet to count on the invisible protection of God? Can you stand before danger as

our Lord did before Pilate and say in John 19:11, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above.” Oh, the sense of the invisible shield of God! As someone has well put it, the Christian is immortal until his work is done. Nothing can touch him nor hurt him except it come by permission of God, who is a living shield around him. We would lose most of our fears if we realized this. Each believer is as safe as one of those TV western stars in the midst of a gun fight! You know that the star of the program is not going to die. It may look as though he is in mortal danger, but he never really is. (Not, at least, until the sponsor is ready to drop the show!)

How many times it seems that we live charmed lives. A number of years ago, my wife and I were driving across New Mexico. We were in a wild and lonely country, driving along about sixty miles an hour. For some time, I had heard a continuous grinding noise. On *my* car that was not unusual, but I finally decided that this was a little out of the ordinary and stopped to investigate. I noticed the hub of the right front tire was hot and smoking. I jacked up the car, and when the weight was lifted, the front wheel fell off and rolled into the ditch. We had heard that grinding noise for some ten miles, and to this day, I am certain that the wheel was kept on throughout that distance simply because of the protection of God.

This is what God is saying to Abram – I am your shield, Abram, a practical defense against any force that would destroy you. Fear not. Nothing shall touch you unless I permit it. Do not fear – I AM!

Have you noticed how many times in the New Testament our Lord Jesus calms his disciples with these words, “Fear not”? And the ground of his reassurance is always that he is with them. When the storm threatens to overwhelm the little boat, when the cold fist of fear clutches their hearts as they sense the shadow of the Cross on their path, when Peter goes weeping bitterly out into the night, his words ring in their ears – “Fear not.” “Let not your hearts be troubled,” (John 14:1a {RSV}). Why? “You believe in God, believe also in me!” {John 14:1b RSV}.

But God is more than a shield. He says also to Abram, “**I am ... your exceeding great reward,**” {cf, Gen 15:1c KJV}. (The rendering of the Authorized Version is to be preferred here.) God is

our dearest treasure, the only genuinely satisfying joy we will ever know.

The other evening my wife and I were invited to a neighborhood party, and we welcomed the opportunity to become a bit better acquainted with our neighbors. We discovered when we arrived that it was a cocktail party, and it had been in progress for an hour or so before we joined it. We were greeted warmly, not to say hilariously, at the door and soon were being introduced to many of our new neighbors, most of whom were in a quite cheerful mood, to all appearances having the time of their lives. But I could soon see that it was all highly artificial. Though there was an outward attempt at happiness and enjoyment, there was also written on every face a haunting emptiness, an expression of meaninglessness and futility. We were both struck by this. They were doggedly determined to have a good time, and insisted they were doing so, despite the hunger and desperation evident in every word and glance. We felt so sorry for those dear people. We said afterwards that we would not trade one moment of the riches of grace in Christ for a whole lifetime of that kind of enjoyment. The sense of the presence of God is a far richer experience of joy than anything else the human heart can find.

This is what Abram experienced when God said to him, “I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” And we never again read of Abram worrying about Chedorlaomer or the loss of Sodom’s wealth. All these pressures from without were fully met by the sense of God’s presence with him, there in the dark.

Ah, but that other request that is in his heart! That vacuum of loneliness within. Could God fill that? And there comes blurring out of the heart of Abram these words, “O Lord GOD, what will thou give me, for **I continue childless**, and the heir of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus.” In the intimacy of that moment, he simply poured out what was in his heart into the ear of his Almighty Friend. And God said, “Get up and come outside with me.” And he led him out into the soft oriental night, and together they looked up into the stars, wheeling in their silent courses above them. Abram must have felt something of the awe of spirit which comes to those who see the blazing heavens at night and sense the insignificance of man. There God said to him, “Abram, I am going to give you a son. Your servant will not be your heir. I will give you a son

and that son shall have sons, and they in turn will beget sons, and you will have a great host of descendants. Now look up at the stars and tell me how many there are, for if you can number the stars, you will be able to number your descendants, for just so many will there be.”

This is a great promise, out of the greatness of God’s heart. It must surely have reassured and encouraged Abram. Each night to come, until the promise was fulfilled, he could look up into the starlit heavens and remind himself of the promise God had made.

There is something of great interest here. The last time God had spoken to Abram about the birth of a son, he had promised him he would make his descendants like the dust of the earth. But now the promise is that they shall be like the stars of the heaven in multitude. Many Bible scholars have seen in this an inference that Abram would have two lines of descendants: an earthly seed and a heavenly one. The earthly seed would be the nation Israel, along with the Ishmaelite (Arabian) nations. But there would also be a heavenly or spiritual seed. That “Seed,” we are told in the book of Galatians, was Christ and all those who through faith in him would be called the sons of God {cf, Gal 3:16, 3:26-29}.

As we look back now from our 20th century vantage point, we can see how God has fulfilled these promises to the letter. There is an earthly seed, but there is also a heavenly one, a great uncounted host of spiritual descendants of Abraham, like the stars of the heaven in multitude. Paul says in Galatians 3:7, “So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham,” {Gal 3:7 RSV}

Now the last statement in this interesting paragraph in Genesis 15 comes before us. It concerns **Abram’s faith**:

And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness. {Gen 15:6 RSV}

Paul refers to this mighty act of faith in Romans 4. He reminds us that Abraham believed God before he was circumcised, that is, before he had any continual guarantee that God would do this thing. The account of Abram’s circumcision comes a couple of chapters later. Paul infers from this that acceptance before God has nothing to do with

circumcision, as the Jews were insisting. Paul says that when Abram heard God say, “So shall your descendants be” that he looked up into the stars, saw their vastness, their multitude, and relaxed – resting in faith upon the power of God.

If we focus our view on Abram’s faith, we are going to miss the point of this whole matter. There is a sense in which we make far too much of these men of old and their faith. “What mighty men of faith,” we say; “how tremendous to believe God against all the evidence of the circumstances around. If we only had faith like that we could do the things they did!” Then we compare our feeble faith with theirs and try to work up a feeling of faith within us until we are turned into spiritual hypochondriacs, always going about taking our spiritual temperature and feeling our spiritual pulse. It is indeed true that when God saw Abram’s faith, it was reckoned to him for righteousness, but it is also true that when Abram saw God, he reckoned him able to perform what he had promised, and so was able to rest his faith on God’s adequacy.

What was it that made his faith so strong? The answer is that he did not look at the difficulty so much as he looked at the One who had promised. His eye was not resting on the problems, but upon the Promiser. When he saw the greatness of God, the might and majesty displayed before him on that oriental summer’s night, he said to himself, “It makes no difference how I feel, nor what may be the difficulties involved, the Creator of that multitude of stars is quite capable of giving me an equal number of descendants.”

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees
and looks to God alone,
Laughs at impossibilities,
and cries, “It shall be done!”

So we read the great sentence, “He believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.” This does not mean that this was the first moment that Abram was reckoned righteous before God – that is, this is not the moment of his spiritual regeneration. The book of Hebrews makes clear that when he left Ur of the Chaldees, in response to God’s command, his obedient faith was also reckoned to him for righteousness. This incident under the stars is simply one instance out of many which illustrates the way in which God reckons righteous-

ness to the man who believes. Abram did not attain a righteous standing by the might of God to do what he had promised, he won immediate favor in God's sight and the righteousness of Christ was imputed to him. Abram believed God about the promise of a coming son, and was reckoned righteous by faith.

Today we are exhorted to believe God about the Son who has already come, and when we cease our own works and rest in helpless dependence upon that Living Son, we too are counted righteous by faith. And that act of faith which first introduces us to the power of God exercised on our behalf, must become an attitude of faith governing each moment of our life.

Do not think you have come to the end of the road when you believe in Jesus Christ. You are then standing at the beginning, and every experi-

ence of the power of God in your life must come from a fresh appropriation by faith of the promise of God.

Prayer:

Our Father, what wonderful lessons come to us from this book and these lives of men of old! How wonderful that in this 20th century we may discover this same truth and be children of Abraham today. Teach us the folly of self-dependence and the glory of God dependence. In every moment of fear, lead us to cast ourselves upon you, reckoning upon your promise to be our shield and our exceeding great reward. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Furnace and the Lamp

by Ray C. Stedman

In the country schoolhouses of old, the common method of teaching writing was to use a copybook. Under a sample line of handwriting every student laboriously attempted to reproduce the original. It is not difficult to tell who learned to write by this method, for they all have the same general style. In a sense, our Old and New Testaments relate to each other this way. In the Old Testament, God's dealing with Israel forms a sort of copybook along which pattern the New Testament is written.

In our study of the life of Abraham, we are viewing the beginning of the scriptural account of God's dealings with Israel. As we trace through the stories of Abraham, we see that these are pattern experiences for the believer today. What literally and physically occurred to Abraham occurs spiritually in the Christian's life today. That is what makes these stories of such eternal fascination and benefit to us. This is why the early Christians, with nothing more than the Old Testament in their hands, could test and prove the doctrine which came from the mouths of the apostles and other leaders as to whether it was from God, for it was only repeating on a higher level of life the pattern written out on the pages of the Old Testament.

In Genesis 15 we have a chapter which condenses for us the whole doctrinal movement of Romans 4-8. Since this is one of the most important sections in the entire New Testament, this is also a highly important part of the life of Abraham. It begins, as we have seen, with that great principle which governed Abram's life – a daily trust that God was able to do through him what he had promised. By this, he was counted righteous when he had no righteousness of his own. This is the truth so clearly presented by Paul in Romans 4-5.

The following chapters, 6-8, unfold the teaching of practical deliverance from the reigning power of sin. If our Christian experience ends in Romans 4-5, we are of all men most miserable, for we have not really entered into the fullness that Christ purchased for us. We need to learn by experience the process of sanctification, taught in Romans 6-8, and beautifully pictured for us in Verses 7-21 of this 15th chapter of Genesis.

It begins with nothing else but **heart hunger**:

And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" (Gen 15:7-8 {RSV})

God reminded Abram that he was the one who had called him to leave Ur and go into the Land of Canaan. Abram's response was, "Lord, how shall I know that this land will be mine? I have been here now for ten years. I have walked up and down the length and breadth of it as you told me to do. I've enjoyed portions of it, but I don't own any of it. Lord, how can I own the land that you said you would give to me?" This is an expression of the great desire in Abram's heart to possess what God has offered him. It is his by promise, but he longs to make it his by ownership.

The land, as we have often noted, is both literal and spiritual in its significance. Through his descendants, Abram is to possess the literal land, that is, through his natural seed. But through his spiritual descendants, he is to possess fully the land in its symbolic significance. This is the fullness of life in the Spirit: All that God intends us to have in

Jesus Christ – all the victory, the power, the abundance, and the fruitfulness that comes by the Holy Spirit. This is the land. It is already ours by promise, because we belong to Jesus Christ. Ah, but the question is, have we possessed it? Do we own it? Have we experienced it? And if not, our question is clearly that of Abram's: How can we come into the fullness of this experience?

Do you hunger for this land? Do you long to have what God offers you?

Abram says, "Lord GOD, how can I know that I shall possess it?" He is desirous of learning the process by which God's promise to him will find its fulfillment. His question is not one born of unbelief or doubt, but it is a desire for further information. Like Mary, when told by the angel Gabriel that she was to have a child, replied, "How can I have a child when I have not known a man?" {Luke 1:34}. This is not unbelief, but wonder and an inquiry concerning the process. So is Abram's question, and God answers him by saying, in effect, "Come along, Abram, and I will show the whole procedure to you. I will reveal the means by which you, through your descendants, will possess the land."

He begins by showing Abram that **the first step must be a consideration of a death!**

He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove and a young pigeon." And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. (Gen 15:9-11 {RSV})

Each of these animals and birds is a picture for us of Christ, our sacrifice. Our deliverance from the reigning power of sin must be based upon that sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross. This is what we learn in Romans 6. We are told that Christ died for our sins in Romans 1-3. We learn that he died for sin in Romans 6. The perfect character of Christ is pictured for us by these animals and birds Abram brought, especially as it was poured out in death for us, so that we might have it. There on the cross, something took place that is able to break the control and dominion of sin over us and allow the Holy Spirit to produce the character of Christ in us:

- In the heifer or ox, patience and strength are symbolized. Who does not need these qualities!
- The she-goat is the symbol of nourishment and refreshment for the soul.
- The ram is the picture of power, of might in warfare.
- The birds are a picture of gentleness and grace, the Spirit of God at work.

It is significant that all the animals were to be three years old. This is a reference to the public ministry of our Lord which lasted for three years. All these qualities of his character were publicly made manifest during that time. Here, then, is a symbolic portrait of Jesus Christ in the beauty and full vigor of his manhood. All that he *was* was clearly told out and made evident by his life.

Now, in the death of Christ, all that he was is made available to us. He laid down his life that we might have it! He poured out his soul unto death that all the fullness of his person might indwell my life and yours, that we might have all that he is. The slaying of these animals and birds and Abram's long contemplation of them is the beautiful picture of this for us.

Whether we view the land as literal or symbolic, the possession of it begins by a thorough understanding of what Christ has done that has made possession possible. On the cross, our Lord Jesus won the right to possess all the kingdoms of the earth. Some day the old hymn will be fulfilled, "Jesus shall reign where e're the sun does his successive journeys run." Israel, occupying the land of Palestine, will be the head of the nations at that time. They shall fully possess the land in accordance with the promise to Abram. But on the spiritual level, this is equally true. On the cross, the Lord won the right to fully possess the kingdom of the heart, so it becomes no longer a matter of my struggling to do the best I can, which is never good enough. A life is available to me that is all I need and ought to be. I am to consider him, therefore, as Abram did, until I see in Jesus Christ all that I need.

All day long Abram sat and watched the sacrificed animals, waiting, waiting, all through the long

hot hours, considering the meaning of all this. When the Satanic doubts, as vultures, descended to rob him of his blessing, he drove them away, as we must do when doubts beset us concerning the work of Christ. All the long day, Abram watched and waited.

And out of his long contemplation there came **the next step:**

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him. Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nations which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." (Gen 15:12-16 {RSV})

As the sun touches the western horizon, Abram sinks into sleep and there comes upon him a great sense of horror and of darkness. In the midst of this mental depression, he is given a revelation of the oppression and enslavement of his descendants. This, as we know, was fulfilled to the very letter. His descendants did go down into Egypt (a land that was not theirs), and there they were oppressed, afflicted, and enslaved for the duration of time recorded here. Then, at last, God sent Moses to lead them out, Pharaoh and Egypt were judged, and Israel was brought back into the land of Canaan exactly as God had told Abram. With this revelation there is a personal word of encouragement to Abram, that he would not enter into this directly himself, but only his descendants would experience these things.

While we are still dealing with the literal fulfillment of this, let us note also the revelation of the great patience of God. He tells Abram that Israel must remain in Egypt for four hundred years because the iniquity of the Amorite tribes living in the land of Canaan was not yet full. That is, these vicious tribes were to be allowed to run the full course of their iniquity. All the depravity inherent in their hearts was to be allowed to exhibit itself to

the full, so there can be no question of the righteousness of God in judgment. When Israel came, at last, into the land again, they were commanded to exterminate all of these people, male and female, adult and child alike. Skeptics have used this to picture God as exceedingly cruel, but the whole picture is that of a God who waits with patience until these tribes become a moral cancer threatening to infect the nations around, and have to be removed. Archaeologists have given us glimpses into the moral life of these people and it is incredibly foul. They indulged in fiendish rites in their worship, and their moral lives were polluted beyond description.

But we are primarily concerned with the spiritual interpretation of this revelation. Spiritually, this is a picture of the unveiling which comes to any seeking soul of the implacable tyranny of self in the human heart. When we seriously contemplate the cross of Christ, there comes to us a revelation of our own enslavement to sin and self within. So many Christians fancy themselves to be free, simply because they have received Christ. They may acknowledge a few minor weaknesses – a little temper now and then, a degree of jealousy occasionally, a little lust, a tendency toward stubbornness or willfulness, but these are minor peccadillos we must all learn to live with. They can look down their noses at the unregenerate, unwashed, who have not yet come to Christ. Nevertheless, they are bothered with a sense of guilt and weakness which they do not understand. Then, gradually, they begin to see that they are mastered by self, that the choices they make are all with self in view. Ego, as an ugly monster, sits on the throne of their lives and though they pay lip service to the cause of Christ, self rules, cracking a remorseless whip and driving them to ever more selfish notions.

This is the self-revelation which Paul describes in Romans 7:24 {RSV}: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" When this is our cry, we have begun to realize that we are, indeed, under the dominion of sin. We become aware of barrenness, fruitless activity, purpose without power, effort without effect. Our service becomes a job without joy. Worship is routine and mechanical. Life is a horror and great darkness. We wonder what is wrong, and cry out, "Who shall deliver me from this reigning power of self in my life?"

It is right at this point that a new thing occurs – **a vision and victory:**

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.” (Gen 15:17-21 {RSV})

At the place of self-despair, there comes deliverance! When we become aware of how much we are enslaved by selfishness, how little we really experience what God is offering, how much we are victims of our own self-indulgence, self-pity, and self-righteousness, then we are ready for victory. At the moment when the heart is cold and empty and the light of faith has gone out, something will precipitate a crisis, and suddenly you find yourself, without warning, in the midst of a smoking furnace:

- When Jacob met his brother Esau, he turned aside by the brook Peniel, and there the angel of God met and wrestled with him until he was broken.
- When David sat on his throne, Nathan the prophet came to tell him the story of an injustice in his kingdom. Suddenly, out of that story, there comes an arrow to the heart of David, “Thou art the man!” {2 Chr 12:7b KJV}. And instantly he was aware that he was in a smoking furnace.
- Paul, newly converted, is filled with the desire to be the apostle to Israel and looks upon himself as the chosen vessel by which God intends to reach that people and bring them to Christ. With confidence he preaches in the city of Damascus, but suddenly events take a turn for the worse. No one will listen to him and he must at last be let down over the wall in a basket at night like a common criminal. That began the smoking furnace in his life.

Perhaps with you, it may be a family crisis, a Bible conference, a trip away from home. Some such thing precipitates a crisis, and you become aware that God is speaking to you and there is no way to escape his voice. He is putting his finger on the thing which is wrong in your life. He is going through your life like a furnace of fire, searing, scorching, cleansing and you cannot escape. You must face yourself. You have to acknowledge, judge, and reject yourself. The instant you do, God is no longer a furnace but a lamp! You see everything clearly in a wonderful, illuminating light. What was confusing before is as clear as daylight now. You know what you have to do and you know how to go about doing it. Your true enemy is clearly defined. There before your eyes you see the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, and the Canaanites – all those filthy tribes that inhabit the human heart. You see that you have been defending and protecting them, though they have been defiling and polluting you. Bitterness, sensitiveness, impatience, envy, self-righteousness, laziness, lust – these are the enemies you see.

But you also begin to see that Jesus Christ is more than all of them, that he is adequate for them, and that you can stand up in the strength of the Lord and smite these enemies and they will go. You see clearly in his death that you died with him to these sins and can now refuse them a place in your thoughts. You will find Christ stands in their place and in the fullness of grace and truth becomes to you everything that you need – your wisdom, your righteousness, your strength, and redemption. Suddenly you discover you are possessing the land! There is joy and peace in your heart. Something new has come in. You own what God has offered you. You have found the way of deliverance. Joy, peace, grace, glory floods your heart.

Now, this is the whole story of the Christian life after conversion – a furnace and a lamp. That is the story of the nation Israel – throughout its history. It is a story of affliction followed by blessing. First Israel is in the furnace, and then the lamp is shining on them again. At the present they are in the furnace, and have been for nineteen hundred years, for they will not judge themselves. But the Scriptures say they will soon come to the place where, in the heat of the furnace, they will cry out for deliverance and God will become a lamp to them once again.

This, too, is the whole story of the Christian life. Once you begin to set foot on the land of Spirit-given power, you discover Jesus Christ is always a furnace or a lamp to you:

- When self begins to threaten, he is a furnace – burning, scorching, searing.
- When self is judged, he immediately becomes a lamp, flooding the whole life with radiance and glory.
 - Have you discovered this experience?
 - Have you found your way to this land of promise?

The one thing Abram had to do was to hunger for it. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied,” (Matt 5:6 {RSV}). When we long for this blessing and freedom, then it is translated out of the realm of theology into experience.

As you may have discovered, it is quite possible to be an expert in teaching the truths of spiritual adjustment and know nothing of the reality of it in life. It is not enough to believe in the doctrine of human depravity. There must come a time when acknowledgment is made of the slavery of self in your life, a time when you have groaned and turned

in disgust from the revelation God has given you of your own heart. Only then can there come the wonderful release, the glorious deliverance, the satisfying sight of watching Canaanites flee before you. Habits you could not conquer before, you now master in the strength of the Lord – and a whole new land of victory lies open before you.

Begin where Abram began. Say, “Lord GOD, how shall I know that I shall possess it? Reveal to me my own heart, and thy deliverance.”

Prayer:

Our Father, we know the transformed life of a Christian living in the strength of God is the most amazing, the most revolutionary thing this world has ever seen. How much we need this today. Lord, may we be people like this, that we may sing anew the songs of the early church, that we may know once again the transforming grace of the power of the Spirit in our lives, the impact that life can make upon life as we rub shoulders with those who do not yet know Christ. May we not be content to live on the edge of the land, or to merely sojourn in it, but make us restless till we own it, possess it, have it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

It all Depends on Me

by Ray C. Stedman

This record of the life of Abram was clearly not written merely to give us historical facts from the distant past. Much of Christian education is superficial in that it is concerned more with the mileage from Jericho to Jerusalem than with the distance between man in his lost estate and the heart of God. But though we find the physical details of Abram's life interesting, we are much more concerned with their spiritual significance to us. To read the Old Testament thus makes every page glow with color and light from God.

In Chapter 16 of Genesis, God begins to translate what he has shown Abram in visions into the practical experience of his life. He does this also with us. We catch sight of great truths out of the Word and grasp them intellectually, but then they must become a part of us through experience and get down into our hearts where they affect and change us. It is one thing to pass an examination on the process and methods of the spiritual life, but it is quite another thing to pass God's examination of the degree to which we have translated this knowledge into daily experience. We shall see here that although Abram had been adequately and accurately instructed through the visions he received, yet he needed sad experience to teach him the power of the self-life within and the need for the daily experience of the cross of Christ.

In Chapter 16, Verse 1, we read,

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. {Gen 16:1a RSV}

After all the lofty experiences of his visions, this was the heartbreaking fact to which Abram returned. For ten years he had been awaiting the fulfillment of God's promise. Sarai was by this time almost seventy-five years old. Still there was no son, and despite the renewed promises, Abram was puzzled and discouraged by the problem of barrenness.

This is also our problem in the life of faith. Like Abram, we too are justified by faith. We accepted this gift of God's righteousness by a simple act of our will. We know we possess it, not by our efforts but by our faith in Jesus Christ. Then we set about trying to please God because we are now his. We do it by the only means we know – trying to do the best we can. But we discover quickly that somehow our Christian experience loses its glow and fire, and instead of the fruit of love, joy, and peace which we were led to expect, we find instead nothing but barrenness. We have the same problem Abram had. This life which is expected to produce immediate fruit results only in barrenness and it is difficult for us to understand. We find no effectiveness in our lives. We are not enjoying Christ as we once did. This is reflected in some of our hymns. We sing:

Where is the blessedness we had
When first we knew the Lord?

We look back to that first experience because our present experience has grown cold and is not producing the joy, the glory, the glow and vigor that we expected. We are trying our best, but something is wrong. Sarai is barren, and there is no fruit as God had promised.

When the problem of barrenness begins to haunt us, the next thing is inevitable: **The proposal of the flesh to do something about it!**

She had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar; and Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my maid; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. (Gen 16:1b-3 {RSV})

There is much in this action of Sarai's which seems deserving of praise. It was, first of all, an act of genuine and costly sacrifice. She evidently had said something like this to herself: "God has promised my husband a son, through whom he means to fulfill all his promises. Yet he has never said that the son must come through me, and perhaps he means to fulfill this promise another way." So she resolves, through what struggles we can only imagine, to give up her own rights in an act of courageous renunciation. She gives up what is a wife's most precious possession, the right to have her husband's sole affection, and she offers her maid to her husband that he might have a child by her and thus fulfill the will of God.

Abram was, as we know, a monogamist. That is not the same as monotonous! He had only one wife, and he was quite content with that arrangement. But to give him the son of his heart's desire, Sarai was willing to sacrifice that relationship. It was not only an act of real sacrifice, but also one of deep sincerity. She was not hoping that he would talk her out of this. She was quite prepared to go through with it, cost her what it may. She took the initiative in proposing it.

Furthermore, it was an acceptable act, strange as that may appear to us. There was nothing immoral about it in the eyes of the community. This was common in the life of these nomadic people. Many of the Canaanite leaders would have had more than one wife and neither Abram nor Sarai would be less highly regarded because of this act. No one would laugh at her, nor point the finger of scorn. It was a perfectly proper and seemly act in the eyes of the community.

Yet, as we see the end of this action, we are aware that it was an act of appalling folly and stupidity, resulting in endless sorrow and heartache to all concerned. The results are evident yet – 4,000 years later! The Arabian nations originated in this act, and the enmity which sprang up between Israel and the Arabs, descendants of Ishmael, troubles the world to this day. If ever we have a picture of the longevity of sin, it is here. Despite the seeming rightness of this to Sarai, it was the worst thing she could possibly have done.

But what was wrong with it? How could Sarai have known what the results would be? How can we blame her for her decision? Here we need to go very slowly and listen very carefully. We are so like Sarai ourselves that we feel resentment at the idea that she should be blamed for this. Yet if we do not learn the lesson here, we shall find our own Christian lives continually plagued with this problem of barrenness, and we shall miss the secret of victory and fruitfulness. Here is pictorially presented the great secret Paul labors to unfold in Galatians – how to walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. He uses this very incident to illustrate it.

Sarai's difficulty was simply that all of her actions grew out of a basic philosophy which, put very simply, says: "God has told me what he wants, now the rest of it depends on me. God has shown me what the goal is, and it is up to me to figure out how to reach it. I know what he wants, and I can count on him for help, but the rest is up to me." This is the philosophy which led to all the folly and heartache and sorrow that Abram and Sarai experienced, as have many others through the running centuries since then.

You will recognize at once that this is a very common and widespread philosophy. We continually think and act this way in the church today. We say the reason God's work is not going forward as it should is that we are not trying hard enough.

It all Depends on Me

The barrenness in our experience is due to the fact we have not really put ourselves into this. Let us hold some more committee meetings and get going. It all depends on us.

We find in our Bibles what we call “the Great Commission,” (Mark 16:15):

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation, {Mark 16:15b RSV}

This is the goal he wants us to fulfill, we say; now the rest is up to us:

- We must plan all the strategy.
- We must raise the money, and determine where it will be spent.
- We must convince candidates that they should go.

It is all up to us to carry out God’s will. And we do get some fruit from this, we get results. We hold our meetings, and plan our programs, and put on our pressures, and we get results, but, oh, they are so unsatisfactory! Do you know why? We’ve gotten Ishmael instead of Isaac!

We hear our Lord say in the first chapter of Acts, “You shall be witnesses” {cf, Acts 1:8b}, and every truly Christian heart says, “All right, Lord, this is what you want me to do – I will do it.”

- We never bother to find out
 - how he wants it done, or
 - whether he has a program to carry it out.
- We start out in fleshly zeal and
 - pass out tracts to everyone we meet, or
 - buttonhole people at meetings.

When it all fails, we recognize that something is wrong, and we wring our hands, and quit. We say, “I’ve tried to obey the Lord, but it doesn’t work, so I quit!”

We read in Scripture that we should have elders in every church, and God’s plan is to direct his church through these men. So:

- We hold an election and put up the wealthiest members or the most popular ones, and
- These men run the church as they would a business,
 - stumbling on in total disregard of the Living Head
 - – who is completely capable of running his own church quite successfully.
- We never bother to find out
 - how he makes known to us the men of his choice, and
 - how he proposes to declare his will through them.

So we have a church filled with divisions and strife, and realize we have Ishmael on our hands instead of Isaac.

Perhaps the worst thing of all, and certainly the matter before us in the story of Abram and Sarai, is that, in reading Scripture, we learn we are supposed to be conformed to the image of Christ – so we set out to start trying to be like Jesus:

- We make up a list of rigid rules for acceptable behavior.
- We become frightfully busy doing things for God.
- We work our fingers to the bone, and
 - spend hour after hour in the church,
 - neglecting our family, our own life, and everything else
 - in order to do things for the Lord.
- We sincerely try to meet his demands.
- We do our best.
- We note how the community around
 - approves our strenuous efforts, and
 - pats us on the back for our faithful spirit.

But despite all the effort and sincerity, deep in our hearts we know there is nothing but barrenness.

Or, if there is fruit, it is not the kind we wanted. It is forced, unnatural, sustained only by continual effort. We are far short of the image of Christ.

This was what happened to Sarai. Note the sacrifice, the seemliness, the appearance of selflessness. The result is fruit all right, but it is Ishmael, not Isaac – the fruit of the flesh rather than of the Spirit. In some moment of illumination we ask,

- “Why are we so barren?”
- “Why so unfruitful?”
- “Where is the impact, the power?”
- “What has become of the glow, that living vitality we see in the early Christians?”
- “What is wrong?”

It is all a result of failing to learn God’s *way* as well as his *will*.

In Verse 2, we read, “Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai and went in to Hagar the Egyptian.” Abram was more culpable than Sarai. She acted in relative ignorance, but he knew better. We are specifically told that he had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, learning every day that God is sufficient for every need. He should have learned that God knows what he is doing and is quite capable of administering and carrying out his plans. He had observed God’s methods for ten years; he should have been a steadying influence upon Sarai here, but instead he hearkened to her and went in to Hagar. It is the story of Adam and Eve all over again.

There are three obvious mistakes that lay behind Abram’s act:

- First, he listened to the voice of one who was not as far along in the spiritual life as he was. This is a frequent source of failure today. What may seem right to young Christians may be terribly wrong for you, simply because you are at a different level or stage of spiritual growth. We must ever be careful of taking advice from someone who is younger in spiritual things than we. This is why the Spirit of God warns against placing men in leadership in the church who are novices. It is not enough to

have the gifts of the Spirit, equipping one for leadership. There must also be the cumulative experience of time and spiritual growth, making possible wise direction.

- Abram’s second mistake was that he consented to something that especially harmonized with the desires of his self-life. Take care here! He longed for a son, and the longing, though proper, made him too ready to find a way to satisfy it. When some advice is particularly along the line of something you want very much to do, be careful. It may be nothing more than a pleasing of the self-life, as it was here.
- The third mistake, the one he shared with Sarai, was his readiness to do the will of God without seeking to discover the way of God. Here is the heart of the problem. This is the most serious error of Christians today. Hudson Taylor said, “God’s work, done in God’s way, will never lack God’s supply.” And the entire record of the China Inland Mission is proof of its truth.

All through Scripture there is incident after incident to illustrate the folly of being committed to the will of God without being committed to his way: When young Moses graduated from the University of Egypt, he came out with his diploma in his hand, a doctor of philosophy in the humanities. There was burning in his heart a great crusade. He knew he was the chosen instrument by which God planned to deliver the people of Israel from the bondage and slavery in which they lived. The first thing he saw was an Egyptian beating an Israelite. He said to himself, “Ah, this is my opportunity. Here is a slave being mistreated. I have a commission and mandate from God to deliver these slaves, and this is my chance to start.” So he looked about to see if any man was watching, though it never occurred to him that God was looking, and he slew the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand. The next day he arose early and said to himself, “I got a good start on the job God gave me yesterday, so I’ll go out and see whom I can deliver today.” He found two more Israelites arguing, and he stepped up and said, “God has appointed me your judge, so let me hear this case.” They said to him, “Wait a minute. Who appointed you to judge us? Are you going to kill us like you did that Egyptian yesterday?”

{Exod 2:14}. And a great fear came into Moses' heart and he turned and ran into the wilderness. He had to flee Egypt. Why? Because he was trying in the strength of the flesh to do the will of God. For forty years his life was a burned-out desert of barrenness, until he learned at last the secret of yielding himself to the control of God's Spirit that he might do God's work in God's way.

Now back to the record of Abram's folly. We have seen the nature of the proposal of the flesh, now we must see **the petulance that follows**:

And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my maid to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her. (Gen 16:4-6 {RSV})

The immediate results of acting in the flesh are always the same. We become petty and petulant, displaying enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, and other ugly emotions which lie ever near the surface of the fallen human heart. Wherever these are evident they are the thermometer which tells us we are being ruled by the self and not by the Spirit. Here they are in this account, as contemporary as today's newspaper.

1. The first one mentioned is *contempt*. When Abram placed Hagar into rivalry with his wife, Sarai, Hagar became insolent and impertinent and held her mistress in utter contempt, taunting her concerning her barrenness. She forced Sarai to drink the gall of bitterness.
2. The next thing mentioned is *unreasonableness*. Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you." If you have had any doubts that Sarai was a true woman, this will convince you! She had initiated the proposal to Abram, and urged it upon him. But when he gave in, she turned around and threw it back in his face, crying, "It's all your fault. Why did you do

this to me? May the LORD judge between you and me." This woman is mad clear through!

That is what Laban said to Jacob when they parted from each other in anger, (cf, Gen 31:51-54). What it means is, "The Lord keep you from sticking a dagger in my back, and keep me from sticking one in yours, while we are unable to keep our eyes on each other." And that is what this means here. "May the Lord keep his eye on you, you rascal! Look what you've done." How completely unreasonable – but how completely characteristic of the flesh.

3. Then the next symptom is *irresponsibility*. Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power, do to her as you please." If you have had any doubts that Abram is a true man, this should convince you! He is dodging his responsibility, passing the buck. "Don't bother me with this," he says, "it is your problem – you settle it."
4. The result is *harshness* and *rebellion*. "Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her." Do you know this pattern? The whole household is in an uproar by now. Yet every one of them could have piously said, "We were only trying to do the will of the Lord." Each one is sure the others are wholly to blame, and none is willing to face the evil of his own heart. There is a strong inference at the beginning of the next chapter that this unhappy state of affairs went on for thirteen long years.

All this is a result of trying to help God when it seemed perhaps he had tackled a job too hard for him, or that time would run out for him before it could be accomplished. We know the will of God; let us also discover his way.

In the last section of the chapter, we see **the provision of God's grace**.

The angel of the LORD found her [Hagar] by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, maid of Sarah, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to

her.” The angel of the LORD also said to her, “I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude.” And the angel of the LORD said to her, “Behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son; you shall call his name Ishmael; because the LORD has given heed to your affliction. He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.” So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, “Thou art a God of seeing”; for she said, “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?” Therefore the well was called Beerlahairoi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

And Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (Gen 16:7-16 {RSV})

It is the angel of the LORD who finds Hagar. This is the first appearance of this phrase in Scripture, and as we compare it with other uses, we find that this refers to none other than the preincarnate Christ. This is the Son of God himself, appearing to Hagar. He says four things to her:

- First, “where do you come from and where are you going?” These are always arresting questions. Hagar answers the first, but she has nothing to say to the last. She does not know where she is going. Where can she go? The question draws her helplessness sharply to her attention.
- Then the angel says, “Return and submit.” This is the only way to experience the grace and blessing of God. Had she gone on wandering into the wilderness, it would have been disastrous. Both she and the child in her womb would have died. When God finds us wandering, this is always what he says, “Return and submit!” “Submit to the circumstances you dislike, and I will work it out. To do anything else is folly.” So Hagar returns.
- With the command to return comes the promise of blessing. Blessing always follows obedience. “I will multiply your descendants so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.”

And then follows the prophecy of Ishmael’s nature. “He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man’s hand against him.” He will be a non-conformist, a Missouri mule – a man whom no one can get along with.

The spiritual significance of this is explained in Galatians 4. There Paul says that Hagar is a picture of the Law and Ishmael, her son, is a picture of those who try to establish favor in God’s sight through religious activity. These are the Ishmaelites, and God says there shall be a great multitude, more than any man can number. Spiritually it is written of them, “those who are in the flesh cannot please God,” {Rom 8:8 RSV}.

Hagar, glimpsing here something of God’s omniscience and power, names him, “The God Who Sees” for she says, “Have I even here seen him who sees me?” This is the circumstance which gripped her. “Here is a God who sees me and knows me just as I am, and all that concerns me.” So she named the well, “The well of One who lives and sees.” (It is named after God, not after her, as the RSV suggests.)

Have you found God to be the One who lives and sees, the One who knows all about your life, and your circumstances? The One who knows the past and the future, and says to you as he said to Hagar, “Return and submit?” That is the place of promised blessing.

We are also told that this well is located between Kadesh and Bered. *Kadesh* means “holiness” and *Bered* means “hail” or “judgment.” Here is the well of grace, lying between holiness and judgment. When we begin to stray from the place of God’s blessing toward the certainty of judgment, God meets us on the way, at the well of grace, saying, “Now wait a minute. I don’t want to have to make this known to others. I don’t want to judge you openly. I don’t want to bring trial or affliction or heartache into your life to make you listen. Listen now. Return and submit so I won’t have to do this.” That is the well of grace.

So Hagar returns and Ishmael is born.

We read nothing about Abram for thirteen years. The next chapter opens when he is ninety-nine years old. This means that for thirteen years, strife, disagreement, bitterness, jealousy, and heartache characterized that tent in the land of Canaan. It is God’s way of teaching Abram: “for apart from

It all Depends on Me

me you can do nothing,” (John 15:5b {RSV}) It does not depend on us, it all depends on him.

We need constantly to reassert our utter dependence upon the God who knows us, knows our circumstances, knows our problems, and who is completely able to work through us to accomplish all that he desires.

Prayer:

Our heavenly Father, how many mistakes we have made by doing this very thing that we have seen Abram do. Forgive us for our consummate folly and teach us, as you taught Abram, to walk in the Spirit in dependence only upon You. Lead us to the place where we recognize the folly of our flesh, and the impossibility of pleasing you in its strength. Teach us that all must be done by a constant and unrelenting reliance upon you to work through us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Circumcised Life

by Ray C. Stedman

Up to this point we have been following Abram as a believer in the true God, sojourning in the land of promise. But the difference between a believer and a circumcised believer is very vital indeed, and it is to this difference that the Spirit of God directs our attention in Genesis 17.

Our last view of Abram found him attempting to help God. He was trying to solve a problem he felt was far too hard for God. He and Sarai felt they had the solution to the problem, and Abram took Hagar, Sarai's handmaid, for a wife. Of that union was born Ishmael, Israel's continual thorn in the flesh until this day. Thirteen years elapsed between the account of Chapter 16 and that of Chapter 17, and we can well suspect these were years of unhappiness and unrest in the household of Abram. The presence of Ishmael in the home created endless contempt, bitterness, envy, jealousy, weariness of spirit, and rebellion. These thirteen years were designed of God to teach Abram the folly of acting on his own.

Perhaps you have had some similar experience, when God has allowed you to have your own way, and the results have been most distressing. You were permitted to go your own headstrong way in order that you might learn the folly of acting apart from God. One of the most frightening things about life with God is this fact: That, if you insist upon having your own way, he will often let you have it, till you are sorry you asked for it. "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul," (Psa 106:15 {KJV}).

But after thirteen years of heartache, a new aspect of God's grace opens before Abram. Three new developments are unfolded in Chapter 17:

The first is the **new revelation** he has of God:

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." (Gen 17:1-2 {RSV})

After thirteen years of silence, God appears to Abram in a new revelation and with a new name – God Almighty. In the Hebrew it is *El Shaddai*, which essentially means "the God who is sufficient," the all-competent God, the adequate God, who knows what he is doing and how to do it. This is an indication that Abram has learned something from his recent bitter experience. God says, in effect, "You have been learning for thirteen years the total inadequacy of your own efforts, through Ishmael. Now learn a new thing about me. I am *El Shaddai*. You have discovered by sad experience how futile your plans and efforts can be without me. Now learn how capable I am to do everything that I desire to do, whenever I desire to do it."

Would that we could all discover this truth! We need desperately to recover the reality of *El Shaddai*, the God who is sufficient for whatever we are going through right now! This is what Abram learned.

In this new light from God came a new demand from God: “Walk before me and be blameless.” In the King James Version this word *blameless* is translated “perfect.” The root meaning of the word is “wholehearted.” “Walk before me and be perfect, wholehearted,” God says, “because I am *El Shaddai*.” That is, I am all-sufficient to make you blameless. Walk before me, therefore, and be blameless.

I remember one time when I was a boy, I was looking through the iron bars of a large gate at a beautiful estate full of flower-bordered walks, and eyeing it with a great deal of envy. Suddenly, before I saw him, another boy about my own age rushed up from the other side and gave my arms a jerk. The bump I received taught me the foolishness of trying to be on two sides of a fence at once!

This is a truth that is often brought before us in the New Testament. We are so constantly trying to serve two masters, to please self and Christ. We are quite content to serve Christ, if we can also serve self at the same time. But God says to Abram, “This can no longer be permitted. You have come to the place where your dual allegiance can no longer be tolerated. Walk now before me, appropriating what I am, and be wholehearted, be wholly on my side, be mine!”

This is what a circumcised life means, as we shall see fully in a little while. It is Christ asserting his practical Lordship in our lives. When you become a Christian, you did so by recognizing the right of Jesus Christ to be Lord in your life. You did not, of course, understand what that would involve, but you saw, in one way or another, that his willingness to save you involved his right to control you. For a time, though you knew you were essentially different, you lived much as you did before. You made decisions on the basis of how *you* felt and what *you* wanted to do. Then the Holy Spirit begins to put on the pressure. He says to you, “Stop this!” or “Start doing that!” All he is really doing is asserting the Lordship of Christ in your life. He is beginning to cut the ties that bind you to the world and the self life within you. This is essentially what he is saying to Abram here.

So important is this step, along with the new revelation of God, that **new names** are given to Abram and Sarai:

Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the Father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.” (Gen. 17:3-5 {RSV})

And then in Verse 15:

And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall come from her.” {Gen 17:15-16 RSV}

Whenever you see God in a new way, it always makes a corresponding change in you. Here God says to Abraham, “Look, Abram, your name now means ‘exalted father.’ Your trouble all along has been that you were looking for your own exaltation. This must now be changed. You must lose your desire to exalt yourself; you will stop trying to advance and please yourself. Your name will now be ‘the father of a multitude,’ for great fruitfulness shall be evident in your life. Because you have now learned that I am *El Shaddai*, your name can no longer be ‘exalted’ but it must now be ‘fruitful,’ for you will be the father of a multitude.”

The same is true of Sarai. Sarai means “contentious.” This speaks volumes of the home life of Abram and Sarai. In Proverbs 21:9 {RSV}, Solomon writes, “It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a contentious woman.” Having had a thousand wives, here is a man who knows of what he speaks! Sarai is, therefore, a problem wife. Yet in the New Testament, Peter says that this woman is a model for all women to follow – not by her name, Sarai, “contentiousness,” but by her new name, Sarah, “Princess.” She is never referred to as Sarai in the New Testament. God does not set her up as a pattern for women until she becomes Sarah and loses her contentious spirit. As Sarah she learned to develop “a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious,” (1 Pet 3:4b {RSV}). Sarai was not naturally thus. She was an argumentative woman, a nagging wife. But she, too, had been taught by grace, and through the years she lost the need to defend herself on every occasion and be-

came Sarah, a princess, a queen, an honored woman, having a meek and quiet spirit, very precious in the sight of God.

Now we come to **the great sign of circumcision:**

And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised; every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house, or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he that is born in your house and he that is bought with your money, shall be circumcised.” {Gen 17:9-13a RSV}

And the actual event is recorded in Verses 22-27:

When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all the slaves born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham’s house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised; and all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him. {Gen 17:22-27 RSV}

What a strange thing this is – the removal of the foreskin of the male procreative organ – literally carving in the flesh the sign of God’s Lordship! This is the great sign of Jewry, intended by God to be the mark of his possession, that they were God’s instrument to use for blessing among the nations. It was placed upon this particular part of the body to indicate that they were to be physically separate

from the other nations. The very organ by which that separation could be violated, bore upon it the mark of God’s ownership.

As we read the course of Jewish history, we see how this mark, intended to be the sign of humility and instrumentality, became perverted into a mark of superiority and favoritism. Those who bore it began to look on others as “Gentile dogs” and to be self-righteous and proud over their supposed favored position before God. Thus the spirit of anti-Semitism which troubles the world so today was born of the spirit of anti-Gentilism which preceded it. This does not justify either, of course.

Now let us remember that what was physical and literal to Abraham is intended to have spiritual significance to us. In the New Testament, therefore, we no longer read of circumcision of the flesh but of the heart. The heart is the symbol of the soul – the mind, emotions, and will, the whole personality. Every believer in Christ is to bear on his heart the sign of Christ’s Lordship. The total personality is to be at his disposal. That is the Christian’s **circumcised life**.

Many scholars feel that circumcision was the origin of the wedding ring. The act of circumcision was performed by a metal or stone knife which cut around the foreskin leaving a circular scar. So a man and woman, standing before someone who represents God, place a metal and/or stone ring upon each other’s fingers, indicating that two hearts are giving themselves to each other.

This is the meaning of heart circumcision: The believer’s heart is totally Christ’s, to use as he wills – all his emotions, mind, intellect, and will are dedicated and available, ready at the command of Jesus Christ to be used for his purposes. Paul says to the Philippians, “We are the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,” {Phil 3:3 KJV}. We are to have no reliance upon ourselves, but rely totally upon him. Every thought, every imagination, is brought into captivity to Christ. That is the circumcised life.

“Walk therefore before me, and be wholehearted, blameless.” That will be a life of fruitfulness and blessing, a life that is well-pleasing to God, for it all springs from the realization that the God who lives within is *El Shaddai*, the God who is sufficient.

Prayer:

Our Father, just as Israel could pervert the truth of circumcision in the flesh, so it is possible for us to pervert the truth of the circumcised heart. It is quite possible for

us to give the impression that we are totally yours, Lord, that we love you and serve you, and that all we have is yours, and yet to be quite false to that ideal. Help us to discover the glory of the circumcised life, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

When God comes to Dinner

by Ray C. Stedman

In our study through the life of Abraham, the pattern man of faith, we last saw him entering into the circumcised life. This is the picture of the heart that is wholly Christ's. Paul describes it this way in Philippians 3:3 {RSV}: "We are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh." That is the circumcised life. Abraham, led of the Spirit of God through many difficulties, and trials and after years of wandering in a state of alternating victory and defeat, has come into the fullness of the circumcised life.

In Chapter 18, we shall see the results of this in terms of practical experience. Here is a very homey scene, what we might call kitchen-sink religion. It is faith-in-overalls, a combination of grace and groceries. These few verses center around three persons. We first see God in disguise, then Abraham in haste, and finally, Sarah in doubt.

In the first five verses, we see **God appearing in disguise**:

And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, and said, "My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on – since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." (Gen 18:1-5 {RSV})

We are told clearly in Verse 1 who this is that appears to Abraham. "The LORD appeared to him

by the oaks of Mamre." It is Jehovah himself coming to see Abraham, and with him come two angels who appear later on in connection with the destruction of Sodom. These are the same two who visit Lot to warn him of the impending judgment upon the cities of the plain. Because there are three men here, some have taken this to be a representation of the trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit appearing together, but a careful look at the context indicates that this is what we might regard as a pre-incarnate appearance of the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is one of those mysterious appearances of Christ before he came to take upon himself human life. He appears as a man, accompanied by two angels in human disguise.

Abraham does not recognize him. All he sees is three travelers, weary and thirsty as they come in off the desert where the temperature often reaches 120-125° – in the shade – and there is no shade. Abraham is seated under the oaks of Mamre in the doorway of his tent in the heat of the day looking out on the blazing countryside and suddenly he sees three men coming toward him. The salutation, "my lord," with which Abraham addresses the central figure is simply the common language of courtesy and does not mean that he had any thoughts that this was indeed the LORD. You will notice in the Revised Standard Version that *lord* is not capitalized. This is correct. Further, Abraham's offer of food, rest, and water shows he had no idea whom he was entertaining.

This is obviously a test of Abraham's heart – whether he is really a circumcised believer – in which God appears in such a commonplace way that Abraham is not aware of his identity. I've long wished for some kind of a test which could be used in Bible schools and seminaries to determine the degree of spiritual maturity the students have attained. All the tests that are commonly used re-

veal only the amount of information that has been amassed. There is little which reveals the real spiritual achievement of the life. It is quite possible, and, in fact, demonstratively possible, to graduate from seminary with a Doctor of Divinity degree or a doctorate in theology and not possess true spirituality or true maturity in Christ.

Nevertheless, although man has not been able to devise any such test, God is always testing us, and his testing does not come when we are warned and ready. Anyone can pass a test then. If I tell you that I am going to test you to see if you exhibit love under pressure, whether you can keep your temper when you are being irritated, and if you can be sweet when things are going wrong, you are likely to pass with flying colors. But God never tests that way. His tests catch us unprepared, off-guard. It is when we are confronted with some simple situation that no one will know about that the tests of life really come:

- When you are relaxing at home and the phone rings and suddenly you are confronted with a call for help, or a demand for a response – and you had planned to relax and enjoy yourself all afternoon – what happens then? That’s the test.
- When you are busy around the house with your hands immersed in dishwater and something is burning on the stove and the refrigerator has just quit and the sink is stopped up and you’ve got sixteen different problems on your mind, and your child comes up and asks you a question which is obviously of little importance, what do you do then? That’s the test.
- When your neighbor or friend gets sick and somebody has to take care of the children – what do you do?

What is your reaction? These are the tests of God. This is the way God tested Abraham.

Is this not the meaning of Paul’s words in Romans 12? “I appeal to you therefore, brethren ... to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,” {Rom 12:1a RSV}. It is one thing to be present in a great meeting where the Spirit is moving in evident power and an appeal goes out to rededicate the heart, and we hear the words, “Present your bodies

as living sacrifices unto the Lord.” Under the stress or pull of that meeting we may well come up to the front and say, “Here am I Lord, I give my life to you.” But this is never the test. The test comes when some situation occurs in daily life that forces you to face the questions:

- Is my body really available for him to do what he wants?
- Am I ready to respond to the need of the human heart right there in front of me, right there at that moment?
- Am I ready to give of myself without stint and without limitation to meet a demand that comes suddenly in the course of my busy life?

These are the tests. This is what God is doing to Abraham when he appears without warning in the heat of the day.

Now let us see **how Abraham fared in his examination.**

And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes.” And Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds, and milk, and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. (Gen 18:6-8 {RSV})

How beautifully Abraham met his test! Look at the words of action here: He “hastened into the tent” and he said to her, “Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal.”

(By the way, these three measures of meal are the key to the parable of the leaven in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. In his little story about a woman who hid leaven in three measures of meal, the Lord is depicting something of the character of the church. These three measures of meal are a picture of the fellowship of God with his own, and this is the key to that parable.)

Then, “Abraham ran to the herd” and picked out a calf and gave it to the servant “who hastened to prepare it.” These words all indicate his prompt and ready response to the evident need before him. He did it all personally too. We know Abraham had more than 318 men in his household who were

his servants, but here he himself becomes personally involved. He does not 'pass the buck' – he hastens to do this himself. Sarah too is involved, personally making bread, although she also had servants. Hagar was there, and others, but she herself makes this bread and kneads it and makes it into loaves.

When I read of Abraham's personal selection of the calf – "tender and good" – I remember something that occurred when I was with Dr. Ironside. At the close of a message he had given one time, a dear old man came up to him at the close of the meeting, and said: "Oh, Doctor, that was a wonderful message. It was just like Abraham's calf, tender and good." Dr. Ironside always thought that was one of the finest compliments he had ever received.

Abraham soon had a wonderful meal ready. He had cottage cheese salad, (curds, it says) with figs cut up all nicely in it; a tall glass of cool milk; hot veal cutlets, breaded and chicken-fried just the way they are the most tender; and fresh hot bread right out of the oven, running over with melted country butter; a nice dish of Sarah's preserves; and, to top off the meal, there was the gracious hospitality with which the guests were served. As they ate, Abraham visited with them.

All this is a beautiful picture for us of the fellowship of a circumcised heart with Christ in becoming his instrument to meet the cry of human need all around. The Lord said in Revelation 3:20 {RSV}: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." That is, we will fellowship together, we will have dinner together. This is not simply private enjoyment, not just a social hour for our own pleasure. This is a picture of the Lord using us as an instrument to meet the need of those around, and, in so doing, we enter into fellowship with the heart of Christ. When Christ comes in to us, he doesn't come in merely to give us a good time, to bless us, and make it an enjoyable experience. He comes in to fulfill his long-standing desire to be what he came into the world to be – a Savior to seek and to save that which was lost, to give and show compassion to others, to minister to human needs whatever they may be, through us.

Isn't this the test which he Himself said he would apply to our lives? In Matthew 25 the Lord presents a scene of judgment (Verses 31-43). He

will divide the nations into two groups. They all claim to be his but, as he sees the human heart, there are two divisions. He says to the one group, Verse 41: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire." And they are amazed and say, "Why do you say that to us, Lord?" And he says, "for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me," {cf, Matt 25:41-43 RSV}. Then to the others, he will say, Verse 34, "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," {Matt 25:34b RSV}. And they are surprised too, and say, "Lord, what do you mean?" And he says,

"for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." (Matt 25:35-36 {RSV})

And they said, Verse 39: "And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?" You remember his words: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me," (Matt 25:40 {RSV}).

This is the test of our faith. James says:

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:27 {RSV})

As he so practically reminds us, faith that does not issue in this kind of a ministry is not real, saving faith; it does not work. The true test of our life is how much our hearts are yielded and wholly dedicated to Christ to respond in fellowship with him in the meeting of human need about us.

This test reveals that Abraham really has a circumcised heart:

- He is not doing this because he wants to gain something for himself.
- He is not trying to impress anybody.
- He is not seeking credit or recognition.
- He is not trying to display his piety.

For all he knows these three men are nothing but poverty-stricken, penniless nomads of the desert. He will perhaps never see them again. But he

treats them as royally as though they were kings come to visit. Even if he had known who they were, he could not have treated them better. This prompt and full response is simply the manifestation of a heart which is filled with grace and love and responds immediately to human need without thought of self or praise from others.

What made him do this?

It was the fact that he had a circumcised heart: He really was Christ's. The man who really is Jesus Christ's does not need to be talked into doing good deeds; rather, he looks for opportunities. He is always ready to respond. Someone has well said,

Your reputation is what you do when everyone is looking,
while your character is what you do when no one sees.

These tests come to us every day.

When the need for help arises, what do you do about it?

Do you run and hide, or run to meet it, as Abraham did here?

I heard of a Christian who was speaking at a men's meeting some time ago about the growing spirit of callous indifference in the world today, and he illustrated it by telling how he and a friend just a few days before had been walking through the busy streets of one of our cities and they saw a drunk lying in the street, half on the sidewalk. They noted how everybody was stepping over him and going on their way, paying no attention to the prostrate form. He said he was appalled at the indifference of people as they walked by. "And you know," he said, "when we came back from lunch he was still there!"

How have you been doing this week with the sick, the hungry, the thirsty, and the dying and the strangers and those who need help physically or spiritually? What is the response of your heart? This is the question the Spirit thrusts upon us from this story.

The last picture applies to the feminine side of the household. Here we see **Sarah in doubt**:

They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." The LORD said, "I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening

at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh." (Gen 18:9-15 {RSV})

Here the first hint is given to Abraham as to who these guests are. They ask him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" Only the LORD could know of her recent name-change, but here is a man who asks, "Where is Sarah?" Abraham begins to realize then who this is, and when the question is followed with the repeated promise of a son, he is sure of the identity of his guest.

Do you remember those two men on the Emmaus road, after the resurrection of our Lord, who did not recognize Jesus when he joined them? It was not until they saw him in the familiar act of breaking bread that they knew who he was. So when Abraham hears these familiar words about the promise of the son, then he knows who it is that speaks.

Beyond the dividing curtain in the tent, Sarah has been listening to everything. She is doing the dishes just beyond the tent curtain, but she hears it all. She hears the question and the promise, and she realizes it is God who is saying that she will have a son. She looks at her 90-year-old body, long since almost dead. She looks in the mirror and sees the whiteness of her hair, the wrinkles in her face. She feels the arthritis in her bones. And when she hears this, she laughs cynically to herself.

She made no sound at all, but laughed to herself, we are told. But beyond the curtains, the LORD read her thoughts and said to Abraham, "Why does Sarah laugh in her heart? Is anything too hard for the LORD? I'll set a date for this: I'll be back next spring and she shall have a son." And we read that Sarah was afraid. She saw that her heart was open and known to God. She saw that there was one who reads hearts as we read books and she reacted just like we do. She denied that she

had laughed. But God knows that to justify or excuse our sin or to protect it and rationalize it and build a wall about it is to drive us into further misery and heartache. We cut ourselves off from divine help. And so the stern word comes to her. “No, but you did laugh. Admit it, face it: you did laugh, Sarah.”

Remarkably enough, the account ends right here. Suddenly the subject is dropped, and another situation is introduced in the next paragraph. We are left to wonder what this means. Back in Chapter 17, when God announced to Abraham for perhaps the fifth time that he was to have a son, we are told that Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah who is ninety years old bear a son?” {cf, Gen 17:17}. This is a different kind of a laugh than that of Sarah’s. This is the laugh of exulting joy over what God had promised. It is a laughter of faith delighting in what God would do in spite of the ravages of time and sin in his body. This is what Paul refers to in Romans: “He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead ...” (Rom 4:19a {RSV}). Further, “No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised,” (Rom 4:20-21 {RSV}).

In contrast, Sarah’s laughter is cynical, unbelieving. If this were all of the story, we would be tempted to say that this woman is no example to follow. But over in the New Testament, in the book of Hebrews, we get the rest of the story. There, in that wonderful eleventh chapter, the hall of fame of the heroes of faith, Sarah’s name appears:

By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. (Heb 11:11 {RSV})

Now we begin to see what must have happened. After the guests left, Sarah was still thinking about what she had heard, and the words of the LORD came home to her heart in peculiar power – especially the question God had asked, “Is there anything too hard for the LORD?” As Sarah thought about it, she had to face that question. Is

there? Is anything too hard for the LORD? She began to think of it – the Creator, the one who called out of nothing the vast world in which we live and beyond that the worlds which circle us in the limitless reaches of space, the one who sustains from day to day all the mighty, complex forces of earth, brings the sun up on time, guides the planets in their whirling courses, predicts human events, and centuries later brings them to pass exactly as he promised. Even the demons obey his word and tremble when they hear it. As Sarah began to think of the one who had said these words, she felt the full force of that question, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” And she looked beyond the contrary facts of her own life and beyond the contrary feelings of her own heart and said, “Of course not. Nothing is too hard for the LORD. If he has promised, then it shall be done.” Through faith she received power to conceive when she was past age because she counted him faithful who had promised.

What a beautiful lesson this is on the nature of faith.

Faith looks beyond all the contrary circumstances to rest upon the character of the one who promised. Do not be misled by the popular delusion that faith stands by itself, that it is simply believing – anything! Faith must have a promise to rest upon. Anything else is presumption, gullibility, folly. But when God has given a word, it is the Word of God, and it can be trusted despite circumstance, feelings, or anything else. For is anything too hard for the LORD? Sarah rested upon that and believed God.

- Does it seem hard to you to be what God wants you to be? Is it hard to keep your evil nature in the place of death? – hard to cast down evil imaginings and bring every thought into captivity to Christ? It is not too hard for the Lord!
- Does it seem hard to you to be made sweet and gracious and forgiving and loving when down inside you know how nasty and devious and unpleasant and perverse you can be? It is hard for you, but it is not too hard for the Lord!
- Does it seem hard that the friend for whom you are praying should ever be converted or the one

that is now rebelling against grace can ever be changed? Is anything too hard for the Lord?

- Does some task which God is now asking of you seem impossible to perform? – some situation in which you are living, is it too hard and demanding for you? Well, it may be hard for you, but it is not too hard for the Lord.

As faith learns to rest, not on its own resources which are never adequate, but upon the unfailing resources of God in response to a definite promise he gives, nothing is impossible.

Faith, mighty faith the promise sees,
And looks to God alone.
Laughs at impossibilities and cries,
“It shall be done.”

When I was out in Formosa waiting to begin my ministry there of speaking at pastors’ conferences, I confess I had a time of real fear and trembling. The night before the first conference, we met at Tunghai University overlooking the city of Taichung. I was scheduled to begin my ministry in the morning. I attended the evening service and there were 300 or more pastors from up and down the length of the island, all speaking a different language from mine – all with a different cultural background. I knew that in the morning I would have to speak through two interpreters (anyone else would have needed only one, but I needed two), and that this would be a difficult barrier. I knew, too, that a whole summer’s ministry of this kind stretched out before me. Here were three hundred men whom I’d never met before, to whom I was expected to minister. Beyond that, in my mind’s eye, I could see the conferences that were coming up in Viet Nam, in Hong Kong, in Singapore, and in the Philippines. I was trembling and very uncertain. I felt the darkness and the oppressiveness of the pagan atmosphere in the land. I had already seen visible evidence of the power of darkness, the

mark of the serpent throughout that island. So I went to the Lord in fear and trembling. I was reading through the Psalms at that time and that night I came upon this word in Psalm 18. What a blessing it was!

**Yea, thou dost light my lamp;
the Lord my God lightens my darkness.
Yea by thee I can crush a troop;
and by my God I can leap over a wall.**

(Psa 18:28-29 {RSV})

I thought of the darkness of the land and of that group of 300 pastors, and that language barrier that stood between me and them. I laid hold of the promise of God that night and my heart was greatly lightened. The next morning God met us in a wonderful way, and I look back on that whole summer’s ministry as one of the highlights of my life, seeing God at work throughout the difficulties, in spite of them, overcoming them.

If you want a wonderful experience, take your New Testament and using a concordance, look up the two little-words, but God. See how many times human resources have been brought to an utter end; despair has gripped the heart and pessimism and gloom has settled upon a people and there is nothing that can be done. Then see how the Spirit of God writes in luminous letters, “But God,” and the whole situation changes into victory.

This is what God is offering to be and do in us, and through us, in our human life today. God responds in the same way to us as he did to Abraham, so when we are oppressed and confronted with circumstances beyond our handling, we find the promise of God that covers the situation. In prayer we can sense some prompting of the Spirit that gives us a word of faith to rest upon.

Then, like Sarah, we may ask ourselves this question: “Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

No, he is able to perform all that he says he will.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

How Prayer Works

by Ray C. Stedman

We will continue our account of the pattern man of faith by reading the sixteenth verse of Chapter 18 where these three visitors (who came out of the hot desert into Abraham's tent and who were unknown to him at first) now go their way to accomplish the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Archaeologists are now convinced that it is the remnants of the ancient cities of wickedness – Sodom and Gomorrah – that have been rediscovered lying under the waters of the Dead Sea. Our next chapter takes up the amazing historical event of their destruction but now we are looking at the preview of it.

As Abraham's visitors leave his tent and go on their way eastward to the valley of the Jordan, Abraham goes with them. They come to a promontory at the edge of a steep ravine which leads down to the Dead Sea where they can see the doomed cities lying far below them in the afternoon sun. Tradition still marks the spot where Abraham intervened with God for the city of Sodom.

As we look at this section of Scripture, we can learn some valuable lessons on the nature of prayer:

First, we see that **prayer begins with the proposal of God:**

The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know. (Gen 18:17-21 {RSV})

This marks a very important fact concerning prayer: Prayer never begins with man; it begins with God!

True prayer is never a man's plans which he brings to God for him to bless. God is always the one who proposes. Prayer enters in when God then enlists the partnership of man in carrying out his

program. In other words, unless we base our prayers on a promise, or a warning, or a conviction of God's will, we have no right to pray.

Some people feel that the prayer of faith is crawling out on a limb and then begging God to keep someone from sawing it off, but that is not real prayer, that is presumption. If God makes it clear that he wants you out on a limb, fine – you will be perfectly safe there. If not, it is presumptuous of you to crawl out on a limb, expecting God to keep you there.

The difference is simply this: The prayer of faith is acting on a previous knowledge of what God wants. It is always founded upon a promise. It begins with a proposal which God makes, or a conviction he gives, or a warning he utters. On the other hand, the prayer of presumption is discovering something we would like to do, and then asking God to bless it. That kind of thing is doomed at the outset. In fact, this is why so many “works of faith” fail, when they otherwise might have been wonderfully blessed of God.

Now when God proposes something, as he does here in proposing to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, he always enlists a man as his partner. So we have here a picture of God talking to himself; he says, “Shall I hide from Abraham the thing I am about to do?” and he begins to list to himself the reasons why he should include Abraham in his plan. The reasons God lists might be called, “the rights of friendship.” Here is where Abraham earned the title which is given to him in both the Old and the New Testament, “the friend of God,” (cf, 2 Chr 20:7, Isa 41:8, Jas. 2:23).

God says, “I won't keep this from Abraham for two reasons:

- “First, because he has been given by grace a favored position in my sight. He is the man whom I have called out to become great. Through him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. And,
- “Second, I have chosen him in order that he might charge his household to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. I came into his life to show him how to do this, and because he has been taught by grace how to walk before God, this is the man to whom I want to tell my secrets.”

Do you see the parallel of the Christian today?

Every believer in Jesus Christ stands in exactly the same relationship with God:

- We have been given, by grace (not on our own merits), a favored position before God. We have been called into the family of God and made sons of the living God by faith in Jesus Christ.
- Furthermore, we are being taught by grace how to walk righteously before him, and, as we learn that lesson, we become the people to whom God tells his secrets.

It is not enough to have the favored position. I think many Christians believe that because they have accepted Jesus Christ, all God has is now open to them. But there must be the walk, the daily appropriation of what he is, so that we learn to walk in righteousness. When we do, then God begins to share his secrets. I think the reason some people get a lot more out of the Bible than others is that they have learned this two-way relationship: God loves to tell secrets to his people.

God's proposal not only enlists the partnership of man, but is based on an impartial and careful justice. The LORD says to Abraham in Verse 20: “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me.” This, of course, is the language of accommodation. God does not need to go down and visit any city in order to see what is going on. He is using Abraham's own language to express the truth which reflects his nature. He talks as though a great outcry has been coming up to his throne from these wicked cities.

When I read this, I can't help but think that every sin of man is like a voice crying out from earth to heaven. What kind of a cry must be going up from America today as a result of the terrible flood of pornography inundating our theater programs and our literature; and the tide of immorality that is sweeping across this country. God, according to this record, sees it all. God is walking in our streets and taking note of all that happens to us. He visits our homes and marks everything, misses nothing. He invades our most sacred privacy. Even our thoughts and subconscious ideas are naked and open before him.

Before he judges the cities of the plain, God carefully investigates the charges and probes to see what the conditions are. Then he tells Abraham that he is going to destroy these cities. Actually, he does not specifically tell Abraham what he will do, but when Abraham hears the ominous words, “I will know,” then he knows what God will do. Abraham knows all the unbridled lust, the foul acts of homosexuality, and the open passion for obscenity, the lurid and salacious attitude that permeated all public and private life in these cities. Abraham knows that the cities doom is sure.

And this leads us to the next step in prayer, **the passions of man:**

So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom [that is, the angels left and went on to the city]; but Abraham still stood before the LORD. Then Abraham drew near, and said, “Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” And the LORD said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.” Abraham answered, “Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Wilt thou destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” Again he spoke to him, and said, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” He said, “Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” (Gen 18:22-32 {RSV})

This is a remarkable account. It sounds as though Abraham is backing God into a corner and making him lower the ante every time. I wonder what we would have said if we had been in Abraham’s shoes.

I think some of us would have wrapped our robes of self-righteousness around us, and said, “Good for you, Lord! They’ve got it coming. I wondered just how much you could take. I’ve long since had enough.” Or perhaps we might have said, “Lord, do you mean you are going to destroy the city? All these wonderful people – I know they are evil, Lord, but they mean well. They have just been carried away a little bit. Don’t be too hard on them.” Perhaps we would have interceded in that way.

Abraham had no time for self-righteousness, smugness, or sentimental nonsense however. When these two angels left to go down to the city, this would have been the cue for Abraham to say goodbye and get back to his tent. But it appears that Abraham did not let the LORD go. He stood yet before the LORD. There was something on his heart, and we see in the following dialogue the emotion, the strong passion, that is awakened in this man’s heart by God’s proposal.

Several issues are of great interest in this account:

- First, Abraham recognizes the mercy of God. Notice that he says, Lord, suppose there are fifty men in the city that are righteous. Wouldn’t you spare the whole city for them? Notice the way he is arguing. This is so easily misunderstood. Abraham is not trying to shame God into doing the right thing by appealing to his self-respect in this reminder, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” – as a mother might shame her child into doing right. God does not need anyone to remind him to do right, or to tell him it would be wrong to slay the righteous with the wicked. Rather, Abraham is basing his appeal on the knowledge of God’s nature. He knows God would never destroy the righteous with the wicked. Now he is asking him to go further and spare the wicked for the sake of fifty righteous. Abraham is recognizing the basis of God’s mercy in every age since then.

I remember a friend telling of walking past a church bulletin board one day and noting the announcement of the sermon: “If I were God.” The man with my friend said, “‘If I were God’ – that’s an interesting title for a sermon. If I were God, I’d just lean down over the battlements of heaven, take a big, deep breath, and blow this earth out of existence!” Why has not God done that long, long ago, with all the shameful record of human defiance, rebellion, and depravity which history records? It is because of this very principle to which Abraham appealed: There are righteous here.

The Lord said to his disciples, “You are the salt of the earth,” (Matt 5:13a {RSV}). The reason for salt is to preserve from corruption. A little bit of salt in meat will keep the whole thing from being destroyed or corrupted. This is why God permits human history to go on, in its awful defiance, there are righteous on the earth – not men who are righteous in themselves, but who have been given the righteousness of Christ by faith in him. Our greatest defense against any satanic force lies not in any of our political scheming or maneuvering but in the character of God who refuses to destroy the earth while there are righteous on it.

- In addition to the recognition of God’s mercy, we note Abraham’s awareness of his own status before God. In Verse 27, Abraham answers: “Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Lord, I haven’t any right to ask this of you. You, Lord, are wholly righteous, true, and I don’t need to tell you what to do. Who am I, a man, talking to you – but Lord, I can’t help but say this thing that is on my heart. Would you not spare the city if there are only 45 instead of 50?” This is the kind of language which delights God to hear and honor, for it is the very opposite of the pride and deceit that makes us think we can demand of God what we want.

I listened to a faith healer one day praying for people on the platform and I was appalled at the way he spoke to God. He ordered him about as if God were a sort of magic genie obliged to do what this man said. It reflected the awful pride of his own heart. This is not

true prayer. Abraham’s approach is right: “Lord, who am I to speak to thee?”

- The third consideration is for the protection of the righteous in Sodom. Abraham continues his dialogue until he comes down to ten people and stops there. Why does Abraham stop at ten? Because there were ten members in Lot’s family. We learn in the next chapter that he and his own children and the ones they were to marry constituted exactly ten people. Abraham knew that, and he had Lot and his family in mind all along. He thought if he could just get the Lord to agree to save the city for ten, Lot’s family would be saved – reasoning that, by this time, Lot must have won at least his own family to the Lord.

Abraham never asks God to spare Lot and his family, but out of compassion for the wicked, he keeps trying to save the whole city for the sake of Lot and his family. He appeals to God on whatever ground of mercy he can find. The evil of this city must have often revolted Abraham, this righteous man, but he is anxious to give it every last possible chance he can. The passion that speaks through true prayer is this recognition of God’s mercy and an awareness of man’s uncertain vision and his limited wisdom. God has a deep concern for the protection of the righteous, and, simultaneously, compassion on the foolish, lustful men who inflict the hurts. God seeks the slightest opening to show his mercy.

In one verse here at the end, **the purpose of prayer** is suggested to us:

And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place. {Gen 18:33 RSV}

It does not say, “And the Lord went his way when Abraham had finished speaking to him.” It says, “when he had finished speaking to Abraham.” In other words. Abraham did not quit here, God did.

Some people say that Abraham’s faith failed him when he got to ten and he did not dare try for any more, but that, if he had, he would have saved the city of Sodom. I think that is highly unlikely

because the next number he would have tried for would probably have been five, since he was diminishing the number by fives all along. If he had asked for five that still would not have saved the city. The next chapter tells us that only three people got out of the city alive. They were the only righteous within the whole city.

No, the verse here suggests that God had initiated this whole conversation with Abraham and led him along all through it, and when he had responded in fullness as God desired, God terminated the dialogue and went his way. In other words, Abraham was not asking God to do something for him; it was God who prayed in Abraham and set the limits of the conversation.

This agrees fully with what we read in the New Testament about prayer. In Romans Paul says, "For we do not know how to pray as we ought," (Rom 8:26b {RSV}). Do you know what to pray for about yourself or about anyone else? No, you do not. But, he says, "the Holy Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings which we cannot express, but which are nevertheless there in the heart," {cf, Rom 8:26c-27}. True prayer, therefore, is never man talking to God, but God talking to God through man. It is God who is causing Abraham to feel his own compassion and to reflect his own desire for an opportunity to show mercy. This is the reason for prayer.

Admittedly, in talking about prayer, we are treading at the edge of mystery, but, through the mists, **certain things are clear** from this account we have been studying:

1. Prayer makes possible, first of all, the joy of partnership. Did you ever see a little boy come into the house and say to his mother, "I'm going to help daddy build the house!" He is all filled with pride about it and he goes out and passes up nails and holds the boards and pounds his fingers. Daddy could have done the job better by himself but he loves to have his son help him. And the son loves it, too. There is a sense of partnership there. This is what prayer does. God never moves all on his own. He loves to gather us in and have us help pound the nails. If we pound our fingers a little bit, he is there to soothe us, and to comfort us. This is why the apostle said we are called to be co-laborers with God, workers together with

him. I read recently of a man who prayed, "Lord, break my heart with the things that break the heart of God." That is a hungering after this partnership with God.

2. Prayer also enables us to appropriate the character of God. Abraham is never more like God than at the moment he is praying for Sodom. His prayer did not save the city, and it was never intended to do so, but it did make Abraham manifest in his own life the mercy and the compassion of God. This is why God asks us to pray, that we might take upon ourselves something of his own character.

In that great verse about prayer in Philipians 4:6 {RSV}, Paul says, "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." And what happens? God will do the thing you ask? No, that is not the promise. "And the peace of God, which passes all understanding" (Phil 4:7a {RSV}), which you cannot reason out, which you cannot explain, which no circumstance will permit you to understand, the peace that rests at the heart of God, "will possess your hearts and minds," {cf, Phil 4:7b RSV}. Circumstances will not be any different. You rise from prayer and find your mother-in-law just as nasty as ever, your boss just as unreasonable, your children just as irritating, your husband just as stubborn, your wife just as bossy. Ah, but you have the peace of God that passes all understanding, which keeps your heart and mind through any circumstance.

3. The third consideration: Prayer focuses the power of God on an individual place or person. I don't understand this, but Chapter 19, Verse 29 says,

So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow. {Gen 19:29 RSV}

Lot received salvation, although Abraham had never mentioned Lot by name. God remembered Abraham and saved Lot.

Now, I don't know why prayer makes such a difference, but I know it does. You can plan a program, think through all the details, set up all the committees, get all the things you need, instruct everybody, rehearse it and run it through – and at the final presentation it may fall totally flat. But if you involve others in the ministry of prayer concerning it, though the preparations may be similar, the difference in the presentation is that it comes with power, with impact, with full strength and lives are changed.

One of our staff was telling us about a high school conference. Many of the young people said they hadn't planned to go, but something just made them go. When they got there, hearts which had been resisting the work of the Spirit, indifferent, and letting things slide, were now open and listening, allowing the Lord to speak to them through the Word. They were changed – simply because all through the intervening weeks women had been gathering in homes and praying for that conference. I don't understand it, but I know it works. Prayer focuses the power of God.

4. The last principle here is that prayer affects the timing of God. Now this is a mysterious thing, but I am sure it is true. Certainly prayer does not change, nor alter, the will or purpose of God. Prayer is not a way to make God change his mind. When he announces something, he will do it. When he declares he will move in a certain direction, he always moves in that direction and no amount of prayer will ever change it. However, prayer can defer judgment, and prayer can also speed up blessing. It affects the timing.

Have you ever noticed that time is one ingredient that God reserves for his own control?

- He tells us plainly, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority," (Acts 1:7 {RSV}).
- We have such an example of how prayer affects God's timing in the case of Nineveh. When Jonah went there and announced "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jonah 3:4b), the

whole city went to prayer and repented, and God postponed the destruction of Nineveh. He waited until almost one hundred years later when the city was finally destroyed.

- Also, Hezekiah in Judah had a severe illness of terrible carbuncles, boils that were eating away his very life. God sent the prophet Isaiah to him and he announced, "Fix up your light in your house, you're going to die," {cf, Isa 38:1}. And Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and wept and prayed and said, "Oh, God, spare my life." God heard and stopped Isaiah as he was going out the door and told him to turn around and go back with another message. Isaiah went back in and said to the king, "God has heard your prayer and added fifteen years to your life," {cf, Isa 38:5}. Prayer doesn't change God's purpose, but prayer does affect the timing.
- There is a very fascinating verse along this line which relates to our own lives today. In Second Peter, speaking about the problem of why God delays judgment, Peter says:

The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. {2 Pet 3:9-10 RSV}

Then he says these words:

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, (2 Pet 3:11-12a {RSV})

That means that, if we are walking before the Lord as Abraham did, and our hearts are available to God to pray through us, and to reflect through us

How Prayer Works

the very passion that is in the heart of God, we can actually hasten the coming of Jesus Christ back to earth again. We can hasten the day when the earth will be delivered from its oppressions and its burdens, and the golden age will break forth and righteousness will cover the earth.

Prayer:

Our Father, we have learned great lessons today on prayer. We see indeed prayer is not a means by which we dictate to you or

summon you to do what our will is, but rather it is the means by which we put our shoulder to the wheel to which your shoulder is put and are enlisted in a partnership with you in your great enterprise and endeavors on earth. Lord, we would pray that we may understand what we read, that we may have ears to hear, hearts that are willing to obey; and that we may therefore stand in the line of succession to those of whom it is said, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man releases great power." We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

The Wasted Years

by Ray C. Stedman

The 19th chapter of Genesis is one of the most fascinating in the Word of God, and yet it is a grim and fateful story. The world has always had a morbid interest in the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Hollywood has seized upon this theme, and made several films; it has all they are looking for.

In relatively recent times, science has taken a new interest in the Sodom and Gomorrah. The discovery of ruins lying under the waters of the Dead Sea are felt by many experts to be the submerged remains of these cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and the villages that clustered around them in the southern part of the Dead Sea plains. Rather than volcanic activity, some scientists have suggested that the cities were destroyed by lightning which set fire to the tar pits that saturated the area. That explanation would certainly serve this account in Genesis.

When we last looked together at the life of Abraham, we found him moved by the Spirit interceding for Lot in the city up on the side of the valley overlooking the Dead Sea region. The two angels that had accompanied the Lord on his visit to Abraham have gone on to accomplish the destruction of the cities and Abraham and the Lord were left alone there for that solemn soliloquy.

Now we pick up the story as the two angels come into the city of Sodom in the evening hours. They enter looking like ordinary men, with no wings or other identifying features. Although this chapter is rather long, there are really only two things to note about it. The first part gives us a view of Lot in the city of Sodom, and the rest of the chapter reveals how much of Sodom was in Lot.

First, we see Lot in Sodom:

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening; and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed himself with his face to the earth, and said, "My lords, turn aside, I pray you, to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the street." But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. (Gen. 19:1-3 {RSV})

The expression we find at the beginning of this account, "Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom," is an eastern expression which needs to be understood. This does not mean he was simply passing the time of day in the gate, watching strangers come into the city. This is a technical phrase which means he was the chief magistrate of the city of Sodom. His job was not only to give an official welcome to visitors of the city but to investigate the nature of any strangers who might come, and also to administer justice concerning any quarrels within the city. The nearest equivalent we have today would be the office of mayor. So this account opens with the picture of Lot as the mayor of Sodom, the chief magistrate of the city.

This is most interesting when we remember what we have read of Lot from time to time. Here is the success story of the Old Testament, the old familiar pattern of the immigrant boy from the foreign country who makes good in the big city. This is rags to riches, poverty to power, the local yokel making good in the big town. You can imagine the biographies being circulated through the city, autographed personally by Lot.

We first met Lot when he left Ur of the Chaldeans and moved to the city of Haran with Abraham. Although he was always subservient to Abraham, it seems very likely that Lot made a genuine response of faith to God on his own. Then, when Abraham came into the land of Canaan, Lot went with him. When Abraham went down to Egypt, Lot went down with him, and they came back wealthy men, although their time in Egypt was a time of great spiritual poverty and distress of heart for both.

When they returned to the land of Canaan, the first thing that happened was the quarrel between Lot's herdsmen and Abraham's herdsmen over the pasture rights. Abraham, though he had the right of first choice as the elder, gave up his right to Lot. That significant choice was the beginning of Lot's downfall. He looked out and saw that the plain of the Jordan was well-watered like the "garden of the LORD" and "the land of Egypt" {Gen 13:10 RSV}. It looked like both to him, and those two little phrases indicate the nature of Lot's choice. He had just come from Egypt, the place of materialism and commercialism – easy wealth – and this looked like such a place to him. In addition, it looked like "garden of the LORD."

Now the "garden of the LORD" is always indicative in the Scriptures of a place of divine fellowship – as Adam and God walked together in the garden of Eden – the place where there was peace of heart and fellowship with God. Lot looked at the city of Sodom and the plain and he thought this was the place where he could have both. He could make an easy living, advance himself, have all the cultural advantages of the city and still have fellowship with God. And he wanted it all. So we read, he "chose for himself," {Gen 13:11b RSV}, i.e., he excluded everything but his own desire. On that basis, he arranged his priorities – to obtain wealth and to have fellowship with God.

In doing this, Lot disregarded the principle that runs all the way through Scripture and through human life. This is expressed by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount when he says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," (cf, Matt 6:33a). The promise that goes with that is that all these other material things will be added. But we are to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Lot did exactly the opposite, placing materialism first. His first priority was to find a place where he could make a good living and ad-

vance his family's material advantages. With that, however, he wanted to have the kingdom of God and fellowship with him. We read the result as we trace this story through.

So he pitched his tent toward Sodom. He was not in the city yet, but he was near it. He was still in his tent; he was a sojourner in the land, and the tent marks his pilgrim character. But he pitched it just outside the city of Sodom in order to take advantage of all the cultural pursuits of the city. Then, in Chapter 14, we read that he was dwelling in Sodom. By the time of the invasion of the five kings, he had moved right into the city. And now, in Chapter 19, we find that he is the mayor of the town.

Now I want to be fair with this man, Lot; I believe he meant to do the right thing. It is clear from the whole story of his life that though he wanted to get something out of Sodom, he also expected to put something into Sodom. He probably thought to himself, "Well I may do these people good. I may be able to win some of them from evil to faith. I can make money faster here than anywhere else, that's true, but I also may help clean up the city a little bit. It's a wicked place, and perhaps I can improve its moral life." When Lot moved into Sodom, this is undoubtedly what he had in mind. But before long he becomes the mayor of the town, the most respected man in the city, the leader of its civic life. This is where the angels found him when they came into the city on that eventful evening.

I would like to ask this successful man four questions. I think they will reveal to us how much there is of Sodom in Lot, how much the life of the city had affected him. The rest of the chapter will give us the answers to these questions:

"Lot, you made a great success out of your life. You've won your way from a nobody to the mayor of the city. You entered as an unknown, a foreigner, and you've achieved both wealth and honor here in the city of Sodom.

- "My first question is this, 'How has your choice of life in Sodom affected your own inner life? You wanted both the personal advantages of the city life and fellowship with God. Have you found it?'"
- "The second question is, 'How much have you influenced the city for good, Lot? How effec-

tive has your life been in changing the city's evils?"

- "The third question is: 'How much money did you make there? How much material advantage was it to you to live there?'"
- "And the fourth question: 'What influence did the city's life have on your own family?'"

Now I think you will agree these are fair questions to ask a man who only wants to gain the best he can from the world and live a life of fellowship with God. The answers are all here in this chapter.

The first question is: "**Lot, how about your own heart and mind in the midst of that city; what effect did Sodom have on your spiritual life?**" Here are the answers:

But before they lay down [that is, the angel visitors] **the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them."** Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Behold, I have two daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please: only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door. But the men put forth their hands and brought Lot into the house to them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves groping for the door. (Gen 19:4-11 {RSV})

Notice the extent of the evil of this city. This is the reason God visited it in judgment. In Verse 4 it says that all the men of the city both young and old, all the people to the last man surrounded the house. Though the language is veiled here in order to make possible a public discussion of the hideous sin,

nevertheless homosexuality is what all the people of Sodom were involved in. As you read this account you can see that Lot's reaction is disgust and shame. And this is no isolated instance; this was just a common ordinary event in Sodom. In the second letter of Peter, in the New Testament, we have Lot's reaction to life in Sodom:

... righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the wicked (for by what that righteous man saw and heard as he lived among them, he was vexed in his righteous soul day after day with their lawless deeds), (2 Pet 2:7b-8 {RSV})

That is a picture of discontent, of bafflement, of frustration. His soul was continuously vexed. He had tasted enough of the higher things of fellowship with God that he could never, never be satisfied with these sordid, ugly obscene and lewd things of Sodom. Where is rest and peace and quietness of heart? It is up there with Abraham in his tent under the oak tree. But here in the city of Sodom is this man Lot. What good is it to have luxuries and wealth and every material gain if the heart is continually filled with a great hunger that cannot be fed or satisfied? Lot's answer to that first question must be that his own life is grievously thwarted and blighted by the life of the city of Sodom.

How about question two: "**Lot what did you do for Sodom?**" When you moved into the city you intended to influence the city, and you did; you became the mayor, the chief magistrate. Now, Lot, in that place of great political influence how many did you win? How many did you turn from evil to faith?"

Then the men said to Lot, "Have you any one else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or any one you have in the city, bring them out of the place; for we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it." So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up, get out of this place; for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting. (Gen. 19:12-14 {RSV})

What a statement that is! With his very own sons-in-law he had no influence whatsoever. When Abraham had pleaded with God for divine mercy, there needed to be found only ten righteous men in this city for the whole city to be spared. But when Lot went out beginning with his own family, he could find none. His political power was great, but his spiritual influence was absolutely nil.

Let us come to the meanest question of them all: **“Lot how much did you make while you were in Sodom? What do you have to show for your years there?”** Here is the record:

When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city.” But he lingered; so the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him forth and set him outside the city. And when they had brought them forth, they said, “Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley; flee to the hills, lest you be consumed.” And Lot said to them, “Oh, no, my lords; behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me, and I die. Behold, yonder city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there – is it not a little one? – and my life will be saved!” He said to him, “Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. Make haste, escape there; for I can do nothing till you arrive there.” Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar [which means “little”]. The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.

Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But Lot’s wife behind him looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD; and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and behold, and lo,

the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.

So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt. (Gen 19:15-29 {RSV})

If you want to know how much Lot made in Sodom, I suggest you make a trip to the Holy Land. Go and stand by the shore of the Dead Sea and look out over that lifeless, brackish, waste, the lowest and most desolate spot on the face of the earth – 1,300 feet below sea level – and listen to the lifeless waves lap the beach in an unending monotone of death. Nothing grows there, nothing lives, nothing moves in all that forsaken valley. How much did Lot win? He lost it all, everything. Here is the disastrous failure of this man. He was a good man who wanted to do right, but chose his own way and lost his peace, and his influence, and all that he had. Still, he longs for a city, even a little one. The life of the city has so gripped hold of his own heart that he has to have a city.

The last and most terrible question, then, is this: **“Lot, what about your family?** When you turned your back on the tent and went to live in Sodom, what happened to your children?” We have just seen how Lot lost his wife. Her heart was knit to the lusts and pleasures of the city and she looked back. Doubtless she was caught by the flames and burned where she stood. Her body was later encrusted with the salt as the winds blew across her and she became just a pillar of salt as described here. The Lord Jesus looked back on this incident and in a solemn passage of warning, he said, **“Remember Lot’s wife,”** (Luke 17:32).

And now we have this account of how the filthy way of the city had become part of his daughters’ thinking. The dreadful story is recorded in Verses 30-38:

Now Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; so he dwelt in a cave with his two daughters. And the first-born said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father.” So

they made their father drink wine that night; and the first-born went in, and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. And on the next day, the first-born said to the younger, "Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father." So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. The first-born bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites to this day. {Gen 19:30-38 RSV}

These two girls were virgins in body, but they were already debauched in mind. They had long since grown accustomed to obscenity and unrestrained luridness, so, up in the cave on the mountainside, they seized the thinnest tissue of excuses and the story ends in a foul orgy of drunkenness and incest. Lot had nothing but heartbreak and grief to show for the years in Sodom. The Lord said, "For whoever would save his life will lose it," (Matt 16:25a {RSV}). So Lot, trying to get the best out of both worlds, lost all and has become for all time the picture of the Christian who is saved, "but only as through fire," (1 Cor 3:15b {RSV}). He has nothing but wasted years to look back on and eternity ahead.

I am sure you have seen many lessons in this story, but let me press just two of them home to you:

1. The first lesson I see is this: The hour of danger is when you first begin to choose.
Young people, especially, often feel the pull to be like the world, wanting to be popular, and to have what everyone else has, and do what everyone else does. They want to be welcomed by their crowd and to be Christians as well. They desire fellowship with Christ, and a life of joy and power. Thus, many try to do exactly what Lot tried to do – compromise, so as to have both – and, like Lot, they have chosen for themselves, putting popularity and self

first. Some young people, teenagers from Christian homes, are drinking, gambling, stealing, and lying about it at home. They are playing with sex as far as they dare to go, and sometimes further. They do it all because they want to be accepted and popular at school. At the same time they want also to be in church to find the Lord, have his blessing and fellowship.

The whole story of life and the Scriptures is that you cannot do both. No man can serve two masters. No man can walk down two dividing roads at the same time. If you are trying to live this way, surely, as you have chosen your own desires first, you will lose it all, just as Lot did. Unless you change your mind, and begin to actually put God first, before all else, you will continue in the very pattern that is traced out here, until you awaken one day to find it has all gone by. As Lord Byron wrote at the age of 29, after he had tried everything that life offered,

My days are yellow in the leaf;
The flower of the fruit of life is gone.
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone.

It is quite possible to fight your way to the top of the heap and then look back on a burned-out life, on empty, wasted, barren years. The hour of choosing is now, in youth, when you are young, when you are setting the direction of life.

2. The second lesson I get from this is that when you attempt to gain the best of both worlds, you destroy others besides yourself.

What was the greatest pang in Lot's heart when he awoke there in the cave in the mountains and learned all that had happened? Do you think it was grief over his lost wealth, his vanished honor, his troubled mind? Do you not think that the greatest, deepest wound of all in that man's heart was the recognition of what he had done to his loved ones in Sodom, his little girls, his wife?

You who are parents are being watched by your children, and they see your outward respectability, your desire to be right and to do good. But they also see, in some of you, that the deepest thing in your life is to get gain or to

enjoy pleasure. They see that you will quickly sacrifice a prayer meeting for a night out, that you are always willing to take a bigger salary, regardless of what it may do to the family in terms of new conditions or new circles of friends. They see that the things you sacrifice for, and are willing to skimp and save for, are not missions, or the church, or the work of God, but a new car, or a color television set, or nicer furniture, or a longer vacation, or a pretentious home. They are watching and they see all this.

Bit by bit they lose interest in the Bible, Sunday School, and church. They resolve to get ahead in the world and win the respect of Sodom no matter what moral restraint they have to throw overboard to do it. This is why we see the tragedy of Christian homes in which children are turning from God. And the sorrow you will carry to your grave, the deepest sorrow of your heart will be that, though you still

have your own faith, yet because of your compromise, you have lost your children. This tragic story of Lot is taking place right here and now, in the modern Sodom and Gomorrah in which we live.

Remember, it does not have to be so. Yonder on the hill is Abraham whose whole life principle was to let God choose and to be satisfied with that choice though it meant a tent all his days. His first question was never, "How much will I make?" but, "Will it destroy my tent and my altar?" Those are the precious things in my life and I want nothing to do with anything which destroys my sense of pilgrimage, my sense of not belonging here, and my fellowship with the living God." In the end, Abraham gained the whole land, and all that Lot possessed, and more besides, and he shall inherit the earth, according to the Scriptures, "for he looked for a city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God," {cf, Heb 11:10}.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Old Natures Never Die

by Ray C. Stedman

Immediately following the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, we encounter a lesson which is most important to the life of faith. We last saw Abraham on the promontory looking out over the valley of the Dead Sea and interceding with God on behalf of the wicked cities of the plain. This is a place of high favor in Abraham's life, when he seems to have grown to a position of tremendous power, authority, and friendship with God. This is what many Christians expect to happen in their lives. They have the idea that as forgiven sinners they gradually learn to improve themselves until they become at last worthy of Christ's friendship and can enter into the secrets of God in some such amazing way as Abraham did here.

But this idea of the Christian life, as this story reveals, is wrong. The account, which continues in Chapter 20, might be entitled, *Relapse*.

Doesn't it sound familiar?

From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. {Gen 20:1-2 RSV}

Here is Abraham doing the same thing he had done thirty years ago. He is down in the land of Gerar, the sea coast country on the southwest side of Palestine, just above the Gulf of Suez on the way to Egypt. The people who lived in this area were later called the Philistines. These were the enemies of Israel from whom came Goliath, the giant David slew. These people had come from Egypt. They were not Canaanites, but Egyptians who had moved up to the border of the land of Palestine. They are a spiritual picture of the moral but unregenerate churchman; that is, a worldly people getting as close to the truth of God as they can while remaining unregenerated.

The world is full of these religious people. Thousands of them meet in churches across our land today who do not know what it means to be born again. They do not know what it is to have the life of Christ dwelling in them. They think the church is where they can learn ethical and moral principles along with others who are interested in advancing the highest good of society. Yet they consider themselves Christians and would feel insulted if they were told that they are not Christian in the scriptural sense.

The king of this group is called Abimelech, which means "my father is king." This suggests an authority no higher than man: It is the concept of "my father as king of all the people," the supreme

ruler. This is characteristic of the worldly church, the church that does not regard authority as coming from any higher source than man. These are the Philistines – “holding the form of religion but denying the power of it,” (2 Tim 3:5a {RSV}).

These are the people among whom Abraham goes. He is evidently upset by what had happened in the destruction of the cities of the plains, and perhaps longs to get away from that infamy and terror. So he moves down into the south country and comes among these people. The first thing he does there is to tell a lie about his wife. He says she is his sister, exactly as he did thirty years ago. This woman Sarah is still such a lovely creature that she is a lure to all the wolves that are around, and Abraham feels the only way to protect himself is to say that she is his sister. Just as before, the king comes and takes her as his own and gets into trouble.

But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, “Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a man’s wife.” [That would not frighten anyone today, but it did then.] **Now Abimelech had not approached her; so he said, “Lord, wilt thou slay an innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.” Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now then restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you, and all that are yours. (Gen 20:3-7 {RSV})**

Here is a picture of the blundering blindness of unbelief. Here is a man on the verge of committing a very grievous sin when God stops him. This is a revelation of how God views this sin of taking another man’s wife. He tells this pagan man he is doing a terrible thing and Abimelech recognizes it. You can see how far we have slipped today, when you realize that even pagans in that day recognized how terrible it was to take another man’s wife.

Abimelech protested that he did not realize what he was doing, that he had been tricked, that he was innocent of any wrongdoing and was acting only out of his integrity. Notice, however, that his moral standards were no protection against stumbling into sin. Even though he had higher moral standards than Abraham, they were no protection against keeping him from stumbling into sin. Even with his eyes wide open and meaning to do right, and thinking he was doing right, he was still on the verge of falling into sin. This is the unhappy state of all those who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord. They do not have the inner voice to protect, restrain, guide and keep them from evil. Had it not been for the influence of God, this man would have plunged right on into sin. For Abraham’s sake, God restrained him, and as we see at the end of this account, he struck Abimelech with a deadly disease which prevented him from taking Sarah as his wife. Undoubtedly this man thought a terrible tragedy had occurred, but it was really the kindness of God keeping him from something far more serious.

I wonder sometimes if many of the events that appear to be tragedy are not the kind-heartedness of God restraining people for the sake of those who know him, who love him, keeping them from evil. Paul writes of one who restrains the full manifestation of human sin. Even in his day, “This mystery of lawlessness is already at work.” (2 Th 2:7a {RSV}), but he says there is one “who now restrains it” {2 Th 2:7c}, keeping it in bounds. In other words, if God was not at work restraining human evil, man would have long since blown himself off the face of the earth. He has never needed atom bombs or hydrogen bombs to do the job. They only speed up the process. He could have done it long, long ago by simpler means – axes, hatches, knives and swords would have done the trick – and he would have done so if it had not been for God’s restraining hand on human society. Paul says that the day is coming when God will take that restraint away and all hell will break loose on earth. That cataclysm is described for us in most vivid terms in the book of Revelation.

In the next section we find **Abraham suffering from the reproach of Abimelech:**

So Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told them all these things; and the men were

very much afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, “What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done.” And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What were you thinking of, that you did this thing?” Abraham said, “I did it because I thought, There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, I said to her, ‘This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother.’” (Gen 20:8-13 {RSV})

As a Christian, has anyone had to say to you, “What were you thinking of when you did this thing?” Have you ever had to say it to yourself: “What got into me anyway? I thought I was further along in the Christian life than this. Here I have done this thing that I thought had long ago passed out of my life. Whatever got into me?” If you have ever had to ask yourself that, you need to learn the lesson Abraham had to learn here.

Old natures never die; they only smell that way. You are still capable of the worst sin that you have ever committed – and more. Abraham has been a coward for thirty years and he is still capable of being the same yellow coward he was at the beginning, hiding behind his wife, subjecting her to dishonor and disgrace and shame, in order to protect his own skin. He had made a pact with her thirty years before and he had never gotten around to giving her any new instructions, in spite of how much he had grown in grace.

This old Adamic nature with which we are born, which is perverted and twisted so that it never operates as God intended it to, is totally depraved. That does not mean that it cannot do what appear to be nice things in the eyes of others and even of ourselves. There is something about the old self, the flesh, which is able to simulate righteousness. In the flesh’s pursuit after pseudo-righteousness, even if it succeeds in an outward demonstration of a sweet and lovely nature, it has never achieved anything but self-righteousness. Self-righteousness always demands self-praise, a longing to be admired and to win the attention of others. If self-

righteousness succeeds, it makes you an extrovert. If you fail in your pursuit of self-righteousness, the result is self-pity and self-pity makes you an introvert. Either way it is the flesh, the same ugly thing. In neither case can it ever please God.

This is why when God comes into the human heart through Jesus Christ, he never tries to do anything about cleaning up that old nature. He writes it off as worthless. He says that everything that comes from self is worthless. No matter how it looks in the eyes of others, if it comes from the self-advancing, self-centered core, it is worthless and it always will be. What you now are in the flesh, you always will be, if you live a hundred years.

Now isn’t that encouraging? I hope it is! If you lay hold of that concept, you will find it one of the most encouraging truths in your Christian life, because it will release you from that awful burden of self-effort which tries to make the old nature behave itself. You must renounce self as the Word of God tells you to, and quit feeding it, protecting it, polishing it up, trying to make it look good. Give it up. Accept all that Jesus Christ is in you and wants to be through you, for his nature is perfect. If you will let him be what he wants to be through you, you will always be pleasing to God.

Any dependence upon self always results in the kind of experience that Abraham had. After thirty years of walking with God and learning wonderful lessons in the spiritual life, the minute he steps out of a dependence upon God, he steps back into that same ugly nature he had in the beginning, and it is unchanged after thirty years. Old natures have to be kept out of the place of control through walking in the spirit. “Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh,” Paul tells us {Gal 5:16 RSV}.

Let us suppose my family decided to demonstrate that the popular conception about a pig’s nature is false, that the idea that a pig likes mud is a complete insult to the nature of a pig. We are going to vindicate the pig by showing how it can be trained and educated to be what it is not by nature. We go and get a little silky, baby pig and bring it home, and I introduce this little pig to my children. We’ll call it Flash. I tell them this little pig is to be their baby brother and they are never to treat it in any way that would let it know it isn’t human. For if we treat it as a human, it will be human. So, we begin its training. We house break it, we teach it to

wipe its feet when it comes to the door, to sit up at the table with a bib around its neck. We dress it in a little pink shirt with blue velvet pants, we tie a little bow around its tail, we teach it to stand up when a lady comes into the room and to be very mannerly. At first we make great progress. It seems as though we are accomplishing our objective because the pig is becoming very cultured and refined. But one day, we make a serious and very fatal mistake. We leave the door open. As the spring air comes wafting in, the little pig sniffs, and suddenly, like a bullet, he is out of that door and heading for the biggest, dirtiest mud puddle he can find. As he scoots in and buries himself in the mud, he rolls over and over in uncontrolled glee, kicking his feet up in the air and singing at the top of his piggy voice, "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home!" No matter how you train it and no matter how you teach it, pig is pig, and mud puddles are home sweet home. You cannot break that nature.

Let us look at the last section:

Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham, and restored Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; it is your vindication in the eyes of all who are with you; and before every one you are righted." Then Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. For the LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. (Gen 20:14-18 {RSV})

God healed Abimelech and blessed Abraham. This very last scene points up the difference between a Christian and a moral non-Christian. Abimelech was really more noble in this incident than Abraham, which means that Abimelech's old Adamic nature was more pleasant than Abraham's old nature. But both were a total failure in pleasing God.

Perhaps you have noticed this difference. Some non-Christians can be more cultured, refined, and pleasant to live with than some Christians.

The Christian who is living in his old nature, in the energy of the flesh, is quarrelsome, irritable self-centered, and difficult to live with. But neither of them can please God with the old nature.

Abraham had something which Abimelech didn't. He had a life from God, a regenerate heart, a new nature, so that when he repented, he was forgiven. God turned his failure into fullness and blessed him and caused him to be the instrument through which Abimelech was forgiven and restored. It was only when Abraham prayed for Abimelech, that Abimelech was healed.

Do you see the distinction? What a lesson is here concerning the grace of God!

When we slip back into the flesh and do some evil thing, we say, "I never seem to learn, it's the old nature again. I have slipped out of dependence upon Christ, and here I am back in this thing." But then we can come back to God, and tell him, "Lord, I don't know when I'll learn to rest and depend upon you, and quit trying to make something out of this old nature. I've done it again. Now take the mess, Lord, and straighten it out."

Remember when our Lord was in the Garden of Gethsemane? Temple soldiers and priests came to take him with force, and Peter impetuously grabbed a sword and struck off the ear of the high priest. The Lord reached down, picked up the ear, and put it back on (see John 18:10 and Luke 22:51).

I have often thought this well describes what we are so often doing – going around lopping off people's ears. And the Lord is so gracious to come along and put it back on, heal it, and give us a place of blessing as he did with Abraham.

He corrects our mistakes and turns the very failures of our life into fullness, the very obstacles into opportunity, the stumbling blocks into stepping stones to further blessing for the grace of God.

Prayer:

Our Father, help us to learn this very, very important lesson. You have not called us to improve ourselves, but to quit trying to improve ourselves and to recognize what we are, that in ourselves we can never be good enough, and to appropriate all that Christ can be to us and through us, for his life is satisfying to you. His life is accept-

able, his life is perfect, his life is the life of peace, joy, blessing. His is a life of compassion, truth, honesty, and sincerity, and as we allow him, Lord, to live that life anew through us, we will manifest the same characteristics of grace, blessing, and fullness he does. Lord, this is what we

would ask, that you would teach us this necessity and help us in the practical experiences of life to refuse to depend upon ourselves, to no longer put any confidence in the flesh in any way whatsoever, but to write it off as totally worthless in thy sight. For we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Ishmael must Go!

by Ray C. Stedman

Our new life in Christ begins with an initial period of joy and gladness, frequently with fruitful activity and observable changes. I always question the conversion of someone who doesn't soon experience some changes in his life, because the very purpose for which Christ enters our life is to redeem us, to buy us back out of uselessness into usefulness. This initial period is almost always a period of great joy. We recognize that we have found the secret of life, that all the empty cisterns from which we have been trying to satisfy our thirsty soul are no longer of any avail and we turn to the fountain of living water. The result is always an experience, varying to some degree by the personality involved, of genuine gladness in the soul.

Also our conversion is almost always followed by a period of failure and frustration, alternating with times of peace and joy and victory. This constitutes a problem to many young Christians. They believe they are going to continue on that initial level of gladness, triumph, and victory, and are very disturbed at first when failure, frustration and defeat come into their lives. They will struggle on through that and come into a time of renewed peace and victory, and then experience another failure. This sometimes goes on for years and years. It doesn't need to go on that long, but it often does.

I think many waste years trying to recapture the first love they had and the joy they first experienced when they came to Christ. But this is a mistake, and Christians need to realize that these periods of frustration and failure are part of the divine plan of God. When we fail to see that, we become

like those Galatians to whom Paul wrote saying, "Oh, foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?" (Gal 3:1 {RSV}). Are you going to be able to work this out in your own strength, having begun in the energy of another? Thus he corrects them and this is what we need to learn. The periods of failure are simply designed to teach us how to live the new way of life.

We have two centers of being from which we can operate:

- What we were in ourselves, and
- What we are now in Christ who is given to us.

Whenever we operate from self, it results in failure. Whenever we depend upon Christ, it results in victory. The Lord simply lets us experience this truth until we finally learn the difference. We are not to depend upon self! Victory comes only through total dependence on Christ and him alone! As we gradually begin to learn this lesson, there are increasingly frequent times of victory, peace, joy, effectiveness and fruitfulness in our life, and there comes at last the long promised era of continuous fruitfulness. One morning we take a good look at our lives and notice what is happening. That nature, that disposition which we have long been trying to achieve – love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, patience, meekness, and self-control – is beginning to manifest itself more and more regularly in our life. That first long-promised joy has begun to be fulfilled.

Ishmael must Go!

This is the place to which we come in the life of Abraham. At the beginning God promised him a son who would bring joy to his heart and begin the long line of descendants which would finally be more numerous than the stars in the sky. This is the picture of fruitfulness that is promised to the believer. **The promised joy** was long delayed in Abraham's life. He went through many trials and failures in which he learned much about himself in terms of defeat and folly; and he learned much about God in terms of victory and fulfillment. But now he has begun to walk so consistently in the Spirit that the continual fruit of love, joy and peace begin to appear. This is what is symbolized by the birth of Isaac here; when Isaac is born, Abraham's joy is fulfilled:

The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; every one who hears will laugh over me." And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." (Gen 21:1-7 {RSV})

This is the picture of the joy of fulfillment. At last we have two sons of Abraham living side by side, Isaac and Ishmael. We don't need to wonder what this means in the life of faith, because in the letter to the Galatians, Paul tells us. He says that Isaac is a picture of that which is born of the Spirit and Ishmael is a picture of that which is born of the flesh {Gal 4:22-23, 28}. Isaac is the result of a life controlled by the Spirit. What does that mean to us? Well, in that same letter he tells us, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control," (Gal 5:22-23a {RSV}). These are the *Isaacs* for which we have been waiting. Ishmael, on the other hand, stands for the works of the flesh that are outlined in that very same chapter {Gal 5:19-21a}.

Notice how that is confirmed in this passage:

- First of all, *Isaac's birth was supernatural*. He was not born until Abraham and Sarah had reached an advanced age. Sarah was 90 years old and Abraham was 100. It occurred at the set time, some 30 years after God had first promised to give Abraham a son. In Romans 4:19a, Paul referring to this time says, "He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old." This was a supernatural birth. God quickened the natural processes again and a child was born, but it was a supernatural quickening. Rather amazing, isn't it?

Do you see now why God waited all this long time to fulfill the promise to Abraham? He was waiting until the ability and forces of natural man had ceased, so his promise could definitely be a supernatural fulfillment. This is exactly what God says to us about the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. It will never come from the flesh. It will never come from self-effort, nor by positive thinking, nor by perpetual trying. Love, joy, and peace, those wonderful gifts of God, never come from any attempt on our part to imitate them. You can imitate them, but they will never be anything but an imitation. You cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit by the flesh, because that fruit is the supernatural gift from the life lived in the power of the Spirit of God, born as Isaac was here. It comes simply by appropriating the life of Jesus Christ.

- The second principle about this new life is *circumcision*. Abraham set upon Isaac the sign of God's ownership, which is the picture of what the Christian does when he recognizes that the love, joy, and peace in his heart is not given for his own private enjoyment, but to share with others. God doesn't make you easier to live with simply to clear up some of the problems in your home, but to demonstrate through your life the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. And you are to use it for blessing for others.

When I was a boy in Minnesota, we had a neighbor woman with a large family who was regarded in the neighborhood as a religious fanatic. We'd hear stories about how she would take her Bible and go out into the fields and spend all day in a haystack. The result was

that she neglected her own household; her children were always running around without proper direction in very dirty clothes, her house was always filthy, and her husband was always complaining about the situation. Nevertheless, she would come into the church meeting and stand up and testify about what a wonderful experience she had had out in the haystack, and what a joy and ecstasy had come into her heart. She may well have had those experiences (we have to take people at their word in this respect), but it was an uncircumcised joy and love. It was not devoted to the purpose for which God had sent it. It did not bear the mark of God's ownership. It wasn't used in the way God intended it to be used.

But when Isaac is born in Abraham's household, he is circumcised.

- The third principle in this account is *the reality of a satisfying experience*. Isaac means "laughter," and when this son was born, the whole household was beside itself with ecstasy. I wish we could have seen Sarah, ninety years old, with that little babe in her arms, her face radiant with the delight of the long-awaited fulfillment of the promise of her heart. What a picture this is of the joy that Christ brings into the human heart. Sometimes language almost seems extravagant when we try to describe this, but if you have ever known what Christ means to the heart, you know that all language is inadequate. The song writer has said:

Heaven above is softer blue,
earth around is sweeter green,
Something lives in every hue,
Christless eyes have never seen.
Birds with gladder songs o'er flow,
Flowers with deeper beauties shine
Since I know as now I know.
I am his and he is mine.

This is the experience of those who have Christ dwelling in their hearts. Have you ever had an *Isaac experience*, when after a long period of struggle in your Christian life, you discovered the secret of walking in the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit became evident in your life? What a day of glad release this is when you have put away all the self-centeredness and begun to manifest that wonderful fruit of Christ-centered love, joy, and peace.

Now this is not the whole story. A **sharp contrast** appears in the next section:

And the child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the lad and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your descendants be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring." So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. (Gen 21:8-14 {RSV})

Now if Isaac represents the gladsome fullness of the fruit of the Spirit in the life, then Ishmael represent some pet manifestation of our self-life in which we find comfort and delight and which we do not want to surrender. You see how perfectly this is pictured here in this story – some value which we have long suspected is not what God would have, but which we were reluctant to give up. Perhaps it is some long-standing habit that we have been defending, such as smoking, or overeating. I am not making any lists of forbidden things; I am merely saying there can be habits or values in our lives which are really some form of self-indulgence. God may allow them for a time, but the time comes when he says, "Now, these have to go." It can be anything:

- It may be some pet doctrine you have been insisting upon, which has been causing division and separation among the brethren. You've gained a reputation in this field as an authority and you are not going to give it up.
- Maybe it is an insistence on a particular mode of baptism, a matter of tithing, some partisan

Ishmael must Go!

political view – something that separates – which you hold as distinctive.

- It may be some friendship, or membership in some lodge or club.
- It can be anything that rises from self-indulgence which we defend, protect, justify and delight in, just as Abraham defended, protected and delighted in Ishmael – until the time came when he had to make this choice.

Notice some things about this:

First of all, this was *a distressing matter* to Abraham. He had to go through an agonizing reappraisal when the word came from the LORD, “Ishmael must go.” He loved this boy – though he had often grieved over his arrogance and hasty ways – and he didn’t want to give him up. I think he was angry with God for bringing the matter up. He probably said to God, as we frequently say, “Oh, this is really nothing, it is such a trivial thing. Why bring it up, why bother with it? Let’s go on the way we were. We have been getting along for quite awhile with Ishmael, why change now?” But the agony of his heart showed that it was not a trivial matter. If it had been a light matter, he could easily have dismissed Ishmael. But it was not; it was something that would cost him deeply.

I remember a telephone call from a lady who had been at a class I had previously held. She said, “I’ve been thinking so much about what you said in class about God asking us to turn away from things in our life that are hindering us: I have a problem, and I don’t know what to do about it.” She named what it was, and said she had heard testimonies from people about what God had done for them when they became Christians and how they had had problems with smoking or drinking or sex or some other habit that God had laid it on their hearts to stop. She said, “They tell me God just takes the desire away and they don’t ever have the desire to do this again. I feel that God would definitely have me turn from this particular problem in my life, but he doesn’t take the desire away. What should I do?” I said to her, “Well, God does sometimes deliver us by taking the desire out of our hearts, but in most cases, I think, God leaves the desire right there and tells us to obey anyhow – even though it costs us some heartache and anguish.” I quoted

this story of Abraham to her, of how he obeyed when it hurt, when it caused anguish to his heart to say good-bye to Ishmael, but this was what God said was harming him, and he obeyed God and sent him away.

I want you to notice that this was *a delayed judgment*. Ishmael was fourteen years old at this time, and Abraham had known from the beginning that Ishmael was not God’s choice. He had come from Abraham’s deliberate choice of self-indulgence. Since God had not chosen this boy, he would not be Abraham’s heir. Yet God permitted him to stay, saying nothing to Abraham about it, until Isaac came along.

When we come to choices like this and the Spirit of the LORD speaks to us about a matter, we tend to think God is very harsh, very cruel, and very demanding when, in reality, he has been patient, forbearing, and tender. For fourteen years Ishmael was allowed to stay in the house without a word, but when Isaac came, then Ishmael had to go at last. He never takes away an *Ishmael* until he has given an *Isaac*!

Because this is so, we need to be very careful about judging others. We may see *Ishmaels* in their lives and want to root them out, saying, “You must get rid of this habit.” But when God takes away an *Ishmael*, he first gives an *Isaac*. In other words, he never tells us to give up some manifestation of self-indulgence until he has first given us some fruit of the Spirit of grace to take its place in satisfying that longing of the heart. However, when he does give us that manifestation of grace and blessing, then the self-indulgence has to go.

When we first become Christians, there are some obviously evil things in our lives brought over from the old days that have to go immediately. But there are others that appear more innocent which God permits, allowing us to struggle and fight until we learn to walk in the Spirit. Then the fruit of the Spirit begins to appear and these things have to go.

A friend of mine was telling me about a prominent evangelical leader who had been given a great opportunity, and he was looking forward to the fulfillment of it as the greatest occasion of joy that he had ever experienced. Others had been praying for this man for a long time, because they saw some *Ishmaels* in his life. One day as he was looking forward to moving in on this opportunity, a friend sat down with him and, in a painful time,

Ishmael must Go!

faced him with some of the things in his life. It was the voice of God to him. The friend told him that he was trying to be a big shot, always wanting to run things himself. He had to learn to let others step in. He put his finger on a personal habit, a bad temper, and told him that the next time he displayed that temper as he had recently been doing, he would find his opportunity gone. He just laid it on the line with him, and said, "Now that this opportunity has come, these things must go." This man, in relating the incident to someone else said, "I realized that this was the Spirit of God speaking to me." And he responded to it and faced the things, recognizing that they must go. This is always a distressing time, but it also represents the faithfulness and patience of God, who has allowed this *Ishmael* until we are ready to give it up.

Notice the last part – *it is decisive*: When God speaks, there can be no dilly-dallying any longer. It is imperative that Ishmael goes. This is what our Lord Jesus was speaking about in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away," {Matt 5:29a RSV}. "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away," {Matt 5:30a RSV}. If you are going to walk in the power of the Spirit, you cannot walk in the power of the flesh. You cannot have both – one must go.

Now, observe the following: God says definitely that Ishmael could never share in the inheritance with Isaac. This is exactly what Jesus meant when he said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," (John 3:6 {RSV}). When the time comes for us to stand before our Lord at the judgment seat of Christ, our lives will be classified into two areas: Those that are wood, hay, and stubble, which are of the flesh; and those of gold, silver and precious stones which are of the Spirit (See 1 Cor 3:10-15). The Lord says to us as he says to Abraham, "Ishmael must go." If you refuse to expose, to examine and remove that which is born of the flesh, even though you know God has said that it hurts you, and even though he had shown you the peace, joy, and love which is the fruit of the Spirit, then you must face this choice as Abraham did. Ishmael must go.

I recall reading an article about Dr. Barnhouse and was struck by evidences of this very choice in his experience. He said, "Early in my ministry, I

had the idea that I must strike out against all error wherever I saw it. I hit Christian Science, Unitarianism, Romanism, and if error was in some fundamental leader with whom I was in 95% agreement, I swung hard at the 5%." This made Dr. Barnhouse a highly controversial figure, often unmercifully sharp and dogmatic. This zeal for truth within him became an *Ishmael* in his life. Then he tells how there came a time when the Spirit of God taught him to love and he faced the choice – *Ishmael* had to go. He had to learn to be more understanding and more tolerant of some of the variant views of others. He wrote, "Some time ago, I published a New Year's resolution expressing regret that I had had differences with men who are truly born again. The results of that resolution were astounding. In the years which followed its publication, my ministry has been transformed. I need to know all who have been redeemed by Christ, for I will never know my Lord fully until I see him in every individual whom he has redeemed and saved by the outpouring of his life for us all upon the cross. This," he says, "is true fellowship." It was wonderful to see in the life of Dr. Barnhouse the removal of an *Ishmael*. The closing years of his life show much of his mellowing and of the sweetness of the fruit of the Spirit in one who before had been so harsh, critical, and demanding.

I don't know what form *Ishmael* may be taking in your life, but I know there are times when God says to us, simply, "This must go; no longer may it be permitted. There can be no manifestation of the life of the Spirit any longer until this is dealt with."

You know how Abraham obeyed. Early in the morning, he got up and took bread and a skin of water and though it cost him heartbreak to do it, sent Hagar and Ishmael out, so that he might have the fullness of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Prayer:

Our Father, we know these things are written not merely to amuse us, that these strike deeply into our hearts and reveal basic fundamental issues and there are things, Lord, that you see in us that are hurting us of which we are not even aware. We are protecting, defending, excusing, justifying, and trying to find all kinds of ways to

Ishmael must Go!

permit them to continue, but we thank you, Lord, that there comes a time when with faithfulness, you say to us, "This must go. Cast out the bond woman and her son for it is a threat to the inheritance, and cannot have any part in it." Lord, we would pray that if we would sincerely and earnestly

long to be a full and completely yielded vessel of your joy and strength and peace among men, we will have the grace to cast out Ishmael and find the fullness and joy of Isaac. For we pray in Christ's name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

This Thirsty World

by Ray C. Stedman

As we are tracing through the Pilgrim's Progress of the Old Testament, the way God calls us from sinful rebellion to the land of fellowship with Christ, let us turn to Chapter 21 of Genesis.

All that took place in the life of Abraham in a wonderfully accurate picture of what happens in our own spiritual progress. When Abraham in obedience to God's call came into the land of Canaan, it was a picture of the individual coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as that was simply the beginning of God's work in this man's life, so when you come to Christ, that's not the end at all, but the beginning of God's work in your life. And there, in a sense, the real problem begins. We have an old saying,

It is easy to take a boy out of the country,
but it is hard to get the country out of the boy,

which exactly describes God's problem with Abraham. He called him out of the land of Ur of the Chaldeans, but it is hard to get Chaldea out of Abraham. It may not be difficult for some to come to Christ, but to get the old man subdued, to get the flesh controlled, and to learn instead to walk in the Spirit – that is what takes grace. It is a process of heartache, interspersed with seasons of joy and blessings. The flesh dies hard and subtly fights back, inventing a thousand and one excuses to get us to leave it alone. But God never leaves us alone. I often rejoice in this, in my Christian life, the faith-

fulness of God will never let us stop short of the goal he has in mind, which is perfection, the image of Christ.

Now in the closing section of Chapter 21, we have a scene of relative quiet and peace. There are three different stories in this section:

- The story of Hagar and Ishmael out in the wilderness,
- The story of Abraham and Abimelech making a covenant, and, finally,
- The scene of Abraham and his family living around the well, enjoying the fullness of God.

The well around which these stories all occur is the central theme in each one. It would be easy to dismiss this as an unimportant detail in Abraham's life, except that nothing is unimportant in the Word of God. As Paul says, "All these things were written down for our instruction," (cf, 1 Cor 10:11). There is nothing included, even though it may seem to be a trivial detail, that isn't here because it illustrates or helps us to grasp some concept of spiritual life that we need to learn. So as you study your Bibles, be sure you learn how to interpret Scripture by Scripture. When you do, all becomes clear.

The spiritual significance of this well is easy for us to identify, since it occurs frequently in the Bible to picture the Word of God. The water in the

well is always Christ in his refreshing aspect, the source of refreshment to the thirsty soul. Remember how the Lord said to the woman of Samaria as she came down to the well, "The water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life," (John 4:14b {RSV}). Wherever you find a well in Scripture it is always picturing that relationship.

With that as our clue, let us look at these stories and see how the well of Christ appears in various ways. The first one is what we might call "**the well of promise**":

So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went, and sat down over against him a good way off, about the distance of a bow-shot; for she said, "Let me not look upon the death of the child." And as she sat over against him, the child lifted up his voice and wept. {Gen 21:14-16 RSV}

The boy was more than just a little boy at this point; he was about fourteen years old.

And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not; for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast with your hand; for I will make him a great nation." Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. And God was with the lad, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt. (Gen 21:17-21 {RSV})

Much is telescoped together in this passage, but we need to understand what this means beyond the mere history of an event. In Galatians, Paul tells us how to interpret Hagar and Ishmael, what they mean to us in the program of God. He says,

"Hagar is a picture of Mt. Sinai in Arabia" (cf, Gal 4:25), from which the Law was given. She, along with Ishmael, is a picture of the present Jerusalem, that is, the nation of Israel who refused Christ and yet retained the promises and God's preserving care in their lives. Israel persecuted all those within the nation who turned to Christ in the early days of the church. In Romans, Paul tells us that after the nation had rejected Christ, blindness came upon a part of Israel which would last until all the Gentiles who would believe had come, (cf, Rom 11:25-26). Here, in the Old Testament, two thousand years before our Lord came, this was told for us in the life of Abraham. The New Testament simply confirms what the Old Testament portrays. (This is what ties the Testaments together so we know that both are equally from the hand of God.)

Like Ishmael, the nation of Israel has wandered in the wilderness of the world ever since the day the people said during that Passion Week as they gathered before Pilate, "We do not want this man to reign over us," (Luke 19:14b {RSV}). And "His Blood be on us and on our children!" (Matt 27:25b {RSV}). And they turned and asked for a robber to be released in the place of Jesus.

Shortly afterwards the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, and the temple ransacked and demolished, and Israel was driven out into the nations. They wandered like Ishmael in the desert for centuries, without any central place of gathering, without any of the real worship of God they once knew back in the Old Testament days. They have been wandering in the wilderness ever since, perishing with thirst.

But a day is coming, as the New Testament tells us, when their eyes will be opened, just as Hagar's eyes were opened here, and she saw the well. The well, remember, is the Word of God, portraying Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Perhaps we are nearing the very hour when Israel, the nation which has been wandering in unbelief around the earth ever since that time, will have their eyes opened and behold Christ once again in their own Scriptures. Many have asked why the Jews do not believe in Christ if the Old Testament is so full of Jesus Christ. The answer is that "a hardening has come upon part of Israel," {Rom 11:25b RSV}. Not all Jews refuse to believe, but many of them, even with the testimony of their own Scriptures, do not believe Jesus is the Messiah. But God says that a day will come at last when their eyes will be opened and

they will see in the word the very one they had once rejected and Israel will turn to the Lord. They will be refreshed with blessing and they will inhabit the earth; God will be with them, and, like Ishmael here, he will make them a great nation again. That is all portrayed in this little scene here.

In the next section we have the well appearing in a different aspect, one of great interest to us. This is what we might call **“the well of contention”**:

At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, “God is with you in all that you do; now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but as I have dealt loyally with you, you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned.” And Abraham said, “I will swear.” When Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water which Abimelech’s servants had seized, Abimelech said, “I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today.” So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs which you have set apart?” He said, “These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that you may be witness for me that I dug this well.” Therefore that place was called Beersheba; because there both of them swore an oath. [Beer-sheba means “the well of the oath.”] So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines. (Gen 21:22-32 {RSV})

What do you make of that? Isn’t that a strange incident to be recorded here? We have met Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, before. The name of his commander, the general of his army, was Phicol. Phicol means, “the voice of all.” Throughout the Scriptures the Philistine nation is a picture of the natural man concerned with religious matters, but exercising authority as though he were the voice of all.

In the light of the rise of the ecumenical movement of our own day and its claim to speak for all Protestantism, this exchange between Abraham and Abimelech is a very interesting one. Abimelech said in effect to Abraham, “I don’t understand you evangelicals, yet it is evident that God is with you. You are sort of a mystery to me. You have a remarkable power to stir people up and to upset the apple cart. Because of this, I would like you to promise me something. After all, we Philistines are just as religious as you are, but we have different objectives. You are a pilgrim in the land, a sojourner; you don’t want to stay here. You keep talking about a city which has foundations that we haven’t yet seen. We are not interested in that city, but we have cities of our own right here, and we have great plans and programs to develop them and to make them nice places to live. Now, Abraham, I want you to promise me you won’t get involved in our programs and plans and mess everything up. Will you promise me that? You have a lot of power and you are a strange person, but please promise me this.”

Abraham said, “I’ll be glad to. I have no interest in your programs or your politics – but Abimelech, there is one little thing that bothers me.” Abimelech said, “What’s that?” And Abraham said, “See this well? It represents to me the book of God. This is the place of refreshment, where my soul meets God. And you know, your men have been trying to take this away from me.”

Abimelech said, “Oh, no, we wouldn’t do that. I’ve never heard a charge like this before. We never meant to take this well away from you. Don’t say that!”

Then Abraham says, “Now look, Abimelech, I want you to know how much this well means to me. You see those seven little ewe lambs over there? I want you to take those and offer them up as a perpetual reminder that this well means life or death to me. Whenever you think of taking the lives of those seven little lambs, remember that is what this well means to me. It means life to me in this land. And I cannot give up this well because this is the source of everything – my refreshment, my strength, and my wisdom. I have need of the well. I found it myself. I dug it. I cannot give it up.”

Now let’s leave the story here for a minute and see its interpretation in our own lives: I find it significant that throughout the Christian centuries the disagreement between the world church and real

believers in God has always been centered upon the “well of God,” the book of God. The well is always a picture of the Word of God, containing and holding in it the waters of refreshment which speak of Christ to the soul. Regardless of what the different views of inspiration of the Bible may be, real believers in Christ have never been able to give up the Book. Here is what God has given us: a well in which we can find that which ministers to the deep, deep need of our soul. Yet this has always been the ground of struggle and quarreling and disagreement with the worldly religious groups – those who make authoritative pronouncements and declare that this Book is nothing but sage literature, or mythology, or a collection of old Hebrew stories put together, and that it has no supernatural significance to the heart. They deny its prophetic import and its ability to set forth a supernatural God involving himself in human life. Throughout the whole history of the Christian church, this is where the struggle has been.

Now, to be very practical, this brings us to a problem we face today. I think we can receive some real help in solving this problem from this story of Abraham and Abimelech. How much should a Christian get involved in the social program and improvement policies of the worldly religious groups? That is a problem we are facing today, isn't it? We recognize there are great injustices in the world in which we live. There are terrible, terrible conditions prevailing in the world today, not only in other parts of the world but here in our own land. To what extent should we involve ourselves in programs aimed at correcting these social ills?

Let's take a lesson from dear old Abraham. Abimelech said to him, “Now Abraham, you don't think like we do. You have a different objective.” I'm amazed at the insight of this man. He at least saw this about Abraham's life. “You are here as a pilgrim and a stranger passing through, a sojourner. Now, Abraham, please promise that you will not get involved.”

And Abraham said, “I'll be glad to.” More and more I think this is the position Christians must take today. I want to be clear about this because this is an area in which misunderstanding can easily come. It is a case of the good being an enemy of the best. All these social programs are very good things and we cannot deny that a Christian is definitely responsible before his God for doing all

that he can to alleviate human misery and suffering wherever he finds it. If we are not doing that, we are like the Levite and the Pharisee in the parable of the good Samaritan, (see Luke 10:33). Our Lord taught us to be responsive to these needs.

Nevertheless, we are not to get involved in the programs or the politics. If we do, we have no time left to be what we are supposed to be here on earth. God never called the church into being in order to make it a means of advancing human and political liberty in this world. This isn't what the church is here for. It is true that everywhere the church has gone preaching the gospel of Christ greater liberty has followed, but that is because the church has created an atmosphere in which these liberties can exist. This is the central theme the Word of God would bring forth for us here. Righteous Abraham, living in this land of the Philistines, was a greater source of strength in defense against the enemy of that land simply by being there and being what he was, a man of God in the midst of that scene, than all the plans, programs, armies, and defenses they were concerned about in their government.

This is true today as well. Our Lord tells us we are to be salt in the earth. We are to be concerned about the changing and transforming of men's lives by the preaching of the gospel. When the church gives itself to this task it discovers that it has created, and is creating, an atmosphere in which political freedom can flourish. Without that atmosphere, no amount of effort, organizing, committees, programming, and policy-making can ever succeed in establishing it. When we turn from the best to the next best, good as that may be, we are wasting the time God has called us to invest which will make all the rest possible.

This is confirmed, I think, in the last section. We read in Verse 33:

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines. (Gen 21:33-34 {RSV})

This last scene is a picture of the “**well of communion**.” Here is old Abraham just planting a tree and living by his well. Why are we told this? Well, it is symbolic of what is taking place in his heart and life. The tree immediately brings to mind

that first Psalm which says of the man of God that he shall be like a tree planted by rivers of living water, bringing forth its fruit in season. Here is a life that is fruitful, that is concerned about those immediately around and is pouring out blessing into their lives and hearts.

Abraham calls on the name of *Jehovah*, the Everlasting God. I am increasingly convinced that if the church desires to do anything to help this poor, blind, bleeding, struggling world in which we live, it will only be as Christian people rediscover what it means to live daily in the strength, the power, the purpose, and the glory of calling upon the Everlasting God. This is what writes joy in our hearts, joy which the world is so vainly seeking to find.

I had the privilege of speaking on the radio one afternoon in Southern California on First Corinthians 10:13:

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. {1 Cor 10:13 RSV}

My concluding point was that in the midst of the hottest trials, God has provided a way of escape, not from the trials, but from defeat by the trials. The *way* is through rediscovering fellowship with Christ in the trials, just as those three Hebrew children found in the fiery furnace when the king looked in and found a fourth form there, "like a son of the gods," (Dan. 3:25 {RSV}). He didn't take them out of the furnace, but he was in there with them.

When I returned home, I received a letter from a man who had taken a whole sheet of paper and scrawled across the front of it this one sentence, "Dear Mr. Stedman: If it is true that God gives us grace to bear all our trials, then why is it there are so many long-faced Christians?" I thought that was a good letter. My answer was another question. "Dear Sir: If it is true the American soap companies have provided all the soap that we need in this world, why is it that there are so many dirty people?" The answer, of course, is that we are not using the soap that has been provided. The reason for long-faced and dour Christians is that we are not finding the joy of the Lord anymore.

Abraham found joy and thus he was the center of blessing to the land of the Philistines. In finding and rediscovering those springs of spiritual strength, he did more to advance the cause of social justice and welfare in the land of the Philistines than any of their programs and plans could have done.

The world about us today is looking for reality more than they ever have before. The world is desperately searching for men and women of conviction who will stand for what they believe, and who will not hesitate to declare it and to say "No" when it means involvement with something they believe is wrong.

The world is looking for men and women who have convictions, and convictions come only from a life that is involved in a living fellowship with a living God. This is what sent that new church in New Testament days out with such triumphant victory over every obstacle. They swept everything before them because they were in daily fellowship with the living God.

We must not leave the best for something less. That would be like a crowd of waiters in a restaurant going back to the kitchen and saying to the cook, "Look, cookie, we are having problems in getting this food out to these people. Why don't you leave the stove and come out here and help us?" If the cook is wise, he will say to them, "Fellows, the worst thing I could do would be to go out to help you. It is true that you have a problem, and you have to work it out, but if someone is not here cooking, there will not be anything to distribute."

- If there is no fountain of morality in the church,
- if there are not lives which are discovering the strength and inner peace and power that comes from fellowship with Christ and a living God,
- there will not be anything to distribute!

God calls us to discharge our duties as citizens, and to do all we can when we have spare time to help. But, by all means, let us give ourselves anew to this supreme task of the church of Christ, which is the declaring of the good news of Jesus Christ, that men may be saved and their lives transformed by coming to know a living God.

Prayer:

Our dear Father, we pray that we may re-discover with Abraham the secret of being a friend of God, men and women of God, by which lives are changed and atmos-

pheres are created in which political freedoms may flourish anew. Help us, Lord, to find these out and to give ourselves supremely to this, above all knowing thee, our Lord and Savior. For we pray in Christ's name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Life's Hardest Trial

by Ray C. Stedman

There is a trial that is perhaps the hardest of all and it is to this incident in the life of Abraham that we now arrive. In the 22nd chapter of Genesis is one of the most famous stories in the Bible, the story of Abraham offering up Isaac. I think anyone can see, in this account of Abraham offering his son Isaac as a burnt offering, a remarkable foreshadowing in the Old Testament of the work of Christ in the New. It seems to me that no one watching old Abraham binding his dear son to the altar and his heart breaking within him can miss the parallel with God sending his own Son to Calvary's mountain centuries later.

I want to touch on that aspect as we go through this story, but I wish primarily to dwell on the individual application to our own hearts. As we have been studying through the life of Abraham, you notice we've seen God has written this man's story in such a way that he is a "sample man of faith," that is, the Pilgrim's Progress of the Old Testament and all these incidents recorded in Abraham's life form clear pictures for us of what occurs in our life of faith. Therein we learn some instructive lessons.

In Chapter 22, we come to the story of Abraham's greatest trial. This is the deepest thrust of the cross of Christ into his life. Because it was the work of the cross in the life of Abraham, there is involved in this account

- a Gethsemane,
- a Calvary,
- and a resurrection.

After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; and he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off. (Gen 22:1-4 {RSV})

It is helpful to realize that about twenty years have elapsed between Chapters 21 and 22. We last saw Abraham in a tent by the well of Beer-sheba in the wilderness with his son Isaac. There he built an altar and worshipped and called on the name of the everlasting, unchangeable God. For twenty years of blessing and happiness, Isaac has been the delight of his parents' hearts. True to his name, he has brought laughter into their tent; the whole family life centers around this dear boy as he grows up to young manhood. Suddenly like a thunderbolt from the sky comes this word from God. Abraham can hardly believe his ears: God says, "Now take your son Isaac, your only son whom you love, (I know you love him) and go to Mount Moriah and offer him up on that mountain."

Mount Moriah is the very place where in later years King David bought the threshing floor of Ornan as a place for the site of the temple, (1 Chr

21:18). On that very place where Abraham offered Isaac, the temple of Solomon was built, (2 Chr 3:1). Today there stands in that very place the Dome of the Rock, a Moslem mosque, built over the great rock that formed the altar upon which Abraham offered Isaac. It is from this rock that the Mohammedans believe Mohammed and his horse ascended to heaven. So it is a very historic spot.

You can imagine what a blow this was in Abraham's life. It is specifically called a test. That means it was meant by God to determine if Abraham's confidence is in his son Isaac, or in God who gave him his son. This is a test of Abraham's real heart love. In other words, will Abraham obey the first commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind"? (Matt 22:37 {RSV}). This is also a test of how far this man has advanced in the life of faith and in the strength of the Spirit.

As we read through this account, we see that it says nothing about Abraham's emotional reaction to this request of God's. I think the reason is that it was quite unnecessary to say anything. We instinctively know what this must have meant to Abraham. His first reaction must have been incredulity. How could God be asking this of him? And yet, the voice is unmistakable; he has heard this voice many times.

Every now and then an account appears in the newspaper that someone has heard "the voice of God" telling him to go murder a certain person. We read of a terrible murder carried out in the mistaken belief that God has ordered it. But there is nothing like that occurring here. It is clear from the complete account that God never had any intention of allowing this to be carried through, but it was a very severe and bitter test as to where Abraham's love was centered.

God is a jealous God, very concerned that he has what he deserves; that is, first place in every human heart and life. You can imagine the questions that must have arisen in Abraham's heart as he contemplated what God had asked of him. What about the promises – all that God had said would take place – what about those? God has said: "Take your son and offer him as a burnt offering."

"But Lord," Abraham might have said, "How will the promises be fulfilled that my seed should fill the land and be as numerous as the stars in the heavens and the sand on the seashore? Why should

this be asked of me?" Whenever we get into a strait like this, the question in our hearts is always: "Why?" Why should God do this? Why should it be asked of me? "I can see, God, why you asked me, your servant Abraham, to give up Ishmael. You told me to cast him out of the tent because he was the son of the flesh, not of promise." We can understand when God tells us to get rid of some cherished attitude that we know is wrong. We never ask why about that. "But, Lord," Abraham said, "This is Isaac; this is the son of promise, this is the one you yourself gave me. Why do you ask me to put him to death like this – the very gift of your grace to my heart?" And then Satan must have suggested doubts to him, so that he wondered, "How can I find strength to do this? And what about Sarah? What is she going to say when I come back from that mountain empty-handed and she asks me what happened? I'll have to invent some kind of yarn to explain it and I know she won't believe me. She'll keep probing till she finds out the answer and how am I going to face her?" These must have been some of the questions that arose in his heart. What a sleepless, troubled night of torture and heartbreak this man went through.

And yet, is it not also a picture for us of that awful struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane when our Lord Jesus faced this very same test? God was requiring something of him which God surely could not be asking. I think in some lesser degree, you and I have had experiences like this. Perhaps you have stared in unbelief at some situation or circumstance in your life, and said, "Is this what God wants me to go through? Is this what God is asking of me? Is this God's will?" And your heart cries out, "Why? Why should this happen to me?" Well, this is life's hardest trial. It is never so difficult when we can see a reason. However, when something happens to us in which we fail to see any logic, and, in fact, everything seems to be against it, this is when faith is really put to the test.

Now, notice that, when morning comes, Abraham's obedience is prompt and complete. Though his heart is torn, yet he obeys God. He has passed the test. I am tremendously impressed at the obedience of this man Abraham. Is not this the secret of his life? We are so inclined to excuse ourselves from hard things and to rationalize our way out of difficult situations, relieving the pressure and avoiding certain unpleasant situations. We don't like disturbing questions, and unsettling challenges.

When it comes right down to it, we don't like to take hold of ourselves, and say, "I am going to obey God!"

As I have lived, and prayed, and studied through the years, I have discovered that God is an utter and complete realist. He is not at all impressed with our emotional, hysterical outbursts. We sometimes get all wrought up, and believe our emotions will melt the heart of God, and change his mind. But God knows that when he tells us to do something, it is necessary for our benefit, for his benefit, and for everyone concerned, he expects us to obey. I am impressed with Abraham's obedience here. When he hears God tell him to offer his son as a burnt offering on yonder mountain, Abraham obeys.

Now we come to **faith's calvary**:

Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the ass; I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place The LORD will provide; as it is said to this day,

"On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided." (Gen 22:5-14 {RSV})

Again the record is silent about the emotional reaction of Abraham here, but we have only to put ourselves in his place to sense what he felt, how his heart was torn, how he avoids telling Isaac the fearful truth until the very last possible moment, how he perhaps trembles within when Isaac asks the question, "Where is the lamb?" We know there is no real answer to Isaac's question until we run through intervening centuries and listen in the New Testament to John the Baptist standing before the people of Israel saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," (John 1:29 RSV)). Just as our Lord Jesus approached his cross with calmness and quiet self-control, so there is seemingly a sense of peace about this man Abraham as he draws nearer the actual sacrifice of Isaac.

What is the explanation for this? Where did this stricken father find the strength to carry through this fearsome task? How did he nerve himself to do it? The answer is found here in one brief phrase in Verse 5, "Then Abraham said to his young man, 'Stay here with the ass; I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.'" We will both be coming back again. Abraham is not trying to deceive these men, but somewhere in the quiet meditations of that awful night when this word first came to him, there came the consciousness that God could do something to raise this boy from the dead and Abraham believed in resurrection. That is where he found the peace to follow God's command. In the struggles of that night, he began to reason and to reckon on God.

He must have thought something like this: "Now God has given me promises and I have lived with God long enough to know that when God gives a promise, he carries it through. God has said that in my son, Isaac, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Isaac is necessary to the fulfillment of the promise. It can't be any other; he has said this boy is the one who is going to be the fulfillment of the promise. Well, then, if God has asked me now to offer him up as a sacrifice, there is only one explanation. God intends to raise him from the dead."

Abraham had never had, as we have today, the experience or the record of anyone having risen from the dead. He knew nothing of Easter, nor of

Lazarus, nor the miracles in the Gospel accounts. Yet so firm is his faith in the character of God that he comes to a realization of the resurrection. This is confirmed in Hebrews 11: "By faith Abraham ... offered up Isaac," {Heb 11:17 RSV}. "He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back," (Heb 11:19 {RSV}). And so, to this father, as he is traveling on the way to Mt. Moriah, Isaac has been as good as dead in his eyes for three days. Abraham risked everything he owned and loved upon the character of God and found him to be a God of resurrection.

Because of this wonderful triumph in his life, he calls this place, "God will provide." Because of this miracle there sprang up a little saying in Israel, a proverb:

"When you get to the mount, it will be provided."

Do you know what that means? God's ways with men are such that it seems as though deliverance will never come. It seems that you will never be delivered. But if you go on, when you get to the mount it will be provided. Man's disappointments are God's appointments. It is never too late for God. Even if Abraham had had to carry the bloody business through to its end, nevertheless, his father's heart was quiet in restful peace because he knew God would raise his son from the dead. He had promised; therefore, it must be.

In conclusion, we read of **the hope of resurrection morning:**

And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice." So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba. (Gen 22:15-19 {RSV})

When Abraham gave his son back to God, then God said the promise of fruitfulness would be immediately fulfilled. There would be no more delay. The rivers of living waters would now begin to flow out from him to bless all the nations of the earth as God had promised. It was when Isaac came back from the dead, so to speak, in resurrection power that God said, "Now the fruitfulness of your life will be manifest." This is resurrection life.

Even God's gifts to us are of no value until we are willing, if necessary, to lose them so that God might reign without a rival in our hearts. When we have to come to that place to which the Spirit of God wants to bring us, that perfect relationship with the Father (in which our Lord lived his entire life) when God means more to us than anything, when we love the Lord our God with all our strength and soul and mind and spirit and heart, and we are even willing to give up the very gift that God has given, then in resurrection power that gift will be a blessing to everyone it touches:

- We all have been given gifts from God. Maybe God has given you a special talent and you are asked to take a job where perhaps you can't use that talent. You wonder about it, and perhaps rebel over this. But remember Abraham, and give it back to God. Face the possibility of not using that talent and the God of resurrection will take that talent and return it to you and make it a blessing to many hearts. Anything else will be a curse.
- Perhaps you have a loved one and a situation arises in which you have to part from him or break that relationship. This is a struggle, but Abraham's faith says that if God asks you to do it, then there is blessing beyond if you obey.
- Maybe you are living in a situation of comfort and happiness but you are needed in another place which is not as pleasant, and you say, "Lord, why – why do I have to give up my home and my relationships which I enjoy and go there?" You resist, you question, as Abraham did.

Remember, however, that if God calls, you must obey.

Beyond the apparent heartbreak and death lies resurrection. In the resurrection of that experience, God will give you back that gift and make it a blessing. Is not this the record of every man and woman whose life has ever counted for God, who have been willing to give up the very areas they thought were God's choice blessing for them when God called? In so doing, God made them a blessing. It can be in minor or major areas. This is the principle of the cross throughout all our lives. This is what makes resurrection life possible. This is why the Lord Jesus says, "He who loves father or mother ... son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me," {Matt 10:37 RSV}. "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it," (Matt 10:39 {RSV}).

Our God is the God of resurrection. When it looks as though we are throwing away every chance of blessing, God transforms in a moment the very thing we give up into the most richly rewarding and meaningful experience we have ever had.

I dare you to act upon this!

I don't know what it might be for you, but I know this is true and God has written this account so we may know that this is his way in the affairs of men.

When we dare to stand upon what God has said, we discover as Paul did that the yearning of our hearts is "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death," (Phil 3:10 {RSV}).

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Till Death do us Part

by Ray C. Stedman

What a bitter day it is when a man buries his wife! It is perhaps the lowest point ever reached by the human spirit, and the sunset for him of all earth's hopes and expectations. In Genesis 23 we stand beside Abraham now, as he weeps at the grave of Sarah. He is walking through the valley where death has cast its shadow, but we shall see as we read this chapter that there is a light which always shines in the dark shadows in the life of a man of faith. As we sometimes sing in the old hymn, "There is a light in the valley of death now for me, since Jesus came into my heart."

The first two verses of Chapter 23 bring us into **the shadow of heartache and death:**

Sarah lived a hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died at Kiriatharba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. (Gen 23:1-2 {RSV})

Probably about seventeen years have passed between Chapter 22 and Chapter 23. These accounts of Abraham's trials follow consecutively in the sacred record, but they are separated by many years of blessing, tranquility and peace. Sarah was one hundred and twenty-seven years old when she died and Isaac, and her son, is now thirty-seven. By this time the little family of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac had moved back from Beer-Sheba to Hebron, under the oak of Mamre, where they had first lived when they came into the land of Canaan – rather like going back to their honeymoon cottage – and here Sarah died. In one respect this was a wonderful place to die. As the place names indicate, it is in the place of "fatness" of soul and rich-

ness of fellowship with the Lord that Sarah, this woman of beauty and faith, dies.

As was customary in those days, the body of Sarah was placed in a tent all by itself and into that tent goes Abraham alone to weep and mourn. It is remarkable that this is the only time we are ever told that Abraham wept. This old man has gone through many, many bitter disappointments and times of heartbreak in his career. He was disappointed when Lot left him. He was heartbroken when Ishmael was sent out. His heart was torn with anguish when he had to offer Isaac upon the mountain. But the only time the record reveals that he wept was when Sarah died. I think this reveals the depth of his grief and love for this woman.

It may be very instructive for us to spend a few moments here with Abraham as he bows over the body of Sarah. As you perhaps already know, if you have wept with Abraham, the well of grief is fed by the springs of memory. All the dear, sweet days come crowding in upon us again as they must have to Abraham here. I think he saw in his mind's eye that beautiful girl who captured his heart long, long ago. I think it was in the spring, for even back in those days in the spring a young man's fancy turned to what the young women had been thinking about all winter! "Boy meets girl" was the same wonderful story back in the days of Abraham some 4,000 years ago as it is today. As the old man wept over the body of Sarah, he must have remembered all those wonderful times.

Memories passed through his fingers like pearls on a string. He remembered the sunlight glittering in her hair when he first saw her, the radiance of her face on her wedding day, the softness of her touch, and the grace of her caress. Each remembrance brought a heartache in the darkness of his grief at this hour. He recalled the high ad-

venture of their life together, and especially that supreme, compelling call from God that sent them out as a couple together into an unknown land. He remembered how Sarah went along with him, sharing hardships, accepting the unsettled life without a murmur or complaint.

How his heart must have been wrung with anguish as he remembered anew the perfidy he showed in Egypt when he exposed her to danger and dishonor with his lie before Pharaoh, and again years later before Abimelech! All the bittersweet memories came in upon him as he recalled their long, weary years without a child and how they wept together. He remembered how Sarah cried bitter tears over that barren womb and how in her desperation to give him a son, she offered her handmaid, even at the cost of her pride, and Ishmael was born. All of this must have filled Abraham's heart and mind as he wept here before Sarah. He remembered, too, how at long last, glory shone in her face when her own son, Isaac, lay in her arms. His memory ran back through the years and retraced the love that drew them together, through the bad times and through the good, till they were one in body, mind, and heart.

Now death has torn her from his arms though it could never tear her from his heart. It is an hour of darkness and grief in the shadow of death. But this is not the whole story. As we read this account through, we read **something further of the life of faith:**

And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and said to the Hittites, "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." The Hittites answered Abraham, "Hear us, my lord; you are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our sepulchres; none of us will withhold from you his sepulchre, or hinder you from burying your dead." (Gen 23:3-6 {RSV})

I love this phrase, "Abraham rose up from before his dead." That signified a squaring of the shoulder, a lifting up of the eye, a firming of the step, a facing of life again, and it is followed by a wonderful confession of faith: "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you." That is the word of a man who looks beyond all that earth has to offer

and once more sees the city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God.

Although Abraham has been weeping in the valley of the shadow of death, he somehow senses there can be no shadow without a light somewhere. Have you learned that? When shadows come into your life, it is a sign that there must be light somewhere. Of course, if we turn our back on the light, then we ourselves are the ones who cause the shadow. I think thousands of people today are living in a constant shadow because their back is turned toward the light and they themselves cast a pall upon their own existence. But if we face the light, as Abraham did all through his life, looking at that light streaming from the city whose builder and maker is God, then the only shadow comes temporarily when some object obscures the light for a moment.

After all, that is what death is; it is simply a temporary obscuring of the light. But the man of faith lifts his eyes and looks beyond the shadow and sees the light still shining and he says to these people, "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you. Nothing satisfies me down here. I can never settle down among you." The whole land had been given to him by the promise of God, but the dead body of his wife before him reminds him that it is not yet God's time. His faith is not weakened by the death which occurred here, but rather, it is strengthened by it.

If Abraham had not remembered that he was a pilgrim and a stranger, his heart would have been crushed to despair by the death of his beloved life's companion. So many, many people just seem to come to the end of existence when some loved one passes on, someone with whom their hearts are closely bound. But Abraham lifts his eyes beyond this to the light from the city beyond. He remembers that nothing in this life was ever intended to fully meet the needs of the heart of the pilgrim stranger passing through. He confesses that fact here again in his hour of grief.

I recall hearing Dr. Barnhouse relate an interesting incident that illustrates this very point. He told of a girl whose husband had been killed in action during the war. When the telegram came, this Christian girl read it through and then said to her mother. "Mother, I am going up to my room and please don't disturb me." Her mother called the father at work and told him what had happened and he came hurrying home and immediately went up to

the room. He opened the door quietly. The room was carpeted and the girl didn't hear him come in, and he saw her kneeling beside her bed. The telegram was spread open on the bed before her. She was bowed over it. And as he stood there, he heard her say, "Oh, my heavenly Father, Oh, my Father, my heavenly Father." Without a word the man turned around and went back down the stairs and said to his wife, "She is in better hands than mine."

This is what faith does in the hour of grief. The very strength of Abraham's faith in the midst of anguish is that he is a stranger and a sojourner, a pilgrim passing through to that city which can alone satisfy the human heart.

Now in the following verses we see **something of the independence of the man of faith:**

Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. And he said to them, "If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Mach-pelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as a possession for a burying place." Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, "No, my lord, hear me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it; in the presence of the sons of my people I give it to you; bury your dead." Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, "But if you will, hear me; I will give the price of the field; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there." Ephron answered Abraham, "My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead." Abraham agreed with Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants.

So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave which was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over to Abraham as a

possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city. After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Mach-pelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as a possession for a burying place by the Hittites. (Gen 23:7-20 {RSV})

Why does it go into all this detail? Well, for one thing, this is the one place among many doubtful sites in the land of Palestine that has been authenticated today. We can still visit the cave of Mach-pelah in Israel. There Abraham and Sarah lie buried together. There Jacob and Leah lie together. There has been a great mosque erected above it, but it is very certain that this is the cave in which Abraham lies buried and where he buried Sarah.

The Alphonse-Gaston rigmarole that they go through in this account is very oriental; they carry on like this today in eastern market places. Abraham's pagan friends do have, however, a genuine sense of respect and honor for the man of faith. "Thou art a prince among us," they say. "Although we recognize that you are different and perhaps this caused many questions in our hearts at first, yet we know that you are a man of great honor." They pay respectful deference to him, and are quite willing that he have the land.

I think this is very instructive, though the difference that being a Christian makes may create a feeling of estrangement and even dislike in people's hearts for awhile, it always results at last in the highest respect and honor from those same people. Young people, who are under so much pressure to conform, especially need to hear this. The world is constantly trying to squeeze us into its own mold, and we don't like to be different. Yet the one thing that Christ demands of us is that in the essentials of our lives and attitudes we be different. There are many areas in which we don't need to be different and may even be offensive by being unnecessarily different. But there are other areas where we must not conform.

When Abraham first came into the land he was a pilgrim and a stranger, and they must have looked upon him as a wandering nomad. It may have taken him a long time to win their respect, but here at the end, all these pagan friends gather around and say to him, "Thou art a prince, a mighty prince

among us. You can have anything you want. We respect your integrity, your heart, even though you are still a stranger and a sojourner.”

Yet, I think the supreme lesson here is to show us the thorough independence of the man of faith. Abraham will not consent to own one foot of ground without paying for it. He courteously insists on taking nothing from the world, though he is ready to take everything from God. He shows a great independence here; he will not allow the world to make him rich in any degree. God had promised him this land, and no stratagem of the enemy, no temporary expedient, will satisfy his heart. It must come from God, and until it does, he insists on paying for this segment of it even though they offer it to him. At the end of his career, although he owned the land by promise, the only part he actually possessed was the field and a cave where he buried his wife. This is a picture of the man of faith.

In the book of Hebrews we are told that none of these men and women of faith in the Old Testament ever really gained the promise for which they were looking. They are still moving toward it, because without it they will not be made perfect. We are called upon to enter this same attitude of life and heart. Remember, nothing on earth satisfies the pilgrims and strangers passing through this land.

There is a great dearth of rugged individualism in our world today. We are missing it in our American scene. What is the secret of it? We learn from the life of Abraham that the secret is essentially fixing our eye upon another place and not being satisfied with anything that earth offers. Then we can be quite indifferent to the appeals, the claims and the pressures which come from every side. If our hearts are really wrapped up in this scene down here, we are sitting ducks for all the pressures that come, in whatever form. If our eyes are fixed upon that over there, off yonder, where the man of faith looks, the city that God alone makes, then we can be very independent here. This is what we see in Abraham.

As a boy, my heart was mightily stirred when I read the accounts of the Scottish Covenantors in their resistance against the tyranny and totalitarianism of the Roman Catholic church. Their very lives were in danger as they were hounded and hunted throughout the glens and hills of Scotland.

Many of them were put to death as martyrs for their faith. It was back in those days that dear old Samuel Rutherford lived, one of those who were subjected to the wrath of the king because of their Protestant faith.

The letters of Samuel Rutherford are a wonderful treasury of the devotional life of the heart that is enthralled and captured by Christ. He was a great, sturdy man. I remember reading about how when he lay dying in prison in St. Andrews, Scotland, the king sent a messenger to summon him to appear in the court in London to answer to the charges of high heresy. When the messenger came in before the old man, as he lay there on his death bed, and announced that the king had ordered him to appear in court, he said to him in his Scottish fashion,

“Gane and tell yere master, I have a summons from a higher court and ere this message reaches him, I’ll be where few kings or great folk ever come.”

It was a stirring rebuke to a man of earth who thought he could summon a man of faith.

This is the kind of individualism that lifting your eyes from the paltry, temporary, transitory, every day happenings and setting them on those eternal issues that alone satisfy the heart can give you. This is so beautifully demonstrated in this scene from the life of Abraham. Abraham owned a burial cave in the end. That was all. It is a reminder to us and to all men and women of faith in all times, that all we can ever really own down here is a burial ground in which we may lay to rest all the hopes and expectations of this life. Isn’t that true? All we hope for and all the fine things we hope to have someday, all the experiences we would like to live over again, all these expectations are buried in the grave. If this is all we have, what an empty, pitiful life this has been.

What a wonderful inspiration it is to look at these men of faith in the Old Testament and read again that stirring account in Hebrews 11 of men and women who, “went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated – of whom the earth was not worthy – wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth,” (Heb 11:37b-38 {RSV}). They had none of the comforts that the world counts of great value, but God has recorded of them that they have a great and wonderful future ahead. For them, like Abra-

ham, even the crushing sorrows of earth, the separation from loved ones cannot dim the light of that hope which streams from the city to come.

We are made to be creatures of eternity. In the book of Ecclesiastes it says that God, “put eternity into man’s mind,” (Eccl 3:11 {RSV}). We are not made to be creatures of time. We are not made to be satisfied with this brief period of life and then to pass into the endless, silent realms of death. God has set eternity in our hearts. But the great tragedy is that we can so easily lose sight of the goal. We begin to be wrapped up in the problems of time, and we lose the broad view of eternity.

Yet the power available to us enables us to lift a face radiant with life in the midst of the deepest sorrow, and to be strong when others are weak, to refuse to give way to panic and fear when the world is trembling and afraid. It all comes from the fact that like Abraham, we too are pilgrims and strangers. As Paul says, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth,” (Col 3:2 {RSV}). It is this attitude, this state of mind, that gives strength and grace and peace to the grieving heart.

Prayer:

Our Father, as we have looked together at this scene of Abraham, bowed in grief for the moment over the dead and lifeless body of his dear life companion, our own hearts enter with sympathy into that scene. We know life can often strike with terrible blows, that we feel the thrust of it, the hurt of it, the loneliness of it. We know that we can be shaken sometimes by the things which take place. But we thank you, Lord, that though there are things about us that can be shaken, there are also things that cannot be. When our faith is resting upon the finished work of our Lord Jesus, and our hearts have been captured by one who has said that we can never be fully satisfied with what is here below, but our eyes are caught by the light that streams from the city beyond and we press on toward that, anxious Lord, that we may be here fitted and made ready for that place, we may learn lessons to prepare us to be used over there. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.

Here Comes the Bride

by Ray C. Stedman

We are almost at the close of our study in the life of Abraham as we look in Chapter 24 of Genesis. This brings us to the entertaining and delightful story of Abraham sending his servant to find a wife for his son. The remarkable love story of Rebekah and Isaac is one of those tales which we have all known since childhood as one of the loveliest in the Old Testament. This is more than the old but ever new story of “boy meets girl.” It has more than that kind of fascination, and certainly it has more than good suggestions on how to get a wife by proxy. It is a story, as we have seen in the incidents from Abraham’s life, that has meaning for us as well, although it becomes evident toward the end of the life of Abraham that these incidents break over the boundaries of individual application. They become a picture of the work of God himself.

For example: in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, it is easy there to see how this is designed by the Spirit of God, 2,000 years before our Lord was born, to illustrate the heart of the father involved in the cross on Calvary. As Abraham and Isaac trudged up the mountainside together, you can see father and son mounting the hill of Calvary and feel the anguish in that father’s heart as he gives his own beloved son as a living sacrifice there. These stories become luminous in their illustration of New Testament events and truths.

This is true of this story of Rebekah and Isaac. It is a picture of Pentecost. Here is Abraham, standing for God the Father, sending his unnamed servant into the far country to take a bride for his son – to invite her to come, to call, to woo, and to win her – to bring her back at last to the Father’s house where the son is waiting to claim his bride

for himself. How beautifully that portrays how God, at the Day of Pentecost, sent his Spirit into the world! It is the Spirit’s job to call out a people for God’s name, to win a bride for Christ; he has been at this task for almost 2,000 years now, and the Son is waiting to receive that bride. We read in the book of Revelation of the wedding supper of the Lamb, and of the Lord coming to claim his bride for himself, (see Rev 19:7-9).

Yet despite this general application, we don’t want to lose the individual application of these stories. These Old Testament stories are somewhat like dreams. Psychologists tell us that no matter what we dream about, we are always represented. If we dream of an old mule eating hay, that’s us. Whatever else our dream may be, somehow we are involved. I think in a sense, this is true of these Old Testament stories. Paul says, “Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come,” (1 Cor 10:11 {RSV}). They are not written just for historic reference. They are written to teach us something, and, therefore, we don’t want to miss this. Read your Old Testament with this in view, and seek to find what the Spirit of God has for you.

If you are a Christian, where are you in this story of Abraham sending his servant to get a bride for his son Isaac? Well, you say, obviously we are the bride, we are the ones who are called by the Spirit of God. This is true. Every Christian remembers how he sensed at one time the calling of the Spirit of God. We remember how he wooed and won us by the loveliness and beauties which are in Jesus Christ, and by a consciousness of our

utter need for him. We were called to love someone we had never seen, and we felt an answering response in our hearts as Christ was painted in vivid colors by the Spirit in our minds. We felt the urge to leave friends and family behind, in the sense of shifting their central place in our affections, and to go after this one who called us. Now we are journeying to meet him at last in that country in the Father's house. We can see ourselves simply here, but this does not exhaust the application of this story, nor does it really disclose the major emphasis.

If you read this chapter through carefully, you will find that the central character is not the bride, Rebekah. Little of her reaction is recorded here; she has sort of a secondary part. The spotlight of the story really follows Abraham's servant. He is the central character. This is a picture, we have already recognized, of the Holy Spirit's work. But remember, the Spirit of God chooses to do his work largely through men and women, through the believers, through the church, through those of us who are his. This is especially true in the work of calling out a people for God's name. God has given us the responsibility and the privilege of being his instruments to call his bride out of the world. So this story becomes a beautiful picture of the whole process of personal evangelism.

The process of bringing others to Christ begins with **the command** of God the Father:

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land [this man knew women]; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?" Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' he will

send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there." So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter. (Gen 24:1-9 {RSV})

The initiative here begins with Abraham. He sends his servant to do this work and binds him to the task with an oath. Putting the hand under the thigh is simply an oriental custom recognizing that the loins of the thigh were the source of life. For the servant, it was a representation of being bound in the very deepest part of his life. This was a solemn oath.

As we apply this to our own situation and see God the Father standing in the place of Abraham here, he is asking every servant to give himself to this task. The servant is unnamed here, I believe, so that you and I can put our names here. We are called by the Father, commanded to go and take a wife for his son.

This is not an option with a believer in Jesus Christ. God has said, not only in the typical fashion we see here, but, in direct statements in the Word of God, again and again, in a most solemn form, that the obligation rests upon a believer to give himself to the task of reaching others for Jesus Christ. God has said, "Take a wife for my son." And to this end the Spirit of God has come into our hearts to dwell. His whole purpose of coming into your life and mine is that he might be what he is, and do what he came to do. Our Lord Jesus is the one dwelling within, and we are told what he came to do. He said, "For the son of man came to seek and to save the lost," (Luke 19:10 {RSV}). If this is what he came to do, we will find him doing it in our lives if we give him the opportunity.

Please notice that the responsibility here is emphasized by the restriction given to the servant. Abraham said to him, "You must not take my son back there. I know how you feel. I know it would be so much easier if you could just take this handsome lad with you. It would be so much easier to convince this girl she ought to come live with him if she could just see him. But don't take Isaac back there!" Why was this odd restriction put upon him? It does seem strange that although it would make the process of courtship so much simpler, he definitely restricts Isaac from going.

The answer is that this is not just an ordinary incident: This is divinely planned, and is intended to exemplify a truth. It illustrates the fact that God's Son is now in his glory and the work of evangelism must go forward in his absence. God does not send Jesus visibly back to earth in order to win the church. How much easier it would seem to be to persuade men and women to believe in him if we could just say, "Well, he is now in San Francisco, and we'd love to take you up there so you could just hear him speak, and see the marks of the nails in his hands. Then you could believe." There is that tendency in our own hearts to think it would go better that way. But the Lord said "No." He sent the Spirit of God to do the work, and, in some remarkable way that we will never fully understand, the Spirit of God can make Jesus Christ more real to a human heart than if he stood before him in human form and flesh.

This is very obviously true, because in the New Testament we discover that when the disciples were accompanying Jesus, personally, they were constantly in a state of confusion and frustration. They could not understand what he said: They were troubled and disturbed time after time. However, when the Day of Pentecost came, and the Spirit of God flooded their hearts, a light came into their eyes that had never been there before. The Scriptures began to open up for them. They became conscious of the reality of Christ and experienced a joy within that they had never possessed before. It is the work of the Spirit to make Christ real to human hearts. Now, that is why God has laid upon every one of us this obligation to spread his word to others.

There is an imaginary account telling of the time when the Lord ascended into glory. He was met by the angels as he came into the throne room of God, and one of them said to him, "Lord, what are your plans now to propagate the work that you have begun down there? What have you devised to carry on this work in your absence?" The Lord said, "I've called twelve men to follow me, and I have taught them, and lived with them for 3½ years. I have left them behind to carry on the work." But the angel said to him, "Lord, what if they fail? What if they don't do this job?" And, according to the account, the Lord shook his head and said, "Well, I have no other plan."

In a sense, this story is true, but I want to hasten to correct the possible false impression that

God has left us to do the job wholly in dependence upon ourselves. Nevertheless, it is true that God has no other plan. He will not send his Son back until the appointed time. Nor will he do it in any other way. He has put the Spirit of God in our hearts so that we might be used in this wonderful work of winning brides for his son. This is our responsibility, and the command of the Father's heart.

The major emphasis of this passage is centered on what we might call "the cooperation of the Spirit." This, I think, is the missing note in much personal evangelism. So many men and women have heard the command of God, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation," (Mark 16:15 {RSV}). They have recognized this is a command, but then they go out acting as though it all depends upon them. The result is that many are laboring in a zeal without knowledge. This is where the buttonholing, grim-faced, fever-eyed fanatic comes from, on the one hand, and, on the other, the timid, blushing, flustered Christian who hardly ever dares to utter a word. There is a failure to recognize that not only has God commanded us to do this, but he has also provided the Spirit by which to do it.

This is what we see in the steps which follow. There are five stages pictured here in what happens when you or I go out to reach someone for Christ:

First of all, there is **expectation**:

Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, grant me success today, I pray thee, and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Let the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Pray let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels' – let her be the one whom thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac. By this I shall know that thou hast shown steadfast love to my master." {Gen 24:10-14 RSV}

Now here is a man expecting God to work. He does not go into this land, and say to himself, “Well now, the whole job is up to me. I’ve got to find this girl, and how in the world am I going to find the right one? And after that, I must persuade her to come. How am I going to do that?”

It is very simple for this man because he knows he is not left alone to do this task. An invisible partner is at work, preparing the way for him. I wish we would learn this lesson about our own witness. God has not left it to us to do alone. The work of reaching men and women for Christ is not a matter of human persuasion, but is a divine call. God is at work to move, shape, and develop the lives and hearts of all. Our job is simply to recognize this.

Do you notice how Abraham’s servant does it? First of all, he prays, revealing his expectation that God is at work. In his simple prayer he asks God to make the way clear, to indicate the one to whom God would have him speak. As he prays about his problem, he expects God to answer.

This is a wonderful concept to remember when witnessing. When I get aboard a plane or train or go someplace where I may be in contact with someone who doesn’t know the Lord, I ask God to indicate who is the one he wants me to talk with. Maybe there is no one; maybe the Lord wants me to spend my time reading or studying. But very likely he does have someone. I don’t know who God is working with, but I know that he will direct me through ways of which I am hardly conscious.

When I get on the train, I find the best seat first. That is the obvious thing to do. Then I trust that the man who sits down beside me may be that man, or the one in front of me, or the one behind me. But I don’t know. It may be the fellow who is to get on at a station down the line, or the one that I will meet in the washroom, or the porter. I don’t know. Well, how do I find out?

Let’s look at the next step. The first step was expectation; the next one is **confirmation**:

Before he had done speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, came out with her water jar upon her shoulder. The maiden was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, and

filled her jar, and came up. Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, “Pray give a little water to drink from your jar.” She said, “Drink, my lord”; and she quickly let down her jar upon her hand, and gave him a drink. When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw for your camels also, until they have done drinking.” So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the LORD had prospered his journey or not. (Gen 24:15-21 {RSV})

Now here is the confirmation. “The man gazed at her in silence,” we read. If we stopped there we might think it was because he was so amazed at a teenage girl so willing to work. I don’t know how authentic it is, but I am told that a camel can drink twenty-one gallons of water at a sitting, and she drew water for all his camels. No wonder he gazed at her in silence!

Specifically, though, we are told that it was to learn whether the LORD had prospered his journey or not. “Is this the one, LORD?” As he watched her he knew that this was the one, because she did what he had asked the LORD as a sign that she should do.

I don’t think it is wise to ask for particular signs in every case. Sometimes we invent these signs in our own mind and use them as an excuse for not doing any witnessing. If we are expecting God to show us someone to talk with, he will indicate to us whom he has prepared.

Many years ago, I was on my way out to Japan one summer, waiting in the airport at Honolulu for a plane to Tokyo. It was early in the morning and the airport was almost deserted. I bought a newspaper to read as I waited for my flight. In it I read an account of a young Filipino eye doctor who was in Honolulu on his way home to Manila. He was a surgeon who had perfected an operation no one else had done, and he had been demonstrating it to the New York doctors. I read through the account, along with other things, and thought nothing more of it. When the time came I boarded my plane, and sat down in the most comfortable seat to wait for the take-off. Soon a man came along and sat down beside me. I turned to say, “Hello,” and saw that it was a young Filipino. I still didn’t make any connection but asked him his name, and he told me he

was a doctor. So I said, "What kind of a doctor are you?" He said. "I'm an eye surgeon." Then I remembered the newspaper account I had just read about this young Filipino eye surgeon, and we had wonderful fellowship which led quickly to a discussion of the Word of God. When I left him, I gave him a New Testament, and when I met him later, in Manila, he told me he'd been reading it every day since. Now this is the confirmation, some little thing by which God says "Here is the one with whom I've been working, and here you are beside him."

The Lord brought the two together. You can expect wonderful experiences to happen if you begin to watch for God to work through you like this, alert for the indication of the Spirit at work.

After the confirmation comes the third stage, **the preparation:**

When the camels had done drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, and said, "Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to lodge in?" She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." She added, "We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in." The man bowed his head and worshiped the LORD, and said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen." (Gen. 24:22-27 {RSV})

Abraham's servant knows that this is the right girl. He has had the sign confirmed. But he doesn't immediately open up the Scriptures to Romans 3:23 and begin to blast her with her status as a sinner. He doesn't brashly chasten her with the Lord's wrath and scare her away, as we sometimes do. Nor does he immediately start talking about Isaac. Instead, he wisely arranges for private conversation allowing sufficient time to make a proper contact. He bathes the whole matter again in prayer and thanksgiving and waits for a suitable time to talk.

I think this is a very important step. Sometimes in our zeal we jump down people's throats

and frighten them, causing them to back away from us. We must remember to take time to lay ample groundwork and to prepare for a proper presentation. Perhaps an invitation to dinner is better than just leaning over the back fence and trying to give the gospel in five minutes.

The fourth step is **the presentation** itself. In the next section we shall find the whole story spelled out plainly and frankly.

So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, camels and asses. And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and to him he has given all that he has. My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell; but you shall go to my father's house and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son.' I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' But he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and prosper your way; and you shall take a wife for my son from my kindred and from my father's house; then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my kindred; and if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.'

"I came today to the spring, and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now thou wilt prosper the way which I go, behold, I am standing by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, "Pray give me a little water from your jar to drink," and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also," let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son.'

"Before I had done speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, 'Pray let me drink.' She quickly said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.' So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also. Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose,

the bracelets on her arms. Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand or to the left."

Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken."

When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the LORD. And the servant brought forth jewelry of silver and of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. (Gen 24:34-53 {RSV})

The servant leaves nothing out, but is forthright and candid. He begins with the glories of Abraham, telling about all his wealth flocks, herds, silver and gold, servants, camels and asses. Why? Because this is the inheritance of the son. Then he recounts how God led him along the way, i.e., he gives his own personal testimony about it. He ends by presenting to her the gifts Isaac had sent along, the sample of the riches he was offering to her.

What a picture of how we should talk to those who are interested and whom the Lord is seeking to reach by focusing it all on Christ! Our job, you see, is not to change people's habits. We are not out to get people to stop drinking, smoking, dancing, going to movies, etc. That isn't our concern, our job is to win them to Christ, not to make church members out of them. This servant did not go into the far country and try to start a *Fans for Isaac Club*. His job was to win her heart and bring her out of the far country to the son, and that is our job, also.

The fifth and last state is **the actual invitation:**

And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me back to my master." Her brother and her mother said, "Let the maiden remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go." [There was a

reluctance here to let her go.] But he said to them, "Do not delay me, since the LORD has prospered my way; let me go that I may go to my master." They said, "We will call the maiden, and ask her." And they called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will go." (Gen 24:54-58 {RSV})

There is the invitation, the altar call if you please. It climaxes the assault on the will of this girl. It is not an easy choice that she is asked to make. It is revolutionary, disturbing, upsetting. All of her life she has been the protected jewel of that household. She has been kept within the family bosom, cared for, protected and guarded, and now she is asked to go with a man whom she has just met a day or two before, to meet another man who is an utter stranger to her. Yet something about the winsomeness of his appeal, his forthrightness, the glory and attractiveness of what she has heard, has won her heart. She is ready to go. We need to recognize that the invitation we give to men and women to become Christians is not an easy choice. It is a revolutionary one. We must clarify the matter, and lay it before them: "Will you go?" And she said, "I will go."

Finally, in the last scene, we see **the communion** with the son. The work of the Trinity is evident throughout this story. It begins with the command of the Father, proceeds with the cooperation of the Spirit, and ends with the communion with the Son. This is a delightful scene at the end where heart meets heart:

Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was dwelling in the Negeb. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there were camels coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she alighted from the camel, and said to the servant, "Who is the man yonder, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into the tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. (Gen 24:62-67 {RSV})

The last words of the servant are here. When Rebekah sees Isaac walking in the field, she says, "Who is this man!" And the servant's words are, "It is my master." This is the place to which we are to bring men and women. The time comes in our dealing with them when we must stop talking about our own personal testimony. We must turn them to look at the one who is winning their hearts, and say, "There he is, it's the Master. You deal with him now, just talk directly with him."

I think the conversation here when the two met was probably rather stumbling at first. She was very shy, and he very reserved. She got off her camel, all atwitter inside. She put her veil over her face so he wouldn't see how she was blushing.

This strong, manly man came up to her, and said, "Hello."

She said, "Hello." He said, "Are you Rebekah?" She said, "Yes," and dropped her eyes.

Then he said, "I'm Isaac." (She knew it all the time.) He said, "You can call me Ike."

She said, "Well, my friends call me 'Becky.'" And off they go, hand in hand.

But look at the servant standing by. Can't you imagine him grinning from ear to ear, registering the joy in his heart at the fulfillment of his mission in bringing a bride for Isaac. Doesn't it remind you of those words of John the Baptist when he introduced the Lord Jesus to Israel and his disciples left him and went to follow the Lord? Someone asked him how he felt, and he said, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore, this joy of mine is now full. He must increase, but I must decrease," (John 3:29-30 {RSV}). We are like that servant.

We can expect the same brimming of joy in our own hearts as we watch someone join together with his Lord in new life.

Do you see now that the story of Abraham's servant is your story as well?

The Abundant Entrance

by Ray C. Stedman

I suppose it might be proper to begin this last study of Abraham as I sometimes do funerals. Since this is Abraham's funeral, I would say,

"We are gathered together to pay our respects to one who has lived among us and has now departed this life."

Here now is the account of the departure of Abraham. If you have been actively participating in this study of Abraham's life, you must now have a great sense of respect and awe for this pattern man of faith as we come to his closing days.

Abraham was called "the friend of God" (James 2:23b), one of the very few men who has ever earned that title in the pages of the Bible. He is one of the great universal names of mankind. You can mention the name of Abraham almost any place in the world and they know who he is. There are places where people have never heard of George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, or Napoleon, but almost every nation and people have heard of Abraham. He is a man of great integrity of heart and purpose, a man of unusual honor and vision, and one of the most faithful men of all time. Yet as we have followed this account through, I hope you have noticed that Abraham is a man of like passions with us. Though we may honor his character and his moral greatness, nevertheless, Scripture very clearly shows that he is the same make-up as we.

As someone has well said, "We are all made of the same mold, but some of us are moldier than others."

Abraham is poured into the same human mold as we are. He is capable of lying, deceiving, rebelling, blaming others, loving himself, giving in to weakness, and shutting his eyes to truth. Obviously, here is a man no different from us. Without the grace of God he never would have been any different, just as without the grace of God we could not be any different than we were in Adam.

What Abraham became by the Spirit is beautifully summarized here in these few verses at the opening of Chapter 25.

First of all, **his life was one of abundant fruitfulness:**

Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoah, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. (Gen 25:1-4 {RSV})

Why are we told this about Abraham in these closing remarks of his life? Remember that at the very beginning of his life, in the journey out of Ur of the Chaldeans, he was promised that he would become the father of many nations. Through Isaac and Ishmael, the two sons with which we are most acquainted, several nations arose. Isaac, of course, became {the father of the Israelites and Edomites, and Ishmael became} the father of another group of nations. Through Keturah, Abraham's second

wife, he has six more sons, who each became the founder of other nations, so God's promise was literally fulfilled that Abraham should be the father of many nations and through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

It is interesting that when Sarah died, Abraham was about one hundred and twenty-five years old. After that he took another wife and, remarkably, had six more sons. We are told specifically in the Scriptures that when Isaac was born, Abraham had long since ceased to possess the ability to have children. Both he and Sarah's bodies were dead, their reproductive powers had ended and it was by a miracle of grace that Isaac was born. He was a child of promise and is called the child of faith. The writer of Hebrews tells us: "For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, 'Surely I will bless you and multiply you,'" (Heb 6:13-14 {RSV}). Evidently, when his youthful powers were restored to him in order that he might have Isaac, these continued afterward and these six other lads were born to grace his home after Sarah's death. If we add these six men to Ishmael and Isaac, we learn that Abraham had a total of eight sons. These eight sons picture the fruitfulness of this man's life.

We have noticed how remarkably the Old Testament takes the physical qualities of Abraham's life and makes them a picture of the spiritual realities in our lives. I have said before, and I repeat it, this is one of the most remarkable proofs to me of the inspiration of the Scripture. It is simply impossible these events could have happened in this way and be such a precise picture of spiritual truths without the hand of inspiration involved. You might as well take some book of ancient history and expect to find everything there an exact picture of spiritual life as to have this occur without this hand of inspiration. This accounting of the eight children is a beautiful picture to us of the fruitfulness of the life in the Spirit, life lived by faith as Abraham lived his life.

You and I too can have eight sons in this metaphorical sense.

Now, to see what I mean, look at Second Peter 1:3-8 where eight marks of the fruitful life are listed. I wonder if it is mere coincidence that these marks are equal to the number of Abraham's children. I think the following passage could well have been the epitaph of Abraham. His whole life is

summarized here for us, beginning with the call of God out of Ur of the Chaldeans unto his own glory and excellence:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature. For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet 1:3-8 {RSV})

Peter begins with *faith*, of course, a supreme ingredient of spiritual life. This was the great thing about Abraham; he had confidence in God despite the circumstances. That is a very simple, realistic definition of faith – having confidence in God despite the circumstances – while unbelief is believing the circumstances in spite of God. Which do you have?

- Faith is not taking the circumstances into account when determining some action to be taken.
- Faith disregards the nature of the test, even though it may be quite disconcerting.
- Faith believes God despite those circumstances.

This is the basis of all contact with God. You and I cannot be Christians, we cannot live as Christians in any sense without faith, without believing that God knows what he is talking about. I am so eager for our young people to begin to appreciate that the Scriptures are the Word of God. In them, God himself is telling us the truth about life.

We are then told to add to faith the quality of *virtue*. In several translations this is rendered

“manly courage,” or “moral character.” I like that. How marvelously we see that in Abraham! With what courage he armed his servants and set out after that great army which came from the east. With what wisdom he surrounded their camp and routed the forces of the enemy, thinking nothing of his own safety in order that he might deliver Lot and the others who had been taken captive! This is one of the key ingredients of a fruitful Christian life. I rejoiced that when Jesus Christ came into my life, he came in to make me a man. A Christian is one who begins to demonstrate manliness or womanliness.

Then Peter says to add *knowledge* to your virtue, or manly courage. I’m so glad he said that. There are some people who get the idea that Christians are so heavenly-minded they have no concern with anything on earth. We have it all right here, and we don’t need to be aware of anything else around us. But it is not like that at all. Further, there are some who think Christianity is against knowledge. But the Christian attitude toward knowledge is that all is from God and we are to learn and to comprehend whatever we can. However, the secrets of knowledge lie not in any human textbook, but only in the book of God. We can find help from some human textbooks, but if we want to get at the streams of life, the very deep things, the basic functions of human life, we will find them only in this book. Without the Bible, we cannot know God, nor can we know ourselves, we who are the greatest enigma of the universe. The Spirit of God at work is always the spirit of knowledge.

Now we come to *self-control*. We see demonstrated in Abraham’s life that he was able to keep his temper amid the irritations of those around him. He exhibited a wonderful degree of self-control. Now there is a type of self-control that says, “Just wait, my time is coming; I won’t say anything now, but just you wait; we’ll straighten things out later!” But this is not what the Spirit produces. Spirit given self-control says: “Before you speak in irritation, remember that you belong to God; he is the Lord of your life, and what you say must reflect him.” Therefore, God-control results in self-control.

I remember reading an account of an incident in Hudson Taylor’s life. He was speaking of his years in China and how on one occasion, since he could get no other transportation, he chartered a small boat to take him down the river to an ap-

pointment. While he was waiting at the wharf to board, a very richly dressed mandarin, a Chinese teacher, came down to the wharf with a couple of men following him. Seeing this little boat there, he asked the driver, “Where are you going?” The man told him, and the mandarin said, “I want the boat.” The Chinese owner tried to explain to him that the boat had already been chartered. The mandarin asked, “To whom did you charter it?” The man said, “To this foreigner,” pointing to Hudson Taylor. The mandarin looked at him arrogantly and with a wave of disdain swept him aside and said, “I’ll take the boat!” Hudson Taylor said that he could feel the ire rise within him. The mandarin was standing between him and the river and all he would have to do was push and he would land in the river. He had almost started to do it when he felt the restraint of the Spirit. Turning to the man, he said, “Look, I know that you regard me as nothing but a white foreign devil, but I have chartered this boat and it is mine by rights. The Jesus that is in me kept me from pushing you into the river just now. You richly deserve that, but the Lord kept me from it because he has not sent me here to push Chinese people into the river, but to win them for Christ. The boat is mine and I must take it; however, I invite you to come along with me and be my guest.” Rather confused and amazed, the mandarin accepted his invitation and went aboard, and they had a wonderful conversation all the way.

Now to self-control, we are to add *steadfastness*, which is an old fashioned word for “patience.” And what a word that is! Have you ever noticed that God cannot give patience? He can only teach it. There is no use praying for patience. If you do, the Lord will send you tribulation, because “tribulation worketh patience,” (Romans 5:3 KJV). So watch out! You need patience but it can’t be given, it can only be taught.

What a marvelous manifestation of the Spirit this is! Look back at old Abraham waiting twenty-five years for a son. The promise had been given, but he waited for twenty-five long, weary years before that promise was fulfilled. You can see something of what the Spirit of God taught this man in the way of patience. Most of us are like the little girl who banged her cup on her high chair and demanded milk. Her mother told her to be patient. She said, “I’ve got patience, but I don’t have any milk.”

Then to patience, or steadfastness, add *godliness*. What is this? It is simply the sense of the presence of God in your daily life. Abraham was the man with the tent and the altar. He always built an altar everywhere he went. He was an intimate friend of God. He knew God; this is what godliness is. In the New Testament it is expressed in the phrase, “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God,” (1 Cor 10:31b {RSV}). Godliness is a consciousness of his presence.

To godliness add *brotherly affection*. This is the sharing of self in hospitality and by encouraging one another, inviting someone over for dinner just to give him a word of encouragement to strengthen him. This is a practical manifestation of the Spirit at work.

Last, we are to add *love* to brotherly affection. Love is the most unmistakable fruit of the Spirit. First Corinthians 13 is the commentary on what love really is, and this kind of love is produced only by the Spirit!

This is the fruitful life, pictured by Abraham’s eight sons. These eight beautiful virtues are part of the Spirit-filled life. Peter continues,

For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. {2 Pet 1:8-11 RSV}

Abraham has now come, at the close of his life, to this abundant entrance into the kingdom of the Father.

In Genesis 25, we find that not only is this a life of abundant fruitfulness, but the next few verses make it clear that it is also **a life of practical foresight**:

Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and while he was still living he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country. (Gen 25:5-6 {RSV})

In other words, he never forgot that Isaac was the son of promise and the divinely chosen heir. He was constantly alert to protect the inheritance of God. He anticipated danger and made some provision for his other sons so that they would not destroy what God was doing in his life. Isaac is throughout a picture of Christ. We read that Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac, just as the Father gives all that he has to the Son. This is a portrait of a life that is so Christ-centered that it exercise care to protect the inheritance and to keep away the things that might harm it.

This expression, “He sent them ... eastward to the east country” is significant. When Abraham first came into the land, he pitched his tent between Ai and Bethel, with Ai on the east and Bethel on the west. *Ai* means “ruin”; *Bethel* means “the house, or place, of God.” Isaac was given the inheritance in the west, in the place of God, while the other boys were sent out into the east countries to the place of ruin. This is a picture for us of the natural life, the life that we had from Adam.

As with Abraham, we are expected to show a little practical foresight in our daily lives. Just as Abraham sent these boys away so they would not injure the inheritance given to Isaac, so we are to be careful not to get into situations that threaten our spiritual lives.

When I was a young man in Montana, I heard of a cowboy who used to come in from the country every weekend. He would tie his horse up in front of the saloon in the town, and go in and get drunk. Then one day he was converted in the little church there and stopped drinking completely, becoming a godly man. For a long time after that, though, he kept tying his horse up to the hitching rack in front of the saloon. One day an older Christian took him aside and said to him, “Now, son, I know you never go into the saloon any more, and I notice you are always at prayer meeting, and your life is a blessing to many, but I would like to give you one suggestion. Change your hitching post! Sooner or later you are going to be tempted to go back into that place. Why don’t you just hitch your horse down the street a few doors so you won’t have to walk past the saloon?” That is good advice. Change your hitching post. Take a little practical foresight in the protection of your spiritual life.

Abraham's life was also a full one:

These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, a hundred and seventy-five years. Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. (Gen 25:7-8 {RSV})

If you and I had been with Abraham at the moments of decision in his life, we might often have pitied him:

- When he left Ur, we might have said, "Abraham, you poor fool, do you mean you are going to wander out there in the desert and perhaps live in a tent the rest of your life, when you could have the enjoyment of the city and all of its blessings?"
- When he allowed Lot to choose the best of the land, perhaps some of us might have thought, "Abraham, don't throw away your rights like that! You are the oldest one. You have the right to choose. Why let Lot take that choice piece while you are left with this dry old pasture? You are throwing away your rights." Abraham let Lot choose, and God chose for him.
- And do you remember when the king of Sodom offered all the riches of Sodom to Abraham, Abraham said, "I'll not take even one of your shoelaces, I don't want any of it." Some of us would have been tempted to say, "Now wait, Abraham, you are carrying this a little too far. You could have deducted this from your income tax, and just think what you are missing, all the riches of Sodom you could have, think how you could use it in the Lord's work."

But Abraham chose God every time, and his was a life of fullness.

He lived one hundred and seventy-five years, and every one was packed full, spiced with excitement and adventure, filled with challenge and interest, rich in faith and blessing. He died an old man, full of days. This reminds one of our Lord's words in Mark 10: "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for

the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life," (Mark 10:29-30 {RSV}). There is the promise of a full life to those who live in the Spirit.

In Verse 8 there is an indication that our pattern man of faith had divine fellowship, he "was gathered to his people." That does not refer to his body, because Abraham was not buried back in Ur with the rest of his family. Nor does it refer to the fact that he was gathered into the realm of death where all the rest of his family had gone – for many of his ancestors who were not godly men were there. We are told that Abraham was an idolater in his early years, and his family worshipped idols. They were not, therefore, men of godliness, and Abraham was not gathered to them.

The account says that he "was gathered to his people." What does that mean?

It means that he was gathered to those before him who had exercised faith in God. He was with those righteous ones who all through that intervening time of history had been walking with God. Enoch and Noah were examples of such men who learned to know the living God. Those are Abraham's people. Just as the people who are ours are not the fleshly people, but the ones to whom we are spiritually bound. Isn't this what our Lord Jesus meant when the word came in to him that his mother and his brethren were waiting outside and Jesus refused to go, saying to those with him, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother," (Mark 3:34b-35 {RSV}). So Abraham was gathered to his people.

This phrase indicates that by no means did his life end 4,000 years ago:

- In Matthew, when the Sadducees – who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead – asked Jesus a question, he answered them: "Have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' He is not God of the dead, but of the living." (Matt 22:31b-32 {RSV}). By this he was answering those who did not believe in life after death. He was saying that Abraham is living. God is the God of the living, not of the dead!

- On another occasion, he said, looking forward into the future, “I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,” (Matt 8:11 {RSV}).
- Then we have that amazing story in Luke 16 in which our Lord tells of the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus died and was carried to Abraham’s bosom, the place of fellowship where Abraham was with God the Father. The rich man in Hades, seeing him there, begged him to send someone to relieve his torment and the anguish of his heart and soul. “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them,’” {Luke 16:29 RSV}. “‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead,’” (Luke 16:31 {RSV}).

What a picture Abraham’s life is of a life like yours and mine! There was nothing unusual about him; nevertheless, God made him an extraordinary person, whose life reaches far beyond the realms of earth, out into eternity. His life is one of blessing, fellowship, and fullness. Abraham stands as a living testimony to anyone who takes the path of faith

and walks this way. In so doing, we will find the same blessing. The author of Hebrews, in the great “heroes of faith” chapter has this to say about Abraham and others before him:

These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. (Heb 11:13-16 {RSV})

Abraham’s life is the life of every Christian, for all who walk in faith with Jesus Christ, called to be his, to be possessed of him, to live as pilgrims and strangers on earth. Thus, all the fruitfulness we desire, and the abundant life in the everlasting kingdom of the Father will be fulfilled in us as they were in the life of Abraham.

Copyright: © 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.