

Understanding the **Old Testament**



From Creation through Captivity

James D. Orten

**Understanding
the
*Old Testament***

From creation through captivity

By James D. Orten

Edited and illustrated by Susan Ayers

© 2013 by James D. Orten. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the author.

ISBN: 978-0-7596-8538-3 (e)

ISBN: 978-0-7596-8539-0 (sc)

ISBN: 978-1-4033-3714-6 (hc)

1stBooks-rev. 01/16/13

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface and Acknowledgments

Part 1: Preparing To Understand The Old Testament

Chapter 1 Why Study the Old Testament?

Chapter 2 Can We Trust the Old Testament?

Chapter 3 The Geography of the Old Testament: A Walk With Abraham

Part 2: The Patriarchal Age

Chapter 4 The Beginnings

Chapter 5 The Beginning of the End: The Origin of Sin

Chapter 6 The Origin of the People of God and the People of Satan

Chapter 7 The Population Explosion

Chapter 8 The End and a New Beginning

Chapter 9 Life After the Flood

Chapter 10 God's Covenant with Abraham

Chapter 11 Isaac and Jacob

Chapter 12 Joseph: The Favorite Child

Part 3: The Mosaical Age

Chapter 13 The Exodus

Chapter 14 Mount Sinai and Meeting with God

Chapter 15 The Priesthood and Further Revelations of the Law

Chapter 16 Moses' Farewell Address

Chapter 17 The Conquest of Canaan

Chapter 18 Living Without a Leader

Part 4: The Kingdom Years

Chapter 19 Israel Takes a King

Chapter 20 David's Flight from Saul

Chapter 21 Two Sets of History Books

Chapter 22 The Reign of David

Chapter 23 The Reign of the Wise Man

Chapter 24 The Divided Kingdom: Israel

Chapter 25 The Divided Kingdom: Judah

Chapter 26 From Captivity to the Messiah

Appendix Outline Of The New Testament

Dedication

*To: Allison Leann Vick
Callie Olivia Orten
Ryan Armijo Orten
and
Haden Allen Ayers
Dallas Raymond Ayers
Connor Christine Ayers*

*May God grant them a love for the
Word like David's, bless them with
understanding, and help them
commit to following it.*

Preface and Acknowledgments

David's love for the Old Testament would surprise many 21st Century Christians. He said, "O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalms 119:97). Again, "I stay awake all through the night that I might meditate on thy word." Was that just an old man's obsession; or did King David know something that most of us do not?

This volume is directed to those at the other end of the spectrum from David, those for whom the Old Testament may seem little more than a collection of childhood stories, boring genealogies, and confusing dreams by prophets. Our goal is to tell the story of the O.T. in clear and readable fashion. We intend to lay out its plan and purpose, and by that to show its relevance to modern life. If our goal is achieved, readers of this book will be able to read the Old Testament with pleasure and comprehension; they will be able to mine the real gold on their own.

Educational research shows that students understand principles and remember facts better if they have an outline in which to fit them. This book provides such an outline. We assume its best use will be with beginning students of the Old Testament, or with those who have not yet begun, but want to do so.

As is true with most authors, we are indebted to many persons who encouraged or assisted in the preparation of the material presented on the following pages. One group that deserves acknowledgment is the participants in our informal Old Testament Study at Oakwood Church of Christ in Edmond, Oklahoma. Their unflagging interest kept the author's enthusiasm alive through three years in which we began in Genesis and studied through Malachi. June Orten deserves thanks for doing all those things around the house (such as mowing the lawn!) that I would have done had I not written the book. Susan Ayers has my special appreciation. She formatted the manuscript, illustrated it, and edited it for grammar. The charts and maps bear her clear fingerprints. An Old Testament student in her own right, she was a worthy assistant and consultant in all phases of manuscript preparation. These and other debts make the use of "we," as opposed to "I," throughout the manuscript more than an editorial generality. Final decisions were all mine, so any mistakes or weaknesses belong to me.

Please notice how Biblical references are used. We tried to stay close to the Biblical account, thus there are many direct quotations. Most of them are from the King James or New King James versions. References for books, chapters, and verses are given in parentheses immediately following quotations, i.e. (Genesis 12:1). “Text boxes” at the beginning of many chapters are intended to shorten and simplify references. They give the Biblical texts that chapters (in this volume) cover. References in those texts are given in chapter and verse only. For example, if the Biblical text is the book of Numbers, references in Numbers are given like this (19:4), meaning Numbers chapter 19 and verse 4.

As you begin to read this volume, let us say this short prayer together: “Dear Lord, may the reading of this book be like the planting of a small seed. Bless it and make it grow to a great interest in Your word. Grant this reader understanding and through it bless his or her life, as You have blessed the author’s. Hear this simple prayer through Jesus’ name. Amen.”

James D. Orten
Tulsa, Oklahoma
10 February, 2002

PART 1:

PREPARING TO UNDERSTAND THE OLD TESTAMENT

Every mental task is accomplished more effectively if it is approached with the right attitude. The trouble is we don't always know what that attitude is or how to acquire it. Part 1 is intended to solve those problems.

Chapter 1 opens with a discussion of frustrations many Christians experience in trying to understand the Old Testament. It continues with a description of the practical and spiritual benefits a knowledge of the O.T. provides.

Chapter 2 deals with the question of whether we can trust the Old Testament. The events it describes are so ancient that there are few other sources to confirm or deny its accounts. But we shall find that there is evidence, both internal (within the Bible itself) and external, that shows the Old Testament to be a true record of real people, places, and events.

Chapter 3 is intended to give a mental snapshot of the geography and culture of the Old Testament. Abraham, our spiritual forefather, walked the length and breadth of the Old Testament world. We shall accompany him, mentally and spiritually, on his journey. When we have finished our walk from Eden to Egypt, we will be prepared to enter the spiritual world of the Old Testament.

CHAPTER 1

Why Study the Old Testament?

“I don’t read the Bible much,” she said, and continued as the preacher waited in silence. “I know I should, and sometimes I try. But each time I do, I read a few verses and find myself bogged down in confusion, especially in the Old Testament. So I just lay it aside until I get to feeling guilty again. Then I repeat the cycle.”

The lady who made this “confession” is a longtime Christian and devoted to the church. She is not alone; we have heard the same basic story from many others, some of whom are elders, teachers, and even preachers. Think about what this means—that leaders in the Lord’s church are teaching others largely on hearsay. Since they do not read the Word themselves, they can not do otherwise.

We do not doubt the sincerity of any of the persons mentioned above, but there must be something wrong with that picture. Did God communicate with man and do it in such a way that many sincere people can not understand it? All of history is against this conclusion. God talked with Adam and Eve in the beginning; they understood him and apparently looked forward to His evening visits (Genesis 3:8). When God described to Noah how He wanted the ark built, Noah understood and obeyed (Genesis 6). God gave Abraham a far-ranging promise that he and Sarah could fully comprehend and trust (Genesis 12:1-3). And when God gave Moses the 10 commandment law (Exodus 20) and later wrote it on two stone tablets, Moses and all the people understood it and agreed to make it the covenant by which they would live. And on and on.

“But those were special people,” you say, “and I am not a Noah or a Moses.” True, but there is more. Here is God’s own assessment of how He spoke in the Old Testament. “I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I did not say to the seed of Jacob, ‘seek ye me in vain.’ I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right” (Isaiah 45:19). That statement is clear even in the 17th Century English of the King James Bible. But let us give it in modern words. “I did not speak in obscure language in some far corner of the earth so that people would not know what I mean. I did not tell the Israelites to seek for

Me, knowing they would not find Me. I, the Lord, speak only truth and righteousness.”

God said He has spoken plainly but honest people say they can not understand it. What are we to conclude? The answer is that many of us have not “broken the code” of how the Bible is written. Years ago, when I began studying psychology, my first course was called “Introduction to Psychology.” The instructor explained that his goal was not to make us Psychologists but to teach us how to study the subject. He would, he said, introduce us to the people who had developed the discipline, give an overview of the areas of human behavior it covers (the geography, if you will), the language of psychology, and so forth. Then, he thought, we would be ready to start the serious journey of learning the discipline.

That is what we propose to do here. My first psychology book was much thicker than this little volume, but then God is easier to understand than guys like Freud. And besides that, He has so much more to say!

Reluctant Readers for Other Reasons

Difficulty in understanding is not the only reason people neglect the Old Testament. Some people say they see no benefit in studying it. We have heard of folks who say they were advised by preachers not to “bother” with the Old Testament because they would get confused and besides that, “it has been done away with.”

The preachers who gave this advice were misquoting, and probably misunderstanding, a statement by Paul in Colossians 2:14. Speaking of the Law of Moses, he said Jesus “took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross.” Paul meant that the law had been removed as a stumbling block to our salvation. This law could make one guilty of sin and worthy of death but it could not save him—that was its curse (Galatians 3:13). The sacrifices required by the law could not ultimately make one free from sin. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin” (Hebrews 10:4).

But the blood of Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, could and did save. Thus, the nails that riveted Jesus’ body to the cross also nailed there the requirements of the law that could condemn but could not save. But that is a far cry from saying the Old Testament has been destroyed. Jesus said, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

Benefits of Studying the Old Testament

There are clear and significant benefits for Christians in a knowledge of the Old Testament. One is that it helps us understand the New Testament. Paul said, “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). The specific Scripture “written aforetime” that Paul had in mind was Psalms 69:9, which he quoted in the verse immediately preceding this statement. The general application of his principle is that the Scriptures—here meaning the Old Testament Scriptures—give us knowledge, patience, and comfort, and through these, hope.

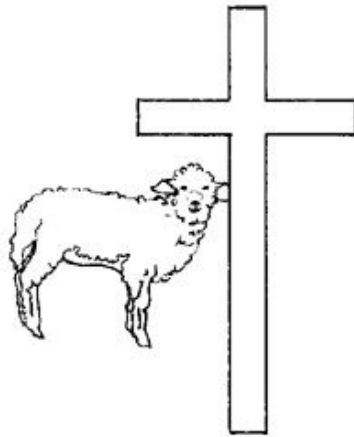
The same apostle reminded the Corinthian church of several incidents in the lives of the Israelites which occurred during their exodus from Egypt. He explained his reason for doing so in these words: “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (I Corinthians 10:11). Apparently this inspired man knew there was no more effective way to give the admonition he had in mind than to draw from the book of Exodus. Surely we will deepen our understanding of his lessons if we know fully the incidents he named.

The Old Foreshadows the New

The great principles and institutions of the New Testament are foreshadowed in the Old Testament. Most Bible students believe God intended to send the Messiah to save man from the foundation of the world (I Peter 1:19-20). Many think this great event was in God’s view when He sentenced Satan at the fall of man. “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). The seed of the woman here is believed to be Christ; His bruising Satan’s head means that Jesus would destroy the devil’s power over man; and Satan’s bruising Christ’s heel refers to the crucifixion. As this promise shows, God did not reveal His plans to man all at once, but rather in a gradual, unfolding manner like the pages of a great book. Each page reveals something man needs to know and the preceding pages have prepared him to understand it.

Not even the greatest prophet of the Old Testament could have described precisely what God had in store for mankind. But with a wisdom that only God could have, He foreshadowed these great events in ways that prepared godly people to recognize them when they appeared. Here is an example of what I

mean. No prophecy of Scripture said directly that God would send His Son to earth to die for man. Peter, James, and John actually heard God speak from heaven and say of Jesus, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him” (Matthew 17:5). Yet Peter tells us the prophecies of the Old Testament are a “more sure” designation of Jesus as the Son of God than the voice he heard. (See II Peter 1:16-19.) How could this be?



The voice of God to the three apostles was certain. They all heard it and agreed on what it said. But Peter knew that unbelievers would gainsay their report, arguing that they were hallucinating, were confused, or lying. The prophecies, on the other hand, were contained in Scripture that Hebrews generally accepted as God’s word. There were so many, and they were so detailed, that they were hard to deny. One could compare Old Testament prophecies of Jesus to the pieces of a puzzle. While they are in the box or scattered on the table, no one can see the picture. But when a vision of the big picture is revealed and the pieces begin to fit into place, you know for certain where each piece goes.

In addition to prophecy, God foreshadowed principles and institutions of the New Testament by persons, practices, and institutions in the Old Testament. Here are examples: Paul tells us that the Passover feast of the Jews pointed forward to the Lord’s Supper. “For even Christ who is our passover [meaning passover lamb] is sacrificed for us” (I Corinthians 5:7). Moses understood that in some way he represented a great leader of God’s people yet to come. God told him, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (Deuteronomy 18:18). We rightly recognize this as a prophecy of Jesus. Surely our understanding of the great institutions and practices of the

New Testament is enlarged by understanding their historical counterparts.

Many False Doctrines are Based on the Old Testament

Few Christians take pleasure in dealing with false doctrines. But they must be dealt with because they cause people to be lost. Even in the early days of the church there were “many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers... whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not.” (Titus 1:10-11).

Many false doctrines are based on incorrect interpretations of Old Testament passages. Unless we know the true teachings of these passages, we will not be able to convincingly refute the doctrines based on them. Here is one example. The idea, taught by a very large denomination, that we should worship on Saturday instead of the Lord’s Day, is largely based on a misinterpretation of Genesis 2:3. “And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.” They assume this means that God established the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship for all people of all time.

But the assumption of the Sabbatarians is wrong. No one was told to worship on the Sabbath until 2500 years after creation. The first mention of the practice is in Exodus 16, when the Israelites were camped at Mount Horeb, where the complete Law of Moses was given. Some time afterward, a man was found breaking the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-35), which was so new at the time that even Moses did not know what the punishment should be. They had to put the man under guard and wait for a further revelation from God to know what to do with him.

Even when the Law of Moses was given, it was not for everyone, only the Jews. Moses reminded the Israelites of these facts just before his death. “The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day” (Deuteronomy 5:2-3). Moses proceeded to refresh their memories on what was given at Horeb and verse 12 says, “Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee.” Later prophets reaffirmed to the Jews that the Sabbath was their special law, given at Mount Horeb (also called Sinai). See Nehemiah 9:13-14 and Ezekiel 20:10-12.

The so-called “higher” criticism of the Bible, which undermines people’s faith

in the entire Word of God, is mostly aimed at the Old Testament. This attack on the Old Testament is so broad that we will deal with it specifically in chapter 2.

The Old Testament Gives Us a Place in God's Grand Scheme

The Old Testament is a real history of real people. The record from Adam to Noah is the genealogy of every person alive today. Of Noah Scripture says, "These are the three sons of Noah [meaning Shem, Ham, and Japheth]: and of them was the earth overspread." From this point forward the focus is on Shem because his was the line through which the Messiah was to come, but glimpses are given of the descendants of Ham and Japheth. An example is the statement in Genesis 10:5 which follows the telling of the generations of Japheth; "By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands..." Of even greater importance than these brief views of our physical lineage is the telling of our spiritual genealogy from Abraham to Jesus. For as Paul said, "to the end the promise might be sure to all seed;.. .to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all" (Romans 4:16).

When we realize that their story is actually our story too, we have a sense of continuity—of being here for a purpose—the purpose specifically stated by God through Isaiah (43:7). "Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes I have made him."

Summary

There are tremendous benefits in studying the Old Testament, and no good reasons for not doing so. As do the New Testament Scriptures, it reveals the mind of God. We should not expect it to read like a novel; and we should be willing to invest ourselves in learning its meaning. But I sincerely believe that ordinary people can understand it. It is like a gold mine—even early diggings are rewarding but the deeper one goes the richer the vein. When you finish this book, we are confident you will be prepared to be an effective miner. We look forward to continuing the journey with you in chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

Can We Trust the Old Testament?

For most readers the question above will be easily answered. You will say something like, “Yes, of course.” Perhaps you would continue with a question of your own: “Why shouldn’t we?” A good question, and your attitude is commendable. Unfortunately, not everyone feels that way. For those who do not, and for those who partly believe and partly doubt, let us take the question seriously. Even believers will likely have their faith strengthened.

When we speak about trusting the Old Testament, we are not talking about whether the Bible is good literature, whether it teaches good morals, and so forth. Everyone except the most rabid of critics agrees with that. What we mean is did the historical events described there really happen, or are they legends? Did the people and places named in the Old Testament really exist, or are they fictional locations and characters in a good story? To take an example that gets to the heart of the matter, was there a real man named Noah who was told by God to build a large ship? And did God open the windows of heaven and the fountains of the deep and bring about a flood over the populated earth at the time?

There have always been individuals who doubted God’s word. Apparently Eve came to do so in the Garden of Eden. God told her not to eat of the tree of knowledge in the midst of the garden because, if she did, she would die. The devil told her she would not die and offered a more intriguing motive for God’s prohibition. “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). In a sense, every willing sinner since that time has doubted God. At least they do not believe Him strongly enough to live by what He said.

But individual doubters have generally not made organized attempts to get others to turn away from God. And they usually do not try to justify their sins by undermining respect for God’s word. That changed, however, in the 19th century when a group of scholars calling themselves “higher critics” of the Bible began to publish their ideas. The designation as “higher critics” was unfortunate

because it vaguely suggested that they operated on a higher plane, and with knowledge that was superior to others. Neither of these suggestions was true and the title was probably not intended for that purpose in the beginning.

Higher versus Lower Criticism

The difference was a matter of focus, not quality of scholarship. Lower critics focused on individual words, phrases, and verses, asking such questions as were they translated correctly, is the meaning clear, and so forth. Their aim was to determine the exact meaning of Biblical writers and to make the correct meaning clear to readers. Higher critics, by contrast, focused on the authors of books, the time periods in which the books were written, and so forth. They asked such questions as did the one to whom the book is attributed actually author it; was it written in the time period of the events described in it; and on and on.

LOWER CRITIC:	seeks exact meaning by focusing on individual words, phrases, and verses.
HIGHER CRITIC:	examines authors and their styles, time periods, etc.

Whether or not they intended it so, the higher critics started with the assumption that the Bible may not be trustworthy. If we can not accept Deuteronomy 31:24 as it says, “when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished...” then we may not be able to accept the contents of the book. And if books of the Bible were not written during the time periods described within them, then they must be just oral history and could have been corrupted as they were passed down through the generations.

Eventually, almost every part of the Old Testament was questioned by these men, and especially their descendants of similar genre. Later writers may have used the work of the early critics in ways they did not intend, but many scientists, academics, and even garden variety unbelievers have labeled the Old Testament as little more than a collection of myths.

The New Testament has not come under such severe attack, mainly because secular history confirms that the people and places of the New Testament did indeed exist. But New Testament writers, including Jesus, often quoted from the Old Testament, so if one can not trust the Old Testament, he can not truly trust the New one. Before we give up our faith and accept these drastic conclusions,

let us look with our own critical eye at the assumptions and scholarship on which they are based.

Beginning Assumptions

The axioms with which one begins an investigation have an influence, often a controlling influence, on the conclusions that will come from the study. An axiom is a proposition or assumption that is accepted as self-evident; it does not need to be researched; it is just considered true. The higher critics started with three assumptions that seem innocent enough at first, but are far afield from the truth of God's word and from later findings of archeology. Let us state the axioms of higher critics briefly so that you can see how they fit together and keep them in mind. Afterward we will discuss each in some detail:

1. Civilization developed slowly, requiring thousands of years to develop a level of technology that equaled, say, the one brought by the Pilgrims to this country.
2. Written language developed late in civilization. This assumption is a principle support for criticism of the Bible.
3. Monotheism developed out of polytheism, or in simpler language, the belief in one God developed out of belief in many gods.

First Assumption: The Development of Civilization

No doubt you have seen those charts, often posted on walls of biology classrooms, that show a tadpole wiggling its way out of the water, next to it is a similar creature with small legs, and beside this another with more distinct animal features, and so on. To the far right on the chart there will be an ape, then a "primitive" looking man, and finally one who looks as if he might be headed for work in a Wall Street brokerage house. The way this fits into higher critics' plan is easy to see.

In this view, early humans, such as Adam and Eve, were little more than apes who walked upright. They foraged for food because they knew nothing of planting and harvesting. Oral language consisted of a few grunts and squeals to express anger or elation. They knew nothing of tools, written language, and so forth. A principle purpose for this assumption is that it supports the idea that Genesis could not have been written in the lifetimes of the people who witnessed it.

Christians know that man did not appear on the earth through a single cell that developed into more complex life. He did not develop through a series of animals and primitive human beings. As the Genesis record describes, he was made in the image of God, fully developed, intelligent, and able to converse with the God of his creation from the first day of his existence.

AXIOMS OF HIGHER CRITICS
1. Civilization developed slowly, requiring thousands of years to reach even a 15th Century level of technology.
2. Written language developed late in civilization.
3. Monotheism developed out of polytheism.

Adam did not have to learn agriculture by trial and error. God taught him about “tilling the ground” (Genesis 2:5) and “dressing and keeping” the garden (Genesis 2:15). He knew about metals, such as gold, and about precious stones (Genesis 2:12). Life was simple for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but it was not crude, and they were not primitive beings who grunted and squealed at each other. They conversed with God; they understood cause and effect relationships; and they reasoned abstractly about moral qualities. All of these characteristics show maturity of mind even by today’s standards.

When Adam and Eve sinned and were put out of the Garden of Eden, they did not suddenly forget everything they knew nor regress to subhuman creatures. Instead the Bible indicates that they did what any intelligent couple would—they began to make the best of their new and more difficult situation. They and their sons tilled the ground and raised cattle (Genesis 4:2). Their sons built cities (Genesis 4:17), learned and taught metal working (Genesis 4:22), and even developed art forms such as music (Genesis (4:21). This is not the picture of a civilization that developed over thousands, even millions, of years.

Critics do not accept this Biblical account, of course, but fortunately there now is ample proof of the things we have described from sources outside the Bible, such as archeology. To quote one author, “No more surprising fact has been discovered by recent excavation than the suddenness with which civilization appeared in the world. This discovery is the very opposite to that anticipated” (Wiseman, p. 28).

Examples of Early Civilizations: Egypt

The oldest known stone building in Egypt is the Sakkara pyramid. This building is believed to be over 5,000 years old, dated at about 3,050 B.C. It shows advanced development in architecture with columns and decorations that seem almost modern. The measurements in Sakkara are as precise as those in most buildings of today. Measurement errors in the whole mass are no more than could be incurred by expansion and contraction of a metal tape measure between hot and cold days.

If the pyramid at Sakkara is interesting, the great one at Cheops is a modern wonder. Dating from about 2,900 B.C., this massive structure is 480 feet high and covers 12.5 acres at its base. It took 300,000 men 30 years to build it. Ten years were required to quarry the stone, ten to move the stones onto the site, and another ten years to construct the building. And sheer size is not the only impressive thing about Cheops. Its construction shows a greater knowledge of astronomy than was used in Europe 3,500 years later. The fact that a king could build himself such a magnificent final resting place is testimony to the richness and luxury of the society.

Although not the oldest, Egypt was one of the great civilizations of the ancient world. Examples such as the foregoing do not support the idea of a painfully slow development. Instead, as the Bible indicates, cities and nations rose rapidly; and often fell even more rapidly. This was true of Egypt. Later temple tombs show a distinct decline in building skills. It is interesting to think that as little as a century ago, Egypt could not have built another pyramid similar to Cheops. One might question whether they could do it now.

Oldest Civilizations: The Fertile Crescent

The oldest known human civilizations were in an area described as the Fertile Crescent, and more specifically within the valley between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in what is now Iraq. This is one fact on which critics and believers seem to agree. Kish, located on the Euphrates River near the later city of Babylon, is considered one of the oldest cities in the world. According to tablets unearthed there, it was the first city rebuilt after the flood (Halley, p. 78). Excavation of Kish began in 1928 by researchers from Oxford University in England and the Field Museum of Chicago. The group was led by professor Steven Langdon of Oxford.

Researchers unearthed ten layers of occupation, some of which dated back more than 4,000 years B.C. There were unmistakable signs of well-developed

societies at all levels. Some examples of their findings include: A palace dating from the time of King Sargon I (about 2,400 B.C.) which was elaborately decorated with pearl and lapis lazuli, a well-preserved temple, and a four-wheeled chariot that was built of wood and put together with copper nails. In front of the chariot were the skeletal remains of the horses that pulled it. Two metal goat's head statues from this area were found and the metal in them analyzed. It consisted of 82.9 per cent copper, 1.33 per cent nickel, .88 per cent iron, .23 per cent antimony, and 14.66 per cent other substances.

These findings describe men and women who used knowledge and intelligence as we do; they built houses, temples, and chariots. They appreciated art and understood metalworking as Genesis 4:22 suggests, even the art of alloying metals. They kept official records, several of which have been found, including those on a stone pyramid that list the kings who reigned in that region beginning before the flood. This is not a picture of men who lived in caves and foraged for food.

The Ancient Kingdom of Babylon

The Babylonian Kingdom rose rapidly and dominated that part of the world for many years. At its height, about 1,800 B.C., the city of Babylon was one of the most magnificent cities in the world. The wall around the city was 136 feet thick. One gate, called Ishtar, was decorated with over 500 enameled dragons, bulls, and lions. A gorgeous "processional street" led from the Ishtar Gate, past the royal palace, through the main part of the city to the great temple of Marduk, called the creator and King of the Universe. The throne room alone in Nebuchadnezzar's palace was 56 feet wide and 168 feet long. The foundation of a tower was unearthed in Babylon that was called, in their tongue, "The House of the Foundation Platform of Heaven and Earth," which is believed to be the ill-fated Tower of Babel described in Genesis 11.

As great and advanced as the Kingdom of Babylon was, it fell more rapidly than it rose. Jeremiah prophesied its destruction in chapters 50 and 51. Verse 11 of chapter 51 says, "The Lord hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for his device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance of his temple." Babylon was not to be captured and forced to pay tribute; it was to be beaten back to the mythical stone age. "And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling place for dragons, an astonishment, and an hissing, without an inhabitant" (51:37). It happened exactly as Jeremiah said.

The city was captured by Cyrus, King of the Medes, in 539 B.C. When visitors first went there in relatively modern times, they found a people in utter poverty, living on the most primitive level. God uses the rise and sudden fall of Babylon to portray the growth and sudden destruction of spiritual Babylon in Revelation 18.

Babylon's rapid rise and sudden fall should not surprise us. The Jews who were left behind after Nebuchadnezzar ravaged Jerusalem in 587 B.C. were in the same condition. This once-proud City of David that dominated that part of the world, which under Solomon was the envy of kingdoms far and near, became little more than a dung heap. This was the report Nehemiah (1:3) heard while he was a captive in Babylon that made him want to go and rebuild the wall of the city.

We have discussed here only a few of the many ancient cities that have been excavated. These were chosen because they are typical of several that rose early to be great kingdoms and fell suddenly into oblivion. Bible critics denied even the existence of some of them until they were unearthed.

The inescapable conclusion about the rise and fall of cultures is this: There is no evidence in the Bible or archeology for the idea of a long, slow development of civilized man. Instead, there is solid evidence of the rapid rise of civilization, and equally good evidence of their rapid fall when they faced the vengeance of God. Thus we should expect to see exactly what we do see, now and in the distant past—highly developed societies coexisting with very primitive ones.

Why should we anticipate a gradual and general rise in civilization, when we see such uneven development now? Today one can visit the African bush where there will not be a stone building within miles and where people live like their ancestors of a thousand years ago. Yet, a few hours' drive into the city and one can find most of the conveniences of the modern world.

Second Assumption: Development of Written Language

This assumption is the most important support for higher critics' charges against the Old Testament. If written language did not develop until late—say in the time of David or Solomon as some argue—then early books of the Bible could not have been written by eye witnesses of the events described in them. This makes those books, according to the critics, simply legends and unworthy of being taken seriously.

Oddly, some Bible commentators have thrown in with the critics, accepting that there was no written language at the time, and that the records of Genesis were passed down by oral tradition. In the preface of his commentary on the Book of Genesis, Adam Clarke asks, how could small, historical details “have been preserved when there was no writing of any kind, and when the earth, whose history is here given had already existed for more than 2,000 years?” (pp. 25-26). He goes on to accept that Genesis is oral tradition, but argues it is good history that passed through only a few reliable persons. Of course, Clarke, writing as he did in the early 1800’s, did not have the advantage of discoveries we shall discuss later, which prove that written language developed thousands of years earlier than he imagines. But he did have a better alternative, and that is God’s inspiration of persons of later periods to write about the past.

The very purpose of inspiration was to guarantee a perfect record of what God wanted man to know. If God could inspire prophets to write in detail and with accuracy about the future, which He did, He could have inspired with equal ease men like Moses and Samuel to write detailed and accurate accounts of the past. God’s inspiration does not depend on man’s knowledge of how He did it.

Biblical Evidence of Early Writing

The critics’ main support for their thesis is false. We shall first discuss evidence in the Bible that written language developed early and second, archeological proof of this fact.

When Cain killed his brother Abel, God punished Cain by banishing him. He was driven away from God’s presence and apparently from the community established by Adam and Eve. Cain said, “My punishment is greater than I can bear” (Genesis 4:13). “I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth;” he continued, “and it shall come to pass, that everyone that findeth me shall slay me.” God responded that anyone who killed Cain would be punished sevenfold. “And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.”

We do not know what the mark God placed on Cain looked like, but we do know that it had meaning. All who saw it knew that anyone who harmed Cain would be dealt with by God. Otherwise it would have no meaning at all and God’s words would seem empty. A mark that is understood to stand for an idea is clearly a form of written language.

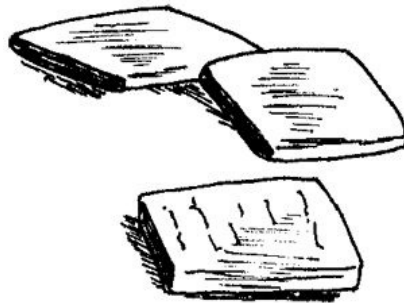
Bible critics’ attacks are aimed especially at the book of Genesis. It covers the

most remote period of human history and is, they think, most vulnerable to the charge of being legend. But the book of Genesis claims to be written history. For example, Genesis 5:1 says, “This is the book of the generations of Adam.” The word “book” means a written account. The English word book is not used again in Genesis, but the same introduction to a personal history, “these are the generations of,” is used ten times. See Genesis 6:9, 10:1, 11:10 and so forth. If the first account was written, it is not reasonable to assume that later ones were oral traditions.

Scholars point out that each of the ten histories has a different and distinct writing style, suggesting different authors. Good students have concluded that each family leader in Genesis wrote the genealogy and major events of his lifetime and that Moses used these in editing Genesis (see Ellicott, p. 179 and Wiseman pp. 4557). Apparently Moses had such respect for the histories written by the ten patriarchs that he simply copied from their tablets into his own when he compiled the book as we know it.

There are further indirect evidences of the early development of written language. Genesis 10:10 speaks of the cities in the kingdom established by Nimrod. “And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.” Shinar is an old name for Babylon. All of these cities have been found and excavated, but one is of particular interest for our purpose. Accad—also spelled Akkad—was located a short distance north of Babel or Babylon. According to Halley (p. 48) the name means “Book Town” which suggests it was known for its libraries. This fits with Keller’s observation (p. 28) that grammar texts and bilingual dictionaries first were written by philologists in Accad.

Archeological Evidence of Early Writing



One of the earliest discoveries regarding ancient written communication took

place in 1887 when a Bedouin woman near Armarna, Egypt, dug into a mound while looking for rich soil for her garden. She found some stone tablets inscribed in a language then unknown in Egypt and sold her interest in them for about 50 cents. Hundreds of tablets were eventually unearthed in what turned out to be the capitol city of Pharaoh Akhenaton, who reigned about 1,400 B.C. The tablets were the official records of what might be described as the Egyptian Foreign Office. At that time Egypt controlled most of the Old Testament world, including Babylon.

These tablet-letters, about 3 inches wide and 6 to 9 inches long, were mostly written in Babylonian cuneiform, even though they came from many countries. One letter from the governor of Urusalem (later Jerusalem) describes how the Habiru (probably the Hebrews) were taking the land and nervously begs for Pharaoh's help. This shows that Babylonian cuneiform was generally understood and written at the time, and further explains how Abraham and the patriarchs could travel about the Old Testament world and freely converse with the people of the lands, as the Bible says they did.

These tablets show how writing was done in ancient times. Some were of stone as were the ones in Exodus 32 upon which God wrote the 10 commandment law. The word in Exodus is translated "tables" in some versions of the Bible, which tends to make us think they were large. But the meaning is tablets, as is shown by verse 15, which says, "And Moses turned, and went down the mountain, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand." Since Moses carried two tablets in one hand, they must have been about the size described in the preceding paragraph. When the tablets were made of stone, the wedge-shaped characters of cuneiform script were engraved with tools. This is the picture from which Jeremiah drew his allegory in chapter 17:1. "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond it is graven upon the table of their heart."

In ancient Babylon, writing tablets were often made of clay that had been softened with water and formed in a mold. The letters were inscribed with a stylus while the clay was still soft and then dried in the sun or baked in a special kiln. Clay tablets were some of the most durable writing materials known to man. There were even clay envelopes made for these tablet letters. Papyrus scrolls were used later, especially in Egypt where papyrus was a native plant, but this material does not seem to have been used much in Babylon. The Jews were familiar with scroll writing and probably used this type the most when they got

to the Land of Canaan. Many materials have been used for written messages, such as wood, leather, copper, gold, and so forth, but in early days the majority seem to have been on stone and clay tablets. The writers of the documents, or the scribe who wrote for them, usually signed them with a seal or signet by the method described by God, Himself, in Job 38:14.

At Ebla, near the ancient city of Carchemesh, Italian excavators discovered in 1974, a palace that was architecturally advanced and that dates to at least 2,400 B.C. The palace is of small interest, however, compared to what was found in two of its tower rooms. There researchers discovered approximately 17,000 inscribed tablets, some scattered in disarray on the floors perhaps during the destruction of the city, but thousands also were stored neatly on shelves. These are the official records of a great kingdom, the memory of which had been lost until this discovery. The tablets describe people and places mentioned in the Bible that critics claimed to be fictitious because they knew of no written record of them other than the Bible.

The city of Erech, mentioned in Genesis 10:10 along with Accad and other cities founded by Nimrod, has also been located and excavated. Work on uncovering this city began in 1852 and continued for many years. Later excavations reached a level of occupation that dates to 4,000 B.C. Silver seals for documents were retrieved along with over 500 tablets, many of which were in pictograph writing, believed to be the earliest form known. These documents describe much religious history and indicate that the inhabitants of Erech believed in only two deities, one of which predated the other. Consider what this means. If our best dating of Genesis is correct, these tablets were written while Adam was alive. Adam lived 800 years after his son Seth was born, which means well over 800 years after he and Eve were put out of Eden and probably hundreds of years after these tablets were written.

There are far too many archeological sites at which evidence of early writings has been discovered to be covered in this volume. Halley (pp. 42-47) discusses approximately 100 such sites and additional ones have been unearthed since his work was published. Suffice it to say that there is abundant evidence to disprove the critics' claim that Genesis could not have been written by eyewitnesses. Instead there is good reason to say with Solomon, "Every word of God is pure: and He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him" (Proverbs 30:5).

Third Assumption: The Development of Polytheism

Critics of the Old Testament have argued that belief in one God developed out of the worship of many Gods. This notion helps their cause, they think, because in various parts of the world there are legends that relate to the same things discussed in the Bible. Examples are stories about the creation of the universe, the relationship between man and God, the flood, and so forth. Some of these legends resemble Biblical accounts, thus, critics assume that Bible writers got ideas from these human sources and incorporated them into Biblical accounts. Then they classify all such stories as myths.

Proponents of this idea are at pains to explain how the development they propose runs opposite that in related areas. For example, man did not start out with many tribes and nations and then suddenly develop a yearning to make one. Since early days men have divided and subdivided continually to make more and more nations and societies. Rarely, one group has willingly united with another; but the trend definitely has been in the other direction. When union came about, it usually was because one nation conquered another. Then, whether in ancient Babylonia or ancient Africa, as quickly as those subjugated nations could, they revolted and made new divisions. Still, undaunted by facts, the critics have assumed that in religion the process went in the other direction.

The evidence is against this conclusion. We think the Bible suggests the time and place that worship of idols began. It was not with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; and it was not with Abel who was a faithful worshipper of Jehovah. It was, we believe, with Cain. Genesis 4 tells the story of Abel's devout worship of God, and God's blessing him. It also describes Cain's corrupt worship that was rejected. Reacting to God's punishment, Cain said, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face I shall be hid." Cain's statement, "from thy face I shall be hid," suggests that he could not, or would not, worship God in his wandering life.

Probably it was true, as Cain infers, that there was a designated place where their sacrifices to God were to be brought. The fact that Cain "brought" his sacrifice and "Abel also brought" a sacrifice suggests this. Cain was banished from that place of worship—the world's first excommunication. Whether he could have repented and served God in his vagabond life is not revealed. What we do know is that from this time forward all references to him in the Scriptures are negative. Without mentioning him by name, Paul, by using words similar to Cain's seems to make him the symbol of all who will be lost. "Who shall be

punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (II Thessalonians 1:9). Thus it seems certain that Cain did not repent and worship the true God, and we think it safe to assume that he invented idols to calm his fears.

At first, idolatry was simple, consisting of worshipping the sun, moon, and so forth. Gradually thousands of gods were devised with legends about how they came into existence and how to worship them. Mostly, like Jeroboam and the Israelites (I Kings 12ff), they mimicked the worship of Jehovah.

The farther one goes back in history, the fewer gods were served. This is precisely the opposite of what we would expect to find if the assumptions of critics were true. At Erech, the city mentioned earlier that dates to 4,000 B.C., tablets were found that show the people worshipped only two deities, and one of these was assumed to be the original one. At Kish, a city of comparable age to Erech, people recognized three gods, one each for the sky, earth, and sun. The sky god was assumed to be the original god from which the others came. After considering evidence from these and other archeological sites, Professor Steven Langdon wrote, “In my opinion, the history of the oldest religion of man is a rapid decline from monotheism to extreme polytheism and widespread belief in evil spirits. It is in a very true sense the history of the fall of man” (Wiseman, p. 176).

Summary

The theories of so-called higher critics of the Bible are soundly refuted by evidence. Today, no one knowledgeable in archeology would defend such assumptions, but Biblical interpretations originally based on them are still alive. The Christian, however, may read the Old Testament with assurance that the persons and places described there were real and the events took place just as written.

In producing these evidences from archeology, we do not see ourselves as “proving” the Bible true. We see it rather as striking the critics on their own turf. Ultimately, God’s word must be accepted on faith, or rejected in unbelief. It is enough to know that the history and prophecies of the Old Testament “came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Peter 1:21).

References

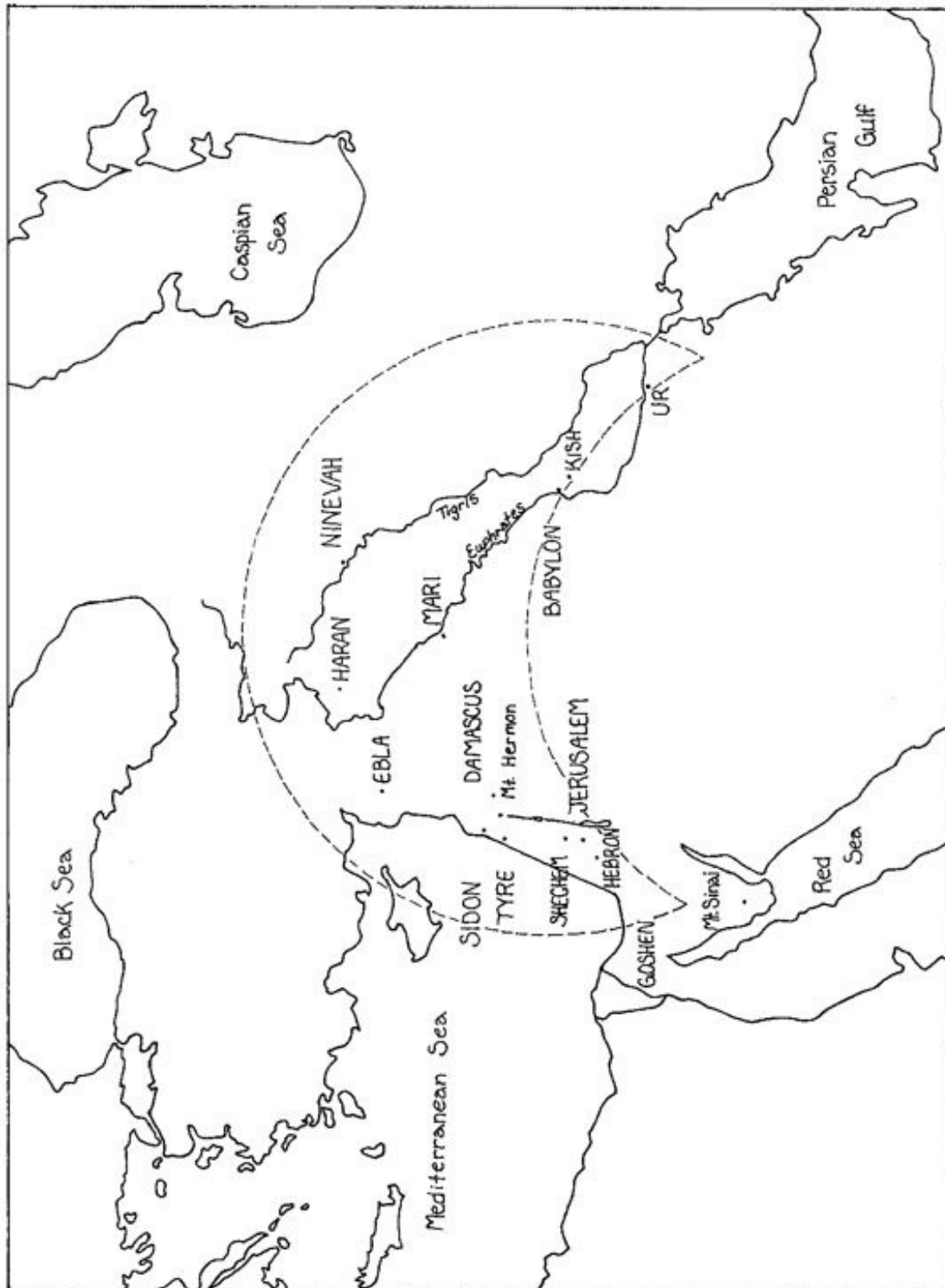
Adam Clarke, Clarke's Commentary. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, nd).

Charles John Ellicott, Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, nd).

Henry H. Halley, Pocket Bible Handbook, 19th edition. (Chicago: Henry H. Halley, 1951).

Percy J. Wiseman, New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis, 6th edition. (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, LTD, 1953).

Werner Keller, The Bible as History. (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981).



Map 2:1 The Fertile Crescent

CHAPTER 3

The Geography of the Old Testament: A Walk With Abraham

The events of the Old Testament took place within a small area compared to the world in which we travel. It is approximately 800 miles across at the farthest point. Let us begin with the geographical point of creation, as far as we know it, and travel from there with Abraham as he walks across the world of the Old Testament. On this journey we will learn about the geography, climate, and somewhat about the culture of Old Testament times.

No one knows for certain the exact spot where God created man or the location of the Garden of Eden. Most writers agree that human life originated in, and the events of the Old Testament were conducted in, what is known as the Fertile Crescent. This is an area bounded by the Tigris River on the east, the Taurus Mountains on the north, the Mediterranean Sea on the west, and the Arabian Desert on the south. The eastern part of the Fertile Crescent is now in Iraq and the northern part is in Syria. The western part is in Israel and Jordan; while the southwestern tip of the crescent is in northern Egypt.

The region was called the **Fertile** Crescent because it was fertile. Originally, it was watered by a mist that rose up from the ground (Genesis 2:5-6). It was fertile, even after the climate changes brought about by the flood, when watered by a system of canals such as those King Nebuchadnezzar built with the captive labor which included the Jews (Ezekiel 1:1).

The traditional site of the Garden of Eden is Eridu, just 12 miles south from Ur where we first find Abraham. While Eridu can not be guaranteed to be the site of Eden, there are suggestive signs. The plain between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers at this point was originally called the Plain of Edin (Halley, p. 64). In addition, ethnologists believe this area to be the place of origin of the present races of humans; and it is also thought to be the birth place of most of the domestic animals we use, as well as our common fruits, vegetables, and cereal grains.

Abraham's World

Abraham, his father, Terah, and his grandfather, Nahor, lived in Ur of Chaldees when we first hear of them in Genesis 11:27-32. Ur was located on the Euphrates River about 100 miles north of where it emptied into the Persian Gulf. This land has been known by several names through the centuries. Parts of it have been called Sumer, Shinar, Chaldea, and Elam. Later, the southern part of it was called Babylon, the northeastern part Assyria, and the northwestern area Mesopotamia, which means land between the rivers. While Abraham lived there, the southern part was called Chaldea. The changes in names were related, as is usually the case, to changes in rulership.

Ur was a large and well-developed city when Abraham's family called it home. Excavations of it were conducted over a number of years beginning in 1854. These revealed paved streets, large commercial buildings, and numerous multi-storied homes with courts, fountains, fireplaces, and sanitation systems. The walls were covered with plaster and painted. This was a prosperous and colorful city.

A large temple tower was also uncovered at Ur. It rises in three levels to a height of 70 feet. Corner stones are inscribed with the names of the city, its founders, and the builders and repairers of the temple which is dedicated to the moon god, Nannar. In a room of a nearby temple, a library of stone tablets was discovered. One tablet records a prayer of King Nabonidus, who reigned from 556 to 536 B.C., for his son Belshazzar. The prayer besought Nannar for the king and his son, especially that Belshazzar would be "kept from sin" and "be satisfied with the abundance of life." Written in cuneiform script, some of these tablets are dated as far back as the time of Abraham. Together these writings confirm Biblical accounts of many events, including the Biblical account of King Belshazzar.

How fascinating to think that this temple, which still stands and is just off the rail line that goes from Baghdad to Basra, is probably the place where Abraham and his family were worshipping idols when God first called him! Joshua (24:2) said, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood [the river Euphrates] in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor: and they served other gods."

God's Call of Abraham

God's first call to Abraham came while he lived in Ur (Acts 7:2-4). It was a call to leave a wealthy and prosperous city and go to an unknown land. Despite the fact that Abraham and his family were idolaters, he clearly recognized the true God when he heard Him. No wonder that such a man is listed in the honor roll of faith (Hebrews 11:8). "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee" (Genesis 12:1). Abraham and his family journeyed northwestward to the city of Haran. The journey was begun when Abraham was a relatively young man and in approximately 2,000 B.C. It was a trek of about 600 miles.

A part of Abraham's route of travel would have taken him and his group northward between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. As he went he would have passed lush farms—plantations some have called them—and markets where food and other commodities were sold. They would likely have met numerous camel caravans coming from southern Arabia to buy and sell in the area. Canals that drew water from both rivers probably watered the farms. The land would have been low and generally flat. About 150 miles on his journey Abraham passed by or through the city of Babylon. Babylon was a notable city, but in 2,000 B.C., not so prosperous as it was later to become or as Ur which Abraham left behind.

The Kingdom of Mari

When Abraham and his family left Babylon and continued their northwestward journey they entered Mesopotamia. Sometimes this name is applied to the entire region but it more properly belongs to the large, flat plain where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers are at the greatest distance from each other. The agricultural development here was extensive; roads and canals cut across the land providing easy travel and abundant water. And when they came to the center of this long, north-south lying plain, they reached the city of Mari, the jewel of the east.



The modern world knew little of Mari, the city or the kingdom, until the 19th century. As excavations revealed the extent of Mari, photos of the city amazed the civilized world. The palace of Zimri-Lin, the last king to rule there, covered ten acres and contained 260 rooms. Kitchens and bathrooms were discovered that could have been put into use without repair after 4,000 years. Such refinements as the richness of the throne rooms and the beauty of the frescos that adorned the walls made this the place to see in the ancient world, as tablets recovered at other cities testify. Each area of the palace had its own library, i.e. one giving instructions and rules for management of the buildings and household which held 1,600 documents. Keller (p. 61) claims that “columns of lorries [trucks] had to be commissioned to remove the cuneiform tablets from the palace archives alone.” For splendor and greatness, Mari eclipsed Babylon, which came to its peak 300 years later, and Nineveh, which reached its zenith a thousand years afterward.

Perhaps the reason the world heard little of Mari is that it was a peace-loving kingdom. Unfortunately it was wars that went down in history then, as is the case now. But the same fact probably also helped make the kingdom great. They could spend their wealth on things of more value, such as great domestic projects and education. The laws that governed Mari were similar to those of the celebrated Hammurabi who ruled Babylon many years later (and whose soldiers captured and destroyed Mari in about 1,700 B.C.). Hammurabi’s reputation for brilliance might not have been so shiny had people known about Mari at the time.

On to Haran and a Respite

As Abraham and his party journeyed northwestward from Mari they would have found the land gradually rising. By the time they reached Haran they

probably would have been in sight of the Taurus Mountains, with Mt. Ararat, where the ark came to rest, off in the distant northeast.

At the time Abraham and his family arrived in Haran it probably was not much of a city compared to ones they had seen along the way. It became so later, especially after the fall of Nineveh to the east, because the Assyrians pulled back and made Haran their capitol. But at this time it was largely a junction and an oasis on the major trade routes. For reasons that were not explained, the family stayed in Haran for an extended period. Perhaps they stopped because Abraham's father, Terah, was ill, for he died there as is noted in Genesis 11:31-32. Some of the family stayed and made Haran their permanent home. Even Abraham referred to it as "my country" in Genesis 24:1-10 when he sent his servant there to find a wife for Isaac.

The records of Haran frequently mention the names of Terah, Abraham, and Nahor and other persons known in the Scriptures. This suggests that the family was wealthy even before God's call. Serving Jehovah and leaving a luxurious city did not diminish their wealth, however, because Genesis 13:2 says, "Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold."

The Final Journey into Canaan

But God's intentions had never been for Abraham to settle permanently in Haran. The promised land was still farther on. So the call to Abraham was repeated (Genesis 12:1-3). This time the route of travel was southwest. Abraham reached the top of the triangle-shaped Arabian desert at Haran, and from there descended in pretty much a straight line to Canaan. If he followed the route that his grandson, Jacob, followed later (Genesis 33), Abraham probably came from Haran through Damascus (now in Syria) and continuing his southwesterly journey, passed through the Golan Heights, which have been fought over so much in our day. Leaving the Sea of Galilee off to his right, he entered Canaan through what later became the land of Gilead, which Moses gave to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh in the early stages of the conquest of Canaan.

After Haran the topography was mostly hilly upland and later, a high plateau. At this point, Abraham's party descended the plateau into the Jordan River Valley. They must have done this near where the Jabbok River emptied into the Jordan, which was about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Traveling directly westward, they shortly came to the city of Shechem and the family made camp near there at a place called "the Oak of Moreh."

Canaan was inhabited when Abraham's party arrived (Genesis 12:6), but not so well settled as Mesopotamia, nor were its cities as large or luxurious. Shechem was a walled city, according to recent excavations, and the people worshipped idols. Abraham, however, built an altar and worshipped Jehovah. About 35 miles north of Jerusalem, Shechem is the modern city of Nablus which has only recently been given by Israel into control of the Palestinian Authority.

Abraham's Travels within Canaan

The length of Abraham's stay at Moreh is not given, but apparently rather soon he moved farther south to a mountain between Bethel and Ai, just north of Jerusalem. The move was probably prompted by fear of the Canaanites or perhaps in search of better pasture for his herds. Still later the group moved farther south to a place between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Coast, and because of a drought (Genesis 12:10), continued all the way into northern Egypt. This is the same part of Egypt, called Goshen, that Abraham's descendants inhabited many years later, and from which Moses delivered them.

When Abraham and his family arrived in Egypt they had covered three sides of the boundaries of Old Testament lands. Their journey began at the Persian Gulf, the eastern point of the Fertile Crescent, and continued as they made a long, sweeping curve northwestward to the apex of the curve in Haran. Then they made the gentle sweep southwestward to place the western point of the crescent in Egypt. There remains only to connect the southern boundary, the bottom curve of the crescent, which Abraham himself did not do. He probably remained in Egypt only a year or two until he returned to Canaan where he lived and died in the land that God had promised to his descendants.

The Southern Boundary

To complete the boundaries of Bible lands, let us jump forward about 500 years in time. Abraham had by then been given the promised heir, Isaac, and Isaac had sons, Jacob and Esau. The promise of God to Abraham to make his family into a great nation was renewed to Isaac and Jacob, because Jacob was the designated heir of the promise. He had twelve sons. Because of a drought, all of Jacob's family moved to Egypt. After four hundred years, much of it spent in slavery, the Israelites, then the great nation God promised they would be, were led out of Egypt under Moses.

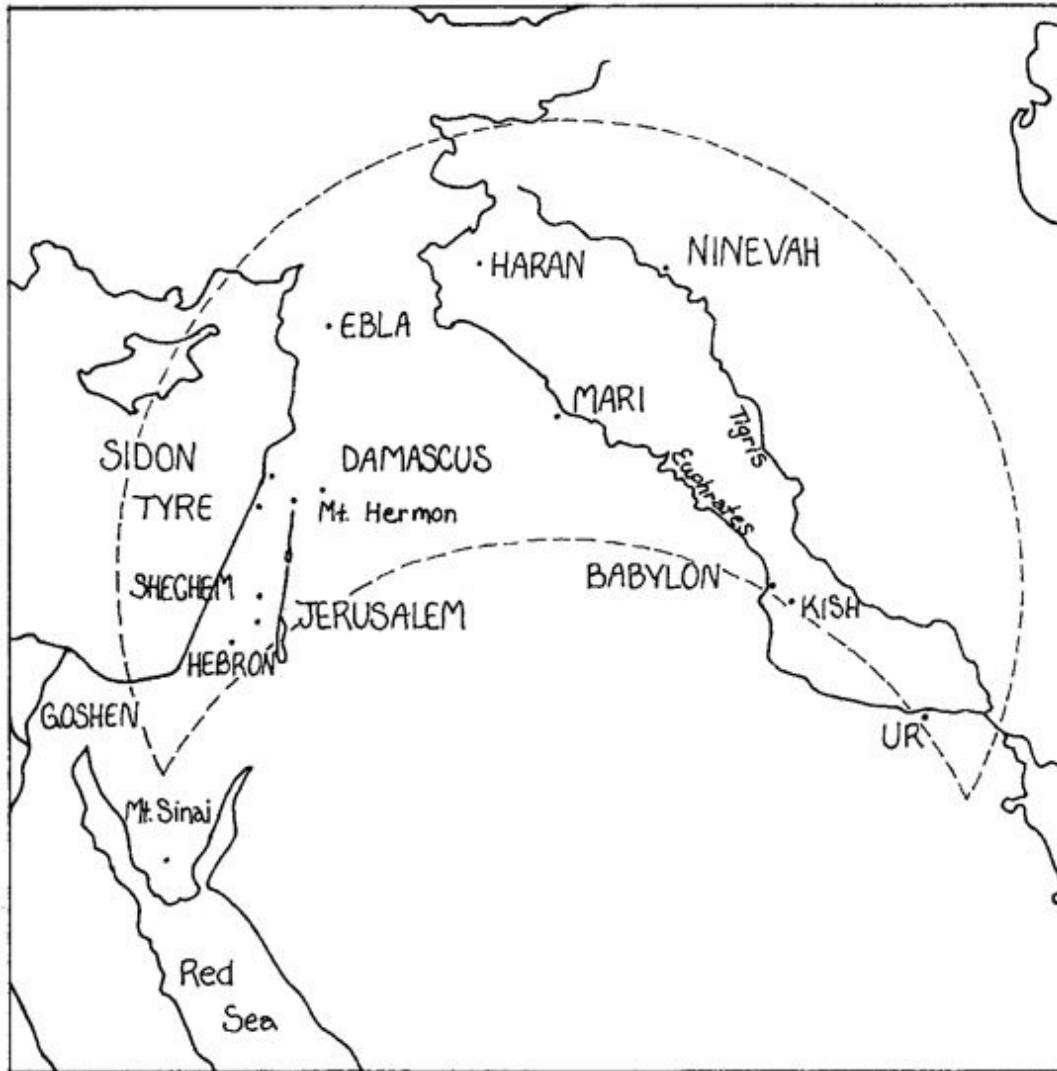
The Israelites left Egypt from the land of Goshen, miraculously crossed the

Red Sea and traveled along its eastern shore southward to Mt. Sinai, which was only 60 miles from the tip of the Sinai Peninsula. They camped at Mt. Sinai approximately a year during which God gave them the law and they built the tabernacle. They rebelled against God and wandered in the wilderness for forty years. When the rebels were dead, God led the nation northeastward on the eastern side of the Dead Sea where they crossed into Canaan near Jericho.

The Israelites were then in the Promised Land; God's promise was accomplished; but we still have not completed the southern boundary of Old Testament geography. To do this we will have to make another leap ahead to the time of King David. God outlined to Abraham the land He intended to give his descendants and Moses recalled for the people its dimensions (Deuteronomy 1:7).

We know from this description that the southern boundary was to extend from Egypt to the Euphrates River and it was not until David's time that the nation actually pushed the kingdom that far (I Chronicles 18:3).

All of the events of the Old Testament took place within this area that is about a third the size of the United States. Most of the action occurred within the Land of Canaan which was about a third the size of the state of South Carolina. What a tremendous impact on the world this small country has had, and is still having! What a testimony to the fact that God used this tiny area of His creation to work out a large part of His great plan for humans!



Map 3:1 Abraham's World

Topography and Climate of Palestine

The physical geography of Canaan is just as spectacular as the events that have taken place there. It is called a world in miniature because of the great variety of landscapes. Wide, fertile plains like Sharon, which Solomon praised for its fruits and flowers (Song of Solomon 2:1-15), and the Plain of Gennesaret, which lies west of the Sea of Galilee, cut across the land. During Jesus' time Gennesaret, where he grew up, was a luxuriant garden. The maritime plains along the coast of the Mediterranean were the home of the Philistines, the ancient enemies of the Jews, and descendants of Ham, the middle son of Noah. Even though the plains are important features of the landscape, the country is more mountainous than is often assumed.

The Lebanon Mountains in the north, part of the Taurus range, are the highest with Mt. Hermon the highest peak. It towers 9,232 feet above sea level and is snow covered most of the time. David speaks of the dews of Hermon (Psalms 133:3), which are said to be almost like rain even during the dry season. But it was the highlands that lay west of the Jordan that were the real home of the Jews. Jerusalem is in this area. David eulogized these hills in Psalms 65:12-13: "The hills are girded with joy, the pastures are clothed with flocks; The valleys also are covered over with corn; They shout for joy, they also sing." When not ravaged with drought as God's response to the people's sins, it truly was a land that flowed with milk and honey.

Perhaps the most dramatic feature of Palestine geography is the Jordan River Valley. A large spring forms the river's headwaters and literally flows out of the southern base of Mt. Hermon in the country's far north. About 30 miles south of its origin the river flows into the Sea of Galilee. This beautiful freshwater lake, the scene of so much of Jesus' ministry, was a source of pride for the Jews. God, they said, created seven oceans but His heart was in the Sea of Galilee. Technically, it is not large enough to be called a "sea," just 7 miles wide and 14 miles long. The title is more a reflection of its importance to the people than its dimensions. From the Sea of Galilee the river flows south approximately 100 miles into the Dead Sea.

In the mountains, the Jordan River is as much as 3,000 feet above sea level and at the Dead Sea it is nearly that much below sea level. The river does not continue beyond the Dead Sea for it has no outlet. The river gorge varies in width from one mile to 14 miles. There is said to be nothing really like it anywhere else in the world. Some people think God chose this place for the Jews, being a world in miniature, to symbolize the worldwide mission He had for them in the salvation of the world. Modern tour guides are fond of making a spiritual point by contrasting the Galilee and Dead Seas. The Galilee receives and gives and is very much alive, still teeming with fish. The Dead Sea receives and does not give and is dead; there is no life in it.

The Climate of Palestine

The climate of Palestine generally is moderate, somewhat like that of South Carolina, to which we have already compared it. There are, however, real variations related to terrain and seasons. The coastal plains are very hot at times and, as is typical, the desert is hot in daytime and cold at night. The mountains

and highlands are cool. Unlike most other countries of the same latitude, there are distinct dry and wet seasons. Winter rains usually start in late October and end by the first of April, but even in this season, rains come only intermittently. These winter rains signal the start of preparation for planting and the spring rains mature the crops. James (5:7-8) used this phenomenon of waiting for the latter rain as a lesson on spiritual perseverance.

The winds of Palestine are mentioned often in the Bible. The north wind, as is true in most of the U.S., is usually cold and dry. The south and east winds come across the desert and are hot and dry. Job recognized these features of the geography when he said, "Out of the south cometh the whirlwind, and the cold out of the north" (Job 37:9). Jesus noted, "When ye see the south wind blow, ye say, there will be heat; and it cometh to pass" (Luke 12:55). Pharaoh even dreamed of the east wind in his famous nocturnal vision of Genesis 41. The seven ears of corn that represented famine were described as "withered, thin, and blasted by the east wind." For other Biblical references to the sirocco winds of Israel see Hosea 13:15, Jeremiah 18:17, and Ezekiel 27:26. The west wind comes off the Mediterranean and is cool and refreshing. Laden with moisture, it meets the cool air of the highlands and produces rain.

Summary

We hope the mental walk with Abraham that you have just completed has made Bible lands become real to you. They are real; in the news daily, and still fought over as they were in days gone by. But we also wish for a more specific and spiritual result. As you read this book, and especially the Bible itself, the mental pictures you created as you read this chapter can be recalled and allowed to enliven your understanding and strengthen your memories of the passages you study. For example, as you read Isaiah's warning to Israel (chapter 8), that Assyria would invade them because of their idolatry, visualize how this great army would start out from Mesopotamia, march through Damascus destroying her on the way, and enter Israel's northeast corner in Gilead. Such mental structuring will set the great facts of God's word in your heart and broaden your abilities to comprehend the Old Testament.

References

Henry H. Halley, *Pocket Bible Handbook*, 19th edition. (Chicago: Henry H. Halley, 1951).

Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981).

PART 2:

THE PATRIARCHAL AGE

Part 2 covers the first 2,500 years (approximately) of human history. The book of Genesis is our source of information. It starts with the story of creation and ends with the Children of Israel in Egypt, where they are later enslaved. In this condition, they are poised for God's miraculous deliverance and their formation into the nation that will bring forth the Messiah.

These years are called the Patriarchal Age because of the way God related to humans during them, which was through the fathers of families. The word "patriarch" means father. God's relationship was not so much with the fathers of nuclear families, but with the fathers of extended families or clans. These were the men through whom God worked primarily and through whom the Messiah was to come—such men as Seth (Adam and Eve's son), Shem (Noah's son), Abraham, and Jacob.

The patriarchs received God's revelations, directed the worship of God, and taught the people His commandments. God's purpose in choosing them is aptly illustrated in Abraham. "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord" (Genesis 18:19). It is their genealogies that we meet again and again in Genesis in a way not seen afterward until the opening words of Matthew in the New Testament.

The story of the patriarchs is a story of real people as they struggled to live in the way God wanted; His blessing when they did, and His discipline when they did not. But it is more. The lives of the patriarchs were the means through which God effected his ultimate plans for man. Fascinating historical accounts, yes, but they are also pictures of the "future" in which we live. Therefore as we study, we will constantly ask ourselves, "What do these day to day struggles of our ancestors foreshadow about the spiritual realities with which we deal?" The answers will provide insight into the ways God works and guidance for our daily lives.

CHAPTER 4

The Beginnings

“One day the Gods of the galaxies got together and decided to create a little person, somewhat similar to themselves but made of flesh and bone. First they had to make a place for him to live, so they created the building blocks of a material universe. Far out in space as they were, it was pitch dark and the raw materials for the universe were scattered around in no particular order. Everything was in confusion.”

Scripture readings for this chapter: Genesis chapters 1 & 2. References in this text will be in parenthesis chapter and verse only, i.e (1:21).

Sound like the opening lines to a sci-fi novel? Yes, because the facts are “all dressed down” into 21st Century vernacular. Even though the ideas are roughly comparable to the real creation, most Christians would heartily reject them in favor of the simple and majestic account of Genesis 1:1-2. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”

Where does the idea of “Gods,” plural, come from? In the Hebrew of Genesis 1 the word for God is plural. You can see it in the English version in verse 26 when God said, “Let us make man in our image, and after our likeness.” It refers to God the Father, Jesus the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit. You just read that “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” The Genesis record does not specifically say it but Jesus also was there, participating in the creation. John opens his gospel with words identical to Genesis, “In the beginning,” and continues with, “was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” Verse 14 of that chapter explains, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” If you want to read a beautiful and poetic description of Jesus’ work in creation, go to Proverbs 8:22-30.

The Real Creation Story

Genesis chapters 1 and 2 give an orderly account of the creation of the universe, its vegetable and animal inhabitants, and man. It is the only factual account of how it all began. There are many theories and opinions, but this is **the** account of man's—our own—heritage. It is the origin and still the basis of all religious thinking; that man was created by God and owes allegiance to Him.

The language is dignified and majestic as one would expect of a record inspired of God. In addition it is beautiful and poetic. It clearly makes God the center of the creative force and man the center of its results. This gives humans an early glimpse of our purpose on earth.

As indicated in the short, colloquial piece that opens this chapter, there are indications that God first created the building blocks of the universe and from this material created the universe and everything within it. We see this illustrated in the formation of man. Genesis 2:7 says, "the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground..." The ground—the earth—had been created earlier. But regardless of how well God formed man from the dust, he still could not live until the Maker created life within him by breathing into his nostrils the breath of life.

There is an old joke about the scientist who challenged God by saying, "I can make a man out of dust." "Go ahead," God replied; and the scientist grabbed a handful of dust and started toward his laboratory. "Oh, no you don't!" called God. "Make your own dust."

When the raw materials of the universe were created, the Bible says that "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Some translators give it as "hovered lovingly over," apparently to bring order out of chaos. Then God created light to separate the light from darkness, naming the light "day" and the darkness "night." This finished the work of the first creative day. In naming the day and night God revealed an early anticipation of the coming of man and of human language, for man is the only creature in the universe that calls things by names.

The Creation: Days 2 through 4

The second and third days of creation God spent in shaping the physical universe into a form that was good for human habitation. First, He separated the waters which were on the earth from those which were above. Then He gathered the waters which covered the face of the whole earth together so that spaces of

dry land appeared. We have long known that there is enough water on the earth to cover its face completely to a depth of many feet if they were not “gathered together” into seas as Genesis 1:9 notes. The prophets, perhaps recalling the flood of Noah’s time, seemed much in awe of God’s power to set boundaries for the seas. Jeremiah (5:22) spoke of God, who “placed the sand for a boundary for the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it.” (See also Job 38:11, Isaiah 51:15, and Psalms 124:5.)

When dry land was ready, God created the vegetable kingdom—grass, herbs, and trees. Each plant had within it the seeds of life so that it could reproduce itself and some of the trees yielded fruit, another anticipation of the arrival of man. At the end of the third day God surveyed His young universe and said “it was good,” probably meaning it was good for man. He made the same statement after following days of creation.

The fourth day was devoted to the creation of the great lights in the universe. The sun was given to rule the day and the moon for the night. The moon and the stars were also for “signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years,” a clear recognition that humans would soon make their calendars by the phases of the moon and movements of the stars. These great lights were to have a spiritual significance as well. The sun would symbolize the Messiah (Malachi 4:2) and the moon those disciples who would reflect His light (Philippians 2:15).

The Creation: Days 5 and 6

The creation of the fifth day opens with God saying, “Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life” (1:20). Some scientists have argued that the seas were the source of all life on earth. This is not accurate, since plant life was created on the third day, nor is it true of all animal life, as the following record shows; but the seas are a source of much life. From tiny minnows, that serve as food for larger aquatic life, to large whales, all felt the creative call of God. Fowls were created on the fifth day as well.

The sixth and final day of creation was special, even among days of creation, for several reasons. This is shown by the many words of power and authority used in it. For example, in verse 24 the larger land animals were summoned into existence. In verse 27 man is created in God’s image. Then, in verse 28 God gives His creation the power to be fruitful and reproduce themselves. And finally, in verse 30, He assigns to all creation its food.

Man was special even among the creation of a special day. When forming all other parts of the universe, God simply spoke and it was done. But as the creation of man approached He conferred with Christ and the Holy Spirit. “And God said, Let us make man in our image, and after our likeness: and let them have dominion... over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (1:26).

Precisely why God approached the creation of man with more care, we are not told. Perhaps, as some say, it was because humans are more complicated beings, with their intellectual and moral faculties, that simply required more care. We are inclined to think it more likely that God was looking far ahead to the consequences of man’s moral freedom and the fact that Jesus and the Holy Spirit would have a part in his salvation. In view of Christ’s sacrifice for our sins, surely He needed a part in the decision to bring to life one whose deeds would create the need for His death.

At the end of the sixth day, God looked over all the work of creation and pronounced it, not just good but, very good. The earth, its vegetable and animal inhabitants, and man had been made just as God wanted them to be. Then God rested from His work on the seventh day. He hallowed and set apart this day, an act that would be fully understood years later when God gave the Sabbath law at Mt. Sinai.

The Days of Creation

Some readers wonder whether the days of creation were ordinary days as we know them or did they represent undefined longer periods? Perhaps they question whether the universe and its inhabitants could be brought to a fully functional state in just a week. Perhaps also some have been made to question by the teachings of evolutionists who argue that it all came about slowly over millions and millions of years. But trusting students must keep in mind that we are viewing the work of God, who can speak and things happen. And there are suggestions in Genesis and clear statements elsewhere in the Bible that these were seven ordinary days.

In the Genesis record God described each day’s accomplishments by concluding, “and the evening and the morning were the first day,” and so forth. This suggests that days of mornings and evenings, AM and PM, as we say it, were what He had in mind. He spoke of phases of the moon, suggesting a

calendar of lunar cycles. But it is to Moses that we look for a definitive answer to this question. When he gave the Sabbath law he said, “Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God.” (Exodus 20:9-10). Continuing in verse 11: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is.” There is no doubt that Moses had in mind a week of seven ordinary days. The same six days that we work, are the six days of God’s creation.

It is quite unwise to take the Genesis record and compare it, as some do, to western science. For one thing, science as we know it is 200 years old at most. If God had explained the creation in scientific terms, then the folks who lived for the first 5,800 years would have had no clue to what He was talking about. Even now, understanding of this wonderful story would be limited because most people are not trained in the scientific method. What incredible arrogance for a few persons to insist that the God of all people and all ages explain things in their exclusive vocabulary!

There are other problems with trying to explain the creation story scientifically. Most scientists are aware that the scientific method, at its best, allows us to see what we are looking for in some areas, while preventing us from seeing other things not considered relevant to the search. To put it briefly, science allows us to see some things and prevents us from seeing others. This is true of all philosophies or methods of searching for knowledge. Eastern scholars, without the western bias, arrived at understandings we might never have achieved. Lack of the western scientific method did not prevent the people of Mari from developing a great, efficient, and peaceful society which, so far, we have been unable to do.

How much we would have missed if God had chosen to describe His work in any other way! He was indeed wise to do so in the timeless and universal style of beautiful, factual, and poetic language.

A Second Creation Story?

Chapter 2 of Genesis gives additional details about the creation. Some people claim to have found it to be a second account of creation with discrepancies from the record in Genesis 1. That is not true. Chapter 2 does not profess to be a primary account. Instead, the theme here is on shaping and molding, in contrast to chapter 1 which is on creating from nothing. Even these extra details are mainly about two facets of creation, the home made for Adam and the formation

of Eve.

Man's Home

“And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed” (2:8). The word garden is sometimes translated paradise. It carried the idea of an enclosed place of beauty and peace. Within the garden, God planted every type of tree that was beautiful and those that produced edible fruit. Among the trees were two special ones in the midst of the garden. The first was the tree of life which seems to foreshadow the one that will be in the New Jerusalem, described in Revelation 22:2. The other was the tree of knowledge of good and evil of which God forbade man to eat.

In anticipation of Adam and Eve's sin, we wonder why God put a forbidden tree in the garden. Why did he not simply leave that tree out? We must remind ourselves that we can not use human judgment to come to certain knowledge of what God has not revealed. Moses said, “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29). It is possible, however, to see a reason for the tree that fits with God's plans for man. He created man with a free will, as a morally free person. If Adam had been placed in an environment in which sin was not possible, he would not have been free. Only by giving him a choice was he free to obey God of his own will. It is significant that God did not place forbidden trees in all parts of the garden, only enough to give man freedom.

A river watered the garden and flowed out of it branching into four rivers. Two of those rivers we know well and have discussed in earlier chapters. One was the Euphrates and the other the Tigris, called here Hiddekel, the Greek version of its Arabic name. The other rivers, Pison and Gihon, are not known and probably were tributaries to the Tigris and Euphrates. Pison is said to “compass” or “go in circular fashion” through the land of Havilah, which is not known, but the river's meandering course suggests flat country as the land between the Tigris and Euphrates is today. Gihon is said to compass the whole land of Ethiopia (in the King James Bible), or Cush as most translations say. That name was attached to Ethiopia in later ages of history, but at this time referred to the southwestern part of Arabia.

God placed Adam in the garden to “dress” and to “keep” it. The first word implies tilling it and the second suggests protecting it. Even paradise needed

some care and this was Adam's work assigned by Jehovah. This also seems a precursor of what was to come because in all ages God has designated a place where He will meet with man and it has been man's job to keep that place as God wanted it. Exactly what the garden might need to be protected from is not clear.

The Creation of Eve

God spoke of creating woman in Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." In this chapter He explains the process of Eve's special creation. First He prepared Adam for her reception. Some people call Adam's study of the animals with their mates for the purpose of naming them the world's first premarital counseling session. In this activity Adam seems to have become aware that he alone in all the universe had no suitable companion. God had already observed Adam's need. "It is not good that man should be alone." No man should take a wife until he too has acknowledged his need for her.

Then God put Adam to sleep and removed a rib from his side. God could have made Eve from dust, as He did Adam. Paul understood the spiritual significance of the way Eve was created, as he explains in I Corinthians 11:7-12. The word rib is usually translated side or flank. Adam seemed to acknowledge that God removed more than a simple bone when he exclaimed, she is "now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." Probably what this signifies is that God removed a side from Adam's nature—bone, flesh, mental, emotional, and spiritual—and taking that as a base built it up into the perfect companion for him. Adam showed his delight for his words were exclamatory. "This," unlike all the animals, "is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."

As a father who takes his beloved daughter's hand and leads her down the aisle to her husband, God took the woman whom he had made and "brought her unto the man."

After his "operation" Adam was less than he was before, because he no longer had what God had removed. But when he received Eve and they became "one flesh," they were more than Adam ever could have been alone. Even though Adam had no parents to leave, he understood marriage, its rich rewards, and its responsibilities. He said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Summary

God's creation is now complete and mankind is set on a 6,000 year journey, one that has brought humans to the year 2,002 A.D. and allowed us to step onto the stage of God's world. We have seen how carefully God created the universe for man and with what love he made man the centerpiece of it. Our purpose on earth is made clear, "to dress and to keep" the great garden God has so lovingly provided, and thus to provide a good place for ourselves and our companions to do well physically, mentally, and spiritually. In so doing we serve an even higher purpose of bringing honor to the Maker who created us in His image.

CHAPTER 5

The Beginning of the End: The Origin of Sin

Genesis chapter 3 opens with a cloud on the horizon of paradise. “Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.” Subtle, as used here, implies craftiness or the use of guile. The record of creation in chapter 2 closed with a statement of the childlike innocence of Adam and Eve. “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” Innocence and guile are a bad combination, especially if the innocent do not have an abiding commitment to God. We soon see how Satan intended to use guile. He exaggerated what God had withheld from Adam and Eve.

Scripture readings for this chapter. Genesis chapter 3. References in this text will be in parentheses; c and verse only, i.e (3:1)

“Indeed,” said Satan, “has God really said that you may not eat of any of the trees of the garden?” There was feigned surprise, even indignation, in his voice. Eve answered with truth and openness, correcting what she may have assumed was an honest misconception. “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.”

Then the serpent employed a second form of guile. He minimized the danger in disobeying God by a blatant contradiction of God’s word. “Ye shall not surely die.” With only a little license we could quote him as saying, “Oh! That is ridiculous. You are not going to die. A little fruit never hurt any body.” And to support his open denial of God, Satan employed a third tactic of seducers, perhaps the most devious of all. He imputed an evil motive to God. “For God doth know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”

We observe the first success of Satan’s efforts when Eve looked at the tree in a new way. “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise.” Had she never seen these characteristics of the tree before? No, because she had never

looked for them before. There were many beautiful trees in the garden and many that bore good fruit. She previously had felt no deprivation from not eating of this particular tree.

Apparently Eve felt deprived. Can you imagine that? They lived in paradise; they had all the resources of the earth at their disposal—by comparison they were richer than Bill Gates—and she felt deprived. If one can be made to focus on the negative of any situation, even beneficial ones, he will be dissatisfied.

How timeworn and how modern these tactics of the tempter. Every seducer since Eden has used them. The lustful man who wants to seduce a woman exaggerates the pleasure of an illicit relationship. Solomon said that a prostitute says to her prospective client, “Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant” (Proverbs 9:17). Drug pushers say to adolescents, “Your parents don’t understand you. They don’t want you to have any fun.” The misguided agnostic proffers “contradictions” in God’s word, and on and on.

SATAN’S TACTICS	
Deception	Appears in familiar form.
Exaggeration	Exaggerates importance of things withheld. “Hath God said. Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”
Minimization	Minimizes danger of disobedience. “Ye shall not surely die... “
Imputation	Imputes evil motive to God. “God doth know... ye shall be as gods... “

The Fateful Moment

How easy it must have seemed to Eve. She simply reached out her hand and took some of the forbidden fruit. Nothing happened. She began to eat—still nothing. She gave some to Adam, who appears to have been listening and watching her interaction with the serpent in silence. Apparently he passively accepted and ate. The fateful deed was done.

Exactly how long the lapse was between eating and recognition of the meaning of their disobedience is not revealed, but it does not appear to have been long. The eyes of their consciences were opened and the awful truth settled in. When God came for His “pleasure walk” (that is what the words imply) in the garden during the cool of the day they already were overcome with guilt.

Prompted by their shame, they sewed themselves girdles of fig leaves and hid from God in the woods. How soon they busied themselves in trying to control the consequences of sin! The aprons were an attempt to get rid of shame. To lessen the fear, they distanced themselves from Jehovah. God called out, “Adam, where are you?” Where are you, indeed? What a dreadful question for these people at this time.

Look at what had happened to this once-happy couple. Adam received Eve with such delight. He had yearned for a companion and Eve was the perfect one. Adam was lonely; she was curious and outgoing. Satan promised them they would be better off, like gods. Instead they were afraid of God who created them and extended such loving care. They were guilty and ashamed. Satan promised that they would know good and evil, but neglected to tell them their knowledge would come, not through intellectual insight, but through the bitter experience of the awful effects of sin. How many individuals and couples have reaped the same rewards of sin from similar types of deception?

Who Have You Been Talking To?

Adam answered God from a distance, “I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” “Who told you that you were naked?” God responded. The question suggests an ancient truth, i.e. that what happens to us is often a result of to whom we have been listening.

“Have you eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded you that you should not eat?” God continued. Adam replied, “The woman whom You gave me to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” The traditional interpretation of Adam’s response is that he was blaming Eve for his sin, and maybe even God who gave her to him. Perhaps that is true. But the more one looks at Adam’s words, the less they seem like blame, and the more he seems to take his actions as a matter of course. Did he not know he had a choice? Could it be that this man who had longed for a companion and received her with such warmth, could not conceive of life without her? We know from Paul (I Timothy 2:14) that Adam was not deceived by the devil’s subterfuge as was Eve. He knowingly followed her into sin.

Turning His attention to Eve, God asked, “What is this that you have done?” She did not have the power to look down through the ages and see the cataclysmic consequences of her deed, but God did. The horror in His voice may have given her a vague awareness and made her reach for someone to share the

blame. Satan was an appropriate target; “the serpent beguiled me.” But there is a thread of nobility in Eve’s answer because she shouldered her responsibility somewhat; “and ‘I’ did eat.” Now it was payback time.

The Consequences of Sin

Why did God have to punish sin? Why could He not have forgiven Adam and Eve on the spot and said, “Don’t do it again?” As noted earlier, humans can not read God’s mind but even we can see valid reasons. Habits are always prevented more effectively by stopping them early. It is never wise to wait until behaviors are well ingrained before trying to curb them. God also was dealing with these two with the whole human race in view.

Second, God was aware of the ultimate effects of sin on humans. Every murder, every rape, every child who is sold into prostitution, and every act of child molestation got its start with these actions of Satan and Adam and Eve. Every child who lost his young life in the awful travesty of being burned in sacrifice to idol gods—and there were thousands of them—can know that the deceiver who led his parents astray is the same Satan who lied to Eve. It is this vision we think, rather than a prudish attitude, that makes God refuse to look on sin. “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Habakkuk 1:13).

Appropriately, God called Satan to account first. “Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

There were three parts to the serpent’s punishment. First, he was cursed among all domestic and wild animals. Indeed, no other animal has been so soundly hated. Second, he was told “upon thy belly shalt thou go.” This arrogant creature who presumed to rise up against God was forced to symbolize the degradation of his heart with his posture. Third, the seed of the woman would bruise his head. The “seed of woman” surely looks forward to Christ and “bruise thy head” predicts the Messiah’s ultimate victory over Satan which will destroy his power over humans. Paul visualizes this happy state in I Corinthians 15. The Messiah “must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” At that time and through the Messiah’s victory the death sentence, placed on man in the garden, will be done away. “O death, where is thy

sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

Satan’s bruising the heel of the seed of woman is an allegory taken from the image of the serpent that lies along the path and bites the heel of men and animals. More specifically it speaks of the crucifixion of Jesus which would hurt but not be fatal because of His resurrection. The enmity, which means something like bad blood, that God put between Satan and the seed of woman foresees the enduring struggle between good and evil. Paul said, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

Mercy At the Time of Punishment

Couched in this pronouncement of judgment, is a prophecy of mercy and hope for mankind. Some students say that all of the gospel is contained in this small seed. It shows that the salvation of man through the Messiah was not an afterthought for God; it was there from the beginning. I Corinthians 2:7 describes it as “the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world” began. This should give us confidence that everything God did for man after Eden was intended to bring him back to the state of purity and blessedness he lost in sin. Compare the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 and 22 and note the similarities.

The woman was called to punishment second as being second in responsibility for the sin. She was told that her sorrow would be “greatly multiplied” and the focus of this additional sorrow would be in “bringing forth children.” The joy of bringing forth a child would not be taken away but would be preceded by “labor and delivery.” In addition, “thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” The first phrase is somewhat mysterious but probably relates to the fact that in the temptation Adam’s desire had been to please his wife more than to please God. She did not handle well his willingness to acquiesce to her, so the matter was reversed. This interpretation is strengthened by God’s statement to Adam, “because thou has hearkened unto the voice of thy wife.”

While Adam was third in line, he was not without guilt. Adam’s punishment was because he had listened to his wife and eaten of the tree which God commanded him not to eat. It was not wrong for Adam to listen to, even acquiesce to, his wife. His sin, like hers, was in disobeying God. A part of being morally free is that no one can take, nor can we give away, responsibility for

what we do. The sin of everyone since Adam has consisted of the same thing, “for sin is the transgression of the law” (I John 3:4).

Adam’s punishment consisted of the earth being cursed for his sake, or on account of his sin. He would eat of the ground “in sorrow,” which apparently means through a struggle which produced the “sweat of his face.” The theme of these statements is that the earth, which previously yielded its fruit with ease and abundance and without thorns and other impediments, would now do so miserly. This curse seems to be a death sentence passed on the earth much like the one passed on man. As their bodies would now begin to degenerate and ultimately die, so would the universe. “And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail” (Hebrews 1:10-12).

In the process of explaining the curse on the ground, God explained how the death sentence on man would work. The sentence, given when they were told not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, was “Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.” Now God said, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.” Adam and Eve’s death was not to be by sudden execution. “Until you return unto the ground” implies a process much like that described for the earth itself. Without God’s intervention through the continually restorative powers of the tree of life, they would gradually degenerate, grow old, and die.

Banished from Home

From a human standpoint the punishment of Adam and Eve seems severe enough, but another facet was required to sustain that already given. They must permanently be put out of the garden. God explained the reason, “lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.” The erstwhile pair was sent out of the home especially made for them and into the big world outside to make their way. God knew that man and woman, who had not been able to resist a tree that was bad for them, would not be able to resist the tree of life when they felt their bodies begin to get sick and grow old.

A guard was needed to protect Eden. Think of how the paradise would have been ravaged later when man became exceedingly wicked. So God stationed

cherubim on the east of the garden. Judging from the description of those who guarded the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:18), the special function of those angel-like spirit beings was to protect. He placed there also a flaming sword that turned every way.

Do you ever wonder what happened to the garden of Eden? If we went exploring in lower Mesopotamia, near old Eridu (described in chapter 3) might we stumble upon it and find the flaming sword still burning and the cherubim still at their posts? Not likely. When all those men who might have ravaged it died in the flood, when the flood itself altered the face of the ground beyond recognition and buried original vegetation under a layer of clay and sand, and when the earth had degenerated for years under its curse, it probably was no longer a garden paradise and thus did not require protection.

Unanswered Questions

We are aware that there are questions left unanswered about the temptation and fall of mankind. The reason is that those questions are left without answers in the Scriptures and we have chosen not to speculate about them or to record the speculations of others. We will mention some of the questions here to explain facets of how we have dealt with related topics that might otherwise be confusing. Christians must accept the fact that not everything they would like to know is yet revealed. On the other hand everything we need to know is furnished. Christians are “thoroughly furnished to all good works” (II Timothy 3:17); and given “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (II Peter 1:3).

Who Was the Serpent?

You will notice that we have used the terms serpent and Satan interchangeably, as do the Scriptures in other places (see Revelation 12:9 and 20:2). Does this mean that the serpent really was Satan, in person, or was the serpent being used by the devil, much as he might use evil men? As far as we can tell neither of these views would violate teaching in the many other Biblical references to him. We do not think the flesh and blood body of a serpent was Satan’s “natural” state because he is a spirit being. But no doubt he could have assumed that form, as angels sometimes assumed the form of men.

On the other hand, it is also appropriate to call someone by Satan’s name when they are doing his work. Jesus told Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan,” when Peter was trying to get Jesus not to die on the cross (Matthew 16:23). Whether

Satan assumed the form of a serpent or whether he simply influenced the serpent to do his work, he was the author of the deception and we properly lay it at his feet. Jesus noted this when he called Satan the “father of lies” (John 8:44).

What Species of Animal was the Serpent?

Many persons who read Genesis 3 come away with questions about what type of animal the serpent was. We have all seen snakes, but we have never seen one like this, who conversed with humans, made intelligent sounding arguments, and so forth. Clearly there was something different about this serpent aside from his moral turpitude.

The Hebrew word is correctly translated into the English “serpent,” but it was a rather general word which could apply to other types of animals. None of the other animals which have been suggested, however, would do anything to answer the question of how the serpent was able to manifest human-like characteristics. What we do know is that other animals, when directed by higher powers, were able to converse with humans. Balaam’s donkey (Numbers 22) displayed more intelligence than he, when according to Peter it “forbade the madness of the prophet” (II Peter 2:16). We do not know exactly what type of animal the serpent was nor how he received the powers of intellect and voice he had. We do know, because the Bible tells us, that he was a “beast of the field which the Lord God had made.”

Why Did Adam Rename His Wife?

Adam named his wife in chapter 2:23 at her creation. “She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Why did he name her again in chapter 3:20? “And Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.” Although it does not show in the English word “Eve,” the Hebrew word means “life.” Before this the continuation of human life on earth did not depend on Adam and Eve. God made them to live forever through eating of the tree of life. The death sentence had been pronounced upon them, but along with it God had said to Eve, “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception.” Now, human beings would die but, through Eve and her sisters down through the ages, human life would continue. More importantly, through the woman would come the Messiah, spoken of in chapter 3:15, who would abolish the death sentence on mankind and bring back eternal life and immortality (II Timothy 1:10).

Adam seemed to understand what God meant. He would die but through his wife human life would continue. Through his descendants he would, in a sense, gain back what he lost. Through Christ, the human race would recover. Adam looked at his wife with new respect and a new name, “Life,” became more appropriate.

How are we to take the fact that Adam called his wife the “mother of all living” when she had no children at all at the time? This word usage, called prolepsis, is not unusual in the Bible and it means the assumption of a future act as though it presently existed. It can be used in a variety of circumstances but is especially appropriate in speaking of acts of God, for nothing can interfere with the fulfilling of His purposes.

Summary

Adam and Eve have sinned. Eve’s thirst for knowledge was not wrong in itself, but she allowed it to lead her into disobedience. They have been punished, put out of their home and into the wide world. Their sins have distanced them from God. We do not see again the close and intimate relationship they originally had with God, but they are not completely banished from Him. Soon we see their sons bringing sacrifices to God—a signal that God has taught them about worshipping Him.

Adam has not forgotten all he learned in dressing and keeping the garden and we see them immediately begin to make the best of their new lives. But the saga of human existence is just beginning. There are yet to be many heroic acts of service to God and even more despicable acts of sin and degradation. Chapter 4 of Genesis begins the great story of man’s life in the world at large and God’s dealings with him as he struggles.

CHAPTER 6

The Origin of the People of God and the People of Satan

Genesis chapter 4 describes the growth of the human family and its separation into a people of God and a people of Satan. At this early date, one could not describe the groups as a kingdom of God and a kingdom of Satan because they were not that organized. They became so as men who alienated themselves from God grew more numerous and more wicked, and as God's plans for the regeneration of the human race unfolded. The groups were represented by Cain and Abel at first. After Abel's murder, God's people were represented by Seth, Adam and Eve's third son.

Scripture readings for this chapter: Genesis chapter 4. References in the text will be in parentheses; cl and verse only, i.e (4:3).

When Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, immediately they seem to have gone about making their new life. God told Eve that she would bear children and so she did. She gratefully recognized God's help in the process of birth for she said, "I have gotten a man from the Lord," or I have delivered a male child with the help of the Lord. They named him Cain, meaning "gotten" signifying that he came from God. A second son, named Abel, was born soon afterward. His name is difficult to decipher, but it apparently means "unstable" or "breath," which may have been given to him after his untimely death.

Adam put to use all he had learned in the garden about tilling the soil and caring for animals. He taught these skills to his sons, one of whom specialized in farming and the other in herding. Such a division of labor made good sense because by it the extended family could share more richly in the produce of the ground and of the herds. Adam and Eve had daughters, also, for we soon find their sons taking wives and having children of their own, but we are not told of daughters since only in special cases were females named in genealogies.

God Taught Them Worship

God taught man to worship Him, a fact we know by inference rather than direct statements. “And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord” (4:3). “In process of time” means “at the end of days” or after a certain time had passed. This suggests God appointed them a time to worship, which is also indicated by the fact that Cain and Abel did it at the same time. God also appointed a place. Cain “brought” a sacrifice to God, and Abel “also brought” a sacrifice which infers that there was a specific place which God designated as the place of worship.

These requirements of time and place for worship foreshadowed later ones which were written into the law God gave to Moses. As an example, “You may not sacrifice the passover within any of your gates, which the Lord your God gives you: But at the place which the Lord your God shall choose to place his name, there you shall sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that you came forth out of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 16:5-6).

We know most clearly about God’s spoken requirements for worship by the fact that He accepted and “respected” Abel’s offering and rejected Cain’s. God said, “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” This clearly implies that Cain knew what to do, and that if he chose he could still comply and be accepted. Paul referred to Abel’s sacrifice as being “more excellent” (Hebrews 11:4) than Cain’s which means there was an objective standard against which the two were measured. Paul took his words directly from God’s words to Cain. “Thou shalt be accepted” means “you will have the excellency,” or your worship will be judged excellent as was Abel’s.

But perhaps the strongest indication that God taught humans how He wanted to be worshipped is Paul’s assertion, in the passage noted above, that Abel’s sacrifice was offered “by faith.” In Biblical terms faith is not an opinion arrived at by human reasoning. It comes by hearing and believing God’s instructions. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing comes by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

There is a clear hint about the specific thing that was wrong with Cain’s sacrifice and why Abel’s was right. Verse 4 says Abel “also brought of the first of his flock and the fat thereof.” It was the fat of the sacrifices in later times that God considered His (see especially Leviticus chapters 3 and 4) and that was burned on the altar as a “savour” to Him. If we can judge by the sacrifices practiced later, God would have been pleased to have Cain’s “fruit of the

ground” too if he, like Abel, had “also brought” a sacrifice of fat from the flocks.

These early requirements of Cain and Abel established the basic laws of worship for all time. Doing the worship God designates at His time, at His appointed place, and in the manner He prescribes is still the way to please God and be accepted. Specific times, places, and content of worship have been changed as God’s great plan unfolded but the fundamental requirements given to Cain and Abel still stand.

Cain Rejected God’s Discipline

God rebuked Cain for his disobedience. When individuals have stubborn hearts they usually are led by them into sinful actions. When they face discipline for rebellious behavior, whether by God, by social consequences, or by the rebuke of those who love them, they then face another choice. They may choose to accept the rebuke and grow spiritually or they can harden their hearts and become bitter. Job, Solomon, and Paul (Job 5:17, Proverbs 3:11, and Hebrews 12:5) all seemed to have had Cain in mind when they said, “Despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint [give up] when you are rebuked of Him.” What an important life principle!

God explained to Cain, if you do well you will be accepted. “If you do not well, sin lies at the door. Unto you shall be his desire, and you shall rule over him.” This language is difficult but it seems to mean this: “If you obey, you will do well. If not, beware. Sin (put for the devil who causes sin) desires to have you. But you are able to conquer him.” Jesus made a similar statement to Peter when he too was facing temptation. “Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for you that your faith fail not” (Luke 22:31-32). Unfortunately Cain chose the course of hardening his heart. This decision caused the final separation that produced a people of God and a people of Satan.

In his anger Cain lured his brother out into the open fields and killed him. There the world was introduced to violence against human beings, one of the most abhorrent things humans can do in God’s eyes. The earth’s being “filled with violence” is the main reason God named for destroying the earth by flood (Genesis 6:13).

A second time God must rebuke Cain and this time it would be more than words of advice. God asked, “Where is Abel thy brother?” The question implied

that Cain had a responsibility toward his brother. Cain got the point and tried to deny it with a lie and a challenge. “I know not. Am I my brother’s keeper?” Although God did not respond directly to Cain’s challenge, the answer was a clear yes. Jesus declared that man’s responsibility to his fellowman is second only to that he owes to God. When asked which commandment in the law was the greatest, the Lord replied: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’ (Matthew 22:37-39).

Instead of responding to Cain’s challenge, God simply let him know He knew what had happened. “The voice of your brother’s blood cries to me from the ground.” With these words God announced a principle that readers of the Old and New Testaments meet often, that is that evil done to another will be avenged. Abel was not able to avenge himself, but not to worry, God could see and He would remember. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). The “voice” of Abel’s blood cried out for justice and retribution and God heard it. Later Paul said that Christ’s “blood speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Hebrews 12:24). The first cried for punishment; the second cried out for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Cain’s punishment was in three parts: 1) He would be cursed from the earth. 2) The earth would not yield to him its strength. 3) He would be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth. Being “cursed from the earth” seems to mean that Cain was banished from that place where God’s people were and where God communicated with man. The earth not yielding its strength appears an intensification of the curse put on Adam. The fact that he would be a vagabond suggests that Cain would never find real contentment on the earth, regardless of where he lived. Even now, no one finds real contentment apart from God.

Cain’s Despair and God’s Mark

Cain said, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid.” The “face of the earth” indicates the place where Cain’s family lived. “From thy face” means God would no longer communicate with him. When Adam and Eve sinned they were put out of the garden but not out of God’s presence. Cain, on the other hand, was being sent away to a place where God would not communicate with him, nor would he have the fellowship of his extended family.

He felt the power of the banishment, as did the man whom Paul “delivered to Satan” in I Corinthians 5.

Cain understood the several elements of his punishment and his fear caused him to make an assumption that it would be even worse than God declared. He said, “and every one that findeth me shall slay me.” God said no and followed with a principle that is still true. The principle is that punishment belongs to God, not man. God said anyone who killed Cain would be punished seven fold—even more severely than was Cain.

As a reassurance to Cain that God would see that his punishment was not more severe than intended, God set a mark on Cain that would signal “hands off” to any person who might think to improve upon God’s response to the original murder. We do not know what the mark consisted of, and centuries of speculation about it—some of it quite imaginative—have not helped. We do know its essential characteristics. It was a recognizable and understandable sign that God would deal severely with anyone who attempted to further punish Cain. Five generations later, Lamech reflected on God’s judgment of Cain (4:24) showing that the meaning of the mark was still understood.

The Bible states that “Cain went out from the presence of the Lord.” What a desolate journey! He was lonely and afraid. Could he have repented even at this point, begged God’s forgiveness, and been restored? We are not told, but from the measured way God dealt with him, calming unrealistic fears, we think he could have been forgiven. Some people think God’s protection of Cain was intended to see that he had time to rethink himself and repent if he were willing. But he was not willing. His example tells us that there are places in the human heart, like the tree in the garden, that should not be visited. Once we go there, return is very difficult. How wise Cain would have been to listen to God’s advice. And now? “Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts” (Hebrews 3:8-9).

Cain went out from his family and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. The word “nod” in Hebrew is very close to the word for vagabond which is “nad.” Some students think the verse means simply that Cain traveled east of Eden and lived as a vagabond, signifying that God’s curses on Cain had been accomplished. His wife, who must have been his sister, went with him and soon began to bear children. Here was the beginning of a line of descendants of Adam and Eve who lived in separation from God.

Cain's People

From this point forward we hear little of Cain and his descendants, and what we do hear is negative. Three passages in the New Testament mention him as an example of evil traits (Hebrews 11:4, I John 3:12, and Jude verse 11). Genesis 4 contains an outline of his descendants for six generations. This too contains bits of information that seem intended to tell us of the group's movement farther away from God.

Lamech, the fifth generation from Cain, is said to have married two wives, named Adah and Zillah. Polygamy was a clear violation of what God intended. Adam said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Jesus used this statement as the basis of a strong discussion with the Jews of His day to show what God intended for marriage (Matthew 19:3-9). The list of sins among Cain's descendants is growing: lying, killing, and now adultery.

Lamech also committed the second murder. He told his wives, "I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt" (4:23). Although these words from the King James version are difficult, the meaning is made clear in most other translations. "I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for bruising me." The suggestion is that Lamech got into some type of brawl and took vengeance on the youth by killing him. Furthermore his rather poetic account of the incident to his wives, who may like Cain have feared retribution, seems to glorify and justify the incident. The reasoning is that Cain killed Abel with no provocation and God protected him from punishment by others, therefore God should protect Lamech even more because his murder was provoked.



The picture drawn of Cain's descendants is of an intelligent, aggressive, and selfish group. They attacked the environment to get from it what they wanted even as they asserted themselves toward each other. Cain built a city, probably for protection, and named it after his son, Enoch. Lamech's son by Adah, named Jabal, was the first to live in tents and move his cattle around to take advantage of the best pasture and thus became the father of the Bedouins. His brother Jubal, son of Zillah, was a musician and inventor of musical instruments. Zillah's other son, Tubal-cain, learned how to smelt brass and iron and make instruments of it. The group was well on its way to economic and cultural development, but while they were growing in these human pursuits they were deteriorating morally and spiritually.

Chapter 4:25-26 gives a brief note about the birth of Adam and Eve's third son, Seth. Eve said, "God has appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew." He was to be the one through whom God's people and the Messiah would come. The writer started us down this line by giving the name of Seth's son, Enos or Enosh.

The chapter closes with a short but significant statement. "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord," or at that time men began to call themselves by the name of the Lord. The sad prospect with which this chapter opened had now been fully realized. There was a clear separation between God's people and the people of the world, later called the sons of God and the sons of men.

Summary

In a portent of things to come, Adam's sin was magnified in his son. Adam was put out of paradise; Cain was banished from God's presence. Through Cain God taught all mankind two important lessons. The first is about the type of worship He accepts; which is the acts He asks for, given when He wants them, and in the manner He describes. The second lesson is who may be called a people of God, and they are those who worship God appropriately and treat their fellowmen right.

The first four chapters of Genesis present the basis for understanding all of the Old Testament. Accordingly we have dealt with them in detail, pointing out, as appropriate, principles of God's relationship with man that will continue, as well as incidents that foreshadow spiritual truths. We hope that you are now sensitized so that you frequently ask, "What does the revelation I am reading now symbolize about future events and spiritual truths yet to come?" If so, you are learning facts about the Old Testament and, more importantly, how to interpret it.

CHAPTER 7

The Population Explosion

“This is the book of the generations of Adam.” So opens the 5th chapter of Genesis. The word “book” means “written account,” which is much the way we would use the word. This suggests that the writer of Genesis, in editing the account, copied from actual records written by those who lived before him. Furthermore, the original records appear to have been made “in the day” or times of the people described. Probably key patriarchs in their older years compiled lists of their families that were passed down through generations, and Moses simply placed these into the narrative of Genesis. This explains the different writing styles that many students have noticed within the book of Genesis.

Scripture readings for this chapter: Genesis chapter 5-6:8. References in this text will be in parentheses chapter and verse only, i.e (5:18).

Although we would normally take the word to mean ancestors, “generations” as used here means descendants. It could not mean otherwise in this context because Adam had no ancestors. Also the persons described are clearly his descendants.

The Spiritual Value of Genealogies

What purpose might God have had in giving us these genealogies? For one thing, they show us God’s long-standing interest in making a distinction between people considered His and those not His. This theme is seen in every age. When the Israelite nation was established 2,000 years later it was because God wanted a people who would be called by His name (Deuteronomy 7:6, II Samuel 7:23). The New Testament expresses the same determination on God’s part. “Wherefore come out from among them, be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (II Corinthians 6:17).

In His spiritual kingdom of our age, God makes it plain that He keeps the records of those who are His. Four times New Testament writers speak of those whose names are written, or not written, in heaven (Luke 10:20, Philippians 4:3,

Revelation 13:8 and 17:8). Paul said we have the assurance that “the Lord knoweth them that are His” (II Timothy 2:19).

A Record of Promises Made and Promises Kept

The genealogies help us keep track of the fulfillment of special promises. Since God worked through key patriarchs, many of His promises to mankind were about these special men. For example, He promised Abraham, and later Jacob, that their descendants would become a great nation, that kings would come from them, and so forth. Without the genealogies, neither Abraham’s progeny nor we would know whether these promises, made when Abraham was old and had no children, came true. Similarly the Messiah was prophesied to be a descendant of David (Isaiah 9:6-7, Matthew 22:42), of Abraham (Matthew 1:1), and of Eve (Genesis 3:15). The genealogies served a valuable purpose in helping to identify the Christ.

There are also special lessons for thoughtful readers of these family lists. We noted in chapter 6 that Cain built a city and named it after his son, Enoch. Because Enoch means training or instruction, we reasoned from this and the context that Cain’s purpose in building the city was to keep his people together and train them in the arts of defense and social development. But there was an Enoch in the line of God’s people also (5:18). This Enoch walked so closely with God that he was “translated” to heaven (Hebrews 11:5) without suffering death. From this good man’s experience we conclude that God’s people emphasize training in spiritual things and in gaining a home in heaven, as opposed to earthly development.

Differences in the Genealogies

When we read the genealogies by different Bible writers (in Genesis 5, Matthew 1, and Luke 3), some differences are observed. Critics have used these differences to try to discredit the Bible. Oddly, the critics do not doubt their own existence when they observe similar differences in their own family histories. The explanations are quite natural. The deaths of childless men, second marriages, adoptions, et cetera allowed different generations to be raised. The result was that some persons were correctly regarded as children of different persons at different times. One ‘line’ may trace descendants biologically and the other legally; one through the father and the other through the mother.

The Growth of the Population and the Growth of Evil

For centuries the first verses of Genesis 6 have puzzled ordinary Christians and scholars alike. Let us consider the most mysterious passage first. Verse 2 states, “the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took of them wives of all which they chose.” What is meant by the sons of God marrying the daughters of men?

Some people have assumed this means that angels were attracted to beautiful women, that they left their abode in heaven, married women, and that these unions produced a super race of humans. Recent movies and T.V. programs have been based on this idea. But this explanation is far too fanciful to fit the context or to agree with other Biblical statements about angels. Jesus said that angels do not marry (Matthew 22:29-30). The Lord certainly would have known about such an event had it occurred before He conducted His ministry on earth.

The meaning of the passage is that the sons of God were the children of Seth, God’s people, and the daughters of men were the descendants of Cain. This explanation fits the context. When Cain was excommunicated by God and sent away, he and his descendants apparently had no contact with Seth and his children for a long while. But as the human population multiplied and the land filled with people, it was inevitable that the two groups would come into contact.

Sons of God:	the children of Seth (raised in God’s presence)
Daughters of men:	the children of Cain (raised apart from God)

From God’s displeasure at these events, we can be sure He had told His people to have no social relationships with the sons of men, and especially not to intermarry with them. God’s views on these matters have not changed through the years. We remember what He told the Israelites later (Deuteronomy 7:3) and what Paul taught Christians (II Corinthians 6:14).

What would have caused the sons of God to be attracted to the daughters of men? We have already noted how Cain’s people specialized in development of the arts, such as music, and other facets of human culture. We may assume that they “progressed” in styles of dress and personal beautification as well. These sons of Seth, like some Christian men now, were attracted to worldly women. No doubt godly women then, as is true of Christian women (I Peter 3:3-4), were under instruction to develop their inner, as opposed to outward, beauty.

Our interpretation of this matter is confirmed by a close reading of the passages themselves. The phrase, “and they took them wives of all which they chose,” suggests that the men took wives as THEY, not God, chose. Further, they did it from the flesh, not from the spirit. Paul probably had these passages in mind when he urged Christians not to choose wives out of “the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God” (I Thessalonians 4:5). Because of the behavior of these sons of Seth, the Lord said, “My spirit shall not always strive with man.” Older translations say, “My spirit shall not always abide in man.” Why? “For he is flesh.” Was man not always flesh? Yes, but the meaning here (as noted by the American Standard Bible and others) is “in his flesh he has gone astray.”

The sons of God went astray in choosing wives out of the lusts of the flesh, as did Solomon years later because of his foreign and idolatrous wives (I Kings 11:4). But why should this union of the sons of God and the daughters of men produce “giants” as verse 4 seems to indicate? Actually they were not giants in the flesh—men of great stature—as we would ordinarily mean by the term. The last part of the verse suggests the true meaning, as does the definition of the Hebrew word. They were men of “great renown” or “conquering heroes.” To put it in different words, these sons of God fully threw in with Cain’s descendants and became, like them, fierce warriors, great hunters, empire builders, and so forth.

God Regretted that He Made Man

The corruption of God’s people was complete. We can see why God regretted that He made man. But what is meant in verse 3 when God said “man’s days shall be 120 years”? The traditional interpretation is that God was announcing a shortened life-span for the wicked human race, so that men would no longer live the long periods they previously had done. After the flood, man’s “allotted days” were curtailed so that lives of 900 plus years were not seen again.

But the preceding explanation does not appear to be the meaning here. God was talking about destroying the human race, not shortening the life span, and the 120 years was the amount of time He gave man to clean up his act and repent. It took Noah 120 years to prepare the ark. While it was being built, Noah preached repentance to the people. If they had repented, as did Ninevah under Jonah, God would have relented and not destroyed the earth. Peter refers to this period of God’s waiting and warning the people through Noah as “the

longsuffering of God” (I Peter 3:20), as indeed it was. The people, however, did not choose to accept God’s mercy; no one believed Noah except his family.

The way God dealt with Noah, a good man who lived in a wicked world, can be instructive to us. Noah was not lost in all that sea of wickedness. He “found grace in the eyes of God” (6:8), Who recognized that this “just man” walked uprightly before Him. He is not “unrighteous to forget [our] work and labour of love which [we] have showed toward His name” (Hebrews 6:10).

Noah’s example also tells us something about ourselves. We do not need to become wicked because others do. We may find ourselves in circumstances in which no one else is willing to stand for what is right. When we do, we can summon strength from Noah’s example. No one will ever be more alone on earth than he was. But he was not truly alone. God was with him all the way.

Summary

In this chapter we have witnessed the earth’s original population explosion. With the growth in population came a growth in wickedness. The people of God intermingled and intermarried with the sons and daughters of men and were influenced by their evil ways. The imagination of men’s hearts became only evil. God decided to cleanse the earth but to save Noah, a righteous seed, alive. In the next chapter we shall see how God’s plans unfolded.

CHAPTER 8

The End and a New Beginning

The day finally came when God had enough. It was not in a fit of anger, but on a day when His infinite wisdom told Him that the earth was irrevocably corrupt. There was no chance of its redemption. “And God said unto Noah, the end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (6:13).

Scripture readings for this chapter: Genesis chapters 6:9 through 8. References in this text will be in parentheses; chapter and verse only, i.e (6:13).

The clear principle established here, that there is a point of wickedness beyond which God will not allow man to go, is restated often throughout the Bible. Years later God promised to give Abraham and his children the land of Canaan, but not immediately because the wickedness of the Amorites, its inhabitants, was “not yet complete” (Genesis 15:16). Closer to our time, we are told that Jerusalem—to be destroyed when the Jews fully rejected Christ—would be trampled under foot of the gentiles “until the times of the gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).

While it is an unalterable principle that God will judge the wicked, it is equally true that He will make provisions to save the righteous. This too is stated often in the Bible, from Noah to Sodom and Gomorrah, to Jerusalem. To Noah He said, “Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood.”

God gave Noah the plan, the “fashion,” for the ark, including its dimensions. Most parts of the plan are clear to us, although some, i.e. the units of measurements, are not. It was 300 “cubits” long, by 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high. The cubit is generally taken to be the distance from the point of a man’s elbow to the tip of his middle finger, and on average is 18 inches. Thus the ark was 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. These dimensions allowed for three roomy stories or decks.

The ark had one window and one door (6:16). Some readers have argued that

this did not provide sufficient ventilation for a ship load of animals and people. Actually the door and window gave no ventilation at all. The door was shut by God (7:16) and not opened until after the flood, and the window was first used when Noah opened it (8:6) to send out the raven and dove to search for dry land.

Ventilation came from a band of open space that circled the ark just under the roof at the top of the outside hull. That is what is meant by the phrase “and in a cubit thou shall finish it above” (6:16), or finish the wall to within a cubit of the top. Some students believe that this open space was the window, but this does not seem likely. Chapter 8:6 says that Noah “opened the window” when he sent out the raven and dove. The open space beneath the roof could not have been easily opened and closed.

Essentially a barge, the ark was built to ride low and securely in the water while supporting a large cargo of animals, food stuffs, and people. It did not need a source of power or guidance. Noah and his family were completely in the control of God.

Spiritual Parallels Between the Ark and the Church

The spiritual parallels between Noah’s ark and the church of Christ are many, which explains why the church is often called the Old Ship of Zion. A few points of comparison are:

1. The ark was designated by God to be the home of the saved then as the church is now (Acts 2:47).
2. The ark had one door representing God’s one plan of salvation or one means of entrance into the church.
3. The flood was God’s means of judgment then as fire will be His means of judgment on the last day.
4. The waters which destroyed the wicked also saved the righteous. Peter compared this to baptism (I Peter 3:21).

God’s Covenant with Noah

God’s purpose in the flood was to cleanse the earth of the wickedness man had brought to it. He said He would destroy “all flesh wherein is the breath of life,”

except Noah and his family with whom He established a covenant (6:17-18).

The covenant between God and Noah represented a change in the way God dealt with man. It suggests God expected the human race to have matured enough that they could interact with Him on a higher level. A more sophisticated religious covenant was established later with the Jewish nation and a still more spiritual one with Christians at the cross.

We are not given the precise words of the covenant between God and Noah. We know it contained promises, i.e. that the earth would never again be destroyed by flood (8:21), and a means of worship. When Noah came out of the ark he built an altar and worshipped, offering sacrifices from the clean animals he had carried into the ark. As yet there was no formal law designating which animals were clean and unclean, as came later in the book of Leviticus (see especially chapter 11). God had, however, explained these matters to Noah, since he knew exactly what to do. God also renewed His covenant with Noah after the flood.

The Last Days of the Old Earth

God watched Noah's progress in building the ark and when it was finished He said, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark" (7:1). This was the signal for the loading process to begin. It took Noah seven days to fill the ark with food, animals, his family, and the things they brought with them.

Can you imagine what all the people who had spurned Noah's preaching for so long were saying now? Lot's espoused sons-in-law thought he was crazy when he warned of the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:14). No doubt the people of Noah's day thought likewise. Nothing like this had ever happened before; why should they expect it now? For a long time unbelievers have been making similar sport about the final judgment (II Peter 3:3-10).

The animals seem to have followed Noah and his family willingly into the ark. The same expression, "went in," describes their entrance as that of the humans. "There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah."

When the loading was complete, "the Lord shut him in" (7:16). There is a point when God's judgment is decided and unalterable. Until this point, anyone who wished could have repented and gone with Noah into the ark, but the door

was now shut and it would not be opened. The same concept is used in the Lord's teaching about the final judgment in Matthew 25:10: "And they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut." Mercifully, the writer of Genesis did not describe the actual scene that took place when the people realized that Noah's preaching was true. We are left to our imagination. But from the preview of the final judgment given in Matthew we know it was terrible. Both Paul (Hebrews 11:7) and Peter (II Peter 2:5) use this general judgment of the world as proof that God will again judge the human race at the last day.

The Flood

On the same day that Noah entered the ark and the door was shut, the rains came. "All the fountains of the great deep werebroken up, and the windows of heaven were opened" (7:11). The word "windows" here means "floodgates," as it is given in some translations. We use the word frequently in everyday life. No doubt many unbelievers do, not realizing its origin. This suggests that torrents of rain fell. Even this type of rain, however, could hardly have produced a flood that covered the highest mountain tops in 40 days. The fountains of the great deep were also opened indicating that subterranean waters were loosed upon the earth. This power of God to hold back or loose the seas often excited David to expressions of awe (Psalms 33:7, 104:6-10). David believed that there would be a flood again at any moment God chose not to hold it back. Although Paul was not speaking specifically about the flood, he was in complete agreement that only God's power holds the universe together (Colossians 1:17, Hebrews 1:3). All God needs to do to destroy the earth is to turn it loose.

The rains came and the fountains gushed for 40 days until the highest mountains were covered to a depth of 15 cubits. It took the waters many months to recede to the point that Noah and his family could leave. Chapter 7:24 says "the waters prevailed upon the earth 150 days," meaning after the rains stopped and before the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. This would indicate that the family was in the ark six months and ten days before it came to rest, but it was still many days before the earth was dry enough for human habitation. Noah and his family spent about a year and eleven days inside.

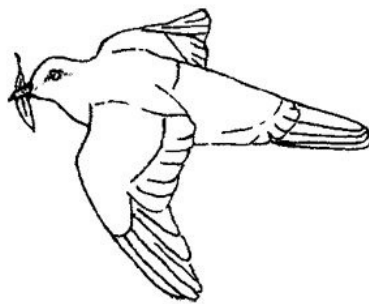
SPIRITUAL PARALLELS	
ARK	CHURCH

Home of the saved One entrance Judgement (flood) Baptism by water saved Water destroyed wicked	Home of the saved One entrance Judgement (fire) Baptism by water saves Lack of water destroys wicked
--	--

The New Earth

The day came when the earth was dry. God spoke to Noah and said “go forth” out of the ark (8:16). Noah’s initial recorded act was to build an altar—the first altar specifically noted to this point in the Bible—and offer sacrifices to God. These were apparently simple thank offerings. No doubt Noah’s feelings of gratitude were intensified as he looked at his new surroundings. All familiar landmarks had been washed away; the face of the earth had been changed; he could see what a great destruction he had survived.

From Noah’s sacrifice on the newly cleansed earth, God “smelled a sweet savour.” The “voices” of all the blood violently shed, beginning with Abel, had been quieted by justice. The corruption produced by man’s idolatry had been washed away. The God, who is “too pure to behold evil,” could look with pleasure on a world free from sin. Does this remind us of the “new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness” mentioned by Peter (II Peter 3:13) and described in Revelation 21?



God blessed Noah and his sons saying, “Be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 9:1). He further explained the provisions of the covenant under which they would live. One notable component was a command against violence toward humans. “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:6). He also gave Noah a sign of His covenant which was the rainbow. This beautiful symbol of God’s benevolent contract with the new earth was all the more meaningful because it apparently had not been seen before.

Since the earth had been watered by a mist that rose from the ground (Genesis 2:6), not by rain, the rainbow would have been a new phenomenon.

Note that God's covenant was with "every living creature" (Genesis 9:9-10) which included the animals as well as Noah and his family. These creatures were representatives of their kind that had died with sinful humans. But there may have been a greater and more spiritually symbolic reason for their inclusion. Perhaps they were a signal that gentile nations, though not to be included in the covenant with the Israelites, would one day be included under the Messiah. As preparation for being sent to preach to the gentiles, Peter was shown a great sheet let down from heaven filled with all types of animals like these (Acts 10:11-16). He was told to call no longer these animals unclean, which he recognized as indicating that the gentiles were included within the new covenant.

As a part of God's contract with Noah, He said, "I will not curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite every thing living, as I have done" (8:21). Does this passage conflict with Genesis 6:5? There God recognized man's sinful nature but seemed to see it as a justification for punishment. Here the same sinful nature appeared as a reason for mercy. There is no contradiction but there is an important lesson in Biblical interpretation.

The Bible often states the great principles of God's relationship with humans abruptly and without elaboration. The exceptions to the rules and the conditions on which they rest are then left to be revealed in other places and through examples. Humans have great difficulty with this method of teaching and frequently use it to their detriment. Many heresies have arisen when a teacher or group seized upon one side of a principle and blinded themselves to the other. The two sides of this principle—God's justice on one hand and His mercy on the other—are shown here for those willing to see. In the world before the flood with death postponed by extremely long lives, the wicked imaginations of men's hearts flourished to the point that justice had to smite them. In the new world, cleansed from sin and immediately hallowed by Noah's worship, God seemed to see a pledge on man's part to struggle against sin. This was a time for mercy and aid from God. See Paul's elaboration of this principle in Romans 11:22-23.

We meet covenants between God and men often from this point forward. In some cases the covenant was with an individual and temporary, in which case the symbol of it would likely be transitory. God promised Hezekiah that he

would recover from his illness and the symbol was a backward movement of the shadow on the sundial (Isaiah 38). He made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants and the symbol was circumcision (Genesis 17:9-11), and on and on.

By all means of assessment Noah was an extraordinary person. He is described in various references as a just man, perfect in his generations, a preacher of righteousness, a man who pleased God, and one who walked with God. Approximately a thousand years after his death, God named him as one of three great men in His eyes (Ezekiel 14:14). The other two were Daniel and Job. With all such persons, we are wise to ask what made them great in God's eyes. With Noah the answer is straightforward. He did what God asked, just as God commanded it. "And Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him" (Genesis 7:5). Every person who behaves in the same way will be so approved by Jehovah.

Summary

God has cleansed the earth. Mankind has an opportunity for a completely new start. Noah was six hundred years old when the flood came. He had lived through much of the time in which the people of God were growing more and more wicked. Surely he can teach his descendants all the great lessons he has learned from these experiences so that they will not repeat the mistakes of their ancestors.

The history of the Patriarchal Age seems to move rapidly from this point onward and we will move more rapidly in our coverage of it. In future chapters we see some of the survivors of the flood acquire curses. We will see them grow arrogant against God, divide into languages and nations, and act in general as if they never knew God.

CHAPTER 9

Life After the Flood

When the waters of the flood receded and Noah and his family again got their feet on firm ground, God blessed them and sent them forth to “replenish” the earth. The blessing sounds much the same as the one given to Adam in the beginning. “And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply and replenish the earth” (9:1).

Scripture readings for this chapter: Genesis chapters 9 through 11. References in this text will be in parentheses; chapter and verse only, i.e (9:1).

We do not know the exact means by which the knowledge of this blessing was delivered. At first God spoke personally with Adam and Eve. As man sinned God withdrew more and more so that His communications were increasingly indirect. The farther into the Old Testament we go, the more illustrations we see of Paul’s assessment that God spoke at different times and in different manners to our fathers (Hebrews 1:1). Perhaps at this stage and to this good man God still spoke directly. In any case the blessing was formal and clear.

Although similar, God’s blessings to Adam and Noah show some differences that reflect the changed situation of mankind. Adam had no human history; originally he knew only God and he did not know sin. Noah, on the other hand, overlapped many years with Methuselah who overlapped many years with Adam. Noah probably heard the whole 1,000 years of human history from one patriarch and experienced over half of it himself. He had seen the earth develop its great wickedness. We should expect such changes in the human circumstance to be recognized in God’s relationship with man.

God’s covenant with Noah was mentioned before the flood but was spelled out more fully as they started on their new life in a cleansed earth. As with Adam, Noah and his family were assured of God’s blessings. Each was given the earth with its animal kingdoms and encouraged to be fruitful in all ways. There was a difference in the food God gave the two families. Adam was given the fruit of the trees and herbs for food (Genesis 2:16), while Noah was given every animal

and fruit of trees and herbs (9:3). Each family had one restriction on its food. Adam could not eat of the tree in the midst of the garden, and Noah could not eat flesh that contained the animal's blood.

The Scriptures do not specifically explain the reason for God's prohibition against eating blood, but because it was given in conjunction with a prohibition against murder and a punishment for violators, we can believe it was intended to restrain violence and create a respect for life. The law also looked forward to the time when the blood of sacrifices would be used to atone temporarily for sins under the law of Moses and, still later, to the blood of the Messiah which would permanently take away sins.

Noah's Vineyard

At the conclusion of God's explanation of his covenant, there is a brief statement that seems out of place until we realize it is an introduction to matters that will be explained later. "And the sons of Noah, that went forth out of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: And Ham is the father of Canaan" (Genesis 9:18). The odd thing here is that one son of Ham was mentioned while the children of neither of the other sons of Noah were noted. And it was Ham's youngest son, not the elder as we would expect, who was named. We shall soon see why God singled out Canaan. First He must tell us about the context of Canaan's actions.

Verse 20 states, "And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard." Noah had been a husbandman before the flood; the new part was his cultivation of vines. Vineyards are still an integral part of husbandry in that part of the world. Not only did Noah grow grapes, he made them into wine and drank the wine to a state of drunkenness. Then he lay uncovered in his tent; the Hebrew text suggests "he uncovered himself." A diminished sense of modesty is a common effect of alcohol and this good man was no exception.

Ham's Irreverence

Ham, Noah's son, saw his father in his nakedness and apparently made sport of it to his two brothers and probably to his own son, Canaan, as well. Shem and Japheth carried a garment, walking backward into their father's tent, and covered him. When Noah awoke and knew what Ham had done, he pronounced a curse on Ham's son, Canaan. "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren." At the same time he gave a blessing to Shem and Japheth and their

descendants.

The moral of this story is clear but some of the facts are confusing. First Ham was called Noah's "younger" son in verse 24, some translations say "youngest." Yet he was listed as the middle son in other descriptions of himself and his brothers. Second, it was Ham who was said to have discovered his father's nakedness and told about it, but it was Canaan who was cursed. What are we to conclude? One piece of the puzzle is that "sons" was often used interchangeably with grandsons in Hebrew language. Jesus was said to be the "son of David" even though He was many generations removed from David. Second, Canaan was Ham's youngest son (10:6). This may mean that Canaan was the youngest son (grandson, as we would say) of Noah mentioned in verse 24, and that he, even more than Ham, his father, showed irreverence of Noah's nakedness.

Just as Noah cursed the descendants of Ham and Canaan for their irreverence toward him, he blessed the descendants of Shem and Japheth who acted with such respect. The curse of the one was intertwined with the blessings of the others. Shem and Japheth would be "enlarged," probably referring to their prosperity and territories. Canaan would be a servant to both of them. The list of nations and lands occupied by the children of these sons of Noah, given in the next chapter, further elaborates the curse of Canaan and the blessings of the other two.

To many Christians Shem and Japheth are the only "good guys" in this story. We can understand the irreverence of Ham, but we are also conditioned against drunkenness so that we wonder why God did not punish Noah too. After all, he started it. We must remember, however, that there were no laws against drinking wine, even drunkenness, at the time. As Paul tells us, "where there is no law, there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15).

At the same time that we are appalled by Noah's drunkenness, we may accept too lightly the irreverence of Ham and Canaan. We live in an age when children's disrespect to parents and other older people is commonplace. Unless it is especially severe, we tend not to be shocked by it. But this was the Patriarchal Age; Noah was God's representative on earth. God had shown that he held Noah in honor. To dishonor him was to dishonor God. (See James 3:8-10 for a discussion of this principle in the Christian Age.)

The Return of Sin

Sin had returned to the human community. The children of Ham had taken the place of the descendants of Cain as the children of men. The children of Shem were destined to become the children of God in a special way that will be described clearly before the close of the book of Genesis. For the present, the descendants of Japheth are passed over lightly, almost dismissively, but we are signaled that they will loom largely in the plans of God for the more distant future.

Chapter 10 of Genesis sounds, in the beginning, like another ordinary genealogical table. Instead it is a very special one. It is not a table of individuals and their descendants, but a record of the tribes and nations that came from the three sons of Noah. Individuals are mentioned who became heads of tribes and usually of nations as well. We are also given the geographical areas occupied by each group.

Another feature of this genealogical table—which is actually an ethnological table—is that it works backward. Chapter 9 describes events that took place right after the flood. Chapter 10 takes up the human race at some distant point after the flood, when the earth had been heavily repopulated, when cities had been built, nations established, and political boundaries drawn. From this point it works backward to tell us who established these nations. Chapter 11 informs us of events that caused the descendants of these three brothers to become divided into separate races and nations.

At first glance we may not feel this early division of the earth into political entities is very relevant to us. But it is relevant. It allows us to see the providential working out of God's plans. Soon He would tell Abraham that He would make him into a great nation. That nation would be a blessing to all nations because through it all peoples would be taught to follow God and shown how He blessed those who did. The division of the earth into nations was early preparation of these Divine plans.

Descendants of the Sons of Noah

Of Noah's three sons, Japheth was the youngest but he was mentioned first. Ordinarily we would assume this meant he was being given preeminence. On the other hand his progeny received only slight mention here compared to that of Ham and Shem. Is this "mixed signals" on the part of the sacred writer? Perhaps it suggests that Japheth's children would have a secondary role in God's plans for the nearer future, but a major one farther down the stream of time.

From the Mountains of Ararat where the ark came to rest, which were in the region between and south of the Black and Caspian Seas, Japheth's descendants migrated northward and westward. The places usually took the names of the pioneers who settled them and we recognize some of them easily. The group mentioned in verse 2 seems to have first settled the region between the two seas, and as their numbers increased, later descendants entered what is modern Russia. Magog especially is associated with that general area. Although this record does not go that far, it is believed that these were the peoples who continued on to settle northern Europe and Britain, making them ancestors to many readers of this book.

The sons of Japheth mentioned in verse 3, Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah, appear to have remained in the general area where the ark came to rest. Togarmah refers to Armenia, a later name for that region, and Askenaz was the name of a southern subdivision of it.

The sons of Javan (a grandson of Japheth) listed in verse 4 migrated westward along the north shore of the Mediterranean Sea. They settled the areas we know as Turkey, Greece, and Italy. Verse 5 states, "By these were the isles of the gentiles divided into their lands." Isles often referred to coastlines, but it probably also included the larger islands along the north coast. Kittim is usually associated with Cyprus. An interesting sidelight is that in the Dead Sea scrolls the word Kittim was used as a general designation for all gentiles.

Sons of Ham

Ham's descendants are described in verses 6 through 20. He had four sons named, Cush, Mizraim, Phut, and Canaan. The children of three are discussed at length but Phut is not mentioned again in the chapter. We know from later discussions in the Scriptures that there was a people of this name, and it was associated with Libyans (Ezekiel 27:10, 30:5, 38:5, and Nahum 3:9). Their influence on God's people through the years was not great, which may explain their lack of space in the sacred record.

The children of Cush went back to the original homeland of mankind, Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Nimrod was the most notable of Cush's sons of whom the Bible says, "he began to be a mighty one in the earth." We heard before (in chapter 3) about many of the cities Nimrod built. Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh are said (verse 10) to be in the

Land of Shinar which was lower Mesopotamia and later called Babylon. These are the peoples who are believed to have developed the Babylonian cuneiform writing that was so important in the development of early post-flood civilizations. We will hear more of this bright and ambitious grandson of Ham in chapter 11 when we discuss his empire, which included Babel and its infamous tower.

Sons of Shem

The sons of Shem, given in verses 21 to 31, were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram. From verse 30, which gives the clearest description, we conclude that they originally settled west and south of the Euphrates River, in the large region generally known as Arabia. Some of the names designated known places in that region, such as Sheba, home of the queen that visited Solomon (I Kings 10). Other names are associated in reasonable confidence with this area, including Ophir and Havilah.

We also know that Elam's descendants settled in Shinar, in southern Mesopotamia, soon after the flood or when their numbers grew large enough to take that land from the descendants of Ham. Some Bible authorities describe an invasion of this area by the Elamites, and verse 11 tells of parts of northern Mesopotamia being taken by another of Shem's sons, Asshur. He built Nineveh and several other cities and gave his name, Assyria, to the region. Perhaps this was an early fulfillment of Noah's curse of Ham's children that they would be servants of Shem.

The description given here of where Noah's descendants settled is based on an interpretation of Genesis chapter 10. As noted previously, it is limited to a specific point in time several generations after the flood. As you continue to study through the Old Testament, you will observe many references to these peoples which find them in different places than those noted here. That is to be expected. The tribes began to move about, many times capturing each other's territory and sometimes in peaceful cohabitation, just as nations do today. If you note the positions given here, you will usually be able to see their route of migration into areas mentioned in later Scriptures.

The Tower of Babel

Genesis chapter 11 returns to a time just after the flood when the population of the earth was still together. It gives a more detailed description of how mankind

came to the state of political and language divisions described in Genesis chapter 10. The starting point here is “the whole earth was one language and one speech.” The words ‘language’ and ‘speech’ suggest that they spoke the same language and pronounced each word in the same way. Communication was easy.

“And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the Land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.” Many translations say, “as they journeyed toward the east.” (Prepositions are always difficult to translate.) This reading fits the context, unless the group had previously made a long and unmentioned move to the east. The Mountains of Ararat, where the ark came to rest, lay to the west of Shinar.

With this move, mankind returned to the region of his original home. The land was fertile here before the flood and perhaps they assumed it would be afterward. It does not seem probable that they could now find even the location of their former homes. A flood of that magnitude would have drastically altered the face of the ground.

In Shinar the people said, “Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven” (verse 4). We are not told how long the group lived in Shinar before someone conceived this grand scheme, but it was a long time. The population had grown large enough that it could be divided into many languages and nations. In addition, building a city of this size was not a work for four men, Noah and his sons, and their wives.

When I read this story as a child, I thought the men of Shinar were trying to devise a quick and sure way of getting to heaven. It made sense in my childish imagination that had been fueled by hearing about how wonderful heaven was and how difficult to reach. Regardless of how misguided such an attempt would have been, their ambitions were not so noble. They wanted to “make a name” for themselves and to keep themselves from being “scattered abroad” on the face of the earth. Yet “replenishing” the whole earth was God’s directive before the flood (Genesis 1:28) and afterward (9:1).

The wish to build a tower to heaven probably indicates the people, at least some of them, had gone back to worshipping idols. They were not trying to build a tower to the heaven of my childish dreams, the real one. That was impossible then, as it is now. But God recognized that what they were preparing to do, they could do, unless He stopped them (verse 6).

The people were probably trying to build a temple tower or worship place dedicated to an idol, perhaps Nannar the moon god. And they did build such towers later anyway, because many have been discovered in excavations of cities named in Genesis 10. But because of God's dispersement of them, one had to be built for each city or group that wanted it since they could not understand each other. Perhaps more important in God's eyes, no one or a few ambitious leaders could then turn all the people away from Him or force them to serve other gods.

The leaders' ambitions were selfish and their plans contrary to God's will. God broke up the population into smaller groups by confounding their language. But true to His original purpose, He did not want His people to become lost in that mass of rebellious humanity. Thus these events are followed by a genealogical list of Shem's descendants. Shem's people would be the ones from whom the Israelite nation would be created. Ultimately they would be the progenitors of Jesus, the savior of all mankind.

Summary

We have seen the human race given a fresh start in an earth that was cleansed of sin. Noah and his family went out of the ark with blessings and instructions from God similar to those given to Adam in the beginning. Alas, the state of purity did not last long. Ham's descendants, like those of Cain, rebelled against God. Leaders arose that wanted to make names for themselves and they wanted to keep the earth's population together and rule over them for selfish purposes. God confounded their languages and divided them into many nations.

God's directive to "replenish the earth" was accomplished, even though many men did it grudgingly and in rebellion. In the next chapter we shall see God choose a man who willingly fulfills His purpose and, with God's help, founds a nation that serves a great role in His plans.

CHAPTER 10

God's Covenant with Abraham

Few things in the Old Testament are so full of meaning for Christians as God's covenant with Abraham. Its importance is signaled by the many times and places it is discussed—six times with Abraham; renewed to Isaac and Jacob; explained by Paul in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews; and referred to in numerous other passages. It is the clear theme of the life of Abraham that is revealed in chapters 12-25 of Genesis.

Scripture readings for this chapter: Genesis chapters 12 through 24. References in this text will be in parentheses; chapter and verse only, i.e (12:1).

The last verses of Genesis 11 tell us that Abraham, with his family, left the place of his birth, Ur of Chaldees, to go to Canaan. The writer set up the story to come by informing us that Sarai, Abraham's wife, was barren. Even at this early date, Abraham was responding to a call from God (Acts 7:2). For reasons not explained, the family stopped in Haran, now Syria, and stayed until Abraham's father died. God's call was renewed in Haran (12:1-3), this time with the initial part of the covenant attached.

God promised Abraham that He would bless him, make his name great, make of him a great nation, bless those who blessed him, and curse those who cursed him. He added that in Abraham all nations of the earth would be blessed. The promises were conditioned on Abraham leaving his family and homeland and going to a land that God would show him. Additional details were given at later dates as God continued to speak to Abraham of His promises and expectations.

The Long Journey

The journey from Haran to Canaan was long (see chapter 3) and involved significant risks. But Abraham did not seem to hesitate at all. When God finished speaking Abraham began his departure. "So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him." No details of the journey are given. Perhaps this is God's way of telling us that He and Abraham considered the going insignificant.

The important thing was that Abraham leave Haran and get to Canaan.

Leaving Haran meant breaking associations with family and friends. This was necessary if Abraham was going to be the man of faith God wanted. His family still worshipped idols and continued to do so for many years. When Jacob, Abraham's grandson, went back to Haran to take a wife from Abraham's family, Jacob's wife, Rachel, stole her father's idol gods (Genesis 31:19).

When Abraham and company arrived in Canaan, God appeared to him and reconfirmed the covenant. This time God added the promise that the land where they then were would be given to Abraham's descendants (12:7). According to Paul (Hebrews 11:8), Abraham did not know where God was taking him when he left his homeland. He lived the rest of his life in this land and was buried in it. Furthermore he lived in Canaan as a stranger, in tents, moving from place to place in search of pasture or to get away from Canaanites who did not want him around. Paul interprets Abraham's nomadic life-style as symbolic of the fact that they knew there was a still better country, heaven, which was their real home (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Abraham Grew in Faith

We assume that Abraham did not fully understand God's covenant at first. He grew, however, to great stature in both faith and understanding. This is similar to the way Christians begin as babes in Christ and grow, hopefully, to the full measure of the stature of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). One example of an early lapse in faith is Abraham's dealing with the king of Egypt regarding Sarai (12:10-20).

There was a famine in Canaan soon after the family's arrival. Abraham led his household to Egypt for food (a portent of what his descendants would do later under Jacob). On the way, Abraham became afraid that the Egyptians would kill him in order to take Sarai, who was very beautiful. He persuaded Sarai to say that she was his sister. To be sure, Pharaoh heard of Sarai and wanted her for his wife. When he brought her to his palace God sent a plague on the king's house and he quickly got the point. The king was miffed, as we could understand, but he returned Sarai and gave Abraham rich gifts to leave the country. Abraham was already wealthy; now he was exceedingly rich (13:2).

No doubt Abraham reflected on this experience. Perhaps one day he smacked his forehead with his palm and said, "Of course! God said He would bless those who blessed me, and curse those who cursed me. I should have known He would

not allow anyone to kill me and take my wife.” Such a mixture of experience and prayerful reflection is the stuff of which deep faith is made.

We can see Abraham’s stronger faith in action after he returned from Egypt. He and Lot had become so rich and their herds so large that they could not dwell together in that part of southern Canaan, now called the Negev Desert. Abraham generously offered his nephew choice of the grazing lands. Lot selfishly chose the well-watered plains of the Jordan River, down near the great and wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Four kings from the east came to make war on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and in the process took Lot and his family captive. Abraham considered an attack on Lot as an attack on himself. He assembled an army of his loyal servants and friends and set out to free Lot. Just the journey to overtake the fleeing kings would have been an effort. It was approximately 200 miles to the place, near Damascus, where Abraham found them. He attacked them by night, routed them, freed all captives, and reclaimed all stolen goods.

This victory must have been especially sweet to Abraham. It proved again that God intended to keep His promise to bless and protect him. If Abraham had not trusted in God, his pursuit of four kings with their seasoned soldiers would have seemed like a suicide mission. Probably the victory was sweet for another reason also. Those kings were from the area that Abraham left to come to Canaan. Scholars believe that Chedorlaomer, King of Elam, was the monarch under whom Abraham lived in Ur of Chaldees. Abraham’s family was well known there, so the king probably knew, or was told, whom he had captured when he took Lot’s great household. It was a special slap in the face to Abraham, and a special gratification when he sent Chedorlaomer high-tailing it home empty handed.

Ebbs and Flows of Faith

Sometimes it is not the crises that test our faith so much as the everyday grind. There are signs this happened with Abraham. God had certainly blessed him with wealth, but what about the promise to make his seed into a great nation? After a long time in Canaan, Sarai was still barren. Both their biological clocks were ticking. Abraham was approximately 85 years old at the time and Sarai only 10 years younger.

After the battle with the kings of the east, God appeared to Abraham in a

vision (15:1) and said, “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceedingly great reward.” Abraham’s response appears abrupt, perhaps indicating what was uppermost in his mind. “Lord, God, what wilt thou give me seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus.” If Abraham had no natural children, his chief steward would be his heir.

God assured Abraham that Eliezer would not be his heir, but rather a child born of his natural seed. Then God led him through a series of experiences and discussions designed to assure him that He had not forgotten His promise, and that it would be fulfilled. No doubt this eased Abraham and Sarai’s worries for a while.

But the clock kept ticking and still no child. So Sarai decided to help God fulfill His promise (16:1-2). She gave Abraham her personal servant, Hagar, as a wife saying, “it may be that I may obtain children by her.” This action sounds repulsive to us, but it was common practice in eastern societies. The laws of some nations required a barren wife to provide her husband with a substitute.

Regardless of how well intentioned one is, it is not constructive to go beyond what God says. It did not work well for Sarai. She thought to get away from the shame of childlessness. Instead she brought the contempt right into her own house; Hagar despised her mistress because she was able to do for Abraham what Sarai could not.

Trouble in the Family

The tension got so bad between Sarai and Hagar that it caused trouble between Sarai and Abraham (16:5). Sarai dealt so harshly with Hagar that she ran away. An angel came and sent her back with the promise that her child would become a great nation. Hagar delivered a son whom Abraham named Ishmael. Abraham loved Ishmael and happily would have accepted him as his heir. But God had not changed His mind.

Thirteen years went by during which Abraham’s faith seems to slump. God appeared to him again to reconfirm the covenant (chapter 17). This time He gave Abraham a token of the covenant, reminiscent of the sign given to Noah after the flood. The symbol was circumcision. This was the time that God changed the patriarch’s name from Abram, which meant exalted father, to Abraham, which meant father of nations or multitudes. Sarai’s name was changed also, to Sarah. The first name meant “my princess,” the second “princess.” The symbolism was

that Sarah was to become a princess to nations, not just to Abraham.

When God spoke of Sarah becoming a mother of nations, Abraham laughed and ridiculed the idea in his heart (17:17). He wistfully asked God if Ishmael could be his heir. God, however, rejected Ishmael as the promised seed through whom the blessings of the covenant would come, insisting that His original promise would stand. We can understand why Abraham's faith was under stress. He was now 99 years old; Paul says his body was "as good as dead" (Hebrews 11:12), which Abraham knew. Sarah was also "past age."

A Break in the Story

At this point there seems a break in the story of Abraham as the writer tells us about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot's misfortunes (chapters 18 and 19). But it is not a real break because it tells of the rise of two nations that will be intertwined with Israel for good and ill through the ages.

Abraham begged God not to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Perhaps he feared that some of Lot's family would perish in the conflagration. But not even 10 righteous persons, God's minimum number, could be found among the multitudes in those cities. Angels were dispatched to warn Lot and, sure enough, his daughters' fiancés would not come out. When Lot pleaded with them, they took the whole thing as a joke (19:14). Even then his wife looked back—not just a glance over her shoulder, but gazed longingly—and was turned to a pillar of salt. What an awful end for a man who started with such privilege and promise!

But Lot's story is not finished. He and his unmarried daughters went to live in a cave on the east side of the Dead Sea. No doubt they were demoralized and these city girls probably did not like living in a cave. But we will have to hand it to them on one score—they were resourceful. They twice got their father so drunk he did not know what he was doing and in that state each lay with him and got pregnant. The child delivered by the oldest daughter founded the Moabite nation and the son of the youngest fathered the Ammonites. As you read farther in the Bible, be alert to how these nations interacted with the Israelites.

Finally the Promised Child

Almost out of the blue came the announcement, "And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken" (21:1). Sarah conceived and bare Abraham a son in his old age. The child was named Isaac. Although the announcement in the Bible is simple and understated, no doubt the

baby was received with an outpouring of all the frustrated love and emotion that was pent up through the years. But the arrival of Isaac rekindled the rivalry between Sarah and Hagar, this time with Ishmael involved.

Children quickly catch the drift of their parents' bitterness, so Ishmael, now about 17, tantalized little Isaac on the day of his big "weaning party." Isaac would have been about three years old; children were weaned later then. Sarah saw the mockery and was furious. Again she ordered Hagar and Ishmael out of the house. Ishmael was old enough to survive with his mother in the wilderness, so God told Abraham, who was troubled about it, to let them go. Paul explains the spiritual meaning of these two women and their descendants in Galatians 4:21-31.

No doubt the long awaited fulfillment of God's promise in the birth of Isaac fully restored and magnified Abraham's faith. He needed it; his biggest test yet was still to come.

"Offer Him as a Burnt Offering"

In the same understated way that the writer announced the birth of Isaac, he described God's request that Abraham offer the child as a burned sacrifice. "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of' (22:2). God made sure Abraham knew who He was talking about. Abraham had another son, Ishmael, but he was no longer in his house. And God made sure Abraham knew that his love for Isaac was understood, "thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest." How would Abraham respond?

Abraham arose early the following morning and began the journey northward, taking with him Isaac and two servants. His early start did not indicate eagerness to sacrifice his son, rather to do the difficult task and have it behind him. On the third day they saw the mountain in the distance. It is believed to be the mountain on which the temple later stood. Abraham told the servants to stay with the donkey while "I and the lad go yonder and worship, and come again to you." These words suggest that Abraham believed he would bring Isaac back with him from the worship, but not that God would stop the sacrifice of Isaac. Paul explains (Hebrews 11:19) that he believed God could raise Isaac from the dead, suggesting that he thought he would actually have to go through with slaying his son. In spite of the fact that he was preparing to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham still

believed that Isaac would be the promised heir. Faith enables one to do the right thing, even if one does not fully understand God's plans.

On the way to the mountain, Isaac asked his father, "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Isaac was a bright and thoughtful boy, probably about ten years old at the time. His intelligent and reflective disposition (see 24:63) had enabled him to figure out that something was wrong and perhaps even suspect what was about to happen. His father replied, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb." A sensitive child can intuit much from his parents' behavior. It was probably things like a more solemn attitude, less conversation, longing looks in his direction, and less openness about the purpose of the journey and why he was brought along that aroused Isaac to think something was wrong.

Once on the mountain, Abraham seems to have set about the task immediately. The altar was built, the wood was placed in order, and then Isaac was bound and placed on the altar. What does one say to his son in this situation? What did Isaac say to his father? Did he cry out? And on and on the questions go. Mercifully we are spared the details. What we do know is that it was a tremendous act of faith on Abraham's part.

When Abraham lifted the knife to take Isaac's life, the angel of the Lord called out to him and said, "Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do anything to him: for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son." At that moment Abraham's eyes fell on a ram that was caught by his horns in a nearby thicket. He released Isaac and sacrificed the ram instead of his son.

Why did God require such a test of Abraham? Although the angel said, "now I know that thou fearest God," we do not believe the test was only for God. Like all of God's acts, it benefited everyone concerned. Isaac's young life was ennobled. By being placed on the altar for sins not his own, he became a symbol of Jesus Christ. Abraham's faith was confirmed to himself. Often we do not know how we will face trials until they come. Abraham was given an opportunity to earn, and he did earn, the title "father of the faithful" (Romans 4:16).

Perhaps the greatest benefit was reserved for those of us who came later. By this act of a father giving his son, humans were being prepared for the true Father of mankind giving His beloved son as a sacrifice for them. Had the Jews

fully understood this symbolic lesson, they would not have found Jesus' death on the cross such a stumbling block, as Paul said they did (I Corinthians 1:23).

The Deaths of Sarah and Abraham

Abraham and Sarah's eventful lives had surely reached their zenith. They became the man and woman of faith God asked. They gave the world the seed through whom all nations would be blessed. And they never went back to Mesopotamia, not even for a visit, which is perhaps symbolic of Christians who leave the world for the Kingdom of God and never look back.

Some years after the near-sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham's beloved Sarah died at the age of 127 (23:1). He purchased a field near the city of Hebron, from a Hittite man named Ephron, as a burying place. Apparently it was a field in a valley and at one end where the hills rose up there was a cave. This cave, named Machpelah, was Sarah's grave as well as that of several later patriarchs.

After the death of Sarah, Abraham asked his servant to go and find a wife for Isaac from among his kinsmen. By this time, Abraham was aware of the plans God had for Isaac; he knew that the blood line for the Jewish nation and the Messiah must be kept pure. In addition he had heard that his brother and his wife, Nahor and Milcah, had been blessed with several sons and daughters (22:20-24). So he sent the servant to Haran on a marriage-brokering mission.

The servant was a Hittite but he obviously had become a believer in Jehovah, for he prayed to God for the success of his journey and God granted it. He met a young woman, named Rebekah, at a well outside the city of Haran on his arrival. She had come to water her father's flock. A beautiful and intelligent girl, she turned out to be the granddaughter of Nahor. After somewhat lengthy negotiations between the servant on the one hand, and Bethuel, Rebekah's father, and Laban, her brother, on the other, they put the decision into Rebekah's hands. Calling her into their discussions they asked, "Wilt thou go with this man?" She said, "I will go."

On the evening the camel caravan carrying Rebekah and her nurse, whom her father had given her as a personal servant, arrived at the family kraal in Canaan, Isaac was walking in the field meditating and mourning his mother's death. He saw the caravan and Rebekah saw him. She dismounted her camel and covered herself with a veil. Isaac took her to the tent once occupied by his mother, which was an honor. Rebekah became Isaac's wife; he loved her; and his love for her

comforted him over the loss of his mother.

Although the Bible says Abraham was “old and well stricken in age” (24:1), apparently the rejuvenation God had given his body that enabled him to father Isaac had lasted. He took another wife, named Keturah, and by her fathered six additional sons. These children of his twilight years were no doubt a comfort to an old man, but the great events of Abraham’s life had been completed. The sons are named in genealogies, such as I Chronicles, but little else is noted about them. Abraham died at age 175 and was buried by Ishmael and Isaac in the cave of Machpelah with his beloved Sarah. “Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people” (25:8).

Summary

God’s covenant with Abraham promised him and his descendants great blessings. Many promises were fulfilled in Abraham’s lifetime, such as wealth, protection, and an heir. Others were realized later when his descendants were made into a great nation, given their own land, and blessed with a law that came directly from the hand and heart of God.

The covenant is still in effect—today. Some provisions were fulfilled only in the Christian Dispensation. The promise that “all nations of the earth” would be blessed in Abraham was realized when Jesus came, died for the sins of all, and welcomed believers of every nation into His kingdom.

At this point, the covenant itself came to full maturity. Its promises are no longer only about physical and temporary things but about spiritual and eternal ones. The kingdom is not limited and geographical but universal and spiritual. Our protection is not from the Canaanites but from our real enemy, the devil. Our blessings are eternal riches rather than earthly wealth, and our home is in heaven rather than in Canaan. Even the symbol of the covenant was changed from physical circumcision to circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:28-29). All true believers are children of Abraham because he is the father of the faithful. Finally, the true covenant with Abraham, envisioned by God from the beginning and revealed in the New Testament, has become a covenant for everyone who will accept it in faith.

CHAPTER 11

Isaac and Jacob

Judging only by the amount of space given to different patriarchs in the Scriptures, Isaac and Jacob do not rank high. The story of Abraham is given approximately 13 chapters, and so is that of Joseph later. By contrast Isaac is allotted three chapters and Jacob about eight. We noted earlier that God did not deal extensively with every patriarch. Some were given large roles and others smaller ones, probably based on God's infinite knowledge of the individuals and what they were able to do. The size of one's role, however, did not define precisely its importance. For example, it is Jacob's name, which God changed to Israel, that the nation wears to this day.

Scripture readings for this chapter: Genesis chapters 25 through 36. References in this text will be in parentheses; chapter and verse only, i.e (25:1).

Genesis 25:11 states, "And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well [named] Lahai-roi." A genealogy of Ishmael's descendants follows and they are not mentioned again in this context. The writer then said, "these are the generations of Isaac," but he can go no farther because Rebekah was barren. This seems to be a theme in the women of Abraham's line, and we will see it again later. We think God wanted the men and women of the chosen line to know that their children were special, that He had plans for them, therefore He would give them at times of His choosing. [Of course, all children are special (Psalms 127:3); and He has plans for all of them, perhaps in less obvious ways.]

Isaac prayed for Rebekah and, after 20 years, she conceived. Soon she knew, because of the intense activity in her womb, that something was "wrong" with her pregnancy. She inquired of the Lord, Who confirmed her suspicions and explained what was happening. "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." So was the announcement of the birth of Jacob and Esau, twin brothers who, through their

progeny, had great impact on the nation of Israel and the world.

Esau was delivered first, a red and hairy infant, which accounts for his name, which means red. When Jacob was born, he took hold of his brother's heel in a conspicuous way that was noticed by the midwives, who gave him a name that was accurate enough to be prophetic. "Jacob" means "supplanter," (27:36) or in modern words, to supersede by force or treachery.

As the boys grew their different personalities began to show. Esau was an active child who developed into a skillful hunter. A man's kind of boy, he was Isaac's favorite. Jacob, a quiet person who liked to stay home, was his mother's companion.

Jacob Got the Birthright

In his quiet meditations, Jacob was apparently learning how to manage people, as an incident in early adulthood shows. Esau came from a hunting trip famished. Jacob was cooking some stew and Esau begged to be fed from it. Jacob said, "I will if you will sell me your birthright." Esau said, "I am at the point of death; what good is a birthright to me?" Jacob made his brother swear that the birthright was his and then fed him. The birthright, which belonged to the eldest son, was a double portion in the inheritance of his father's goods.

Paul (Hebrews 12:16) tells us the foregoing incident is a symbol of persons who despise future eternal blessings in favor of present and temporary ones. That is a worthy lesson. Anyone who does not learn to manage his fleshly cravings is in trouble as far as his spirit is concerned. But the story does not overlook the character of Jacob who is already living up to his name. This exploitation of his brother's weakness set in motion a hatred that had repercussions for many generations. One of the bad things about a feud between brothers, in the flesh or in the Lord, is that even if they get over it, as these two did, their descendants may carry it on. Hundreds of years later, Ezekiel (35:5) referred to the "perpetual hatred" of Esau's descendants toward Jacob's children as a reason for God's judgment of the former.

There was a famine in Canaan similar to the one in Abraham's day (26:1). God appeared to Isaac, confirmed the covenant that He had made with Abraham, and told him not to go down to Egypt for food. Isaac obeyed and moved instead to the city of Gerar, which was in southwest Canaan near the border of Egypt. There Isaac told the King of Gerar that Rebekah was his sister, as his father had

done earlier with Sarah. The king discovered the truth by accident and scolded Isaac but allowed him to stay in the land and Isaac prospered.

When Isaac was old and thought his death was near, he called Esau and told him to go hunt some venison and make for him the spicy meat that he loved and he would give him his final blessing. These deathbed pronouncements by the patriarchs had the character of Spirit-led prophecies and, like the laws of the Medes and Persians later, once given could not be revoked. Rebekah heard Isaac preparing to bless her least favored son and made an elaborate scheme to deceive Isaac into blessing Jacob instead. In Rebekah's favor, she may have believed the blessing belonged to Jacob. God told her before the boys were born that the elder would serve the younger. But if she believed this, she should have learned from her mother-in-law's experience that God did not need her help in bringing to pass what He wanted.

Rebekah and Jacob's scheme worked. When Isaac and Esau discovered the deception, Esau wept in bitterness and begged his father to find a way to bless him too. It could not be done. Esau had not gotten over the earlier exploitation by Jacob, and this time he made plans to kill him. Rebekah, ever looking out for Jacob's welfare, heard of Esau's plans and sent Jacob to Haran to her brother Laban's house under the guise of looking for a wife.

Little else is heard of Isaac, but he apparently recovered from whatever physical ailment caused him to think he was near death. He was about 120 years old at the time he blessed Jacob and he died at the age of 180 years (35:28). His was a cameo role in God's great drama, important but small. He fathered the son, who fathered the sons, who founded the nation God promised. Otherwise he did not distinguish himself.

Jacob's Flight from Esau

Jacob left home a penniless young man with little more than the staff he had in his hand. Fleeing from a brother who had proven himself a skillful hunter, alone on a road that was dangerous, these must have been sobering experiences. Perhaps God knew Jacob was in a mood to listen and grow. That night when Jacob lay down to sleep, God appeared to him in a dream (28:11-16). A great ladder extended from earth to heaven and God stood at the top. Angels of God were going up and down the ladder. (Jesus made use of this symbolism in John 1:51.) God confirmed the covenant to Jacob as He had done with Isaac. Jacob was frightened saying, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not."

The dream and God's message had a good effect on Jacob. He made a vow to God saying that if God would protect and bless him, as He had already promised to do, then he would be faithful to God and return in offerings a tenth of all God gave him. As we shall see, God heard and accepted Jacob's vow.

When Jacob arrived at Haran he stopped at a well, probably the same well at which Abraham's servant had found Rebekah. Inquiring of the men at the watering hole if they knew his uncle, Laban, Jacob was told they did and furthermore his daughter Rachel was coming at that moment with her father's sheep. Jacob wept with joy at the sight of Rachel. It must have been a great relief to find friends and family after such a long journey. And it was love at first sight by Jacob for Rachel.

Laban welcomed his nephew and offered him a job. Jacob accepted and proposed that his wages be Rachel as his wife in return for seven years work. The deal was struck. For a young man who apparently had never traveled more than a few miles from home, Jacob did all right. On his first day in a foreign country he acquired a home, a job, and a wife. Seven years would seem like a long time to young people today, who say they are so much in love that they can not wait even to finish school. But to Jacob these years "seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her" (29:20).

Jacob's Surprise

The years flew by but Jacob was in for a rude surprise at the end of them. The wedding took place and that evening Laban took Leah, his oldest daughter, to Jacob's tent. Veiled as she was and in darkness, it was an easy deception. Leah, who probably had not had any proposals for marriage, seemed a willing coconspirator. Jacob spent the night with her without knowing the difference. The morning light revealed that his companion in the night of love was not his beautiful Rachel, but her "weak-eyed" older sister.

When Jacob complained to Laban, he did not even apologize, but simply explained that it was not their custom to give the youngest daughter in marriage first. It was a dirty deal, but it is a bit hard to feel sorry for Jacob who had shown himself good at dishing out deceit. We wonder if he reflected on the matter and accepted that he was reaping what he had sown? Laban soothed Jacob's feelings by telling him to fulfill Leah's honeymoon week and he would give him Rachel also—for another seven year's work, of course.

God saw that Leah was not loved so he blessed her by opening her womb. She had four sons one after another, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Although we will have to wait for the actual fulfillment, we are seeing the fathers of the 12 tribes that formed the Jewish nation born in rapid succession. In addition, Levi founded the Levitical priesthood and Judah was the progenitor of the Messiah. All this time Rachel was barren and frustrated. She railed at her husband, "Give me children, or else I die" (30:1). Jacob angrily informed her that he was not God.

Reminiscent of Sarah, Rachel gave Jacob her maid, Bilhah, who bore a son named Dan. Leah had stopped having children at this time and, not to be outdone, gave Jacob her maid named Zilpah. She gave birth to two sons, called Gad and Ashur. It was a busy time in the Jacobite household. Bilhah had another son and named him Naphtali, and by this time Leah regained her fertility and gave birth to Issachar and Zebulun. Finally God opened Rachel's womb and she gave birth to Joseph.

If you have been counting you know that this is 11 of the 12 patriarchs. The last, Benjamin, was born years later to Rachel after the family had returned to Canaan. Rachel died in that birth and was buried near the present city of Bethlehem (35:16-20). Jacob set up a pillar to memorialize Rachel, which the writer of Genesis said, "is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day." There is a place near Bethlehem that is designated Rachel's tomb to this (modern) day. Whether that is the exact spot of her burial is probably not known.

By the time Jacob's 14 years of service for his wives were finished, he was eager to start acquiring wealth on his own. He asked Laban to free him to return to Canaan, but Laban, whose flocks and herds had prospered under Jacob's care, did not want him to go. Jacob agreed to stay if Laban would give him all the spotted and speckled animals currently among the cattle, sheep, and goats and all those so born in the future. It sounded like a good deal to Laban, because the normal birthrate of animals colored like that was small. Jacob, however, had in mind a scheme to increase that number (30:37-43). It worked, probably because God had promised to bless Jacob rather than because of the scheme itself. Jacob became quite rich.

The richer Jacob got, the more jealous Laban's sons became. Laban understood that God had prospered him because of Jacob (30:27), but the sons claimed he was draining off an inheritance that was rightfully theirs. Their dirty

looks made Jacob nervous and finally Laban's attitude changed too. God told Jacob it was time to return to Canaan (31:3). Rachel and Leah agreed. The disdain of their father and brothers was probably providential help to get them on their way. Earlier Jacob had put some distance between his household and Laban's, so they were able to get a three-day head start before Laban knew they were gone. God's use of human nature and circumstances beyond their control to direct his people's lives is an important principle clearly visible here. How wonderful that He has shown us in vivid detail the kinds of things to step back and look for in our own lives!

Laban and his sons pursued Jacob's caravan. It was inevitable that they would catch them because Jacob had to move more slowly because of large herds of animals and women and small children. They overtook the caravan on the seventh day. Laban complained vociferously, saying it was rude of Jacob not to allow him to say good-bye and to kiss his daughters and grandchildren. Perhaps we can grant that this not-altogether-admirable man loved his daughters, but he seemed more concerned about the fact that someone had stolen his household gods.

Household gods were important to people of the ancient east for more reasons than whatever blessings they were presumed to bring. They had to do with one's identity as a family member and thus his right of inheritance. Rachel had stolen them unknown to Jacob. These daughters thought their father had slighted them, so Rachel's actions may have been akin to the neglected child who steals material things in an unconscious attempt to make up for his deprivation. Jacob offered Laban the right to search every tent, promising that if he found the idols the guilty person would be put to death. Rachel deceived her father by putting the images in her camel's saddle, sitting on it, and claiming she could not get up because she was menstruating. The girls in this family knew how to tell a story too!

Jacob Faced Esau

Now that the family did not have to worry about Laban coming from the rear, Jacob could concentrate on what lay ahead—Esau. The nearer they came to Esau's territory, the more frightened Jacob became. He did not know whether Esau had gotten over his anger in the twenty years since their last meeting, or nursed it into a bitter hatred that was more dangerous than ever.

When Jacob came near the border of Canaan, he made camp a few miles east

of the Jordan River close to where the Jabbok empties into it. Here Jacob saw angels of God. The means of the vision—whether in a dream or directly—is not explained, but apparently from the vision Jacob knew he should send messengers ahead to advise Esau of his arrival. He did so, after carefully coaching the ambassadors on what to say. He asked them to tell Esau about his life in Haran, the wives and children he had acquired, and other homely things. He seemed to be presenting himself as a mature family man, different from the scheming young fellow with whom Esau last dealt.

There is reason to believe that Esau's response was not favorable at first. The messengers returned to tell Jacob that Esau was gathering a force of 400 men and coming to meet them. Jacob was very frightened. He earnestly prayed to God. His prayer showed that he had matured into a more spiritual man. His growth is also indicated by the fact that he did not prepare for battle, although he had the forces to do so. He planned simply to throw himself on his brother's mercy, apologize, and manfully face the consequences of the hatred his behavior had provoked.

Servants were sent ahead to meet Esau with gifts of cattle, camels, and sheep. Each set of servants with their gifts were instructed to repeat peaceful words about Jacob. The women, children, and herds were divided into two groups so that if Esau attacked one group might escape.

That evening an angel appeared to Jacob and wrestled with him all night. Perhaps this struggle symbolized that there was a higher meaning in Jacob's troubles than he had known. At daybreak, the angel proposed to leave but Jacob insisted that he not go until he blessed him. The angel changed Jacob's name to Israel saying, "as a prince thou hast power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (32:28). This seems a recognition that Jacob had overcome in his life-struggles, and by implication an assurance that the meeting with Esau would go well. God Himself confirmed the name change sometime later (35:10).

As Esau approached, Jacob bowed himself to the ground seven times. This moment would tell what type of man Esau was, and most important, it would tell whether God would honor that part of Jacob's vow that asked to be brought home in peace. "And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept" (33:4). Esau behaved better than Jacob had a right to expect. He did not want to accept the herds that were offered as gifts, but Jacob insisted. Perhaps he thought they were an appropriate token in return

for the birthright, which was the first object of their brotherly animosity. The brothers parted in peace. Esau and his men returned to his home in southern Canaan, near Mt. Seir, and Jacob and company forded the Jordan and camped near Shechem, the present city of Nablus, in the area later called Samaria. Jacob was home and safe.

Jacob's Later Life

The family camped for a while near Shechem but had to leave when Dinah, Leah's daughter, was raped by the prince of the city. She went into town, seemingly out of youthful curiosity, to see how the Canaanite women lived. The prince saw her, raped her, and apparently took her home with him. His lust had sublimated into attraction if not real love.

The king asked Jacob to give Dinah in marriage to his son, but Dinah's full-blood brothers, Levi and Simeon, would not allow it. They told the king and his men they would allow the marriage if the men of Shechem would be circumcised, as they were. Urged by the king, the men submitted. On the third day when they were very sore and recuperating in their houses, Levi and Simeon slaughtered them with the sword. They also looted the city. Jacob scolded his sons, knowing the treachery would incite all Canaanite tribes in the area. God told Jacob to move to Bethel, down near the present city of Jerusalem, which he did.

In preparation for going to Bethel, Jacob ordered the members of his household to get rid of all idol gods, a part of his original vow to God. We know there were some. The family complied, surrendering the idols and the earrings associated with them. Earrings often were engraved with the signs of the gods and worn as talismans. Jacob buried these objects under an oak tree near Shechem. At Bethel Jacob built an altar and worshipped in fulfillment of his vow. Surely Jacob's reconciliation with Esau, his completion of his vow to God, and the birth of Benjamin, the twelfth patriarch, which took place shortly after this, were the climaxing events of Jacob's life.

Summary

God appeared to Isaac and Jacob confirming to each a continuation of the covenant made with Abraham. Isaac's role in the covenant was small, mainly to father the father of the nation of Israel. We saw Jacob grow under God's tutelage from a selfish and scheming young man into a true patriarch who led his large

family into faithfulness to Jehovah. God recognized Jacob's spiritual attainments by changing his name from one meaning supplanter, to Israel, which means a prince who has power with God and men. The nation of Israel was still years away, but its foundation was laid in the 12 men who would produce the tribes that made it up. The events yet to come largely are centered around one who at this time was still a boy. Joseph is the subject of the next great narrative from God.

CHAPTER 12

Joseph: The Favorite Child

Joseph played a central role in God's formation of the Israelites into a nation. Many of God's promises to Abraham had been fulfilled, but little progress toward statehood was visible. The nation and its people were important because they were to be models for all mankind on how to become true servants of Jehovah and be saved. But how could a few dozen souls be made into a great kingdom that could accomplish this mission? They needed a place in which they could prosper, grow numerically, form a unique identity, keep their bloodline pure, toughen themselves for difficult tasks, and become conscious of God's purpose for them. God had such a place in mind and Joseph would lead them to it.

Scripture readings for this chapter: Genesis chapters 37 through 50. References in this text will be in parentheses; chapter and verse only, i.e (37:1).

The story begins in Genesis 37:3 when the writer tells us that Jacob, now called Israel, loved Joseph more than his other children because he was the child of his old age. It did not hurt that he also was the son of Israel's favorite wife, Rachel. Nothing is more potent to instigate sibling rivalry than favoritism by a parent. It certainly worked that way here; Joseph's brothers hated him. The father's feelings were made obvious by a special gift to Joseph, called a "coat of many colors." Joseph would have been about 18 years old at the time.

The brothers' resentment was made worse by two dreams that Joseph related. The first scene showed the brothers reaping in a field, each with a sheaf of grain in his arms. Joseph's sheaf stood upright while the other sheaves made obeisance to it. It was not a hard dream to interpret, and the brothers got the message. The second dream displayed the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing down before Joseph. Again the symbols were clear. Because this vision showed the parents serving Joseph, the father was annoyed, and rebuked his son. One could question a boy's wisdom in telling such dreams to jealous brothers, but he was, after all, young.

Israel sent Joseph from Hebron, where the family lived, to Shechem where the older sons were tending the family's herds and flocks. This was a distance of about 50 miles. The animals were moved around during summer months to find good pasture and the father wanted news of his sons and his herds. Joseph arrived at Shechem but could not find his brothers in the fields there about, until a stranger advised him they had moved farther northwest to Dothan.

The brothers saw Joseph long before he arrived at camp; he was probably identified by the distinctive garment his father had given him. Their hatred had time to smolder afresh as he approached. They planned to kill him and throw his body in a pit. The leaders in the plot may have been the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah (Dan and Naphtali, and Gad and Asshur) about whom Joseph earlier had given their father a bad report. Reuben persuaded them not to kill the boy, but to just throw him in the pit, implying that they would be less culpable if he died by himself. He intended to return later and rescue Joseph. They took Reuben's advice. We know from Psalms 105:17-18 that Joseph was very tormented and pleaded with his brothers for mercy.

As the brothers were having their evening meal, a caravan of Ishmaelite traders came by from the east. This would not be unusual, since Dothan was on the main east-west route from Asia to Egypt. Judah suggested that it would be more profitable to sell the boy to the traders than simply let him die. The others agreeing, Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver. According to Leviticus 27:5, this was the "normal" price of redemption for a male slave under 20 years of age.

No doubt Joseph hoped that his father would search for him when he did not return home. He did not know that his father thought he was dead, fooled by the brothers' trick of putting goat's blood on the coat and telling Israel they found it in a field. Israel concluded, as the brothers intended, that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. He mourned his son many days. Joseph did not know either that Reuben had tried to rescue him. He would learn these facts many years down the road. In Egypt Joseph was sold to the captain of Pharaoh's guard whose name was Potiphar.

The Interlude About Judah

There seems an interlude in the story while the writer tells us about troubles encountered by Judah, the brother who proposed selling Joseph. He married a Canaanite woman, called Shuah, who gave him three sons named Er, Onan, and

Shelah. Er grew into a very wicked man and the Lord slew him. We are not told what Er's wickedness consisted of, but it must have been great to have called forth such an unusual judgment from God. Er's widow, Tamar, was left childless.

Judah told his second son to marry his brother's wife and raise up seed to his deceased sibling. This custom was practiced among the Jews until Jesus' day and was the subject of a confrontation between Jesus and the Sadducees (Matthew 22:23-32). It was a form of social security for the widow who would have a child to care for her, and it kept the dead brother's lineage alive. The first child would belong to the dead brother's line; subsequent ones to the biological father. But Onan did not want to do this, so he managed to "spill the seed on the ground" rather than give a child to his brother. Obviously he too was wicked. God treated Onan to the same judgment as Er. Do you think Judah was reaping the harvest of promoting the sale of his younger brother?

Shelah was still young and no doubt Judah was afraid he would receive a fate similar to his older brothers, so he proposed to Tamar that she return to her father's house, promising to give Shelah to her in marriage when he was old enough. Judah did not keep his promise.

Then Judah's wife died. Afterward he went up with a friend to Timnath where his sheep were being sheared. Tamar heard of his coming and knew he would pass by her father's house. She dressed herself as a prostitute and sat by the roadside. Judah saw her and turned in to her unaware that she was his daughter-in-law. They bargained over the price and Judah promised her a kid from the flock. Tamar agreed but asked for his signet ring, bracelets, and staff, all objects of identification, for security.

Judah sent the goat as payment by the friend who was with him at the time. The prostitute could not be located; no one seemed to know who she was; and payment could not be made. Later Judah was told that his daughter-in-law had played the harlot and was with child. Since Tamar had been dedicated to his son, Judah, as the leader of his family, had the right to name the punishment. He pronounced the maximum sentence saying, "bring her forth, and let her be burnt" (38:24). Tamar dropped her bomb. She sent the objects of identification to Judah saying, "I am with child by the man whose these are. Discern, I pray thee, to whom they belong."

Judah acknowledged his sin and took care of Tamar, but did not go to her again as a wife. She gave birth to twins, the oldest of which was named Pharez.

He became a progenitor in the line of the Messiah.

The principle reason for the story about Judah probably was to convince the family of the need for a separation of the Israelites from the Canaanites. For the promises and plans of God to be fulfilled, the bloodline needed to be kept pure. The Canaanites seemed eager to intermarry with them and Israelite men were unwilling to resist. This trouble with an idolatrous wife and the children that came from her should sober other family members.

Additionally, Judah's problems illustrate one of the oldest principles in God's book: humans reap what they sow. Sometimes the harvest comes early, as it did in the case of Er, and sometimes years later as was the case with Judah and the brothers who mistreated Joseph, but it always comes. Paul said it most clearly. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:7-8). Judah had already reaped a rich harvest for his deeds, but he and the others still had more to come.

Joseph in Egypt

Meanwhile in Egypt, Joseph was prospering in Potiphar's house. He served his master well and God blessed Joseph and his master for Joseph's sake. Potiphar turned his entire operation over to this intelligent young man, from his farms to his household. Potiphar was free to indulge his fancies, caring for nothing we are told save the food which he ate. He could not turn that over to Joseph because it was a rule with Egyptians that they did not eat food prepared by those from another race.

There was one fly in the ointment. While Potiphar was busy enjoying his freedom, his wife was busy enjoying Joseph. Egyptian women were notoriously free compared to Hebrew women and history records that they were sexually "liberated" as well. She spoke to Joseph regularly, openly asking him to have sex with her. Joseph refused and tried to stay out of her presence. His refusals seemed only to further excite her lust. Joseph lectured her, saying it would be disloyal to his master and a sin against God (39:9-10). Finally she grabbed hold of him, apparently intending to push the matter further with physical stimulation. Joseph fled, leaving his cloak in her hands.

"Hell hath no fury..." must have originated with Potiphar's wife. She laid

Joseph's coat by her, called in other men servants, accused Joseph of attempted rape, and waited for her husband. She goaded Potiphar by trying to make the matter partly his fault. "The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought in unto us, came in unto me to mock me" (39:17). The master was furious and threw Joseph in prison. The prison was a part of Potiphar's large house (see 40:3), as was the case with such officials in Hebrew society many years later. Jesus was kept in ward at Caiaphas' house the night before his crucifixion.

Joseph in Prison

Was there no end to troubles for this good young man? It seems not. But just as one does not always reap the rewards of evil deeds immediately, so is the case with a good life. God was toughening and training Joseph for great leadership ahead. Every ounce of patience gained, every degree of trust in God stored up, and every lesson learned through these bitter experiences would come to fruition later.

There is evidence that when the master cooled off he did not completely believe his wife's story. If he had he would have put Joseph to death. Perhaps he knew his wife's character; and he had several years of experience with Joseph's dependability. Joseph served as faithfully in prison as he had in the house. The official boss of the prison was like Potiphar; he turned everything over to Joseph.

One day two special prisoners arrived, the king's chief butler and baker, and were put in Joseph's care. The king probably suspected that they were involved in a plot against him and ordered them imprisoned until he could sort out the matter. While there the two had nightmares on the same night. They complained to Joseph that there was no one to interpret their dreams, i.e. that in prison they did not have access to the royal soothsayers. Joseph told them that dream interpretations belonged to God and volunteered to help them.

The dream brought good news to the butler, whom Joseph said would be restored to his position in three days, at the king's birthday celebrations. The baker's dream was a bad omen, for it said he would be put to death in three days. Apparently the king had decided that his suspicions of the baker were true. Joseph's interpretations came to pass as stated. He asked the butler to remember him when he again had the king's ear. The butler agreed but forgot his promise.

From the Prison to the Palace

Two years after the butler's release, the king had a disturbing dream. When his

soothsayers could not interpret it, he continued to fret. Then the butler remembered Joseph and praised his skill in dream interpretation. The king sent for Joseph, hardly giving him time to wash off the smell of the dungeon.

The king's dream was in two parts. First he saw seven fat and beautiful cows come up from the Nile River. While these fed in the meadow, seven skinny and scruffy cows came out of the river and devoured them. Afterward the starved animals looked no better than before. The king went back to sleep and dreamed again. This time he saw a healthy looking stalk of corn on which grew seven full and good ears. Then followed a stalk that was thin and looked as if it had been blasted by the east wind straight from the Arabian desert. The thin stalk devoured the healthy one as had happened with the cows.

Joseph told the king that God had given him a message. The dreams were the same; the repetition signaled only the certainty and urgency of the matter. The country would experience seven years of abundant crops and prosperity, which would be followed by seven years of scarcity and famine. Then Joseph advised the king, somewhat suggestively, to find a wise and discreet man to create a nationwide program to store up food during the years of abundance so that the people would not perish in the times of famine.

Whether or not they understood Joseph's God, the king and his servants believed the Spirit of God was in Joseph, so they took his advice and appointed him to the post. In a moment Joseph had gone from prisoner to second ruler of Egypt, subject only to Pharaoh. He rode in the king's second chariot and wherever he went people bowed to him in reverence. Joseph was only 30 years old. The 12 years he spent as slave and prisoner probably seemed a long time, but they did not slow down any success he might have dreamed of as a boy.

Joseph's program of food conservation went well and the king gave him a wife from a prominent Egyptian family. Right away Asenath gave Joseph two sons. Life had certainly turned around, but there is evidence this young man still bore the scars of his early trauma. For example, he named his first son Manasseh, which means forgetfulness, saying, "God has allowed me to forget my troubles and my father's house." That is a paradox, is it not? God had turned humiliation into honor and troubles into great success, but every time he called his son's name, he would be reminded of his pain.

Why do you think Joseph did not try to contact his father? It was not very far up there, probably less than a hundred miles. He could have sent messengers or

even gone himself. The likely explanation is that Joseph expected his father, a rich and powerful man, to rescue him and was disappointed that he did not. Also he had no way of knowing that Reuben had tried to rescue him. He seems to call a plague on them all.

The Famine Began

The seven years of plenty passed and the granaries of Egypt were bulging. The famine began right on schedule. The food people had stored on their own was soon dissipated and Joseph's organization did a brisk business selling grain. The famine was just as severe in Canaan and Jacob's family was affected. He complained to his sons, "Why do you stand here looking at one another? I hear there is corn in Egypt. Go down and buy some for us, or we will die" (42:1-2).

Joseph supervised the sales of food so he was present when his brothers arrived in Egypt. He recognized them, but they did not know him. The brothers presented themselves to Joseph, bowing low and pleading to buy grain. The dreams of his brothers doing obeisance before him flashed into Joseph's mind and he knew they were being fulfilled. Joseph accused his brothers of being spies. In the pleading exchanges that followed, the brothers spoke freely between themselves in Hebrew, not knowing that Joseph could understand them. He learned that Benjamin, who had no part in the kidnapping, was still at home with his father, and that Reuben had tried to save him. He also learned that the brothers seemed to regret their evil deed. He continued to accuse his brothers and put them in prison three days. Afterward he kept Simeon as hostage, sent the others home with the food, and ordered them to return with their youngest brother. If they did not, he said, they would get no more food.

When the sons of Israel returned to Canaan and told their father the story, he was greatly distressed. He assumed Simeon would not be released, recalled his loss of Joseph, and vowed that Benjamin would never go to Egypt. But when the Egyptian food ran out, he softened, and when Judah promised personally to be surety for Benjamin's life, he allowed them to take him.

This time Joseph received the brothers well and even wept at the sight of Benjamin, but still did not reveal his identity. That night he made a feast for them in his house. Keeping his secret required that he eat at a separate table from his brothers because it was an abomination for Egyptians to eat with Hebrews. All went well and the next morning the Israelite brothers were sent away, but Joseph had one more test for them. He had his steward put his special silver

drinking cup in Benjamin's bag. When they were on their way, he sent the steward to catch them, accuse them of thievery, and bring them back.

The conversation between Joseph and his brothers was emotionally charged. Joseph insisted that Benjamin would stay in Egypt as his servant because he alone was the thief. Judah fulfilled his promise to his father, begging for his young brother's life and offering himself as slave instead. In the conversation, Joseph learned that his father believed him to be dead and was still grieving over him. He could see how the brothers had repented. The same brother who proposed his sale, now offered himself in place of Benjamin. This scene melted Joseph's heart. He revealed himself and forgave his brothers saying, "God did send me before you to preserve life, to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (45:5 and 7). A tearful reunion with hugs and kisses followed.

Joseph sent his brothers home with gifts, wagon loads of provisions, and instructions to bring the whole family to Egypt where he could care for them. He knew there were five more years of famine to come. Jacob's heart fainted when he heard that Joseph was alive; and at first he would not believe it. The sight of all the gifts, which he knew the brothers would not have purchased, convinced him and he agreed to move the family to Egypt

On the way, God appeared to Jacob and said, "I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes" (46:3-4). The last promise meant that Joseph would be by his side when he died to close his eyelids.

After a poignant reunion with his father, Joseph and Pharaoh settled the Israelites in the Land of Goshen, between the northern part of the Nile River and the Red Sea. The land was rich and good for raising cattle, a specialty Jacob learned as a young man while working for his uncle to pay for his wives. Jacob lived approximately fifteen years in Egypt and saw his family flourish. As death approached he called Joseph and blessed him and his sons. To Joseph's dismay, his father told him that his younger son, Ephraim, would be greater than the oldest, a prophecy signally fulfilled in later years when his name became a synonym for the Jewish nation.

Jacob then "blessed" all his sons (chapter 49). As noted earlier, these deathbed pronouncements were more like Spirit-inspired prophecies than simple good

wishes. Jacob had great news for some of his sons and not-so-good words for others. He “told it like it was,” reminding them of their sins (such as Reuben’s adultery with Bilhah, 35:22) and character flaws, no doubt hoping they would correct them. To other sons he prophesied strength and greatness. After this Jacob drew his feet up into his bed and died (49:33). The family and a great entourage of Egyptians took him to the cave at Machpelah in Canaan and buried him with Abraham and Isaac.

The family at last was in a position to grow into a nation. They would prosper on the richest land in Egypt and some of the richest in the world. Their numbers would increase greatly. The bloodline would be kept pure; they would not intermarry with the Egyptians because the Egyptians did not want to intermarry with them. When we hear of this family again in the first chapter of Exodus, they numbered about two million souls. The sky was clear and blue now, but one part of that prophecy (15:13) haunts our memory. It said that they would be strangers in a land not theirs for 400 years, that they would be afflicted there, and afterward brought into their own land. So far it had been all good times in Egypt. The afflictions that would toughen them and make them want to leave were yet to come. We will read about those in the book of Exodus.

Summary

Joseph’s great influence on the formation of the Jewish nation was undeniable. There was, however, a more far reaching purpose in the events of his life. The establishment of the nation was a part of a larger plan, which is symbolized by the many similarities between Joseph and Jesus. A few examples are: Joseph was his father’s favorite son; Jesus was His father’s beloved and only begotten son. Joseph left his father’s home seeking the welfare of others; Jesus left His Father’s home (heaven) to seek and save others. Joseph was hated by his brothers whose welfare he sought; Jesus “came to his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11). Joseph was an innocent man condemned to death; Jesus was an innocent man who was put to death. Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver; Jesus was sold for 30 pieces of silver. Joseph was raised from humiliation to be second ruler in a great kingdom; Jesus was raised from death to be first ruler in His own kingdom, and on and on.

In addition to Joseph’s representation of Jesus, his story is a wonderful example of God’s providential management of the universe. Consider how many facets of the story had to come together with precision in order for Joseph to go

from being a spoiled child at home with his father to being a ruler in Egypt. Any part of the story could have gone wrong and all of it would have turned out differently. For example, suppose Joseph had not found his brothers, as almost happened, and had returned home to his father. Suppose he had not worn his distinctive coat and they did not recognize him afar off and have time to plan his destruction. Suppose the Ishmaelite traders had been five minutes earlier or later. Suppose they had sold their slave in another city of Egypt or that Potiphar had not needed another slave, and on and on.

The story of Joseph is about a real young man and his real troubles. They must have seemed to him at the time as just rotten luck; but the troubles were not luck and, in the long run, they were not rotten. To his brothers Joseph said, “you thought to do evil against me, but God meant it for good” (50:20). Note that Joseph did not say that God took their evil actions and turned them into good; but that God meant it from the first for good. God was in control all the way.

PART 3

The Mosaical Age

The Mosaical Age covers approximately 1500 years of Biblical history that began with the establishment of the Jewish nation and ended just before the coming of Christ. It is so named because the law given by Moses guided the nation during the period, and was the basis of God's relationship with the people. Other peoples and nations are discussed as they related to Israel.

The story begins in the book of Exodus with the Children of Israel enslaved in Egypt and describes their miraculous deliverance and eventful journey through the Arabian desert to the Promised Land. En route to Canaan, God appeared to them, instructed them about how to build His sanctuary, and how to worship Him. The book of Joshua explains Israel's lightning-like conquest of Canaan. Judges describes the early years of the people in Canaan before the formal establishment of the Kingdom.

Six additional books of history (First Samuel to Second Chronicles) tell the triumphs and tragedies of the Kingdom. Although mostly given in separate books under their own names (Isaiah etc.), the words and works of the prophets are interwoven with the events of daily life described in the books of history. These special messengers of God rebuked the people for their sins, predicted the coming of the Messiah, and generally served as advisors to the nation. Special books of wisdom, such as Esther and Job, will be noted as the periods during which their authors lived are discussed.

In all of these events, the discerning eye can see the overall plan of God unfolding. Thus in everyday matters, as well as prophecies, we will look for spiritual and future meanings, continually asking ourselves, "what do these things signify for the time in which we live?" We are fortunate to live in the times when God blesses "all nations of the earth" through the spiritual fulfillment of His covenant with Abraham.

The Book of Genesis alone covers 2500 years of Biblical history. All the rest of the Old Testament covers only 60 percent of that amount. Obviously the written record of God's dealings with mankind in this period is much more

extensive, and conversely our coverage of it must become less detailed. From this point forward we will paint with a broader brush, sometimes leaving with a sentence what could usefully be discussed in detail. And of course, we must pass over entirely many areas of interest. We are content to do this because we must, and because we think you are able now, if not before, to read and interpret on your own. May God bless you with insight as you do.

CHAPTER 13

The Exodus

The migration of Jacob's family to Egypt was a glorious event. They were starving from a famine in Canaan. In Egypt there was food and Joseph was the second ruler of the kingdom. Under these favorable conditions they prospered for many years, and grew from a few dozen souls to a number of 600,000 adult males plus women and children. But as the Book of Exodus opens, we find them in slavery. What happened?

Scripture readings for this chapter: Exodus chapters 1 through 15. References in this text will be in parentheses; chapter and verse only, i.e (1:8).

The Bible explains it (1:8) by saying, "Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph." This probably does not mean that he had never heard of Joseph; that would have been highly unlikely. But rather that he did not approve of the policy of favoritism shown the Israelites because of Joseph. Joseph's service to Egypt had been over 200 years ago and the Hebrews had grown to the point that the Egyptians feared and hated them.

Pharaoh instituted a policy that he thought would depress the Israelite birthrate and benefit the state as well. He put them to work as slaves in all manner of work but especially building storage cities for the government. The scheme did not succeed. The Hebrews increased all the more. The king raised the amount of work required of the slaves to the breaking point, and ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill every male child at birth.

The midwives resisted Pharaoh's command as much as possible, claiming that the Israelite women were delivering their own babies. The king broadened his order to include everyone who knew of a male child being born among the Hebrews. They were to throw it into the Nile River, probably intending it to be eaten by crocodiles as a sacrifice to their crocodile-headed god, one of many they worshipped. The lives of the Israelites were bitter, indeed!

The Birth of Moses

During this time, a man of the tribe of Levi, named Amram, and Jochebed, his wife, delivered a son. He was a beautiful child and they could not bear to give him up. They hid him at home three months then made him a little boat of reeds covered with tar and placed him in the bulrushes in the edge of the Nile. Technically they had fulfilled the king's order to put their child in the Nile, although he would not have taken it that way. Paul calls their handling of the matter an act of faith (Hebrews 11:23).

We can be sure that the family had studied the habits of Pharaoh's daughter and knew the days and times she came to bathe in the river. The princess arrived as expected with her attendants, saw the little ark among the weeds, and pulled it to shore. When they opened the container, the child cried and the princess had compassion on him. Few things are more powerful to soften the heart than a baby in distress. Moses' older sister was stationed nearby and when the princess found the baby, Miriam asked if she needed a nurse to take care of it. In short order Moses was back home legally with his mother. The difference was that now he belonged to Pharaoh's daughter and the family would have to give him up when he got older.

Jochebed kept her part of the bargain and delivered the child to the princess. The record says, "he became her son" (2:10). Whether this implies a formal adoption or simply that she accepted him as her son is not clear. It certainly means that she took his sonship seriously and brought him up with all the advantages of an Egyptian prince. Stephen said, "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22). But Moses' mother did a good job of instilling in his young mind who he was, and when he was grown the seeds she planted came to flower.

"It came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren." (2:11). This was more than a social call, nor was it a nostalgic visit to see his heritage. Paul tells us Moses made a choice to give up the pleasures of Egypt and to suffer affliction with the people of God (Hebrews 11:24-25). Both he and Pharaoh knew that he was renouncing his identity as a member of the king's family to become a slave. Pharaoh surely took this as an act of ingratitude and betrayal, not to mention foolishness. Egyptians were keen on respect for parents and authority in general. Moses was 40 years old at the time (Acts 7:23).

Not yet psychologically prepared for the sights and sounds of slavery, Moses saw an Egyptian, probably a slave master, beating a Hebrew man. His anger

flashed, and he killed the Egyptian, burying him in the sandy soil of the Delta. He thought no one had seen him. But the next day when he tried to separate two quarreling Hebrews, one of them asked if he would kill him as he had done the Egyptian the day before. Knowing the matter would be made public, and aware that he could expect no mercy from Pharaoh, Moses fled for his life.

Why did Moses act so hastily in this matter? He had surely been taught the promise (Genesis 15:24) that God would visit them in Egypt and lead them out to the Promised Land. Such a promise would not have meant much while the Hebrews were living comfortable and prosperous lives. But in times of affliction, it would have been remembered and called on for consolation. Moses believed that he would be the one to lead the people out; who was in a better position for the job? It must have been a great disappointment when his brethren did not respect him, and instead threatened to expose his murder to Pharaoh. If Moses thought this way, he needed to learn the lesson that Abraham, his grandfather many times removed, and other great men of God, learned, viz that God chose His leaders and did His work on His schedule, not man's.

Forty Years in the Desert

Moses fled to the back side of the Sinai Desert, to the Land of Midian. He may have felt that these people would befriend him because they were his distant relatives. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham through Keturah, the wife taken after the death of Sarah. He stopped at a well where shepherds came from the desert to water their flocks.

The rule of the desert was that people drew water in the order of their arrival. But Moses saw that several young women shepherds were being bullied out of their turn by men shepherds. He protected them, which allowed them to finish their work and go home early. The women were sisters, daughters of a priest of Midian, named Reuel. The father inquired about their early arrival and was told of Moses' kindness. A man who risks himself to help others with nothing to gain must have been rare then as it is now. Reuel sent the daughters back to invite Moses to come and eat with them.

Moses and Reuel loved each other from the start. He gave Moses his daughter, Zipporah, as wife and a job tending his sheep. The relationship lasted without interruption for forty years. Sometime during this period Zipporah gave Moses a son, whom he named Gershom which meant "a stranger in a strange land." Moses was probably the most overqualified shepherd in Midian—an intelligent

and educated prince tending sheep in the desert. Caring for these meek and helpless animals must be good training for God's leaders. It was so with Jacob, Joseph, David, and others.

During the forty years of Moses' exile in Midian the exploitation of the Israelites in Egypt continued and worsened. The king who had instituted the enslavement died and the people perhaps hoped for relief, but it did not come. Their cries of pain grew louder and their calls to God for relief increased.

The Call from the Burning Bush

As Moses was tending his sheep on the back side of the desert near a mountain called Horeb, he saw an acacia bush on fire. The fire itself might not have been so unusual, but the fact that it did not burn up was strange. Moses turned aside from his path to see it at close range. When he came near, God spoke and told him not to come closer, and to take off his shoes for the ground on which he stood was holy (3:4-5).

A long conversation ensued in which God told Moses that He had heard the cries of the people of Israel and that He would send Moses to lead them out of Egypt and into the land He had promised them. Moses demurred arguing that he was unfit for the job because he was a poor speaker. God answered the reason in Moses' heart rather than the excuse saying, "Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain" (3:12). "When you have brought the people out." was a promise that he would be successful, but Moses continued to argue. He was probably not afraid of being prosecuted for murder; he knew that the king whom he had angered was dead. More likely he remembered the rejection of his people and feared they would do it again. "They will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice" (4:1).

God was patient with Moses, even leading him to perform three miracles there in the desert as a sample of the power He would give him to convince Pharaoh and the people. Finally Moses directly asked God to send someone else (4:13). God's anger flashed and He made it clear that Moses would go to Egypt, but He would send Aaron, his brother, to be his spokesman. In fact, God said, Aaron is already on his way to this mountain to meet you.

Moses returned home to deliver the sheep and get his father-in-law's permission to leave, a common custom in the east. Reuel, ever a gracious man,

blessed Moses and sent him away in peace. Taking with him Zipporah, Gershom, and Eliezer, who was apparently a newborn, Moses set off for Mt. Horeb to meet Aaron. They stopped in an “inn” on the way, not a hotel, but a rude resting place by the wayside. That night God sent an illness on Moses that threatened his life, and both he and Zipporah knew it was because they had not circumcised Eliezer. The lapse seems to have been due to Zipporah’s resistance. Although she did not understand or appreciate Moses’ religion, she was not prepared to resist God. So she took a stone knife, circumcised the boy, railed at Moses, and threw the foreskin at his feet.

Moses sent Zipporah and his sons back home to Midian, probably because of this incident. We do not learn about it, however, until months later when the Israelites have been freed from bondage and the whole nation was camped at the base of Mt. Horeb in fulfillment of God’s promise (18:2-3).

God dispatched Aaron from Egypt to Horeb to meet Moses. The brothers discussed all that God had revealed to Moses and made their way back to Egypt. What a time the two must have had comparing notes on what had happened to the family in the forty years since Moses left! In Egypt they wasted no time in calling the elders of the people together, laying out before them their plans, and sharing with them the words and signs from God. No doubt to Moses’ relief, “the people believed: and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshipped” (4:31). It was a good start, but the real job was still ahead.

Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh

God told Moses that Pharaoh would not easily let the people go, that he would harden his heart. That was exactly what happened. When Moses and Aaron appeared before him and said, “The God of Israel says ‘Let my people go that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness,’” Pharaoh responded, “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?” (5:2). It sounds to us like Pharaoh was an irreligious man, but in fact he was very religious. He believed that every country had its own god, and perhaps that every region had its sub-gods. The powers of gods were shown in the powers of their peoples. Since the Egyptians were stronger than the Hebrews, that proved that his god was stronger than Moses’ God. He had nothing to fear.

Pharaoh argued that the people were thinking “vain” thoughts and listening to “false” words because they were idle, so he doubled their work. Before this the

brickmakers had the straw for the bricks delivered to them. Now they would have to scour the fields to find their own straw without any diminishment in their daily quota of bricks. The people complained to Moses, and Moses complained to God. “Since I came here Pharaoh has done nothing but evil to the people and you have not delivered them at all.” God led Moses through a comforting review of all He had done for the people since His covenant with Abraham. He reassured him that He had heard the people’s cries of pain and that they would be delivered (6:2-8).

Moses tried to reassure the people but they were in too much “anguish of spirit” to listen. It looked as if the mission was doomed. God got a bit more stern with Moses and Aaron and “gave them a charge. to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt” (6:13). Moses’ courage stiffened at this point, and the people took courage from him. Pharaoh did not give up quickly, but his resistance only played into God’s plan. The more he resisted, the greater were the opportunities for God to show His power. The Egyptians would be shown that there was a God over all the universe, and the Hebrews would have their faith in Him strengthened.

Chapters 7 through 12 of Exodus describe the process by which God crushed Pharaoh’s resistance. He was a stubborn man; he believed in his god; and he did not want to lose his slaves, a potent combination of factors that made him hard to deal with. After doing their initial miracles, which Pharaoh scoffed at, a series of ten plagues were brought on Egypt. To make it obvious that the afflictions were brought by Moses’ God, none of the plagues affected the Hebrews. Following each curse, a space of time was given the king during which Moses and Aaron visited and reasoned with him.

First the water in the Nile River, Egypt’s lifeline, was turned to blood. Pharaoh was not impressed. Then the land was filled with frogs, even in Pharaoh’s house. The king blinked, but quickly hardened his heart. Then the land was filled with lice, and when those were removed, with flies. Pharaoh was shaken but each time Moses took a plague away his heart hardened again. The flies were followed by a great disease that killed the cattle of the Egyptians and then came a plague of boils on men and beasts. God sent a message to the king which said, “I raised you up to show in you My power, and so that My name would be declared throughout all the earth. As yet you still exalt yourself against my people and will not let them go” (9:16-17). The message was, “there is more to come.”

The seventh plague was a hail storm such as the country had never seen before, with stones so large that exposed men and beasts were killed. Pharaoh acknowledged his sin, promised to let the people go, and begged Moses to stop. But again when relief came, he hardened his heart. The next curses of locusts, which ate every green thing, and three days of pitch darkness saw Pharaoh weaken even more. He tried to bargain with Moses but still hung onto his pride. God prepared Moses and the Hebrews for the final blow that would make the king release the Jews. Every firstborn male of men and beasts in Egypt would be killed.

The Passover Supper: A New Beginning

With all other plagues, the Israelites were simply exempted with no effort on their part. This one was different. They would have to do something to insure that the firstborn among them was not killed along with the Egyptians. There was no salvation for the Egyptians. Furthermore the Jews were to change their calendar to reckon a new beginning from this time. The first month of the year in their old calendar was in the fall, when the earth was dying; this one was in the spring, when the earth was coming alive. Passover means “greenness,” referring to the greening of spring.

God told Moses that the great plague would take place at midnight on the 14th day of the month formerly called Tisri, named Abib in the new calendar. “About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die.” (11:4-5). In order to save themselves, the Hebrews were told that each household must take a perfect lamb from the flock, keep it up from the 10th to the 14th day, probably to inspect it for imperfections and diseases, and kill it at sunset on the 14th day. Some of the blood was to be splashed on the door posts and lintels of the doors. The families were required to stay inside their houses until the plague was finished and, while there, eat the specially prepared lamb as a sacrificial meal.

God promised that the death angel would pass over their houses, if they would do as instructed. “When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt” (12:13). The angel was represented as entering through the doors of the houses, but upon seeing the sacrificial blood on the posts and lintels he would turn away. God also made it clear that the Passover meal symbolized future events and would be celebrated each year at the same time. The spiritual fulfillment of it is observed

by Christians around the world on the Lord's Day. Paul called the Lord's Supper "our passover" in I Corinthians 5:7.

The fateful day came and at midnight a great cry went up throughout Egypt. We do not know the means the angel used to effect God's judgment, but the deaths must not have been silent. All Egyptian families seemed to discover their losses at the same time. By now the Egyptians were accustomed to blaming Moses and Jehovah for any trouble that came on them, and they knew exactly who caused this one. Moses had told Pharaoh that he and his men would come and bow down before Moses begging the Israelites to leave (11:8). And they did, urgently begging, in the middle of the night. As a sign of his ultimate humiliation, Pharaoh asked a blessing of Moses, the man he had originally scoffed at as a deceiver.

In the east it was customary to give gifts to those departing on a journey. The Israelites "borrowed" jewels, clothing, and so forth from their Egyptian neighbors, who were so eager for them to leave that they gave whatever was asked. God promised the Israelites that they would not go out empty-handed and they did not. Perhaps He considered the gifts only payment for wages out of which the Israelites had been cheated.

The Exodus

The Israelites departed Egypt in haste, but they did not forget to take the bones of Joseph with them, as their ancestors had promised to do over 400 years earlier (Genesis 50:25). With characteristic understatement, the Bible writer described this great event by saying, "the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth..." (12:37). Succoth was their first camping place inside Egypt and before coming to the Red Sea. The special cloud of God's presence, called the Shekinah, went before them and did not leave until they entered the Promised Land 40 years later. The Israelites were on their way, but they were still not free. They were yet in Pharaoh's kingdom and he could change his mind at any time.

God told Moses not to take the Israelites to Canaan by the nearest route because that would take them through warring Philistine tribes (13:17). These people were not prepared for war. They needed organizing and toughening before facing battles, and the desert route would give time and opportunity to do that. So the large caravan headed southeast instead of northeast.

When Pharaoh heard that the Israelites were going the "wrong" way, he

assumed they were lost and wandering aimlessly. Stubborn to the core, he mobilized his army and set out to recapture them, overtaking the caravan while it was camped by the Red Sea. The Shekinah moved from in front of the Israelites to behind them, blocking the Egyptians' view. The Israelites were frightened and accused Moses of bringing them out to die in the wilderness. Moses said, "fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (14:13). When he called on the Lord, God said, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward."

At God's instructions, Moses held out over the waters the shepherd's rod that he had brought with him from Midian. The waters parted, standing up like walls on the right hand and left hand of the people as they marched through the sea as on dry land. When the Egyptian army tried to follow, they had all sorts of troubles. The war chariots mired in the sea floor, the wheels came off, and on and on. When the Israelites were safely on the other side, Moses again held out his rod and the walls of water collapsed, drowning the soldiers in the deluge.

The Israelites were no longer in Pharaoh's kingdom; no longer under his jurisdiction. Besides that, his feared soldiers were dead, strewn along the banks of the Red Sea. Now they were truly free. In the words of a famous American, "Free at last, free at last; thank God almighty, we are free at last." "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord.," the song of true deliverance (15:1).

Summary

The story of the Jews' deliverance from Egyptian slavery is a historic event in its own right. The family of one man, Jacob, moved to Egypt, grew to be a great nation, was enslaved by a nervous king, and freed by a shepherd. The providential and miraculous workings of God were shown in signal fashion.

The story also was a judgment on the gods Egypt served as well as upon the men and women who served them. Jehovah intended it so (12:12). As was true of other pagan nations, the Egyptians considered many animals as incarnations of their gods and, thus, sacred. No doubt this was the reason that God, who has shown clear concern for animals (Jonah 4:11, Matthew 6:26-30), included the firstborn of beasts in the plague. When animals that were believed to be incarnations of gods were slain by Jehovah, there was no question of which God had power.

While these were worthy purposes served by the Jews' deliverance, there was a more important one. Their salvation was an allegory for how all mankind would one day be freed from the greater slavery of sin. A close reading of Old and New Testaments shows that we must do the same things to be freed from our slavery that the Israelites did to be freed from theirs. This comparison is enhanced by noting that, in Scripture, Egypt is a symbol of sin (see Ezekiel 20:7, Revelation 11:8); Pharaoh represents Satan; and Moses is a type of Christ (Deuteronomy 18:15-18). Let us take an even closer look.

The Israelites could never have freed themselves without God's intervention. He chose and sent a deliverer, Moses. We could never have freed ourselves from sin. God chose Jesus, who was foreshadowed by Moses. For their part, the Jews had to believe in Moses and the God he represented. We must believe in Jesus and the God He represents (John 3:14-16). They had to go with Moses to Pharaoh and confess that they believed in Moses and Moses' God (Exodus 3:18). We must confess our faith in Jesus (Matthew 10:32). They had to repent of their service to Pharaoh, i.e. to physically turn away from it and leave the country. We must turn away from our sins and repent of our service to Satan (Luke 13:3). The Hebrews had to go through the waters of the Red Sea; then their enemies were washed away and they were truly free. We must go through the waters of baptism where our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16). Paul called the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea their baptism and compared it to ours (I Corinthians 10:1-2).

After the Israelites were freed, their first order of business was to learn how to worship God and live good lives before Him. That is precisely what God teaches them at Mt. Sinai.

CHAPTER 14

Mount Sinai and Meeting with God

From the point of crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites traveled southward parallel to its eastern shore. They were making their way to Mt. Horeb, or Sinai, where God first appeared to Moses. He promised Moses that the nation would assemble at this mountain to worship Him when they came out of Egypt. The distance was a little over 100 miles. Judging from the time en route, the caravan averaged approximately three or four miles a day.

Scripture readings for this chapter: Exodus chapters 16 through 40. References in this text will be in parentheses; chapter and verse only, i.e (16:1).

The group was about a month out of Egypt when they camped for a while in a desert flatland called the Wilderness of Sin. The great events of their deliverance were now in the past and the reality of traveling in the desert had settled in. The food they brought with them from Egypt was exhausted. They were not starving, because they still had flocks and herds, but they acted as if they were. They complained against Moses, saying they wished they had stayed in Egypt because there, at least, they had good food. Now, they said, we will die of starvation (16:3).

God told Moses that He would “rain bread from heaven” on the people. The manna, as they called it, would be waiting for them each morning with the dew. It was white like coriander seed and in small wafer-like pieces. The taste was similar to bread made with honey (16:31). The manna—David called it angels’ food (Psalms 78:25)—appeared faithfully all the years the Israelites were in the wilderness and stopped after they entered Canaan and could eat of the produce of the land.

In connection with giving the manna, God instituted the observance of the Sabbath. We remember that He blessed the seventh day at creation (Genesis 2:3), but this was the first time any religious observance of it was asked of man. At first glance we wonder how manna and the Sabbath were related. A closer look at how each worked may reveal the connection.

Sabbath observance required that no ordinary work be done. On weekdays the manna had to be gathered daily. If they gathered more than could be eaten in one day, it spoiled and stank. On Friday morning, however, they could gather a double portion and it would stay fresh through the Sabbath. Perhaps these special conditions, which only God could create, reinforced the faith of a people who had shown themselves fragile believers.

In the Desert without Water

The caravan moved on, going almost due east across the lower end of the Sinai Peninsula. At this time they were traversing some of the worst part of the desert, and when they made camp at Rephidim, not far from Sinai, there was no water. One would think they had seen enough of God's power and care for them to believe that He would provide, but they did not. Instead they complained against Moses and talked about stoning him to death (17:4).

Being more patient than the people deserved, God told Moses to go ahead of them to Mt. Horeb to a rock that He would show him. Moses was advised to bring the rod that he had held out over the Red Sea, to strike the rock with it, and water would come from it. It did; David said it flowed like a river (Psalms 78:16). Paul tells us that the rock represented Christ, and smiting the rock, no doubt, represented Jesus' crucifixion. The people "did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (I Corinthians 10:4).

While at Rephidim the Israelites fought their first battle, this one with the Amalekites. These people were descendants of Esau; Amalek, the father of this tribe, was a grandson of Esau (Genesis 36:12). We remember that Esau moved his family to this area from central Canaan to make room for Jacob when he brought his group back from Haran. These great, great grandsons of Esau were still smoldering over the Israelites' treatment of their forefathers, and they did not intend to take an invasion of their territory. Neither did they bother to find out whether Israel intended to stay in the land.

Moses appointed Joshua commander of the army and asked him to choose special men to fight the Amalekites. For his part, Moses promised to "stand upon the rock" with the rod, now called "the rod of God," in his hand. The next day, when the battle was joined, it went well as long as Moses held his hands toward heaven in a prayerful attitude. When he lowered his arms in fatigue, the battle turned against them. Aaron and Hur, who had accompanied Moses, propped up

his arms until the battle was won. What a wonderful signal that the battle belonged to the Lord!

God told Moses to record the war with Amalek in a book. He seemed to want it known that He would destroy the memory of Amalek from under heaven (17:14). The reasons were twofold. First, that they had hung onto their hatred of Israel for so many generations (Ezekiel 35:5). Second, for the way they began their war with Israel by ambushing the most defenseless members of the company, those who lagged behind because they were weak or faint (Deuteronomy 25:17-18). The Amalekites were put to rout here and were finally and utterly destroyed later by King Hezekiah (I Chronicles 4:43). Those who think to exploit the weak should beware of God's care for them.

While the Israelite company was camped at Rephidim, Moses' father-in-law brought Zipporah and her sons back to Moses (18:15). The relationship between Moses and Jethro seemed as good as ever. After a warm welcome, he recounted to Jethro all that God had done in delivering the Jews from Egypt. Jethro rejoiced, offered sacrifices to Jehovah, and said, "now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods" (18:11). The elders of Israel ate the sacrificial meal with Jethro, signifying the respect in which he was held.

From the lack of fanfare attached to Zipporah's return, one can not help but wonder what the relationship was like between Moses and Zipporah. She is mentioned only indirectly after this (Numbers 12:1), and perhaps not at all, since some scholars believe Zipporah had died and this reference was of another wife.

Mt. Sinai and the Appearance of God

In the third month after leaving Egypt, the caravan moved the short distance from Rephidim to Mt. Sinai and camped at its base. Immediately Moses "went up to God" (19:3), and God spoke with him directly. The Lord gave Moses a message for the people. "If you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you will be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And you will be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (19:5-6).

These were wonderful promises, especially the one to make them a kingdom of priests. This meant that each Israelite could be a priest; they would not need a priest to represent them to God or God to them. Each individual could relate directly to God in his civil duties, because the religious law and civil law were

the same. They would not need a king over them. Sadly, as we shall see, the people were not ready to receive such great promises, and they were not fulfilled until Jesus came (see I Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6).

For the meantime, however, they heard the words of God from Moses and said, “all that the Lord has spoken, we will do.” Moses returned to the mountain and reported the people’s acceptance. God took them at their word and sent Moses back with instructions regarding how to sanctify themselves for the third day when He would come down upon the top of Sinai and actually give the law. He also asked Moses to set clear boundaries around the base of the mountain beyond which neither man nor beast, except those invited by God, could go. Should they violate this limit, they would die. Moses delivered the message and the fence was erected.

Awesome Events on the Mountain

The third day dawned and the awesome events began. A thick, dark cloud covered the top of the mountain, lightning flashed from it, and thunder pealed. Then a trumpet blasted so loudly that the people trembled. Moses understood the symbolism of the trumpet; it was calling the multitude to hear the voice of God. The people came out of camp and assembled at the base of Sinai. Then the Lord descended onto the mountain in smoke and fire. The mountain shook violently and the trumpet pierced the ear. Even Moses was frightened. He called to God and God answered by voice.

God summoned Moses up into the mountain, and immediately sent him back to warn the people about coming too close to “gaze.” Moses insisted that the boundaries were set and no one would violate them. But God knew better, and the second warning was given.

Then the ten commandment law was announced—by God Himself, in an audible voice, from the top of Sinai, in the hearing of all the multitude (chapter 20). These ten commandments were the basis of all the law of Moses.

Some have assumed that the law was given to Moses in a private conference and related by him to the people. Moses and Aaron were apparently on the mountain (19:24), and the commandments later were written by the finger of God on two stone tablets and given to Moses for the people. But in recounting the scene in Deuteronomy (5:22), Moses specifically stated that it was spoken to all the assembly.

The Israelites Ran Away

By the time God had finished giving the law, the people had become so frightened that they ran away. They told Moses, “you speak with us and we will listen, but do not let God speak with us anymore, or we shall die” (20:18). Whether the people realized it or not, by this request they were asking God not to fulfill His promise to make them a kingdom of priests; they asked Him to put someone between Himself and them. How thoughtless sometimes are our religious decisions and how fateful the outcomes!

The altars built to offer sacrifices to God were of special concern to Him. An altar of earth—a simple mound of dirt—on which to make a fire and lay the special animal was sufficient to secure His blessing (20:24). If they wished to build a stone altar, they could do so, provided they used only natural stones; no human tool could be used to shape them. If they touched the stones with a tool, God said, the altar was polluted and the sacrifice unacceptable. When the tabernacle was erected, the people needed an altar that could be put up and taken down efficiently for moving, and God gave detailed instructions for making it. The message to the people and to us is clear. Worship is to be done as God designed it. Jesus said, “In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9).

After the appearance of God and the giving of the ten commandments, God, as the people requested, gave additional laws to Moses (chapters 21-24), instead of directly to the people. These were not a full revelation of the law, finer details were reserved for the books of Leviticus and Numbers. An outline of what was to come, they were intended to regulate the social lives of individuals and give a basis for religious observances. There were laws that dealt with murder, assault, theft, property rights, and so forth. There followed an overview of the three annual feasts required of Israel once they settled in the Promised Land.

The Sabbath Day observance, which had already been explained, was reiterated and the Sabbatical Year explained. No nation with which Israel had dealt had a law like this; one designed to protect the poor. It required that the people allow their fields to lie fallow each seventh year and invite poor persons to gather the crops that grew voluntarily. As further defined in Deuteronomy (15:12), it also required owners of indentured servants to set them free during the seventh year.

The laws were coupled with promises that God would keep the people in their

wilderness journey and bring them safely into the Promised Land. He assured them He would see that they drove out the wicked nations then populating Canaan. He would not, however, drive the enemies out all at once, because the people would not be able to control the land. Instead He would do it little by little as Israel grew stronger (23:30). We take that as an allegory for how God helps us rid ourselves of our spiritual enemies, not all at once as we would like, but little by little, as we grow stronger and are able to exercise self control.

Moses held a formal ratification ceremony for the people to approve the laws and commit themselves to obedience. They offered sacrifices to God. Moses read the laws in their hearing, then took the sacrificial blood and sprinkled it on the people saying, “behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you” (24:8). In the book of Hebrews (9:19-20), which is built around the spiritual fulfillment of the Law of Moses, Paul describes this scene and adds that Moses sprinkled the book of the law as well as the people. This signified the binding together of the people and the law.

A Visit with God

One of the most awe-inspiring scenes described in Scripture took place after the people ratified the law. Moses, Aaron, and Nadab and Abihu (Aaron’s sons who were to be appointed priests with him) along with seventy elders of Israel went up on Mt. Sinai and there saw God and ate and drank in His presence (24:9-11). Twice in this narrative the writer says “they saw the God of Israel.” There is a brief description of the glory of God’s surroundings.

The Hebrews believed that no one could see God and live. This conviction was based on a solid foundation. Had not God told them that if man or beast even touched the mountain while He was on it they would die (19:12-13)? Did He not later tell Moses that no one could see Him and live (33:20)? Yet the invitation to come to this feast came from God, and the Word says that God “laid not his hand” on the elders of Israel, meaning He did not hurt them. Rules are not invalid because there are exceptions to them, and it seems God made an exception in this special case.

What are we to make of this wonderful experience? Perhaps God wanted these leaders of the people to see His soft and lovely side. They had seen a terrifying demonstration of His power in the giving of the law. This scene would surely convince them that God had spoken and it would give them a view of another side of God’s nature. “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God”

(Romans 11:22).

Building the House of God

Moses was summoned back to the mountain top to receive the tablets of stone on which God had written the ten commandments (24:12). He received them, as promised, and much more. God announced one of the most important developments that the Israelites and mankind would ever hear. “Let them build me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them” (25:8). The hope that God would dwell among men, make Himself accessible to them, and be familiar with their needs was not generally expected by Israelites, nor was such hope entertained by heathen peoples of their gods.

But Jehovah’s promise was based on a condition. They must build Him a house according to the pattern He gave them. “According to all that I show you, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so shall you make it” (25:9). The last 14 chapters of Exodus are largely consumed with instructions for building the tabernacle and descriptions of its actual construction.

The tabernacle was a large, well-constructed, and magnificent tent. It was approximately 45 feet long and 15 feet wide. Israel could not have a permanent temple while they were en route to Canaan, so God gave one that fit the conditions in which they were. There was a wall of curtain around the outside of it, which provided a courtyard. The tabernacle was always erected so that its one entrance faced eastward, and in the center of the camp, symbolizing that God was the center of the people’s lives. The interior was divided into two rooms separated by a special curtain. The first room, called the Holy Place, was 30 feet long and 15 feet wide. The second was 15 feet square and was designated the Most Holy Place.

The tabernacle had special articles of furniture that were designed by God and placed within the structure precisely as He specified. The single piece of furniture in the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant. It was considered the most sacred article in Israel, and for good reason. God dwelled upon it. Essentially the ark was a chest, measuring approximately 3.7 feet long and 2.3 feet wide and deep. It was made of wood that was completely covered with gold. At each end was a golden cherub (guardian angel) placed so the two faced each other. The lid of the ark, called the mercy seat, was where God dwelled. How significant that God’s throne on earth was named by Him as the “mercy seat.”

Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and he only once a year on the Day of Atonement. The date corresponded approximately to our October 1. The purpose of his entrance was to sprinkle the blood of the atonement sacrifice before the ark, which means before God.

Furnishings of the Tabernacle

The Holy Place contained three articles: The altar of incense, the table of shewbread, and the lampstand. Regular priests could go into the Holy Place. As the priest entered the tabernacle, the altar of incense would be directly in front of him at the center of the curtain that separated the Holy and Most Holy places. The table of shewbread would be on his right against the north wall of the tabernacle and the lampstand on his left hand against the south side. The altar of incense was made of wood overlaid with gold and often called the golden altar (30:1-10). It was small, 18 inches square at the top and 36 inches tall. Incense was burned upon it in the morning and evening. We understand from Revelation 8:3-4 that the incense rising from the altar represented the prayers of the people rising to God. Only the inner curtain separated the altar from the ark of the covenant.

The lampstand was made of gold and of one piece (25:31-40). In addition to the center stem, three “prongs” extended outward and upward from each side. At the end of the stem and prongs were oil lamps. The seven lamps were lit each evening and allowed to burn through the night. They were trimmed and serviced in the morning. The lamps represented the light of God’s truth burning through nights of darkness in the world.

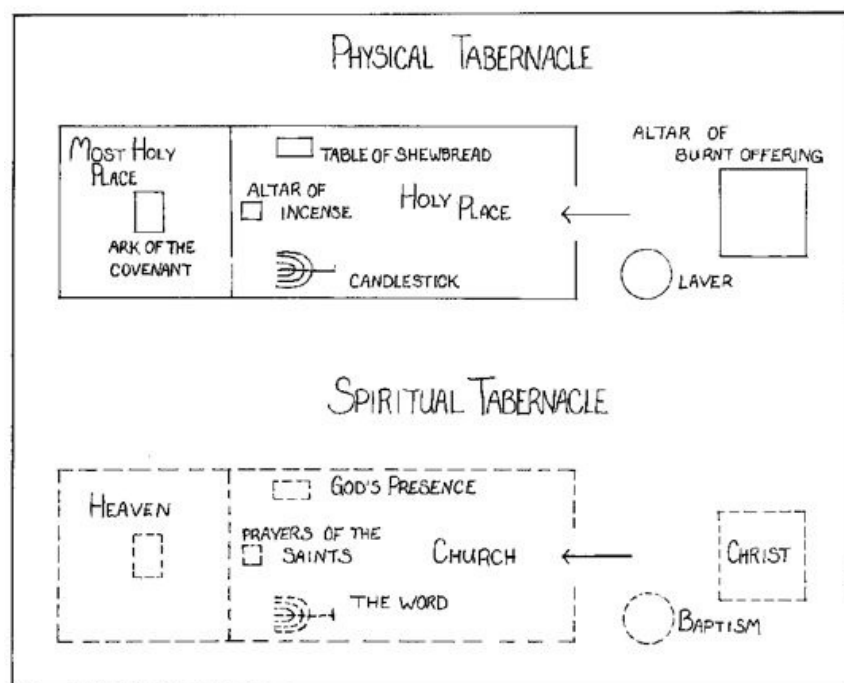
The table of shewbread held 12 loaves of unleavened bread at all times, a loaf for each of the 12 tribes of Israel. Shewbread meant “bread of the face” or “bread of the presence,” suggesting God’s face and God’s presence. The thought is apparently that through this bread God is seen. We would describe it as giving the food for spiritual growth. The bread was replaced each Sabbath with freshly baked loaves and the first ones were eaten by the priests in the Holy Place. The bread could not be taken outside the tabernacle (25:30, 35:13, and 39:36).

The Brazen Altar and Laver

There were two important items in the court of the tabernacle, the altar of burnt offering and the laver. Seven and a half feet square at the top and four and a half feet tall, this altar was made of wood overlaid with brass (27:8). It was

sometimes called the brazen altar to distinguish it from the altar of incense that was covered with gold. All burnt offerings, such as the regular morning and evening oblations, those offered during the three annual feasts, all trespass offerings, and voluntary thanksgiving sacrifices were made on this altar. It was placed on the east side of the tabernacle opposite the entrance.

The laver was a pedestal of brass with a bowl of brass at the top (30:17-21). It was kept full of water for the priests to wash themselves before they offered sacrifices or entered the tabernacle. God said they would die if they failed to do so. Appropriately the laver was placed between the altar and the entrance to the tabernacle. Paul called these ceremonial washings “baptisms” and thus seemed to compare them to our baptism (Hebrews 6:2).



We can see a pattern in the layout of the tabernacle and the functions of the articles within it. The outer court represents the world. The altar and laver symbolize acts that God designated for man to become clean and thus able to enter the tabernacle. The Holy Place represents the church and the furnishings within it show the means by which we grow spiritually to become more like God. The Most Holy Place is a type of heaven, where God dwells. The fact that no one save the high priest could enter it, and he only once annually, signified that the way into heaven was not made clear while that tabernacle stood (Hebrews 9:8). Thank God that way was made open by the blood of Christ

(Hebrews 10:19).

Israel's Moral Low Point

Moses spent 40 days and nights on the mountain with God receiving the foregoing instructions for building the tabernacle and its furnishings (24:18). At the end of that time, God told Moses he must quickly get back to the people for they had corrupted themselves (32:7). They had indeed! They had broken the first and most basic commandment in their law by persuading Aaron to make them an idol god in the form of a calf of gold. David explained it by saying, "They changed their glory [God's true glory] into the form of an ox that eats grass" (Psalms 106:20).

The Israelites offered sacrifices to the calf, but there is more. The writer said, "the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play" (32:6). The first phrase means they ate the sacrifices and drank the wine offered with them. "Rose up to play" implies the sexual orgies that were usually associated with idol worship. It took many years for the people to get over the fascination with idols they had learned in Egypt (Isaiah 19:1-3, Ezekiel 20:7 and 18).

What could have caused these people to turn so completely away from God and the law they had ratified just 40 days before? Surely Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders, who had so recently eaten and drank in Jehovah's presence and witnessed some of the glory of His surroundings, could have prevented it. They told Aaron that Moses had been gone a long time and they did not know what had become of him. It seems as if they were looking for an excuse to reinstate the idols with which they were familiar.

Moses was furious. He burned their golden image in fire, ground it to powder, and sprinkled it over the stream that supplied their water, the same stream that God had miraculously made come from the rock. Thus the people were made to drink the object of their sins. God was also furious with the people. He proposed to destroy them and make of Moses another great nation, but Moses pled with God and He relented. Both Moses and God (Deuteronomy 9:20) were angry with Aaron who let it happen. He, after all, had been left in charge while Moses was away. The people were not destroyed, but they did not go free. "The Lord plagued the people, because they made the golden calf, which Aaron made" (32:35).

Israel's Finest Hour

In order to understand God's dealings with the Israelites we must see them as they were, looking objectively at their sins and virtues. After the incident with the golden calf, God threatened not to go with them on the way to Canaan (33:1-3). The covenant He had made to dwell among them was defunct because they had broken it. He would keep the covenant He made with their forefathers, to bring them to the Land of Promise, but He would do it by "sending an angel" before them rather than leading by His presence. The people received this as the great loss it was and repented. They showed their repentance by humbling themselves before God. At Moses' pleading (33:11-23), God relented and renewed His covenant with the people (34:8-10). The actual construction of the tabernacle began (chapter 35).

The construction of the sanctuary was one of Israel's finest hours. God endowed two men, Bezaleel and Aholiab, with special talents in artistic work, which they used and taught to others. The tabernacle required a great deal of gold, silver, and brass that was made from jewelry and other articles given by the people. There was no place to purchase such material in the wilderness. We recall also that much of this jewelry had been "borrowed" from the Egyptians on the Hebrews' way out of the country. Their spoiling of the Egyptians was not solely for selfish purposes. They gave voluntarily and so generously that they had to be restrained (36:6). One interesting example is that the laver, in which the priests bathed before entering the tabernacle, was made of brass mirrors given by Israelite women (38:8). Surely there is a spiritual lesson here. Moses did an accounting of all materials given for the work (38:24-31).

Men and women worked side by side; there was a job for everyone who was willing to work. Best of all, the people seemed to take special care to do everything exactly according to the pattern given by God to Moses. "Thus was all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation finished: and the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so did they" (39:32). Moses inspected the work, approved it, and blessed the people (39:43).

Exodus chapter 40 is a beautiful description of the erection of the tabernacle and the installation of its furnishings. As each part was reared and every item of furniture put in its place, the writer said it was "as the Lord commanded." What was the result of such careful obedience to God's instructions? "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (40:34).

Summary

The Israelites' wilderness journey was intended to bind the people together as a nation, toughen them so they could fight the battles ahead, and to teach them to worship God as He wanted. To some extent all of these purposes were accomplished. But God's plans for men can go only as far and as fast as their wills allow, so the people had successes and failures. Their greatest failure was a return to the idol worship learned in Egypt. Had Moses not intervened, God would have destroyed them; but he did intervene and God listened. The people's finest hour was the actual construction of the tabernacle. They gave generously of materials, worked zealously, cooperated, and did every thing exactly as God asked. Their success was attested by the fact that when it was finished, the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle—God truly did dwell among men!

The Jews' wilderness journey symbolizes our experience after we are saved from the Egypt of sin. We are not immediately taken to heaven, but are given time to grow so that we will be able to live with God in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-3).

CHAPTER 15

The Priesthood and Further Revelations of the Law

No event in the life of Israel was more important than the establishment of the Levitical priesthood. It was called “Levitical” because members of the tribe of Levi, the third son of Jacob (Genesis 29:34), were charged with being priests and carrying out all the duties related to the tabernacle (Numbers 1:47-53). For the same reason, the Biblical book that describes the laws and administration of the priesthood is called Leviticus.

Scripture readings for this chapter: the books of Leviticus and Numbers. References are given in full.

The purpose of the priesthood was to teach and administer the laws of the covenant that God gave to shape His relationship with man. Jehovah did not agree to enter a fellowship with humans as a buddy, nor as a grandfather who might dote on his grandchildren for pure enjoyment, but rather as a father who would live among them and train them for their betterment. A key passage in understanding the priesthood, and the book that describes it, is chapter 11 verse 45: “I am the Lord that brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God: Ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” The Hebrew word here translated “holy” is used approximately 150 times in Leviticus.

The opening words of Leviticus are, “And the Lord called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation.” God first spoke to Moses from a burning bush and later to him and the people from the heights of Sinai. But He promised to dwell among them if they built Him a house as He asked. They did; and from that point forward He spoke from that sanctuary.

God did indeed love Israel; they were his “peculiar treasure.” But we also should not forget that His peculiar treasure was a part of Jehovah’s larger plan to bless “all families of the earth.” Thus we must be alert to the meaning the law had for the rest of mankind. God’s purposes for Jews and Gentiles were not different, just that the accomplishment was to be through the Israelites first, and through them to the rest of the world. “Abraham shall surely become a great and

mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him” (Genesis 18:18).

Two Purposes of the Law

Paul explained the goals of the law, the first of which was to show the true nature of sin. “Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful” (Romans 7:12-13). The phrase “might become exceedingly sinful” means that sin might be shown for the truly destructive thing it is.

Paul’s language implies that our foreparents, Adam and Eve, did not think about sin with the gravity it deserved. We can see this from the story itself in Genesis 3. Their disobedience to God was committed without real thought, almost casually, it seemed. Had they known its consequences, surely they would have looked on it with horror.

Remember this purpose of the law as you read the many statutes in Leviticus that relate to sin. Note the various sacrifices for different types of sins, the annual day of atonement on which special sacrifices and fasting occurred, and especially the multitude of things in daily life that became symbols of sin by being defined as unclean. Be alert also for the cumbersome rituals required to cleanse one who was required to touch an unclean thing (such as a dead person) or accidentally did so. If you find it tedious just to read these requirements—and you will, but do persevere—think how it must have been to live under them. Surely this would make one’s heart deeply sensitive of sin.

Our generation takes sin as a light, at times sporting, thing. It needs the lesson the law was intended to teach, and could get it by a thoughtful reading of the Old Testament. The prophets repeatedly tried to teach Israel how God saw sin. “Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity...the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment” (Isaiah 1:4-6). Do you think God has come to like sin any better?

The Second Purpose

Another purpose of the law was to lead people to the Messiah. “Wherefore the

law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). Those who truly got the message about the gravity of sin, and how frequently they committed it, longed for a Messiah who could remove sin. The sacrifices required by the law were necessary, but they could not permanently take sin away. They had to be offered over and over. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4).

Nor was the law powerful enough to regenerate the human heart so that one did not want to sin. No doubt many Jewish people felt the despair expressed by Paul as he described himself while under the law: “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death” (Romans 7:22-24). The prophets felt this longing and spoke of a time when a better law, and a covenant that was more powerful to change the heart, would be given. “Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which covenant of mine they broke, although I was a husband to them, saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 31:31-32).

How do we reconcile such statements by Jeremiah and other prophets that there would be a change in God’s law, with those that say the Israelites would be under this law forever? The commandments in general and specific institutions within the law, such as the Sabbath, circumcision, and the Passover, were said to be everlasting (Deuteronomy 4:40, Exodus 31:13). The real answer is in understanding God’s long, which is to say His spiritual, view. The Israelites are still God’s chosen people, but spiritual Israelites rather than genetic ones (Romans 9:6-8, Galatians 6:15). We are required to practice circumcision but ours is spiritual, not physical (Romans 2:27-28). The same is true with the Passover (I Corinthians 5:7), and on and on. The spiritual fulfillment of these institutions has the power to regenerate the heart in ways the law, which spoke to the flesh, did not (Romans 8:4).

The Sacrifices

The first seven chapters of Leviticus describe the various types of sacrifices required by the law. Burnt offerings came from the herds or flocks and were

entirely consumed upon the altar. These were the only sacrifices that were completely burned. Of the others, a “memorial” part was burned “to the Lord” and the rest eaten by priests or the priests and their families. Grain offerings, peace offerings, and trespass offerings were also described. The names of the sacrifices indicate the ways they were categorized, such as by what was done with them (burnt), what they consisted of (grain), and the purposes for which they were offered (to atone for specific trespasses or sins).

Chapters eight through ten describe the ordination of the priests, their special clothing, and the particular duties they performed. Aaron was the first high priest and his sons, Nadab and Abihu, were regular priests. The priests and their duties pointed forward to a time when God would fulfill His promise to make His kingdom a “kingdom of priests.” They represented all Christians, and Aaron represented Christ who is our high priest (Hebrews 4:13-16, 5:1-10).

Chapter 10 of Leviticus tells of a terrible mistake made by Nadab and Abihu early in their service in the tabernacle. When the first sacrifice was made on the altar, God sent a special fire to consume it (9:24). That fire was kept burning and all subsequent sacrifices were ignited from it; this was holy fire. But Nadab and Abihu used “strange” fire (10:1), which meant fire from a common source, to burn their sacrifice. That foreign fire blazed out and burned them to death. God explained the lesson in verse 10 by saying He intended to put a difference between holy and unholy things.

There is a suggestion that Nadab and Abihu had been drinking wine before they went to do their priestly duties (10:9). Their lack of respect for God’s law is typical of the behavior of mildly inebriated individuals. Loss of moral judgment is the first response to drinking alcohol, and it happens while physical coordination and speech still seem normal. God forbade priests to drink wine when they engaged in priestly duties.

Clean and Unclean Things

Chapters 11 through 15 of Leviticus describe clean and unclean animals as well as physical conditions and diseases that made one unclean. These include the types of animals that could be eaten and those that could not. The general rule was that animals that had a divided hoof and chewed the cud could be eaten and those that did not fit both qualifications could not (11:3). Cows, sheep, et cetera were eaten while horses, pigs, and the like were not acceptable. Similar regulations were given for fish (fins and scales made them clean) and fowls

(11:13-20).

SUMMARY OF LEVITICAL SACRIFICES

Two-page chart—follow rows
across both pages

CATEGORY	NAME OF SACRIFICE	DESCRIPTION	OBJECT OFFERED
Burnt Offering	Took their names from times offered. See “When Offered.”	Called “burnt” because animal was wholly burnt. The Hebrew name meant “rising” i.e. as the smoke rose toward heaven so did the sacrifice.	Male bullock, ram, lamb or goat. If offerer was poor; 2 turtle doves or pigeons.
Sin Offering	Sin Sacrifice (atoned for the person, not for specific sins) Trespass Offering (willful sins “in things of the Lord”)	Offered for unintentional sins or those done in ignorance, and for cleansing of ceremonial uncleanness. To repay for a “fault” or for what one did not give to God.	Bullock (for priest) Male goat (for prince or a new moon., annual feast, etc.) Female goat or lamb (for cleansing) A ram, or on special occasions a lamb.
Peace Offering	Thank Offering (Lev 7:12,22:29) Votive Offering (Num 6:14,15:3) Freewill Offering (Lev 7:16, 22:18) Wave Offering & Heave Offering	Served to establish one in God’s grace & fellowship. Also called “Communion” Offerings. So called because they were “waved” back & forth or “heaved” up & down before the Lord.	Oxen or smaller cattle of either sex. Always with Meat & Drink Offering. The breast (Wave Offering) or the right shoulder (Heave Offering) of a Peace Offering.
Meat & Drink Offerings	Meat (mostly unleavened but in one case leaven) Drink Offering	A recognition that all things came from God. Recognized the sovereignty of God and His goodness in supplying all things. Same as above	Cakes of flour, roasted corn, etc, prepared with oil and salt. Always wine.

SUMMARY OF SACRIFICES (cont.)

Chart 15:1

CATEGORY	WHEN OFFERED	HOW OFFERED	WHO ATE
Burnt Offering (cont.)	Each morning & evening Sabbaths (a double offering) New Moons Regular Feasts Day of Atonement Other times	Offerer led animal to altar, laid his hands on it, & killed it. Priest sprinkled blood on altar. Animal burned.	No one ate-it was wholly burned to God.
Sin Offering (cont.)	Regular Feasts New Moons Day of Atonement Consecration of Priests Various cleansings As needed to atone for specific sins	Led to altar by offerer, laid hands on head & killed it. Priest sprinkled blood inside veil or on altar, depending on who offered. Killed on north side of altar, blood sprinkled on altar.	Eaten by Priest except when offering for own sins, then entire sacrifice burned outside camp. Eaten by priest in Holy Place.
Peace Offering (cont.)	Commanded for feasts of Pentecost and offered on many other festive occasions, i.e. inauguration of kings. Not commanded but offered at free will of offerer.	Led to altar by offerer, laid hands on it & killed it. Priest sprinkled blood on altar. "Fat" parts burned on altar. As noted above.	See Wave & Heave Offering. Eaten by priests & immediate family.
Meat & Drink Offerings (cont.)	Offered with Burnt or Peace Offering but not with Sin Offerings. Used as a substitute for Sin Offering by poor. With every Meat Offering.	No special instructions given.	Except for the "Memorial" part that was burned, was eaten by priests. Poured out in a holy place or on altar (Num 28:7, II Kings 16:13).

Note: The central idea of all sacrifices was "substitution." The original Passover Lamb (Ex. 12) for the lives of the firstborn males, the sin sacrifices for the lives of offerers, the first fruits for whole harvests, etc. Additionally they expressed gratitude, reverence, and a desire for more communication with God. Specific meanings of individual sacrifices were denoted by the nature and presentation of each one.

Certain bodily conditions such as open sores or the emission of semen caused men to be unclean as did childbirth and menstruation for women. Having one of these conditions, or coming in contact with one who did, required a cleansing ceremony. A major place in the law was given for the diagnosis and handling of leprosy (Leviticus 14) which was a special symbol for sin. After a firm diagnosis

was made, which was by an elaborate process, infected persons had to live outside the regular camp of the people. This symbolizes for us the separation of ourselves from sinful persons. Note the passages in the New Testament which teach Christians to separate themselves from sinful persons (Romans 16:17, I Corinthians 5:11, Philippians 3:17-18).

The remaining chapters of Leviticus (17-27) give a variety of laws that range from ceremonial regulations regarding tabernacle service, to curbing of individual lusts, marriage, punishment for sins, and the keeping of vows. Clearly God expected to be a part of every aspect of the Israelites' lives. Tucked away in this catalogue is the law that Jesus singled out as the second most important of all laws of the Old Testament. Chapter 19:18 states, "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord." A lawyer tried to trick Jesus by asking him a question on a controversial subject: "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus answered that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all one's heart, and the second is to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matthew 22:35-40).

Numbering Israel

The book of Numbers is noted for the census with which it opens and another that is described in chapter 26. These were not just counting of the people; they were part of God's organization of the nation for two purposes. One was the wars they would soon face when they took the Promised Land from the wicked nations God wanted driven out. The second purpose was for the protection and safe movement of the sanctuary that they had just completed.

Chapter 1 verse 3 states, "From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel; thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies." Jesus discussed a spiritual application of such numbering in Luke 14:28-33. He said a king does not go out to battle without first comparing his troops with those coming against him and considering the cost of the engagement. He was telling His disciples not to enter discipleship with Him thoughtlessly, but after considering the costs and making a determination to succeed.

In the process of numbering the tribes, captains and other leaders were assigned and a specific order of march for each move established. God also instructed Moses to make two silver trumpets which called the people to battle, to assembly, and so forth (Numbers 10). The number of blasts and whether

blown by one or both trumpets alerted the people to the purpose of the assembly and who should attend.

Paul probably had these trumpets in mind when he taught about proper and improper use of spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 14:7-8). "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to battle?" A specific meaning was attached to a specific trumpet sound so the people would know how to respond. Just so a spiritual gift, like speaking in tongues, could be used in the church assembly only if someone were present who was gifted to interpret its meaning. The Christians had to know exactly what was taught.

The trumpets apparently survived the ravages of wars with the Canaanites and even the captivity in Babylon and were taken by Titus when his army sacked Jerusalem in A.D. 70. There are pictures of them on Titus' triumphal arch in Rome, along with other trophies of his victories over the Jews. He is said to have dedicated them to the idol he served and placed them in a pagan temple.

Moving Instructions

The other purpose of the census was to allot special duties for protecting and moving the tabernacle. The tribe of Levi was instructed to camp around the sanctuary (Numbers 1:50), occupying the land immediately next to it. This was a part of their responsibility for the tabernacle and all its implements. They were the ones to take it down and prepare each article of furniture for safe and ceremonially clean removal. What a nice symbol for how Christians are to guard and care for the church.

Other tribes were assigned places to camp in relation to the sanctuary. For example, Judah camped in front of the entrance. Since the tabernacle was always erected facing east, Judah's camp was "on the east side toward the rising of the sun" (Numbers 2:3).

We do not know the reasons God had for assigning most of the tribes their particular places. We are convinced there were reasons. Perhaps the discerning reader can discover some of them as he or she reads and meditates. With the tribe of Judah we are more fortunate. Judah was the line from which the Messiah was to come. When the prophets spoke of God or the Messiah coming to His sanctuary, it was from the east or via the eastern gate (Isaiah 41:1-2, Ezekiel 40:1-6, 43:1-4). Judah's placement was a constant reminder of the Messiah's coming.

A Time to Move

When the Israelites had been at Sinai about a year, God told them it was time to leave. Their stay at Sinai was for a purpose and, to the extent they had received God's instructions, it was accomplished. They had been taught how to worship God; and they were organized for travel and for war. The sanctuary was completed and the glory of God's presence dwelled among them.

Fully as important as these specific blessings, they had spent a year in the desert living under Jehovah's care. They had seen God produce streams of water from a rock, and each morning they gathered food He had miraculously sent them. They fought and won a war with a nation greater than themselves. In all the time they spent in the wilderness, their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell (Deuteronomy 8:4). They now had every reason to believe that God would keep His promises to bring them safely into the Promised Land.

Numbers 10:11 says, "And it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, of the second year, that the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of the testimony." The cloud was the symbol of God's presence. When it lifted from off the tabernacle that was a sign that God had left the Most Holy Place in the sanctuary and that it was time for them to move and follow God. When the cloud came back to earth again, that was the signal to make camp (9:15-23).

The company moved in a northerly direction and camped in an area of the desert known as the wilderness of Paran. The Israelites did not move well. Each move seemed to stimulate their doubts and cause them to behave badly, even to yearn again for Egypt. Paran was the scene of disastrous events.

First the people complained—the specific nature of this complaint is not given—and God sent a fire among them that consumed some (11:1). Moses prayed for the people and the fire was taken away. Then the people murmured about the manna and longed for the foods they ate in Egypt. God sent a plague that killed many. As if these troubles were not enough, Miriam and Aaron complained against Moses "because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married" (12:1).

We do not know for certain whether the two siblings were complaining about Zipporah, Moses' first wife, or whether she had died and Moses had taken another. Although there is no mention of Zipporah's death, the latter is probably the case. As the daughter of Jethro, a Midianite, she would not likely be called an Ethiopian.

There is no indication that God disapproved of Moses' marriage, but He certainly disapproved of Miriam and Aaron's revolt about it. Miriam, seemingly the leader, was struck with severe leprosy. At Aaron's pleading, Moses prayed for Miriam and God healed her, after banishing her outside the camp for a week (12:9-15). Moses' leadership was reconfirmed, but the worst was still to come.

God told the people to move on—on to the Promised Land, and despite the people's churlishness, Moses intended to do so. At God's instructions (13:1-2), Moses chose 12 princes, one from each tribe, and sent them into Canaan on a spy mission. They were told to go up from the south to "the mountain," probably meaning Mt. Hermon, in the far north. The word these men brought back about how well fortified the cities were, how strong the people, and so forth would be the basis for Moses' military plans for taking the land.

The men did the spying as directed, but they brought back an "evil report" (13:32). They described the land as they saw it, saying "it surely floweth with milk and honey" as told God us. But they also added their fears. Many people have difficulty distinguishing between the facts they see and the emotions they feel, and these men had a severe case of this disability. They said the cities are great and walled; we can not take the land; the people are strong and there are giants there; they make us look like grasshoppers in their sight. What a confusion of fact and emotion!

Two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, tried to reason with the people, argued that they could take the land with God's help, and that they should do so immediately. The crowd would not listen. Instead, they spent a whole night of weeping and self-pity. "Why has the Lord brought us into this land, to fall by the sword," they said, "so that our wives and children should be a prey?" (14:3). They actually tried to organize and elect a captain to take them back to Egypt. God was angry and on the verge of destroying the whole nation but Moses prayed for the people and God relented from total destruction but not from punishment. He asked Moses to tell the people that all those men who had refused to go up and take the land, those from 20 years old and upward, would die in the wilderness and never see the Promised Land.

Thus the nation was doomed to the infamous 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

Israel's Further Spiritual Decline

Israel's hold on faith in God and its own spirituality had always been precarious, but from this point the nation seemed to go into a spiritual free-fall. After God's announcement of their punishment, they decided to go in and try to take the land after all. God told them they would not succeed, but they hastily organized against Moses' orders and engaged the Canaanite army that, by this time, had suspected Israel's intentions. They were quickly and soundly defeated.

The history of the nation's wandering is sketchy from this point. A record of the places they camped is given, but several of the places named can not be determined with confidence. There also seem to be lengthy periods between some moves with little or no activity reported. Because of the many rebellious events, this makes the nation's history appear as one long, downhill slide.

A man was caught breaking the Sabbath law by gathering wood for a fire on that day (15:32-36). Apparently this was the first such infraction since the law was given because even Moses did not know what the punishment should be. They put the man under guard until God advised them that he must be stoned to death. But the worst problem was a rebellion against Moses and Aaron led by three men, named Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who had persuaded 250 other leaders of the tribes to join them (chapter 16). They seemed to be trying to bring about a democratically selected leadership group that represented all tribes. Moses, a man whose patience and meekness were legendary, angrily engineered a confrontation in which God caused the earth to open up and swallow alive the men and their families. A plague then destroyed 14,000 of those who had aided and abetted the three.

To show whose leadership He respected, God asked each tribe to select a prince and have him bring to Moses a staff, a walkingstick, with his name written on it. Aaron's name was written on the staff for the tribe of Levi (17:1-11). The rods were placed inside the tabernacle overnight with instructions that the one that sprouted live buds would identify God's leader. When the staffs were brought out the next day, Aaron's rod had budded, blossomed, and even grown ripe almonds. Paul mentions this incident (Hebrews 9:4), which is commonly accepted as a symbol of how Jesus would grow up as a tender shoot from the rod of Jesse to lead God's people (Isaiah 11:1 and 53:2). In the New Testament, the rebellion of Korah and his followers is compared to Christians who pervert the doctrine of God (Jude, verses 1-11).

Moses' Great Mistake

The twentieth chapter of Numbers opens with the Israelites back at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin, where they were when the spies were sent out. Apparently they had made a large circle in the desert. Miriam died and was buried at Kadesh (20:1). The people continued their murmuring, again because there was no water. This time they clamored against Moses (20:3-13) so hard that he “lost his cool” and made a terrible mistake. God told him to speak to the rock in the presence of the people and it would bring forth water. Moses spoke to the rock and also smote it twice with his rod. The rock burst out with water; but God condemned Moses and Aaron for adding to His commandment and said they would not be allowed to go into the Promised Land.

This incident has been a major stumbling block for many Christians. The punishment seems too harsh for the “crime.” After all, Moses was frustrated and we can understand why. His record of service was impeccable to this point; why not overlook this one mistake? But when we judge God—an exceptionally dangerous business—we demonstrate our ignorance.

God wanted Moses to glorify Him with complete obedience, which would at the same time lift up Moses in the eyes of the people. Bringing forth water with a word alone would surely enhance the respect of the people for his word. Jesus acknowledged this principle when He praised the great faith of the centurion who said the Lord did not need to come to his house to heal his servant. “Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed” (Matthew 8:8).

But there was another, perhaps more important, reason for God’s action. Moses’ actions symbolized things to come. Paul tells us what they were. He said, all our fathers “were baptized into Moses in the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat [manna]; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (I Corinthians 10:1-3).

The picture Paul sketches is a beautiful one. The Israelites’ facing death from thirst in the wilderness represents all men’s facing eternal death in the desert of their sins. The Rock is Jesus. Moses’ smiting the Rock the first time represented Jesus’ crucifixion. The water that came forth represents the gospel, our water of life (John 4:10-14). A beautiful picture, yes; but what if Moses’ smiting the Rock two additional times had been allowed to stand? It would have meant that Jesus had to be crucified two additional times! Paul tells us that the acts of worship performed on earth are representatives of what takes place in heaven (Hebrews

8:5). How careful men should be not to change God's patterns!

Summary

The two Biblical books discussed in this chapter, Leviticus and Numbers, contain important lessons for Christians. Leviticus teaches how God sees sin. Touching any unclean thing required cleansing, just as sin requires forgiveness. One example portrays beautifully the guilt and hope represented by the laws on clean and unclean things. Childbirth made Israelite women unclean and required purification. The pain of birth depicts the sorrow of sins, but the pain is soon forgotten with the joy of a new life, which represents being cleansed (I Timothy 2:15). The birth of every child contained the promise of the redeemer who was to bring, and has brought, new life to all mankind. Jesus tenderly explained this in John 16:21. "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world."

The book of Numbers teaches us that God has plans for man that will work wonders if man will follow them. Refusing to follow them always brings disaster. God would have brought Israel from Egypt to Canaan in about a year. Instead, by stubbornness and rebellion, they stretched the wilderness journey into 40 years. The question for us is how long will it take us to learn to submit to the Lord, to become truly spiritual? Will we be able to do it in a year, or will we stretch our "training period" into 40 years? Will many of us fall along the wayside and never make it at all to the Promised Land?

CHAPTER 16

Moses' Farewell Address

The book of Deuteronomy opens with the Israelites camped in the Plains of Moab at the northern end of the Dead Sea just across the Jordan River from Canaan. The city of Jericho was probably within sight. The people were flushed with victories in their encounters with their enemies thus far, and no doubt eager to get on with taking the Promised Land. But there was a fly in this sweet-smelling ointment. Moses must die before the people went farther. He had asked God to relent from the punishment placed on him for striking the rock in the desert of Zin (Numbers 20:12), and God refused (3:25). They must watch their leader and benefactor of 40 years go upon Mt. Nebo and never come down.

Scripture readings for this chapter: the book of Deuteronomy. References in this text will be in parent chapter and verse only, i.e (3:25).

This was a difficult parting. It is always harder to get over the loss of an intense and troubled relationship than a purely pleasant one, whether the separation is by divorce, death, or whatever means. Moses was afraid to leave the people. He remembered that he went upon another mountain 40 years ago and in little more than a month the people turned to idolatry. What would happen now when they knew he would be gone for good? The people were surely riddled with guilt. They knew they had not treated Moses well. Since that day in Egypt 80 years earlier when Moses left Pharaoh's palace thinking it was time to lead the people out of slavery, they had rejected him, complained against him, and made his job harder. It was frustration over their faithlessness that caused him to strike the rock.

If we read closely we can see traces of all these painful years in Moses' farewell address. Before we are carried away with the emotion, however, let us step back and enter our study more deliberately.

The opening verse of Deuteronomy tells us, "These are the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red Sea, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth,

and Dizahab.” Some of these places can not be identified with confidence, but it is certain that they speak of Israel’s journeys on the west side of the Dead Sea, not in the Plains of Moab on the east side. But verse 5 tells us, “On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law saying.”

Although critics have argued over these verses, there is no contradiction. The answer is that Moses taught the people the law when they left Sinai and were traveling toward Kadesh where they first were supposed to take Canaan. And he taught the law again in Moab as they faced the task they refused to do before. The word deuteronomy means a second law or, more properly, a second giving of the law. The two presentations of it described in these passages are the reason the book is named Deuteronomy.

More than a Second Reading of the Law

We are mistaken, however, if we think Deuteronomy is “only” a second reading of the law. Moses was a different person from the one he was when he started with these people as a young man of about 39. His heart was to do the will of God then, but he lacked the wisdom, confidence, and patience that came from experience. He gave the law this time with the passion of a father speaking directly to his children.

Deuteronomy was written to the people, to their hearts, unlike Leviticus which was principally for the priests. There are everyday applications and interpretations that are not contained any place else in the Old Testament. This is the reason that Deuteronomy is quoted in the New Testament 83 times, more than any other O.T. book. Only six books in the New Testament contain no quotations from it. All three responses Jesus made to the devil during the temptation are from Deuteronomy. When Satan urged Jesus to turn stones into bread (Matthew 4:4), Jesus answered, “It is written, ‘man shall not live by bread alone,’” Deuteronomy 8:3. For the second temptation the Lord referred the devil to Deuteronomy 6:16, and in response to the third, to 6:13-14.

Something for 21st Century Christians

Deuteronomy has teachings of use and interest to all Christians, even those with special interests—assuming those special interests are legitimate. For example, environmentalists will be glad Moses forbade wanton destruction of trees, even in time of war (20:19-20). Animal lovers will note that Moses outlawed the killing of a mother bird and her chicks (22:6-7), and stated that an

ox could not be muzzled while it was made to tread out the grain (25:4). Apparently it was deemed “cruel and unusual punishment” to make a hungry animal work with grain and not be able to eat. It was probably passages like these that made Solomon say, “A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast” (Proverbs 12:10).

Those who are concerned about social responsibility will be interested to know that Moses required those who built new homes to put railings around the roofs to prevent young children and others from falling (22:8). The flat roofs of houses were used for many things in that hot climate, especially in the evenings. They needed to be built in a responsible way.

Parents are taught how to effectively teach their children. “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (6:6-7).

These instructions embody one of the most respected principles in child training, viz to teach the lessons at the times they are most relevant to the child. We can imagine, for example, a Hebrew mother walking along the way with her young son who is eager to practice his skill with a sling. He spies a bird’s nest and the mother bird is a close and easy shot. The mother affirms his developing skill but restrains his urgency, talks with him about the law, about the mother bird who loves her young as she loves him, and about the fact that the little birds would die if the mother bird is killed. Such an example could be straight out of a child psychology text.

Paul tells us that these homely laws, that relate to small and everyday matters, also have a higher purpose. For example, he applies the command not to muzzle oxen that tread the grain to preachers of the gospel being supported for the spiritual work they do (I Corinthians 9:9-11).

The Point of Reference

The spiritual point of reference for Moses’ farewell address was symbolized by the geographical campsite at the time, the Plains of Moab by the Jordan River near Jericho (1:5, see also Numbers 36:13). This was the last camping site of Israel before they went in to take Canaan. But it was more than a campsite; it was a spiritual position. They had refused to take the land once. If they failed

again, Moses would not be there to “stand in the breach” between them and God. Before them lay the “land that flowed with milk and honey,” and all the blessings of nationhood God had promised. It was a point of no return, a do or die situation. Israel’s success or failure here had implications for all of mankind.

We believe that Moses knew, perhaps vaguely, that Israel must succeed for themselves and for those gentile nations that hovered around them looking on with evil eyes. All nations being blessed in Abraham meant that his seed had first to become a great nation. Moses wanted the people to learn from their mistakes and be conscious of the glorious mission that lay ahead.

A Review of Their History

The first three chapters of Deuteronomy are a review of their history of the last forty years. Israel’s mistakes and shortcomings are pointed out in merciless detail. This is followed in chapter 4 with an exhortation to obedience based on how fortunate they were. Ask, he said, of the days past. Was ever a people so blessed as we? Did ever a people hear the voice of God speaking out of fire and live? Did God ever take a people out of a great nation for His own peculiar heritage? And the Lord did all this that you should know that He alone is God (4:32-35).

Then Moses restated the 10 commandment law as given to the people the first time. Deuteronomy chapter 5 is almost a carbon copy of Exodus chapter 20. There is a strong emphasis on the covenant nature of the law, that it was voluntarily given by God and voluntarily accepted to by Israel. “The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day. The Lord talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire” (5:2-4).

Moses’ wisdom in emphasizing the contractual nature of the law was surely inspired because it was too far ahead of its time to be from human wisdom. Therapists used to think it was useless and insulting to ask troubled persons to behave better. Now we know that our strongest therapeutic tool is a contract, an agreement in which the counselor chooses one specific self-destructive behavior and asks the patient to change it to a better one. If the patient makes that covenant, the likelihood that he will keep it and get better is high. Moses wanted this new generation of Israelites, who were too young to participate in the first covenant, to make a commitment to be obedient to God’s law. He even planned a ceremony in which the covenant would be renewed after they settled in Canaan

(11:29-32 and 27:11-26).

Moses' Worries about Idolatry

The misbehavior Moses worried about most was a return of the Israelites to idolatry. The people had brought the idols of Egypt with them in their hearts (Ezekiel 20:7-18), and perhaps in their knapsacks. This generation had grown up in the wilderness where they were not closely associated with others who worshipped idols. But in Canaan all the nations were wholly given to idolatry. A fear of the influence these peoples might have on Israel was the basis for a number of the commandments given in Deuteronomy.

Israel was ordered to make no covenants with the Canaanites (7:1-2). They generally kept this commandment during the early settlement years, but they allowed themselves to be tricked into a peace treaty with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:3-20), which came back to haunt them. Paul probably had these commands in mind when he told Christians the temple of God has no agreements with idols (II Corinthians 6:14-16).

Even more than treaties, Moses was concerned that the Israelites make no marriages with the Canaanites (7:3-4). He knew that within this intimate relationship, Israelite men and women could be turned to idols. The nation did not do well on this score. Even King Solomon married many foreign wives, probably to form political alliances at first, and had his heart turned away from the true God by them. "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father" (I Kings 11:4). How sad to think that probably some of King Solomon's own children were sacrificed to idols in the shrines he built on the western side of the Mt. of Olives for his idolatrous wives!

The Final Countdown

The final countdown of Moses' life seems to begin in chapter 28. There he painstakingly numerated the blessings that would come on those who obeyed God, and then in gruesome detail described the curses that would befall those who did not. In both cases, the list is thorough beyond what most persons would have imagined. The curses are especially frightening. They would be cursed individually. "The Lord will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed.

The Lord will smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart” (28:27-28). And they would be cursed as a nation. “Thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee” (28:37).

Moses clearly spoke with prophetic vision for he described the ultimate captivity of the people when God’s patience completely ran out. “The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young” (28:49-50). This prophecy came to pass in 722 B.C. when Assyria carried Israel away captive, and in 586 B.C. when Babylon captured and sacked Jerusalem and made slaves of the people of Judea.

The following chapter contains another plea for the people to enter into a covenant with Jehovah, and after the list of curses that has gone before, who would dare not do it? “Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day” (29:10-12).

The main part of Moses’ address is concluded in chapter 30 with a dramatic call “to life or death.” “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; in that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments, and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (30:15-19).

The Leadership of Israel Transferred to Joshua

When Moses finished his address, God told him to bring Joshua to the tabernacle so that He could make the transfer of leadership official. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thy days approach that thou must die: call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of the congregation, that I may give him

a charge.” (31:14). Joshua had already been ordained, as is recorded in Numbers 27:15-20, and Moses had given Joshua his personal charge (31:7-8). God seems to want to make it known to the people that He too had accepted Joshua’s leadership.

When the two men went into the tabernacle, the pillar of cloud that represented God’s presence covered the tabernacle. This cloud, called the Shekinah, was like a great and good friend that had been with the Israelites since they crossed the Red Sea. It had visibly directed their every move, but now it would not be seen again. There is no record of its appearance after this point. We do not know whether the Israelites were aware at the time that this was its last appearance. If they were, they must have feared and mourned its loss as much as that of Moses.

As readers of the Old Testament, we should not be surprised that the Shekinah left with Moses. On three occasions God promised to go with Moses as he led the people from Egypt to Canaan (Exodus 3:12, 13:21-22, and 33:14-17). The cloud was His fulfillment of that promise. We have been told that God dealt with Moses in a different and more familiar way than any other leader or prophet. The Shekinah is a symbol of God’s closeness to Moses. Since Moses represented the Messiah, the Shekinah symbolized God’s closeness to Christ.

There is another reason that we could have expected the cloud to depart. It was given to lead the people through the desert to the Promised Land. It was God’s means of assuring that they did not lose their way; that they moved when and where He wanted. Now they had arrived. They could see Canaan from where they were camped in the Plains of Moab. The disappearance of the cloud did not mean that God had abandoned the people, but it did signify that His guidance of them from this point forward would be by a different means. We will see what that method is and note its meaning for us when Joshua takes the nation across the Jordan.

The specific charge God gave to Joshua is not given. Instead He told Moses to write down a song to teach to the people, a song that would be a witness against them if they should betray Him and go after other gods (32:1-43). The song is the last words of Moses that are recorded. After this Moses is spoken of in the third person, so another person, probably Joshua, took over the authorship of Deuteronomy (32:44-50).

The last act of Moses with the people was his blessing of the individual tribes

(chapter 33), which is reminiscent of the blessings Jacob gave to his 12 sons, the fathers of the tribes, just before he died in Egypt (Genesis 49). As we would expect, the two sets of blessings are comparable in many ways.

Then, “Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho” (34:1). The Lord invited Moses to look at all the land He planned to give the descendants of Jacob. The writer stated that Moses could see it, from the land given to Naphtali near the Sea of Galilee in the north to the city of Zoar at the southern end of the Dead Sea. This was a total distance of about 150 miles or 75 miles each way. Ordinarily a person can not see well for that distance, even if we allow that the atmosphere was not cluttered with smog from industrial pollutants. We have reason to believe God helped Moses’ vision. He said, “I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither” (34:4).

After viewing the Promised Land Moses died. In the simple, low-key way of Bible writers we are told, “So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord” (34:5). Moses was 120 years old. His eyes were not dim nor was “his natural force abated.”

How does a healthy man simply die? There was no disease, no violence; Moses just died. We think Jesus gave the answer (Matthew 4:4) when talking with the devil on the Mt. of Temptation. Satan’s argument went something like this: “You have not eaten for forty days; you are about to die. If you are the Son of God, command these stones to be made bread and eat.” Jesus’ answer was from Moses’ own words (8:3). “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” Perhaps we could paraphrase Jesus’ response like this: “Man does not live or die by whether his stomach is full or empty. He lives every day by the power of God, and at God’s word he will die whether full or empty, whether sick or well.” God just spoke the word and the spirit of Moses, the man of God, was called home. God buried his body in a valley in the land of Moab.

Summary

With this chapter we close what is commonly called the Pentateuch, meaning the first five books of the Bible. They cover momentous events in the lives of humans on earth. God created man in His image; man recreated himself in the image of Satan. God chose a people and saved them from a slavery into which they had willingly gone. He made a great nation of them, in order to show the

world who He is and how to receive His blessings. He appeared to that nation and promised to give them a good land of their own. They now stand at the door of that country, looking inside.

If we are willing, we can learn from these events. The God who walked with man from the Garden of Eden to the Plains of Moab, will hold our hand if we will allow Him. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It is man who changes, as if propelled to do so by the march of the seasons.

Great events have taken place in the lives of the Israelites, but equally momentous ones are ahead. No event affected the history of the world more than Joshua's leading the people into Canaan. We will live with the nation through which God promised to bless the rest of the world—see their trials and triumphs—in the chapters ahead.

CHAPTER 17

The Conquest of Canaan

No event changed the course of human history more than Israel's crossing of the Jordan River under the leadership of Joshua. The nation had murmured, stumbled, and even rebelled in their 40-year trek from Egypt. In spite of this, God brought them to the place He promised their forefathers hundreds of years earlier. God's patience was because He loved Israel and because He intended for Israel to bless all mankind.

Scripture readings for this chapter: the book of Joshua. References in this text will be in parentheses; chapter and verse only, i.e. (2:1).

Soon after the death of Moses, God spoke to Joshua saying, "Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel" (Joshua 1:2). God followed this command with an outline of the land He had devoted to the people. It was to be from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea on the west and from Lebanon in the north to Egypt in the south.

Joshua sent two men to reconnoiter Jericho, a strong and walled city just a few miles inside Canaan (2:1). The spies looked over the city and lodged in the house of a harlot named Rahab. Some Christians are offended by the spies' choice of a place to stay, but they need not be. In that idolatrous society, prostitution was a respectable occupation, and their houses were often the nearest things to hotels to be found. The choice was also a good one for strategic reasons. By this time the people of Jericho understood Israel's intent, so they were wary of strangers. A harlot's house was the least suspicious place they could go.

Rahab proved to be a wise woman and an excellent ally. Like everyone else in Jericho, she had heard what Jehovah did for the Israelites in Egypt and to the kings they had conquered on the east side of Jordan. Instead of continuing to trust in her idol gods, she came to a wise decision based on the information she had.

“The Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (2:11). Rahab hid the spies, deceived the officials who came looking for them, and sent them safely back to Joshua. In return she asked the lives of herself and her family when Jericho was destroyed. Rahab’s faith in God apparently remained strong, for she married a Hebrew man named Salmon, became a great, great grandmother of King David and an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:5-6).

Crossing the Jordan

This was Joshua’s first time to move the nation. Under Moses we would have expected the move to be signaled by the Shekinah rising from off the tabernacle. But as noted in the last chapter, we will not see the cloud of God’s presence again. Instead, Joshua commanded the people, “When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it” (3:3).

From this point onward, the Israelites followed the ark of the covenant instead of the cloud. The ark contained the tables of stone on which God had written the 10 commandment law. This fact signals the meaning of these events for us. We believe the Shekinah foreshadowed the special work of the Holy Spirit in the early days of Christianity. Like the Shekinah, the Spirit provided special guidance and powers to the infant church, and similar to the Shekinah, this special measure of the Spirit was for a specific purpose and a limited time (I Corinthians 12:31 and 13:8-11). When the New Testament was completed and confirmed, the special gifts of guidance ceased and we now follow the written Word.

When the feet of the priests who were carrying the ark of the covenant touched the waters of the Jordan, it parted in a manner reminiscent of the Red Sea with Moses. The waters that flowed from above “stood up in a heap,” and those that were below flowed away to the Dead Sea, so that the people crossed over on dry land. This was more impressive because the river was in flood stage (3:15). It still floods at that time of year. Joshua had a prince from each of the 12 tribes to take a large stone from near the place where the priests stood with the ark while the people crossed. With the stones, he erected a monument at Gilgal, their first campsite inside Canaan (4:3 and 4:20).

This crossing of the Jordan is the mental vision of the river that is fixed in Christians’ minds. It explains why the Jordan is described in Christian song and story as “muddy, deep, and wide.” That is a realistic picture as it was at the

height of the annual floods when Joshua crossed. When Christians go to Israel in the dry season and find it a mild-mannered stream that would not require a miracle to cross, they are likely to be surprised.

One of Joshua's first tasks after the people were safely camped in Gilgal was to circumcise all the men (5:1-9). This was preparation for worshipping God in the eating of the Passover. The law (Exodus 12:48) said that no uncircumcised male could eat it. Those men who came out of Egypt had been circumcised by Moses, but the generation that was born in the wilderness had not. When it was finished, God said, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off of you" (5:9).

The day after the Passover, the people ate the produce of the land, probably from fields the Canaanites deserted in fright when the nation came in. The following day the manna that had sustained them for 40 years in the wilderness ceased to come. The spiritual symbolism here is clear and beautiful. Jesus is our manna, the true bread of life that came down from heaven (John 6:30-40). Our manna too will cease to feed us when we cross into our Promised Land, heaven. There we will feed on the bread of that "land," which is the tree of life (Revelation 22:2).

Joshua's Special Visitor

While the nation was camped at Gilgal, Joshua looked across the way and saw a man standing with a drawn sword (5:13-15). Joshua approached the stranger and asked, "are you for us, or for our adversaries?" The man responded, "Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I come." Joshua fell down and worshipped and the man said, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy."

In some ways this is a strange vision. It leaves us wishing for verbal guidance about the meaning. The message, we think, is in the symbolism. The command to Joshua to remove his shoes reminds us of Moses' vision in Exodus 3, when God spoke to him out of the burning bush and said almost identical words. But the context of the vision was different. The voice of God coming from the burning bush was symbolic of God being with the Israelites in their affliction in Egypt, an appropriate setting to promise Moses that He would lead them out. This vision came to Joshua just before he began the conquest of Canaan. The drawn sword is a symbol of victory, a promise of success in the coming campaigns. But there is more.

Joshua asked the stranger whether he was their ally or adversary. The man replied that he was neither, but that he had come as captain of the Lord's army. The message is that the battles Joshua and Israel were about to fight were not theirs, but the Lord's. The Lord would not go with them to help them; rather they would go with Him and be under His command. The message was important for the Israelites, and it is important for those who read about Israel's wars with the Canaanites.

Some people read about the conquest of Canaan and chafe at the total destruction of men, women, and children. They consider Joshua and the Israelites cruel and inhumane. We should remember that God led them to this place, and it was His decision to destroy these nations. Israel's main mistake in the conquest was that they did not do as complete a job as God asked of them. It is also a mistake to assume that God ordered the destruction of these nations just to give Israel the land. The destruction was a judgment on those nations because of their wickedness, similar to that on Sodom and Gomorrah.

When God first spoke to Abraham about the Promised Land, He told him the promise would not be fulfilled for 400 years because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Genesis 15:16). This statement suggests that if the Canaanites had repented during that time, they would not have been destroyed nor their land taken away. God would have provided another land that flowed with milk and honey for the Israelites. Furthermore, God told the Israelites that His actions were because of the wickedness of those nations. He also warned Israel that if they committed similar sins they would see the same fate. Specifying the abominable practices He had in mind, such as child sacrifices, He said, "for all who do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God will drive them out from before you" (Deuteronomy 18:12, see also 9:4-6, and 20:17-18).

Such signal acts of God's judgment throughout history are intended to be warnings to those who come afterward (II Peter 2:4-10). Each example is just a down payment on the final judgment of all the world at the end of time.

Taking Jericho

God's instructions for taking Jericho were: Put seven priests with trumpets at the head of the column. Follow these with the ark of the covenant, and then the regular soldiers. Have the column to march around the city once a day for six

days. On the seventh day they shall go around seven times. At the conclusion of the seventh circuit, have the priests to blow the trumpets and the people to shout.

Only God could make such battle plans, and only He could make them work. He wanted the people to know who gave them the victory. As odd as the plan may have seemed, it worked. At the people's shout, the great walls of Jericho fell down flat. The army marched in, every man straight ahead; not a soldier had to detour around a patch of wall left standing. The army completely destroyed the city (6:21), and Joshua cursed it, saying anyone who tried to rebuild Jericho would sacrifice his youngest son in laying the foundation and his eldest in setting up the gates.

Joshua's fame as a leader mushroomed and the nation was confident in victory. But a seed of evil had been planted. One of the soldiers violated God's order not to take spoils.

Ai, just a few miles northwest of Jericho, was the next city to be taken. Joshua sent spies who came back and reported that the whole army was not needed in that effort. Two or three thousand men could take Ai, they said, because the city was small and the people weak. A contingent of 3,000 soldiers was sent and quickly defeated. Joshua wept before the Lord, inquiring why God had not been with them at Ai. God replied that Israel had disobeyed Him by taking spoils from Jericho. He told them how to find the guilty person, who turned out to be Achan of the tribe of Judah (7:1). The people put Achan to death and destroyed all his goods, including the gold, silver, and so forth that he had stolen.

Why did God put the whole nation through all that trouble when only Achan was guilty? The main reason, we believe, is that the nation needed the lesson. The army marched off to Ai confident in victory and apparently without inquiring of God about the battle. They boasted that only a small part of the army would be needed to take that insignificant city. They needed to know that without God they could do nothing; and with Him no city could stand before them. Solomon expressed it well, "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

The nation learned from the experience. With a sober attitude and God leading the way, they returned and captured Ai handily. After Ai, Joshua brought the army back to camp at Gilgal in order to take care of religious business ordered by Moses in Deuteronomy (27:2-14). Moses told the people to gather in the valley between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal and have the blessings promised to the

people for obedience read from Gerizim, and the curses for disobedience read from Ebal. This required the people to travel about 25 miles north to a point near the city of Shechem. God told them they could not worship Him in any place except those He designated (Deuteronomy 12:2-5).

Joshua built an altar of natural stones as God said (Exodus 20:25), and offered peace offerings on it. Then from the sides of the mountains, he read the complete law given to Moses. “There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them” (8:35).

The Southern Confederacy

The things that Joshua and the Israelites did were carefully watched by the Canaanite tribes. After the defeats of Jericho and Ai, the main kings of the city-states in the southern part of the country came together in a great confederacy to fight Israel (9:1-2). If one king could not defeat Joshua, surely five kings could. So far as we know, only one southern kingdom, the people of Gibeon, did not join this confederacy.

The Gibeonites, like Rahab, sensed that there was a power working with Israel that was too great for them to withstand. They also seemed to know that Joshua would not make a treaty with tribes within the territory he intended to take (Exodus 23:32-33). So they disguised themselves as travelers from a far country and tricked Joshua and the elders of Israel into making a treaty with them (9:3-27). When the people discovered their mistake, they would not go back on the oath of their treaty, so Joshua reduced the Gibeonites to servitude. Many years later, King Saul killed some of them in a fit of patriotism and the nation was cursed because of it (II Samuel 21:1-5).

The kings of the confederacy attacked Gibeon because of their treaty with Israel. Gibeon appealed to Joshua for help, and he marched the army all night in order to get there before Gibeon was attacked. This was a significant hike, a distance of about 30 miles. The Lord promised Joshua the battle, and he made a slaughter of Israel's enemies. As they fled, God caused a great hailstorm to overtake them, so that more enemy soldiers were killed by hailstones than by the Israelite army. During the chase, Joshua asked God to let the sun stand still so that night would not give refuge to his enemies (10:12). The prayer was answered. “There was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel” (10:14).

The confederacy of southern kings had hoped to do away with Israel once and for all. Instead they played into Israel's hands. It would have taken Joshua much longer to defeat these kings one by one. As it was, the real control of the country in the south was secured with one lightening-like strike. The army returned as victors to the camp at Gilgal for a much-needed respite.

The Northern Confederacy

The army's rest was not for long. The kings that still hoped to defeat Israel were now more worried than ever. Jabin, King of Hazor, which was in the far north of Israel near Mt. Hermon, put together a huge confederacy of all the kings of the north and west, perhaps as many as 16 rulers. Not only was this combined force larger than the one in the south, they were better equipped with horses, war chariots, and so forth. They gathered at the Waters of Merom, which was between the Sea of Galilee and Mt. Hermon.

Again God promised Joshua the victory. "Be not afraid because of them: for tomorrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel" (11:6). Joshua obviously preferred to surprise his enemies so he "fell on them suddenly" by the Waters of Merom. Those who were not killed, he pursued as far as Sidon which was outside the borders of what was to become Israel. He then return and burned Hazor. This was an unusual move because Hazor was built on a mound (for protection) and such cities Joshua ordinarily kept for the people to inhabit. Perhaps he wanted to send a message to any other king in the north who might wish to attack Israel.

The back of the enemy was now broken in the whole of Israel. There were still strong pockets of resistance to be dealt with in the north and south (10:20), but these retreated into walled cities and gave Israel no trouble for a time. Joshua knew that the army of any particular tribe could take care of them on their own when the people were settled in the land; this seemed to be what God promised in a special statement to Joshua (13:6). The people needed to get on with settlement, building homes, planting fields, and so forth. They had defeated the kings of 31 city-states (12:9-24), which gave the people rest from war. After a hiccup or two at the beginning, the nation had performed brilliantly during the conquest. It was another of their glorious hours.

Some Bible critics claim there are conflicting stories of the conquest, one in Joshua of lightening strikes and victories and another in Judges of struggles and

defeats. But these are the voices of those who look for flaws, not of seekers for truth. God and Joshua knew there were more battles to fight and much work to be done. To Joshua God said, “Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed” (13:1). He continued with an outline of the fields yet to conquer. The successes of Joshua’s unified army from all the tribes were real. The defeats described in Judges were defeats of one or a few tribes as they dealt with Canaanite peoples not destroyed in Joshua’s conquests. And their struggles were not because the Canaanites were strong, but because the Israelites fell into idolatry and God forsook them.

Dividing the Land

The time had come to parcel out the land to tribes and families, the fulfillment of God’s promise of so long ago. The promise had been renewed to each succeeding generation and even implied in special events, such as Jacob’s blessings of his sons before his death (Genesis 49). Joshua had pitched the tabernacle at Shiloh, north of Gilgal, about half way between Jerusalem and Shechem. He gathered the tribes there and, at the door of the tabernacle, he, Eleazar the priest, and the elders of Israel drew lots for the assignments of land. The full story is given, with the boundaries of each tribe’s inheritance, in Joshua chapters 13 through 19.

It was a momentous occasion, and Joshua wanted the people to savor its importance. He reminded them that the Lord had given them all the land He promised to their fathers (21:43). Furthermore, “there failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel; all came to pass.”

When the division of land was complete, God asked Joshua to appoint cities of refuge (20:1-2). These cities, three on either side of the Jordan and located for easy accessibility, were for the protection of anyone who killed a person by accident. Together they are believed to represent the church of today, and individually the congregations of the church. There are beautiful parallels to be drawn between them and the church. The elders of these cities were charged with protecting accidental killers and providing them with a fair trial.

Joshua also provided for the Levites. This tribe was not given a body of land as were the others. God told Aaron that he and his descendants would not inherit land (Numbers 18:20), instead He, God, would be their inheritance. Their special duties of attending the tabernacle and administering and teaching the law required special provisions. For one thing, they needed to live among all tribes.

Thus Joshua gave them cities to live in that were scattered throughout Israel (chapter 21). The tithes assessed on all Israelites went mainly for the support of the Levites.

The men of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, who were given land on the east side of Jordan, were released to go home (22:1-6). They had promised Moses that they would remain with the army until the land for all tribes was secure. Their commitment was finished, so Joshua blessed them and sent them away. On the way, the men reflected on their choice of a homeland. The tabernacle, the only place of true worship of Jehovah, would always be on the opposite side of the river. Perhaps one day the other tribes would claim the river was a boundary between them and that they had no part in worshipping their God.

The men of the eastern tribes decided to erect, at the Jordan, a replica of the altar that was in front of the tabernacle. If the western tribes ever challenged their right to worship at the tabernacle, they could say, "See, we know Jehovah, and this copy of the altar that is at the tabernacle is our witness" (22:21-29). Word got back to Shiloh of what the eastern tribes were doing, but as is often the case, something was lost in the transmission. Western Israelites thought the easterners had built an unauthorized place of worship.

The nine tribes rose in righteous indignation against their brethren, prepared, if necessary, to use force to put down the false worship. Joshua sent Phinehas the priest and princes of the tribes to see about the matter. When they found that the altar was only for a witness and not for worship, they were content and blessed their brethren. Would that all religious problems could be settled with such maturity! We still consider a knowledge of true worship to be evidence of knowing the true God.

Death of the conqueror

Joshua was now old and the time had come for him to die. He, as did Moses, worried about what would become of the people. Like his great mentor, he too called the people together and charged them to be faithful to Jehovah. "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth..." (24:14), forerunners of Jesus' words in John 4:23-24. Joshua was buried on his own land, a special inheritance given him for his faithfulness when he and Caleb alone, among the 12 spies, brought back a true report (Numbers 13). Apparently the bones of Joseph, brought out of Egypt at his request (Genesis 50:24-25), were

buried at the same time.

Summary

Israel has achieved statehood. Slaves have freed themselves from the dictator of a powerful nation. They have walked through a great desert with little preparation and no special equipment. They have defeated nations that were well-armed and experienced in war. We can understand Moses' exaltation: "Ask now of days that are past. Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of fire, as thou hast heard.? Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders.? Unto you it was showed, that thou mightest know that the Lord, he is God" (Deuteronomy 4:32-35).

Israel's taking Canaan from wicked nations at the direction of the Lord is symbolic of our battles with Satan. Paul said that our war is not with flesh and blood, but with the spiritual forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12). By teaching people the truth, we enter Satan's 'land' and spoil his goods (Matthew 12:29). Each soul saved is one soldier of the Devil that is captured and made a soldier for the Lord. As was true with the Israelites in their capture of Canaan, God has not promised to give us the victory all at once (Deuteronomy 7:22). But as certainly as we are faithful to Him, the victory will be ours.

CHAPTER 18

Living Without a Leader

When Moses was about to die, God asked him to anoint Joshua as the new leader of Israel (Deuteronomy 31:14). After Moses' death, God nudged Joshua into actually taking the leadership role (Joshua 1:1-2). Who took the lead in selecting Joshua's replacement? No one; there was no national leader after Joshua. This was not an oversight on God's part. It signaled a change in the way He intended to do business with Israel.

Scripture readings for this chapter: the book of Judges. References in this text will be in parentheses; chapter and verse only, i.e (2:1).

We might miss this important point if we plunge immediately into reading about the struggles of the tribes described in the book of Judges. Alert to it, we see the change in the first verse of the book. "Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the Lord, saying, who shall go up against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?" Note that the "children of Israel" inquired directly of the Lord and He answered. Earlier this would have been done by Moses or Joshua.

No national leader was installed during the long period of the judges, probably over 400 years. This changed in the latter days of Samuel the prophet (I Samuel 8:1-7), when the people demanded a king. At that time, God said, "they have rejected me that I should not reign over them." Instead of working through a single leader, note how often in the book of Judges God spoke directly to the nation. Sometimes He spoke to a great assembly (2:1-4), and often to ordinary persons who carried messages to, or performed services for, the nation.

At Sinai many years earlier, God addressed the people, but they became frightened and asked Him not to do so (Exodus 20:19). He had given them a second chance to secure this wonderful blessing.

The theme of the book of Judges is the nation's struggles to relate to Jehovah without a strong leader to run interference for them. Their struggles with the

Canaanite tribes are secondary, not the primary theme. Had they ever gotten right their relationship with God, short work would have been made of the enemy. This theme is clearly stated several times: “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (17:6, 18:1, and 21:25). The point here is not simply that there was no king—God had made it obvious He did not want them to have one—but that the people did not unite in obedience to God’s word. Each man became a law to himself.

God’s Method of Government

What type of government did God want for Israel? He wanted a personal relationship with the people that was molded by the covenant He made with them. That law covered religious and civil matters. Each tribe had elders who were empowered to settle intratribal disputes, and the priests were available to teach and interpret the law. The tribes lived independently, but in times of crisis two or more tribes could cooperate under temporary leadership (1:3). When national emergencies arose, God provided “deliverers,” called judges. What need had they for an earthly king? Their real king was in heaven.

In addition to avoiding the burdens of having a king—those explained by Samuel in I Samuel 8:10-20—God’s plan would have promoted the moral and spiritual maturity of individuals. One is not spiritually strong because he is compelled, or even led, to do right. He is mature when, as Jeremiah (31:33) suggested, he has the law written in his heart. But there is more.

We believe God was foreshadowing the type of government He planned for His spiritual kingdom when the Messiah came. The organization established in the church by the inspired apostles seems an exact copy of Israel’s first government in Canaan. Each congregation is autonomous, relating directly to Christ, guided by His word. Congregations are authorized to cooperate in times of crisis or to do works too large for a single church. Individual churches are to have elders, who direct internal matters, and preachers and teachers who teach the word. But there is no national leader or headquarters; our king is Jesus.

Finishing the Conquest

The people seemed to know that their biggest test in living without a national leader would be in completing the conquest of Canaan. They were right. God chose Judah to join the battle first (1:2). We understand His choice. Judah led the marches on the journey through the wilderness; and she was one of the largest

tribes. But perhaps more important was the fact that Jacob's blessing of Judah said, "thy hand shall be on the neck of thy enemies" (Genesis 49:8).

Judah asked the tribe of Simeon to help and Simeon agreed (1:3). At first these tribes had great success (1:4-18). They destroyed several of the strongest city-states with strikes that would have made Joshua proud. But when they encountered Canaanites who had war chariots made of iron, their faith seemed to fail and they did not take on those enemies (1:19). The other Israelite tribes had somewhat less success with the Canaanites that remained in their areas (1:21-35). Thus Israel was reduced to sharing the Promised Land with peoples whom God had said would make them sin against Him (Exodus 23:33).

Israel's worst mistake, however, was that when they got stronger and could have renewed the battle with greater vigor, they made peace with the enemy. "And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out" (1:28). A weak faith is bad enough, but deliberate compromise with the enemy is worse. God had specifically forbidden treaties with the Canaanites (Exodus 34:12).

An angel was sent to rebuke the people, and he did so in a great assembly (2:1-4). They wept, offered sacrifices to God, and seemingly renewed their commitment to Him. The revival lasted through that generation. When a generation arose that did not know Joshua and Moses, and who were far removed from the events of Egypt, the nation went into open idolatry. "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim" (2:11-13).

The Rollercoaster: Sin-Oppression-Repentance-Deliverance

That brief announcement in the preceding paragraph heralded a sequence of events that was repeated many times. Along with the worship of the Canaanite gods, the people freely intermarried with the enemy (3:5-6). God was angry with Israel and He "sold" them into the hands of Cushan, the king of Mesopotamia, who oppressed the nation for eight years (3:8). In oppression, the people repented and the Lord raised up a deliverer, named Othniel. This man was a nephew of Caleb, one of the two faithful spies along with Joshua. Othniel led the nation against the king of Mesopotamia and God gave them success. The people had peace for 40 years.

This experience of the people going into sin, being oppressed by the Lord, repenting, and being given a deliverer was repeated many times after Othniel. It

seemed the nation was on a rollercoaster from which they could not alight. The chart on page 220 lists 12 judges, not including the prophets Eli and Samuel. They judged the nation, but also served the special role of prophet and priest.

The main part of the book of Judges (chapters 3-16) tells the story of this long, national rollercoaster ride. One measure of the depth of sin into which the nation fell was the experience of the Levite in chapter 19. This story of marital infidelity, homosexual lust, rape, and murder is one in which villains abound and heroes are scarce. God warned the Israelites that if they committed the sins of those nations, they would suffer a similar fate. That time had come.

The spiritual leaders were corrupted along with the people. Chapters 17 and 18 describe a young Levite who left Bethlehem searching for work. His need for a job suggests that the people had stopped paying tithes that supported the tribe of Levi in their service in the tabernacle and to the people. At Mt. Ephraim he stopped by the house of a wealthy man, named Micah, who hired him to be his personal priest, to serve before carved images in his house. The writer did not tell the young man's name until the very end of the story (18:31). He seemed ashamed to acknowledge that Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the grandson of Moses the great lawgiver, served in front of idols.

Idolatry and immorality permeated the daily lives of the people and the official practice of religion to the point that many honest people probably were confused about what to do. The distinction between good and evil became blurred much as in our own society. Gideon was a great warrior for the Lord, a clear opponent of the Canaanite gods. After his victories that delivered Israel from the Midianites, he refused to be made king, rightfully insisting, "the Lord shall reign over you" (8:22-23). But this good man made an ephod, resembling the one worn by the high priests, set it up in his hometown, and it became an idol to many Israelites.

We are reminded here of how the church drifted into paganism in the dark ages and how long it required to work out all traces of that apostasy (assuming they are all worked out, even now!).

A Remnant was Faithful

As wicked as the nation became at times, there was always a remnant of Israel that remained true to Jehovah. Such men and women were Othniel, Debra, and Barak. These were the people through whom God related. There were probably many others who quietly and devoutly served God without calling attention to

themselves. Manoah and his wife (13:1-25), Samson's parents, seemed of this type. We would never have heard of them had God not chosen them to bring forth a deliverer.

There were also gentile people who had learned of Jehovah and committed themselves to Him. The book of Ruth was set in the period of the judges, probably the latter part. A beautiful story, just the opposite of the one about the Levite, it tells of people who behaved nobly in hard times and there were no villains. A godly woman, named Naomi, left Bethlehem with her husband and two sons because of a famine and dwelt in the land of Moab. The sons married Moabite women, one of whom was Ruth. Eventually all three men died. Naomi determined to return to Bethlehem and Ruth, out of loyalty to Naomi and her God, insisted on going with her.

In Israel, Boaz, a relative of Naomi's husband, acted generously and honorably toward the women and led others to do so. According to the law regarding childless widows (Deuteronomy 25:5-10), Boaz married Ruth who became the great grandmother of King David and an ancestor of Jesus. Her loyalty to the family she married into and the God they served is expressed in some of the most memorable words of the Old Testament. "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me" (Ruth 1:16-17).

Job also was a gentile who served Jehovah. The exact dates of Job's life can not be confirmed, but the calculations we consider most trustworthy put it near the time of Israel's entrance into Canaan. This descendant of Esau and his friends believed devoutly in Jehovah as the creator of man and the ruler of the universe. Their speeches to each other seem almost like a commentary on the book of Genesis. "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me. Remember, I beseech thee, that thou has made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?" (Job 10:8-9).

The faithful remnant is always important to God, and He is always faithful to them. This is a fact that should be cherished by true believers of all ages, but especially in times of national wickedness.

Oppression and Deliverance

The oppression of Israel by the offending kings seemed to have varied from harassment and forced payment of tribute to crushing servitude and violence. Under Moab, for example, the people seemed rather free and secure as long as they sent King Eglon his gifts (3:12-30). The Midianites, on the other hand, seemed especially cruel (6:1-6). The people were forced to abandon their homes and live in caves and other strongholds. “Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites” (6:6).

A similar variability occurred in the amount of Israel’s territory the oppressors controlled. Some, like the king of Mesopotamia, probably subdued about all of the nation. Moab, on the other hand, may have controlled mainly the land east of the Jordan and some territory around Jericho.

The role of the judges probably varied with the amount of territory the enemy had conquered. They were primarily military leaders who rallied the people to rise up and drive out the enemy, which explains why they were also called deliverers. After military success, they appeared to carry a semiofficial leadership role in helping the people settle disputes. Because their leadership was informal, and the territory over which they had influence did not necessarily cover the whole nation, some of the judges may have overlapped. This makes the length of this period of Israel’s history difficult to determine. Another factor in making this decision is the date of Israel’s exodus from Egypt.

JUDGES AND OPPRESSORS OF ISRAEL*

CHART 18:1

Judge’s Names	Scripture	Oppressors	Years of Servitude	Years of Peace
Othniel	3:9	Cushan, King of Mesopotamia	8	40
Ehud	3:15	Moab	18	80
Shamgar	3:31	Philistines	?	?
Debra & Barak	4:4	Jabin, King of Canaan	20	40
Gideon	6:12	Midianites	7	40
Tola	10:1	?		?
Jak	10:3	?		?

Jephthah	11:1	Ammonites	18	6
Ibzan	12:8	?		?
Elon	12:11	?		?
Abdon	12:13	?		?
Samson	13:2	Philistines	40	20

* All scripture references are from the book of Judges

The date of the exodus itself is not given in Scripture, but related dates are. Thus there are two methods by which scholars attempt to determine when the children of Israel left Egypt. One is by reconciling the various Biblical dates that relate to the exodus; the other is from archeology. The dates arrived at from these two vantage points differ by approximately 150 years. Bible students generally do not suffer greatly by not being able to set exact dates for historical events. Yet we think it much safer to rely on Biblical dates, even though reconciling them may be difficult, than those of archeology.

Some of the principle passages that relate to the time of the exodus are Judges 11:26, I Kings 6:1, and Acts 13:20. Without detailing the difficulties in the passages or the scholars' reasoning on them, we think the best conclusion is that the Israelites came out of Egypt about 1500 B.C. Given the 40 years in the wilderness, their entry into Canaan would be about 1450 B.C. This would make the length of the period of the judges approximately 400 years.

Summary

At the close of this chapter, we leave the Israelites in confusion. They are intermittently overrun by enemies, and when they are not, they seem willingly to cohabit with them. They have no national leader, but they have not been able to live up to God's promise to make them a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6) in which each person would relate personally and faithfully to God. When relating to humans, whom He made with free wills, God seems always to have backup plans.

The Israelites' experiences in living without a national leader should be very instructive to Christians. The spiritual kingdom of Christ has no earthly head and no temporal headquarters. How much better have we done with this type of

government than did our spiritual forefathers? Surely we have made many of the same mistakes, as the apostasies of the dark ages and later have shown. The question is, can we learn from our mistakes before God gives up and puts into place alternative plans?

Nations in Canaan

Nations in Canaan		
“.. .save alive nothing that breatheth.” Deuteronomy 20:16		
Nation	Descendant of	Reference
Amorites	Canaan	I Chronicles 1:14
Canaanites	Ham	I Chronicles 1:8
Hittites	Canaan	Genesis 23:10
Hivites	Canaan	I Chronicles 1:15
Jebusites	Canaan	I Chronicles 1:14
Girgashites	Canaan	I Chronicles 1:14
Perizzites	?	Deuteronomy 7:1-2
Gibeonites	Hivites and	Joshua 11:19
	Amorites	II Samuel 21:2
Nations Surrounding Canaan		
“.shall be tributaries unto thee” or “.smite every male.” Deuteronomy 20:11,13		
Nation	Descendant of	Reference
Amelakites	Esau	Genesis 36:12
Ammonites	Lot	Genesis 19:38
Edomites	Esau	Genesis 36:1
Kenites	Jethro, priest of Midian	Judges 4:11, Exodus 18:1
Midianites	Abraham	Genesis 25:1
Moabites	Lot	Genesis 19:37
Philistines	Ham	I Chronicles 1:8,11-12

Zidonians	Canaan	I Chronicles 1:13
-----------	--------	-------------------

PART 4:

The Kingdom Years

This section is called The Kingdom Years to emphasize the change in Israel's government. The title also reflects our adaptation to the change of focus in Biblical history. From creation to the appointment of King Saul, the narrative of Scripture was on God's interaction with the people, first through special patriarchs and then through spiritual leaders, viz Moses and Joshua. From King Saul forward, the focus largely was on the kings. Attention was given to the actions of the kings toward the people, and to God's dealings with the kings, often through prophets. Clearly the king stood between God and the people.

The Law of Moses remained in effect throughout the kingdom years, from Mount Sinai to the Messiah. That changed only when Jesus died on the cross and brought into effect a new covenant (Romans 10:4).

Part 4 deals primarily with the Biblical books that are commonly called "history," which are I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, and I and II Chronicles. Brief notice will be taken of Ezra and Nehemiah which tell of the Israelites' return from Babylonian captivity. The time period reflected here is the last two-thirds of Israel's existence as God's chosen nation, approximately 1,000 years. This leaves several Old Testament books that are not taken under specific review, a fact that does not reflect our view of the importance of these Old Testament writings. It relates instead to our purpose in writing this volume.

The goal for this book is to tell the story of the Old Testament, to provide a mental framework around which to fit its facts and doctrines. Such an outline can enhance memory and understanding. We will mention the works of the major prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, to show where they fit into Israel's history. A knowledge of when and to whom they prophesied helps to understand their messages. We will not attempt to make extensive comments on the contents of their revelations, contenting ourselves with a skeletal view, believing it will enable you better to fill in the details.

CHAPTER 19

Israel Takes a King

The book of I Samuel opens with the birth of Samuel, truly one of Israel's great prophets. Eli was high priest at the time. Elkanah, from the tribe of Levi (I Chronicles 6:20-28), had two wives. Hannah was his beloved, but she was barren. Peninnah was fecund and she lorded her position as mother of Elkanah's children over Hannah. Humiliated and depressed, Hannah decided not to go with the family to the yearly feast of the Passover at Shiloh. Her husband comforted her, and she went, but she was not a happy woman.

Scripture readings for this chapter: I Samuel 1:1-15:35. References in this text will be in parentheses; chapter and verse only, i.e (1:14).

While the other members of the family feasted on Elkanah's part of the animals he sacrificed and drank their wine, Hannah went to the tabernacle to pray. Eli sat in a high position overlooking the people who came to worship. Hannah's lips moved, but she did not pray aloud as others did, so Eli assumed she had drunk too much wine at the family's sacrificial meal. He rebuked her. "How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee" (1:14). Hannah responded that she had drunk no wine, but was pouring out her heart to God in bitter sorrow. Without inquiring about the subject of her grief, Eli blessed her and said, "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition."

The petition Hannah asked of God was really a vow. She promised that if God would give her a male child to take away her humiliation, she would "lend" that son to the Lord all the days of his life. This meant that Hannah was giving up her "social security," the religious obligation of the son to care for his parents, especially his mother, in her old age. She also promised God that her son would drink no wine or strong drink during his lifetime and no razor would come on his head. Apparently in those days, children kept the vows their parents made for them. The twin promises, that Samuel would forego wine and not cut his hair, meant that he was to become a Nazarite (Numbers 6:1-21). This vow could be taken for short or long periods, but the two qualifications were in effect for the

duration of the vow.

When the child was weaned, which meant more than learning to eat solid food and came late among the Jews, Hannah kept her vow. Samuel grew up at the feet of Eli in and around the tabernacle at Shiloh. “And he worshipped the Lord there” (1:28). “The child did minister to the Lord before Eli the priest” (2:11). All Israel recognized this young man because they saw him when they came to Shiloh for the three annual feasts. They knew he was set to become a priest.

Samuel’s First Revelation

God’s first revelation to Samuel came while he was still considered a child, and it was a difficult one. God spoke to him as he lay on his bed. Three times Samuel mistook the voice for the call of his master, Eli. Finally, Eli suspected what was happening and advised Samuel how to answer. When he did, God asked the child to tell his aging mentor that the priesthood would be wrenched from his descendants because of the wickedness of Eli’s sons whom he had made priests.

The wickedness of Hophni and Phinehas was very great (2:12-17). Among other sins, they committed fornication with the women who assembled at the tabernacle and changed the ways sacrifices were offered in order to give themselves better portions. The women may have been those who sang in the worship, for the Scriptures speak often of “singing men and singing women” (i.e. Ezra 2:65 and Nehemiah 7:67). The priests’ immorality was bad enough, but the changes they made in God’s sacrifices were perhaps even worse, as Eli seems to indicate in his complaint to his sons.

“Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord’s people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?” (2:24-25). One example of the changes was that the priests demanded the right to take the parts of the animals they wanted rather than the ones God had specified; and they made their choices before the fat of the sacrifices was burned to the Lord on the altar. By such actions they placed their wishes before God’s. When the people tried to refuse the innovations in their worship, the priests threatened them with violence.

Hophni and Phinehas were very modern in their outlook. They made their decisions on human reasoning rather than loyalty to God’s word. Apparently

they did not understand that the acts of worship they carried out had a sacred symbolism far beyond just the expression of feelings in the people's hearts.

God's Promise was Fulfilled

God was not long in fulfilling the promise to remove Eli's descendants as priests, and he did it through Israel's old nemesis, the Philistines. Perhaps sensing Israel's confused and weakened state, they gathered for attack at Aphek, just west of the city of Beth Shan. When the battle was joined, Israel was defeated; 4,000 men were slain on the battlefield. That night the elders of Israel acknowledged that God was not with them. Their solution was to send for the ark of the covenant to be brought from the tabernacle in Shiloh and taken into battle with them. This seemed an attempt to force the hand of God, thinking He would not allow the most sacred object in Israel to be captured by the enemy.

Since the ark could be moved by the priests only, Hophni and Phinehas carried it into the battle. When the ark arrived, the army was encouraged and gave a mighty cheer. The Philistines heard the shouts and were afraid, but despite their fear, they proved themselves disciplined soldiers, and went into battle more determined than ever. That day 30,000 of Israel's men were killed, including Hophni and Phinehas. The whole army fled and the ark of the covenant was captured. A messenger ran to Shiloh and found Eli sitting by the wayside eager for news of the battle because "his heart trembled for the ark of God" (4:13). When the herald informed the old and blind priest what had happened, he fell over backward and died.

With this defeat, Israel went into a political decline from which it did not fully recover until the time of David. In addition to being high priest, Eli judged Israel, but nothing is said of his military leadership. He seems to have refused, or been refused, the role of deliverer. His heart was in the right place, but he was not strong enough to control his wicked and strong-willed offspring. "His sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not" (3:13). He did complain about their sins, but as high priest he had the power to remove them and he did not. The nation's taking the ark into battle was a desperate attempt to fix a moral predicament that was curable only by repentance.

The Philistines' Experiences with the Ark

The Philistines won a great victory because God wanted to chastise Israel. They were soon to learn, however, that their victory did not mean He approved

of their idolatry. They took the ark to Ashdod, a stronghold city on the Mediterranean coast, and placed it in the temple of Dagon, their god. They interpreted the victory to mean that Dagon was stronger than Jehovah, so it seemed reasonable to them that Jehovah should now serve Dagon.

The following morning, they found Dagon fallen on his face before the ark (5:3). Reluctant to accept the message, they set Dagon upright. The next day, Dagon was prostrate before the ark with his head and his hands broken off. What a beautiful symbol that their idol had no intelligence and no power! But the Philistines still did not understand. They sent the ark to other Philistine cities and one after another God plagued those cities. The hand of God was heavy on the Philistines (5:6). Such demonstrations of God's power probably accounted for the fact that a trickle of Canaanite pagans became true believers in Jehovah and converts to the Jewish religion.

The princes of the Philistine city-states called a great conference with their wise men and diviners to figure out what to do about the ark. Cleverly concluding they must send the ark back, they did so along with an offering in the form of golden symbols of the plagues God had sent on them. The ark was placed on a cart drawn by two cows that were separated from their newly-born calves. They reasoned that the cows, agitated over the loss of their calves, would not stand still and that the "gods" would guide them in the right direction. Although their pragmatic reasoning was false, God did guide the animals in this instance.

The cows and their cart stopped in the field of a man named Joshua near the city of Bethshemesh. This was a providential choice, because it was a city of priests who should have known God's instructions about caring for the ark. But the people either did not know, or did not obey, and many were slain when they came to look inside this sacred object (6:19). Perhaps in the religious decline that engulfed the nation, the priests had not refreshed themselves on how the ark should be respected.

The people of Bethshemesh were frightened by the deaths of their curious neighbors and asked the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim to come and remove the ark (6:21). They were more devout, and moved it safely to the house of Abinadab where it remained for many years, until it was brought to Jerusalem by King David. One of Abinadab's sons was appointed to take care of the ark.

Samuel as Priest and Judge

Samuel was a young man when Eli died, but he appears to have assumed the role of priest and judge with mature confidence. His preaching was energetic and effective. He urged the people to repent so they could be delivered from the Philistines, and they did (7:3). While the people were offering sacrifices and prayers, the Philistines attacked. Samuel prayed and God gave such a decisive victory that they did not threaten the nation again during Samuel's long tenure. Israel regained much of the territory the Philistines had taken.

The places at which Samuel judged Israel were all in the south, so his influence was probably greater there (7:16). The moral and spiritual revival also may have been confined to that part of the nation. This great man, whom God spoke of as equal to Moses in His eyes (Jeremiah 15:1), served Israel approximately fifty years.

In his latter years, Samuel made his sons judges, as Eli did; and like Eli's sons, they perverted justice (8:3). Samuel may have set his sons straight, because God did not destroy his "house," as He did Eli's. His grandson, Heman, was chief of David's singers for the temple worship (I Chronicles 6:33 and 25:4-6). Nevertheless, the sons' wickedness was an excuse for the people to do something that displeased God and Samuel—demand a king to rule over them.

Moses had prophesied that the people would ask for a king (Deuteronomy 17:14-20), and had given instructions for how the king should behave. That was not to be taken, however, as approval of their actions. He also predicted they would turn away from God in other ways (Deuteronomy 31:16-19). Both Samuel and God made it clear that the people were rejecting God's rule over them by demanding a king. "And the Lord said unto Samuel, hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (8:7).

God asked Samuel to solemnly warn the people what life under a king would be like (8:11-18), but if they persisted, to give them what they asked. This seems an example of what David had in mind when he said, "And He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Psalms 106:15). The people listened to Samuel's warning and said, "Nay, but we will have a king to rule over us." Samuel sent them home to await further instructions from God. Even though God acceded to their request, that did not mean they could choose as king anyone they pleased.

Saul Chosen King

There was a wealthy man of the tribe of Benjamin, named Kish, who had several sons, one of whom was Saul. Some of Kish's donkeys wandered off and he sent Saul and a servant to find them. They searched for three days, ending up in the land of Zuph near Samuel's home. Saul proposed to go home, thinking his father was now more worried about them than the donkeys. The servant suggested they go to see the prophet who could tell them about the donkeys. Saul agreed.

The day before the men's arrival, God had advised Samuel they were coming (9:16), and that he should anoint Saul king. As they entered the city, they met Samuel coming out. Samuel spoke mysteriously to Saul about becoming king and invited them to a sacrificial meal that evening. They ate with the man of God, were served special portions, and treated generally with honor. The next day, Samuel spoke to Saul in private and plainly and anointed him king. This young man literally left home looking for lost donkeys and returned as King of Israel.

What an instructive example that sometimes lost donkeys, and similar occurrences, are more than hungry animals in search of food. Sometimes they are a part of God's providential plan; and he is wise who can see and accept those special occasions. As Saul journeyed homeward the Spirit of God came upon him, as Samuel had predicted, and other signs took place that showed him that he was God's anointed.

Saul's Public Appointment

A public ceremony was needed to present Saul to the people and secure their allegiance. Samuel called all Israel to Mizpeh (10:17) and, after reminding them again that their desire for a king was a rejection of God, made the nation pass in review by tribe, by family, and by individuals. When it was clear that Saul was chosen, he could not be found. Samuel inquired of the Lord and was told that Saul was hiding among the baggage. His modesty is appealing, especially when compared to the public arrogance displayed by would-be leaders now. But such extreme reticence showed a lack of confidence and faith that appeared later in less winsome ways.

The New King's First Test

The first test of Saul's leadership came soon. Ancient rulers, as well as modern

ones, were attracted to opportunities for mischief, and a new and timid king seemed ready-made for intrigue. Nahash, King of the Ammonites, positioned himself to attack the tribes closest to him, those in Gilead on the east side of Jordan. Apparently the Israelites had little confidence in their new king; they offered to surrender without a fight. Nahash stated his terms tersely: “That I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach on all Israel” (11:2). The people pleaded for a week to make a decision and it was granted.

The threatened tribes sent messengers throughout Israel asking for help. They were still operating as though under the judges—appealing directly to the other tribes. And well they might do so; when the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul, their king was in the field tending his herds (11:5). But the Spirit of God came on him and he acted decisively, sending a dramatic message demanding that the nation rally to fight for the Gileadites. He also wisely invoked the name of Samuel in his call. The people responded “with one consent.”

Saul set the army in array, marched to Jabesh-Gilead, and fell with fury on the Ammonites. They were defeated so completely that “two of them were not left together” (11:11). The people were ecstatic, thinking their demand for a king had been vindicated. They pointedly suggested to Samuel that those who had not wanted Saul as king should be put to death. They were not threatening Samuel, nor anyone who may have stood with him in opposing a kingdom, but rather those who wanted another person as king for private motives (10:27). Saul stepped in and behaved magnanimously toward his detractors. “There shall not a man be put to death today: for today the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel” (11:13).

Despite a timid beginning, Saul’s reign was off to a good start. His “job approval rating,” to use the language of poll-driven politics, could not have been higher. The people called a great meeting at Gilgal to make him king. Saul had already been anointed twice, but those times were at Samuel’s direction. This one was the people’s party, intended to show popular support for a leader who had won their hearts by his bravery.

Samuel’s Farewell Address

Samuel used the assembly at Gilgal to make his farewell address to the nation (12:1-25). In the manner of Moses and Joshua he rehearsed the great things God had done for them, reiterated the people’s tendency toward apostasy, and noted again their sin in asking for a king. To punctuate the latter point, Samuel asked

God to send thunder and rain in the normally-dry time of wheat harvest (12:17-18). God answered. The people feared God and asked Samuel to pray for them.

As an old man who had been disappointed in his children but loved them still, Samuel closed with a warning and a touching promise that he would continue to pray for them, if they would “only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart” (12:24). Note how similar this definition of true worship is to Joshua’s (Joshua 24:14) and Jesus’ (John 4:24).

Some writers claim to see in Samuel’s address a churlish attitude toward Saul. A few suggest that Samuel’s “lack of support” was a major cause of Saul’s dismal performance in the latter years of his reign. We believe those writers have engaged in fanciful character analyses that bear little resemblance to the facts. They should not be allowed to obscure the simple truth: Saul failed because he got arrogant and disobeyed God. Samuel loved Saul and mourned for him, even after God rejected him (15:35).

A Short Peace and More War

The nation had peace for awhile and Saul sent home the volunteers who were marshalled to fight the Ammonites. He kept a small standing army of 3,000 men who seemed to serve mainly as royal guards (13:2). Two thousand of these were stationed with Saul in Michmash and Bethel and a thousand under command of his son, Jonathan, in Gibeah. All three towns were in the central highlands not more than 25 miles north of Jerusalem. This suggests that Saul’s kingdom, while recognized by the Israelites, was rather narrowly constricted by the Philistines.

Jonathan led his men in a successful attack on a Philistine outpost at Geba. It was probably a morale booster for his men, but it angered all the Philistines who mobilized for all-out war with Israel. They assembled at Michmash with 30,000 war chariots and soldiers that seemed like the “sands of the sea shore” (13:5). Saul called the Israelites to Gilgal, apparently having retreated early to safer ground. The Israelite people hid in caves and thickets. Many of Saul’s soldiers deserted in fear.

Saul’s First Blunder

Samuel promised to come to Gilgal to offer sacrifices and pray for the success of Israel. Out of impatience born of fear, Saul decided Samuel was not coming and offered the sacrifices himself, a bold usurpation of the role of priest and a grave sin. Samuel arrived just as Saul finished, bluntly told him he had forfeited

his right to the kingdom, and predicted that God would take it from him (13:13-14). Saul's ranks continued to thin because of desertions and the Philistines plundered the land freely.

After deciding on a means to know the Lord's will, Jonathan and his armorbearer took on a Philistine garrison by themselves (14:6). They routed the enemy, slaughtering 20 Philistine soldiers. The victory emboldened the Israelite army and those who were in hiding came out and helped put the Philistines to flight. "The Lord saved Israel that day: and the battle passed over to Bethaven" (14:23). The best part of Saul's reign followed. He seemed actually to rule Israel for a while, and he had success against the nation's enemies (14:47).

Saul's Second Blunder

Saul was an unstable personality who was prone to uncontrollable fear in bad times and arrogance in good ones. This double curse enabled him to snatch personal defeat from the jaws of victory. The Amelakites had been marked by the Lord for judgment from early in Israelite history (Deuteronomy 25:17-19), and Samuel told Saul now was the time to carry it out. God's instructions were clear, "utterly destroy" the Amelakites and all they had.

The Israelite army, now battle-hardened and confident, made short work of the Amelakites. But Saul saved the king alive, probably as a trophy of victory, and brought back the best sheep and oxen, supposedly for a great sacrifice to God. God sent Samuel to Saul saying, "I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not performed my commandments" (15:11). Samuel wept and prayed all night.

The next morning Samuel met Saul returning from the battle. Saul seemed eager to proclaim his obedience and victory. "Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (15:13). Note the difference between Saul's assessment of his own behavior and God's judgment of it. Samuel chastised Saul and in the process enunciated some basic principles regarding service to God. "Hath God as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams" (15:22). Partial obedience is disobedience. The only way to obey God is exactly as He says.

Samuel told Saul plainly that God had rejected him and that the kingdom would be taken from him. The old man of God mourned for Saul but refused to

see him again.

David was Anointed

God told Samuel to stop mourning for Saul and go anoint the king He had chosen, the son of Jesse who lived in Bethlehem (16:1). Saul was now suspicious of Samuel, so the prophet had to travel under the guise of going to Bethlehem to offer sacrifices. The elders of Bethlehem were frightened at his coming, probably because they knew of the estrangement between Samuel and Saul and feared Saul's wrath if they seemed to side with Samuel. Samuel prepared the sacrifices and invited Jesse and his family to the sacrificial meal.

At the meal, Samuel had Jesse's sons to pass before him. When Eliab, the oldest, came in, the prophet looked on his tall frame and handsome face and decided in his heart that he was the one God wanted (16:6). But God spoke to Samuel: "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." In this homely setting, God revealed a great truth about how he dealt (and still does) with humans. Earthly appearance, power, or knowledge did not matter. He can supply those if the heart is right. Only the human heart will God not overrule because He made it free.

Seven of Jesse's sons passed before Samuel, each being rejected as king. Samuel asked, "Are these all your children?" and was told that the youngest, David, was in the field with the sheep. He was fetched in haste because the prophet refused to continue with the meal until his mission from God was accomplished. David was brought in, fresh-faced and clearly youthful in appearance. His heart must have shown through his eyes. The Bible writer said he had a "beautiful countenance," which is often translated "beautiful eyes." There in the privacy of David's family, Samuel took oil and anointed David king.

What must have been going through this young man's mind as he sat down to eat after these startling events! He already had shown himself to have presence of mind under pressure, but he must have wondered what now lay ahead. Mercifully, he did not know. He was king, but it would be years before he would see any of the trappings of the kingship. There was a long period of training in front of him, a degree to be earned from the University of Hard Knocks. Had he known the trials he would face, he might have gone into early despair. The Spirit of God came on David from that day forward. So far as we know, no one, save

his family, knew he had been anointed king.

Summary

Israel has survived traumatic events. The priesthood was corrupted by Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas. The people came to despise their religion because of the evil priests with whom they had to deal. Hophni and Phinehas were killed in battle, fulfilling God's warning, but the people's cynicism compromised their confidence in God's system of government and prompted them to demand a king. Saul was anointed, against Samuel's and God's advice. His mercurial personality produced erratic behavior, bravery sometimes and cowardice at others. The nation has suffered and there is more to come.

David was anointed king and the Spirit of God came on him from that day forward. At the same time, God's Spirit departed from Saul. Always unstable, he drifted into positive mental illness. If Saul's social history were presented to a psychiatrist today, he would surely be diagnosed as "Paranoid State," one characteristic of which is "an exquisite sensitivity in interpersonal relationships." We will see that "sensitivity" cause him to wreak havoc on the nation and especially on David. But under God's guidance it trained David to be the king against whom all others were measured.

CHAPTER 20

David's Flight from Saul

When the Spirit of God left Saul, at the appointment of David, Saul's mental health deteriorated rapidly. His associates noticed the changes in behavior and concluded that an "evil spirit from God" was troubling him (16:15). Saul's servants suggested that a skillful harp player could make him feel better, and one of them recommended David. Messengers were sent to David's father who dispatched his son to the king. "David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed and well" (16:23). This appears to be the first example of the use of music therapy for mental illness.

Scripture readings for this chapter: I Samuel 16:1-31:13. References in this text will be in parentheses chapter and verse only, i.e (16:15).

Obviously Saul did not know that David had been anointed king. That piece of information would not have helped his mental state. Neither are we told how David felt about playing for the king he was intended to replace. Probably he was advised by Samuel that he would not take the throne immediately and that God would make clear how and when it would come about. Although Saul is said to have loved David, he left Saul and returned to his father's sheep (17:15).

Meanwhile the Philistines had regrouped after their earlier defeat and had marshalled for battle at Shochoh (17:1). This was southwest of Jerusalem, and far from the scene of former battles which were in the central highlands north of Jerusalem. They had lost territory in their last battle with Saul, and Shochoh may have been near their border with Israel at the time.

This time the Philistines had a new and fearsome weapon, a giant named Goliath. Over nine feet tall and a seasoned warrior, Goliath taunted the Israelites. The armies were camped on opposing mountain sides with a narrow valley between them. Each morning and evening Goliath stood in the valley and shouted insults. "Choose a man to fight me," he would say, "If he kills me, we will be your slaves." "If I kill him, you shall be our slaves." Saul and his army were "dismayed and greatly afraid" (17:11). The Philistines and Goliath kept up

the psychological warfare for 40 days, probably hoping to deplete Saul's ranks by desertions.

David Went to the Battle Front

David was sent by his father to the battle front to discover the welfare of his older brothers who were soldiers. He arrived as Goliath was making one of his daily appearances, heard his blasphemous words, saw the Israelite soldiers cower in fear, and was indignant. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" he asked (17:26). Eliab, David's older brother, scolded him, and called David a naughty boy. But it was clear to the other soldiers that David was the only one who was not afraid to fight Goliath, so he was brought to the attention of Saul.

Saul attempted to make David aware of the danger. The differences in their physical attributes were obvious, so Saul pointed out David's lack of battle experience. "Thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth" (17:33). David responded by telling Saul about killing a lion and a bear when they had attacked his father's flock. It was clear that David's confidence was in God rather than his own prowess. "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (17:37).

Whether Saul was convinced by David's faith or simply had no other options, he approved David's plan. "Go, and the Lord be with thee." David had no armor of his own, so Saul dressed him in his battle gear, which David rejected, saying he had not "proved" it. How wise of this young man to fight with his own skills and in his own way, rather than attempting to be someone he was not! On the way to meet Goliath, David selected five smooth stones from the brook, put them in his sash (purse, as we would say), and took his sling in his hand. Probably the long hours in the fields with his father's sheep had given David time to perfect his skill with a sling shot, a formidable weapon in the hands of one who could use it well. There were men who could "hit a hair" with them in those days (Judges 20:16).

Goliath was insulted that one so youthful was to be his opponent. He disdained David and vowed to feed his body to the birds. David responded with a short lecture of his own. "I come," he said, "in the name of the Lord of hosts whose armies you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, I will take off your head and give your body to the wild beasts, then all the earth will

know that there is a God in Israel.” “The Lord,” David continued, “does not save by spear or sword, for the battle belongs to Him.”

This confident speech probably angered Goliath, who started toward David. Instead of cowering in fear, David ran to meet Goliath, loading his sling as he went. He spun the sling around his head and let go. The stone hit Goliath in the forehead and imbedded itself in his skull. The giant dropped in his tracks, face downward. David ran to him and cut off his head with his own sword. A great shout of joy, probably mixed with relief, arose from the Israelite army. The Philistines fled with Israel in pursuit. Saul’s men chased and slaughtered the enemy to their stronghold cities of Ekron and Gath. The nation burst out in song at this astonishing victory.

Saul’s Strange Reaction to David

Saul had a different reaction to David’s victory. He did not seem even to know David and asked Abner, the captain of his army, to inquire about David’s identity (17:55-58). This odd reaction about someone Saul knew and loved, and someone to whom he had recently given permission to fight the nation’s number one enemy, has caused Bible commentators much difficulty. They have gone to great lengths to explain it, even suggesting that the sacred record has been mixed up, perhaps by copyists who accidentally put parts of the story in the wrong place.

Granted that Saul’s behavior takes us by surprise, there is a simpler and more straightforward answer to the puzzle. It is not uncommon for persons in Saul’s mental state to wander in and out of lucidity, and in the process to lose large blocks of information. Alzheimer’s patients are notorious for this tendency, and theirs is not the only condition that can produce it. Furthermore, stress, such as Saul was in, is known to aggravate the process. The general truth of God’s word would not be compromised if an ancient copyist had made a mistake, but we think such assumptions are a dangerous business, especially when an easy solution is so near the surface.

We take Saul’s strange reaction as due to his deteriorating mental health and the stress of the situation. Abner, knowing the king’s volatile personality, wisely chose not to challenge it. Saul set David over the army and offered him his oldest daughter, Merab, as wife. David refused Merab, probably because he did not have the dowry expected by the king.

The Victorious Homecoming Turns Sour

As the army came home from battle, the people lined the route rejoicing. The women sang to Saul and David. “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (18:7). The female adulation for David excited Saul’s paranoia and he “eyed David from that day forward” (18:9). Sometime later, while David played the harp for him, Saul attempted to kill him with a javelin. Obviously the therapy was not working. From that point Saul became David’s open and confirmed enemy.

Jonathan, Saul’s oldest son, loved David from the start (18:1) and the two made a covenant to always be friends. A philosopher once described friends as one soul that dwells in two bodies, an allegorical definition that fit David and Jonathan. Saul’s youngest daughter, Michal, also loved David and made it known in the right places. The king assumed she would be an ally to help him kill David, so he had his servants put out the word that he did not want a dowry of money and, instead, would be pleased with a hundred Philistine foreskins (18:25). He assumed the Philistines would fight hard to avoid this disgrace and would probably kill David in the battle. David and his men went out promptly, killed 200 Philistines, and brought the gory gift to the king.

Michal became David’s wife and her young love proved to be strong enough to defy her father’s insane attempts to kill David. At first Jonathan could not believe Saul’s evil intent and spoke to his father in David’s behalf. It worked for a while (19:4-7). But when David led the army out and successfully fought the Philistines again, Saul’s paranoia came back. He tried to engage Michal in a plot on David’s life. She warned her husband to flee. Jonathan spoke to his father again about David and this time Saul cursed Jonathan as a traitor and tried to kill him (20:30-33). Jonathan helped David escape out of the area.

Life on the Run

David went first to Ahimelech, the priest at Nob, and asked for food and a sword. Ahimelech had neither in his personal possession, but gave David the shewbread that had been removed when fresh bread was put on the table in the tabernacle. This bread was to be eaten by the priests, and was therefore unlawful for David to have. The only sword available was Goliath’s, which apparently had been laid up before the Lord as a thanks offering. Jesus recalled these events for the Pharisees to show that God understands exceptional circumstances (Matthew 12:1-4).

For the next several years—seven we believe—David ran from Saul in a

deadly game of hide and seek. Much of the time was spent in the mountains and caves west of the Dead Sea. A collection of men who were discontented with Saul gathered around him, and David proved himself a good leader by wielding this disparate group, eventually about 700 men, into a crack fighting force. The split in the kingdom, as divisions often do, brought out the worst in some people. For example, while David was with Ahimelech, an Edomite named Doeg who was chief of Saul's herds, saw him and reported it to Saul (22:9-23). David escaped but Saul killed 85 priests and their families as traitors. Abiathar, one of the sons of Ahimelech, escaped and joined David's band.

Many of David's Psalms were composed during the period of flight from Saul. The 52nd Psalm was written, according to the heading, in response to the betrayal by Doeg. "Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully" (verse 2), and "Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue" (verse 4). No doubt David was simply pouring out his heart to God; several of the Psalms have the character of prayers. An understanding of the circumstances in which David wrote helps to understand the content.

For example, reading through the Psalms is like riding a rollercoaster of emotion. At one moment David was in the depths of depression, and in the next he was praising God in an ecstatic high. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" (22:1). And then, "Oh how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!" (31:19). Such mood swings are easily explained by the events of life on the run. One day David was fleeing Saul, perhaps cornered by the army, and fearing death. The next day he was ecstatic over deliverance and thanking God with joy.

David Remained Faithful to Saul

During the entire period of flight, David behaved himself wisely and faithfully toward Saul. Perhaps this was partly because of his love for Jonathan, but it was also due to David's respect for Saul's position, which he called "God's anointed." He believed that because God had anointed Saul, only God rightfully could remove him. There were times that David easily could have killed the king, and his men urged him to do it, but David refused and restrained the men (24:1-22 and 26:6-25). He seemed to believe that if Saul knew he had opportunity to destroy him and did not do so, then Saul would be convinced of

his faithfulness and leave him alone. Alas, it did not (and it does not) work that way.

In one of the examples referenced above, David explained the ways God could, and in His own time would, bring about the removal of Saul. He and his men came upon Saul's camp at night. Saul and the army were sound asleep, probably fatigued after a long day's march. David and Abishai, the second in David's command, sneaked into the camp and stole Saul's water jar and spear that was stuck in the ground at the king's head. Abishai pleaded for permission to drive the spear through Saul's heart, insisting that one stroke would be enough. David responded: "As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish" (26:10). It was the last means that God actually used sometime later.

This brief discourse, seemingly whispered to Abishai in the darkness, beautifully explains the means God uses to accomplish His will on earth. First, God can perform a miracle. Second, the natural laws He made to govern the universe do His bidding, and third, He can use other humans to accomplish His work. We see all these means used throughout the Old Testament. Which means is used for a particular task is determined by the immutable counsel of His infinite wisdom.

At one point David gave up. "David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul." (27:1). He concluded that it would be safer for him to live in a city of the Philistines than to keep running from Saul. Actually, David had tried this earlier in his flight (21:10-15). He went to Achish, King of Gath, but became afraid of Achish when he learned that his name as the slayer of Goliath was famous there. Achish did not welcome David, probably because they believed him still to be loyal to Saul, and did not trust him. David feigned insanity, drooled in his beard and made mysterious scribbles on the city gate, in order to distract the king until he could safely leave the city.

The second time David was warmly received by Achish. The difference was probably because they now knew of Saul's hatred for David, and assumed him to be unlikely to betray them to Saul. At David's request, Achish gave him and his men the city of Ziklag to be their home. Before going to Ziklag, David had taken his parents to Moab and left them in that king's care, assuming Saul might kill them as he had the priests at Nob. We never hear of David's father and mother again. Some people assume the king of Moab betrayed them to Saul, because

David fought the Moabites after he became king, and killed many of the men, but in an unusually discriminating manner (II Samuel 8:1-2). Since David himself was descended from a Moabite woman, Ruth, and because he had formerly had friendly relationships with the Moabites, there must have been a cause for his change in attitude.

David Settled Down in Philistia

David probably asked Achish for Ziklag for a specific reason. It was not within the walls of Achish's stronghold capitol, Gath, but was about fifteen miles south. David did not want to be under close scrutiny by Achish, because he and his men made their living by raiding the Amalekites who lived farther south. While there was no particular love between the Amalekites and the Philistines, such warlike behaviors might have made Achish nervous. Instead he came to trust David implicitly.

While David was on the run, Saul took the occasion to give his wife, Michal, to a man named Phalti from the city of Gallim (25:44). Sometime during this period, David took Ahinoam as his wife. We know little of this woman, except that she was from Jezreel, probably not the northern and better known Jezreel, but a smaller one in the south, believed to be near Hebron. We do not know how David acquired Ahinoam, but perhaps we can assume that she was a member of one of those families that joined David's band because they were disaffected with Saul.

David acquired another wife whose history we know well. She was Abigail, the wife of Nabal, a wealthy herder who lived in the center of the area of David's exile. Nabal was a foul tempered man, probably an alcoholic, whose own servant described him as "such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him" (25:17). David's men had protected Nabal's flocks and herds from poachers. But when David sent messengers to Nabal and asked for a gift of food, Nabal insulted them and sent them back empty handed. David vowed to kill every male in Nabal's company.

A servant told Abigail of her husband's foolish behavior. She quickly loaded some donkeys with food and wine and went to meet David. Bowing in obeisance to the young, fugitive king, she reasoned with such grace and wisdom that David's heart melted. Abigail reminded David that he had behaved sinlessly in his adversity to this point, assured him that God had not forgotten His promise to make him king, and argued that to avenge himself on Nabal would be a sin he

would later regret. Abigail returned home with David's blessings to find Nabal in a drunken stupor. When he sobered up, she told him what had happened. He had a heart attack and died ten days later. Hearing of Nabal's death, David sent Abigail a marriage proposal which she accepted (25:39-44).

David and his men lived in Ziklag for a year and four months. He lived well, was trusted by the Philistine king, and had his family around him. He no longer needed to look over his shoulder for Saul. That was probably as good as it was going to get until Saul was out of the way.

The Philistines Attack Again

Israel's old enemies appear to have used Saul's obsession with David as an opportunity to attack (23:27), and they seem to have had success. They marshalled a large force at Shunem, not far west of Beth Shan and farther inside Israel's territory than early battles, such as when David fought Goliath. Saul assembled his army at Mt. Gilboa, very near Beth Shan (28:4). He was frightened and inquired of God about the battle. "The Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets" (28:6). Samuel was dead by this time; Saul did not know where to turn.

Saul asked his servants to find a witch to predict the outcome of the battle. In one of his better moments, the king had banished "familiar spirits" from Israel (28:3), but he knew they still operated in secret. The servants told him of a witch at En-dor, a village on the south side of Mt. Tabor, about ten miles north of where the army was camped. Saul and two of his men set out to find the witch. We remember that Samuel told Saul that disobedience to God, such as he had shown in the battle with the Amalekites, was as bad as witchcraft (15:23). At the time, we did not know how clearly the events of Saul's life would illustrate that truth. Now the very man who outlawed witches was on his way to find one.

The witch demurred at first, and reminded the men of Saul's edict. The king, who was in disguise, assured her nothing bad would happen and asked her to bring up the spirit of Samuel. When Samuel appeared, he complained of being disturbed and asked, "Why do you come to me, seeing the Lord has departed from you?" (28:16). Samuel continued, telling Saul the Lord had done what He said He would do, and that now the kingdom would be given to David. "Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me" (28:19). Although it is difficult to feel sorry for this erratic and spiteful man, it was a devastating

blow. Saul collapsed on the ground and had to be revived by the witch and his servants before he could make his way back to camp.

Achish and the Philistine soldiers under his command were principal participants in the battle at Mt. Gilboa. David volunteered to help Achish, and Achish accepted. He and his men marched as the rear guard with the Philistines to the battle front. It looked as if David would be in a position to fight against his own people, and to help kill the man he had called “God’s anointed” and whom he had earlier refused to harm. Would he really have done this? Or would he have gone into battle and turned against the Philistines? We do not know; and fortunately for him, the real test never came. The Philistine princes, who did not trust David as much as Achish did, complained and forced him to send David’s army home (29:3-7). Surely the hand of God worked to save David from this dilemma.

Saul’s Final Battle

The day following Saul’s visit to the witch, the battle was joined at Mt. Gilboa and it went precisely as Samuel’s spirit had predicted. Saul’s three sons, including Jonathan, were killed and Saul was mortally wounded by archers. It seemed the archers were dedicated to killing the king. Saul asked his armorbearer to finish the job because he was afraid the Philistines would find him and torture him. But the servant could not bring himself to kill his master, so Saul fell on his own sword. The soldiers fled and the people of Israel deserted their cities, leaving them to the Philistines (31:7).

When the Philistines came to strip the bodies of the dead, they found Saul’s body and those of his sons on Mt. Gilboa. They cut off Saul’s head and sent the news throughout the lands of the Philistines. They also put Saul’s armor in the temple of Ashtoreth in Beth Shan and nailed the bodies of the four men to the city wall. Some brave men from Jabesh-Gilead, about 12 miles across the Jordan, came by night and took the bodies of Saul and his sons to Jabesh where they were cremated and buried.

While the disastrous battle of Mt. Gilboa was in progress, David and his men were on a three-day march back to Ziklag. They did not know the outcome of the battle. When they arrived home they found their city burned and their families and property had been taken captive by the Amalekites. The men were so distraught that they spoke of stoning David. In a painful and helpless situation, some people want a scapegoat.

If it is true that the darkest hour is just before dawn, then dawn must have been near. This was truly David's darkest hour; his state matched that of the nation of Israel. But dark hours are also places where character is made, and the writer adds a beautiful line to this sad tale. "But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God" (30:6). He inquired of God whether he should pursue the Amalekites, and God said "go" (30:8). Even though David's men were exhausted and some of them were overcome along the way, he overtook the Amalekites, defeated them, and recovered all captured persons and property.

Summary

The long, national nightmare of Saul's reign was over, but the nation was devastated. The man who began with winsome humility, became arrogant, unstable, and paranoid. Samuel told Saul, "When you were little in your own sight, God anointed you king over Israel" (I Samuel 15:17). The nation suffered because of Saul's sins, but no one more than David. His good qualities, such as bravery and loyalty to the king, were rewarded with persecution. David was probably unaware of it, but God was using Saul's persecution to train him to be the type of king He wanted. Every ounce of trust in God, patience, and self control he gained would be useful to him later. For example, Saul was bullied by his emotions into disobedience. David got abundant practice in controlling his behavior during emotional highs and lows before ascending the throne. The training worked. David became the king by whom all others were measured.

CHAPTER 21

Two Sets of History Books

All serious readers of the Old Testament have noticed two sets of books that contain histories of God's dealings with man. The first set begins with Genesis and includes all books through II Kings. These give an orderly account of human history starting with creation and continuing with the lives of the patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt, the settlement in Canaan, and ending with the captivity in Babylon. The writers discuss the reigns of all kings of Israel and Judah. Their works comprise the basic history of the Patriarchal and Mosaical dispensations of time.

The second history is given in I and II Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. The opening chapters of I Chronicles (chapters 1-10) give genealogies that begin with Adam and cover the patriarchs and the Israelite leaders to the reign of King Saul. There are brief, historical notes interspersed with the genealogies, but the thrust is clearly to establish who descended from whom. With the reign of David (chapter 11 and forward), the account in Chronicles takes a decidedly different tone and records selected activities in detail. This makes an account that overlaps with parts of II Samuel and I and II Kings. There is a clear pattern in what the writer of Chronicles chooses to discuss. The general focus is on the "good" kings of Judah, and more specifically on their actions that relate to the establishment of the religious institutions and spiritual activities of the nation.

Why were two sets of histories needed? As students, what attitude should we take toward the two? And how should we make use of them to best understand their messages and avoid getting confused?

Perhaps answers to the foregoing questions can be gotten more easily by beginning with what we know. First, the principal history is the one given in the books from Genesis to II Kings. Without this material, we would have little knowledge of the first 2500 years of human existence. We would have no knowledge of the exodus and the first several hundred years of Israel in Canaan. It is clear that the Chronicles were intended to supplement the original history, not compete with or replace it. This fact is also suggested by the early Hebrew

name given to the Chronicles. In English it meant “Things Omitted.”

We also know that the two histories were written in different time periods. The early books, such as Genesis through Deuteronomy, are believed to have been written or compiled mostly by Moses. This means the date of their authorship was approximately the middle of the 15th Century B.C. The second history probably was written by Ezra after the return from captivity, over a 1000 years later. This conclusion that Ezra wrote these books can not be guaranteed, but it seems likely. For example, the last verses of II Chronicles and the first verses of Ezra form a continuation of the same thoughts and by the same author. We also know that early Hebrew scholars considered the Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah as one book.

If the foregoing assumptions are true, what was Ezra’s purpose in writing a supplemental history? His emphasis on religious matters gives a strong clue. Ezra understood the reason Israel was sent into captivity: their neglect of true worship of Jehovah in favor of idols. His recounting of the nation’s best days, when it served God faithfully, was a part of his effort to see that his people did not make the same mistake again. Other measures directed toward the same goal were his establishment of synagogues as convenient places for Jews to study and pray, his harsh reactions toward Jewish intermarriage with heathens (Ezra 10), and so forth.

Ezra’s second account in the Old Testament is similar to the four gospels in the New Testament. They overlap and augment each other, each emphasizing special facets of Jesus’ ministry. They do not compete with or contradict each other.

Two Sets of History Books

4000 BC

THE BOOK OF GENESIS THROUGH II KINGS

580 BC

History begins with creation and is covered in narrative form with relevant genealogies

The Patriarchs; descent into Egypt and Exodus

Conquest of Canaan, reign of Judges

Reigns of Kings of Israel & Judah

Captivity and to middle of stay in Babylon

4000 BC

I CHRONICLES, II CHRONICLES, EZRA, NEHEMIAH

530 BC

Genealogies beginning with Adam & Eve up to the reign of King Saul. Brief historical notes are interspersed with genealogies

Narrative begins with David and Solomon and emphasizes religious activities, i.e. developing tabernacle service, building the temple, dedication of temple, etc. Mostly ignores Kings of Israel, focusing on Kings of Judah

End of captivity and early restoration

Chart 21:1 Two Sets of History Books

Summary

Ezra wrote to strengthen the people in true religion. His purpose was not to write a history, but to use history to edify the nation, as noted by the fact that he hardly mentioned the kings of the northern kingdom. He probably considered them as based on an illegal apostasy and not worth discussion. David, the great organizer and reformer, was discussed in much detail (I Chronicles 11-29), but even here, it was David's establishment of the tabernacle worship, the work of the priests, the song service, and so forth that were given prominent places. Solomon was given less space than David (II Chronicles 1-9), and the writer seemed unimpressed by his great cultural achievements, noticing instead the building of the temple, its dedication, and similar matters. Even the genealogies in the first ten chapters of I Chronicles were needed for spiritual purposes, for example, to establish who could be priests (Ezra 2:61-63). These religious leaders had to be able to trace their lineage back to Aaron.

Bible critics, as such critics delight to do, have searched the two histories attempting to find contradictions. We need not concern ourselves with such exercises. Nor should we be confused by the two accounts. Instead, we can use them for the purpose they were intended, and find in the second one wonderful descriptions of the work of great religious reformers from before the captivity and afterward.

CHAPTER 22

The Reign of David

After David returned to Ziklag from his successful pursuit of the Amalekites, a messenger arrived from the Israelite army. He told David about the nation's defeat and the deaths of King Saul and his sons; but he embellished the story by saying he found Saul wounded and put him out of his misery. The lie was added because he hoped David would reward him for clearing the way to the throne (4:10).

Scripture readings for this chapter: the book of II Samuel. References in this text will be in parentheses chapter and verse only, i.e (4:10).

Instead of rewarding the liar, David had him put to death and mourned for Saul and Jonathan (1:19-27). Perhaps David felt relief at knowing he would not be hunted by Saul, but his grief was sincere. He genuinely loved Jonathan and he respected Saul because God had him anointed king.

When the mourning period was over, David inquired of God whether he should return to Israel. God answered that he should return and live in the city of Hebron. He did so, and leaders of the tribe of Judah came and made him king.

The men of Judah also told David of the valor of the citizens of Jabesh-Gilead in recovering the bodies of Saul and his sons. David wrote to the Gileadites praising their bravery and issuing a not-too-subtle invitation for them to join Judah by becoming a part of his kingdom. Apparently he planned to reach out to different parts of the country, gradually extending his rule over the nation. But his plans were thwarted. Abner, Saul's commander-in-chief, had already gone to Mahanaim in Gilead and set up Ishbosheth, a remaining son of Saul, as king. David was now king, but only over the large tribe of Judah. Ishbosheth ruled the rest of Israel.

War Between the Tribes

A divided kingdom made both sides nervous, especially the commanders. Abner led some of his troops across the Jordan and Joab, David's commander,

met him at the Pool of Gibeon with a small army. The original purpose of the meeting was not clear, perhaps it was just to test each other's wills. Abner suggested a fencing game between 12 of the young men from each side. It was described as "play" (2:14), but if it was intended as sport, it got out of hand, for all the young men were killed.

The deadly game set off a real battle between the armies. David's side won a decisive victory, killing 360 of Ishbosheth's soldiers while losing only 20 men. Among those 20 casualties, however, was Asahel, the brother of Joab. Asahel was killed by Abner, Joab's counterpart in Ishbosheth's army. Joab harbored hatred toward Abner for years over the death of Asahel.

Those events showed that uniting the kingdom would be neither fast or easy. There was an uneasy truce, interrupted by sporadic fighting, between the houses of Saul and David for seven years. David seemed content in Hebron, which was surely better for him than running from Saul or living in Philistia. He consolidated his kingdom, acquired several wives, and began in earnest to raise a family.

Ishbosheth Proved to be a Weak Leader

In contrast to David, Ishbosheth's control over the other tribes was fragile. Abner was the power behind the throne from the beginning, and he grew stronger and Ishbosheth weaker as time went on. Abner took one of Saul's concubines, a signal that he saw himself as taking Saul's place in the kingdom. Ishbosheth understood the symbolism and complained to Abner, who railed at Ishbosheth and threatened to give the kingdom to David.

Abner made good on his threat, and began immediately to communicate with the leaders of the tribes, reminding them that they had once wanted David to be king over them, and saying now is the time to make it happen (3:17-18). He also sent messengers to David saying, "make a league with me, and my hand shall be with thee to bring all Israel unto thee" (3:12). David responded that he would make a treaty with him but only if he brought with him Michal, David's first wife, whom Saul had given to another man. At the same time, David sent word to Ishbosheth demanding the return of Michal. Ishbosheth took Michal from her husband, Phalti, and sent her by Abner to David. He probably did not know the real purpose of Abner's visit to David.

David accepted Michal back, received Abner, and concluded a treaty with

him. Abner was sent away in peace to finish convincing the leaders of Israel to join David's kingdom. Joab was away during Abner's visit, but his men knew that he would not be pleased to see the powerful commander of the opposing army, and the man who had killed his brother, welcomed into the kingdom. When Joab returned, they informed him about what had taken place.

Joab scolded David, claiming Abner had come to spy on them in preparation for an attack. Then he secretly sent messengers to call Abner back. When Abner returned, Joab took him aside under a pretense of speaking privately with him and killed him. David mourned for Abner and called a curse on Joab's house because of the treachery (3:28-29), but he did not try to punish Joab for the crime. To a lesser degree, David feared his powerful commander as Ishbosheth did Abner.

Ishbosheth was Assassinated

All Israel knew that Abner was the real power in the kingdom. When news came that he was dead, unrest spread throughout the tribes of Israel. Two men, named Baanah and Rechab, went to Ishbosheth and gained entrance to his house under the guise of delivering food. They found the king in bed, stabbed him, cut off his head, and brought it to David in Hebron. Claiming to have avenged David of his enemies, they supposed he would reward them. Instead, David "rewarded" them as he did the man who falsely took credit for killing Saul (4:9-12).

David Made King Over All Israel

After the death of Ishbosheth, the elders of Israel came to David in Hebron, made a covenant with him, and anointed him king. David understood that the Lord had established him as king over all Israel in fulfillment of the promise made approximately 14 years earlier (5:12). He was a young man, just thirty years old when he began to reign in Hebron, but he had a good vision for the kingdom. For one thing, he understood that the work of taking the land from their enemies had not been completed under Joshua. Nor had the borders of the kingdom been extended to the Euphrates River as God had authorized (Deuteronomy 11:24). He set about accomplishing these tasks.

Jerusalem was the new king's first target. David intended, probably at God's direction, to make it the capitol of the kingdom. It was well fortified and the Jebusites taunted David saying the blind and lame could defend the city against him (5:6). They had reason for their confidence. The Israelites had tried to take

the city under Joshua and failed (Joshua 15:63). David succeeded, however, and immediately established his residence there.

Renewed War With the Philistines

The defeat of their strong city, which the original inhabitants of Canaan had held against Israel for approximately 400 years, seemed to stun the Philistines. They gathered a large force against David in the Valley of Rephaim, which stretched to the southwest of Jerusalem (5:18). David inquired of God whether he should go against them. God said yes, and promised victory, which He gave. The Philistines apparently feared David because they brought images of their idol gods into battle and then left them behind when they fled in defeat. David and his men gathered up the idols and burned them.

The enemies regrouped and came for a second battle in the same valley. Again, they were defeated. This seemed to break the back of Philistine resistance, and later they were completely subdued (8:1). David then turned his attention to the Moabites and the Syrians. The Moabites had been protected by God because they were descendants of Lot (Deuteronomy 2:9), but they forfeited that shelter, perhaps by the mistreatment of David's parents as discussed in the preceding chapter.

At that point, the Syrians were the main barrier between Israel and the Euphrates River on the northeast. David knew the limits of the kingdom. He attacked the Syrians who were ruled by Hadadezer (8:3), whose homeland by the Euphrates was called Zobah. The Syrians of Damascus, nearer to Israel, rallied to the defense of Hadadezer and both were defeated. The Kingdom of Israel was secure for the first time since Joshua led the nation into Canaan. And for the first time it extended, as God said it would, from Egypt on the southwest to the Euphrates on the northeast.

High Points of David's Rule

With control of the nation in hand, David concentrated on developing the kingdom. God's purpose in raising David to the throne was further to introduce the line of descendants, that began with Seth, through which the Messiah would come. David's own ambitions were to establish a theocratic kingdom, one that worshipped Jehovah and accepted His word as law. The two purposes were in agreement.

One of David's first, official acts as king over all Israel was an attempt to

bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and restore true worship of God (6:1-18). The ark had remained in a private home (6:3), where it was taken when returned by the Philistines, after they had captured it in the days of Samuel. That first attempt was a disaster. They put the ark on an ox cart for the nine-mile trip from Kirjath-Jearim to Jerusalem. This was a violation of God's law, for He had commanded that the ark be moved only on the shoulders of the priests (Exodus 25:14-15 and Numbers 4:15). When the oxen stumbled and shook the ark, Uzzah, a son of Abinadab who had cared for the ark, reached out to steady it and was struck dead. Only priests who were properly sanctified were authorized to touch the ark, so this too was a sin.

David was angry and afraid of God. He took the ark aside into another private home, went back to Jerusalem, and sulked for three months (6:8-12). When he calmed down, and probably consulted the law about how the ark should be moved, he made a second and more informed attempt. That time the ark was brought to Jerusalem with great joy and without a problem.

We know that David came to understand his and the people's mistake in the first effort to move the ark. He explained what they had done wrong and acknowledged that God "made a breach" upon them because "we sought Him not after the due order" (I Chronicles 15:11-15). If we ever wonder whether sincerity of heart alone is sufficient to please God, David's experience can give a certain answer.

David Wanted to Build the Temple

One night as David sat in his newly-constructed house visiting with Nathan the prophet, he voiced his feelings of guilt at living in a nice place while the ark of God was housed in a tent. Nathan encouraged David to build a temple. "Go do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee" (7:3). But the word of the Lord came to Nathan that night saying, tell my servant, David, "thou shalt not build me an house to dwell in" (I Chronicles 17:4).

God acknowledged the nobility of David's wishes and promised to bless David's house forever and the Children of Israel through him. Solomon, however, would be the one to build the temple. Then God explained a basic principle about how to please Him in matters of religion. "In all the places where I have walked with the Children of Israel, did I speak a word to any of the tribes, saying why do you not build me an house of cedar?" (7:7).

The message was clear. “If I did not ask for it; I do not want it.” This example, and others like it, caused Bible scholars of the past to teach respect for the silence of God’s word. “Speak where the Bible speaks,” they said, and “Be silent where the Bible is silent.” Paul showed that the principle is true in the New Testament. He pointed out that the law said nothing about priests coming from the tribe of Judah; they came only from the tribe of Levi. Therefore if the law had not been changed, Jesus could not be our high priest, since He came from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:11-14).

The lesson David learned in bringing the ark to Jerusalem is one of the most important ones in religion. God guides our behavior in matters of His house by a pattern, and men can not give more or less than the blueprint demands and still please Him. This principle was taught at Sinai when the tabernacle was first built. “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it” (Exodus 25:8-9). In our private lives, God directs our behavior by guidelines that leave room for personal discretion.

David and Bathsheba

The major battles with Israel’s enemies were won, but there was still some military cleanup to be accomplished. David sent Joab and the army to Rabbah, on the east side of the Jordan, to put down the Ammonites. These descendants of Lot’s youngest daughter were extraordinarily fierce warriors. While the army was away, David walked one afternoon on the roof of his house and saw a beautiful woman bathing. Perhaps from the way she bathed, he could tell she was purifying herself after her monthly period. He sent for her and committed adultery with her.

Bathsheba conceived and reported it to David (II Samuel chapters 11 and 12). He sent to Joab at the battle front requesting news of the battle and specifically asking that Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, be the messenger. David hoped that Uriah’s visit home would cover his adultery. When Uriah arrived, the king inquired of the battle and then sent him to his house, followed by a gift of food from the king’s kitchen. But Uriah would not go home. It was not that he suspected his wife, but because he was a noble man, and felt it unfair that he come home to the comforts of his house and the joys of his wife while his commander and fellow soldiers were fighting for the nation. David should have

suspected such behavior. Uriah was, after all, among the king's elite corps of "mighty men" who had distinguished themselves with great acts of bravery and loyalty (23:39). David tried again, even getting Uriah drunk, but the second night also Uriah slept in the king's court with the servants.

David wrote a letter to Joab commanding that Uriah be put in the hottest part of the battle, left unsupported by other soldiers, and killed. He sealed the letter and sent it by Uriah. Joab obeyed the king, having to practice poor military tactics in the process, and consequently many soldiers were killed. He sent word that Uriah was dead. When the messenger described how badly the battle had gone, David was cavalier toward the death of his men, including one of his most valiant soldiers. "Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devours one as well as another" (11:25). The king thought he had covered his sin, but he had not covered it from the "eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

God sent Nathan the prophet to David. Nathan devised an allegory about a rich man who, having large flocks and herds, stole a poor man's only lamb, his children's pet, with which to feed a visitor. The king's righteous anger flared and his judgment was quick. "The man that has done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold." (12:5-6). Nathan said, "thou art the man," and continued with a severe tongue-lashing as David's guilt settled in. When Nathan finished, David said, "I have sinned against the Lord."

The prophet told the king, "the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die." David had reason to worry about being put to death; Nathan had tricked him into pronouncing judgment on himself. He knew the punishment for such willful sins was death (Numbers 15:30). Sinners are almost always harsher in judging others than themselves, but God sees the sins of kings and beggars as the same. The fact that David's sin was forgiven did not mean there would be no social consequences. Nathan advised the king that what he had done to Uriah in secret, another would do to him in the light of the sun, and that the sword would never depart from his house. In addition, the child born of their adulterous union would die. David took Bathsheba as his wife; perhaps it seemed the only decent thing to do.

The Social Consequences of David's Sin

Earlier God had blessed David and promised to bless his descendants after him. "Thy house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee." (7:16). But as David learned, God's promises are conditional, and this one was

revoked by Nathan's words. The later part of David's reign was overshadowed by the specter of this sin. The social consequences were not long in coming.

The child was born and soon became sick. David mourned and prayed for the baby. He fasted and lay all night on the ground, but the child died (12:15-24). David comforted Bathsheba and she became pregnant again. The two of them became especially close, one of the few rays of light in this tragedy. When parents lose a child they will either get closer and their relationship stronger or they will grow farther apart and likely divorce. Perhaps in their long nights of sorrow, they acknowledged their sins to each other and grew spiritually. The son that came from their legitimate but sorrowful union was Solomon.

David's wife, Maachah, who was the daughter of the King of Geshur, had given the king a handsome son, named Absalom, and a beautiful daughter, named Tamar. Amnon, David's eldest son, decided he loved Tamar, his half sister. With the help of a crafty friend, Amnon devised a sneaky way to get Tamar into his bedroom and raped her (13:1-22), despite her poignant pleadings that it was an evil and foolish thing to do. Amnon's emotions after the rape showed that his desire was not love, but lust; he despised her and drove her out of his presence. Humiliated and weeping, she made her way to her brother's house. When Absalom learned of the rape, he comforted Tamar, took her in his house to live, and plotted to kill Amnon.

Two years later Absalom got his chance. He invited all his half brothers to a sheep-shearing party out in the country. Apparently these harvest celebrations were gala affairs during which wine flowed freely. Absalom and his servants waited until Amnon, and probably the group, was drunk and killed Amnon. It was a "sobering" experience; everyone fled. Absalom also fled to the King of Geshur, who was his grandfather.

David Mourns Absalom

In many ways it is easier to adjust to the death of a child than to alienation. Joab, commander of the king's army, understood David's grief and undertook to bring Absalom back. He enlisted the help of an intelligent woman from Tekoa, a small city far enough south that the king would not know her family, who told David a tale about her two sons. One killed the other, she said, and now the family wanted to put the murderer to death, which would leave her alone and helpless. The king understood her plight and promised to order the people not to harm her remaining son. Then the woman, as Nathan had done about Bathsheba,

sprang her trap. “The king speaks this judgment,” she said, “as one who himself is guilty, because he does not bring home his own banished son.”

David suspected that Joab was behind the ruse, but he loved Absalom so he told Joab to bring him home. Absalom was required, however, to stay in his own house; David refused to see him in person. “So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king’s face” (14:28). Absalom chafed under house arrest. He sent Joab to plead with David to allow him to come for a visit, arguing he may as well have stayed in Geshur. The king agreed and Absalom bowed before his father in obeisance. David kissed Absalom and reconciled with him.

But Absalom, a scheming man, wanted his freedom to move about the country for other purposes. In the manner of modern politicians, he glad-handed the people and told them how much better he would make life for them if he were king. Absalom probably considered himself the rightful heir to David’s throne because Amnon, the eldest son and normal heir, was dead. For one so given to intrigue, it is easy to suspect his murder of Amnon was not altogether out of love for Tamar. David had another son between Amnon and Absalom. His name was Chileab, the son of Abigail (3:3), but he apparently died young for he was not mentioned as an adult.

The day came when Absalom had a strong following and was ready to make his move. He told his father he wanted to go to Hebron because he had made a vow while in Geshur that he would sacrifice to the Lord in Hebron, if God would bring him back to Jerusalem in peace. As any Godly parent would be, David was pleased to hear of his son respecting the Lord. Hebron was a plausible place to do his penance. It was a holy city, the ancient home of Abraham, and the place of Absalom’s birth. But more to Absalom’s purpose, it was approximately 30 miles away and out from under the eyes of Joab and the royal guard. Meanwhile Absalom sent spies throughout the country saying, “when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then shall you say, Absalom reigns in Hebron” (15:10). Some of David’s most trusted advisers went with Absalom.

David Fled from Absalom

The first part of Absalom’s conspiracy went well for him. A messenger came to David and said, “the hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom” (15:13). As Absalom and his army marched north, the king and those closest to him fled Jerusalem eastward, toward the wilderness and the Jordan River. They needed time to mobilize the full army. Ten of David’s concubines were left behind to

take care of the palace. Perhaps David thought that nothing could be worse than fleeing from Saul, but running from his own son was, indeed, worse. The group left Jerusalem weeping; people along the way came out and wept; the king wept and was barefoot.

Just out of the city while the sad entourage walked in the valley, a man of Benjamin, who was still angry about the kingdom being taken from Saul, came and walked on the hillside above them (16:5-12). Shimei shouted obscenities at David and threw dirt and rocks down upon them. Abishai, one of the king's mighty men, asked permission to go up and take off his head. The king said no because the Lord may have told him to curse David. No doubt David was reflecting on the prophecy of Nathan years earlier: "The sword shall never depart from thy house."

Absalom Took Over the Palace

As news of the rebellion spread, David's friends began to rally to him. Abiathar and Zadok, the priests, brought the ark of the covenant and met David. He sent them back saying the tabernacle was the place for the ark. Hushai, a respected counselor to David, also came. David sent him back to feign loyalty to Absalom and counter with bad advice any good plans Absalom made. David's group made camp at Mahanaim, a small city east of the Jordan and on the Jabbok River, about 50 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Many people from the area brought equipment and provisions for David and his people, especially an old, wealthy, and good man named Barzillai.

When Absalom and his troop arrived in Jerusalem and took over the palace, he asked counsel of Ahithophel, one of David's wise men who had defected. Ahithophel argued that Absalom must show the people that he had the will and determination to fight his father. He advised that Absalom go in to his father's wives and let it be known to Israel. They pitched a tent on the top of the palace so that all Jerusalem could witness the spectacle of a young man going in and out to his father's concubines. It probably worked to convince the people that Absalom had gone too far to ever turn back, but more importantly, it was a dramatic fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy from God. "I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them to thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun" (12:11).

The Battle for the Kingdom

David numbered and organized his men for battle, set them in three divisions, and put a captain over each. He told the captains, in the presence of the men, “deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom” (18:5). Absalom had the will to fight his father; but clearly David had no taste for fighting his son. Fortunately, his men felt differently. The battle was joined in a forest called the Woods of Ephraim and it quickly went against Absalom. It spread over much of that part of the country as the rebels fled in fright and the soldiers chased them. Twenty thousand of Absalom’s men were killed. When Absalom faced David’s men he fled on his mule. The mule ran under the branches of an oak tree and Absalom was caught by the long, thick hair in which he prided himself (14:26), and left hanging “between heaven and earth.” One of the soldiers saw him and reported it to Joab, but would not touch him because of the king’s charge. Joab, never prone to mercy, took three sharpened sticks and stabbed Absalom in the belly as he hung in the tree (18:14).

The battle was over and the rebellion squelched, but David was not a happy man. At the news of Absalom’s death, David wept so loudly that the people were embarrassed. “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (18:33). The victory was turned into mourning; the people began to steal away to their houses in confusion. Joab knew that what David was doing was ungracious and dangerous. There are times that grieving must be done in private. The people had risked their lives for David and his kingdom and they should be thanked and encouraged. It was also as important for David to show a will to rule, as it had been for Absalom. There was already a beginning of strife among the people. Joab scolded David, accusing him of loving his enemies more than his friends, and insisting that he go out and speak to the people. David arose, sat in the gate of the city, and talked with the people.

Joab was known neither for sensitivity or wisdom, but on this occasion he gave David good advice. Any one who treats his friends and enemies the same will soon have few friends, a lesson many family members and church leaders sorely need to learn.

The Other Side of David’s Reign

The foregoing description of the latter part of David’s reign sounds as if the king spent all his time dealing with the consequences of his sin with Bathsheba. While we have followed the story given in II Samuel, and the ghost of the sin

was always lurking in the background, David also made many important religious accomplishments. The writer of I Chronicles tells us (beginning with chapter 15) of David preparing a place for the ark of the covenant, restoring true worship, reinstituting the annual feasts, writing psalms for the worship (many of which are recorded in the book of Psalms), setting the work of the priests in order, organizing the song service, and on and on. And intermittently he fought battles to keep the kingdom secure.

Perhaps David himself would consider his greatest achievement the preparation he did for Solomon to build the temple. The writer of Chronicles also considered it important, for he told the story in great detail (chapters 22-28). David contributed generously from his own funds, organized an effort to get other leaders to help, and revealed to Solomon the pattern for the temple that God had given him for safe keeping (I Chronicles 28:11). There is no doubt that Solomon's great success in building the temple was partly due to his father's preparation for it.

Late in David's life there was yet another attempt on his throne by one of his sons (I Kings 1:5-53). David had told Bathsheba that Solomon would reign after him, and God had confirmed this in His revelation to David about building the temple (II Samuel 7:12-14). But Adonijah, a son of Haggith, a wife of David that we know little about, was now the eldest living son. He made a conspiracy with Joab, Abiathar the priest, and others to proclaim himself king. They assembled at Enrogel, a spring not far outside the city of Jerusalem, and prepared to crown Adonijah. Apparently they were prepared for a quick dash to the city and capture of it.

But Nathan discovered the plot—perhaps it was revealed to him by God—and advised Bathsheba, who told David. The king was now frail, but his mind was still alert. He took command of the situation, called Benaiah, captain of the royal guard, and Zadok the priest. David then had Solomon crowned by Zadok and Nathan, and accompanied to the throne by the royal guard. When the men with Adonijah heard the city rejoicing and were told that Solomon had been made king, they trembled and deserted Adonijah.

Solomon behaved graciously and wisely toward his brother, advising him that as long as he was a loyal subject he would be spared. Adonijah caused no trouble at first, but later angered Solomon and was put to death. Joab seemed to know that he would receive no mercy from either David or Solomon, and he was right.

He took refuge in the tabernacle and, refusing to come out, was executed there on Solomon's orders. The third leader of the conspiracy was Abiathar, the priest. Probably because he had been with David since the early days of his flight from Saul, he was not put to death nor even removed as priest at first. Solomon removed him as high priest, some years later when the temple was complete.

The writer reports the death of King David in the simple, elegant style that readers of the Word expect. "David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David" (I Kings 2:11).

Summary

God raised David to the throne of Israel saying He wanted as king a man after His own heart (I Samuel 14:13). David fulfilled that divine wish. Although obviously human, compared to Saul and every king after him, he was a great success. The accomplishments of his reign were clear and concrete. Under David the full boundaries of the kingdom were first secured. He handed over to his son, a nation that stretched from Egypt to the Euphrates River. The people were at peace within and no nation threatened them.

David's greatest accomplishments, however, were spiritual. He restored true worship, but even more, he showed the people how to love the Lord and His law. "O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalms 119:97). In this respect, David was far ahead of his time, and even our time. He did this by raising the worship of God to a level that appealed to the human heart. The development of the song service is an example here. In these efforts he presaged the Messiah who taught that, not only what one does, but also what he feels in his heart is important (Matthew 5:21-48).

In reading the record of David's reign, the latter part of it seemed overshadowed by his sin with Bathsheba. It certainly was affected by it. We believe, however, that it was David's view of his sin, rather than God's or the people's, that we get from the record. He seemed always conscious of what he had done. "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me" (Psalms 51:3). That tender conscience made him accept the lying vituperation of Shimei and, no doubt, feel responsible for Absalom's wickedness. (How many Christian parents have searched their own souls in the same way?) The same conscience had made him feel guilty, as a young man, for cutting off a corner of King Saul's skirt (I Samuel 24:5). But it also made him a man after God's own heart.

CHAPTER 23

The Reign of the Wise Man

Solomon ascended the throne of Israel with great promise. Much of his advantage was inherited from David, who made careful preparations to insure his son's success. But Solomon also made wise decisions early in his career.

When the kingdom was secured after Adonijah's attempted coup, Solomon led the nation in a great sacrifice to the Lord at Gibeon (II Chronicles 1:1-6). This site was chosen because the tabernacle and altar were there. God told Israel that they must not make sacrifices to Him in any place they pleased, but at the place He chose and on His altar (Deuteronomy 12:1-8). David had built a tabernacle for the ark of the covenant at Jerusalem, presumably with God's blessings, and the people of that area "inquired at it," meaning they prayed there.

Thus for a while there seemed to be two centers of worship. One was at Gibeon, in the tabernacle Moses built, with its altar and Zadok as priest. The other was at Jerusalem, with the tabernacle David built and the ark of the covenant, under Abiathar the priest. Sacrifices, however, could legally be offered only on the altar God had given.

The night following the great sacrifice, God appeared to Solomon and said, "Ask what I shall give thee" (II Chronicles 1:7). Solomon humbly requested wisdom with which to lead and judge God's people. Jehovah was pleased with the young king's prayer. He promised the wisdom Solomon asked and riches and honor too. The promise of wisdom was soon fulfilled.

Two women, harlots, came to the king for judgment. They had delivered infant sons at about the same time, but one had lain on her child in the night and smothered it. Discovering her tragedy, she took her friend's sleeping baby and placed her dead son by that mother's side. Now they were in Solomon's court, each claiming the living child. Solomon called for a sword and proposed to cut the child in two, giving each mother half. The pretender agreed, but the real mother shouted, "No! Give him to her!"

For those of us who grew up hearing this story, it seems commonplace, not a

demonstration of extraordinary wisdom. It would not work now; no one would believe a judge would actually carry out such a sentence. It would not have worked then, had not Solomon presented it with appropriate drama. But at just the right moment, with the metal of the sword gleaming over the infant's body, it had the power to bring out the true characters of these women. That is the definition of real wisdom: The ability to see the unique characteristics of a problem, and to craft a solution that specifically fits that situation.

Happy Days in Israel—Every Man under His own Vine

The early years of Solomon's kingdom were halcyon. Peace and prosperity prevailed and the king's wisdom seemed to pervade the nation. "Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree" (I Kings 4:25). This was a Hebrew adage denoting peace and safety. Because of Solomon's secure rule, they did not need to dwell in fortified cities, nor did they worry, as in times past, about predators coming in to take their harvests.

Despite an auspicious beginning, not all of Solomon's early decisions were wise, specifically his marriage to an Egyptian princess. "Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David" (I Kings 3:1). Although the sacred historian merely stated Solomon's actions without complaint, there were two things wrong with them. First, God specifically forbade the Hebrews to marry heathens. Second, He told them not to make treaties with neighboring idolatrous nations.

Solomon probably made the alliance to assure peace and promote trade with Egypt. Intermarriage of their sons and daughters was a common practice among ancient kings, and it probably worked for the purpose Solomon intended it (II Chronicles 1:14-17). It also brought negative consequences, but we will not see these until later. God still forbids His people to make intimate relationships with infidels, and no doubt He does so for the same reasons as then (II Corinthians 6:14-17).

Building the Temple

In the fourth year of his reign and the 480th year after the exodus from Egypt (I Kings 6:1, II Chronicles 3:2), Solomon began to build the temple of God. Years earlier, God refused David the right to build it, but he did not forbid him from helping Solomon. The old king amassed great quantities of gold, silver, brass, precious stones, et cetera and charged all leaders of the people to

cooperate with Solomon (I Chronicles 29:1-10). He also seemed eager to impress his son, whom he referred to as “young and tender,” with the seriousness of the task. “The temple must be magnificent,” he said, “because it is not a house for man, but for God.”

First, Solomon needed a blueprint. We remember how precise God was in His instructions for building the tabernacle. Surely He was no less concerned about the permanent house that bore His name. Again David provided the answer. God, he said, had guided him to write out the pattern for the temple and all its furnishings (I Chronicles 28:11-19). David kept it safely and gave it to Solomon at the appropriate time.

In addition to the materials David provided, Solomon needed stones and timber for the structure itself. Israel did not have the types of wood he required in quantities large enough to meet the need. He made a bargain with Hiram, King of Tyre, to have his skilled lumbermen cut cedar and fir logs and float them by sea from Lebanon to the port of Joppa. Hiram was willing to help because he was a friend of David. Solomon also conscripted 150,000 non-Jewish persons who lived in Israel and put them to work with Hiram’s laborers in Tyre and in Israel.

The building skills of Hiram’s men, which Solomon praised, must have been superb. Stones and timbers were measured, cut, and shaped before delivery. No sound of hammer or any iron tool was heard at the building site (I Kings 6:7). This fact also indicated the clarity and precision of the plans God gave for the temple.

The Temple Mount

The temple was built on Mount Moriah, a fitting historical site. Late in life, David ordered an unauthorized census of the people (I Chronicles 21:1-30). God plagued Israel and David repented and begged God not to punish the people for his sin. God accepted the prayer and told David to build an altar on Mount Moriah in the threshing floor of Ornan. David bought the land, built the altar, offered the sacrifice, and the plague stopped. Thus Mount Moriah was a place of worship authorized by God, and a place that represented sacrifice and forgiveness.

By noting the date Solomon began to build (I Kings 6:1) and the date on which he finished (I Kings 6:37-38), we know the temple was 7 years and 6

months in construction. By any standard, it was magnificent. Within the Most Holy Place alone, about 28,125 pounds of gold were used. This sounds like an enormous amount, but it is easily acceptable. The golden figures of the cherubim that spread their wings over the ark of the covenant were 30 feet across. The ark and other articles were also covered with gold. The rest of the building was decorated similarly with artwork of precious metals and stones.

The Dedication

When the temple was complete, Solomon assembled the leaders of Israel to Jerusalem for its dedication (II Chronicles 5:2). Perhaps their most important task was to bring in the ark of the covenant. It did not have to be brought from far, only from the City of David and the tabernacle David had built for it. That community joined Jerusalem on the west. As with the original tabernacle, when the priests brought in the ark and put it in the Most Holy Place, “the glory of the Lord filled the house of God” (II Chronicles 5:14). The temple was dedicated with great joy. Solomon blessed the people, thanked the Lord, and made a long prayer asking God’s blessings on Israel and the temple (II Chronicles 6:1-42).

After the dedication of the temple, God appeared to Solomon a second time (II Chronicles 7:12). He told the king that He had heard his prayer of dedication; and that He would accept the sacrifices and hear the prayers of the people that they prayed in or (if they were away) toward that house. “Mine eyes shall be open and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.”

Then God spoke directly to Solomon. “And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and judgments; then shall I stablish the throne of thy kingdom according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel” (II Chronicles 7:17-18). God continued to warn Solomon, in startlingly severe language, that if he turned away from Him, He would pluck his kingdom up by the roots and cast out of His sight the great temple Solomon had just dedicated.

God’s promises usually are conditional; but He does not usually spell out the conditions in such graphic language. Had He already seen something in Solomon that made Him know the young king’s vulnerability?

Solomon’s Wisdom

Solomon’s reputation for wisdom grew so that rulers of other lands came to

hear his counsel. The Queen of Sheba pitched up with a train of attendants bearing gifts and a list of questions with which to test the king (II Chronicles 9:1-12). Obviously skeptical at first, she concluded, “It was a true report which I heard in mine own land of thine acts, and of thy wisdom” (II Chronicles 9:5).

Solomon was granted wisdom by the Lord, but he was also a diligent student. He studied humans, animals, trees, plants, rock formations, and on and on (I Kings 4:29-34). The book of Ecclesiastes describes a one-man scientific project in which the king experimented to find out how humans could find contentment on the earth. His final conclusion was: “Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (12:13). In true academic fashion, he published his research, much of it in hundreds of pithy sayings, called proverbs (I Kings 4:32). There is no doubt that he was a scholar of the highest rank.

The Opulence of Solomon’s Reign

Solomon proved himself a skillful manager of the nation’s economy. He put the country to work, promoted trade with other nations, established a merchant navy, and collected taxes. Many of the great, domestic projects that provided jobs for the people were related to the kingdom, such as Solomon’s own house, which required 13 years to build. Then there was the House of the Forest (I Kings 7:2), probably a great Hall of State, and houses for his wives. These buildings are believed to have formed a complex located on the hill just across the Tyropean Valley immediately west of Jerusalem. The compound was connected by a magnificent viaduct to the temple. The Queen of Sheba seemed as impressed by this as by the buildings themselves (I Kings 10:5).

There were other measures of opulence in Solomon’s kingdom. Gold and silver were said to be as common as stones and imported cedar wood as abundant as the sycamore that grew in the valleys (II Chronicles 1:15). The king amassed chariots, horses, and horsemen by the thousands and stationed them in cities around the nation. Recent excavations at Jezreel uncovered a battery of stables believed to have belonged to Solomon.

As in modern economies that rest on free-enterprise, the wealth in Solomon’s kingdom was not evenly distributed; much of it was in the hands of the king and his government. This, and the king’s luxurious life-style, resulted in heavy taxation and conscripted labor, especially in the latter years of his reign. These were the types of burdens that Samuel, the prophet, had tried to warn the people about when they first demanded a king (I Samuel 8:10-20). Considerable

dissatisfaction developed among the citizenry.

Even in earlier years, Solomon was not considered by everyone to be a generous man. King Hiram put most of his nation and its resources at Solomon's disposal to help build the temple. A skilled craftsman in brass, he actually came to Israel to construct some of its grandest features, such as the front pillars (I Kings 7:13-22). As payment for his work and resources, Solomon gave Hiram 20 cities in Galilee, which was next door to Tyre. Hiram was not at all pleased with the payment. He voiced a brotherly complaint (he was half-Jewish), called them "dirty cities," and eventually gave them back.

From Opulence to Decadence

Indulgent life-styles frequently lead to decadence, and it was so in Israel. Many of Solomon's wives were from foreign nations and heathen in religion. Solomon allowed them to openly practice their idolatry and eventually the king himself was carried away. "Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites" (I Kings 11:1-8). The western slope of the Mt. of Olives was said to be covered with shrines to false gods.

Perhaps most ominous of all was that "Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem." Chemosh and Milcom (also called Molech) "required" child sacrifices of their subjects. Thus it is likely that some of Solomon's children, King David's grandchildren, were burned to idol gods. Years later, in a determined effort to reform the nation, King Josiah destroyed the shrines and broke down the altars in order to stop that revolting practice (II Kings 23:1-20). He called the Mt. of Olives the "Mount of Corruption" and specifically fingered Solomon as the one responsible.

Had Solomon forgotten God's clear warning against idolatry? We do not know; but we do know that God had not forgotten. He spoke to Solomon and told him the kingdom would be taken away from his descendants, nevertheless, He would give his son one tribe for David's sake (I Kings 11:9-13). This was an open reference to the divided kingdom that came at Solomon's death.

Ahijah, the prophet, found Jeroboam and anointed him king, much as David was anointed while Saul was still on the throne. Jeroboam was a brave and industrious man who worked for Solomon on rebuilding the fort at Jerusalem,

and who rebelled against the king. The reasons he “lifted up his hand” against Solomon are not clear, but he had to flee for his life. “Solomon therefore sought to kill Jeroboam. But Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon” (I Kings 11:40). Thus Solomon did to his successor what Saul did to David.

Summary

“Then Solomon rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David his father.” So the writer closes one of the most extraordinary periods of Jewish history. Solomon’s accomplishments were real and great. Knowledge was advanced and the infrastructure of the country, such things as roads, irrigation systems, and parks, were upgraded. The nation reached its highest respect ever in the community of nations. Early on there were spiritual achievements, most notably the completion of the temple. But the nation reached its pinnacle about the middle of Solomon’s 40 year reign, and from that point it was all down hill.

By the time of Solomon’s death, idolatry was rife, led by open participation of the king and queens. The nation’s old enemies, subdued since David, were beginning to reassert themselves. Edom, Midian, and Syria were restive and Egypt, no longer a solid ally of Israel, was giving them encouragement. The people of Israel resented the heavy taxation and conscripted labor. Solomon had disavowed conscription of Israelites during the great building programs of his early years (II Chronicles 8:9), but that policy apparently was abandoned later. This irksome practice was probably the cause of Jeroboam’s rebellion. “And this was the reason he lifted up his hand against the king. [Solomon] gave him charge over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph” (I Kings 11:27-28, Revised Standard Version). The early years of Solomon’s reign would be the period Israelites would look back to with longing for centuries. Sadly, the nation’s days of glory were over.

CHAPTER 24

The Divided Kingdom: Israel

When Solomon died, Rehoboam, his son and heir apparent, went to Shechem to be crowned king. The location was politically wise. His support was weaker there than in Jerusalem, so it was an attempt to reach out to the northern tribes. And well he should. In the period between Solomon's death and Rehoboam's coronation, the people sent to Egypt for Jeroboam, one of the few Israelites who had shown the nerve to stand up to Solomon.

The inaugural festivities were soon eclipsed by serious political bargaining. Jeroboam led a large delegation to the new king and said, "Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee" (I Kings 12:4). From our vantage point, it sounds like a reasonable request. The king wisely asked for three days to study their proposal and promised to give them an answer on their return.

Rehoboam asked the old men who had advised his father what he should do. They agreed that Solomon's burden was too heavy and strongly recommended concessions. But the young king did not like that advice and called in his buddies with whom he grew up. They argued he should come down hard on the people. "Get your bluff in early," seemed to be their motto. When the delegation returned, "The king answered the people roughly. and spoke to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions" (I Kings 12:13-14).

Rehoboam's Mistake

Rehoboam's actions rank high among the worst political mistakes of all time. It is never wise to make threats one can not carry out, and Rehoboam soon saw that it was his bluff that was called. "When all Israel saw that the king harkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David?, to your tents, O Israel: Now see to thine own house, David" (I Kings 12:16). The language was quaint, but the message was clear. The ten northern

tribes made good their threat by making Jeroboam king. Rehoboam had to get out of Shechem fast for his own safety, and when he sent back Adoram, his tax collector, that official was stoned to death.

The nation was on the brink of all-out war. Judah remained loyal to Rehoboam and Benjamin, small and attached to Judah, seemed at first to waver between the two sides. Rehoboam prepared for war against the northern tribes, but God sent Shemaiah to tell him not to do it. “Thus saith the Lord, ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me” (I Kings 12:24). Rehoboam accepted the prophet’s advice and was probably relieved to have a face-saving way out of the war.

Jeroboam proved himself an able administrator. He took ten tribes of discontented people, without even a capitol city, and developed them into a nation, at times a strong nation. He did have some advantages, such as the largest part of the land area, the best land for farming, and the best location for trading with other nations. On the other hand, Judah had the beautiful and revered capitol city and the religious center with its beloved new temple. It was the latter advantage on the part of Judah that prompted fear in Jeroboam and caused him to make a great spiritual error.

Jeroboam’s Mistake

Jeroboam was afraid the people would want to return to Jerusalem to worship in the temple, at least for the annual feasts. If they did so, he feared they would eventually return their loyalty to the king who ruled there. Jeroboam knew that he was a legitimate king only because God had rejected Solomon and shown His displeasure by removing a large part of the kingdom from his descendants. To keep the people at home, Jeroboam made two calf idols and set up one in Bethel, near the border with Judah, and the other in Dan, in the country’s far north. The king told the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (I Kings 12:28).

There probably never has been a more deliberate prostitution of true religion for political gain than this one, nor one that was more led by a single individual. Apostasies are generally movements in which the thinking of many leaders comes together. Of course, some people were already prone to idolatry. But we must acknowledge that Jeroboam’s leadership in this evil matter was also effective. He made idolatry a democratic movement by ordaining anyone who wished to be a priest (I Kings 13:33), and he made the apostasy more palatable

by mimicking the feasts and other ordinances of the Law of Moses. Just as David set the standard for godly leadership, Jeroboam was the model for evil rule. Bible writers referred to his actions as “the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat,” and that label was attached to kings who followed in his footsteps.

The northern kingdom seemed to prosper for a while. Jeroboam set up his capitol in the city of Shechem and quickly established control over the northern tribes. There were border skirmishes and brush wars as long as the reigns of Jeroboam and Rehoboam overlapped (I Kings 14:30), which was about 17 years. During the reign of Abijah, Rehoboam’s son, there was one all-out battle. Judah prevailed and 500,000 men of Israel were killed. Jeroboam moved his capitol from Shechem to the small city of Tirzah which was only a few miles farther north and east. A later king, Omri, moved the capitol to Samaria, just a few miles northwest of Shechem. Constructed on a hill and well fortified, Samaria survived two attacks by the Syrians and remained the capitol of Israel until the nation was destroyed by the Assyrians approximately 200 years later.

God Warned Jeroboam

God chose Jeroboam to take the kingdom from Solomon’s descendants and would have blessed his reign. As we have witnessed so often, however, God’s blessings are conditional and Jeroboam forfeited God’s protection when he sinned. A prophet, whose name was not given, was sent from Judah to Bethel to warn the erring king. The man of God arrived just as Jeroboam was about to personally burn incense on his altar. Burning incense was considered the most sacred act of worship under the law, and could be done only by a duly appointed and sanctified priest. Since Jeroboam had changed everything else, there was no reason to expect him to honor this principle.

The prophet cried out against the altar and those who sacrificed there with an astonishingly specific prophecy. He said that a child, named Josiah, would be born and grow up to burn on that altar the bones of the priests who sacrificed there. As he preached, Jeroboam reached out his hand toward the prophet and shouted to the people to arrest him. The king’s hand withered and his arm froze in place (I Kings 13:4). He changed his tune immediately and begged the prophet to pray that his hand be restored. His hand was restored and Jeroboam did not threaten the man of God further, but he also did not repent.

Jeroboam’s son became sick and he asked his wife to disguise herself and go to Ahijah, the prophet who had anointed him king, to inquire about the child’s

prognosis. Ahijah was old and blind, but God advised him that Jeroboam's wife was coming and instructed him what to say. The old prophet told the king's wife that the child she inquired about would die, all Israel would mourn for him, and he would be given a proper burial. The reason the child would die was that God had found good qualities within him (I Kings 14:13); all the other males of Jeroboam's house would die violently. "Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam. Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the Lord hath spoken it" (I Kings 14:10-11). This prophecy was fulfilled in the days of Jeroboam's son, Nadab, who reigned only two years before being assassinated along with all the male descendants of Jeroboam (I Kings 15:25-30). Death is not to be looked at as punishment for a good person; in the case of Jeroboam's son, it was a reward.

Meanwhile in Jerusalem

Rehoboam was clearly frightened by the early events of his reign. He turned to the Lord for help, and God gave it. He cemented the relationship with the tribe of Benjamin (II Chronicles 11:12) and received the many priests and Levites who fled the northern tribes because of Jeroboam's open idolatry. Security conscious as he was, the king strengthened the defenses of fifteen strategic cities around Judah. These developments gave Rehoboam confidence, and in his confidence, he turned away from the Lord (II Chronicles 12:1).

God allowed a league of African nations, led by Shishak, King of Egypt, to come up against Judah, capturing cities in the southern part of the country on the way to Jerusalem. The prophet, Shemaiah, explained the source of the trouble. "Thus saith the Lord, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak" (II Chronicles 12:5). The king and the people repented for a while and God gave them temporary relief, but the enemies looted the temple of the gold and precious things that David and Solomon dedicated to it. Rehoboam seemed to want to follow in the footsteps of Solomon, his father, but he did not have the wisdom to do it. And he had limited help from God because he deserted the Lord earlier in his reign than did Solomon. Rehoboam was also fond of wives, collecting 78 wives and concubines. The prophet summed up his seventeen-year reign by saying, "he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord" (II Chronicles 12:14).

The Northern Kingdom from Jeroboam to the Captivity

In the southern kingdom, the people knew that all kings were to come from the lineage of David, and with one exception, they did. There was no royal line in the north. This left the way open for easy challenges to the throne and there were many. Of the eighteen kings that ruled after Jeroboam, half died violent deaths. Eight were assassinated and one, Zimri, committed suicide while facing execution.

Nadab, son of Jeroboam and fully as wicked as his father, took the throne at his father's death. After a two-year and unremarkable reign, he was murdered by a man, named Baasha of the tribe of Issachar, during a battle with the Philistines (I Kings 15:27). When Baasha felt secure on the throne, he killed all the house of Jeroboam, fulfilling a part of the prophecy made about that evil man. Then a prophet was sent to Baasha to tell him that his house would be like that of Jeroboam (I Kings 16:3). Although Baasha had one of the longest reigns in the northern kingdom, 24 years, it too was distinguished for its wickedness. Elah, Baasha's son, reigned in his place and was assassinated by Zimri during a drunken party in the second year of his kingship. Zimri ruled only seven days before being overthrown by Omri.

This synopsis of the lives and rule of the first several kings of Israel is intended to give a flavor of the wicked and chaotic state into which the nation fell. Each king tried to pass on the throne to one of his sons, but these dynasties were fragile. In the first three cases, only one son followed the father before an assassination ended that line. The dynasty that was begun by Omri was different; he was followed on the throne by three descendants. For that reason, his was one of the most important periods in Israel's history.

An Evil Dynasty

Although an evil man, Omri was apparently a strong leader. It was he who moved the capitol to Samaria and fortified it. He apparently made friends with the Assyrians and established trade with them. The Bible does not speak of these things, but Assyrian records refer to Israel as the "Land of Omri." The Biblical record of Omri's reign is brief, but there is one important line: "Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him" (I Kings 16:25).

When Omri died after a twelve-year reign, his son Ahab ascended the throne. If anyone was looking for a religious reformation, they were disappointed. "Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were

before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal King of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him” (I Kings 16:30-31).

Jezebel was a zealot for her religion. Under Jeroboam, idolatry was a religion of convenience and probably many Israelites did not practice it. Under Ahab and Jezebel it became the established religion; prophets of the Lord were killed; and ordinary dissenters were persecuted. Jezebel imported 450 prophets of Baal, the supreme god of the Zidonian people, and 400 prophets of Ashtoreth, Baal’s female counterpart. Some people believe that Baal represented the sun and Ashtoreth the moon. The great prophet, Elijah, was summoned out of the obscurity of the small village of Tishbe, on the eastern side of the Jordan, to warn the king and the people.

Elijah, a Great Man of God

Elijah was a grisly, rough-hewn man who eschewed the comforts of city life. He was also a man of few words who seemed to prefer to communicate with actions. When he first appeared at the king’s court, he simply announced a three-year drought and disappeared. No doubt the king and his courtiers had several good laughs at the “crazy old man” who said it was not going to rain. But two years later, when the country was dried up and the cattle were dying, they were not laughing. They were out scouring the countryside for Elijah and looking for water.

Elijah hid himself where he was miraculously provided for by the Lord. At the end of three years, he showed himself to the king and arranged a great confrontation with the false prophets at Mt. Carmel, which overlooks the sea coast. Elijah invited the people as witnesses and challenged them: “How long halt [waver] ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: But if Baal, then follow him” (I Kings 18:21). Elijah proposed that each side offer a sacrifice of a bullock and pray to their god to send miraculous fire to burn the sacrifice. The god that answered by fire would prove himself the true God. The people agreed that this was a fair test.

Elijah gave the prophets of Baal the first go. They laid the wood on the altar, prepared the sacrifice, and prayed all day. The more they prayed, the more frenzied the false prophets became. They jumped up and down on the altar, shouted aloud, drew their own blood by cutting themselves, and on and on. At

evening time they gave up. Elijah repaired the altar of God that had fallen down from disuse. He put his wood and sacrifice on the altar, doused it with many barrels of water, and prayed a simple and fervent prayer to God. Fire fell immediately and consumed the sacrifice, the stones of the altar, and licked up the water. The people fell on their faces and confessed Jehovah as God. Elijah ordered the false prophets arrested and they were brought down to the little river Kishon, that flows on the north side of the mountain, and killed. The prophet prayed again and an abundant rain broke the drought.

Elijah's Disappointment

Elijah hoped for, and after the showdown expected, a complete restoration of true religion in Israel. He ran, perhaps in the strength of the Spirit or perhaps from sheer elation, ahead of Ahab's chariot for the 25-mile trek to Jezreel. Ahab had been remarkably quiet in the extraordinary events of the day, even during the slaughter of 450 of his wife's prophets. But when Ahab told Jezebel what had happened, she was not quiet and Elijah's hopes of a religious reformation were dashed. She told the prophet that she would see that he was dead within 24 hours.

This time Elijah did not just hide; he fled 150 miles south to Mt. Horeb, where he went into a cave and begged God to let him die. He complained that he had been very zealous for God's kingdom, but "it is enough." From God's response, we assume the prophet was saying, "I tried; I failed; I have had enough." God showed Elijah that his assumptions were wrong, and that He had more work for him to do.

The prophet's lesson came in the form of three dramatic events. First a great wind crashed on the mountain and rent the rocks. Elijah was told, however, that God was not in the wind. This was followed by an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. Then there was fire, but neither was God in the fire. Finally God spoke to the prophet in a "still small voice" (I Kings 19:12-13).

These awesome events are made more mysterious by the fact that God had appeared in them before, even on that mountain (Exodus 19:18). No doubt Elijah had wanted a great demonstration of God's power to convince Jezebel, or at least to frighten her enough to cause her to leave the prophets and people of God alone. He had to learn that God chooses the times and means of accomplishing His purposes. God told Elijah to go and anoint Hazael King of Syria, Jehu King of Israel, and Elisha as prophet to follow him. It was through the work of these

men, rather than miracles, that he would bring down the dynasty of Omri and the house of Ahab.

The lesson God seemed to want for Elijah was succinctly stated by Paul in Romans 9:18. “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and on whom he will he hardeneth.” This does not mean that God arbitrarily chooses to show mercy to one person and exact stern justice from another. Rather it shows that He alone knows the hearts and circumstances of individuals, thus only He can decide when to speak in the “still small voice” of mercy and when to kindle the fires of judgment. God’s decisions may appear arbitrary to humans because we do not know what He knows, but they are perfectly consistent with His infinite wisdom.

Elijah left Mt. Horeb and went to Abel-meholah, in the northern part of the Jordan River Valley, to find Elisha. This was not far from Elijah’s own home which was just across the Jordan to the east. He found Elisha ploughing a field with a team of oxen. There were eleven other teams and ploughmen in the field, which suggests Elisha’s family was wealthy. The old prophet threw his mantle over the shoulders of the younger man as he ploughed. Elisha knew what the symbolic gesture meant and, after some initial reluctance, followed Elijah.

God had told Elijah to anoint Elisha “to be prophet in thy room,” or in your place (I Kings 19:16). Apparently Elisha’s training period was eight years, for we do not really hear from him again until the time Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire (II Kings 2). After that he seemed to take over the role of prophet with confidence. Because of the many miracles performed by him (see II Kings 2:19-25, 3:4-27, 4:5, 4:8-37, 4:38-41, and 4:42-44), we know God was with him.

Elijah and Elisha: Different Styles Same Goal

Elijah and Elisha were studies in contrast. Their work together holds a lesson for all workers in the Lord’s vineyard. Elijah was a man of the country—a true Bedouin, some have called him—who was content to camp by a brook or live in a cave. He was distinguishable for his unkempt hair, rough clothes, and leather girdle (II Kings 1:8). When he went to the city, it was to deliver a message, often a fiery rebuke to the king, and leave. He was austere in looks and stern in action when the occasion demanded it. Elijah would surely be called a “conservative” or a hard-liner if he lived today.

Elisha, on the other hand, was a cultured man and probably wealthy. After he became a prophet, he lived in a house in the capitol city (II Kings 2:25) where he received representatives of kings and the elders of the city (II Kings 5:9). From hints in Scripture, we see his clothes as the typical ones of the day. His hair was trimmed and he carried a walking “staff” as was the habit of grave old men. Elisha seemed to work from within the system to reform it. He would likely be called a “liberal.” But the two men worked together and seemed to love and respect each other.

For a while God separated Ahab and Elijah, and other prophets were sent with messages to the king. I Kings 20 tells of four visits by prophets whose names are not given. But when Ahab allowed Jezebel to defame and kill a good man and his family so Ahab could have his vineyard (I Kings 21), God called the stern, old prophet back into service. Elijah walked in as Ahab was admiring the prize of his iniquity. Ahab said, “hast thou found me, O my enemy?” Elijah did not blink at the word enemy, but acknowledged, “I have found thee.” He predicted the end of Ahab’s reign, the end of his life, and the end of his lineage. “The dogs,” he said, “will lick your blood in the very place where they licked the blood of Naboth.” And “the dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel,” the resort city where Ahab had a summer palace.

About three years later Ahab went into battle against the Syrians. He had defeated them twice, and this time he had more advantages than ever. Jehoshaphat, King of Judah and a goodman, had misguidedly made an alliance with Ahab. Although it was not Jehoshaphat’s fight, he took his army into battle with Ahab. In addition, Ahab disguised himself so that enemy soldiers could not find him. But a soldier drew his bow and shot an arrow at random which found its way to a joint in Ahab’s armor and mortally wounded him (I Kings 22:34). Israel was defeated and King Ahab died that evening about sunset. They washed the blood out of his chariot at the very same pool where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth!

Elijah’s Last Prophetic Act

Elijah lived to see God’s judgment on Ahab, but Jezebel was alive and well and ruling, through her son Ahaziah. The old prophet was taken to heaven (II Kings 2) before his prophecies about Jezebel and other members of their family were fulfilled, but not before another chance to show them the power of God.

King Ahaziah fell, injured himself, and sent messengers to Ekron to inquire of

Baalzebub whether he would recover. Elijah intercepted the messengers and told them to return to Ahaziah and ask him if he was sending to Ekron because there was no God in Israel. Furthermore, he said, tell Ahaziah he will not come down from the bed on which he is resting.

Angered, Ahaziah sent a captain and 50 soldiers to arrest Elijah. The captain found Elijah sitting atop a small hill and called to him: “Man of God, the king said, come down” (II Kings 1:9). Elijah responded, “If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty.” It did! The king sent a second captain with his company who were treated to the same fate. The third captain fell on his knees before Elijah and begged for the lives of himself and his men. God told Elijah to go with him. He did, and repeated to the king’s face what he had told the messengers. The king died. This was the grand old man’s last prophetic act before being taken to heaven. We might say—a bit facetiously—that Elijah went out in a blaze of glory.

Ahaziah had no son, so his brother Jehoram took the throne. Jehoram was a better man than his brother and father, but still wicked. His best gesture toward reform was to destroy the great statue of Baal that Ahab erected. Apparently Jehoram wanted idolatry to be a little less visible, but he did not put down the practice of it nor destroy the great temple of Baal that Ahab had built (I Kings 16:32).

God had told Elijah to anoint Hazael as King of Syria, Jehu King of Israel, and Elisha as prophet. Elijah personally did only the third; Elisha did the other two (II Kings 8:7-15, 9:1-10). Jehu was charged to execute the final judgment on Ahab’s household. A captain in the army stationed in Ramoth-Gilead at the time, Jehu took the job with enthusiasm. He made an immediate and “furious” march to Jezreel.

Jehu Gave the Nation a Bloodbath

When the company neared Jezreel, the city watchman advised the king, who sent messengers to meet Jehu and ask, “Is it peace?” Jehu took the messengers captive. Then King Jehoram and Ahaziah, King of Judah who was visiting Jehoram, went out in their chariots. Jehoram shouted at Jehu, “Is it peace?” Jehu answered, “What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcraft are so many” (II Kings 9:22). The king screamed “treason” and turned to flee. Jehu shot him in the back as he fled. The arrow pierced his heart and came out the other side. The King of Judah got away temporarily, but Jehu’s men

gave chase and killed him also.

Jehoram and Ahaziah had met Jehu right at Naboth's vineyard—surely a providential occurrence. Jehu remembered the prophecy of Elijah, which said that Ahab's son would lie dead there because Naboth's sons were slaughtered there. Jehu ordered his captain to throw Jehoram's body in the vineyard, where it was doubtlessly eaten by wild dogs as the prophet also predicted.

When Jehu and his men entered the city, Jezebel knew he would come after her. She put on her make up, fixed her hair, and sat in an upper-story window waiting for him. When he arrived she shouted insults until he ordered her servants to throw her down. She was trampled to death by the horses. No one wants to say good things about Jezebel; her very name is a synonym for feminine wickedness. But we will have to hand it to her on one score. She was a gutsy woman. How wonderful it would have been had she used all that courage for the Lord!

Jehu left her body by the wall, went inside, took over the palace, and ate lunch. When they returned the dogs had eaten her body so that nothing was left save her skull, feet, and hands. The prophet had said that her body would become manure on the face of the fields of Jezreel (II Kings 9:36-37).

During the next several days, Jehu went on a purge of all the friends and relatives of Ahab such as had never been seen before in Israel. For example, he ordered the caretakers of Ahab's seventy sons to send their heads in baskets to Jezreel where they were stacked in heaps at the city gate. "Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining" (II Kings 10:11). Then he left Jezreel and the summer palace and went to Samaria, the regular capitol.

On the way to Samaria, the company stopped at an inn, probably for lunch since it was not normally a two-day journey from Jezreel. They met 42 relatives of the King of Judah who did not know about the revolution and were on their way to visit the King of Israel. Jehu killed them and threw their bodies in the cistern of the inn.

Jehu entered Samaria with his sword swinging, and purged it of every relative and friend of Ahab as he had done in Jezreel. Finally, he lured the worshippers of Baal to Ahab's temple under the guise of having a great feast to the idol. "Ahab

served Baal a little,” he said, “but Jehu shall serve him much” (II Kings 10:18). When the huge house was packed from end to end, Jehu ordered his army to kill them all. He destroyed the images of Baal and converted the building into a public toilet.

The Purge was for Nothing

Given the new king’s self-described “zeal for the Lord,” we would have expected a complete return to true worship at this point. That did not happen. Jehu’s 28-year reign is passed over by sacred writers with the briefest of notice, but one point is made. “Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and in Dan” (II Kings 10:29). Obviously Jehu was not opposed to idolatry, just the idolatry that Ahab and Jezebel introduced. Perhaps he thought that those worshippers of Baal, supported as they were by Ahab and Jezebel, would undermine his reign.

In Jehu we have an example of people who do God’s work but not from His Spirit and motives, and they never get it right. They are surprised when God is not pleased. Jehu had a mandate to execute judgment on Ahab’s household, but he did not have God’s permission to kill hundreds of people from private motives.

Isaiah explained this principle in chapter 10:1-12. He said that God would use Assyria’s military might to punish rebellious Israel, but Assyria would do it out of greed and lust for power. Then Assyria, he said, would be punished for her hateful destruction of Israel. Does that sound unfair? It is not. What father, who measures out punishment to a beloved son, wouldn’t come down even harder on a bully who beat up the son for pleasure.

This principle is of tremendous importance, with many up-to-date applications. For one thing, it shows that the basic principles of service to God were the same in the Old Testament as now. God’s ordinances must be done in His way and from pure motives, i.e. in spirit and in truth (Joshua 24:14, John 4:24, I Corinthians 13:1-3). Another application is in the administration of church discipline. Leaders of the church are charged to rebuke and, when appropriate, excommunicate inveterate sinners. But if done in the wrong way and with wrong motives, discipliners may be held as guilty as disciplinees. No doubt this is the reason Paul said acts of church discipline should be preceded by mourning on the part of the church for the sinner (I Corinthians 5:2).

Hosea (1:4) told us that it was because of Jehu that God made His final decision to destroy Israel. Is not it remarkable that it was not under notoriously wicked leaders like Ahab and Jezebel that Jehovah's patience ran out, but under a man who claimed to be God's servant!

Ahab's Reign was Symbolic

We have lingered in our discussion of the Omri dynasty, and specifically the reign of Ahab, because it gives clear lessons on several issues that are important to Christians, i.e. the free will of man, human wickedness, God's mercy, and His judgment. But we lingered for another reason too. This period was the nation's last, best hope for a real spiritual reformation. They had greater prophets, probably more of them, and more visible demonstrations of God's power than perhaps any other period in the nation's history. Years later Jeremiah (44:4-5) would say, "Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying Oh do not this abominable thing that I hate. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness." Then Ahab's descendants were followed by Jehu, who was supposed to be a reformer but was not.

We can see the immediate effects of God's decision to give up on Israel. "In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short: and Hazael [King of Syria] smote them in all the coasts of Israel" (II Kings 10:32). They lost all the territory east of the Jordan River and later significant amounts to the Philistines in the west. From that point it was all downhill for Israel. There were times of prosperity for some people (see Amos 6), particularly during the reign of Jeroboam II. But according to Amos (5:11), much of the prosperity of the rich was gained by taking from the poor. There was no effort to turn around the rampant immorality and idolatry of the nation.

Four of Jehu's descendants succeeded him on the throne. After the reign of the third, Jeroboam II, the kingdom stood only about forty years. Then about 730 to 725 BC, when Hoshea was on the throne, Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, came against Israel and defeated it. At first he allowed Hoshea to stay on the throne as his vassal and Israel to pay tribute. But Hoshea conspired with the King of Egypt to revolt against Assyria, and the King of Assyria came back with a vengeance. "In the ninth year of Hoshea the King of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and Habor by the River Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes" (II Kings 17:6). Even the vivid teaching and urgent

warnings of Hosea and Amos did not bring the nation to its senses.

After the deportation of the best and brightest of the Israelites, Assyria sent slaves captured from other lands to repopulate Samaria (II Kings 17:24). These pagan peoples brought their idols with them. God sent lions among them and many settlers were killed. The people assumed the God of the land was angry with them because they did not know how to worship Him, and in a way they were right. A priest was sent back from among the captives to teach them how to worship. They sacrificed to Jehovah, but worshipped their idols too.

The Israelites who were left in the land intermarried with these foreigners, producing an ethnic group known as Samaritans. It was the Samaritans, whom Ezra (4:4) called “the people of the land,” that wanted to help build the temple after the Israelites were restored from captivity. Ezra and Zerubbabel, the governor, would not allow it. Their bloodlines were not pure and their religion was mixed with idolatry. Ezra and Zerubbabel had returned from captivity determined that the nation would not repeat its mistakes of the past. Hostility arose between the groups, and the Samaritans used all means possible to undermine the Jews’ progress. The woman Jesus talked with at Jacob’s well was a Samaritan (John 4:79). She was surprised at His friendliness and, when He asked for a drink, commented that the Jews ordinarily “have no dealings with the Samaritans.” There are still a few Samaritans living in Israel, near Jacob’s well, and we can safely assume the Jews in general still have little dealings with them.

KINGS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL

THE UNITED KINGDOM

1095 BC – 1056 BC	Saul	I Samuel 10-30	Samuel (prophet)
1056 BC – 1016 BC	David	II Samuel 11-24 II Chronicles 11-29	Nathan (prophet) Gad (prophet)
1016 BC – 976 BC	Solomon	I Kings 1-11 II Chronicles 1-9	Nathan, Abijah, Iddo (prophets)

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

JUDAH

KING	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	PROPHET(S)	BC	BC	KING	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	PROPHET(S)
Rehoboam	I Kings 11:42-14:31	Shemaiah	975	975	Jeroboam	I Kings 11:26-14:20	Unnamed, Abijah
Abijah (Abijam)*	I Kings 14:31-15:8		957				
Asa	I Kings 15:8-24		955				
				954	Nadab	I Kings 15:25-28	
				953	Baasha	I Kings 15:27-16:7	
				930	Elah	I Kings 16:6-14	
				929	Zimri	I Kings 16:9-20	
				929	Omri & Tibni	I Kings 16:16-21	
				925	Omri	I Kings 16:22-28	
				918	Ahab	I Kings 16:28-22:40	Elijah, Micaiah
Jehoshaphat	I Kings 22:41-50		914				
Jehoram	II Kings 8:16-24		897		Ahaziah	I Kings 22:40-II Kings 1:18	Elijah
Jezebel				896	Jehoram(Joram)*	II Kings 1:17-9:26	Elisha
	II Kings 8:24-9:29		895				

Chart 24:1 Part I

JUDAH				ISRAEL			
KING	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	PROPHET(S)	BC	BC	KING	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	PROPHET(S)
<i>Athaliah</i>	II Kings 11:1-20		884	884	Jehu	II Kings 9:1-10:36	Elisha
Joash (Jehoash)*	II Kings 11:1-12:21		878		Jehoahaz	II Kings 13:1-9	
Amaziah	II Kings 14:1-20			856	Jehoash (Joash)*	II Kings 13:10-14:16	
Azariah (Uzziah)*	II Kings 14:21-15:7	Isaiah, Hosea, Amos	839	841	Jeroboam II	II Kings 14:23-29	Jonah, Hosea Amos
Jotham	II Kings 15:32-38			825	Zechariah	II Kings 14:29-15:12	
<i>Abaz</i> (Jehoahaz)*	II Kings 16:1-20			773	Shallum	II Kings 15:10-15	
Hezekiah	II Kings 18:1-20:21			772	Menahem	II Kings 15:15-22	
<i>Manasseh</i>	II Kings 21:1-18			761	Pekahiah	II Kings 15:22-26	
Amon	II Kings 21:19-26			759	Pekah	II Kings 15:25-31	
Josiah	II Kings 21:26-23:30			758			
Jehoahaz II(Shallum)*	II Kings 23:30-33	Zephaniah &	742	730	Hoshca	II Kings 15:30-17:6	
Jehoiakim(Eliakim)*	II Kings 23:34-24:5	Jeremiah					
Jehoiachin(Jeconiah)*	II Kings 24:6-25:30	Jeremiah	639	722		Israel taken into captivity – Assyria	
Zedekiah(Mattaniah)*	II Kings 24:17-25:7	Jeremiah	608				
Judah taken into captivity – Babylon		Jeremiah	586				
		Jeremiah	586				
			586				

Legend: -Reformer kings of Judah shown in **bold**
 -Especially wicked kings of Judah shown in *italics*
 -All kings of Israel were wicked
 -*Denotes alternate name

Chart 24:1 Part II

Summary

We have seen the kingdom of God's people, that reached such heights of glory under David, sink into idolatry under Solomon, and divide under Rehoboam, Solomon's son. We have followed the northern tribes as they went deeper into sin during the reigns of successively more wicked kings. Under the guidance of Ahab and Jezebel, Baal worship became the official religion; true prophets and ordinary worshippers of Jehovah were killed or persecuted.

Although speaking in a later time, Jeremiah (50:6) described it well: "My people have been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray." False gods bring warped morals, and it was certainly so in Israel. Justice was perverted; the poor were robbed; the marriage bed was defiled. The people to whom David said, "Children are an heritage of the Lord" (Psalms 127:3), burned their infant sons and daughters to idol gods (II Kings 17:17). The dramatic acts of Elijah and the cool logic of Elisha, and later the vivid preaching and emotional pleas of Hosea and Amos could not save them.

God's patience seemed to snap under Jehu, a man who was anointed king by a true prophet to execute God's judgment on Ahab's house. Instead, he turned God's disciplinary action into a national blood bath and himself worshipped idols. The Assyrians came, as the prophets had warned, and carried captive to Assyria the king, his officials, the wealthy people, and the best and brightest of the rest. Only captivity and slavery could burn away the dross of idolatry and refine the gold of Israel's collective heart.

CHAPTER 25

The Divided Kingdom: Judah

In this chapter we will summarize the fortunes of the southern part of the divided kingdom. The preceding chapter left off the discussion of Judah with Rehoboam, whose foolish miscalculation at his coronation caused the division. It seemed simpler to trace separately each wing of the division to the captivity, rather than to interweave discussions of the two.

A glance at the chart of the kings will show one of the main differences between the two kingdoms, viz. the moral quality of their leaders. Some of the nineteen northern kings were more wicked than others, but there was not a good man among them. By contrast some of the kings of the south were better than others, but most of them seemed to make a sincere effort to keep the charge of David, their forefather, to seek the Lord with all their hearts (I Kings 2:1-4). There were, to be sure, wicked kings among the rulers of Judah. But after each evil king or two a true-hearted reformer would arise to bring the people back to Jehovah. This was so at least until the late years of the southern kingdom.

The second major difference in the two kingdoms was that Judah had the temple, the place of true worship, and the priesthood that served it. When Jeroboam established idol shrines at Bethel and Dan, a large portion of the true priests, whom God had purposely dispersed throughout the nation, fled to the south (II Chronicles 11:13-14). This was a “brain-drain” on the northern kingdom and a morality drain as well. When the kingdom worked at its best, as under David, a godly king encouraged and supported the priesthood, and the priests encouraged and taught the people.

Rehoboam's Successors

Rehoboam seemed one of those men who turn to the Lord in bad times but are unable to maintain good conduct in prosperity. He ended up an evil man. His son, Abijah, was strong militarily, soundly defeating Jeroboam in the largest battle between the two kingdoms (II Chronicles 13), but not a good man. “He walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him.” (I Kings 15:13). Abijah reigned only three years.

Asa, Abijah's son, took the throne as a true reformer. During the twenty years of his father and grandfather, the evils of idolatry had increased. Asa removed his own mother from being queen because she had made herself a personal idol shrine. Then he destroyed her idol, as well as those his father had made. He also banished the male prostitutes who "assisted" the men who came to the shrines to practice homosexuality as a "service" to the idol.

Asa was encouraged in his religious housecleaning by a prophet, named Azariah, who met him in the way (II Chronicles 15:1-7). Azariah said, "Hear me Asa, and Judah and Benjamin; the Lord is with you while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you." The prophet continued to tell Asa that for a long time—during his father's and grandfather's reigns—the nation had not had the true God, the law, or a teaching priest. This, he said, was the reason for the wars, crime, and other vexations God had visited on them. "You be strong, and your work will be rewarded," he promised.

With renewed determination, Asa "put away all the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin" (II Chronicles 15:8). He invited all the people of the land to Jerusalem where they "entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and all their soul." Asa seemed to understand what Jesus taught in the parable of the empty house (Matthew 12:43-45), that true religion is more than simply quitting bad behavior, whatever bad habits one has. It means also seeking the true God with a pure heart and growing spiritually in Him.

It is tempting to leave the story of Asa on that moral high note. But alas, one of the truisms of human personalities is that men can be good, or bad, or all shades of mixtures of the two. Asa was a good man; perhaps coming from the father and grandfather that he did, he was as good as one could expect. Nevertheless, he had clay feet and Bible writers did not cover them up. In Asa's latter years, Baasha, the King of Israel, began to make threatening motions, one of which was to fortify Ramah, a small city near the border of Judah. Asa worried that Ben-hadad, King of Syria, was helping Baasha, so he bribed Ben-hadad to desert Israel and help Judah. He had to strip the temple of its treasures to pay Ben-hadad.

The prophet Hanani rebuked Asa, saying he had made a very bad bargain (II Chronicles 16:1-10). Had he trusted in the Lord, God would have given him

victory over the Israelites and Ben-hadad too. The peace he had secured by his worldly alliance would not last. Asa was angered by the prophet's rebuke and actually put the prophet in prison.

Jehoshaphat: Reformer and Educator

Jehoshaphat, Asa's son, was both a reformer and an educator. He sent out the princes, priests, and Levites in great teaching teams throughout all the cities of Judah (II Chronicles 17:7-10). They carried with them the book of the law, that was ordinarily laid up in the temple for use by the priests. The mere presence of this divine book, written by Moses from the mouth of God, would have added excitement to such occasions. These "revivals" seem like forerunners of the great religious meetings of the restoration period in America.

Jehoshaphat was truly a great and good man and Judah prospered under his leadership. But there was a flaw in his character too. He allowed his desire for peace with Israel—Ahab was king of Israel at the time—to lead him into bad decisions. For one thing, he agreed to go into battle with Ahab against Syria and nearly got himself killed. For that decision Jehu, the son of Hanani and himself a prophet, rebuked Jehoshaphat saying, "Should you help the ungodly and love those who hate the Lord?" (II Chronicles 19:2). That is still a good question. A desire for peace is noble, but not at the expense of truth.

Jehoshaphat's worst decision, however, was in taking Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, as wife for his oldest son, Jehoram. As is the case with many decisions, the results of this one did not show up for a while; but in the long run, it was disastrous. Athaliah was truly a chip off the old Jezebel block.

When Jehoshaphat died and Jehoram took the throne, he showed early the influence of his wife and, through her, the influence of Ahab and Jezebel. He killed all his brothers and other princes in Israel (II Chronicles 21:4). He probably had more than one motive for the slaughter. First, he planned to restore the idol shrines, which his father and grandfather had destroyed, and he probably thought some of his brothers would oppose that move. But another motive for the slaughter may have been simple greed. Jehoshaphat was very rich and he distributed his wealth before his death more evenly than usual among his sons. The same greed that made Ahab and Jezebel kill Naboth and his family for his vineyard lived on in Athaliah and Jehoram.

Jehoram also lost no time in carrying out his plans to restore idolatry.

“Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit harlotry, and led Judah astray” (II Chronicles 21:11). “High places” is one of two terms commonly used in the Old Testament to designate idol shrines. In this case, the descriptions of the geographical locations on which they were built were substituted for the shrines. The other term is “groves.” The people thought it was offensive for their gods to be shut up within walls, so they placed the images outside the temples in pleasant places, such as groves of trees or on high hills. In almost every instance in the Old Testament where the word “groves” appears, it was translated from the Hebrew name for the idol, which was Asherah. The goddess that was favored in Israel under Ahab and Jezebel was Ashtoreth; the name for the image that represented her was Asherah.

Elijah’s Letter to Jehoram

Elijah’s prophetic service was mainly confined to the northern kingdom, but he obviously knew what was happening in the south and cared about it. He wrote to Jehoram warning him specifically about great afflictions that would come on his family (II Chronicles 21:12-15), including a deadly disease upon himself. Not long afterward a coalition of Philistines, Arabians, and Ethiopians invaded Judah, carried away booty and slaves, among whom were Jehoram’s wives and sons, except his youngest son. Jehoram died, in great pain, of a disease that could not be cured by physicians or his idols, and he had forfeited the right to call on the Great Physician.

The eldest son of a king was usually designated the heir to the throne, but Ahaziah (also called Azariah) was the only son of Jehoram left. He was 22 years old when he began to reign. The sacred historian commented, “He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother counseled him to do wickedly” (II Chronicles 22:2). He reigned only a year, continuing the close alliance with the northern kingdom as his father had done. His friendship with that kingdom caused his death. He was visiting his maternal relatives in Israel at the time Jehu carried out the final destruction of the house of Ahab. Because he was in the wrong place, with the wrong friends, at the wrong time, Jehu killed him also.

When Athaliah heard that her son was dead, she seized control of the kingdom and made a determined effort to kill all the “royal seed,” meaning anyone who might claim a right of succession to the throne. She was almost successful. Jehosheba, one of King Jehoram’s daughters by another wife, took Ahaziah’s

infant son and hid him in one of the temple chambers. Jehosheba was married to Jehoiada, the high priest, so the temple was a convenient and effective place to shield the child. That son's name was Joash; he spent his first seven years hidden in the temple.

Jehoiada Engineered a Coup

Athaliah's personal wickedness aside, Jehoiada and Jehosheba knew she had no right to the throne of Judah. By a promise of God to David, Judah's throne was reserved for descendants of David. When Joash was seven years old, Jehoiada planned a coup against Athaliah. As high priest, he had control of the temple guards. He made a secret pact with them, with leaders among the Levites, and the captains of the royal guard. On the appointed day they brought the young child out under heavy guard and anointed him king. Word spread quickly and there was much joy in the city (II Chronicles 23).

When Athaliah heard the noisy celebration, she ran to the temple and seeing the young king shouted, "Treason! Treason!" Is it not amazing that those who treat others with such ruthlessness expect gentle and fair treatment for themselves! Jehoiada ordered her arrested and put to death, but not in the temple. The guards followed her back to the palace and killed her at the Horse Gate entrance. Athaliah ruled Judah six years, the darkest days of Judah's history.

When the coup was complete, "Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord, the king, and the people, that they should be the Lord's people, and also between the king and the people" (II Kings 11:17). Jehoiada showed the king and the people what true leadership in God's kingdom was supposed to be. It is still that way. Whether he behaves accordingly or not, whether he even recognizes it or not, a leader in the Lord's church has a responsibility to lead the congregation according to God's law, and his position is always a covenant between God, himself, and the people. The apostle Peter taught similar principles for elders (II Peter 5:1-4).

At age seven, it was obvious Joash could not rule alone. Jehoiada was the only "father" he had known and it was natural that he should be the power behind the throne. As long as Jehoiada lived, Joash was a good king, seeming to mature quickly in the office. He is best known for his thoroughgoing repair of the temple. We would not have expected Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah, Baal worshippers that they were, to have taken good care of the temple. They did not. In fact, they ransacked it of its treasures and dedicated them to Baal (II

Chronicles 24:7). Perhaps Joash loved the temple for the same reasons others did, and one additional reason. He grew up in the temple; it was the first home he knew. He actually seemed more zealous for it than did the priests.

Apparently collection of the temple tax had been ignored and consequently there was no money for the upkeep of the temple. Joash urged the people to pay it, provided convenient means for its collection, and pushed the priests to get the money into the hands of craftsmen. This small tax was first instituted at the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 30:13-16) and was reinstituted by Joash and later by Nehemiah (10:32). It was the same tax that the Pharisees asked Peter about in Matthew 17:24-27 and which resulted in Jesus performing a miracle to obtain the money. Other than his great interest in the temple, Joash's 40 year reign seemed rather unremarkable until his latter years.

After Jehoiada died, certain leaders of the people persuaded Joash to allow a resumption of idol worship, which he did. Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, preached against what they were doing, and Joash conspired with the people to stone Zechariah to death. As he was dying, Zechariah prayed that God would remember the treachery of Joash. That same year a small army of Syrians invaded Judah and defeated Judah's large and formerly powerful host. The Syrians killed all the leaders of the people, the same leaders who had influenced Joash to murder the prophet, and took great spoils to Damascus. The invaders did not kill Joash because he was already terminally ill, but after the Syrians left, Joash's own servants murdered him because of his treatment of the man of God. Judah had hit bottom—again.

Judah's Middle Years

With the ouster of Athaliah and the coronation of Joash, Judah entered the mature years of her statehood. The six kings that followed Joash reigned longer than all the rest of the kings of Judah combined. Unfortunately, the men and their leadership styles ran the full gamut of morality, from very good to very evil.

Amaziah took the throne at age 25 when his father, Joash died. The sacred historian described his reign by saying, "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart" (II Chronicles 25:2). When he was established as king, he put to death the men who had killed his father. The writer notes, however, that he had respect for the law (Deuteronomy 24:16) that said children should not be put to death for the sins of their parents. Despite that good beginning, he showed less respect for other aspects of the law. He immediately

hired mercenary soldiers from Israel to help fight the Edomites who had rebelled against Judah. A prophet rebuked him and he sent the “hired guns” home. Angry at being fired, the Israelite soldiers ravaged several cities in Judah on their way back to Samaria.

Amaziah’s campaign against Edom was successful. Judah defeated the Edomite army and actually captured the stronghold city of Selah (II Kings 14:7), which was quite a prize of war. From its location, half way between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Akabah, and the description of what Israel did to enemy soldiers, threw them off of cliffs, Selah is believed to be the city later known as Petra. It was built in a narrow valley that was walled by high mountains, and with narrow, easily defended entrances. Fortifications, and even ordinary dwellings, were carved out of rock faces of the cliffs, high off the ground. Obadiah (1:3) described the pride its inhabitants took in a city believed to be impregnable. “The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?” But they were brought down; God willed it so. Petra is remarkably well preserved and can be visited today.

Amaziah’s pride at defeating Selah, caused him to challenge the King of Israel to war. Although the kings of Israel were not known for wisdom nor restraint, in this case Jehoahaz gave Amaziah good advice, which was to stay home, enjoy his success over Edom, and not meddle with Israel. Amaziah did not take the advice; Judah was defeated and looted. His popularity with the people was already fading and this arrogant mistake made it worse. He learned of a conspiracy against him and fled to the Philistine city of Lachish, southwest of Jerusalem near the present troubled Gaza Strip, but his enemies followed him there and killed him.

Uzziah and a Different Type of Apostasy

Uzziah, also known as Azariah, was made king at age 16. He was guided by a prophet named Zechariah (not the same Zechariah who was killed by Joash) and appeared to be without the temptation to idolatry that dogged so many kings of Israel and Judah. He was successful in keeping Judah’s enemies at bay at home and as far abroad as Assyria (II Chronicles 26:4-9). While Israel was being harassed by Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, prior to Israel’s final destruction, Judah was conspicuously avoided by that ruthless and greedy monarch.

Uzziah was also noted for his interest in animal husbandry and agriculture. He

is said to have “dug many wells,” or cisterns, in the desert. Authorities now believe those cisterns were an ingenious way of getting water from the moist air that came across the desert at night from the Mediterranean Sea. They were made by erecting circular walls of smooth, heavy stones. The stones, heated by the daytime sun, would condense the cool, moist air and water would drip down, saturating the tree or plants inside the circle. Isaiah, whose prophetic ministry began during Uzziah’s reign, may have been inspired by these desert cisterns to give his allegorical description of the Messiah’s kingdom: “the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as a rose” (35:1). Several of these cisterns have been uncovered recently.

Uzziah was perhaps the most intelligent king since Solomon and the nation prospered under his rule. But Paul observed that “knowledge puffeth up” (I Corinthians 8:1), and it was so with Uzziah. He demonstrated that one does not have to worship idols to transgress God’s law. He can do a perfectly good job of it by corrupting true worship. Uzziah went into the temple, where only priests were allowed to go, and offered incense, which only priests were supposed to do. The priests looked on in horror and, to their credit, followed him inside and rebuked him (II Chronicles 26:16-23). While Uzziah angrily argued with the priests, they saw his face cover over with leprosy. God humbled the proud man. He was hustled out of the temple and to an isolated house where he lived out his days in the quarantine required of lepers by the law.

Jotham: A Good Man—Not a Spiritual Leader

Because of his father’s illness and quarantine, Jotham came to the throne before the death of Uzziah. He was a good man, avoiding the idolatry of earlier kings and the sacrilege of his father, but apparently not a spiritual leader. The writer acknowledged Jotham’s personal qualities and adds: “Howbeit the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places” (II Kings 15:34). Jotham seemed content to concentrate on a great defensive building program of city walls, towers, and castles in the mountains (II Chronicles 27:3-6). Perhaps he thought it was legitimate for him to leave religious work to Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah, all of whom prophesied during his reign (see Isaiah 1:1, Hosea 1:1, and Micah 1:1). These men seemed to think the defenses were contributing to the peoples’ corruption by helping them trust in things other than God, their true fortress. “For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities: but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof” (Hosea 8:14, see also

Micah 3:10-12).

The line of partly good-partly bad kings came to an abrupt end when Jotham's twenty-year old son, Ahaz, ascended the throne. Rather than being opposed to the worship of Jehovah, as some idolators were, he seemed an enthusiastic devotee of all gods. "He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree" (II Chronicles 28:4). This included burning his children in the Valley of Hinnom. God punished his wickedness by bringing Rezin, King of Syria, against Judah. Rezin captured the city of Elath, on the Gulf of Akabah, occupied the city, and carried many Israelites captive to Syria (II Kings 16:5-6).

Building a Better Altar

Rezin seemed poised to take all of Judah, so Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-pileser of Assyria for help. Tiglath attacked Syria, killed Rezin, and rescued Ahaz, but at a great price. Ahaz and Judah became vassals of Assyria. As soon as Syria was under Tiglath's control, Ahaz was summoned to Damascus to kowtow before the Assyrian monarch. Ahaz made his obeisance to Tiglath-pileser and probably agreed to specific terms for paying tribute. In addition to the business, the trip provided an unexpected "bonus."

While in Damascus, Ahaz saw an altar that was used to offer sacrifices to the Assyrian gods and was taken with its beauty. He copied the blueprint and sent all details to Urijah the priest in Jerusalem. Urijah had a copy of the new altar finished by the time the king got home. They moved from its place in the front of the temple the brasen altar, the one God designed for Solomon, and replaced it with the Assyrian model. Ahaz ordered Urijah to offer all regular sacrifices on "the great altar," the new and better version, while the old one was relegated to a spot on the north side of the temple. Ezekiel (8:3-5) probably had Ahaz's altar in mind years later when he referred to "the altar this image of jealousy," meaning the image that provokes the Lord to jealousy. The altar of the Mosaical Age represents the worship of the church. Dare we to think about how God feels toward changes in His worship today?

The Terrible Cycle

When one reads the story of the kings of Judah, he is struck by how often the nation was led into sin by a wicked king, brought out by a reformer, only to repeat the cycle. At times we are amazed at God's patience. Why did He not just

“zap” Judah and be done with it? But God was not merely “showing” mercy; He loved Judah and did not want her destroyed. Each reformation caused many individuals to truly repent and every one of those souls was precious in His sight. Ezekiel (33:11) spoke for God: “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his evil way and live.”

We also wonder at the speed with which these national religious revolutions took place. Did the people have no convictions of their own? Did they just blindly follow a good or an evil king? The answer was in the nature of the law. Civil and religious law was the same. The king was charged by God to enforce the law. Worship of idols was a crime punishable by death (Deuteronomy 13:6-9), as well as a sin. When a king who believed in God and enforced the law was on the throne, most people stopped the open practice of idolatry. This did not mean that real devotees got the idols out of their hearts. They just worshipped their gods on the tops of their houses, in their bedrooms, and at shrines built in secret places (II Kings 17:9). When a king who was favorable to their practices arose, they quickly came out of their closets. In fact, it seemed the people were divided into religious/political parties much like the Republicans and Democrats of today. The difference was that the inclination of each new king, rather than an election, determined which group was in power. Another difference was that one party was trying to follow the truth of God’s word, the other was not.

As repetitious as these events seem, each apostasy and reformation provided special lessons for us. For example, Hezekiah, who came to the throne after Ahaz, showed us how to truly worship God. He did all the usual reformer things, such as destroyed the images, cut down the groves, and forbade the open practice of idolatry (II Kings 18:4), but Hezekiah also went further. “He clave unto the Lord and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments.”

That old-fashioned word “clave” speaks of trust in the heart as opposed to intellectual belief. It was Hezekiah’s trust in God that calmed his heart in times of trouble. When Hezekiah’s father was threatened by Syria, he made an illegal league with Assyria for protection. When Hezekiah was threatened by Assyria, he took the menacing letter to the temple, spread it before the Lord, and prayed. Note also that Hezekiah “kept the commandments of the Lord.” There was no conflict in his mind between faith and works. His hands performed what his heart believed.

Hezekiah's Disappointment

Hezekiah prospered in whatever he did, becoming a wealthy and powerful king. Thus he was surprised when God sent Isaiah to announce: "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live" (II Kings 20:1). The king lay on his bed, turned his face to the wall, and wept. He complained that the Lord must have forgotten how well he had served Him. God stopped Isaiah before he cleared the palace grounds and sent him back to tell Hezekiah: "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years" (II Kings 20:56).

As do most people today, Hezekiah considered death as punishment. It seemed unfair to be cut down in the middle of his career since he had been zealous for the Lord. Perhaps Isaiah (57:1) had Hezekiah in mind when he wrote, "The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from evil to come."

Hezekiah should have accepted God's offer of an early departure to his reward. The next 15 years were the worst of his life. His own spiritual state deteriorated, and three years into the extension he wanted so badly, he fathered Manasseh, who became one of Israel's worst kings. It was in Manasseh's reign that God made the irrevocable decision to destroy Judah and send the people into captivity.

Manasseh came to the throne at age 12 and wasted no time undoing the reforms of his father. His special claim to infamy was in placing idols in the courts of the temple and actually in the temple itself (II Kings 21:4-5). He also sacrificed his son to an idol, used wizards, and "filled Jerusalem with violence." The last phrase refers, we believe, to his persecution of the prophets of God and other godly people who opposed his desecration of the temple. Isaiah may have been among those killed, because we do not hear of him again. Jeremiah (2:30) was probably speaking of these deeds when he said, "your own sword has devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion."

The End of God's Patience

The actions of Manasseh appear to have been the last straw for the Lord and the point of no return for Judah. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel, behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle" (II Kings 21:12 and 24:3). Surely this

was not to be just a light, corrective discipline. And the beginning of the end came before Manasseh died.

“Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the King of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon” (II Chronicles 33:11). “Thorns” in this passage probably referred to the hooks that were put in prisoners’ noses or lips and attached to the chains by which they were led. Such thorns made prisoners easy to control, lest they have their chains pulled! This invasion seems to have taken place near the middle of Manasseh’s 55 year reign.

To his credit, Manasseh repented under the lash of captivity and truly sought the Lord. God heard his prayer. The Babylonian king allowed him to return to Jerusalem as a vassal ruler. Manasseh actually carried out limited religious reforms in an attempt to undo the evil of his earlier years. But the reforms were incomplete—perhaps due to limits put on him by the Babylonians—and the writer in II Kings ignores the whole saga of Manasseh’s capture, captivity, and return. Nor did God change his mind about His final judgment of Judah.

Amon, Manasseh’s son, was made king at Manasseh’s death. He reigned only two years before being assassinated by his court officials. His tenure in office was unremarkable except that he restored the idol shrines and worship of his father’s early years.

When Amon was murdered, his son Josiah, just eight years old, became king. By all accounts he was a great man. Surely his advisors—caretakers even—ruled in his name at first. But at age 16 he began a serious study of God’s word (II Chronicles 34:3), and at age 20 he began some of the most thoroughgoing reforms in Judah’s history. Josiah was not content to destroy the idols, he ground them to powder and strowed them over the graves of the “priests” who had served at the shrines. When he finished in Judah he went into the territory that had been Israel and did the same thing there. We remember that unnamed prophet who decried the altar of Jeroboam’s first shrine: “O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense unto thee, and men’s bones shall be burnt upon thee” (I Kings 13:2). Probably all of the people who heard that prophecy 135 years earlier died thinking it would not be fulfilled, but God had not forgotten (II Kings 23:16).

Josiah’s next project was to repair the temple. In the process of clearing it out

for reconstruction, Hilkiah, the high priest, found the book of the law of God (II Kings 22:8). We do not know how long it had been lost. Perhaps it was hidden during the reign of one of the wicked kings who did not want a true priest bringing it out to read in public meetings. Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, the king's scribe, who read it to Josiah. When the king heard the words of the book, he was afraid and rent his clothes in humiliation before God. He sent emissaries to Huldah, the prophetess, saying, "Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me. concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us" (II Kings 22:13). Josiah was especially concerned that the Passover had not been observed as God described it in the book.

God replied through the prophetess that He had indeed seen the people's sins, and He would surely destroy the nation as He had written in the law. But because King Josiah's heart was tender and he had humbled himself, destruction would not come in his days (II Kings 22:15-20). The young king was encouraged by God's words. He called the people together at the temple, stood by a pillar, and read to them the book of the law. When he finished, Josiah asked the people to "make a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul." (II Kings 23:3). The people accepted his request and "stood to the covenant."

Josiah's Observance of the Passover

Josiah then led the nation in keeping the Passover "as it was written." He supplied thousands of lambs for sacrifices from his personal flocks. The Bible says there had not been held such a Passover since the days of the judges. We do not know the precise ways in which the sacred supper had been changed, but Josiah's emphasis on doing it "as it is written in the book" indicates they had not been following God's instructions. Paul suggested that the Lord's Supper is "our passover" (I Corinthians 5:7). We wonder how God feels about changes in the frequency and manner of its observance by some religious groups today.

Josiah was blessed and the nation fared well under his rule. Nevertheless, God did not revoke His decision, made under Manasseh, that Judah would be destroyed (II Kings 23:26-27). Josiah reigned 31 years and died what Bible scholars describe as a useless death. The King of Egypt led his army through

Israel on his way to a battle between Assyria and Babylon, where he hoped to help Assyria. For reasons unknown, Josiah did not want the Egyptians to pass through his territory, even though Pharaoh-nechoh made it clear he had no quarrel with Israel. Josiah insisted on going up against Nechoh and was killed in the battle near the city of Megiddo.

All of Judah mourned the death of this good king. Jeremiah, who was just beginning his prophetic career, is specifically said to have lamented Josiah's death. His mourning was probably with special poignancy because he knew what lay ahead for the nation.

The Nation's Last Years

The nation lasted only 22 years after the death of Josiah. Judah had not been completely free from foreign domination, mostly from kingdoms of the east, since the days of Ahaz. He invited Assyria to protect Judah from Israel and Syria. She did, but at a price. During the reign of Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, Assyria conquered Israel and invaded Judah. She was not successful against Judah because God miraculously intervened (II Kings 19:35-37). Then Assyria herself was defeated and replaced by Babylon as the dominant power in the east.

Pharaoh-nechoh of Egypt had unwisely aligned himself with Assyria in the waning days of her greatness. He conquered Judah on the way to the battles, but lost out when his ally, Assyria, crumbled under Babylon. Thus Pharaoh's domination of Judah was short, but in that period, he put Josiah's son, Shallum, on Judah's throne, and soon afterward deported him to Egypt and made his brother, Eliakim, king. Egypt's defeat by Babylon did not free Eliakim and Judah, it only changed their "master" to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, which continued through the last 18 years of Judah's existence.

One might have expected the kings of Judah to have assessed their situation and repented. They did not. Ezekiel (19:1-4) was probably speaking of Shallum when he referred to one ruler as "a young lion that devours men." By this time Jeremiah knew that complete captivity of the nation was inevitable. He advised the people to accept it and live peaceably under the Babylonian yoke. This angered the kings and princes of Jerusalem who frequently beat Jeremiah (20:1-2), put him in stocks, and imprisoned him in dungeons, pits, et cetera (38:4-6) during those last terrible years. The book of Jeremiah is a poignant story of the prophet's warnings, promises of restoration from captivity after 70 years (25:11-12), and the people's abuse of him.

Despite Jeremiah's pleadings, the last three kings of Judah plotted rebellion against Babylon, usually by trying to make leagues with Egypt. Each plan was discovered by Nebuchadnezzar and the nation punished by his army. There were three successive invasions in which the nation, and especially Jerusalem, was brutally put down, looted, and droves of people taken captive to Babylon. The first took place under Jehoiakim (II Kings 24:1-2, II Chronicles 36:5-8), a few years before 600 B.C. Daniel and his friends were taken among the captives in this invasion (Daniel 1:12).

The second pillaging was under Jehoiachin about 598 B.C. The great prophet Ezekiel was taken in this invasion. He and thousands of others were settled along the river Chebar, also called Habor (II Kings 17:6, Ezekiel 1:3), which was believed to be the centerpiece of a great system of waterways developed by Nebuchadnezzar. The captives were used in building the canals and then in maintaining them.

The last invasion and final destruction of Jerusalem came in 586 B.C. under Zedekiah (II Kings 25:1-21, II Chronicles 36:10-21, and Jeremiah 39:1-14). Zedekiah conspired with Pharaoh-hophra of Egypt, who seemed to make a weak attempt to help Judah and then back off (Jeremiah 37:5-8). Those people who could barricaded themselves inside Jerusalem; Nebuchadnezzar simply besieged the city and waited. After two years of incredible affliction and famine, the city fell. Zedekiah and his family fled by night but were caught near Jericho. His sons were slaughtered before his eyes and his own eyes were put out. Every good house in the city was razed, the city wall was broken down, and the temple burned. The complete book of Lamentations is an expression of Jeremiah's great grief over the city and the temple.

Summary

No event in history was more important to God than the destruction of Jerusalem. We know that because it was recorded four times in the sacred word (II Kings 25, II Chronicles 36, Jeremiah 39 and Lamentations). The people Jehovah took out of Egypt for His own, the ones who were supposed to show the heathen world how to worship Him, no longer existed as a separate nation. They were scattered among and ruled by the heathen they should have led. The temple that Jeremiah called "the beauty of Israel," lay in ruins, and the ark of the covenant that David called the "footstool of God," was taken to Babylon and dedicated to an idol. We may picture Jeremiah sitting among the ruins and

pouring out his heart: “In all the world has there ever been such sorrow? O Jerusalem, what can I compare your anguish to? How can I comfort you? For your wound is deep as the sea. Who can heal you?” (a paraphrase of Lamentations 2:13).

These terrible things happened because the people brought idols with them from Egypt in their hearts and could never fully get them out. Lighter discipline did not work. God knew it would take captivity to purge this dross, refine the gold of the nation, and thus to prepare it for the advent of the Messiah about whom Isaiah and other prophets had spoken so clearly (see especially Isaiah chapter 53).

The one bright spot in all this was that the prophets who warned of Judah’s destruction had also distinctly said God did not intend to make a full end of her. If Judah would repent, the nation would be restored; she would “take root downward, and bear fruit upward.” The captivity, according to Jeremiah (25:11-12), would last 70 years. They had the prophets with them in captivity who could lead them. Daniel, great man of God that he was, had the ears of the kings. Ezekiel was the prophet of the trenches who preached to the captives as they dug canals for Nebuchadnezzar. His beautiful sermons, such as the vision of the valley of dry bones (chapter 37), told them that God could and would restore them. God had not cast off His people forever; He sent them away to a very tough boot camp.

CHAPTER 26

From Captivity to the Messiah

The Israelites from the ten northern tribes had been in Assyrian captivity 135 years by the time Nebuchadnezzar's army sacked Jerusalem. Unlike Judah, who had clear promises of a restoration, there were no promises of restoration for these tribes. This probably signaled God's intention that His people never again be divided into two nations, and the people known as Israel were not restored as a group. No doubt individuals made their ways back to their homeland. For example, Anna was of the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36). A large part of them, however, were absorbed into the populations of foreign lands. Those who retained their identities as Jews and their religion were known as "the dispersion" (John 7:35, I Peter 1:1, and James 1:1).

What we know about living conditions in the captivity largely is taken from the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Esther, which were set in Babylon. Historians say, and hints from the Bible confirm, that the people from Judah were generally treated well for captives. Two key phrases here are "generally" and "for captives." Daniel and his friends rose quickly to positions of honor and authority (Daniel 1:3-21). Daniel was a person of great wisdom, which might have made him an exception, but Queen Esther and her guardian (uncle) rose also, and they were not so notable at first. Even those captives who did the work of building Nebuchadnezzar's canals were apparently treated with reasonable dignity and freedom. Ezekiel lived among the workers and he had a house (8:1) in which he received the elders of the people and conducted spiritual business. The strongest evidence of good treatment is that many did not want to return to Israel when freedom to do so was given. Some of the people had gotten wealthy in Babylon.

There is also evidence of prejudice and maltreatment. When Haman, the king's lieutenant, got angry because Mordecai would not bow down to him, his assistants "told him who Mordecai's people were" (Esther 3:5-6). Then Haman disdained to kill Mordecai alone, and instead set out to destroy all Israelites throughout the whole kingdom. There were plenty of people who planned to participate with Haman in the slaughter of the Jews and looting of their property. This evil plan was averted by the courageous actions of Queen Esther, but the

fact that it could have happened showed that the people of Judah were looked on as a separate group with lower status, and that captivity was not a bed of roses.

Through prophetic vision, the writer of Psalms 137 penned an emotional description of life on the canals. “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.” These words may also express the people’s sorrow about their sins that caused the captivity, but such phrases as “they that wasted us” do not paint a pretty picture of slavery in Babylon.

The difference between those who fared well in Babylon and those who did not was probably determined by whether they repented and turned their hearts to God. Jeremiah (29:4-7) promised that they could “build houses, and dwell in them; plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take wives and beget sons and daughters...” if they would “seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away.” This was similar to what happened in Judah; the people made it worse by their resistance. The city of Jerusalem would not have been sacked and burned if the people had not fought the captivity that Jeremiah (38:17-18) knew was inevitable. God was directing Nebuchadnezzar, especially through Daniel, so that his treatment of the people was precise and purposeful.

The People Left in Judah

The people left in Judah seemed to fare worse than those taken captive. Only the poorest and least skilled persons were allowed to remain (Jeremiah 39:10). A population with no money and few skills does not make a good economy. At first it appeared things would go well. The Babylonians freed Jeremiah from prison and made Gedaliah, a grandson of Shaphan and a good man, governor. The commanders of the Judean troops in the field, who had gone into hiding after Jerusalem fell, came out and joined Gedaliah. Jeremiah and Gedaliah counseled the people to serve Babylon and promised that things would go well with them (Jeremiah 40:9).

One of the field commanders, however, had not had his fill of fighting Babylon. Ishmael conspired with the King of Ammon, brought a troop of renegade soldiers, and killed Gedaliah and his Babylonian guards (Jeremiah 41:1-18). He gathered the best of the remnant, intending to take them to Ammon. Johanan, a commander who joined Gedaliah, took his troop and pursued Ishmael

and freed the people but Ishmael and a few men escaped. Now the remaining leaders of the people were afraid the Babylonians would not believe their account of the violence, and made plans to flee to Egypt. They asked Jeremiah to inquire of God. God responded that they should not go to Egypt; the Babylonians would not hurt them; and He would bless them if they stayed in the land (Jeremiah 42: 7-12). Still they refused Jeremiah's advice and carried him captive with them to Egypt. Jeremiah, the servant of God who for years preached against an alliance with Egypt, probably died there.

The condition of the Jews left in Judah did not improve over time. Toward the end of the captivity, even after some people had returned to Israel, the state of the people was deplorable. "The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire" (Nehemiah 1:3). It was this report that made Nehemiah determined to go to Jerusalem and help his brethren.

The Restoration

Nebuchadnezzar reigned from approximately 606 B.C. to 560 B.C. He was the "great" king of Babylon. His son, Evil-Merodach (Jeremiah 52:31-34), reigned after him, but only for two or three years before being assassinated by Nergal-Sharezzer (Jeremiah 39:3). Two other kings, not mentioned in the Bible, ruled Babylon before Belshazzar, the "son" of Nebuchadnezzar, came to the throne. Son here means grandson, as it often does in the Old Testament.

Belshazzar was the king discussed in Daniel 5, who in his great party drank wine out of the sacred vessels of gold brought by his grandfather from the temple in Jerusalem. The city of Babylon was under siege by Darius, the King of the Medes. Belshazzar's arrogant show of contempt for Jehovah was probably an effort to prove his loyalty to his god in hope of enticing him to protect the city. It did not work to bring help from his god, but Jehovah responded to the blasphemy. The fingers of a man's hand came out of the night and wrote the downfall of Belshazzar and his kingdom on the plaster of the palace wall (Daniel 5:5). The destiny written in the message was not long in coming. "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom." (Daniel 5:30-31).

We do not know precisely who the Darius was that brought down the kingdom of Babylon for there were several kings and princes among the Medes and Persians by that name. Perhaps as captain of the army he was made governor of

Babylon after the capture. Cyrus was the King of Persia (sometimes called Medo-Persia), the large kingdom that absorbed Babylon at its downfall. By this time, the end of the 70 years that Jeremiah had predicted for the captivity had come and, right on schedule, Cyrus issued an edict that the Jews who wanted to do so could return home (Ezra 1:1-5). This action is made more impressive because God had called Cyrus by name approximately 175 years before he was born saying he would be the one who would free the Jews and rebuild Jerusalem. Cyrus' decree was issued in 536 B.C. and about 712 B.C. Isaiah said that God "saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Isaiah 44:28).

Just as there were three "waves" of captives carried from Judah, there were three groups of people who returned. The first came with Zerubbabel soon after Cyrus' decree. This group of over 42,000 persons arrived in Jerusalem in 535 B.C. (Ezra 3:1-64). Under Zerubbabel as governor, they set up the altar of God and, as Isaiah predicted, laid the foundation of the temple. A second and smaller group came in 458 B.C. under Ezra (chapter 7). A priest and scribe himself, Ezra's group was largely composed of priests, Levites, singers, and others who would support the temple service. His mission was clearly to establish true worship of Jehovah. The final wave of returning captives was under Nehemiah in about 445 B.C. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe the return of the people and their struggles to build again the nation and their religion. Whether the people realized it or not, this was in preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

The End of the Old Testament

The last three books of the Old Testament, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were written by prophets who lived after the restoration. These writers take us through the first 135 years of the restored kingdom. Haggai and Zechariah both preached early in the restoration, about 520 B.C., working with Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 5:1). Malachi's work, and the close of the Old Testament, came about 397 B.C. His were the last prophetic utterances before the time of Christ. From the work of these men, two facts emerge about this period in the history of God's people.

First, the people of the restoration still needed God's hand through the prophets to keep them from immorality. They seemed much less inclined toward

idolatry, at least traditional and open idolatry. But they were not yet prepared to be a truly holy and spiritual nation. Even during the rebuilding period, Ezra was frustrated by the people's affinity for foreign wives. He lamented, ".the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands; yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass" (Ezra 9:2). He ordered the people to get rid of their "strange" wives and recorded the names of the priests who were guilty for all the subsequent world to read (Ezra 10). Greed was also a problem. Nehemiah (5:1-12) rebuked the wealthy among those who were restored for exacting usury and enslaving the children of the poor. God complained of being robbed (Malachi 3:8). "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings."

A second characteristic of the late Old Testament period was that prophecies of the Messiah became clearer. We could have expected this because statements about Him had gotten continually clearer over the history of mankind. His coming was implied when God dealt with the original sin (Genesis 3:15), it was spoken of more clearly when Moses was made a symbol of Him (Deuteronomy 18:15-19), and declared still more openly by later prophets. David, also a symbol of the heavenly king, eagerly foretold His appearance (see especially Psalms chapters 2, 22, 45, 72, 89, and 110). Isaiah described the Messiah's kingdom in chapters 2 and 9, His judgment in 11, His ministry in 42, and His covenant in chapter 49. He poignantly and extensively spoke of the Messiah's death in chapter 53. Jeremiah told of the Messiah's divinity (23:6), of the new covenant He would establish (31:31), and of the divine nature of His kingdom (33:16). But Zechariah's predictions were remarkably specific, such as that the Redeemer would enter Jerusalem riding a donkey (9:9), that He would be betrayed by friends (13:6), and so forth.

Malachi (4:2-6) closed the Old Testament with two wonderful promises. First, "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings." Then he told us who would break God's silence of 400 years and announce the Savior. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." By now we know about understanding prophecy, so we are not surprised that this meant someone who would come in the spirit and power of Elijah, as explained by Jesus (Matthew 17:10-13), and not that Elijah would come in the flesh. It was John who, on instructions from God, pointed out Jesus as the Messiah. "Behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The Not-So-Silent Years

The 400 years between the close of the Old Testament and the coming of Jesus are often called “The Silent Years.” But they are silent only if we expect to hear God speak through the voices of prophets. If we are willing to ‘listen” to the actions of His providential hand, we can hear Him shouting in triumph as He prepares the world for the gift of His Son. Besides that, we have the prophecies of Daniel that give us a good outline of what to expect.

Daniel’s (chapter 2) great man-image prophecy—actually a dream he interpreted for Nebuchadnezzar—described the world kingdoms that came after Nebuchadnezzar and before the coming of the Messiah. We know what this prophecy meant because Daniel interpreted it for us. Then he supplemented it with related prophecies in chapters 7 and 8. The head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian kingdom that was in existence at the time. The breast of silver signified the Medo-Persian kingdom, ruled by Cyrus and others, that the Bible also briefly described. The legs of brass referred to the Greek kingdom, headed by Alexander the Great; and the feet that were of iron mixed with clay represented the Roman kingdom that was in power when Jesus came. Daniel (2:44) specifically said, “In the days of these kings [the Roman kings] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people [as every other earthly kingdom has been], but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.” Thus, we know that everything that happened in the two world kingdoms that came after the close of the Old Testament was a part of God’s preparation for His kingdom.

The Jews were generally treated well by Persian rulers. Cyrus seemed to recognize that he was under a charge from God to bring about the restoration (Ezra 1:2). The nine rulers that followed him allowed the Jews to conduct worship and other religious and civil affairs. Although not free from domination by Persia, the high priest was given significant political powers. The Persian Empire lasted more than 200 years (539 B.C. to 331 B.C.), but as Daniel predicted, it did not stand forever.

In his “four beasts” vision of chapter 7, Daniel represented the world kingdom that replaced the Persians with a leopard that had four wings and four heads (7:6). This beast was comparable to the legs of brass in the man-image of chapter 2, and to the he goat whose feet did not touch the ground of chapter 8:5.

All three prophecies speak of the kingdom of Alexander the Great of Greece. Surely the four wings of the leopard, and the male goat whose feet did not touch the ground represented the speed of this brilliant, crazy, and ruthless man's world conquest. In just 13 years Alexander conquered the rest of Greece (he inherited Macedonia, one Greek state, from his father Philip), Egypt, and all of the Persian Empire. How aptly and precisely Daniel described him!

The Jews Under Alexander

Alexander's reputation has been sanitized by historians; and he has been credited with various noble ambitions such as wanting to spread Greek culture to the world. Actually, he was an amoral person who served his own ego. Apparently abused by a volatile, hard-drinking father and exploited by a fanatical mother who hated Alexander's father, he probably had reasons to qualify for a couple of psychiatric diagnoses. He could kill a friend as quickly as an enemy. But he seemed to like the Jews, which some people think came from an acquaintance with Daniel's prophecies about him. He encouraged the Jews to settle in centers around the world, such as Alexandria. He did aid the reception of Christianity, with its acceptance of the gentiles under the gospel, by blurring the distinction between Greeks and barbarians. The spread of the Greek language enabled people everywhere to read about the coming of the Messiah when, later, the Old Testament was translated into Greek.

Alexander's rise was meteoric and, like a meteor, it faded fast. When he had conquered Persia, the rich kingdoms still farther east beckoned, and he took his army into what is now India. There, his own troops rebelled and he withdrew to Babylon where he contracted a fever and died at the age of 33 on June 13, 323 B.C. As Daniel prophesied (8:8), his kingdom was divided between his four generals who called themselves kings and proceeded to establish dynasties. Ptolemy ruled Egypt, Seleucus in Syria, Antipater controlled Greece, and Philetaerus, Asia Minor. Israel was sandwiched between the Seleucids of Syria and the Ptolemies of Egypt.

At first Israel was under Egyptian control and the early Ptolemies treated them badly. Later Egyptian rulers relaxed the harsh treatment and, among other freedoms, encouraged learning. They were the builders of the famous library at Alexandria. This was the period (285 B.C.-250 B.C.) during which the Old Testament was translated into Greek, supposedly on orders of Ptolemy Philadelphus himself. Known as the Septuagint (which means "seventy" for the

70 Hebrew scholars who worked on it), that version is still in existence. Although the Ptolemies had initial control of Israel, there were many wars between Egyptian rulers and the Seleucids in Syria. It is believed that Jerusalem actually changed hands many times in the century after Alexander's death. But in 198 B.C., with a victory at the battle of Banias under Mt. Hermon, the Seleucids took firm control of Israel. They tried to invade Egypt itself but were unsuccessful there.

How the first few Seleucid rulers treated God's people is not known, but in 176 B.C. an infamous king named Antiochus Epiphanes took over the Syrian throne. His dark fame largely was earned by mistreatment of the Jews. At first he probably did not hate the Jews as a people. He was an ardent Hellenist, however, and did not respect the Jews' religion. He angered the Jews by forcing appointment of high priests, probably ones who favored Greek culture, which they would not accept. When a rumor circulated that Antiochus was dead, the Jews celebrated and that infuriated him. Then Antiochus set out on a determined effort to destroy the Jewish religion. The temple was desecrated and turned into a shrine for the Greek god, Zeus; a hog was offered on the altar; Jews were forbidden on pain of death to observe the Sabbath, openly read the Scriptures, or circumcise their sons; women and children were enslaved; and on and on. These were the darkest days since the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Maccabee Rebellion

Measures such as those just described were sure to incite resistance from true believers. But there was more. Antiochus sent officers through cities and towns to force leading citizens to renounce their religion and prove it by worshipping Greek idols. When the king's emissary came to Modin, just north of where the Tel Aviv airport now stands, they pled with Mattathias, an aging priest, to obey the king and be rewarded. Mattathias refused. One of his countrymen stepped forward to do the sacrifice. Mattathias attacked them, killing the king's man and the one who would have obeyed him. In a single burst of passion, a unique period of Jewish history was begun.

Mattathias was too old to lead the war, so leadership passed to his son, Judas Maccabaeus. No one knows for sure the origin of "Maccabaeus," but it probably was a nickname meaning "hammer." Judas assembled the zealots and, using the Judean mountains as his base, achieved some stunning victories. After three or four resounding defeats at the hands of small zealot forces, the Syrians withdrew

for a few years. During the lull, Antiochus Epiphanes died. Judas and his men took Jerusalem, cleansed the temple, and restored proper worship. The reopening of the temple in December 165 B.C. was celebrated with the feast of dedication mentioned in John 10:22.

Lysias, the successor to Antiochus, returned to Israel with the largest force yet, said to be over 120,000 men. He also had a new and fearsome weapon, war elephants. Seeing the odds against him, Judas withdrew and hunkered down in Jerusalem. Lysias besieged the city, but trouble at home in Antioch caused him to offer surprisingly generous terms of peace, including religious freedom, which the Jews accepted. Judas had accomplished the goal for which his father had defied the beast of Syria.

The Syrians did not keep their agreement, however, and within a few years Judas was back on the battlefield where he was killed in 161 B.C. For the next half a century the fortunes of the Jews rose and fell with various Syrian monarchs. Judas' brother, Jonathan, took the leadership of the Maccabean movement and was soon killed by a Syrian general. Simon, another brother, took charge. The strength of the Syrian kingdom was waning, and by 143 B.C. King Demetrius II was eager to make peace with Simon. He gave the Jews religious freedom and removed all payment of tribute to Syria, virtually giving the Jews political independence. This treaty inaugurated a period of freedom and prosperity, but without an enemy to unite them, the patriotic move fell apart. It was civil strife that ultimately destroyed the independence sought by Mattathias.

Trouble from Within

The patriots who had fought with Mattathias and Judas wanted religious freedom and were satisfied when they got it. Known at first as Hasidim, they wanted to be left alone to worship God according to the ancient order of Moses and had no political ambitions. Other Jews were attracted to the Greek culture that had knocked on their doors for generations. They wanted to accept it and live within the Greek-speaking community that had enveloped all of the Mediterranean. At first these differences were merely points of view, but later hardened into political parties. Bitter fights and murders were committed in struggles that went on for years. Simon was killed by his son-in-law, who intended to usurp the throne, but Simon's son, John Hyrcanus, outmaneuvered him and seized control of the nation. Hyrcanus was a strong leader who seemed able to unite the country, giving a measure of peace and prosperity until his death

in 105 B.C.

Following the death of Hyrcanus, the nation entered a 40-year series of struggles in which control changed often from one political party to the other. These parties, which apparently developed into the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day, treated the other viciously when in power. Neither could gain permanent control of the government. They generally had peace with surrounding nations, more because the great empires to the east and south were emaciated than because of Israel's strength.

There was, however, a new power on the horizon; Rome was rising. She had already subdued the government of Cleopatra in Egypt, and in the middle 60's B.C. was advancing her way across the northern shores of the Mediterranean. In 63 B.C., Pompey and the Roman army entered Syria and conquered it in short order. Both parties in Israel knew they could not fight the Romans. Hyrcanus II was leader of the old Maccabean and later the Pharisee group, and Aristobulus II was leader of the forerunners of the Sadducees. Each pitched his case to Pompey. Both offered Pompey control of the country and asked for his support for their parties. Pompey chose Hyrcanus. Aristobulus, in control of Jerusalem at the time, tried to defend it, but his troops lasted only a short while. He was captured and sent with other prisoners to Rome.

The holy city and the holy seed were again in captivity. This time there was a difference. They were now ruled by the Roman kings—the ones Daniel said would be reigning when the Messiah came. "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed."

Summary

The Jewish nation was intended to bless "all nations of the earth." They would do this by pointing the world to the true God, showing them how to worship Him, and ultimately by bringing forth the Messiah. We followed that nation as it took many twists and turns of fortune mostly because of its sins. We wept as we saw the people of God taken into captivity, held our breath waiting for the promised restoration, and cried out with joy when it came. We leave the Old Testament with the holy nation again in captivity, but we know that Daniel's words are true; God does not intend to make an end of the Jews. The Messiah will come; and God's kingdom will be established. Now it is time to turn the page to the New Testament to see "the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings."

Suggestions of Additional Reading

Hester, H. I. The Heart of Hebrew History. Quality Press, Inc. Liberty, MO, 1962.

Keller, Werner. The Bible as History. William Morrow and Company: New York, 1981.

Willis, John T, editor. The World and Literature of the Old Testament. A.C.U. Press: Abilene, 1979.

Wiseman, Percy J. New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis, 6th edition. Marshall, Morgan & Scott, LTD: London, 1953.

Wood, Leon. A Survey of Israel's History. Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, 1970.

Appendix

Outline of the New Testament

Matthew	These books are called “The First Four Gospels” because they each tell the story of the gospel. “Gospel” means “good news” and the news is that Jesus, the Son of God, came to the earth to save man. The authors’ goals are to build or strengthen faith in Jesus Christ. See John 20:30-31. Each writer, in his own inspired Acts of the Apostles words, tells the facts of Jesus’ life on earth and his preparations for his coming kingdom or church. Such matters as his birth, life, miracles, death on the cross, and resurrection are explained. In several places, Matthew chapters 5-7, for example, Jesus gives a preview of the doctrine his church will have when it is established on earth.
Mark	
Luke	
John	
Acts	This book tells people what to do to be saved and describes the establishment of the Lord’s church in which they are to live and worship. It does this great task by recording the “acts” or preaching of the inspired apostles as they told people about Jesus and explained his doctrine. There are several examples of people being saved. See chapters 8, 10, and 16. For the first sermon ever preached to tell people what to do to be saved, read Acts chapter 2. This chapter also notes the establishment of the church. See verse 47.
of	
Apostle	
Romans	All of these books are letters from inspired apostles or inspired evangelists to churches or individual Christians. They were written to tell Christians how to live good lives in Christ and how to worship God in the church. In some cases, they were also written to solve specific problems that had arisen in churches.
I Corinthians	
II Corinthians	
Galatians	
Ephesians	Although these inspired letters were written to specific churches or individuals, they were also intended for Christians of all times. See I Corinthians 1:1-2.
Philippians	
Colossians	
I	

Thessalonians Letters to individual Christians are I and II Timothy, Titus, II Philémon, and II and III John. All others are to churches. These Thessalonians letters, or epistles as they are also called, give guidelines for daily living that will bless all who follow them. They discuss such matters as marriage (Ephesians 5), appropriate dress (I Peter 3:1-4), and how one should relate to the government (Titus 3:1). They give blueprints for how the church is to be governed (I Timothy 3) and how it must conduct its public worship (for one example, see I Corinthians 14).

I Timothy
 II Timothy
 Titus
 Philémon
 Hebrews
 James
 I Peter
 II Peter
 I John
 II John
 III John
 Jude

Revelation This book is prophecy about the church. It tells of trials the church will face through the years but also about its final triumph. See Revelation 1:10-19. It is written in symbolic language sometimes difficult for new students. Its wisdom becomes more apparent as one studies it and grows spiritually.

About the Author

Born in Lawrence County, Tennessee, James Orten attended public schools and a small, country church. He has earned degrees from North Louisiana University, the University of Tennessee, and a doctorate in clinical social work from the University of Alabama. Doctor Orten has held teaching positions at several institutions, including the University of Oklahoma Medical School and the University of Cape Town, South Africa. He is a Professor Emeritus at the University of Tennessee. Retiring early, he has worked full time for the church since 1994, including two years in Zambia, Africa. The Old Testament is his special interest.