

Chapter One **The Beginnings of Mankind: Genesis 1-11**

It's no exaggeration to say that there are no writings more important for the proper understanding of history and man than the first 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, the solution to the problem of mounting divorce rates and other marital issues that abound in modern society. Here, also, is the explanation of the struggle of life and here great light is thrown on the problems of work and leisure. In these opening chapters of the Bible is the first and 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. Therefore, it is clear that this whole section is unprecedented in its importance.

INCOMPLETENESS OF MAN

Genesis is the book of beginnings. That is what the word itself means, and it takes us back into the very dawn of human history. It traces the story of man from his beginnings within the natural world and follows his history in a continually narrowing process down to the story of four great men of the past: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. These men are not mere mythical figures of the past, but are living, breathing, flesh and blood personalities whom we can all relate to. This marvelous account preserves accurately for us not only the facts of these men's lives but the color and depth and the tone of life in their days.

But Genesis is not only history, it is also a book with a single message, and a message which can be declared in one brief statement. It reveals to us the need of man for God. That is the whole purpose of the book and as such, it strikes the keynote for all subsequent revelation concerning God and man throughout the Bible. Genesis reveals that man can never be complete without God, that he can never discover or fulfill the true meaning of his life without a genuine and personal relationship with an indwelling God.

Throughout the book this incompleteness is revealed to us in three realms--realms in which each of us personally and daily live.

First, our incompleteness is revealed in the realm of natural relationships, that is, the area we call the natural sciences. These consist of cosmology (the study of the universe, its origin and makeup); geology (the structure of the earth itself and its major features); and biology (the study of life in all its divisions and manifestations). These natural relationships circumscribe our lives with regard to the physical world around us, and yet within them man is seen to be inadequate without God.

The second area is the realm of human relationships. This would include the sciences we call today sociology, psychology, anthropology, demonology, etc. The beginnings of all these are traced in the opening chapters of Genesis and again man is set forth as inadequate to function within them without a relationship with God.

The third area is that of spiritual relationships, encompassing the studies of theology, philosophy, soteriology, angelology, etc. The beginnings of all these themes are explored in Genesis and yet the one message of man's inadequacy apart from God echoes throughout the book like the sound of a bell.

UNIVERSALITY OF MANKIND

Genesis opens with an awareness of the greatest material fact in all human life; a fact that we are all subconsciously aware of almost every waking moment, that is, that we are living in a universe. We quickly become aware that we are living on a planet shared with millions of other human beings like ourselves. As we come to know more about modern science we become aware that our planet is part of a solar system. In some strange, mysterious way this mass of earth upon which we live is winding its way on a prearranged path about the sun circling continuously and precisely on schedule.

We are also told by astronomers that the whole solar system itself--the sun with all its planets--is making its way through a great whirling body of stars called a galaxy, a vast almost incredibly immense system of stars some 300,000 light years across. Then this galaxy itself is moving at incredible speed through the vastness of space in conjunction with millions (and some astronomers say even billions) of other galaxies like ours. It is precisely at that point that the Bible opens in a majestic recognition that man is part of a universe." In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).

What a strange conjunction--to put all the vast heavens on one side and our tiny planet Earth on the other. But the book moves right on to tell us that man-- insignificant man--this tiny speck of life living on a minor planet in the midst of this unthinkable vast universe, is the major object of God's concern.

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 has significance and is inexhaustible in its meaning to even the most erudite and learned of men. It addresses itself with equal ease to all classes of mankind. This universality is evident in the phrase "the heavens and the earth." That has meaning for a savage in the jungle when he simply perceives the land on which he lives and the sky over his head. He would describe 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." Thus the Bible consistently remains true to the most complex discoveries of science at the same time retaining a simplicity of statement that the most uneducated can understand, even though it is not the intention of the Bible to be a textbook on science.

God has deliberately made the physical universe to reveal and manifest an inner spiritual reality. There is a direct correspondence between the two. This correspondence between the outward physical reality and its invisible spiritual counterpart is fundamentally the reason why "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Since the world is made for man it constantly reflects truth to him. This is, without doubt, why Jesus found the world of nature such an apt instrument to teach men spiritual realities, as His parables reveal.

Dr. F. A. Filby, senior lecturer on inorganic chemistry at an English technical college, has put this very accurately: "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 the first truth God would suggest to us, manifested in a material universe all around us, is that there is a heavenly as well as an earthly life. There is a difference between the heavenly life of God and the earthly life of man. The supreme subject of the Bible will be how to move from the level of earth to the life of the heavens. This difference is declared by Isaiah where God says, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,' declares 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'" (55:8,9). That is the great truth with which, symbolically, the Bible begins.

THE CREATION

We have seen that the greatest observable fact known to man is the existence of the universe, "the heavens and the

earth." To this, verse 1 links the greatest fact made known by revelation: the existence of a God who creates. There is thus brought together at the beginning of the Bible a recognition of the two great sources of human knowledge: nature (including human nature), discoverable by the five senses; and revelation, which is discoverable only by a mind and heart illuminated and taught by the Spirit of God. Both of these sources of knowledge originate with God and each of them is a means of knowing something about God and man. The scientists who study nature are 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. So also those who seek to understand the Bible are likewise in search of God. Nature is designed to teach certain facts about God, but revelation is designed to bring us to the God about whom nature speaks. The two are complementary and are not contradictory in any sense.

Verse 2 adds the information that the earth began as a planet covered by an uninterrupted ocean which was itself wrapped in darkness. Revelation says that it was "formless and void," that is, 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. With that picture science fully agrees. But revelation as a key factor that many scientists do not acknowledge. Revelation says, in addition, "the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters." God was at work in His universe interacting and interrelating with it. Notice that in these verses of the first chapter there is a moving toward order out of disorder and form out of formlessness. Something comes out of nothing. God is moving. The Spirit of God is producing an intended end. He brings light out of darkness, shape out of shapelessness, form out of formlessness.

The first step God took, according to the record, was to create light, "'Let there be light'; and there was light." Light as we know now is absolutely essential to life of any sort. Without light there can be no life. With the advent of light we are now ready for the record of the six days of creation. Each of the days, except for the seventh, includes an evening and a morning and each, except for the seventh, records a progressive order of creation.

How are we to view these days? Are they 24-hour days, constituting one literal actual week, or do they represent long and indefinite ages of time as science would claim today? It is my conviction that the controversy which has endlessly raged upon these questions has been largely responsible for missing the real purpose for which God gives to us this first chapter of Genesis. It should be clear to anyone upon reading the passage that the chapter does not focus upon the question of time. Important as this may seem to us it is not the focus of God, and if we center upon it we shall miss the point that He intends to make. God is moving toward a goal which He has clearly in mind from the beginning and toward it all the physical universe is moving. The steps God takes to accomplish this goal are recorded as several great creative acts occurring in certain progressive stages which logically succeed one another. It does not all happen at once. 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 chose to do it in stages and these stages are very clearly evident throughout this passage.

Each of the days of creation include an evening and a morning and the evening comes first. This suggests a period of incompleteness moving toward completeness, of gradualness coming at last to completion. Furthermore, let us remember that these physical things which God makes are reflections of an inner greater reality. God made the physical universe to reflect spiritual realities so that as we look around us and observe and assimilate with our senses we are constantly to be reminded of the great things that are to take place within us in the invisible kingdom of spiritual truth.

If this be the case then Genesis I becomes a kind of table of contents, if you like, for the rest of Scripture. It introduces in physical symbolism the great themes which will be amplified throughout the rest of this amazing book. In other words, there are great lessons which God has deeply etched in nature in order to remind us of corresponding realities in our lives which the physical processes around us are designed to picture. Let us go through the creative days from this point of view and we will see what I believe to be the real point of this passage.

Day one describes the creation of light and darkness. The light is said to be good and the darkness by definition is not good. Both these words, light and darkness, are used subsequently in Scripture to picture good and evil. There

is good in the universe but there is also that which is "not good," which is darkness. Thus a fundamental fact we must continually bear in mind is that throughout our lives we will need to discern between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error. We are reminded of it every day and night.

On day two we learn of the firmament which separates the waters below from the waters above, and this firmament is called heaven. Physically this is a description of the creation of the atmosphere around the earth which supports great quantities of water in evaporated form :- above the earth and separates it from the oceans below. This ocean and sky, divided asunder, picture for us the - reality of human physical life (elsewhere frequently symbolized by water), and a subsequent heavenly life. There is a life now and a life to come and one passes into the other. Human existence is not complete when this earthly life is fulfilled. The two levels of human existence are tied together with invisible but very real links and one merges into the other as oceans, by evaporation, move into the waters of the air.

It is striking that it is the forgetfulness of these two facts, revealed in the first two creative days, that is the root cause for the violence and moral decline of our day. Men no longer seek to distinguish between good and evil between light and darkness. Though every 24 hours these reminders come to us, we continually blind our eyes to them and seek to blur these distinctions. It is also increasingly evident that men no longer want to think about the life to come. We want everything now. Instant happiness! That is what the world is seeking. We do not wish to anticipate a future or to prepare for a life to come. But we must remember that this present earthly life will find its culmination and fulfillment only when the intended lessons are learned here below and then all God's great provisions for man will be available to him. That is what God is teaching us in the first two creative days.

Day three is a different kind of day from the first two. It is a double day in which 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 plants, trees and vegetation. As we have seen, on the physical level this is but a manifestation of a parallel spiritual and moral reality. We are to learn that human life on earth between the period of birth and death is itself divided, pictured by the land rising up out of the oceans. Thus, there will be land which is capable of producing fruit surrounded by vast oceans which are incapable of doing so. The truth God wants us to learn from this is that there is an old humanity which by nature is incapable of bringing forth what God desires, but there is also a new humanity, called out of the fold, which will be capable of producing the fruit God envisions. In the second part of the day, that fruit actually appears and is pronounced by God to be good. It appears in three divisions: general vegetation, seed bearing plants, and fruit trees. Perhaps this reflects the divisions of the apostle John who describes Christians as "little children, young men and fathers" (see I John 2:13). At any rate, this fruit is pleasing to God and is a result of the activity of the Spirit upon the barren waters of humanity.

Day four describes the creation of the sun and moon and the stars, and the placing of them as lights and signs to govern the seasons of earth. The sun clearly pictures Jesus Himself (called in Mall 4:2 "the sun of righteousness") as the light of the world; and the moon, reflecting the brightness of the sun and shining in the darkness of the night, is a symbol of the church shining in the moral darkness of this world. The stars are used repeatedly in Scripture as symbols of individuals who shine with great moral influence upon others.

The fifth day describes the creation of birds flying in the heavens above the earth and great living creatures that swarm through the waters of the seas. Since the atmosphere above depicts the heavenly kind of life and the waters, as we have seen, are a picture of unregenerate humanity, this created day symbolizes to us the possibility of living triumphantly in either an alien or a hostile environment. Both birds and fish are used symbolically of believers in the Bible. The spiritual life is alien to natural man but by the redemption of God he can "mount up with wings like eagles" (Isa. 40:31). The world is a hostile environment to him but he can learn to live in it as effectively as a fish swims to swim in the sea.

MAN'S UNIQUENESS

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. This sixth day is parallel in some respects to the third day in that it is also a double day. It

has, as do all the days, an evening and a morning, and during the first part of the day God created the land animals--from the larger beasts (called "the cattle") to the creeping things, including the world of insects, reptiles, etc. It is quite obvious that all this is aiming toward the creation of man and is in exact accordance with the fossil records. Man makes his appearance last in the order of life. But there are some distinctive things said of him that are never said of any of the animal creation.

First, God holds a divine consultation about Him saying, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). This divine conversation clearly is the first hint given to us that God consists of more than one person. This revelation is given only in connection with the emergence of man upon the earth for only man can understand and enter into an experience with a triune God and is seen also as the link between God and the rest of His creation. The first man, Adam, is a mediator between God and the animal world just as later the last Adam (Jesus Christ) will be seen as the mediator between fallen man and God. The first Adam was made to reign over the world of nature as the last Adam also makes it possible for those who are in Christ to reign in life through Him as Paul puts it in Romans 5:21.

The key phrase about man as created on the sixth day is the "image" and "likeness" of God. That image is found not in man's body or his soul, but in his spirit. For, as Jesus told the woman at the well in Samaria, "God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). But what is godlike about our spirit? If the spirit is made in the image of God, then it can do things that God can do but no animal can. Three things are suggested throughout Genesis I which God alone does: first, God creates; second, God communicates; and third, God evaluates, pronouncing some things good and others not good. It is here that the image of God in man appears. Man can create. Inventiveness clearly marks him off from the world of beasts. Further, man communicates as no animal can possibly do, sharing ideas which affect (and infect) others. Finally, man is the only creature that has a moral sense, recognizing some things as good and others as bad, feeling the impact of conscience upon his own actions. Thus, man shares the image of God.

However, though he has retained the image, he has now lost the likeness of God. Image is the capacity to be godlike, but likeness is the proper functioning of that capacity. Adam, formed by the creator, stood before God as a spirit dwelling in a body and exercising the functions of a soul. He had the ability to be creative, to communicate, to make moral choices, but he not only had that ability, he was actually doing it. He was exercising the function of God-likeness. The secret, as we learn from the rest of Scripture, lay in an inner dependence that continually repudiated self-confidence.

The seventh day is clearly quite different from all the preceding six. It is a day without an evening or a morning. There is no movement within, no advance from incompleteness to completeness. It is, instead, a day characterized by rest; God ceased from His labors, intending it to be a picture of what is called later in Scripture "the rest of faith." Hebrews 4:10 declares "For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His."

Here is pictured a revolutionary new principle of human behavior on which God intends man to operate, and which was His intention from the very beginning of history. It is from this principle that man fell and it is to this in Jesus Christ that he is to be restored. It is the principle of human activity resting upon an indwelling God to produce extraordinary results. The weekly observance of a Sabbath day is but a shadow, Paul says in Colossians 2: 17, of this principle of activity, resting upon God's willingness to work in and through what we do. He who learns to labor on those terms is keeping the Sabbath as God intended it originally to be kept.

Chapter 2 finds man walking in the Garden in communion with God, functioning as a spirit living within a physical body and manifesting the personality characteristics of the soul. At this point, God gives him a research project, to investigate the animal world in search for a possible counterpart to himself. God knew that man would not find what he was looking for but in the process man discovered at least three marvelous truths.

First, he learned that woman was not to be a mere beast of burden as the animals are, because that would not in any way fulfill his need for a helper and companion.

Second, it became evident that woman was not to be merely a biological laboratory for the producing of children. This is what the animals use sex for, but that was not sufficient for Adam's needs. Sex in mankind, therefore, is different from that among the animals.

Third, Adam learned that woman was not a thing outside himself--she is not something to be used at the whim of man and then disposed of. Women are to be helpers, fit for him, corresponding to him.

So, in a remarkable passage we are told that Adam fell into a deep sleep and God took a rib and from it made a woman and brought her to him. This period of Adam's unconsciousness strongly suggests what modern psychology also confirms, that the relationships of marriage are far deeper than mere surface affection. They touch not only the conscious life, but the subconscious, even the unconscious as well.

Chapter 2 ends with a marvelous statement of the principles God intends for marriage. The first and most fundamental is that marriage involves a complete *identity* of the partners. The two are to become one. This is not an immediate act of magic happening during or immediately after a wedding, but takes place as a couple lives together, blending their psyches, merging their lives, and creating a single history.

The second principle is that of *headship* which marks the role of man as the leader in determining the direction in which a home should go and the woman's responsibilities to support and sustain that leadership. The third factor emphasized is that of *permanence*. Men and women are to cleave to one another--he is to stay with her and she with him, because marriage is a permanent bond. The fourth factor is revealed in the verse, "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." This speaks clearly of openness and free *communication*.

MAN'S LIMITATIONS

In chapter 3 of Genesis we have the explanation for over 100 centuries of human heartache, misery, torture, blood, sweat and tears. Remove this chapter from the Bible, and the rest of it is beyond explanation. But the most striking thing about it is that we find ourselves here. The temptation and the fall are reproduced in our lives many times a day. We have all heard the voice of the tempter and felt the drawing of sin and we all know the pangs of guilt that follow. This is why many have called this story a myth. In one sense this is true. It happens continually because it did actually happen once to our original parents and thus we, their children, cannot escape repeating it.

Many biblical scholars feel that the tempter in the Garden was not a snake, but a "shining one" which the Hebrew word means. Snakes were undoubtedly created to represent the punishment that fell upon this being when he brought about the fall of man by his cunning and his deceit. It is clearly the devil, in his character as an angel of light, who now confronts the woman in the Garden of Eden. His tactic with her is to arouse desire. First he implanted in her heart a distrust of God's love, "Has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1). Next, he dares to deny openly the results that God had stated will occur, "You surely shall not die" (v. 4), he says. Then he clinches his attack with a distorted truth, "God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." All the devil wishes to do is to leave Eve standing before the fruit, hanging there in all its luscious fascination, tantalizing her, offering her an experience she never dreamed would be possible.

Now the mind comes into action. Without Eve's realization she has already experienced an arousing of her emotions so that she longs for the tantalizing fruit before her. Thus, when her mind comes into action it can no longer do so rationally. Already the will has secretly determined to act on the facts as the emotions present them and thus the mind can only rationalize. It must twist the facts so that they accord with desire and the result was that Eve took the fruit and ate.

But there was still hope for the race. Adam had not yet fallen, only Eve. A battle has been lost, but not the war. But in the innocent but ominous words, "she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate" (v. 6), we face the beginning of the darkness of a fallen humanity--what the Bible calls "death" immediately follows.

The first sign is that Adam and Eve knew they were naked. This is the birth of self-consciousness, and the

immediate result is an attempt to cover up, which is the invariable psychological reaction of mankind to self-exposure ever since.

The second mark of death is the tendency to hide. It reveals the fact of guilt--that inner torment we are all familiar with which cannot be turned off no matter how hard we try.

The third mark of death at work in human life is the beginning of blame--the passing of the buck from Adam to Eve and from Eve to the serpent. Behind both excuses is the unspoken suggestion that it is really God's fault. Thus man attempts to turn guilt into fate and make of himself a mere innocent victim suffering from a breakdown in creation for which God is responsible.

The fourth mark of death is the divine establishment of the limits of life: pain, sweat and death. Adam and Eve must learn the hard cruel facts of life lived apart from dependence upon God. At this point of repentance, God then clothes them with animal skins as a picture (as all animal sacrifices are, a kind of kindergarten of grace) to teach us the great truth that ultimately it is God Himself who bears eternally the pain, the hurt and the agony of our sins. This is followed by banishment from the garden, not as we so often imagine, to keep man from coming to the tree of life, but as the text specifically states "to guard the way *to* the tree of life" (v. 24). There is a way to the tree of life, but it is no longer a physical way. In the book of Revelation, we are told that the tree of life is for the healing of the nations (see Rev. 22:2). It is surely to this that Jesus refers when He says, "I am the way." 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.

We can thus summarize chapter 3 in the process it follows: beginning with temptation; followed immediately by death; leading to repentance and grace taken by an act of faith; and resulting in a public acknowledgment on God's part of acceptance; and ending at last in healing.

In chapters 4 through 11, relating early human history, we also see the underlying threads of all human society for all time. Without doubt there was a real Cain, there was a genuine 40-day deluge, there was a solid gopherwood ark and there was an actual tower of babbling confusion. There is no need to question the historicity of these events, but they are recorded so as to teach us graphically the principles on which man has built his society and the inherent flaws in those principles.

History, as we know it, is the chronicle of man's progress from the use of the primitive ax to machine guns, napalm and nuclear explosions. It is the story of wars battles and the bloodshed of mankind. The key to this 20 centuries of dilemma actually lies in the story that took place at the dawn of history--the story of two brothers: Cain and Abel.

The focus of the story is in the two offerings which these brothers brought to God. It is clearly indicated that there was a prescribed time for the bringing of an offering and a prescribed place for the offering of it; but Abel's offering of a lamb is accepted and Cain's offering of grain is rejected. Surely the commentators are right in indicating that God's reason for rejecting Cain's offering was that it was a bloodless offering and, therefore, could not take away sins, for "without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). But it is not clear that Cain understood that.

What is clear is that Cain was angry at God's action, and when given opportunity to repent refused to do so. Thus, when later opportunity finds him in the field with his brother, Abel, Cain's jealousy takes over and the murderous ax rises and falls and Abel sinks to the ground with a smashed skull, murdered by his brother's hand. Thus the roots of human warfare are seen to lie in the jealous and envious spirit in the heart, in the unwillingness to forgive and forget and the ease with which we utter Cain's contemptuous words, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The blood of Abel cries from the ground for justice and God answers by cursing the ground in which Cain took such great pride and joy. Cain has lost his green thumb; the ground will no longer release its fruitfulness to him and he will therefore be forced to wander from place to place as the crops fail wherever he goes. To protect Cain from excess punishment, God set a mark upon him. It is not a mark of shame, as many interpret it, but a mark of

grace by which God is saying, "This man is still my property; he is guilty, he is a murderer, but he is still mine, and don't forget it in your dealings with him."

EXPANSION OF CIVILIZATION

The next element we trace in Genesis is the beginnings of culture, or civilization, and especially the part city life plays in the shaping of human society. To Cain is born Enoch, who builds his city on ground that is yet red with the blood of Abel.

The city Enoch builds is certainly a most imposing one. Within it are found all the ingredients of modern life: travel, music and the arts, the use of metals, the organized political life, and the domestication of animals. These things look impressive, but they are all built on shaky ground. Polygamy appears with Lamech and his two wives. Violence and murder are justified on the grounds of self-defense. The state begins to replace the family as the focus of human interest. The trend toward urban over rural life is evident and increasing toleration of sexual excess appears.

But in the midst of this deterioration God has another plan ready. Adam knew his wife again and she bore a son and called his name Seth (which means appointed), and through Seth the redemptive work of God is traced in chapter 5 in a most remarkable sequence of names. There is difference among authorities as to the meaning of these names, but one authority gives an interesting sequence of meanings. *Seth*, as we have seen, means "appointed" *Enoch*, his son, means "mortal," and his son, *Kenan* means "sorrow." His son, *Mahalalel*, means "the blessed God"; he names his boy, *Jared*, which means "came down," and his boy, *Enoch*, means "teaching." *Methuselah*, the son of Enoch, means "his death shall bring"; *Lamech*, Methuselah's son, means "strength," and *Noah*, the end of the line, means "comfort."

When this is all put together, it tells the story of grace: It is appointed that mortal man shall sorrow, but the blessed God came down teaching that His death shall bring strength and comfort. The focus of the chapter is Enoch who learned to walk with God. Thus, a brilliant but wicked age ends with a single man having learned to walk in fellowship with God in the midst of a godless and violent generation.

Who are the "sons of God" who are mentioned in Genesis 6 as coming in and marrying the daughters of men and producing a race of giants? Of many explanations, the best seems to be that of Jude who suggests that these are angels who "abandoned their proper abode" (rude 6) and, presumably, took up improper dwelling places. Human bodies in Scripture are called dwelling places. This would then imply that fallen angels (evil spirits) possess the bodies of men and these demon-possessed men married women and produced a race of strange beings called the *Nephilim*. The word means "the fallen ones," and thus explains the race of giants which are frequently referred to in mythical accounts as half men and half gods. But God immediately sets a limit to their existence of 120 years during which time Noah became a preacher of righteousness. Thus, the first mark of an imminent collapse of civilization is the appearance of demonic powers which manifest themselves in open and unchecked violence. The outward wickedness rests upon a deeper corruption within--"every intent of the thoughts of his heart" (Gen. 6:5). Thus, demonic control, outward violence and inward corruption become the marks of a civilization so decayed it can no longer be tolerated.

God announces to Noah that He intends to judge the world and commands Noah to build an ark of safety which will be his means of deliverance from the coming catastrophe. When the ark is completed, Noah is invited to enter it with all his family, bringing also two of every kind of animal and seven of clean beasts. Noah demonstrated his faith by entering the ark in obedience to the word of God against the ridicule and contempt of his age.

The distinction between clean and unclean animals is an artificial distinction drawn in order to teach men a needed truth. As soon as the lesson was clearly evident in the work of Christ, the distinction disappeared. By certain functions of animals that were designated as clean, corresponding spiritual qualities which God loves are indicated; while the absence of those functions in unclean animals is intended to teach that God disapproves of their corresponding character in the lives of men. -So the flood comes with the fountains of the great deep bursting forth and the windows of the heavens opening. The whole earth is covered to the tops of the mountains and all life

perishes except the handful of humans in the ark and those marine animals which could survive in the waters. The rain continues for 40 days and nights and then ceases. At the end of 150 days the waters begin to abate and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month, the ark comes to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

This seventeenth day of the seventh month is the same exact day of the year when, centuries later, Jesus rose from the dead. After the exodus from Egypt God changed - the beginning of the year from the seventh month (in the fall) to the first month (in the spring) when the Passover was eaten. Jesus rose on the seventeenth day of the first month, which would be the same as the seventeenth day of the seventh month in the old reckoning in this passage in Genesis. Thus, clearly, the emergence of Noah from the ark is intended to be a picture of the new beginning of life which every Christian experiences when he enters into the resurrection life of Jesus Christ by the new birth.

GOD'S INTERVENTION

Chapter 9 of Genesis records one of the major covenants of the Bible--a covenant made with Noah, but beyond Noah with all humanity. This covenant is the basis for all human government today. It contains God's provision for the ordering of human life.

First, nature is made to be dependable, secured by the promise of the rainbow from universal catastrophe. Then man's rule over the animal world through fear is disclosed and animals are given to man as food along with plant life

Next, human life is seen to be so sacred that only God has the right to take it, but He uses the state as His instrument and a foundation is thus laid for police work and capital punishment. Once again, the command is given to multiply and populate the earth. All this is to be lived under the constant reminder that "the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21).

The strange story of the drunkenness of Noah and the curious action of his son, Ham, toward his father, followed by the cursing of Canaan and the blessing of Shem and Japheth contain much of great significance. Many scholars feel that Ham committed some homosexual act; at the very least it is clear that Ham looked upon his father in his exposed condition with a leering glance that had sexual connotations.

It is also noteworthy that Shem and Japheth would have nothing to do with their brother's lewd delight. They exemplify in action the verse in the New Testament, "Love covers a multitude of sins" (I Pet. 4:8). 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. If this is the case, then Noah knew that Ham's tolerance of perversion would break out in an intensified form in at least one of his children.

Thus, guided by divine wisdom, Noah unerringly selects the one boy of Ham's four sons in whom this perversion will find outlet and expression. So a curse is pronounced upon Canaan. That curse is not a black skin as many have mistakenly stated, but a tendency toward homosexuality which was clearly evident in the Canaanite tribes that inhabited the land of Palestine when Israel came into it, and which has broken out in human society in many places since.

In the prophetic words uttered by Noah concerning his sons, we have a key to the dispersion of mankind throughout the earth. Shem is given religious primacy and the Semitic people are responsible under God to meet the spiritual needs of mankind. It is most striking that the three great religions of earth all come from the Semitic family: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

Japheth was promised enlargement and the Japhetic people are in general the peoples of India and Europe. It is largely from this family that Americans come and 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 of Asia are of the same stock.

Ham is given the role of a servant in relation to the other families of earth, but not in the sense of enslavement. The

sons of Ham fulfill a servant relationship as the practical technicians of humanity. The Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Mayans, the Aztecs all were Hamitic people, and they are the great inventors of mankind.

In chapter 10 God narrows the flow of history down to the Semitic races. In chapter 11 He will narrow 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. We have, then, in these two chapters one of the most important links in understanding the Bible.

The atmosphere of this time 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. One branch of the Hamitic family settled in the land of Shinar or Babylonia. They soon discovered they could invent their own materials for building and they were fired with desire to build two things--a city and a tower. A city reflects the need of man for social intercourse where the hungers of the soul can be satisfied for beauty, art, music commercial and business life. A tower, on the other hand reflects the need to satisfy the spirit of man.

Archeologists have now found that the Babylonians built great towers called ziggurats which were built in a circular fashion with an ascending spiral staircase terminating in a shrine at the top around which were written signs of the zodiac. Obviously, such a tower IS a religious building. Unquestionably there was a plaque somewhere attached to each which carried the pious words "Erected in the year 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. This is revealed in what the builders said, "Let us make a name for ourselves."

The reaction of God is one of exquisite irony. God takes note of their unity and their creativity and comes to a startling conclusion, "Nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible to them." Thus, for man's sake, to keep him from destroying himself by ignorant ambition, God confused their language and man is scattered over the face of the earth. 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.

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Two

The Need of Mankind: Genesis 12-50

Imaginative writers of our day seek continually to depict what kind of world this would be after an atomic holocaust had completely wiped out all life as we know it. What would it be like to be the first people to start out in such a world? Noah and his family knew, for that is exactly what happened after the flood.

Physically and materially they began again to fulfill the original divine command to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." Spiritually, having been on both sides of the flood, Noah becomes a picture of regeneration. He went through the waters of judgment, being preserved in the ark, and came out into a new world and a new life, as a Christian passes from death into life in Christ.

Genesis 12--50 traces three great truths that belong to this new life. In the lives of four men--Abraham, Isaac,

Jacob and Joseph, Genesis reveals what man is always seeking:

Righteousness, the sense of being right. Man dislikes the feeling of guilt or unrighteousness and wants always to be seen as acceptable by whatever standard he views as relevant. We see the fulfillment of this need in the life of Abraham.

Peace, a sense of inner well-being. Man is ever seeking a certain calmness and inner confidence which can only be described as peace. The story of Isaac and Jacob, who portray sonship and sanctification, are in themselves the secret of peace of heart.

Joy, a sense of gladness and happiness out of life. This is so evident as to require no documentation other than life itself. Joseph manifested the truth of glorification.

These three virtues are the unseen, almost unconscious goals of life everywhere. But where are they truly to be found? Romans 14:17 says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Only God can impart these things to men, and this is the story of the rest of Genesis.

MAN SEEKS RIGHTEOUSNESS (Gen. 12-25)

Abram appears first as called by God to exemplify in his entire life story the process of achieving righteousness by means of faith, or as the New Testament calls it, "justification by faith."

God appeared and conversed with Abram on seven occasions, beginning with Abram's call in Ur and ending with his offering of his son Isaac in obedience to God's command. Out of this relationship with God Abram learned eight lessons of faith. The parallel to all these is found in the life of every believer today. For this reason, Abraham is known as the father of the faithful and is called "the friend of God." He depicts forever the friendship which God desires to have in intimate communion with everyone who is made righteous by faith.

The first lesson faith must learn is that of obedience. It is not faith to simply say "I believe"; it is necessary also to add "I obey." In his first encounter with God, Abram is sent out on a march without a map to an unknown destination, but with the promise that God will go with him and show him the way. The promise includes seven specifics: (1) I will make of you a great nation; (2) I will bless you; (3) I will make your name great; (4) you shall be a blessing; (5) I will bless those that bless you; (6) I will curse them that curse you; (7) in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Though Abram was 75 years of age when this call came to him, his obedience was immediate. He left Ur and went to Haran where his father Terah lived. There, after his father's death, he came into the land of Canaan in obedience to the call of God. The spiritual parallel of this in today's believer is found in a willingness to turn from the natural claims of family and friends, and to recognize the right of God to lead and direct his life.

In the land of Canaan God appears to Abram for the second time. He promises to give the land to Abram's seed, despite its present possession by the Canaanite tribes. Abram's life in the land is immediately characterized by two meaningful symbols: a tent and an altar. Whenever Abram is walking in faith these two symbols are always present. The tent is the symbol of the pilgrim character of his existence. He is never to own the land outright but is to be a sojourner in it, looking for that "city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10). The altar is the symbol of fellowship and communion with a living God. It is the secret of the ability to endure in a land possessed by enemies. Every believer must have such an altar, a personal time alone with God, for Bible reading and prayer, that he might endure in a hostile world.

The second lesson Abram learns in the life of faith is that of the sufficiency of faith to meet all human need. Abram's faith was tested by a famine in the land. He trusted God enough not to return to the land of Haran, but he does attempt to flee the famine by going down to Egypt. During his time in Egypt, there is no record of either the tent or the altar. His weak faith led Abram to resort to a lie to defend his wife's honor and finds himself a recipient of Pharaoh's rebuke (see Gen. 12:1-19). Thus, through failure, Abram learns the necessary truth: God is able to supply his need, even in the midst of pressure and circumstantial difficulty. Humbled and repentant, Abram

returns to the land and once again the tent and the altar appear.

Abram's third lesson of faith is that of humility, to learn to take second place. Abram and his nephew, Lot, illustrate different principles of Christian living: Abram was following God; Lot was following Abram--he was a tag-along believer. When a dispute arose between the herdsmen of the two men over the use of the land, even though Abram was the older and had the God-given right of first choice, he exhibited the humility of faith and allowed Lot to choose first. Lot chose his land on the basis of human measurements and ended up in Sodom. However, even though he obtained, he did not truly possess the land, because God gave Abram all the land, including that which Lot had chosen for himself (Gen. 13:14-18). In this lesson of Abram's we see that God's children are called to risk the obedience of faith, believing that God will take care of them even though they apparently are giving up their rights.

Abram's fourth lesson was to exhibit the boldness of faith. Chapter 14 records the historic invasion of the valley of the Dead Sea by the five united kings from the east. Lot was captured and, through this, Abram learned this fourth lesson. Though greatly outnumbered, Abram gathers his servants about him and with a company of 318 he pursues the united armies as far north as Dan and overcomes them in a great battle.

On his triumphant return he is met by Melchizedek at the King's Vale (now known as the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem). Melchizedek appears as the type of an eternal priesthood, to strengthen Abram to meet the most subtle encounter of his career so far: the offer of the king of Sodom to make him rich. Strengthened by the bread and wine which Melchizedek gave him (forerunner of the Lord's Table established centuries later), Abram refuses to be made rich except by God Himself, thus manifesting the fifth quality of faith.

Faith is independent of all natural resources. Chapter 15 is the account of the fourth direct appearance of Jehovah to Abram. Abram had now passed through several testings of his faith and the divine voice declares that He is Abram's shield (for his protection) and his exceeding great reward (as Abram's ultimate resource). Abram's intimacy with God had grown to the point where he can now share the temptation to doubt that was in his heart. God's response is to promise him an heir from whom would come a progeny as numerous as the stars of the sky.

Despite his age Abram believed in the promise of a coming son and for the first time in Scripture we read the great sentence, "his faith was reckoned to him for righteousness" (see Gen. 15:6). Abram is now the friend of God, not by his own merit but on the basis of his faith. Jehovah renews the promise of the land as Abram's inheritance and confirms it with a sign at Abram's request. The sign is a vision of a smoking furnace and a lamp indicating the furnace of affliction Abram's descendants would go through in Egypt before the land was granted to them. Here Abram begins to learn the sixth quality of faith.

Faith endures and has patience. Chapter 16 is the account of Abram's second major deflection from faith. After 12 years of waiting for God to fulfill His promise of a son, Sarai and Abram resort to a human expediency to help God along. Hagar, Sarai's maid, is given to Abram as a wife and from her is born Ishmael. No tent or altar appears in this chapter and Abram reaps the harvest of his folly by continual strife between Sarai and Hagar and the eventual exclusion of Hagar from the household. Thus the man of faith of chapter 15 becomes the man of flesh of chapter 16 and the far-reaching result visible today is the strife between the Arabs (of Ishmael) and Israel (of Isaac). Yet God tenderly cares for Hagar and sends her back to her mistress with a promise of divine support.

God then appears to Abram for a fifth time and an everlasting covenant is made, symbolized by the change of names from Abram to Abraham and from Sarai to Sarah. This is clearly what the New Testament calls "the new covenant," by which God undertakes Himself to be the total resource of the believer for daily activity. This is confirmed by a new revelation of God's name, that of El Shaddai, which means "the God who is sufficient." The sign of this new covenant is that of circumcision, which involves the cutting off of the flesh. It was the outward sign of an invisible inward truth. Abraham's faith falters slightly in seeking to bring Ishmael before God for blessing, but Jehovah patiently explains that he cannot be the heir of the promises since his birth does not rest upon faith, as does Isaac's. (The apostle Paul will base a great argument upon this difference in the letter to the Galatians 3:15-18)

The next chapter records the sixth appearance of God to Abraham, during which God announces the imminent birth of the promised son, and reveals to Abraham His plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. The encounter grows out of Abraham's warm hospitality toward three strangers who appear to him as he sits in the door of his tent. As he shows them hospitality there gradually dawns upon him the realization that it is the Lord Himself who thus comes, accompanied by two angels.

Sarah, listening behind the tent door, hears the announcement that she would bear a son within a year. She laughed when she heard it. But God graciously meets her with a divine revelation upon which her faith may seize and rest. He asks the question, "Is there anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14). Sarah doubtless meditated on that for the intervening months, and by the time her son was born she was strong in faith, even as Abraham her husband.

Then Jehovah reveals to Abraham, His friend, the second purpose of His coming, that of the imminent destruction of the cities of the plain for their extreme wickedness and unbelief. This introduces a most helpful manifestation of the authority of faith, exercised in prayer by Abraham out of concern for Lot and his family and the inhabitants of Sodom. With obvious reverence Abraham intercedes with God on behalf of the doomed cities. This intercession is based upon Abraham's awareness of the character of God: " Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (v. 25). It would be a mistake to view Abraham's prayers as reflecting more mercy than does God. We learn from the New Testament that it is the Spirit of God who prays within the believer, urging him to the specific requests that are made. Thus it is God's mercy, expressed through Abraham's prayers, that limits and tempers the Justice and wrath of God. The sequel shows that God goes beyond anything we ask. Abraham stopped at ten righteous persons, but God saved the two or three in whom there was any recognition of Himself.

Chapter 19 records in vivid detail the sequel of the two angels' visit to Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot himself is righteous, as the New Testament makes clear, but his righteousness has been compromised by his conformity to much of Sodom's ways and he finds himself unable to influence his city, even his own family, toward righteousness. The homosexuality practiced in Sodom reflects the curse of Canaan upon these Canaanite tribes, and the ugly story of Lot and his incest with his daughters reveals the degree to which such practices may pervert those who maintain only an external pattern of righteousness.

Again, for the third time, we see a weakness in Abraham's faith (Gen. 20). Surrounded by the men of Gerar (who afterward were known as the Philistines) Abraham again lies concerning his wife Sarah. Once again the man of faith is censured by the man of the world as Abimelech, the heathen king, rebukes him for his lack of complete honesty. These deflections in Abraham's faith are never in the great things but in the smaller details of his life. Clearly they illustrate for us the danger we face in matters where we feel no compulsion to act in confidence and trust in the living God.

At long last Sarah's laugh of incredulity is turned into the laughter of realization. As Isaac, the child of promise grows, conflict breaks out with the son of bondage, Ishmael. Eventually Abraham must make a choice between the two and in simple obedience he sent forth the child and the bondswoman, and leaned back on the gracious provision of God to fulfill His promise.

Chapter 22 records the last great lesson of faith, the intimacy of faith. In this chapter we also find the seventh and last appearance of Jehovah to Abraham. A gap of perhaps 20 years is evident between chapters 21 and 22. Isaac has grown to young manhood and, as the pride of his father's heart, God asks that he be offered up as a sacrifice to Him whom Abraham serves. It is Abraham's greatest test and must have proved a stunning and desolating trial to him. But faith enables him to triumph as he rests upon the character of God and feels that God is able even to raise the young man from death. Thus, as Hebrews (11:17-19) tells us, in a figure of resurrection Abraham received his son back from the dead. It is most striking that, according to biblical scholars, the mountain on which Isaac was offered is the same mountain upon which the Temple was later built and upon whose summit, many centuries later, Jesus Himself was offered as the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world.

This last experience ended the testing of Abraham's faith. He had learned his faith lessons and there are no more

failures of faith on his part. The testing however is followed by the repetition of God's great promises to Abraham, with the addition of a promised seed, as numerous as the sands of the seashore (22:17). It is clear from this that Abraham is to have two lines of descendants: a heavenly line, symbolized by the stars of the heavens; and an earthly line, symbolized by the sands of the seashore. Thus the writer of Hebrews will later reflect upon a heavenly Jerusalem which is above, and an earthly Jerusalem which is below. Those who by faith are the children of Abraham, whether Jew or Gentile, are of the heavenly seed. Those who belong to the earthly Jerusalem are the physical descendants of Abraham, the Semitic nations of today (see Rom. 4:9-16; 9:6-8).

Chapters 23 through 25 record the death of Sarah and Abraham's sorrow at her passing. For her burial Abraham purchases the cave of Machpelah from the Hittites. Thus Abraham's first actual possession in the land is a grave.

In the story of Abraham's servant, Eliezer, sent to find a bride for Isaac, we have a beautiful Eastern idyll, picturing in accurate terms the sending of the Holy Spirit from the Father to seek the church as a bride for His own dear Son. Running throughout the account is the theme of the sovereign call 'of God. This alone accounts for Rebecca's willingness to leave her home and family to join a man she has never seen, in a land to which she has never been before. She finds Isaac waiting for her, meditating in the fields at evening time. Abraham's faith is rewarded by seeing the union of his son with a woman of his own kindred, who, though they are of two different temperaments, would walk together in the fulfillment of the divine purpose.

The final years of Abraham's life are gathered up for us in chapter 25, following his marriage to Keturah. From this union there came six more sons who also fathered tribes that later appear in the record of Israel. They form no part of the heirs of the promises made to Isaac, but are nevertheless given, by God's grace a place to dwell and made to flourish as nations.

Finally, at the age of 175 Abraham dies and is buried by his two sons Isaac and Ishmael in the cave of Machpelah, beside Sarah his beloved wife. Throughout the rest of the Bible, the figure of Abraham looms as preeminently the man of faith. By his experiences with God, and even by his failures, he has been taught the ingredients of righteousness which come by faith alone. These, as we have seen, may be summarized as: the obedience of faith, the sufficiency of faith, the humility of faith, the boldness of faith, the independence of faith, the authority of faith, and finally, in the sacrifice of Isaac, the intimacy of faith.

MAN SEEKS PEACE

Isaac symbolizes the condition of those who are the sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ. He dwells in the land in the midst of God's blessing and is refreshed by a continual supply of water in the wells that he digs in various locations, despite the opposition of his enemies. This truly depicts one who has found peace.

There is another aspect to Isaac: the principle of sonship. While his father was alive Isaac was the darling of his father's heart, and after Abraham's death he becomes the heir of the promises to Abraham and of the blessings of God. But Isaac's sonship also reflects the weaknesses of his father. For in the land of Gerar he repeats his father's sin: he lies about his wife Rebekah. Abimelech--not a proper name but the title of the kings of the Philistines--was the man of the world who rebuked Isaac.

As the heir of the promises, Isaac is given authority to pass these along to his posterity. When he was an old man, nearing the end of his life, he called his sons before him to give them his blessing. Before his twin sons, Jacob and Esau, were born, God told their mother Rebekah that the elder would serve the younger. Even though Isaac must have been aware of this prediction, when the sons appeared for their blessing Isaac sought to reverse the divine command. He intended to give the greater blessing to Esau, the firstborn.

Through a series of deceptions, masterminded by Rebekah, Jacob appears before his blind father in the guise of Esau, and receives the blessing of the firstborn. When Isaac found out that he had been tricked, he dares not alter the blessing he has pronounced. Instead he confirms to Esau the fact that he must serve his brother, but assigns to him the role of rebel and proud overthrower of his brother's yoke.

When Isaac died, the story centers on Jacob. Isaac has been a man of peace, quite content to enjoy his close relationship with his father and to experience his own spiritual relationship with God, distinct from those of Abraham or Jacob. He has learned how to pray and receive God's answer and to obey God's word and experience His blessing. In the brief record of his life we learn the secret of being a son and enjoying the inheritance of a great and glorious father.

Just as the life of Abraham vividly illustrates what is involved in the teaching of justification by faith, and that of Isaac, his son, portrays the meaning of sonship, so the life of Jacob describes and illustrates for us in exceedingly helpful ways the doctrine of sanctification by faith. Jacob's story is that of the struggle of two natures within him. His natural disposition was one of cunning and self-centered shrewdness. When he was born he emerged from the womb with his hand upon his brother Esau's heel and thus was given the name Jacob which means "heelcatcher" or "supplanter," one who seeks to take another's place. But Jacob had another bent within him which Esau, his twin brother, seemed totally to lack. Jacob had a hunger for spiritual relationships. He valued his brother's birthright which he took from him by trickery. He had a strong personal faith, was a hard worker and an intensely loving person. The story of Jacob, therefore, is the story of how God so dealt with a man of like passions with ourselves that He taught him how to rise above his lower nature and to become a man of God and a man of respect and dignity in his own generation.

Jacob's life can be seen in three clear stages. The first stage is his early years at home when he was basically a deceiver of others, living up to his name. In the second period of his life he learns what it is like to be deceived. Finally, Jacob learns to live as a man devoted to the word and will of God.

Jacob, the Deceiver

Esau, the older of Isaac's twin sons, was a man of the field, a skilled hunter, hairy and of ruddy complexion; he was also called *Edom*, which means red. Jacob, his brother, on the other hand, was a quiet lad and content to live in the tent around his mother. As the firstborn, Esau had the right to the blessing of Isaac, but God had told Rebekah that the "elder shall serve the younger." So Rebekah was determined that Jacob would receive the inheritance.

One day, in a moment of hunger, Esau traded his birthright to Jacob for a mess of pottage. The Bible said that "Esau despised his birthright." So when the time came for her sons to receive their father's blessing, Rebekah decided to make sure that Jacob would get the firstborn blessing. Isaac, old and blind, had sent Esau out to the field to hunt game "and prepare a savory dish" for his father. While he was gone, Rebekah told Jacob to dress in Esau's clothes. She covered his hands with hair. Then she prepared a savory stew of goat meat and sent Jacob to his father with the food. When Jacob entered his father's room he said, "I am Esau your first-born; Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me" (Gen. 27:19). Isaac was a little doubtful at first, but finally gave Jacob the blessing.

When Esau returned from the field, he also prepared a savory stew from the game he brought. He approached his father to receive the blessing. As Isaac learned of the deceit practiced upon him he fell into a violent fit of trembling, undoubtedly caused by his consciousness of the sovereign overriding of God. Isaac, aware of the divine prediction which he had sought to evade, gave Esau a lesser blessing.

Rebekah, fearing what Esau would do, convinced Isaac to send Jacob to Laban, her brother, to find a wife. Isaac sent Jacob off with his blessing.

Jacob, the Deceived

It was 600 miles from Jacob's home at Beersheba southwest of the Dead Sea, to Haran in Mesopotamia where Rebecca's family lived. Jacob spent his first night in lonely homesickness at a spot which he later named Bethel. There God appeared to Jacob in a dream of a ladder reaching up into heaven upon which angels ascended and descended. The ladder symbolized the continual communication open between him and God. This was followed by God's renewal of the promises which He made to Abraham, now extended and confirmed to Jacob. Thus

God's first step in the process of sanctifying Jacob was not to scold him or punish him or rebuke him, but rather to reveal to him His love and faithful concern. Jacob was shown that the way was open between himself and God and was given a promise upon which his faith could rest and which he could pass on to his descendants.

Jacob had thought he was alone and uncared for, but he found that God was with him, loving him and seeking to help him. In response, Jacob erected a great stone, anointing it with oil, and named the place Bethel--the house of God. To this place Jacob returned again and again, gaining from each visit a renewed awareness of God's faithful love and sure promise. So the sanctifying process in each believer today will consist of ~ returning again and again to the faithful promises of God and the reminders of His love and care for us.

The rather lengthy account in chapters 29 through 31 of Jacob's life in Haran is the story of God's loving discipline of a favorite son. It is a record of God's careful mingling of blessing and chastisement so that Jacob's spiritual fiber is toughened and strengthened while his heart is kept from discouragement by the love of Rachel, one of his wives, the fertility of Leah, another wife, the birth of sons, and by his growing prosperity even under the exacting hand of his uncle Laban. The scene when Jacob arrived at Haran and met Rachel beside the well is reminiscent of the story of Rebecca and the servant of Abraham many years before. Jacob fell in love with Rachel at first sight and, having been welcomed initially into Laban's family, felt that all was working out well for him, for he was promised his beloved Rachel for his wife after seven years of service to his uncle.

But Jacob must learn the harvest of deceit, and at the end of seven years he found himself tricked into marrying Leah, Laban's older daughter, instead. When Jacob protested, Laban offered to let him have Rachel for yet another seven years' servitude. So great was Jacob's love he consented to this as well. Fortunately for him, Rachel was given to him immediately and he had her love and companionship throughout the second seven years of service.

During this time a total of 11 sons were born to Jacob's wives and their handmaids who became his concubines. This was in accordance with the customs of the day and before the written law made such practices clearly wrong. When Rachel gave birth to a son after many years of barrenness she named him Joseph. At that point Jacob decided that the time had arrived when he should return to Canaan.

But God was not yet through with Jacob's training. He must again experience the deceitfulness of his uncle in the matter of obtaining flocks and herds to take on his journey. After 14 years of service Jacob had learned much of the need for straightforward honesty and integrity and so he offered to make a deal with his uncle. He would take only the speckled and spotted sheep and goats while Laban would retain all those who were totally white, which was certainly a predominance of the flock. To this Laban readily agreed but secretly separated the spotted and speckled sheep and goats and put them under his sons' care at a distance of three days' journey. Jacob was left with nothing but white sheep and goats. He resorted to what he felt would be a stratagem to overcome his uncle's deceit. He tried a method that we would consider an "old-wives-tale" to insure that he would have sheep and goats to take with him. What he did not know was that God, who understood the laws of genetics since He Himself had called them into being, was using the invisible, hereditary genes for color in the white sheep to produce offspring which were spotted and speckled. The result was a spectacular increase in Jacob's flocks.

At this point God appeared to Jacob again in a dream and commanded him to return to the land of promise. To escape from Laban's wiles Jacob left in the middle of the night with his wives, children and flocks, and though Laban pursued him and caught up with him, God intervened to keep him from harming Jacob any further. Instead Jacob and Laban made a covenant of peace with one another and Laban returned to his own home. Despite Jacob's suffering during all these 20 years there was no trace of bitterness in his attitude, but one of praise to God for His blessing. Jacob had grown spiritually in tremendous ways during the 20 years of his servitude, but he would reach his true potential only after he had wrestled with God and his human strength was broken completely.

Jacob, Man of God

As Jacob came to the ford of the river Jabbok he learned that his brother Esau was on his way to meet him with 400 armed men. Immediately his reaction was to resort again to wiles and stratagems of his own. He divided his household into two groups and planned to send them on before him to try to appease the wrath of Esau with gifts

before he must encounter him personally. While he waited alone, an angel in the form of a man, met him and began to wrestle with him through the long night. As the day broke the angel sought to disengage himself but Jacob clung with stubborn persistence. The angel touched Jacob's thigh and threw it out of joint; but still Jacob clung in helplessness to the divine messenger, refusing to let go until he was blessed of God. Then the divine being changed the name of Jacob to Israel which means "he who prevails with God." As the sun rose, Jacob limped off to meet Esau with a totally different attitude in his heart. He no longer feared man but was confident that God would fight his battles for him. When Esau arrived his own heart had been strangely altered and instead of attacking he fell upon Jacob's neck and embraced him. Thus Jacob learned the great principle of sanctification: that God was his strength and his refuge and is fully capable of working out all the problems with which he may be confronted.

As the result of an incident involving Jacob's daughter Dinah, God appeared again to Jacob and sent him back to Bethel to dwell there with a tent and an altar, as his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac had done before him. There God renewed His promises to Jacob and there Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel, gave birth to her second son Benjamin, and died in childbirth. Jacob traveled on to Mamre where he found his aged father on his deathbed and he and Esau joined together in burying Isaac with honor and reverence. The record then traces in one chapter (36) the extent of the sons of Esau and the nation of Edom which came from his loins. From here on, in Scripture, Jacob and Esau will forever stand for conflicting and opposite principles, the Spirit versus the flesh. The spotlight of Genesis now turns to Joseph and his sons.

MAN SEEKS JOY

With Joseph we come to the last of the four great patriarchs who symbolically present to us the great truths of redemption. To justification by faith, exemplified in Abraham; to sonship, shown in Isaac; and to sanctification, revealed in the life of Jacob; we now add the truth of glorification, set forth in the story of Joseph. He clearly appears as the forerunner, sent into Egypt to prepare the way for the coming of the 12 tribes into that land, and as such he pictures our great Forerunner who has gone on before us, even Jesus our Lord, to prepare the way for all His own to come into glory with Him and to share that glory together. In line with that emphasis, the character of Joseph is presented to us with almost unblemished consistency. He is often regarded as a type of Christ since he was beloved of his father but rejected by his brethren, sold into slavery for 20 pieces of silver, and, in the view of his father Jacob, died and eventually was brought to life again as a triumphant king instead of a suffering servant. Like our Lord he also forgave his brothers for their treatment of him and was used to save them from death and preserve the family line.

Beloved by His Father, Rejected by His Brothers

We have already learned that Joseph was born in Haran while Jacob was serving Laban, his uncle. In chapter 37 we discover him at the age of 17 working as a shepherd in his father's home in Hebron. Joseph was the obvious favorite of his father Jacob, who had bestowed on him a princely coat as a special mark of his favor. Therefore, he was the object of bitter hatred by his brothers. When, further, they learned that God had given Joseph two special dreams which predicted his elevation above his brothers, their hatred took a murderous form and they sought a way to kill him. Like his father Jacob, to whom God also spoke in dreams, Joseph seems to have had a special spiritual quality which God would greatly use in the years that lay ahead.

When Jacob's sons delayed returning from Shechem where they were feeding their flocks, Jacob sent Joseph the 50 miles from Hebron to Shechem to check on his brothers. Upon arriving at Shechem he found his brothers had departed for Dothan and he trudged on another 20 miles further north to find them there. Seeing him coming from afar, and recognizing the hated coat, his brothers plotted together to kill him, throw him into a pit, and tell his father that a wild beast had destroyed him. The oldest of the 12, Reuben, objected and persuaded them to leave him to die in a pit.

One can imagine the agony and fear of the 17-year-old boy who was thus roughly treated by his own brothers and tossed into a pit to die alone. While his brothers were in preparation for their journey home, they saw a caravan of

Ishmaelites traveling by and hit upon a scheme to sell Joseph to them as a slave, but to tell their father that he had been killed.

Sold for 20 Pieces of Silver

Thus for 20 pieces of silver they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites. Then they brought his coat, dipped in goat's blood back to their father with the report that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. Once again, Jacob who had deceived his own father Isaac, is now most truly deceived by his sons. But God's strange purposes were at work to bring about a quite different turn of events.

Chapter 38 records an incident to show why God found it necessary to remove the chosen family into Egypt for a period of time. Judah the fourth son of Jacob married a Canaanite woman. Their marriage led to a series of events that indicates the degradation of Canaan. To prevent them from being absorbed by a heathen culture God was moving in ways that would eventually put the family out of Canaan.

Meanwhile, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, an officer in the army of Egypt. The excellence of Joseph's character soon elevated him to a place of trust and responsibility and he was put over all of Potiphar's household. Surely he must have felt that the prediction of his dream was soon to come to pass. But a loving heavenly Father saw his need for being made perfect through suffering (see Heb. 2:10) and events quickly took another turn.

Because Joseph was handsome and good-looking, Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him. Joseph resisted until one day she found him alone and lay hold of his garment, attempting to drag him into her bed. Crying out, "How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9), Joseph fled from her presence leaving his garment behind.

Potiphar's wife reported the incident to her husband as though Joseph had attempted to assault her. Potiphar cast Joseph into prison. In all this there is no hint of bitterness or resentment on Joseph's part, but a quiet trust that God was working His way. Joseph's kindness and skill soon won him a position as trusty over the other prisoners, because "the Lord was with Joseph." Whatever he did the Lord made it to prosper.

Once again, dreams play a large part in Joseph's story. This time Pharaoh's butler and baker, who were cast into prison, were the dreamers, and Joseph was the interpreter. The dreams were fulfilled as Joseph said. The baker went to his death and the butler was restored to Pharaoh's household, but soon forgot his promise to remember Joseph when he was released. But another dream got Joseph out of prison two years later.

From Suffering Servant to Triumphant King

Pharaoh had a dream. He commanded his seers to interpret the dream for him. When they could not the chief butler remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh of his interpretative skill. Joseph was hastily hauled from the dungeon and brought before Pharaoh. There he interpreted Pharaoh's dream, predicting the seven years of good harvest followed by seven years of drought and famine. Pharaoh, impressed not only by Joseph's interpretative skills, but also by the wisdom with which he suggested ways to meet the coming crises, put his signet ring upon Joseph's hand, arrayed him in garments of fine linen, put a gold chain about his neck and made him at the age of 30 years the second ruler in all the kingdom. Thus the stage was set for the coming of Jacob and his sons down to the land of Egypt.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch in Canaan, Jacob and his sons were experiencing terrible famine which settled upon the land. Jacob sent all his sons but the youngest, Benjamin, into Egypt to buy grain for their cattle. When the brothers came before Joseph he recognized them immediately, but did not reveal his knowledge. Instead he treated them roughly and accused them as spies come into the land. When they protested he ordered that they leave one of the brothers behind as a hostage and return to Canaan and bring back Benjamin, the youngest, as proof of their integrity. In discussing this among themselves, Reuben, the eldest, reminded them that this was a divine retribution for their treatment of Joseph many years earlier. Simeon, the second oldest, remained behind and the brothers returned to Canaan. Jacob at first was adamant that he would not let Benjamin leave. But the famine

forced him to relent.

Upon reaching Egypt, Joseph entertained the brothers in his own home, much to their bafflement and uncertainty. When they left he commanded that the money they used to buy the grain be put back in their bags, and his own private cup be hidden in Benjamin's bag. A short way out from the city he sent his servants after them who accused them of stealing the cup. Protesting their innocence they vowed that the man in whose bag the cup should be found would immediately be put to death. But when the cup was found in Benjamin's bag they were overcome with sorrow and were brought back to Joseph's presence.

There, in a most moving plea, Judah privately recited the whole story in Joseph's ear and begged of him that Joseph would permit Judah to remain as hostage and let Benjamin go. Upon hearing this Joseph could not control himself any longer, and ordering all the Egyptians from the room, in a most moving scene he made himself known to his brothers. Upon Pharaoh's command the brothers returned to Canaan with the good news, and at last Jacob was persuaded to come with them into Egypt. Once again God appeared to Jacob in a vision of the night and reassured him that it was right for him to go into Egypt, for there He promised to make of his sons a great nation and to bring them again to the land of Canaan.

The remainder of the story is quickly told. The Israelites settled in the land of Goshen with Pharaoh's permission and became the herdsmen and keeper of Pharaoh's cattle. As the famine continued, the Egyptians sold first their cattle and then their land to Pharaoh, and at the end of the drought Joseph gave them seed to plant their land and retained the fifth part for Pharaoh's possession.

As the aged Jacob neared his death, Joseph brought his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim before him to be blessed of him. Joseph stood Manasseh, the older one, at Jacob's right hand and Ephraim, the younger, at Jacob's left hand, but when the old patriarch, sitting on the side of his bed, blessed them he crossed his hands so that the blessing of the firstborn fell upon Ephraim the younger and Manasseh, the elder, was given the secondary blessing. Once again the right of the firstborn was withheld from the one born first, and, by means of a cross, was transferred to the younger son. It was God's reminder that the right of the firstborn, which belonged to Adam, was now transferred to the last Adam (Jesus) that He might be "the firstborn of all creation."

In a great predictive chapter, Jacob called his sons before him and in poetic style foretold their destinies. When he had finished charging his sons "he drew up his feet into the bed, and breathed his last."

The final chapter recounts how Joseph brought the body of his father, in a great procession, up to the land of Canaan and buried him with Abraham in the cave of Machpelah. Joseph then returned to Egypt where he lived till the age of 110 and himself died, having made his brothers swear that they would bring his bones into Canaan when at last God brought the nation out of Egypt into the Promised Land (see Exod. 13:19).

Thus Genesis, which began with the creation of the heavens and the earth, ends in a coffin in Egypt. But behind the sad reality there bums the bright promise of El Shaddai, the God who is sufficient to bring about the fulfillment of all His promises by means of the process of justification, adoption, sanctification, and ultimately, glory.

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Three

God's Answer To Man's Need: Exodus

As we have already abundantly seen, Genesis is the book that reveals the need of mankind. It is all about man--the creation of man, the sin of man, the world in which he is placed, and his slow journey through time groping after God. Its very last phrase, "a coffin in Egypt," is a revelation that the most you can say about man when you have said all there is to say is that he lives in the realm of death.

But Exodus is all about God. Exodus is God's answer to man's need. God's supply for man's sin. It commences immediately with God's activity in the preservation and call of Moses, and throughout the whole of the book we will see God mightily at work. The theme of the book is redemption, God's activity to restore man from his sin his degradation and misery. It contains many instructive lessons for us, especially what constitutes redemption in our own lives. We shall understand what God is doing with us when we see what He did with Israel in the book of Exodus.

The book centers around four great events which are easy to keep in mind for they focus on four experiences in the lives of the people of God in any age.

The first event is *the Passover*, chapters 1-14, which climaxes in that great event. The second significant event is *the crossing of the Red Sea*, described for us in chapter 14. The third great event is *the giving of the Law* at Sinai, chapters 19 and 20. The fourth event is *the construction of the Tabernacle* and its accompanying regulations for the camp of Israel.

The first two events relate closely to each other. The Passover and Red Sea are but two aspects of one great truth: the deliverance of God's people from the bondage of Egypt. They portray in Christian experience one great truth which we call conversion or regeneration--the deliverance of an individual from the bondage of the world. If you want to understand what God did with you when you became a Christian, study the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea.

The other two events likewise tie together. The giving of the Law and the construction of the Tabernacle are absolutely inseparable. The pattern of the Tabernacle was given by God to Moses on the mountain at the same time that the Law was given, and we must understand from this book why these two are inextricably linked together. We shall do so as we move into this study. The Law requires the Tabernacle and the Tabernacle exists because of the Law.

OBSERVING THE PASSOVER

When man wants to change history he usually uses a battle or a ballot, but when God wants to change history He begins with sending a baby.

The opening chapter informs us that a new king had arisen over Egypt who did not know Joseph--Exodus opens some 300 years after the close of Genesis. The original 70 Israelites had multiplied to a great multitude of nearly two million. The new Pharaoh greatly feared the power of this developing nation in Egypt, and gave orders that all male Hebrew children should be cast into the river at birth. Against this dark background, Moses was born.

The story of his first 80 years is given to us in one brief chapter (chap. 2). In a delicate twist of irony that is wonderful to observe, God moved in such a way that despite the decree of Pharaoh to put all Hebrew male babies to death, Moses was not only saved but Pharaoh hired Moses' own mother to care for her baby. This is surely one of many delightful manifestations of the humor of God.

Moses was reared in the court of Pharaoh and had access to all the learning of the Egyptians. As Stephen will tell us many centuries later (see Acts 7:17-22), Moses was trained in the best university of the biggest empire of the world in that day. He was the foster son of the Pharaoh and every privilege and every advantage were his.

But when Moses came of age, he realized, evidently from his mother's instruction, that he was destined to be the

one who would deliver Israel from the bondage of the Egyptians. He attempted this in his own wisdom and tended up murdering a man and having to flee into the wilderness to escape the justice of Pharaoh. There in the wilderness of Midian he spent the next 40 years herding sheep for his father-in-law, Jethro. What a sense of failure and humiliation Moses must have had! All his dreams of glory fading away, he saw nothing in the future but the life of a shepherd in a barren desert. But all this was necessary in God's disciplinary training of his faithful servant. What Moses could not learn in Egypt, he must learn in the quietude of the desert. In Egypt he had learned the wisdom of man; in the desert he was to learn the wisdom of God.

It was here that God appeared to Moses in the remarkable confrontation of the burning bush. That bush was to become a symbol of Moses' own life. As the bush burned with great brilliance and power yet was not consumed, so Moses would become a man of tremendous power so that when he died at the age of 130 years "his eye was not dim nor his vigor abated" (Deut. 34:7). The power was not from Moses but from God.

Moses' response to God's call was to doubt himself. "Who am I?" he cried out (Exod. 3: 11).

To this God replied, "I will be with you."

Again Moses doubted, based on his awareness of his ignorance of God. "What do I know about you?" is the essence of his query.

The answer was the reminder of the meaning of the divine name, "I AM WHO I AM." In its full intent, this is the name, the Lord "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty," as found in Revelation 1:8.

Yet again Moses doubted, and this time his doubt is based upon the people of Israel. "What if they will not believe me, or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you'" (Exod. 4:1). God understood this fear and granted him three signs: the rod which could become a serpent; the hand which could become leprous and cleansed; water which could become blood on the land.

All Moses' fear had been met by the revelation of the grace and power of God, but still Moses doubted and retreated to his first argument, asking that someone else be sent in his place. At this the Lord became angry, for Moses in effect was saying, "I can't do this and I don't think you can do it either." God answered Moses' faltering faith by giving him Aaron as a mouthpiece. Here, as in many other instances in the Bible, God accommodated Himself to man's unbelief and yet at a cost of sorrow to that man's own heart, for Aaron proved to be an unreliable companion in times of crisis.

A further flaw in Moses' obedience is dealt with when at a lodging place in route to Midian the Lord met Moses and sought to kill him. For some unrecorded reason (probably due to the opposition of his Gentile wife) Moses had failed to carry out the divine instructions concerning circumcision. The circumcision rite being taken care of, Moses and Aaron met the people of Israel, performed the signs God had given them, and were encouraged by the reception and obedience of the people.

In chapters 5-11 is found the record of Moses and Aaron's confrontation with a repeatedly obdurate and stubborn Pharaoh, and God's breaking of his power by the presentation of nine miraculous plagues. This is a most dramatic encounter, and the drama is clearly designed to reveal the redemptive power of God against the satanic power personified in Pharaoh.

Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh and demanded in the name of the God of Israel that Pharaoh let God's people go. As predicted, Pharaoh defiantly refused, and actually increased the burden of the people by requiring that bricks be made of straw which the people must themselves supply. Jehovah encouraged Moses by reminding him of His promises of judgment until the Egyptians should know that He is the Lord. Subsequently, in the king's presence, the sign of the rod was employed; but when Aaron's rod became a serpent and swallowed up the rods of the Egyptian magicians who performed the same feat, Pharaoh's heart was still unmoved. These miracles by Egyptian magicians were undoubtedly manifestations of evil powers such as those manifest today in occultism.

Then began the series of nine plagues, to be culminated in a tenth, the death of the firstborn of the land and the celebration of the first Passover. The plagues came in series of three and were all directed against the gods of the Egyptians. The first plague was that of fuming the water of the Nile River into blood so that the fish died and the Egyptians found little water to drink. Before the second plague Pharaoh was given opportunity to repent, but hardened his heart instead, and the land was filled with the frogs of the second plague. The Egyptian magicians had imitated both the first and second plagues, but when the third plague struck, with gnats covering the land on both man and beast, the magicians confessed their inability to imitate and declared it to be the finger of God.

Again Pharaoh hardened his heart, and so the judgment of God continued and we have the first of the second cycle of plagues. Swarms of flies filled all the houses excepting in the land of Goshen where the people of Israel dwelt. Thus Pharaoh was to be impressed by the immunity of Israel, that they are truly the people of God.

Pharaoh attempted to compromise by suggesting the people sacrifice in the land of Egypt, but Moses would have none of this. Pharaoh then seemed to give way, declaring his willingness to let them go, but not far away. At this sign of fuming on Pharaoh's part, divine mercy fumed toward him and the flies were removed from the land. But Pharaoh broke faith and again God warned him, and the next day sent the second plague of the second cycle. All the cattle of the Egyptians died, but none of the cattle of the people of Israel died. Still Pharaoh was unrelenting; so without warning, the sixth plague struck. Ashes which Moses and Aaron tossed into the air became boils on the Egyptians, both man and beast throughout the kingdom.

The third cycle of three plagues began with hail. In the midst of a terrible thunder and lightning storm, heavy globes of hail struck down everything in the land of Egypt, sparing the land of Goshen. When Pharaoh seemed to repent the hail ceased, but again we are told Pharaoh callused his own heart and God responded by hardening His own. Pharaoh attempted another compromise but Moses rejected it and called for the plague of locusts to cover the land. Pharaoh was now beyond reason and God did not reason with him. Instead He sent a ninth plague, a terrible darkness to be felt throughout the land of Egypt for three days. In the midst of the darkness Pharaoh made his fourth and last attempt at compromise by suggesting the cattle be left behind. When Moses refused, Pharaoh said he did not want to see his face again.

Chapter 11 describes the conversation between Jehovah and Moses in which the final plague, the death of the firstborn throughout Egypt, is predicted and Israel is commanded to ask of the Egyptians gold and silver and jewels that they might leave with abundance when the hour strikes. This brings us to the central act in the redemptive program of God, the feast of the Passover. Jehovah now made this the beginning of the year and gave detailed instructions how the Passover lamb should be taken and killed and the blood placed on the doorposts of the houses, followed by the eating of the unleavened bread.

At midnight, in a most solemn account, the Lord smote the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from Pharaoh on his throne to the captive in his dungeon, as well as the firstborn of all the cattle. In that very night the Egyptians urged the Israelites to leave, thrusting their gold and silver upon them, six hundred thousand men...aside from children. And a mixed multitude also went up with them" (Exod. 12:37,38) of those who had married Egyptians. Every Israelite was commanded to teach the meaning of this Passover to his children.

Centuries later when John the Baptist would meet Jesus of Nazareth at the River Jordan, his announcement, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29), would be understood by every Hebrew present. The Passover feast is clearly the anticipation of the cross of Christ where the judgment of God was vented against all that is of the flesh within man and only those are saved who rest under the protecting blood of the Lamb.

Following the Passover is the feast of unleavened bread described in chapter 13. This was to be a perpetual memorial to the necessity to abstain from anything and everything which causes defilement in the individual life.

As the Israelites began their journey God went before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, to guard them on the way.

CROSSING THE RED SEA

Immediately after the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread, the people of Israel left the safety of their homes in Egypt and went out into the wilderness, coming at last to the shores of the Red Sea. Looking back they saw 600 Egyptian chariots hot upon their trail; looking ahead they saw only the waters of the Red Sea. The case looked hopeless to them, and they began to cry out to Moses and ask him why he had brought them here to die in the wilderness.

Moses' answer is wonderful. He said, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exod. 14:13). It was a great cry of faith, and God's word came immediately, saying, "Lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land" (14:16). The pillar of cloud moved between Israel and the Egyptians and throughout the night a great east wind drove back the waters of the sea. The next day the people marched through the sea safely, the waters standing as a wall on either side. When the Egyptians attempted to do the same, the waters of the sea resumed upon them and they all perished. "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians" (Exod. 14:30).

In I Corinthians 10:2 we are told that all the people "were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." The meaning of that is they were made one, they became a nation when they passed through the Red Sea. When Moses went down to Egypt the people of Israel were not a nation. They were a disorganized mob. But when they came out of the sea they were a unit. This is a beautiful reflection of the truth that every Christian must discover.

Before he became a Christian he was simply an individual struggling to make his way through life. But when he has gone through the experience of the Passover, when he has seen the blood of the Lamb nailed to the cross for him and has rested in the security of that fact, and when he has passed through the Red Sea experience, moving forward into an openly Christian stand, he will understand fully that he has now become part of a Body, the Body of Christ, and is joined together in a living unit with all other Christians.

The Red Sea typifies a break with the world. Egypt is now on the other side. Once Israel passed through the Red Sea they were then in the wilderness, but they were out of Egypt. The river of death now rolled between them and the place of bondage; and exactly that same river of death rolls between the Christian and the world when he claims Jesus Christ as Lord. Here is perhaps the reason why many professions of Christian faith never seem to go anywhere. There are people who are willing to sit under the Passover blood, willing to receive Jesus Christ as Savior, but they are not willing to walk through the waters of the Red Sea. They never take that step which brings them to the other side and cuts them off from the world. In their mind and thinking they are still back in Egypt. They will not move forward through the waters of death, and until that happens they are still under the bondage and control of the world.

The first thing Israel did as they walked through to the other side of the sea was to break into song. There had been no song in Egypt. That was a place of unrelenting bondage and heartache, misery, toil and danger. But when they came onto the far shore of the Red Sea they began to sing. Real deliverance always brings a song, reflecting joy in the greatness of God. The song they sang acknowledged the sense of dread that falls on the men of other nations who hear the story of the triumphal crossing.

Annie Johnson Flint has written a beautiful poem reflecting the truth of the Christian crossing of the Red Sea.

Have you come to the Red Sea place in your life,
Where, in spite of all you can do,
There is no way out, there is no way back,
There is no other way but--through?

Then wait on the Lord with a trust serene,
Till the night of your fear is gone,
He will send the wind, He will heap the floods,

When He says to your soul, "Go on."

And His hand will lead you through-- clear through--
Ere the watery walls roll down,
No foe can reach you, no wave can touch,
No mightiest sea can drown;

The tossing billows may rear their crests,
Their foam at your feet may break,
But over their bed you shall walk dry shod
In the path that your Lord will make.

In the morning watch, 'neath the lifted cloud,
You shall see but the Lord alone,
When He leads you on from the place by the sea
To the land that you have not known;

And your fears shall pass as your foes have passed,
You shall be no more afraid;
You shall sing His praise in a better place,
A place that His hand has made.

We have also in chapter 15 the story of the waters of Marah, the place of bitterness. In order to cure these bitter waters, Moses cut down a tree which the Lord showed him and threw it into the water and the water became sweet. This is a clear symbol to us that the cross, that great tree on which the Lord Jesus hung, is God's answer to the bitterness of life. When we have experienced the security of the Passover and passed through the Red Sea, cutting ourselves off from the world, we discover that the cross is forever the answer to the bitterness that sin may have brought into our lives, both past and present. To accept that cross as the will of God is to find the waters of life sweetened.

In the record of chapters 16-18 we have the account of Israel's first experiences in the wilderness. They provide a continuing contrast between the murmuring, unbelieving people and the patient mercy of God. It becomes increasingly clear that Jehovah was attempting to wean them from their craving for the material and the immediate, to a realization of the value of the spiritual.

Their first supernatural provision was the gift of manna, the bread from heaven. They were given clear instructions to gather each day for five days and on the sixth enough for that day and the following Sabbath. The people had difficulty in obeying, even as today. We also find it difficult to trust God for His deliverance in the midst of impossible situations. Again their faith was tried when they came to a barren desert, wherein there was no water at all; but again Jehovah patiently met their murmuring unbelief by providing water out of the rock for them.

They encountered a third trial when they suddenly found themselves under attack from Amalek. This was their first experience with war after leaving Egypt. The principles of divine conflict were revealed in that Joshua led the men in actual fighting while Moses, assisted by Aaron and Hur, prayed on the mountainside. The Israelites, through this experience, taught that faith requires obedient action, combined with dependence on God. Here again the eternal conflict between Jacob and Esau reappears. Amalek was a tribe that descended from Esau and represents always the flesh in eternal battle against the spirit. Here a great victory was gained, which Moses commemorated by raising an altar which he named The Lord is My Banner. It was to be a continuing encouragement to any who would have to battle Amalek, with whom Jehovah declared Himself to be at war from generation unto generation.

In chapter 18 an interesting interlude occurred when Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought Moses' wife and his two sons from their home in Midian. Even though Jethro was a priest of Midian, upon hearing Moses' recital of God's activity in delivering Israel from Egypt, Jethro acknowledged Jehovah as supreme and offered to Him a

sacrifice. Purely as a matter of common sense, he offered advice to Moses on the delegation of authority within the camp of Israel. The fact that Moses acted on this advice is clear evidence that he recognized God speaking through Jethro. The advice probably saved Moses from an early death from sheer exhaustion, and is excellent counsel for those who have not learned to share their work load with others.

From chapter 19 through the remainder of the book, the record concerns itself with the last two great events of the book of Exodus.

GIVING OF THE LAW

The 10 words of God are introduced to us in a scene of fearful solemnity and majesty. God called Moses and announced to him the purpose for Israel: They shall be to Him. "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." When Moses repeated these words to the people their easy and superficial response was, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exod. 19:8). It is clear that the people have no true consciousness of what these words mean. Jehovah, therefore, directed Moses to separate the people from the mountain and to consecrate them for three days that they might be able to endure the sights they were soon to see.

On the third day there were thunderings and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a piercing trumpet blast which made the whole camp of Israel tremble. As the trumpet blew louder and louder and the mountain shook continually, Moses and Aaron were summoned to the mountain and Moses alone was called into the very presence of God. There the voice of God delivered to him the words which we call the Ten Commandments.

The first five of the commandments deal with the relationship between God and man and especially guard against the violation of God's Person. The first warns against polytheism. The second against idolatry. The third proclaims the righteousness of God and warns against profanity. The fourth guards the worship of God against secularism, and the fifth requires the honoring of father and mother as representatives of God, guarding against irreverence to authority.

The second five concern the relationships between persons, guarding the sanctity of life, the sanctity of marriage, the sanctity of property, the sanctity of character and sanctity of the inner thought-life.

Immediately instructions were also given as to the nature of worship, and it is significant that the only altar which God will honor was to be made of simple, unadorned stones devoid of any human workmanship in which the heart of man might boast. Thus the people were instructed in two essential matters: the law which describes the character and holiness of God and the system of sacrifice by which a sinful and lawbreaking people may yet draw near to a holy and righteous God, and find Him merciful and gracious toward them.

As yet the words of the Law were not written upon the stones, but Moses had simply repeated them before the people. He proceeded to give them certain ordinances which apply the principles of the ten words to life. The first section deals with the rights of persons, regulating slavery, wrong done to one's fellow man, and injuries brought about through neglect or carelessness. The second section deals with the rights of property covering theft and dishonesty. The third section (22:1-19) touches upon matters which directly affect worship, including seduction, sorcery, bestiality and idolatry.

Great concern is shown for the rights of strangers, indicating that God hears the cry and avenges the sorrows of many who are oppressed. Warnings are given against reviling God and cursing rulers, and the rights of God concerning the firstborn are reiterated.

Finally, matters of justice are detailed, and the three great feasts which Israel was to keep each year are described. These are the feast of unleavened bread, associated with the Passover; the feast of firstfruits, later associated with Pentecost; the feast of harvest at the end of the year.

These divine admonitions conveyed by Moses to the people conclude with God's great promise to send His angel before them to guard them and to bring them to the place that God had prepared. This angel of the Presence is

surely to be identified with Him who eventually became flesh and dwelt among us. He would insure God's blessing to the people and drive out all their enemies.

Following these ordinances, Moses and Aaron and 70 of the elders of Israel were called upon and Moses in their presence repeated all the words of the Lord, reading them as they were written in the Book of the Covenant. Taking blood from the altar he sprinkled the people as they responded, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient."

At this solemn point, the elders of Israel were invited to ascend the mountain where they saw the glory of God described in words which recall the vision of the apostle John, recorded in the fourth and fifth chapters of the Revelation. Here they entered into some mystic communion in which "they beheld God, and they ate and drank" (Exod. 24:11).

Following this, Moses alone was called to the top of the mountain where he waited for six days, and on the seventh he disappeared into the cloud of glory which, in sight of the people of Israel, was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain. There he remained for 40 days and 40 nights.

CONSTRUCTING THE TABERNACLE

From chapter 25 through chapter 31 we have the account of the explicit directions given to Moses for the construction of the Tabernacle, the dwelling place of God among the people. It begins not with the building itself, but with the three articles of furniture which were to be at the heart of the worship of Israel. The first was the Ark of the Covenant with its covering cherubim over the mercy seat, symbolizing the place of the dwelling of God. The next instructions describe the table for the bread of the Presence. In Eastern imagery the table is the symbol of fellowship, and thus the people were reminded of their constant need for communion with God and with one another. The golden lampstand follows, symbolizing the revelation these people were to receive and the testimony they were subsequently to give to the outside world.

These three pieces of furniture were to be the center of all national life and worship: (1) The meeting place with God on the basis of propitiation; (2) the table for fellowship between God and His people; (3) the lampstand of testimony, symbolizing the work to which they were called.

Following this, the divine details of the curtains and coverings in the Tabernacle are specified. The 10 curtains of fine-twined linen contain white (the color of purity), blue (the color of heaven), purple (the color of royalty) and scarlet (the color of blood), as foregleams of the Person and work of Him who would fulfill the symbolism of the entire building. This is also true of the Tabernacle coverings, the boards, the veil and the door screen, which are next described. The veil which separates the holy place from the holy of holies is interpreted in Hebrews 10:20 as the flesh of our Lord. When Jesus died the curtain of the Temple was torn in two and a new and living way was opened up into the presence of God, by Jesus' death.

Exodus 27 brings before us the court surrounding the Tabernacle, and once again the description begins from the inside. We are given first the brass altar on which the animal sacrifices were to be burned. It was to be set within the outer court of the Tabernacle in front of the entrance to the holy place. The outer court was to be enclosed with curtains of finely twined linen, set in sockets of brass and capped by crowns of silver, suggesting purity resting upon the strength of government and crowned with the symbol of redemption.

The screen before the entrance to the court was similar to that before the holy place, and in turn was somewhat like the veil before the holy of holies. As we have seen, intertwined colors picture the person of Christ. Thus no man might pass within the court save through the symbol of mediation. Likewise there could be no entrance into the holy place of fellowship and testimony but through the same gateway. And none might reach the inner chamber of the presence of God without participating in the very body and blood of the mediator.

Oil was also commanded to be brought for the continuing light of the lampstand. This clearly symbolized the

Holy Spirit who gives the light of revelation in the midst of the darkness of human knowledge.

Following the revelation to Moses of the precise pattern of the Tabernacle, he was then shown the divine mind concerning the priesthood; The priesthood in Israel was to be vested in Aaron and the sons of the tribe of Levi. Aaron as the high priest foreshadowed the work of Christ as confirmed by the book of Hebrews. The garments of the high priest were to represent the glory and beauty of Christ as our High Priest. The vestments of the high priest with their colors of gold, purple, scarlet and white, spoke eloquently of the Person and work of Jesus. The shoulder pieces, each adorned with two onyx stones, engraved with the names of the 12 tribes, symbolized the office of burden-bearing. On the head was the glorious breastplate embellished with precious stones containing also the names of the 12 tribes. At the center of this were the strange Urim and Thummim (Lights and Perfections) which indicated in some mystic manner the work of the priest in discovering the divine mind and will.

The robe of the ephod was entirely blue, suggesting the heavenly matters with which the high priest was to be engaged. The alternating bells and pomegranates on the skirts of the robe spoke of testimony and fruitfulness necessary to priestly intercession. Attached to the golden mitre on the head was a plate bearing the words "Holy to the Lord," indicating the exquisitely balanced perfection of the priestly office.

The consecration of the priests to their office is described in chapter 29, consisting of a threefold function: washing, dressing and anointing. The washing symbolizes the forgiveness of sin; the dressing symbolizes imputation of righteousness; the anointing speaks of the enduing of the Holy Spirit. The offerings which follow are repeated in more detail in the book of Leviticus. They emphasize anew the truth that Jehovah wants always to be before His people, that God could meet with them only through sacrifice and the cleansing of sin. The priests alone are to feed upon the meat of the offerings as a symbol of the necessity of understanding all that is involved in the work of redemption, that by these means and these alone would a living God be able to dwell among a sinful people.

At this point the altar of incense which is supremely the altar of priesthood is introduced. It completes the furniture of the holy place and speaks of the offering of praise and adoration unto God. The bronze laver is then described, which stood before the entrance of the holy place within the outer court.

Finally, we have instructions concerning the use of anointing oil and incense. The whole is symbolic of the fact that only those who had given the half-shekel of redemption, had been cleansed at the bronze laver, and anointed by the fragrant oil could truly offer the worship of prayer and thanksgiving typified by the incense. The Lord who gave these complicated instructions was able also to call and equip certain workmen to construct the Tabernacle and all its furnishings. Two men, Bezalel of Judah and Oholiab of Dan, were filled with the Spirit of God in order to provide the skilled labor necessary to this work.

Then the Sabbath was brought in as essential to all, typifying that the energy by which they labored was to be that of those who have entered into God's rest and have ceased from their own labors. As we have seen before, the Sabbath is forever the symbol of restful activity, dependent upon the Spirit of God.

While these careful instructions were being given to Moses on the mountain top, the people at the bottom of the mountain were already falling into grievous sin. The people who had so wondrously been redeemed from Egypt and led through the waters of the Red Sea and fed miraculously by manna from heaven and refreshed by water from the rock, now manifest a great wickedness in making and worshipping a golden calf. In a scene reminiscent of Abraham pleading with God for the salvation of Sodom and Gomorrah, we see Moses pleading before God on behalf of this people. As with Abraham, it was God Himself who was using Moses to call upon His mercy and allay His wrath. Moses pleaded not so much for the people but for God Himself. He reminded Him that His honor is at stake and pleaded the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He thus became the instrument to turn aside the divine wrath.

On coming down from the mountain with the tables of stone, and surveying the scene of idolatry and debauchery, Moses angrily threw the plates to the ground, breaking them at the foot of the mountain. He ground the golden calf

to powder and compelled the people to drink of the water into which it was thrown. He called, "Who is for the Lord?" In response, the Levites gathered to him and he sent them throughout the camp with a sword in every hand and 3,000 of the worst offenders were slain. The next day he returned to the presence of God and there confessed the sin of the people and pled that they might be spared even if he himself must be blotted out of God's book. God responded by sending him back again to lead the people and promising the angel of the Presence to go with him. Though the angel of the Presence will go before the people to Canaan, nevertheless Jehovah indicated that He would not dwell among them in their sinful state. This remoteness is indicated by the tent of meeting (the predecessor of the Tabernacle) being placed outside the camp where God would commune with Moses.

Moses again interceded before Jehovah saying, "If Thy presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here" (Exod. 33:15). With this God acquiesced and Moses asked for funkier display of the glory of God. Hidden in the cleft of the rock he saw the back parts of God but not His face. While man is yet on earth, God may be seen only by the results of His passing by; the vision of the face of God is reserved only for heaven.

Strengthened by this vision, Moses was called again to ascend the mount and to receive two other tablets inscribed by the hand of God. There on the mountain top the Law and the covenants were renewed and the necessity to keep the feasts and the Sabbath was again decreed. After another 40-day stay with the divine presence, Moses came down the mountain with a shining countenance to greet the people. When he learned of his shining face, he put a veil upon his face that he might speak to the people unhindered. Later we learn from the apostle Paul that he kept the veil there that the people might not see the fading glory. This is to contrast the glory of the law with the superior glory of the face of Jesus Christ.

Chapters 35 to 39 contain the account of the actual building of the Tabernacle. Once again the Sabbath law is restated as emphasizing the need for all activity to be performed in the consciousness of the divine activity superseding the human. The offerings commanded in chapter 25 were brought by the people for the construction of the Tabernacle. The offerings were wholly voluntary, and the labor on the Tabernacle was to be done only by those who came with a willing heart. So abundant was the offering that Moses had to command the people to cease their giving.

First the curtains for the Tabernacle proper were set up and then the beams for the building itself. These were overlaid with cloths of blue, purple and scarlet stuff, with fine-twined linen and cherubim skillfully worked in. The furniture of the Tabernacle was then constructed, beginning with the Ark of the Covenant with its cherubim overshadowing the mercy seat. This was followed by the table of showbread, the golden lampstand and the altar of incense. For the outer court the altar of burnt offering was made, with its horns and grating. Then the great laver of bronze was cast. Finally the curtains of the outer court were hung on each side and the screen for the gate of the court was embroidered in blue and purple and scarlet stuff with fine twined linen. Then the accounting was given of the work of the materials of which the Tabernacle was made.

Full details are given concerning the holy garments of the priest which were made strictly according to the pattern shown to Moses. At last the statement is made, "Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was completed; and the sons of Israel did according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses; so they did" (Exod. 39:32)

Moses blessed the people for their obedient labors and, according to the instruction of God, set up the furniture of the Tabernacle all in its proper place. When the work was finished and the Tabernacle stood exactly according to the pattern which God had shown Moses on the mountain, then the cloud covered the tent and the glory of the Lord came down and filled the whole of the Tabernacle. So splendid was this glory that Moses was not able to enter the Tabernacle. Moreover the cloud of glory remained over the Tabernacle as a permanent guide. Throughout the years of their wanderings it was to be a symbol to the people of the presence of God and the sign of the divine intent to move or to settle.

What shall we make of this amazing building and its precise God-given design? We have already seen that its intimate detail is a foreview of both the Person and the work of Christ, but in the Epistle to the Hebrews we are

given a funkier hint as to its significance. There in chapter 3 verse 5 we are told, "Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house, whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end." There the full meaning of the Tabernacle is stated plainly for us. It was the symbol of man himself. It was a symbol of Christ because Christ was the perfect man, but it was also the symbol of every believer in Christ who with his Lord shares the glory of the Son of Man.

As the Tabernacle in the wilderness was built in three parts--an outer court, the holy place, the holy of holies-- so man is a threefold construction consisting of body, soul and spirit. The human spirit is intended to be the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and this is symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant with its mercy seat by which the living God can dwell within His people. The apostle Paul confirms this when he says, "You are a temple of God" (I Cor. 3:16). The soul of man corresponds to the holy place, and the furniture within, that of the table of the bread of the Presence, the golden lampstand and the altar of incense, reflect the qualities of emotion (essential to fellowship), mind (encompassing knowledge which gives light), and will (making obedient choices which redound to the praise and glory of God).

The outer court symbolized the body of man with its exposure to the outside world. As Paul tells us in Romans 6, the body is the seat of sin and therefore the site of the altar of sacrifice. It is also the place of defilement and requires the cleansing work of the laver. But above all else, man is to be the dwelling place of God and the anointing of the Holy Spirit is to suffuse his being with the presence and power of God.

It has always troubled me to hear Sunday School teachers and others teach children that a building is the house of God. It is true that the Tabernacle of the Old Testament is called the house of God, but it was a mere shadow. The Temple in Jerusalem took its place, and it too was a shadow. When we come to the New Testament we never find a building designated as the house of God. The house of God in the New Testament is a human body. The apostle Paul declares in I Corinthians 3:16 "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" When we teach that a building is the house of God, we make it very difficult for people to grasp the idea that their bodies are the temples of God. Nothing is more important than to realize that Jesus Christ Himself is dwelling in your body, which is His temple. Deep at the center of your life is the holy of holies, your human spirit, and in that place the Spirit of God dwells.

Sometimes we hear that the weakness of the Old Testament was that they were under the Law and did not know the grace of God. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is true, they were under the Law, but the Law was not given to them to be their Savior. It was given to reveal their sin and to make them aware of how hopeless was their condition apart from God's redemptive grace. Their problem was not the Law, but the Tabernacle and its system of sacrifices. It was not sufficiently complete; it was not real enough. It consisted only of shadows, just kindergarten pictures, and could never really accomplish anything. Thus when we come to the book of Hebrews we learn that the shadows are done away because they are fulfilled in the great anti-type, the Lord Jesus Christ. We read: "We have confidence to enter the holy place" (Heb. 10: 19). We need no longer fear to enter; for in the blood of Jesus, by means of the cross, God has set aside all that separates us from Him and has brought us near to Himself.

Thus the great message of the book of Exodus is that by means of the cross God has made it possible for a holy, righteous God to dwell with sinful man. The Tabernacle is the picture of God's dwelling with His people. The great truth for us is that God has so totally handled the problem of sin in the sacrifice of His Son that, as Paul says in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." We have perfect access to the Father through the Son, and God's indwelling Spirit will never leave us or forsake us. He has taken up His abode in our hearts.

Chapter Four

The Way to Wholeness: Leviticus

The book of Leviticus is probably most famous for being the place where many people stop in their reading through the Bible. It seems to be a book of strange ceremonies and sacrifices with many odd restrictions, problems of diet, and other difficulties which seem meaningless. But properly understood, Leviticus is one of the most beautiful books of the Bible. If you wish to understand Leviticus, one verse near the center of the book will help greatly, "You are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine" (Lev. 20:26). That is the purpose of the book of Leviticus. It details the way by which man is made holy enough to live in the Divine Presence and to enjoy a relationship so close that God will delight to say, "You are mine."

Don't be turned off by the word "holy" in this passage. Most people associate holiness with some kind of grimness. They react as did the little girl who happened to see a mule looking over the fence at her. She had never seen a mule before and she said to it, "I don't know what you are but you must be a Christian--you look just like grandpa." To many of us, "holy" people are those who look as if they had been steeped in vinegar or soaked in embalming fluid. But the Scriptures speak of "the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2, KJV). True holiness is therefore something splendidly attractive.

The original root from which the word holy is derived is the same root from which a very attractive English word also comes. That word is "wholeness." Holiness, therefore, means wholeness, being complete. If you read "wholeness" in place of "holiness" everywhere you find it in the Bible, you will be much closer to what the writers originally meant. We all know what wholeness is. It is to have together all the parts which were intended to be there and to have them function as they were intended to function. Our modern expression "getting it all together" is very close to the root meaning of holiness.

The word "wholeness" has power to awaken desire within us. We long to be whole people. Who does not want to be what God made him to be, with all the ingredients of his personality expressed in perfect balance? That is what the book of Leviticus is all about. We are much aware of our own brokenness, of our lack of wholeness. We know how much we hurt ourselves and each other. We are aware of our inability to cope with life. We sometimes put up a facade and try to bluff our way through as though we are able to handle everything, but inside, most of the time, we are running scared. That is a mark of our lack of wholeness. We also know our diabolical power to irritate, to enrage and to inflame others--and even ourselves. But this great statement in Leviticus 20:26 declares that God knows all about human brokenness and that He knows that we are that way. He sees it in sharp contrast to His own wholeness, and His love reaches out and says, "You shall be whole, for I am whole."

Leviticus, then, is the story of how God has determined to heal man's brokenness and make him whole again; and He knows how to do it, for He says, "I have separated you from the peoples;" The reason we are so broken is because we are involved in a broken race. Our basic attitudes are wrong. Our vision of life is twisted and distorted. We believe in illusions and follow them as facts. We pursue phantoms and fantasies and delusions.

Therefore, God must separate us from such thinking. He must break us loose from conformity to the thought patterns and attitudes and reactions of those around us. When He has straightened out our thinking and set our minds and hearts aright and corrected our tangled, fouled relationships, then we shall be whole as He intended.

This is a process which takes infinite patience and love, because we are so slow to recant. That is why God gave us this book of pictures. He starts in kindergarten with us. He begins with shadows and pictures as a kind of visual aid in order to show us what is the meaning of what He eventually does in history. Therefore, all the ceremonies and offerings of the Old Testament are foreviews and pictures of Jesus Christ. Leviticus is full of

Christ. As He Himself said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6). Thus, these Old Testament sacrifices and rituals are the means by which believers before the cross laid hold of the full value of the work of Jesus Christ on their behalf. These men and women before the cross were as hurt and broken and fragmented as we are. They, too, needed Christ, and through these shadowy anticipations He was available to them. They may not always have seen the fulfillment of these things in Christ, but God did! Any Israelite who obediently and sincerely offered these sacrifices found that the reaction of the Spirit was to bring him to the same joy and peace that we have today. Read the Psalms and see how much David understood of the presence and the grace of God in his life. Some of these men and women of old were so taught of the Spirit that they actually foresaw the person and work of Christ as the great anti-type of the shadows with which they were involved. Thus, Jesus could say in John 8:56, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad."

But there's even more to see in a book like Leviticus.

Since in Jesus Christ God took upon Himself the form of a man, and Jesus dwelt among us as a man--man as God intends man to be--therefore, everything that pictures Him also pictures us. Here in this book, therefore, we can understand our own humanity better than we can know it anywhere else. This book, then, becomes a penetrating study into human psychology, made all the more valuable because it is divinely guaranteed to be the truth about humanity.

The book itself falls into two basic divisions. The first part, chapters I through 16, reveals the fundamental needs of our humanity and God's provision. The last section, chapter 17 through 27, unfolds what performance God expects from us in response.

First comes God's provision and then the performance which results from that provision. Within the first division there are four elements traced which reveal the basic need of sinful humanity.

Need for Offerings

The first is the series of five offerings with which the book begins. These are the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. In these is found a basic insight into the fundamental nature of humanity. They describe in symbolic terms the two essentials for human existence: love and responsibility--that is, the need to be loved and to love in turn. Love is the absolutely essential ingredient in life. Nothing harms or disfigures or blasts a person more than to deny him love. Another essential for wholeness, self-respect and a feeling of worth, is that we must have a sense of our responsibility to love others.

The Burnt offering

Each of the five offerings follows a five-step pattern.

First a selection of the sacrifice must be made. In the case of the burnt offering, it must be a male without blemish. It could be a bull from a herd, or a sheep or goat from the flock, or if the offerer was very poor, it could be turtledoves or young pigeons. In any case, it must be male, for in the burnt offering God is dealing with man to remind him of his role as a king over all the earth.

The second step was the laying on of hands upon the offering. What does that mean? That is God's way of teaching the great truth of substitution, the fact that we human beings are tied together with each other, belong to one another, and share life together, and thus others can do things for us which we cannot do ourselves. This is the basis of fellowship among believers. But in the case of dealing with sin, the substitute must be a spotless, sinless person. Thus, Jesus Christ is the only adequate substitute and this is symbolized by the burnt offering.

The third step was to kill the animal involved. God never allowed any compromise on this. He did not say, "This is a nice little lamb and is innocent of any wrongdoing himself, so if you'll just drain a half pint of blood from him I'll be satisfied." God would never say such a thing because He desires to impress upon us the fact that the

problem He is dealing with is so intense and so deeply rooted in our human lives that nothing but death itself can solve it. It cannot be palliated by some temporary expedient. It requires the pouring out of life itself.

The fourth step was either the sprinkling of blood or the burning of the sacrifice as an act of consecration and commitment to God. The instant one of these animals died it became fully acceptable to God. Death solved the problem of alienation and so the sacrifice could then be offered acceptably to God. In the case of the burnt offering, the animal was to be totally consumed. No one was ever to eat the meat of the burnt offering.

This burnt offering is the first of three sacrifices that are said to be "a pleasing odor to God." It symbolized the great truth that in order to fulfill the dominion given to man he must himself be given wholly to God. Man was born to rule, but he was also made to be possessed. He was born to be king over all, but he was to be under the authority of God. The testimony of all history is that man is very unhappy until he is possessed by God. The most basic question of every life is to belong to someone, to have an identity, to be loved, and accepted and owned by someone else. No sight is more pitiable or pathetic than someone who feels that no one loves him--that he belongs nowhere, and no one cares for his soul.

Thus, the purpose of the burnt offering is to remind us that in the death of Jesus Christ we can find the full satisfaction of that basic human longing. You can find a certain amount of satisfaction in being part of a family, you can find satisfaction in having an ancestry, but you will never satisfy your restless longing in these ways. The cry of your heart, the clamant hunger to be possessed and to belong, can be satisfied only by God through Jesus Christ coming into your life.

The final distinction of the burnt offering is given in chapter 6. In verses 12 and 13 we are told that the fire on the altar must be kept burning constantly and must never be allowed to go out. Every morning and evening, the priests were to offer the burnt offering; the fire would consume the wood and the meat all through the day and all through the night and thus the fire of the burnt offering never went out. This symbolized the truth that our basic identity before God is the fact upon which all the rest of life must rest. It must never be forgotten. If you stand there, you have a basis upon which all the other relationships of life can be worked out. That is the burnt offering--the need to belong.

The Meal Offering

In chapter 2 it is the cereal offering which is brought before us. This is otherwise known as the meal offering, or in the King James Version, the "meat offering," from the Old English use of the word meat as meaning food. It is the one offering which has no meat in it, for it consists of grains, or loaves of bread, sometimes even simply flour, offered before the Lord. It is obvious that the essence of this offering was that it was bread; it was food, the staff of life. This is the key to the meal offering. Since it is bloodless it does not symbolize a death but rather a life, and the reason for all this becomes apparent when we remember that in the New Testament Jesus stood before the people and said to them, "I am the bread of life...I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread he shall live forever" (John 6:48, 51).

All this should indicate to us that the gospel consists not only of the death of Jesus but also of His life, made available to us. The really good news is that Jesus Christ *died for you* in order that He might live *in you*. The fine flour beautifully symbolized the perfection of humanity in Jesus. He was without coarseness or granularity or any roughness at all. So, if we permit Him to live in us, all that we do will also be balanced and without coarseness.

As we move through chapter 2 we note there are three things which always had to be included in the meal offering, and two things which never could be included. It is important to heed these. The three things always included were *oil, frankincense* and *salt*. The oil, which always typifies the Holy Spirit, was both mingled with the fine flour and poured on top of it. Thus it speaks of the indwelling Spirit who mingles with our humanity and also of the anointing of the Spirit which is to empower us. The second element to be always included was frankincense. This is said to be a delight to God and speaks of our praise and thanksgiving, which pleases Him. The third element is salt, which is a preservative. It speaks of a life which reaches out to touch others with good

effect. It is our righteous influence. "Every grain offering," God said, "you shall season with salt."

There are two things, found in verse 11, which were to be excluded from the offering. There was to be no *leaven* nor any *honey*. First, leaven is yeast and is always a type of sin, because it has the power to puff up. By this God is saying, "When you come to offer your humanity to me there must be no ego in it: do not do this for your own glory." As He says elsewhere, "No man should boast before God" (I Cor. 1:29).

Second, there must be no honey. Honey is natural sweetness; there are people, even non-Christian people, who have a natural, even temper and disposition about them. They are naturally sweet. But God refuses to accept this, for the only sweetness He will accept is the imparted sweetness of Jesus Christ in you.

It is significant, too, that the meal offering is listed next to the burnt offering. The practice among the Israelites was usually to offer the two together. This is very instructive since the burnt offering indicates God reaching out to man and saying, "You are mine." Therefore, this requires a response from man. God has reached out to us and we need to reach back to Him. That is what the meal offering signifies; we must come to Him and say, "Lord, here I am, here is my redeemed humanity with its oil and its frankincense and its salt, but with no leaven and with no honey. I want to be yours; I give myself to you." When that happens, you have offered the meal offering unto the Father just as the Son of God in the beauty of His life constantly offered His humanity, through the Holy Spirit and without spot or blemish, unto God.

The Peace Offering

After the burnt offering--representing our need to be loved--and the meal offering--representing our need to respond to God's love--*then comes the peace offering*, found in chapters 3 and 7. This does not refer to the peace of forgiveness. That will come in the sin and trespass offerings. It is not peace *with* God which is in view, it is the peace *of* God which this sacrifice depicts--the sense of calmness, of serenity, of the untroubled heart which was so continually manifest in Jesus. It is of this He speaks when He says, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you" (John 14:27). Man is not made to function out of tension, pressure, restlessness, or continual anxiety. He is made to live and act out of a sense of peace and it is how this peace can come to us that this sacrifice speaks.

There are four distinctives about the peace offering which mark it as different from the others.

The first distinctive is that the offering can be either a male or a female. It could be from the herd or the flock, and the sex was not important. This indicates that in the peace offering we are not dealing with man in his generic relationships, but in his present condition, his existential relationship, the way he actually is. There it does not make any difference whether you are a leader or a follower; whether you are in a position of authority or not--what you need is peace in any case. That is the point.

The second distinctive mark is that all the fat of the peace offering was to be consumed upon the altar. This is repeated several times and in the seventh chapter it is developed even further. The striking sentence is, "all fat is the Lord's" (Lev. 3:16). In the Scriptures, fat is everywhere used as a symbol of the richness of life. Even today we think of fat meat as rich meat, and that is what this symbol portrays. Richness belongs to God, and as these Hebrews were told to take the fat and carefully remove it, especially the interior fat on the inner organs of the body, they were being taught that all the inner richness of life--everything that makes a person strong and delighted within--is from God, belongs to Him, and comes only from Him.

There is a third characteristic of the peace offering (7:28-34) which is extremely important. Only two portions of the peace offering animal were to be eaten; the breast and the right thigh. But before they were eaten, they were offered to the Lord. They were not burned upon the altar, for that would have ruined them as food for the priests. They were merely waved up and down before the Lord. The thigh, perhaps heavier than the breast, was heaved up and down before the Lord, rather than waved. This was a symbolic gesture that these portions were related to God. And then the priests were to feed on them.

Hidden in these symbols is the secret of how to have peace in the midst of trouble. The breast is always a symbol

of affection and love; the thigh is the symbol of power and strength. Dependence upon the affection and the strength of Jesus Christ is the way to solve our problems and live in peace. His love is to steady us and remind us of His concern about us. His strength is to encourage us that He not only knows what to do but is able to do it. As Paul will say in Ephesians 2:14, "He Himself is our peace."

There is one final characteristic of the peace offering (7: 15-18). We are told that an offerer could eat the flesh of the offering on the day he offered it if it was an offering of thanksgiving for some particular thing. Or if it was just a general expression of gratitude toward God, some of it could be saved for the second day. But under no circumstances were they ever to eat of the flesh of the peace offering on the third day--it must be burned with fire. What does this mean? It is a very beautiful way of saying that we must not rely upon the feeling of peace, but only upon the One who is its source. We cannot live continually on the feeling of peace that comes to us when we trust God. It must be renewed day by day.

The Sin Offering

In the sin offering we come to the way God deals with the problem of guilt. Having offered to mankind both love and peace, He now begins to deal with the problem of the alienation which prevents man from receiving God's grace.

The first distinctive of the sin offering is that it provided for both public and private sin. When the sin was that of a group or a public individual representing a group, then the offering always had to be a male. When it was an individual sin, the animal was a female. Thus for a sinning priest a young bull without blemish was the offering. For the sin of the whole congregation it was likewise a young bull (Lev. 8:14). But in the case of a ruler or king, it was a male goat and for the common people, a female animal without blemish. Thus distinction is made between those in authority and the individual acting on his own.

There were further provisions for those who could not afford an animal, for they were permitted to bring either two turtledoves, or, if they could not afford those, a handful of fine flour. In the latter case they were to put no oil or frankincense on it. For oil was the symbol of the Spirit-filled life and frankincense the symbol of the heart dedicated fully to God, which anyone guilty of sin was not able to claim until the sin offering had effected his restoration.

The second distinction of the sin offering is that it was frequently offered when the individual had sinned unknowingly. Thus this offering deals not so much with the act of evil but with the nature which prompts such acts. Another element of distinction in the sin offering concerns what was done with the blood of the animal. In the case of the sinning priest, blood was sprinkled seven times before the Lord, and put on the horns of the altar of incense which stood in front of the veil before the holy of holies, that is, right in the very presence of God. The same thing was required if the whole congregation sinned, but in the cases of the offerings for a ruler or for an individual the blood was put on the horn of the brazen altar which was in the outer court (Lev. 8:15). Clearly a special emphasis is being placed upon the blood as displayed before the presence of God. Only when the offering individual sees that God looks not at his sin, but at the blood shed for it, is there a release from the sense of guilt.

A final distinction is made in the handling of the fat and meat of the offering. The inward organs and their fat were to be offered to God, as in the peace offerings, but the entire rest of the animal is to be taken outside the camp and there it was to be burned (Lev. 8:14-17). Here is a remarkable symbol which says that all the inward life of the believer, redeemed by blood, is now acceptable to God but the outer life--the body--is still unredeemed. In the book of Hebrews we are told that Jesus fulfilled this Himself when He went "outside the camp" (Heb. 13:11) of the city of Jerusalem to be crucified, and believers are likewise exhorted to "go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13:13). Thus, though our inner nature is now changed and acceptable to God, nevertheless we are still living in the world. We must bear its reproach and suffer its rejection, just as Jesus did.

The Trespass Offering

The sin offering dealt with the nature which causes us to sin, but in *the trespass* offering we are dealing with the

actual acts of evil we commit toward one another, including not only acts of commission but those of omission as well. The unique characteristic of the trespass offering was that it required restitution. It was necessary to right the wrong which had been done as far as it could be corrected.

There were five different categories of sin covered by this offering. Three of these categories are grouped together by virtue of their type of sacrifice. The first was what we might call acts of guilty silence--to see a crime committed and to keep silent about it was a trespass (Lev. 5:1); the second category involved defilement from contact with unclean things--these touch upon matters which we now would regard as ecological violations, threatening a whole society (Lev. 5:2, 3); a third category dealt with rash oaths or vows (Lev. 5:4). This was evil because in attempting the impossible the individual was pretending to be God and not man. Nothing has done more to wreak havoc among mankind than man's arrogant pretension to control the forces of nature.

For all three of these categories the sacrifice to be offered was the same. It was to be a female lamb or goat, thus indicating that we are dealing with man in his weakness and submission to the laws of nature. As with the sin offering, provision was made for the poor to bring substitutes if they could not afford an animal (5:7). But the one inflexible requirement was that the individual must admit the offense (5:5). There could be no forgiveness without that.

Two other classes of trespass sins are brought before us. The first category was that of religious offense, something done with "the Lord's holy things" (5:15). Though the sin was an "unintentional" sin (vv. 15,17), nevertheless the individual is required to offer a trespass offering and to make restitution up to the value of the offering plus a fifth added to it (v. 16). Thus even something done with utter conviction at the time that it was the right thing, when discovered to be wrong, was to require sacrifice and restitution.

The last category of sin involved cheating, robbing or defrauding a neighbor, or any form of dishonesty such as removing someone else's property or reputation (6:1-3). Such a broken relationship must be restored and restitution made. This is surely what Jesus refers to when He says: "If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering" (Matt. 5:23, 24). Clearly the trespass offering is given for the healing of all broken relationships and to give the offender a clear conscience before God and man.

How clearly these five offerings have shown the provision made in Christ for our human need of love, of the joy of response, of peace, of forgiveness before God and of right relationships with our fellowman.

Need for Priesthood

From chapters 8-10 we will see that the second element required for an adequate walk and worship before God is that of a priesthood. The priests were in a sense the psychiatrists of the Old Testament. They were the ones to whom people came when they had emotional problems. Priests were skilled in handling problems of guilt and fear, anxiety and hostility, and all the traumas and neuroses and psychoses which arose out of these. In the Old Testament the priesthood consisted of Aaron and his descendants; all the sons of Levi. That is where Leviticus got its name.

We have in these chapters the historical account of the actual consecration of the priests and the Tabernacle, and the beginning of worship within the sacred building. The entire congregation of Israel, some two million strong, were assembled in solemn convocation to witness the stirring ceremonies. Aaron's first act as high priest was to bring a sin offering and burnt offering for himself, and then the acts of the priests on behalf of the people are recorded. They began with the sin offering, then the burnt offering, then the meal offering, and finally the peace offering, indicating the proper procedure in approaching the living God. Then Moses (the prophet) and Aaron (the priest) came out of the Tabernacle and blessed the people and the glory of the Lord appeared to them all. The waiting throngs were stunned by the sudden appearance of fire from the Lord which consumed the offerings, and when the people saw it they shouted and fell on their faces (Lev. 9:24).

Following this impressive moment we have the account of the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu who offered strange fire before the Lord (10:1). It was evidently a form of incense other than the prescribed frankincense. For this they were destroyed by a supernatural fire. But the charge that followed, to abstain from strong drink, suggests the possibility that Nadab and Abihu had acted wrongly because of excessive use of wine. The whole account helps us see that priesthood is a serious matter involving both privilege and responsibility. We must always bear in mind, in reading these accounts, that there is no special priesthood today. All believers in the Body of Christ are made priests one to another (see I Pet. 2:5). Thus in the church, the Body of Christ, we *are all* to minister to one another, bearing each other's burdens, rebuking and reproving one another, and doing all in the recognition that One is our Master and we all are brothers.

Need for Standard

The third element of human need revealed in this first section of Leviticus is the revelation of a standard by which men may tell the difference between true and false, the phony and real, the helpful and the hurtful.

In this chapter appears *various dietary laws and sanitary practices* which were necessary to preserve Israel from diseases and epidemics rife in the nations around them. An excellent book available today, called *None of These Diseases* by Dr. S. I. McMillen, shows in a very charming way how many of the illnesses and ailments of our present life could be avoided if we simply follow some of these common sense regulations which God taught His people in the Old Testament.

But not all the regulations were for health reasons. There was nothing wrong with many of the animals that were prohibited to these Israelites as food. They were prohibited only to teach a symbolic lesson. There were four spheres in which food could be taken.

There were the animals which walked about on the earth, the natural food of man. Among these they were to eat only those which both chewed the cud and split the hoof. Surely this pictures for us the spiritual food upon which believers are to feed, the Word of God.

The first requirement is that we must meditate, which is pictured by the chewing of the cud.

The dividing of the hoof pictures the principle of discrimination, the need to distinguish between that which is from above and that which is from below. It means to take note of the fact that the Bible reports the lies of Satan and the confused thinking of man, as well as the revelation of the mind of God.

The Israelites were also to take food from the sea, which is used throughout Scripture as a symbol of the world, of society. From this area the proper food was to be distinguished by the possession of both fins and scales. Since fins are for progress and scales are for protection, this symbolizes our need to have both the capacity to penetrate a subject and yet to protect ourselves from any wrongful effect. We need both to understand and to discriminate, when feeding upon the knowledge of the world and its ways.

The third sphere from which food could come was the heavens. There all birds who fed upon flesh, all carrion eaters, and those that are omnivorous (that is, eat anything and everything), were forbidden. Also the winged insects were largely forbidden except those which leap upon the earth, as the locust, the grasshopper, and the cricket. Since the heavens are clearly the realm of the spirit we are dealing here with spiritual knowledge, especially in the realm of religion. We are clearly warned to reject all that is related to the flesh, that which is carnal in nature arising out of the principle of self-sufficiency. Then we are to reject spiritual knowledge which is eclectic, that is, gathering ideas from all sources with an attempt to blend everything together. Next, those insects which crawl and fly, but are not able to leap upon the earth, were to be rejected. Thus ideas which accurately tie man's earthly life to his relationship with God may be acceptable, but we are to be careful in this area.

Finally, there was a sphere from which all food was to be rejected. Those creatures which were in constant contact with the earth, whatever swarms upon the earth, goes upon its belly or has many feet, are all to be rejected. This immediately suggests the story of the Fall in the Garden of Eden and the curse which came upon the serpent in

that he was to crawl on his belly for the rest of his life. This is clearly then, knowledge based on satanic philosophy. It is wholly of the earth, relating only to this present life--its standards, its values, its pride and its glory. We are not to feed upon these or accept them as principles on which to live.

Chapter 12 deals with congenital depravity, reminding us that the race is sinful and that every child is therefore born in sin. Women who gave birth could be resumed to their privilege of worship only by the presentation of sin and burnt offerings. These kept fresh in mind a sense of sin, but also the promise of restoration through expiation and cleansing.

Chapters 13 and 14 deal wholly with the subject of leprosy. The term not only includes a number of skin diseases, but even types of mold and fungi appearing on garments and in houses. Leprosy in garments was symbolic of relationships with others, and the possibility of these relationships becoming infected through destructive practices or habits. The cleansing of a leper involved the death of a bird and the release of a living bird, picturing both the death and the resurrection of Christ. This step was followed by the personal cleansing of the applicant and then, on the eighth day, he was to bring first a trespass offering, then a sin offering, then a burnt offering, and finally, a meal offering.

Finally, the fifteenth chapter of Leviticus relates to sexual pollutions associated with various secretions and issues. Some of these were normal and others were unnatural. It all is to remind us of the pollution of our nature at its very fountainhead, and the perpetual necessity for cleansing.

Need for Atonement

The great Day of Atonement, described in chapter 16 closes the first half of the book of Leviticus and details the provision God has made for dealing with all sin in His people, whether known or unknown. It was the one day of the year when the high priest would actually enter the holy of holies, dressed not in his garments of beauty and glory but in simple white linen undergarments, which spoke of humility and weakness. There he offered incense for himself, the blood of a bull for his priestly household and finally, the blood of a goat as a sin offering for the people.

Upon the head of a second living goat all the sins of the people were confessed and symbolically placed, and the goat was led away into the wilderness. It is specifically stated that he was sent to "Azazel" which is one of the names for Satan. This pictures the act of faith of a believer in resuming sin to its author, and recognizing the fact that he has no ground upon which to bring further accusation against those whom the Lord has justified.

MAN'S PERFORMANCE

Chapters 17-27 form the second section of this book and describe the performance which is possible on the basis of the provision God has made. Notice carefully the order: God never mentions performance until He has fully revealed His provision. He does not speak about behavior until He has made clear the power by which we are to act.

In this section there are also four elements set forth.

Basis for Wholeness

First, there is a need to understand the basis for wholeness; that basis is blood. Many are offended by the amount of blood involved in the Old Testament sacrifices, but by this means God is impressing us with a fundamental fact. He is telling us that the basis for wholeness (holiness) is a life given up, that we can never be whole on the basis of our natural life. We must have a new kind of life and to have it we must give up the old. Often the problem of the Christian life is that we keep trying to hang on to the old way of life and refuse to accept the new. For this reason the Israelites were forbidden to eat blood but must remember that it is the symbol of life and the constant reminder of the need for atonement.

Standards for Purity

The second element of this section is a series of practical guidelines for acting in love amid all the relationships of life. The book proceeds to give standards for purity, first in the family, and especially with regard to sexual morals: incest, marriage of close relatives, adultery, homosexuality and bestiality, along with the terrible practice of the Canaanites, that of child sacrifice.

There follows a section of general ethical prescriptions which God, as it were, signs His own name 14 times. This is intended not only to indicate authority but also to suggest resource. Here the various regulations are summed up in the admonition of 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

To enforce the standards for purity, Leviticus gives certain prescribed punishment. The death penalty is required for child sacrifice, consulting with spirits, cursing parents, for adultery and homosexuality, and for intercourse with animals. We must understand that in Christ, though these penalties are mitigated, and opportunity is given for repentance and forgiveness, nevertheless the deeds are as wrong today as they were in Old Testament times.

The final category of standards concerns those for the priesthood. The priest must avoid all personal defilement, especially keeping himself from all contact with the dead. In his marriage he must not impair his ministry, nor could he serve if he had physical defects in his own body. These matters, of course, have symbolic application to the universal priesthood of today.

Enjoyment of God

The third element in this last section is the enjoyment of the presence and power of God Himself. Here we learn the meaning of the worship of Israel, and deadly peril of blasphemy, and, in chapter 25, the provision for the compassionate distribution of wealth through the institution of the sabbatical year and the year of jubilee.

The feasts of Israel were not mere holidays, to be observed on the nearest Monday in order to provide for a long weekend. Each was a symbolic occasion designed to teach a truth which God wants to impart to His people that is fundamental to human happiness. In their arrangement they constitute an outline of history.

First, the Sabbath is reiterated as indicating that rest is at the heart of everything God requires. The indispensable secret of our humanity is to learn how to operate out of rest. It is activity, growing out of dependence upon the work of Another, with the realization that the responsibility to achieve lies with Him.

The first of the set feasts was the Passover, occurring in the spring of the year, on the fourteenth day of the first month. It was God's graphic way of teaching that His work of redemption must rest upon the death of another on our behalf. The New Testament calls it justification.

Linked with the Passover was the feast of unleavened bread, which followed immediately. Two Sabbaths were always involved in this, including the weekly Sabbath. Its central feature was the exclusion of all leaven. This pictures the cleansing of life which must follow the act of justification.

Associated also with the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread was the feast of first fruits, which came on the morrow after the Sabbath. This would place it on a Sunday and therefore it was a fitting anticipation of the resurrection of Christ, the "first fruits from the dead."

Counting 50 days from the feast of first fruits there came what was called the feast of weeks. In the New Testament this is called Pentecost. It was characterized by two loaves of bread, baked with leaven, which were waved before the Lord. Thus it typifies the church, made of two bodies, Jew and Gentile. Both are sinners needing redemption but joined together into one body, the church.

On the first day of the seventh month came the feast of trumpets. This followed the long summer in which no feast was held. Its central feature was the loud blast of trumpets. Prophetically, this anticipates the prediction of

Jesus that He will return "coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matt. 24:30,31).

This was followed by the great Day of Atonement, on the tenth day of the seventh month. It was characterized as a time of affliction of spirit and of mourning over the wasted opportunities of life. It will find fulfillment when, after long centuries of unbelief, Israel "will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son" (Zech. 12:10).

Finally, the last feast was the Feast of Tabernacles, also called the feast of ingathering, for it marked the end of the agricultural year. It pictures time when, after Israel's restoration to their Lord and God, they will experience a lifting of the curse from nature and the blessing of the earth so that the desert shall blossom like the rose. It is -the time of Messiah's kingdom, when all nations shall feast in joy before Him.

In the opening part of chapter 24 we have a marvelous description of the functions which went on in the holy place of the Tabernacle. It begins with the candelabra, fueled by oil brought by the people. As light is always the symbol of truth, this becomes a picture of truth made known to the mind of man by the Holy Spirit. The table of showbread was to be spread every Sabbath day with a freshly baked series of 12 loaves of bread, with frankincense spread beside them. The 12 loaves, made of unleavened fine flour, depicts the commonality of life within the family of God.

The frankincense, as we have seen, was to be burned on the altar of incense, the third piece of furniture in the holy place. This represents the obedient heart, responding to the beauty of God, and offering praise and thanksgiving unto Him.

The closing incident of chapter 24, concerning the young man of mixed parentage who blasphemed the name of God, is doubtless inserted to indicate that which threatens the intimate relationship of God's people with Himself. The subsequent death of the young man highlights the seriousness of such violation.

This brings us to the sabbatical year. Not only was one day out of seven a day of rest, but every seventh year Israel was to let the land rest for a year. They were not to sow crops or even to prune vineyards but to let the trees and vines grow without hindrance. This periodic rest of the land is an important principle of horticulture. Symbolically, it points to a recognition of dependence upon God's ability to bring fruitfulness (1) in social life, (2) interpersonal relationships, and (3) even in governmental matters.

With this is linked the Year of Jubilee, which came every fiftieth year, as an intensification of the sabbatical year. Characteristic of the Year of Jubilee was the proclamation of liberty to all the inhabitants of the land. The mark of liberty is to regain a lost inheritance and to have broken relationships restored. There is no record that Israel ever actually experienced the Year of Jubilee. In all their history they never trusted God enough to try it out to see what He would do and so they never saw God's full supply. This becomes the reason, ultimately, for the 70 years of captivity in Babylon, for in the 490 years of their history God had been counting up the years, and at the end of that time God sent the people off to Babylon that the land might have its rest.

Preserved in Righteousness

The final section of the chapter consists of the necessity to give the poor a chance to recover from their poverty and restates the fact that no Israelite was to be a slave. The final lesson is summarized in the great statement "the life of the land is preserved in righteousness."

As the book draws to a close, the divine Voice recalls the people to two of the Ten Commandments: the warning against idolatry and the call to keep the Sabbath (26:1, 2). In a passage of infinite beauty and light God promises six blessings upon the people if they would walk in faithfulness before Him, utilizing the provisions for cleansing which He had instituted. The first promise is for fruitfulness (v. 4); the second, for full supply (v. 5); the third, for security (vv. 6-8); the fourth, for increase (v. 9); the fifth, the fellowship of the living God (v. 12); and sixth, the

promise to make the people "walk erect" as men and women ought to walk and live (v. 13).

But, in anticipation of Israel's actual future, God moves on to set forth the cursings which will follow failure to walk in the divine ways. These punishments would include: disease, conflict, drought, wild beasts invasion, and break-up of family life, and finally, captivity. All of this now stands written in history, but the wonderful thing is that through it all God has a redemptive, constructive goal toward which He aims. If there is repentance and return, there is also the promise of recovery and restoration.

This is the story of the inflexibility of love and the ruthlessness of grace. It is an inevitable rule of life that if you reject light then you must endure darkness, if you will not receive the positive then you must experience the negative; if you will not go in then you must stay out--until the time comes when you are ready to go in. There are no other choices. Thus the last element dealt with in this book is the awareness of the issues at stake and the decision that is expected of us.

The final page of the book deals with the matter of vows. Vows are voluntary obligations which are promised to God, usually on the ground of some blessing from Him. They include here, vows concerning persons, animals, and objects. The point is that it is not necessary to make vows but if they are made they must be observed. If for any reason the one making a vow desires to be set free from it, he must pay its full value, plus something more, according to the appraisal of the priest. Doubtless God uses such vows to draw us out and to help us grow in the discipline of grace. It is significant that the book which calls us preeminently to worship closes with regulations on how to handle the voluntary commitments of our awakened hearts.

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Five

The Incomplete Life: Numbers, Deuteronomy

Numbers takes its title from the census with which it begins and that with which it ends. It opens in the wilderness of Sinai, in the second year after the Israelites had left Egypt, and closes at the edge of the Promised Land, 40 years later. In between is a long and sad record of the failure of Israel to believe in God's provision and power during the wanderings in the wilderness.

Numbers is a dramatic setting for what is perhaps the hardest lesson a Christian must learn--to trust God instead of his own reason. The book forms a commentary on two verses from the Proverbs. Proverbs 3:5 states, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding." That is the truth God had vividly taught His people in the book of Leviticus. But another verse in Proverbs describes the way the people actually responded. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Numbers is the record of the discipline of God in the life of those whom He deeply loves and continually cares for, but who stubbornly resist the way of spiritual progress and thus delay their experience of victory and the joy of fellowship with a living God.

The book easily falls into three divisions. The first 10 chapters summarize God's ample provision for Israel's guidance and warfare. The major part of the book, from chapters 11 through 21, is a description of the continual murmuring and rebelling of the people. The latter part, from chapters 22 through 36, is a remarkable record of the

protection of Israel despite their failure.

GOD'S PROVISION

The book opens with the divine command to number from the 12 tribes, the men of war from 20 years old and upward and gives us a census of the fighting men of the nation. The total amounted to 603,550 (Num. 1:46). The Levites were omitted as being dedicated to the service of the Tabernacle. So their place was made up by dividing the tribe of Joseph into two tribes, named for Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. It is instructive that only those who had a clear pedigree could go forth to war. The lesson for the Christian is clear: only those who are certain they belong to the family of God can effectually do battle in the spiritual warfare to which we are called.

The camp is then set in order, with three tribes placed at each of the four points of the compass (chap. 2). The Levites gathered around the Tabernacle, which is clearly to be the center of everything in the national life. Every man had his own appointed place in the great army of Israel, just as the apostle Paul reminds us that each member of the Body of Christ is placed according to the mind and will of God.

In place of the firstborn of every family, whom God had claimed for Himself, the entire tribe of Levi is substituted. There were 22,000 acceptable Levites. But since there were 22,273 firstborn sons, for the extra 273 firstborn sons above the number of Levites, God accepted redemption money which went to maintain Aaron and his family (Num. 3:39-43). Though the Lord Jesus, centuries later, was not of the tribe of Levi He was a firstborn and so, according to the original provision, He was rightly a priest.

Each of the families of Levi is then assigned its special role in the work of caring for the Tabernacle (chap. 4). The family of Kohath was responsible to carry the holy furniture. The curtains and the tents were given into the care of the Gershonites, and the foundations of the Tabernacle were committed to the Merarites. The special care given to the symbols of divine relationship suggests how important are the divine provisions for maintaining a strong spiritual life.

Further arrangements were made for maintaining the purity of the camp (chap. 5), even to the point of settling marriage difficulties arising out of jealousy and suspicion.

The restrictions on those who took the voluntary vow of a Nazirite are given (chap. 6), and have particular interest for us since three of the best known biblical characters--Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist--seemed to be such from birth. They were to refrain from the use of alcohol in any form, from the cutting of their hair or beard, and from contact with dead bodies. The Nazirite vows were taken as an act of consecration to some special service to God. These vows are somewhat similar to the vow of fasting in the case of present-day believers. In this special connection, the well-known threefold benediction is uttered (6:24-26).

Chapter 7, the longest in the book, deals with the voluntary offering of the princes of Israel for the maintenance of worship. It is an almost monotonous recording of each man's identical offering. But the fact that it was so carefully chronicled indicates the interest of God in the individual's gift. The Levites then appear again, are separated from the rest of the people, cleansed, sprinkled, shaven, and finally presented to the Lord by Aaron. There is a clear analogy in this to the presentation of present-day believers before the Father by our great High Priest the Lord Jesus. He said of Himself, "I sanctify myself, that these also may be sanctified" (John 17: 19, KJV). Thus we were separated by His death that we should be holy before God. "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17).

Three things yet remain to be set in order before the people begin their march from Sinai.

First, the Passover was kept for the first time after leaving Egypt. Gracious provision was made for the observance of it again one month later for certain ones who were unclean on the first occasion. This indicates some liberty in the observance of the Passover and perhaps helps with the problem in the Gospel of John, where it appears our Lord ate the Passover the evening before the rest of the nation partook of it.

The second thing to be done was to make clear the provision for guidance in the cloud and fire which rested over the Tabernacle. The people were not responsible to determine either the time or the direction of their march but were required only to be obedient to the divine signs. Sometimes the clouds tarried for two days, or a month, or even longer, and then, however difficult and dangerous was the location, there was no option but to remain encamped. Surely this is one of the most difficult lessons for believers to learn. "Wait" is the hardest word to learn in the vocabulary of spiritual discipline.

The third requirement before the cloud lifted as to learn the signals of the trumpets when they sounded. These signals clearly understood, the cloud' over the Tabernacle was taken up and the people began their journey through the wilderness of Sinai. The account closes with the remarkable call of Moses to invite the presence of the Lord, both at their setting out and their resting, thus indicating that everything is centered in the presence and government of God.

THE PEOPLE'S REBELLION

Chapters 11-25 record the people's discontent with God's provision and care. The first complaint seems to be against the hardship of their circumstances, but when the fire of the Lord burned among them and Moses interceded on their behalf, the fire abated (Num. 11:1-3).

The next complaint arose over the monotonous diet of manna. All they could think of were the melons, the cucumbers, the leeks, onions, and garlic of Egypt. They forgot the bondage and misery of Egypt and remembered only its delights. Moses, in his complaint before Jehovah, comes perilously close to joining their murmuring; but God's answer is to appoint elders to assist Moses in the oversight of the people (vv. 16, 17). To the people God then gave quails in such abundance that they ate them for an entire month--and then began to complain about the abundance of meat!

These rumblings of discontent were followed by a mutiny in Moses' own family (chap. 12). Aaron and Miriam became upset at Moses' marriage to a woman from Ethiopia. Though the Lord directly explained to Aaron and Miriam that He had called Moses to a specialized ministry, nevertheless their jealousy continued and Miriam was punished with leprosy. Upon the intercession of Moses, and after seven days wait, Miriam was restored, for God is ever ready to pardon when evil is confessed and forsaken.

By this time the thousands of Israelites have reached Kadesh-Barnea, at the edge of the Promised Land. At the divine command, 12 spies were chosen to enter the land and view both its resources and its dangers (13:1-20). In comparing this with the first chapter of Deuteronomy it appears that the command to send out the spies was in response to the people's determination to do this. As they decided, so they were commanded to do; just another example of God's accommodation to man's weakness.

After 40 days the men returned, bearing with them, in the grapes of Eshcol, visible evidence of the land's fertility. But there is both a majority and a minority report. Ten spies compared themselves with the giants and were disheartened: the two spies compared the giants with God and were greatly encouraged. Upon hearing the majority report the people virtually mutinied and took action to return to Egypt. Though Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before the people, and Joshua and Caleb pled with them to act in faith rather than fear, the people responded by picking up stones to stone them.

At this, Jehovah's patience was exhausted and He threatened to cut them off and raise up another people through Moses. Once again, as in Sinai, Moses interceded with the people, pleading the honor of God and the gloating of the Egyptians should they hear that Jehovah was unable to bring His people into the land of promise (14:13). Again it is God's grace, working through His human instrument, Moses, to plead the cause of mercy.

The people were pardoned, but were sentenced to 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and exclusion from the land of everyone over 20 years of age. In a response of remorse rather than repentance, the people promised to go up to the land and attempted to do so in spite of the warning that their day of opportunity was gone. A defeat at the

hands of the Amalekites and Canaanites was the result.

In seeming preparation for their 40 years of wandering, certain sacrifices and laws are repeated (chap. 15), with the explanation that they would be fulfilled when the people came into the Promised Land. What follows illustrates that they were not clear whether the laws were to be enforced in the wilderness. One man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath and was put in custody until they determined the mind of God toward him (15:32-34). The people were immediately instructed to put him to death according to the law, and when this was done they were all instructed to wear tassels on the corners of their garment. Into each tassel was bound a cord of blue, a symbol of the deepest truth in their life: that they were under the direct government of heaven.

Despite the divine warnings, rebellion continued to spread throughout the camp, and three men, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, openly challenged the authority of Moses and Aaron (chap. 16). Korah, as a Levite, resented the fact that the priesthood was confined to the family of Aaron; while Dathan and Abiram, both Reubenites, were contemptuous of Moses' authority, and resentful of the circumstances into which he had brought them. Korah led 250 of the elders of Israel in seeking to offer priestly incense before the Lord, but the cloud of glory appeared to the congregation and the Lord warned all the camp to stand back from the dwellings of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. As these men and their families stood at the door of their tents, suddenly the ground opened beneath them and they were all swallowed alive. Furthermore, fire from the Lord consumed the 250 elders (16:35).

On the morrow, in unbelievable stubbornness, the people yet murmured against Moses and Aaron, accusing them of responsibility for the death of those who had been punished. Immediately a plague from the Lord broke out among them, and 14,700 died before Aaron filled his censer with fire and made atonement for the people (16:47). Upon that, the plague stopped. To make an end of the spirit of murmuring, Jehovah commanded each of the heads of tribes to write their name upon an almond rod, along with that of Aaron, and leave them in the tent of meeting overnight. On the morrow Aaron's rod had budded, blossomed, and bore fruit (17:8), thus indicating that those who have the right to bear authority are those who walk in the fullness and fruitfulness of resurrection life.

Further regulations were then given for the sanctity of the priesthood and the work of the Levites, and provision was made for their support from tithes and offerings. The tribe of Levi was to have no part of the division of the land when they came into Canaan, for the tithe was to be their inheritance. The priests, likewise, were to have no inheritance, for the Lord Himself was their portion. All this has clear application to the universal priesthood of today.

Special provision for cleansing from defilement was made in the ordinance of the red heifer (chap. 19). With careful ceremony a red heifer was to be sacrificed, according to minute instructions, and its ashes were to be carefully gathered, mixed with water, and used for certain cases of uncleanness, particularly those involved with touching dead bodies. When it is remembered that on the average 82 people per day must have died during the 40 years wilderness wanderings, it is easy to see how necessary it was to have some provision for cleansing from such defilement. Nothing could more graphically portray the contagiousness of sin. There is unavoidable defilement involved in contact with those "dead in trespasses and sins" around us, but for this reason we must perpetually seek the fresh cleansing of the precious blood of Christ. As the book of Hebrews puts it, "If...the ashes of a heifer...sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ...cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:13,14).

We now reach the record of events at the close of the 40 years, when the people were again at Kadesh-Barnea. Here Miriam, the sister of Aaron and the half-sister of Moses, died and was buried (20:1). Also, once again the people were without water. When they complained, God graciously sent Moses and Aaron with the rod to a rock to speak to it that the people may have water. But though God was gracious, Moses was ungracious, and in his irritation and unbelief he struck the rock twice. For this violation of type Jehovah told both Moses and Aaron that they would not be able to lead the people into the land. But, nevertheless, he caused the rock to bring forth water for the people's needs (20:11).

The enmity of Edom (the descendants of Esau) is indicated by their truculent refusal to let Israel pass through their

land along the King's Highway. In circumventing Edom they came to Mount Hor on the border of the land of Edom. There Aaron died (20:28), after transferring his priestly garments to his son Eleazar.

On leaving Kadesh, the king of Arad, a Canaanite leader, attacked Israel as they called upon the Lord for grace, and was defeated. Immediately after their victory comes the incident of the fiery serpents sent among the people because of their murmuring and impatience against Moses (21:6-9). This is the incident referred to by the Lord Jesus in His nighttime talk with Nicodemus (see John 3:14,15). He pointed out its significance in that just as Moses lifted up a bronze likeness of the creature causing death, so Jesus, made in the likeness of sinful flesh, was lifted up to give life to all who would believe.

Chapters 22 through 24 tell the story of Balaam, that strange Gentile prophet who seemed to have a genuine knowledge of Jehovah and yet whose heart was filled with avarice and lusting for material advantage. He was hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse Israel, since Moab was next on their route of conquest. Told by God that Israel was only to be blessed, Balaam sent the Moabite embassy home with his refusal. But once again Balak sent princes to him to offer a huge reward if he would come and *curse* Israel. Evidently, Jehovah, reading the true intent of Balaam's heart, permitted him to go, though He was displeased with his motives. On his way, Balaam was confronted by an angel of the Lord--with drawn sword. However, only Balaam's donkey saw the angel. Three times the donkey turned aside to avoid the avenging angel. But when Balaam, in anger, struck the donkey, the Lord opened the animal's mouth to rebuke the prophet for his cruelty.

Three times Balak sought to have Balaam curse Israel, and three times the prophet was unable to utter cursings but instead, in lilting poetry, predicted the sovereign call of Israel, their protection by the divine hand, and their ultimate conquering of the peoples around. When the furious Balak refuses to pay him Balaam uttered an oracle of doom against Moab, Edom, and Amalekites, and the Kenites. In his final oracle he seemed to see even to the days of David, predicting "a star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth" (Num. 24:17). In its ultimate fulfillment this reaches unto the Messiah Himself.

Though the Old Testament does not clearly describe Balaam's evil, the New Testament makes clear that the subsequent sexual immorality of the men of Israel with the daughters of Moab, and their consequent idolatry, was an outcome of the teaching of Balaam. When an Israelite man brazenly brought a woman of Midian into his tent for sexual purposes, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, jealous for the honor of God, thrust his spear through both man and woman and by that terrible punishment stayed the plague which had broken out (Num. 25:6-9).

GOD'S PROTECTION

Chapter 26 begins the third and last movement of the book. Here we have the account of the second census taken of the men of war and their families. Instructions were then given to Moses concerning the division of the land when they came into Canaan. Of the original number that left Egypt, only two men were permitted to enter. These were Caleb and Joshua, the men of faith, who saw beyond the giants to the living God (Num. 26:65).

An interesting incident is related concerning the five daughters of Zelophehad. Left fatherless, they petitioned and were granted an inheritance in the land of promise (27:1-11). Typically, it established the principle that in Christ there is neither male nor female.

At this point, Jehovah informed Moses that the time has come for him to die, and at Moses' request for a successor, God appointed Joshua, the son of Nun (27:18,19). Joshua would not inherit the full authority Moses exercised, but that he would discover the divine will through the high priest by use of the Urim.

Following this, God repeated the various offerings and sacrifices to be given at the great feast days of Israel, already outlined in the book of Leviticus. Certain exceptions were then made to the general rule concerning vows. The vow of an unmarried daughter, living with her father, may be nullified if her father chooses to do so on the day she makes the vow as may that of a married woman by her husband (30: 1- 16). It is clear, however, that the men are involved only as the heads of households, otherwise single women were under the same solemn

obligation to keep their vows as were the men.

The concluding chapters of the book, from chapter 31 through 36, are given over to an account of a holy war led by Phinehas the priest, against the Midianites, during which Balaam, the false prophet, is also slain. Here also, the two tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh insisted unwisely on settling on the east side of the Jordan rather than in the land of promise. They were permitted to do so only by agreeing to join their brethren in subduing their Canaanite enemies.

After reviewing the route taken by Israel from Egypt to the Jordan, and giving directions for the division of the land when the tribes enter it, Moses then assigned certain cities as residences for the Levites, six of which are especially designated as Cities of Refuge (35: 10- 15) for those who killed as the result of an accident or a sudden flare of temper.

Historically, the book of Numbers closes where the last chapter of Deuteronomy begins, giving us the account of the actual death of Moses. Numbers is the record of the failure of the people in their perpetual stubbornness and foolishness, yet it is also the story of the unwearying patience and continual faithfulness of God. Thus it encourages those of us who have often found failure in our own spiritual life. We have come to learn, as the New Testament declares, "If we are faithless,-He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

DEUTERONOMY

Deuteronomy is the last of the five books by Moses. It is a pastime of scholars today, and a supposed mark of intelligence, to raise the question of whether or not Moses actually wrote these books. Some maintain that the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) was put together by some unknown editor who went through ancient books and abstracted various parts, and to which Moses' name was added to give it status. This is called the documentary theory of the Pentateuch. Anyone who studies comparative religion in high school or college will probably be exposed to it. But it is a theory that has been carefully examined and proved false by both Christian and Jewish writers. As one authority put it, "If the five books of Moses were not written by him, they must have been written by somebody else named Moses."

The book of Deuteronomy is made up of three great sermons? delivered by Moses shortly before his death. These were given to Israel while they waited on the east side of the Jordan in the Arabah, and after they had been victorious over Sihon, the king of the Amorites, and Og the king of Bashan. At this time the multitude of Israelites were made up of a new generation who were but children when their fathers had been given the Law from Mount Sinai, and many of them were not yet even born at that time. Now they are about to enter the land of Canaan, and it is essential that they thoroughly understand their history before they make such a venture.

REVIEW OF THE JOURNEY

Chapters 1-4 contain the first message, in which Moses reviews the journey from the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai until the people reach their present location in the land of Moab, at the edge of the Jordan River.

Moses' first task was to recite to the people the wonderful love and care of God, who led them with a pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day, and guided them through the trackless, howling desert. He reminded them how God brought water from the rock to slake their thirst in a vast and waterless area; how He fed them with manna that did not fail; and delivered them from their enemies again and again.

In chapter I he traced the movement of the people from the giving of the Law at Sinai (also called Mount Horeb) to the refusal of the people to enter the land at Kadesh-Barnea. In chapter 2, he reviewed the second movement from Kadesh-Barnea to Heshbon, around the land of Edom, and through the wilderness of Moab to their encounter with Sihon, the king of Heshbon. Throughout this passage, Moses emphasized the continual deliverance

of the people by the hand of God from their enemies, despite their unbelief.

Continuing his discourse, Moses reviewed the conquest of the: Jordan Valley as far north as Mount Hermon, and the decision of Reuben and Gad to settle on the east side of the river. In a note of pathos, he recalled his own eager desire to enter into the land when the people do, but also the divine denial of this to him, though he was permitted to view the land from the top of Mount Pisgah. Moses closed the historic review, in chapter 4, with an exhortation to the people to remember the greatness of their God and to be obedient from their hearts. He warned also against the danger of idolatry, especially in the making of graven images. He reminded them of their surpassing privilege of relationship with the living God above all other nations around them. He concluded the message with setting aside three cities of refuge on the east of the Jordan for the protection of those who accidentally kill another.

SECOND GIVING OF THE LAW

The second message of Moses covers chapters 5-26. This begins with a fresh recital of the Ten Commandments as God gave them to Moses on Mount Sinai. It is from this that the book gets its name, for Deuteronomy means "the second (giving of) law." That has more significance than merely the historical account of the law's recital for a second time as we shall see before we finish the book. It must be understood that Deuteronomy is not merely a recital of the journeys of Israel, but it is also a divine commentary upon the significance of those journeys and their events.

In connection with the giving of the Law, Moses reminded the people that at that time they had promised to hear and to do all that God said. To this God had responded "Oh that they had such heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever" (Deut. 5:29). Moses then proceeded to give them the famous Shemah or "Hear, O Israel," which devout Jews have used for centuries to summarize the central feature of their faith--the uniqueness of their God. In connection with this is given the divine requirement to observe these words, to teach them diligently to their children by means of talking to them when they were sitting in the house walking by the way, lying down, or rising up. This is a great lesson on pedagogy, suggesting the utilization of "teachable moments," when truth could be imparted much better than in formal classroom situations.

Moses then began to review the conditions they would find in the land and the blessings that will await them there. He especially warned them to beware of three perils: that of *prosperity*, of *adversity*, and of *neglect to teach* their children. In chapter 7, Moses dealt with the danger Israel would face in confronting the corrupt nations already in the land. However tempted they might be to show mercy to them, they were commanded to thoroughly eliminate the inhabitants of Canaan, that no vestige of their idolatries and depraved worship should remain to turn the people aside from their worship of Jehovah. They were reminded that they were chosen because the Lord had set His love upon them and that He, Himself, would be their strength in subjugating the nations around. Their own prosperity and good health would depend on the faithfulness by which they carried out these instructions. They need not fear the people for God Himself would cast them into great confusion until they were destroyed.

Chapter 8 recalled to the people the lessons God had taught them in the wilderness; how they had been humbled, and fed with the manna, so that they might know that "man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord" (8:3). These were familiar words to Jesus who used them to good effect against the tempter in the wilderness of Judea centuries later (see Matt. 4:4).

When the people have entered the land and are feasting upon its richness, they are to beware lest they begin to feel self-sufficient and to take credit in their own heart for all that God has given them. They must not say to themselves that it is because of their own righteousness that the Lord brought them in, they must remember that they are basically a stubborn people, and their history is one of a continual provoking of the Lord to wrath. Moses then recalled the awesome scene at Sinai, when, in the very face of the demonstration of the power and might of God, the people sinned by making the golden calf, and Moses must intercede for them for 40 days and nights. At that time he also made the second tablets of stone, and later placed them in the Ark of the Covenant where they were at the very moment he is speaking to the people.

In a passage of great beauty and power, Moses reminded the people that God is not asking of them anything but to love Him and to serve Him with all their heart and soul, keeping His commandments and statutes for their own benefit. The central emphasis of all is that "the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God" (Deut. 10:17). Yet His actions toward them are those of infinite tenderness and love. God is not asking them to love Him, apart from their awareness that He has first loved them and tenderly cared for them and watched over them, delivering them from their enemies, and disciplining them that they may be strong and whole as a people. As they enter the land, therefore, they are promised rain from heaven to water the earth, grass in the fields for their cattle, power in their warfare to drive out great nations before them until the whole of the land shall be their possession. To remind them of the essential in all this, they are annually to recite the blessings on Mount Gerizim and the cursings on Mount Ebal, which faces the site of Jacob's well.

Chapters 12 through 21 constitute a series of statutes and ordinances which are given to the people for their government within the land. They must first destroy all the places of worship of the nations then in the land, tearing down their altars and burning their Asherim (phallic symbols). These were clear indications of the foulness of the worship in the land at the time. God would then indicate, in due season, one place within the land where they must bring their burnt offerings and sacrifice and there they were to rejoice before the Lord. This was not fulfilled until the days of David and Solomon when the Temple was built, though a temporary provision was made when the Ark was located at Shiloh.

Further instructions are given as to the foods they may eat, avoiding always the eating of blood. They are then told how to tell false prophets from true. Even though the false prophet may be a wonder-worker, if, despite all his apparent power, he should suggest that they go after other gods, they were to stone him. Even if close friends or relatives should seek to entice them to idolatry, they likewise must be put to death. Even if a whole city should apostatize and begin to serve other gods, the inhabitants of that city were to be put to the sword, for "you are the sons of the Lord your God" (Deut. 14:1).

Once again the dietary laws are restated, and the tithes are required for the support of the Levites. The sabbatical years are reiterated as the solution to inequities in economic life, and periodic readjustment of the means of wealth. The three great feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Tabernacles, are once again required as the three times in a year when all Hebrew males must appear before the Lord at the Tabernacle.

Provision is then made for the functioning of judges to decide cases where the law had not specifically spoken; also for the choosing of a king, who must not be a foreigner, nor multiply horses, or silver and gold, but must carefully walk by the statutes of the Law and keep his heart humble before the Lord his God.

In chapter 18, there is the great promise given that "the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him" (v. 15). In some measure this great prophecy was fulfilled by all the true prophets who would rise later in Israel, but in its ultimate it looks forward to the coming of Jesus and His Moses-like actions in beholding the face of God, and uttering His word to all the people. This is the way Peter understood it in Acts 3:22. It is Jesus who perfectly fulfills the Old Testament ideal of priest, prophet, and king..

Again, three cities of refuge were chosen, this time on the west side of the Jordan. Those who were guilty of deliberate murder could find no sanctuary in these cities, only those who killed accidentally were to flee to them to escape the avenger of blood. Ancient landmarks must not be removed, and truth between man and man must be maintained at all costs.

It should be remembered that the Israelites were being sent into the land not only to gain it for their own possession but also to act as the instrument of God in exterminating a foul and corrupt people. In view of the warfare this involved, they were charged to keep before them the vision of their God and His power, and to eliminate from their armies any whose hearts were occupied with other matters, or who were fainthearted and fearful. Terms of peace were to be offered to every city they attacked, and if they were accepted, the inhabitants were not killed but put to forced labor. If the terms of peace were refused, the city was to be decimated.

Chapters 22-26 gather up various regulations for the life of the people within the land. They concern lost or stolen property, prohibitions against the wearing of the opposite sex's clothing, regulations of sexual uncleanness and sanitation, usury, vows, and divorce. Provision was then made for the punishment of theft; but excessive punishment was strictly forbidden--anything which humiliated or made an individual appear vile in others' sight. It was likewise forbidden to muzzle an ox as it tread out the corn. This is given a special spiritual significance by the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 9:8-10. The law of the kinsman-redeemer for those left without an heir, was again enunciated, and all weights and measures were ordered to be kept strictly honest.

The second message then concludes with the instructions of Moses on how the people were to worship in the new land. They must bring the firstfruits and offer them to God, with acknowledgments of His provision and grace, and this was to be followed with gifts given to Levites, to strangers, the fatherless and to widows. Upon the conclusion of this second message, Moses gave detailed instructions as to the impressive ceremony which was to be carried out upon the twin mountains of Gerizim and Ebal within the land. The Ten Commandments were to be given permanent display by being written upon plaster-covered stone monuments, and each year the sons of Rachel and Leah were to recite the blessings upon Mount Gerizim, and the sons of Jacob's concubines were to recite the curses upon Mount Ebal. The curses are detailed in chapter 27, and the blessings summarized in the opening words of chapter 28.

REVELATION OF THE FUTURE

The third message of Moses, chapters 27-31, is a great revelation of the future of Israel, both in terms of the possibility of blessing or of cursing. Chapter 28 is one of the most amazing prophecies ever recorded. It is as fully complete and remarkable in its detail as any other prophecy in all of Scripture, for it predicts the entire history of the Jewish people, even to the point where they cease to be a nation and are scattered over the face of the earth.

First, there is the prediction of the Babylonian dispersion, subsequent to the unbelief and disobedience of the people. This occurred eventually under Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldean. Then there follows a prediction of their ultimate return to the land and that after several centuries they would again fall into the terrible sin of rejecting the great Prophet whom God would send. A strange nation would come in from the west (the Romans) who would be a hard and cruel people. They would burn the cities of Israel, destroy the inhabitants and once again disperse them to the ends of the earth.

Israel would then wander for many centuries as a people without a land, but God would at last gather them again, and there would be a final restoration. Upon concluding his great prophecy, Moses reminded the people that on this day they stand before the Lord their God and though there is much about the divine government which they cannot fathom, nevertheless the things that had been revealed to them in their past are given that they may take heed to their present and talk faithfully before their God. In graphic and vivid terms he described to them what would result if they turned from the living God to the gods of the nations about them'

In his closing word, Moses seems to look far into the future and see the people dispersed in lands of captivity. There he reminded them that if they will return to the Lord with all their heart and soul, God would forgive their sin, restore their fortunes, and gather them again into the land.

At this point, Moses uttered the great words which the apostle Paul quoted centuries later in his Epistle to the Romans, and which reveal the reason why Deuteronomy is called "the second law." Moses said to the people, "This commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach" (Deut. 30:11). This speaks of the divine provision by which the demands of the law might be fully met. "It is not necessary," Moses continued, "to go up to heaven and bring it down or to go beyond the sea and bring it back" (see vv. 12,13); but as Moses put it very plainly, "the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it" (see v. 14).

In Romans 10:5 Paul declares that "Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by that righteousness." Here he quotes the words of Moses concerning the Law given at Sinai, and taken from the book of Exodus. Then in Romans 10:6-9 Paul quoted this very passage from Deuteronomy

30, indicating that it refers to Christ, "But the righteousness based on faith speaks thus, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down), or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).' But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart'--that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Rom. 10:6-9).

In this quotation from Deuteronomy 30, Paul is declaring that it is not necessary to bring Christ down from heaven (the Incarnation), or to bring Him up again from the dead (Resurrection), for this has already been done. It is only necessary that the heart believe and the lips confess that Jesus is Lord and risen from the dead. Thus "the second law," which Paul calls "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus," fulfills, by another principle, the righteousness which the law demands. It is possible, because of this emphasis in Deuteronomy, that the book became Jesus' favorite.

Both of these principles are clearly taught to the people of Israel by Moses. He reiterates constantly the just demands of God expressed in the Ten Commandments. That is the first law. But, equally, he reminds them again and again of the gracious provision through the sacrifices and offerings by which the life of a living Lord can be their personal possession, to enable them to live at the level that God requires. The word "in the mouth" and "in the heart" would enable them to do all that God demanded.

As a consequence, Moses concluded his great address by saying, "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity" (Deut. 30:15). And with earnest words he pleads with them to choose life "in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days" (30:19,20).

In the final chapters, Moses summoned Joshua before him and charged him to be strong and of good courage. Then Jehovah told Moses that the time had come for him to sleep with his fathers, and that despite his faithful warnings, the people he had led would fulfill all his solemn predictions and that God would necessarily visit them with the punishments announced.

Moses was then commanded to write a song which would remain in the memory of the people long after Moses himself had departed. The song dealt with the great themes of God's everlasting covenant with Israel, His mercies to them, their failures and the penalties which followed, and the promise of final deliverance.

Then, before Moses' lonely death, he announced a benediction, similar in its predictive insight to the blessing of Jacob upon his sons in Genesis 49. The great lawgiver concluded his benediction by reminding the people that "the eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (33:27).

The final chapter is undoubtedly added by another hand, for it recounts how Moses ascended Mount Nebo to the top of the peak of Pisgah, and there, with his eye not dim nor his natural force abated, Moses laid down and died and the Lord Himself buried him in an unknown place in the valley of Moab.

The next glimpse of this mighty leader in Scripture shows him on the Mount of Transfiguration, along with Elijah the prophet, speaking to the Lord Jesus about His death which would soon take place at Jerusalem.

Though the people immediately rallied around Joshua and gave to him the obedience which they had shown to Moses, they knew that they would never see a man like Moses again, whom the Lord would speak to face-to-face, and through him manifest great and terrible deeds. It was not until the Messiah Himself should appear that the record of Moses would ever be excelled.

Chapter Six

The Way to Victory: Joshua

The time had come for the people of Israel to enter into the land of promise. All those who left Egypt some 40 years before had perished in the wilderness, except for Caleb and Joshua. A new generation had grown up in the wilderness journey. Moses had fully instructed them in the laws and the sacrifices before he died, and Joshua had assumed the task of leading the people into the land.

Moses, the great lawgiver, was not permitted to take the people into the fulfillment of promise; rather Joshua (whose Hebrew name is the equivalent of the Greek name, Jesus) is given that privilege. This is surely an anticipation of the New Testament truth that the law cannot fulfill the promises of God, but they are all available to us through our heavenly Commander, Jesus.

Nevertheless, Joshua was instructed in the use of the law as necessary for meditation and a guideline to obedience. But the strength by which it shall be fulfilled lies in the great word, "Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).

VICTORY IS POSSIBLE

After reminding the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh of their promise to assist their brethren in the conquest of the land, Joshua sent out his spies to view the situation. These go out as he himself went out, 38 years before, in confidence and faith that God intended to give them the land. They were simply attempting to see how that deliverance will be brought about. With boldness they entered into the city of Jericho and were hidden in the house of Rahab, the harlot, who informed them that the people had for 40 years been afraid of the Israelites, having heard of their miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea and their conquest of the two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og. The giants which Israel feared at Kadesh-Barnea had themselves been afraid of the people of Israel for the whole 40 years' wandering!

Rahab's personal confidence that the God of Israel was the Lord of all the earth led her to hide the two spies and aid in their subsequent escape from the city, after having them promise that when the city fell she and her household would be spared.

Forsake Unbelief

After the spies returned, Joshua ordered the people to assemble for the crossing of the Jordan. The Ark of the Covenant leading the way would show the people that a living God was among them as He opened a way through the Jordan, just as He had once opened a way through the Red Sea.

Twelve men were chosen, one from each tribe, to memorialize the occasion. As the feet of the priests touched the edge of the Jordan, the waters began to recede, having been cut off far upstream near the little city of Adam.

The priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant remained in the middle of the river until all the people passed through. Then a monument of 12 stones was erected in the middle of the river and another similar monument at the river's edge. These were to be a memorial for the children to see, that they might ask and receive an explanation from their parents.

As we seek the significance of this event in the Christian life, we must remember that just as the crossing of the Red Sea meant the willingness to forsake the world typified by Egypt, so the crossing of the Jordan indicates a

willingness to enter into all the promises which God has given the believer in Jesus Christ. It acknowledges the choice to forsake the unbelief of the wilderness and to fully lay hold of all that God has made available.

Some have seen in the two memorial monuments the Christian ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and surely these are designed as memorials to remind us of the basis upon which all of God's mighty promises rest. They too need to be explained to children so that they understand their full import.

Depend on God

Four significant events are recorded in chapter 5. First, all the males of Israel were circumcised at Gilgal. The name means "rolling away," for here the Lord said Israel had "rolled away the reproach of Egypt" (Josh. 5:9). Evidently the nation had forsaken this ritual during the wilderness wanderings; thus the mark of difference between them and the pagan nations around them had disappeared. Before the land is conquered they must again be seen as the distinct people of God. The New Testament speaks of a "circumcision of the heart" (see Rom. 2:29 which is the counterpart to this Old Testament ritual, and indicates a heart that is ready to forsake all dependence on the natural life and rely upon the strength of God alone).

The second event in Gilgal was the celebration of the Passover for only the second time since leaving Egypt. Then the day after the Passover the provision of manna ceased entirely, the third event of this chapter, and the people began to subsist upon the natural produce of the land of Canaan. This corresponds to our spiritual feeding upon the full potential of the resources we have in Christ.

The fourth event of chapter 5 was Joshua's encounter with the commander of the hosts of the Lord. Clearly it was not up to Joshua to plan the strategy of this campaign of conquest, but God Himself would do so, just as today it is not the church's task to develop the strategy by which it can overcome the world, but it is to obey the Word of the Lord and to obey the pattern of the church's function as given in the New Testament.

Release Worldliness

Both the foolishness of the Jericho strategy, in the eyes of the watching world, and its mighty power to conquer are revealed in the subsequent actions of Israel. Upon reaching the city of Jericho with its massive walls, the people were instructed to march once around the city in silence while the priests sounded trumpets. Each day for six days this was Joshua's command. Then on the seventh day the people were told to encompass the city seven times and, when the priests blew a mighty blast of the trumpets, the people were to shout and the walls would fall down.

To this apparently foolish behavior the people had faith enough to consent. And on the seventh day, exactly as predicted, the mighty walls tumbled down at the shout, of faith. Rahab and her family were spared according to the prearranged provision, but the city was sacked and the rest of the inhabitants were put to the sword. A curse, involving the death of the firstborn and youngest son of any who would rebuild the city, was pronounced by Joshua. The fulfillment of this curse some two hundred years later is recorded in I Kings 16:34.

This curse indicates the symbolic meaning of Jericho in the life of the present-day believer. The death of the firstborn son links it with the final judgment of God that brought the Israelites out of Egypt. Jericho, therefore, like Egypt, is a type of the world. Christians are not to covet or to claim as their own the things of the world, but are to hold them loosely and use them for the Lord's purposes. They are likewise not to fight the world directly, but by faith to maintain an attitude of heart separation from the world, and thus it will lose its allurements for the believer " who will find it open to conquest through the testimony of faith.

Battle the Flesh

Chapters 7 and 8 give us the bittersweet story of Ai, the next city in the line of conquest. It was such a small city and looked so easy to overcome that only a few thousand were sent to capture it. They suffered, however, a serious defeat, and about 36 Israelites were killed. As Joshua inquired before the Lord the reason for this, God told

him that the defeat resulted from an incomplete obedience within the camp of Israel: one man, Achan, of the tribe of Judah, had disobeyed the instructions concerning Jericho and had hidden in his tent some silver, a wedge of gold and a garment from Babylon.

This helps us understand the symbolic significance of Ai in our own lives. It is a picture of the flesh, the natural humanity within us, inherited from Adam, which also loves the things of the world, and yet it appears to us to be of lime consequence and easily overcome.

When the sin of Achan was discovered, apparently by the casting of lots, the seemingly harsh but faithful judging of the people by stoning Achan to death made possible a renewed attack upon the city of Ai, this time by the strategy of ambush. The city fell and all the inhabitants were put to the sword. Thus it is evident that the conquest of our enemy, the flesh within, is accomplished by our willingness to accept the judgment of death upon it, to take up battle against it by the power of the Spirit, for "the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

Since Ai was the gateway to the west, its defeat left the entire central portion of the land of promise open to the Israelites. Joshua's first act was to fulfill the command of Moses and to build an altar upon Mount Ebal. There, as the law had carefully provided, the blessings were read from Mount Gerizim and the cursing from Mount Ebal, that Israel (and us) should forever remember the blessings that will follow the putting aside of the flesh and the cursings which will inevitably appear if we fail to accept the judgment of the cross upon our natural life.

Resist the Devil

The cities of the west along the coastal plain from Gaza in the south to Lebanon in the north met together to form a league to stop the Israelites' conquest (Josh. 9:1). One of the cities that lay in the immediate path of Joshua and his armies was the city of Gibeon, near present-day Jerusalem. Afraid for their lives, the Gibeonites resorted to a ruse to trick the Israelites into making a treaty of peace with them, which Jehovah had strictly forbidden should be done with any of the inhabitants of the land.

When later, upon attacking Gibeon, Joshua learned of their deceit, the worst he could do to them was to make them hewers of wood and carriers of water.

The kings of the Canaanite cities to the south now determined to combine their armies for a united attack on Gibeon. This large city, thus attacked by their own allies, immediately called upon Joshua for defense, in line with the treaty of peace he had made with them. By a forced march from Gilgal, Joshua and his armies traveled by night and took the enemy armies by surprise, throwing them into a panic. It was on this great occasion that Joshua prayed and asked for the lengthening of the day that they might have needed time to accomplish the routing of the enemy. It is recorded that the sun stood still over Gibeon and the moon over the valley of Aijalon for almost the length of a day. Accompanying this, huge hailstones fell from the heavens, killing more of the allied armies than even the Israelites themselves killed with the sword.

This event has been ridiculed by the critics for centuries, but impressive evidence now has been discovered that the earth has in times past shifted on its axis, and such a shift would account for the phenomenon recorded in Joshua.

Symbolically, the account pictures the ability of Satan to use circumstances in such a way as to harass and frighten the Christian, but when such circumstances are met by the unyielding heart of faith, the very circumstances are turned to the benefit of the believer.

Obey the Living God

After the battle of Gibeon the conquest of the south was soon accomplished. The cities were taken one by one and the inhabitants slaughtered in obedience to the command of God to eliminate the cities of the Canaanites in their entirety. Then the kings in the northern part of Canaan banded together under the leadership of King Jabin of the fortified city of Hazor. Joshua met them in battle at the waters of Merom and another great victory was

accomplished, including the taking of Hazor.

On the defeat of the northern kings, the entire land lay under the control of Israel. Jehovah's promise to Joshua had been fulfilled that "no man will be able to stand before him." Thus we see the three great enemies of the believer--the world, the flesh and the devil--are overcome by the simple means of faith and obedience to the Word of the living God.

This first section of the book of Joshua is clearly designed to encourage us to understand that a complete victory is possible over these three fearsome foes--the world, the flesh and the devil. And though there are temporary failures (as at Ai) and partial compromises (as with the Gibeonites), God will give us victory just as He conquered the great giants who frightened the Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea.

THE CONQUESTS

The second section of the book covers chapters 12 through 21, and primarily consists of a listing of the enemies who were subdued under Joshua's first attack, in the first seven years after Israel had entered the land. Then we learn how the land was apportioned bit by bit to the various tribes according to the casting of lots. This device permitted the decision to be according to the divine mind and not according to man's wisdom. Thus each tribe would know that the portion of land given to them was given by God's own choice. We are reminded today that the circumstances in which we find ourselves are not of our own choosing necessarily, but the hand of the Lord has brought us to the place where, for the present at least, we are to be.

Though the major portion of the land promised to Abraham was now under Israel's control, still along the fringes there were unoccupied territories and within the land itself pockets of resistance remained. When Joshua allotted each tribe its own territory by casting lots, he reminded them that they were individually responsible to claim the territory which rightly belonged to them. There would be battles involved, but they were to be assured that the ultimate victory would be secure, for God had given His word.

Scattered within this section largely devoted to the distribution of the land are isolated stories which constitute beautiful illustrations of personal faith. One is the story of Caleb, who at 85 years of age was still willing to claim the inheritance promised to him when he was yet in the wilderness with Moses. In accordance with his request, Caleb was allotted the city of Hebron and its provinces as a permanent inheritance. But in order to conquer it he must drive out the giants who dwelt there.

The names of three of these giants, sons of Anak, are given: *Sheshai*, "who I am," *Ahiman*, "what I am," *Talmi*, "what I can do." These are clearly indicative of the believer's struggle to subdue the giants of self which oppose his progress. This section also gives the account of the setting up of the Tabernacle at the city of Shiloh, the allotment of an inheritance to the daughters of Zelophehad, as Moses had promised them, and the designation of cities of refuge as the law had provided. The Levites, of course, were given no inheritance within the land except for certain cities to dwell in, and they were reminded again that the Lord was their portion. As previously seen, the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh were given their part on the east of the Jordan, but the rest of the land was divided between the nine and one-half tribes.

THE CONSECRATION

The last portion of the book of Joshua, from chapters 22 through 24, include the account of the misunderstanding which arose between the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh east of Jordan, and closes with two addresses by Joshua to the people shortly before his death. When the major portion of the land had been conquered Joshua permitted the two and one-half tribes to return to their homes east of the Jordan, but to the dismay of the other nine and one-half tribes, the eastern Israelites immediately erected an altar on the west side of the river. Remembering the sin of Achan and how God had punished the whole nation for the sin of one man, the western tribes gathered armies at Shiloh, under the leadership of Phinehas. They came to Gilead and demanded an explanation, reminding the eastern tribes that burnt offerings and meal offerings and other sacrifices were to be

offered only at the Tabernacle in Shiloh.

The two and one-half tribes then explained that they had no intention of using the great altar for any such sacrifices, but had erected it as a memorial to teach their children that they too shared the inheritance of the Lord with the rest of Israel. These two tribes seem, therefore, to typify the Christians who still remain at heart committed believers, but who in their daily lives experience incomplete enjoyment of the full inheritance.

Aware of his advanced age, and knowing he will soon die, Joshua summoned Israel to Shechem and there he delivered two magnificent addresses which close the book. The first is a warning against turning to the idolatry of the surrounding nations and a solemn promise that if they do so, God will permit them to fall again under the power of their enemies. The second address is a marvelous review of the way the Lord has led them, from the plagues of Egypt to the conquest of the Promised Land.

Joshua ended his message with a magnificent summons to the people to make personal choice among themselves as to whom they will serve; but he warned again that such service must be from the heart and not from lips only.

Shortly after having recorded the promise of the people to serve the Lord, Joshua died at the age of 110. The close of this book looks back to the close of Genesis and records how the bones of Joseph were at last buried in the city of Shechem in the ground which Jacob had bought from the Hittites. Thus in the words appearing on the memorial to John Wesley in Westminster Abbey " God buries his workmen but carries on his work."

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Seven

The Incomplete Victory: Judges, Ruth

The book of Judges relates the "history of Israel after the days of Joshua until the time of Samuel and the choosing of the first king over all of Israel. It is a record of alternating defeat and victory, corresponding to the experience of most Christians--especially in the early years of their Christian life when they alternate between succumbing to the energies of faith and, upon confession and repentance, being restored again to a place of overcoming.

The book takes its name from the series of judges God raised up to deliver the people when they had fallen into the hands of their enemies. The repeated theme of the book is stated first in Judges 2:18,19: "When the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. But...when the judge died...they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways."

ISRAEL'S FAILURE

The first two chapters review again the situation in Israel at the death of Joshua. An account is again given of the conquest of Debir by Othniel. Though Judah and Simeon joined together to subdue the Canaanites within their territory, they only succeeded in part. Some areas, especially the Philistine cities of the coast, remained unsubdued. Benjamin, Manasseh, Zebulun and Dan also failed to claim for themselves the full inheritance promised them within their allotted borders.

So once again, as within the wilderness, the angel of the Lord appeared to warn the people of the inevitable consequences of their unbelief and incomplete obedience (chap. 2). As we saw in Exodus, this promised angel of the Presence is a manifestation of a divine being. Though the people of Israel wept and apparently repented, their repentance was not long lived. Soon they were back again in their idolatries, bowing before the idols of their neighboring nations. Remember that the worship of these idols involved depraved sexual practices and even at times the sacrifice of living children.

Parallel to this in the Christian's life is the continual temptation to adopt the goals and standards of the world around him, and especially to seek the favor and approval of men rather than the approval of God.

In chapter 3 we are told that God used these remaining Canaanite tribes to teach the new generations within Israel how to make war--that is, how God, rather than man, makes war. As Paul will say in 2 Corinthians 10:4, "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

DAYS OF JUDGES

When the Israelites fell into sordid idolatry, Jehovah allowed the nations around them and living among them to conquer them. They first fell under the rule of a king from Syria, to the north; but upon the repentance of Israel, Othniel, Caleb's nephew, rose in the Spirit of the Lord and led the forces of Israel against Syria and drove them from the land. For 40 years he ruled as the first judge of Israel and the land had peace during that time.

Immediately upon his death, the people fell into sinful ways again and God allowed King Eglon of Moab to conquer a part of the country. For 18 years the Moabites held the people in bondage requiring heavy taxes from them annually. At last the people wearied of their bondage enough to turn again to the Lord and cry to Him, and in gracious response He raised up Ehud from the tribe of Benjamin, who was chosen to carry the tax money to the Moabite capital. There he tricked the king into receiving him in private, and when the two were alone Ehud drew from his belt a long dagger and thrust it into the fat king's belly (Judy. 3:15-23). Leaving King Eglon dead behind him, Ehud returned to Israel, blew the trumpet of assembly and mustered a large enough army to attack the Moabites, killing about 2,000 of their best warriors.

The land again enjoyed peace for about 40 years under Ehud, and apparently another 40 years under Shamgar, who is briefly mentioned (3:31), but who gained fame for killing 600 Philistines with an oxgoad. (It should be noted that the periods of relief under the judges are not to be taken consecutively, for some of them overlap, there being a judge in one part of the country and another ruling in another part.)

Deborah

In the north of Canaan, the Israelites fell under the hand of Jabin of the city of Hazor, who with 900 iron chariots made life unbearable for 20 years. The leader of faith in that part of Israel was a woman named Deborah, who judged Israel in the hill country of Ephraim (chap. 4,5). Through her God sent a command to one Barak in the tribe of Naphtali, who mobilized 10,000 men and led them against King Jabin.

Barak refused to go to battle with Jabin unless Deborah went with him. When she consented, 10,000 men assembled on the slopes of Mount Tabor and prepared to assault the armies of Jabin, led by his general Sisera.

When the Canaanite armies panicked before Israel, Sisera fled on foot and found what he thought to be a refuge in the tent of a woman named Jael. While Sisera slept in the tent, Jael took an iron tent peg and a hammer and drove the long spike through Sisera's head, ending his life and the power of the northern Canaanite tribes.

This use of two women, Deborah and Jael, again confirms the statement in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ "there is neither male nor female." Deborah seems truly to have fulfilled the office of prophet, while Jael is an instrument in the hand of the Lord to judge and remove the enemies of Israel.

The account is followed by the singing of a great song of triumph known as the "Song of Deborah," which

recounts in poetic detail the story of the triumph of Deborah and Barak, giving credit to the God of Israel rather than the might of her armies.

Gideon

The 40 years of peace that followed was broken once again by the faithless idolatry of Israel. This time it was the people of Midian from the east of the Jordan who for seven years so harassed the Israelites that they were reduced to living in caves and dens of the mountains. The Midianites overran the land, claiming all the Israelites' sheep, oxen and donkeys for themselves and stripping the land of its fodder by enormous herds of camels.

Again Israel's deep trouble brought about their repentant cry for help, but this time they were warned by the prophet of God that what was happening to them was merely a fulfillment of what the Lord had predicted many years before through Moses. Nevertheless, in grace, God sent the angel of the Lord to appear to Gideon (chap. 6-8) who was threshing wheat in a winepress to hide himself from the Midianites. There, in an account similar to the call of Moses, Gideon pleads his low status in the nation and his inability to overthrow Midian.

As with Moses, God reassures him with, "I Will be with you," and Gideon quickly returns to his home to prepare a meal for his strange visitor whom he has not yet recognized as the angel of God. When he spread the meat and bread upon a rock the angel touched it with his staff and the fire of the Lord consumed the sacrifice. That night Gideon pulled down the family altar to Baal and cut the wooden sex symbol of Asherah to pieces with an ax. When his neighbors discovered what he had done, they threatened to kill him for insulting their god Baal; but Joash, Gideon's father, defended his son by arguing that if the god Baal was truly a god he could defend himself. He thereby gained the nickname, *Jerubbaal*, which means, "Let Baal contend against him" (Judges 6:32).

Soon after, the armies of Midian and other neighboring nations came with a great horde against Israel. God graciously strengthened Gideon's faith by twice giving him a miraculous sign involving the fleece of a sheep (6:36-40). So Gideon gathered 32,000 men of the northern tribes and assembled them beside the spring of Harod at the foot of Mount Gilboa. Across the valley, the Midianite hosts were encamped as numerous as a plague of locusts; but strangely, the Lord told Gideon that he had too many men. God wanted to be sure that Israel knew Who would defeat the Midianites.

When Gideon had sent home all the fainthearted, there were still 10,000 men of Israel left. Again, at the Lord's command, Gideon tested them at the brook and only 300 men remained. Putting torches within large earthen jars, and carrying trumpets along with their swords, the 300 divided themselves into three groups and surrounded the Midianite camp. There again Gideon's faith was strengthened when, waiting in the darkness, he heard a man of Midian recounting his dream from which he had just awakened. The other soldier interpreted it as an omen of the defeat of Midian, and when Gideon heard it he breathed a prayer of worship to God there on the spot.

Shortly after midnight, Gideon gave the signal and his men simultaneously broke the earthen jars causing the torches to flash out, and sounded the trumpets. Then they enjoyed the sight of watching the Midianite army destroy itself. In the subsequent confusion and panic the Midianites could not tell a friend from an enemy. The waiting troops of Naphtali, Asher and Manasseh then joined the fight, chasing the retreating Midianites to the Jordan River and capturing and killing their two generals, Oreb and Zeeb.

Gideon crossed the Jordan with his 300 men and fought all through the night. His men were weary and hungry and Gideon asked food both from the city of Succoth and the city of Penuel. He was rebuffed in both places and, vowing to remember their truculence, he pursued the Midianites until only 15,000 of their original 135,000 remained. On returning to Succoth and Penuel, he executed the promise of vengeance; then he took the two kings of Midian and put them to death because they had slain his brothers. Gideon refused the request of Israel to make him king, but foolishly he made a priest's garment for himself and decorated it with gold from the earrings of the Midianites. This soon became an object of idolatrous worship by Israel. But the land again had peace for 40 years while Gideon judged the nation.

Of the seventy sons Gideon fathered, one is especially marked out--Abimelech, the son of a concubine. Incredibly,

as soon as Gideon was dead the Israelites began to worship again the idols of Baal. Evidently remembering that his father had almost become king of Israel, Abimelech sought the support of his Canaanite uncles in Shechem and with their help slew all 70 of his half brothers, except for the youngest, Jotham, who escaped (Judy. 9: 1-6).

When Abimelech was proclaimed king by the men of Shechem, Jotham stood on Mount Gerizim and, in Eastern fashion, recited to the men of Shechem the fable of the trees. The olive, the fig and the vine all refused to reign over the other trees. When they turned to the thornbush, it consented to be their king and warned them of a fiery destruction if they refused (9:7-20). By this Jotham indicated that Abimelech would destroy the leaders of Shechem and they in turn would destroy Abimelech. Subsequent events proved the accuracy of this prophecy.

When trouble arose between the men of Shechem and Abimelech, Abimelech led an army against the city, defeating and wounding many of the Shechemites. When he attacked also the suburb of Thebez, a woman on a rooftop threw a millstone which landed on Abimelech's head and in shame he bade his armor bearer to kill him, that it might not be said that a woman had slain Abimelech. Thus God punished both Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and Jotham's curse proved true (9:50-57).

Two judges next appear in brief account. One named Tola from the tribe of Issachar, who judged for 23 years. He was succeeded by Jair from Gilead who judged Israel for 22 years. As before, the people of Israel turned away from the Lord to worship pagan gods, and this time it is added that they ceased worshipping Jehovah at all. Since it is true that "whatever a man sows that shall he also reap," it was not long before the Philistines and Ammonites were harassing and tormenting Israel again.

Jephthah

After 18 years, the Israelites pled for deliverance; but this time Jehovah sent them back to their new gods for help (10:14). In an amazing display of grace, when they had at last put away foreign gods, the heart of Jehovah grieved over their misery.

When the Ammonites on the east launched an attack against Israel, God laid hold of Jephthah (11:6-12:7), the son of a harlot (11:1). Jephthah's brothers had driven him away from their home that he might not share the inheritance with them. Under pressure of the Ammonite advance, the elders of Gilead, Jephthah's brothers, sent to him and asked him to lead the Israelites against Ammon. Jephthah attempted to negotiate with the Ammonites. In an interesting parallel to the present situation in the Middle East, where Arabs and Israelis argue over who properly possesses the land, Jephthah answers the Ammonite claim by reminding them that Moses had attempted to pass through their land peacefully, but when attacked he defeated their forces in battle and thereby won the right to inhabit the land.

Before the subsequent battle, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord that he would offer in burnt sacrifice whatever or whoever came out of his house to greet him on his return (11:29-31). Thus after the rout of the Ammonites, Jephthah returned and his daughter, his only child, met him at the door. Jephthah refused to break his vow, and the account says he " did to her according to the vow which he had made" (11:39).

This strange story has been the subject of much debate among Bible scholars. Did he actually sacrifice her, or not?

Since we have seen in Exodus that a provision was made to redeem all firstborn sons, who also were vowed to the Lord, by the payment of redemption money, so it is possible that this was done in this case also. Her sorrow then would be that she was to remain unmarred for the rest of her life.

Chapter 12 recounts the civil war which broke out between Abraham and the men of Gilead over the anger of the Ephraimites in not being summoned to battle with the Ammonites, though Jephthah explained that he had summoned them but they did not respond. Nevertheless, the Ephraimites continued their attack and a great battle ensued in which 42,000 of Ephraim were slain. Those who attempted to escape could not disguise themselves as Gileadites because they could not pronounce the word *Shibboleth* correctly.

Samson

After the death of Jephthah, a series of three little-known judges arose in various parts of Israel, judging for varying periods of seven to ten years each.

The record then focuses on the life of Samson (chap. 13-16), who is remarkable for being set aside before conception to be a Nazirite unto God for all of his life. Again in a time of decline, the angel of the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah of the tribe of Dan, and announced that her barrenness was to end and she would bear a son who would be devoted to the Lord from his birth. Manoah seems to be a man of small faith, for it is not until the angel of the Lord ascends before him in the smoke of his offering that Manoah recognized the Divine Presence.

So Samson was born, like Isaac, a child of promise. When he grew to manhood, he manifested the presence of the Spirit of the Lord upon him in great deeds of physical strength. His one moral weakness seemed to be an attraction to the daughters of the Philistines. On the way to negotiate a marriage, Samson with his bare hands slew a lion that attempted to attack him (14:5, 6). Later when he came to claim his wife he saw that the body of the lion had been inhabited by a swarm of bees and was filled with honey. While Samson waited, with 30 Philistine companions, for the negotiations to be completed, he put to them a riddle, promising each of them a new garment if they could solve it. The riddle was: "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet," referring to the honey in the lion (14:10).

For seven days they tried in vain to solve the riddle and finally resorted to bribing Samson's new wife to extract the answer from him. When Samson told her, she repeated it to the Philistines. Samson paid his debt to them by killing 30 men of Ashkelon and giving their garments to his 30 Philistine companions. But angered at their deceit, he returned to his father's house and his wife was given instead to the best man (14:20).

When Samson went later to visit his wife, he learned that she had been given away. He caught 300 foxes, tied them together in pairs by the tails with torches between and set fire to the Philistines' fields of grain. When the Philistines in revenge, burned Samson's wife and her father, Samson retaliated by killing many of them, and then went down to the rock of Etam (15:1-8). The Philistines demanded his return, and 3,000 men of Judah went to Samson and convinced him to allow them to deliver him bound with ropes into the Philistines' hands. When the Philistines came to take him, Samson broke the ropes and, seizing the jawbone of a donkey, he slew a thousand of the Philistines (15:9-17).

Thirsty after his exertions and finding no water nearby, Samson prayed to the Lord and He opened a spring of water before him at that place (vv. 18-20).

Then Samson became involved with a Philistine harlot. The Philistine men heard he was in Gaza and laid in wait for him. He arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the city's gate and, pulling them up tear and all, he carried them on his shoulders to the top of the hill that is before Hebron (16:1-3).

The final incident of his life centered around a third Philistine woman named Delilah. The story of her attempt to discover the secret of Samson's strength has been told around the world. Three times he gave her false clues and three times the Philistines came upon him and he repulsed them. Despite her obvious disloyalty, he remained with her and when she nagged him unceasingly he finally told her the truth. Then, while he slept in her lap, she called a servant to shave off all of Samson's hair. When he awoke it is recorded that "he did not know that the Lord had departed from him" (16:20). Since he was unable to resist, the Philistines captured him, gouged out his eyes and put him in prison in Gaza, forcing him to grind at the prison mill. Thus God's mighty man, wretched and blinded, stands as a continuing reminder to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul (I Pet 2:11). Left unjudged, these lusts will bring the mightiest saint into bondage and darkness.

But even in prison God's grace did not forsake Samson, His chosen servant. As the sightless Samson ground at the prison mill, his hair began to grow, and when after several months the Philistine lords gathered for a great sacrifice to their god Dagon, they called Samson before them to make sport of him. Samson asked the lad who led him to put him between the two great pillars that supported the house, and praying with earnestness to the Lord, he

bowed himself mightily, pushed the pillars apart and the house fell upon the princes, crushing about 3,000 men and women to death. Samson, too, perished in the ruins (Judg. 16:28-30). His life testifies that even those of great and marked spiritual ability can fall from their place of usefulness; and although God in His faithfulness will not desert them, their spiritual effectiveness is far from what it could have been.

"Doing What Was Right..."

The strange story of chapters 17 and 18 is apparently included that subsequent generations might have a picture of the ignorance and unbelief which was quickly manifest among the people of Israel when they turned from the living God. A man named Micah in the hill country of Ephraim apparently stole 1100 shekels of silver from his mother, but when he confessed and restored the money, she took 200 pieces of silver out of which she had made one engraved metal image and one of cast silver. Micah's religious faith had evidently deteriorated to the level of mere superstition, for he took the two images and set them up in a house of gods, along with a priestly ephod and seraph. The explanation is given that this was a result of the lack of central authority in the land, and so "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (7:6). But what they thought was right was very wrong indeed.

When a young Levite from Judah came by Micah's house, needing a place of his own, Micah urged him to join the family circle and become the family's official private priest. This he did, and became to Micah as one of his own sons.

At that time, the tribe of Dan had been given a small inheritance near Judah's land, but recognizing its inadequacy, they sent five of their men toward the north to find new territory which they could subjugate and claim for themselves. On the way they stopped by the house of Micah. Finding the young Levite there, they urged him to inquire of the Lord whether their journey would be successful. Upon receiving his encouragement, they traveled north to the city of Laish, which is located near the foot of Mount Hermon. There they found people from the coastal city of Sidon, so isolated from their brethren they would be unable to defend themselves successfully. When they reported this to the Danites in Judah, 600 armed men went out to take the new land. When these came to the house of Micah, they enticed the young Levite to steal the two silver images, the ephod and the seraph, and to go with them to their new country as their official priest. Though Micah followed them to protest, he was unable to recover his lost treasures, and the Danites went on to capture the city of Laish and renamed it Dan. There they set up their graven images, and the young Levite, who turns out to be the grandson of Moses, becomes the head of a line of priests who served the city of Dan until the time of the Assyrian captivity.

The account explains the deteriorating moral condition which later permitted Jeroboam, the son of Solomon, to set up in the city of Dan the worship of the golden calf.

The final story of the book of Judges is likewise a flashback to the earlier days of conquest when Phinehas, grandson of Aaron, is still priest within the nation. It is one of the most sordid accounts in Scripture, and illustrates the ease with which even the most vile and repulsive sin can take root in the hearts of those who turn away from daily fellowship with the living God.

It concerns another Levite in the hill country of Ephraim whose wife had returned to her father's home in Bethlehem. When the Levite went to bring her back, his father-in-law received him warmly, and despite his repeated attempts to return home, persuaded him to stay for six days of feasting and drinking.

On the sixth day, having gotten a late start they found themselves at eventide near the Benjamite city of Gibeah. There they sought lodging, but no one would take them in, until at last an old man, finding them abandoned in the city square, took them to his own home. The subsequent account is reminiscent of the story of Lot in the cities of Sodom, for that evening certain men of Benjamin who had given themselves over to homosexuality beat upon the door of the house and demanded that the stranger be brought out for their sexual indulgence. Again, like Lot, the master of the house offered them his own virgin daughter and the Levite's wife instead. When they refused this offer the Levite forced his wife out the door and the men of the city took her and abused her all night.

At daybreak when the Levite prepared to go on his way, he opened the door and found his wife lying dead on the

threshold He took his body to his home, and there with a knife he divided the body into 12 pieces and sent a piece to each of the tribes of Israel. This shocking deed so stunned the chiefs of the people that, in response, they gathered an army of 400,000 men and marched against Benjamin. They demanded that the guilty men within the tribe be given them for punishment, but the Benjaminites refused. Instead they mustered an army of 26,000 men from the cities of Benjamin. The two armies met for battle before the city of Gibeon.

At this time the Ark of the Covenant was located at the city of Bethel before being removed to Shiloh, and the Israelites went to inquire of the Lord which tribe should lead into battle. Judah was chosen and when the battle had ended, 22,000 men from the Israelites had fallen. Shaken by this defeat, the Israelites inquired again of the Lord as to whether to continue the battle and were given command to go up again.

On the second day another great defeat followed and 18,000 Israelites were slain, all of whom were swordsmen. The double defeat indicated that other tribes were also implicated in the guilt of Benjamin. The whole army went up to the house of God and fasted and wept before the Lord, offering burnt offerings and peace offerings. This time the Lord commanded them to go up, but promised to deliver the Benjaminites into their hands.

As in the battle of Ai, the Israelites resorted to ambush, and when they drew the men of Benjamin out of the city of Gibeon by feigning retreat, the men in ambush set the city afire. As the Benjaminites turned and fled the men of Israel fell upon them and a total of 25,000 Benjaminites were slain. A remnant of 600 fled through the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon for refuge.

This terrible civil war had taken a dreadful toll, for now the Israelites recognized that they had virtually eliminated one of the 12 tribes. They had vowed before the Lord at Mizpah that they would not allow any of their daughters to marry Benjaminites; therefore it looked as though the tribe of Benjamin was doomed to extinction. Realizing what a breach this would make in their nation, they settled on a terrible remedy.

Learning that the city of Jabesh in Gilead had not sent any armed men to the conflict, they sent 12,000 of their men against that city and slew with the sword every male and every married woman in the city. They brought back with them 400 young virgins, and these they offered to the remaining 600 men of Benjamin for wives. To find additional wives for the remaining 200 men, they encouraged the men of Benjamin to lie in wait at the city of Shiloh and when the young women of the city came out to celebrate one of the annual festivals they were to fall upon them and take them for wives. By this bloody stratagem they preserved Benjamin as a tribe within the nation.

The book closes with the reminder that this was all the result of "every man doing what was right in his own eyes." The terrible record of Judges is one of vile idolatry, treachery, betrayals, civil war and ruthless human connivance. It should be read frequently as a reminder of the fatal weakness which can permit the blackest of sins to take root when the heart no longer daily fellowships with God.

RUTH

The book of Ruth is universally recognized as a beautiful literary gem. On one occasion, Benjamin Franklin, then ambassador from the United States to Paris, read the book without comment to a literary circle in France whose members were largely made up of humanists and rationalists. When he finished the reading they were universally loud in their praise of such a perfect gem. When they inquired where he had found it, they were chagrined to learn it came from the Bible they despised.

The scene is set for us in the opening paragraphs, recounting the story of a man named Elimelech ("my God is King") who with his wife Naomi ("pleasant") and their two sons left Bethlehem because of a famine and went to live in the country of Moab. The story takes place in the days of the judges, and it is instructive to note that in Bethlehem ("the House of Bread") there was no bread, but a famine. The book of Leviticus has already told us that

famine indicates a low level of spiritual vitality within the chosen nation.

In Moab, Elimelech died and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, married women of Moab, Orpah and Ruth. After 10 years, the two sons also died and Naomi was left with her two daughters-in-law.

On expressing her determination to return to Bethlehem, having learned that the famine was over, Naomi exhorted her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab and remarry there. Orpah is unwilling to leave her home for an uncertain life in Palestine, but Ruth refuses to stay in Moab, and in a plea of enduring-beauty, declares her determination to identify herself with Naomi's land and Naomi's people. The deepest cause of her determination is seen in her statement in 1:16: "Your God [shall be] my God." This clearly represents her willingness to leave the idols of Moab for the worship of the living God of Israel.

So the two arrive in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest with a very uncertain future before them. The invisible hand of the Lord in caring for His own is apparent in the statement that Ruth went into the fields to glean, and "happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz" (2:3). This man, a close relative of Elimelech, Naomi's husband, appears in the story as a man of unusual character and sensitivity. He has heard the full story of Naomi and Ruth's return to Bethlehem. Upon meeting Ruth in his fields he commends her for her kindness to her mother-in-law, and especially for her faith in Jehovah the God of Israel, under whose gracious wings she has taken refuge.

Obviously attracted to the beautiful Moabite woman, and yet acting always with restraint and dignity, Boaz instructs his workmen to deliberately leave grain in the field for Ruth to glean. When she returns to Naomi in the evening with an unexpected abundance, she learns for the first time from her mother-in-law that Boaz is a possible kinsman-redeemer. Thus, at Naomi's instruction she continues gleaning in Boaz's fields through the barley and wheat harvest for approximately three months.

At the end of the harvest, when the winnowing of the grain took place, Naomi seized the initiative provided by her relationship with Boaz and instructed Ruth on a stratagem that would combine both the law of redemption and the law of Levirate marriage. By coming to the sleeping Boaz and lying at his feet, Ruth is following a custom in Israel by which she is essentially asking Boaz to fulfill the responsibility of a kinsman to marry her and raise up heirs to the deceased Elimelech. She does this so modestly that Boaz commends her for her action, and having now clearly fallen in love with her, he eagerly consents to take on the requested responsibility. He has evidently hoped that such a situation would occur, for he immediately informs Ruth that a closer kinsman is involved and his claim must be settled first.

In the morning he generously sends her back to Naomi with a gift of six measures of barley and Naomi wisely tells her that the matter will surely be settled that day.

That same morning, Boaz took his seat at the gate of the city where the elders gathered for the settling of lawsuits and the judging of other matters brought before them. When the closer kinsman came by, Boaz requested an informal court, and when all were seated he presented his case to the other relative. He declared that Naomi wanted to sell a piece of land which belonged to Elimelech, but if she did the next of kin would be responsible to care for the family, since they now would have no property. Seeing the possibility of obtaining a choice piece of property, the first kinsman declared his willingness to assume this responsibility, but then Boaz played his trump card. He informed him that the land was also encumbered by a Levirate marriage, and that if he bought the property he would also have to marry the woman. This changed the picture for the first kinsman, since the land would then not belong to him but to whatever issue resulted from his union with Ruth. To symbolize his action, in the colorful custom of the East the man removed his right shoe and handed it to Boaz in the presence of the witnesses. The shoe symbolized his right as owner to set foot upon the land. This right now becomes Boaz's and the coast is clear for him to take Ruth as his wife.

The account closes with the birth of a son to Boaz and Ruth, who brings great joy to the heart of his grandmother, Naomi, and grows up to be the grandfather of David, Israel's mightiest king.

The beautiful little story of Ruth not only provides a link between the days of the judges and the subsequent reign of David, but symbolizes in the figure of Boaz how Christ our great Kinsman-Redeemer overcomes the obstacle of our birth in Adam, as strangers and foreigners to the promises of God, and takes us to Himself in a union that will produce the fruit of the Spirit to the honor and glory of God. It is highly significant that in the genealogy of Matthew, Ruth is included as the ancestress of Jesus the Messiah.

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Eight The Flesh and the Spirit: First Samuel

First Samuel is one of the key books of the Old Testament, forming a link between the decadence of the period of the Judges and the rise of the monarchy--first Saul and then David. It is the story of three men: Samuel the last of the judges and the first of the prophets; Saul the first king of Israel; and David the greatest of all of Israel's kings. These three men mark off the divisions of the book.

The first seven chapters give us the life of Samuel. Chapters 8-15 present King Saul who is seen as symbolic of the man of the flesh; for in him we see the ruin which is caused by the mind which is set on the flesh. By contrast, David is the man of faith, and is a beautiful illustration of the mind which is set on the Spirit, as Romans 8:6 puts it: "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace."

SAMUEL: THE VOICE OF GOD

Samuel, who became the human expression of the voice of God to both Saul and David, was the chosen instrument of God to close the realm of the judges and to introduce the beginning of the prophetic ministry and of the monarchy.

The first chapter introduces another of the great women of the Old Testament. Like Sarah and Rachel, Hannah enters the biblical scene as a barren woman. She was the wife of a man named Elkanah, a Levite of Ephraim.

Though her husband loved her, Hannah's life was made miserable by Elkanah's second wife, Peninnah, who taunted Hannah because of her barrenness and boasted of her own fertility in having given her husband many sons and daughters.

The barrenness of Hannah, coming as it does at the beginning of this book, doubtless is introduced to illustrate the spiritual state of Israel. The people of God had fallen into a state of utter infertility and barrenness. The priesthood, which God had set up with the Tabernacle as a means by which the people would have access to Him, was beginning to disappear. It had degenerated to mere ritual and ceremony and was no longer a potent factor in maintaining the vitality of faith within the nation.

Hannah was a woman of quiet faith and godly character. In great distress, she took her problem of barrenness to the Lord at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. As she prayed, Eli the priest saw her lips move but heard no sound. So he thought she was drunk. When she was rebuked by Eli, Hannah explained that she had been promising God that if He would give her a son she would dedicate him to the service of the Lord all his life, as a Nazirite from his birth. Eli pronounced a blessing on her and she and her husband returned to their home. In due course, the promised son was given and Hannah named him Samuel, which means "asked of God."

True to her vow, when the child was weaned, probably about five or six years of age, Hannah brought him to the Tabernacle and left him in the care of Eli the priest to serve the Lord.

Chapter 2 records the beautiful song Hannah sang on this occasion. Within it she indicates the problem she herself has faced in the mockery of her rival, which was also the problem Israel faced as a nation at that time.

"Boast no more so very proudly, do not let arrogance come out of your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and with Him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are shattered, but the feeble gird on strength" (2:3,4).

The priesthood was failing in Israel not because there was anything wrong with the priesthood, but because the people, in pride, refused to bow before the Lord. Through arrogance they would not turn from their idolatrous worship and come before the Lord for cleansing. As a result, their access to God was cut off. Ultimately, in the contrasting lives of Saul and David, this book will describe the eternal conflict between the proud heart which finds confidence in itself and its ability to perform and the humble spirit which looks to God in utter dependence and thus receives all the fullness of divine blessing.

The state of spiritual decay in the priesthood was clearly visible in the lives of Eli's two sons. Contrary to the law, they forced the people to give them the best parts of their offerings. Also they openly lay with the women who served in the Tabernacle. This scandalous conduct was only mildly rebuked by their father Eli, and in due course Jehovah sent an unnamed man of God to Eli to announce that the priesthood would be taken away eventually from his descendants and given to another. This prophecy was fulfilled in the days of Solomon, when Abiathar of Eli's family was set aside and Zadok from another house within the tribe of Levi was given the priesthood. The promise of "a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul" (2:35) seems to anticipate the coming of the Messiah and the eternal priesthood of the Lord Jesus.

The remarkable account of the boy Samuel being called by the direct voice of the Lord (3:1-18) is reminiscent of the appearing of God to Moses in the wilderness of Midian. The nature of Samuel's ministry as an authentic prophet of the Lord was indicated by God's revelation to him of the fate of Eli and his sons. As the lad grew to manhood, he became widely recognized as God's appointed prophet, so that "all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord" (v. 20).

Again the low state of Israel's faith was observable when, on the occasion of a military defeat at the hands of the Philistines, the people superstitiously demanded that the Ark of the Covenant be taken from the Tabernacle and accompany them in the renewed battle. Total disaster followed wherein thousands of Israelites were slain, including the two sons of Eli, and the Ark itself was taken captive by the Philistines.

When news of his sons' death was brought to old Eli he fell over backward and broke his neck at exactly the same moment his daughter-in-law gave birth to a son. In view of the terrible circumstances, she named the child *Ichabod* ("the glory has departed"). Here Israel reaches one of the lowest states in its national history.

Though the Ark of the Covenant brought no victory to Israel, nevertheless, in the hands of the Philistines it proved to be a source of continual torment. The Ark was placed in the temple of Dagon, the Philistine fish god. On two successive mornings the Philistines found their idol first lying on its face before the Ark and the second morning shattered to bits. Next a plague of tumors broke out among the people of the city of Ashdod, who hastily sent the Ark to Gath. There the tumors broke out again. The association of these tumors with mice (probably rats) has been understood by some scholars to indicate a form of the bubonic plague.

Finally, in desperation, the lords of the Philistines decided to return the Ark to Israel, along with an offering of five golden tumors and five golden mice. In order to determine whether God was actually behind the plague the Philistines hitched two milk cows to a cart but shut up the cows' calves at home. Contrary to nature, the cows drew the cart away from their calves, directly to Bethshemesh, which was the first city within the border of Israel.

Here God taught the people a lesson in reverence, for when 70 men looked into the Ark out of curiosity, contrary

to the Law, they immediately died. Frightened by this slaughter, the inhabitants of Bethshemesh appealed to the people of Kiriath-jearim to take the Ark into their city. There it was put into the care of Eleazar, a Levite, and remained for some 20 years.

Samuel seized the occasion of Israel's renewed fear to exhort the people to put away their idols and to serve the Lord only. The people gathered at Mizpah and confessed their sin. As Samuel was offering the burnt offering, the Philistines attacked but were routed by a mighty thundering from the Lord. The subsequent great victory over the Philistines was memorialized by a stone which Samuel erected and named Ebenezer, "the stone of help."

SAUL: THE MAN OF FLESH

Saul, the first king of Israel, begins his career with bright promise. But a shadow over his reign is seen from the very beginning when the people demand of Samuel a king "like all the nations" (8:20). This is a denial of their very purpose, for under Moses they had been called to be unlike all the nations, and were to be a people directly governed by God. Though in Deuteronomy provision had been made for a king, he was to be a king of humble spirit and obedient heart who would be the human instrument of the government of God. But as so many times before, God permitted them to have their way that they might learn from the sad results the nature of their folly. The principle of the flesh is thus seen at work in the nation of Israel to destroy its communion and enjoyment of God's blessing.

The same principle is interwoven in every Christian life. The desire of the flesh is to be religious in a manner acceptable to the world and to conduct its business along the principles of the world. Even within the church many are often uncomfortable with the idea of an invisible Head directing the affairs of the local assembly. They insist on making a pastor or some other leader the ultimate voice of authority in the church, and thus follow Israel in their folly.

The fascinating story of Saul follows. It is the story of a young man of handsome physique and apparently modest disposition, who nevertheless proves to have little real concern for the things of God, but rather is interested in pursuing his own endeavors (9:1,2). He is first found busy with his father in the donkey business. In the inscrutable ways of God, the donkeys strayed off and Saul was sent in search of them. After a long and fruitless search he ended up at the town where Samuel lived. Saul's servant suggested that they consult the prophet as to the location of the donkeys, but Saul was not anxious to do this for he wanted to return home. The servant prevailed upon him. So Saul went to Samuel and, to his amazement he found that Samuel was expecting him (9:18-20), for God had told Samuel that a young man from Benjamin would appear the next day and Samuel was to anoint him as king over Israel. The prophet had prepared a feast for Saul and symbolically set the shoulder of the roast before him, the portion of an offering always symbolic of government (9:22,23).

The next day, Samuel privately anointed Saul as the new king. He described three signs which would be fulfilled to assure him that this was a definite call of God (10:1-8). These signs were immediately fulfilled. In due course the people were called together at Mizpah for the formal presentation of their new king. On this occasion there was a manifestation of that weakness of character in Saul which eventually brought about his complete failure as a king; for despite the clear demonstration as to the will of God, he seeks to evade that responsibility by hiding among the baggage (v. 22). It appeared to be modesty, but in view of Saul's later character it seems more likely to be a stubborn spirit which found it inconvenient to do God's will.

As Saul stood among the people, they raised a great shout, for he looked the very picture of a king, towering head and shoulders above everyone.

The first test of his kingship came with an attack by the Ammonites against Jabesh-gilead in the north (chap. 11). Stirred by the Spirit of God, Saul sent word to the 12 tribes to gather an army, and 330,000 men responded. A great victory resulted and in the midst of it Saul manifested a spirit of fairness and mercy toward some who had refused to acknowledge his kingship. Responding to Samuel's call the people gathered at Gilgal and there renewed their vows to the Lord and offered peace offerings and burnt offerings for the new king (11:15).

On this occasion, Samuel delivered what was virtually a farewell address on his part (chap. 12), for though he would continue to serve as prophet it would be in a somewhat more private manner. He rapidly surveyed the history of Israel from the days of Moses and Aaron to the present moment, reminding them that deliverance had always come to them when they walked in obedience to God, but disaster had befallen them whenever they turned from Him. Now even though the Israelites' insistence on having a king meant a partial rejection of the government of God, the old prophet promised them that the Lord would not cast away His people for His own name's sake, and he, Samuel, would continue to pray for them and teach them.

Chapters 13 and 14 are a summary of Saul's wars with the Philistines. It is difficult to determine how long a period they encompass, but it was probably several years.

Saul first amassed a standing army of 3,000 men and put part of it under his son, Jonathan, who defeated a garrison of the Philistines at Geba. This brought on a massive mustering of the Philistine army with some 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore. This enormous army so frightened the Israelites that they fled before them, hiding in the caves and rocks of the mountains.

Meanwhile, Saul waited at Gilgal with his small army for Samuel to come and offer offerings for their success. When the prophet delayed beyond the seven appointed days, Saul took on himself the priestly office and, as he explained to Samuel when he came, "forced myself, and offered the burnt offering" (13:12). This self-dependent spirit was rebuked by Samuel with the announcement that, because of Saul's act, his kingdom would be taken away and given to another man.

While the people trembled before the oncoming Philistines, Jonathan and his armor-bearer manifested great confidence in the power of God to act on their behalf. The two men made a remarkable attack on the foe resulting in the slaying of 20 men. This unexpected attack produced panic among the Philistines and, seeing it, the Israelites emerged from hiding to complete the rout of the Philistines.

Again Saul's weakness is shown as he laid a rash oath upon the people to refrain from taking food during the battle. This so weakened the fighting men that they were unable to accomplish as great a victory as they might have. It further imperiled the life of Jonathan, who had not heard about his father's order and had eaten of some honey during the battle. When Saul's intransigence threatened Jonathan's life, the people refused to allow him to be sacrificed but ransomed him, apparently by the payment of money (14:45).

God gave Saul one last chance to redeem himself as king. He commanded Saul, through Samuel, to launch an attack upon the Amalekites and utterly destroy them by the edge of the sword. Remember that Amalek was the people about whom Moses had said, "The Lord will have war against Amalek from generation to generation" (Exod. 17:16). Saul's campaign was victorious, but again he proved disobedient; for he spared King Agag of the Amalekites and saved the best of the sheep and oxen and the goods. His fleshliness is thus revealed, for he presumed to find something good in what God had declared utterly bad. This is a clear picture of what many Christians do today when they refuse to judge the manifestations of the flesh, but defend them and excuse them as part of their personality or temperament.

When Samuel came to Saul, having been told of his disobedience by the Lord, he was met by Saul's announcement that he has completely performed the commandment of the Lord. However his self-commendatory speech was interrupted by the telltale bleating of sheep and the lowing of the oxen which he had spared. Saul lamely excused himself as having saved them for sacrificial purposes, but Samuel bluntly interrupted his hypocrisy with the announcement that the Lord had rejected him from being king over Israel. In the course of his rebuke he reminded Saul that obedience is the first and greatest service to God, and that rebellion is like witchcraft and stubbornness like idolatry. Samuel then called for a sword and himself slew the Amalekite king. Then Samuel returned to his home, never to see Saul again. However, he grieved over the disobedient

The statement at the end of chapter 15, "the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel," is written from a human point of view. The eternal God,- of course, does not change His mind, and He knows the end from the beginning, even before anything is brought into existence. But to one living in Saul's day it would appear that

God had changed His mind. Thus the statement is recorded from the human perspective.

DAVID: THE MAN OF FAITH

The story of David is the story of the man after God's own heart. Jehovah sent Samuel to the home of Jesse in Bethlehem in order to choose a king from among Jesse's eight sons. When the seven eldest passed before Samuel each one looked like a king in the making, but God said to Samuel of each, "This is not the one that I have chosen." At last David, the youngest, was brought in from the fields where he had been watching his father's sheep. Though David was young and handsome, nevertheless the choice was not made according to outward appearance for God declared that He looked upon the heart. Before his anointing, the Spirit of God came upon David and remained with him throughout his life.

In the meantime, the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and we are told "an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him" (16:14). This expression means that God had allowed evil spirits to have access to Saul's mind and heart, since he himself had chosen to reject the ways and resources of God. As the book of Ephesians warns us, to give way to the desires of the flesh is to give the devil an opportunity over us (see Eph. 4:17-27). The result in Saul's life was attacks of some mental disturbance, expressed in violent outbursts of rage. To calm him in these times a skilled musician was recommended, and in the providence of God David was brought from his father's home to play his lyre in the king's court.

It is evident that David was not to be set on the throne immediately, as was Saul, but he was tested and proved by struggle and adversity. This is the principle God often follows with the man who learns to walk by faith. He is put through a time of obscurity and adversity. Everything seems to go against him until at last he recognizes the great principle by which God's activity is always enacted--man can do nothing in himself, but only in complete and utter dependence upon the God who indwells him. Even as a shepherd boy, David had begun to learn this, for he could say, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul" (Ps. 23: 1-3).

In chapter 17 we have the famous story of the testing of David as he comes face to face with the giant Goliath. The armies of Israel were being mocked and taunted by this giant who paraded up and down morning and evening, mocking the impotence of the Israelites who did not dare to send a man into combat against him. When David came from his flock to bring food to his brothers he found the whole camp of Israel plunged into gloom and despair. While he was there the giant came again and mocked the men of Israel, daring them to meet him in combat. David's question to his brothers was, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?" That is always the outlook of faith. It is not shaken by circumstances, but looks beyond them to the God who is greater than all circumstances.

Word was brought to Saul of the young man who is contemptuous of the challenge of the Philistine giant. When Saul summoned him he did not recognize David, possibly because some time had elapsed since David had served in his court, or perhaps Saul's mental illness had erased David from his memory. When Saul saw how young David was he attempted to dismiss him; but David reassured him with stories of how he had killed both bears and lions when they attacked his father's sheep. Saul then consented to David fighting the giant and, thinking to be helpful, put his own armor on David. But Saul was a much larger man than David, and the young man found it impossible to use his armor.

Instead he went down to the brook and chose five smooth stones for his sling. It has been suggested that he chose five because later, in the book of 2 Samuel, we read that Goliath had four brothers. David was prepared to take on the whole family!

When the Philistine champion saw David coming, he cursed David for his youth and vowed to give his flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, but David calmly replied that "this day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands" (17:46). David's faith rested in the assurance that "the battle is the Lord's." Projecting a stone from his whirling sling, he struck the giant between the eyes and Goliath fell on his face to the ground. David ran and seized the giant's own sword and cut off his head with it. Thus he becomes a picture of the One who encountered

the great enemy of mankind and met him face to face and slew him with his own sword. We read in Hebrews 2:14, by death Jesus "might render powerless him who [has] the power of death, that is, the devil." David becomes here a picture not only of Christ, but also of the believer who lives the life of Christ.

This event is followed by the story of Saul's great jealousy of David. Because of his "great victory over Goliath David has now become the sensation of the nation, and Saul eyed him with increasing envy from that day on. Twice, in his madness, Saul sought to kill David with his spear, but both times David evaded him. In sharp contrast with this, Jonathan, Saul's son, openly sought friendship with David and it is recorded he "loved him as himself" (I Sam. 1 8:1).

Saul's enmity toward David grew so fierce that he attempted to enlist Jonathan in a plot to kill David. Jonathan nobly defended David and gained a temporary reprieve for him from the king's wrath. Soon, however Saul again attempted to kill David with a spear, and once again David escaped. The king then sent soldiers to David's house to take him, but Michal, his wife, let David down through a window and, placing an image under the blankets on David's bed, reported to the messengers that David was ill (19: 11-14). When her duplicity was discovered she excused it to her father by claiming David had threatened to kill her if she did not aid his escape.

David, however, fled to Samuel at Ramah, and there, when Saul sent messengers after him, was protected by a direct divine intervention in which the Spirit of God turned back three companies of soldiers by compelling them to prophesy. At last when Saul himself came to capture David, he too was seized by the Spirit of God and prophesied before Samuel, so that it was said throughout all Israel, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (19:24). From here to the end of the book, we have the story of the unceasing persecution of David by Saul. It is a living illustration of the principle Paul declares in Galatians 4:29, "He who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit." The quote refers directly to Esau and Jacob, but the principle is reflected in various accounts in Scripture, and especially in this account of the persecution of David by Saul. It was during these days of constant flight that David wrote many of the psalms, those wonderful songs which speak of God's faithfulness in distressing conditions. David returned to seek the intervention of Jonathan, with his father, and the two young men exchanged vows of eternal friendship. Jonathan knew that God had chosen his friend to be king, but he was without jealousy and consented to the divine appointment, only asking David to promise that he would not cut off his friendship from Jonathan and his descendants after he became king.

When Saul noted David's absence from the royal table, Jonathan explained that he had given him permission to go to Bethlehem. Upon this, Saul fell into a great rage and threw his spear at Jonathan. Seeing the king's unreasoning rage, Jonathan warned his friend by an appointed signal that his life was in great danger. The two took their leave of one another in a touching scene of mutual grief (I Sam. 20:42).

Through the painful persecution that David was now experiencing it is evident that God was preparing him for the work that lay before him. He fled first to Nob, the city of priests. There, needing bread, he was given the Bread of the Presence from the table of showbread in the Tabernacle (21:6). Centuries later, Jesus would refer to this incident and justify David's conduct as the actions of a man of faith. However, the next incident reveals David's occasional fear, for he sought refuge among the Philistines in the city of Gath. There he found his reputation as a valiant warrior had preceded him. To avoid being slain by the Philistines, he pretended to be mad, letting his spit run down his beard. It is sad to see the anointed of the Lord reduced to such tactics to save his own skin. The story stands as a continuing warning against taking refuge among those who are basically the Lord's enemies.

David now gathered about him a band of some 400 men and made his guerrilla headquarters in the cave of Adullam. There everyone who was in distress, everyone in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. When Saul was told by Doeg the Edomite (a descendant of Esau) concerning David's visit to Ahimelech the priest, Saul summoned the entire body of priests to his presence. There he accused them of harboring David and ordered them to be killed. When the king's soldiers refused to kill the Lord's priests, Doeg the Edomite fell upon them and killed 85 persons. One of the sons of Ahimelech, named Abiathar, escaped the slaughter and joined David in his hiding place (chap. 22). It is interesting to note that in his exile David the king had a prophet, Gad, and a priest, Abiathar, whose resources were available to him even though he was being hunted, "just as one hunts

a partridge in the mountains" (26:20). So too when we find ourselves in trouble, unable to work out our problems ourselves, we can find in the Lord Jesus Christ, (who is our Prophet, our Priest and our King) all that it takes to bring us through the time of trouble to the place of reigning and triumph.

King Saul's relentless pursuit of David meant that the affairs of the kingdom were falling in great disarray. The Philistines took full advantage of this condition, and attacked the city of Keilah. It is David, rather than Saul, who responds. With 600 of his men he put the Philistines to rout and saved the city. When David learned that Saul had heard he was in Keilah and was sending an army against him, David consulted the Lord through his priest, Abiathar, and learned that the men of the city were ready to give him up to Saul's vengeance.

Again he fled, this time to the wilderness of Ziph. There Jonathan sought him out and encouraged his heart with reminders that God had determined to make him king over Israel. The Ziphites attempted to betray David into the hands of Saul, but David was spared when the Philistines launched another attack and Saul had to turn aside from his pursuit of David and go against the Philistines (23: 15-29).

David's greatness of spirit is revealed by the account of Saul's renewed pursuit of him after returning from the battle with the Philistines. Saul unwittingly entered the very cave in which David and his men were hiding. While Saul was in there, David managed to cut off the hem of the garment he had laid aside. After Saul left the cave David came out and held up the piece of garment as proof that when he had him in his power he did not take vengeance but rather honored him as the Lord's anointed and spared his life. Saul seemed to be moved by this mercy on David's part and acknowledged that David would indeed be king some day. But since David and his men returned to their stronghold, it seems they attached little importance to Saul's words (24:22).

The death of Samuel at this point meant that Israel had lost a great voice for God and a great prayer warrior for the people.

We then in, chapter 25, have the account of Nabal (which means "fool") and his wife, Abigail. When this wealthy but mean-spirited farmer was shearing his sheep near Mount Carmel, David sent 10 of his young men to ask for a supply of food, reminding Nabal that the safety he enjoyed was due to the presence of David and his men. Nabal refused with unusual churlishness, and David, angered, gathered his men to wreak vengeance upon the foolish man.

When Nabal's wife Abigail heard that David was intent upon their destruction, she hastily sent David a generous present of bread, wine and sheep, clusters of raisins and cakes of figs. Mounting her donkey she went toward the men and met David on his way to revenge. There, with gracious words, she reasoned with him, reminding him that he was taking vengeance into his own hands and this would be evil in the eyes of the Lord. David courteously commends her for the service she has rendered him in preventing a bloody deed on his part.

When Abigail, the next morning, told her husband Nabal of his narrow escape from death, the shock brought on an attack, which 10 days later resulted in his death.

When David heard of Nabal's death, he sent his servants and claimed Abigail as his wife. We are also told that David took Ahinoam of Jezreel to be his wife as well, in place of Michal whom Saul had given to another. Here we have evidence of a weakness in David which would ultimately lead him into the most terrible sin of his life.

Once again the Ziphites attempted to betray David to Saul, and once again Saul pursued him with an army of 3,000 men. This time David and two of his men found Saul sleeping at night in the midst of his camp, and, carefully stealing into the camp amidst the sleeping men, David took Saul's spear and water jar and left the camp. Then standing afar off he called out, waking the king and his men, and rebuked Saul's general, Abner, for his lack of care of the king. He again reminded Saul that he had had an opportunity to take his life but spared him because he was the Lord's anointed.

Once again Saul was moved with remorse and confessed to David, "I have played the fool" (26:21). But there is no attempt to restore David to his rightful place, and the account ends with Saul returning to his headquarters and

David going his way into exile again.

This perhaps accounts for David's weary and despondent statement that he feels he must soon perish at the hand of Saul, and again David seeks refuge among the Philistines, asking of King Achish accommodation in the town of Ziklag (27:5-7). From there he carried out raids against other Canaanite enemies of Israel. But in his reports to Achish, David deceived him into thinking his attacks were directed against the cities of Israel. It is clear that when a believer takes refuge among those who are the enemies of faith he is in great danger of violating some fundamental principle of righteousness himself. Surely the God who had delivered David from the hand of Goliath could have kept him from the hand of Saul, without the necessity of resorting to a refuge among the Philistines.

This dallying with the Philistines resulted in David being compelled to join the Philistine army in preparing to launch an attack upon Israel (28:1). When King Saul learned that the Philistines were gathering against him he was afraid and sought the Lord for guidance, but the Lord refused to answer him in any manner. In desperation, Saul disguised himself and sought out a medium, though he himself had given orders long before that such mediums should be put to death. Saul asked the medium of Endor to recall Samuel from the dead to advise him. Evidently God overruled in this and sent, not an impersonating spirit as the medium expected, but the true Samuel who announced Saul's impending death on the battlefield the next day (28:13-19).

The scene changed then to the Philistine armies who were assembling for the battle. When the lords of the Philistines saw David among them, they protested to King Achish and forced David to turn back. When David returned to Ziklag he found that in his absence the city had been sacked by the Amalekites. He sought the guidance of God and set out in pursuit. He managed to overtake the raiders and attacked and destroyed them, recovering his two wives and great quantities of spoil. He insisted that 200 of his men who had been too exhausted to join him should share equally in the spoil with those who had gone with him; for he maintained that it was the Lord who had delivered the enemy into his hands and not those who fought.

The closing chapter of the book recounts the fulfilling of Samuel's prophecy; for when the battle was engaged between Saul and the Philistines, the Philistines overtook Saul and slew all his sons, including Jonathan, and wounded Saul. When his armor-bearer refused to kill him, Saul died by his own hand. The Philistines, finding Saul's body with those of his sons, cut off their heads and hung their bodies on the wall of the city of Bethshean, but the men of Jabesh-gilead recovered them by night and buried their remains in Jabesh.

So Saul joined Samuel in the life beyond, but as one whose earthly life was essentially wasted and whose opportunity for service in eternity was thereby diminished. His life recalls the words of Paul in I Corinthians 3:14: "If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward."

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Nine

The King After God's Own Heart: Second Samuel, First Chronicles

Since the books of 2 Samuel and I Chronicles cover the same period of time, even though from quite distinct viewpoints, and though they do not follow one another in the biblical order, they may be studied as one book. They both center upon the story of one man--David, the king after God's own heart.

Second Samuel falls into four simple divisions: (1) chapters 1-5 trace David's road from king over the tribe of Judah only, to total dominion over the 12 tribes of Israel seven years later; (2) chapters 6-10 highlight the themes of worship and victory--those two things that always go together in the Christian life; (3) chapters 11-20 record David's failure and God's forgiveness and the results of both in David's life; (4) chapters 21-24 comprise an appendix which sets forth certain important lessons learned by King David in the course of his reign.

In focusing thus upon the life of David there are two ways that we may view him. First, it is perfectly proper to see him as a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, for Jesus Himself used this analogy. David was not only the forerunner and ancestor of Jesus according to the flesh, but in his reign he is a picture of the reign of Christ during the millennium. David went through a long time when he was rejected, persecuted and harassed; but during that time of exile he gathered men around him who later, after he was king, became his commanders and generals. Thus David pictures Christ in His rejection--forsaken by the world but gathering in secret those who will be His commanders, generals and captains when He comes to reign in power and glory over the earth.

Second, David is also a picture of each individual believer; and it is only as we read these histories from that point of view that the books come alive and glow with truth for us. "These things...were written," Paul says, "for our instruction" (I Cor. 10:11), that we might understand ourselves as we see events worked out in the lives of these characters in the Old Testament.

The story of David portrays what happens in a Christian's life as he follows God into the place of dominion and reigning. Every Christian is offered a kingdom, just as David was offered a kingdom. That kingdom is the believer's own life and it is exactly like the kingdom of Israel. There are enemies threatening it from the outside and there are enemies threatening it from within, just as there were enemy nations outside the boundaries of Israel and there were enemy tribes living amongst the people within the land. The enemies from without are representative for us of the world and the direct attacks of the devil upon us. The enemies within represent those internal enemies of the flesh that threaten to undermine and overthrow the dominion that God intends us to have as we learn to reign in life by Jesus Christ. We do not call them Ammonites, Jebusites, Perrizites, etc., as they are called in the Old Testament, rather we call them jealousy, envy, lust, bitterness, resentment, worry, anxiety, etc. But they are the same enemies and proceed in the same ways.

What an accurate picture all this is! David, in I Samuel 13:14 is called "a man after [God's] own heart"; but King Saul, the first king of Israel, is labeled "the king like the nations around." Thus, as we have seen in I Samuel, Saul represents the man of the flesh who tries in his own way to please God by good-intentioned, highly sincere but basically disobedient efforts to be religious. For him everything falls apart. We learn from Saul that the Christian life is not to be a shabby imitation of the life of Jesus Christ. It must be the real thing, with Christ Himself living His life in us. But as Saul is the picture of the flesh and its attempt to imitate reality, David is the picture of the man after God's own heart, the believer in whom the Spirit of God dwells and who is open to the instruction of the Spirit and is led by the Spirit.

FROM EXILE TO THE THRONE

Second Samuel opens with a second account of the death of Saul, the man of the flesh. David learns of Saul's and Jonathan's death from a passing Amalekite who boasts that he slew King Saul, took his crown from off his head, and brought it to David (2 Sam. 1:10). When we recall that an Amalekite is a descendant of Esau and one with whom God has said He is at war "from generation to generation" (Exod. 17:16), we can regard his tale as essentially a fabrication, for it differs in considerable degree from the account of the death of Saul in I Samuel. Without a doubt he found the dead body of the king and attempted to despoil it and use it for his own advancement. The whole story affords an accurate picture of how the flesh can steal away our crown and seek to turn it to its own glory. David however honors Saul as the Lord's anointed, and gives the Amalekite the ultimate penalty.

In a song of great beauty and power, David, ever the man of faith, extols both Saul and Jonathan as men used of God despite their weaknesses. The song closes with an eloquent expression of David's sense of loss at the death of

his dear friend Jonathan (1:26).

David's first act after the death of Saul was to inquire of the Lord where he should establish his residence as king of Judah; God directed him to the city of Hebron ("fellowship"). Here David was anointed as king by his own tribe of Judah (2:4) and with true nobility of character he commends the men of Jabesh-Gilead for having recovered and buried the body of Saul. However, kingship over all 12 tribes was not to be easily gained, for Abner, the cousin of Saul and his leading general, took Ishbosheth, the 40-year-old son of Saul, and anointed him king over all Israel outside of Judah. This act precipitated warfare between David and the house of Saul, which broke out in immediate conflict between Abner and Joab, David's nephew and general over the fighting men of Judah. Both these men were strong and powerful leaders and remained rivals throughout their careers. In the first encounter, Abner killed Asahel, Joab's brother and Joab was never to rest until his vengeance was satisfied by Abner's death.

The warfare between David and the house of Saul continued for the duration of seven years. Matters were brought to a crisis by a quarrel that broke out between Abner and King Ishbosheth, the son of Saul. Abner felt that he was unjustly charged with taking to himself a concubine of Saul's and in anger he swore to transfer his loyalty to David and thus to carry out what he felt all along was God's purpose: to make David king over all Israel. But when Joab, David's general, learned that Abner, his hated rival, was about to become David's supporter, Joab lured Abner into a private conversation at the gate of Hebron and there slew him (3:30). King David promptly denied all complicity with this murder, openly praised Abner to the people, and followed his bier to the grave. This greatly pleased the people, and David steadily won his way into that respect and love which is the greatest support for the power of a king.

Chapter 4 recounts the bloody story of the murder of Ishbosheth by two men of the tribe of Benjamin. They brought the head of Ishbosheth to David in Hebron, thinking to gain his approval but he met them with the same treatment he had given the Amalekite who brought the news of Saul's death. Their immediate death at the hands of David's men demonstrated again David's unwillingness to make use of subterfuge and injustice to secure the ends appointed by God. Nevertheless, with the death of Abner and Ishbosheth, the warfare with the house of Saul is ended and the way is now clear for David to be king over all of Israel. In our lives, this depicts the time when we come at last to the full truth of the cross and what that cross has done in putting to death the old man within us, thus bringing an end to the reign of the flesh, as pictured by the house of Saul. When at last it breaks upon our astonished minds that God really means it when He says He has separated us from the life of Adam and linked us to the life of Jesus Christ, and thus our old man no longer has any right to live, then we are standing right in the same place David was when he saw the opportunity to ascend to the throne over all the united land of Israel.

The elders of all the tribes gathered at Hebron and there publicly acknowledged David as king over the entire land (5:1-3). His first act was to attack the city of Jerusalem, the home of the Jebusites, and by forcing an entrance through a secret water tunnel he gained control of the site and made it his capital. Following this, he built a magnificent house of cedar in Jerusalem with the aid of Hiram the king of Tyre. Here in 2 Samuel 5:13-16, a note of weakness interjects, for we learn of further wives and concubines which David added to his family and from which were born many sons and daughters. His growing power as king was immediately manifest in a double victory over the Philistine armies.

WORSHIP AND VICTORY

With the borders of land secure and a standing army of 30,000 men, David felt the time had come to bring the Ark back from its long resting place in the city of Keriath-jearim, here called Baal-Judah. David built a new ox cart and set the Ark in the middle of it and started back to the city of Jerusalem with the people singing and rejoicing around the Ark (6:5). It was a time of enthusiastic, utterly sincere, and complete dedication and devotion to God. But then a terrible thing happened: as the Ark was going down the road the cart hit a rut and trembled and shook so that it looked as though the Ark was about to fall off the cart. A man named Uzzah, standing by the cart, reached out his hand to steady it and the moment his hand touched the Ark the lightning of God struck him dead.

David was nonplused and fearful, not knowing what to do.

Of course, it cast a pall of tragedy over this whole scene, and the rejoicing and merrymaking was abruptly stopped. David was so sick at heart that he turned the ox cart aside and put the Ark of God in the house of Obed-Edom. Then he returned to Jerusalem, bitter and resentful against the Lord for doing such a thing.

Although David was afraid of the Lord because of this event, the truth was that it was David's fault that Uzzah had died. In the book of Leviticus there were very specific and detailed instructions on how the Ark was to be moved. Only the Levites were to touch it. It was David's fault that the Levites had not been asked to move the Ark. He was presumptuous enough to assume that God was so strongly for him that he could get away with almost anything. David had to learn the lesson that sincerity in serving God is never enough. Things must be done God's way in accomplishing God's will.

Perhaps you have had some similar experience. You may have had some favorite project which you felt, in the earnestness of your heart, would be a wonderful thing to glorify God, and you set about it, determined to bring it to pass. But God failed to bless the project and the whole thing crumbled to pieces. The death of Uzzah stands as a constant testimony that it is not God's responsibility to carry out our program; it is rather our responsibility to be in such a relationship to Him that He may carry out His program.

After three months, during which the Ark brought great blessing to the house of Obed-Edom, David had recovered to the point where he was ready to bring the Ark into Jerusalem, borne properly upon the shoulders of the Levites. As he danced in joy before the Ark he drew the contempt of his wife Michal, the daughter of Saul, who looked out at him from her window. But David was able to ignore her reproach, for he knew that what he had done was proper and right before the God of Israel.

Before David brought the Ark back to Jerusalem he had brought the Tabernacle from Gibeon for the Ark to rest in. But now he found himself concerned that he himself was dwelling in a beautiful house of cedar, while the Ark rested in a lowly tent (7:1,2). It came into his heart to build a magnificent house for the Ark of God. When Nathan the prophet heard of this he encouraged David to fulfill his desire. But God sent a message to Nathan saying that it was not His will for David to build the Temple, since he was a man of war; only a man of peace could properly build the Temple of God. Surely this anticipates the New Testament truth that Jesus Christ alone, the Prince of Peace, is capable of erecting the Temple of God among humanity. Though God had rejected his plan to build the Temple, David, evidently learning the lesson of Uzzah, humbly accepted the divine will, and in a prayer of great beauty and humility praised God for His glorious leadership over himself and the nation, and accepted the reversal of his own plans with grace and patience (7: 18-29).

The rest of this major section gives itself to an account of David's consolidation of his kingdom, conquering many of Israel's ancient enemies on every side, including Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Amalekites, and even the Syrians, far to the north.

A beautiful interlude is recounted of David's search for any remaining sons of Jonathan (chap. 10). Upon finding one named Mephibosheth, who had been lamed by a fall on the terrible day when Saul and Jonathan fell in battle, David brought him to Jerusalem, set him at his own table, and treated him as his own son. Thus he remembered his covenant with Jonathan to "show the kindness of the Lord" to his descendants. In all this he appears afresh as a man after God's own heart.

DAVID'S FAILURE, GOD'S FORGIVENESS

The next part of the story of David can be told in three simple sentences: he saw; he inquired; he took. It is the story of his tragic downfall and the entrance of sudden and terrible sin into David's life.

Walking on the roof of his house (when he should have been in battle), David saw a beautiful woman taking a bath. He sent and inquired about her, and then he took her. In those three statements we have a graphic tracing of the process of temptation. All temptation begins, first with a simple desire. There is nothing wrong with the desire,

for it is awakened in us because we are human beings. It may be along any avenue, but whenever it appears it must be properly dealt with. Either it is to be put away, or it is to be formed into a proper intent. David saw the beautiful woman, desired her, and then began to work out a way by which he could take her, even though he knew it was wrong. This was followed immediately by an act of adultery, and David, "a man after God's own heart" is thus involved in deep sin.

When the act was accomplished he refused to face the music, as many of us do. Instead of openly confessing and acknowledging the wrong and trying to make it right, he committed another sin to cover it up. This is often the process of sin. Commit one sin and you must commit another to cover that one up, and 10 more to cover up the second. So when David found out that Bathsheba was pregnant, he sent for Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, and tried to trick him into Lying with his wife, thus covering up David's double-dealing. But Uriah, in simple faithfulness to his duty and to God, confounded David. The matter ended finally in the murder of Uriah at the hands of the Ammonites. Joab, David's ruthless general, became a conspirator with David in the plot, and Uriah was placed at the forefront of battle. Though slain by the Ammonites, it was really David who was the murderer. So, suddenly and appallingly, there breaks into David's life the double sin of adultery and murder.

Many have wondered how the man who is called "a man after God's own heart" could ever merit such a title after being guilty of such a sin. But if you want to see what God meant when he called David "a man after his own heart," look at what happens in David's life when God sent Nathan the prophet to him. Nathan told the king a parable, which caught him completely off guard; and when the king responded in righteous anger, Nathan charged him with having committed the sin he had just condemned. Immediately, David acknowledged and faced his sin; he no longer tried to justify it, but confessed his total wrong in this matter. It was at this point that David wrote Psalm 51. Many have turned to this psalm in times of guilt and self-condemnation, and have found in David's experience the grace to handle their own sin properly before God, and to know also the washing away of stain and ugliness in the ever-flowing stream of God's mercy.

Chapters 12 through 20 record the results of David's sin as they unfolded in his life. When Nathan the prophet came to David, he told him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your companion, and he shall lie with your wives in broad daylight' " (12:11). This was to be literally fulfilled by Absalom, David's own son. Nathan had further said to the king, "However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die" (v. 14).

So it proved to be. The first result was that the baby born of this illegitimate union died, even though David pled with the Lord in a pathetic, poignant passage which reflects the tearing of his heart by grief. Then the predicted results in David's home, his family, and his kingdom began to appear.

Chapter 13 tells the dark story of Amnon, David's son, who sinned against his own sister, Tamar. This resulted in a black hatred born in Absalom, also David's son, against Amnon. In David's family, among his own sons, was spread a bitter spirit of rebellion and evil created by David's personal failure. The story of Amnon and his quarrel with Absalom, and finally the murder of Absalom at the hand of Joab, shows King David to be utterly helpless. He cannot even rebuke his own son, for Amnon simply follows in David's footsteps.

We are told next of the uprising of Absalom (chap. 15). This handsome, brilliant, gifted son of David fomented rebellion throughout the whole kingdom and secretly worked against his father in attempting to take the throne for himself. He was so successful that David, along with all his court, finally had to leave the city, fleeing as an exile. Weeping, David left the city, barefoot and with his head covered as symbolic of his penitent heart. He acknowledged the fact that these evil circumstances were the result of his own folly. But even in his humiliation and shame he had the presence of mind to send Abiathar and Zadok back into the city; he told his friend Hushai that he could serve him better by remaining behind, rather than accompanying him in his exile.

Further ignominy was added to the fleeing king when Zeba, Mephibosheth's servant, met him with the false information that Mephibosheth had remained in Jerusalem with the expectation of seeing the house of Saul

restored by Absalom (16:1-3). Also Shimei the Benjaminite and a relative of Saul openly mocked and cursed King David. But when Abishai, Joab's brother, sought permission to kill Shimei, David, with great magnanimity of spirit, restrained him, remarking that perhaps the Lord had sent Shimei to humble David even further (16:5-12). Thus he showed himself, even in his humiliation, as a man after God's own heart.

Meanwhile, back at Jerusalem, Hushai had won the confidence of Absalom and was invited to act as one of his counselors. Ahithophel, formerly David's advisor, suggested to Absalom that he immediately pursue and kill his father. Hushai was able to turn Absalom from such counsel and advised him rather to wait until he could gather a large army from all of Israel and then go up against the king. In suggesting this, he was seeking to give David time to gather men.

Eventually the two forces came to battle in the forest of Ephraim, and a mighty conflict ensued, resulting in the death of over 20,000 men. When Absalom saw that his forces were defeated he tried to escape on a mule through the forest. He was caught in a branch of a tree and left hanging by the head in midair. When Joab heard of this, he immediately went to the spot and, taking three darts, thrust them into Absalom's heart, directly contravening the orders of David who had commanded his men to spare Absalom's life. When the news of Absalom's death was brought to David he was crushed with sorrow and cried, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you" (18:33).

So distraught was David that Joab ultimately reproved him for his mourning and warned him that he was in danger of losing the support of his fighting men by apparently loving his rebel son above all his loyal supporters.

The section ends with the account of the return of David in triumph to Jerusalem. Again he showed magnanimity to the now remorseful Shimei, who formerly had cursed him, and was gracious again to Mephibosheth, who explained that David had been deceived by Mephibosheth's servant. David's return, however, was marred by the rebellion of Sheba, a Benjaminite, who sought to exploit the situation by leading a breakaway rebellion from David's authority. Abishai and Joab were sent to suppress the outbreak and on their way they met Amasa, formerly Absalom's commander, at Gibeon. Joab, knowing that David had offered to make Amasa commander in his place, treacherously greeted Amasa with an apparently friendly kiss, but instead stabbed him with his sword and left his body wallowing in blood on the highway. The strange ferocity of this man, coupled with his loyalty to David, was manifested clearly in this bloody deed.

The insurrection ended when a woman in the city where Sheba had taken refuge convinced the townspeople to save their city from siege by beheading Sheba and throwing his head over the wall to Joab. Thus, through much humiliation, shame and bloodshed David was restored to his position as king, and the affairs of the kingdom were once again set in order.

THE EPILOGUE

The epilogue to 2 Samuel, chapters 21 through 24, gathers up, though not in chronological order, some of the events and lessons which David experienced through his 40-year reign. The first is the story of the Gibeonites whom Saul had attacked, contrary to the covenant which Joshua had made with them when he first had conquered the land. The result of Saul's breach of faith was a continuing famine in that section of the country which could not be ended until expiation was made by handing over to the Gibeonites seven of Saul's sons or grandsons. The lesson of this incident is that the past must be reckoned with. If there are things in our past which can still be corrected, we have a responsibility before God to go back and set these things straight. Thus, in the account of David and the Gibeonites, a correction was made of something which occurred under King Saul, and as Saul's heir to the throne, David had to set it straight.

Chapter 22 records one of David's most beautiful psalms. It appears again as Psalm 18. In it is found David's own recognition of the things that made for greatness in his kingdom. He acknowledged God as the source of all human strength and the One who alone can bring deliverance. He stated that what a man is to God, God will also be to that man. If one is open and honest and forthright with God, He will also be open and honest and forthright in return. But if a man insists on being crooked and perverse and deceitful, God will cause the circumstances of

his life to deceive him. This reflects the same truth that Paul declares in Philippians 3:12, in which he says, in essence, about Christ, "what I am to Him, He will be to me."

The final chapter gives the account of David's third great sin as recorded in this book--his sin of numbering Israel" Many have wondered why God would view this as sin, since He Himself had commanded Moses to number the people, as recorded in the book of Numbers. But David's numbering was done from a quite different motive, as seen in the rebuke of Joab to the king. Apparently the king began to reckon on his military might and the numbers of the people rather than wholly on the grace and power of God. For his sin, David was given a choice of three possible punishments; wisely, he left the matter in the hands of the Lord. To indicate the seriousness of reliance on human strength, the angel of the Lord was sent among Israel for three days, and a pestilence took the lives of 70,000 men. The prophet Gad was sent to the king to tell him to erect an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, where the plague was stayed. This was later to be the site of the erection of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Thus 2 Samuel closes with the man after God's own heart turning from his sin to the worship of the living God.

FIRST CHRONICLES

It is clearly evident that I Chronicles was written after the return of Israel from their 70 years of captivity in Babylon. It was probably written by Ezra the priest, who also wrote the book which bears his name. Ezra was one of the great figures who returned with the captives to reestablish the Temple and the worship of Jehovah in Jerusalem.

Although I Chronicles covers much of the same period as 2 Samuel, it does so with a particular emphasis on the worship of Israel. This is evident in the opening chapters. The first nine chapters are given over to a long list of genealogies. This is not merely the stringing together of many names, but is a compilation of some of the most helpful material available to anyone working on the problem of biblical chronology. If we look at these names carefully and compare them with other accounts, we will see that God is selecting and rejecting, excluding and including and working toward an ultimate goal. These genealogies are given that we might see both the goal toward which the Lord works in human history, and the principle by which He includes or excludes events.

THE PROCESS OF SELECTION

The genealogy begins in chapter 1 at the dawn of human history, listing the sons and descendants of Adam--Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel. We know that among the sons of Adam were Cain, Abel and Seth, but here Cain and Abel are excluded and there is no mention of them. The focus is upon the descendants of Seth, for from him eventually came the family of Abraham and the Israelites. Here is the principle of exclusion in evidence.

Then the line of Seth is traced down to Enoch and Noah. The three sons of Noah are listed as Shem, Ham and Japheth, but Ham and Japheth are dismissed with a brief word and attention is focused on the line of Shem. From Shem we trace on down to Abraham and his family. The constant narrowing process also excludes Ishmael, the son of Abraham, and Esau, the son of Isaac, and focuses on Jacob's 12 sons who became the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel.

The genealogy continues and selects the tribes of Judah and Levi--the king and the priestly lines. It traces the tribe of Judah down to David, to Solomon and then through the kings of the house of David to the Babylonian captivity. The tribe of Levi is traced down to Aaron, the first of the priests, and then to the priests who were prominent in the kingdom at the time of David.

In all these genealogies there are interspersed brief reasons for the selections which are made, and certain isolated incidents are reported. One is found in chapter 4:9, where we read, "Jabez was more honorable than his brother, and his mother named him Jabez saying, 'Because I bore him with pain' " (Jabez means "pain"). The reference goes on to recite the brief prayer of Jabez in which he asks God to enlarge his borders and keep him from harm.

God granted him what he asked. This apparently minor incident reflects the principle God follows in His process of selectivity. Wherever God can find an obedient heart, that individual is included in the account. In the case of Jabez, his native disabilities were canceled out by his faith and he is immediately made an effectual instrument in the working of God through him in history. When God excludes a name, or turns from a line or family, it is always on the basis of repeated disobedience. This principle can be traced throughout the entire genealogical record.

Chapter 10 gives a brief account of the death of Saul, the first of Israel's kings. Verses 13 and 14 tell why Saul's kingship ended: "So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the Lord, because of the word of the Lord which he did not keep; and also because he asked counsel of a medium, making inquiry of it."

GOD'S KING

The rest of I Chronicles is about David. The book emphasizes that from the moment he was anointed king, David was God's king. His first act after coming to kingship in Israel was to take over the pagan stronghold of the Jebusites, the city of Jerusalem--God's city. This was the place where God had chosen to put His name among the tribes of Israel.

Beginning with chapter 11:10, the account names those who were loyal to David during his exile, and the things they did that made them mighty. These were men of faith and passion, and were attracted to David by the character he displayed. These mighty men who shared David's exile eventually became the leaders in his kingdom. It is a beautiful picture of the glory we are promised to share with the Lord Jesus when He establishes His kingdom of righteousness over all the earth.

A second emphasis of the book is on the Ark of God. In chapter 13 we are told that David went down to the city where the Ark was situated and took it upon a cart to bring it back to Jerusalem. Evidently David knew that the law commanded that the Ark be carried only by Levites, but in the exuberance of his joy and his zeal for God's cause he attempted to do it another way. The result was the immediate death of Uzzah, who touched the Ark to steady it when it appeared about to fall. There is no incident in the Old Testament that teaches more clearly the importance of a careful, precise obedience to what the Word of God says. It also teaches that God is able to care for His own cause. Many today, like Uzzah, are seeking to steady the Ark of God which they feel to be in danger, but it is quite apparent from this incident that God is quite able to defend His own cause.

When eventually David does bring the Ark into Jerusalem, borne by Levites, he placed it in the Tabernacle which he had previously brought up from the city of Gibeon. The restoration of the Ark to the Tabernacle was an occasion of great rejoicing and we have recorded in chapter 16 the great psalm sung on this momentous occasion. It is made up of parts of psalms 105, 96 and 106. It is a great declaration of the government of God, the majesty of God which draws forth the worship of His people, and a great expression of gratitude to God for what He is in Himself.

The account in chapter 17 of David's desire to build a Temple in place of the Tabernacle and God's rejection of that plan, with David's subsequent prayer of praise and worship, is almost identical to the account in 2 Samuel. Likewise, the story of David's victories over the nations surrounding Israel is, with slight variations, identical with 2 Samuel 8. These stories are beautifully descriptive of what happens in our hearts when Christ is crowned as King. There is immediately a subjugation of the dark enemies of our soul that created so much havoc in our lives.

It is remarkable that the double sin of David in taking the wife of Uriah the Hittite and arranging for the murder of her husband is passed over in this book in total silence. The only reference to it is the fact that "David stayed at Jerusalem" (20:1). That sin was one which grew out of his own foolish willfulness as an individual. It had nothing to do with his reign as a king; therefore it is omitted from this book which centers on his kingship. But David's action in numbering Israel is recounted in detail, as representing an abrupt departure from the principle of dependence upon the strength and glory of God. As king, David desired to see the number of people that were available to him, and thus to glory in the physical strength of his realm.

A problem arises in any Christian circle when men begin to depend upon numbers. One of the great principles which runs through the Bible, from beginning to end, is that God never wins His battles by a majority. When we begin to think that the cause of Christ is losing out because the number of Christians is decreasing in proportion to the population of the world, we have succumbed to the false philosophy that God wins His battles by numbers. In many instances throughout the Bible we are taught that God does not rely upon numbers but upon quality. There is the story of Gideon, with God's deliberate reduction of the number of men supporting him from 32,000 to 300. There is also the story of David and Goliath, the deliverance of Israel by a single shepherd boy with a single sling and a single rock from the brook. There is the story of Samson, who slew the Philistines with nothing but the jawbone of a donkey. Thus, all through Chronicles, the same principle is repeated as we find the emphasis upon God's method of the development of quality rather than quantity.

As the result of David's departure from this principle, and because the whole nation looked to him as king, God's judgment was exceedingly severe. The prophet Gad was sent to David to give him the three choices of punishment. When the angel of the Lord came into the midst of the people pestilence raged throughout the nation. David saw the angel with his sword stretched out over the city of Jerusalem, ready to slay there also, and David pled with God saying, "It is my fault; why do you take vengeance upon these others? I am the one to blame" (see 21: 17). Then God instructed him to buy the cattle and the threshing floor of Ornan (spelled Araunah in I Samuel). On this spot David erected an altar and worshiped God. The altar was placed where the angel of God stayed his hand from judgment.

AUTHORITY OF THE TEMPLE

Chapters 22-29 tell of David's passion for the building of the Temple. Because he understood that a nation without a Temple could never be a proper nation, he longed to see the Temple built. A people without the living God in their midst would never amount to much. Though David knew that Solomon his son had been appointed by God to be the actual builder of the Temple, yet in grace God allowed David to do everything for the Temple but to actually build it. It was David who drew the plans, designed the furniture, collected the materials and made all the arrangements for ritual and ceremony. He brought down cedars from Mount Hermon and Mount Lebanon from the north. He dug up the rock and quarried the stones. He gathered in great quantities of gold, silver and iron, and when it was all ready, David commanded the leaders of Israel to help Solomon in his task. In order to give Solomon the prestige and power necessary to this work, David made him a virtual co-ruler with himself.

Careful detail is given as to the work of the Levites in carrying out the work in the Temple, and special attention is paid to the ministry of music for the services within the Temple. David's musical skill had played a great part in his life, and his interest in these musical arrangements was most natural and delightful. David's concern for every detail of the building of the Temple is evident in his care for the workers who labored in its building, and for the cultivation of crops and the raising of cattle and all that pertained to the welfare of his people in carrying out their central activity--the worship of the living God.

Chapters 28 and 29 recount the final charge of David to his son Solomon and his impressive recital of reasons for God's refusal to allow him to do the building and his choice of Solomon for that task. David then gave to Solomon the pattern of the house with all its detail. Then, standing among the people, David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly, recognizing God's gracious gifts to them and the privilege of giving back to him the very best that men could give. He concluded with a great prayer for Solomon that God would preserve him in safety and grant him a perfect heart to fulfill the great work.

What is the ultimate message of I Chronicles? It is the supreme authority of the temple in our individual life. Central to all of life is the worship of the heart. Over the three great doors of the cathedral in Milan, Italy, are three inscriptions. Over the right hand door is carved a wreath of flowers and the inscription, "All that pleases is but for a moment." On the left hand door is a cross, and over it is written, "All that troubles is but for a moment." Over the main entrance are the words, "Nothing is important save that which is eternal."

This is the lesson of Chronicles, for it is in some sense the lesson of the whole Bible. "Whatever you do in word

or deed [i.e. in the temple of the body], do all in the name of [by the authority and by the ability of] the Lord Jesus [King in His temple]' (Col. 3:17).

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Ten
The Way to Lose a Kingdom: First Kings, Second Chronicles 1-20

In the Hebrew Bible, our books of I and 2 Kings are combined into one book simply called Kings. The present division was not made until the first century before Christ by the translators of the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. Since I Kings and the first 26 chapters of 2 Chronicles cover the same period of time we will take them together in this study. The unknown writer of the books of Kings has written not only a book of history, but has selectively chosen significant events from this history that would help his readers understand the internal meaning of the outward events, especially as measured against the covenants which God made with Israel centuries before at Mount Sinai.

First Kings begins with the reign of Solomon and carries us through the tragic division of the kingdom under Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. Then we are given summaries of the various dynasties within the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the lives of the kings of the single dynasty of the house of David in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In each case, the spotlight is always on the king, for it was what the king did in relationship to God that determined how the nation went. When the king walked with God in obedience and humility, God's blessing and prosperity and victory rested upon the kingdom. The rains came at the right time, the crops grew and the land flourished. There was victory over their enemies even though the enemies came in allied forces. But when the king disobeyed and allowed the people to fall into the worship of other gods, immediately famines broke out, plagues came, invasions occurred, and the land fell into difficult and serious conditions. The kings that walk in obedience become, as always, types of Christ, such as David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, and Josiah. But the kings who walk in disobedience become types or pictures of the anti-Christ, the man of sin who is yet to appear upon the earth.

The factor, of course, that makes even these historic books of perennial fascination to us is that the kingdom of Israel is an accurate picture of our own lives. It was for this purpose that God chose Israel to be a nation and gave it its unique laws and its unique government, in order to provide an example to all the world of what the living God is willing to be in any individual's life. Thus, as we read these books, we find ourselves also in the midst of the problems, the blessings, and the possibilities that are reflected in these books of the kings.

THE REIGN OF SOLOMON

First Kings opens with the last days of David. He appears here as a very old and feeble man, unable to discharge properly the duties of his high office. This feebleness created the opportunity for one of his sons, Adonijah, to foment a rebellion which would make himself the successor to his father. We can place the time of this rebellion as following that of Absalom recounted in 2 Samuel, and occurring just before Solomon was acknowledged openly as joint king along with David, his father. Though Adonijah obtained the support of Joab and Abiathar, the priest, his plans were thwarted by the intervention of Nathan the prophet who, through Bathsheba, David's wife and Solomon's mother, informed King David of the plot. Immediately David arranged for the public anointing of Solomon as king.

Adonijah, fearing Solomon, took shelter at the altar in the court of the Tabernacle and was spared for a season;

however, he eventually was slain at Solomon's command. After David's death, Adonijah presumed to threaten the throne by seeking marriage with the girl who had been David's nurse during the closing days of his life.

Before David died, he called Solomon before him and solemnly charged him to walk in the ways of the Lord his God, and to teach his children after him, that the kingdom might endure in safety and prosperity forever (2:1-4). He left to Solomon's wisdom the fate of those men whom David had never fully trusted in his own time--Joab, his brutal and bloody general, and Shimei, who cursed David so violently on the day he fled from Absalom (vv. 5-9). David had kept his covenant with these men by sparing their lives; but they eventually paid for their treachery by death at the command of Solomon. He also deposed Abiathar, the priest, and substituted Zadok in fulfillment of the prophecy given to Eli many decades before.

The reign of Solomon appeared to hold much promise for it is recorded that he loved the Lord and walked in the statutes of David, his father (see I Kings 3:3). Soon after Solomon ascended the throne, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and offered him his choice of gifts. Aware of his own incapacities for the heavy demands of government, the young king asked for the gift of wisdom--the ability to distinguish between good and evil. God's answer was one of gracious and abundant mercy for He gave Solomon what he asked, but added also the riches and honor he might have chosen but wisely had passed by. It is clearly evident from this that wealth and fame are proper honors when God bestows them, but if sought for selfish purposes they frequently prove to be curses rather than blessings.

Solomon's gift of wisdom is immediately manifested in the famous story of his choice between two mothers who each claimed a certain baby as her own. When Solomon ordered the child divided by a sword and half given to each, the real mother quickly gave up her right in order that the child might live, though the other woman would possess it. Solomon promptly awarded that child to the first and proper mother. With this incident his fame spread throughout the kingdom.

Solomon's reputation for wisdom spread far beyond the borders of his kingdom, which now extended from the Euphrates in the north to the border of Egypt in the south, almost the entire extent which had been promised to Abraham hundreds of years before. A summary of Solomon's wise sayings included 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs (4:32). His fame spread widely, also, as a naturalist and philosopher.

Yet, despite this apparent magnificence a note of weakness is found in his marriage alliance with Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, by bringing Pharaoh's daughter to Jerusalem as his wife. As we have seen, Egypt in the Scripture is always a type of the world's allurements to the human heart. When Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter into his court the door was open for alliances with other lovely maidens from the tribes around Israel. Soon he had 1,000 wives. And along with them came their idols. Thus, despite outward prosperity and glory, the kingdom began to deteriorate under Solomon because he allowed the world to entice and allure him and draw him away from his heart's interest in the Temple, where his worship should have been centered.

By the fourth year of his reign, Solomon was ready to begin the building of the Temple, 480 years after the Israelites left Egypt. They were now settled in the land of promise, enjoying a season of rest from warfare, and unusual prosperity. In preparing materials for the Temple, Solomon enlisted the aid of his father's friend, Hiram the king of Tyre, from whom he obtained massive quantities of cedar and cypress wood as well as skilled workers in bronze and gold (5: 1-12). The stones for the Temple were quarried out beneath the Temple mount and were finished within the quarry so that "neither hammer nor ax nor any iron tool [was] heard in the house, while it was being built" (6:7). This remarkable sentence finds its parallel in Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:20-22, concerning the building of the church. It is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into it a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Without noise or fanfare the Spirit of God has for 20 centuries been constructing a glorious temple, from living materials, to be a habitation of God through the Spirit.

Solomon built the Temple along the same pattern as the Tabernacle in the wilderness, though it was double the

size and was characterized by a greater magnificence and durability. Like the Tabernacle, the Temple was most beautiful from within, for almost everything was covered with pure gold.

In the midst of the account of the building of the Temple, which took a period of seven years altogether, the chronicler interjects a brief account of the building of the palace for Solomon and adds this significant statement: "Solomon was building his own house thirteen years" (7:1). The significance of this is seen in the insightful comment of Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, "If the time and possessions devoted to our own comfort be greater than those devoted to the service of God, it is sure proof that the master passion is self-centered rather than God-centered. "

The furniture of the Temple likewise duplicated that of the Tabernacle except it was of far greater magnificence. When all was finished the solemn moment for the dedication of the Temple arrived. In an impressive ceremony of solemnity and beauty, the Ark of the Covenant was brought from its place in the Tabernacle and installed within the Temple. When the priests came out from the holy place after installing the Ark in the holy of holies, a cloud of glory from the Lord suddenly filled the Temple, and when Solomon saw this evidence of God's immediate presence with His people, he uttered a cry of rejoicing and arose to bless the people (8:15-21).

Then kneeling (v. 54) before the altar of burnt offering and raising his outstretched hands, Solomon uttered a moving prayer of dedication, recognizing the faithfulness of God and the peril of departing from the ways of God (vv. 22-53). His understanding of God's transcendent majesty was manifest in his words, "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee, how much less this house which I have built!" (8:27). In prophetic vision he outlined the many circumstances that might arise in which the people would turn, temporarily, away from the ways of God, but from which they might recover when they turned again with repentant hearts to the presence of God, as symbolized by the Temple.

Rising from prayer he pronounced another blessing upon the people, and followed this with the offering of thousands of sacrifices (8:54-64). At the close, the joyful people returned to their dwellings, having participated in the greatest moment of glory the nation was ever to know from the days of Moses and until the time of the Messiah.

After the dedication of the Temple, Jehovah appeared again to Solomon in a dream (9:2-9) and assured him that his prayer had been heard. He told Solomon that His divine promises to David his father were renewed, upon the condition that Solomon and his descendants would walk faithfully before the Lord. If they failed to do this, the beautiful Temple would be torn down and the people would be driven from the land and become a byword and a proverb among the nations.

As we read the account, we know the terrible fulfillment of this in history, for the conditions were not kept either by the king or the people, so that the penalty was fulfilled in precise detail. Again, the parallel to the individual life is self-evident.

Solomon's present of 20 cities in Galilee to King Hiram of Tyre is recorded in 9:10-14. His establishment of various storehouse cities and military barracks throughout the land, and his creation of a commercial navy are detailed in verses 15-28.

At this time, the apex of Solomon's prosperity, the famous visit of the queen of Sheba occurred (10:1-13). Sheba was located in what is now southern Arabia, but even at that distance its queen had heard the fame of Solomon and especially of his noted wisdom and blessing from the Most High God. She came to Jerusalem with a great caravan to see for herself whether what she had heard was true. When Solomon showed her the magnificence of his palace and of his kingdom, she reported that even the half had not been told her, but in words of great insight she expressed clearly that the secret of his greatness lay in the centrality of the government of God.

A further description of Solomon's astounding wealth is given in verses 14-29, in which it is noted that he made silver as common in Jerusalem as stone, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore wood. The wealth of all the nations around seemed to pour into Jerusalem as a result of the, blessing of God upon Solomon and his kingdom. Yet the

luxury with which the king surrounded himself reveals a love of indulgence which, expressed in many ways, would soon result in widespread dissatisfaction within the nation and ultimate division and decay.

In chapter 11 the writer of Kings unveils in detail the degeneration within Solomon's heart which was soon to result in the division of his kingdom. The point where evil first took hold was in Solomon's love for women. His commercial enterprises brought him into contact with many surrounding nations, and there he let his heart go after women from nations which the Lord had forbidden the Israelites to enter into marriage with. Soon he built temples for these women to practice their own degraded worship within, and eventually he joined them there, actually bowing down himself to the abominable idols of his pagan wives. For this "the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel" (11:9). For the third time He appeared to Solomon, perhaps again in a dream, but this time to announce to him that the kingdom would be torn from him and given to another; yet for David's sake it would occur after Solomon died, during the lifetime of Solomon's son. Immediately we read of several adversaries rising up against Solomon, including Hadad the Edomite on the south, Rezon in the land of Syria on the north, and from within the kingdom itself, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite who lifted up his hand against the king.

The prophet Ahijah was sent by God to meet Jeroboam outside of Jerusalem. Divesting himself of the new garment he wore, Ahijah tore it into 12 pieces. He handed Jeroboam 10 pieces, symbolizing that Jeroboam would be given 10 of the 12 tribes, while only two--Judah and Benjamin--would remain with the house of David. The promise given to David of divine blessing was extended to Jeroboam if he, too, would walk in the ways of God and keep His commandments as David had done. When Solomon heard of this he sought to kill Jeroboam, but he fled into Egypt and remained there until Solomon died.

After 40 years of unprecedented magnificence and prosperity, Solomon died and was buried in the city of David, his father, a sad and tragic close to a life which had begun with great promise and possibility.

The life of this man clearly indicates the importance of the will. In the kingdom of your life the human will is the king, and nothing can take place in that kingdom except as it is allowed by the choice of your will. Therefore, what your will does determines what your life will be like. If, willingly and obediently, you yield yourself to the influences of the Holy Spirit dwelling in your human spirit, you are like the kingdom when David walked with God and the land flourished, and the influence of the kingdom reached to the uttermost parts of the earth. But if, like Solomon, you begin to walk in disobedience, if your will is defiant and set upon the things of the flesh rather than the things of God, then evil invasions will begin in your life. You will no longer have strength to repel inward corruptions that ruin and take their toll upon you; thus the kingdom of your life will fall into ruin as well.

THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM

When Rehoboam, Solomon's son, came to Shechem to be anointed king, the people, led by Jeroboam who had returned from Egypt, asked that the new king would grant them relief from many of the burdens which Solomon had placed upon them. These included forced labor, unnecessary extravagance, and heavy taxation. The king sent them away for three days and consulted with both the old men who had advised his father and the young men with whom he had grown up. His own pride and despotism was revealed when he chose the advice of the young men. He told the people that their burdens would be increased (12:1-15). This announcement became the signal for widespread revolt. The 10 tribes chose Jeroboam to be their king, fulfilling the decree God had made to Solomon.

Jeroboam set up his capital at Shechem and, fearing that if the people continued to worship at Jerusalem they would eventually return to the authority of Rehoboam, he introduced the great sin for which the Northern Kingdom was ever after to be noted. Making two calves of molten gold, he set one up at the city of Dan in the far north, and another at the city of Bethel, at the border with Judah. Summoning Israel he said to them, "Behold your gods, O Israel" (v. 28). This was a harking back to the sin of Aaron at the foot of Mount Sinai, when he made a calf of gold which the people began to worship. They called that calf, Jehovah (Exod. 32:5), not intending to deny that Jehovah was their God, but foolishly misrepresenting Him as no more than the gods of the nations around.

The parallel in our lives is that form of godliness which denies the power of God. It is an outward conformity to Christian faith which lacks the inner response of the Spirit. It means to conform outwardly to everything Christian, but inwardly there is no true worship at all. This is the fatal sin which Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, introduced to the Northern Kingdom.

From this moment on in Israel's history, David and Jeroboam became representative of two spiritual principles that are traced throughout the kingdoms. They became the standards of measurement for the kings that followed. In Judah a good king is said to "walk in the ways of David, his father," and to serve the Lord his God by tearing down the false and abominable worship that Israel had fallen into; but in the Northern Kingdom, the evil kings are said to "walk in the ways of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to go awhoring after the gods that he had set up." It is significant that in Israel, the Northern Kingdom, there are no godly kings at all. There is but a continual succession of kings who walk in idolatrous ways and who frequently gain the throne by murdering their predecessor. Despite this, God in grace often intervenes by sending prophets to arrest the decay and fall of the Northern Kingdom.

In Judah, the Southern Kingdom, there were a few godly kings among many who were evil, but these godly men stand out like lights in the darkness. The primary ones were Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah and Josiah.

In an attempt to give Jeroboam opportunity for repentance, God sent a prophet to him, warning him of his evil by predicting the immediate overthrowing of the altar. When Jeroboam stretched out his hand to order the prophet's arrest his hand was withered and he could not draw it back. When he begged the prophet for healing, the hand was restored, but it represented no real repentance on Jeroboam's part (13:1-6).

A solemn lesson follows when the prophet attempted to return to his home. He disobeyed the expressed word of the Lord and entered into another prophet's house to eat and drink with him after the man lied and told him God had sent him. There it was predicted that the man of God would die as a result of his disobedience. On the way home a lion met him and killed him. Though no excuse can be made for the prophet who lied to him, nevertheless the account indicates that when God gives a direct command, it must not be disregarded, even though an angel from heaven or another prophet suggests a change.

Further judgment fell upon Jeroboam in the sickness of his son. Ahijah, the prophet, sent word to Jeroboam through his wife that the same God who had exalted him to power and made him king over Israel would now, because of his sin, remove him from the throne. The sign of it would be that his son would die. As Jeroboam's wife brought the news to her husband the child died. Nothing further is told us concerning the 22 years of the reign of Jeroboam except to record his death and the fact that his son, Nadab, reigned in his stead.

Meanwhile, things were going no better in the Southern Kingdom under Rehoboam (14:21), whose 17-year reign also was characterized by the introduction of idolatry and the reappearance of homosexual prostitutes within the land. The result was an invasion by the king of Egypt, who carried away the treasures of gold from the Temple and the king's palace. The substitution of bronze shields and vessels for the golden ones was God's reminder to the king of the deterioration of the worship in the land. A border war raged continually between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, and ultimately it is recorded that Rehoboam, too, slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David, and Abijam, his son, reigned in his stead.

Abijam lasted three years as king of Judah before he died and one of the good kings, Asa, began a 41-year reign. Asa's reforms included the elimination of homosexual prostitutes and the removal of idols, even that belonging to his mother, the queen, whom he removed from her office because of her idolatry (15:9-13). This partial reform under Asa undoubtedly preserved Judah, for the time, from the decay and corruption which was evident in the Northern Kingdom.

The Northern Kingdom suffered under the rule of a series of evil kings who all walked "in the way of Jeroboam." All this time, God tried to reach His people in Israel. When the most evil of all the kings of the Northern Kingdom ascended the throne, we meet a man whose name rings through history as a prototype of John the Baptist.

ELIJAH: THE PROPHET OF FIRE

Ahab not only adopted the idolatry of Jeroboam but in addition married Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Sidon, and thus introduced the worship of Baal into Israel. It is recorded that "he did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him." It was during the reign of this evil pair that Elijah, the prophet, made his appearance. This is in line with the declaration of the New Testament, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20). The account of the conflict between Ahab and Jezebel with Elijah occupies the next four chapters, from chapters 17 through 20.

The sudden appearance of Elijah in the account is dramatic and startling. He came from Gilead, east of the Jordan, but not much more is known of his nationality or parentage. He suddenly confronted Ahab with the announcement that the living God was about to bring a drought upon the land, which would not be relieved until Elijah gave the word. The drought began immediately and was very severe. To protect him from the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel, Elijah was sent first to the brook Cherith where he was fed by ravens, and then to the land of Sidon on the coast, where he lived with a widow and her son.

After three years Elijah was sent back to confront Ahab, who greets him with the words "Is this you, you troubler of Israel?" (18:17). Elijah responds that it is the king who, through his vile idolatries, has troubled the land, and challenges him to a contest between the prophets of Baal and the power of God, to be held on Mount Carmel. There follows a familiar story, full of drama and majesty. On one side are 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. On the other side stands Elijah alone, crying out, "If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him" (v. 21). There is a sardonic humor in the description of the Canaanite prophets calling out in vain for their god Baal to burn up the sacrifice that waited on the altar. Elijah mocks them by suggesting that perhaps the god is asleep, or has gone on a journey, or even has gone to the bathroom to relieve himself.

Finally, it was Elijah's turn, and after drenching his sacrifice with water he prayed a mighty prayer of faith, and God answered by devouring the sacrifice by fire from heaven. When the prophets of Baal had been proved to be false prophets, they were put to death. Then, in answer to the prayer of Elijah, the rain, which had not fallen for three years, now came in great torrents.

The fury of Jezebel was awakened by the destruction of her prophets. She sent a message to Elijah threatening him with immediate death (19:2) and, surprisingly, the prophet who stood with great courage against 850 adversaries on Mount Carmel, now fled for his life from a single woman. But God, with great patience and tender care, met first his physical need and then sent him to Mount Horeb where He gave him a great revelation of Himself through "a still small voice." That quiet voice then rebuked him for his lack of faith and revealed to him that there were yet 7,000 within the nation who had not bowed the knee to Baal. He was then sent back to anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, Jehu to be king of Israel, and Elisha to be prophet in his own place (vv. 9-18). The obedient prophet returned to the land and, finding Elisha plowing with oxen, cast his mantle upon him. After offering a sacrifice, Elisha took up his new role as servant to the old prophet.

Despite the wickedness of Ahab, God's patient mercy was extended to him on the occasion of an attack upon Samaria by the king of Syria, Ben-hadad (chap. 20). With arrogance Ben-hadad demanded the surrender of the city but, through an unnamed prophet, Jehovah announced the defeat of the Syrians at the hands of Israel.

Again the Syrians came against Samaria the following spring. Once again Israel won by the mercies and grace of God. But in the moment of his triumph, Ahab made a covenant with Ben-hadad whom God had clearly devoted -to destruction. For this, God sent a prophet again to the king to announce his doom. Characteristically, Ahab returned to his house, "sullen and vexed" (20:43).

The terrible struggle between good and evil in the heart of King Ahab seems to reach its crisis in the account of his selfish longing to possess the vineyard of his neighbor, Naboth. Thwarted by Naboth's unwillingness to sell, the king behaved with such petulance that his wife, Jezebel, offered to obtain the vineyard for him by an evil ruse. Falsely charging Naboth with having cursed God and the king, Jezebel obtained his death by stoning at the hands of the citizens of the city. But when Ahab went to the vineyard to take possession he is suddenly confronted by the

rugged prophet, Elijah. Upon hearing from Elijah that his dynasty would end, Ahab tore his clothes and, with fasting and sackcloth, expressed his repentance before God. It was enough to obtain a temporary reprieve. God announced that "I will bring the evil upon [Ahab] in his son's days" (21:29).

The final chapter in both Ahab's life and the book of I Kings details the story of the visit of Jehoshaphat, who ascended the throne of Judah, to establish an alliance with King Ahab of Israel. Planning war against Syria, Ahab invited Jehoshaphat to accompany him, and the two kings, through 400 false prophets attached to Ahab's court, sought the mind of God as to the outcome of the battle. Their prophecies promised success, but Jehoshaphat insisted upon consulting Micaiah, a true prophet of God in Israel. At first he gave an ironic confirmation of the prediction of victory, but when pressed gave the true word of the Lord, predicting the death of Ahab during the battle.

By a cowardly ruse Ahab placed Jehoshaphat of Judah in a conspicuous place during the battle, hoping that he would be mistaken for himself and be killed. But an arrow shot into the air (by chance) by a warrior on the opposite side, found its way through Ahab's armor and into his heart. God is the God of circumstances, and even the God of accidents! Ahab's body was brought to the capital where his bloodstained chariot was washed, and the dogs licked up his blood according to the prophecy of Elijah. The final account of the book briefly summarizes the reign of Jehoshaphat of Judah, who walked in the godly ways of his father Asa. This story is picked up and continued in the second book of Kings.

The stories covered in this first book of Kings highlight the great truth declared in Proverbs 4:23, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." The picture drawn for us, in our individual lives, reveals that nothing we face in terms of outward pressure or circumstances can ever succeed in dethroning us. Such dethronement will only come as we permit some rival worship to enter the heart and replace the living God. When we become emotionally attached to some place or someone that is a rival to the worship of God, then our kingdom's days are numbered.

SECOND CHRONICLES 1-20

Since the first 20 chapters of 2 Chronicles cover the same chronological period as I Kings and, for the most part, in somewhat briefer style it will not be necessary to cover it in detail. There are, however, certain omissions and also certain additions which merit comment, and it may be helpful to point out additional factors that would apply in the parallel experiences of our own spiritual Journey.

The first nine chapters recount again the story of the reign of Solomon. His humble request for wisdom from God's hand, his building of the Temple and construction of its furniture, and the solemn and impressive ceremonies of the Temple's dedication, are detailed. The visit of the queen of Sheba is also recorded here.

It is the nature of Chronicles, as different from Kings, to give us more of detail of the worship of Israel and Judah and their kings than it does on historical matters. The transference of the worship of the nation from the Tabernacle at Gibeon to the Temple in Jerusalem symbolizes the growth of a Christian. From his early up and down experience, like Israel in the wilderness of wandering, a Christian grows to a more settled condition where he recognizes the Lord Jesus as King and Ruler and walks consistently in the light of God's settled presence.

In building the Temple, Solomon is the type of Christ as the Prince of Peace, who has the honor of building the true temple of the Holy Spirit, the human body. In Hebrews we are told that Moses had honor in God's house (the Tabernacle) as a servant, but Christ had more honor for the builder of the house has more honor than the house itself (see Heb. 3:5,6). Christ is the One who has made the temple of our body, which contains the sanctuary of the Spirit.

All this is pictured in the physical temple, described in 2 Chronicles. What a beautiful place it must have been! It

was small, as temples go, but incomparably beautiful. The entire interior was completely lined with gold. It has been estimated that the value of it was some \$10,537,000. The furniture of the Temple, except for the Ark of the Covenant, was rebuilt completely. The Ark, which symbolized the initial meeting place of God and man, needed no duplication, for the new birth can never be repeated. But in other ways, the Temple represented a new beginning. This parallels the experience of many Christians who, often after years of a vacillating experience, come to a place where, intelligently, conscientiously and with permanent intention, they yield themselves anew to the Lordship of Christ. Emotionally, it is almost like being born again. That is what is depicted in the new beginning of the Temple.

The response of God to Solomon's dedication of the Temple, recorded in chapter 7, is given in somewhat fuller detail than the account in I Kings. Here the well-known promise is found in verse 14: "My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14).

The story of the visit from the queen of Sheba to Solomon is a wonderfully illustrative picture of the means by which God intended the whole earth to know the story of His grace. Jews of the Old Testament were never sent into the whole world, as we are commanded to do now in the Great Commission. God's grace was rather displayed by the building of a land and a people so wondrously blessed of God and so obviously different from all other nations around, that word of it would spread to the uttermost parts of the earth. People would then come to Jerusalem from all over the earth to learn the secret of God's blessing.

In the New Testament, God's supreme method of evangelism is that every believer is to be walking in obedience to the Spirit of God who inhabits the temple of his human spirit, and his life is to so manifest the victory, the rejoicing, the blessing, the prosperity, and the joy of the Lord, that people around will ask, "What is the secret of this life?" As I Peter 3:15 puts it, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." That is God's most effective method of evangelism.

An additional note is given in 2 Chronicles 11 covering the reign of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. Despite the personal weakness of the king there was considerable spiritual vitality within Judah, and the secret of it is given to us in verses 16 and 17: "And those...who set their hearts on seeking the Lord God of Israel, followed them to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers. And they strengthened the kingdom of Judah and supported Rehoboam the son of Solomon for three years, for they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years." Rehoboam misunderstood the secret of his strength and, it is later recorded (12: 1): "He and all Israel with him forsook the law of the Lord." In consequent judgment, the king of Egypt, Shishak, came against him and carried off the treasures of the house of the Lord.

It is noteworthy that in 2 Chronicles, only the kings of Judah are reported in detail. The northern kings are passed over except as they had contact with the kings of Judah.

The obscure prophet Azariah, the son of Oded, is introduced during the days of Asa, the king of Judah (15:1). His ministry is revealed as having a part in the godly reign of Asa. Further detail is also given in Chronicles regarding the reign of Jehoshaphat of Judah. Upon returning from the disastrous battle of Ramoth-gilead, where Ahab of Israel was slain, Jehoshaphat was rebuked by the prophet Jehu for having made an alliance with Ahab. The king's response of turning back to God brought immediate reactions for good among the people. Jehoshaphat set judges over the people and reminded them that God was no respecter of persons, and they, too would be accountable before Him.

Soon after, Judah was threatened by a powerful invasion of the united armies of Moab, Ammon, and certain Edomites. The response of the king was to lead the nation in prayer before the Temple. Confessing their powerlessness and their ignorance of what to do in the situation, but pleading with God for His intervention, the answer was immediate, for the Spirit of the Lord came upon a Levite and he prophesied that Israel need only take their position before the enemy but would not need to fight, for God would fight on their behalf. With music and

singing the people went out to meet the foe; and Jehovah sent such confusion and terror among the enemy that they turned upon each other and their vast army was completely destroyed.

Yet, in his closing years, Jehoshaphat made another foolish alliance with Ahaziah, king of Israel, joining him in a naval expedition which met with disaster. Shortly afterward, King Jehoshaphat died, ending a reign of 25 years during which he had, for the most part, walked in godly ways, though it is recorded (20:33): "The high places, however, were not removed; the people had not yet directed their hearts to the God of their fathers." One of the outstanding highlights of his reign had been the sending out of bands of Levites, headed by the princes of Judah, to teach the law of God among the cities of Judah. As a consequence, the fear of the Lord fell upon all the lands around and they made no war against Jehoshaphat until the final invasion of the Edomite host. Thus, God was with the man who was with Him, and honored him with a protracted period of peace.

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Eleven

Light and Shadow: Second Kings, Second Chronicles 21-36

Second Kings

Since the two books of Kings in our present Bible were originally one book, 2 Kings continues on in the account of the kings of Judah and Israel where I Kings ends.

Second Kings opens with the closing incident of the life of Elijah during the reign of King Ahaziah of Israel, the son of Ahab. Ahaziah reigned for only two years and the last word we read of him in I Kings was that he "provoked the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger in every way that his father had done." Perhaps for this, he fell through a lattice window and, while lying injured, sent to inquire of the pagan god, Baalzebub, as to whether he would recover. For this he was severely rebuked by Elijah the prophet, who informed him that he would die.

When the king sent a band of 50 soldiers to capture him, Elijah called down fire from heaven to consume them. Another band of 50 men met with a similar fate, and when the third band of 50 came, the captain entreated Elijah to spare him and his men, and the prophet went with him to the king to convey personally his sentence of doom. When the king died his brother Jehoram succeeded him, for Ahaziah had no son.

Here a certain degree of difficulty enters in keeping straight the two lines of kings in Israel and Judah, for when this Jehoram had reigned for seven years in Israel another Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat began his reign in Judah. The problem is further complicated by the fact that a shorter spelling, Joram, was used for both kings at various times. A similar confusion later exists with Kings Ahaziah and Joash.

Elijah's last moments on earth and his triumphant and miraculous translation into heaven without dying is next related in careful detail. When the faithful Elisha refused to leave him until his moment of translation, the mantle of Elijah fell upon him. He had been promised a double portion of the spirit of Elijah and this became evident immediately in the first two incidents of his ministry. There was the punitive character of Elijah in the story of the she-bears who came out of the woods to destroy those youths who jeered at him, in mockery of Elijah's translation (2:24). But there is also clearly evident the spirit of grace and kindness when he made the bitter waters wholesome by throwing a handful of salt into them (2:20,21).

These two men, Elijah and Elisha, both portray the future ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Elijah pictures His attitude toward official Israel, reflected in Christ's two cleansings of the Temple with the whip of cords and with flashing eyes, while Elisha pictures the ministry of Jesus to individuals, filled with compassionate tenderness and helpfulness.

During the reign of Jehoram of Israel, the nation Moab rebelled against Israel's control and Jehoram joined with King Jehoshaphat of Judah and the king of Edom to suppress the rebellion. The allied kings found themselves in the desert with no water. They sought the counsel of Elisha who promised that the valley should be filled with water, though no rain would fall, and that their attack upon Moab would be successful. Evidently a flash flood from some considerable distance did indeed fill the valley with water without any rain falling on the spot, and their campaign was successful, as the prophet had predicted.

Chapters 4-8 contain a series of incidents from the life and ministry of Elisha, which are given in a somewhat jumbled chronological order but are presented together in this way to indicate the ministry of mercy extended to individuals while the judgments of God ground out the ultimate overthrow and exile of the nation. In these miracles Elisha provided a continuous flow of oil to a poor widow until she had enough to pay her debts; he healed the barrenness of a wealthy woman of Shunem who had been kind to him; she later bore a son and he raised this same child from the dead when he succumbed to a sudden fever; he rendered harmless a pot of poisonous vegetables by casting in a handful of meal; he fed several hundred men with only 20 loaves of bread; he healed the Syrian general, Naaman, from leprosy by having him dip seven times in the Jordan River; he caused a lost axehead to float on top of water; he opened his servant's eyes to see the Lord's chariots of fire that were protecting them when the Syrian army was besieging them; he rescued the city of Samaria by making the attacking Syrian army hear sounds of a great army which frightened them away; he predicted to Hazael, the Syrian general, that his master, Ben-hadad, king of Syria, would recover from his sickness but would be murdered by Hazael who would then proceed to bring much distress upon Israel. This insight caused Elisha to weep, much as centuries later Jesus wept over the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

In 2 Kings 8:16 the chronicler returns to the history of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, giving a brief account of the reign of Joram, the son of Jehoshaphat, who married the daughter of Ahab of Israel and "walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done" (v. 18). As a result of his evil the land of Edom revolted from the rule of Judah as did the city of Libnah. Joram was succeeded by his son Ahaziah (v. 24) who joined with King Joram of Israel to war against Hazael, king of Syria.

During the battle Joram of Israel was wounded and returned to Jezreel to recover. While Ahaziah of Judah was visiting him Elisha sent one of the young prophets to anoint Jehu, the general of Israel to be king in Joram's place. Immediately Jehu mounted his chariot and, driving furiously, headed for Jezreel.

Learning that Jehu was on his way, the two kings (Joram and Ahaziah) set out to meet him and came upon him at the vineyard, formerly belonging to Naboth. There the prophecy of Elijah to Ahab was fulfilled when Jehu drew his bow and slew Joram, leaving his body in the vineyard of Naboth. As Ahaziah fled, he was shot by Jehu's men and, wounded, fled to Megiddo, where he died.

Coming back to Jezreel, Jehu saw Jezebel, Ahab's widow, looking at him from her window. Jehu called to her attendants to throw her down from the window. When they did so her body was eaten by dogs, again according to the prophecy of Elijah.

Jehu then became a terrible scourge in the hands of God. But he himself did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam and "was not careful to walk in the law of the Lord, the God of Israel, with all his heart" (10:31). As a consequence, parts of Israel fell into the hands of Syria and after a reign of 28 years, Jehu died and his son Jehoahaz reigned in his stead.

When the queen mother, Athaliah (daughter of Ahab and Jezebel) learned that her son, Ahaziah, was dead, she seized the throne of Judah for herself, murdering the entire royal family (her own grandsons), except for an infant named Joash, who was hidden by his sister in the Temple. Like her mother, Jezebel, Athaliah was a devotee of

Baal worship, and for the six years of her reign she did her best to introduce the worship of this male sex god to Judah, installing a priest named Mattan to officiate at her altars.

During this six year period, the boy king, Joash, was still hidden in the Temple, as evidence of the divine overruling of human events. But in the seventh year, Jehoiada the priest, the husband of the woman who had hidden Joash, organized a plot to put Joash on the throne. With the support of the army and the priesthood, he brought the seven-year-old boy out and publicly anointed him as king. Athaliah was slain and the temple of Baal destroyed (11: 13-18).

Joash (also spelled Jehoash) reigned for 40 years in Judah; and it is recorded he "did right in the sight of the Lord all his days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him" (12:2). The major event of his reign was the repairing of the Temple, which had been neglected for many years. This was accomplished by special offerings which the king himself oversaw. The close of his reign was shadowed by an invasion from Syria which Joash, in cowardice, averted by surrendering the treasures of the Temple to the king of Syria. Soon after this, a conspiracy was plotted by his servants, and Joash was slain in Jerusalem and his son Amaziah ascended the throne.

Turning again to Israel the Northern Kingdom, we find Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, upon the throne. He continued the evil of the kings before him and in consequence the Syrians, under King Hazael, reconquered great portions of the land, and left Jehoahaz with an army of only 50 horsemen and chariots and 10,000 soldiers. Seeing the low state of Israel, the king turned to the Lord and besought His help. In response, "a savior" was granted to Israel. We are not told who this was, but it is very likely that it refers to an incident with Elisha the prophet, which immediately followed (13:14-19).

After a reign of 17 years Jehoahaz died and his son, Joash (not to be confused with the Joash of Judah) reigned. During his reign Elisha died and was buried, but even after his death miracles followed him. A group of men seeking to dispose of a body were suddenly surprised by a mob of bandits. They threw the body into the tomb of Elisha and when the body touched the bones of Elisha the man sprang back to life. Thus the entire ministry of Elisha seems to typify the ministry of the Spirit of Christ in bringing life out of death.

Turning briefly to Judah we are told that Amaziah, the son of Joash, "did right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like David his father" (14:3). Still the high places were not removed and worship continued there instead of at the Temple in Jerusalem where it belonged. Amaziah won a great victory over Edom and, emboldened by this, he challenged the power of King Joash of Israel. They met in battle and Amaziah was captured and a portion of the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and the Temple entered and sacked. Though Amaziah was permitted to reign 15 years after the death of Joash of Israel, eventually a conspiracy was made against him and he was slain in the city of Lachish. His son Azariah, who was only 16 years old, was made king in his place.

In Israel Jeroboam II, who followed his father Joash to the throne, had reigned for 41 years. During this time he reconquered all of Israel's territory from Syria and even brought Damascus and Hamath of Syria under tributary to Israel. The prophet Jonah (famous for his escapade with a fish) ministered in Israel during the days of Jeroboam II, also the prophets Amos, Hosea and Isaiah. Yet despite this gracious touch from the Lord, Jeroboam walked in evil ways and after his long reign, was replaced by his son Zechariah (15:8).

Azariah (15:1) is known as Uzziah in the book of 2 Chronicles (26:1-3) and also in the prophecy of Isaiah (6:1). It was during his long reign of 52 years that Isaiah began his great ministry. Azariah followed in the footsteps of his father, Amaziah, but like him did not remove the high places nor interfere with the worship that went on there. In 2 Chronicles 26:16 we are told that "when he became strong, his heart was...proud" and sought to offer incense himself upon the altar in the Temple at Jerusalem. For this he was smitten with leprosy and remained a leper until his death. His son Jotham shared the regency with him and succeeded to the throne upon Azariah's death.

Meanwhile in Israel, things were rapidly sliding into chaos. Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam, only reigned for six months and was slain by Shallum who thus ended the dynasty of Jehu in the fourth generation, as had been predicted. Shallum was only on the throne one month, and was succeeded by Menahem, who slew him and reigned for 10 evil years, characterized by cruelty and extortion. During his days the land was invaded by the new

world power of Assyria to the north. Menahem was forced to pay tribute to Pul (otherwise known as Tiglath-pileser).

Menahem was succeeded by his son, Pekahiah, who reigned for two brief, evil years (2 Kings 15:23) and was slain by an army captain named Pekah. During Pekah's reign of 20 years, Tiglath-pileser of Syria invaded the northern portion of Israel and carried off captives from Galilee. Pekah later was slain by Hoshea, who had the support of Assyria. This murderous state of affairs in Israel was testimony to the persistent evil of king and people, in turning from the living God.

Things were not much better in Judah, for though Jotham, the son of Amaziah, walked before the Lord in some degree of righteousness, nevertheless, during his 16-year reign, the kings of Syria and Israel threatened the land of Judah, sent, as we are told, by the hand of the Lord as a judgment against Judah.

Jotham was followed by his son Ahaz, who likewise reigned for 16 years in Jerusalem. During the reign the nation sank to a new low, for the king himself practiced the abominations of the Canaanites, even offering his son as a burnt offering to the god Moloch. When the combined armies of Syria and Israel came against him he sought help from the king of Assyria, offering to be his vassal. He followed this idiocy by constructing a heathen altar in the actual courts of the Temple, commanding the priests to offer sacrifice on it (16: 1~16). Further, he desecrated some of the holy furnishings in the outer court of the Temple. Yet during his reign, Isaiah and Micah, the prophets, carried on a faithful ministry of testimony to the truth.

In chapter 17 we have the record of how God's long patience with Israel was at last exhausted, and the divine stroke of judgment falls. During the nine-year reign of Hoshea, the last king of Israel, Shalmaneser V of Assyria, invaded Israel and besieged Samaria. After three years the city fell and the Assyrian king systematically deported the Israelites into various cities of Assyria and Media.

Careful assessment is made of the reasons for this overthrow of the people of God. Their persistent sins of pride, evil practices, and public idolatry are detailed, and especially set against the patient love of God who had warned them repeatedly through prophets and seers.

When the 10 tribes had been deposed, the Assyrian king attempted to repopulate the land of Israel with people from Babylon and other countries, who brought with them their own idols. Experiencing some difficulty in settling in the land, they blamed it on their ignorance of the God of Israel, and it is recorded that they "feared the Lord, and served their graven images" (17:41, KJV). This attempted religious mixture probably contributed to the enmity between the Jews and Samaritans which, centuries later, was recorded in the New Testament (see John 4). This is clear testimony to the folly of trying to mix the religion of man with divine revelation. The result is corruption worse than anything else. The Christian church can provide many examples of this principle.

While Israel was collapsing in the north, Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, began his reign in Jerusalem (chap. 18). His father had been an ungodly king, but Hezekiah, perhaps warned by the fate of Israel, began to walk wholeheartedly before the Lord. It was said of him "after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him" (18:5). The kingdom had fallen into such decay that when he came to the throne his first act, as we learn from 2 Chronicles, was to cleanse the Temple. It took the Levites 16 days to carry out all the rubbish which had collected (2 Chron. 29:17). Hezekiah also reinstated the Passover in Israel and destroyed the great brazen serpent which the people had been worshipping (2 Kings 18:4). This was the serpent God had used for their blessing when Moses erected it in the wilderness. It had become a source of idolatry just as many things which once blessed our lives become idols if we begin to hold them in too high regard.

When Hezekiah had been on the throne for 14 years, the Assyrian king Sennacherib, who had replaced Shalmaneser, invaded Judah and took certain of their fortified cities. Frightened by this, Hezekiah offered to pay tribute, and was forced to strip the gold from the Temple to meet the payment required. Undeterred by this, the Assyrian king sent his general Rabshakeh, to besiege Jerusalem. With terrible arrogance and scorn, the Assyrian general challenged, not only the might of Israel, but the power of their God to deliver them.

In desperation, Hezekiah turned to his old friend, Isaiah the prophet, who reassured the king that God was yet in control and would turn the Assyrian hosts aside, by causing them merely to "hear a rumor" (19:7). When Rabshakeh returned to learn Hezekiah's answer, he found that Sennacherib had been diverted by rumors of an attack from Ethiopia. A letter was sent to Hezekiah to warn him that the Assyrians would return, and nothing could save him from their wrath. Hezekiah spread the letter before the Lord in the Temple, and in a moving prayer, called upon God for His deliverance (19:14-19).

Apparently when the Assyrians returned to the attack, Isaiah the prophet sent word to Hezekiah announcing that the Lord held Assyria and its armies in utter contempt, and by His own mighty hand would turn them back upon the way they had come. That very night an angel of the Lord entered the camp of Assyria and slew 185,000 men (19:35). Secular history records this as a great plague which swept the camp. With the remnant of his army Sennacherib departed for Nineveh, where, according to the prophecy of Isaiah, his sons slew him in the temple of his gods.

When King Hezekiah fell sick and was told he would die, he wept bitterly and besought the Lord for a reprieve (chap. 20). In response to this, his life was extended for 15 years, and as a sign, the shadow on the sundial turned back 10 degrees. In those 15 years, however, Hezekiah had a son whom he named Manasseh, who became the worst king Judah ever had. His was the longest reign of any of the kings, extending for 55 years of ungodliness. Some have said, therefore, that Hezekiah was "the man who lived too long," for had he accepted the word of the Lord about his death, Israel would have been spared the terrible days of Manasseh. Also during these 15 years, Hezekiah received the envoys of the king of Babylon and showed to them all the treasures of the house of the Lord. For this he was severely rebuked by Isaiah, who prophesied that the things which the envoys had seen would ultimately be carried to Babylon. In due course Hezekiah died and Manasseh became king.

Manasseh's long reign of 55 years is covered in brief account, for it is said, "he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah...and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them" (21:3). His reign is summarized in these words, "Manasseh seduced them to do evil more than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel" (v. 9). His son, Amon, followed him to the throne, to reign for two years. He was killed in a conspiracy and his son Josiah was made king in his stead.

Josiah was eight years of age when he came to the throne (22:1). His reign marked the last attempted reformation before the kingdom would be carried into captivity. The evil state of the nation after Manasseh and Amon is seen in the fact that when King Josiah attempted to clean out the Temple and repair it a book of the Law of Moses was found within. Incredible as it may seem, neither the king nor the people seemed to know of its existence. The sacred writings had been so neglected that the actual Temple copy was lost. When this book was read to the king, his sensitive conscience was greatly distressed, and he turned for counsel to the prophetess Huldah. She responded that it was too late to save the nation from its fate, but that the reforms which the king would effect would delay the judgment of God until he had gone to his grave.

With great enthusiasm the king began his reform, first reading the book of the Law directly to the people and then making a personal covenant to walk before the Lord and keep His commandments with all his heart. The Temple was cleansed of all idolatries of the false cults, and throughout the country idolatrous priests and altars were put away (chap. 22). The reform extended even to Bethel in the north, which had been part of Israel, and the altar at Bethel which Jeroboam had erected was torn down and ground to dust.

Following this the Passover feast, which had long been neglected, was observed again in moving ritual and power (23:21-23). Homosexual prostitutes, wizards, mediums, and other abominations were swept from the land. But despite King Josiah's sincere efforts at reform, the heart of the people was not truly repentant, and when Josiah was slain in battle with Pharaoh Neco of Egypt and his son Jehoahaz succeeded him, the nation immediately returned to evil ways.

After a brief reign of three months, the king of Egypt deposed Jehoahaz and set his brother Eliakim, whose name he changed to Jehoiakim, upon the throne.

For 11 years Jehoiakim reigned, first as a tributary to Egypt and then for his last three years, under tribute to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (24:1). During these years the land was torn by raiding bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites and Ammonites, for the long patience of God was now ended.

Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, but after a brief reign of three months Nebuchadnezzar came against the city, besieged it, and eventually overthrew it and carried off to Babylon both the people and the treasures of the city. Jehoiachin was carried to Babylon as well and his brother, Zedekiah, was set upon the throne as a vassal king in Jerusalem. In his ninth year he attempted to rebel against Babylon, and again Nebuchadnezzar came against the city and besieged it. In Zedekiah's eleventh year a breach was made in the city wall. The king was captured and blinded and sent to Babylon in chains. The house of the Lord was burned, the walls of the city broken down, and a governor was appointed over the land. When the governor was later murdered, the remnant of Israel fled to Egypt (25:26). Thus the nation which God had called and delivered from the power of Egypt, returned to that land as a scattered and suffering people.

Yet a touch of grace closes the book, for after 37 years of imprisonment in Babylon, Jehoiachin was released by Evil-merodach, king of Babylon, who showed him great kindness and permitted him to feast from the king's table for the rest of his life.

We remember that the book of Kings began with the wonderful scene of Solomon, his kingdom at peace kneeling in his royal robes, praying to the God of heaven. Contrast this with the final scene when the Temple lay in ruins, the city was destroyed and the people were slaves and bondservants in a foreign country. In this contrast we have a vivid picture of what happens in the human heart when it disobeys God. God's loving warnings are ignored for so long that God's patience draws to an end and disaster follows.

SECOND CHRONICLES 21--36

Since the record of 2 Chronicles chapters 21-36 cover the same events that we have just covered in 2 Kings it is unnecessary to repeat the story in detail. Though in general the accounts are briefer than in 2 Kings, the author of Chronicles gives more understanding of the reason events occurred. Greater detail is given of the reformation under King Hezekiah and King Josiah than in Kings, and we learn from Chronicles that Manasseh, the most wicked king of Judah, after he had been taken captive by the Assyrians and sent to Babylon, repented from his evil and turned with a whole heart to God. He was restored to his throne and in the closing years of his life accomplished certain reforms within Jerusalem. But although the king's personal repentance was genuine, and met with the gracious restoration of God, nevertheless his long years of evil had so affected the people of the nation that when his son Amon came to the throne, the evil ways of Manasseh broke out in full force again throughout the land.

The closing days of Judah and the exile into Babylon are traced in much briefer detail than in Kings, and in the closing paragraphs we learn that the reason for the 70 years of exile was in order to permit the land to enjoy its Sabbath; the nation for 490 years failed to keep the sabbatical year of rest.

An additional note of hope is struck at the very end of Chronicles when the writer recounts how the Spirit of the Lord stirred up Cyrus, the king of Persia, after the years of exile, to issue a decree to build again the house of God in Jerusalem. This lays the groundwork for the record in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and suggests perhaps that the writer of Chronicles was Ezra, the priest.

As we contemplate in these historical books the sorrowful record of the decline of the nation from its days of glory in the time of Solomon to the awful record of the exile, there are many valuable lessons to draw in the parallel experiences of our individual lives. Certain steps can be traced in the downward path of the nation.

THE PATH TO DESTRUCTION

First, there was the *self-indulgence* of Solomon, which weakened the spiritual strength of the people. Following him, Rehoboam his son turned a deaf ear to the advice of his older counselors and, it is recorded that when he was strong, "he forsook the law of the Lord." As a result, the kingdom was invaded by the Egyptians. So in our lives the moment there is a turning away from obedience to the voice of God there is an immediate weakening of the defenses of life and the enemies begin to invade.

When Jehoram followed his father Jehoshaphat to the throne, a spirit of *jealousy* in the royal family enters, and it is recorded that Jehoram slew all of his brothers with a sword and also some of the princes of Israel. Further he made high places in the hill country of Judah and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness. This too was quickly followed by invasion and by plague.

In Israel, King Ahaz introduced directly the *worship of the Baals* with their despicable practices of vile and sexual nature. Ahaz further burned his sons as offerings; immediately invasion followed from the king of Syria. We sometimes wonder why we fall prey to afflictions and oppressions, to nervous reactions, and depressive neuroses. Sometimes these are from physical causes, but often it is because the defenses of our temple are destroyed. Some inner idolatry is weakening us, and we find ourselves defenseless against the invaders of the spirit that bring on depression, frustration, defeat and darkness. So the awful account goes on, set against the continual efforts of a patient God to awaken the consciences of evil kings and correct the practices of a stubborn and rebellious people.

THE GRACE OF GOD

By contrast, the good kings of Judah reflect the grace of God in cleansing and restoring the land and the people. There are five great reformations recorded during which God sought to arrest the deterioration of the nation and restore it to the place of glory and blessing as in the days of David. With each one, certain principles of reformation are revealed which have also application to us.

The first of these periods of reformation was under King Asa. He not only took away the foreign altars and high places, broke down the pillars, and hewed down the Asherim (a sex symbol), but also "commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers and to *observe the law and the commandment*" (2 Chron. 14:4, italics added).

It is not surprising, therefore, that when he was attacked by the Ethiopians with an army of a million men, the prophet Oded met him and said to him, "The Lord is with you when you are with Him" (15:2). Thus in Asa we find a determination to obey the Lord as an important principle in reformation. The way to return ends in renewal of the vow, a renewal of the determination and hunger to walk before the Lord. Immediately, there is a return to rest.

King Jehoshaphat during his reign also cleaned out the idols from the land, but in 17:7-9 a second principle of restoration is stated: "In the third year of his reign he sent his officials...*to teach in the cities in Judah...having the book of the law of the Lord with them*" (italics added). Here the great principle is that of study and teaching of the law and the Word of God.

Under King Joash we have the third principle of reformation. The main accomplishment of Joash *was to restore the Temple, and to do it required the collection of long neglected taxes*. If, as we have seen, the Temple represents the human spirit, then the repairing and restoring of it is a picture of the strengthening of the spirit. This is often accomplished by the process of restitution--the paying of that which we owe. It may be an apology to someone, or the restoring of something wrongfully taken, or putting back something which has been wrongfully used. No matter--it is an important principle of return.

In Hezekiah's reign, a fourth principle is seen in the cleansing of the Temple. The Temple was finally cleansed after 16 days of clearing out rubbish. The worship was restored and a Passover celebrated. This clearly pictures the cleansing of the Temple of our spirit by putting away the filth which has accumulated. It is to turn away from wrong ideas and concepts and attitudes to which we have given ourselves and to turn back to the cleansing of the

Lord and the renewing of our minds with truth.

Then, in Josiah, the last good king of Judah, we find the final principle of restoration. His attempts to restore the worship of the Temple resulted in finding anew the book of the Law which had been lost. Josiah himself publicly read this book to the people and made a covenant to walk before the Lord and obey His commandments. Thus the final principle of restoration is *a return to the hearing of the Word of God and a determination to daily walk in its light and understanding.*

Let us never forget that as we read these books we must bear in mind the words of Paul in I Corinthians 10:11: "Now these things happened to [Israel] as an example." We have noted specific details of these from the various incidents we have covered, but even in the total picture there is a remarkable parallel.

From the very beginning of the monarchy there were two divisions within the nation. Even under David this was true, for David was king only of Judah for seven years and it was only during the last 33 years of his life that he reigned over all 12 tribes. Thus a division between the 10 tribes of the north and the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the south existed from the start. But though there were two sections within the nation they were intended to worship only at Jerusalem and to be under the authority of only one king. Taken as a whole, therefore, it is evident that the nation of Israel represents the divisions of our humanity.

There are clearly two divisions in us: the outer man, consisting of the body, and the inner man, consisting of soul and spirit. But in the capital city of Jerusalem the very essence of the nation was vested in the Temple wherein the living God dwelt. We know from the Scriptures that in the human life there is not only body and soul but within the soul, so closely linked with it that only the Word of God can divide between soul and spirit, is the spirit, the dwelling place of God. Thus the temple of the Spirit was in Jerusalem and all the worship of the kingdom was to be there.

In this picture, then, the 10 tribes of the north represent the body, while the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the south represent the human soul, and linked to the soul is the temple of the spirit where the Spirit of God Himself dwells. This is surely what the Lord Jesus had in mind when He said to the woman at the well of Samaria, "God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24, italics added). We find many who worship him in soul, that is mere emotional worship. But God is not interested in that. He is looking for that worship which is centered in the deepest part of our nature--in the spirit.

In line with this, it is instructive to note that when the nation began to disintegrate, it was the 10 tribes of the north which fell apart first. It is amazing how early marks of sin begin to appear in the body when there is a dissolute and debauched way of life. Coarseness and vulgarity soon begin to mark the bodies of those who give themselves to overindulgence in food and drink and a debauched lifestyle. The body is the first to deteriorate, as Israel was the first to go in this record.

But Judah (depicting the soul, the personality), was next, arrested temporarily by the reformations we have noted. Ultimately, the kingdom declined until Judah too was carried away into captivity. For a few years the Temple remained in Jerusalem, but in the end it too was stripped and burned. Thus the whole record is a picture of a wasted life. It is the picture of an individual who is a Christian but who has built upon the foundation of Christ with only wood, hay and stubble. Eventually the test of fire comes and only that which cannot be burned survives.

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Twelve:

The Way Back: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah (one book-in the Hebrew Bible) trace the story of the return of the people of God to the land of Israel after the 70-year captivity in Babylon. Scholars differ as to the chronological order of the books, some maintaining that the events of Nehemiah occur before those of Ezra. Other historians place the return under Zerubbabel (recounted in the first six chapters of Ezra) as the earliest return, dated approximately 537 B.C., with Ezra and Nehemiah leading later returns in that order. Be that as it may, we shall follow the biblical order so that we might learn the meaning of these events in the spiritual parallel of our individual lives.

The book of Ezra begins with the same words which close the book of 2 Chronicles. They recount the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, to reestablish and restore the house of the Lord at Jerusalem. This gives us our clue to the meaning of Ezra, for it is a book which recounts the method of God in restoring a heart which has fallen into sin.

The book divides naturally into the ministries of two men: Zerubbabel, chapters 1-6 and Ezra, chapters 7-10. Both of these men led expeditions of Jewish captives back to Jerusalem from Babylon. Zerubbabel was a descendant of David and thus of the kingly line. Ezra descended from Aaron and is therefore a priest. This suggests immediately that in the work of restoration both a king and a priest are needed. The work of the king is to build, or in this case, to rebuild. The work of the priest is to cleanse. Restoration in an individual life always requires these two ministries. There is need to rebuild the character through a recognition of the kingship and lordship of Jesus Christ in the human spirit. Such building involves the recognition of God's right to own and direct us and to change us according to His will.

But restoration also involves cleansing. The spirit and the soul are to be cleansed by our great High Priest, who is able to wash away our guilt, tidy up our past and restore us to a place of fellowship and blessedness before God.

ZERUBBABEL

Under Zerubbabel an early return takes place. This kingly descendant led about 50,000 people from Babylon back to Jerusalem. This is far fewer in number than those who have returned to the land in our own day, but the biblical record attaches great importance to this first return. Cyrus, the king of Persia, may have known of Isaiah's predictions concerning his instrumentality in the hands of God, for he gave willing aid to the Jews who returned, putting in their hands again the vessels of the Temple and giving them goods and animals (Ezra 1:7).

When they came to Jerusalem it was the seventh month of the year and they arrived in time to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast (also called the feast of ingathering) was the time when Israel dwelt in booths to remind them of their pilgrim character. This feast also looks forward to the eventual regathering of Israel from their vast worldwide dispersion to celebrate the personal reign of Messiah upon the earth in great power and glory.

The careful list of those who returned, given in chapter 2, indicates that not only did various families and clans go back but also a company of priests, a smaller number of Levites, certain servants who were to assist the Levites in their service, and a number of people whose genealogy was somewhat uncertain.

Their first act upon return was to build an altar on the original Temple site, in the midst of the ruins. Under the open sky they erected an altar to God and began to worship and offer sacrifice as the Law of Moses had bid them. This is most significant, for the first act of a heart that really desires to return from wandering in darkness and the ways of the world to real fellowship with God is to erect an altar. The altar is the symbol of divine ownership and involves sacrifice, worship and praise. The sacrifice is that of our right to run our own lives; worship is the enjoyment of the restored relationship where the heart is ministered to by the only One who can fully meet its needs; praise is that of a rejoicing heart.

The second thing they did was to lay the foundation of the Temple (3:10). This work when finished was met with

mixed feeling, for some of the people shouted with a great shout of joy and others, including those who had seen the first Temple built by Solomon, wept with a loud voice, so that it was impossible to distinguish the shouts of joy from the sounds of weeping (3:13). Perhaps you too may have felt this way. Have you ever returned to God after a time of coldness and withdrawal, with a great sense of joy as the foundations of fellowship were re-laid by the Spirit, yet with regret for the loss of wasted years? This is what is portrayed here. Tears of joy mingled with tears of sorrow as the people saw the Temple being rebuilt.

The third factor in the return of Zerubbabel was the immediate opposition which developed to the restoration of the Temple. Here we see portrayed the force at work in every human heart which immediately rises up to oppose everything God attempts to do. There is a great lesson here in how this force reveals itself. The opposition first appears as friendly solicitude. The people of the land approached Zerubbabel and said, "Let us build with you, for we like you seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here" (4:2). This apparently friendly and openhearted desire to participate in the work marked a very subtle attack upon the returning exiles. It is not difficult to say no to an enemy who breathes fiery threats of slaughter, but when he comes dripping with solicitude and offers to help with your project it is difficult to say no.

But this Zerubbabel did, for he declined their offer of help and stated the Jews would do the work alone. It may have seemed a bit churlish, but it was not mere caprice, for God had commanded Israel not to fellowship with other nations or engage with them in joint enterprises concerning faith. It meant simply that God rejects utterly the philosophy of the world in carrying out His work in the world. There is a worldly religion, and a worldly philosophy which tries to interject the concepts and methods of the world into the lives of God's people. God has made it clear that these are to be rejected. The thinking of the world reflects the spirit of the devil, who is the god of this age. His philosophy is, "Advance yourself; do this for your own glory. Use religious ways to advance your own purposes and thus win admiration, power and fame." But God rejects this principle in its totality.

When the offer of friendship was rejected, it quickly turned to hatred. The people of the land began to mock and taunt the Jews, thus discouraging Israel from doing the work that God had commanded. These so-called "friends" even used legal means to undermine Israel's authority and right to build, for they obtained from Artaxerxes, the king, a decree to stop the rebuilding of the Temple in view of the rebellious history of the Jews. The work was stopped for a period of six years and the Temple lay with only its foundations completed, overrun with weeds and grass (4:24). It was during this period that, according to the prophet Haggai, the people turned instead to building their own homes with many luxuries and comforts. Those who attempt a return to fellowship with God may often find that the record of their past rises again to haunt them and impede their progress, but a determination to go on with God would overcome even this handicap.

To aid the people, God sent two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, who proved to be God's instruments to turn the people back to their work (5:1). God also moved the heart of Darius the king to search for the original edict of Cyrus which allowed the restoration of the Temple. When it was found a decree was sent to Israel to permit the rebuilding to continue.

At last the work was finished, and in chapter 6 we read of the celebration of the Passover, marking the beginning of their new life under God. Since the Passover pictures the conversion of a Christian, it is clear from this that our new birth will never be a source of delight to us until we are restored in the temple of our spirit to fellowship with the living God. Unless we are enjoying the glory and the light of heaven upon our hearts we have nothing for which to give thanks, nothing to celebrate.

EZRA

Chapters 7-10 concern the ministry of Ezra the priest. He too led a band of captives back to Jerusalem, though the exact dates are difficult to determine. It is said of him that "he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the Lord his God was upon him" (7:6). What kind of a man is this whom a Gentile king regards so highly that he will give Ezra anything he asks? The secret is given in 7:10, "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to

practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel." He was not only a Bible reader; he was also a Bible doer. As a result, Ezra could ask anything of the king and it would be granted.

Ezra's specific assignment by Artaxerxes the king was "to adorn the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem" (7:27). To achieve this Ezra gathered a great company about him, taking special care to include among them a company of Levites. After prayer and fasting they set out on their journey, committing themselves to the overruling providence of God to keep them safe on their way. In due time they arrived in Jerusalem and there Ezra found an incredible condition. The Jews and the Levites had again begun to marry with their ancient enemies, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites.

Centuries before, God had given specific orders that the Israelites were not to intermingle with these tribes. Now they were starting the whole wretched mess over again. It was this intermarrying which had broken the strength of the nation before. It had undermined the power of God among them and finally divided the people, broken up the tribes and separated them into two nations. At last, as they succumbed to the idolatrous practices of those whom they had married, God delivered them into the hands of their captives. Now it appears that after 70 years of captivity they had not learned a thing. This is a vivid reminder that the flesh within us never changes. No matter how long we may walk in the Spirit, we will never arrive at a place where we cannot revert to the worst we have ever been, if we depart from dependence upon the Spirit of God.

When Ezra heard that the people had disobeyed God in intermarrying he tore his garments, pulled the hair from his head and beard, and sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. It was unbelievable to him. But as the book nears its close Ezra prayed to God and confessed this great sin of the people. In graciousness God moved the hearts of the people and the leaders came in brokenhearted contrition to Ezra and acknowledged their wrong. A great proclamation was issued and the people assembled together. It happened to be a day when it was raining, but despite the rain the people stood, thousands of them, in front of the Temple and confessed their guilt and agreed to put away the wives and children they had acquired outside the will of God (10:9-17).

This was not an easy thing to do, but it is surely what Jesus meant when He said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children...he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). It does not mean that a man must put away his wife today, for this is symbolic teaching. It means that we are to put away whatever comes from the flesh (which is always pictured by the Canaanite tribes).

The book closes with a listing of the men in Israel who were faithful to the Word of God, and obeyed Him in this painful matter. Thus the work of Ezra was completed and the task to which he had been assigned, that of beautifying the Temple, went forward. So it is also in the parable of our lives.

NEHEMIAH

As the book of Ezra recounts the building of the Temple, so the book of Nehemiah gives us the story of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. This is a significant order, for always the way back to God after a period of declension and captivity to evil must begin within the human spirit--the temple of man. But the next step is to begin a reconstruction of the walls, since walls are universally the symbol of strength and protection. This is a clear picture of the process of rebuilding the defenses of the spiritual life to protect against the attacks of any enemy. Many human derelicts drift up and down the streets of our cities, hopeless and helpless, because their defenses have crumbled away; but frequently God in grace reaches them, against all the expectations of those who have known them, and their walls of defense are rebuilt again. This is the story of the book of Nehemiah.

REBUILDING THE DEFENSES

The first step in this process is given in chapter I where a report is brought to Nehemiah in the city of Susa

concerning the ruin and decay of Jerusalem. When Nehemiah heard these words he wept and mourned for several days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven (1:4). Thus the first step in rebuilding the defenses of any life is to become greatly concerned about the ruins. Have you ever taken a good look at the ruins of your life? Have you ever stopped long enough to assess what you could be to God, compared to what you are? Have you looked at the possibilities that God gave you and seen how far you have deviated from that potential? If you have, then like Nehemiah, you have received word in some form or other of the desolation and ruin that is present. If you will begin to be concerned and weep over those ruins, you will have begun the process of rebuilding.

This mourning is immediately followed by confession (1:5-9). Nehemiah prays a great prayer in which he acknowledges the sin of his people and the justice of God in having fourfold the words of Moses, given in warning centuries before. Also in Moses' words, recorded in Deuteronomy, was the promise that when anyone, even in a distant country, would begin to pray to God, a recovery and restitution to the place of blessing would begin.

The prayer of confession is followed by a great commitment (1:10, 11). Nehemiah asked for divine success to be given him, for a plan is already forming in his mind even while he has been in prayer. He has something definite which he wants to ask and he prays that God will grant him mercy in the sight of the king.

Here is a man who, out of his concern and after the confession of his heart, commits himself to a project. Invariably in an enterprise like this there are factors over which man has no control and God must arrange them. So Nehemiah prays about his appearance before the king.

When, in his work as cupbearer, he comes before the king (2:4-8), his face shows concern over the city of his fathers. At the king's request he makes known to him what is troubling him. The account especially notes that the queen was sitting beside the king. Our Bible scholar has identified the king as Ahasuerus who appears also in the book of Esther. If this is the case the queen here is Esther herself. The names Artaxerxes and Ahasuerus are not proper names but are really titles meaning the great king (Artaxerxes) and the venerable father (Ahasuerus). If Esther is the queen then it would explain why the king in Nehemiah is willing to restore Jerusalem; for Queen Esther is also a Jewess.

The next need in rebuilding the defenses of a city, or of a life, is that of courage to face the opposition that immediately arises. Encouraged by the king, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem (2:8) where he found certain Canaanite leaders who were greatly displeased that someone had come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. Whenever a man like Nehemiah says "I will arise and build," Satan always says, "Then I will arise and oppose."

Such opposition requires not only courage but caution. Nehemiah rode out around the city of Jerusalem by night (2:15), surveying the ruin that was there and taking careful note of what needed to be done. He made an honest survey of the facts and then began to lay his plans. There was no public announcement of what he intended to do, for that would have stirred up even further opposition. But without conceit or ostentation he began his work.

PRINCIPLES OF RECONSTRUCTION

If the walls of your life are broken down or your defenses have crumbled so that the enemy is getting at you on every hand, and you easily fall prey to temptation, it would be well to pay special heed to the principles of reconstruction set forth in chapter 3 of this book. We learn, first of all, that the people were willing to work. Second, that they became personally involved and began right where they were. Each began to work on the part of the wall that was nearest to his own house, and so called forth the deepest of personal involvement on his part.

It is noteworthy that the reconstruction of the walls centered about the 10 gates of the city. Again, in one of the marvelous hidden revelations of truth which is frequently found in Scripture, the names of these 10 gates, in the order in which they appear, is most instructive.

First, there is the Sheep Gate (3:1). Through this gate the sacrificial animals were brought into the city to be offered on the altar. This clearly pictures the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed on the cross for us, and

therefore stands for the principle of the cross. That is always the starting place to regain strength in your life. You must recognize anew that the work of the cross is to cancel out your selfish ego and put to death that which is for your own glory and advancement.

The account then moves to the Fish Gate (3:3). When we remember that Jesus said to His disciples, "Follow Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1 :17), this gate suggests the witness of a Christian. Every Christian is called to be a witness. If you can never give an account of what the Lord has done for you, then this wall is broken and the Fish Gate needs to be rebuilt.

In verse 6 the Old Gate (3:6) represents the unchangeable truth of God upon which everything new must rest. As someone has well said, "Whatever is true is not new and whatever is new is not true. " In many places today the old truth is being forsaken, but if you allow this old truth to go you will find that the wall crumbles and enemies outside gain access to your soul.

The next gate is the Valley Gate (3:13). This suggests the place of humility, the place of lowliness of mind and humbleness of heart. On almost every page of Scripture God speaks against the pride of man. He looks always for the lowly, the humble, the contrite and those who have learned that they are not indispensable. This gate seems to be frequently in need of repair with many of us. But we need to be reminded that "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6).

Next in order is the Dung Gate (3:14). This is not a very beautiful name but it represents an essential process in life: you need to eliminate that which is corrupt and defiling. No life can be strong or healthy that does not have an often used elimination gate within it.

The Fountain Gate is mentioned next (3:15). This name reminds us instantly of the words of Jesus to the woman at the well: "The water that I shall give [you] shall become in [you] a well of water [a fountain] springing up to eternal life" (John 4:14). This speaks of the Holy Spirit who is to be like a river of life in you, enabling you to obey God's will and His Word. To drink from that flowing fountain is to be refreshed in spirit, and to find power to do what God requires.

The Fountain Gate is followed by the Water Gate (3:25,26). Water is always, in Scripture, the symbol of the Word of God. The interesting thing about this Water Gate is that it did not need to be repaired. Evidently it was the only part of the wall that was still standing. The people who lived near it are mentioned, but nothing is said about its repair. Thus the Word of God never breaks down nor does it need repair, it simply needs to be reinhabited.

The eighth gate is the East Gate facing the rising sun (3:29). This is, therefore, the gate of hope, anticipating that which is yet to come when the trials of life and the struggles of earth end, and the glorious new sun rises on the day of God. This gate needs to be rebuilt in many of us who fall under the pessimistic spirit of this age and are crushed by the hopelessness of our times.

The ninth gate is the Horse Gate (3:28). The horse in Scripture is the symbol of warfare, that is, the need to do battle against the forces of darkness. It too is often in need of repair. As the apostle Paul says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world-forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness" (Eph. 6:12).

The final gate is the Muster Gate (Neh. 3:31). The Hebrew word means literally "the examination" gate. This is evidently the place where judgment was conducted, and speaks of our need to take a good look at ourselves now and then and evaluate what we are doing.

That brings us around again to the Sheep Gate (3:32), the gate of the cross. The cross must be at the beginning and end of every life.

PRAY AND WATCH

The derision and scorn of their Canaanite neighbors continued to mount, and threats were made against the lives of Nehemiah and other leaders. In response, Nehemiah did two important things: He went to prayer, and set up a guard. From then on, the workers labored with their weapons beside them, keeping watch and building at the same time (4:16). It was a practical demonstration of, "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition."

Seeing his persistence, his enemies tried various approaches to stop the work. Nehemiah retained a single eye to the work to which God had called him. The end result was the finishing of the wall and the gaining of the respect of surrounding nations when they saw the hand of God at work.

When the walls were completed the people were encouraged to move back from the suburbs to homes within the city walls (chap. 7). The register of peoples is almost identical to the list in Ezra, which lends confirmation to the theory that it was Nehemiah who first returned from Babylon and Ezra who came later. This also is strengthened by the fact that it is only at this point in Nehemiah that Ezra appears in the book.

When the walls were completed, the time came to reaffirm the spiritual strength of the nation. In a great gathering of the people, the Law was read to them anew, accompanied by exposition given by Ezra the priest (chap. 8). It is especially significant that when the people were convicted by the reading of the Law to the point of weeping, Ezra and Nehemiah comforted them with reassurances that the Lord Himself had made provision for their forgiveness, and that "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (8:10).

Chapters 11 through 13 conclude the book, with first a recognition of certain gifts among the people. Levites, gatekeepers, singers and various other ministries were recognized. This is similar to the New Testament which sets the church to discover the gifts of the Spirit that are given among them, and put them all to work. In chapter 12 is the story of the dedication of the wall. The people gathered and marched around the wall with instruments, singing and shouting, playing and rejoicing.

During the reading of the Law, it was learned again that the people of God should give no official place to either an Ammonite or a Moabite. Nehemiah, who had gone back to Persia and apparently had returned for the dedication of the walls, reminded the high priest that Tobiah was an Ammonite and had been given a place to live within the very Temple itself. This is the Tobiah who had done so much to hinder the work of building the wall. To correct this, Nehemiah went in and threw Tobiah's furniture out into the street. Further, he found that the priests and Levites had been cheated, so he restored the money that belonged to them. Then discovering that the people were violating the Sabbath, he commanded that the doors of the city should be shut when the Sabbath began and kept shut until it was ended. Finally, he dealt with some violence with the problem of intermarrying with forbidden races again. When he learned that one of the priests was the son-in-law of Sanballat, who had done so much to oppose Nehemiah's work, he chased the young man from his presence.

To us it may appear that Nehemiah was overly severe with these violations, but here is a man who has learned that there can be no compromise with evil. He manifests one of the greatest lessons the Spirit of God can ever teach us: to say no when it needs to be said and to say it with firmness and determination. Those who have made a mark for God throughout the history of the church have been those who have learned to say no at the right times.

Thus the book of Nehemiah has given itself to a clear demonstration of how to rebuild the walls of strength in our individual lives, and to maintain those walls in strength by unceasing resistance to allurements and attacks which attempt to force us to compromise. How important it is to be ruthless against the forces that undermine and sap the vitality of our lives in Christ.

ESTHER

The book of Esther is an historical incident that occurred during the days of Jewish captivity in Babylon. Some Bible scholars feel that the Persian king, Ahasuerus in the book, is Xerxes the Great. one great Bible scholar,

however, identifies him with Astyages--also called Artaxerxes in Nehemiah and Ezra, the father of Cyrus the Persian.

Esther doesn't appear to be a religious book because nowhere does the name of God appear--nor any mention of heaven or hell. However, the name Jehovah does appear four times in the original Hebrew in a hidden way: in the form of acrostics. It is interesting to note that Jehovah declared in Deuteronomy 31 that if His people forsook Him He would hide His face from them.

As in our study of other Old Testament events, the greatest lesson in the account of Esther is in its spiritual parallel to man himself. This pattern appears in the Tabernacle, is repeated in the Temple, appears in the three-fold division of the nation Israel and now is the key to the book of Esther.

Ahasuerus, the king, depicts the soul of man, comprising mind, emotions and, especially, will. His capital city, Susa, is the body in which all his decisions and actions will be most immediately felt. His empire is the sphere of influence which each one of us exerts on all whom we contact. His queen is the spirit of man, closely bound to the soul in such a way that no division or separation can be felt. The queen, bound in marriage to the king, depicts the place of fellowship, refreshment and communion with God which is intimately related to our soul.

Ahasuerus's empire was in a time of peace and blessing, fullness and fruitfulness. No enemy threatened his kingdom from the outside; there was nothing to do but display the lavish glory of his kingdom. Unfallen Adam in parallel, was just such a king. His whole empire, the Garden of Eden, lay at rest and he was free to do nothing more than manifest the riches, fruitfulness and glory of his kingdom while enjoying unhindered communion with God.

During a six-month long feast, which began in joy and merrymaking but ended in tragedy, the king was lifted up in pride and sought to disgrace his queen. Her refusal to submit to his demands resulted in her being deposed from the throne. This decree became a law which could not be changed. When Adam chose to assert the desire of his will over what he knew in his heart that God wanted, he laid the groundwork for the eventual fall of the entire race. His disobedience caused him and all his descendants to enter a fallen state, losing communion with God, which they were helpless to change.

In his loneliness, Ahasuerus sought a new queen. Esther one of the Jewish captives, who was under the control of her cousin Mordecai, was chosen and was exalted to second place in the kingdom. In the spiritual parallel of our life, fallen man, in loneliness and restlessness, also searches for a new place of communion and fellowship with God, even though he himself hardly knows what he is looking for. The new queen depicts our moment of conversion. At this moment we receive a new spirit who, though we do not yet understand it, is under control of another--the Holy Spirit. Throughout this book, "the little man," Mordecai, is the power behind the throne, thus depicting the humility and self-effacement of the Spirit of Christ.

When Haman, a descendant of Amalek--who always pictures the aspects of the flesh--convinced Ahasuerus to decree that the Jews should be destroyed, Esther risked her life to save her people. She told the king that his decree would mean her death as well as her people's death. The king, in consternation, had Haman hanged; Mordecai is exalted to a place of power and instantly everything begins to change. Another decree by the king removed the threat of death from the Jewish captives and allowed them to kill their enemies, just as in Romans 8:2 Paul tells us that "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."

The book ends with the establishment of the feast of Purim as an enduring memorial to the events of this story. There is a tradition among the Jews that the feast of Purim is the only feast that will be observed after the Messiah comes. This reflects the truth that to walk in the Spirit is normal for both time and eternity. It is the greatest lesson which God wants us to learn.

In this book we have the same king and the same kingdom at the end as we do at the beginning. The only difference is that Haman is out and Mordecai is in. But what a difference! Just as the king and kingdom remain the same, so the Christian remains the same person when the Spirit is given the place of control in his life. Personality

does not change, but it is cleansed and enhanced by the presence of the Spirit. So Paul can say, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). The person remains the same; the principle upon which he lives and acts is entirely different. That is the secret of the Spirit-filled life. As Mordecai, through the will of the king, brings power and peace to the kingdom, so the Holy Spirit, through our human will and never beyond it, brings peace and prosperity into our lives.

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Thirteen The Cry of the Spirit: Job

The book of Job is perhaps the oldest book in the Bible. No one knows who wrote it. Some scholars think it may have been written by Moses while others date it as late as the time of Solomon. But one thing is certain: this book is given to us by the Holy Spirit. It is a beautiful and profound book, touching upon the themes of suffering more deeply than any other book in the Bible. It is also written in beautiful, majestic, even glorious language.

Job was a real man, not a mythological figure. He is mentioned by Ezekiel and is classified as one of the three great men of the Old Testament, along with Noah and Daniel. He is mentioned also in the New Testament by James, who refers to Job's patience and steadfast endurance. In the opening part of the book, Job is found living in the land of Uz, which is probably located in southeastern Edom. He is clearly one of the most prominent citizens of that land and may well have been a contemporary of Abraham. Thus the book takes us back to the very beginnings of biblical history.

Most of the book is poetry, but it begins and ends with prose sections which are like program notes given to an audience. Many scholars think this story was presented at times as a drama in which actors recited the parts of the different characters in the book.

Act I, God Meets with Angelic Creations

The book opens in heaven where God is meeting with the angelic creation. Among them is Satan who strides in sneering and swaggering, operating on the philosophy that self-interest is the only valid motive for all human behavior. In response God says: "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:8, NASB).

Some have felt that the book of Job is given us, for one reason, to help us understand the relationship between Satan and God. It is clear from this scene that Satan is not on an equal basis with God. Some scholars feel that the book of Job is the record of a great battleground between God and Satan, with Job caught in between. But what kind of battle is this in which one side must get permission from the other before it attacks? Can you imagine a German commander during World War II stepping up to General Patton, saluting him and saying, "Herr General, we would like permission to bomb your troops, destroy your tanks and wreck all your plans." Surely General Patton's reply would have been unprintable! Yet that is the situation we find in the book of Job. It is God who initiates a test of Job's character and proposes to Satan that Job be put to the test. Satan then responds with alacrity and asks permission from God to take away Job's prosperity so that he will curse God to His face.

The latter part of chapter 1 records the terrible results. One by one the props are pulled out from under Job's sense of well-being. In one tragic day Job learns that first all his oxen and donkeys were driven away by enemy raids and his servants slain. Next, word comes that his sheep have all been killed by a terrible electric storm, or perhaps

a volcanic eruption. Crowding upon the heels of that comes the news that Job's great herd of camels, the true wealth of the oriental world, has been wiped out by a raid of Chaldeans. Finally comes the heart-rending news that his seven sons and three daughters were enjoying a birthday celebration together when a great tornado struck and the house was demolished and all his children killed. The malignancy of Satan is revealed in that he struck to the full extent of his permission. He went to the ultimate boundaries God had permitted and took away everything Job had.

Job's reaction to this is magnificent: "Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord'" (1:20, 21, NASB).

It is clear that Job has won the first round of testing. Take away the possessions of a man like Job and he still will not curse God to His face. He still loves God and follows Him and recognizes God's right to do with him as He will.

But the test is not over. There is much worse yet to come. Before the book is finished we will see levels of pride in Job of which he is totally unaware, and we will begin to understand what God is after in Job's life (and in ours) by this kind of testing.

Again it is God that initiates further action against Job. Satan is rather taken aback by Job's steadfastness but responds to God's challenge by asking for a change in the rules. "Put forth Thy hand, now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse Thee to Thy face." So the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life' " (2:5, 6 NASB).

So Satan is given renewed access to Job and without warning Job is suddenly stricken with a series of terrible boils or carbuncles. Some scholars think this was a form of leprosy. Others think it was a variety of elephantiasis which not only covers the body with running, putrefying sores, but also causes swelling and distortion. Whatever it was it rendered Job a pitiful spectacle; a repulsive hulk of a man, swollen, disfigured and hurting.

As the malady continues, Job's wife is the first whose faith succumbs. She turns on him and says, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die" (2:9 NASB).

Just as Satan used Eve as his instrument to get at Adam in the Garden of Eden, so the assault upon Job's emotional life comes through his wife's failure of faith. She advises him to do two things: apostatize and then commit suicide.

But once again Job's faith proves triumphant. He gently rebukes his wife and reasserts the right of God to be sovereign in human affairs. Job's wife had the philosophy that life ought to be pleasant, and if it was not there was no use living. Job at least understands that the reason we are on earth is not necessarily to have a good time. When the pressure comes, life is still worth living. Job argues that we take God's joy and pleasure with gladness and gratitude. If He then chooses to send something difficult, shall we abandon the gratitude and begin to curse Him in protest? To do so is to allow Satan the victory.

Clearly Job has won again. The score is now 2-0 in favor of Job. But Satan is not through. He had obtained permission from God to assault this man in every area of his being. He has taken away Job's possessions and all his children, and now he has taken away also his health and the pleasure of living, even to the degree of making Job feel abandoned by his wife.

Satan now proceeds to attack the first stronghold of Job's spirit. In the closing verses of chapter 2 he moves up his heavy artillery, and the big guns he seeks to employ are, to say the least, most unexpected and unusual." Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him" (v. 11, NASB).

At this point the whole book slightly shifts its focus. We no longer are looking only at Job but now at his controversy with these three friends, and their discourses occupy the major part of the book. The primary attack on Job's faith now comes not alone through his physical trials but through an attack on his spiritual relationship with God by means of these three well-meaning friends.

When the friends arrive they are shocked at what they see. They can hardly believe their eyes. This monstrous repulsive hulk of a man--could he really be their dear old friend Job? Could this obnoxious creature sitting on a heap of ashes, scraping himself with a broken piece of pottery, be the man they had known and loved? They tear their coats, sprinkle dust on their heads in oriental mourning, and finally end up sitting on the ground around Job observing him in silence for seven days.

While they were sitting there they were thinking, and what they thought will come out in the arguments they present in the next section of the book. It is enough for us to see at this point that while they were waiting in silence around Job they came to the conclusion that he was suffering under the hand of God for some terrible sin he must have committed and that it was therefore right for God to make him suffer this way. Their hearts were hardening against Job. They had come to comfort him but in their heart of hearts they believed that Job deserved what he was getting.

Act II, Dialogue with Three Friends

There are three cycles of dialogue with Job and his friends. They try various approaches with Job: first, sarcasm and irony; then they appeal to Job's honesty; finally they accuse him of specific crimes and misdeeds, and in the end fall silent and sit miffed and sulking because they feel Job has insulted them. In all their speeches they attack Job's integrity with the argument that if God is indeed Just, the righteous are always blessed and the wicked suffer. If an individual is suffering, it must therefore be because something is wrong in his life. Their explanation of suffering is a simple matter of cause and effect. It is neat and tidy and explains everything--that is, unless you happen to be the sufferer!

Before the dialogue begins, Job raises three questions. It is evident that after months of suffering a change has taken place in him. He no longer submits without question to the will of God, but begins to ask why. First, "Why was I ever born?" His misery is so intense that he would like to have his birth day blotted out of existence and left unrecorded on the calendar. His second question is, "Why didn't I die at birth?" Life has been totally meaningless, Job infers, and it would have been better to have died at birth. Then he gives his view of death as a time of rest and quiet after the tumult and trouble of life. His third question is: "Why can't I die now?" He is not thinking of suicide, but only desires that God would take his life.

After Job asks these questions the first cycle of the replies of the friends is introduced. Though these friends propose the same solution to the problem of suffering they approach it in three distinct ways, according to their personalities. They might be nicknamed Eliphaz the Eloquent, Bildad the Brutal, and Zophar the Zealous.

Eliphaz, the first speaker, is evidently the oldest, for there is a smoothness about him and a courtesy (at least at the beginning) that indicates he has learned to say unpleasant things in gracious ways. His first argument breaks down into six main points. He begins in chapter 4 by saying, in effect, "Follow your own advice, Job. You have been a counselor to many and you have been able to put your finger on their problem and help them deal with it. You delivered them and found the key to what was troubling them, and now your turn has come. Follow your own advice and you will be relieved." His second point is that the basic principle of life is that the righteous are never punished; only the unrighteous suffer. Eliphaz goes on to tell Job that if he will fear God and admit his sin, things will be all right. He claims to have learned this truth from a vision in which he saw that God is of such holiness and purity that even the angels stand defiled before Him. What chance can a man have, then, to claim sinlessness? Though this is accurate theology it is unbalanced, for it sees God only as a God of justice and knows nothing of His love, compassion and forgiveness nor of the discipline and training of the Father's heart.

In chapter 5 Eliphaz argues that trouble comes only from sin, and he slyly suggests that the loss of Job's children was the result of Job's personal evil. He then warns Job not to play games with God because God knows too

much. Finally he closes with a section which says, in effect, "Just give up and God will bless you."

Job's reply to this is found in chapters 6 and 7. In chapter 6 Job rebukes his friends, stating that he has a right to complain because of his terrible suffering. "For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me" (6:4).

Then he speaks of his inability to bear more pain. "What does God think I am made of, stone or bronze that He subjects me to all this?" (see 6:12).

Then Job expresses his irritation at the misunderstanding of his friends. He says in effect, "You friends are like *the* mountain brook that is full of water in the wintertime when no one needs it, but when the hot summer sun comes out and we long for the refreshing of the water, it is nothing but a dry, gravel-filled stream bed. You said you came to comfort me and all you have given me is trouble."

Job then turns to God and complains to Him about the hardness of his present experience. He views the future as absolutely hopeless, and in the honesty of his despair, in baffled bewilderment, he cries, "Have I sinned? What have I done to Thee, O watcher of men? Why hast Thou set me as Thy target, so that I am a burden to myself?" (7:20 NASB).

In chapter 8 the second friend takes up the attack. His name is Bildad the Shuhite, but we have called him Bildad the Brutal. His style is to ask questions in an effort to focus everything into logical framework. He is a cold intellectual thinker who debates the issue at the level of the mind.

His first question is, "Can God do wrong?" He feels that Job has slandered God and he moves on from his basic premise to draw the logical conclusion, "If your children have sinned against God He has delivered them into the power of their transgression. When they died on that tragic day you can only conclude it was because they did something terribly wrong." He supports his argument further by various platitudes of the day, pointing out how God always cuts off those who seem to prosper because of evil in their midst, and he closes with an exhortation to Job to repent.

Job replies to Bildad in chapters 9 and 10. He explains the difficulty he has with God, for he accepts the principle that trouble comes only because of sin. He would have analyzed another's problems along the same line before his own trials began, but in the long dark hours of searching his own heart he has not been able to put his finger upon any sin he has not already dealt with. His dilemma is, "I am not aware of sin in myself, yet I am in deep trouble; therefore, the problem must lie in God." But he has no way of examining God, and he states this in very eloquent terms. God's wisdom is far beyond man's and He exercises power which can only make man tremble in awe. His invisibility makes it difficult to deal with Him and His sovereignty is overwhelming. "If I called and He answered me, I could not believe that He was listening to my voice. For He bruises me with a tempest, and multiplies my wounds without cause" (9:16,17 NASB).

He goes on to describe how life becomes incomprehensible when there is no understanding of God. The reference point is then gone and one cannot make any sense of life. But in verses 33 through 35, out of the deep darkness that surrounds this suffering saint, a ray of light breaks through. It represents the first awareness of what is missing. "There is no umpire between us, who may lay his hand upon us both. Let Him remove His rod from me, and let not dread of Him terrify me. Then I would speak and not fear Him; but I am not like that in myself" (NASB).

Job at last begins to feel, deep in his bones, the terrible gulf between man and God that must be bridged by another. God is laying the foundation in Job's understanding for the tremendous revelation which comes in the New Testament: God at last becomes Man.

But in chapter 10 the darkness closes in again around Job. He pleads with God to let him know what is wrong, or at least to leave him alone, for anything is better than his present misery.

Every argument which has ever occurred to a suffering saint is brought out here in the book of Job. Every nuance of suffering, whether mental or physical, is explored to its utmost throughout the book. All the tormenting questions are asked. All the haunting dilemmas are faced, so that anyone who is suffering will find that Job has felt whatever he has felt and has articulated it eloquently. The questions are not answered at this point, but they will be answered before we are through, yet in a way we could never anticipate.

In chapter 11 Zophar the Naamathite (we can call him Zophar the Zealous) moves up to bat and opens with a scorching rebuke to what he sees as Job's sinful folly. He accuses Job of wordiness, foolishness, mockery and of self-righteous smugness. He says Job is only getting what is coming to him and not even all of that. He describes Job's stupid ignorance in contrast with God's deep wisdom and inscrutable ways. He closes with the shining possibilities that are ahead if Job will only repent.

The problem with these friends is that though much of their theology is correct, yet they answer Job's words without trying to find out what lies behind them. They comment on what he says without understanding his agony. Further, though their theology is correct as far as it goes, it is very incomplete. They speak with the utmost confidence that what they are saying is the final word on the subject. There is apparently no understanding that perhaps there are aspects of God and dimensions to His wisdom that they have not yet seen. The third thing wrong is that they never pray with Job. They never ask God for help to open their minds and illuminate their understanding so they can help their friend. The book is filled with prayers, but they are all prayers of Job crying out to God in the midst of his sufferings.

This is the difference between mere theology and the experience of a man taught by the Spirit. Theology can be very clear and right, but when one is dealing with the hurting problems of life a deeper dimension must be added--that compassion Jesus manifested, that sympathy that identifies with hurt and opens the door of the spirit to receive more light.

The first round ends with Job's sarcastic defense, found in chapters 12 through 14. Job sees his friends as know-it-alls who deal with elementary truths which everyone knows. Consequently they have not helped him but are really in the same boat with him, being subject to the same judgments from God that they warn him about. He therefore requests they leave him alone with God, and only asks they will do him the courtesy of listening carefully to the case he seeks to present before Jehovah.

In chapter 13 Job is like a man in prison, planning his case for his appearance before God. He divides his case into four major points. The first is a plea for certain conditions he feels must be granted before he can talk with God. One is that God will lift the pain and anguish he is now going through so he does not have to speak out of torment. Second, that God would so veil His presence that Job will not be terrified by His awesomeness.

He next pleads for the knowledge of the charges which are against him, and protests the silence of God in His apparent anger with him. In chapter 14 in two marvelously moving passages, Job brings out the helplessness and hopelessness of man before God. Job feels that man is helpless to control his affairs but God judges this limited helpless man for things he cannot help. Because of his sense of hopelessness, he cries out for a kind of purgatory after life is finished. He sees life only as a natural man, with the present existence as the only truly important thing, and if one does not make something out of the present experience he will never have another chance. So the first cycle of dialogue ends with Job's stout insistence that he has done no wrong, so he cannot understand what is behind his torment.

Act III, Second Round of Speeches

In chapters 15-21, the second round of speeches is recorded. For this the friends gird up their loins, sharpen their spears and come at Job again. Once again Eliphaz the Eloquent is the first speaker. He charges Job with presumptuous words and with pretentious claims, and then supports it with his narrow and worn-out theology. He points out the general nature of the depravity of man and the effects of the Fall upon human life. He rightly says that there is no one who is clean and righteous before God, but he fails to point out specifically what it is that Job has done. As a matter of fact he himself is guilty of the very thing he sets before--Job because he too is part of

the human race, yet there is never a word of self-examination from him.

In a long passage Eliphaz argues again from experience, pointing out that God will never let a man get by with wickedness, and therefore if one is being punished he must be wicked. It is the same old tired thrust at Job: he must be guilty of some terrible sin.

In chapters 16 and 17 Job answers Eliphaz. He does not really know what to say, but he is trying to be honest. The great thing about Job is that he is no hypocrite. He never tries to cover over or set his case in a better light than it truly is. He simply blurts out all the hurt and anguish of his heart as best he can.

Again he rebukes his friends for their misunderstanding and windy words. Though Job cannot see it, it is clear to us that Satan is there in the background using these friends as channels for what the apostle Paul calls "the fiery darts of the wicked one" (see Eph. 6:16). It is a good reminder to beware lest we become a channel for Satan's accusations against someone who is suffering as Job is suffering here.

Job goes on to state the facts as he now sees them. He can only conclude that God must hate him, though he does not know why, for He lets men insult him and seems to totally disregard Job's innocence. Despite these strong feelings a gleam of faith emerges at this point in that Job still sees that God must supply the answers to these questions, for man is totally helpless to solve them in his ignorance. Job concludes this reply by praying for relief, largely from his friends. He has heard all their arguments and knows they do not help, and in the final part of chapter 17 he sinks back again into the darkness of despair.

Bildad the Brutal then takes up the cudgels with the same tired line of argument as before. He is a good example of what has been described as "an evangelical crab." To this attack Job replies with a piteous plea. He beseeches mercy from his friends and describes his own bafflement at what is happening to him. His feelings of isolation from all are very vivid. "My breath is offensive to my wife, and I am loathsome to my own brothers. Even young children despise me; I rise up and they speak against me. All my associates abhor me, and those I love have turned against me" (19:17-19, NASB).

But once again faith responds and he utters the great anticipation of bodily resurrection for which he is famous: "I know that my Redeemer [Vindicator] lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is flayed, yet without my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another" (19:25-27, NASB).

Slowly, through the anguish and gloom of this man's heart born out of passion and pathos, comes the dawning realization that God is working out a great and mighty purpose, and that one of these days God Himself (whom Job has never failed to see as the God of great majesty and power) will be visibly present before men. Thus with a slow but certain light, Job is gradually learning that though life is essentially a mystery, God is working out His own purposes.

Job ends the discourse by warning his friends to be careful about judging him. "If you say, 'How shall we persecute him?' and 'What pretext for a case against him can we find?' then be afraid of the sword for yourselves, for wrath brings the punishment of the sword, so that you may know there is judgment" (19:28,29 NASB).

Despite Job's tremendous flash of hope, Zophar the Zealous looses a blast of impassioned words in a strong outburst of emotions against Job. These three men represent what the New Testament would call pharasaian: the appearance of being orthodox, yet without true godliness. Pharasaism is one of the most deadly enemies of truth, for it is so easily self-deceptive. Chapter 20 represents Zophar's last appearance in the book. His argument is that the prosperity of the wicked is always short and his joy is but for a moment. He goes on to describe the punishment of the wicked as being terrible and always certain.

Job's response this time is very reasoned and calm. Though sometimes he speaks rather sharply to his friends, at other times, perhaps when the pain is not as intense, he is able to speak more dispassionately. After a reasoned appeal for a careful hearing, Job sets forth the facts about the wicked. They often live lives that are for the most

part untroubled. They openly defy God and yet prosper. God's judgments upon them are infrequent and long delayed, and even when they come they seem to be uneven. He concludes the second cycle of dialogue by chiding his friends for their hidden surmises and their unsupported convictions. His closing words are: "How then will you vainly comfort me, for your answers remain full of falsehood?" (21:34 NASB).

Act IV, Final Round of Speeches

The third and final round of speeches is found in chapters 22 through 31. Eliphaz begins the round again, but whereas once he had been calm and courteous he now is clearly upset and angry, and begins to pour out invective and accusation upon poor Job. He accuses Job of imaginary motives and even stoops to inventing totally false charges against Job. In a rather patronizing way, he assumes insulting concepts which he feels Job holds and ends with inappropriate exhortations (though phrased in beautifully expressive language) to Job to confess his sin and return to God, with the hope that God will again pour out blessings upon him.

In a most moving reply Job does not attempt to answer the arguments of his friends any further. He simply cries out of a troubled heart, expressing before them but addressed to God, the deepest problem he now feels. He has two basic questions: Why is God absent and Why is God silent? As Job's pain increases and his frustration grows, his basic longing for God remains, and though he searches everywhere to find God nothing seems to work. Yet despite this, a slowly growing faith in God's justice sustains him and confidence in God's ultimate purpose encourages him. Nevertheless, he is terribly afraid of God and dreads a confrontation with Him. It is in this section that his progressing faith produces the highest expression of trust found in the book. "But He knows the way I take. When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (23:10, NASB).

In chapter 24 Job faces his second question: Why is God silent? He raises the complaint many have raised about God, Why doesn't He judge evil? Job points out that thieves and scoundrels flourish, poor people suffer terribly, having to scratch for a living, being exposed to the elements and exploited by the rich and yet seem neglected by God. Criminals strike in the darkness and yet God delays His justice. Thus, though the three friends assert that evil finds invariable retribution, Job points out that the facts of life are quite different.

In a final blunt address, Bildad the Brutal restates his argument that God is all-powerful and man is inherently sinful. Then he concludes: "How then can a man be just with God? Or how can he be clean who is born of woman? If even the moon has no brightness and the stars are not pure in His sight, how much less man, that maggot, and the son of man, that worm!" (25:4-6 NASB).

In chapter 26, Job concludes the dialogue with the friends. His answer to Bildad is one rich in irony. He sarcastically declares that the friends have been of no help at all to him, for he quite agrees that there is a mystery in God that no man can plumb. Even when man recognizes God's omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience, still he cannot explain all of God's ways.

In a closing soliloquy, covering chapters 27 through 31, Job reviews the situation. He states again his sense of unshakeable integrity, for there are facts he cannot deny and yet he must agree with much his friends have stated. In a passage of moving beauty he traces man's search for wisdom, comparing it with the hardships men endure in mining the mountains for treasures of gold and silver. He concludes that wisdom is illusive for it cannot be found by searching, cannot be purchased with gold and cannot be known in nature. The only way to obtain it, he asserts, is from God, for God knows what it is, where it is and how to find it.

In painful reminiscence, Job looks back on the good old days of his prosperity and blessing, recounting in detail the honor that was shown him and the power of his influence over others. He contrasts that with the painful present where he faces the mockery of men, the anguish of pain and--the ultimate torment--the silence of God. But once again he searches his life for a clue as to why he is being so tormented. There have been, he says, no sexual misdeeds, no injustice toward his servants or the poor, no trust in wealth, no secret idolatry, no gloating over other's misfortunes, no stinginess or hypocrisy and no polluting or misuse of his land. He can find no reason in himself why God continues to allow this pain to go on.

With this, the words of Job are ended. He has nothing further to say. Baffled, questioning, tormented, yet unwilling to forsake God, he falls silent.

Act V, The Man from Buz

At this point a noteworthy break in the book occurs. Another voice is heard, that of a young man named Elihu. He is identified as the son of Barachel (which means "God blesses") the Buzite. In the opening of the book we learn that Job lived in the land of Uz, but there was a nearby land called Buz. These two lands were named for two brothers who lived in the days of Noah following the flood. Elihu came from the land of Buz.

Commentators seem to differ widely in their view of Elihu. Some regard him as a brash young man, speaking out of the cocksure arrogance of youth, who tells the older men how they are wrong. Others see him as merely repeating the arguments of the three friends without adding much to them. Still other commentators view Elihu's discourse as a kind of meaningless interruption, of which God takes no notice at all. But still others (with whom I agree) see Elihu as playing a very important part in this book.

It is noteworthy that at the end of the book when God rebukes the friends of Job, Elihu is not included. Also he is given a very prominent part in the drama. His message occupies the next five chapters and constitutes one of the major discourses of the book. And he always speaks with courtesy and sensitivity to Job, despite his strong feelings. He seems to recognize the depth of Job's suffering and always speaks with understanding. Probably the most important thing about Elihu is that he claims to speak not out of experience as the other men did, but from revelation. He claims that "the Almighty gives [man] understanding" (32:8 NASB). Elihu, therefore, comes into the book as the answer to Job's cry for an explanation. God replies to Job in a way he did not expect, for suddenly a young man who has been listening all along speaks up and appears as witness to the Mediator for whom Job has been asking throughout the book. Elihu thus appears as a kind of John the Baptist of the Old Testament. He begins where the friends began, but ends with words very similar to the voice of God when God ultimately appears on the scene.

In chapter 32, with a courteous word of explanation, Elihu states that he has not entered the discussion before because he felt his youth might make his judgments seem immature, but now since old age has not solved the problem of Job's suffering he feels pressured to speak. He opens with an invitation to Job to dialogue with him, promising that he will give only honest words and speak without partiality.

Then in 33:8 Elihu begins to analyze Job's view of God. He says Job sees God as capricious, acting as men do out of His feelings and moods; and his answer is that in this Job is not right, for God is much greater than man. Further, Elihu says, Job claims that God is silent, but actually God speaks in two ways: (1) in dreams and (2) in pain, even repeating Himself patiently so that man may get the message. The essence of Elihu's argument is that affliction is sent by a God of love in order to discipline and purify. To this Job is invited to reply, but he remains silent.

In chapter 34 Elihu goes on to take up Job's view of God in further detail, opening with an invitation to all who listen to join in the judgment. Elihu claims that though Job is patient with his attackers, nevertheless his view of God makes him echo the arguments of the ungodly: "What man is like Job, who drinks up scoffing like water, who goes in company with evildoers and walks with wicked men? For he has said, 'It profits a man nothing that he should take delight in God'" (34:7-9).

In effect, Elihu says Job is saying, "What advantage is it to me to behave myself? I might as well have sinned." But in a powerful passage Elihu reveals the truth about the character of God. He cannot be unjust because He cannot deny Himself, and since He judges men He Himself must be just. Further, He is beyond accountability to man, for no man authorized Him to act and nothing functions without Him. Actually it is He who teaches man what justice is, for man cannot govern without the concept of justice and he learns impartial justice from observing God. Yet God does not need to investigate when He judges and will not accept outward reformation, but requires inward repentance. Therefore, the consensus of the wise is that Job speaks from some degree of ignorance of God

and needs further enlightenment.

Chapters 36 and 37 conclude Elihu's argument by presenting a magnificent description of the glory of God. He begins with a claim to speak from divine authority, saying: "For truly my words are not false; One who is perfect in knowledge is with you" (36:4, NASB). Some commentators have thought that he is referring to himself as "perfect in knowledge" and is therefore a brash and arrogant young man.

But in chapter 37, verse 16, he asks Job: "Do you know about the layers of the thick clouds, the wonders of one perfect in knowledge...?" (NASB). Obviously he here refers to God and his claim, therefore, in chapter 36 is that he is speaking with the wisdom and authority of God, who is perfect in knowledge.

He points out that Job is in a rather perilous position because he is so preoccupied with justice that he comes close to blasphemy and judgment in his view of God. If he goes on in this vein his case will be hopeless, for God's wisdom is inscrutable and He is varied in His purposes, being great in power and justice, and unimpressed by man's conceit.

Act VI, God's Message to Job

This brings us to the climax of the book of Job, where the voice of Jehovah Himself is heard, speaking out of the whirlwind. In the first of God's two speeches to Job He sets forth a series of questions designed to test Job's competence to argue with the Almighty. The language and poetic style of this passage is magnificent, unequaled in all of literature.

Jehovah first asks concerning the earth, as to where Job was when its foundations were laid. And then selecting its most prominent feature, the sea, God proceeds to question Job as to how the sea was born and how it is kept within limits. He probes Job's understanding on the processes of day and night and what lies beneath the sea and beyond the boundaries of life and behind the horizons of history. He continues to ask about common mysteries, such as the source of light, the uses of snow and hail and the processes of the storm and ice and frost.

Then He explores the heavens, questioning Job as to his power to bring forth the spring, symbolized by the Pleiades; or the winter season, represented by Orion; or to control the Zodiac or the influence of the Great Bear in the north. Finally He examines Job's ability to handle God's daily chores of feeding the animals, watching over their birth processes, giving them varied instinctive controls--the wide-ranging freedom of the wild ass, the independence of the wild ox, the stupidity of the ostrich, the courage of the horse and the vision of the hawk and the eagle.

In reply to all this, Job admits his total incompetence to contend with the almighty and declares himself unwilling to speak further. But though he is silenced, he is not yet convinced. He has not discovered yet the basic problem of his life or learned what God had in mind when He invited Satan to try him in the first place. So, in Jehovah's second speech out of the whirlwind He uses two symbolic beasts to teach Job the final truth he needs to learn. Once again he subjects Job to a series of questions, but this time as to his ability to morally govern the world and mankind. "Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him; and tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them in the dust together; bind them in the hidden place. Then I will also confess to you, that your own right hand can save you" (40:12-14 NASB).

In the next sections God brings before Job two amazing animals, one called Behemoth, a land animal; and one called Leviathan, a sea creature. Commentators have had difficulty identifying these in the natural world. Some think Behemoth is either the hippopotamus or the elephant, perhaps even the rhinoceros. They feel that Leviathan is the crocodile, though some think it could be a whale. But the language employed here clearly goes beyond the natural realm. These beasts seem to be symbolic of that which is invisible and supernatural. Behemoth, the land animal, means in Hebrew "beasts," and Leviathan means "the folded one." Isaiah in chapter 27 refers to Leviathan thus: "In that day the Lord will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, with His fierce and great and mighty sword, even Leviathan the twisted serpent; and He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea" (v. 1 NASB).

This brings to mind the two beasts found in Revelation 13, one which comes from the sea and reigns over the waters, representing the multitudes of the people of the earth. The other beast comes out of the land; but behind both is still a third creature called the Great Dragon, and we are told plainly that he is Satan who gives his power and authority to the Beast. Thus, here in Job, we have a tie to the opening scene of the book where Satan appears before God and is given authority over the life of Job. Behemoth represents the Satanic twist in man's fallen nature against which we all struggle and which the Bible calls "the flesh," with its continual desire to assert itself and live for itself. The second beast represents the world with its vast influence upon each of us, pressuring us to conform to its philosophies and reflecting the values and attitudes of a satanic view of life.

One Bible commentator has put it this way: "It seems probable that Behemoth represents the evil one acting in the animal and carnal elements of man's own constitution, and that Leviathan symbolizes the evil one energizing as man's external enemy. Behemoth is the enemy within us. Leviathan is the enemy without us."

In magnificent poetry, these two supernatural animals are described. Behemoth is viewed as self-sufficient, self-centered and totally self-confident; while Leviathan appears as untamable, unconquerable in his fierceness, fearful and awe-inspiring, irresistible in strength, and yet characterized totally by pride. The secret of his life is revealed in Job 41:33,34: "Nothing on earth is like him, one made without fear. He looks on everything that is high, he is king over all the sons of pride."(NASB).

These are the beasts that Job is up against. God's question is: "Job, are you able to handle these?" Job is here given a clear revelation of the reason behind his illness. Not his own failure or willful misdeeds, but a serious problem so imbedded in his nature that he is not even aware that it exists, yet it is destroying him. It is with this God must deal.

Chapter 42 sets forth Job's repentance, consisting of a new view of God Himself and a totally new view of his own life. He says in response to God's charges, "You're right, Lord. I have been ignorant" (see v. 3), and again, "You're right, Lord. I have been arrogant" (see vv. 4,5). He concludes: "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes" (42:5,6 NASB).

Thus Job learns that the ultimate problem of life is within us, but it is a problem that only God can handle. We are unable, totally unequipped to handle it by ourselves. All we can do is put ourselves in His gracious hands and allow Him to work out the circumstances of our lives, to teach us what He desires us to learn. This is surely what Jesus has in mind in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3).

The closing scenes of the book record Jehovah's rebuke of the friends and His vindication of Job before them. They are required to bring an offering of sacrifice and to request Job to make intercession for them before their sin is forgiven and set aside.

The book closes with Jehovah's complete restoration of Job, granting him double blessing in all that he once possessed, including even seven more sons and three more daughters. Job's closing days are recorded: "And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. And Job died, an old man full of days."

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Fourteen

The Voicing of Feelings: Psalms

The book of Psalms joins with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in expressing the cry of man's soul. Just as the soul has three major divisions--the emotions, mind and will--so these books express these divisions. The primal need of the human spirit is faith, because man was made to believe in God, but the cry of the human soul is for hope.

The book of Psalms particularly reflects the variety of human hopes. Every experience of man's heart is reflected here. No matter what mood you find yourself in, some psalm will reflect that mood, for this amazing book records every one of man's emotions and reactions. Some people seem to have discovered the secret of perpetual emotion; these people certainly ought to get well acquainted with the book of Psalms! For instance, if you are fearful read Psalm 56 or Psalm 91, or certainly Psalm 23, the famous Shepherd Psalm which everyone knows. If you are discouraged read Psalm 42 which is only one among many for the discouraged. If you happen to be feeling lonely, then turn to Psalm 71 or Psalm 62.

If you are oppressed by sinfulness there are two marvelous psalms for this: Psalm 51 written after David's double sin of adultery and murder, and Psalm 32, also David's great expression of confession and forgiveness. If you find yourself worried or anxious I would recommend Psalm 37 and Psalm 73. If you are angry, try Psalm 13 or Psalm 58. If you are resentful, Psalm 94 or Psalm 77. If you find yourself feeling happy and wanting words to express your happiness, read Psalm 92 or Psalm 66. If you feel forsaken, try Psalm 88. If you are grateful and would like to say so, read Psalm 40. If you are doubtful and you find faith is beginning to fail, read Psalm 119.

A few years ago I entered a house and stumbled upon the body of a man who had committed suicide. I found the body lying in a pool of blood. What a shock it was! I had known him fairly well for he had been coming to me for counseling help. That night I found it impossible to sleep because I was so disturbed and troubled. In that hour of desolation my wife and I turned to Psalms and read some of them together. It was the only book that could quiet our hearts in an hour of trouble and anguish. Psalms has always been the book where men and women of God have pillowed their heads in times of distress or heartache and sorrow. Whatever your feeling, turn to Psalms.

Many people think of Psalms as being entirely the work of King David, but in fact, though more than half of them were written by David, the sweet singer of Israel, there are several authors besides him and many of the psalms are anonymous. Most of them were written to be sung in public, which is why you will often find at the beginning of the psalm "to the chief choirmaster." In some Bibles the Hebrew titles are given which are normally translated either as psalms, prayers or praises. One psalm (90) was written by Moses and one by King Solomon:(127). There are also psalms by Asaph who was the chief choirmaster under King David, and a group of psalms is attributed to the Sons of Korah, who were a band of musicians charged with leading the singing of Israel. Thus the psalms were written over a long period of time, beginning with the days of Moses and including the return of Israel from exile in Babylon.

No one knows who collected the psalms, but the final collection of 150 psalms constitutes the longest book in the Bible and was divided from antiquity into five books, each ending with a doxology (praise to God). You will find the first one at the end of Psalm 41 which closes the first book and reads: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen."

Similar doxologies are found at the end of the other books: Book II from Psalm 42 to 72; Book III Psalm 73 to 89; Book IV Psalm 90 to 106; and Book V Psalm 107 to 150. Among the Jews the book of Psalms was closely associated with the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, and this may well represent a key to the structure of the book of Psalms.

As we have seen repeatedly, the five books of Moses were designed deliberately to give us a pattern of God's working in human history in the world of nations and with individuals. The five books of Psalms follow the same pattern, but reflect the emotional reactions of the heart to God's divine program. This explains the fact that has

troubled many about Psalms. Certain psalms (called imprecatory psalms) speak with bitter, scorching words against enemies, calling down God's wrath upon them and wishing the enemies to be torn limb from limb and hung from the nearest tree. This disturbs many who feel the message of Psalms is much different from the New Testament with regard to loving our enemies and our treatment of them.

Other psalms give the impression that human existence ends with death and there is no afterlife, but we must remember that the psalms reflect the way people feel and not necessarily the reality of truth. Just as today we often find our reactions differing from what they "ought" to be, so it was in Bible times.

Furthermore, we can understand these troubling psalms better if we remember what the New Testament tells us about the Old Testament: "These things..." Paul says, "were written down for our instruction" (I Cor. 10:11). If we put ourselves in the place of the psalmist, we will see that the enemies he faces on the physical level correspond in remarkable ways to the enemies we face on the spiritual level. The New Testament tells us that "we are not contending against flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:12). We often feel that people are our enemies, but they are not. Our feelings would tell us to cry out against those who attack or oppress us, just as the writers of the psalms do; but in reality we know that our true enemies are the pressures of the evil one, the philosophies of the world and the attitudes of the flesh within. Remember Jesus said, "Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.... For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander" (Matt. 15:11,19).

Thus when we read Psalms today, when we read of imprecations against enemies, we must think of our own temptations toward covetousness, jealousy or pride and ambition. If we do this, the severe language of Psalms makes great sense, for we are taught in the New Testament that we must deal severely with these inward attitudes. They have no right to be honored in a Christian's life.

This is what Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount: "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away...If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away" (Matt. 5:29,30). Jesus does not mean to do this literally. He simply means we are to deal with temptation ruthlessly. So the ruthless psalms picture the way we must deal with the real enemies of the heart. And the doubting psalms are not expressions of truth, but of the way life looks to someone who is thinking only within the boundaries of birth and death.

Book I, Man's Awareness of His Need

If we follow the ancient Jewish practice of linking the five books of Psalms with the five books of the Pentateuch, we will find a key to understanding the special grouping of psalms. As Genesis in the Pentateuch describes man's awareness of his need for God and his inadequacy in himself, so the first book of Psalms--Psalms 1 to 42--in general expresses that same sense of need. It begins in Psalm 1 with a picture of the perfect man, just as Genesis begins with man in the Garden of Eden. Psalm 2 presents man in his rebellion: "Why are the nations in an uproar, and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed: Let us tear their fetters apart, and cast away their cords from us!" (vv. 1-3, NASB).

Psalms 3 through 7 are various expressions of man's sense of rejection and of attack from the world and enemies without. But Psalm 8 is a marvelous expression of man's awareness of an eternal destiny and a deep and intimate relationship which he once enjoyed with God and which he hopes will be restored. Even in his brokenness, man is learning to worship, and cries out: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!"

Psalm 8 is paralleled in Psalm 19 which also reflects upon the glory of God in nature and compares it with the glory revealed through revelation. In these two psalms are expressed God's double method of communicating with His human family through the things He has made and the things He has said.

The fourteenth Psalm is a recognition of the folly of being ungodly and a reassurance to those who seek to walk with God: though the ungodly seem to flourish, a certain judgment will overtake them unless they repent. Psalm 16, along with Psalms 2, 22 and 40, are messianic psalms, clearly predicting the sufferings of Christ and the glory

which should follow. Portions of these psalms are quoted in the New Testament and applied to the life of Jesus. Psalm 16 is particularly the psalm of resurrection referred to as such by Peter on the Day of Pentecost where he quotes verse 10: "For Thou cost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the pit" (see also Acts 2:27). Psalm 22 describes in a most remarkable way details of the crucifixion, beginning with the very words of Jesus from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." Graphic details are given, even including the prophecy of the soldiers casting lots over Christ's seamless robe, and the piercing of Jesus' hands and feet.

The universal favorite of all the psalms is found in this section, Psalm 23. Here is the great Shepherd seeking the lost sheep and leading him into green pastures and beside still waters. Psalm 27 is a song of confidence in God's sovereign ability to strengthen the life and steady the heart in the face of conflict and distress. Psalms 28 through 31 describe various experiences of David and his recognition of his need for God's help in these circumstances. Psalm 32 is the noteworthy psalm of repentance and forgiveness. This psalm meant so much to Saint Augustine that he had it carved on wood and hung at the foot of his bed that he might see it every morning when he awoke. The apostle Paul quotes from it in Romans 4 as an example of what God will do with human sin when it is confessed before Him.

The closing psalms of Book I express the human heart's deep-seated longing in its separation from God and its desire to find Him in the midst of need. Psalm 40 is a beautiful example of this: "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay; and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God" (Ps. 40:1-3 NASB).

Psalm 41, which closes Book I, looks back to Psalm 1 and describes the blessed man--this time not one who is perfect in his own integrity, but one whom the Lord protects and sustains. This psalm ends the book with the doxology: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen" (v. 13).

Book II, Man's Longing for Deliverance

The second book of psalms covers Psalms 42 through 72, and corresponds in theme to the book of Exodus. As Exodus tells us the story of Israel in captivity in Egypt-- describing their sorrow, their bondage and the slavery of sin, yet learning much of the grace of God in His power to deliver them and bring them out of captivity--so the second book of psalms traces the same theme in a wider human experience. The slavery of sin and the longing for deliverance is beautifully expressed in the opening words of Psalm 42: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food-day and night, while they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?' " (vv. 1-3 NASB).

But immediately the theme focuses upon the greatness of God and His power. Book II finds its theme in Psalm 45 which describes God as King, ruling in sovereignty over man and all his experiences. The book also closes with a psalm of the King, Psalm 72, in which God is pictured in mighty conquering power, setting man free from the bondage which has enslaved him.

Psalm 46 becomes a very appropriate expression of confidence in God as a refuge: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Psalm 50 looks at God as the Judge of the earth, describing Him as: "The Mighty One, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth. Our God comes, he does not keep silence, before him is devouring fire, round about him a mighty tempest" (vv. 1-3).

The theme of redemption is continued in Psalm 51 which is one of the great biblical expressions of confession and cleansing from sin. This was written after David's twin sins of murder and adultery, and records first his godly sorrow then his forthright confession and desire to turn from his evil, calling for the forgiveness of God and God's restoration to service so that he might tell others of the restoring grace of a loving God.

Psalm 59 includes a good example of the imprecations of God's people when they are suffering persecution and

oppression: "My God in His loving-kindness will meet me; God will let me look triumphantly upon my foes. Do not I slay them, lest my people forget; scatter them by Thy I power, and bring them down, O Lord, our shield. On account of the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips, let them even be caught in their pride, and on account of curses and lies which they utter. Destroy them in wrath, destroy them, that they may be no more; that men may know that God rules in Jacob, to the ends of the earth" (w. 10-13 NASB).

Many of us today feel exactly like this when we are being persecuted or oppressed, but we must always remember that the New Testament reveals that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. Our oppressors are victims themselves and need our prayers and help that they may be delivered from that which causes them to act with cruelty and bitterness.

Psalms 60 through 64 describe similar experiences of . repression. Psalm 65 breaks out into a note of praise for God's delivering grace. This theme is continued through Psalms 66-68. But like Israel at the Red Sea, having been delivered from the bondage of Egypt and yet sinking again into despair at the waters before them, so Psalm 69 cries out: "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold, I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God" (vv. 1-3). This beautiful psalm moves on to describe sufferings which could only have been fulfilled in the sufferings of Jesus, and several of the verses are quoted in the New Testament in this way.

But again deliverance comes from the mighty hand of God and, as we have already seen, the book closes with the great psalm of the King and the doxology: "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone works wonders. And blessed be His glorious name forever; and may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen" (Ps. 72:18,19, NASB).

Book III, Man's Heart Before God

Psalms 73 through 89 constitute the third book of Psalms. This corresponds in theme to the book of Leviticus which is the book of Tabernacle worship, the discovery of what God is like when man comes before Him and what man is like in the presence of God. Thus the theme of Book III reveals the inner workings of man's heart and his discovery of what God is like.

Psalm 73 opens the book by facing one of the most common problems of faith in an unbelieving world--the problem of why the ungodly prosper and seem to enjoy so much of God's blessing while the righteous suffer. The psalmist describes how terribly unfair this seemed to him until he went into the sanctuary and there reamed what the end of the unrighteous will be. His conclusion is: "For, behold, those who are far from Thee will perish; Thou hast destroyed all those who are unfaithful to Thee. But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Thy works" (73:27,28 NASB). This psalm establishes the theme of Book III. It describes the sanctuary of God in which truth is seen in all its reality.

This theme is continued through Psalm 78. These psalms lay heavy emphasis upon the duty of believers to look back upon God's dealings in the past and remember what they learned through their previous times of deliverance in order to help them in the present. Psalm 77 is a particularly vivid description of one who loses his sense of faith altogether and is only restored by thoughtful consideration of the unchangeable record of God's dealings in the past.

Psalms 80 and 81 describe the sense of wrongdoing which believers experience that they may learn to value afresh the forgiveness and restoration of God. Psalm 80 links with Psalm 23 as a further ministry of the great Shepherd of Israel to His believing flock

A new theme is introduced in Psalms 81 through 84 depicting God's desire to be with His people, to see them delivered from their iniquities and to abundantly heap upon them blessings He desires to give. The beautiful eighty-fourth psalm which has been put to music and is frequently sung, is an expression of the New Testament emphasis upon the indwelling of God in the human heart. It is clear that Old Testament believers experienced this

indwelling as fully as New Testament believers do, but they came to the knowledge of it by a more roundabout and shadowy method, for they were being taught by symbols and ceremonies rather than by direct statement of truth.

Again Psalms 85 through 88 record the psalmist's cry for God's deliverance; and the closing psalm of Book III, 89, is a magnificent description of God's covenant promise upon which the believer may safely rest. This psalm is a poetic counterpart to the covenant God made with David, described in 2 Samuel 7. The psalm goes on to speak prophetically of the culmination of the Davidic line in Jesus and the fullness of deliverance which He will bring. Beyond David is seen David's greater Son, and He is described in these words: "My faithfulness and My loving-kindness will be with him, and in My name his horn will be exalted. I shall also set his hand on the sea, and his right hand on the rivers. He will cry to Me, 'Thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.' I also shall make him My first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth. My loving-kindness I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall be confirmed to him" (w. 24-28, NASB).

On this triumphant theme Book III closes with the briefest benediction: "Blessed be the Lord for ever! Amen and Amen."

Book IV, Man's Wilderness Experience

The book of Numbers is the record of the wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness for 40 years, so the fourth book of Psalms, covering Psalms 90 through 106, reflects the up and down wilderness experience of a believer. This alliterating theme is clearly seen in Psalms 90 and 91. Psalm 90 was written by Moses and was undoubtedly sung by Israel during the days of their wilderness wanderings. It is a recognition of the frailty of men and the justice and greatness of God. The psalmist describes life thus: "For all our days have declined in Thy fury; we have finished our years like a sigh. As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away" (v. 9, 10 NASB).

Yet the next psalm, 91, is the very opposite. It describes the delight of one who has turned to the Lord and dwells in the secret shelter of the Most High. When the believer walks closely with his God, even in the wilderness, his heart is kept strong and confident, but when he wanders away, trusting in his own resources, he feels estranged from God and suffers under a sense of guilt and condemnation. The alternating experience is seen again in Psalm 95 which opens with the familiar words: "O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms" (v. 1 NASB).

Yet in verse 8 the voice of God is heard: "Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness; when your fathers tested Me, they tried Me, though they had seen My work. For forty years I loathed that generation, and said they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know My ways" (NASB).

Psalms 96 through 101 are all psalms of rejoicing, but in Psalm 102 the psalmist bewails his aimless existence and says: "My days are like a lengthened shadow; and I wither away like grass" (v. 11, NASB). The closing verses of this psalm are quoted in Hebrews 1 as referring to Jesus: "Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thy hands; they will perish, but Thou remainest; and they all will become old as a garment, and as a mantle Thou wilt roll them up; as a garment they will also be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end" (Heb. 1:10-12 NASB).

Thus even in the wilderness experiences of life there is a continual recognition of the presence of One who will not forsake; One who never relaxes His vigilance even though those whom He guards are unaware of His presence. The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:4 says that the Israelites "were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ" (NASB).

Psalms 103 through 106 are historic psalms, reviewing Israel's past experiences of deliverance by the hand of the Lord in order that the faith of God's people might be awakened in the present and they will be encouraged to endure their present trials. Book IV, therefore, appropriately closes with the cry: "Save us, O Lord our God, and

gather us from among the nations, to give thanks to Thy holy name and glory in Thy praise" (106:47 NASB).

Book V, Man's Deliverance

The fifth and longest book of Psalms corresponds to the book of Deuteronomy in theme. It records the fullness of deliverance brought about by the resources of God instead of by reliance upon dedicated human resources. Psalm 107 introduces this theme with a remarkable sequence of deliverances, all achieved by men in various circumstances who cry to the Lord in their troubles and find that He is able to deliver them. The experiences cited correspond remarkably with various attitudes and depressions which believers experience today. There are those who seem to wander in desert places. There are those who sit as prisoners held in bonds of iron and affliction. There are those who are sick because of their sinful ways and who spend their days in jaded and restless boredom. There are those who face great danger and pressure and yet in it all they find God adequate to deliver when they abandon trust in their own resources.

Psalm 109 is regarded as the most severe of the imprecatory psalms, but certain indications suggest that the imprecations are properly viewed as quotations from the psalmist's enemies and represent the things they are saying about him. Viewed in that sense the psalm is another great expression of the power of God to sustain under bitter attack. Psalms 110 and 118 are clearly messianic psalms, looking beyond David's experience to a more complete fulfillment in Jesus and His universal reign.

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the book of Psalms and follows the Hebrew alphabet with 22 sections, each of which begins with a different alphabet letter. The theme of Psalm 119 is the Word of God and its remarkable power to examine the heart and deal with the thoughts and intents of man's inner life, correct and sustain the spirit, and in every way accomplish the work and will of God.

Psalms 120 through 134 are called Songs of Ascent, and were sung by worshipers as they marched up to Jerusalem from various parts of the land to offer their sacrifices in the Temple. They contain beautiful expressions of thanksgiving and praise to God as the deliverer and protector of His people.

Psalm 137 seems to be the one psalm which comes out of the exile of Israel in Babylon. It is probably the last of the psalms written and was added to the collection probably by Ezra the priest. Psalm 139 corresponds in theme to Psalm 8, and recognizes the omniscience and omnipresence of God in relationship to a single individual, and God's knowledge of the human makeup. A short section of the psalms, from 140 through 143, reflect various prayers for God's help; but beginning with Psalm 144 to Psalm 150 there is almost unbroken praise and thanksgiving, expressed in magnificent language. These psalms sound one triumphant note all through, and the closing psalm is made up of hallelujah: "Praise the Lord."

These triumphant psalms are the expression of someone so excited about God that all he can do is shout "Hallelujah!" That will always be the experience of one who learns to understand the pattern of God's working in his life.

The psalms are designed to teach us to do one primary thing--to worship. Though they reflect every human emotion, they do so in a distinct and important way: They are emotions seen in relationship to God. Every psalm is written as in the very presence of God. This book therefore teaches us how to be honest before God. If you have a problem in your life, tell God about it. Don't hide it. Don't cover it up. Especially, do not become pious and sanctimonious and try to act as though there is no trouble. If you feel angry with God, it is best to say so. If you are upset about something, tell Him your sense of disturbance but remind Him also that you know how foolish it is to be upset with Him. If you are resentful, bring that out. If you are happy and joyful, express that. This is what worship is--a heart pouring out honest reactions to a God who can both correct and restore. If we learn to be honest before God even about troubles and problems, wrong moods and resentful attitudes, we shall quickly find His grace answering our needs.

Chapter 15

The Searchings of Mind and Will: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes

In ordinary everyday conversation we frequently describe the functions of our personality as mind, emotions and will, but Scripture does not follow this order; it would put them emotions, will and mind. As we have already seen, the book of Psalms is the expression of our human emotions. In similar manner the book of Proverbs is the expression of the will, while Ecclesiastes is the record of the investigations of the mind. Proverbs, therefore, sets before us the choices of life. Those choices govern all that we do and say and are therefore the very heart of our conscious existence. Both the emotions and reason are to be considered in making up our minds, but the final decision of the will governs our conduct and ultimate destiny.

The profound significance of these choices is beautifully described in the introduction to the book of Proverbs:

"The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: to know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity; to give prudence to the naive, to the youth knowledge and discretion, a wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise, and their riddles" (Prov. 1:1-6, NASB).

Proverbs is the book designed expressly to help us confront the mysteries of life. It covers the whole of life, from childhood through youth and maturity, and gives us very practical guidance for very practical problems.

As the introduction suggests, most of the book comes from the pen of Solomon, the son of David and the wisest king Israel ever had. When young Solomon succeeded his father as king of Israel, he was granted a vision from God in which he was permitted to choose what his heart desired above everything else. Solomon asked that he be granted wisdom to fit him for the task of ruling. Because he asked for this instead of riches or fame, God gave him all three. The book consists, then, of the laws of heaven applied in a logical and reasonable way to life on earth. The secret of it is given in verse 7, chapter 1: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."

The fear of the Lord mentioned here is not a craven fear that God is going to whip or torment us, but rather a fear that we might hurt His loving heart and awaken His just correction toward us. The closest English translation is really "reverence" or "respect." In a world of deceit and illusion, the greatest gift we can be given is the gift of truth. We are told at the beginning of this book that God is the source of truth and the only trustworthy source; therefore the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge of the truth. It is not the end; it is but the beginning. And only the one who in his heart has a continuing respect for God's wisdom can properly evaluate and understand life.

The book appears to be difficult to outline, as, like the dictionary, it seems to change the subject with every verse. But there is a definite structure which can be detected. Following the brief introduction there is a series of ten remarkable discourses on wisdom which are the wise teachings of a father to his son. Ten times in the first nine chapters we find words to this effect: "Hear, my son..." These discourses begin with the child in the home and then follow the youth as he moves out into the busy streets of the city and encounters various new circumstances of life. He is taught how to choose and make friends, how to face the perils which are at work to destroy his life,

and finally to discover the forces which will make him strong.

These "facts of life" discourses are followed by two collections of proverbs--from chapter 10 through 24 and from chapter 25 through chapter 31. The collection in chapters 25 to 29 is said to be "the proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied" (25:1) some centuries after Solomon's death. The closing two chapters bring before us the words of two otherwise unknown individuals; Agur, son of Jakeh, in chapter 30 and Lemuel, king of Massa, whose words are found in chapter 31.

Concerning the Choosing of One's Friends

Chapters 1 and 2 are given largely to the problem of how to choose one's friends while yet young in years. Perhaps nothing is more important for a child to learn early in life, for the influence of peers has a powerful effect. Two types of friends are described, personified as two alluring women who cry to us from the streets of the city and the public places of life. One reflects the divine view of life which is true reality. The other is described as a "loose woman" whose smooth words reflect the popular outlook of the day; and though they sound fair and logical they lead to ruin and death. Confronted by these two contrary outlooks the young believer is exhorted. "My son, if you will receive my sayings, and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the Lord, and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (2:1-6, NASB).

Chapter 3 follows the young man as he grows up and makes his way into the city and is immediately confronted with pressures and temptations. The section speaks very delicately and frankly about the pressures of sex and about the destruction that wrong responses to these pressures can effect on a life. There is also strong admonition against getting involved in shady financial transactions.

No young person ever imagines that he or she will become a failure in life. No one has ever said to me, "My ambition is to be a bum on skid row." Yet the heartbreak of life is that with the best of intentions, and often with frightening rapidity, we can suddenly find ourselves in trouble up to our ears and all our dreams of glory faded and gone. A young man recently told me of how he had left his home and moved to the city and did what he thought was right and what he hoped would fulfill him. At the urging of new friends he became involved in drugs until he began to experiment with LSD and ended up mainlining on heroin, experiencing fantastic hallucinations. He eventually became a procurer for a prostitute on the streets of San Francisco and there, like the prodigal son, he finally awakened to what was happening to him and began to seek God again.

That is the kind of thing that the writer of Proverbs is seeking to forestall. He points out that life is simply too big for us to handle by ourselves. No matter how good advice may seem to be, if it is not consistent with what God has told us, it is not to be trusted. Thus he sums up the section by saying: "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. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to you' flesh and refreshment to your bones" (3:5-8).

Once again the two ways of life are symbolized by two women. One is an adventures, bold and impudent, offering immediate pleasure and delights but actually intent only on self-satisfaction. Whoever follows this philosophy is like an ox led to the slaughter or a stag or bird caught by a hunter. In chapter 7 the young believer is warned: "Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths. For many are the victims she has cast down, and numerous are all her slain. Her house is the way to Sheol, descending to the chambers of death" (v. 25-27, NASB). It is not merely sexual sins which are thus described, but the whole philosophy of the world which offers fame and fulfillment and suggests that we deserve the very best and finest things of life. One only has to listen to the commercials on television or view the advertisements in magazines to see the same philosophy abounding today.

But in chapters 8 and 9 the delights of true wisdom are described. Here are the secrets hidden (from the natural

man) from the very foundations of the earth which touch upon the deep things of life and reveal the true secrets of security and true identity. This all corresponds exactly with the advice of the apostle Paul in Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Concerning Most of Life's Situations

Beginning with chapter 10 through chapter 24 are the actual proverbs of Solomon; all very pithy, practical words of advice concerning most of the situations of life. The method of teaching is either by contrast or by climax. In the contrast the writer sets two things side by side and shows the good and evil results of various attitudes and actions. In the teaching by climax he makes a statement in the first half which is then enlarged upon and concluded in the second. A vivid example of contrast is found in 10:7: "The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot." Another is found in 10:10: "He who winks the eye causes trouble, but he who boldly reproves makes peace." There the deceitful look expressed by a wink is contrasted with the one who frankly and forthrightly speaks truth, even though what he says is not especially welcome. The result of that kind of frankness is peace.

An example of climax is found in 10:22: "The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it." Again in 11:31: "If the righteous is requited on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!"

Another form of teaching is that of vivid simile, such as 10:26: "Like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him." As vinegar sets the teeth on edge and smoke burns the eyes, so is the man who is entrusted with a message but who dawdles along the way. Another of this sort is found in 11:22: "Like a gold ring in a swine's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion." Imagine an ugly pig with swill dripping from its mouth, but with a gold ring affixed to its nostril! The gold ring signifies value, but it is in the wrong place. So is a beautiful woman who has not learned that true beauty is the inner beauty of spirit.

Still another of this type is found in 12:4: "A good wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones."

These observations clearly reflect a true evaluation of life rather than the shallow and artificial viewpoints found in the world's thinking. The chapters of Proverbs cover a wide range of subjects and do so in short, pithy epigrams; but there are also more extended treatments of subjects. For instance in chapter 12:16-22 there is a short discourse on the tongue and the dangers and blessings which can come from it: "A fool's vexation is known at once, but a prudent man conceals dishonor. He who speaks truth tells what is right, but a false witness, deceit. There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment. 'Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but counselors of peace have joy. No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal faithfully are His delight'" (NASB).

There is not only truth for young people in Proverbs, but also wisdom for parents. In 13:24 there is a verse which many children have wished were not included in the Scriptures: "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." This is the biblical basis for the saying: "This hurts me more than it does you!" In this connection also 22:6 is an often quoted verse: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." The first part of this verse should really be translated "Train up a child according to his way." This means a parent should find out what is in the child and bring him up according to his natural bent, so that what God has hidden in him may be developed and drawn out. A child trained in these ways will not depart from that training when he is older.

Further wisdom concerning discipline is found in 23:13,14: "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. If you beat him with the rod you will save his life from Sheol." The rod here is not an iron rod or even a thick stick, but a light twig which stings but does not bruise. This is of course counsel for parents with small children. When dealing with adolescents it is quite different.

Certain of the Proverbs present very profound insights into the nature of life and reality. It would be good to commit them to memory since they represent a necessary understanding of life. One such is found in 14:12: "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." How clearly this states that our own actions nearly always seem right in our own eyes, but we cannot see the end. Here again we must not rely upon our own judgment but trust in the wisdom of God.

Another verse of profound insight is 20:27: "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts." This is probably one of the most important verses in the Bible to help us properly understand our humanity. Our human spirits are designated the "lamp of the Lord" and this is true whether the individual is a believer or an unbeliever. But the "lamp" is not a light. The human spirit is the lampstand, made and designed to project a light, but the light itself is that of the Holy Spirit of God. When the lamp of the spirit holds the light of the Holy Spirit, then one is enabled to search the innermost part of one's life and to understand oneself for the first time. Where the lamp does not hold the light of God, the individual dwells in darkness and walks and lives in darkness.

Still another insight into human nature is found in 19:3: "When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord." How true to life this is! When someone's foolishness brings him into trouble, whom does he blame? The Lord, of course, or if he is married perhaps he takes it like a man and blames it on his wife, as Adam did in the Garden of Eden. But the ultimate blame is cast upon the Lord.

This should lead one to say in the words of 20:9: "Who can say, 'I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin?'" An honest answer to that question will soon put the blame for evil where it properly belongs and open the way for the cleansing of God.

Concerning What God Has Concealed

In chapter 25 begins the second collection of proverbs which were copied by the men of Hezekiah. Verse 2 is very suggestive in this connection: "It is the glory of God to conceal things but the glory of kings is to search things out." This suggests a possible reason why King Hezekiah set his men to copy the proverbs of Solomon which had not previously been recorded for he was a king who loved to search out what God had hidden. If you want to have a royal experience I suggest that you search the Word of God for the things God has concealed there. You will find it an exciting treasure hunt and highly rewarding.

Chapter 26 has some very helpful words about troublesome people in general. Verses 3-12 present a series on fools and how to handle them. Verses 13-16 tell us what to do about sluggards and what is wrong with laziness. Verses 17-23 concern meddlers and how to handle them. Then verse 24 to the chapter's end is all about the loveless--those who hate others. Here we learn what hatred will do to the man who indulges in it.

These proverbs from the men of Hezekiah reflect the concern of rulers and kings for the rights of their people. For instance in 28:27 we are told: "He who gives to the poor will not want but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse." Again in 29:7: "A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge." Still again in 29:14: "If a king judges the poor with equity his throne will be established for ever." These proverbs clearly recognize the problem caused by social injustice and lay the responsibility to correct this not only upon the king but on individual citizens in the realm as well. We must ever remember "no man is an island." We must not shut ourselves away from those around us who are less fortunate than we. These proverbs remind us that we have a responsibility toward them.

Chapter 30 contains the words of Agur. This chapter somewhat parallels the closing chapters of Job for Agur is greatly impressed by the wisdom of God in nature and His power and might as contrasted with the frailty of human beings. He finds numerous examples in nature which give warnings against disobedience toward parents to excite the imagination and awaken wonder to warn against allowing sudden good fortune to go to one's head and to encourage those who feel very small and insignificant yet do great and remarkable things.

When Agur says: "Three things...four" (see v. 15, 18, 21, 29) he is not being uncertain as to the number but is

using this climactic formula as a way of emphasizing the truth he presents.

Chapter 31 contains the words of Lemuel king of Massa. We know nothing more about him but in a brief section he is given certain exhortations about royal responsibilities and the chapter concludes with a most remarkable poem in acrostic form (each verse begins with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet) which seems also to come from the pen of Lemuel. It praises the model wife who is devoted to her husband's and children's welfare and interests and is diligent and tireless in providing for all her family's needs. She is gracious toward those outside the family and amply deserves the gratitude of her husband and children.

The secret of her accomplishment is given in verse 30: "A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." It is remarkable that in this description of the model wife the woman is involved in much work that would often be thought of as "man's" labor. She buys and plants fields she sells goods which she herself manufactures and she works beside her husband in all the enterprises of life. There is only one field which she does not enter, and that is the realm of government. It is her husband who sits in the gates among the elders of the land. The participation of women-in government was not unknown in Israel, as witness Deborah the judge, and Hannah the prophetess. But these served not as men but in their unique function as women, supporting and augmenting the male leaders.

The nature of Proverbs is such that it requires frequent reading to absorb its content. Dr. Billy Graham has made a habit of reading Proverbs through once a month. This is made easier by the fact that the book has 31 chapters corresponding with the number of days in most months. The book is so filled with practical, earthy wisdom that it would not be too much to read a chapter of Proverbs every day of a lifetime. Undoubtedly it would save from many heartaches and introduce many blessings.

Ecclesiastes

The book of Ecclesiastes is unique in the Bible, for there is no other book which limits itself to a completely human rather than a divine point of view. As a consequence, the book of Ecclesiastes contains error, and yet it is wholly inspired. This may confuse some because many feel that inspiration is the guarantee of truth; but this is not necessarily so. Inspiration merely guarantees accuracy of a particular point of view. If it is God's point of view the statement is completely true. If it is man's point of view, or even the devil's point of view, it may be true or it may not be true. Only careful comparison with the divine point of view will determine which it is.

This is what makes possible the charge that one can prove all kinds of things by quoting the Bible. This is certainly true; but what is often being ignored is that the Bible invariably points out the error and makes it clear that it is error. In the opening two verses of this book, it is carefully pointed out that what is recorded is not divine truth. In verse 2 and many times throughout the course of the book the phrase "under the sun" is repeated. Everything in the book is evaluated according to outward appearance--that is, man's point of view of reality. It is only that which can be observed under the sun.

It is this character that makes the book of Ecclesiastes the favorite book of atheists and agnostics. Many of the cults quote frequently from this book, because it gives purely naturalistic views of death and immortality. For instance in 3:18-20 it says: "I said to myself concerning the sons of men, 'God has surely tested them in order for them to see that they are but beasts.' For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust" (NASB) Clearly this is a contradiction of what is taught elsewhere in the Bible, that man is different from the beasts, and that beyond man's physical death lies a continuing existence with awareness and personal expression. Yet only divine revelation can teach us that truth. Man's observation "under the sun" makes it appear that man is no different from the beasts and his death no different from theirs.

Ecclesiastes, however, is not an atheistic book, for to be atheistic is to be unrealistic and the Bible is never

unrealistic. Atheists are those who have convinced themselves, by somewhat tortured argument, that there is no God, though every inward testimony of their conscience and the structure of the universe around give constant witness to the fact that there is a God. Usually it takes a good deal of education to be an atheist, and it is a remarkable fact that primitive people are never atheistic. Atheism arises from a desire to escape life's reality, and especially a desire to escape any sense of responsibility toward a God to whom one must answer. But Ecclesiastes is not atheistic, even though it is written from a humanistic point of view. Ecclesiastes views God as men in general view God: as waiting at the end of life to subject men to judgment and possible condemnation, but not offering anything vital to the enjoyment of life during the life span.

Though the name of Solomon is never mentioned in the book, the writer identifies himself in the very first verse as the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Even some evangelical scholars have felt that certain indications in the book require a writer who lived much later than Solomon's time. It may be possible that some of the words of Solomon were incorporated into a work written some time after Solomon's reign. However, King Solomon was in an unusual position to undertake the experiments and investigations reflected in this book, for during the 40 years of his reign there was utter peace in the kingdom of Judah and Israel. Since he did not have to concern himself with military pursuits, he had all the time he needed to follow through with investigations into the meaning of life. Furthermore, he had all the wealth he needed and was possessed with a keen, logical and discerning mind which had gained for him the reputation as the wisest man in the world.

The value of Ecclesiastes, therefore, is that it sets forth life from the standpoint of the natural man apart from divine revelation and views life from the best possible advantage.

In most of our modern versions, the writer calls himself "the Preacher." This, however, is not a good translation of the Hebrew word used. The idea is one who investigates or gathers facts together; perhaps the best translation would be "the Searcher." The book presents the conclusions of one whose brilliant mind has searched through all the phenomena of life and come up with one definite conclusion. That conclusion is stated in verse 2: "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. " We use the word vanity in a different sense today. To us vanity is conceit over personal appearance. If someone spends long hours primping before a mirror we regard him/her as suffering from personal vanity. But in Ecclesiastes vanity means emptiness, futility, meaninglessness. When the Searcher has completed his survey of life he says that everything is futile and without meaning--there is no sense to anything.

He supports this conclusion with a series of arguments gleaned from sifting through various philosophies of life. Perhaps the most interesting thing about this book is that all the philosophies by which men have attempted to live are summarized here. To quote from the book: "There is nothing new under the sun." Though we are almost 30 centuries removed from the time of the writing of this book, yet nothing new has been produced in the world of ideas than what is reflected here.

The Searcher first investigates what might be described as the scientific outlook, or the mechanistic view of the universe. His view of nature is that it is a meaningless cycle of processes which repeat themselves without progress or meaning. His conclusion is: "That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun" (1:9, NASB). Nevertheless, there are some remarkable recognitions of the scientific processes here which were not known in the world of science of Solomon's day. For instance, there is a description of the circuit of the winds, "The wind blows to the south, and goes round to the north, round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns" (1:6). Men of science were not aware of this until some centuries after this book was written. There is also a description of the evaporation cycle of circulating waters: "All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again" (1:7). Though the writer has this keen insight into nature, his outlook is that life goes on and we are lost in the meaninglessness of the universe where nothing is to be heard but the clanking of gears. This is a very common philosophy today. What is man in a universe like this? He is but a tiny speck with no meaning or significance whatever.

In chapter 2 the writer examines the philosophy of hedonism: the pursuit of pleasure as the chief end of life. What

will give life meaning? Millions today say: "Just enjoy yourself. Have a good time. Live life with gusto. Do as you like. Seek pleasure. That is the purpose of living. That's why we are here." So the Searcher says: "I said to myself, 'Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself.' But behold, this also was vanity" (2:1). Then he proceeds to itemize the pleasures he sought. He first tried pleasure in the form of laughter or mirth. He sought out opportunities to give himself to genial, laughing, happy company; but after a time he says even this yielded weariness of spirit.

Then he tried acquisition of possessions. Perhaps meaning would come from wealth: "Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor" (2:9,10, NASB). But this too produced emptiness of spirit and did not satisfy his longings.

Then he says: "I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly" that is, he set himself to investigate opposites in the realm of ideas. Though he saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness, nevertheless his ultimate conclusion was that it all comes out at the same place. "Then I said to myself, 'As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?' So I said to myself, 'This too is vanity.' For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!" (2:15,16, NASB).

Then he comes to this terrible conclusion: "So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind" (2:17, NASB).

Here is a man who has given himself to pleasure, to amassing possessions, to the pursuit of wisdom and the realm of ideas, and yet all he can say is: "I hated life." Despair is the end of it all.

Chapter 3 begins a second major discourse which ends at Ecclesiastes 5:20. It is an investigation of what is called existentialism today. Americans, I think, have difficulty understanding why existential thinking has so powerfully gripped the minds of people in our world. The philosophy became popular at the end of World War II when Europe was left in shambles and the great cities of Europe were in ruins. It was evident that all that men had previously pinned their hopes on--government and religion as they knew them--had been powerless to arrest the catastrophe and terrible chaos of World War II. At the end of it, men were left with utterly shattered hopes concerning what they had previously trusted in. They said to one another "What can we trust? We can't trust religion, for it did nothing to stem the awful tide of tyranny under Hitler. We can't trust government because it is the very tool of such power. So what can we trust?"

Someone then suggested that the only thing to be trusted is one's own reactions to life as we experience various circumstances. Though no two persons may have the same reactions, at least each person's reaction is real to him. So the philosophy of existentialism became wide-spread.

Now the Searcher says: "I too tried this. I discovered that I also reacted to events and had certain inescapable experiences in life." He says:

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones, a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

"What gain has the worker from his toil?

"I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end" (3:1-11).

Here is the explanation for all the restlessness of humanity. Man can never be content with simple existence. He must look deeper. Eternity is in his heart (see v. 11, NASB). So the events of life are inescapable and are experienced by all men, yet when they are over they all turn to dust; and despite the variety of experience man has not found contentment for there is a restless longing placed within him for something deeper. His conclusion, therefore, is: "There is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live" (3:12). This theme of "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" is repeated again and again throughout this book as the only workable relief to the endless discontent of life.

In chapter 4 the Searcher investigates what we would call the "competitive enterprise" of life--capitalism. When the Searcher tried the competitive system he saw that it resulted in injustices and oppression. Behind it were selfish motivations resulting in inequities. So he said it all came to the same end: "A poor, yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction" (4:13, NASB). In other words, what good does it do to get to the top of the heap when a young man at the bottom with nothing but a few smart ideas can surge ahead? What is the good of it all?

In chapter 5 he tries religion, to do good and to be good. Yet he points out that religious people can do very unethical things and they also oppress the poor. Furthermore, there is no power in deadly religious formalism to arrest wrongs or change inequities. So it too comes to the same end--emptiness and vanity.

Chapter 6 sets forth his experiments with materialism--the philosophy of the "good life." Once again he concludes: "If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things, and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, 'Better the miscarriage than he' " (6:3, NASB). Thus if one has everything and yet there is still a craving which these things cannot satisfy, one is no better off than if he had never been born. It all comes to the same place.

In chapter 7, Solomon approaches life from the standpoint of stoicism---a cultivated indifference to events. In this philosophy there is an attempt to be moderate in all things, so the Searcher says: "I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. Do not be excessively righteous, and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself? Do not be excessively wicked, and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?" (7:15-17, NASB).

Chapter 8 through the first eight verses of chapter 11 are a connected discourse examining what might be referred to as the "common sense view" of life. Anyone approaching life is exhorted to master the power structures of the world in which he lives. The Searcher says in effect, "Try to understand who is the boss and who is not and do your best to be on the right side at the right time. " It is easy to recognize that philosophy around us today. But here is the Searcher's conclusion: "I saw every work of God, [and I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, 'I know,' he cannot discover" (8.17, NASB).

Chapter 9 examines- the world's value judgments which have an aura of wisdom about them but are not accurate. The race is not always to the swift or riches to the intelligent. The battle does not always go to the strong, for the

Searcher says: "Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net, and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them" (9:12, NASB).

Chapter 10 presents a collection of proverbs which exhort one to maintain discretion in life, but it is all an enlightened expression of selfishness which is the underlying motivation.

In chapter 11 success is seen as simply a matter of diligence. One need only work and apply himself. But then the Searcher concludes: "Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. Everything that is to come will be futility" (11 :8, NASB). So he has proved his case. All the way" through it is the same: life lived from a human point of view comes out to meaninglessness and futility.

There comes a remarkable change of viewpoint at 11:9 and through the concluding chapter (chap. 12). All the way through the Searcher's investigation of life his continually repeated conclusion has been "Eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow you must die." It is stated in various ways in 2:24, 3:22, 5:18, 8:15, 9:7, and in 10:19 the Searcher says: "Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything." One has only to look around in modern life today to see that the world comes to the identical conclusion. It is the inevitable conclusion of any approach to life that erases God from the picture. Man is told to live like an animal, but this denies the glory of humanity. It reduces man to the level of the beast and the statement, "eat, drink and be merry" becomes the most hopeless statement one can make about life. What is life if it consists only of that? It is indeed utterly insignificant and without meaning. Life goes out like a candle flame in the end, and utter pessimism rules the life lived without God.

But the Searcher now speaks directly to youth and says: "Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things" (11:9, NASB).

Then a new, truer view is presented in 12:1: "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (12:1). Verses 2 through 7 are a marvelously beautiful description of old age and death: "...the silver cord is snapped...the golden bowl is broken...the pitcher is broken at the fountain...the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." Before this occurs, the Searcher says, youth are well-advised to put their lives in the hands of a loving Creator and to walk with Him through the varied experiences of life.

Thus a gleam of light comes at the end of this pessimistic book, for the Searcher concludes: "The end of the matter, all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man" (12:13). It is most unfortunate that the word "duty" has been inserted in this version, as well as others, for it is not in the Hebrew text. What the verse actually says is: "Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the wholeness of man." This is what makes man whole! The secret is to enthrone God in the days of your youth. If you want to find the secret of living so that the heart is satisfied and the spirit enriched and fulfilled according to God's intention, then "remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come." Enthroned God at the center of your life and you will discover all that God intended life to be. You will be able to rejoice all the days of your life.

The philosophy that begins and ends in the dust and says that dust is all there is to life is indeed "vanity," utterly folly. But the Searcher's ultimate conclusion is that wholeness comes from putting God at the center of life.

Chapter Sixteen

The Urges of Love: Song of Solomon

Love songs are always popular, and this one is called in the Hebrew "The Song of Songs," which is a Hebrew expression for the best or finest of all. It is the last of the five books of poetry in the Old Testament. Job was the first; then Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes form a trilogy; the last is the Song of Solomon. As we have seen, these books reveal the basic elements of humanity. The most profound of the five is Job which represents the voice of the spirit in man, the deepest part of our nature. The trilogy of Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes expresses the voice of the soul in its three parts--emotion, will and mind. Psalms is the book of the heart. Proverbs is directed to the will, making its choices in life. Ecclesiastes is the penetrating inquiry of the mind, searching for answers.

What then is the Song of Solomon? It is preeminently the cry of the body in its essential yearning. That essential yearning is for love. From its birth our bodies cry out for love. They are made in such a way as to enjoy being touched, patted, caressed and embraced. Climaxing this capacity of the body for sensuous delight is the thrill sexual intercourse. Therefore, the theme of this book is sexual intercourse between a man and his wife as the ultimate and purest expression of the divinely given function that we call sex. This book describes sex as God intended it to be, involving not merely physical exchange but touching the whole nature of two lives.

Freud was right about one thing--sex permeates our lives. He saw it as primarily physical and psychological, but it is even deeper. It is part of the expression of the human spirit as well. Someone has described the basic definition of sex as "the urge to merge." That urge finds its intended culmination with respect to the body in sexual play in marriage; with respect to the soul it finds delightful expression in friendship and social interchange; and with respect to God the "urge to merge" appears as worship, for the deepest desire of the heart is to be possessed by God and to possess Him. Surely this is what Jesus had in mind when He said in John 15 that the highest relationship He could have with His disciples would be "you in me and I in you" (see v. 4).

Because the Song of Solomon is about sexual love, it has been mistreated and often neglected. Victorian prudishness regarded sex as something dirty and not to be mentioned in polite company but kept locked in drawers and hidden behind curtains. That represents an extreme distortion of sexuality which has produced widespread hurtful responses in social life. The opposite view treats sex as something so commonplace it should be displayed without qualm and openly enjoyed whenever desired, with whatever partner is available. This too is extremely hurtful and produces social disaster.

But sex is not treated in either of these ways in the Bible; it is handled like every other subject, with frankness and forthrightness, yet with purity and restraint. Sexual love is never seen as pornographic or obscene in itself, but removed from the protection of marriage it becomes abused and ultimately emerges as something sordid and licentious. In the Song of Solomon we find the subject treated with delicate beauty and reflecting a wholesome delight in the joys of married sex.

The book comes to us as a musical play. The characters are Solomon, the young king of Israel, who at the beginning of his reign certainly must have manifested the finest qualities of the beauty and manliness of youth. In the complementary role is the Shulamite (the name is the feminine form of Solomon and we would translate it in modern language "Mrs. Solomon"). The play is set in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, and is acted out before a chorus of singers referred to as "the daughters of Jerusalem." They ask certain leading questions from time to time, and on three occasions the Shulamite addresses them directly.

The book consists entirely of dialogue between the man and the woman with occasional side remarks directed to the chorus. This makes it difficult to piece together the background story, but certain verses give clues from time

to time as to what the setting of the book is. At the end of the play in 8:11 we are told: "Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard to keepers; each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver." This suggests that the family of the young woman who is called the Shulamite evidently rented a tract of land from King Solomon located in the north country of Israel. The Shulamite is the Cinderella of the family. She has two brothers and two sisters but has been left to tend the flocks and to work in the vineyard herself. She spends her time out in the open sun all day, so that she becomes quite sunburned. In fact the book opens with her acknowledgment: "I am very dark, but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not gaze at me because I am swarthy, because the sun has scorched me. My mother's sons were angry with me, they made me keeper of the vineyards; but, my own vineyard I have not kept!" (1:5-7).

As she works in the fields she watches the beautiful ladies of the court riding in their carriages up and down the road and envies them, but is quite content to remain in her humble life. One day she looks up to see a handsome stranger, a young shepherd lad looking at her very intently. She is disturbed by his gaze, but he says to her: "You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you" (4:7). That goes a long way in establishing a friendship, and they soon draw closer to each other.

As love dawns between them, they describe the beauty of each other in exquisite yet chaste language. Suddenly the young shepherd leaves, but before he goes he promises that he will return. Through the night she dreams of him and wishes for him, remembering his appearance and describing him to her friends.

Then one day there is a great commotion in the valley. The latter part of chapter 3 describes how excited the countryside is as King Solomon himself, with a company of sixty men of war, is seen coming up into the valley, riding in his royal carriage. To the amazement of everyone the king sends his riders to her house with the message that he desires to see her. She comes out shy and afraid and is brought to the royal pavilion. To her amazement she discovers that King Solomon is none other than her shepherd lover. He carries her away to his palace and they enter into a blissful state of communion and consummation together.

The language of the book is highly poetical and figurative and there may be some difficulty in determining who is the speaker, but it is helpful to remember (in the version we are following) that the bridegroom always refers to his bride as "my love" and she, in return calls him "my beloved." Here is her description of him: "My beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk, fitly set. His cheeks are like beds of spices, yielding fragrance. His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh. His arms are rounded gold, set with jewels. His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires. His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. His speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (5:10-16).

He describes her in similar language: "Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved. Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an arsenal, whereon hang a thousand bucklers, all of them shields of warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies" (4:1-5).

It is important to see that the book describes married love as God intended it to be. The full abandonment to each other in mutual satisfaction which is described in this song is possible only because it is experienced within that total oneness which marriage alone permits. This is strongly emphasized throughout the book by the threefold warning which the bride addresses to the unmarried girls in the chorus, referred to as "the daughters of Jerusalem." Three times, in 2:7, 3:5 and 8:4, the bride turns from her rapture and delight with her lover to give the secret of this delight: "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the hinds of the field, that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please." What does she mean? She means do not prematurely arouse love. Wait until it develops naturally in its own time. Do not stimulate it artificially before one is ready. Let love dawn of itself

at its own unhurried pace. Surely much of the problem in today's broken marriages is a result of failing to heed this admonition. Fatuous mothers often encourage their small children to ape adults by teaching them to dance and even to date one another before they enter their teens. Without realizing what they are doing, they are awakening love before its time and it is no wonder that teenagers often enter into marriages for which they are almost totally unprepared. It is like trying to pry open a flower bud before it is ready to bloom. One simply destroys it.

The same is true of the practice of petting and necking. These too are ways of stimulating love before its time, and without doubt it has created serious problems of adjustment for young people entering into marriage. To young people, who truly desire the best out of love, this book teaches them to leave off such premarital stimulants and wait for the dawning of love in its own time. The Shulamite is able to say: "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" (2:4). For her the consummation of love in marriage was like a banquet for which she had long been eagerly waiting and which fulfilled her anticipations to the very fullest degree.

Because the language of the book is strongly figurative, it is sometimes difficult for the Western mind to see the meaning of the figure employed. For instance, when the bridegroom says to the bride, "Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from their washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved," he means that her beautiful teeth are full and complete and not one of them is missing. The actual act of sexual intercourse is referred to delicately by several euphemisms. One is that of coming into a garden. For instance: "Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its fragrance be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits. I come to my garden, my sister, my bride, I gather my myrrh with my spice, I eat my honeycomb with my honey, I drink my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends, and drink: drink deeply, O lovers!" (4:16--5:1).

Still another description of the act of love is climbing a palm tree; "How fair and pleasant you are, O loved one, delectable maiden! You are stately as a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its branches. Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, and your kisses like the best wine that goes down smoothly, gliding over lips and teeth" (5:6-9).

God has ordained that the delights reflected here be a part of the experience of man and woman in marriage. To ignore this is to cheapen these delights and to make sex as commonplace as cutting one's fingernails. That which, with due restraint, is intended to be a rushing torrent of sensuous delight becomes instead a spreading flood in which one wades continually without pleasure.

This is clearly indicated toward the end of the book where reference is made to a sister of the bride: "We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister, on the day when she is spoken for? If she is a wall, we will build upon her a battlement of silver; but if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar" (8:8,9). The little girl may be like a wall, that is, closed to easy friendships, resistant to the approaches of others. Her family then will respond by "building upon her a battlement of silver." A battlement is a sloping ramp by which a wall may be surmounted. In this case it was to be made of silver, which in Scripture is always a picture of redemption. The suggestion is that by teaching her the value of redemption by the love and grace of God she will be enabled to find a security that will safely accept the approaches of others and make her more open to communication.

However, "if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar." She may be like a door--open to all who come and far too easily influenced by others. In that case the role of the family is to protect her and enclose her with loving guidance that will enable her to grow and fully develop before she enters into marriage.

But of course we have not heard the deepest message of this song until we pass behind the description of purely physical love, perfect as it is, to read this as an expression of communion between man and God, between Christ and His church. From very earliest Christian centuries, this book has been taken in that way. Even the Jews took it allegorically in that sense. The preface to this song in one of the Jewish Targums reads like this: "This is the Song of Solomon, the prophet king of Israel, which he sang before Jehovah the Lord." This was not for them a purely human love song, but one to be sung before Jehovah. It was a song about one's own relationship with God.

Certainly the early church fathers took it in that way, and throughout the Christian centuries this little book has been one of the most read and cherished books of all the Bible.

During the dark days before the Protestant Reformation, when the Albigenses fled the Catholic church and John Huss led his small band of Christians in Bohemia, this was one of the books of the Bible frequently read and quoted and memorized. It was a great comfort to the persecuted saints. After the Reformation, in the bitter persecution of the Covenanters of Scotland out of which came the Presbyterian church under the leadership of John Knox and others, this again was one of the most frequently quoted books. It brought the Covenanters areas comfort and sustained the spirits of men and women who were hunted like animals throughout the mountains and glens of Europe.

Someone has well said, "If you love Jesus Christ, you will love this song, because here are words which fully express the rapture of the heart that has fallen in love with Christ." The message of the Song of Solomon is, metaphorically, that Christ is so wonderful, so magnificent, and the heart has so fallen in love with Him that it will never be possible to plumb the depths of Christ's love and concern and care. Every passage of this song can be reverently elevated to this higher level and seen as the expression of the heart enraptured with the Lord. Taken thus, it reveals a highly significant truth. As we read of the rapturous delight that the bride and the bridegroom expedience in each other, we are also reading a magnificent and beautiful description of what God intends the relationship to be between Himself and each individual. Thus the great commandment is: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matt. 22:37). Out of that love will flow every other love, including loving your neighbor as yourself.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he describes Christ as the true Bridegroom and His church as the bride, and says: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." And then he goes on to add: "This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:25,32). So the love of a husband and wife pictures the love of Christ and His church. This in turn is a representation of the deep love God intends to exchange with each individual in a personal relationship together.

Listen, then, to these beautiful words of the bridegroom to the bride: "For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away" (Song of Sol. 2:11-13)

There is described the springtime of life, but it does not lie in the past. It is in the future! One day this whole world will experience springtime. The Lord Jesus Christ returning at last to claim His waiting bride, will greet her with words very much like those. The springtime of earth will have come. The time of the singing has arrived. The time when the earth shall blossom and the curse will be lifted and flowers will appear on the land. But this is also a picture of what can take place in the heart of one who falls in love with Jesus Christ and thus enters into the springtime of his life. The cold winter of loneliness, misery and selfishness is past and the time of the singing has come!

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Seventeen God Redeems: Isaiah

The prophecy of Isaiah begins the last great division of the Old Testament--the 16 books of the prophets. We have

already seen in the Old Testament that the first five books set out for us the *pattern of God's working in our lives*. These were followed by the historical books, Joshua through Esther. The major purpose of these is to detail *the perils which confront those seeking to walk with God* in the midst of a degenerate world. There we learned the power of the opposing forces of the spiritual life in their sly subtlety and cruel destructiveness, manifesting themselves in historical events. Then came the poetical books--Job through Song of Solomon--which express the *protests and rejoicings of the heart* exposed to the perils of the world. These books concentrate on the character of man and help us to understand ourselves in our threefold makeup of spirit, soul and body.

But now we come to the prophets. The pattern of life is given in the Pentateuch, the perils are set forth in the historical books, and the protests of the spirit and soul are expressed in the poetical books. But in the prophets we discover *the mighty promises* of God. What is a promise? When two young people stand at a wedding altar while someone sings "O Promise Me," what are they doing? They are committing themselves to give of themselves to each other. A promise basically is a commitment to share yourself. In a promise you commit something of your time, your energy, your resources to another person. That is what a promise is; it is a sharing of self.

So the great promises of the Bible are God's commitments to share Himself with us. When we understand those promises we will understand something more of the nature and character of our God. That is why an understanding of the prophets is of such momentous importance in reading the Bible, for it is here we learn what God says He will do. It is impossible to exercise true faith if we do not have a promise upon which to rest our faith. People often prate on about faith and belief and yet never have any true basis or ground because they have no promise. If God has *said* He will do something, then we can exercise faith and expect Him to do it. If He has not said so, faith has no ground and is of no value.

Each of the prophetic books takes as its theme a great promise of God and highlights it in various ways, some like Isaiah in magnificent language, and others like Ezekiel in awesome imagery. Others employ powerful invectives or speak from weeping, grief-stricken hearts. But whatever the prophetic style, there gradually emerges through the prophetic books a vision of the character of God.

The prophets were all men who walked closely with God, and that is what enabled them to see into the heart of things, both present and future. As the priests of Israel sought to present men to God, so the prophets gave themselves to the ministry of presenting God to men. In our English versions of the Old Testament, the first of the prophets is Isaiah. In many ways that order is representative of the man and his ministry, for Isaiah was the greatest of the prophets and a superb master of language.

This prophecy is the fullest revelation of Christ to be found in the Old Testament--so much so that it is frequently called "the gospel according to Isaiah." The book is often called a miniature Bible, for its structure parallels that of the whole Bible itself. As the Bible has 66 books, so Isaiah has 66 chapters. The Bible divides into two major divisions, the Old Testament and the New Testament, and Isaiah likewise divides into two major divisions. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and there are 39 chapters in the first section of Isaiah. There are 27 books in the New Testament and there are 27 chapters in the last half of Isaiah. Just as the New Testament begins with the history of John the Baptist the forerunner of Christ, so the second half of Isaiah at chapter 40 begins with the announcement of the coming of the forerunner. The New Testament ends with the book of Revelation with its vision of the new heaven and the new earth, while the book of Isaiah closes with a remarkable chapter that speaks also of the new heavens and the new earth God is now creating.

We know very little about Isaiah himself. He lived during the reigns of four kings of Judah--Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. His ministry began some 740 years before Christ at a time when the 10 tribes that formed the northern kingdom of Israel were under attack from the Assyrian general, Sennacherib. At the close of Isaiah's ministry, Judah, the southern kingdom, was plunging into a terrible idolatry which would end with Nebuchadnezzar's attack and eventual captivity in Babylon. Thus the ministry of Isaiah spans the time between the captivity of the northern kingdom and the captivity of the southern kingdom--about 50 years duration. Ministering along with Isaiah during this same period of time were the prophets Amos, Hosea and Micah.

Tradition tells us that Isaiah was martyred in the reign of Manasseh, one of the most wicked of the kings recorded in the Old Testament. The story is that he was fleeing from the soldiers of the king and hid in a hollow tree, hoping to escape. But the soldiers, knowing that he was in the tree, sawed the tree down and thus the prophet was sawn in half. In the great chapter of the heroes of faith, Hebrews 11, verse 37, there is reference to some who perished by being sawn in two, and many scholars feel this refers to the prophet Isaiah.

The theme of the book is reflected in the meaning of the prophet's name: *Isaiah*--the salvation of God. It is the great and fundamental promise of all the Bible that God is able to redeem. It is declared most clearly in the opening chapter, verse 18: "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."

It is declared plainly again in chapter 55, verse 1: "Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Though these verses may be taken as a key to the book of Isaiah, nevertheless they must not lead us into thinking this book and other books of the Bible are like locked houses, barred and shuttered which cannot be entered unless a key is employed. Some people seem to feel that the only duly licensed real estate agents are Bible teachers and preachers who alone have keys to the Scriptures.

In 2 Peter, in the New Testament, Peter says: "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (1:20, 21, *NASB*).

In this first letter, Peter had declared that "the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry" (1:10, *NASB*). Thus we learn that prophets like Isaiah were very much aware that an invisible power within them was speaking through them and that what they spoke and wrote was greater than their own ideas. Peter goes on to say they actually searched through their own writings to discover hidden truths therein, and in this sense they ministered to themselves by their own prophecies.

The Search for Salvation

If any key is needed to the book of Isaiah, this is it: Isaiah was a man who was searching for something, and the apostle Peter tells us plainly that he was searching for the salvation which was to come from God.

But what set this man searching? Why does he pore over his writings, puzzling about what he had said? One need only open the book and read the first few chapters to find the answer. Isaiah lived in a time of national stress when man's fundamental nature of rebellion and evil was exposing itself for what it was. The nation had deliberately forsaken the ways of God and their stupid obstinacy is beyond the prophet's understanding. He opens the first chapter (v. 3) by saying: "The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand."

In various beautiful figures the prophet goes on to describe the condition of the nation in their self-deceptive reliance upon external religious activities while their hearts were given over to idolatry and sinful practices. There are gleams of promise in the midst of words of condemnation, such as the famous passage in chapter 2 (which also appears in the prophecy of Micah): "In the last days, the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways, and that we may walk in His paths'" (2:2, 3 *NASB*).

But before that beautiful promise is fulfilled, the terrible Day of the Lord must come, and Isaiah describes this both in its immediate fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon and in its ultimate fulfillment in the last days of the age.

Chapter 5 contains the prophet's description of the nation as the vineyard of the Lord. It is to this passage that

Jesus refers in the Upper Room Discourse in John 15 when He says: "I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser" (v. 1). Isaiah is puzzled how these two themes of condemnation and reconciliation can both be fulfilled, and he continues his search for an answer.

Then God gives Isaiah a vision and he sees the holy and pure God in an amazing revelation described in chapter 6: "In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory'" (6:1-3, NASB).

In the year that King Uzziah died, when the throne was vacant, the prophet saw the throne that was never vacant. He saw the God of both wrath and power, the God with power to shake the earth to its foundation--an immense God, infinite and mighty, speaking in thunder and moving in strength. The prophet's reaction is to see his own sinfulness and cry out: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (6:5).

But one of the angelic seraphim flies to him with a burning coal and touches his mouth and says: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven" (v. 7). Thus in his own personal experience the prophet learns the secret of God's salvation: it is God Himself who must accomplish it, and man can have no part of it. Isaiah is then commissioned to go to the nation and cry to them, but is warned that they will not listen to his plea. When he asks how long this should go on the answer is: "Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant, houses are without people, and the land is utterly desolate (6:11, NASB).

God's Plan of Salvation

Beginning with chapter 7 through chapter 12 the first step in God's compassionate plan of salvation is revealed. When Ahaz, king of Judah, is troubled about threats to his kingdom from Syria and Samaria on the north, the prophet is sent to him with a message that God Himself will deliver the nation, and He will give them a sign: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good. For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken" (7:14-16, NASB).

This, like many other prophecies in the Old Testament, finds a dual fulfillment. There is an immediate fulfillment described in chapter 8: "And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, 'Call his name Maher-shalal-hashbaz for before the child knows how to cry "My father" or "My mother," the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria'" (8:3,4).

Here it is clear that God uses even the names of Isaiah's two sons to convey his prophetic intent. An older son named *Sheari-jasheb* (a remnant shall return) had already signaled the promise that Judah would not be totally destroyed, but now *Maher-shalal-hashbaz* (swift the booty; speedy the prey) was to be a sign to King Ahaz that the two kings he feared would in themselves become booty and prey, fleeing swiftly before the Assyrian conquerors who would overcome them. And so it proved to be true.

The baby, who was the type of Immanuel, was not yet 12 years old before Damascus had been overthrown by a king of Assyria in 732, and Israel (Samaria) fell before the armies of Sargon in 722 B.C. The Assyrian hordes so ravished the land of Palestine that the cultivated fields reverted to pasturage and the diet of Maher-shalal-hashbaz would therefore consist of curdled milk and honey rather than the more normal food.

But a further fulfillment centuries later is, without question, in view in this passage, for in chapter 9 the prophet's vision spans the centuries and settles upon a great blessing to come in the land of Galilee: "In earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphthali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a

great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them" (9:1,2 NASB).

It is precisely this region which was to be the home of Jesus the Messiah, and it was from Galilee of the Gentiles that the light began to shine upon Israel in final fulfillment of the prophetic promise. Chapter 9 expands this promise by indicating that Messiah would be born as a human child. He would be of the line of David and yet would become the ultimate ruler of the earth. He would be God Himself and rule as Prince of Peace over the whole world, bestowing prosperity and peace upon the nations in the age to come. Thus the promise reaches even beyond the first coming of Jesus to the second coming as well, and to the millennial kingdom beyond.

The final vision of this section sees the judgment of God falling upon Assyria, who had been God's instrument to judge Samaria and Syria, but in turn became the deserved recipient of God's anger. Even here the judgment extends beyond the immediate fulfillment upon Syria in the eighth century B.C. and describes the ultimate judgment upon the man of sin who will appear in the last days, seen in foreview as the king of Assyria.

The section closes in chapter 11 with the prediction of a shoot coming from the stem of Jesse and a branch growing out of his roots, and of this promised One from the line of David the prophet sings: "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord" (11:2,3).

These very words are fulfilled by Jesus in His ministry at Nazareth and all Galilee.

The Prediction of Judgments

A large section of the book, from chapters 13 through 23, is given over to judgments predicted upon the nations surrounding Judah. First the rising power of Babylon, which would ultimately overwhelm Assyria and become the greatest kingdom on earth; yet Babylon would ultimately fall to the Medes and the Persians and itself become an uninhabited ruin.

In chapter 14 the prediction of judgment again rises beyond the immediate earthly kingdom of Babylon and sees the satanic power which controls the early nations, describing the sin of Satan which occurred even before the foundation of the earth. "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High'" (14:12-14, *NASB*).

Here the difference between the divine and human points of view is clearly evident. Man sees but the earthly kingdoms, the thrones which rise and fall through the passing centuries; but Scripture sees the satanic powers and angelic conflicts behind the earthly events. It is as Paul described in Ephesians 6: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (v. 12 *NASB*).

Judgment is then pronounced upon Israel's ancient enemy, the Philistines, and upon their treacherous relative, Moab, on the eastern shores of the Dead Sea (chaps. 14 through 16). The power of Damascus and Ephraim (northern Israel) shall be brought to ruin, but a gleam of hope appears in the promise that Samaria would have a remnant of believers who would remain true to the living God.

Ethiopia and Egypt are then surveyed and both nations are warned of impending judgment from the Assyrian empire. However, in both cases an ultimate time of repentance and restoration through the mercies of God is predicted, and the final view of Egypt is that of a kingdom brought into godliness and true worship. These promises remain to be fulfilled at some future day (chaps. 18 and 19).

Again Babylon is described in its defeat by Medo-Persia and especially judgment upon her idols. Then Edom's destruction is foretold by the symbolic name, *Dumah*. which means "silent," representing the silence that will fall

upon the land as its cities are left desolate and decayed. The Arabian tribes of Dedan and Kedar are put to flight by the conquering Assyrians, and ultimately even Jerusalem itself, in its careless gaiety, shall find its walls broken down and its citizens put under siege. The final burden of judgment falls upon Tyre, the commercial center of the world of the Mediterranean, because of her pride; and yet after 70 years she will be restored, as history confirms (chaps. 21-23).

Warning of Destruction

There follows in chapters 24-35 a series of sermons addressed to the leaders of the nation, giving warning upon warning of all-consuming destruction to come upon all classes of society if the present course of wickedness is not abandoned. Chapters 28 through 33 are especially severe, describing a series of "woes" which will come upon various classes within the nation for their continued unbelief and idolatry. The condition of the nation is described in vivid language: "These also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused with wine, they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in giving judgment. For all tables are full of vomit, no place is without filthiness" (28:7, 8).

An important passage here reveals God's method of teaching: "Whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, those taken from the breast? For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little" (v. 9, 10).

God does not give His message in orderly chapters as men do, with one chapter devoted to a single subject, but the Bible is written with a marvelous intermingling of truth, so that truth is always found balanced with other aspects of truth. This is why the expository study of Scripture is so very important and helps to keep truth in the balance which is necessary to preserve from heresy.

Judah's condition is so bad, however, God must employ a special form of communication to reach those who are turning a deaf ear to His usual warning. Therefore the prophet goes on to say: "Indeed, He will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign tongue; He who said to them, 'Here is rest, give rest to the weary.' and, 'Here is repose,' but they would not listen" (vv. 11,12, NASB).

This is a reference to the coming Assyrian and Babylonian invasions of the land, filling the cities with strangers who will speak alien languages, as a grim confirmation that God keeps His word and punishes disobedience. This passage is quoted by the apostle Paul in chapter 14 of I Corinthians with reference to the gift of tongues, and shows that the purpose of that gift is one of judgment upon the people who should have been the conveyors of the message of deliverance to the nation but who instead were living only for selfish interests. As the apostle states, such strange tongues are "a sign to unbelievers" (see v. 22). The tongues on the Day of Pentecost were such a sign, indicating that God was turning away from a favored position with Israel to the Gentile nations of the world.

But amidst the warnings to Judah there is a radiant burst of promise to those who remain faithful, for the prophet declares that God will lay in Zion a foundation stone, a precious cornerstone who will be utterly trustworthy and who will provide a basis for salvation to individuals and to the nation. Clearly this reference looks ahead to the coming of the Messiah, for Jesus Himself declared that He was that cornerstone.

Further vivid warnings are given, especially to those who seek to rely upon the help of Egypt or any other human aid other than the divine promise. The terrible Day of the Lord is described in frightening terms as crushing both human enemies and the satanic powers which are behind them. But the section closes with a beautiful passage in which God's promise of restoration is described: "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.' Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert" (35:3-6).

An Historical Interlude

An historic interlude appears in chapters 36-39 which is recorded in prose style rather than in the poetic form of the rest of the book. It centers upon King Hezekiah, the last of the four kings during whose reign Isaiah prophesied. Rabshakeh, the arrogant general of the king of Assyria, has led a great army against Israel and Judah. Having laid waste the cities of Judah, he now stands before the walls of Jerusalem and impudently demands the surrender of the city. When the report of this demand was brought to King Hezekiah he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the Temple of the Lord. From there he sent word to the prophet Isaiah and the prophet returned a reassuring word that the king was not to be afraid, for God would cause the general to return to Assyria, and this was shortly fulfilled.

However, the king of Assyria renewed the assault and sent an arrogant letter to King Hezekiah again demanding the surrender of the city under pain of its total destruction. Hezekiah took the letter into the Temple and spread it before the Lord and prayed humbly for God's intervention. Again the prophetic word was given that God Himself would defend the city and would keep it safe from the Assyrian assault. That very night the angel of the Lord came among the Assyrians and slew 185,000 in one night. History records it as a great plague which suddenly broke out in the camp. After this, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, departed to his own land where he was murdered by two of his sons and another son, Esar-haddon, reigned in his stead.

Following this great deliverance, King Hezekiah fell sick and Isaiah was sent to him with the word that he was to set his house in order for he would surely die. But once again Hezekiah turned in prayer to the Lord and besought Him for restoration. Once again the prophet Isaiah was sent to the king but this time with a message of mercy and a promise of recovery. Fifteen years additional life had been granted to the king because of his repentance, and as a sign of this divine mercy a remarkable event took place. The shadow on the sun dial in the king's garden turned backward 10 degrees. This meant that the day was lengthened by several hours and would have required a shift in the direction of the axis of the earth. The biblical account does not record any of the results of this in nature, but scientists have learned that there have been times in the past when the earth changed its axial direction, with remarkable suddenness. This event was surely intended to impress King Hezekiah that the God whom he served was the God of life and of death, of time and eternity, and in control of all events and circumstances of earth.

But the significance of it seemed to be lost upon the king, for chapter 39 begins the account of how the king of Babylon sent envoys with letters and presents to Hezekiah after he had recovered from his illness and the foolish king took the Babylonian ambassadors into the treasure house of the palace and showed him all his wealth. When Isaiah heard of this he said to the king: "Hear the word of the Lord of hosts: Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in Your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the Lord" (39:5, 6).

Thus the first half of the prophecy of Isaiah ends with a shadow of ultimate captivity darkening the future, despite the partial recovery of the nation under Hezekiah.

Salvation Revealed

The last 27 chapters of the book (40-66) present in magnificent language the answer to Isaiah's long search for the salvation of Jehovah. Woven beautifully throughout the book has been the ever-growing revelation of God's love and promise of salvation to be realized in the figure of One who is to come--the Messiah, the Servant of Jehovah. At first that figure is dim and shadowy, but gradually it grows brighter and still brighter until in chapter 53 the Suffering Servant who accomplishes the ultimate salvation of God's people fills the whole horizon. It was given to Isaiah to show that the God of transcendent glory, whom he described in chapter 6, is the same God who would one day be "despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces" (53:3).

Isaiah saw how God's love would break the back of man's rebelliousness and, despite his stubborn perversity, would open a way of recovery and restoration.

Then at last, beyond the darkness and gloom of the centuries yet to come, there would be a morning without clouds, the Day of Righteousness when all of God's glory would fill the earth and man would make war no more.

They would beat their swords into pruning hooks and their spears into plows, and nothing would hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain. This is the magnificent theme of chapters 40-66.

It begins in chapter 40 with a word of comfort declared to the suffering nation and the promise of the appearance of one who would be the forerunner, who would cry in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (40:3). These words were clearly fulfilled by John the Baptist as recorded in the Gospels. The prophet extols the majesty and the greatness of God and contrasts Him with the puny insignificance of the idols whom the people have given in themselves to worship. Then in chapter 42 the Servant of Jehovah is clearly introduced: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law" (42:1-4).

In chapters 43-48 the prophet describes in majestic and marvelous language the unchanging love of God for His people and the power and providential wisdom of God in working out His strange ways through the nations of earth to accomplish His ultimate purposes of redemption and grace.

But in chapters 49-57 the Servant of Jehovah occupies the whole horizon of prophetic vision. First He appears in His birth and early life: "Listen to me, O coastlands, and hearken, you peoples from afar. The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. And he said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'" (49: 1-3).

Then His character and ministry are described: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting." (50:4-6).

This prophetic anticipation of the close communion between Jesus and His heavenly Father is expanded in succeeding chapters and is met by the joyful response of those who are touched by the messianic hand of deliverance: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'" (52:7).

Then in full and glorious vision the description of the actual atoning sacrifice is presented: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." (53:5-7)

The passage goes on to imply clearly a resurrection after the suffering and death, for the prophet states: "When he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand; he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied" (53: 10, 11). Nowhere in all the Bible is there a more lucid view of the person and work of the Redeemer than here in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah! Here, as Peter says, the prophet saw clearly "the sufferings of Christ" (see 1 Pet. 1:11).

But in equally clear vision Isaiah sees beyond to "the glory which should follow." Chapter 54 opens with the triumphant exhortation to those who have entered into the redemption provided so freely but at such great cost. "Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in travail! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married, says the Lord" (54:1).

The glorious invitation to all who would partake is extended in chapter 55: "Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the

waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Hearken diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in fatness" (55:1, 2).

The final chapters from 56-66 are given over primarily to the description of the glory and peace that shall come to the earth when God's King reigns in righteousness. This is also of course fulfilled in the individual within the redeemed spirit. It thus has both a symbolic and a literal fulfillment. Listen to the magnificent language of this promise: "For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign which shall not be cut off" (55:12, 13).

The promise of restoration to the nation Israel, the fulfillment of all God declared to David, is clearly stated in chapter 60: "Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you; for in my wrath I smote you, but in my favor I have had mercy on you. Your gates shall be open continually; day and night they shall not be shut; that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste" (60:10-12).

Again in the same chapter the beautiful description continues: "The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land for ever." (60:19-21)

As in the book of Revelation, where John the Seer cries out in the closing words, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" so Isaiah ends his prophecy with the prayer of God's people crying: "O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at thy presence--as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil--to make thy name known to thy adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at thy presence!" (64:1, 2).

Finally, the ultimate end is achieved: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create" (65:17,18).

Before this beautiful day arrives a time of final judgment must be consummated, and the prophet describes it: "For behold, the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots like the stormwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire will the Lord execute judgment, and by his sword, upon all flesh; and those slain by the Lord shall be many." (66:15, 16)

But the final scene is one of eternal peace: "For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, says the Lord; so shall your descendants and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord." (66:22, 23)

Thus the great prophecy of Isaiah presents the theme of all the prophets, the majesty of God and the greatness of His redemptive love. But more clearly than anywhere else in the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah is given to see the divine-human Servant of the Lord who presents His body as an atonement for the sins of God's people and through His suffering obtains a salvation which, entered into by faith, brings deliverance and ultimate restoration of beauty and grace to the individual and to all the earth.

Chapter Eighteen

God Chastens: Jeremiah, Lamentations

What would be the reaction of the congregation if some present-day American stood in his pulpit and persistently declared God was on the side of the Communist bloc nations and against America? Suppose he claimed divine inspiration in declaring that God was raising up the Russians to be His servants for the destruction of the United States. And further, that God cared nothing for the Declaration of Independence or the American Constitution or the heritage of religious worship which our nation has experienced. In fact, emphasis on these things were an offense to God.

And what if this preacher even advocated that Christians renounce their loyalty to their country and join the Communist bloc of nations? What if that preacher were to be subjected to house arrest, flung into prison, even slapped in the face in public and his writings burned, and he himself half-drowned in a pit of slime--yet he would not take back one word of what he had said, but stubbornly repeated it again? If this should occur it would have a very similar impact to that recorded in the prophecy of Jeremiah! This was the experience of Jeremiah the prophet. Imagine yourself as that preacher. Imagine how you would feel when you preached your heart out but no one would listen, and persecution hounded you every way you turned. You are unable to seek comfort in marriage because the days are too difficult and God has specifically told you to- remain unmarried. You feel abandoned and alone. All your friends turn from you. But if you try to quit, and refuse to preach, you find that you cannot quit--that the word of God burns in your bones and you have to speak it whether or not you want to. Despite the message of judgment you are called upon to deliver, your love for your country is genuine and deep. As you see it surrounded by its enemies, ravished, conquered and despoiled, you are overcome by a deep sorrow that breaks out in the lamentations of grief.

If you can imagine such a situation, you will understand why Jeremiah, of all the prophets, was unquestionably the most heroic. Isaiah spoke in more exalted language and saw more in detail the coming of the Messiah and the fullness of His work. Others of the prophets speak more specifically concerning future events to be fulfilled. But Jeremiah is outstanding among the prophets as a man of heroic and dauntless courage. For almost 50 years he endured the kind of persecution we have described, and yet he never gave up!

Jeremiah lived in the last days of the southern kingdom of Judah. Isaiah had finished his ministry about 60 years before Jeremiah came on the scene. Jeremiah ministered at the close of the reign of the last good king of Judah, the boy king Josiah who led the last revival the nation experienced before it went into captivity. His ministry carried on through the reign of King Jehohaz and through King Jehoiakim--one of the most evil kings Judah had. Jehoiakim was followed by the three-month reign of Jehoiachin (also called Coniah), who was taken by Nebuchadnezzar and brought into captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah's ministry continued through the reign of Judah's last king, Zedekiah, who reigned until Nebuchadnezzar returned and utterly destroyed Jerusalem, taking the entire nation into Babylonian captivity.

Unfortunately, the messages of the prophet which appear in this book are not arranged in chronological sequence, especially in the latter part of the book. The Greek version (the Septuagint) shows considerable difference from the Hebrew text of Jeremiah. We learn from the book itself that Jeremiah dictated his prophecy to his secretary Baruch (see 36:4-8), and the disorderly arrangement of the messages may possibly be accounted for by the confusion attendant upon Jeremiah's flight to Egypt.

Two important emphases are woven into the fabric of this entire book. One concerns *the fate of the nation*. The other concerns *the feelings of the prophet*. Both are exceedingly instructive to us. The first chapter of the prophecy recounts the call and commissioning of Jeremiah to his prophetic office. He was only a young man, probably in his late teens or perhaps 20 years of age when he was set aside for his prophetic task. Like Moses at the burning

bush, Jeremiah protested his commission and pleaded that he was too young for the immense task set before him, but God gave him clear answer: "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (1:9, 10).

In the first of many parabolic figures which appear in the book as helpful visual aids, the young prophet is shown the vision of an almond tree which is the first of the fruitbearing trees to bloom in the early spring. Because the Hebrew word for *almond* is very close to the word for *watcher*, the prophet is told that the almond branch is a symbol of God's watchfulness over His word to perform all that He said in precise detail. Jeremiah is then shown a vision of a boiling pot, facing away from the north, and this is interpreted to be a picture of the tumultuous trouble that will come upon the land of Judah from a northern kingdom. These introduce the themes of the entire prophecy. The prophet himself is encouraged to speak regardless of what the reaction of his hearers may be, for God says: "And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you" (1:18,19).

Condemnation of Judah's Apostasy

As with many of the prophets, Jeremiah's early messages, recorded in the first 13 chapters, consist largely of condemnation of Judah's apostasy and earnest pleas for repentance while there is yet time before judgment falls. The major figure employed is that of a bride with her husband whom she forsakes and turns to many strange lovers. For this reason God calls Judah a prostitute, for the Baal worship which she was indulging in involved many foul sexual practices.

In a similar manner Israel, the northern kingdom, had fallen into idolatry and had been sent into exile which the prophets likened to being "divorced" by the Lord. But in spite of this vivid example, Judah persists in her idolatrous behavior, and though she attempts to win God's favor by an outward show of religion, it is but a sham repentance and neither God nor His prophet Jeremiah is deceived by it. The lion from Babylon is stalking its prey and soon Jerusalem will be laid under siege. It is not a cruel and heartless God who brings that about, but Jeremiah plainly declares to the people of Judah: "Your ways and your doings have brought this upon you. This is your doom, and it is bitter; it has reached your very heart" (4:18).

Nor does the prophet deliver these messages with unfeeling indifference. When his prophetic vision sees the coming judgment he cries out: "My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war" (4:19). In beautiful poetic discourse the prophet describes in detail the sight of the invading armies of the north and the terror they create as they enter the land, though it will be several decades before this fierce judgment ultimately falls, for God is a very patient God and waits until the last possible moment for genuine repentance from His people. Nevertheless, the prophet knows that judgment is inevitable, for he sees the events of his day from the divine viewpoint.

He is told by the Lord concerning his own ministry: "I have made you an assayer and tester among my people, that you may know and assay their ways" (6:27). But such clear vision only means deeper anguish on the prophet's part, for he sees how blind the people are to their own peril and how they turn a deaf ear to all words of warning.

An example of this is found in chapters 7-10. The prophet is sent by the Lord to stand in a gate of the Temple and proclaim a great message of warning to the people who trust in their ritual--and in the fact that the Temple was God's earthly home--to protect them from any judgment. To them the prophet said: "Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'--only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, says the Lord" (7:8-11).

In vivid and forthright words the prophet describes their foul idolatrous practices and warns them that exile is certain unless they change. The prophet identifies himself deeply with the people's fate, crying: "O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (9:1).

In the midst of this great Temple message there are many wise words of counsel, such as: "Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord'" (9:23,24). Also, with keen awareness of the nature of fallen humanity, the prophet says: "I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps." (10:23)

Chapters 11-13 highlight the fact that God's judgment of His faithless people rests upon the broken covenant which Israel as a nation had accepted at Sinai. There Moses had faithfully warned them of the consequences of turning from their relationship with God; and now in Judah those terrible results were hovering on the horizon of national life. They were so far advanced in their stubborn rebellion that the prophet is told not to pray for them any longer, for judgment was now inevitable.

Prayer has the effect of delaying judgment, but delay is not helpful unless it can lead to repentance. In this case long delay had not awakened a true repentance in the people and God knows that only a severe hand of punishment can awaken them to their true condition. It is evident that nations, like individuals, can sin "the sin which is unto death" (see 1 John 5:16). Physical judgment cannot be averted even by prayer, because it is the only way to at last reach the stubborn and willfully rebellious heart.

The prophet employs in this section two vividly enacted parables to impress upon the people the impact of his message. He is sent by the Lord to buy a pair of linen undershorts and to go to the Euphrates River and hide them in the dirt. Then after several weeks he was to recover the rotted cloth and display it before the people, with the words: "Thus says the Lord: Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own heart and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this waistcloth, which is good for nothing. For as the waistcloth clings to the loins of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the Lord, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen." (13:9-11)

Pull wine jars are also employed as a parable of the stupefaction and bewilderment which possessed the people who, like drunken men, fall helpless to the ground, unable to rise.

God Prohibits Jeremiah's Intercession

Further symbols are used as vivid visual aids by the prophet in the section from chapters 14 through 19. Once again the prophet is told not to intercede for the people, for the Lord will not hear their cry even though they offer burnt offerings and sacrifices, for He knows their hearts. In fact God says that even though Moses and Samuel stood before Him, yet their intercession would not effect deliverance for this stubborn people.

This seemingly heartless stance finds immediate effect upon the prophet, who cries out in protest: "Thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by thy name, O Lord, God of hosts" (15:16).

But despite his joy in the word of the Lord, he cannot reconcile this with the refusal of God to allow intercession for the people, and so he cries again: "Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Wilt thou be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail." (15:18)

But Jehovah is merciful with His overwrought prophet, and says: "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze, they will

fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the Lord. I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless" (15:19-21).

Because of the troubles which were coming upon the land and the resentment which Jeremiah's message would arouse, the Lord commanded him to remain unmarried though it would mean loneliness and pain to the prophet. He is given great insight into the troubled character of fallen humanity and is encouraged to deal resolutely and realistically with life as it truly is, for he is told:

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings" (17:9, 10).

But to encourage him, in chapter 18 the prophet is sent to visit the house of the potter and there to observe the potter at work. He watches him take a lump of clay and shape from it a vessel. As the prophet watches, the vessel in the potter's hand is marred and broken. Then the potter takes the broken vessel and forms it again into a lump of clay to reshape it into a vessel, true and perfect according to the potter's design.

So the prophet was taught by this object lesson what God does with a broken life, whether it be a nation or an individual. He can take it and make it over, not according to the foolish dreams of an individual, but according to His own heart, for the potter has power over the clay to shape it as he wishes. So Jeremiah spoke a prophecy of ruin, desolation, destruction and judgment; nevertheless beyond the judgment would lie the hope of the glory of God when God would reshape the vessel and make it according to His desire.

Jeremiah's faithful preaching in the public courts of the Temple was not taken lightly. Chapter 20 records how Pashhur the priest, chief officer of the Temple, seized the prophet and beat him and put him in stocks, but when he is released the next morning Jeremiah proceeds again to prophesy. The courage of this prophet is amazing, for when he is in the public eye he is fearless as a lion. He speaks to kings and captains and even hired murderers who hurl enraged threats against him, and he is utterly fearless! He looks them right in the eye and delivers the message of God, even when it predicts their own destruction. But when he is alone with God, he is filled with discouragement and depression and bitterness, and it all comes flooding out.

After his encounter with Pashhur, the prophet pours out his troubled heart to the Lord. He determines not to preach any more, but says: "If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (20:9). Like Job, he curses the day he was born, and wishes that the Lord would take pity upon him and end his days on earth. The problem is, of course, that he has forgotten what God has promised to be to him; but when he remembers his God, his despair passes and he realizes that his adversaries cannot ultimately prevail against him.

Prophecies of Exile and Restoration

In the section, chapters 21-39, there is a collection of messages from the prophet uttered during the reign of King Jehoiakim and the last king of Judah, Zedekiah. They are not found in chronological order, but contain many items of interest within them.

Before King Zedekiah, as recorded in chapter 21, the prophet foretells the victory of the Babylonian forces who are besieging the city, and announces that the king himself will be taken captive. He urges the people to go out of the city and surrender to the Chaldeans. This message was of course regarded as treason by the leaders of the nation, and plots were laid to trap Jeremiah and put him to death.

The short three-months reign of Jehoichin, the son of Jehoiakim, is covered. This king is also called Coniah, and in chapter 22 an important thing is said about him by the prophet: "Thus says the Lord: 'Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days; for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David, and ruling again in Judah'" (22:30). The fulfillment of this prediction meant an end to the dynasty of the descendants of King Solomon. His uncle, Zedekiah, was the last king of that line to sit upon the throne, and since

that time no king of the Solomonic line has occupied the throne in Israel.

In the New Testament, Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus, comes from the line of kings which trace back through Jehoiachin, but that line has lost its right to reign. It is for this reason that the genealogy of Mary is traced by Luke and indicates descent from David through another of his sons, not Solomon. It is through David's son Nathan that the royal line is continued, and Mary thus passes on to her son Jesus the right to the throne, thus evading the curse placed upon Jehoiachin.

In chapter 23, Jeremiah sees across the centuries and describes the outworking of God's ultimate plan for His people: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness'" (23:5,6).

Chapter 24 employs another vivid visual aid in the figure of two baskets of figs which have been brought to the Temple as first-fruits. One basket is filled with good figs and the other with rotten. The good figs represent the exiled from Judah which are taken to Babylon but who are godly in heart and continue to worship the Lord there. Promises are given of encouragement to them. The bad figs represent Zedekiah and the leaders of the nation who remain in the land and become a curse to the nation, bringing warfare, famine and pestilence upon the land.

In chapter 25 the great prophecy of the 70 years of captivity is found. Most scholars compute this as beginning in 605 B.C. when the first deportation to Babylon took place. This would bring the end of the 70 years in 538 B.C. with the decree of Cyrus the Persian for the return of the remnant to the land, recorded in the book of Ezra. It was this very prophecy of Jeremiah which young Daniel, one of the royal captives in the land of Babylon, studied and understood from it when the 70 years would end. As the time drew near, he based his prayer for restoration upon the promise of God to end their captivity within 70 years.

Chapter 26 is a flashback to the days of King Jehoiakim at the beginning of the ministry of Jeremiah, and records his contest with certain false prophets in the royal court.

Chapters 27 and 28 leap ahead to Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, and describe the prophet's conflict with the false prophets in Zedekiah's reign, especially Hananiah, who had prophesied to the king that Babylon would soon be defeated and the Temple vessels returned to Jerusalem. He claimed divine inspiration for his prophecy, and in answering, Jeremiah predicts the death of Hananiah as a sign of his false ministry. Within the year the prophet died, but the people seemed to be unimpressed by this dramatic sign. By this time a considerable number of exiles had already been carried to Babylon, and the prophet sought to encourage them by writing them a letter, recorded in chapter 29. Certain false prophets among the Jews in Babylon were predicting a speedy return to Jerusalem, but Jeremiah warned them that their captivity must last out the entire 70-year period predicted. During this time they were to marry and raise families, build houses and work for the welfare of the land in which they found themselves captive.

Chapters 30-33 are the heart of the prophecy, and in this section Jeremiah seems to see with clear vision the days of restoration after the judgment of Israel. In the peculiar way of prophets, he extends his view from immediate events to those far distant, even beyond the ultimate dispersion of the people of Israel to the final regathering of the nation into the land. In this section is found the promise of the new covenant, to be applied to the united nations of Israel and Judah. This new covenant is what is called in Hebrews 13:20 "the eternal covenant," and is what the Lord Jesus referred to when, at the Last Supper, He took the cup and said, "This is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28) The new covenant is the promise of an indwelling power and a full forgiveness which enables individuals to fulfill the law and walk in unbroken fellowship with a holy God. Hebrews 8 makes clear that it is the privilege of believers today to live in the power of the new covenant by faith, but one day that blessed promise will be worked out for the entire nation of Israel, as the apostle Paul confirms in Romans 11.

This new covenant is so sure in its fulfillment as applied to the nation that Jeremiah is told that while the sun gives

eight by day and me moon and the stars by night he may rest assured that God will fulfill His word and carry out His promises to His people.

This beautiful vision of restoration was given to Jeremiah during a time of great persona pressure. The Babylonian army was besieging Jerusalem and Jeremiah had been shut up in the court of me palace of King Zedekiah because he had predicted that the city would fall to me Babylonians, but while Jeremiah was a prisoner God sent his cousin to him to arrange for Jeremiah to purchase a field in his hometown of Anathoth and to record the deed very carefully in the legal records of the kingdom. This was a seemingly foolish action in eight of the present circumstances, for what good are legal deeds when an army is pounding at the doors ready to carry the people off into captivity? But Jeremiah rightly saw it as a promise of God mat the nation would be restored and that when the days of captivity were ended me deeds would again be valid.

Once again the prophet is given a vision of the coming Messiah and the days of fulfillment which await the nation: "Behold, the days are coming, says tbe Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in me land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness" (33:14-16).

Chapters 34-39 again are not in consecutive order but concern certain relationships which the prophet had with two of the kings of Judah, Zedekiah and Jehoiakim. Chapter 34 especially gives a keen perspective on what God expects of kings in relationship with their subjects and emphasizes the divine view of human slavery. King Zedekiah took back the slaves which he had freed in accordance with the word of the Lord in Deuteronomy and he is accused by the prophet of having thus "profaned the name of the Lord" (see v. 16). Thus mistreatment of other human beings is clearly regarded as an insult to the divine name and will. For this the king was to suffer greatly in Babylon.

Chapters 35 and 36 concern an earlier incident during the reign of Jehoiakim. One concerns the family of the Rechabites, who seem to be the forerunners of modern gypsies. Another important incident describes how King Jehoiakim deliberately destroyed the scroll of prophetic revelation which came to him from Jeremiah by the hand of Baruch, Jeremiah's servant. Insolently the king took his pen knife and cut the scroll in pieces, throwing them into the fire, thus indicating his contempt for the word of God. We are told: "Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire, and many similar words were added to them" (36:32). Here we see something of the method of the prophet in recording the revelations which God gave.

Turning again to the reign of Zedekiah and the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, we learn in chapters 37-39 of the personal persecution which fell upon Jeremiah the prophet during the closing days of Judah's national existence. During the siege, Jeremiah left Jerusalem to go to his native Benjamin, but was arrested as a deserter, was beaten and imprisoned in the house of the secretary to the king. When Zedekiah secretly questioned him about a word from the Lord, Jeremiah stoutly refused to change his message but insisted that the city would fall into the hands of the king of Babylon. Though the king meant only to confine him to the court of the guards, the prophet's enemies within the royal court conspired against him and he was taken and cast into a dark cistern partly filled with muck and water. But an Ethiopian eunuch in the king's court took pity on the prophet and arranged for his release from the terrible dungeon. Again with remarkable boldness the prophet said to King Zedekiah: "Thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel, if you will surrender to the princes of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live. But if you do not surrender to the princes of the king of Babylon, then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand" (38:17,18).

The king attempted to evade these words and escape from the city by night, but in accordance with the prophetic word he was captured by the armies of Babylon and taken before Nebuchadnezzar; there his eyes were put out and he was bound in fetters and carried to Babylon. The walls of the city of Jerusalem were breached and, as Jeremiah had long been warning, the Babylonians came into the Temple and the city and carried away all the treasures of

Judah to Babylon, leaving only a remnant of the people in the land.

Prophecies to the Remnant

After the fall of the city, Jeremiah continued to minister to the remnant of Judah under the governorship of Gedaliah who had been left in charge of the country by Nebuchadnezzar. When Gedaliah was murdered by certain of his enemies in Jerusalem, the remnant of the nation thought to flee to Egypt to escape the terrible conditions then prevailing in Judah. But Jeremiah waited upon the Lord for 10 days and, at the conclusion of this, summoned the leaders of the remnant and told them they were to remain in the land and God would sustain and keep them if they would do so. They were further warned: "If you set your faces to enter Egypt and go to live there, then the sword which you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt; and the famine of which you are afraid shall follow hard after you to Egypt; and there you shall die" (42:15, 16).

But the remnant refused the divine warning and fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah captive with them. There Jeremiah continued his prophetic ministry, predicting the conquest of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, and warning the Jewish fugitives that they must learn from the lessons of history not to persist in idolatry, for God would afflict them in Egypt as He afflicted their fathers in Jerusalem. This too was rejected, and soon Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled; for in 568 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt and carried out the divine word.

The short chapter 45 is a personal word of both warning and encouragement to Baruch the servant of Jeremiah not to seek for himself great things in the midst of God's judgments on the world at that moment in history. It was a wise warning to take note of the movements of God and adjust his personal life accordingly.

Judgment of Surrounding Nations

Chapters 46-51 record Jeremiah's prophetic messages to the nations surrounding Jerusalem. His call was to be a prophet to the nations, and this closing section of his prophecy fulfills that calling. Words of warning and coming judgment are given, first to Egypt (46:2-28) then against Philistia (47:1-7) and Moab (48:1-47) and Ammon, the sister nation of Moab (49: 1-6), Edom (49:7-22), Damascus (49:23-27), Kedar, one of the Arabian tribes (49:28,29), and Hazor, a city in the north of Israel which was a confederate of the Arabian tribes (49:30-33).

Then the prophetic vision enlarges and includes Elam (present-day Iraq) where the Tigris River flows. Finally the vision of the nations ends with the description of the fall of Babylon and God's judgment upon them for their cruelty and evil.

Though these prophetic judgments have long since been fulfilled in history, they constitute a present-day word of help to believers when viewed from their typological significance. Each of these ancient nations is consistently used throughout the Old Testament as picturing aspects of what the New Testament calls "the flesh." Here in these nations is pictured characteristics of the fallen nature which we all inherited from Adam. Pride, lust, envy, jealousy, ambition, anger, bitterness, violence, debauchery--all these are faithfully pictured in these enemy nations of Israel, and God's judgments upon them as well.

Review of Jerusalem's Fall

Chapter 52, the closing chapter of the book, is a historical review of the fall of Jerusalem. Its lesson is clear. Although God is a God of marvelous patience and waits until the last possible moment for human repentance, pleading in a hundred different ways for the return of His wandering people, yet inevitably if sin persists there will come a "fifth month, on the tenth day of the month" (see v. 12) when God's word will be carried out to the very letter and no human maneuvering can possibly evade it. When Nebuchadnezzar entered the city of Jerusalem, as predicted, "He burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down all the walls round about Jerusalem" (52:13, 14).

The book closes with a brief word concerning God's grace to King Jehoiachin who had been imprisoned in

Babylon for 37 years. At the end of that time he was taken from prison and allowed to dine regularly at the king's table. Thus the great prophecy of Jeremiah ends. The prophet himself has died a nameless death in Egypt, in exile, but his words ring through the centuries since as a faithful recorder of the divine foreview of history and the certainty of God's purposes in human affairs.

LAMENTATIONS

This little book is an eloquent expression of the sorrow of Jeremiah as he saw his own prophecies fulfilled in the desolation and destruction of the city of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar. The Septuagint states that he sat weeping over the city and lamenting over Jerusalem in these moving words. The five poems which make up this book and correspond with its five chapters express not only the horror and desolations which came upon Jerusalem, but also the anguish of spirit which the prophet himself felt when these desolations occurred. There is no exultation over the fulfillment of his predictions, but a poignant expression of heart misery over the sins of the people of Judah and their consequent punishment. In this sense again Jeremiah becomes a type of Christ, the "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." (Isa. 53:3)

The first four chapters are in the form of acrostic poems, as each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The third chapter contains 66 verses, devoting three verses to each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 5, though a 22-verse poem, does not follow that acrostic form.

In the first poem there are two clearly defined movements. Using the figure of a widow sitting desolate in the midst of her degradation, the prophet describes Jerusalem as weeping bitterly in the midst of her lovers, finding no one to comfort her. The prophet acknowledges that the desolation has been brought about by the grievous sins of the city. He clearly acknowledges that "the Lord has made her suffer for the multitude of her transgressions; her children have gone away, captives before the foe" (1:5).

The latter part of the poem is an appeal to the passersby to understand something of the sense of desolation and sorrow which grips the city. Even though it is acknowledged that the siege is well-deserved, appeal is made to the Lord for mercy in a time of great distress.

In the second poem an explanation is given of the sources of the nation's evil. Judgment from the Lord has fallen upon the princes of Israel because of their perfidy. Both king and priest have contributed to the downfall of the nation. Likewise the place of worship has been destroyed and all of Israel's solemn assemblies are degraded. The prophets are judged because of their false visions and prophecies. All comfort is removed from the stricken city because it ignored the faithful warnings of the Lord. Earnest appeal is made, however, to cry to the Lord for deliverance and for His restoring mercy.

Chapter 3 centers upon the feelings of the prophet himself and his identification with the sins and sorrows of the nation. He has fully shared the grief of the people, and has felt in himself the horror of judgment, yet he clearly recognizes that the steadfast love of the Lord has never ceased, and even in the midst of His judgments His mercies are fresh and new.

Jeremiah reminds himself and he reminds the people that the Lord will not cast off forever, nor does He willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men, but will extend mercy and restoring grace when they call and return to Him. The poem ends with the realization that the enemy who brought such desolation upon the city will himself be judged for his evil, and the tender compassion of the Lord will be visible even in the midst of His judgments.

Chapter 4 is a dirge of desolation, describing again the disasters which befell Jerusalem because of its sin, which the prophet describes as greater than that of Sodom. The blame for all this is largely laid at the feet of the prophets and priests within the city who utterly failed to discharge their ministry. It ends with a satirical address to the

nation of Edom to beware for it too shall come under Jehovah's judging hand.

The final poem is an appeal from a sorrowing heart to a merciful Lord to restore the nation. The prophet recognizes that the people cannot turn to Jehovah apart from

His help, and he cries in helplessness: "Restore us to thyself, O Lord, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old!" (5:21).

In its application to the individual, the book of Lamentations may be taken as a parallel expression of Psalm 51, which is the cry of a heart that has become aware of its deserved punishment, yet casts itself upon the mercy of God as its only hope in the hour of affliction. It is a recognition that though grief has been brought by the righteous hand of God, it is the loving heart of God which can be appealed to for restoration.

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Nineteen God Rules: Ezekiel, Daniel

The two prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel are found back to back in our English Bibles, and the men who wrote these prophecies were contemporaries during the days of the exile of Judah and Israel. Ezekiel, the older of the two, was carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar after his first invasion of the land of Judah, when King Jehoiachin was taken captive. Ezekiel was a young man of 25 at the time, on his way to becoming a priest when he reached the required age of thirty. His apprenticeship was rudely interrupted by the siege of Jerusalem and his consequent capture and exile.

Daniel likewise was carried to Babylon when but a young man. He was of the royal line of Israel and recognized as a promising young prince of the royal family. He too was taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, but in another group from that of Ezekiel. Doubtless the two young men knew each other, although no record is given in Scripture of their acquaintanceship. In one reference Ezekiel does refer to Daniel, along with Noah and Job, but otherwise the record is silent about what must have been a continuing friendship between them.

There is no question but what Ezekiel is the most colorful and unpredictable of the prophets. One writer calls him "the wildest man in the Bible." To this unusual young man is granted weird and wonderful visions of the majesty and mystery of God; nothing of a similar nature is found anywhere else in the Bible. He is shown the glory of the Lord in such cosmic proportions that language fails to describe it accurately, and he resorts to strange and even bizarre symbolism to depict what he sees. Further he is given strange assignments by the Lord to act out, in bizarre fashion, the messages he is asked to convey to the people.

Though his prophecy is written in Babylon, by means of visions and trances he returns frequently to Jerusalem and describes much of what is happening in the hidden areas of the Temple in that city. The message, therefore, is addressed not only to the exiles in Babylon, but includes also much direct exhortation to the Jews who remained in the land of Judah. Without a doubt he is one of the most gifted and effective communicators of unpleasant truth to be found among the prophets.

Lamentations, Warnings and Woe

The prophecy opens dramatically with a shattering vision of the glory of God, seen amidst the desolate

surroundings of the refugee camp of Jews, beside the Grand Canal which is called the River Chebar. The vision came from the north and took shape as a great fiery burning cloud from the midst of which emerged, first, four strange living creatures, each with four faces and four wings. The four faces were those of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. This detail seems to parallel the vision of John in the book of Revelation, chapter 4, where he saw four living creatures before the throne of God; the first like a lion, the second like an ox, the third with the face of a man and the fourth like an eagle. It is apparent that these creatures, whatever else they may be, are always connected with the majesty of God and represent qualities in the character of God. The face of a man pictures intelligence and understanding; that of an ox symbolizes servitude and sacrifice; the lion is the king of beasts and stands for sovereignty and supremacy; the eagle is a heavenly creature, and represents transcendent power and omniscient vision.

It has been pointed out by others that the four Gospels present exactly these same qualities in Jesus Christ. He appears first in the Gospel of Matthew as King, like a lion in the kingdom of beasts, sovereign over all. In the Gospel of Mark He is the Servant, the humble and sacrificing ox. In the Gospel of Luke He is the Man, intelligent, insightful, understanding all of life. In the Gospel of John He is clearly represented as Deity, containing in Himself the life of the heavens, and giving it in sovereign grace to all whom He calls.

Further, Ezekiel saw in his amazing vision a strange combination of great cosmic wheels which seemed able to go in all directions at once. This is generally taken to symbolize the processes of the government of God. In the center of the square formed by the living creatures, there was something that burned like coals and flashed like lightning. Perhaps it is not surprising that UFO enthusiasts have seen some justification for describing this as a visit of spacecraft to earth, containing four spacemen whose helmets appeared to Ezekiel as the four faces he describes

But Ezekiel saw something far greater than the mere visit of non-terrestrials. Seated on the throne which was on the burning platform was one who was the "likeness of the glory of the Lord," wrapped in a rainbow of dazzling and exquisite colors (see 1:26-28). The details given of the living creatures and the great wheels are symbolic expressions of aspects of the Great Being whom Ezekiel saw on the burning platform. The creatures "had the form of men" (1:5) which suggests the divine desire to work through humanity as the chosen vessel of God's self-revelation. Their straight feet speak of stability in the Lord's work. The burnished color is a reference to purity. The hands under their wings graphically describe the practicality which must go with heavenly endeavors. Their wings suggest mobility, and the covering of their bodies, modesty. The fact that "each went straight forward" (1:12) indicates great sense of purpose and integrity. Yet they went "wherever the spirit would go" (v. 12) which describes availability. And their appearance as lightning speaks of tremendous activity. In all this Ezekiel was being shown that God moves in the human world through His created beings, but in such a way that His service is both demanding, exhilarating and terrifying, and like nothing else man can ever engage in.

The fact that the great wheels, full of faces, could move in four directions simultaneously is a vivid description of omnipresence. Their great size and awesome power is descriptive of omnipotence, and their rims full of eyes pictures divine omniscience. Before this marvelous vision, Ezekiel fell on his face, fully aware that here was something far beyond his ability to comprehend and, least of all, to employ to his own advantage. Thus his prophetic ministry began, as Isaiah's, with a humbling and yet energizing vision of the mystery and majesty of God engaged in His awesome ministry in the world.

Though Ezekiel seems to be shattered by the vision of the glory of the Lord, he is not left to lie on his face in the dust of the ground. He heard a voice speaking to him, addressing him as "Son of man" (2:1), and commanding him to stand upon his feet, and when he did so he felt the Spirit entering into him and the commission was given to him to minister to the people of Israel, regardless of whether or not they would receive his word.

Suddenly as Ezekiel stands there, a hand appears out of nowhere, holding a scroll with writing on both the front and back. The words written were described as "lamentations and mourning and woe" (2:10). To the young prophet, who must have been unnerved by all he had seen thus far, the command is given: "Son of man, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel" (3:1). In obedience, Ezekiel opened his mouth and ate the scroll and found it was in his mouth as sweet as honey. The Lord was impressing upon Ezekiel

the fact that assimilation of the divine Word may appear unpalatable and even repulsive at first, but when actually obeyed, even the "lamentations, warnings and woes" become sweet to the taste. The prophet must allow the awesome truth of God to sink into his being and permeate his whole humanity so that his will would be nerved by something more than human energy; but the sweetness of God's truth would carry him through the ordeal ahead. He was then clearly told that the people to whom he would go would have hard faces, strong foreheads, rebellious looks and bad attitudes; but he would be made equally strong that he might stand against them.

Then, amidst the whirring of the wheels, the great vision departed and Ezekiel found himself still among the exiles along the River Chebar, where he sat overwhelmed in silence for seven days. Thus the amazing ministry of Ezekiel began, amidst a further warning from Jehovah that he was to be a watchman over the house of Israel and must be faithful to his task at his own peril.

In chapters 4-7 the unique ministry of warning continues in a series of symbolic acts by the prophet. Without speaking audible words, in a series of four charades the prophet describes what is about to happen to Jerusalem. First he draws on a brick a picture of the siege of the city. Then at the command of the Lord he lies upon his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40 days. Each of the 390 days stands for a year and depicts the length of Judah's trouble, and the 40 days imply 40 years of punishment which would be visited upon her. The third sign was that of the prophet's own food which was to be nothing but bread and water indicating the famine and desolation which would accompany the destruction of Jerusalem. Finally he took a sword and sharpened it as a razor, cut off his hair and beard and divided it into three parts: the first to be burned, the second to be hacked to pieces with a sword and the third to be scattered to the wind, indicating how a third of the people of Jerusalem should die by siege another third killed in battle, and the remaining third taken in exile to the four winds of the heavens.

These actions were followed by strong messages of denunciation and exhortation to the people. It was all to the end that they would know that God is God and able to fulfill His divine Word.

Chapters 8-12 are devoted to an extended vision which began as the elders of Israel sat in the prophet's house in Babylon and waited in silence for his prophetic utterance. Suddenly the prophet seems to be caught up by the hair of his head and finds himself transported in vision to Jerusalem. Standing in the court of the Temple, he is permitted to see the hidden idolatries going on in secret places within the Temple conclave, and at the very gate of the altar he is shown the "image of jealousy" (probably a foul sexual symbol which the people of Israel were worshipping) which arouses God to a terrible jealousy.

Next he sees 70 elders worshipping creeping things and loathsome beasts, and the women of the Temple court weeping for the Babylonian deity, Tammuz, the god of vegetation and fertility. Finally, in the inner court of the Temple the prophet saw 25 men, with their backs turned toward the Temple, worshipping the sun.

In response to this corruption, the prophet is charged to call those who had charge of the city to draw near. In response six men immediately appeared, armed with weapons, and a seventh, clothed in linen with a writing case at his side. They were charged to pass through the city and slay the inhabitants, but the man with the inkhorn was to put a mark on the foreheads of those who mourned the abominations which were committed. During this holocaust of destruction the Shekinah glory of God was seen to move from the holy place to the threshold of the Temple, and the cherubim of God's glory again appeared to the prophet as he had seen them by the River Chebar. The man with the inkhorn was commanded to pass between the whirling wheels and gather coals of fire and scatter them over the city. The Shekinah glory then moved from the court of the Temple to a place beyond the eastern gate. By this the prophet is informed that the ultimate catastrophe is to have God withdraw from His people.

Finally the prophet is shown a group of 25 men, led by the princes of Israel, who are plotting revolt against Babylon and declaring that they must free Jerusalem for it is a boiling pot doomed to destruction. Filled with the Spirit, the prophet declares to them that flight will not avail them anything for they will be destroyed at the borders of Israel.

While he was prophesying, one of the princes suddenly died and Ezekiel fell on his face and cried: "Ah Lord God, wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" (11:13). In answer a gleam of hope is given him, for God promises the day will come when He will Himself take out the stony heart of flesh from His rebellious people and give them instead a new heart and a new spirit within them. Then the glory of the Lord lifts from the city and rests upon the Mount of Olives to the east, a clear foreview of the day when Jesus of Nazareth, the promised Messiah, would leave the Temple courts, pronouncing judgment upon them, and make his way across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives, from which, after His crucifixion, He would ascend to the glory of the Father. In chapters 12-14 the prophet again teaches by means of a series of symbolic action interspersed with messages of doom. First he enacts the part of a refugee by carrying only an exile's baggage from his own house. After denouncing the false prophets and prophetesses among them, Ezekiel warns that God will not accept mere lip service for repentance, but judgment cannot be stayed apart from a true turning to Him. Using various parables and metaphors, the prophet describes in stark and bitter words the fate of Israel because of her idolatrous harlotry and her base ingratitude to the God who has tenderly cared for her and loved her. She will be like a harlot stripped, humiliated and destroyed before those to whom she had given herself in wild abandonment. Further warning is given that no escape from judgment can be achieved by reliance upon Egypt or other powers around, nor can any refuge be found in the self-righteous argument that the present generation is suffering for the sins of their forefathers. But like Jeremiah, Ezekiel himself is greatly affected by what he pronounces, and in chapter 19 he utters a beautiful allegorical dirge to mourn the downfall of Israel.

Again the elders of Israel come to the prophet and sit before him, confident that God will preserve His chosen people from harm without judgment. Again, in chapters 2~24, the prophet speaks in the plainest of language to describe the vileness of Israel's sin. Under the figure of two lewd sisters Oholah and Oholibah, representing: Samaria the northern kingdom and Judah the southern kingdom, the prophet describes the lust of Israel for pagan idols and the foulness of their worship under terrible terms of harlotry and lewdness. For this, judgment upon the nation is inevitable but in the days of their terror and despoliation the people shall at last know that the Lord is God.

So in chapter 24 the word of the Lord came saying, "The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem" (v. 2). To illustrate this graphically to the people the prophet is told that the Lord is about to take the delight of his eyes away from him at a single stroke, and yet he was not to mourn or weep or let his tears run down (see v. 16). This was immediately fulfilled for Ezekiel says: "So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded" (v. 18). So also the Temple, the delight of Judah's eye, would be destroyed, and yet the people were not permitted to mourn its overthrow but were carried away into exile to pine away and groan to one another.

Judgments Against Foreign Nations

In chapters 25-32 there is a series of judgments pronounced against foreign nations which are guilty of crimes against the people of God. Since Israel could not sin with impunity, neither could other nations escape the wrath of God. But though this is true, there is also a parallel principle found throughout the Scriptures that the enemies of God cannot overthrow His purpose of redemption and salvation. There will ultimately be a restoration of the people of God and every promise of glowing beauty and prosperity will be fully carried out, not by the wisdom and power of men but by the grace and mercy of God.

Seven nations are thus submitted to the judgment of God. Four of them, Ammon, Moab, Edom and Philistia, are dealt with briefly and quickly. Each of the four gloated over the punishment of Judah and Israel and took advantage of their downfall. For this reason they are to be given over to avenging marauders.

Tyre and Sidon are dealt with at much greater length especially Tyre. The sin of Tyre is that of godless materialism, but she too finally expresses rejoicing over the downfall of Jerusalem, and her expectation of enrichment from that overthrow. But God will shatter her false security, bringing up many nations against Tyre and reducing her to a barren rock and a village of fishermen. This prophecy was fulfilled with absolute accuracy of detail. The prophet pictured Tyre as a great ship that would be wrecked by the wind and seas, and ultimately sink

into oblivion. The prophecy ends with a message directed to the prince of Tyre, who is evidently the reigning king, and a further lamentation against the king of Tyre, who is a supernatural authority of terrible evil, whose instrument the prince of Tyre was. Commentators have rightly seen this as a description of Satan, for the prophet describes his original appointment by God and the nature of his sin, which began when a terrible pride was found in him and murder became his method.

Chapters 29-32 are devoted to a description of the coming overthrow of Egypt as the principle foe of the people of God. The two great superpowers of Ezekiel's day were Babylon and Egypt, and these two giants were continually struggling for dominance. In a series of seven oracles against Egypt, the prophet makes plain that the battle for world dominion would end in disaster for Egypt and even the power of mighty Pharaoh cannot prevent the destruction of Judah nor the scattering of her people among the nations.

In this prophetic series Nebuchadnezzar is named as the instrument of God's judgment on Egypt, "the great dragon of the Nile." Egypt is also depicted as a great cedar, spreading her lofty boughs of influence among the nations, yet the great tree will be cut down and left broken upon the land to the consternation of the people of earth. Thus, finally, Pharaoh, mighty as he is, will join other nations who have lifted themselves in pride and arrogance and shall lie with them among the uncircumcised of the earth in the Pit of Sheol.

For years, Ezekiel's call was to be a predictor of disaster; but at last in chapters 33-39 he is permitted to become the proclaimer of God's restorative grace.

Renewal and Reunion

Chapter 33 contains the news of the fall of Jerusalem, which came to Ezekiel through a refugee from the city. Before this, Ezekiel is newly commissioned as a watchman to Israel, since he is to begin a new task as the messenger of hope. The limitations on his speech are removed and he prepares to proclaim the message of renewal and even of reunion of the nation. When the exiles saw that his prophecies of the overthrow of Jerusalem had come true he became immediately the sensation of the nation. Curious crowds gathered to hear him, but for the most part their hearts remained untouched by the message of grace. To them the prophet still gives words of warning of God's ultimate judgment.

Then, at the command of the Lord he speaks to the shepherds of Israel, that is, the rulers of the people. They are charged with exploiting the sheep and feeding only themselves. But these false shepherds would be relieved of their duties and replaced by a Good Shepherd. God Himself would come to them and be their Shepherd-King, ruling His people with mercy and justice, providing to the very weakest, refuge and protection.

The fulfillment of this beautiful promise would begin with the gathering of Israel upon its ancient hills in Palestine. The land itself would be restored to productivity and prosperity, and the mountains of Israel would experience the blessing of God, in contrast with the Mount of Seir (Edom) which was still to suffer under the judgment of God. As God had once promised, He would put His Spirit within His people and remove from them their stony hearts and give them a heart of flesh. The fulfillment of these promises began with the restoration of Israel from the exile in Babylon but stretched on through the centuries to follow to the time of the coming of the Messiah, the Good Shepherd, and on through His first appearance to the very end of the age, when at last, after long years of further exile, the nation Israel would be restored to its land in penitence and mourning and would then experience the total fulfillment of God's promise.

To demonstrate how this would be accomplished, Ezekiel is once again seized by the mighty Spirit of the Lord and transported to a valley full of dry bones. Surveying this desolate scene, the prophet must have been startled to hear the Lord say to him: "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord" (37:4). But when he began to preach to the bones, a remarkable thing occurred: The preached word held such power that the bones began to shake and rattle everywhere in the valley, clicking themselves together until whole skeletons appeared everywhere. While the prophet watched, sinews came upon them and flesh covered them, followed by skin, so that the valley was occupied by corpses, lying perfectly formed yet unliving.

This time Ezekiel is told to preach to the wind, and on doing so the wind blew upon the corpses and they sprang to life, a great living army.

As if this great and amazing sight were not enough to restore hope to the people, the prophet is told to take two sticks, marking one Judah and the other Joseph, standing for the northern kingdom. These he joined together in his hands so that they appeared to be one stick; and when the people inquired what this meant he told them the purpose of God was to reunite them as a single nation. All this would come to pass under the coming great Shepherd that would appear to Israel, and the people shall know: "My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore" (37:27, 28).

But all this was not to happen without further tribulation to the people of Israel. Chapters 38 and 39 are given over to a detailed description of an assault from the far north upon the land of Israel after the people have been restored to Palestine. The great enemy who now appears is no longer Babylon, but "Go", of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal" (38:2). Much controversy has raged among the commentators as to the identity of this new enemy. Gesenius, one of the greatest of the Jewish authorities, identifies Gog as Russia, translating the words "chief prince" as more properly "the prince of Rosh" and Meshech and Tubal. Meshech and Tubal have been identified as ancient forms of the names Moscow and Tobolsk. Thus the great enemy of Israel in the last days is identified as Russia and her satellite nations.

The prophet is told to describe the great enemy as coming out of the north against the land of Israel at a time when its people dwell in security. They will be brought upon the mountains of Israel as a great armed horde advancing like a storm covering the land. But though this fearful host seems to threaten the very existence of the restored nation, nevertheless God intervenes in direct combat and the great army is destroyed upon the mountains of Israel by a terrible rain of hailstones, fire and brimstone from heaven. So great will be the slaughter that it will take seven months to cleanse the land and bury the corpses.

This final restoration of Israel to the land is to be accomplished by the pouring out of God's Spirit upon the house of Israel. It will leave them a people dwelling securely, with none to make them afraid, and then shall all the nations know that the Lord their God has not only sent them into exile but brought them again to be a people and a nation once more. The apostle Paul clearly has this picture in mind in his great prediction of the future of Israel in Romans 11.

The closing chapters of Ezekiel's vision 40-48, constitute one of the most dramatic predictions in all the Bible and one which has been a continuing puzzle to the commentators.

The prophet is caught up once again by the Spirit of God and in vision is taken to a high mountain overlooking the city of Jerusalem. Historically, at the time of this vision Jerusalem had been lying in ruins for some 14 years, but in his vision the prophet sees no longer a city in ruins but a city of beauty and order, dominated by a great new Temple which is the center of the worship of God. To aid the prophet in understanding his vision, an angelic being appears with a measuring rod in his hand. Throughout the vision he measures everything that is seen and reports the measurement in precise detail to the prophet. The symbolism of measuring is a way of underscoring the definiteness of the vision as something real and not imaginary, and also its divine ownership as something God will bring about and not man. It is a symbol which is used also in Zechariah's prophecies in the Old Testament and John's visions in the book of Revelation in the New Testament.

In chapters 40-42 the prophet is taken on a tour of the outer courts of the Temple and then the inner courts, being shown not only the great altar of sacrifice but the chambers for the priests, the decorations of the holy place and the great courts which surrounded the Temple on all sides. All of this is carefully measured and the measurements noted with precise detail.

Chapter 43 records an event which must have been of great encouragement to Ezekiel's heart, for he records: "And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the east; and the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with his glory" (43:2). That cloud of shining Shekinah glory entered the Temple

by the eastern gate, and as the prophet watched, the glory came into the Temple and filled the whole Temple.

The chapter continues to describe the worship of the people and the sacrifices which were performed by the priesthood in that day. There are certain noticeable differences from the pattern of sacrifices offered in the Temple of Solomon as well as those offered in the Temple of Herod in our Lord's day. Though the Passover reappears, there is no mention of the Day of Atonement or the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).

Much controversy has raged over the meaning of these omissions and of the significance of animal sacrifices being again offered after the one sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary. Those who see this vision as entirely symbolical of spiritual realities for the people of God today have no difficulty here, but those who hold to a literal temple to be rebuilt for the millennial kingdom find it somewhat embarrassing to explain these. They may however be viewed as purely memorial in character, much as the Lord's table is to us today.

Following the return of the glory of the Lord to the Temple, the prophet is shown a river of water which flows from underneath the threshold of the Temple toward the east. As it flowed, it deepened and widened in dimension. When the prophet was bidden to enter it, it was ankle deep; then reentering further downstream, it was knee deep; 1,000 cubits further it was deep enough to swim in. As he and the measuring man came back along the bank of the river the prophet saw many trees growing. He was told that wherever the river flowed everything it touched would live. The leaves of the trees were to be used for the healing of the nations, and their fruit would be for the people's food.

Finally he was shown a vision of the entire land of promise itself, divided among the 12 tribes, with the Temple in its midst and a special provision made for the Levites, the priests, and the prince.

The vision closes with the designation of the gates of the city and the simple yet sublime name given to the entire city: *Jehovah Shamah* which means "Jehovah is there."

It is a most wonderful and fitting termination for this marvelous vision of Ezekiel. The prophet had been shown the essential glory of God and the greatness of His majesty, and had also seen, in clearest vision, the vile and reprobate sin of the people of Israel. He had beheld the glory of God departing from the city because of these sins, but had lived to see it, in vision, restored by the grace of God, with the people living in purity, harmony and safety under the arching promise of the words, "The Lord is there" (48:35).

The vexing question of whether Ezekiel's temple is one of literal construction yet to appear in the last days, or merely symbolical representing the realities of the New Covenant experienced by God's people today, has been a question debated for centuries. Certainly no such building has ever appeared in history as of this date. But it is clearly futile to demand an either/or choice between these two views. It is much more likely that, as we have seen before, both are true. Ezekiel's temple is indeed a symbolic picture of the relationship of a living God to His people today, living under the New Covenant with its intimacy of communion and availability of power and blessing.

But it is surely not wrong to see it also as a precise and detailed revelation of a temple which will yet be built in the city of Jerusalem at the time when God fulfills all His great promises to the people of Israel and makes them once again the head of the nations of earth. In that day all that is now experienced by faith in the believing heart shall be visible to the eye of any observer. Then shall Ezekiel's great city of promise be seen as John the Seer saw it in Revelation 21:2: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

DANIEL

To be a godly teenager is a tough assignment in any period of history. To continue to be a godly teenager when exposed to pressure from a world system committed to pagan philosophy, is to make the assignment infinitely

tougher. But to begin as a teenager in such an environment and yet rise to a position of high honor, despite several changes of government and at the frequent risk of life, is to fulfill the toughest assignment of all. Yet that is the story of the book of Daniel.

Like Ezekiel, Daniel was carried captive to the land of Babylon from his native country of Judah in one of the early deportations under Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, were royal princes of the tribe of Judah, and are described in the first chapter of Daniel as "youths without blemish, handsome, and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning, and competent to serve in the king's palace" (1:4). These splendid young men serve as a continual example to the youth of any age of the possibility of standing true to principle in the midst of great pressure, and of drawing upon the invisible help of God to remain faithful against all odds.

The central figure of the four is Daniel, whose personal history is traced through four changes of dynasty in the first six chapters, and whose visions of remarkable scope and content are given to us in chapters 7-12.

Counselor to Kings

Chapter 1 records the initial test to which the young men were subjected as they were set aside for special training for service in the government of Babylon. They were assigned a three-year course of indoctrination involving a change of names to indicate their new loyalties--a change of food, and a change of language. They made no objection to the change of names or language, since these were necessary to participate in governmental affairs. But they did object to the change of food, for the diet required foods forbidden to the Jews. Courteously, Daniel asked the prince of the king's eunuchs to permit a 10-day test of vegetables and water, and when this change of diet produced no ill effect, but rather enhanced their health, full permission was granted to abstain from the rich foods the king had ordered for the remainder of their three years of training. At the end when they were presented to the king, they were found to be 10 times better than any of the other young men from Babylon, also in training.

In chapter 2 Daniel is in trouble again. This time not of his own making. He and his three friends became involved in a situation in which their own lives were at stake, but they were innocent victims of something over which they had no control. The story centers around King Nebuchadnezzar who dreamed a dream which troubled him greatly, but which he could not understand. In the early morning hours he summoned his magicians and counselors and demanded of them that they not only tell him the meaning of the dream but tell him what the dream itself was. Though they objected that this was a most unreasonable demand, Nebuchadnezzar informed them that if they could not comply with his request they would all be hacked to pieces and their homes destroyed.

We would never have known of this ancient incident were it not that the demand the king made included in its scope Daniel and his three friends. When they learned of their danger, Daniel, through the king's captain, Arioch, obtained an interview with Nebuchadnezzar, asking for time to discover and interpret the dream. When his request was granted he went immediately to his friends and the four of them took themselves to prayer, asking God to reveal the information they so desperately needed to know.

That night in a dream the secret was revealed to Daniel, and in gratitude he blessed the God of heaven in a hymn of beauty and wonder. When he was brought into the king's presence he took great care to inform all that it was the God of glory who had given him the interpretation and not his own wisdom.

Daniel then described the great image of a man which the king had seen in his dream. The head was of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of bronze and the legs were of iron, with its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As the image stood complete a great stone appeared, cut by no human hands, and fell upon the image's feet and broke the entire image into pieces, which were then blown away by the wind so that no trace could be found. But the stone grew into a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

The prophet then informed the king that he and his kingdom of Babylon was represented by the head of gold. He would be succeeded by another empire, represented by the chest and arms of silver, which history records was the Medo-Persian empire. A third kingdom, represented by the belly and thighs of bronze, would then appear, and

this was historically fulfilled in the Greek empire under Alexander the Great and his successors. Then the fourth empire, represented by the legs of iron and the feet of iron and clay, would come into being. Historically, this could be nothing else than the Roman empire which was divided into two segments, the eastern and western empires, symbolized by the two legs of the image; then culminating at last in a 10-kingdom empire, indicated by the 10 toes.

Up to this point most commentators are agreed in interpretation, but much disagreement arises over the meaning of the 10 toes and the mingling of iron and clay. All commentators agree that the great stone which broke the image in pieces represents the kingdom of Christ and the rule of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. However the fulfillment of the dream seems to picture the second coming of Christ rather than the first, so that in some sense the fourth kingdom of the Roman empire is seen to continue in history until the end of the age. Many Bible teachers, therefore, teach that the final form, represented by the 10 toes, will reappear at the close of the age as a national confederacy under the leadership of the beast of Revelation 13, the final world dictator. Further prophecies in Daniel seem to confirm this interpretation and link closely with the vision seen by John in the book of Revelation.

At any rate, when King Nebuchadnezzar heard Daniel's interpretation he fell upon his face and did homage to Daniel, making him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and appointing his three friends as fellow administrators with him.

In chapter 3 the story reverts to the personal history of the young Israelite men in their attempt to live godly lives in the midst of pagan Babylon. Perhaps in prideful distortion of the identification of Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold in his dream image, the king erects a great image made wholly of gold and sets it up on the plain of Dura, commanding the worship of the entire people of the land. When Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, under their new names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, hear the command of the king they refuse to give homage to the image; when the report of this was brought to Nebuchadnezzar he fell into a great rage. Summoning the young men into his presence, he warned them that if they refused to obey his edict they would be cast into a great, burning fiery furnace and consumed alive. Their answer is a model of courage and faith. They said: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up" (3:17,18).

This is a clear instance of the problem created when the law of the land runs contrary to the command of God. But these young men recognized that no human government has the right to command the worship of any people, and rather than compromise their consciences by some outward conformity, they boldly committed themselves to God, submitted themselves to the punishment which the king devised, and were thrown into a furnace which had been heated seven times hotter than usual.

But in the furnace they found a new freedom, for only their bonds were burned, and when the king looked into it he saw not only the three men he had cast in, but the form of a fourth whom he recognized to be the Son of God. Thus, in the words of Hebrews 11 "through faith they quenched the violence of fire" (see Heb. 11:33-34), and gave continual encouragement to all those who, like they, are called to live in a secular and sensuous age which is able to bring great pressure to conform upon those who seek to walk with God. The threat of losing popularity money, friends or position is often like a fiery furnace which we fear to face, but if we truly believe the unseen God who is able to deliver, we too can count on Him to bring us safely through the fires of persecution and pressure to a greater position of honor and influence, as these young men experienced.

The opening chapters of Daniel are clearly the story of how one brave and godly young man with his three companions so influenced the mightiest king then on earth that the king ultimately became a humble believer in God himself. This story is completed in chapter 4, which opens with the edict of King Nebuchadnezzar to all the peoples, nations, and languages of the earth to worship the most high God whom he has discovered. He then gives in detail the account of how his great pride was humbled and he was brought at last to faith in the living

God.

Again it began with a dream which alarmed him and which he called his astrologers and magicians to interpret. But once again it is Daniel (who here is called by his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar) who gives the interpretation. This time the king told the prophet what he had seen. He had seen a great tree growing in the midst of the earth whose top reached the heavens, but by angelic power it had been cut down and stripped of its leaves and fruit, with only its stump left in the earth until seven years had passed.

Because Daniel immediately saw the interpretation of the dream as it applied to the king, he was reluctant to give the interpretation, but in loyalty to the truth he informed the king courteously that the king was the great tree and that he would be removed from his throne and driven out from among men to live among the beasts of the field, eating grass like an ox, until the seven years had ended. Daniel then urged the king to break off his sins and practice mercy and righteousness that the sentence might at least be delayed.

But at the end of one year, as Nebuchadnezzar gloated in pride over the beauty and greatness of Babylon which he felt he had made, he was suddenly seized with mental cloudiness and lost his reason so that he was indeed driven out from men, living as an animal in the fields. When his reason at last returned, Nebuchadnezzar recognized the God of heaven and upon being restored to his kingdom he praised God who was able to humble the proudest of men.

The next scene, in chapter 5, occurs in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's successor, Belshazzar. This man who for a long time was not known to history has now been discovered to be the grandson-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar; he was made a co-regent for a portion of the empire of Babylon.

On the occasion of the annual feast of the gods, Belshazzar invited a thousand of his lords and their wives and concubines to the palace. At this time the city was under siege by Cyrus, the Persian emperor, whose attacking army was led by one called Darius the Mede. The licentious feast of King Belshazzar reached its height when he called for the golden vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem and the king and his guests drank wine from the vessels, praising their pagan gods in deliberate blasphemy of the God of Israel. Immediately a supernatural hand appeared and wrote upon the plaster of the wall certain Persian words. As in the reign of his grandfather, the wise men of the kingdom were unable to interpret the meaning and Daniel, by now an old man, was called in. With boldness he rebuked the king for his licentious ways and his persistent refusal to recognize the true God, and interpreted the writing as indicating that God had numbered his kingdom, weighed it as to its value and determined to divide it among the Persians.

That very night, as history records, two Babylonian deserters led Persian invaders under the wall of the city where the Euphrates River had been diverted, and the defending garrison found itself attacked from within. That same night the king was slain as the Persian troops raged through the city.

Chapter 6 is one of the most famous stories in the Bible. It is the story of Daniel in the lions' den. Darius the Mede reorganized the government of Babylon and made all the executives responsible to three presidents, of whom Daniel was one. His wisdom and judgment were so superior that the king planned to set him over the entire kingdom, but this aroused a spirit of jealousy among the other presidents and satraps. They cunningly plotted Daniel's downfall by inducing the king to sign a decree that for a period of 30 days no one should petition either God or man, save the king. Flattered by this, Darius signed the decree, making it the law of the Medes and Persians which could not be changed.

When Daniel heard of it he continued his daily act of prayer, kneeling openly before the windows which -opened toward Jerusalem. Reluctantly the king was forced to commit Daniel to the den of lions, but it was the king who spent a sleepless night. It is ironic to see how royally the prophet was kept. The king of beasts stood guard over him. The king of Persia sat up all night out of concern for him, and the King of kings sent His angel to protect him. When Darius found Daniel safe the next morning he issued a great proclamation glorifying the God of Daniel for His power and majesty.

Prophet of the Last Days

Chapters 7 through 12 chronologically revert to the realm of Belshazzar, and the visions which Daniel received under his reign, and carry us forward to the reign of Cyrus the Persian and the revelations which came to the prophet during those days. Though it is not apparent to an English reader, there is another link which ties chapter 7 to chapter 2. The whole portion of the prophecy between these two boundaries appears in the Aramaic language rather than Hebrew. Aramaic was the language of Babylon, a Gentile language. Thus the section fittingly begins with a vision tracing the entire course of Gentile supremacy in the world; for Nebuchadnezzar's great dream image of chapter 2 covers the same general course of history as Daniel's vision of four beasts, found in chapter 7. There Daniel is shown a vision of four great beasts arising out of the Mediterranean Sea. The first was like a lion, the second like a bear, the third like a leopard and the fourth was a great and terrible animal with great iron teeth, different from all the preceding beasts. It had 10 horns and as the prophet watched, three of the first horns were plucked up by an eleventh horn which grew up among them, having the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking great things.

Immediately the vision changed and Daniel saw the throne of God and one seated upon it, before whom a stream of fire issued and thousands upon thousands of angels served Him. As he watched, one called the Ancient of Days (who is also described as Son of Man) was presented before Him and to Him was given dominion and glory over all the nations of the earth (see 7:13, 14).

The interpreting angel then announced that the four great beasts were four kingdoms which would arise out of the earth. These seem to be identical with the four kingdoms of the great dream image of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 2. There the kingdoms are viewed from man's point of view as of great but decreasing value, represented by the gold and silver and the bronze and iron. Here they appear from the divine point of view as great snarling animals fighting and clashing with one another; but most interpreters agree that they represent the same kingdoms, those of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The 10 horns which appeared on the fourth beast's head apparently link with the 10 toes of the fourth kingdom in the dream image. The eleventh horn, with the eyes and mouth that spoke great things, is often linked with the great beast of Revelation 13 who appears as the world dictator of the last days and is known as the Antichrist.

Again it is made evident that all these shall fall before the might and majesty of the Son of Man who sits in judgment over the nations of earth and whose kingdom shall ultimately fill the entire earth.

Two years later, still in the reign of King Belshazzar, Daniel sees another vision, this time of two beasts. One is a ram with two horns which pushes to the west, the north and the south. While he watches a he-goat attacks the ram and overcomes him. From the one great horn on the goat grow four horns and from one of these comes forth a little horn which grows exceedingly great and attacks the Temple, eventually taking away the continual burnt offering and desecrating the sanctuary for a permitted total of 2,300 evening and morning sacrifices.

The interpreting angel Gabriel was sent to make the meaning clear. Daniel was informed that the ram was the kingdom of Medo-Persia while the he-goat was Greece with its notable horn standing for Alexander and his rapid conquests. Four kingdoms would arise after him, which history knew as Macedonia, Thrace, Syria and Egypt. The little horn which would grow from one of these was historically the Syrian king named Antiochus Epiphanes. He fulfilled the vision by attacking Jerusalem, entering the Temple and desecrating it by sprinkling the broth of a sow throughout the area, and erecting an image of Jupiter in the holy place. The Temple remained desolated for a little over three years, which is exactly the amount of time during which ordinarily 2,300 morning and evening sacrifices would have been offered. History records that at the end of that time the Maccabean revolt restored the sanctuary to its original function and Syrian power over Jerusalem was ended.

However, many interpreters believe that at Daniel 8:23, which begins "and at the latter end of their rule," the vision leaps over the centuries to the end of the age when a second desecration of the Temple will take place under the leadership of an individual who appears in Revelation 13 as the second beast, the false prophet. It is this desecration to which Jesus refers in Matthew 24 when He speaks of "the abomination of desolation which was

spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (Matt. 24:15, NASB). Daniel is told by Gabriel that the vision "pertains to the appointed time of the end" (Dan. 8: 19) and though the two beasts he saw are clearly identified to him, he records that he was "appalled by the vision and did not understand it" (v. 27). Evidently this indicates that there were aspects of the vision which went beyond what the angel had identified for him.

Chapter 9 records what many consider to be the most important prophetic passage in all the Bible; for in the great prophecy of 70 weeks the prophet Daniel is given by God Himself an outline of history from his own day until the end of the age, when the kingdom of the Messiah shall be set up over all the earth.

The vision began while Daniel was praying before God for the return of the people from Babylon to Israel, having been convinced by the prophecies of Jeremiah that the 70 years of exile were about to end. His prayer of confession and supplication is a moving and marvelous recognition of the majesty and faithfulness of God and the helplessness and weakness of man.

In the midst of it, while he was praying and confessing his sins and the sins of his people, the angel Gabriel, appearing as a man, was again sent to him, addressing him as "O Daniel, greatly beloved." He unfolded to him the divine calendar of prophetic events.

Seventy weeks of years were marked out, during which the people of Israel and the holy city of Jerusalem would be brought at last to full salvation and redemption. The word rendered "weeks" really means a period divided into seven. Dr. D. Douglas Young well reminds us that it is definitely misleading to study this Scripture with conventional methods of measuring time. As he put it: "We do better to think in terms of seventy periods of time, each of which is divided into seven parts." The prophet is told that the 490 years (70 times 7) would be divided into three parts. One part, of 49 years duration; a second period of 434 years, to total 483 years; and the third of 7 years only.

By the end of this entire period a six-fold program would have been accomplished: (1) the finishing of transgression; (2) putting an end to sin; (3) the making of atonement for iniquity; (4) the bringing in of everlasting righteousness; (5) the sealing up of visions and prophecy; (6) the anointing of a most holy place.

Looking back from our vantage point in history it is easy to see that the first three were accomplished by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, while the last three remain yet to be fulfilled at the second appearing of Christ.

Daniel was further told that during the first period of 49 years the city of Jerusalem would be built amidst great difficulty. The period would begin with a decree to restore and build Jerusalem, which seems to be the one referred to in Nehemiah and dates at 445 B.C.

The second period of 62 weeks of years, or 434 years, would be terminated when the "anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary" (9:26). The Anointed One is clearly the Messiah who was indeed cut off by crucifixion at the appointed time, and subsequently the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70 and the Temple burned and flattened. Since this was to come "after the sixty-two weeks" it would fall in an unspecified period of time between the 62 weeks and the beginning of the seventieth week which was scheduled to last for seven years.

Most Bible teachers therefore believe the seventieth week is yet future, and will be the same period of time referred to by Jesus as the "great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21). Daniel is told that "the prince who is to come...shall make a strong covenant" with Israel for one week of seven years (9:26,27), but in the midst of it shall break his word and defile the sanctuary much as Antiochus Epiphanes did in 168 B.C. Many link this with the apostle Paul's prediction in 2 Thessalonians 2 of the appearance of a man of sin who shall exalt himself as God and shall appear in the Temple at Jerusalem, proclaiming himself to be God.

The final vision given to the prophet Daniel occupies chapters 10-12. Once again Daniel and certain of his companions were fasting and mourning for a period of three weeks. Suddenly, as with his contemporary Ezekiel,

Daniel is given a vision of the glory of God and he saw one whose face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes burning like flaming torches and his arms and legs gleaming like burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like a noise of a multitude. The prophet fell into a trance and was awakened by the touch of a hand upon him and a voice addressing him. Evidently again it was the voice of Gabriel sent to interpret the vision for him.

In chapter 11 the angel gives to Daniel a long and intricate series of predicted events which would befall the people of Israel after Daniel's death. Many details were clearly predicted, and history records their fulfillment in the struggles between the Selucid empire of Syria and the Ptolemaic empire of Egypt. After a long succession of battles and military forays, the struggle eventuates in the appearance of Antiochus Epiphanes, whose history begins with verse 21 and carries through verse 35. The details of his conflict with Egypt are clearly given and were as clearly fulfilled, and further prediction is made concerning the profaning of the Temple in Jerusalem, the taking away of the continual burnt offering, and the setting up of the abomination that makes desolate.

Beginning at verse 36, however, a personage identified merely as "the king" is introduced, who is said to "magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods." Many Bible scholars feel that this clearly identifies him with the predicted man of sin of whom Paul speaks, as well as with the second beast of Revelation 13, of whom John speaks. Daniel is told that at the time of the end the king of the south (Egypt) shall attack him, but the king of the north (Syria and possibly Russia) shall come rushing down upon him with a great army, and tens of thousands shall fall. This seems to identify itself with the invasion of Gog and Magog described by Ezekiel in chapters 38 and 39 and that identification is confirmed by the information given to Daniel that "he [the king of the north] shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him" (v. 45). This apparently describes the divine destruction which comes upon the invading northern armies by the great rain of hail and brimstone from heaven, which Ezekiel describes.

The vision continues in chapter 12 with the information that at that time Michael, the great prince who is identified with Israel, shall arise and Israel will be subjected to a time of trouble such as has never been since there was a nation until that time. This phrasing is apparently parallel to that used by Jesus when He refers to the Great Tribulation in these words: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be" (Matt. 24:21).

Daniel is further told that this will be followed by a great resurrection from the dead, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. The prophet is then told to seal the book until the time of the end, which shall be identified by many running to and fro and a great increase of knowledge.

In answer to the prophet's request for information on how long it would take to accomplish these wonders, he is given two further periods of 1290 days and 1335 days. Though these are somewhat uncertain in their interpretation, they may refer to the duration of the Tribulation under the rule of the antichrist, and further indicate that those who maintain their faith for the period of persecution will emerge at last into a time of great universal blessing.

So the prophecies of Daniel are brought to a rather abrupt end, having unfolded many events which at our point in history have already been clearly and accurately fulfilled, yet contain many other predicted events which are yet to be brought to pass. No other predictive passages are quite as revealing until, after several centuries, Jesus of Nazareth will sit upon the Mount of Olives with His disciples gathered around Him and unfold in amazing detail the coming history of the troubled city and its ultimate fate, at the end of the age.

Chapter Twenty

God Persists: Hosea, Joel

In many ways the book of Hosea is the most beautiful book in the Old Testament. It is a love story--the story of a broken marriage and of the heartache which unfaithfulness brings into a life. Yet it is also the story of the persistence of God in fulfilling His promise of redemptive action. It pictures the New Testament promise of Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

We are informed in the opening verse that Hosea ministered in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, the kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel. This would make him a contemporary of Isaiah, Amos, and Micah. It was a time of spiritual declension within the nation and the people were paying lip service to the worship of God but their hearts were far from Him. It was a case with them as it is often with us that the spirit was willing but the flesh was ready for the weekend!

Chapter 1 opens with the remarkable command of God to the prophet to go and marry a girl who would ultimately prove to be a harlot, and thus to illustrate through the personal history of Hosea the heartbreak of God when He saw the people of Israel given over to spiritual harlotry. There is no reason to believe that Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim whom Hosea married, was a harlot at the time of their marriage, but it is clear that Hosea was told by God that this would ultimately come to pass. You can't read the prophecy of Hosea without seeing that he loved Gomer with all his heart and at first they must have been wonderfully happy together. When their first child, a boy, was born, Hosea went to God to determine the name for the lad. To his great surprise, God picked the name *Jezreel*, which meant "castaway" and was a name of shame in Israel. It recalled the story of Queen Jezebel and King Ahab who cheated their neighbor Naboth of his vineyard. Their treachery was avenged by the king's general, Jehu, who usurped the throne and ordered the servants to throw Jezebel out the window. Her blood was licked up by the dogs in the courtyard, and the courtyard was named Jezreel, for it was there that Queen Jezebel was cast away (see 2 Kings 9:30-37).

Obediently, Hosea gave this name to his oldest son for he understood that God was thus warning the people that they, too, would be cast away if they didn't recognize the folly of their actions. In the course of time another child, a daughter, was born to Hosea and Gomer. This one was named *Lo-ruhamah*, which means "not pitied." It meant that God would no longer have pity on His people if they continued their stubborn rebellion, for His patience was wearing thin. When this little girl was weaned, Gomer conceived again and bore a third child, another little boy. This one God named *Lo-ammi*, "not my people," for God was saying, "You are not my people and I am not your God" (1:9). Yet in the face of this clear revelation of coming judgment, the prophet was sent also to tell the people that there would come a day when Israel would be restored and their names of reproach taken away and they would be called by all "Sons of the living God" (v. 10).

In chapter 2, though no direct mention is made of Gomer's unfaithfulness, it is clear from the prophet's words that he is feeling great personal anguish over her harlotry. Though Hosea still warns of judgment to come and the fact that God would send the Assyrians raging across the land, he no longer announced this with thunder in his voice. Rather he spoke with tears, and tenderly described the day when love would at last triumph after the bitter lesson of disobedience was learned. He predicted Israel would yet turn back to the God who had loved her so faithfully, and instead of being called "not pitied," Israel would be pitied, and instead of "not my people," they would be named "my people" again.

The five short verses of chapter 3 describe how the prophet was sent to find his wandering wife and bring her back into his home again. Evidently her current husband had tired of her and she was to be sold as a slave, so Hosea went to the marketplace and watched as Gomer was brought up and placed on the dock. She was stripped of all her clothing and stood naked before the crowd. The bidding began, and ultimately Hosea offered 15 pieces of silver and a bushel of barley. The auctioneer's gavel fell, and Hosea had his wife back again.

As he put her clothes on her and led her away, he spoke to her what is perhaps the most beautiful verse in all the Bible: "You must dwell as mine for many days; you shall not play the harlot, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you" (3:3). That this painful but beautiful action was symbolic as a message to the people is made clear in the next two verses: "For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or seraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days" (3:4,5). This prophecy seems to encompass both the return from exile in Babylon and the later dispersion among the nations of the world following the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, with an ultimate return in penitence and faith at the end of the age in view.

In chapters 4 and 5 the prophet summons the people to hear the Lord's controversy against the inhabitants of the land. Their sin is described in clear detail: "There is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder" (4:2). Such open sin is declared to be a result of their religious ignorance and lack of knowledge. Priest and prophet alike are guilty of greed and iniquity, and so the land suffers and the people are subjected to invading hosts.

But in the closing verse of chapter 5 and the opening verses of chapter 6 a clear note of hope is struck, for Jehovah says: "I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress they seek me, saying, 'Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn, that he may heal us; he has stricken, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord, his going forth is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth'" (5:15--6:3). It is remarkable that here restoration is promised the people "on the third day." Without doubt this has in view the resurrection of Jesus on the third day and the symbol this represents of a new beginning and a new kind of life.

The rest of chapter 6 and all of 7 describe the divine frustration at having tried various ways to reach the people of Israel and awaken them to their peril, yet all to no avail. They were like "a cake not turned" (7:8). That is, undeveloped on one side and burned on the other. Further they were like "a dove, silly and without sense" (v. 11), for they kept calling upon the nations around them for deliverance, only to find themselves trapped and destroyed by the ones to whom they looked for help. Like many today, they kept howling and complaining about their mistreatment, but would not repent and turn to the Lord from whom they might find full deliverance.

In chapters 8 through 10 the prophet employs various figures to describe the coming judgment upon the people and the inevitable invasion from Assyria and exile to that land. They are warned that Assyria is like a vulture over the house of the Lord who shall be permitted to descend upon the people and punish them for their sins. The population of the land will be decimated and the countryside left desolate. Though Israel was once like a luxuriant vine yielding much fruit, the vineyard shall be destroyed and their idols carried away with them to Assyria. Through the prophet, Jehovah speaks with great plainness: "You have plowed iniquity, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruit of lies. Because you have trusted in your chariots and in the multitude of your warriors, therefore the tumult of war shall arise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be destroyed" (10:13,14). Yet it must be remembered that Hosea does not pronounce these words with thunder and lightning, but with deep heart-anguish and an awareness from his own personal history of how Jehovah feels when He visits judgment upon His people.

Chapter 11 opens with the words: "When Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and burning incense to idols." Here again God's loving heart comes bursting through the revelations of judgment as the prophet cries in the name of the Lord: "How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! How can I make you like Admah! How can I treat you like Zeboiim! My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender" (11:8). It is language reminiscent of the scene in the Gospels where Jesus sits on the Mount of Olives and weeps over the rebellious city of Jerusalem.

Yet though God feels the anguish of His people and suffers with them, nevertheless He resolves upon judgment

for He knows there is no other way to break the back of the people's rebellion and bring them at last in repentance to His feet. So He declares: "Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword, their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open." (13:16)

All through this severe language one can detect a sob in the voice of God as He pronounces judgment. And finally in the last chapter, the love of God comes flashing through the darkness. He cries beseechingly: "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the Lord; say to him, 'Take away all iniquity; accept that which is good and we will render the fruit of our lips.'" (14:1, 2)

To this attitude the divine promise is revealed: "I will heal their faithfulness; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be as the dew to Israel; he shall blossom as the lily, he shall strike root as the poplar; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom as the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon" (14:4-7).

It should be clear to us as we read this beautiful story that it is really our own personal history. Ours is the blindness that, like Gomer's, cannot distinguish between lust and love. We try to run from God and drown our miseries in empty pleasures or in overwork; but as surely as we think we have escaped, as surely as we think we have run away, God touches our sleeve with His love, saying, "My child, my name and my nature are love, and I must act according to what I am. When you tire of your running and your wandering and your heartbreak, I'll be there to draw you to myself again." At Bethlehem God entered the slave market of this world where the whole human race was putting itself up for auction, prostituting its humanity to a cheapened life. But on the cross the Lord Jesus paid the price of our freedom and bought us back. Thus Hosea is but again the story of God's love and God's heart, revealing His loving desire to make us, His people, the whole persons He intended us to be.

JOEL

For centuries men have been looking for the principle upon which the events of history turned. Since the dawn of history there have been many guesses as to what that principle is. The great Greek philosophers declared that history moves in cycles, and a leading modern historian, Arnold Toynbee, agrees with that. For instance, Aristotle said that history follows a predictable course; first a tyrant rises, a man of iron, who seizes control of a nation and rules until his dynasty ends. Control gradually passes from him to a ruling family of aristocracy, and as their power deteriorates, control passes to the people in what Aristotle called democracy. But the democracy, too, will deteriorate and gradually bring about a breakdown of power until anarchy ensues. Out of anarchy a tyrant again seizes control and so goes the cycle of history.

Other men have felt somewhat differently. Thomas Jefferson thought the hinge of history was political; and when he wrote the Declaration of Independence he incorporated that idea in the prologue, declaring that human governments must recognize certain inalienable rights that are granted to men and, to preserve those rights, governments are instituted among men. He felt, therefore, that the forces that shape human history are political in nature.

In the last century, Karl Marx dipped his pen into the acid of his own embittered spirit and wrote the work that has dramatically influenced our modern time. His idea was that the controlling force of history is economics, and that it is the need to meet the material demands of life that shapes the events of any day. He called this force "dialectical materialism," the principle of material supply arrived at through dialectical discussion, that is, debate. Today millions around the earth feel that economics is indeed the controlling force of life.

H. G. Wells, however, was one of a number of thinkers who said that evolution shapes the course of human destiny. Schools often teach today that behind the events of human history is an evolutionary principle, forcing us

on to higher and higher endeavor and making life better and better.

But in many places in the Bible we learn that these insights are all wrong, especially in the book of Joel. Joel declares that the hinge upon which history turns is spiritual--God's Spirit at work among men. Even as early as the great universal flood Noah was told, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever." In that brief phrase we learn that God's Spirit is in conflict with the spirit of the age, and that the Spirit of God patiently is restraining human evil so that life can go on. But at last God's patience will reach an end and then comes a time--often repeated throughout history--when God removes His Spirit from His restraining ministry and everything collapses, great catastrophes occur, and judgment strikes. It is what the Bible describes as "the day of the Lord." That is essentially the message of the book of Joel.

Joel was a prophet to the kingdom of Judah and also a contemporary of Isaiah, Hosea and Amos. His prophetic vision encompassed not only immediate events of his own day, but as with many of the prophets, he saw to the final stages of God's dealing with human events.

He begins in chapter 1 with a dramatic description of an invasion of locusts upon the land of Judah. As a boy I witnessed such an invasion in Minnesota many years ago. I can still remember how the sky was darkened by the great cloud of insects, and one could hear them descending into the standing grain fields, like hail upon the ground. There was a continual rustling of the noise of their wings as they covered the fields, and within moments every blade of grass, every bit of vegetation was gone, and the fields were left as though they had been plowed.

That is what happened in Israel in Joel's day. A locust horde had descended upon the land and devoured every living thing. The crops were ruined and famine was at hand. Joel calls the attention of the nation to this event, summoning the elders to take heed and even the drunkards to be aware of the disaster that had fallen upon them. His point is that God is behind such an event as this. It is not merely a freak of nature, but happened in obedience to the command of God who works through natural laws to teach His people the lessons they need to learn. Joel clearly implies that if the people will learn this minor-league example of the day of the Lord, they will save themselves the awful heartache that will come in what he later calls "the great and terrible day of the Lord."

In chapter 2 the prophet leaps a great span of time to the end days and uses the invasion of locusts as a picture of the invasion of a great army into the land of Israel in the latter days. He says: "Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been from old, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations" (2:2). This begins to sound very much like the language Jesus used in describing a time of trouble which would be, He said, "Such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be" (Matt. 24:21). The prophet describes how the land is scorched behind this great army as it advances, and he describes the army itself as having the appearance of horses. Fear grips the hearts of the people as they see this invading host. "The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining" (2:10).

Anyone who carefully compares prophetic passages from the Scripture will soon discover there are certain interpretational landmarks. Symbols appear again and again through various books of prophecy so that one can identify the events which are described. The darkening of the sun and the moon, and the withdrawing of light from the stars is one of these landmarks.

Jesus Himself refers to such an event in His great description of the last days in Matthew 24. It appears also in the book of Daniel and in Isaiah and in the book of Revelation. Whenever it is mentioned, it is an interpretational landmark pointing to the last days which mark the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

This section of Joel's prophecy then seems to link directly with the description of the prophet Ezekiel (chaps. 38, 39) of a great northern army which invades the land of Israel, destroying everything before them, and ultimately capturing the city of Jerusalem.

But in each of the prophecies mentioned, God promises that the northern army will be dealt with by direct divine intervention. Isaiah says so, Ezekiel says so, Daniel says so. Now Joel also adds his voice: "'Yet even now,' says

the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.' Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil. Who knows whether he will not turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him" (2:12-14).

Then the divine promise comes: "I will remove the northerner far from you, and drive him into a parched and desolate land, his front into the eastern sea, and his rear into the western sea; the stench and foul smell of him will rise, for he has done great things" (2:20). Here also the great northern invader is found to be destroyed upon the mountains of Judah. The eastern sea is the Dead Sea and the western sea the Mediterranean, and there, according to both Joel and Ezekiel, the stench and foul smell of decaying corpses will fill the land. And afterward the land itself is called to rejoice and to blossom with fecundity and prosperity. The great promise is: "I will restore to you the years which the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame" (2:25,26).

This is always God's way of dealing with those who repent and return to Him. I shall never forget the agony in the eyes of a young man who a number of years ago looked at me and said, "You know I've become a Christian and it's wonderful, but when I think back to what I've missed and the years of my life that I've wasted, my heart is sick in remembering it. If I'd only had the sense to come to the Lord before I did all these terrible things." I had the joy of saying to him, "Son, God says 'I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten.' It is His delight to make up to us for the barrenness of our lives when we return at last to Him."

Beginning with verse 28 on through chapter 3, the prophet describes the means by which God will accomplish His great purposes. Verses 28 and 29 are a familiar and oft-quoted promise: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit." Perhaps you will recognize that these are the verses quoted by the apostle Peter when he stood up on the day of Pentecost and, interpreting the sign of tongues of fire and strange languages which the apostles were speaking, he said to the assembled multitudes: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (see Acts 2:16-18).

Peter went on quoting from the prophet, pointing out that there would be signs in the heavens when the sun would be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the terrible day of the Lord shall come. It is clear from this that Joel foresaw both the beginning and the ending of the great period of time which we call now "the age of grace." The pouring out of God's Spirit on the day of Pentecost was to be the initial introduction of an entire age during which there would be no special priesthood or order of prophet, but all God's people would be equipped with spiritual gifts and be enabled to minister one to another.

But that age would end in a time of great universal disaster and the appearance of terrible judgments upon the earth. Those days of judgment will be introduced by a period of intense international warfare, for Joel is told: "I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations, and have divided up my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy for a harlot, and have sold a girl for wine, and have drunk it" (3:2,3). To bring this about, the prophet is told: "Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, 'I am a warrior'" (3:9,10).

Many have quoted the famous words from Micah and Isaiah, "beat your swords into plowshares and your spears into pruning hooks," but little mention is made of this statement from Joel in which the nations are summoned not to make peace, but to make war. It is clear that Joel's prophecy must be fulfilled first and the present course of world events seems to indicate that there is no hope of universal peace until first there must come universal war and divine judgment.

Once again mention is made of the terrible judgments of the great day of the Lord: "Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining" (3:14,15).

But the final scene is one of beauty and glory: "And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the valley of Shittim" (3:18). As we have already seen, this is the way Ezekiel's great vision ends, with a river flowing out from under the threshold of the altar and watering the land. Water in Scripture is a picture of the Holy Spirit and fulfills the word of Jesus in John 7:38: "He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

It is apparent from Joel that the future is in God's hands and not man's. It is in the hands of One who is preparing something which is beyond anything eye has ever seen or ear has ever heard or has ever entered into the heart of man. God deals with us in judgment that He may capture our attention and wake us up to reality; but through these difficult things God in grace is simply saying: "Adjust your life to reality now that you may be ready for the great things which are yet to come." The promise to Israel is: "But Judah shall be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem to all generations. I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty, for the Lord dwells in Zion" (3:20,21). Again, this is where Ezekiel ended his prophecy, with a picture of the restored city under its new name "the Lord is there."

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Twenty-one God Judges: Amos, Obadiah

The prophecies of Amos and of Obadiah were uttered about a century apart yet their theme is very similar--it is that of the inevitability of judgment when sin is excused and continued. As we've already seen, Amos was a contemporary of prophets such as Isaiah, Joel, Micah, and Hosea. Though he himself grew up in the little town of Tekoa near Bethlehem in Judah, his ministry was largely directed toward the northern kingdom of Israel during the days of Jeroboam II, about the middle of the eighth century B.C. Amos has long been the favorite of social reformers, for his voice speaks with great power and clarity against injustices in social life. He minces no words in describing the atrocities and oppressions which the rich visited against the poor, and in warning the people who lived in comfort and luxury that they were living in a fool's paradise which would soon end in terrible disaster.

The atmosphere of the prophecy of Amos is set in the second verse of the first chapter where the prophet pictures Jehovah as a great lion, roaring out from Jerusalem over the cities of the land, and bringing fear and terror upon the hearts of all who hear the terrible sound.

In chapter 7 the prophet tells us a bit of his personal history. He was not trained as a prophet, nor even as a priest, but was a common herdsman--a shepherd--and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. From these humble origins he was called by God to utter a prophetic word against the extravagances of the nations surrounding Israel, against Judah the southern kingdom, and primarily against the kingdom of Jeroboam in the north. He is a striking example of the frequent pattern which God follows in calling His spokesman from unexpected backgrounds and without formal training or preparation.

The first two chapters reveal the concern of God for the behavior of nations, especially in the matter of cruelty and

oppression. Using the simple formula, "for three transgressions, yea for four" God utters warnings against Damascus, the Philistines, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, and an expanded judgment uttered against Israel. The prophetic formula is an indication of patience being pushed to the extreme and finally triggered into action by a sin of such seriousness that judgment can no longer be delayed.

The flagrant sin of Damascus was her barbarous treatment of the northern area of Israel called Gilead. For this, Damascus (Syria) would be ultimately delivered into exile. Gaza (Philistia) was judged for her terrible practice of enslaving peoples and selling them for profit to other countries. Tyre (Phoenicia) was committed to judgment by fire because of her treachery in pursuing the slave traffic at the expense of breaking an agreement she had made with other nations. Edom was doomed because of her unforgiving spirit against related nations around her. Ammon was condemned because of brutality and savagery against Gilead. Moab was to be judged for her violation of the dead. Judah would face ultimate exile because of her ignoring the word of God and her idolatrous practices. All these nations had ignored their moral responsibilities and were to be called into account because of this.

Finally, turning to the northern kingdom of Israel, the prophet described her sins as oppression of the poor, shocking immorality, blasphemy, and open sacrilege which they persisted in despite the fact they had seen the Amorites destroyed for the very sins they were committing. Knowing the concern and care of God for His people as demonstrated in their own history, they had nevertheless given themselves over to open debauchery.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 all begin with the phrase "hear this word." These three addresses cover chapters 3 through 6 and lay the careful groundwork for the warnings of the prophet and his appeal to the nation for repentance.

The theme of the first discourse, in chapter 3, is that privilege does not preserve from punishment. We often feel, as the nation Israel did, that because we are the special people of God we will be preserved from danger and judgment no matter what we do. By a dramatic series of questions-, the prophet points out that when you see certain effects you can be sure of the cause. If you see two people walking together, it is clear they have some agreement. If a lion roars in the forest it is clear he has found some prey. If a bird suddenly falls in its flight it clearly has been taken in a snare, etc. His conclusion is when Jehovah roars like a lion it is time to fear for judgment is near; and when God speaks, then His prophets can only utter what He says.

In the second address, chapter 4, the prophet describes the society women of Samaria as fat cows grown rich and lazy by their indolent lives. They were charged with making excessive demands upon their husbands to satisfy their cravings, and thus contributed to the oppression of the poor and the degradation of the nation.

With stinging irony, Amos invited the peoples to increase their religious practices and to give themselves even more avidly to their rituals and meaningless sacrifices. Since they had chosen to ignore the warnings which God sent to them in the form of famines, blights, pestilences, and invasions, they may as well give themselves to empty worship since it would afford them the only pleasure they could experience until the judgment would fall.

Beginning his third address, the prophet sang a dirge over the nation as though he were already celebrating its funeral. His words are eloquent, as seen in the exhortation to "seek the Lord and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel, O you who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth!" (5:6, 7).

Two classes of people were especially singled out for warning. There were those who kept wanting "the day of the Lord." They were the religious hypocrites who made much of their feasts, sacrifices, and solemn assemblies and spoke longingly of the need of God's judgment upon blatant and open sinners, but who were unaware of their own sinful and greedy hearts. To them the prophet declared that God hated their rituals and took no delight in their offerings, and would in no wise spare them from the judgment which was to come.

The second class of people were the indifferent, those who were "at ease in Zion." These were particularly the rulers who had given themselves over to luxury and were living as though no judgment were possible. To them the prophet declared the swift and certain judgments of the Lord, and that they would be the very first to go into

exile.

The third division of the prophecy covers chapter 7 through chapter 9, verse 10, and contains five visions which the prophet saw and which symbolized the people's condition. The first was of a plague of locusts which were forming to descend upon and devour the land. But when Amos saw the terrible destruction this would bring about he pled with the Lord to set it aside and his prayer was granted. The second vision was of a devouring fire (perhaps a severe drought) which again portended such destruction that the prophet pled for the people and this judgment was also averted. In the third vision the prophet was shown the Lord standing beside a wall holding a plumb line in His hand. This was a symbol of the deviations of Israel from God's righteous law. By this symbol the prophet learns that God has determined not to restore His people before judgment strikes. Against such terrible finality the prophet falls silent and does not intervene in prayer.

A parenthesis then occurs in which Amaziah, the priest of the false altar at Bethel, sends a lying report to the king concerning the ministry of Amos. With the king's authority behind him, Amaziah ordered Amos to leave the country and in defense Amos pointed out that he had not chosen to be a prophet but God had called him to it and he had no choice but to deliver the message he had been sent to speak. Amos utters a prediction of doom against Amaziah and his family because of his obstinate opposition, and foretells again the exile of Israel in a foreign land.

This interruption over, the prophet resumes his report of his visions describing how he had been shown a basket of summer fruit. Thus the nation was described as overripe and ready for judgment. Once again the prophet describes, in connection with this, the social injustices which had aroused the wrath of God against His people. They enslaved the poor, they cheated those who came to buy wheat, they were dishonest in all their business transactions, and the result would be earthquakes, famines, darkness and utter disaster.

The fifth vision, in the opening words of chapter 9, are a vivid description of the destruction that was to come upon the nation. The prophet saw the Lord Himself standing at the altar in Bethel. Then, in terrible sovereign power, He ordered the land of Israel to be subjected to destruction and the peoples of the nations to come and take them as prey and as exiles to foreign lands.

But, as in the other prophets, the final scene is one of the ultimate restoration of blessing and prosperity. The prophet declares: "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," says the Lord who does this" (9:11, 12). These words are quoted by the apostle James, in Acts 15, at the great council of Jerusalem, indicating that the prophets had foretold a time when the gospel would go out to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews, and that it would follow the restoration of the Davidic authority. Most commentators feel that this was accomplished in the first coming of Christ as the son of David but would be completely fulfilled in His return.

The closing verses of Amos are a marvelous description of the cleansing of the land and of the people in the final movement of God with Israel. A promise is given: "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land which I have given them," says the Lord your God" (9:15).

Thus it becomes clear that even though Amos speaks with severe language and bitter words, the reason for divine judgment is never revenge but only that God may usher in a restored order and bring about an incredible period of blessing and joy.

OBADIAH

The book of Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament and can be read in just a few moments. It seems to be nothing but a pronouncement of doom against the ancient nation of Edom, which has long since disappeared from history and been buried in the dust of the past. Yet the book finds its place in the Word of God, and that fact

alone indicates it has a message beyond its immediate fulfillment.

There are several men in the Old Testament named Obadiah, but the prophet who wrote this short prophecy seems to be identified with none of them. The name means "servant of Jehovah" and like a servant this Obadiah keeps himself in the background. He comes quietly onto the stage of prophecy, delivers his message, and is gone.

In Jeremiah 49 there seems to be a quotation from this book and some have surmised therefore that Obadiah was a contemporary of Jeremiah. But it seems much more likely that he prophesied somewhere around the middle of the ninth century B.C. Verses 10 through 14 of the prophecy describe an invasion and capture of the city of Jerusalem. There were four such plunderings of Jerusalem in the history of Judah and the most likely occurrence to link with this prophecy was that which took place under the reign of Jehoram of Judah in about 845 B.C. Obadiah's prophecy is directed toward the southern kingdom of Judah and yet concerns itself wholly with the predicted destruction and downfall of the nation of Edom. This nation, which we have seen frequently referred to in prophetic sections, was a descendant from Jacob's brother Esau. It occupied the rugged mountainous region south east of Judah, known in Scripture frequently as Mount Seir and whose capital was Sela, which is the Hebrew word for rock. The ruins of the city are known today as Petra, which is the Greek word for rock.

The book of Malachi, the last prophecy of the Old Testament, makes a statement from the mouth of God: "I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau" (1:2,3). This statement is quoted elsewhere in the Scriptures as declaring a great principle which runs throughout the course of scriptural history. Many have asked why God should make such a sharp distinction between these twin brothers. It is the purpose of the prophecy of Obadiah to answer the question, Why did God hate Esau? The prophecy divides into three parts verses 1 to 9 revealing the inward attitude of the heart; verses 10 through 14 detailing the outward acts of violence and cruelty charged against Edom; and verses 15 through 21 depicting the ultimate end, both of Edom and of Judah.

The essential evil, which God declares is the source of His unending hatred, is revealed clearly in verse 3, concerning Edom: "The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is high, who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?'" The phrase "you who live in the clefts of the rock" describes the capital of Edom, now known as Petra, which is a valley plateau accessible only through a long narrow ravine, containing within it huge temples carved out of the living rock. The Edomites, therefore, felt themselves to be impregnable. But Obadiah predicts that God will cast down their strongholds and bring them into judgment. Thus the essential evil which is symbolized everywhere in Scripture by Esau and his descendants is that of the pride of self-sufficiency, the philosophy which feels it has no need of God or of any help outside itself.

This inward pride finds its expression in outward acts of violence and cruelty toward Judah, described in verses 10 through 14. When Jerusalem was under attack and the people of Judah were being carried away by strangers who had invaded the city, Edom looked on with delight and shouted for joy at the news of the overthrow of Jerusalem. Furthermore, they took an active part by delivering up the survivors to the enemies of Judah and cutting off those that escaped. Thus for their evil against their brother nation the Edomites stand condemned, and despite their proud self-sufficiency are to be brought low and humbled in the day of the Lord.

Verses 15 through 21 describe the inevitable end of pride. For the prophet states: "As you have done, it shall be done to you, your deeds shall return on your own head" (v. 15). History records that some five years after the fall of Jerusalem, in 586 B.C., the Edomites were forced out of Petra by the Nabataeans, an Arab tribe which was encouraged to the attack by Nebuchadnezzar, and settled ultimately in southern Palestine in an area which the Greeks later called Idumaea. During the Roman conquest of Palestine, the Idumaeans joined the rebellion against the Romans in A.D. 70 and were entirely exterminated during the siege of Jerusalem in the third century A.D. Origen, one of the early church fathers, spoke of them as a people whose name and language had perished.

Obadiah's prophecy closes with a prediction of restoration to come to Judah, here called Mount Zion. Thus is fulfilled the word of Obadiah that "the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions" and also "there shall be no survivor to the house of Esau; for the Lord has spoken" (vv. 17, 18).

The deeper meaning of this little prophecy can only be understood when one sees Jacob and Esau as symbols of the antagonistic principles of the flesh and the spirit in man. God hates Esau and loves Jacob because Jacob stood for all that Esau was not. Jacob represents faith in God and a willingness to submit to God's guidance. Though in the personal life of Jacob there was much of failure and of shame, yet through all his record there shines the glory of faith in God's ability to bless.

But Esau hated that ideal. His own attitude was of self-sufficiency and pride and he took every opportunity to assault his brother Jacob whenever he was down. It has been well stated that every human institution is but the lengthened shadow of its founder, and this principle is seen clearly in the nations of Judah and Edom, which descended from Jacob and Esau. There is a footnote to history in the record of the New Testament which is most remarkable in this regard. In the scenes of Passion Week when Jesus was facing His coming crucifixion, all the Gospels give an account of the time when Jesus of Nazareth stood face to face with King Herod Antipas. Jesus was the son of Jacob, His whole life was lived to express complete and utter faith in God, and in Him was fulfilled the principles of Jacob, but without Jacob's failures and follies. But Herod is an Idumaeon, an Edomite, a descendant of Esau. He is proud and arrogant, watching with cruel satisfaction the mockery of the soldiers as they stripped Jesus and dressed Him in robes of royalty. With an evil smile, he plied Jesus with many questions, but for the son of Esau there was no answer from the son of Jacob. He had nothing to say.

The final issue is most remarkable, for the son of Jacob was crucified by the violence of sinful pride but rose a conqueror and is to return to reign as Lord of lords and King of kings, so that, as Obadiah states in his closing words: "the kingdom shall be the Lord's."

But what of Herod, the son of Esau? Tradition tells us that after the crucifixion he returned to Galilee, but soon his pride led him to seek the overthrow of his brother. In appealing his case to the emperor he was dethroned and exiled in Gaul where he died a painful and hideous death. Thus the question which this shortest of the Old Testament prophecies confronts us with is relevant yet today: It is either Jacob or Esau--which do you follow?

As Jesus Himself put it in John 6:63:

"It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Twenty-two God Waits: Jonah, Micah

Probably one of the best known stories in all the Bible is that of Jonah and the fish. Skeptics laugh at the account as one which could not possibly be true, and liberal Bible scholars often regard it as an example of a myth or early legend which was invented to teach a lesson. The book is also known for its reference to Jonah as a jinx or a bad luck person. But all this has obscured the true message of this book. The fact that Jonah was an historical character is confirmed by mention of him in 2 Kings 14:25 where we learn that he lived in Gath-hepher, north of Nazareth in Galilee. Since Jesus referred to him as prefiguring His own resurrection it is impossible to accept the view that Jonah and the fish story are mere legend or even parable.

The book opens with the story of Jonah's commission from the Lord to go to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh and

to preach against it, and Jonah's direct refusal to obey that command. Instead he boarded a ship going to Tarshish, in the opposite direction at the extreme west of the Mediterranean, to get as far away from Nineveh as possible. We are not told in the first chapter why Jonah did this, but the key to the book is in seeking the answer to the question: What made Jonah refuse to go to Nineveh?

Chapter 1 completes the story of Jonah's rebellious flight from his duty as a prophet. A great storm arose on the sea and the mariners became fearful that the ship was about to sink. When all their efforts seemed of no avail they cast lots to determine who was being punished by the gods through the instrument of this great storm. The lot fell upon Jonah who at that time was asleep in the inner part of the ship. Jonah confessed that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord and, though the mariners tried to spare him, eventually they felt they had no choice but to cast him into the sea. Immediately upon doing this the storm quieted and the sailors were impressed by the power of Jonah's God and offered sacrifices to Him.

Jonah himself would have drowned but for the fact that a great fish, especially sent by the Lord, swallowed him and carried him in his belly for three days and three nights. Though popular reference almost always refers to the fish as a whale, there is no evidence that such was the case. The Hebrew uses the term fish rather than whale and in other places the word is translated sea monster.

Chapter 2 records the prayer Jonah uttered while in the belly of the fish. It is a compilation of various quotations from the Psalms and indicates both the general knowledge which Jonah had of the Scriptures and also the specific ones that came flashing into his mind as he found himself in the darkness amid the gastric juices of the great fish. The import of the verses he quotes is one of thanksgiving for his relationship to the living God, and a casting of himself upon God's mercy for deliverance. The chapter ends with the brief statement, "And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land" (2:10).

Once again the word of the Lord came to Jonah, commanding him to go to Nineveh and proclaim the message he had been sent to deliver. It is clear that God has changed the prophet's mind by his experience in the fish, but He has not changed His own mind one degree about what He wants Jonah to say to Nineveh. The description given of Nineveh is of "an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth" (3:3). A day's journey was reckoned to be about 12 miles, so a three days' journey would be 36 miles. Nineveh was actually a group of cities, much like Los Angeles, clustered together on the banks of the Tigris River and forming the capital of the Assyrian empire.

The prophet went a day's journey into the city crying monotonously, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Ordinarily that kind of a message of destruction would not get much of a reception, for the Bible reports that other prophets were sent with messages of warning, but the people paid no attention. But an amazing thing happens. We are told that "the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them" (3:5). Even the king covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes, uttering a decree to urge the entire population to turn from their evil ways and violence with the hope that God would repent and save the city.

This is surely one of the most remarkable revivals ever recorded in history. That the city's repentance was genuine is indicated by the fact that God saw what they did and turned from the evil which He intended to bring against it, and the city was indeed spared. But another question remains unanswered. What potent factor caused the inhabitants of this great pagan city to repent so quickly and so thoroughly? This would be a continuing mystery were it not for a clue supplied by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In the Gospel of Luke, He refers to Jonah with these words: "For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be to this generation" (Luke 11:30). He thus indicated that the prophet himself was the sign to the city which brought about their repentance. In the same manner He indicated he would be a sign to the whole generation of Israel and, beyond them, to the race of mankind.

What did He mean by this? There are Bible scholars who feel that something happened to Jonah in the fish's belly which changed his entire features. It seems highly likely that the prophet's skin was altered in appearance by the gastric juices of the fish. Dr. Harry Rimmer in his book *The Harmony of Science and Scripture* tells of an English

sailor who fell overboard and was swallowed by a fish. A day or two later his shipmates saw the fish floating on the surface of the water. They caught it and took it ashore. When they opened it up, the sailors, to their amazement, found their shipmate alive. However, his skin had turned to chalky white and remained so for the rest of his life. Harry Rimmer personally talked with the man and learned from his own lips the details of his experience. There are probably in extant a half dozen accounts of individuals who have been swallowed by marine animals and survived.

It is not difficult to imagine what happened in the city of Nineveh when Jonah preached, if his entire face and body confirmed the remarkable story. The Ninevites would have clear proof that the God who sent Jonah to proclaim, "Yet-forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown," was a God who kept His word. Hence, the city repented to the last man and the judgment of God was stayed.

There have been some who have been troubled over the fact that Scripture says that God repented. This seems to indicate that He changed His mind from what He had previously determined to do. But this idea is difficult to square with the doctrine of God's omniscience and His sovereign determination of all events. We must remember, however, that these events are recorded for our information and instruction and therefore are written from a human point of view. God, of course, knew all the time that the city would repent at the preaching of Jonah under the peculiar circumstances in which he preached. And that also, from the apparent change in the divine actions, men would learn that repentance and contrition are the necessary conditions for a continuing relationship with the living God. Thus human repentance does not change God's mind, but actually carries forward His purpose. This whole story is an exemplification of the divine command "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" (James 1:8). The city of Nineveh was spared and it was not until a hundred years later that God carried out His judgment on Nineveh and it was destroyed.

In the last chapter of the prophecy, we learn of the reaction of Jonah to God's mercy upon the pagan city. Here also we learn at last the reason why Jonah fled to Tarshish when the command first came to him to preach in Nineveh. The opening words of the chapter tell us that the prophet was angry when he saw the city was spared. In his anger he said: "I pray thee, Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentest of evil" (Jonah 4:2).

It is clear from this that Jonah hated the Ninevites and would have liked nothing better than to see them destroyed. There was probably good reason for his hatred for the Ninevites were known throughout the entire world of that day as a cruel and ruthless people. Perhaps Jonah had actually seen several Ninevite invasions of Israel and the raiding and destruction of his people. He may have even suffered the loss of loved ones at the hands of these merciless soldiers, for the Ninevites had found more ingenious ways to be cruel than any other nation that had existed to that time. They were brutal, godless, and sinful, and for this reason the prophet wanted to see Nineveh destroyed.

One would have thought that he would have jumped at the chance to announce to this brutal city that they would meet their comeuppance in 40 days, but Jonah knew God better than that. In effect he says now to God, "I know you too well. If anyone by repenting gives you half a chance to be merciful, you'll change your mind and will not carry out your judgment against them." So to prevent that divine change of mind, Jonah fled to Tarshish.

What a revelation this gives of the character of God and the understanding of that character which these Old Testament prophets had. Critics today sometimes picture the God of the Old Testament as a vengeful, wrathful God, dealing only in black thunderclouds and lightning bolts, but that is not the kind of God Jonah knew. He knew that God was a gracious God, merciful and slow to anger, and abounding in love, quickly turning His judgments aside if there was any sign of repentant hearts.

The prophet was still in hopes that God would destroy the city; so he sat out on the rimrock looking over the city from the east and waited to see what God would do. Evidently he sat there for several days, for enough time elapsed for a gourd to grow and shade him from the hot sun. The prophecy informs us that it was God who

appointed the gourd to thus bring relief to the prophet's discomfort. But the next day God also appointed a worm to destroy the plant and then sent a hot east wind to increase the heat and discomfort which Jonah felt.

Once again Jonah becomes angry at God and asks to have his life taken from him. But God responds with a beautiful word: "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (4:10,11).

The reference to persons who do not know their right hand from their left is the Hebrew way of describing children. There were in Nineveh 120,000 little children as well as many animals, all of whom would be innocent victims of the sins of the adults under the avenging hand of God. Again, it is clear that God takes no delight in judgment, but seeks in long-suffering patience to bring individuals and even nations to the place of repentance and change.

The book ends rather abruptly at this point and we are not told whether Jonah learned his lesson or not. From the fact that he himself records this experience for us, it is most likely that he did learn. It is a lesson for all believers in all ages, that God loves the pagan world even if His people do not. How many of us would be delighted if tomorrow morning's paper reported that Moscow lay in smoking ruins? Yet we must never forget that God loves the Russians and the Chinese and any others who at this present time, we call our national enemies.

Further, the lesson of this book is that God has sent us to the unbelieving peoples of the world as he sent Jonah to Nineveh. Around us also are the godless, the lawless, and the disobedient. We often dismiss them by saying, "How revolting! How disgusting! They deserve damnation." But God has sent us to be a sign to this generation. The sign is that of resurrection, as Jesus said it would be with Him. It is the sign of people who once were dead but have been made alive in Jesus Christ. The very skin of our faces should shine with a new brilliance which grace has brought to it, and thus we ought ourselves to be a sign of resurrected life to the hopeless and lost around us. But how like this stubborn prophet we often are, intent upon our own goals and our own comforts, and unconcerned about those who stumble in darkness around us.

MICAH

The prophet Micah came from the city of Moresheth which is near Gath, about 30 miles from Jerusalem. He was a contemporary of Isaiah and his book is of a somewhat similar style. The prophet's name means "who is like God," and this forms the theme of his prophecy well. Micah describes not only what God is like, but how man can be God-like.

The book divides easily into three parts. The first three chapters describe the failure of both Judah and Israel, and predict the judgment that would fall upon each. It is vivid description of the lack of godliness in both nations. This is followed by a wonderful section in chapters 4 and 5, that describe the One who is coming, who is like God in every way. It is a great predictive section that looks forward to the coming of the Messiah. The last three chapters give us the pleading of God to the nation to lay hold of the secret of godliness.

Chapter 1, in striking language, describes the majestic approach of God striding forth in judgment upon His unrepentant people. Both the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions are in view in this passage, and the prophet describes in vivid and striking simile the fate of various cities as the invading forces come upon them. It is impossible to see this in English, but the Hebrew is a series of puns upon the names of the cities. For instance, Micah says, "Tell it not in Gath, weep not at all; in Beth-leaphrah roll yourselves in the dust" (1 :10). The name *Gath* means "weep" and the name *Beth-le-aphrah* means "dust town." Thus the passage would read something like this: "In Weep-town, weep not; in Dust-town, roll yourselves in the dust; in Beauty-town, beauty will be shamed; in Zasnán (which means "march") they will march not forth in Neighbor-town they will end up with

useless neighbors; and in Bitter-town they will grieve bitterly."

Chapter 2 goes on to picture vividly the destruction of the people, beginning with their rulers and reaching unto the women and the children. The prophet seems to be interrupted by false prophets who have protested his message, but to this objection Micah answers that God has changed His attitude toward the people because of their change toward Him. He speaks with great indignation against the false prophets who have misled the people.

In chapter 3 we are told the reason for the severity of judgment. Micah has been seeking godliness among the peoples of God and he looks where he might most expect to find it, among 'tine rulers of the nation and the representatives of God. Instead, however, he finds corruption, oppression, bribery, and injustice. Thus Micah exposes the mess in Jerusalem and says that the reason God visits judgment is that those who have been given authority to act in God's stead have forgotten that they are responsible to God.

This touches us also, for whenever we find ourselves in a position of authority, we are told everywhere in Scripture to remember that we also have an Authority over us. The New Testament reminds us that masters are to remember they have a Master in heaven as well, and God holds all authority responsible to Him. The man who forgets this begins to use his power for his own advantage; and that is what had corrupted the nation in Micah's day and corrupts the peoples today. Micah sums this up for us in 3:11: "Its heads give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for hire, its prophets divine for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, 'Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us.'" Here are mentioned all three classes of leaders in the nation--the spiritual rulers, the civil rulers? and the moral rulers. When such remember that they are representatives of God, there is always good government; but when they forget, there is corruption, oppression, bribery, agony and tears.

But in chapters 4 and 5, in a passage of wonderfully exalted vision, the prophet lifts up his eyes and looks across the centuries, past the rise of Assyria and Babylon past the great eastern empire of Greece, past the Roman empire and the days of the Caesars, past the Middle Ages with Martin Luther and the Reformation, past the eighteenth century awakening under John Wesley, and even past our own day to the coming of One who is truly God-like. It is one of the most beautiful messianic passages in Scripture. The passage is almost identical with Isaiah 2:1-4. Since Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries, it is striking to note that they were both given the same vision of the glory that was ultimately to come to Israel. It begins with the exaltation of the Temple as a place of worship for all the nations of earth, and then narrows to a Person: "He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken" (Micah 4:3,4). Clearly that is a scene yet to come in world history. In the meantime, Joel's word must be fulfilled--that the nations beat their pruning hooks into spears and their plowshares into swords. They shall never forget how to make war and never obey this command of God until One comes who knows how to rule in godliness.

But Micah goes on to show that before that beautiful scene can be fulfilled, the nation must be carried away to Babylon, and then be restored at last to their land.

Chapter 5 opens with a new thought: "Now you are walled about with a wall; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike upon the cheek the ruler of Israel." The historic fulfillment of this in the Gospels confirms that this is a picture of the Roman rule over Israel, when they would be contained like a city within a wall, and when the ruler of Israel would be struck on the cheek with a rod. When Jesus stood before Mate, a crown of thorns was put upon His head and a robe of purple on Him, and the soldiers bowed before Him and mocked Him, striking Him on the cheek with their rods.

This application is confirmed by the next verse where the prophet sees where this mighty ruler is to come from. It is one of the great predictive passages of the Old Testament: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days" (5:2). When the wise men came from the East to Jerusalem they asked the chief

priests, "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" and the chief priests said that He would be found in Bethlehem. How did they know? It was because 700 years before, Micah had predicted that Bethlehem, though little among the cities of Judah, would be honored by being the birthplace of Him who was to be ruler of Israel.

The passage goes on to predict a time when Israel would wander in defeat, without a king, without a temple, without a sacrifice "until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth; then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel" (5:3). This indicates a gathering of Israel back to the land to join a nation which has already been partially restored.

Then the prophet sees the One who had come out of Bethlehem and describes Him thus: "And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth" (5:4). Looking thousands of years down the corridors of time, Micah clearly perceived One who would rise out of obscurity and fulfill all these predictions. He is the God-man, the only God-like man that ever walked on earth.

In the remaining verses of chapter 5 the prophet describes how this One shall cleanse the peoples of their iniquities and remove their idolatries from them, and execute His anger and wrath upon the nations that had oppressed them during the days of their exile from the land.

In chapters 6 and 7, in a passage of great power and beauty Jehovah pleads with His people to tell Him why they have turned from Him, and to give their reasons for their rejection of His loving ministry. Plaintively the Lord asks what He has done to them that they have rejected Him so, and in what way He has wearied them. In answer, the people sarcastically say: "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on High? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (6:6,7). The people are asking, "What more can we do that we have not done? We have brought the required offerings, and still God is not satisfied. What more can we bring? Shall we even do like the pagans around and offer our children? Will that please God?"

To this blasphemous response, the prophet declares: "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (6:8). This is perhaps the most oft-quoted verse from the prophecy of Micah, and is the favorite of many who feel that God's only requirement for salvation is a virtuous life. But that is to ignore the fact that to walk humbly before one's God involves a full acceptance of God's provision for personal redemption and salvation through the sacrifice of Another on our behalf. The way to Godlikeness is to put away our wickedness by confessing our guilt before God, and looking to Him to pardon our iniquities and to cast our sins into the depths of the sea.

Because Israel refused to do this, the prophet goes on in the remainder of chapter 6 and the early part of chapter 7 to resume the theme of judgment, but concludes his message with a marvelous picture of the mercy of God. Notice especially the question with which he begins: "Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion upon us, he will tread our iniquities under foot. Thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as thou hast sworn to our fathers from the days of old" (7:18-20).

From the New Testament we learn that the way to walk humbly before our God is to walk in the light as He is in the light, that is, to walk openly and in honesty. Do not try to hide anything from God. Do not pretend to be something you are not in His presence. Walk in the light as He is in the light and as John assures us: "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). So Micah's question rings in our ears--Who is like God? Well, the only answer is, the God-like person is the one who walks with Jesus Christ--God Himself become man--who imparts to us His own likeness.

Chapter Twenty-three God Answers: Nahum, Habakkuk

The two prophets, Nahum and Habakkuk, both deal with a common problem in the life of believers: the anger we often feel at God when He does not act as we expect Him to.

Nahum's name means "comfort" and though the prophet's message is conveyed in strong and forceful language, nevertheless his message is basically one of comfort to the southern kingdom of Judah. He prophesied at the height of Assyrian power after Sennacherib had invaded the kingdom and the northern kingdom of Israel had been carried away into Assyrian exile. It looked as though Judah would shortly suffer the same fate, but Nahum was sent to declare that it was rather the seemingly resistless might of Assyria that would be crushed and judged. There was warning in this too for Judah, but the essential message of Nahum was that God answers the plight of His people and moves in unexpected ways to deliver them.

Very little is known of the prophet Nahum except that he came from the village of Elkosh, whose location is uncertain. There is some indication that it was in Galilee and it is interesting to note that the name Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee literally means "the village of Nahum." The prophet's message is directed against Nineveh, the same Nineveh we saw humbled and repenting under Jonah's ministry. But Nahum prophesied some 70 years after Jonah's day and by his time the Assyrian capital had fallen again into its violent and degraded ways.

The prophecy opens with a striking vision of the majesty and might of God. He is described as a God of zealous consistency in defending His holy and righteous character. Yet He is slow to anger and, though merciful, is never mocked. The prophet sees Him as moved at last by the wickedness and cruelty of the Assyrians to permit His anger to burn in terrible fury. We can get some idea of the awfulness of the divine anger in the fact that every Hebrew word for anger is compacted together in the first nine verses. They combine to picture God as burning with a terrible blistering rage.

Yet He does not strike out in all directions, as in a temper tantrum, but directs His rage against those who are most guilty. Verses 11 through 15 most probably describe the Assyrian king Sennacherib who had invaded Judah in the days of Hezekiah, as recorded in Isaiah 36 and 37. He is described by Nahum as one who came "out from you, who plotted evil against the Lord, and counseled villainy" (1:11). But in verse 14 the prophet says: "The Lord has given commandment about you: 'No more shall your name be perpetuated, from the house of your gods I will cut off the graven image and the molten image. I will make your grave, for you are vile'" (1:14). This was fulfilled literally in the murder of Sennacherib who, while worshipping in the temple of his gods, was struck down and murdered by his sons who then took his throne.

Verse 15 seems to reflect the joyful shout that went up from Jerusalem when news was brought of Sennacherib's death. "Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! Keep your feasts, O Judah, fulfill your vows, for never again shall the wicked come against you, he is utterly cut off" (1:15).

In chapter 2 the prophet looks on to describe in vivid detail the siege and fall of Nineveh, which historically occurred in 612 B.C. when the Babylonians and Medes finally overthrew the city. The entire chapter is a remarkable dirge which vividly describes the attacking army, the red uniforms of the Babylonians, the raging of their chariots through the streets of the city, and the drunken, half asleep responses of the Assyrians as they

stumbled to their assigned defense posts.

Verse 6 says, "The river gates are opened, the palace is in dismay." The historian Diodorus Siculus, writing in the first century B.C., declares: "There was an old prophecy that Nineveh should not be taken until the river became an enemy to the city. And in the third year of the sedge, the river being swollen with continual rains, overflowed every part of the city and broke down the wall for twenty furlongs. Then the king, thinking that the oracle was fulfilled and the river become an enemy to the city, built a large funeral pile in the palace and, collecting together all his wealth and his concubines and eunuchs, burned himself and the palace with them all, and the enemy entered at the breach that the waters had made and took the city." Thus Nahum's prophecy was fulfilled in precise detail

In the latter part of chapter 2 the prophet predicts that Nineveh's destruction would bring about total desolation and this was fulfilled so completely that when Alexander the Great marched across the site of Nineveh in 331 B.C he did not know that a great city had once stood there. It was not until 1845 that the site of Nineveh was identified and its ruins uncovered.

Chapter 3 states the reasons for the overthrow of Nineveh. The prophet declares, "Woe to the bloody city all full of lies and booty--no end to the plunder!" (3:1) God's anger is awakened because of the legendary cruelty of the Assyrian armies and their ruthless plundering of the nations around by means of deceptive agreements which they broke without warning or regard.

In verse 8 the prophet asks, "Are you better than Thebes that sat by the Nile, with water around her, her rampart a sea, and water her wall?" This great city of Egypt was located some 400 miles up the Nile and was regarded as one of the impregnable fortresses of the day, yet it was destroyed by Ashurbanipal in 663 B.C. God thus warns Nineveh that if such a great city could fall, so Nineveh's overthrow was equally possible. The prophecy ends with the words, "There is no assuaging your hurt, your wound is grievous. All who hear the news of you clap their hands over you. For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil?" (3:19). The Assyrians attempted to gain rule over all of western Asia and were universally despised. When Nineveh was destroyed there was rejoicing throughout the whole of the known world for Assyrian arrogance and cruelty was hated everywhere.

Thus Nahum's word brought comfort to a nation threatened by a godless, cruel and rapacious foe. Yet Scripture speaks of a latter-day Assyrian which shall rise as a godless and cruel power, which again will dominate the world of the end times. It is not surprising that many Bible scholars have identified this with Russia. It is striking that here the Lord addresses Nineveh twice saying, "Behold, I am against you"; and in Ezekiel's description of the invasion of Israel by the northern army in the last days, he begins chapter 39 with similar words, "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal." Perhaps it is time again to reassert God's capacity for anger and judgment. It is a mistake to think that God is so loving that He cannot punish sin, for as Charles Spurgeon has said, "He who does not believe that God will punish sin will not believe that He will pardon it through the blood of His Son."

HABAKKUK

The little prophecy of Habakkuk is undoubtedly one of the most important books in all the Bible, for it answers the question, "Why does God permit the righteous to suffer and the wicked to flourish?"

Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah who ministered in Judah, as Jeremiah did, just before the Babylonian invasion. It was a time of gross spiritual decline and widespread injustice within the nation. The name *Habakkuk* means "the embracer." It suggests the picture of a father whose son has been injured by some passing bully and he gathers up the hurt child and comforts him while bitterness enters his own heart. He cries out in perplexity, "Why doesn't God do something? How can a just God permit such wrong?"

So the prophet Habakkuk gathered up the hurt of Judah and the righteous remnant within it and cried out in

perplexity at the seeming silence of God. His first cry is: "Why dost thou make me see wrongs and look upon trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is slack and justice never goes forth" (1:3, 4).

God answers in verses 5 through 11, saying in effect, "I am doing something. I am raising up the Chaldeans to punish the wicked in Israel. I am not indifferent, but am moving to judge evil."

But this brings no relief to the troubled prophet, for if he was puzzled by the apparent inactivity of God against the wickedness of the rulers of Israel, he is now even more troubled by the problem of how a righteous and holy God can use an ungodly nation to punish His own people. The Chaldeans are well known for their crass indifference to human suffering, and their gross immorality and callous luxury. So the prophet asks, "Is he then to keep on emptying his net, and mercilessly slaying nations forever?" (1:17).

When no answer comes to his tormented question, the prophet retreats to his watchtower where in silence he will wait for God's reply. Soon the answer comes for the Lord commands him to write that a day of judgment awaits the Chaldeans as well, but it will not be immediately. Habakkuk is encouraged by the words, "If it seem slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay" (2:3). And then he is given the key message of the entire Bible, "Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith" (2:4). This verse is quoted three times in the New Testament--in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. In each of these great books a different emphasis is underscored. In Romans the emphasis is upon the words "the righteous." In Galatians, it is upon the words "shall live." While in Hebrews the emphasis is upon the words "by his faith." Literally the verse declares that the unrighteous soul is puffed up and is thus "not upright in him." It is a picture of pride and its effect upon the human ego. It puffs it up in arrogance and self-sufficiency. As a result, the unrighteous perish, but the man or woman of faith is living by another principle. It is a confidence that God is at work and will not fail to fulfill His determined purposes. The result of that is life. Faith then is the principle of life, in spite of all appearances at the present moment; but pride is the principle of death, despite the present appearances.

The prophet is then shown five woes which are addressed against the characteristics of pride. The first, ambition, is denounced. The ambitious man carries within himself the seed of his own destruction, for he is ultimately crushed by the ambitions of others. The greedy likewise overreach themselves and lose all. The violent man ends by destroying himself. The insolent man becomes sated with his contempt, and thus the cup of judgment in the Lord's right hand comes 'round to him as well. The idolater trusts his own creation and finds himself left without help in the day of his own need. So Habakkuk is reassured that the Chaldean onslaught against Judah will not be left unavenged, for the attacker carries the seed of his own destruction within himself. The prophet is left with the words, "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" (2:20).

In the third chapter Habakkuk is granted a vision of God moving in judgment against the proud. It comes as an answer to his prayer in which he requests that God will make known to him both His wrath and His mercy. In majestic and moving poetry, the prophet then reveals the might and glory of God which he saw. "His brightness was like the light, rays flashed from his hand, and there he veiled his power. Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind. He stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook the nations; then the eternal mountains were scattered, the everlasting hills sank low. His ways were as of old" (3:4-6). He goes on to describe God as striding the earth in fury, trampling the nations in His anger, as crushing the head of the wicked and stripping him naked before the world.

As a result of such a vision, the prophet declares, "I hear, and my body trembles, my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones, my steps totter beneath me. I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us" (3:16). Thus he has learned that when God gives a promise, those who wait in faith will surely see its fulfillment. Meanwhile, their faith is the principle of life for them despite the circumstances.

And so his puzzled cry turns at last to singing and the prophet closes the prophecy with these beautiful words: "Though the fig tree do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in

the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like hinds' feet, he makes me tread upon my high places" (3:17-19).

The application of this to our own hearts is plain. We, too, live in the days of the apparent silence of God. Under a silent heaven, we watch injustice and cruelty and violence rule the earth. Nothing seems to intervene, and our heart questions, "Is God too weak or too indifferent to help us?" But the answer is that evil and injustice has already received its death blow. On a cross outside Jerusalem God has done all He needs to do to end the blight of sin, except for the actual destruction of the wicked. His last word spoken to the race was that of love and grace uttered on the cross. His next word must be wrath and judgment, but as Peter tells us, He is long-suffering, "not wishing that any should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9). The word of Habakkuk is that faith waits in confidence that God will complete His work in His own good time, and meantime we, like the prophet, may rejoice in the fact that the Lord is our strength. As Psalm 50:3 puts it: "Our God comes, he does not keep silence."

Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Twenty-four God Is Jealous: Zephaniah, Haggai

In the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, we are told of an occasion when Jesus went into the synagogue at Nazareth, His hometown. There was given to Him the book of the prophecy of Isaiah to read. Opening the scroll He found the place where it read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). The passage goes on to describe the ministry of the Messiah, and Jesus read it until He reached the sentence, "To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (v. 19). At this point Jesus stopped His reading and handed the scroll back to the attendant saying, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21). The remarkable thing about this incident is that Jesus stopped His reading in the middle of a sentence, for Isaiah goes on to say "and the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa. 61:2). Jesus did not read that last sentence because it was not yet time to proclaim the day of vengeance of God. That day of vengeance is coming and Jesus said much more about it in His great Olivet Discourse, but it was yet many centuries in the future from when Jesus read the verse in the synagogue.

It is this "day of vengeance" which is the theme of the prophecy of Zephaniah. The prophet's name means "hidden of the Lord" and he speaks as though he were a representative of the remnant of faith, those few people who remain true to God during the time of great trouble that is to come upon the earth. They will be hidden by God Himself and watched over by divine love to keep them during this time. It is of these people that the book of Zephaniah is written, and especially of the great day of the Lord which is vividly described in this prophecy.

The prophet identifies himself as a great, great grandson of Hezekiah, one of the great and godly kings of Judah. His ministry occurred during the days of Josiah, the last godly king of Judah. Perhaps the ministry of Zephaniah had much to do with the reforms which Josiah instituted during his reign. Since Josiah was also a descendant of Hezekiah, it meant that he and the prophet Zephaniah were related members of the royal family. Zephaniah begins his prophecy with a vivid description of the coming judgment under Nebuchadnezzar, though he describes it as "the day of the Lord." The detail of destruction which he envisions was clearly fulfilled by the Babylonian invasion.

We must recognize there is a great deal of difference between the day of the Lord and the Lord's day. Sunday is the Lord's day, for it was the day when our Lord arose from the dead. But the day of the Lord is the day of the manifestation of God's hand directly in human affairs. At the present hour even though God is working through

the events of history bringing about overthrows, uprisings, and calamities as well as periods of prosperity and blessing, nevertheless His hand is hidden in the glove of history. But all the writers of Scripture agree that a day is coming when God will intervene directly in the affairs of men again. Notice how Zephaniah uses the personal pronoun throughout this passage: "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the Lord." Again, "I will sweep away man and beast," etc.

Beginning with verse 14, as in many of the prophecies, the prophet's vision lifts to encompass another day far down the corridors of time which will be the last great judgment of God upon earth. He calls it "the great day of the Lord" and describes it thus: "A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements" (1:15, 16). This describes a time of such great and universal trouble that there will be nothing comparable to it in all the annals of history.

Zephaniah goes on to say, "I will bring distress on men, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord" (1:17,18). We must always remember in reading passages like this that it is not easy for God to speak this way. He Himself declares that He takes no delight in the death of the wicked. Judgment, one prophet says, is His strange work, for His heart delights in mercy. But eventually, if His will is to be done, and if earth at last is to attain to the glorious freedom described in the prophets concerning mankind, if the dreams that lie hidden away in the hearts of men for a warless world and a great time of prosperity when joy will flood the earth--if that is ever to come, then God must deal with the entrenched evil of men. This is why the coming of a day of vengeance is absolutely certain. All the prophets warn of this and the New Testament writers refer frequently to it as well.

In Zephaniah's second chapter, he traces the extent of God's destruction. Certain nations are named outright. The ancient enemy of Israel, Philistia, will be made desolate. Moab and Ammon will be destroyed and their land become like Sodom and Gomorrah. The Ethiopians will be slain and the great nation of Assyria will be judged, with its capital, Nineveh, rendered a desolation and a dry waste in the desert.

Finally in chapter 3 the judgment centers upon the city of Jerusalem. Its case is hopeless from the human standpoint. Its evil is so widespread and so deeply imbedded that there is no likelihood of correction from within. All her leaders are corrupted and faithless so that the nation lies hopeless and helpless, awaiting its deserved judgment.

But in the midst of this, there comes a gleam of hope: "'Therefore, wait for me,' says the Lord, 'for the day when I arise as a witness. For my decision is to gather nations to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all the heat of my anger; for in the fire of my jealous wrath all the earth shall be consumed'" (3:8).

In the midst of this universal judgment, Jehovah promises to bring relief to the suffering of Judah, and He declares: "For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord, those who are left in Israel; they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall pasture and lie down, and none shall make them afraid" (3:12,13). Thus even in the midst of His judgments, God would preserve Himself a people who would remain faithful to His cause. In beautiful language, the prophet depicts the character of those who will be redeemed. They shall be "humble and lowly" for they have been conquered by the sovereign grace of God.

The closing verses, from 14 on, constitute a command to the redeemed in Zion to break into praise to the Lord in song for the redemption He has brought about. This is the new order that follows the darkness, the gloom, and the slaughter. It is what God has been aiming at all along, that He might bring song instead of sorrow, service instead of selfishness, security instead of slavery. The prophet's picture is one of great beauty and glory. He describes the scene thus: "The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival" (3:17). It is the song of the redeemed in which the Lord Himself is present to lead them in glorious exultation.

All this is possible to believers at the level of the spirit right now. When God deals a death stroke against the flesh within us and brings us through the painful judgment of saying no to the ego and the self life, there follows a time of singing and of joy. That is the reason God takes us through the pain and the darkness. What we see to be true of the individual life today will ultimately be true on the whole wide canvas of history as God brings the evil of humanity to an end and ushers in the day of joy and gladness.

HAGGAI

Earlier in this volume we noted the fact that the Old Testament is naturally divided into two major sections, each one covering in general the same period of time. The Old Testament begins with Genesis and the account of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, but then narrows its vision to trace the family of Abraham through Moses and the Exodus with its new beginning, with entrance into the land of Canaan. The history of Israel in the land is followed through the period of the judges, the beginning of the monarchy under, first, Saul and then David, and finally the story is traced through the succession of kings of both Israel and Judah to the final exile of Israel to Assyria and Judah to Babylon. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, which close the first half of the Old Testament, give us glimpses of life in Babylon and record the return from Babylon to Jerusalem and the beginnings of the worship of Jehovah again in a Temple in Jerusalem.

This second half of the Old Testament begins again with the period of the patriarchs, going back to the story of Job and his struggles to learn what God wanted him to know about God and himself. Through the books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Song of Solomon the inner life of the people of God is traced during the period roughly from Moses to David and Solomon. Then the prophets brought before us the struggles of the people of God during increasing declension and spiritual idolatry until at last the period of exile is reached.

Now once again we have come to the time of restoration from Babylon, and the ministry of the three post-exilic prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. These three prophets ministered in Judah after the return from the Babylonian captivity as recounted in the book of Ezra when the people began to lay the foundations of the Temple. However, because of political and local problems, the work ceased and Haggai begins his ministry with one theme in view: "Let us arise and build the house of the Lord."

Because of this continuing emphasis the prophecy of Haggai has been a favorite book for all Preachers today who are trying to get their congregations to build adequate buildings. But it is a misuse and misunderstanding of Scripture to apply it in that way. In Haggai's day, the Lord's house was the Temple. Although the returned people were still under the domain and rule of the Babylonians, they had permission from the king of Babylon to begin work on the Temple. Haggai delivers four messages to the people, all uttered within the space of a year and a half, and all concerning the need to build the Temple. But this becomes for us a picture of our responsibility as believers today to build the true house of God, which is not a building, but people. Each believer is the Temple of God and collectively all believers form the great house of God which is the church, the place where God dwells. The proper application of the prophecy of Haggai to our own time is therefore to see it as an exhortation to the people of God everywhere concerning their responsibility to make the worship of God and the holiness of the church of God their first concern.

Haggai's four messages are carefully dated. The first one includes all of chapter 1. It was addressed to the civil governor, Zerubbabel, and to the religious head, Joshua, the chief priest. Each message reveals an excuse given by the people for not working on the Temple, and what God saw to be the real reason behind that excuse. So to the leaders of the people Haggai says, "Thus says the Lord of hosts: This people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord" (Haggai 1:2).

After the laying of the foundation, the work of building the Temple had been abandoned for 15 years. The reason the people gave was that some mistake had been made in figuring the 70 years that Jeremiah prophesied. They were suggesting there was no use doing anything because God was not yet ready to move. But God answered

their excuse in these words, "Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, 'Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared'" (1:4,5). Ironically, God suggests that the real reason the work of building has lagged is that they are all wrapped up in their own affairs. They did not feel it was time to build God's house, but they had no doubt that it was time for God to help them build theirs! Clearly they had forgotten that the fact they were in the land at all proves that God's time had come. They would not have been back in Palestine had the 70 years not been fulfilled. The real reason for their indolence was that they were not willing to put God's concerns first.

So the prophet invites them to consider what the results have been in their lives. Twice he uses the phrase "Consider how you have fared" (vv. 5, 9). Their harvests were poor, their clothing inadequate, their returns could not keep pace with inflation. Furthermore, they were neglecting the Temple while adequate supplies of wood were available on the hillsides of Israel to build the house of the Lord. So the Lord reminds them, "Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought upon the land and the hills, upon the grain, the new wine, the oil, upon what the ground brings forth, upon men and cattle, and upon all their labors" (1:10, 11).

Why did God do this? Was He trying to punish them? No, God does not punish in that sense; He was trying to wake them up. He was attempting to recall them to a reappraisal of their priorities and a remembrance of a rule which runs through all of Scripture and through life, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matt. 6:33).

The result of this forceful reminder was that the people began work immediately upon the Temple, and Haggai was sent to encourage them with the word of the Lord, "I am with you, says the Lord" (Hag. 1:13).

How long did the work last? Three weeks; then it ground to a halt again. Twenty-one days after his first message, the word of the Lord came to Haggai once more. "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of She-altiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people, and say, 'Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not in your sight as nothing?'" (2:2,3).

A comparison of this passage with Ezra 3 indicates that Jehovah was simply repeating here what the people had been using as a further excuse to stop work on the Temple. Certain old men had come down to watch the work who had been but children when they were carried captive into Babylon. They had seen the Temple of Solomon in all its glory and, as old men sometimes do, they were living in the past. They said to the people, "Do you call this a Temple, this heap of ruins here? We saw Solomon's Temple and what you are building is nothing compared to that. We remember the gold and silver that was in his Temple and you do not have any gold or silver. How are you going to decorate this Temple?" The people grew discouraged at this and said in effect, "You know, they're right. We don't have any gold or silver, we don't have anything to make this Temple beautiful. What's the use? Why work?" So they quit.

Once again the word of the Lord was, "Work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise I made you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit abides among you; fear not" (2:4, 5). Jehovah goes on to promise He would shake the political powers of the day so that they would pour gold and silver into the land. But even more significantly He says, "The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts" (v. 9).

These words were fulfilled after 400 years when the same Temple, changed and altered by Herod the Great but the same essential building, was entered by Jesus of Nazareth and was filled with the glory of His teaching, standing in the midst of the Temple and saying things that the people had never heard before. By those words He utterly changed the life of that nation and every nation in the world since. Thus the glory of the second Temple was a greater and different glory than that of Solomon's.

But the people quit work again and two months later a third message was given to the prophet Haggai: "Thus says

the Lord of hosts: Ask the priests to decide this question, 'If one carries holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and touches with his skirt bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any kind of food, does it become holy?' " (2:11, 12). To this question the priests properly answered no. The prophet then pointed out that any person who is unclean contaminates everything he touches, and by this the people were to learn that the ruined and neglected Temple had been the cause for all the economic difficulties which they had experienced for so long. But now that they had begun to build, the prophet reassured them that divine blessing would not be far behind.

The final word of Haggai is a personal message to Zerubbabel, the governor. It is a reminder that the Lord is in charge of all the nations of the earth, and promises to shake the kingdoms of earth so that continual instability will mark the days of Zerubbabel's governorship, but he himself is given reassurance: "On that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, says the Lord, and make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts" (2:23). This was undoubtedly a great personal encouragement to the governor, but it clearly views him also as typifying the messianic King who, as the chosen of God, would bear the signet ring of authority upon His hand and would build a Temple not made with hands, which would remain when all earthly kingdoms and governments are shaken and destroyed.

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Highlights of the Bible by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter Twenty-Five God Encourages: Zechariah, Malachi

The prophet Zechariah was a young contemporary of Haggai. Both ministered to the remnant of the people who had returned from captivity in Babylon. It was a discouraging and depressing time for, although they were back in Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple had begun, they were still vassals of Babylon, subject to the Gentile powers around them, without much hope for the future.

The dating of God's first message to Zechariah indicates that it fell between two of the messages which Haggai had addressed to the people. Thus both of these prophets were attempting to awaken the people to new hope and new activity.

Zechariah introduces himself as the son of Berechiah, who was in turn the son of Iddo, the prophet. These names are significant, for *Zechariah* means "God remembers," *Berechiah* means "God blesses" and Iddo means "at the appointed time." Thus even in the prophets' names God has hidden the theme of the book of Zechariah, for His message was a reminder that God remembered His people and would bless them at the appointed time.

The prophecy of Zechariah has been called "The Apocalypse of the Old Testament," for like the book of Revelation, it is an unveiling of the unseen things. That is what *apocalypse* means, a revelation, an unveiling. However, in Zechariah Israel is in the foreground and the Gentile nations in the background, while in the book of Revelation the reverse is true.

Zechariah 1:2,3 gives a brief summary of the book in outline form. It reads:

"The Lord was very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them Thus says the Lord of hosts:

Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts."

Three divisions of Zechariah's prophecy are indicated by the repetition of the dramatic name "the Lord of hosts." This is one of the unusual names of God in the Scriptures, and means "God of the masses," the Lord of *all* hosts--whether angel, human, demonic, whatever. Even the stars are referred to in Scripture as the hosts, and whatever hosts or masses may be in view. Jehovah is the God who is sovereign over them all.

The statement that indicates the first division is: "The Lord was very angry with your fathers." This is then enlarged upon in verses 4-6, describing God's displeasure with His people.

The theme of the second division is described by the words, "Return to me," and from 1:7 to 6:15 Zechariah tells of God's program to deliver His people and bring them back to Himself.

The third division, chapters 7-14, is an exposition of the words in verse 3 of chapter I, "And I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts." This is always the program of God. If anyone finds himself straying away from the Divine Presence so that life grows cold and faith grows dim, exposing him to great temptations and pressures toward evil, the only recourse is to turn to the Lord. If you want God back in your life with all the glory His presence entails, then come back to Him. That is the formula for recovery.

The first division is a brief reminder by the prophet that the history of Israel has been one of departing from the words and ways of God. There is no need for the prophet to enlarge on this, for the long years of captivity in Babylon were sufficient confirmation that moral departure brings God's displeasure.

The Second Division

Beginning with 1:7, a most remarkable vision was given to the prophet. It was actually eight visions in one which were all shown to Zechariah on the same night. These eight visions fall into three major divisions which may be likened to three acts in a great drama revealed to the prophet. As we read them we may imagine ourselves as spectators to this drama which God is unfolding to Zechariah. God is the Author; Zechariah is the producer; and we are the audience.

The entire vision covers the time from Zechariah's day through all of subsequent history to the return of the Lord to His people in power and glory. The first act is made up of two visions. The prophet sees a Watcher looking out over the people in a valley. The Watcher is riding upon a horse, and with him are other riders upon horses. The angel of the Lord interprets the vision to the prophet. It means simply that Israel--symbolized here by the lowly myrtle shrub--were the people shadowed in the valley, watched over by a divine Watcher. The returned exiles could clearly see that they were indeed in a shadowed place, but what they could not see was the One who was watching the whole procedure, who had with Him great resources to meet their need in the hour of despair. This was what the vision revealed to them.

The second vision in the first act reveals four smiths or workmen--actually carpenters. The prophet saw four horns and four carpenters, and this too is interpreted to the prophet. Like the riders in the first vision, the four carpenters are divine agents who are sent out to terrify the nations, symbolized by the four horns. The people of Zechariah's day were discouraged by the seeming invincibility of the great powers arrayed against them, but what they did not see was the divine resources. They were unconscious of the divine agents who were there to move on their behalf, and that is what God revealed to them.

Thus the curtain falls at the end of Act one, and in the second chapter it rises on Act two, which is but a single vision. It was the vision of a man with a measuring line in his hand who went out to measure the city of Jerusalem and as he did this the interpreting angel said to the prophet:

"Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and cattle in it. For I will be to her a wall of fire round about, says the Lord and I will be the glory within her"

(2:4, 5).

This is followed by a beautiful description of the days of blessing which are to come upon Israel, all to be literally fulfilled as Israel would be brought into the place of blessing in the land. It was God's way of saying to the people, "Come back to me and blessing will flow to you." Blessing can come from no other source. It is only from the resources of God that joy, love and peace can flow. The man with the measuring line was sent to highlight, by contrast, the measureless blessings God was ready to pour out to those who returned to a relationship with Him.

Act three consists of five more visions. Here the way to return to God is acted out in five steps. In the first scene Joshua the high priest is revealed, standing before God. Opposed to him is Satan, the adversary. The people of Zechariah's day knew well that Satan was against them, but what they could not see was the Advocate, the One who stood on their behalf and ministered for them. Then, in this wonderfully moving vision, the prophet saw how Joshua was cleansed. His filthy garments were taken off and he was clad in new, clean garments. The reason for this was given: "I have chosen Jerusalem" (see 3:2). The way this cleansing of God's chosen people would occur is then clearly described: "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men of good omen: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. For behold, upon the stone which I have set before Joshua, upon a single stone with seven facets, I will engrave its inscription, says the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day" (3:8, 9).

This is a marvelous prophecy of the coming of Jehovah's servant, the Branch. He would be areas stone upon which God would make certain engraving (this, perhaps, refers to the marks of crucifixion), and by Him the guilt of the land would be removed in a single day. It is clear in this vision that cleansing is the first step the way back.

Then in Scene two we learn what follows was the cleansing of God. It is a vision of a lampstand and two olive trees. The trees continually dripped oil from their branches into the lampstand, which was burning brightly. Oil is everywhere in Scripture used symbolically of the Holy Spirit, and this is a wonderfully symbolic description of the truth that God will dwell within, supplying inner resource that makes it possible for his own to burn brightly as lights in the midst of a dark generation. Thus the word of the Lord was addressed particularly to Zerubbabel, the governor, saying: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (4:6).

Scene three (5:1-4) describes a flying scroll with writing on both sides, containing curses against thieves and those who blaspheme among the people. It was a picture of the law in the midst of corruption. The people could see the corruption in their midst, but they could not see the law, so this is God's encouragement in the hour of darkness, that God's law was still at work, bringing a curse upon lawlessness, bringing it ultimately to an end.

In Scene four (5:5-11), Zechariah saw a woman in an ephah, which was a measure of grain very much like our bushel basket. While the prophet and the interpreting angel watched, wings were given to this basket and it flew away to Babylon. Though the prophet is given no explanation of this, it is possible to interpret it because it contains terms which are used elsewhere in Scripture. Whenever a woman appears as symbolic of evil it is always a reference to something religiously wrong. Here then is the picture of the judgment of false faith, very much as in the book of Revelation, where a woman who is the false church is called "mystery: 'Babylon the great'" (Rev. 17:5). Zechariah sees God's judgment falling upon hypocritical religions. The people could see the hypocrisy of their religious leaders, but they could not see the power of God to identify it as Babylonian in its origin and thus expose it and render it powerless.

In the last scene of Act three, the prophet sees four chariots which were driven out upon the earth (Zech. 6:1-8). It is very much like the vision in the book of Revelation of four horsemen who ride out to bring judgment upon the earth (Rev. 6:1-8). The number four is the symbol of universality, and the four riders are sent out to bring judgment upon the whole world.

Thus the curtain rings down on the great drama of redemption. It is God's symbolic play of how to find the way back to Him--first by cleansing, then the filling of the Holy Spirit, then the putting away of lawlessness and

hypocrisy, and finally the judgment of the entire earth.

Chapter 6 of Zechariah closes with a prophetic vision of the crowning of the One whose name is the Branch, and it is said of Him: "He shall grow up in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord, and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule upon his throne" (6:12, 13).

The true temple, as we have seen, is the church of the living God, and this scene depicts the building of that great dwelling place of God by the Spirit, which Jesus, the great King-Priest, is building to the glory of His Father.

Chapter 7 marks the beginning of the last division of the book. Here God speaks in a different form, for instead of visions He addresses the prophet directly. The theme of the section is found in chapter 8, verse 3: "Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city and the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain."

The historical setting for this message of hope and promise was an inquiry from the people as to whether they should continue celebrating the fast which had been begun in memory of the burning of Jerusalem in the fifth month of the year. God's answer was to point out that such fasts had been instituted not by divine command but solely on the initiative of the people. They were reminded that what God sought for was justice and mercy rather than the observance of self-appointed ritual. The inference was clear that had they been obedient the occasion for this fast would never have occurred. Despite the shameful record of the people's failure, God promises that when they walk in obedience and return to Him He shall turn the fasts into feasts to such a degree that all the nations around will envy the prosperity of Jerusalem and: "In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (8:23).

In chapters 9-11 the prophet continues his description of the means by which God will return to His people, but this time in prophetic poetry very much in the style of Isaiah or Ezekiel. First he predicts an invasion of Israel during which Damascus, Tyre, and Sidon, and the cities of Philistia would be captured, but Jerusalem would not be attacked. This was historically fulfilled by the coming of Alexander the Great who captured Damascus and, after a siege of seven months, overthrew Tyre. He then marched against Gaza and Philistia, razing the cities to the ground; but though he passed by Jerusalem he did not attack it. Thus Zechariah's prophecy was fulfilled. In 9:9 his prophetic vision predicts the actual appearance of the divine king in Jerusalem: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass." Matthew 21 records the fulfillment of this when Jesus sent His disciples to find a colt and an ass and mounted the colt to ride in triumph through the streets of Jerusalem with the people crying, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Luke tells us that as He drew near Jerusalem He wept as He looked out over the impenitent city and said these remarkable words: "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes" (Luke 19:42).

The remainder of Zechariah 9 is a prediction of victory for the sons of Judah over the sons of Greece, and many Bible scholars feel it speaks of the Maccabean uprising and victory of the Jews over Antiochus Epiphanes.

In chapter 10 the prophet looks ahead to describe the final victory of the people of God. The promise is specific: "Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and with their children they shall live and return. I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria; and I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, till there is no room for them" (10:9,10).

But in chapter 11 the prophet returns to a day during which a fire of judgment will devour the people and spoil the glory of the false shepherds. Many take this to be a description of the Roman conquest of Israel and the subjugation of the priesthood under Roman rule. Then the prophet is called upon to act out the role of the Good Shepherd who holds in His hands two staves, named Grace and Union. This true Shepherd then rejects the false shepherds and is in turn rejected by the people. The staff labeled Grace is broken in half and the Shepherd is given His wages, consisting of 30 shekels of silver which are cast into the treasury (in Hebrew it is the word *potter*). This is a remarkable foreview of the betrayal by Judas for 30 shekels of silver, which were ultimately paid to the

potter for the field in which the body of Judas was buried.

After this the prophet, still enacting the role of the Good Shepherd, broke the second staff labeled Union and thus symbolized the breakup of the nation and its ultimate dispersion among the nations of the world.

The prophet is then told to play the role of a false shepherd, for Jehovah says: "For lo, I am raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for the perishing, or seek the wandering, or heal the maimed, or nourish the sound, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs" (11:16). Very likely Jesus had this passage in mind when He said to the blinded Pharisees of His day: "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (John 5:43).

This false shepherd is the one whom the apostle Paul calls the man of sin who shall be received as the Messiah but turns out to be the anti-Messiah, the one we know as the antichrist (see 2 Thess. 2:1-4). It is remarkable that today, when many are falling into the error of anti-Christian cults, they do so because they have first rejected an opportunity to hear the truth. The result is they are allowed to believe a lie, just as Paul warns will be the case in the last days.

Zechariah 12-14 constitute the last vision of the prophet and his final description of how God finds a way to return to His people. It opens with these words: "Lo, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the peoples round about; it will be against Judah also in the siege against Jerusalem. On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it shall grievously hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth will come together against it" (12:2, 3). According to this word the darkest days for Jerusalem lie yet ahead. It shall become a burden to all nations, a grievous stone of stumbling. Against it the peoples of the nations shall be gathered together, for Zechariah informs us that God will not allow Himself to be ignored, but the ultimate breakthrough will come by the actions of divine grace.

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born" (12:10).

After the mourning comes the cleansing of the people and the setting aside of the idols of the land. Then prophecy will be brought to an end, for there shall be no need for further prediction. The time has come when all that the prophets have uttered shall be fulfilled.

In chapter 14 the prophet returns again to the vision of the destruction of Jerusalem, and describes how the nations surround it and the city is taken and plundered, and at that time he declares: "Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward. And the valley of my mountains shall be stopped up, for the valley of the mountains shall touch the side of it; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord your God will come, and all the holy ones with him" (14:3-5).

Geologists have long known that a great earth fault runs through the Mount of Olives. There is certainly coming a day when the mountain shall be split in half and the armies of the nations that assault it shall flee in terror.

The prophetic vision goes on to say: "On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea, it shall continue in summer as in winter. And the Lord will become king over all the earth on that day the Lord will be one and his name one" (14:8,9).

This accords with the description of Ezekiel and Joel and depicts the glory of the earth in the days when God shall reign, through His Son, as King over all the earth. The book then closes with these beautiful words: "And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, 'Holy to the Lord.' And the pots in the house of the Lord

shall be as the bowls before the altar, and every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the Lord of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the flesh of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day" (14:20, 21).

Every commonplace thing is yet to be made holy unto the Lord. Have you realized that that is what God is promising you? Every moment of your life, every commonplace thing, shall be touched with the glory of His presence when He is in the center of your life. Someday it will be visibly true on earth, but it can be spiritually true of those who open their hearts and enthrone the King of Glory as Lord in their lives right now!

MALACHI

This last book of the Old Testament is separated in time from the first book of the New Testament by a period of more than 400 years. After the ministry of Malachi the heavens fell silent, and no prophet came to Israel and no further Scriptures were written. History, of course, was still going on, and remarkable things were taking place in Israel among the Jews. New institutions were being formed that appear in the opening of the New Testament, but none of this is recorded in sacred history.

As we have already seen, the Jews did not return from Babylon in one great happy throng. There was a drawn out, straggling return, consisting of several groups. The first one, led by Zerubbabel, was in 535 B.C. After building their own homes they began to lay the foundations of the Temple, but when this work slowed to a halt it was Haggai's ministry 15 years later that stirred them up to carry on the work.

The Temple was completed during the ministry of Zechariah, and during this time Ezra the priest led another group back from Babylon. Finally the last return was accomplished under Nehemiah, who in 445 B.C. began to lay the walls of the city of Jerusalem.

It was shortly after Nehemiah finished his task that the prophet Malachi appeared on the scene. If the prophecy of Malachi is read in connection with the historical events of Nehemiah, it is clearly evident that they were contemporary.

The name *Malachi* means "my messenger." The prophecy opens with a tender and sensitive word from the Lord to the people: "I have loved you," says the Lord" (1:2). This is the underlying theme of Malachi's prophecy, and forms the bright background against which is seen, in stark contrast, the darkened hearts and blinded minds of the people.

Though the Temple was now completed and the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, still the people were not enjoying the promised period of blessing and prosperity which Haggai and Zechariah had predicted. As a consequence, their reply to the Lord's vow of love was: "How have you loved us?" The structure of the book of Malachi is here revealed, for again and again God declares His expectation of love from them in return for His love of them, and seven times the people reply, in effect: "How have we fallen short? We do not see any failure on our part." Here is a callous people who have become so indifferent and unresponsive to God that, in perfect sincerity, they can reply, "What do you mean--why do you say such things to us? We do not see any evidence of love on your part."

God's answer to their question, How have you loved us? is to remind them that His love dated from the very beginning of the race, as evidenced in the patriarchs, Jacob and Esau: "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau" (1:2). He goes on to point out that the history of Edom, the nation descended from Esau, is quite different from the story of Jacob and Israel.

If we had known these two men we probably would have loved Esau and hated Jacob, for Jacob was the schemer, the operator, the untrustworthy rascal. Esau was the outdoor man, hearty, open, frank and strong. Of the two he appears naturally to be much the better man; but in effect God says, "I love Jacob, because in his heart is a hunger

for deeper things than life affords." Jacob wants something more than what is on the surface. That always draws out the heart of God. Esau was a despiser of his birthright and cared nothing for spiritual matters.

God's love for Israel should have drawn from them a response of love in return, but through Malachi God charges the people with their failure to return His love: "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name" (1:6). These charges against the priests, which run on through chapter 2, verse 9, reveal in detail how the priests committed sacrilege in offering polluted food on the altar of Jehovah, and manifested greed and covetousness in that none was found willing to open the doors of the Temple without pay; and finally displayed contempt for the whole sacrificial system which manifested itself in sniffing at it as a great weariness of the flesh.

To these accusations the priests respond with great resentment, asking again and again, "How have we?" The punishment of the priests was that they would be made despised and abased before all the people. This is always the reaction of people to hypocrisy in the ministry. There is nothing but contempt for those who claim to be the special ministers of the Lord but whose lives deny God's ways.

In the latter part of chapter 2 the prophet details the sins of the people. The first specific sin was the mixed marriages of the people with the pagan nations around them. Throughout the history of Israel this had always led to the introduction of idolatry and ultimate depravity. These people seemed to have learned nothing from the years of captivity in Babylon, and were again beginning the same practices which had destroyed them as a nation years before.

The second sin was the prevalence of divorce. When the people asked why God did not receive their offerings any longer, the prophet replies: "And this again you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, 'Why does he not?' Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. For I hate divorce, says the Lord the God of Israel" (2:13-16).

This sounds very contemporary, does it not? Malachi had to minister to a nation in which divorce was widespread and, more than that, to a society in which moral confusion and cynicism was rampant. While indulging in easy divorce and mixed marriages, the people were, nevertheless, saying: "Every one who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them." This is equivalent to what we often hear today, "God is so loving and merciful that He will not punish sin, but only bless the sinner." Even more up-to-date, some of the people of Malachi's time were asking, "Where is the God of justice?" which is to say, "God does nothing; why should we care?"

But chapter 3 contains the remarkable prediction of the coming Messiah. It begins with the words: "Behold, I send my messenger [in Hebrew that would be, "Behold, I send Malachi"] to prepare the way before me." As we discover in the book of Matthew, that "messenger" was John the Baptist. He came to prepare the way of the Lord, to announce the coming of a second Messenger from God. That second Messenger is now brought before us in Malachi's prediction: "And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming says the Lord of hosts" (3:1). This clearly foresees the night when the Lord Jesus took wine and bread with His disciples, and holding the cup said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of trouble to the disciples of Jesus, for they said to Him: "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" The Lord's answer was, "Elijah has already come, and they did not know him" (17:10,12). He saw the look of astonishment on their faces and made it clear that it was John the Baptist who came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17) and fulfilled his ministry in that initial coming. Yet Jesus stated this in such a way as to leave the clear inference that Elijah the prophet would actually come before the glorious appearing. Many identify the two witnesses of Revelation 11 as Elijah and

Moses, though it is difficult to be dogmatic about that point.

But it is not without significance that at the end of all the literature of the Old Testament the last word is: "curse." The prophecy of Malachi begins: "I have loved you, says the Lord." But it ends with the warning that if the message of love is not received the only alternative is a curse.

Compare that with the last word of the New Testament. Leaving out the final benediction, the last word is the name above all names: "Come, Lord Jesus!" That is God's answer to the curse. Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us! Thus the full answer of God is grace and love which pours out even more blessing, despite man's sin, that we might be brought at last into the light and knowledge of Christ. Thus the supreme task of the Christian is to learn to think upon His name and enjoy the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8).

So the great message of the prophets draws to a close. These sturdy men of God, coming from all walks of life, have been called into activity to reveal the character of God's heart. Through all their severe words and forceful utterances, there runs the revelation that God does not delight in judgment but uses it only that He might waken His people to the reality of where they really are before Him. But the final word is never one of law but of grace. Finally, across the corridors of the centuries, there is always the final scene of glory, where the Son of Righteousness rises with healing in His wings. Thus when Malachi lays down his pen, the next word to be heard from the divine lips is this: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1).

END

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