

James Philip Bible Readings

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THE BOOK of GENESIS

Genesis is so called because it is a book of beginnings, the beginning, as has been said, "of everything we know, except God; the beginning of the universe, of man, of life, of death, of sin, of families, of the Sabbath, of the covenants, of nations, of languages, of cities, of culture, and even of redemption itself. It has been named, very beautifully and aptly, "a day-break book", for it is the book of the dawn, and there is a sense in which it is the seed-plot of the whole Bible. It is essential to grasp its significance if we are to have a true and adequate understanding of the Bible as a whole, and especially of the meaning of the New Testament. Its authorship is traditionally ascribed to Moses and, notwithstanding the claims of modern criticism, we proceed on the assumption that this is so.

1) **1:1**

"In the beginning God . . ." There is a solemn majesty in these opening words that makes us want to fall down and worship. They are so sublime and confront us with mystery so profound that it were almost an impertinence to comment upon them. In this, they bear witness surely, at the outset of the Holy Scriptures, to the need for an attitude of humble reverence on our part as we approach them. They remind us that we are but man, and that the place whereon we stand is holy ground.

They also provide a key to the proper understanding of the book as a whole, in that they indicate that its purpose is religious and not scientific. It was not written primarily to reveal the secrets of Creation, but to make known the plan of redemption and it should not be consulted as if it were a scientific treatise. We should read these opening chapters not to see whether what they say about creation tallies with the statements made by geologists and biologists, but as a word from the Lord; and, as such, it will be not so much something to satisfy our intellectual curiosity, as something to meet our spiritual hunger and need. This does not, of course, mean that the questions that face us in relation to science and religion are not important, but there are more important questions, and it is these that the Scriptures concern themselves with, as we shall see. (We suggest that the whole chapter be read through in its entirety, before particular points are noted.)

2) **1:1-2**

There is so much that needs to be said by way of introduction to this wonderful book that we are obliged to tarry for some time in the first chapter. We may gather something of significance in the two opening verses. First of all, we have a statement about the creation of the heavens and the earth, the universe as we know it, then immediately our attention is fixed upon the earth in 2. From the universe, we are narrowed down to one particular planet, and its history, and the first eleven chapters may be said to deal with mankind as a whole. But then, at chapter 12, a further narrowing-down is evident, and mankind as a whole recedes into the background, and one particular family (that became a nation) holds our attention for the remainder of the book. But this is a principle, which continues to operate throughout the entire Bible. There is a further narrowing down, from the family to one Person in it Jesus Christ, the son of David, son of Abraham. And it is at that point - the lonely figure on the Cross of Calvary - that the movement begins to widen out to the first-fruits of His resurrection, the infant Church born at Pentecost, and onwards to the extension of its influence from Jerusalem to Judea, and Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the world, embracing finally the great multitude that no man could number, of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues, mentioned in Revelation. Such is the scope and intent of this wonderful story, of which Genesis is, as it were, the first chapter.

3) **1:1-5**

Commentators all down the ages, following the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 4:6) have seen in these verses an illustration of God's recreative work in the souls of men by the Gospel, and it is a marvellously apt picture of what happens when Divine grace overshadows a man's life. Before God deals in mercy with us, our lives are "without form and void", purposeless, empty, without direction, without meaning, without hope, as Paul so movingly describes it in Ephesians 2:12 and 4:17,18. But God in mercy shines in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ, the Spirit broods upon us as He brooded of old upon the face of the waters, and light comes, banishing the darkness and the emptiness and purposelessness from our lives. Now notice that there is an oft-repeated phrase throughout, "And the evening and the morning were the first day". The significance of this order is not merely that the Jews reckoned their day as starting at sunset and continuing till sunset the next day, but something wondrously blessed bright with hope. When God starts to work in a man's soul, it is dark and when He finishes, it is the morning. The light comes and a new day has dawned for him. Such is God's order. He begins with chaos, and He ends with order and beauty. And it is as true in every fresh dealing that He has with us as at the beginning of things. As the Psalmist puts it, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning (Psalm 30:5). Sometimes the "evening" seems long and protracted, but God's dealings always bring us to the "morning". This is borne out in later verses, particularly in the recurring phrase, "And it was so" (7, 9,11,15, 24, 30). We are to learn from this - and what infinite encouragement it gives us - that what God purposes to do, He will invariably bring to pass. It does not matter how impossible the future seems, or how many discouragements may be piling up, if God has spoken, He will surely perform, and nothing will hinder the fulfilment of His purpose.

4) 1:6-25

If it is legitimate, as Paul indicates, to see in the original "Let there be light" an illustration of spiritual re-birth, then we may also extend it to include the further Divine enactments. Just as God commanded the flowers and the fruits, and all manner of beauty into being by the Word of His power, so He commands the flowers of grace and the fruits of the Spirit into existence in the lives He has recreated. The fragrance and loveliness of the original creation have their spiritual counterpart in the new creation of God in Christ, and the souls of men may become like Eden, the garden of God, and what was once a barren and desert place begins to blossom as the rose. If this be so, then we have some indication of the possibility of Christian living, and having seen it, we should not rest until it is accomplished in our experience. Well might the Psalmist pray, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us". It is a sentiment entirely in harmony with the lesson we find in these verses.

5) **1:26-31**

The question of the "six days" of creation has been perplexing to many. It is asked, "Are we to take this as meaning that God created the world in six literal days? Surely all the evidence of science obviously discredits such a view entirely? But we may remember what Peter says, "A day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. In addition, the word "day" is often used in Scripture in a metaphorical rather than in a literal sense. There is, however, another view which commends itself, and it is that Moses received a series of visions and in each vision God revealed to him a series of visions and in each vision God revealed to him a stage of the creative process, and the phrase "the evening and the morning were . . . marked for him the close of each successive vision.

The fact that man was created on the sixth day means not only that man is the crown of God's creation, but that he was brought into a world that was wonderfully prepared for him by the good and gracious hand of God, into a world glowing with beauty and splendour, a world "of hills and valleys, that drinketh water of the rain of heaven" (Deuteronomy 11: 11, 12). Is it not wonderful, as we view the breath-taking beauty of the heavens and the earth, the serenity of the everlasting hills and the ever-changing splendour of sky and sea, to think that the Lord God Almighty made it all before ever He brought man into it, because He wanted everything to be "just right" for the pleasure and enjoyment of the crown of His creation, Man. Sometimes, we forget in our (very proper) Christian preoccupations with the glory of redemption, that it is a Christian duty to glory in creation. The Old Testament saints were ever gripped by it, as we see from the Psalter in particular; they saw that all creation is marked with the fingerprints of the Almighty. Read Joseph Addison's hymn "The spacious firmament on high", as a worthy commentary on this thought.

6) **1:26-31**

Notice in 28 that God set man in authority. When man was created he was created as overlord of this world. The fact that this is no longer true of man is entirely due to the Fall. It is certainly true that man still tries to make himself creation's overlord, and the achievements of modern technology are an impressive proof of his ability, but because man's existence is a sinful existence, every attempt he makes to fulfil this ancient role lands in disaster. He probes the secret of the atom; but in so doing brings paralysing fear and dread into his experience. This is his unalterable and inevitable dilemma, that each successive advance of science is likely to bring new terrors and forebodings to mankind. He is in a prison of his own making,

That original authority extended to the brute creation, and the fact that man does not now exercise lordship over the animals is also due to the Fall. But on the glad day of restoration, when Jesus comes to reign, that ancient prerogative will be renewed. Not for nothing does the Scripture tell us that in that day "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard lie down with the kid . . . and a little child shall lead them (Isaiah 11:6)". Of this there have been suggestions and hints in the history of God's people, Daniel manifested it forth, momentarily, and on one special occasion, when he stood unharmed in the lion's den. The powers of the world to come were upon him, and no lion dared touch him. They recognised authority. And are we not now told in the Temptation story (see Mark 1:13) that the wild beasts were with Jesus - not menacing Him, surely, but doing obeisance to Him! These are only hints, but they are hints, of a glory that is now no longer in man.

7) 1:26-31

What is the purpose of this wonderful creation that God has brought into being? John Calvin, the great Reformer, says, "Creation is the theatre of His glory", its purpose is to set forth, to display, the glory of God. We do not take this in any narrow, restricted sense, The divine glory is seen not merely in the works of His hands, but in the attitude of His heart. Speaking of the grandeur and majesty of the narrative of creation, someone has said, "These mighty words stand in Scripture not for the satisfaction of curious inquisitiveness, nor even only for the intellectual completion of our picture of the history of the world's salvation, but in order to show the greatness of the Divine love. Before the seas raged and swelled, before the earth was built or its foundations were sunk - yes, before those morning stars exulted and those sons of God shouted for joy - God, the Almighty, even then had thoughts on me. On me, the worm of the earth, who have given Him so much trouble and labour with all my sins." The attitude of His heart: Look at the oft-repeated words throughout the chapter, "And God said . . . " This great Creator is not a silent Worker; He is a God Who speaks. He does not will to be alone in the world He has made. He wills to have fellowship with the souls He has made. He wants to speak with them. That is the greatest wonder and the greatest mystery in the whole story, and that, in the deepest sense is what it is all about. He has made us for Himself, for fellowship with Him. Such is the dignity conferred upon us. My God, 'how wonderful Thou art'

8) **1:1-31**

We ought not to pass from this chapter without making mention of an interpretation of its structure and intention which is widely held by many Christians. According to this view, the work of six days is to be regarded not as a work of creation, but of restoration, after some tremendous catastrophe, which, it is suggested, took place between the first and second verses of the chapter. The second verse can be translated, "And the earth became without form and void . . ." That is to say, the first verse refers to the original creation, and then something happened, which brought the original creation into chaos. To support this view, Isaiah 45:18 is quoted, "He created it not in vain"- the words "in vain" being the same in the Hebrew as those translated in Genesis 1:2 "without form". If He did not create it "without form", then something must have overtaken it to make it so. This "something", it is suggested, was associated with the fall of Lucifer, son of the morning from heaven. (John Milton develops this theme in the grand manner, in "Paradise Lost"). It is thought that passages such as Ezekiel, 28:12-15 and Isaiah 14:9-14 refer to such a fall. They certainly seem to have a deeper reference than merely to the kings of Tyre and Babylon. This view has much to commend it, and should not be lightly set aside without careful thought. (For further details see "The Dawn of World Redemption", by Erich Sauer, pp. 35, 36).

9) **2:1-3**

There are several matters in this chapter that belong to the fundamental order of creation. The first, recorded here, is the Sabbath. This is a particularly important matter at the present time when the whole Biblical concept of the Lord's Day is being challenged. It is often asserted that Christians have no obligation to observe what is, after all, a Jewish, legalistic matter which has been superseded. "We are not under law", they say, "but under grace". But this passage makes it clear that it is neither a Jewish institution (We are at a point here long ages before the Jews were called God's people) nor confined to the Mosaic Law (and therefore left behind when law gives way to grace). The idea of a day of rest is as old as creation itself, and was instituted right at the beginning as an integral part of man's life. It can never, therefore, be good to undermine a basic ordinance of creation, and for this reason, we ought to view with disquiet the attempts to encroach on its sanctities that are being made today. Not only so the Epistle to the Hebrews uses this word to illustrate the rest of faith and we may certainly regard the Sabbath as a symbol of the central message of the Scriptures and of the Gospel, namely that for salvation, man must rest from his own works completely and put his trust in the work of Another, even Christ. It is to this that the Sabbath pre-eminently bears witness, and to encroach upon it is in effect to challenge the basis of our salvation. Is the Church so clear on the question of justification by faith that it can afford to dispense with this witness to it? We think not: it is perhaps a measure of how far our generation has misunderstood the purpose of the Sabbath that it should be speaking so much of its restrictions and boredom. 'God blessed the day.' That is its intention - to be a blessing and a benediction to men. It is this that needs to be re-discovered, and once it is, there will be no fear of its ever being lost to mankind. It is no reason to throw away treasure!

10) **2:4-7**

After the consideration of creation as a whole, our attention is now directed to man as being the special concern of the book - the history of man in relation to God. In this connection, notice the phrase in 4 - "These are the generations of . . . " It occurs ten times throughout the book, each time introducing the history of the particular family which follows (The first "history" extends from 2:4 to 4:26), Its meaning, then, may be fairly taken to be "The story of the family of . . ." and here it can only indicate that the "family" of heaven and earth is man. It is a declaration that man is the offspring of both earth and heaven - of earth in that he was formed of the dust of the ground, of heaven in that God breathed into him the breath of life, making him a living soul. He therefore belongs to two worlds, and no interpretation of his nature, which does not take this into consideration, can possibly do justice to him. As Ecclesiastes puts it, "God hath set eternity in their hearts" (3:11 - see modern translation) and this conditions all man's experience. Since he is made for God - and even in his rebellion against God he does not cease to be destined for Him - he can find his rest only in God. That is what the "story of the family of the heavens and the earth" has to tell us.

ii) 2:8-17

The important point to notice here is that we have the first reference in the Bible to the existence of evil. This is all the more startling because we usually think of evil in connection with Genesis 3, which records the story of the Fall. How are we to explain the existence of evil on the earth before man sinned? This can be done only by assuming (as the Bible everywhere does) the existence of Satan as the prince of darkness. We have, already (see day 8) referred to Isaiah 14:9-14 and Ezekiel 28:12-15 which seem to speak of a fall of angelic beings, and is only in the light of this that we can properly understand such a passage. It is clear from these verses that the existence of evil was assumed as a reality against which man required to be warned. Evil must therefore have existed before man in another creature. In this connection, Paul's words in Romans 7 - "When I would do good, evil is present with me" - might well have a startling and unsuspected application, for it is certainly true that evil was present in the Garden of Eden as something to be guarded against. The word "keep" in 15 is said to imply difficulty and danger, and the verse might legitimately be interpreted, as indicating that man had to guard the Garden against some hidden peril. It is not until chapter 3 that the nature of this veiled warning becomes clear when Satan, in the guise of a serpent comes on the scene.

12) 2:8-17

We should not miss the significance of 15, for it contains the first expression of the Biblical doctrine of work. It is important to realise that work, so far from being "a necessary evil" as many seem to think it, belongs to the original order of creation and is part of God's gracious provision for man's well-being and fulfilment. This means that work well done - any work, not merely spiritual work - is a means of grace and blessing and is fruitful in building true integrity of character. It is scarcely surprising, in view of this, that when men depart from the Divine institution of work, the whole economy of the country should be set at odds. The real answer to the ever-recurring dispute between capital and labour lies in a renewed understanding of the meaning and intention of work as a basic and fundamental part of the order of creation. The recovery of a sense of honour in relation to work is one of the greatest needs of our time, in labour and management alike, and few things would transform the industrial situation so quickly or effectively.

The prohibition in 17 with regard to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil should surely be interpreted as an expression of man's creatureliness and dependence upon God. It is significant, as we shall see in the next chapter, that Satan's temptation was concerned precisely with throwing off this dependence and becoming independent, so gaining freedom. But true freedom consists in accepting our position of dependence upon God, recognising that that is our proper place in the order of creation, and must be adhered to if harmony and fulfilment are to be possible. The words, "Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free" contain the whole Biblical philosophy in this verse.

13) 2:18-25

Marriage, like the institution of the Sabbath and the doctrine of work, belongs also to the basic order of creation, and on a right understanding of these verses much in Christian life will depend. There are a number of important lessons to be learned, and learning them would do much to dispel the confused and even false ideas held today about marriage. In the first place, we notice that in the provision of a helpmeet, it was God Who took the initiative, not Adam and we feel that if only men and women were content to leave such arrangements in God's safe hands, for Him to bring about in His own good time, much distress and heartbreak - aye, and tragedy too - would be avoided. If there is anything taught in 21 it is surely that union was brought about without anything in the way of human connivance or planning. Human hands are generally too clumsy to deal with such delicate matters. Furthermore, the word "help" is deeply significant. What help did Adam need? Towards what was this help directed? Surely towards the fulfilment of his high destiny as a man made in the image of God. Two things therefore emerge here first, that marriage is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, and secondly, it is good and profitable in the way God meant it to be only when it does in fact bring men and women nearer to Himself and into closer fellowship with Him. The highest aim in life - and that which brings its truest and deepest fulfilment - is fellowship with God, and marriage is meant to be a help towards it. Not only so, the deepest hunger in human life is for fellowship with God, and it is particularly unfortunate that people should enter into marriage in the expectation that it will answer the intense yearning within them which only God Himself can satisfy. We dare not expect too much of even the dearest and most precious human relationships on earth. God has set eternity in our hearts and He alone can fulfil the eternal longings within us and that not here, but hereafter. To recognise not only the blessings and benedictions of marriage but also its limitations is one of the greatest lessons a Christian can ever learn.

14) **2:18-25**

We may notice before passing on, a point of real import in 24 - "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife". Many marriages suffer from the fact that one or other of the partners has not in fact truly broken away from parental loyalties and attachments. The modern practice of living with the in-laws has been forced upon many young people because of the exigencies of the post-war housing situation, and, significantly, this is where many marriages are under strain. It can never be a happy arrangement, even when the 'in-laws' are of the kindest and most understanding, for the reason that it is violating a very deep principle of marriage itself. For this same reason, it is not wise for young married couples to depend too much upon their parents even when they are not staying with them. "Running home to mother" in times of stress and strain and effectively prevents the possibility of standing on one's own feet and forging a true and independent family unit - the "one flesh" spoken of here. To maintain such independence may well mean making mistakes, even serious ones, (we learn from experience) - but failure or unwillingness to leave father and mother in favour of the greater loyalty to husband or wife may have the far more grievous-- and sometimes fatal effect of undermining the marriage altogether. The practical implications, of this verse should be closely studied.

15) 3:1-7

This is the chapter which tells how the dark shadow came upon God's good creation, the shadow of sin and death. It is basic to the whole meaning and message of the Gospel, and we shall never truly understand the Gospel until we have grasped the significance of what is taught here.

Already in 2:8-17 (see, Day 11) we have encountered the problem of evil, and we may well ask, "Why had there to be a tree of the knowledge of good and evil?" The answer is that God made man for fellowship with Himself, and fellowship is something that is freely given. Inherent, therefore, in the very possibility of fellowship between God and man is the idea of man's free will. Man had to be created with free will if for no other reason that an automaton could not give to God the free response of his heart and God would not be satisfied with less. But the implications of this are very considerable. If man were made so as to be able to give freely the love of his heart to God, the possibility is that he could also withhold it if he chose. As a free agent, it would be equally possible for him to obey, or disobey, God. And we speak reverently this was a risk that God had to take. Since, then, man was in fact made like this, it follows necessarily that God had to place some restriction upon him, namely the prohibition about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That was the testing point of man. How would he choose? Would he say Yes or No to God? That is the issue in this chapter.

16) 3:1-7

The question arises, "Are we meant to take this passage literally, or ought we to interpret it metaphorically?" We think, literally. The danger of metaphorical and symbolical interpretation is that, instead of explaining things, it often explains them away. And, if by understanding this passage metaphorically and symbolically, we take the serpent simply as meaning the principle of evil and no more, we have set ourselves at odds with the entire teaching of Christ and His apostles, who believed in the personality of Satan. There is much more here, however, than at first appears. Our version says that "the serpent appeared to Eve", and we may well ask, "How in the world, if we are to take this literally, could Eve have been "taken in" by a serpent? But, in the original, the word means "The shining one", and this is very revealing especially when we remember Paul's words in 2 Corinthians, 11:3,14, where he speaks of Satan transforming into an angel of light. It is distinctly probable that what confronted Eve in the Garden was a shining figure which she mistook for an angel of God, bearing messages from Him to them. Angelic appearances to men are in the Scriptures, but they did occur from time to time and we do not think of them as to be interpreted otherwise than literally. Adam and Eve were doubtless more familiar in their unfallen state with angelic beings than we can now possibly imagine. Why should this appearance not have been, as Paul seems to suggest in 2 Corinthians 11, that of Satan disguised as an angel of light? Surely his subtlety consists precisely in being able to impersonate an emissary of God.

17) 3:1-7

One lesson that stands out with the uttermost plainness in the account of the Fall of man is that, behind the fact of sin, is the personality of Satan. It is impressive to realise that the Fall is spoken of entirely in terms of Satanic attack upon, and interference with, mankind and that the first promise of redemption in Genesis 3:15 is one of victory over the serpent. We must at all costs, therefore, include the fact of Satan in all our thinking about the problem of sin. To leave him out is to neglect the deepest dimension in the whole question.

At the same time, however, we are confronted with a paradox. Though Satan be at the root of sin, we are nevertheless fully responsible before God for sinning. We may never, as Eve attempted to do in 13, excuse ourselves and blame the devil. Even when we are most conscious of the tyrannising power of sin and of our own powerlessness against it, we recognise our own responsibility. Though Satan tempted Eve, he did not make her sin. He planted the seed in her heart, and stood back into the shadows and watched her step into sin of her own free will. He tempts us, sways us, but it is we who commit the sin.

18) 3:1-7

To continue from the previous thought, a question of very considerable importance now arises. If we are responsible for our sin, while at the same time Satan is behind it, can we plead "diminished responsibility?" This could scarcely be, but the idea does bear witness to a significant facet of truth. In all human sin there is a mixture. It is never pure rebellion against God. Only Satan's is unalloyed revolt and malignity; man's is tempered, so to speak, in greater or lesser degree, with frailty, waywardness and ignorance. For this reason, though his fall from grace is total, he is not fallen beyond hope. His sin cannot be excused in terms of diminished responsibility, but it can be forgiven. "I obtained mercy", says Paul, "because I did it ignorantly, and in unbelief." "Father, forgive them" said Jesus on the Cross, "for they know not what they do." Man does not ordinarily invent sin; he succumbs to its pressure from without, Satan is the originator, and for him there can be no forgiveness. He has reached the point of no return. This is the significance of the terrible word spoken by Jesus about the sin against the Holy Ghost, for which there can be no forgiveness, for when a man has so identified himself with sin that he no longer needs Satan's incitements towards it, he has become a devil. We might well employ our Lord's words at His Trial in another sense than that originally meant, "Sayest thou this thing of thy self, or did another tell it thee?" That is the test, other influence than our own at work. This may be one of the things we are meant to gather from Paul's repeated assertion in Romans 7:17, 20 "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."

19) **3:1-7**

We note next, the focal point of Satan's attack in the words, "Yea, hath God said?" He called in question God's word, and doubt very quickly passed to disbelief and disobedience. That is generally how the trouble starts. The manner in which he sowed the doubt is evidence enough of his subtlety. He suggested that the restriction placed upon them by God with regard to the tree was unreasonable and unfair. "It is not fair of God to do that to you. " We may learn from this that when we find ourselves at any point in our own experience giving vent to such a complaint, Satan is at work in us, seeking to undermine our faith and trust in the goodness and love of God.

It is impressive to realise that Satan used the same tactics in his attack on the second Adam, Jesus Christ. Immediately after His experience at Jordan when the Divine Voice had said, "Thou art My beloved Son . . ." Satan came with the words, "If Thou be the Son of God . . ." and the same implication, "It is not fair of God to ask you to tread the path of suffering." The great difference, however, is that whereas the first Adam succumbed (and all mankind in him) to the wiles of the devil, the second Adam (and all believers in Him) triumphed saying "Get thee behind me, Satan". In this sense, the New Testament represents a new beginning for humanity.

"O wisest love! That flesh and blood

Which did in Adam fail,

Should strive afresh against the foe,

Should strive and should prevail."

20) 3:1-7

We should note well how the sin finally came about. Eve's imagination and thoughts (6) were quickened by means of the parleying with Satan, and doubtless the forbidden fruit was tasted a hundred times in imagination before her hand was stretched out to take it. The real battleground of evil is in the thought-life. There is usually a long trail of thought preceding the forbidden act. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. The lesson for us here is, resist beginnings. Guard the frontiers of the mind, for once they are crossed, the enemy is well on his way to victory. Compare James 1:14.

In this connection, we should also remember that sin is never so attractive and fascinating in reality as it is in imagination. Satan knows we how to dress up his wares in such a way that they mesmerise and hypnotise us into tasting them. Will we not admit that our enjoyment of the sin itself has rarely been so entrancing and captivating as the imagination of it that preceded it? This is because while we were playing with it in our thoughts there was a spell upon us which rendered all rational thinking impossible at the crucial moment when it was most necessary. This is something that will need careful consideration, for there is a point at which we can, by the grace of God, shake ourselves out of the spell Satan is weaving round us before it finally engulfs our minds, and we can say, "Thank God. A moment or two more and I would have been under".

21) 3:8-13

Now look at the terrible change sin made in Adam and Eve's attitude to God. They hid themselves from Him Who formerly had been all their joy and their very life. Satan had said, "Thou shalt not surely die" but these verses make it very plain that they did die, something vital died in them, the spiritual light went out and the link that bound them in fellowship with God was broken, and the inevitable result was disorder. The desire for concealment, the fear, the concern to "blame someone else" (12,13), and above all, the self-conscious embarrassment (10) - all these are fateful evidences that "death" had "set in". But why, "above all, the self conscious embarrassment?". For this reason: the nature of the temptation suggested by Satan, "Ye shall be as gods" really meant "Throw off restriction, be independent of God. Make yourself, instead of God, the centre of life. And, having fallen to the temptation, this is precisely what did happen. They became self-conscious in place of their original God-consciousness. And that is the essence of sin.

22) 3:8-13

Not only so, we see here the degrading power of sin. Adam blames Eve for what has happened. Is there not something base and ignoble about this? Nothing is truer than that all the finer instincts in man become debased and coarsened by sin. Eve in turn blames the serpent, and this is also a characteristic of sin - unwillingness to confess their sin to God. They admitted it, it is true, but their excuses show that they were unwilling to take responsibility for it. To "confess" means to "say the same thing as God about our sin", and when we do, there are no "buts"; we say, "Thus and thus have I done", and take the responsibility fairly and squarely. But there is something even more sinister here. "The woman Thou gavest me", said Adam, charging home the responsibility upon God Himself. Nothing could show more clearly the antagonism that sin breeds in human hearts, and the extent of the alienation and rebellion that now existed in Adam. Satan had said, "Ye shall not surely die", but this is one more melancholy evidence that in the deepest and most tragic sense they did die, and that the image of God in them was defaced and vitiated beyond any merely human possibility of recovery.

23) 3:14-19

Nor are we even yet finished with the dire results of sin. In 17,18, we see that creation itself is involved in man's downfall, and "comes down" with him. The shadow and the curse that came upon him came also upon the created order, to be lifted again only when man is finally redeemed. This explains why there should be barbarity side by side with beauty in nature, and merciless ferocity as well as entrancing loveliness. Not only so - and this is something which the poets also have so rightly and intuitively discerned, there is a note of melancholy running through nature. Think of "the low murmur of the waves on the sea-shore", and "the sighing of the wind in the trees"; is there not a minor motif in the music of creation, bearing witness to the fact that it has been subjected to vanity, and that in its bondage 'It waits with eager longing for the manifestation of the sons of God'. (Romans 8:19 22) And when our mortal bodies are quickened, when the King comes back, not only we, but all creation also, will be set free from the age old curse and rejuvenated, and the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose (Isaiah 35:1), and the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12).

24) **3:14-19**

All is not therefore dark in this sad and tragic chapter of the history of man. Indeed, as far back as 9 in the words "Where art thou?" we can hear the voice of the Good Shepherd seeking after the lost sheep. The wonder of the Scriptures is that, even thus early, they speak of God's search for man. This seeking God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. The opening scenes of Genesis may well be compared to the experience we sometimes have of entering into a room and switching on the light. The bulb fuses, but the momentary flash has lit up the contents of the room before it is again plunged into darkness. So here we have just been, as it were, able to see what things were like in the beginning before the dark shadow of death came down. But all is not finally lost, for God has come into the darkness, and His coming pledges to lost mankind that hope is given and help will come. This is sealed in the promise of 15. God's answer to the sin of Adam is the promise of a second Adam, the Seed of the woman who will bruise the head of the serpent. It is His assurance that a counter-offensive against sin would be begun. And, centuries later, in the fullness of the time, the promised Seed, Jesus Christ, made of a woman, came to do battle with the serpent, and on the Cross won everlasting redemption for the sons of men. It is passing wonderful to realise that as soon as man sinned, God spoke to him of the Saviour. This means that despair need never be, for God's gracious promise stands over against our sin. Have you sinned today? He is there at hand, to help. If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:1, 2).

25) 3:20-24

The coats of skins were the Lord's provision to replace their own self-made clothing. It is not difficult to see a spiritual lesson here - no human effort can serve to "cover" our sin, only God can adequately do so. This provision was made after Adam changed his wife's name to Eve, and some commentators think that since "Eve" means "living" or "life-giving", naming her was an act of faith on Adam's part in the promise God had given that the Seed of the woman would yet bruise the head of the serpent. First, then, faith in the promise, then "covering" for sin. The skins must have been procured by the slaying of animals, and this leads us, in "type" or illustration, to the thought that without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sin. There is mercy as well as judgement in 22; for man, to live forever in his now sinful state would be not only to perpetuate evil, but also intolerable hell for him. Not only so, man the sinner has had fulfilled to him, in a far different way than he expected, the baneful promise of Satan that he would know good and evil. The terrible thing is, he now has to live with this knowledge. Is this not a permanent element in the horror of sin? Do we not wish a thousand times that we could "unknown" what we now know about the life and ways of sin? Well might Paul warn us to be "wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil" (Romans 16:19).

26) 4:1-5

The first and obvious lesson to be drawn from this chapter is the teaching it provides on what might be called "the entail of sin", the development and ramifications of sin. The progression we saw in chapter 3 was doubt, disbelief, disobedience - this was in two individuals. Now we see a home and family clouded and darkened by sin, and now it is bloodshed and killing. This is the fruit of the disobedience in the Garden. The consequences of sin go on and on, even when the sin itself is forgiven. The whole chapter is meant to teach this - the theme continues down to Lamech (23) who sings in praise of killing, and through to Genesis 6, in the phrase "only evil continually" (6:5), and on to the judgement of the Flood. As James says, "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:15).

Eve's words in 1 would seem to indicate Eve's hope and belief even then that this son was the promised seed mentioned in 3:15 that would bruise the head of the serpent. But there was much for the human race to learn before that Seed could come. The whole Old Testament is the record of its slow, slow learning about the sinfulness of sin, which made the coming of the Saviour necessary. The two offerings (3-5) illustrate the two ways in human history of coming to God. By faith, Abel discerned the need for a true sacrifice for sin as the only true way of acceptance with God. This is the Bible's first lesson on justification by faith. (See Thomas Binney's Hymn "Eternal Light, Eternal Light", especially v. 4),

27) **4:6-8**

The interpretation of 7 is problematic. The phrase "sin lieth at the door" may be taken as meaning that sin lies like a crouching beast ready to spring upon the man who entertains it as Cain did. The second part of the verse seems to mean, "Sin desires to have you, but you must rule over it and get the better of it". We recall Christ's word to Peter "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you" (Luke 22:31). The warning of God, who could read his heart, was unheeded however, and thought became action. In 8 we should read, "And Cain said to Abel . . . " what he said was not finished, for anger arose and the foul deed was done. Joseph Parker, in the People's Bible comments: "If you want to find out Cain's condition of heart you will find it after the service which he pretended to render (to God); you know a man best out of Church; the minister sees the best side of a man, the lawyer the worst, and the physician the real. If you want to know what a man's religious worship is worth, see him out of Church. Cain killed his brother when church was over, and that is the exact measure of Cain's piety."

28) 4:9-16

Here again, as in 3:9, we meet the questioning, all seeing God (10). We cannot hide from Him. We learn from this that sin has a voice, and speaks a language, that readies the throne of heaven. (See also Genesis 18:20 and James 5:4). Nothing can silence its cry save only the atoning blood of Jesus, which, as Hebrews 12:24 indicates, speaketh better things than that of Abel. The mark of Cain (15) was for protection, as 15 makes clear, not condemnation. We may think, how strikingly similar is the story of the Jews who slew Christ and were rejected of God. God has nevertheless set His mark upon them, and even in their rejection it does not go well with those who harm them as history has abundantly proved. Cain's going out from the presence of the Lord (16) reminds us of 3:24 - indeed, in so many ways the events of this chapter echo those of the previous one. And this may show us that even in his rejection God was still mindful of Cain, just as He was gracious to Adam and Eve, and that even murderers stand under the shadow of the Cross.

29) 4:17-26

The purpose of these verses is to show the development and outcome of a civilisation that was founded on the principle of separation from God (16). This Cainite civilisation reached its culmination in the days of Noah when it was judged by God in the cataclysm of the Flood. We should not make the mistake of supposing that because this is the record of an ancient time it was necessarily primitive. The signs are not wanting that this was an extensive and well-developed civilisation. What is of most importance, however, is that its predominant emphases had no reference to God. In home life (19), in agriculture (20), in culture (21), and in industry (22) alike, God had no place. He was not in all their thoughts. And, bearing in mind that the days of Noah reflect the full flowering of this civilisation, we must recognise that this is not merely of historical and antiquarian interest, but relevant for our own day, for Jesus said, "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:26). The study of these early chapters in Genesis may be far more important than we realise for an understanding of the troubled times in which we live. This much at least our age has in common with that ancient time - in industry, commerce and culture alike - aye, and in home life also. God is being left out.

30) 5:1-31

It is best to read this long genealogy through in its entirety, then return to various points of interest and significance. We should not regard the long lists of names in Scripture as unimportant, for they are part of sacred writ, and therefore have their lessons to teach us. Bear in mind the writer's purpose, to show the development of the principles of good and evil, on the one hand the development of the evil that began in Eden; on the other hand, that of the promise given by God and how some men responded to it. Thus, in 3, we read, "Adam begat a son . . . in his own likeness." No longer the image of God but in the likeness of fallen human nature. So also the oft-recurring phrase: " . . .and he died" throughout the chapter. This is the fruit of sin, and it is meant to underline the sentence passed upon Adam in the Garden. It is as if the Holy Spirit were intent on giving the lie to Satan's false assurance in 3:4, "Ye shall not surely die", and it rings like a melancholy refrain from beginning to end. As one commentator says, "A sense of the vanity and frustration of this present life begins to steal over us thus early in the Bible. Generation by generation the full tragedy of the Fall unfolds itself more and more".

31) 5:1-31

The immense length of the lives of these ancients poses a real problem for us. Are we to take the statements before us literally? Some have suggested that what we have here is reference to clans, not individuals. But many of these figures are recognised elsewhere in Scripture as individuals. Others have suggested that perhaps the years were much shorter, and were computed differently then, perhaps even lunar "years", i.e. months. But this theory will be seen to break down if we divide Enoch's age, for example, when Methuselah was born, by twelve. Not only so, in the record of the Flood in chapter 7 the years are divided into months. Nor can we dismiss them as legendary figures, for that would raise problems of inspiration of the Scriptures. The only solution is to take them as they stand, and this becomes feasible when we remember that the world was then young, and the human race was in its infancy. Death is not a natural thing although we accept it as such today. There was no history of chronic disease then as we have now, nor was there a long accumulation of the ravages of sin and disease in mankind such as is our inheritance today. May we not accept the testimony of Scripture as it stands? We know all too little about former times to dogmatise about them,

32) 5:1-31

One of the choicest jewels in these early chapters of Genesis is the passage here (21-23) about Enoch. It is particularly noticeable that this patriarch lived on earth for far less time than any of the others. Indeed, a careful study of the chronological data in the passage will reveal that Adam was the first to die (apart, of course, from Abel who did not die naturally and Enoch's translation followed before any of the others died). There is, it seems to us, a deep symbolism in this order. Adam's death was the first fulfilment of the sentence in Eden; but Enoch's translation was a token from a gracious God that death would not always reign, and that its dread power would not always stand between man and God.

Enoch walked with God. And his walk bears testimony to the reality and possibility of a spiritually fruitful life in the midst of a God forgetting age, and, be it noted, in the heart of family life with its many distractions, for it was after the birth of his son Methuselah that he thus walked. Common Christian experience seems often to suggest that the cares and worries of family life prove too great a stumbling block to many, but Enoch stands in the Scripture to remind us not only that it is possible for parents to live godly lives, but that it is required of them. One recalls that Paul speaks of the Christian walk in the context of family life in Ephesians 5, in the relationship of husband and wife, parents and children. The Christian life is not a cloister life, it has to be lived and can be lived faithfully and steadfastly in the midst of the common concerns and perplexities and hazards of everyday experience.

33) 5:1-31

Towards the end of the chapter, special mention is made of Noah (29) as one who is to come to the forefront of attention in subsequent chapters. His name was a prophetic one, given in pious hope by his father, and meaning "Rest" or "Comfort". Like Eve, Lamech hoped that perhaps his son might be the fulfilment of the Promise given in 3:15. In this he shows a very different spirit and temper from his namesake in the godless line of Cain (4:23). There is something very striking about these early patriarchs, one senses the pathos of the long lists recording life and death, and yet at the same time one sees the nobility of a people caught up in and by the promise of a people who had hope. They had the forward look, as the writer to the Hebrews was quick to see in his estimate of ancient history in Hebrews 11. However dimly and partially they may have discerned it, they looked for a city having foundations, whose builder and maker is God. This is what makes men of character, and what should characterise God's people in this age of deepening perplexity and gloom. As Paul says, "If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable". (1 Corinthians 15:19).

34) 6:1-8

With this chapter we come to the crisis point of the old world. If we are tempted to think: "Only chapter 6 and judgement already". We should remember that ages and generations have been telescoped into this brief opening portion of the Divine revelation. According to the chronology given us, from Adam to the Flood covers a period of no less than sixteen centuries: if anything is taught by this, it is surely that God is longsuffering towards mankind, not willing that any should perish.

Some have seen significance in the opening words, "When men began to multiply on the face of the earth", especially in view of our Lord's warning "As it was in the days of Noah, . . . ", and think that the phenomenal increase in world population in recent generations from 800 millions in 1800 to over 3,000 millions in our time may have spiritual import beyond our realisation. It is certainly true that this tremendous multiplication of people has coincided with the development of sinister forces of evil and the appearance of the demonic in so much of international tension in the twentieth century, and it may yet be seen more clearly than it is now that the connection is more than accidental. Jesus once challenged His disciples to discern the signs of the times. Are we able to interpret the events of our day in the light of the Word of God?

35) **6:1-8**

There is divergence of view as to the interpretation of 2. Some take it as referring to the intermarriage of the line of Seth with the line of Cain, believers with unbelievers, and the consequent dimming of the witness to the truth resulting in a chosen people falling into conformity with the world. If this be so, it speaks of something which is amply substantiated in history and Scripture alike: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers". Such a union never works from a spiritual point of view, and generally ends in the believer becoming a backslider. But is this the correct interpretation? The context shows that it was when this happened, whatever it may mean, that the crisis point was reached and God uttered the sentence of doom (7) upon the old world. Does the first interpretation fit such a situation? Scarcely, we think.

The other view is that "sons of God" refer to angelic beings, and that what is indicated here is a union between spirit beings and humans, an unholy, unnatural, blasphemous offence for which the only answer or remedy was judgement. The phrase "sons of God" as used elsewhere in the Old Testament certainly has reference to angels, as for example in Job 1: 6, 2:1, 38:7. On this interpretation (see also 2, Peter 2:4 and Jude 6) what we have here is the invasion of the human race by demonic powers, leading to the "demonising" of humanity. And this is always the precursor of Divine wrath.

36) **6:1-8**

It may well be asked, in view of the previous reading, how this could possibly be? The answer to this might be that these fallen spirit beings who, as Jude says, "kept not their first estate", entered into men and possessed them, as the devils in Gospel times did, and through this means came in touch with the daughters of men. The fruit of his lawless, unnatural union we are told of in 4 - mighty men of renown. This has greater significance than we might suppose. We are familiar with the idea in the New Testament that demon-possessed people have superhuman strength, and we may remember that the evil geniuses that have trodden down and oppressed hapless millions down the ages of history have usually, in this classical sense of the term been demon-possessed - the Hitlers, the Tsars, the Neros. Churchill once described Hitler as "a maniac of ferocious genius" and in that remarkable phrase he was unwittingly confirming the teaching of this Scripture that the age of the "superman" and of totalitarianism is the expression of the demonic in human life. This is what the New Testament means by "the Spirit of anti-Christ", and we are taught to expect that in the last days a final culminating manifestation of this spirit shall appear (see 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4) and that this will herald the coming of the Lord in judgement, just as, in Genesis 6, the demonising of humanity brought about the judgement of the Flood.

37) **6:1-8**

Commentators have differed in their interpretation of 3. The spirit referred to may be taken (a) to mean the life principle breathed into man at his creation, or (b) the Holy Spirit. If we take the first to be correct, the verse would mean that the race as such was to be destroyed for its wickedness. If the second were adopted, the meaning would be that God was to remove His Spirit from the earth, and no longer plead with men. The phrase "for that he also is flesh" means that man had by his continued sin reduced himself to the level of animals and no longer discerned his destiny as a spiritual being; the kind of condition which renders any further advances by the Spirit of grace unavailing. This is further indicated by 5 in the words "only evil continually", evil in its fullest and most complete expression, with no redeeming features. This is the ultimate declension, which places man beyond redemption point. Finally, 6 reveals the restless agony of God in the face of human sin - it grieved Him at His heart - and links us directly with the spirit of Gethsemane and Calvary, where that agony was finally assuaged and put at rest in the blood of the Cross. Is it not significant, that 8 follows hard upon the "grief of God", with its message of grace. " Grace is free" we sometimes glibly sing. True, but at what infinite cost to the heart of God?

38) 6:9-22

The building of the Ark, God's refuge in judgement, is committed to godly Noah, of the line of Seth. This passage introduces the story of the Flood, and the next two chapters are devoted, in considerable detail, in recounting it. We may be pardoned for assuming that the writer, giving so much space to it after previously telescoping many centuries into the brief compass of a few chapters, had a particular concern to emphasise some important lessons on the ways of God in judgement of sin.

We need to realise, however, that although this account is historical, the purpose of the narrative is not primarily to record history but to give the record of human life in the light of the Divine purpose. Not history as such, but the significance of history is the burden of the book. This is why the writer to the Hebrews, in 11:7 passes over much on which we might be tempted to concentrate, and goes to the spiritual heart of the story. The real point of this account is neither the size nor shape of the Ark nor the fact that a particular number of animals went into it. It is that a signal intervention of God took place, in judgement upon human sin. All the references made to it in the New Testament by our Lord and the apostles indicate that this should be its primary significance for us also,

39) 7:1-24

A comparison between 7:11 and 8:14 will make it plain that the duration of the Flood was one year and ten days, not the comparatively brief period of forty days, as has commonly been supposed. It is clear that it was a very extensive and extraordinary happening, Not only so, it was not confined to unusually severe rainstorms. The fountains of the great deep were broken up (11). This may refer to gigantic underwater earthquakes causing immense tidal waves and flooding from the oceans. Some indeed hold that a cosmic disorder of great magnitude took place, affecting the heavenly bodies, which in turn disturbed the tides of the oceans in unprecedented ways. This may be much nearer the truth than we had realised. The Scriptures teach that there is a link between the sin of man and the disorder of creation. Since this is so, the abounding wickedness of Noah's time, the consummation of evil, one might say, in the ancient world might well be reflected in increased disorder in creation. This explains why in the New Testament the last days are said to be not only a time of terrible iniquity when evil men shall wax worse and worse and the love of many shall grow cold, but also a time when extraordinary signs will appear in the physical universe - signs in the sun and in the moon, and in the stars, the sea and the waves roaring (Luke 21:25).

It is impressive to realise that these weird, apocalyptic warnings no longer seem far fetched in an age in which scientists are probing the secrets of outer space. It has suddenly become quite believable in our time that cosmic disturbances should take place, and that these should somehow be linked with the terrifying pretensions of modern man whose technological advances have in no wise been matched by a proportionate increase in moral power to control them. Well might the Scriptures say that men's hearts shall fail them for fear.'

40) 7:1-24

There are two delicate touches here that we ought not to miss. In 1 the Lord said, "Come thou into the Ark". "Come, not Go". The Lord is there, and Noah was called into His presence out of the impending doom. One is reminded of the well-known words, "The Name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe." (Proverbs 18: 10) The great lesson that this teaches us is that when we are called of God into the ark of His salvation, it is into fellowship with Him that we are called. There are many valuable and precious things in Christian life: knowledge of the Word, Christian service, worship and fellowship, but all are eclipsed by this greatest, "That I may know Him" (Philippians 3:10).

In 16 we read that "the Lord shut him in." There is an awesome finality about these words. God sets before men in the Gospel an open door and no man can shut it (Revelation 3:8), but when He shuts the door no man can open it, and all the cries and clamour from them that are lost will then be unavailing (see Matthew 25:10 13). But there is also a wondrous security in these words, for, shut in with God, Noah was safe from all the storm of wrath raging outside upon the world. That is the basis and ground of the believer's assurance of salvation.

41) 8:1-22

We might take 1 in two different ways. We could interpret it as meaning, "Thus God remembered Noah", referring to the record in the previous chapter of the Divine provision for him in the midst of the storm of wrath. This yields good meaning and indicates, in type, the New Testament message of salvation through Christ, our Ark of Refuge, But we may also take it to mean, and the remainder of the verse seems to underline this that God had mercy on Noah in the sense of bringing the long terrible time of visitation to an end. Perhaps Noah's faith was beginning to falter at the length of the trial he was called upon to endure and he was asking, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Not for one moment had God forgotten Noah, but now He gave sensible tokens of His love and care by sending a wind to dry up the earth. This also teaches a valuable lesson in Christian experience. Sometimes God calls us to pass through times of discipline and testing, and in such times we cannot see His face. We walk in darkness and have no light. And we question and are in doubt. But God has not forgotten us. He is fulfilling His purposes through the trial, and presently He will send sensible tokens of His remembrance of us. His loving kindness will break through the midnight of our souls. And each succeeding day will bring added confirmation that His purposes are ripening and coming to fruition in our lives and that the time of testing has fulfilled His perfect will in us.

42) **8:1-22**

At the outset of the new era in the history of the world, Noah set up an altar unto the Lord (8). There is a deep significance in this. It indicates that the only possible basis of life for man is sacrificial life through death. It tells us and this is seen supremely in the sacrifice of Calvary, that as sinners we have no right to be alive at all, and that we live only by the grace and the mercy of God. We are not our own, we are bought with a price, and we must therefore yield ourselves to God as those that are alive from the dead (Romans 6:13). It was to this that Noah bore witness, however dimly he may have apprehended it, and, as Hebrews 11:7 tells us, he thereby became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

The imagery of 21 is beautifully suggestive of the central truth of the Gospel, the offering and sacrifice of Christ which is a sweet smelling savour to God, signalling that wrath is propitiated in the blood that He shed and peace and reconciliation effected through the death that He died. Thus early in the Scripture record do we discern the message of the Cross, which casts its gracious shadow upon all the course of history, for the blessing of every age.

"In the Cross of Christ I glory

Towering o'er the wrecks of time;

All the light of sacred story

Gathers round its head sublime."

43) 9:1-7

These verses record the new beginning of the race a kind of repetition, almost of Genesis 1, a fresh start for man, full of hope, with every guarantee of Divine blessing. After the judgement of the Flood come grace and opportunity. In this way we may surely see an illustration of the new creation in Christ Jesus in which, after the failures and sins of the past, comes the gift of new life bright with possibilities for good and for God.

It is interesting to compare the conditions of this new start with those given to Adam. Noah is given a kind of limited lordship over creation, The very fact that fear and dread (2) was to constitute the attitude of brute creation to man testifies to the presence of disorder and sin in the world. Now - significantly - an additional command is given in 4, 5 concerning the sanctity of life, surely a necessary one in view of the bloodshed and violence which characterised the Cainite civilisation which had just been destroyed. There is some difficulty as to the meaning of 5 - some think it is a prohibition of suicide. Blood means life, and life belongs to God and is ours only as a stewardship, Whether this be the interpretation or not, it is clear from the general tenor of the verses that what is in view is the sanctity of life and reverence for human personality. Man as such is to be respected because he is made in the image of God. This is true even of the lowest of the low. Remember our Lord's attitude to the outcasts and the hopeless, the lepers and the demoniacs also are in His image, and still destined for God even in their disorder. God has set His love upon each man. Dare we, then, despise anyone for whom Christ has died?

44) 9:8-17

The rainbow is now invested with spiritual significance as the token of God's covenant with Noah and his sons. This is very wonderful. All creation speaks to us of God, but, as Paul points out in Romans 1, it is His eternal power and Godhead that are seen in the works that He has made. But here, in the rainbow sign, it is His love and grace that are manifested to us, and we should learn to rejoice in this oft recurring natural reminder that His mercy is greater than our sin.

But more. A rainbow is caused by the refraction and reflection of rays of light from drops of rain. You cannot therefore have a rainbow without the rain clouds. There is much for the spiritual life in this, For one thing, it is through the storms of life that we learn most deeply of the "many-coloured" wisdom and love of God, just as it is the rain-clouds that break up the white light of the sun into the many colours of the spectrum. For another, we may learn that the darkest hours of human experience may suddenly be transfigured by God's grace, bringing the hope and promise of help in time of need. Best of all, behind the storm clouds there is a shining sun. Behind a frowning providence God hides a smiling face. It is not always easy, in the midst of trials, to realise this, hence the value of the token, which is a visible reminder to us that evil and sorrow do not have the last word in our experience, but that God's grace will surely prevail.

45) **9:18-29**

There is something inexpressibly sad about this story of Noah's fall. After a faithful testimony during the long years of apostasy, when with unwavering steadfastness he stood for God, he is betrayed into this state of drunkenness. It is a solemn testimony to the danger of the unguarded moment. We dare not lower the defences even for a moment. And it is very often after a time of great testing, in which we have proved victorious, that the temptation to relax our vigil comes. We may recall how Elijah, after his great triumph over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, was brought through an over wrought condition of exhaustion, to utter depression and despair; and learn a new significance in Paul's words in Ephesians 6, "Having done all, to stand." The particular tension of the time of crisis often enables us to hold fast in the grace of God, but it is after it is over and we have begun to relax that Satan can make the greatest inroads into our spiritual life. Remember, it was after the crisis of our Lord's baptism that Satan came to tempt Him in the wilderness, and there may be more significance than we realise in the fact that He often retired to pray after the notable signs and miracles that He performed. "Watch and pray" is His word to us, and how needful it is. Faithfulness in the past is no guarantee of immunity from Satan's wiles. If we allow ourselves to become careless, we shall pay dearly for it.

46) 10:1-32

This long genealogy records the descendants of the sons of Noah, Japheth, Ham and Shem, providing us with a link between Noah and Abraham, as chapter 5 linked Adam and Noah. There is a deep underlying significance in its position here, in the structure of Genesis. For, from this point, mankind as a whole is no longer the central theme of the book, the emphasis passing to the Semitic line, the family of Shem. One writer has put it thus: "The tenth chapter of Genesis is a very remarkable chapter. Before God leaves as it were, the nations to themselves and begins to deal with Israel, His chosen people from Abraham downwards. He takes a loving farewell of all the nations of the earth, as much as to say, "I am going to leave you for a while, but I love you. I have created you: I have ordered all your future." And their different genealogies are traced. This does much to explain to us God's seemingly arbitrary choice of one rather than another. We sometimes ask, "Is it fair of God to set aside all the other nations and concentrate on one only?" But surely we see here that it is the underlying purpose of it all that explains it. This was the way - the only way - for God to deal with the problem of sin. He could not help but set aside the others, to take up one, for it is through the taking up of one rather than all that eventually all would be given the opportunity of blessing. This is borne out in the wonderful picture we have in Revelation of "all nations and kindreds and people and tongues" gathered round the throne of God worshipping the Lamb that was slain for their redemption. Thus, the "narrowing down" at this point is but a stage in the whole Divine plan of the ages. Well might we say, with Paul, "How unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out" (Romans 11:33).

47) **10:1-32**

Two points in particular, in the chapter, arrest our attention. First, Nimrod (8 10). The words used to describe him take us back to chapter 6:4, and he seems to have represented a revival of the pride and arrogance of the antediluvian civilisation with its rebellion against God and desire for independence of Him. He was the founder of Babel (of which we read in the next chapter), elsewhere called Babylon, a name fraught with abiding significance in Scripture as standing for everything that is godless and indeed anti-god in world history. Just as in chapter 6 we had men of renown vaunting themselves against God (cf. Romans 1:21, "When they knew God they glorified Him not as God") so in Nimrod and Babel we have the symbol of the lust for power characteristic of all totalitarian dictatorships, ancient and modern,

Second, the name Eber in 21, from which the word Hebrew seems to have derived. Our attention in the story is gradually and decisively being focused upon one particular line, and this is developed in 11:10 ff. The reference to the division of the earth in the days of Peleg, son of Eber, seems to be to that spoken of in the story of Babel, 11 9. The fact that it is made particular mention of is an indication that it was a very significant event. We may be sure that the Holy Spirit did not record this without a specific purpose. Is it fanciful to suppose that the movements of peoples in our time (e. g. the Jews) and the changes in the balance of power in the world, and the emergence of young nations from hitherto backward and even primitive cultures, constitute a parallel on which, in the light of the sovereign purposes of God, the same Holy Spirit would place an interpretation full of significance?

48) **11:1-9**

It is far off the mark to imagine this to be a primitive folk-tale. It is one of the profoundest insights into human sin in the whole Bible, and it is no accident that some of the most discerning minds of our time are speaking of the present world situation in terms of this story. Its significant phrases are, "whose top may reach unto heaven" and "let us make us a name", and in relation to these someone has written, "It is in the sphere of technical invention that man enters - so to speak, into human competition with the Creator of nature . . . it is this generation which is tempted with a feeling of godlike power."

It is startling to see how similar in principle the story is to Genesis 3, where the key to the interpretation lies in Satan's promise "ye shall be as gods" This is what underlies the building of Babel; man forgetting his limits, man, victim of an overweening determination to storm upward to God - this is always the demonic element in sin and is, ultimately, the spirit of anti-Christ - see Isaiah 14:12 and 2 Thessalonians 2:4. God's answer to man's proud pretensions is so devastatingly humbling - how effortlessly He confounds them. "He that is in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." (Psalm 2:4) And so the story now turns from the city and tower reaching to heaven, to Abraham, who looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

49) **11:10-26**

The point of this genealogy is to show the ancestry of Abraham as descended from Shem, the son of Noah. It is the line of the promise that is before us, and henceforward one family in particular occupies our attention. There is a startling contrast between the stirring events in the story of the tower of Babel and the unostentatious list of names in the second part of the chapter, and we should not miss the significance of this. Alongside Babel's proud pretensions the quiet and unobtrusive work of God goes on, and His unfolding purposes stand, inviolate and unmoved. It is as if God were saying, "This does not disturb Me, I will work, and who shall let it?" (Isaiah 43:13). For those who have eyes to see, this is one of the most wonderful lessons that the Scriptures teach, and we should learn to apply it, in the light of the sovereignty of God, to present situations, and realise that whether in the lives of nations or of individuals no possible manifestation of human arrogance or demonic wickedness can ever serve to frustrate the purposes of God or hinder the outworking of His grace.

F W Faber was so right when he wrote in the hymn "Workman of God O lose not heart"

"He hides Himself so wondrously
As though there was no God;
He is least seen when all the powers
Of ill are most abroad."

Why is this? Because He chooses so often to work quietly. God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty. His answer to the revolt of mankind was not myriads of angels sent to exact justice from the rebels, but a Babe in a manger, born in an obscure village in a land that was under the Roman yoke. The Gift of gifts was given silently and without acclaim. Happy is the man who has learned what God is like in the workings of His sovereign will.

50) **11:27-32**

It is useful, at this point of new departure in the book, to see the relation of what has gone before to what follows. As has been said "The first eleven chapters are the foundation of which the other thirty-nine are the superstructure. They trace back the Divine redemption until its cause is found in the sin of the human race, and its scope is shown to embrace all mankind. This done, we are now free to consider the precise method whereby God accomplished His purpose, and redeemed mankind through the instrumentality of one man, his family and his nation."

Abraham was of the line of Shem, and to this line a special revelation of God was given. "Shem" means "Name" and God in the fullness of time, brought forth One with a Name that is above every other name. That is the particular significance of the call of Abraham, and we must learn to see the story of his life in relation to the over-ruling purpose of God in redemption. There is an unbroken line from the Garden of Eden through Noah, Shem, Abraham right down to Bethlehem, and, significantly, Matthew underlines this continuity in the first words in his Gospel "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham". God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.

51) **12:1-9**

There is some doubt as to how we are to interpret the call of Abraham. If we compare 1, 4 with 11:31 and Acts 7:2-4, and realise that the opening phrase here should read, "Now the Lord said", not "had said", it would seem that God spoke twice to him, once in Ur of the Chaldees, and again in Haran. This may be interpreted in different ways: it could mean that he was led out step by step, with the Divine will becoming clearer as he went on. We need to appreciate the tremendous nature of his venture of faith. He went out, as Hebrews 11 puts it, not knowing whither he went, and it is certainly true that the Christian life often involves taking one step at a time. On the other hand, it may mean that, in stopping at Haran, his obedience was only partial and that God had to speak again to him. Some have suggested that Terah his father lacked spiritual sympathy with his son's call and that this hindered Abraham's advance into the will of God. How sad, if this is so, that a parent should prove a stumbling block to his son's service for God. (We wonder whether if there is some hint of this in Acts 7:4). Certainly nothing significant seems to have happened in his spiritual life until he moved into the place where God wanted him to be. From this we may learn that there can be no "half-way house" for the man on whom God lays His hand. It must be all or nothing; and God never intended that there should be any other alternatives. No one must be allowed to come between us and the call of God. (Luke 14: 26).

52) **12:1-9**

Whatever be the correct interpretation to be placed upon the twofold call, there can be no doubt that the response recorded in these verses was unhesitating and purposeful. The Hebrew epistle says, "Abraham, when he was called . . . obeyed" and to see something both of the nature and of the effect of that obedience in 5 - "They went forth to go into the land . . . and into the land . . . they came." This spirit of holy determination is the hallmark of his faith, and it is all the more impressive when we remember in what loneliness and isolation he took such a step - there was no fellowship of the faithful to help or encourage him in his new life, nor did he have any of the means of grace which play such a large part in our spiritual experience. What he did have was the promise of God, and what a promise it was. It is best understood in relation to the primal promise made in Genesis 3:15 to Adam, concerning the redemption to come, and as a development and continuation of it. (Everything indeed in Old Testament history focuses upon this, it is what the story is "about"). One cannot but marvel to think how the sevenfold promise was so abundantly fulfilled both to him and to his seed down the subsequent ages of history. But we see the story as a whole as Abraham did not, and it is even more wonderful to realise that in simple, child-like faith, doubtless perceiving only dimly and partially the significance of the mighty words that had been spoken to him, he was prepared to venture wholly upon God. He staggered not, as Romans 4:20 says, at the promise of God through unbelief, being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was also able to perform. We may never know what far-reaching significance the response of faith we make to the summons of God is likely to have, both for our own lives and for the larger work of His kingdom. We may be sure that, if His sovereign grace is in it, it will be more, not less than we think. It is not for little that He calls us to go out.

53) **12:10-20**

One of the great and abiding values of Abraham's life story is that it is so representative of Christian experience. Tests of faith come to the believer, and the famine, which Abraham now encountered, is surely to be interpreted as such. We have to learn to trust God in adversity, and it is a lesson that often comes very quickly after we step out in faith. John Bunyan's insight in the Pilgrim's Progress is so true when he brings Christian from his experience at the Cross -, to the Hill Difficulty. The famine in Canaan was Abraham's Hill Difficulty, just as the jail at Philippi was Paul's, on his arrival in Macedonia in the will of the Lord. And Abraham seems temporarily to have lost sight of God's promise in face of the crisis of famine, and this loss of faith resulted in serious trouble for him, for it led him into telling a half truth (which is the same as telling a lie) about Sarai his wife, with the distressing consequences here recorded.

We may learn from Abraham's unfortunate lapse. First of all, let us grasp this truth, that nothing unworthy or underhand will ever further our cause as Christians. Whatever the stress or emergency, it is never justifiable to stoop to anything that violates standards of truth and honour. It is never right to do wrong. In effect, Abraham was trusting in the power of a lie rather than the living God. In the second place, when we step out of the place of blessing as Abraham did on this occasion (his place was in the land of promise to which God had called him), we step out of the range of God's saving and sanctifying grace, and presently the old nature begins to assert itself. It is an unlovely manifestation that we see here. In the third place, being even temporarily 'out of touch' with God means that we "infect" the "atmosphere" around us, causing disturbance even when we do not say a word. Look at the unfortunate impression Abraham left among the Egyptians, as he left them mortified and covered with confusion. The world is never slow to criticise the moral life of a believer. It is not interested in the visions of God we have had; it is our works they will scrutinise. And they are surely entitled to do so. For faith without works is dead.

54) **13:1-4**

These verses teach a deep spiritual lesson. When we backslide there is only one thing for us to do; we must get back to the place where we lost out spiritually. When we lose God's blessing in our lives we will usually find it again when we go back to the place where we lost it. Thus Abraham returned to "the place where his tent had been at the beginning and to the altar he had made "at the first".

This should teach us to keep short accounts with God, and to make sure day by day that we are always on the right road. And when we do deviate from His good and perfect will, we need to get back quickly, for it is in the interval of wandering that things happen to our cost and consternation. Yesterday's reading should have served to remind us that when we are not "right" with God, situations tend to deteriorate very rapidly. It is a lesson writ large on many a page of Scripture, as witness the experience of David in 1 Samuel 27, when, in a moment of unfaith he got out of God's will and went to Philistia from whence he invaded Geshur and found the wife who bore him Absalom (2 Samuel 3:3), the son who caused him such grief and heartbreak in after years. Nothing is so grimly true in the life of the believer as that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

55) **13:5-18**

We see now a further step in Abraham's training and discipline here. From the beginning God's desire was for a separated Abraham. First it was the link with home and kindred that was broken, then the loss of his father (through death), and now Lot. It is a costly thing to be God's man, costly to everything that is natural, as we shall see Abraham proved still more in subsequent chapters, but it has its own unique compensations. It was after this separation from Lot that God came to him in an especial way. This is the point of the words "Lift up now thine eyes . . ." in 14. There are some things that God cannot reveal to us until He gets us to a certain place of separation and consecration. The break came through a strife between their respective herdsmen. It is said that it takes two to make a quarrel, but it only needs one to stir up strife. Doubtless the conflicting motives of the masters were reflected in their servants. It is clear that a widening gulf was driving the two men apart, and the sacred record is intent on showing us how widely different were the basic guiding principles in their lives. The contrast is between two different levels of spiritual life and experience. Lot's eyes were upon the advantages and prizes of this world (10), Abraham's were on the promise (14), and God saw that this was so, and dealt with them accordingly, ordaining that when a man tries to get the best of both worlds he gets the best of neither, and that when a man puts the things of God first, all these things shall be added to him. The whole land, including the part Lot had selfishly chosen for himself, was assured to Abraham by God (15:17). God is no man's debtor. "Them that honour Me I will honour."

56) **14:1-12**

Lot had made his choice and pitched his tent towards Sodom, and we are now shown some of the spiritual implications of that choice. The war on Sodom was a warning to him that the way of transgressor is hard, and to Sodom that a still greater judgement would come upon her if she did not repent, which judgement came, as chapter 19 records. How slow we are to learn that if we do wrong we shall suffer for it. We cannot escape the consequences of our own actions. Notice the progression in Lot's involvement. In 13:12 he "pitched his tent towards Sodom"; in 14:12 he "dwelt in Sodom"; in 19:1 he "sat in the gate of Sodom". We should not miss the import of these statements. Most people underestimate the "pull" of the world and of sin. They never mean to become so involved. "I'll keep myself unspotted" they say, but this also is an indication of their misunderstanding of the nature of sin and their ignorance of the wiles of the devil. When a man goes near, he is usually drawn nearer. Sin has a magnetic, even a hypnotic power that only the grace of God can annul, and when by his own wilfulness he removes himself from his only protection, disaster must inevitably follow. Lot was pulled gradually and steadily into the atmosphere of Sodom, with fateful consequences for himself, and, as we shall see later, for his family also. No believer can ever deliberately dwell in such a place with impunity.

57) **14:13-16**

Abraham's reaction to the disturbing news of Lot's capture was an instant and generous desire to help him, and this shows how deeply the grace of God had wrought in his soul. Lot's treatment of his uncle had hitherto been mean and shabby (and this is no small reason why he was now in dire straits). God repays our shabby treatment of others with interest but Abraham could find no bitterness against him. He was a big man in every way and the call of God to his soul had freed him from the thousand petty grudges and animosities that make life a hell for so many lesser men Moffatt translates 1 Corinthians 13: 6 "Love is never glad when others go wrong", and Abraham's gracious and generous attitude here shows how deeply he had submitted to the new life that God had bestowed on him, the life of grace. One finds deeper and deeper meaning in our Lord's words about him, "he rejoiced to see My day, and was glad. When one realises just how much of the spirit of Christ he showed in his experience. This, after all, is the real test. "Being like Him" is the only adequate proof that He has in fact come to indwell our lives. "Christ liveth in me" is no fancy theory, but a practical reality. It shows.

58) **14:17-24**

That there is something mysterious and of profound spiritual significance in this encounter with Melchisedec is seen in the other references in Scripture to this strange figure, Psalm 110 and Hebrews 7. The bread and wine (18) are, we think, symbols of blessing to Abraham, a sacrament, as it were, a sign and seal of God's purpose in choosing him and his seed to be the instrument of His grace to the world. It is as if Melchisedec saw in Abraham's victory over the kings a foretaste of the greater victory which the promised Seed, Jesus Christ, would one day accomplish over all the nations of men, as King of Kings and Lord of lords, "Great and wonderful things lie ahead of you" he seems to say, "things beyond the thought of man". There is surely a link between this and the next verses where we are told that Abraham refused the spoils of war (21). It is all indication that he understood the significance of the spiritual blessings conferred on him and sealed in the benediction of Melchisedec. He refused to be implicated in anything associated with Sodom, having seen the harm these unhallowed possessions had done to Lot. Nor is this a great loss to sustain or a great self-denial to endure. The man who has access to the hidden riches of God will not lightly barter them for the tinsel and glitter of the world that fade even in the touching. "My kingdom is not of this world" said Christ. Would that we remembered it, as Abraham did.

59) **15:1-6**

Times of spiritual reaction often follow great exploits for God, and it would seem that Abraham, after his victory over the kings, passed through such an experience. (We may recall a similar happening in the case of Elijah, after his notable victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, 1 Kings 18,19). This would explain the words spoken by God, "Fear not". There is almost a plaintive note in Abraham's rejoinder in 2, "What wilt Thou give me? And we may gather something of the strain that is upon him, and the sense of loneliness and discouragement that going forth" has cost him. It was to such a troubled and tried heart that God spoke this wonderful promise and assurance. "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness" (Psalm 112:4), says David, and this is surely what happened to Abraham. That day God not only renewed His promise to him, but amplified it (4), and made the starry heavens a sacrament of remembrance for him (5) as to the truth of the promise, and Abraham believed God (6). In the midst of the despondency, when his mind and heart were dark and his spirits discouraged he believed the bare word of a promising God. What a lesson there is here for us in our times of spiritual darkness - this is the way out, to cast ourselves upon His faithful, unchanging Word, against all the evidence of our senses and feelings and indeed, in face of all the pressures of Satan and believe what He says to us This is both shield and exceeding great reward to us and all our fears are set at rest.

60) 15:7-21

There is an air of mystery about these verses. The dividing of the animals was a usual form of making a contract or covenant (cf., Jeremiah 34:18), the walking in procession along the pathway between the pieces of the sacrifice, thereby signifying their agreement and instituting the covenant. Here, God alone (17) passed between the pieces, showing that this covenant was all of God and all of grace.

The "horror of great darkness" (12) must have deep symbolical significance, and perhaps the following verses serve to explain it "as being a foretaste, so to speak, an emblem of what his seed was to pass through ere the promise of the covenant was fulfilled to them; a kind of prophetic preview of His dealings with them. As to Israel, his natural seed, it signified the bondage in Egypt (13) before they reached the promised land. As to Christ, the promised Seed, it surely signified the Cross that was to be endured for the joy that was set before Him as to believers. As Abraham's spiritual seed, it signifies that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Notice particularly that this darkness came after the revelation of God and after Abraham's response of faith to it. It is impressive to trace a similar pattern in the experience of others in Scripture, and it should encourage us in our own times of darkness to realise that they may be very closely related to future blessing in our lives. It was when our Lord had received His anointing at Jordan that He was driven straightway into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. It was on the borders of the Promised Land, on his return from Laban's household, that Jacob wrestled with the angel. It was on the threshold of his life's work that Moses had that strange and terrible encounter with God (Exodus 4:24). These things are written for our learning and encouragement. God does not always let the sun shine on us, for we must learn to walk by faith, in the darkness. Remember Exodus 20:21, "Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was."

61) 16:1-2

This chapter introduces us to one of the darker episodes of Abraham's history, and one which had continuing repercussions in after years. The association with Hagar brought a shadow on the patriarch's life and experience, and there are good grounds for supposing, as we shall see in later readings, that by this step of unfaith which he took on this occasion, he delayed the fulfilment of God's promise to him concerning an heir.

We may pause to ask how it came about that Abraham had an Egyptian in his household. If we look back to 12:10 we shall recall how he had made a serious mistake in going down into Egypt. How else could he have obtained an Egyptian maid for Sarai than then? That lapse in Egypt is now proved to have been more costly to him than he might have realised. Paul says, "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgement; and some men they follow after" (1 Tim. 5:24). O for clear-sightedness in time of temptation, that we might see the consequences of our actions before we do them. Someone has said, "Satan always blinds us to consequences, especially ultimate consequences. His control over men is accomplished by inducing short sight, whereby we live for the moment, and the future takes care of itself; whereas in reality we are making our future now". O God, keep our eyes clear, and our hearts pure.

62) 16:3,4

The full significance of Abraham's action is spotlighted by the words, "after . . . ten years in the land of Canaan". His lapse took place in face of God's faithfulness. Already one part of the promise had been fulfilled to him in that God had given him the land, and for ten years he had lived in it, every day he dwelt there, reminding him and confirming that God had honoured His promise to him, so far as Canaan was concerned. Yet he doubted and stepped out of patient dependence on God, taking matters into his own hands, and with what unfortunate consequences. It is startling to realise how irrationally we sometimes act in face of reasonable spiritual evidence. It was unreasonable of Abraham so to have done, and there was no kind of excuse for such a lapse.

Now Isaac was not born for another fifteen years after this, and we may well wonder whether, in addition to other consequences, the result of his unfaith was the hindrance of the fulfilment of the promise? May it not have come sooner had he only stood firm? We must beware the danger of meddling with God's purposes in our impatience, and taking matters into our own hands. Even if we think that God is taking so long to fulfil His will for us and in us, we should remember that the longest way round is often the shortest way home, and the safest, if God has indicated it to be His way. Short cuts that bypass the Divine Will always lead to trouble - always.

63) 16:5-6

If it were not plain by this time that both Abraham and Sarai had made a serious mistake, these verses would leave us in no doubt. When strife, dissension and friction arise in a home as they did on this occasion, something has certainly gone wrong. A spirit of bitterness seems to have entered which was to cause much distress in subsequent days, as later chapters will show. Not only so; both show a shameful attitude towards Hagar in desiring to be rid of her, and this indicates the decline in moral character that sin brings inevitably in its train. A departure from the will of God always brings moral failure in its train. Abraham is obviously ill-at-ease; he wants to forget the whole sorry affair as quickly as possible, and be clear of it. But that was not to be permitted. "They will not get rid of you as easily, Hagar", says the Lord, "they made use of you and now they will have to put up with you until I decide you will go". Ah, when we think what His chosen are capable of doing when they get out of touch with Him, we are much more prepared than we formerly were to speak in terms of Paul's devastating self-analysis: "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing. It is grace and grace alone, that makes men of us."

64) **16:7-16**

In contrast to the barbarous treatment shown to Hagar in Abraham's home, we marvel now at the tender pity and compassion of God for her in the wilderness. Her experience of His care and love, and her wondering consciousness of His watchful eye upon her "Thou God seest me", stand as a permanent record of assurance and encouragement and hope for all who have failed and all who are broken in spirit and facing hopelessness and despair. We recall the words of the hymn, which speaks of God's love as reaching "deeper than the depths of self-despair" and this is surely what Hagar encountered in her desolation. There are times when even the best of God's saints pass through such hours of darkness, and one of the sweetest and most precious of all experiences is to prove the reality and the gentleness of His love and to find the darkness turning to light at His presence.

But look at God's assurance to her (10). It is that her son shall become the head of a considerable nation. There is mystery here. It is a matter of history that the Ishmaelites, and their descendants, the Arabs, have been and are to this very day, a thorn in the flesh to the chosen people and one marvels at the Divine permission that allowed a people to spring up to be such a source of grief and trial to them. It is but one aspect of the problem of evil, and one can only say that God permits the existence of such things because they can become a means in His hands of disciplining and chastening and purifying His people, and of fulfilling His own sovereign purposes in the world. He can turn the wrath of man to praise Him. It is Satan who introduced sin and suffering into the world, but it is God Who ordains that this should be the means whereby redemption is wrought out for mankind. God has set a Cross at the heart of human history, and the word of the Cross is the power of God unto salvation.

65) **17:1**

If we read this verse along with the last one of the previous chapter, we gather that a period of thirteen years has elapsed. From his eighty-sixth year until his ninety-ninth there is no record of God's dealings with Abraham. In view of the detailed account of his life, which we have in Genesis, this long silence may well have significance and we should not be slow to ask what it has to say to us. God was not silent in those years. For those who have ears to hear, God is always speaking not always in the way we expect, or in the way we would like. And in Abraham's case Ishmael was God's word to him during these years. It may be that he took a longish time to learn and to appreciate what God was saying to him - it was certainly a sore word for him to hear. But when you are at school, you do not go on to the next lesson until you have grasped the first one properly, and a very great deal depended upon Abraham's true progress in this spiritual school. Our verse is given particular force in this connection, for it is a summons to consecration, and he is ready to go forward with God. Happy is the man who benefits from the lessons that the circumstances surrounding him teach him, 'O God, give us ears to hear Thy voice in all that Thou dost allow to touch our lives'.

66) 17:1-8

In the summons to consecration (2) there comes a new confirmation of the covenant with him, in which God changes his name; Abram meant "high father". Abraham means "Father of many nations". This is surely significant. The patriarch is now ninety-nine, and within a year his heir is to be born through whom the promise, that he shall become the father of many nations, will be fulfilled. One senses once more the purposefulness of the words. Always, when God is at work, we become conscious of the steady tread of His footsteps, marching on imperturbably to His intended destination. He is never late in fulfilling His purpose. His time is always on time. This, although we had not probably realised it, is what we missed in the atmosphere of the previous chapter. It is always missing when we impatiently take matters into our own hands, and try to speed up God's purposes to suit our own imperfect understanding of the situation. It is when we look back after God has so graciously brought His purposes to fruition in our lives, that we are able to see the pattern clearly - that we realise how needless our impatience and our doubtings have been. Why should we not trust His faithful word? Hath He said, and will He not do it? It is a poor child that cannot trust his father in the dark.

67) 17:9-14

Since God not only made promises to Abraham but also entered into covenant with him (7), Abraham's response is now dealt with. The rite of circumcision, instituted here, was meant to signify his response of faith to the covenant, the sign that he believed. Its significance is that it is the symbol of the "cutting-off" of the God-estranged life with all its impulses - the surrender of the sinful nature to death. Its New Testament counterpart is baptism, which signifies our identification with Christ in his death and resurrection, whereby we put off the old man and put on the new. Notice that Abraham received his new name before the rite was performed. This is important. It is not the rite, whether circumcision or baptism, that bestows the new name; it is merely the seal that it has been given, and assumed. It is likewise very important to realise that here God entered into covenant also with little children, and in face of this it will not do for people to say that they can see no evidence in the Scriptures to warrant the practice of infant baptism. The principle is firmly imbedded in the Scriptures - and it is evident that Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost was referring to it in the words "The promise is unto you and to your children" (Acts 2:39). The vexing problem of baptism is not one that is adequately dealt with by reference to "proof-texts" - fundamental and far-reaching principles are at stake. We should learn from this passage that inclusion in the covenant does not first depend on our faith but on the Divine condescension, and that this applies even more so in the New Testament than in the Old. We cannot think that grace includes children in the Old Covenant and excludes them in the New. The blessings of the New are greater and more comprehensive, not less, than those of the Old!

68) 17:15-27

Sarah is also included in the covenant. It is impressive to note that the family is the Unit that God deals with, rather than the individual, and this ought to encourage us in our prayers for our loved ones who may not be Christ's as yet. So often the faith of one member of a family is the means of all its other members becoming Christians. Keep on praying, and rest on such a word as this.

Now, compare 17 with 18: 2. It would seem that Abraham's laughter, though filled with astonishment, was nevertheless that of exultation and joy, not of unbelief, as Sarah's seemed to be later on, and for which she was rebuked by the Lord. He staggered not, says Romans 4. Those who have experience of the promises of God will know exactly what this holy exhilaration feels like. It is something, after all, to face a situation which is obviously impossible from the human point of view, and yet be sublimely confident that it will come to pass because God has said it would.

Note 23, "in the selfsame day" - these words show how instant Abraham's response to God's promise was, and confirm the view that there was no unbelief in his laughter. Would that we always responded unhesitatingly to God's Word.

The name "Isaac" means "laughter", and as the promised seed, he surely foreshadows in this the ultimate fulfilment of the covenant - promise in the One Who came to give "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah, 61:3).

69) 18:1-8

The next two chapters offer us a remarkable contrast between two distinct levels of spiritual life, as represented by Abraham and Lot. The one speaks of a holy intimacy of fellowship, the other of the Divine displeasure with a believer who has lost out terribly in his spiritual experience through worldliness and compromise.

The words "in the tent door" in 1 stand as the symbol of Abraham's refusal to be conformed to this world, his confession that he was a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth. There is no doubt that this was the secret of his close walk with God. (How different he was in this from Lot, who sat in the gate of Sodom - see 19:1!) Now it is to the pilgrim, not to the compromising spirit that God delights to reveal Himself. Indeed, when men are yielded to Him, obeying His commands, and walking uprightly, He has pleasure in their company (See Isaiah 57:15, 62:2, John 14:21, 23). We do not think it unlikely that as he sat there his mind was brooding on the events of recent days, pondering the wonderful promises of God to him. He was, in a spiritual sense, "sojourning in the land of promise", and it was to that waiting, meditating figure that the Divine visitation came. There is little doubt that the writer of Hebrews had this incident in mind when he wrote the words, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews, 13:2). O the thrill and blessedness of waiting upon God, and of waiting for God. "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me". (Isaiah, 49:23).

70) 18:9-15

A careful study of these verses will show that one of these mysterious visitants was the Lord Himself - in 9, they; in 10, he; in 13, the Lord and later in 17, the Lord. The nature of the communication made to Abraham in 10 must finally have convinced him as to their identity. Sarah's laughter seems to have been tinged with the bitterness of unbelief and she incurred the displeasure of the Lord. Her denial in 15 was doubtless due to fright as she realised that she had ridiculed the promise of the Lord, and we may gather from the swift insistence by the Lord that she had done so, how grieved He was at her disbelief. This should teach us all the much-needed lesson that nothing dishonours God and grieves His holy, sensitive heart so much as our failure to believe what He says to us and to trust His faithful Word. Even in seemingly impossible situations, such as Abraham's here, He expects us to trust Him, if He has once assured us of His intentions. One can sense surprise in His words in 14a that they should think that their particular circumstances constituted any problem to Him. O let us honour Him by believing that He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. He loves to be trusted.

71) 18:16-22

This is one of the passages, which give us a glimpse of the ineffable compensations of living a life of costly consecration like Abraham's. There is bestowed the privilege of an inner fellowship with the Lord in which, "far ben" with Him, we may learn the secrets of His workings. God said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (17). Do we really grasp what these words are saying? Abraham taken into the Lord's confidence! What a sublime experience! This is surely part of the meaning of 15:1 - "thine exceeding great reward". It is only to our intimate friends that we confide the inmost and intimate secrets of our hearts; we do not blurt them out to occasional acquaintances or even to erstwhile friends whom we have not met for years and from whom we may have drifted considerably in the meanwhile. Nor should we expect that God will give us His confidence if we have withheld from Him the undivided love and loyalty of our hearts that Abraham showed to Him.

And notice in 19 the words, "I know him". We sometimes speak of men like Abraham being sure of God, but here, God is sure of Abraham. What a wealth of meaning there is there. Does it not indicate above all the worth that God placed upon him and his friendship. How glad God must be when, by His grace, men so respond to His dealings with them that He knows He can count on them, for anything. Does God know you like that?

72) **18:23-33**

There is a close link between the previous thought and this one. It is the man who is "far ben" with God that prevails in prayer at the throne of grace. Abraham's intercession derived its value and power from what he himself was, not from what he said, or how he said it, and it was certainly the means of sending the angels of God to Sodom to bring out Lot and his family - this is the point of the reference in 19:29. Notice the ring of reality in his prayer. He had a limited objective. Under the impress of the Spirit he was brought down to the number of Lot's family, and thus he prevailed. This teaches us the important lesson that we must not pray either beyond our faith or beyond God's purpose and will. People sometimes pray wildly and extravagantly as if merely asking great things were an evidence of great faith, whereas on the contrary it simply indicates at times the measure of unreality in such a life and a lack of discernment of the Divine purpose. We can waste so much time in prayer because we have not troubled to find out what God's purpose is, or because we have not been sensitive enough to the whisper of His Spirit to know His will. Abraham knew how much to pray for and how far to go in his intercession, and he knew because he lived close to God. That is the way to prevail in prayer.

73) 18:23-33

A further thought on prayer before we pass on. One great lesson of the passage is that prayer moves the hand of God. Six times God is here said to have modified or been prepared to change His plans in answer to the prayers of Abraham. This is terribly important. It means prayer does things that would not have been done without it. If Abraham had not prayed, the likelihood is that Lot would have perished in the destruction of Sodom. To think otherwise is false to the entire teaching of the Scriptures. It is true that we come face to face here with the mystery of Divine predestination and its relation to human freewill, but we need to realise that this is a mystery far too deep to be reduced to a simple doctrine of fatalism - "what will be will be" or "what's meant for me won't pass me". This is not a Christian doctrine, and we must find another and better way of holding together the two seemingly paradoxical truths of Divine sovereignty and human responsibility so that both retain their validity without impairing or diminishing either. Here the human side is emphasised and we ought not to miss the force of it. God is the hearer of prayer, and it is not only our privilege, but also our responsibility, to come to Him in intercession for others. Eternal destinies may depend upon our obedience to the call to prayer.

74) **19:1-14**

The contrast here is complete. Two angels only came to Sodom. The third member of the trio who appeared to Abraham - the Lord Himself was not there. Lot's life showed so little sign that he wanted the Lord, and He reserves His presence for those who seek it. How different the atmosphere from that in chapter 18. Even the angelic visitants had little desire for fellowship with this unhappy worldling, and had to be pressed to enter his house (3). There is a graphic symbolism in the words "at even", for this was the evening of Sodom's existence, and indeed the evening of Lot's history. It is very striking to realise that this is the only occasion mentioned in Genesis when he had converse with the messengers of God, and it serves as a solemn warning to us all. We may be sure that if the long day of our lives is destitute of fellowship with God, the evening-time will be dark with foreboding. Whatsoever a man shall sow, that shall he also reap.

Tomorrow's thought about Abraham's power in prayer is mirrored here in the reverse. It was what Lot was, and what he was not, that rendered his testimony useless before his sons-in-law (14). If our lives do not speak to those around us, it is futile to suppose that our words will. Lot had lived too long as one of themselves, without any real difference, for his last-minute testimony to spiritual realities to be of any avail. What we are always speaks louder than what we say.

75) 19:15-25

One solemn word grips us here. 'He lingered' (16). It seems scarcely credible, that in face of all that had happened, Lot should be so unwilling to leave the doomed city. Ah, one of the penalties of sin for the believer is that it begets in our hearts a secret hankering after it that is all too difficult to get rid of, and even in face of impending judgement part of us will cling to it and cherish it. Doubtless, Lot had little sympathy with the grossness and vileness that were in Sodom, but there was much that was attractive to him in its worldly ways. Satan would see to that, and spare no effort to dress up his wares to make them pleasing and seemingly harmless to the eye of a man who, after all, did have some conscience and scruples. Experience shows that such people seldom prove a problem to Satan. He is a past master in the art of subtle compromise and has any number of ways of giving sops to uneasy spirits when he sees that there is any chance of beguiling them. O God, teach us to abhor that which is evil, give us grace to see it as it really is, shorn of all its deceptive attraction and fascination. Help us to call the ugly thing by its proper name.

76) 19:26-29

The fate of Lot's wife is made the subject of a very solemn warning given by our Lord to his disciples - see Luke 17:31 ff, and we should pay particular attention to it because of this. Our Lord is warning against the danger of turning back, and indicating that only the most wholehearted resolution will avail the believer in the light of eternity. When we remember the secret hankerings after sin that so often lurk in our hearts, we will do well to heed the words, "Remember Lot's wife".

The "pillar of salt" is to be taken literally. The particular area around the Dead Sea where Sodom was situated was then, and still is, rich in bituminous and salt deposits. It is likely that the judgement that overtook Sodom was a natural phenomenon in which natural gases exploded, causing eruptions of salty grit and ash which filled the air and showered down upon the reluctant and lingering woman, engulfing her and overwhelming her. One needs only to think of other great historical disasters, such as the last days of Pompeii, to realise how swiftly the doom would have overtaken her. Well might our Lord warn His children, for judgement strikes swiftly when it comes.

77) 19:30-38

As we read these sad and distressing verses, we remember the words of Saul the king, "I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly". Poor, tragic Lot! Truly the way of the transgressor is hard. We must not forget that this all started with one fateful, wrong choice (13:11), and we can trace the development of Lot's backsliding from that point with unmistakable clarity. What are we to say of his daughters' conduct? Without doubt, it is the foul spirit of Sodom. They were poisoned with the atmosphere of that evil place. But who brought them to Sodom? He himself had, from motives of worldly advantage, allowed his family to grow up in an atmosphere of moral pollution. It was scarcely surprising that they turned out as they did. Parents, learn from this that it is your responsibility to give your children the right air to breathe, and an environment that will be conducive to clean and healthy living. It is all a question of basic priorities in a man's life. It may be socially and economically advantageous for a man to move from one community or locality to another, but he had better be very sure that his social advancement is not being made at the expense of the moral welfare of those he loves best. Some men pay very dearly for getting on in the world, and live to regret bitterly their preoccupation with temporal prosperity when they see the effect it has on their children in later years.

78) 20:1-18

We are immediately struck with the similarity of this chapter to the story recorded in 12:10-20; both the incidents, and the circumstances surrounding them, bear a marked resemblance to each other. Significant lessons emerge from a comparison between the two.

In the first place, we note that both lapses follow great peaks of spiritual exaltation. In the one, Abraham had just obeyed the call of God and had gone out in utter surrender to His will - a tremendously big step. In the other, he had just witnessed the judgement of God, following his sublime experience of fellowship with Him in intercession for the lost city and for Lot's safety. Now such a state of spiritual exaltation is particularly blessed, but it is also particularly open to satanic attack. That is when the enemy comes, with all his arts and wiles to attack, and if possible, to destroy. This is why Paul is so insistent in Ephesians 6:13 that we must not only withstand in the evil day, but also, having done all, to stand - that is, when the main battle is over, still to be found standing, and alert. We may assess how important this is by studying the testimony of the Scriptures concerning the sins of the saints. Remember, when Noah fell - after the magnificent endurance of the terrible days of the Flood. When did Moses speak inadvisedly with his lips? After long years of faithful testimony. When did Elijah lose faith? After he carried the day with fearless courage on Mount Carmel. Ah, Satan waits for our unguarded hours. We must watch and pray.

79) 20:1-18

Another lesson to be learned here is this. There is a lapse of more than twenty years between the two incidents, and so what we have here is a return of an old temptation. This should teach us to have a healthy respect for former temptations, even when we think they have long since ceased to trouble us. We can never be too careful, and we must show a wise caution in speaking too unreservedly about victory over sin. Satan delights in humiliating us, as he assuredly did with Abraham on this occasion.

Now, look on to the next chapter. It records the birth of Isaac, the promised seed. You see the significance of Satan's timing of his attack? It was his last furious attempt to interfere with the fulfilment of the promise. It is often possible to know that particular blessing is coming by the very fierceness and persistence of Satan's attacks just prior to it, and to look back over a long period of Christian service with this thought in view, can be a very illuminating experience indeed. We can learn much about the wiles of the devil from the events recorded in these chapters. With regard to the particular attack on Abraham and the promised seed, we may see it in its true perspective if we recall the words in Revelation 12:3, 4, "The dragon stood before the woman . . ." This has ever been Satan's concern to destroy the seed, and frustrate God's redemptive purposes. Why also should Abraham have been beset at this particular point? And why else should King Saul have been incited by the evil spirit to attempt to slay David, who was in the direct line of the promise? And why else should King Herod have planned the massacre of all the male children in Judea? As Revelation says, "to devour the child as soon as it was born". O for greater discernment to see the enemy's working in our lives!

80) 21:1-8

These are verses, which should rejoice our hearts for the glad testimony that they bear to the faithfulness of God. "The Lord visited Sarah as He had said and as He had spoken". Oh, does not this rebuke our little faith and make us feel ashamed that we should ever doubt His royal promises to our hearts! God said it would be so, and it was so. Great is His faithfulness to the children of men. We note how long it took and how much Abraham went through before the promise was fulfilled. The events of eight chapters intervene, and quarter of a century elapses. God has His time. He is never in a hurry, but He is also never late. And when the time of promise draws nigh, nothing in earth or hell is allowed to stand in His way, and no kind of impossibility has any relevance. He sweeps them all aside. There is nothing too hard for the Lord. What an encouragement this is to all who are standing on the promises of God. Dear tried, tested, burdened believer, does your faith sometimes falter, in spite of yourself, in relation to some long-standing promise? Listen. Did He say He would do it? Then nothing, nothing, will stand in the way of its certain fulfilment. As Hudson Taylor kept saying, "He means what He says, and He will do all He has promised".

81) 21:9-21

The dismissal of Hagar and Ishmael raises very real and perplexing problems in our minds. Sarah's cry in 10 is undoubtedly full of bitterness and jealousy, yet God indicated that, although her conduct could not be approved, her counsel was to be followed. (12). This is very mysterious and hard to understand, but what we must not forget is that this extremely embarrassing and complicated situation came about through Abraham's own doing. We may learn from this that our sinful indulgences often cause us needless involvement and bring about situations from which we have later to be extricated - often with tears - by God.

The fact is that, hard as it may seem, it was the only possible solution to the problem, and it is Divine realism that we see at work in these verses. It is clear that Ishmael's presence in the house was likely to be a hindrance to the fulfilment of God's purposes for Isaac. God would take care of the exiles; Abraham's part was to obey. We may safely leave the consequences of Spirit-inspired actions to God. He will undertake. It can never be wrong to obey His voice.

But being cast out, Hagar and Ishmael were not without the tender care and compassion of God, as the sequel shows. They were not to be in the line of the promise, but God abundantly provided for all their needs. The covenant God is also the God of the outcasts, and to them also He says, "Fear not".

82) 21:22-34

Here is an unexpected testimony to the worth of Abraham's life. Abimelech is drawn to him by the manifest presence of God with him in all he did (22). It is something when a pagan can recognise the basic integrity of our character and be impressed by our religion because of the effect it has upon our behaviour. We see something of the rugged honesty and justice of Abraham's nature in his reactions in this very ordinary and mundane affair, and it is very often just in the ordinary, unspectacular matters that what we really are comes out. The daily round and the common task test the worth of our lives far more than we realise, and especially with regard to our relationships with unbelievers. It is always what we are that makes the impact upon them, for good or ill. The eyes of the world are upon us all the time, sometimes critically, sometimes with a great wistfulness, but always demanding that we shall be real. Men are not slow to see through a sham religion.

83) 22:1-24

The previous reading showed Abraham in the ordinary everyday events; today, we see him in the greatest crisis of his life and the supreme test of his faith. (The word "tempt" in 1 is to be taken in its frequent Biblical meaning of "testing"). The first of many impressive things in this wonderful chapter is Abraham's instant and unquestioning obedience. He rose . . . and went. He obeyed, although his whole world was crashing down about his ears. What we see here is a broken hearted figure - going on with God. His face was set steadfastly to do His will. How proud of His servant God must have been that day, and how well pleased with the work of grace in his heart that could produce such submission.

The moral problem involved in the thought of God asking Abraham to make this sacrifice is a very real one. Some have attempted to explain it by saying that Abraham mistook God's directive, but the record is quite unmistakable and such an interpretation could not be adopted without violating the text. It was indeed, as 1 makes clear, God that tempted (tested) Abraham. We must remember, however, that in those days human sacrifice was by no means unknown, and doubtless accepted. God's demand would lacerate his heart, but not offend his conscience. Nor does this mean that God asked him to do something immoral. On the contrary, through this experience, God revealed to him that human sacrifice was not pleasing to Him.

84) 22:1-14

We need to get beyond the outward expression to the inward essence of this story and recognise the spiritual nature of the sacrifice that Abraham made. The Epistle to the Hebrews says that "Abraham offered up Isaac". In Genesis, however, the story tells us that he was stopped short by God. But in principle, he did really offer him up. It was not the outward form but the heart of the sacrifice that was the important thing. It is the intention of the heart that makes a sacrifice a sacrifice - not the presenting of the gift, but the obedience and devotion of the soul. This is further borne out in Abraham's words in 5 "I and the lad will go yonder and worship. This was the interpretation that Abraham put upon the costly act of yielding up his son to God. This is indeed a royal way of living and we may gather from it just how kingly a spirit possessed his heart. Would that we always regarded the sacrifices that we are called upon to make as acts of worship. What a transformation this would bring to our lives.

85) **22:1-24**

It is not easy to read this story without realising that it illustrates in a remarkable way a still greater sacrifice, that of Christ on Calvary. Even the language seems reminiscent of John's Gospel! Nor should this surprise us, for Isaac as the promised seed stands as a type of Christ, and the events surrounding his life have therefore typical significance. The whole story is a "fore-enactment" of the divine drama of redemption a "rehearsal" if you like, of what God was to do in the fullness of the time. As such, it may surely be read as a revelation of the heart of God. In understanding the bleeding heart of the father in this story we catch a glimpse of what it meant to God to give His only-begotten Son to die for the sins of men. But more, it is as if God were whispering to Abraham the plan of the ages, in his own agonising experience. Did we not read a chapter or two back, that God said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" Is it altogether surprising, then, since Abraham was so centrally placed in the line of the promise, that God should show to him in this way that the promised seed must be laid on the altar of sacrifice, and that only thus could the blessing of salvation come to all the families of the earth? Indeed we can go further and say that this is the pattern for all, whom God calls to His service. Only by a fiery baptism can the chosen of God enter into the resurrection ground of His fulfilment. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit".

86) 22:1-24

Look now at 16-18. This is the reward of costly obedience. And this is true not only for Abraham but for all who, Abraham-wise, will obey the voice of the Lord. Obedience is the touchstone of fruitfulness in the spiritual life. It is said of Christ, "By the obedience of One many are made righteous", and this is a permanent principle in spiritual life, the law, one might say, of spiritual harvest. All the lives that have ever blessed men are lives in which their obedience to God has borne the marks of sacrifice on the altar.

Nor, in this connection, must we fail to note the theme of resurrection running through the chapter. (The writer to the Hebrews makes this point very plain in his comments on the story). The real goal of sacrifice, as we see here, is not death, but life. No one has expressed this profound spiritual truth more forcefully and unmistakably than Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, where the "death - life" pattern runs like a refrain throughout the passage. This is the great encouragement for the Christian. God is no man's debtor. He repays, at compound interest, every death that we die for his sake. Death worketh. And in Christian life and service, no other kind of work will avail.

87) **23:1-20**

After the promise of blessing in 22:17 comes the death of Sarah. This would seem very strange and bewildering if we were not able to view it from the perspective of faith. The truth is that spiritual blessing often comes at the expense of natural ties. We may recall the words of Bonar's hymn:

"Dear ones are leaving, and as they depart,
Make room for something that is yet more dear".

What we must never forget is that evil has lost the initiative in the believer's life. Even death is made to do duty in advancing the Divine purposes in his experience.

There is something very moving about Abraham's confession in 4, and we doubt not that in his bereavement he felt more acutely than at any other time what someone has called the "homelessness of the human spirit". There are moments and this was surely one of them when we feel a very deep homesickness for the Father's House. But, paradoxically, to feel this ache also brings comfort to the heart, for it bears witness in an unmistakable way to the reality of the eternal home that awaits us when we shall put on immortality and see the King in His beauty. Hudson Taylor echoes this in the words he wrote after the passing of his wife in China, "Love gave the blow that for a little while makes the desert more dreary, but heaven more home-like".

88) 23:1-20

The triumph of Abraham's faith is very evident in face of the bereavement that had overtaken him. There is something inexpressibly moving and touching about his demeanour, a quiet dignity which marks his real stature. Sorrow shows the deepest things in a man's character. But there is a real danger lest it be allowed to overwhelm us, and the only effectual safeguard against this is to apply oneself resolutely to the task that lies nearest at hand. Life must go on, even when we have lost from our side our nearest on earth, and this he recognised, as 3 indicates. Not only so, his desire to bury the body of Sarah in the Promised Land was an act of faith, an expression of his faith in the resurrection. It is the superimposition of "the hope" upon human circumstances. The promise was the most real thing in his life, and it conquered sorrows and gave peace.

The readiness which the heathen wanted to give him the land as a gift shows not merely how courteous and generous they were, but also how profoundly the quality of this good man's life had impressed them down the years.

89) 24:1-10

This is one of the most fragrant chapters in the whole book. From a literary point of view, apart from any spiritual considerations, it must be regarded as a masterpiece. As a spiritual guide its value is enormous.

Abraham is deeply concerned here to guard against a "mixed marriage" for his son. This is a message for Christian parents and indeed for all who have influence over young people, who should be well instructed about the dangers of such a union. The teaching of the Scriptures is quite unambiguous on this point: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers". (2 Corinthians 6:14). Patient explanation of this principle needs to be given before they begin to be involved in unwise friendships. It is often too late to do so when such a relationship has been formed. It should surely be plain that a union in which one partner cannot possibly share the deepest and most precious thing in the other's life, his faith and fellowship with Christ, is doomed to failure from the very start.

It is remarkable to realise that it was Abraham, not Isaac, who made the choice. We are tempted to remark that if all parents were as spiritual as Abraham, the choice of a life partner might well be left in their hands.' And this may well enshrine an important principle. It is wise for young and sometimes headstrong people to take into consideration the advice of spiritually mature friends and counsellors before finally committing themselves in such an important matter.

90) 24:11-21

Abraham's servant was obviously of the same spiritual calibre as himself, and this was doubtless due to his master's influence. He made the whole question a matter of prayer. How wise to pray that in this all-important sphere of life one should be kept out of unhallowed associations and wrong friendships!

It is interesting to see the nature of the token he asked of God. The test was to be one, not of natural beauty, or of family, but of thoughtfulness and kindliness. That is to say, one of character, and it is a testimony to the worth of the work of grace in him, that he should have discerned so truly, the really important issues. How wise he was to look for these traits in the ordinary tasks of life! It is what we are in the little things that really show our calibre. Did she but know it, Rebekah was on trial that day, and her destiny was involved in the drink of water she gave to the stranger who had approached her. This may give us an insight into what Christ said about a cup of cold water given in His Name in no wise losing its reward. It was the kindliness that her action represented that was important, and it is what the cup of cold water stands for in the believer's life that is rewarded. As James puts it, faith without works is dead.

91) 24:22-50

The servant's words in 27 "I, being in the way, the Lord led me" are important, not only in this, but also in every other relationship of life. It is a tremendously critical thing for a Christian to be out of the Lord's Will, because that is the time when he will say things, and do things, that may have truly fearful repercussions afterwards. The great thing to remember, is that we may always be in the way of the Lord, and consequently in the way of His blessing, and be sure of His guidance in the big things and the little things of life. If we are living in Him, desirous for His will in the deepest places of our hearts, it is not possible but that we shall be led safely and unerringly by His Spirit.

We should not fail to notice that on this occasion, in the matter of a bride for Isaac, there was a smoothness and inevitability about the whole proceedings, which made it obvious that God was in it. The story, recounted to Laban is full of simple beauty. All was in harmony. This should teach us that when God begins to work He moves with effortless ease towards the accomplishment of His purposes. We ought to learn to beware when all sorts of difficulties crop up around a certain course of action. which we are intent on following. God may be indicating that we are not on the right track. Remember Paul's experience in Acts 16, when he became so conscious of the restraint of the Spirit. The trouble is, we are often so set in our own way that we dull the sensitiveness of our spirits to the voice of God's Spirit and so go astray.

92) 24:51-67

The important thing to notice about Isaac here is his attitude. He was meditating when he met his bride; his mind was on spiritual things. It is almost, as it were, a repetition of 27 - "I being in the way, the Lord led me". We may recall the story of and reflect that if Samson had been more prone to meditation, he might have escaped the seductive charms of Delilah. This is a useful and important lesson. The circumstances in which we meet people and make friendships, especially friendships of this nature, are surely of very real significance!

As we look back over the chapter, we cannot fail to see how well it illustrates not only Christian conversion (that surely is obvious in 58 - "Wilt thou go with this man?" but also Christian service. The Christian is sent out by his Master he follows his Master's instructions, he speaks of his Master not of himself, he pleads his Master's cause, he prays to his Master's God, his whole concern that his Master's plans and purposes will be fulfilled. God give us grace to serve our heavenly Master as faithfully and lovingly as Abraham's servant served him!

93) 26:1-12

The circumstances recorded here are very similar to those in 12:10 20 and the lessons are the same. We may note two points. Firstly, the famine. This appears to be one of God's prominent ways of testing His children. Abraham had a famine; Jacob had a famine; Joseph had a famine; and in each case it would seem as if God were saying, "Trust Me in the famine". This should encourage us. We are never alone, even from the human point of view, in time of testing. John says in Revelation 1:9, "I am your companion in tribulation", and somehow tribulation never seems quite so bad when the sense of isolation is taken out of it. Peter says, "the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren . . . " and it is surely because it is the same work of sanctification that is being wrought out in each of us, however different our circumstances, and indeed our calling may be.

Secondly, as in the case of Abraham in 12:10 20, Isaac seems to have been in the wrong place at this point, and became involved in the unfortunate complication with Abimelech through incomplete conformity to God's will as expressed in 3. This interpretation of the passage has been objected to in view of what is said in 12 about God's blessing being upon him. But look on to 23 25, where blessing of a different order met Isaac on his return to the Promised Land. It was material blessing that God sent in Gerar, but spiritual blessing in Beersheba. The significance of this distinction is that when we are only partially in the will of God, He does not withhold all blessing from our lives, but blesses us within the limits that we ourselves set. Thus Isaac could not know the sweeter intimacies of the Lord's presence until he removed the barriers that being in the wrong place had erected. God is not slow to bless. It is we who are slow to receive.

94) 26:13-35

Isaac's attitude of patient submission in the matter of the wells is remarkable. Ecclesiastes says there is a time to speak and a time to keep silence, and it is a great thing in Christian experience to have the discernment to know the one from the other when to take an uncompromising stand and oppose the injustices of selfish men, and when meekly to submit to them. There are times in spiritual life when an attitude of submission works wonders!

Commentators in the past have not been slow to see in this incident an illustration and parable of Christian work. The wells of spiritual water dug by our forefathers in times past have been filled up by the Philistines, and there are those of us who see it as the great task of our day to clear these wells, and re-open them to let the living water spring up again. And it is a work calling for much patience, for there are many setbacks and disappointments. Nor need we be surprised at this, or discouraged, for sooner or later the rivers of living water will begin to flow, as they once did, in Scotland.

95) 27:1-46

This chapter needs to be read through in its entirety to obtain the full sweep of its message. It is a sad, sad story, and teaches many solemn lessons. Perhaps the most tragic thing of all and doubtless the root of everything else, is the obvious deterioration in the relationship between Isaac and Rebekah. If ever a marriage was made in heaven, theirs was (chapter 24), and the indications are that for long enough they lived in close fellowship with God (see 25:21, 22). But now the fellowship that existed between them was gone, and with the disappearance of mutual trust other things also went. Here is a wife deceiving her husband, and inciting her son to deceive his father. When such a state of affairs arises, it is not merely love that has died; there is also no respect for one another left. This is far more important than many people realise. It is not possible to build a true relationship without a basic respect for one another, and not even very deep feelings of love will succeed in doing so where the other is lacking. That is why relationships that fail to take this into consideration so often come to grief.

96) 27:1-46

We tend to lay chief blame in this story on the favouritism shown by Rebekah for Jacob, but we should not forget Isaac's share in this domestic tragedy. There is no doubt that Rebekah was actuated in all she did by her intense love for Jacob. But what are we to say of a man who had become so blunted in spiritual discernment that he was prepared, for venison a savoury meat, to go right across the known will of God for himself and his family, and deliberately thwart the Divine purpose declared at the birth of his sons? It is in this that we see the real tragedy of Isaac's life and we are prompted to reflect that the test of living quietly and in obscurity, without anything very spectacular to do in the work of the Kingdom, is a very great one indeed, especially after the passing of years that have shown faithfulness. Paul chided the Galatians with the words, "Ye did run well; who did hinder you?" and this is the question that is written over Isaac's life in the chapter before us. The "slow" failure of the quiet, humdrum years is one of the great hazards of spiritual experience. We can never be too careful. Bunyan's Pilgrim fell asleep in the quiet arbour and lost out seriously. So did Isaac, and met disaster and heartbreak.

97) 27:1-46

There seems little doubt that Jacob was dominated and overshadowed by the strong personality of his mother, just as she was certainly over-attached to him. This was a basic factor in the disorder in their home. Some parents find it extremely difficult to realise that their children, if they are natural, will eventually want to be independent of them, and it is often the biggest blow to parents to find that out. They want to be running their children's lives for them until they die. How unwise an attitude this is can be seen in the emotional unbalance and psychological disturbance it causes. It is a grave sin on the part of parents to deny their adult children complete independence. Some children take years to get over it, and some never do; going through life in a state of arrested development. In Jacob's case, God removed him from his home environment completely for twenty years. He could not afford to leave him any longer under such influences. It would have too seriously jeopardised His purposes for the chosen family. And from this point of view, it was the best thing that ever happened to him. He found his own feet and became a man. Wise and happy is the parent that can distinguish between true and unselfish love for her son and that possessiveness that ties him to her apron strings and denies him the right through sheer selfishness, to be an independent personality!

98) 27:1-46

And now a word about Esau. It is open to question whether any kind of religious influence had worked in his heart over the years. There is certainly little evidence of any point of contact in his life for spiritual things. But it is perfectly clear that what Jacob and Rebekah did to him that day would have set him permanently against religion. This is often how people are set against the Christian faith. We can never be too careful about the way we live. Paul speaks in Romans 2 about the name of God being blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the sinfulness of the chosen people. And it remains sadly true that believers can prove to be a stumbling-block because their lives are a living denial of all they profess.

Esau's reaction in 34 and 38 recalls to mind the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16 ff. who left the needs of his soul until it was too late. Esau's neglect of holy things caught up with him, and his remorse, though great, was unavailing. This is a story that should reveal to us the fallacy of the idea that somehow, everything will work out well in the end for all. The Biblical principle is very different "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap".

99) 27:41-28:9

After the great deception and the subsequent crisis in the home, Rebekah seems as confident and resourceful as ever, and thinks herself in charge of the situation. Her plan is to despatch Jacob to her brother Laban in Haran. "It will only be a few days", she assures him. But she reckoned without God and miscalculated very seriously. Jacob was an exile for twenty years, and she never saw him again. It is a sad truth that we are often our own worst enemies and harm ourselves and bring on ourselves lifelong sorrow by our faithless scheming and meddlesome manipulation of events and circumstances surrounding our lives. We need to recognise that it was lack of faith in the providence of God and in His promises that led Rebekah into such a fateful complication of events. Paul speaks of "the simplicity that is in Christ" and we may well, in view of this sad story, covet an attitude of simple trust in God that will save us from restless anxiety and enable us to leave matters entirely in His hands. "He knoweth the way that I take", said Job. Ought not that to be enough for us?

100) 28:10-22

And now Jacob, having been removed from the house of Isaac, is brought to Bethel, the house of God, where a new discipline in his life begins. There are enough lessons in this wonderful story to keep us meditating for several days. In the first place, notice that God's dealings with him began in what must have been one of the darkest hours of his experience. He had fled the murderous fury of his brother and was now far from home, foot-sore and weary, lonely and cast down, and smarting under a sense of guilt, not knowing what the future would hold, and conscious perhaps most of all that his sin had led him into this trial. And God came to him there, and assured him of a love, and a purpose, that was greater than all his sin; and promised His unfailing presence with him until all His sovereign will was fulfilled in him. That is the wonder of the grace of God and it is something that applies unconditionally to each and all upon whom God set His hand let the circumstances be as dark and as unpromising as they will, there is a ladder set between the throne of God and human extremity and a Divine "Fear not" from the heart of the Almighty. Such is the first message of Bethel to all who are seeking comfort and encouragement in the difficulties and perplexities of this earthly life. May God Himself speak home that word of promise to all our hearts today!

101) 28:10-22

Bethel was also in effect God's confirmation of the blessing conferred by Isaac. Jacob had obtained it by trickery, but it had from the beginning been God's purpose to bestow it upon him. In his preoccupation with it, however, and his determination to take it by his own resources, he had interfered with God's plans and caused untold trouble for himself. But now all is different. The vision of the ladder is a vision of Divine activity. Hitherto, it has been Jacob who has been at work, now God is going to work, and in 13-15 we are told what God is going to do. In the vision of the angels on the ladder it is as if God were saying to him, "Look Jacob, you who are so intent on taking matters into your own hand, do you think I am inactive? I have legions of angels to act as ministering spirits to them that are heirs of salvation; I am busy on My plan and purpose for the world. You might spare yourself the trouble of trying to arrange things, for I can do it infinitely better". Thus does God rebuke our scheming hearts. But there is encouragement as well as rebuke here in the realisation that God is at work in our lives even though we cannot for the moment see Him. Perhaps the best comment on this is the hymn "Workman of God, O lose not heart" and it should be read often to remind us of some of the most comforting truths in Christian experience.

102) 28:10-22

We may also interpret Bethel as the record of Jacob's spiritual conversion, for it was for him a personal meeting with God. This is the point in his startled exclamation, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." For all his religious upbringing, he was insensitive to the presence of God, and in spiritual darkness until God made Himself known to him. This is the truth about every man by nature, and it is sadly true that many never seem to become aware of God's presence, even when the house of God is vibrant with the power of the Spirit. There were those on the day of Pentecost, when Jerusalem had that marvellous visitation of grace, that were so dulled in spirit that they thought the disciples were drunk. The Lord was there, and they knew it not. Not for them the gate of heaven, as it was for Jacob. Never did he speak a truer word for when God makes Himself known- the kingdom has drawn very near. But it is one thing to see the open gate and another to enter in, and many do in fact see without entering. When Pilate asked the agonising question, "What shall I do then with Jesus?" He was at the gate of heaven, but he did not enter in. Agrippa said, "Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian;" he might at that moment have entered into life, but did not. But Jacob did the one right thing; he committed himself to God in a response of faith and made the Lord his God. There is no other way of entering into life. As John puts it in his Gospel (1:12), "As many as receive Him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name".

103) **28:10~22**

The promise given by God to Jacob is almost limitless in its implications. When we think of his long and chequered career with its joys and sorrows and turmoil and turbulence throughout the remainder of Genesis, until his old age and death in Egypt, we recognise that it remained unchangeably true that the God of Bethel never left him. But, more. Down the entire history of the Old Testament this "I will not leave thee" held good, for God was at work in His chosen family, fulfilling His purposes in and through them. Indeed, down to this present day, He has not left them. After two thousand years Israel is still in the hollow of God's hand, and centuries of persecution have not availed to wipe out the people that God willed to remain in existence. What was it that God spoke to Jacob of? "In thy seed shall all families of the earth be blessed". Ultimately, that is a promise that will not be fulfilled until Jesus comes to reign, and therefore, until then, the Jews will be under the shadow of the Almighty. This historical phenomenon ought to give us great encouragement, for the promises He gives us are no less sure than this. Has God taken you up in His service, and has He spoken to you words of encouragement and promise about it? Then heaven and earth will pass away before He should fail to perform it. He means what He says, and He will do all He has promised. Nor will He leave you till all be fulfilled. Happy is the man that hath the God of Jacob for his help!

104) 28:10-22

One last thought from Bethel before we pass on. What Jacob saw may well be described as a prophetic preview of what the promise, made to Abraham and ratified to him, really signified "In thee and in thy seed . . . " Doubtless, he and his family had often asked themselves what the nature of that blessing would be and God says here, as it were, "This, Jacob an open heaven for the sinful sons of men, through the seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ". It is not too much to suggest that Jacob caught a glimpse of what would be accomplished in the fullness of time in the death and resurrection of Christ. It is little wonder that he said, "How dreadful is this place!" Doubtless he saw very imperfectly, but he saw enough to know he was standing in the presence of Divine mystery.

That this is no mere fanciful interpretation is borne out by the reference our Lord is said by most commentators to have made to the story of Bethel in John 1:47 51, in the words, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man". Christ Himself is the ladder set between heaven and earth, bringing God to men and men to God. As the children's hymn so profoundly puts it, "He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in".

105) 29:1-14

The next three chapters cover a period of twenty years in Jacob's life, twenty turbulent, disturbed years, which, after the glow and glory of the previous chapter represent a dismal anti-climax and make us want to exclaim, "Where is the God of Bethel?" Indeed, there is little mention of God in any significant way throughout. It is the biography of a man for whom many things seem to have gone wrong. One commentator says that he was permitted to reap the shame and sorrow of his self-chosen way, and it is certainly true that, notwithstanding his experience of grace at Bethel, his pathway was marked by difficulties and problems, disappointments and frustrations. All the evidences indicate that he was somehow out of vital touch with God. Was it that he should have gone back to Esau to try to put things right? It is striking to note that when Jacob did get right with God it was associated with his reconciliation with Esau.

The truth is, he was still a man intent upon taking matters into his own hands, a scheming opportunist, often having recourse to unworthy and sinful expedients to gain his ends. We see him, for example, in 7 in a characteristic pose, as he tries to "arrange" a private meeting with Rachel. In this he was foiled by the shepherds but it may well be that his meddlesome haste to grasp prematurely what God had doubtless all the time planned for him was in part, at least, the cause of the almost incredible complications which presently surrounded him. We should learn from this that when we appear to be determined to do things our way, God sometimes in the end allows us, and we learn from bitter experience that they who refuse the Divine ordering of life pay very dearly for it.

106) 29:15-30

These verses show the tangle of human relationships that Jacob became involved in. It might be said that it was through no fault of his own that he married Leah, but it is a measure of the "out-of-jointness" of his life that things should have worked out that way. What we sometimes do not realise is that when we sin we set in motion a chain of circumstances over which we no longer have any control. This is what we see in Jacob's life at this point.

Not but that there were pleasant experiences for him. The story of his courtship with Rachel bears this out. But, and this is the point, there were only glimpses of the fragrance that might have been, and would have been, had he been right with God. How different his story is from that recorded of his father and mother in Chapter 24. There, the Lord was sovereignly in control, but here, human hands have been trying to manipulate events in defiance of the Divine will, and there is a price to be paid for such temerity. The following verses show how much Jacob's foolishness cost him.

107) 29:31-30:24

When we recall the subsequent history of Jacob's sons, with the many unlovely traits of jealousy and bitterness that marred their lives, we are scarcely surprised to find that this was the environment in which they grew up. How could it have been otherwise for them in later life, when their childhood was spent in an atmosphere of friction and tension? When there is trouble between parents, the children will always be worst off. In this department of life, as in so many others, no man sins unto himself. How sad that this should have happened in the family of a man who had been to Bethel, and heard the voice of God.

But we must not forget that in all the turbulent experiences of that home, God was at work, disciplining him, fulfilling His perfect will in him. Even when He allows us to reap the fruits of our disobedience, He does not let us go, but "employs" our disobedience in His service, making capital out of it for His own sovereign purposes. He is never at a loss, in any situation. It is we who lose out, every time.

108) 30:25-43

We should not miss the significance of Laban's part in the story, for he, too, was an instrument in God's hand for the disciplining of Jacob. Jacob's glaring fault was that he was an inveterate schemer and this led him into blatant deceit. And God was intent upon driving this out of his system. And so, in a combination of judgement and mercy, He submitted him to a tremendous ordeal over these years of deception after deception by his uncle Laban. This is often God's way. When the jeweller wishes to polish a gem, he does not use a chisel or mallet, but another diamond, often small pieces of diamond or diamond dust. Thus did God do with Jacob, subjecting him to so much guile and craftiness that deception must have begun to stink in his nostrils and made it appear to him so horrible a thing that he longed to be rid of it in his own heart.

We may learn in this way about our own lives. The kind of people we are tempted to dislike for example, and the reasons we have for disliking them prove often to be an accurate mirror of our own faults and sins. This can be a very shattering experience when we realise how true it is, but also very salutary. It is an excellent way of getting to know the truth about ourselves!

109) 31:1-55

Relations between Jacob and Laban were now becoming so strained that separation became inevitable. One marvels at the sovereignty of God at work in the whole situation, Rebekah had said (27:44), "Tarry with Laban a few days", but God ordained twenty years, and kept Jacob in the furnace until His time was come. And now, when Jacob might well have become so accustomed to Laban's household that in spite of the unpleasantness of the atmosphere he might want to stay, God makes it so difficult for him that he has to depart.

The most significant part of the chapter is the record of a new appearance of God to him, in which the Divine command came to him to return to the land of promise, and it is doubtless not without import that he was reminded of Bethel and of the vow he made to God there. This is one of the basic lessons of Christian life, when we get out of the will of God there has to be a new beginning, and we must go back to renew our vows. It is humiliating for us to realise that nothing can ever really be right again with us until we retrace our steps. Jacob must have found it so, but it is clear from this and following chapters that real fellowship with God was not renewed until he did so. As 32:1 says, it was on his way back that the angels of God met him. It is always so, Jesus said, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth".

110) 32:1-23

Jacob, we are told in 7, was greatly afraid and distressed, and these words bear witness to the power of a guilty conscience. His apprehension was related to the twenty years previously. There is no record of his being conscience stricken during that time, yet it needed only a certain combination of circumstances to bring home his sin with deep conviction to his heart. God sees the sins of twenty years ago as if they had been committed yesterday. It is a dangerous fallacy to assume that the passage of time diminishes the seriousness of sin!

But there is something else here. We are told that the angels of God met him on the way. It was just as if God were saying: "If only you will trust Me, Jacob, and let Me order the course of events, all will yet be well". But what do we see? Jacob was apparently constitutionally incapable of trusting simply in God. Again, we see his agile, scheming mind at work, planning and arranging in 3 5, 7, 8, 13 ff. with such resourceful cunning that we want to cry out in exasperation, "Oh, Jacob, stop, stop! Have you forgotten the assurance that the presence of the angels of God gave you on the way?" Even his prayer in 9 12, which by itself must stand for all time as a model of true prayer (see the next note), seems to lose its point when followed by the same old attitude of unfaith. If he had really believed, would he not have known a rest of faith in his heart that would have kept him from his feverish precautions? Ah, there is a good deal of Jacob in most of us, is there not?

III) 32:1-23

Jacob's prayer, the first recorded since that at Bethel twenty years previously! is a most striking example of what all true prayer should be. It is the "objectiveness" of it that impresses. He looks wholly away from himself to God. He is under no illusion that his petition could be answered because of any legitimate claim he could put forward. (It is a refreshing experience to hear this resourceful man of guile confessing his utter unworthiness in the sight of God.) His petition is based upon two things, the covenant and the promises. First, he pleaded the covenant God had made with his fathers, "O God of my father Abraham . . ." This was a reminder to God that He had pledged Himself to be the God of this family, and God likes us to remind Him of His covenant in this way. (Cf. Isaiah 43:26, "Put Me in remembrance"). But more, Jacob reminded Him of His promises "the Lord which saidst unto me . . ." (9); "And Thou saidst . . ." (12). This is something that must prevail with God, for His honour is involved. He cannot be untrue to Himself, He will always keep His word, and when His children stand thus upon His promises, He delights to answer their prayers. Prayer grounded on something God has said will always prevail. This was the secret Jacob stumbled upon in the hour of his extremity. Has God promised? Did He say He would? Then you are straightway on praying ground, and you may ask in faith, nothing wavering, and IT SHALL BE DONE.

112) 32:24-32

The striking story of Jacob's experience at Peniel has been variously interpreted and, one sometimes feels, misinterpreted. It is usual to speak of Bethel and Peniel as two decisive crises in his spiritual life, but dependent on the construction you put upon it, this could be very misleading. It can scarcely be accurate to speak of Peniel as an experience of consecration in the sense that he had now "arrived" spiritually, for events following this chapter still show evidences of self will and fleshly resourcefulness. But it is certainly true, on any interpretation, that God was dealing with him very summarily. Indeed, that seems to be the key to the incident.

Jacob was preoccupied with his forthcoming meeting with Esau, but a more fateful meeting was destined to take place. He met with God. And, against the background, and in the context, of the twenty years' discipline in the wilderness, discipline which failed to bring him to a position of real trust in God, we begin to understand that what happened was that God lost patience with this schemer, and took a grip of him that left a permanent mark on his life, and something was broken in him for good. In this sense, the Peniel experience is not something for a believer to covet but something to dread. God wants our willing surrender to His will and purposes. But when after long patience it is slow in forthcoming, He sometimes has to touch our natural powers and resources, and touch them permanently, reducing us to impotence before we learn the needed lessons. The wrestling seems to stand as a symbol of Jacob's whole life; he always resisted the Spirit. Thus, the drastic action of God at Peniel. It was a costly day, but fruitful; judgement and mercy met in that fateful hour, and he went limping into the sunrise.

113) 33:1-20

The events recorded in this chapter afford an example of how abundantly God answers prayer. Jacob had asked for deliverance from the imminent wrath of Esau, and in answer, Esau gives him an embrace of welcome. He is far more eager to hear our petitions than we realise. But there are other less happy lessons, for throughout, we see telltale evidences of the old Jacob asserting himself, Peniel notwithstanding, pointed out that although he received the new name, Israel, from the Angel, the old name occurs far more frequently than the new, and this seems a parable of the very partial nature of Jacob's consecration. Not only did he show an attitude of mistrust, in the arrangement of his wives and children in 1, 2, placing the best loved hindmost, "just in case . . . ", but he very shrewdly declined Esau's invitation to travel together (12). The worldly wise Jacob doubtless anticipated the possibility of some sort of reprisal from Esau where surely none was intended, and was taking no chances. What price his trust in God if this was so? But, worse still, he deliberately deceived his brother once more. He promised to rejoin Esau in Seir (14), but instead, when his brother went on before him, he went in exactly the opposite direction, to Succoth. (Seir is Southeast of Peniel; Succoth Northwest). One wonders what Esau must have thought of Jacob's profession of having met with God at Peniel when this happened! And Jacob settled down, it would seem, at Succoth, although God had summoned him to Bethel, and built an altar. But he was in the wrong place, and this is not made right by building altars. Disobedience is not covered by devotion!

114) 34:1-31

A sad and sordid chapter indeed. One is prompted to think how much happier the story would read if we could have passed from Chapter 33 right on to Chapter 35. But it was because Jacob in his experience did not pass from Chapter 33 to Chapter 35, namely from Shechem to Bethel, for some years at least, that the tragic events in Chapter 34 took place. The disaster recorded here was directly due to his being in Shechem instead of Bethel, but the general savagery of his sons must be laid to the charge of their godless upbringing in those critical early years. It is what happens in the years we are out of God's will, that proves so devastating in after years. Right to the end of his days, Jacob's life was saddened by the sins and shame of his family. He indeed reaped the harvest of his years of backsliding. If only there had been a real consecration at Bethel, how different his family life would have proved. Experience in every age has proved that it is early influences that are decisive in the shaping of lives. Parents have a tremendous responsibility towards their children, in seeing that by prayer, precept and example, their minds and spirits will be so trained and conditioned in godliness that they will grow up impervious to the appeal of worldliness and every other fateful influence.

115) 35:1-29

In this chapter, Jacob "gets right again with God", and, it would seem, reaches a deeper submission to the Divine will than he has yet known. Perhaps for the first time we begin to see the lineaments of true spiritual character emerging in him. There is something almost noble in his firm and clear call to his sons to put away their strange gods and return with him to Bethel. He recognised that the moral lapses in his family had spiritual causes. How true it is that a man's worship will determine his daily living.

It is very striking, however, that at the time he is most consecrated to God, greatest sorrow comes upon him. In 16, Rachel's death is recorded, and in 29, that of his father. We might well entitle the message of the passage as being the ministry of a great sorrow. God ploughed His servant with the agony of grief and bereavement and this, though the most mysterious, can also often be the most fruitful of His disciplines. It is true that our loved ones will necessarily die sometime. Sometimes it is significant when they die. But life's mysteries often remain mysteries, and it is not light for the mind, that God gives at such a time, but comfort for the heart and fortifying for the spirit, and this Jacob received. He called the new-born child not Ben-eni, "son of my sorrow", but Benjamin, "son of the right hand". In other words, he recognised in his sorrow and loss, the loving Hand that had guided him through the years and was even then with him in his heart-sore experience. Faith rose triumphant, and although he lost his wife, he found his God in a new way. And that is not a little thing.

116) 36:1-43

We come to another of the familiar "These are the generations of . . ." which characterise Genesis. Here it is the "family tree" of Esau. We might be tempted to pass over a dry genealogy, but the Holy Spirit does not record even genealogies in vain. They are written for our learning. We may note, for example, that this family history is very much briefer and more compressed than that of those within the covenant. Why should this be? One reason is that life within the covenant is very much more interesting and vital not to say, from the Divine point of view, more significant! than outside it. Life can be very dull apart from God! It is also striking, as has been pointed out, that here is a long list of names recorded in God's Book, known to God though they knew Him not, and indeed included here because God would have us know that one day He would include all the nations of man within the compass of His redemption. They "appear" here, vain and empty though their lives might have been, as a foretaste, a token of the future inclusion of the Gentiles in the great multitude that no man can number, of all nations and kindreds, and people, and tongues that shall stand before the throne and before the Lamb.

117) 37:1-11

The story of Joseph, the fourth major character in the second great section of Genesis, is one whose excellence as a literary masterpiece is matched only by the wealth of spiritual lessons it teaches. No story could exemplify more fully the trial and triumph of faith, Joseph's life stands as one of the finest recorded in Scripture. And yet, sentiment and familiarity with it should not blind us to the fact that it is the story of a life, which at the outset had some very unpromising features in it. It is difficult to escape the conviction that the young man we see in these verses as the idol of his father was in fact somewhat objectionable and self-centred, with a considerable "superiority complex" which earned him the dislike and even hatred of his brothers. His dreams prove this. He dreamed at night because his whole attitude by day was dictated by a strong and well-defined ambition. Dreams so often reveal the deep underlying motives of the personality; they do not so much tell the future as the past! And yet, in some strange, mysterious way, they were given him by God. Joseph was moved by the same stirrings of faith as his forebears, conscious, young as he was, that God had appointed him a work to do; and even then big enough to discern the movement of faith in his family, and that he was destined to play a significant part in it. But it is one thing to have convictions about one's part in God's design, and quite another to be obsessed with a feeling of one's importance, giving rise to pride and arrogance. This God will not tolerate in His children. The dross must be purged from the fine gold, and so Joseph is thrust into the furnace, and kept there until he is purified for God's sovereign purposes. This is the real key to his story.

118) 37:12-36

There is no doubt that Joseph brought upon himself the disaster that overtook him at the hands of his brethren. The ire smouldering in their hearts was fanned into flame by his arrogance in the matter of the dreams, and when opportunity presented itself they gave vent to the unhallowed passion within them and sold him into Egypt. But behind his own wisdom and the hatred of the others we can see the sovereign hand of God ordaining the chastening. And it is indeed characteristic - the proud, confident, young man is utterly humbled; he who was used to having his own way in everything found that he was henceforth to have no will at all, but be a slave. From the place of honour in the family he descended to the pit at Dothan!

Was the pit the place of his decisive meeting with God? One can imagine the gloom of spirit that descended on him as all his dreams seemed reversed, and all that he called life was taken from him at one sweep. Perhaps in the pit and on the slave-chain on the way to Egypt he would look back over his life and begin to see how he had earned the hatred of his brethren, see his vanity, his proud superciliousness, his selfishness, see himself. You certainly get a new angle on life from the bottom of a pit "looking up", especially if you have been used, as Joseph had been to "looking down" on everybody. When we next see him in Chapter 39, he will be different from the proud, spoiled youth that we have seen in this chapter. God's discipline begins to work, and meanwhile the inspired writer draws the veil over him for a time, till the work should be well begun in him, and turns to other matters.

119) 38:1-30

We offer two thoughts on this sad and sordid chapter. We have just begun the final section of Genesis, which among other things, reveals how it came about that the family of Israel should come to dwell in Egypt. This chapter before us indicates why they were brought down to Egypt. There was a need for Israel to be separated from the grave, moral dangers surrounding them in Canaan, and to be purged by chastening and affliction of the evil and sin in their lives. This seems to be the significance of this ugly story being included right in the midst of the history of Jacob. He was the instrument; the depravity was the cause, of their being brought to Egypt.

In the second place, sordid as it is, the chapter speaks of those whose names appear in the genealogy of our Lord. Compare Ruth 4:18 22 with Matthew 1:3, 5 and Luke 3:32, 33. It is awe-inspiring, to realise that God permitted the human descent of the Messiah to come not only from Judah but even from Tamar, and we see in this something of the marvel of Divine grace that can transform and transmute human sin and bring forth from its horror and tragedy an eternal hope. How completely did our Lord, even from the beginning, identify Himself with sinful man! Does not this chapter illumine in a new way Paul's words about Him, when he says that He came "in the likeness of sinful flesh"?

120) 39:1-6

And now back to Joseph. And it is surely a changed man that we meet here! Captive though he be, and a slave without rights, he is the Lord's freeman, and stands before us in this passage as a man of stature, of such undoubted ability and quality that his master sets him in full authority in his house. The significant, operative word is "the Lord was with him" (2). We need not imagine that Joseph went through the long trial unmoved, that is a sentimental view of the story. There must have been many days of darkness, many lonely hours of weariness and near despair when everything seemed against him and hope was well nigh gone. But there was something to cling to, and in clinging to the assurance of God's presence he rose above his misfortune, and in so doing his horizon was widened. The world of men displaced his self-centredness and self-absorption, and he began to make himself useful. It could not have been easy for him to accept such an irksome lot; he knew that his circumstances had been brought about by the evil intent of his brothers. But now that he was in such a predicament, a certain treatment of it and attitude to it could be God's will. And he rose to the challenge magnificently, and won. God's disciplines may be painful, but they do work!

121) 39:7-23

Satan is never very far away when a work of God is in progress in a man's soul. As the old Puritan said, "He that standeth near to his Captain is a sure target for the archers". No sooner had Joseph gotten the victory in the painful frustration of slavery, and made capital out of his adversity, than the adversary tried to corrupt him by the temptations of the flesh. It was a particularly mean and horrible attack, and one which cost Joseph a very great deal of pain and distress. But he rode the storm, and for this reason: the struggle involved in adjusting himself successfully to his new situation as a slave created moral fibre of a quality that enabled him to meet the next sustained attack and triumph in it. Temptation resisted and overcome in any particular sphere (in his case, the temptation to "go under" when the disaster overtook him at Dothan) results in an all-round strengthening and invigoration. The old hymn expresses a profound truth when it says, "Each victory will help you some other to win". This should encourage us in our battles, when we realise that victory brings not only present well-being, but lays up moral and spiritual reserves for the future. God has ordained that in spiritual life His blessings accrue at compound interest!

122) 39:7-23

To look at a situation from the stand point of Satanic strategy is not however to take the highest ground. Shakespeare spoke truly when he said: "There is a destiny that shapes our ends. Rough hew them, as we will . . ." and not even the machinations of the prince of darkness could prevent God from fulfilling His perfect will in the man of His choice. Indeed Satan's attack was used of God, and became His instrument, to perfect the Divine purpose in Joseph's life. God needed him to be in prison that was an integral part of the plan to bring him into prominence in the court and government of Pharaoh - how else could he have been made a man of such authority in Egypt? When God works, there is a wonderful effortlessness about the course of events. How cleverly He does it! One is reminded of this in Paul's experience at Philippi having crossed over from Asia to Greece in obedience to the vision, he presently found himself in prison, a strange experience, and one that might well have caused him serious reflection as to the validity of his guidance. But God needed him in prison, in order to reach a man who might never have been reached otherwise. We may learn from this that seeming setbacks encountered when we are surely in God's will, may have a more glorious final fruition than we could have believed possible. God is sovereign, and we may safely trust Him in the darkest prison!

123) 39:7-23

An interesting and significant comment on Joseph's experience during his trials is found in Psalm 105:19 "The word of the Lord tried him". According to this inspired interpreter, it was not the privation he endured, or the suffering or the humiliations that constituted his great testing during these years, but the fact that God had promised (in the dreams he had given him) and yet any kind of fulfilment seemed so very remote and unlikely. That was the trial for Joseph's soul. The following words were quoted in a recent sermon on a similar period of David's life. They are worth remembering: "Keep on believing God's Word; never be moved away from it by what you see or feel, and thus, as you stand steady, enlarged power and experience are being developed. The fact of looking at the apparent contradiction as to God's Word and being unmoved from your position of faith makes you stronger on every other line. Often God delays purposely, and the delay is just as much an answer to your prayer as is the fulfilment when it comes".

124) 40:1-23

We are reminded by v. 7 of the gracious words of the hymn "A heart at leisure from itself, To soothe and sympathise", and nothing could sum up more beautifully the extent of the work of grace in Joseph's heart. Here is the picture of a man who has triumphed over the adverse circumstances that have overtaken him, because he has triumphed over self. The story of Joseph began with a man intent upon interpreting his own dreams, and preoccupied with his own interests, but now he is interpreting the dreams of others. Nothing could be more significant. He has been freed from the tyranny of self-centred living, and it is worth a dozen imprisonments and humiliations to know such an emancipation. (Not that trials and afflictions necessarily break the power of self in us.) It is our reaction to them that is significant), They can prove a potent instrument in God's hands for the promotion of true sanctification, if our attitude to them is one of submission and acceptance. We may assume from the train of events which began with this chance meeting with Pharaoh's butler and baker, that God's purposes in the continuing discipline laid upon Joseph were now being brought to fruition. May we not learn from this? Must not self be broken in us before we can be of much use to God?

125) 40:1-23

It is the apparent coincidence of Joseph's meeting Pharaoh's butler and baker that strikes us. That it was a marvellous planning of events by God with far-reaching consequences for him, we can now see, although he could have had little idea of the significance at the time. The fact is, when a man is in God's will and responsive to His Spirit, everything has significance, everything is made to count in His service. Two years and more were to elapse before this particular outworking came to fruition, but when it did it changed the whole history of the Old Testament.

One is reminded of Paul's statement when he was in prison: "The things which have happened unto me have served the furtherance of the Gospel". Looking at Joseph's experience in perspective, it is clear that the imprisonment was an integral part of the Divine plan for the future of the chosen people. It furthered God's purposes in them and brought about something that could not have been accomplished otherwise. We may see from this how important Joseph's reactions were. What if he had 'gone down' under the pressures, or become embittered, or turned in upon himself? He would surely have missed the opportunity, through very self pity, of commiserating with his fellow prisoners, and something vital in God's purpose would have gone by default. It makes us wonder how much of God's great design for our lives we miss by failing to be alive to the possibilities of chance encounters! Has self-preoccupation made you miss something to day?

126) 41:1-13

Notice in 1, "At the end of two full years". We may well ask ourselves why there should have been this delay, since Joseph seemed to have been disciplined sufficiently, his character forged, and his self-centredness broken. Why then should so much time have elapsed before his release? Obviously God permitted it and He is Sovereign. It may in this respect have been a further secret refinement beyond any obvious need in his life, a deepening still further of the foundations for the future. But we may not stress the Sovereignty of God so exclusively that human responsibility becomes meaningless. Certainly God turned it unto good, He always does; but from the human point of view it was caused by the forgetfulness and ingratitude of Pharaoh's butler, and in this respect it was a needless distress, and one that could, and should have been avoided. God's servants are often subjected to needless indignities and embarrassments and distresses by the crass unthankfulness and culpable carelessness of those who owe them most and who have least cause of any to be neglectful of them. This is grievous in the eyes of the Lord Who says: "Touch not the Lord's anointed, neither do His prophets any harm". Experience has proved that it does not go well with those who lightly esteem the men upon whom God has set His hand.

127) 41:14-36

One marvels at the effortless ease with which the Sovereign Lord moved in accomplishing the release and deliverance of Joseph. Impossibilities were swept aside in a moment; dreams were planted in a despot's mind; the magicians of Egypt were confounded and all were used as mere pawns in relation to the fulfilment of God's eternal purposes and grace. We should rejoice that we have a God to Whom nothing is impossible. When He works, none can hinder!

What impresses us about Joseph here is the ring of authority in his words. Here is a man in complete command of the situation, whose clear sighted discernment never for a moment hesitates as he interprets the dreams and advises the king how to act in the coming emergency. There is a price to be paid for such wisdom, but Joseph had paid it in full. No man can imitate or simulate it. It is God's peculiar hallmark on the instruments of His own making and men are never slow to recognise it when they see it. When that stamp is upon a man, everything he does tells for God. He is a prince with God, and prevails.

128) 41:37-44

We see from these verses the force of the long discipline to which Joseph was subjected. Deeply laid foundations are required when a vast superstructure is to be built upon them and he was destined to occupy a place of great eminence in public life for which a lesser training might have proved disastrous. We might speak of the recognition Pharaoh gave Joseph here as God's reward to him, but it would be truer to say that the greater reward lay in what God had made him. Moral integrity is more precious than the highest worldly position. God exalted him thus because He knew He could trust him now in the position of influence and power without any danger of his being corrupted.

But this principle is not always appreciated, and men may often covet position and influence, which they are ill-prepared to sustain, and which is therefore very dangerous for them spiritually. We should cease from coveting what God cannot yet with safety give us and allow Him to make us into men and women He can trust with power. Paul recognised this in his instructions to Timothy as to the appointment of bishops (elders) in 1 Tim. 3:6, "Not a novice", he warns, "lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil". The sorry history of many fellowships has proved that there is much more in his warning than we often realise. Spiritual leadership is never a question of mass production; God's men are forged in the furnace of affliction and only such is it safe to elevate to positions of responsibility and authority.

129) 41:45-57

Two verses stand out in this passage, 51 and 52. The names given by Joseph to his sons are full of interest reflecting his inner experience and his consciousness of the fulfilment of God's purposes in him. He is able to view his arduous, toilsome path in the light of its real intention in the mind of God. "God hath made me forget all my toil . . . " We should not miss the tremendous thing he is saying here. Do we not often feel when we are passing through tribulations that they are leaving marks on us that we shall never get over? We are sometimes in danger of allowing our distresses to overwhelm us and colour our whole subsequent experience. But Joseph proved that God could and did, blot out all the bitter memories of past years. Is the past with all its sorrow and pain, dogging your footsteps, burdened believer? Take it to God and ask Him to do for you what He did for Joseph.

"God hath caused me to be fruitful . . . " Why, of course! Affliction and fruitfulness are always united in the economy of God. It is the law of spiritual harvest that except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit. "Out of the presses of pain cometh the soul's best wine".

130) 42:1-20

We pass with this chapter into the larger fulfilment of God's purposes in the chosen people. More than twenty years after Joseph was sold into Egypt, the family once more comes into prominence. One cannot but admire the marvellously complicated pattern of events all moving forward and unfolding at the behest of God for the fulfilment of His will. But now there is a significant development. What we have seen up to this point is the discipline that God laid upon individuals of His choice in making them instruments of His purposes. Now, however, it is the family that He takes up for discipline and training, and the experiences that tested Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph are repeated on a grander scale in the life of Israel, presently to be led down into Egypt, the furnace of affliction, in which she was forged into a nation, according to promise. "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform."

It is not always easy to keep clear-sighted under pressure, but the events in Genesis should help to reassure us that even when our circumstances seem quite meaningless, and frustrated and disappointed hopes discourage our spirits seemingly beyond endurance, God is working His purposes out and at the appointed hour will demonstrate the meaning of His dealings with us. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter". This is not a pious platitude, but a word of hope and promise that He will make it plain. When we thrill to see the unfolding of the mysteries of God behind the apparently trivial circumstances of a family's history, with its loves and its hatreds, its joys and sorrows, does it not encourage us to look deeper at our own experiences and try to see the real story of our lives?

131) 42:21-38

We may wonder why Joseph dealt thus with his brethren and not reveal his identity to them right away. But surely we ought to assume that he was guided by the Spirit of God in so doing. It is not difficult for us to see that these men had to be dealt with for their past wickedness. It is not love to pretend that sins have not been committed when they have. God forgives, it is true, but He does not let people off, and this fine distinction is one we should not forget in our own experience. It is now the brethren's turn to go into the crucible, and the first part of their refining is a thoroughgoing conviction of sin for the past. In 21, 22, the sin which had been hidden and dormant in their hearts for twenty years flew suddenly in their faces, in fierce accusation without warning. This should serve to cure us of the false notion that somehow the passage of time erases the sins of former years. As if sin grew less serious from having been committed twenty years ago! God does not forget. He has a long memory, and He bides His time.

132) 42:21-38

We pause once more at this passage, to notice Jacob's reaction in 36, "All these things are against me". This was undoubtedly the voice of the old Jacob speaking, and it was the expression of a complete lack of faith in the providence of God. In point of fact "All these things" were not against him, but for him, had he had faith to see it. In a marvellous, blessed way, God was working all things out for him and his family and posterity. One cannot help contrasting his attitude with that of Paul, who passed through different, but equally trying, times of discipline and frustration. "We know, " says the Apostle, "that all things work together for good to them that love God..." (Romans 8:28).

Such an attitude as Jacob's is not without its dangers. The effect of delaying the fulfilment of God's purposes for a considerable time. The next step in God's plan required the presence of Benjamin down in Egypt, but God had to wait patiently until the pressure of the famine forced Jacob to comply with Joseph's original request. One is tempted to wonder whether some at least of the "delays" in spiritual experience, which seem so unaccountable to us, are not due to a faithless attitude in our hearts which unconsciously frustrates the Divine ordering of events. Do you think "everything is against you"? Beware that attitude of heart!

133) 43:1-14

Jacob's unwillingness to allow Benjamin to go down to Egypt is finally overcome by force of circumstances. We may well regard this pressure on the now aged Jacob as the last final testing for him in the purposes of God. When we look back over the years to Peniel we marvel at how much he had to pass through after that decisive experience of consecration. We must learn that the fullest conscious consecration that a man can make still leaves vast tracts of his heart and life untouched and undisciplined by the grace of God. We need to be very wary of assuming that any particular experience in spiritual life can be so decisive that it leaves nothing more to be done in us in the way of sanctification. The writer to the Hebrews had a far more realistic assessment of Jacob's life than we often have of our own. When he points out, that right to the end the sanctifying work went on in the patriarch's turbulent life "Jacob, when he was dying . . . " The bewildering variety of ways in which self manages to find expression should cause us to be very chary of making extravagant claims about our spiritual attainments. It is only too true, as James says, that, "in many things we all offend".

134) 43:15-34

The uneasiness of Joseph's brethren is very evident throughout all these transactions. Fears seem to have gripped them at every turn as the prospect of being caught up in some critically significant enterprise came home more and more to their hearts. Whether or not they were conscious that God was at work, there is some evidence to suppose that they were. It is clear that this was the cause of their disturbed state of mind. This is in line with Biblical teaching in general and New Testament teaching in particular, that coming into touch with the workings of the living God is a profoundly disturbing experience. It is one thing to pay lip service in theory to the idea of God working in our lives and taking dealings with us, but quite another when we are at last confronted with this vibrant incredibly dynamic, all-consuming, unseen Presence, and know that He is going to have His way with us and that there is no escaping Him. Disturbing and uncomfortable indeed! Well might Jesus say: "I came not to send peace, but a sword," for when he does begin to deal with us, He turns our little world upside down. This was what was happening with Joseph's brethren. And they found it rather un-nerving.

135) 44:1-17

It has been suggested that Joseph's purpose in the trick he played on his brethren was to test them in relation to Benjamin and see whether they would be prepared to sacrifice him to their own safety. The outcome proved how different they now were from the time they basely sold Joseph into Egypt. They stood by Benjamin to a man in the crisis and returned with him to Egypt. This was the real evidence of their change of heart. Already they had been convicted of their past sin; but were they so convicted of it that it would not happen again? A similar opportunity occurred in which they might well have repeated towards Benjamin the callous and heartless attitude shown in their treatment of Joseph. It is the change in character that is significant. This is a lesson to us. It is one thing to confess sin, but if circumstances were favourable would we do it again?

It is easy to see how hindered God would have been in continuing His work through this family if they had still been riven with jealousy and hatred. Each of these men was to be the father of one of the Tribes of Israel, hence they must be set under discipline and tested and proved, for the work God had for them to do. No one who is destined for God's service can hope to escape His gracious disciplines. He spares us no sorrow in making us what we ought to be.

This makes life very serious. For God does not "announce" when He is to test us. We are usually quite unaware that the Divine scrutiny is upon us. God sees to that. He wants to see us in true character, as we really are, not as we would arrange to be if we knew we were on trial. Well, if the circumstances God brought upon us today were in fact a testing for Him, what did our reactions reveal? Did we pass the test?

136) 44:18-34

Judah's noble outburst is very moving, and one marvels that a man with such a history (cf. 37:26 and 38:2 ff.) should have risen to such heights. But what you are in time of crisis depends on what you have been in the time leading up to it. You always run true to type. You cannot suddenly be different from what you have habitually been. All that a crisis does is to show up, in sharp outline, what you really have been all the time. Judah's speech reveals the working and discipline of grace over the past, and particularly the more recent past the pressure of poverty during the famine, the stings of conscience, the disturbing events in the house of Joseph. As Paul says in Romans 5, tribulation worketh character.

The language Judah uses in 32, 33, has a strange familiarity for us who live in the New Testament dispensation. It was from the family of Judah that Jesus Christ, the great Surety for sinners, came, and here, His ancient progenitor according to the flesh, "foreshadows" as it were, that costly self-giving on the Cross, when he offered himself as a surety to Joseph instead of Benjamin. It was an enactment of the idea of substitution, an enactment which found its true fulfilment and most complete expression in the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God, for the sins of men. Since the purpose of God's dealings with Judah was to make him the ancestor of Jesus, it cannot be surprising that we catch this faint glimpse of the Cross in his experience.

137) 44:1-34

We pause another day at this chapter to remark on what one commentator has called "the moral power of fear". Joseph's brethren were actuated by fear throughout; fear assailed them when first they came to Egypt; when they found money in their sacks; when they came the second time; when discovery was made of the cup in Benjamin's sack. Psychologists and some theologians often tell us that fear is an unworthy motive in spiritual things, but is it? It had a tremendously good effect on these men; it shaped them, as nothing else would have done. When we encounter something in God's Word that disturbs us, and makes us afraid, it may be a very good thing for us. Sometimes it is only by fear that we can grow and develop. Often it is nothing else but the fear of the disastrous consequences of sin that keeps us from it. It is only later that we keep from sin because it is wrong in itself; and later still that we keep from sin because we love the good, and love Christ and want to please Him. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. We should be thankful to God that He frightens us from time to time; it is necessary for our well-being since we are the kind of people we are.

138) 45:1-15

When we think how often men nurse their grievances for long years, we marvel all the more at Joseph's generous forgiving spirit towards his brethren. Nor should we underestimate the true moral greatness which his attitude showed. His brethren were now in his power. And he could have thrust them into prison if such had been his inclination. But the trials that their treachery and hatred had brought upon him had imparted such stature to him that he was now too big to stoop to the indignity of continuing bitterness against them, and he forgave them freely and unreservedly. The reality of his faith expressed itself in a true spirit of forgiveness. There are two important points here. We often hear people say, "I could forgive him anything except that", when in fact "that" is the only thing there is to forgive. It is when we are not involved in a situation which demands a forgiving spirit, that forgiveness seems so easy and natural. But as soon as we are really wronged, we feel we must draw the line there. This is simply to deceive ourselves. Again, some say, "I'll forgive but I cannot forget". But to forgive is to forget. The Divine example is the standard here, "Your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more," and to imagine we can forgive while storing up resentment and bitterness in our hearts is sheer self-deception. Well, have you a forgiving spirit?

139) 45:1-15

Observe how Joseph's eyes had been opened to see God's hand at work in his life, "It was not you, but God". He saw God in all the bitter experiences he had passed through. It is a mighty source of peace and serenity in life to be able to rest in the knowledge of God's sovereignty. There is a mystery attaching to that sovereignty, it is true, but it is a comforting mystery for it displays the work of Satan being overruled by God for our good. The attacks on Joseph were inspired and engineered by Satan, and they began as evil darts from him. But they were turned by God, in full flight, as it were, into arrows of the Almighty, and used by Him as instruments of grace and sanctification. What a comfort for the Christian, for it means that there is no real poison left in them to harm him! Someone has aptly remarked, "It is not always easy for the sufferer, if he remain clear-eyed to see that it is God's will. It may have been caused by an evil mind, or a light fool or some stupid greed. But, now it is there, a certain treatment of it is God's will, and that is to capture and exploit it for Him". It is not the misfortunes and trials themselves, but our attitude to them that is important. They may be accepted as from God, and then they have infinite potential for good.

140) 45:16-28

We note two points here. In the first place, (24) Joseph exhorted his brethren not to quarrel on their way home. He knew what was in man: He knew that a part in them would not take kindly to the new situation. There is something in us that almost resents forgiveness. It is so humbling to be so completely at the receiving end and human pride reacts against it. Hence Joseph's words of counsel.

In the second place, we must not miss the parallel and the contrast between Jacob's experience in 25 ff and Abraham's on Mount Moriah (ch. 22). Both received their sons "back from the dead", but with Abraham it was so prompt and immediate because his dedication and surrender to God were so unhesitating and complete. With Jacob it took more than twenty years because it took that long to discipline his heart into submission to the Divine will. He received Joseph back when grief had done its gracious work in his soul, We mourn sometimes at the length of the trials we pass through, but what if it should be our own stubborn and unsubmitive hearts that prolong them far beyond the original Divine Intention?

141) 46:1-34

The descent of Israel's family into Egypt has a deep significance. Here is the family to whom God had promised the land of Canaan being removed from it by necessity and made to sojourn out of it for so long. Why should this be? The answer is given in 3, "I will there make of thee a great nation". In the sovereign purposes of God it was there, in the place of bondage and in the furnace of affliction that their greatness as a nation was to be born. God was trying to do something vast and far reaching with this family and in face of all the ramifications of their experience this was the only way He could do it. His real purpose went very far beyond getting corn in time of famine; it was to further the strategy of redemption that He thus dealt with them. This should be a means of great encouragement to believers when they (very naturally) shrink from the fires of affliction and fear the crucibles of God. Does it not help to think that that is where all that God wants and means us to be will be shaped and fulfilled?

Notice particularly the last words in 4, "Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes". Sometimes the impression might be given that these Old Testament figures were mere pawns in the hands of God. It is true that God was intent upon fulfilling His purposes of redemption, and that this was ever the over-ruling consideration. But this does not mean that He was indifferent to the very human feelings and needs of those with whom He had dealings, as 4 comfortingly indicates. Indeed, it is precisely when we are most submissive to God's sovereign workings and most concerned with them to the virtual exclusion of our own desires and feelings that God shows Himself most tenderly disposed to care for our personal relationships. The promise, "Them that honour Me I will honour" is a sure one and we may rest content in the knowledge that we will never be the losers from having put the interests of the Kingdom first in our lives. God will see to that.

142) 47:1-12

These verses do not merely record the settlement of the family of Israel in Egypt; they bear witness to the extraordinary care God shows towards His chosen people. This is something which all history demonstrates, even when, since their rejection of Christ, they have been under Divine judgement. His gifts and calling are without repentance, and not only their earlier, and happier, history, but also the later tragic sequence of events down to the present day, shows that His eye is ever upon them.

Jacob's testimony in 9 seems to convey at least a hint of regret at the mis-spent years of his life. Neither in quantity nor in quality did he attain to the years of Abraham and Isaac. It is sad to have to look back over wasted years. Not even the calm and sweetness of forgiveness can take away the regrets. If only. . . ! If it is true, as Bonar's hymn says, that "He liveth long who liveth well", then Jacob is right when he says that his days were few and evil. It would be an interesting experience to read through the whole of that hymn in the light of Jacob's story.

143) 47:13-31

There is something strangely up-to-date in the story of Joseph's administration of Egypt during the years of famine, and words like nationalisation, state ownership of supplies, bulk buying, come readily to mind. Different estimates of his policy might be made; dependent on one's political colouring, but that assuredly is not the point here, for the real significance is spiritual. Joseph's policy put power in the hands of Pharaoh, and Pharaoh's favour was towards Israel and Israel was therefore protected. That, quite simply, is the real understanding of the situation, Israel needed safety in order to develop and become a great nation, and the overruling providence of God saw to it that she was given that safety. This is borne out by the fact that the whole vast enterprise is passed over almost without comment, as being relatively unimportant. The famine was in God's sovereign purposes the instrument of the fulfilment of sacred history. The sense of "balance" between the one and the other may well be a pointer to a true spiritual attitude towards the affairs of this world. Political questions, however important, are not the Church's main concern, nor the main concern of the Gospel, and should not be treated as if they were. Not this world, but the world to come, is the real subject matter of Holy Writ and it is misleading, as well as dangerous, to be interested in the Christian message only for the contribution it is able to make to the management of this world's concerns. Church history has proved that it has been when the Church has been most "other worldly" that she has made most impact on the affairs of this life. It is the powers of the world to come that can set the affairs of this world to rights, and when these are absent from the Church's message and life no other expedient will serve to heal the woes of men.

144) 48:1-22

From this point onwards to the end of Genesis the last days of Jacob are dealt with in considerable detail, and Joseph, his work and mission fulfilled, recedes into the background. According to the writer of Hebrews, this is the most significant period of Jacob's life, and we can certainly discern in the chapter, a breadth of spiritual vision and prophetic insight that tell a very different story from that of earlier chapters. The blessing of Joseph's sons is full of interest. The extraordinary thing is that the elder is passed over in favour of the younger, as has so often happened already in this book Seth instead of Cain, Shem instead of Japheth. Abraham instead of Haran, Isaac instead of Ishmael, Jacob instead of Esau, and now Ephraim instead of Manasseh. Once more the sovereignty of God is manifested, in order to assert that His blessings do not follow the line of natural privilege. He chooses whom He will, and none can say, "What doest Thou?"

Jacob's words in the blessing of the boys, 15, 16, is not only deeply moving, it is very revealing. "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil . . .", " what volumes that speaks! It takes us back to the angel traffic on the ladder at Bethel; it takes us back to Peniel where he was maimed for life in that weird encounter at the ford Jabbok. How wonderful that he could look back on these critical experiences and realise that God's purposes of redemption were being fulfilled in him, both in the assurances they brought him and the buffetings they bestowed. On the whole he did not have an easy time with God's angels, but he recognised their saving and sanctifying ministry. Like Rutherford, he could have sung, "With mercy and with judgement my web of time He wove". Happy is he who at the end of the road can look back and realise that the pains and sorrows of the way have been for good.

145) 48:1-22

Someone has beautifully suggested that this picture of the sunset of Jacob's life may well be taken as a type and model for old age. Here, we have faith, looking upward, Jacob was now resting in the promises of God, and all the troubled waters of his life had settled and cleared. Then, gratitude, looking backward. He thinks of God as One Who had followed him with His goodness and mercy all the days of his life. And love, looking outward. He was thinking of his grandsons to whom the promise had now passed, and was praying God's benison upon them. And finally, hope looking onward. The hope and expectation of a glorious future for his seed in the promise of God burned brightly in his breast.

We may well covet such an ending for old folks, for there is nothing so sad as the picture of those nearing the end who have no sure anchorage and no real ground of peace, and above all, nothing of solid and assured comfort to look forward to in the eternal world. Perhaps you know someone like that? Remember that one in prayer today, asking God in His mercy to enlighten them even at this late hour, and lead them into peace.

146) 49:1-33

The dying words of Jacob to his sons bring to a significant close the patriarchal dispensation. The family was in process of development into the nation God had promised to make it, and in this inspired, prophetic utterance Jacob gives at once a review of the past and a preview of the future in the light of the past. These so-called "blessings" are outlines of character, and illustrate a lesson that has repeatedly been taught throughout the book of Genesis and is summed up in the old adage,

"Sow a habit, reap a character,

Sow a character, reap a destiny".

In some of Jacob's sons, character formed and became rigid and "unmouldable" and in some mysterious way it was transmitted to posterity. Of Reuben it was said that, being unstable, he would not excel, and it is a remarkable fact that no significant personage seems to have emerge from the tribe of Reuben down the history of Israel. When we do take time, to reflect on the great figures of Old Testament and New Testament history we realise that they came from a few notable tribes rather than from all alike. Moses came from Levi, Joshua from Ephraim, Gideon from Manasseh, David from Judah, Paul the apostle of the tribe of Benjamin. One has only to think of some of the famous Christian families which have produced several generations of prominent figures for the work of God, to realise that here we have an abiding moral and spiritual principle. One man, by living a holy and dedicated life, may lay the foundations of many generations. Another, by living a careless and undisciplined and wilful life, is going to transmit evil influences to his posterity. We often say that no man lives unto himself. Viewed in this light, it makes life very solemn and earnest.

147) 49:1-33

There is a sense in which the chapter presents a "judgement picture", in which each of Jacob's sons came up in turn before the bar of Divine justice. It seems as if their lives were up to this point under Divine probation and now were up for account. How solemn! We think that there may well be critical times in the lives of believers when assessments of this nature are made upon them in the light of their past history. Paul has this in mind when he expresses the fear of becoming "disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27), and if he was afraid of this possibility none of us can afford to be complacent. It is significant in this connection to note that the "birthright" blessing, which would naturally have fallen to Reuben, passed over all the brothers who had so basely dealt with Joseph, and came to the latter's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. (A further graphic comment on this is found in 1 Chron 5:1 where a specific sin of Reuben's is mentioned as having been responsible for his losing his privilege.) It is possible, by our sins as believers, to jeopardise our place in God's redemptive purposes and foil His original plans for our lives. How terrifying! To forfeit our reward, and lose our crown, to suffer loss, to be ashamed before our Lord at His coming, when we might have been as those that shine as the stars for ever and are royal diadems in the hand of their God. Could anything be more tragic and disastrous?

148) 49:1-33

Space does not permit comment on all that Jacob says about his sons, but we may note some points in particular. The verdict on Reuben is very searching, and may well cause us, if we are conscious of erratic, unsteady traits in our make up, to despair. But these things are written for our learning, not our condemnation, and the lesson we must learn is to press into the grace of God while time is given us, and ask Him, at whatever cost to our trembling spirits, to make us steady and consistent in heart and life. This chapter may be a clearer mirror than we had realised in which to see our own weaknesses and faults and sins, and by grace have them dealt with before they do us untold spiritual harm. It is remarkable how once again, as in 44:18-34, we have in relation to Judah, the clear intimation concerning the promised Messiah. The prophecy about Shiloh is one of the most beautiful in the entire Old Testament. Even the language used in 11-12 contains hints and flashes that suddenly remind us of Christ's life and death, the ass's colt, the stained garments, the wine-press. How wonderful that the aged Jacob, on the threshold of glory as at the outset of his spiritual career, should have seen so much of Him Who was the fulfilment of all the mysterious promises that had come to his family.

Verses 22-26 provide a penetrating summary of Joseph's honoured career - a fruitful bough indeed! We need not doubt that the Divine approbation upon him was "Well done, good and faithful servant . . ." The simple words in 23, 24 are eloquent of spiritual victory at its highest and best, "The archers have sorely grieved him . . . but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob". There is nothing higher than this in the New Testament teaching on Christian victory. This is victory. Joseph triumphed gloriously. May it be ours to know his experience too.

149) 50:1-26

Following the death of their father, the brethren of Joseph are stricken with the dread that he will at last avenge himself on them. We may well imagine how hurt Joseph must have been at this attitude. Never was a heart so empty of a spirit of revenge as his! Their fear demonstrates the power of a violated conscience even when all is forgiven. Satan is not slow to bring his own conviction home to our hearts long after God has put our sins behind His back. How hard some people find it to forgive themselves for the past. God is often much more ready to forgive us than we are to forgive ourselves, and we must beware of allowing ourselves the doubtful luxury of mourning past sins when God has spoken them into oblivion. To mourn our sins so much that they preoccupy us is to dishonour Him Whose blood was shed to cleanse us. We are to forget the things that are behind. We might worthily write Joseph's words, "God meant it unto good" over all the story of Genesis. All happened at the behest of God, and in many mysterious ways His purposes were furthered and realised. His was the hand that guided, and His the heart that planned. If there is anything that the book of Genesis teaches, it is that we can with absolute assurance leave the planning of our lives in His strong hand. We may wholly trust Him to perfect that which concerneth us.

150) 50:1-26

Joseph's dying words in 24 breathe the true spirit of the story. He is conscious of the higher and greater purpose of God at work, and is content that it should have been furthered in his own life and through his labours. The earthen vessels fail, but the unchanging God goes on, steadily and effortlessly fulfilling His purpose. Our God is marching on! Such is the testimony borne by the dying administrator of Egypt. What a perspective with which to live and die! To recognise that it is not our lifespan that is the centre of the world, but His glorious purpose of grace, to which we are privileged to contribute our part by humble obedience to His will and guiding. It is this that gives balance to life, and meaning and serenity and peace, and it was this that touched the lives of all these men in patriarchal times and made them great. O that such a sense of the Divine purposes for the world might touch our lives and impart to us something of the nobility and grandeur of lives that looked for a city having foundations, whose builder and maker is God!

151) 50:1-26

One final thought for the present from this wonderful book. Its first words were "In the beginning God. . . " Words of infinite meaning and possibility and hope; its last, "A coffin in Egypt". The book that opens with life ends in death, and this is its central and tragic message, for sin entered the world, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

But the end of Genesis is not the end of the story. After Genesis comes Exodus, with its fulfilment of Joseph's confident dying words, "God shall surely visit you". Nor can we be content to regard his prophecy to have been fully realised in the events of Exodus; they are the pledge and promise of God that death will not have the last word in the world that God made. The real ending of the story is found in the book of Revelation, with its triumphant cry that there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, because of Him Who makes all things new and causes the former things to pass away. Doubtless the patriarchs had much less light than we have in the New Testament dispensation; but they saw Him, however dimly and afar off, and were persuaded of the promises that sin and death would not always be, and embraced them, and died in faith and hope that what God had promised He would also perform. Wonderful God! Wonderful Bible! Amen.