

James Philip Bible Readings

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THE BOOK of EXODUS

There are two ways of studying the book of Exodus. One is to take it as a straightforward, historical account of the experiences of the peoples of God - it is this, of course, and as such, many valuable lessons can be learned from it, The other is to take it as constituting a part of the Divine unfolding of redemption, promised first in Genesis 3:15 and fulfilled in the coming of Christ as the Seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of the serpent. It is in this second way that our Lord Himself encourages us to read Moses (Luke 24:27), and unless we do so, we shall fail to understand the real meaning of the Old Testament. For 'faith' in the Old Testament is 'faith in the promise', and it is in relation to this that the deepest significance of Exodus is to be seen. We must never forget that Jesus said of the Old Testament Scriptures, "They are they that testify of Me" (John 5:39).

1) 1:1-6

In the introduction above it was pointed out that any true interpretation of Exodus must be related to Christ. This does not mean that we are merely to look for 'types' of Christ in a particular verse or character, but rather see the history of Exodus as having meaning in relation to the coming of Christ in the fulness of the time, and to see the whole unfolding history in its broad outline 'suggesting' the grand drama of redemption wrought out on the Cross. The Old Testament as a whole is the covenant of promise, and as such points forward to its fulfilment in the New; but within that framework one sees 'little' fulfilments, anticipatory and token in character, that are shadows and suggestions, 'pictures' of the greater fulfilment to come. Thus, in Genesis we have the first word of promise, and in Exodus the work of deliverance, and this must be thought of as a hint, a foretaste, so to speak, of the real Exodus to come, by which men are brought out of the bondage of sin into the glorious liberty of the children of God (cf Luke 9:31, where 'decease' translates the Greek word for 'exodus'). This, it seems clear, is the kind of interpretation Paul himself puts on the Old Testament, as we may see from 1 Cor 10. The Old Testament was not a mere historical record for him, speaking of material blessings and deliverances, but essentially a spiritual reality related to and mediated by Christ Himself to His people. We are therefore to see in Moses a 'type.' of Christ in this deeper sense, and in the journeyings of Israel a 'type' of the Church's battling on to glory. Exodus thus gives us illustrations of Christian experience and Christian doctrine.

2) 1:1-6

There are different ways of analysing the book of Exodus. One is to take as its three main themes, History (1-19), Law (20-24) and Worship (25-40), and this is perhaps the simplest and most obvious analysis. Another is to analyse it 'typically', as follows: The story of the Redeemer (1, 2); the story of redemption (3-14); the story of the redeemed (15-40). It is important, however, if the first be followed, to note that both law and worship follow the account of redemption, and flow from it as a necessary consequence. Neither law nor worship are properly understood except in this context.

The story begins, then, with Israel in Egypt. And the question that naturally arises is; How does it come about that God's people are in this bondage in Egypt? Two answers may be given to this question. The first is that the sin of Joseph's brethren against him brought the whole family down from the Promised Land into bondage. The connection with Egypt dates from their selling Joseph as a slave to the Ishmaelites. And although secondary causes certainly operated in the situation, such as the famine in Canaan, this must not blind us to the ultimate factor in the case. It is one of the great lessons of the earlier books of the Bible that sin is something over which man loses control once he indulges in it. The second answer to the question is that God saw that the family He had chosen needed purging from its sin, worldliness and false gods before He could further His purposes in and through them. Thus, in a marvellously mysterious way, even evil is made to yield good in the sovereign control God has in the history of men.

3) 1:7-14

One of the most striking - and, rightly understood, most thrilling - things about these verses describing the plight of Israel is that the name of God is not even mentioned. What is underlined for us is the 'hiddenness' of His working (cf Matt 13:33 and the words of the Hymn, "He hides Himself so wondrously...."). And the true and significant understanding of the situation is that in fact the family and people of Israel had become a battleground of unseen powers. On the one hand - we see this from the authoritative New Testament interpretation of this passage in Acts 7:17 - the power and purposes of God were at work fulfilling the Divine will calmly, unhurriedly, and with sovereign ease in the multiplication of the insignificant family group into a great and numerous people. On the other hand, we may be sure that the devil would view this with misgiving and proceed to counterattack. This is the explanation of the bitter persecution and oppression that now came upon God's people, and this should serve to illuminate some of the darker passages of life in our own experience, when we feel heavy pressures upon our spirits and the heavens seem as brass. It is not always easy to see clearly in such circumstances, but verses such as these help us to do so, and to realise the all-important truth that nothing the devil is able to do can finally hinder or frustrate God's purposes. It stands written that the more the Egyptians afflicted Israel the more they multiplied and grew. God is sovereign in the affairs of men!

4) 1:15-22

The over-ruling sovereignty of God is seen still more clearly in this part of the story as the pressures increased upon the Israelites. And God did not suffer them to be crushed or overwhelmed. This is the salient point. There are several lessons to be gathered here. For one thing, we are struck by the attitude of the Hebrew midwives; whatever may have been true of the people in general, they at least were in no wise low-spirited, and showed a commendable ability to rise above the misfortune and tragedy of their situation and resist with success the nefarious designs of the king. But there is something more important, It is the whole question of why God should allow such suffering and, associated with this, the more particular question why the people of Israel should have been called upon to suffer so much and so greatly down the history of the human race. One reason at least why God allows suffering to continue beyond, as we sometimes think, the bounds of human endurance, is that He gives evil its head in order to draw it out into the open and finally to destroy it. This is always true, whether on the universal scale or the particular, and is a necessary corollary of the Divine sovereignty of God in human affairs. The most concise answer to the problem of Israel's sufferings - and we must remember that in spite of the most determined attempts of world-powers down the ages to exterminate the Jews, Israel is still even today recognizable as a nation because God has willed her to remain in existence - is that she is the chosen people of God through whom He has willed to reveal the mystery of redemption through suffering, and all who are associated with Him in the fulfilment of that redemptive purposes share, willingly or in spite of themselves, in the effects of man's revolt against God. This cost Him a Cross, and His people are necessarily involved in its shame and reproach.

5) **2:1-4**

With these verses we are introduced to a completely different kind of atmosphere from that of the previous chapter. There, it was the wide sweep of the national interest, here it is a domestic picture, and nevertheless the underlying theme is the same in both cases, the sovereignty of God. The humanness and apparent domestic insignificance of this story are lovely to see, presenting a welcome contrast to the harshness of Israel's lot as described in the previous chapter. But its real significance is much deeper, for we are to see in this idyllic picture the mighty works of God beginning to operate in answer to the prayers of His people. This is the 'inside story', so to speak, of the Divine initiative in history, not indeed associated with dramatic and spectacular manifestations of power, but in the context of ordinary, everyday events and human happenings. Again it is the 'hiddenness' of God's working that is stressed. No-one could have thought anything unusual or significant had happened in the birth of a little one into the Levite family, yet this was God's answer to the plight of His people. It is very striking to view this in relation to more recent situations in the life of the Church. We know, for example, how much earnest prayer arose in the Church in the early nineteenth century, among people like Robert Murray McCheyne and the Bonars, for spiritual awakening to bring deliverance and renewal. What we perhaps tend, however, to overlook, is that the band of men whose hearts God touched to become the leaders of the great 1859 revival were born into the world at the time these earlier prayers were ascending to God! We should not be surprised if, when we cry to God to raise up men after His own heart, He begins at the beginning, to do a new thing. It is twenty years now, in the early post-war era, since God began to burden His people to pray for revival and the renewal of the Church, and it may be that in the generation now reaching adult life we shall see the significant answer to these early cryings to God!

6) 2:5-10

Once again we see the interplay of suffering and blessing in the strange experiences that befell the infant Moses. The anxious parents, Amram and Jochabed, victims of the tyrannous and heartless decree of Pharaoh (1:22), 'lose' their precious child, yet receive him back from the dead, so to speak, and God ensures that they are in no wise the losers in the transaction. Their son is initiated into his divinely appointed preparation for his future destiny. And God so orders matters that his mother Jochabed is made his nurse! Thus easily God over-rules the wickedness of evil men, and almost 'plays' with Pharaoh, as He arranges for the tyrant's destroyer to be brought up in his very court, and has him pay wages to Moses' mother for doing so! 'He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh' (Ps 2:4)! And so, thus early, the future deliverer of Israel was thrust into training for his onerous task, set apart unto God by his committal to the ark of bulrushes, passing through death, so to speak, and entering totally into an existence in grace. But was it not very daring of God so to thrust a helpless infant into the court of Egypt? Was He not afraid of his becoming polluted by the influences around him? Apparently not: nor can we say that there was really no option for Him either this way of preservation or death at the hands of Pharaoh. God was not in such straits as to be able to preserve Moses only by pitching him into a dangerous environment. He had His purposes in it. And here there may be a moral for us. There is too often a tendency today to seek to preserve, in an almost hot-house atmosphere, the spiritual life of young people. Some Christian parents try to shield their children from every conceivable outside influence in their concern to keep them unspotted from the world. But this is an unrealistic procedure because, short of contracting out of life itself, it is impossible of fulfilment. God is far less fearful of His own than we often are. Is it that He could count more on Jochabed's influence on her child than He can on ours today upon our young people?

7) 2:11-15

Moses' childhood and youth are now left behind, and he is forty years old (see Acts 7:23). We are told that he "went out unto his brethren" (11). This might seem an almost casual visit, if we did not have Hebrews 11:24-26 to guide us to a much deeper significance. When he was come to years, the Apostle tells us, "he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing....esteeming..." It is clear then that he was brought to a great place of consecration. It must have been a tremendously costly thing for him to do; indeed it was the fulfilment of the 'death' enacted in symbol for him in the ark experience (2, 3). The statement in Hebrews 11 is worthy of the closest and most careful study. It is not too much to say that it explains almost everything in his subsequent history. But we should also note particularly in this passage that although his great surrender to the will of God for his life meant that he was willing for all that will, it did not thereby make him ready. These verses in fact show both his willingness and his unreadiness. He was now in the place of God's appointment for him but not as yet in the state of readiness for all that would involve. We assume too easily that consecration means readiness for anything. No; it is an essential preparatory in the sense that we cannot ever be ready without it, but it does not signify readiness itself. Training and equipment need to follow. Moses' action here was rash and impetuous, and it is perhaps salutary for us to realise that a consecrated spirit can sometimes do rash and impetuous things that are ill-considered and immature. It was undirected, and therefore unrelated to the Divine will and purpose. It is a high mistake to think that anything will do, so long as we do something, in the service of the kingdom. Moses was sent to another school to learn the ways of the Lord, and it was from that long discipline of the wilderness that he finally emerged to fight the battles of the Lord to some purpose.

8) 2:16-22

Interestingly enough, Moses was faced in the wilderness with the same sort of injustice as that which had been the cause of his flight from Egypt (17). This time, however, he is much more restrained, and it would seem that he is already beginning to lay a curb on that impatient nature of his. The Midianites(15, 16) were descended from Abraham by Keturah (Gen. 25:2), and there was thus a bond of sorts between them and Moses. Clearly Reuel was a religious man, from what we can gather about him and his family in Exodus. The Midianites were known to be monotheists, over against the polytheism of much of the ancient world. It is impressive to see how God 'placed' Moses in a prepared environment. It was to be a time of lonely discipline for the future leader of God's people, but God saw to it that there would also be means of grace and no lack of fellowship for him. But we should not forget either that there would necessarily be a two way traffic in such a situation. Here was a family worshipping God, yet cut off, amidst ungodliness all around them. And God gave them Moses. What a privilege to nurture such a man in the things of God! And Moses was content (21) to dwell with Reuel; content not in the sense that he had all he wanted, for it was a time in which the discipline must often have been bleak and demanding (this is probably the force of 22, and the reason for the name he gave his firstborn son), but because he recognised that God's hand was upon him guiding his fortunes, and he was prepared to allow God to have His way with him. In acceptance lieth peace – and contentment. This is one of the biggest lessons to be learned in life,

9) 2:21-25

These are two further points to note as we come to the end of the chapter. It is surely of practical significance and relevance that it was when Moses was content to submit himself to Divine providence at work in his life that God gave him his partner in life. There is a true and important precept to be learned from this. It is that happiness, in many things and in other departments of life, too, than this, comes upon us and to us only when something greater than personal happiness is allowed to become the supreme goal in life. Many Christians have never had the courage to allow God to choose for them their highest and truest happiness. The second point concerns "the process of time" (23) or, as it might be rendered, "the course of these many days". The reference is to the fulness of the time from the point of view of the Divine action. It does not mean that the death of Pharaoh was the signal for God to begin to work, as if He had to wait for Pharaoh's demise before He could act. But it may well be that Moses did so much harm by his ill-considered and hasty intervention (11-15) that he made it impossible for himself to go back as his people's deliverer to Egypt. We so often delay God's purposes for our lives, and set the clock back, by our foolishness and un-wisdom. There is need for prudence in the work of God, to save us from causing any unnecessary reproach. It all has to be lived down, and that often takes time!

10) 3:1-6

This is one of the most outstanding passages in the Old Testament, and we must study it carefully and patiently in order to draw out its meaning. Older divines have tended to interpret the Bush as a type of Christ in both His person and work. We should perhaps check the temptation to be impatient at such apparently extravagant interpretations, by reminding ourselves that they were held by men who lived very near to the Lord and who were probably in a better position to discern the inner meaning of the Scriptures than we often are. At the same time, however, there is a more general symbolism here that has much to teach us. In the first place the Bush was a revelation of God to Moses, in which He made known to him His Name, the awful Name of the covenant, Jehovah. In simplest terms, this is what God is like, a flame of fire, unchanging. It is as if He were saying to Moses, and through him to Israel, "I am still the same covenant-God, as of old. I change not, the same yesterday, today and forever" (cf Gen 15:17 - the same fire that gave assurance to Abraham came to assure Moses). In the second place, God was in the midst of the fire, and His voice came out of the fire, that is to say, He was with His people in their torment, and was saying something to them in it. This is the same message as John received on lonely Patmos; to him came the vision of the mighty, ever-living Christ with eyes as a flame of fire, holding the keys of death and hell. The Bush did not mean only this, but it could not have meant less, to Moses, and as such was really the answer to his strange and unaccountable unwillingness to being the Divinely appointed deliverer of the people, mentioned in the next chapter (of which more later). In face of such Divine assurance- (cf Isa 43:1, 2), how could any man fear or shrink from the fight?

11) 3:1-6

We may well see also a message for Moses himself in the burning bush, in relation to his earlier failure, in his self-directed service for God. Here, in the emblem of the Almighty burning steadily in a common bush, it may be that, as has been said, "a new conception leapt up in his heart. His life-work might yet be accomplished by the union of his worthless nature with the Eternal Being of God, He was required to become, not man agent, but an instrument; not a promoter, but a conveyor; not a source, but a channel" (FB. Meyer). Above all, however, Moses learned that the God with whom he had to do was a holy God. It is hardly possible to lay too much emphasis on this today, when the sense of Divine holiness is at such a discount in the mind of the Church. One has only to ask whether in fact the call to Christian service in our time is accompanied by a sense of the awe and majesty of God's holiness to realise how different a conception prevails in the modern mind from that which is uniform in the Scriptures. Isaiah, Daniel, Saul of Tarsus, John on Patmos, were all alike overwhelmed and prostrated by the brightness of His glory, but we sophisticated moderns, God help us, want to treat the Almighty as a chum, and speak of fellowship with Him as 'good fun'. So great - and disastrous - is the difference of viewpoint from that of the Scriptures.

12) 3:7-10

These verses take us a step further in our understanding of the vision given to Moses in the bush. God reveals Himself to men as One Who wills to go into action, and in so doing here He summoned Moses into action too (10). There is something of vital importance here. The revelation of God communicated to us must necessarily enlist us in the service of the kingdom. Isaiah's vision of the glory of the Lord ended with the command 'Go' Saul of Tarsus said, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" The disciples were commissioned after the Resurrection, "Go ye into all the world". God does not reveal Himself to us for our idle curiosity or intellectual stimulation; He means it as a summons to an awesome co-operation with Him in His holy and sovereign purposes, among men. Unless we see this to be so, we miss the whole point of His revealing Himself to us in His Word and by His Spirit. God means business, and it may be that one reason why He sometimes remains silent in face of our distresses is that, in spite of our cries to Him for help, we do not ourselves mean business. This, in fact, was the challenge Moses had to face, as we shall see in the next verses. Even in the context of His desire to help his people, he was not, when it came to the point, over anxious to put himself in God's hands. It is one thing to want God to make bare His holy arm, but quite another when He decides to do so using you as an instrument! "I will send thee... that thou mayest bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt" We so much prefer to be spectators than participants.

13) 3:11-14

It is impressive to see the strange and unaccountable unwillingness that came upon Moses at this point, and it is something that merits examination. We have already seen how he had genuinely consecrated himself to the service of God when he 'went out' to his brethren (2:11), but that was forty years previously, and it is possible, even in the context of preparation for the work of the Lord, for the call to service to assume a theoretical, if not unreal, character. It is still there, but the passage of time seems to blunt its urgent and compelling summons. And when it comes to the point of irrevocable commitment to action, the battle of consecration has to be fought all over again. The dedication of former years cannot do duty for the present. That is the first possibility we must consider here. The second is this: to put the best construction upon Moses' attitude, it may be that when faced with the prospect of fulfilling his consecration to the service of the Lord, he was appalled at the thought of all that would be involved in it. There may be something here akin to Paul's experience at Corinth when he said, "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling". How wonderful, in face of such a dread, to have the assurance given in 12, "Certainly I will be with thee", especially when that 'I' is the great 'I AM', the eternal, unchanging One, the same yesterday, today and forever. This is the ultimate confidence of the servant of God, and the source of his authority, that it is 'I AM' Who sends him.

14) 3:15-22

In 11 we see that Moses had a double concern, Pharaoh on the one hand, and the children of Israel on the other. But in fact, in these verses Israel looms more largely in the discussion than does the tyrant king, and this may indicate that Moses had more fear of them than of him. And, of course, in terms of continuing burden, Israel was certainly a much greater hazard than Pharaoh could possibly have been. For his demise was a once-for-all matter and, after a sustained trial of strength, soon over. But Israel, with all her fractiousness and murmuring, was with Moses for the subsequent forty years. Small wonder that the man was apprehensive, when we think of all that was involved for him of heartbreak and frustration in his association with the people of God! But God's quiet, inexorable assurances undergird His faltering and reluctant servant, setting his objections at naught. The pulse of the Divine determination throughout the passage is very wonderful, "Thou shalt" (15), "Go....and say" (16), "I have....I have....I will" (16, 17), "They shall" (18), "I will....I will" (20, 21). Here is the Divine sovereignty at its most glorious and reassuring, and it stands over against Israel's seemingly hopeless situation of bondage and oppression. It is God saying, "I will work, and who shall let it?" (Isa 43:13). The extent of His control over the situation is seen in the promise that Israel would not only be delivered but also given favour in the sight of the Egyptians. How like God not to be content with mere liberation, but also to guarantee recompense and restitution for all they had suffered at the hands of their oppressors! Well might we trust such a God and have confidence in Him. But Moses is not so sure of this, as we shall see in the next passage.

15) 4:1-9

There is a great deal for us to learn in this chapter. In it the debate begun in 3:11 about the awesome calling to which God was summoning Moses is continued and carried forward several steps. It is important for us to understand the opening verse in the light of what God had just said to him in 3:18. There, God had given a simple assurance, "They shall hearken to thy voice". Here, Moses says, "They will not....hearken unto my voice". It is when we take these two statements together that we see how ugly is the evil heart of unbelief lurking within Moses. It is little wonder that the Lord's anger kindled against him (14). Moses had already said (11) "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh?" This is all very well as an evidence of humility, but he would have been better to have paused at 4:1 to say, "Who am I blatantly to contradict God and tell Him He is wrong?" This is the real situation here, and we should not let the thought of God's great patience with His reluctant servant beguile us into thinking that the lesson we are meant to grasp at this point is that He is forbearing with our hesitancy and forebodings. This is true, of course. He is very patient, but we had better learn to distinguish between genuine misgivings and latent unbelief. It is also true, in this connection, to say that God graciously proceeded to give Moses tokens of reassurance (2-4, 6-7); but are we always to require tokens before we are prepared to believe Him when He speaks to us? He gave Moses the tokens, yes; but let us think it possible that He did so with a heavy heart and in disappointment that He was obliged to do so. To pray, as the Psalmist once did, "Show me a token for good" may be an evidence of the weakness of our faith, not of its strength.

16) 4:2-6

The miracle of the rod seems to have been designed to be repeated before the people (5) to convince them of the reality of Moses' commission. But it is also a parable speaking directly to Moses' own heart, and through him to us. If we bear in mind that Moses' hesitancy over his call to service may have been due to the consciousness of his earlier failure (2:11-15), it may well be that in this miracle God is saying to him, "Yes, Moses, you have natural qualities and gifts of leadership, but gifts and qualities unsanctified and undirected can run amok and turn and rend you, making you flee in disorder as you flee from the serpent. But taken up at My behest and controlled and directed by My hand they can be used to some purpose. So, Moses, take up the work from which you fled in disorder, and do it My way, and under My direction, and then they will hear you." This parabolic interpretation has application to us in a number of directions, as a little thought will make apparent. For one thing, it underlines the fact that in each man there is a terrific potential for either good or evil. Let loose, the natural man, without the constraint or control of the Spirit of God, can be like a serpent, biting and stinging, and ruinous to life and soul, our own and others alike. Only when this nature of ours is taken up in faith and in obedience to the will of God can its potential for good be realised. Life can either be a terrific and terrifying problem, bewildering us with the powers that rage within it, or what it was meant by God to be, a life harnessed to His will, an instrument of righteousness, carrying power and authority, and speaking to men from Him. And this is surely true even in the context of the sometimes grave and intractable weaknesses and twists of personality, the instabilities and abnormalities that play havoc with life and have ruinous repercussions for those afflicted with them. The 'serpent' can become at God's behest and in His control a rod of authority and power that will be for His glory.

17) 4:7-9

The second miracle surely signifies cleansing, but in what connection? (We wonder whether David had this incident in mind when he wrote in Psalm 24, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart"). It may be that God is revealing to Moses the real truth about himself in relation to the excuses he was making and the hesitation he was showing. Is he in fact saying, "The real trouble with you, Moses, is that you have an evil heart of unbelief"? And this is something that must be cleansed before a man can ever serve God. To interpret the miracle thus is to underline its connection with the first, for both speak in different ways of something wrong with Moses, and of something that needs to happen to him before he can go forward in the service of the Lord. One thinks of the sudden and terrifying sense of uncleanness that came upon the prophet Isaiah when he saw the Lord, high and lifted up, followed by the instant: cleansing as the live coal touched his lips, and of the commissioning for service that followed such an experience (Isa 6). It is very disconcerting to realise that other eyes can penetrate behind all the facade of our excuses to the real reasons that underlie our hesitations and reluctance to venture out on God. But how slow we are to believe the truth about ourselves even when God makes it plain to us by His Word or through the wise and faithful dealings of a spiritual counsellor. We will not take a telling!

18) 4:10-17

It now becomes clear that Moses is prevaricating, for he moves from one objection to another. Now he pleads lack of eloquence as an excuse for not going to Pharaoh. (The fallacy in this is to suppose that eloquence is a necessary qualification in the service of the Lord. This is not so; what God was asking him to say to Pharaoh, 'Let My people go' did not need any eloquence. There is a givenness about the Lord's message that precludes the need for eloquence). In answer to the Divine assurance (11), Moses replies in terms of 13. This may be interpreted in two possible ways, either to mean, "O Lord, send someone else" or a little more flattering to Moses, but not much - "I go because I must; I greatly question Thy choice, but if there is no alternative, be it so". Either attitude on Moses' part would have been sufficient to kindle the anger of the Lord (14), and something solemn takes place at this point, for Moses is punished for his continued reluctance. As he seemed determined to decline the sole leadership of the people of God, he was deprived of its honour and happiness. Aaron was appointed to share the honour of the office. Dean Stanley comments, "In all outward appearances, Aaron and not Moses, must have been, in the eyes of the Egyptians, the representative and leader of Israel". Moses lost a blessing that day, and this is what we must learn from the story before us. As F.B. Meyer pointedly comments, "Beware. If you will not step up to the opportunity which God offers, you will not only miss it, but will live to see it filled by an inferior man to yourself, through whom you may have to suffer many sorrows."

19) 4:18-23

If it was with a sense of trepidation that Moses told his father-in-law about his intention to return to Egypt, making him less than open (18) about his reasons for going - and many a young servant of God has had good reason to fear what parents would say when they heard of such intentions - it must have come as a great relief to have had Jethro's reaction, "Go in peace". Nor need we under-estimate what it must have meant for him, for although Moses was but his son-in-law, Zipporah was his own flesh and blood, and father-love is much the same in any country. Jethro's stature stands out very clearly for us. And God had prepared the way for such an attitude to be taken. Is not this something that should be much prayed for today, when sometimes the greatest hurt to a young missionary is the adverse and even hostile attitude of parents who deeply resent the will of God being placed before family loyalties? Some think that may have delayed his departure, even after receiving Jethro's blessing, and he had to receive another urgent summons from God (19), and this may well be; we have seen so much of Moses' unwillingness in this chapter. It has also been suggested that personal difficulties in Moses' relationship with his wife may have caused the delay. We shall see in the next reading more than a little, evidence of this. From 18:5 we see that Zipporah did not: in fact accompany him to Egypt after all and it would seem that after the incident recorded in the next passage, she returned to her father in the desert of Midian. Of which, more in the next note. In the meantime we may regard 21-23 as representing the communion Moses had with the Lord during his journey from Midian to Egypt. As Moses stepped out, the Lord spoke with him all the way, telling him what was to happen in Egypt. Fruitful converse indeed for an outgoing servant of God!

20) 4:24-31

This is a very mysterious passage. It seems best to interpret 24 in terms of a sudden, severe illness endangering Moses' life, which both he and Zipporah construed as a warning from God to attend to His will and obey His ordinance of circumcision. Nothing else will explain the performance of the rite at that particular juncture. The covenant sign had been neglected. Some commentators have suggested that it had once been an issue in their home, that Zipporah had opposed it, and for peace' sake Moses had yielded against, his better judgment. One wonders if in fact this is the real explanation of Moses' continued reluctance as recorded in this chapter. Had he put peace in his home before the fulfilment of his high calling? It never pays so to do; the issue must at last be faced, and it is usually much more distressing and costly when it is postponed for so long. They went back to Jethro; they would be no use to Moses in his arduous task, but rather a hindrance. But we may take leave to ask whether it would ever have come to such a painful, though temporary, separation as this, if Moses had stood for principle in the beginning, when, the matter had first become an issue in the home. It is never right to do wrong, and the sacrifice of right, is too great a price to pay for peace. It cost Moses pain and loneliness that, it would seem, he need not have had to suffer, and it cost Zipporah the privilege of seeing the mighty hand of God stretched out in the deliverance of His people. To refuse the will of God is always loss.

21) 5:1-9

The next several chapters in Exodus are occupied with the unfolding of a great trial of strength between Moses and Pharaoh and, on the deeper level, between the powers of light and of darkness. The actual text of the chapters is in the main plain and straightforward, but the underlying implications are very profound and far-reaching, and the problems they raise are not inconsiderable. The first two verses here sum up in essence the nature of the conflict that is to occupy our attention up to the story of the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea, with the destruction of the hosts of Egypt. It is important to remember the background of this contest with, on the one hand, the crisis in Moses' experience (dealt with in the previous note) culminating in a new obedience and conformity to the Divine will, and, on the other hand, the humble, worshipful reaction of the children of Israel (4:31) in their expectant waiting upon God (cf Psalm 130:6). This is significant in relation to what followed, because it was not until some considerable time later that the promise of the Lord became an accomplished fact. Indeed, the situation deteriorated markedly before it became better for Israel, as we see in these verses. It is so often like this, when God covenants with His people for awakening, deliverance and revival. There is the great, moving experience, in which the reality of the Divine promise and assurance seems quite certain, then the long darkness and opposition in which it often seems that the Lord has forgotten to be gracious. This then, is the test: Are we to believe in the faithfulness of God in spite of all the evidence of our senses? Are we going to say, like Paul in the height of the storm, "I believe God"?

22) 5:10-23

It is better to take a larger portion of the Scripture at this point, and sweep through it so as to see the main theme in proper perspective, rather than concentrate on details and in so doing risk losing the thread of the story. This passage shows in sharp outline the marked reaction of Pharaoh in antagonism and opposition to the demand of God to let His people go, and the seeming collapse of Israel's hopes of deliverance. There is a simple explanation of this, from the spiritual point of view, and it is that the powers of darkness are real, not a pious fiction, and that when God purposes to work among men, the evil one immediately organises his forces to oppose and resist with all his might. We must not of course construe this to mean that God is caught out by this, or is hard-pressed to overcome it; rather, He permits the opposition to express itself to the full in His Own wise purposes. On the one hand, He does so to test the faith of His people, and make their graces grow, for does not tribulation work patience (Rom 5:3)? He knows, better than we do, what our breaking point is. There is more endurance in us than we think! On the other hand, He is intent on letting evil destroy itself, by allowing it its head, so drawing its fangs, He permits the devil to do his worst, thus spending his strength and finally reducing him to furious and frustrated impotence. If only we could discern all this at work when under pressure, we would be saved from dark despair and encouraged to trust on in the darkness that surrounds us. God is faithful, and He will not allow us to be tempted above that we are able (1 Cor 10:13).

23) 6:1-8

We are shown in these verses the hidden communing between Moses and the Lord as the contest began to grow in intensity. Faced with the intransigence of Pharaoh, Moses 'took it to the Lord in prayer', and God graciously reassured him about the ultimate outcome of the matter, covering once more the same ground as before, and showing him the immutability of the promises (of Ps 42 and Ps 77). The reference to Abraham in 3 seems particularly significant. It is as if the Lord were challenging Moses to remember that Abraham had 'believed God' on the bare promise that he had been given, and that he must do likewise. "You stand in a noble succession, Moses, and you must rise to your high calling". Thus, once again, over against the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and the worsening of the conditions of slavery, God sets the wealth of His promise in 6-8. Note the sevenfold 'I will' and the glorious 'I am the Lord' which makes them certain. It was worth Moses' while taking it to the Lord in prayer to hear this. How wonderful - and how needful - to be reminded that no circumstances, however unpropitious or forbidding, can ever make any difference to the promises of God, since He simply makes use of these circumstances in the fulfilling of them. There is a great lesson for us here in the calm reiteration of the promise with the rumbling of the storms of Egyptian wrath in the background. What are storms, if He has spoken?

24) 6:9-13

Moses is reassured enough to go with the Lord's message to the people; but they have no heart left and cannot lift their heads enough from their bitter bondage to listen to him. And this disappointing response obviously proves a further discouragement to Moses, as we see from 12, and is like to make him doubt afresh. But the answer is again the same - the promise is unchanged, either by Pharaoh's arrogant intransigence or by Israel's dejection and refusal to listen, Ah, Moses, there is an education for you in all this, is there not? You are being taught and disciplined in the midst of the unfolding of the Divine purposes for the people. And thus he is again commissioned to Pharaoh with the same message as before (11). This also has a significance for us. It is something when a man becomes so sure of his message that he is prepared to go on delivering it not only when it does not seem to work, but also when it seems to have the opposite from the desired effect. Those who so petulantly crave for quick results have usually little inkling of the bidden powers and forces at work or the depth at which the challenge of the Spirit requires to be made before the work of God can be accomplished. And so, when immediate effects are not seen, they conclude that the message is defective, and they abandon it to try something else. But the man who is sure of God and of what He has given him to say is content to proclaim it whether things happen or not, in the assurance that in the fulness of the time, God's time, the word will produce its desired and intended effect. But let us be clear that there is a test of faith involved in this. It is easy to say 'I believe God', but another thing to do it!

25) 6:14-30

At first glance it seems odd - and even pointless - that a genealogy occupying many verses should be inserted into the story at this point, but we may be sure that there is some good purpose in it. And we may discern at least part of that purpose in the tracing of Moses' and Aaron's line from the patriarchs, as if to say, "These men (26, 27) are not just any men, but stand in direct relationship to the patriarchs to whom the promise was given. They stand in an honourable line of succession. This is not a different story from that recorded in Genesis, but simply the next development of it." God is, as it were, saying to us, "Now let Me see if you know where you are in the history of the promise", and gives us a panoramic view of its 'movement' from the beginning up to this particular point. Furthermore, when we read through this list of names, we see that some of them have an unsavoury history, and we are reminded that, frail and human and sinful as this line and family was, it was caught up into a destiny of glory in the purpose of God, In the words at the beginning of the next chapter (7:1), "I have made thee a god unto Pharaoh" at least suggest and give us a glimpse of the high and exalted destiny to which they were called. Finally, in the word 'god' we are introduced to the real realm in which the contest with Pharaoh was being fought out, the realm of principalities and powers, for from this point onwards we become deeply conscious of the supernatural at work with, on the one hand, the rod of God and, on the other, the dark powers of Pharaoh's magicians. The family line, then, becomes the meeting-place between two worlds, the arena in which the wrestling with principalities and powers becomes evident.

26) 7:1-7

Now the contest is about to begin, and the Lord is about to multiply His signs and wonders in the land of Egypt (3). F.B. Meyer points out that these signs and wonders were primarily intended to answer the question which Pharaoh had asked of Moses. "Who is the Lord?" (5:2), and comments: "By entering into the spheres which were ruled by the gods of Egypt and by over-ruling them; by predicting exactly what would happen and by causing the prediction to come to pass; by leaving the magicians with all their arts outdistanced and ashamed, Jehovah through His servants answered the question to the full and gave incontestable evidence that He was God of gods". In this respect, the happenings of this time are a type and symbol of the breaking in of the gospel into human life. The miracles of the gospel era were the evidence that the kingdom of God had come upon men. We should note also that attention is drawn to Moses' age in 7. In Acts 7:23 we are told that he was forty when he left Egypt for his long discipline in the wilderness (Exo 2: 11, 12). Here, then, the second significant stage of his experience is brought to a close, and the third forty-year period begins, reaching to his death on the borders of the Promised Land (Deut 34:7). Now the long story of many years' training and preparation is over, and that for which he was destined and brought into the world begins to unfold. It is instructive to see the proportion existing between the years of preparation and those of service and to contrast this with modern ideas. This may provide us with a clue to the relative ineffectiveness of so much in Christian service today. Do we really allow ourselves to be prepared and equipped for the work that needs to be done?

27) 7:8-13

There are two points in particular that should be noted at the outset of our study of the details of the conflict between Moses and Pharaoh. The first is that we see immediately that Pharaoh also possesses 'godlike' powers. What we need to realise is that characters like Pharaoh represent the epitome of evil in history, heading up the essence of evil in themselves, as it were, and showing up its ultimate origin and pretensions, as being demonic and devilish. This is why modern totalitarian figures are so frighteningly and terrifyingly powerful; they embody the personality of evil itself. The second thing is this: miraculous power as such is not necessarily of God or from God. Both the Old Testament and the New recognise the reality of evil, as well as good, supernatural power. This, however, does not mean that the two powers are equal, or even of the same sort. Satan's wonders are lying wonders (2 Thess 2:9), that is, wonders intended to deceive, and having their origin in the father of lies. It is certainly no evidence, therefore, of the Divine origin of the movement that it should be accompanied by signs and wonders, as some heretical and manifestly devilish movements apparently are. What John says (1 John 4:1) about trying the spirits is equally applicable to miracles. We should note very carefully here that evil powers aped and imitated the power of God in the court of Pharaoh. It was a blasphemous parody, it is true, but to the undiscerning it may well have been so impressive as to convince and win them to its allegiance.

28) 7:14-25

We must pause at this point to say something about the mystery of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. The subject is not without its problems, and it is only by collating all the references throughout the story and examining them as a whole that we can understand their significance. The references are as follows: 3:19; 4:21; 5:2; 7:3, 13; (7:13 should read, with RSV, "And Pharaoh's heart was hardened", not as in AV); 7:14,22; 8:15, 19,32; 9:7,12; 9:34,35; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8, From these references we see that three forms of expression are used: "Pharaoh's heart was hardened", "Pharaoh hardened his heart", and "The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart", Certain things can be discerned here. The hardening of the heart in Pharaoh was the inevitable consequence of his refusal to obey God. Then, the three occasions in which it is said that Pharaoh hardened his heart (8:15, 32; 9:34) follow an actual softening of his heart by God. He deliberately hardened himself against God when he might have sought and found His grace. And it is only after this that it is said that God hardened his heart. It is surely not without significance that only in the later stages of this conflict is it said that God hardened his heart (9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:8). Whatever therefore may be the mystery of election and predestination lying behind this question (see Rom. 9:14-24), it was no arbitrary decree of God, but Pharaoh's own deliberate resistance of the Divine will that brought upon him the judicial hardening of heart from God.

29) 7:14-25

An examination of the plagues shows that there is both progression and development in them. For example, in the two recorded here, the serpents (10-12) and the blood (20-22), and in the next, the frogs (8:6, 7), the Egyptian magicians were able to imitate Divine power, whereas in the later miracles they were unable to do so. There are several thoughts here. On the one hand, we are reminded that Satan can imitate God, but is unable to do anything original or creative, not being an 'original thinker'. We should recall in this connection the terrible imitative trinity of evil in the book of Revelation, the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, standing over against the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It is not without significance, however, that the Egyptian magicians do not, in the exercise of their power, undo the miraculous work of God by turning the serpents back into rods, or the blood back into water. Only God can do that. The evil power is always negative and destructive. But there is something else. The fact that presently the Egyptian sorcerers were unable even to imitate the Divine power is an indication not only that they were beaten, but also - far more significant - that God was now turning in real earnest to deal with them. It is as if, at the outset of the miracles, God had been patient and forbearing, smiling almost (cf Ps 2:4), at their attempts to rival His power - "Let Me see how many miracles you can do" - but then the smile of forbearance disappears, and a grimness comes upon His holy face, and He begins to deal in earnest with them, putting pressure upon them, and taking the offensive against them. It is amazing just how much rope God gives to men in their arrogant rebellion against Him, but there comes a time when He finally says, "That will be enough". That time was soon to come for Pharaoh.

30) 8:1-15

The importance and significance of this passage is that it records the first signs of spiritual conviction in Pharaoh in face of God's dealings with him. In ignoring his magicians' performance (7) the tyrant seems tacitly to admit their inability to remedy the situation, and to recognise a higher hand at work in it that made their efforts irrelevant. It is clear that he had begun to be unnerved by the inexorable Divine visitation upon his land, and that fear had struck into his heart. This was surely a time of hope and opportunity for him; to be wrought upon in this way is always fraught with destiny, and a right reaction and response can lead to do so. Nor is Moses slow to encourage him to incalculable blessing for those who are prepared respond to God's dealings (9) for he allows Pharaoh to decide when the miracle of reversal shall take place, so as to prove to his own satisfaction that it is God Who is at work, and not any chance circumstance. And yet, when Pharaoh saw that there was respite (15) he hardened his heart against the voice of God. This is the first of three occasions on which it is explicitly said that he hardened his heart, and it is significant that he did so after he had been wrought upon and softened by God through the judgment of the plagues. This is the point at which God's strange work begins. The plagues, which should have been instructive and illuminating to Pharaoh - and could have been, and in fact had begun to be - suddenly began to be punitive and destructive to him. Having refused the word that might have led to his ultimate salvation, Pharaoh found in the end that it became his destruction and damnation.

31) 8:16-19

The battle between the powers of evil and God continues and intensifies. We see the sinister effect of Pharaoh's hardening of his own heart after the Spirit of God had begun to soften him, for now he is harder than ever. Part of the price of hardening one's heart is that it becomes harder than one realises. Sin is always something that passes beyond our power to control, He who commits it becomes the slave of it in the committal. This is what we see so frighteningly in these verses. The magicians are also on the side of the powers of darkness in this conflict, but they are tools, not principals, and they know it is time to call it a day, when they realise that their powers are spent in face of this vastly superior might and dominion with which they have been confronted. "This is the finger of God" they exclaim in awe to the king, as if to say they knew when to retire from the unequal contest. It was wisdom for them to have thought so, and to have tried to persuade the king to do likewise, but he is no longer permitted to do so; the terrible 'No' which he uttered when he might have said 'Yes' becomes an awful and presently an unalterable reality for him, and the wheels of the chariot of Divine justice come grinding inexorably towards him as he shuts himself up in the impenetrable prison of his own making. Let us learn from this grim story that to harden the heart against the word of God is to take a step towards a point of no return, the boundary between hope and despair.

32) 8:20-24

A change now appears in the nature of the judgment plagues. Up to this point they had afflicted the entire land, and the children of Israel suffered with the Egyptians in a common affliction; but now, the land of Goshen was excluded from the visitation and the Israelites were given immunity. This was surely designed to demonstrate that the series of plagues could not be attributed to chance circumstances. This is a very necessary exercise; there is nothing more impressive than the apparent inability on the part of those under Divine discipline to perceive the hand of God at work in the misfortunes and afflictions that come upon them. It would be stretching credulity too far to suppose that these plagues, following one after the other upon Moses' threatenings to Pharaoh, should have been mere coincidence, but there is an incorrigible part of human nature that is prepared to believe even that. And so the real meaning of the plagues is placed beyond the shadow of a doubt with the miraculous protection afforded the Israelites in Goshen. The force of this irresistible logic-in-action seems to have come home to Pharaoh; but seeing the truth is one thing, obeying it is quite another, and the king's further reaction, as we shall see in the next Note, amply demonstrates the fact that stark rebellion as well as ignorance and blindness lies at the heart of human sin. Pharaoh had begun by asking, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?", and now, having learned Who He is, he is found to be implacably opposed to paying heed to His voice. Sin is at last unveiled in him as being exceeding sinful.

33) 8:25-32

We come in these verses to Pharaoh's attempts to reach a compromise with Moses and with the Lord concerning the inexorable demand to let the people of Israel go. First of all, he suggests the possibility of their sacrificing 'in the land' (25), then, when this is rejected as unacceptable, in the wilderness but 'not....very far away'. Compromise is dear to the heart of the natural man who is willing to bid for the best of both worlds, and we should see in these circumstances a parable of what we are sometimes tempted to do in our spiritual lives when the allurements of Egypt are in conflict with the pull of the Divine will on our lives. Serving the Lord in true obedience is possible neither in Egypt or just outside its borders; the break must be clean and irrevocable. Lot, we may remember, pitched his tent towards Sodom (Gen. 13:12) and ended up by sitting in the gate (19:1), having lost his testimony and all but losing his life in the judgment that came to that wicked place. Pharaoh's refusal after all to allow Israel to go, when the plague had been stayed, is also parabolic in that it reminds us that compromise never fulfils what it offers to those who are foolish enough to entertain it. 'Deceitful dealings' (29) are never very far away when the spirit of compromise is in the air.

Before passing from this chapter we should note the tremendous implication in the twice-repeated statement (13, 31) that "the Lord did according to the word of Moses". Here is the fruit and reward of his costly obedience to the will of God. Obedience moves the hand that moves the world!

34) 9:1-12

The contest begins at this point to assume ugly and dangerous dimensions, as Pharaoh by his intransigence brings upon himself heavier and more costly judgments. The previous plagues had caused distress, but the murrain on the cattle was an economic catastrophe of great magnitude. And while Egypt was still staggering under this blow, with Pharaoh tight-lipped and more deeply set in his refusal to yield, the Divine judgment touched them more closely still in a plague of boils and blains. But the most important point to note here is the fateful change represented by 7b and 12a. The hardening which had begun through a wrong reaction to God's dispensations and been aggravated by a perverse attitude of will at last becomes judicial, and to use Paul's words, because Pharaoh did not like to retain God in his knowledge, God gave him over to a reprobate mind (Rom 1:28). God confirmed him in his choice of remaining in antagonism against Him. It is this principle that is echoed in Rev 22:11, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still, and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still". When God really intervenes in judgment, it is as in a film when the movement is suddenly stopped and the character portrayed is fixed forever in the fateful attitude he has adopted. Pharaoh had resolutely turned his heart against the Lord, and now he was to be fixed forever in that attitude by the judicial action of God. No-one knows when that moment may come in the life of sin, and none may presume upon the Divine longsuffering and patience. The only possible safety lies in being constantly turned towards His good and perfect will. Happy will be the man found in such an attitude on the great Day.

35) 9:13-26

Again there is an intensification of the crisis of judgment, as another terrible and disastrous stroke comes upon the hapless land of Egypt. Two points in particular should be noted here. The first concerns the interpretation of 16. The RSV reads differently from the AV, rendering 15 and 16 thus: "For by now I could have put forth my hand., and you would have been cut off from the earth; but for this purpose have I let you live, to show you my power...." This helps us out of a real difficulty, since the AV seems to suggest that Pharaoh was raised up by God with the purpose of being made the object of His judgment. It may be questioned, however, whether this answers the problem raised by Paul's quotation of this verse in Rom 9:17. It is a difficult, frightening verse. The second point to be noticed is the response made by at least some in Egypt to the warning voice of God (20). This is very striking and impressive, and it bears witness not only to the power of Moses' word among this pagan and heathen people, but also to the reality of Divine mercy even in the context of God's 'strange work' of judgment on Pharaoh. And more. It demonstrates the truth which Paul was to express centuries later when he said that in his ministry he was 'the saviour of death unto death' to some and 'the saviour of life unto life' to others. As has already been noted, the same sun that softens wax hardens clay. To fear the word of the Lord enough to act upon it is a sign of grace indeed, and we doubt not that it led to more than their cattle being saved in the terrible disaster that followed.

36) 9:27-35

When we read these words we may be tempted to think that the comments made in the previous note were premature, for here once again Pharaoh is touched by the Spirit of God, and a change in his attitude is evident. In view of what Moses says in 30, however, it seems clear that remorse rather than repentance was at work in him, and that Moses saw this to be so. As Paul says in 2 Cor 7:10, 'the sorrow of the world worketh death' and bears little relation to true heart repentance. The die, it seemed, had already been cast, and Pharaoh's attitude hardened and fixed beyond remedy. It is very frightening to see such human impenitence in face of the great demonstrations of Divine power at the hands of Moses. It is sometimes thought - as it was, for example, by the Jews in our Lord's day - that if signs and wonders are impressive and dramatic enough, they will compel belief; but here we see that not only is this not so, but in fact they serve to do the opposite, producing in the end an irremediable hardness of heart (cf. Matt 16:1 ff; Luke 11:27 ff; John 2:23-25). It is significant, however, to see that even in his impenitence and rebellion, the king was obliged to confess the righteousness of God's dealings with him (27). Again and again we see in the Scriptures that in God's judgment of men He makes them agree with the justice of His case against them (cf 1 Kings 20:35-43). This much the wonders did effect: Pharaoh was made to know that the Lord was God of all the earth (29); but there is an eternity of difference between bowing the knee to Him in glad and humble worship and adoration, and being crushed by that Lordship under His feet (1 Cor 15:25).

37) 10:1-11

One would have thought that with the mounting intensity of the judgments upon him, Pharaoh would have learned by this time the folly of pitting himself against the will of the Lord. But there is something essentially irrational about the course of sin which makes a man act against all reason. This is brought into even greater relief by the attitude of the king's servants (7). They at least could see the disastrous effects of Pharaoh's obstinate and implacable resistance of the will of the Lord. But he was prepared to let Egypt be destroyed, and himself also, rather than capitulate. It is at this point that we see just how much of hell there is in the human heart that has set itself against God. The evil of the pit has always the seeds of self-destruction within it. But Pharaoh makes a gesture and proposes a further compromise. The men of Israel may go to make sacrifice, but their families and their flocks must remain in Egypt (10, 11). Moses, however, will have none of this; no partial exodus could be of any avail, either to God or to Israel. It was to be a complete deliverance. Nor does Moses argue or plead with Pharaoh, but sternly announces what will happen if he continues to resist. The hour-glass of Pharaoh's life is fast running out.

38) 10:12-20

With an almost monotonous similarity the process of devastation is again repeated, and the land is engulfed in another ruin more deadly and disastrous than before. And again Pharaoh is made to cry out in craven fear. But, as we believe, the point of no return has already been passed, and the depraved king's reaction is predictable: as soon as the plague is stayed, he will again change his mind about letting Israel go, and so it proves. It is impressive to see how 'spiritual' he sounds in 16, 17, and this should make us intent on piercing beyond religious jargon in our assessment of the professions men make. It is also interesting, however, to see that -even in the context of having in all probability sinned away his day of grace - God was still even then prepared to take him at his word, false though his heart was, and stay His hand. It is the extraordinary patience and long-suffering of God that stands out at every point, and this is one of the things that Paul stresses in Rom 9:22. It is not, of course, that the Lord only gradually discovered how deceitful and wily Pharaoh's heart was, and was obliged in a moment of final discovery to deal with him in judgment. He knows the end from the beginning, but was prepared, in the strange interaction of Divine sovereignty and human responsibility, to give him time and opportunity in which to repent. It is only when all doors are closed that mercy turns sadly and finally away from the human soul. What we read in the remainder of this chapter makes it clear that this point had now been reached, so far as Pharaoh was concerned.

39) 10:21-29

The final plague, leading up to the judgment upon the firstborn of Egypt, was a great, awesome darkness that came upon the land. There is surely a deep symbolical significance in this. It was the light of mercy going out for Pharaoh, did he but know it, and his reaction to it, first in seeking a further compromise (24) which was refused categorically by Moses, then in blind rage and fury dismissing the man of God with dire threats, amply confirms this, and brings the long and dramatic conflict to its climax and the beginning of its denouement. We wonder at the temerity of Pharaoh in thus threatening a man who had wielded in his presence such supernatural power (28). What did he think he could do to one who had brought these disastrous wonders upon his kingdom? But one of the penalties of closing your eyes to the obvious is that you finally become incapable of seeing it even if at last you want to. His final word to Moses serves in a fateful way to seal his own judgment (28, 29), for in excluding and banishing Moses from his presence, he excluded and banished God, Who took him at his word. This, then, is the ultimate issue of the movement that began with the words "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" (5:2). We recall an earlier word in Gen 6:3, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man", and see its fulfilment in Pharaoh. Nor should we lightly assume that our resistance of His will will necessarily be met by long patience and forbearance on His part. Those who try to see how far they can go in wilful disobedience without incurring Divine disfavour may find too late that they have been playing with fire, and be badly and fatally burned.

40) 11:1-10

The time has now come for Israel to be delivered from their bondage in Egypt. Pharaoh's time is up, and the judgment announced in this chapter no longer has the intent of changing his attitude towards Israel; it is penal in its design, and is the bitter fruit of his long resistance against the will of God. But in the Divine economy, what was his judgment was also to be Israel's deliverance; the stroke that devastated Pharaoh and Egypt set free the children of Israel into a glorious liberty. To read 2 as the AV renders it raises a problem about the ethical worthiness of such an action on Israel's part when they knew they would never repay what they had borrowed, But the RSV substitute 'ask' for 'borrow', and this puts an entirely different construction upon the matter. We are told in 3 that the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. This may mean that in view of all the sufferings of Israel under their harsh bondage there had arisen some measure of sympathy for them, which doubtless would have been heightened by the display of superior power by Israel's God in the series of miracles they had witnessed in the land. It was this, it seems, that moved the Egyptians to give of their gold and silver to the children of Israel when they asked. There is a certain irony - and it is in keeping with the general emphasis on the sovereignty of God throughout the story (cf 2:9) - in the fact that the Egyptians are constrained by God to subsidise the Israelites' journey into freedom. God certainly does not do things by halves!

41) 12:1-2

This wonderful chapter recounts the story of the Passover, the foundation and inspiration of Israel's religion. The two opening verses give us some indication of the fundamental importance it was to have in the life and experience of the people. It was to be the beginning of months for them, and the first month of the year - that is, it was to signify the beginning of everything for them. And it is significant that all down Israel's subsequent history the Passover was looked back on as that which brought them as a nation into covenant relationship with God. And God is spoken of as the God that brought them up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. There is always a new beginning when God intervenes in the human situation. One is reminded of the opening words of Genesis, "In the beginning God. It was certainly a new thing that He did in Israel on this occasion. It is well for us to remember, in the illustration which the entire chapter gives of the work of redemption wrought in Christ, that our Christian history begins with the mighty work of God in redemption, and that our whole existence rests on something God has done for us that we could never do for ourselves, just as truly as Israel's did in old time. It is therefore an existence in grace, and auditioned at every point by grace. We shall see, when we come to the story of the giving of the law at Sinai, that this is again emphasised, in the summons to obedience of the commandments based on the fact that the people had been redeemed unto God. Every new beginning in spiritual life has its origin in the renewal of the consciousness of what God has done for us in Christ. Little wonder that Paul is so concerned in his epistles that we should know (Rom 6:3, 6, 9, 16) and understand (Eph 1:18; 3:18,19) these things!

42) 12:3-20

This is a long reading but it is wise to take the instructions given by God to Moses in one, so as to see the more clearly their significance. This is the final judgment on Egypt and Pharaoh, a doom which secured Israel's destiny as God's chosen people. A lamb without blemish was to be taken and killed, its blood sprinkled on the lintels and doorposts of Israel's houses. The lamb was to be roasted with fire, and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, and the people were to eat with haste, with loins girt and staffs in hand. The blood thus sprinkled was to be a protection to Israel's firstborn against the angel of death -not indeed in any superstitious or magical way, but in the significance it had in being the sign of death. The death of the lamb was in fact in place of the death of the firstborn, and was appointed as such by God Himself, so that in availing themselves of the Divine provision and protection Israel was utterly safe. Their safety, then, lay in something outside themselves and their own resources, in something God had done for them rather than in anything they themselves could have done. We should also realise that in inviting Israel to participate in this solemn ordinance, and particularly to eat of the lamb roasted with fire, the Lord was initiating a covenant with His people, and binding Himself to them unconditionally as their covenant God. The whole story is clearly so rich in illustration of spiritual categories that we shall require to spend some time relating it to that of which it is a type in the New Testament, and to this we shall return in the next note.

43) 12:3-20

The Passover story, as was suggested in the previous note, gives an almost perfect picture of what the death of Christ means in relation to the redemption of the world, and it is clear that this is how the New Testament itself regards it. John the Baptist's words, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" seem to have their roots here; Paul makes a specific reference to it in the words, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor 5:7); and Peter obviously has it in mind when he says, "ye were redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet 1:18, 19). And it is in line with this 'typical' significance that our Lord should have been crucified at the time of the Passover. Nor is it merely in words such as those in 13, "When see the blood I will pass over you" that the illustration lies, for the whole story in its several details is rich in spiritual allusion. And one of the principal lessons it underlines is the fact of substitution which lies at the heart of the Christian doctrine of redemption. Christ's death was substitutionary in the sense that, like the lamb in the story here, He stood in the place of those for whom He died. The words of the old gospel hymn,

"Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood,
Sealed my pardon with His blood"

are still the most profound expression and interpretation of what He did on the Cross for us men and for our salvation. But, rightly understood, His substitution of Himself for us is twofold in its significance, and the story of the Passover serves to emphasise a second aspect also that is sometimes missed in our understanding of New Testament teaching. We shall deal with it in the next note.

44) 12:3-20

The Passover lamb was required to be without blemish (5), and this has a particular and precise significance for the biblical doctrine of redemption. The lamb was to be kept until the fourteenth day of the month, after which it was to be slain. The point of this was surely to 'prove' it's being without blemish. To this corresponds the spotless life of the Son of God, which has an integral and indeed decisive importance in the fulfilment of God's redeeming purpose. For there are in fact two problems, not one, involved in making atonement. Not only is there the penalty of the broken law, vast and imponderable as this is; there is also the repair to the injury that sin has done to the Divine majesty. God expects holiness from His creatures, and has a right to do so; and nothing less could ever satisfy Him, not even punishment of the lack of it, taken by itself. "Be ye holy, for I am holy" is his demand. And in the death that He died, Jesus not only paid the penalty of the broken law to the full, but also atoned, 'made up', for our lack of holiness, by offering Himself without spot unto God.

45) 12:3-20

It is this double substitution, referred to in the previous note that is indicated in the selection of a 'lamb without blemish'. A simple illustration will help here. When a crime is committed against person and property, it is not enough that the offence be punished, as it is in due course when the law catches up with the offender. If something is stolen from me, merely to imprison the thief does not in itself put matters right; I want my property returned. The injury done to me must be repaired as well as the offence punished, and only when such restitution has been made has the situation been put right. So in the Atonement, it is Jesus' blood (shed in payment of the penalty of the broken law) and righteousness (freely offered to God for us in the death He died) that are the sole ground of our hope and salvation.

46) 12:21-28

Moses here passes on the Divine instructions to the people. Their reaction - bowing down to worship, then returning to their homes to complete the commanded preparations - is significant, for it is in the obedience we offer to the command of God that faith is proved real. The Divine provision of protection would have been unavailing for the Israelites if they had not in fact made it their own by placing themselves under the sheltering blood. It was not their action in so doing, but the provision of God, that saved them, but the provision of God could not have helped them if they had not done so. Similarly, in the New Testament antitype, it is not faith that saves us - we are justified by His blood - but we cannot be saved without faith. Faith is the hand that receives. But the Israelites also obeyed the instructions to eat the Passover with loins girt and staffs in hand, and this is meant to signify their identification with the inner meaning of the Passover sacrifice. This bears a lesson of the supremest importance for the spiritual life which we will look at in the next note.

47) 12:21-28

The lesson that we are to draw from the Passover story which is so critical for spiritual life is that there can be no real substitution without identification. The faith in the sprinkled blood that brought protection to Israel also brought them into the closest possible relation of obedience to God, And in the New Testament this is categorically emphasised: "We thus judge that if one died for all (substitution), then were all dead (identification); and He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him" (2 Cor 5:14, 15). A faith in Christ which does not recognize that we die in Him is less than biblical; a faith that does not bring us into union with Him is a faith that does not justify and does not save. It is this identification alone that safeguards faith in something entirely outside oneself from degenerating into an empty and amoral superstition, offensive to God and man alike.

48) 12:29-30

It is well for us to pause at these solemn verses and see the grim climax of the long-drawn-out conflict with Pharaoh. They afford us an irrefragable proof that God means what He says, and that His warnings of judgment are to be taken seriously. And inasmuch as the whole story of the Passover is an eloquent illustration of the gospel, they also reflect the reality of the final judgment that will come on those who resist and reject the mercy and grace of God offered in Christ. There is another 'midnight', infinitely more dark and terrible and despairing than that which witnessed the cries of the Egyptians, and it will surely come upon all who have spurned or neglected the claims of Christ. We have only to read Paul's words in 1 Thess 5:1-10 to realise how central this reality was in the mind of the early Church. In a very true sense, they regarded themselves as working 'against time' in their preaching of the gospel. Time is, indeed, nothing but an enemy to the unconverted, nor must we ever assume that it is on our side in our concern to evangelise. If these words have anything to say to us, it is in terms of the solemn admonition of our Lord: "I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work".

49) 12:31-36

The extraordinary nature of Israel's exodus from Egypt is perhaps best underlined by moving 35 and 36 back a few chapters and realising how utterly ludicrous such a possibility would have seemed, to Israel and the Egyptians alike, at the outset of the contest between Moses and Pharaoh. To have imagined, then, that a time would ever come when the Egyptians would even think of giving to a slave people of their gold, silver and raiment, would surely have strained all possible credulity. But God is the God of the impossible, and nothing is too hard for Him to accomplish. There is more than a hint here of what is possible in terms of New Testament redemption. God can also, in the spiritual sense, make capital out of the powers of darkness that hold men in thrall; He can restore to us the years that the locust has eaten, and He makes the last state of the prodigal immeasurably better than his first. Man's state in grace is so much higher than if he had never sinned.

The following verses in the chapter recount the movement of the children of Israel out of the land of bondage, and, we shall see many further illustrations of the gospel as we go on. It may suffice at this point to sum up the lessons of the Passover story in simple form. Someone has underlined the following four emphases as epitomising the whole message: a long-suffering God - an approaching storm - a bountiful provision - a simple invitation. Such is the 'Gospel in Exodus'.

50) 12:37-51

The first recorded act of the emancipated people was to bake unleavened cakes (39) of the dough they had brought forth out of Egypt, and this is surely symbolic of the separated and simple life they were meant to lead as the pilgrim people of God. We can hardly doubt that at least to begin with the children of Israel responded to the spiritual implications of their deliverance, and that their hearts were really towards God (it was only later that their murmuring became such a tragic evidence of spiritual sickness). And this may well account for the fact that so many who were not of Israel accompanied with them. It is not surprising that there should be many Egyptians prepared to go out with Israel, for had God not shown His mighty power among them, attesting the reality of the redemption He had promised to His people? The real surprise would have been if none had responded in faith or wanted to go out with them,

51) 12:37-51

We must not misunderstand the meaning and significance of the 'mixed multitude' referred to in the previous note (38). It is true that no 'stranger' was allowed to eat of the Passover - it was for the Lord's people alone. Yet an invitation was given to the stranger and foreigner to become one of the Lord's people. This is a paradox that Israel as a whole did not understand, and it is one of the tragedies of their history that the wrong kind of exclusion was practised. The Gentiles became abhorrent to Israel, and were despised by them as dogs, but this was certainly not the Divine intention in making them a peculiar people. The separation was meant to preserve them from alien influences from the outside, not to prevent outsiders from coming in to share the blessings of His love. In the end, Israel not only failed to keep evil influences from entering in to adulterate their pilgrim faith, but also effectively prevented, by their pride and arrogance, those who would have come in from sharing the grace of the Lord's covenant. The ill-fated fruits of this disastrous misconception are seen in the attitude of the Pharisees (Matt 23:13; Luke 11:52) in the time of our Lord, and in the reaction of the Jews in general against the gospel (Acts 22:21, 22).

52) 13:1-7

These verses complete, as it were, the meaning and significance of the Passover ordinance. The first born of Israel received substitutionary protection in the blood of the lamb that was slain, but this laid them under an incalculable debt to God and confirmed their obligation to live for Him. In effect, the firstborn of Israel had no right to be alive at all; that they were was due entirely to Divine mercy and provision, and therefore God could say of them, "They are Mine". This is the sentiment that Paul echoes in more than one place in his epistles: "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:19, 20) and "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto Him Who died for them and rose again" (2 Cor 5:15). God intended that by receiving the Passover His people would be united with its true meaning, and be separated unto Him. This is something we dare not forget in our understanding of the gospel. The Cross lays upon us a total demand, and makes a total claim upon our lives. To taste therefore of the Cross's power and virtue without the recognition that we thereby become unalterably God's is to rob Him of what is rightfully His. No understanding of redemption which falls short of this has any warrant for supposing it has a biblical basis.

53) 13:8-16

The first-born of every beast was to be a sacrifice to God, the first-born of man was to be redeemed; by which arrangement we are meant to understand that redemption and sacrifice belong together. The firstborn who remained alive were to be living sacrifices, but were nevertheless still truly the Lord's. All this was to be kept assiduously before the minds of the people. On the one hand, children were to be instructed as to the meaning and significance of the Passover, on the other they were to wear signs and tokens on their hands, and frontlets between their eyes to remind them of their indebtedness to the Lord for His great deliverance and of their belonging utterly to Him. These 'tokens' are certainly the 'phylacteries' mentioned by Jesus in Matt 23:5, and our Lord's scathing strictures upon the Pharisees for their use of them may serve as a reminder to us that any outward token and evidence of one's dedication to the Lord may become a snare, and an occasion of spiritual pride and even hypocrisy. We do not wear phylacteries today, but sometimes badges, labels or distinctive articles of clothing, and we must realise that these too can just as easily become an empty show bearing little relation to the state of our hearts. We must see to it that our lives as well as our lapels are showing forth that we are not our own, but bought with a price. It may be relevant to recall a notable passage in 1 Peter (3:3, 4) in which that Apostle reminds us that it is not outward adornment but inward that is all-important, in the hidden man of the heart, and that the adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, being in the sight of God of great price, will also tell most effectively that we belong to Him.

54) 13:17-19

These verses are full of interest. We are told that God did not lead the people by the shortest and most direct route, through Philistia, but by a more devious and roundabout one, through the wilderness of the Red Sea. The reason given for this is that the people might have lost heart when they saw the prospect of war. The fact is, a suppressed and subjugated people do not turn overnight into a trained army, and Israel would almost certainly lack moral and physical vigour after long years of slavery. It is true that God could have given them miraculous power to defeat the Philistines, but there is an economy of miracle with God, and He did not. Rather, He trained Israel in the wilderness to be soldiers. And there is ample evidence in the rest of Exodus both that they needed much training and that they received it in the hands of a wise and patient God. The reference to the bones of Joseph in 19 (cf Heb 11:22) is strangely moving, and bears witness to the idea of continuity in the plan and purpose of God, reminding us that the story in which Joseph was once the chief actor is the same story in which Moses has now taken the central place. Joseph had discerned by faith that Israel's sojourn in Egypt was to be only a temporary one, and such was his confidence in the purposes of God that he was able to give commandment that his bones should be brought up to the Promised Land with Israel on their return. And Moses, with the same lively sense of the continuity of the Divine purpose, fulfils the patriarch's command. What bedrock faith in God these men had!

55) 13:20-22

The pillar of cloud and fire was one of the most distinctive and important factors in the history of Israel's journey to the Promised Land. It was looked back upon with wonder and awe by succeeding generations, and referred to again and again in the Scriptures of Old and New Testaments. It will be useful at this point in the story to anticipate some of the other references to the pillar throughout Exodus and elsewhere and gather up the teaching they afford not only concerning Israel's journeyings but also in relation to the spiritual life in general (cf 14:19,20,24; 33:9-11; 34:5; Numb 9:15-22; Ps 105:39). The pillar of cloud and fire was, first of all, the token of God's presence with them, and the assurance that He Who had brought them out of Egypt would bring them in to the Promised Land. This is the amazing reality throughout the story. Israel's history shows many ups and downs, many murmurings, failures and declensions, rebellions and backslidings, and God had perforce to chastise and rebuke them, smiting them with plagues and serpents and enemies, but He never left them. He is a covenant-keeping God, and day and night, in darkness and in light, His presence was always assured to them.

56) 13:20-22

By the same token (see the previous note) the pillar was a guarantee of His shelter and protection. The reference in Ps 105:39 seems to indicate that the cloud was a shade to them from the excessive heat of the day, while Exo 14:19, 20 reveals the marvellous activity of the cloud coming between them and their enemies, to protect them in the hour of danger from foes seen and unseen. One wonders whether David was thinking of the pillar when he wrote Ps 121. God was certainly the keeper of His people, their shade upon their right hand. Nor is it a far step from this to the moving New Testament picture in Matt 23:37, "How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings...." The protecting love of God is fierce and tender, rugged and gentle, and in Christ this is all ours. Blessed are they that put their trust in Him.

57) 13:20-22

The pillar was also the assurance of right leading and guiding for Israel. He led them by the right way (Ps 107:7) - it was not always the expected way, or even the shortest way. With God to lead, however, the longest way round proves to be the shortest way home. Nor need we, as Christians, ever be without that guidance, for Christ undertakes to guide His children and lead them in the way they should go. But more. It was in the cloud, and out from the cloud, that God spoke to Israel, revealing His Name to them (34:5), showing Himself to be the long-suffering, merciful, gracious God, keeping mercy for thousands. It was from the cloud that God spoke forth the Ten Commandments. It was a source of revelation. But above all, it proved to be a place of communion. When the cloud came down upon the Tabernacle (33:9-11) the Lord spoke with Moses and communed with him 'face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend'. This is the ultimate possibility of the pillar of cloud and fire. This is indeed the whole aim in God's drawing near to men in redeeming love - not merely that they might be forgiven, not merely that they might receive newness of life, or even created anew in the image of God, but that they might be restored to fellowship with Him. Jesus lived and died to make this possible, and lives at God's right hand to make it real to all who believe in Him. And as with Israel, so also with us; the gateway into this and every other blessing of the cloud is obedience. "Ye are my friends", said Jesus, "if ye do whatsoever I have commanded you" (John 15:14), and His presence, protection, guidance, revelation, and fellowship, all depend alike on our willingness to give Him the obedience of our hearts.

58) 14:1-9

The direction in which the children of Israel were now commanded to turn is not certain - either southwards from their south-east course, which would take them to Etham and lead them over the wilderness of Shur, or northwards, towards the direction of what is now Port Said. But either way, it was a turn back into the teeth of the enemy, so to speak. There is deep significance in this. It tells us that the Israelites were not so much in flight from Pharaoh as on the initiative against him. It is almost as if the Lord were 'dangling' Israel before Pharaoh's eyes to entice him out to battle. There is something very grim about this, and something the enemies of the Lord should learn to fear. When God deals with them in such earnest the game is up. From the human point of view one would have thought that after the terrible judgment on the firstborn of Egypt Pharaoh would have recognised the sovereignty and superiority of God and let well alone, but doubtless the strength of his heart's perversity drove him on to this final attempt on the people of God. But there is something else also that must be said. What we see here is God drawing out evil into the open, giving it its full rein in order that He might finally destroy it. It is this that serves to explain the continued and seemingly inexplicable persistence of evil in human experience long after we may think that God should have dealt with it. He is not slow to exercise His power; it is rather that He is patiently giving evil its head so as to draw it out of all its lurking hiddenness and deception, and thereby deal with it at its roots and put it away forever. We may surely trust Him to make a final end of all that opposes His good and perfect will.

59) 14:10-12

The children of Israel did not, however, appreciate the Divine strategy, or see that they were the 'bait' in God's hands by which He was to lure Pharaoh to his final destruction. All they were conscious of was the apparent danger that confronted them. And they panicked. They cried out in bitter complaint against Moses and against the Lord, all faith gone, and hearts well-nigh paralysed by fear and craven cowardice. From the human point of view, it could be said that they had good cause to panic, for were they not hemmed in on all sides with no hope of escape from their former overlords? Yes, but - crisis reveals character, and they were shown up as having been little impressed after all by the previous demonstrations of power by the hand of God. Should they have been so devastated by terror after the miracles of the plagues and the Passover? Paul says, "Experience worketh hope" (Rom 5:4). Should it not have done so for them? There is an interesting and significant commentary on this kind of issue in Psalm 3 where, in the contrast between the opening verses and those that follow, the emotional pressures that threaten to engulf the Psalmist are displaced by the rational appraisal of the facts of the situation from the Divine point of view - that is, he sought rationally to recognise the spiritual position in which he stood and to allow these spiritual facts to lay hold of him and control him and his thinking, and lead him into the victory of God. If Israel had done this, and argued from the reality of God's mighty power manifested on their behalf in the Passover, they would have concluded that it was irrational for them to doubt Him now, in a situation which after all was no more impossible than their previous oppression and captivity had been. In times of stress and emergency, what we need supremely to do is to think rationally, and apply spiritual logic to our circumstances. That is the way to confidence and peace.

60) 14:13-18

Over against the panic of Israel there stood Moses, the man who was sure of God. And he said, "Fear not, stand still..." which, it has been suggested, means, not "Wait and see", but "Stop and think". It is not that Moses had 'inside' knowledge of what God was intending to do - this could hardly have been the case, and to suggest so is to detract from the magnificent calm of his faith in God - but rather, being sure of God, it was, for him, only a question of how God would accomplish His people's deliverance. There seems at first glance to be a contradiction between Moses' words to the people "Stand still..." and God's command to Moses, "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward", but it is only apparently so. In fact; the two commands refer to two different exercises of faith. In the spiritual life - and what Israel underwent that day was a spiritual test - we are to stand still in the sense of utterly trusting God for our salvation and all our help, and we are to go forward in that spirit of trust, obeying His lead in all things. (For an interesting and instructive parallel, see Galatians 5 where the command 'Stand fast' is followed by the injunction to 'Walk in the Spirit' without any sense of incongruity). For justification and deliverance, it is always a matter of standing still and seeing the salvation of the Lord, but for sanctification, for growth and progress in the Christian life it must ever be a matter of going forward in obedience to the will and command of God (cf Phil 3: 13, 14).

61) 14:13-18

We must pause for another day at these verses to reflect further on the superb illustration they give of the nature and operation of faith in the Christian life. Israel was shut up unto faith (Gal 3:23) by the circumstances that assailed her at this point. The geography of the place was said to have been rocky crags on the one side of them, and frowning Egyptian fortresses on the other side. Behind them were the pursuing hosts of Pharaoh, and in front of them the Red Sea, They were hemmed in on all sides, and when left, right, backwards and forwards are all impassable, the only other direction is upward, and it was thence that help came. It is in fact only when faith is left as the only alternative to despair and disaster that it can be truly born in the soul. The human heart has an almost unbelievable capacity for self-trust, and it is this that God has to shatter before He can bring men to rest themselves utterly on Himself. This is true of saving faith - how many false trusts have to be broken and done away with before a man will cast himself, forlorn and helpless, on the Rock of Ages! - and of every further expression of faith in the spiritual life. One recalls Paul's words in 2 Cor 1:8-10, where he speaks of having the sentence of death upon him that he might not trust in himself but in God. This is the true parallel in spiritual life to Israel's experience here. And advance in Christian things means nothing more or less than a repeated coming to this point, dying again and again to all self-trust in order to live unto God.

62) 14:19-22

These are dramatic verses, not only in the miracle of the sea being divided, but also in the interposition of the angel of God to protect His people. The pillar was no mere natural phenomenon but, as we see in 19, the dwelling place of the angel of the Lord, and it would seem that the movement of the angel from the front of the camp to the rear was the beginning of the fulfilment of 14. There is something very wonderful about that gesture, and one almost visualises the angelic sentinel towering between Egypt and Israel and saying, "Touch them if you dare". Nor is it difficult to see here an illustration of the protection that Christ, the great Angel of the Covenant gives to His people from the wrath that would otherwise engulf them. Did Israel but realise it that night (20) they were as safe from Pharaoh as if they had been on the other side of the Red Sea or in the Promised Land itself! As to the miracle of the parting of the waters, compare 21 with 16, to see that it was the rod of power and authority, symbolising the Divine enduement that wrought the amazing deliverance. Nor should we be over-concerned to seek explanations on the natural level which might make this miraculous happening seem a little more feasible to the modern mind. The God of nature, Who in the beginning divided the waters in creation (Gen 1: 7) is not so inept that He cannot on occasion manipulate them to suit His purposes and serve His people's safety. As we know from the Gospels (Mark 4:39) He is good at giving orders to the seas that He has made!

63) 14:23-31

Here is the final denouement of the tremendous and sustained conflict. God got Him honour upon Pharaoh and upon all his host (17). We best understand this final operation against the wicked king as a judicial enactment, the execution of the judgment pronounced at the Passover, the fulfilment of the sentence, for such it indeed was, and a lawless and wholly evil tyrant was brought to his deserved end. In 24 there is a notable and graphic description of how the Lord dealt with the enemies of Israel - He looked unto them through the pillar and troubled them. What volumes this speaks! The frown of the living God is a conception analogous to the still more terrible wrath of the Lamb mentioned in Revelation 6:16, and we doubt not that it dismayed and discomfited the Egyptians and spread confusion among them. This is something we may expect God to do when He begins to deal in earnest with those who oppose Him and harm His servants. Alas, it is sometimes only when it is too late to withdraw that His enemies see the extent of their folly. It was too late to come to this conclusion in the bed of the Red Sea when they had lost their chariot wheels, too late to recognise that the mighty Lord of Sabaoth was fighting against them. There could not have been a more complete rout and ruin than that effected by the hand of Moses when the rod once again came down to restore the waters to their appointed place. The words in 13, "The Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever," symbolise the completeness and finality of God's salvation, and the spiritual application is surely plain. This is what God seeks to do with our sins and the dark powers that tyrannise us. Let us think of the Cross, and know, as someone has said, that the sands of time are strewn with dead Egyptians, who once held the hearts and minds of men in thrall. And may it be so for our lives also.

64) 15:1-20

This passage records the triumph-song of Moses. It is the first song recorded in the Scriptures, and as such should have particular significance for us. It certainly has a great deal to teach us. But first, of all, we must deal with a problem that exercises some in the very thought of rejoicing over a downfall such as Pharaoh's was. Can it be right, or Christian, they ask, to exult in this way over such a judgment? Well, we must be quite clear that this is not something belonging to a primitive and barbarous age which later religious development in New Testament times regards as unthinkable. It is not without significance that the Book of Revelation uses the Song of Moses as the norm for its own rejoicing and triumph. (Rev 15:3). It is not wrong (how could it be?) to be glad when evil is vanquished; it could only be wrong if there could be no such thing as righteous judgment. But if the judgment of God is righteous, as it always is, then it is not only right to rejoice in it, but it would be wrong not to, for not to rejoice would be to take sides against God in His rejoicing. There is a Divine perspective from which it is seen that the destruction of evil is seen to be not only a necessity but something to exult in when it is accomplished. The full-throated rejoicing that rings throughout this song is neither vindictive nor unchristian, but in the truest sense spiritual. It is ironical that the moral values of our generation should have become so distorted as to make it seem that, in our objection to the idea of Divine judgment, we are more moral than God, and more kindhearted than He. We must beware of entertaining a secret sympathy with sinners in their sin.

65) 15:1-21

The song of Moses is a song celebrating the mighty acts of God in redemption. This is very significant for us, and we can learn a great deal from it. It tells us, for one thing, that redemption is the true basis of spiritual worship and no-one who has not tasted of God's wonderful redemption in Christ can really worship Him in spirit and in truth. Furthermore, it reminds us that true worship is objective, not subjective, centred on God and His mighty acts, not on our own subjective experience of Him. It is remarkable that the only reference throughout the song to the personal experience of Moses and the people is in 2; apart from this all the rest of the song looks outward. So great and wonderful a thing had happened that they were completely engrossed by it. It is the outgoing of the heart to the majesty and glory and greatness of God; they were taken out of themselves, and the glad and adoring and exultant response of their hearts was well-pleasing to Him. Nor should we forget that this torrent of adoring homage and praise came from a man who (4:10) complained to the Lord that he was not an eloquent man! Perhaps he was not, but when the heart is gripped and overwhelmed by the wonder of redeeming love something happens to a man's lips; they are touched with holy fire, and they cannot remain silent for long. "O Lord, open Thou my lips" cried David (Ps 51:15), "and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise". This is what happened to Moses, as it may also happen to us. The experience of Divine redemption does much to quicken human language, and raise it to dignity and beauty and magnificence. What the servant girl said to Peter in Pilate's Judgment Hall, "Thy speech betrayeth thee" is of wide application and is certainly relevant here. A man who has been gripped by the Everlasting Mercy in the deep places of his heart will speak, even in his casual, lightsome moments, in a certain way. There will never be anything tawdry or mean about his words; they will partake of the lofty stature and grandeur of that which commands his heart and soul.

66) 15:1-21

Another lesson that is underlined in this glad song, particularly in 3-12, is the realisation of the easy victory of God over His enemies, and its effortless and completeness. God does not find it a strain, nor is He hard-pressed, to set at nought those who oppose Him, There is a grim humour about 10, "Thou didst blow with Thy wind", as if to suggest that one breath was sufficient to puff them out of existence. After 12, the emphasis changes; up to this point in the song, Moses has been looking up, so to speak, looking to what God had done, but now at 13 he begins to look forward. Scholars prefer 'ledest forth' to 'hast led' here, and it is certainly true that the leading had not ended, but only begun, at this point in the story - for the next forty years they were to know the guiding Hand upon them. Thus, it is a forward look to the purpose of God in having so delivered them, namely their guidance into the Promised Land. We may ask, however, whether 14-16 did in fact come to pass. It is true that fear did possess these nations, yet they did oppose Israel, refusing them free passage. It may be, however, that the resistance came because Israel were so disobedient to God, and by their disobedience took so long to get to Canaan, that the fear and dread of them were dissipated. It is true in spiritual life that disobedience robs us of our testimony and influence, and we must remember that Israel's history was spiritual as well as material (cf 1 Cor 10). Finally, note "Thou shalt bring them in" in 17. This is the second act, so to speak, in redemption. God purposes a full redemption, not a half; He brings men out of bondage that He might bring them into freedom and into the blessing He has prepared for them.

67) 15:22-27

The story of Israel's experience at the waters of Marah is one which has many lessons to teach in relation to the spiritual life of the believer, and we must be patient to extract them for our good. And before we consider the details of the Divine succour provided them, we should pause to reflect that things were perhaps harder for the people than they need have been because they were not right with God. God had said to Moses in 14:15, "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward", but a 'going forward' that is fitful and partial, not to say almost unwilling, and liable to be halted at the first sign of difficulty, is hardly calculated to make for an exhilarating pilgrimage. Their hearts did not seem to be in it. It is possible to be doing all the right things, yet not be wholeheartedly committed to them, and this is why we often make heavy weather. The people were on trial, of course, on this occasion, and the Lord was proving them (25), but it matters a very great deal how and with what spirit we enter and face the trials of life. There is a low spirited, pusillanimous attitude, which makes it a foregone conclusion, almost before the trial starts, that a man will crumple as soon as the pressures begin to increase. He feels he has no fight left, but it is because he had so little fight in him to begin with. This is not the way to advance; we must brace ourselves, make our souls put on their Sunday clothes, and front the adverse circumstances with courage and determination. "We faint not", says the Apostle Paul (2 Cor 4:1).

68) 15:22-27

The bitter waters of Marah were encountered almost as soon as Israel's pilgrimage began, and this is surely meant to teach us that the spiritual life of God's people is never likely, nor meant, to be an easy one. One thinks of Bunyan's true insight in making Christian in the Pilgrim's Progress encounter the Hill Difficulty directly he moved on from the experience of pardon and rebirth at the Cross. The entire testimony of Scripture is that the Christian way is one that lays discipline and testing and trial on those who engage in it. It is true that there are always some who wish for an easy life, and who allow this wish to dominate everything else in life. This is how it was with some in Israel, and explains the constant spirit of murmuring among them which eventually led them, at the crucial moment on the borders of the Promised Land, to turn back when they might have entered in, and when they were well able to do so. This is a deadly dangerous attitude. To be unwilling to face the discipline of difficulty and hard times is to run contrary to the real essence of life. All great advances and discoveries in human culture, science or medicine are made in the face of the greatest difficulties and often after many failures, disappointments and discouragements. Why should it be thought that the spiritual life will be different, offering as it does the greatest discovery and prize of all? A spiritual life that costs nothing is worth nothing and will get us nowhere. (The New Testament parallel is found in the disciples' unwillingness to receive Jesus' teaching about taking up the Cross to follow Him. They wanted an easier way).

69) 15:22-27

The Lord showed Moses a tree, we are told, which when cast into the waters, made them sweet. By this we are meant to understand that there is a power in God that can make the bitterest trial on earth a sweet and gracious blessing to the soul. This can, and needs to be applied in the widest possible sense. Every dispensation of a mysterious Providence can be included. Sometimes we meet with trials of various kinds, sorrow, bereavement, temptation, a difficult and painful decision, or the challenge of a continuing and protracted discipline, the burden of worry and perplexity, or a task that seems beyond our strength - all these can prove to be our Marahs, and often the stream is bitter and we cannot drink of it. But there is a tree that can make Marah's streams flow sweet to the taste. The Cross, as an old Puritan saint once said, is made of sweet wood, and those who take it up find that it transforms experience from bitterness into sweetness. But what does it mean for us, to take the healing tree into our Marahs? It means accepting the challenge of the hard way in the spirit of submission and acceptance, as our great Exemplar did, when He took the bitter cup in the Garden of Gethsemane and drank it to the dregs, for our sakes. To relate thus our dark experiences to the Cross, is to take into them its healing. It is not something that can well be described, but rather known only as we pass through it; but it cannot mean less than this: in the midst of the excruciating pain and the desolating sense of alone-ness in that Marah experience, there sweeps over the soul also a fierce tenderness and sweetness and solace, and an unfathomable sense of aching joy and peace and even fulfilment that passes all comprehension, as if a wonderfully soothing oil were being poured gently on a raw flesh-wound. This is the force of 26, "I am the Lord that healeth thee". A cross taken up at the behest of the Saviour not only does not harm us, though we naturally shrink from it, but rather brings healing and wholeness to the entire being as nothing else can. The Lord of the Cross is the great Healer, and that is why those who bear in their bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ are men and women who have added conscious vigour and vitality, and spiritual power and maturity to their experience.

70) 15:22-27

After Marah, the children of Israel came to Elim, where they found shelter from the heat of the day, and abundant supplies of fresh water. There are two thoughts here that call for comment with reference to the spiritual life. The first is that God in His mercy sees to it that His pilgrims are well-provided for by the way, and that although they are often called upon to pass through bitter trials, they will never be without an oasis in the desert in which to find refreshment for their weariness and woe. After Christ's temptations in the wilderness, the devil left Him for a season; after the persecution that followed Stephen's martyrdom, the churches had rest throughout all Judea and Galilee.

It is well for us to remember, when passing through our Marahs, that Elim is just along the way, with its wells of water and shady palms. God is very liberal in the provision of His means of grace. The second thought is that while in the Old Testament story Elim follows Marah, in the deeper experience of the New the two often stand side by side. For Marah, in the sense of taking up the Cross, is never simply a passing phase, but a constant factor in spiritual life. Since, therefore, we never leave Marah behind, so likewise Elim is ever with us. There is a hidden place of calm repose where the cross-bearing believer may for ever remain, drinking fully of the refreshments of God. It is significant also that God revealed Himself by a new name at Marah (26). It is not often when the sun is shining that we learn new things about God, but in the trials and afflictions of life. And it is surely abundantly worth while passing through these if in doing so we learn more of Him.

71) 16:1-8

We may suppose that some time has elapsed since Israel's experience at Marah and Elim, as we can gather from the dating given in 1b. But there is a certain significance in the fact that here, so soon, is another instance of their murmuring spirit (in the next chapters there are numerous others!) We might be excused for supposing that they were murmuring all the way along this pilgrim journey, and this in fact is the point that is being made - not that in the literal sense this was so, but that it was undoubtedly their prevailing characteristic. And part of the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to show us in perspective the over-all pattern of Israel's experience. This is how the Spirit of God sees men - in perspective - and He holds up a mirror to us here as a wise precaution, for it is certainly true that this is something that can develop in us without our becoming aware of it. A man can fall into a complaining spirit almost unconsciously until people around him say of him, "He is always complaining". Other faults and failings than murmuring fall into this category too, and it is well for us to have a good, honest look at ourselves in the mirror of the Word as a healthy corrective to attitudes which may have developed unawares in us (though, alas, obvious to all around us!). The marvel is that God was so patient with them in it all, and so unaccountably gracious in providing for their needs. And this provision serves but to set in clear outline their ingratitude. David's words in Ps 103:2 are always a timely exhortation in this connection: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits". But the fleshpots of Egypt were destined to trouble Israel again and again (3); they had been delivered from the house of bondage, it is true, but Egypt was still in their hearts. Environment is but one factor in the human situation, and a change of abode does not mean a change of heart.

72) 16:1-8

Another point that must be noted here is that Moses and Aaron became the butt of Israel's complaining. But Moses is shrewd as well as faithful in pointing out the real issue to them; their quarrel was not with him, but with the Lord. One recalls the trenchant words of C.S. Lewis written to explode the fallacy of supposing there is any difference of view between the teaching of Paul and that of Jesus. He says, in words of wide application: "In the earlier history of every rebellion there is a stage at which you do not yet attack the King in person. You say: "The King is all right. It is his ministers who are wrong. They misrepresent him and corrupt all his plans - which, I'm sure, are good plans if only the Ministers would let them take effect".... And the first victory consists of beheading a few ministers: only at a later stage do you go on and behead the King himself". This is also something that is worth an honest look by those who react to and resist the ministry of the Word. It is easy to criticise the man, but this should not be allowed to deceive anyone. It certainly does not deceive God! The truly astounding thing, however, in all this, is that in face of the bitter, peevish spirit of the people, God came to them with messages of grace and promise of provision (4, 7, 8). Nothing could magnify the meaning of grace more beautifully than this - undeserved love and favour. God loves us not because we are lovable, but because He is love. This is the unaccountable God of the Scriptures.

73) 16:9-10

There are different ways of interpreting the 'theophany' described in 10. That it was a special and unusual appearance of the glory of the Lord we need not doubt, and in face of the graciousness of the provision that was about to be made for Israel, it may very well be construed as having been meant as an encouragement to the people, and an assurance that in their time of need God was still with them. On the other hand, however, it seems clear that the Lord was displeased with them for their murmuring, and the manifestation of the glory may have been meant as a rebuke to them. But there is another possibility. Israel had challenged Moses and Aaron in murmuring against them, and God is ever concerned to vindicate His servants against such maligning; it may well be therefore that we should understand these verses in this sense. We shall have other instances of this Divine vindication throughout the story of Exodus, and this should perhaps serve to remind us that God has a special care for His servants to support them and take their side against the oppositions of evil men. This is something that will bear thinking about. There is, after all, the verse in the Psalms, "Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm" (Ps 105:15).

74) 16:11-15

Commentators tell us that it was a frequent occurrence in the springtime for large flights of quails to come eastwards over the Red Sea after their migration to Africa for the winter. Exhausted after a long flight, they would drop to the ground as soon as they reached land, when it would then be easy to capture and kill them. It seems likely that this is what happened on this occasion. But it is the timing of this bountiful provision that is the point here, and this that constitutes the miracle. The manna, however, that came down with the dew, has no possibility of 'natural' explanation. The word 'manna' comes from two Hebrew words, which may be rendered either 'What is this' or 'This is a gift'. The fact is, they did not know what it was, except that it had come from God. There was mystery about it, and there is a sense in which there is always mystery about the gifts of God. This is supremely so in the gift of all gifts, His Son Jesus Christ, for the Incarnation is essentially a mystery. Nor must we think it fanciful to speak of Christ in relation to the manna that was provided in the wilderness, for Paul himself interprets it in 1 Cor 10:3 with reference to Christ. He has always been the bread of life to His people (see also John 6:31ff). The Psalmist said of the manna, "He satisfied them with the bread of heaven" (Ps 105:40), and this is surely how we must interpret its meaning. It was a kind of sacramental meal, in which not only their bodies, but also their souls, were fed with the bounty of God. It is in the truest sense a type of Christ, the Bread of life, given for the life of the world.

75) 16:16-21

There were two stipulations with regard to the gathering of the manna. One was that the people were to gather enough for one day only at a time, and nothing was to be left over until the next day; the other was that on the sixth day they were to gather two days' supply, for there would be none to gather on the Sabbath. There are lessons here of deep significance. For one thing, God was intent on teaching His people to depend upon Him day by day, and to live one day at a time. One Jewish Rabbi says in this connection, in answer to the question why the Lord did not give the Israelites enough for a year at a time, "I will answer with a parable. Once there was a king who had a son to whom he gave a yearly allowance on the same day each year. But it soon happened that the day on which the allowance was due was the only day of the year when the father saw his son; and so the king changed his plan and gave his son daily supplies and then the son visited his father every morning. Thus did God deal with Israel". This orthodox Jewish interpretation is, of course, perfectly right. It was a lesson of daily dependence that God was intent on teaching His people. This very aptly illustrates the truth that the spiritual life is a present reality, not a future anxiety. The essence of salvation is that we are saved from the burdens of the past and the anxieties of the future in order that we might live fully in the present, trusting in the sufficiency of the Divine provision. To have gathered two days' supply, as some did (20) was evidence of lack of trust, and this is what God was concerned to correct in His people (see Matt 6:25ff, especially 32).

76) 16:22-31

The persistence of Israel's perverse attitude is sorrowful to behold. Not only did they gather manna for more than one day at a time when they should not, but they failed to gather two days' supply for the Sabbath when they should. Here was a double unbelief, a double unwillingness to submit themselves to the commandment of the Lord. They were trusting in merely fleshly considerations, and expecting heavenly, spiritual provision to operate in accordance with merely natural laws. But God's provision is conditioned by His directions, not our own natural assumptions, and it is surely wisdom to pay heed to what He says (28). The fundamental distinction placed between the Sabbath and other days is a salutary reminder to Israel of their separation unto God, and it is significant to notice that the day is a 'Sabbath unto the Lord'. It is His day, not ours, and important to Him before it is blessed to His people. It is His pleasure, before ours, that is paramount in the keeping of it. This is the real heart of the Sabbath question; it is a day when the Lord takes special pleasure in His people (Ps 149:4), a day which He devotes exclusively to taking and finding pleasure in them; therefore, in neglecting or violating its sanctity, we are not only hurting ourselves, but grieving Him and depriving Him of the pleasure for which He created us. This is the real meaning and force of the fourth commandment.

77) 16:32-36

These verses must surely belong to a later date than the rest of the chapter which they conclude, as they assume the existence of the Tabernacle and the Ark of Testimony (34). They complete the story of the provision of manna, with the twofold indication that an omer of it was preserved down the generations as a perpetual memorial, and that it continued throughout the forty years of Israel's pilgrimage until they reached the borders of the Promised Land. The spiritual message here is surely plain: it is that right at the heart of Israel's worship - the Tabernacle, and the Ark of the Covenant - there was this reminder of God's bountiful provision for the needs of His people. So also, at the heart of Christian worship there is the Lord's Table with its reminder of an all-sufficient provision for our salvation, in the symbols of Christ's broken Body and shed blood. But we may also see a further symbolism here: the Ark of the Testimony was so-called because it contained the tables of the Law, the words of God's covenant with His people, and the association of ideas as between the manna and the law is deeply suggestive. It is in fact the Word of God that is the bread of life to those who believe in Him, and it is through the Word, by the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, that the sufficiency of Christ's atoning work is mediated to us in such a way that our souls are fed and nourished. This is something that we also must never forget, but keep as a perpetual memorial before us. When we do, we shall prove, as Israel did, that the supply will never fail us, but will sustain us every day and all the days until we ourselves reach the Promised Land.

78) 17:1-7

One's first impression on reading this passage is to be conscious of its similarity to the incidents we have already studied in the two previous chapters, the provision of manna and the sweetening of the waters of Marah. We ask ourselves therefore why this should be recorded, and the same lesson repeated so to speak, again and again. The answer is inescapable; it was because Israel was so slow to learn (as we also so often are) what God was intent on teaching. This is an important consideration. God, as a wise Teacher and Instructor 'repeats' lessons, when His people fail to learn them the first time. Not only so, it is often necessary to repeat them because even when we may think we have learnt them, we fall back into old mistakes repeatedly, showing that our learning has been at best fitful and superficial. But there is something even deeper to be considered. It is that one principal purpose of the inspired writer is to show us the ultimate failure of this people to rise to God's high destiny for them. A people who have to be pacified and reassured at every turn are not likely to be of much use to God. And in the end, this particular generation of Israel became castaway, and left to spend its years in the wilderness, without ever entering the Promised Land. And we are meant to see that it was this perverse, murmuring spirit that finally led to their downfall. The story of Kadesh Barnea in Numb 14 is the climax to which such incidents as this before us eventually led.

79) 17:1-7

From the purely human standpoint, of course, Israel had their complaint, for they were up against it. But they had forgotten they had been singled out for a particular destiny. Apart from God's dealings with them they would have remained an unknown slave race, as has been said, "with neither identity nor character, and indeed with no purpose or significance in the world". And here is the crucial point: in times of testing, the temptation is very real to want to be left alone, and left to oneself, rather than face the cost of being made something of by God. One recalls the people of Gadara, who prayed Christ to depart from their coasts (Mark 5:17), and the magistrates of Philippi who begged Paul and Silas to depart out of their city (Acts 16:39), because their presence was too disturbing and fraught with too critical a possibility. But we should also learn to trace this attitude to its proper source in the powers of darkness. It was an unclean spirit crying out in a man (Mark 1:24) that said, "Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth...?" Now it is the fact that God takes us up and seeks to make something of us that is the explanation of the difficulties and pressures that beset our way. He proves us, tests us, and moulds us. This is why life is far more turbulent after conversion than before. It is the sign of the new dignity conferred upon us, and we should be of good courage, not cast down and disaffected.

80) 17:1-7

The miracle itself, by which water was made to gush out of the smitten rock, was wonderful enough in itself, apart from any significance it could have had for Israel. It underlines of course the sheer grace of God, in making such a bountiful provision in face of the bitter murmuring of the people; but it does more. It teaches a 'sacramental' lesson, in the same sense that, although the water from the rock quenched their physical thirst, it also was a spiritual experience to them, being the material symbol of a spiritual reality behind it. Paul makes this very clear in his interpretation of the passage in 1 Cor 10, - 'that Rock was Christ'. The smitten Rock speaks of a crucified Saviour whose wounds are the healing of the nations. It is perhaps significant that it should be in the Corinthian epistle that Paul should make mention of this story, for the Corinthians were the counterpart in New Testament times of Israel in the Old, with their murmuring against their God-appointed leader and their carnal desires and attitudes. And what Moses did in symbol with Israel we see actually fulfilled in Paul's dealings with the Corinthians, for he confronted them with the Cross and challenged them to allow its disciplines to touch the deep places in their lives. There is little doubt that the real need of both the Corinthians and the Israelites was to allow the ploughshare of the Cross to go deep into their carnal hearts, to slay the carnality and self-will there. The spirit of murmuring can be done away only by crucifixion, and the association of living water with the Cross reminds us that real blessings in spiritual life is not known apart from it.

81) 17:8-16

There are two ways of interpreting Israel's encounter with Amalek, and both are valid in the insight they give into spiritual issues, although we hardly see that they can both at the same time apply to Israel. One is to say that Amalek followed the murmuring, the other that Amalek followed the blessing. Let us look at these in turn. Israel, it is clear, were at this time out of joint with God, their hearts disaffected against Him and His appointed servant, Moses, and such a spirit certainly gives place to the devil, in individuals and in fellowships alike, and opens the door to his unwelcome attentions. And once he makes his way in, it can prove a very costly and painful matter before he is eventually dislodged again, as Moses was to prove here. What we must learn is that when we withdraw ourselves from fellowship with God through our sin we also withdraw ourselves from His protection. We ask for trouble, and we get it. This is certainly what Israel experienced at Rephidim.

82) 17:8-16

On the other hand, however, it is just as true that the blessing of God upon a people draws the attention of the enemy. After Sunday comes Monday morning. After the exalted experience at Jordan, Christ was led out into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. After the glory of Pentecost came the fires of persecution. After the amazing outpouring of the Spirit that attended Paul's missionary endeavours came from the enemies of the Cross seeking to undo his work. In face of such satanic counterattacks on the work of the Lord there can be only one expedient - prayer. It is this that the latter part of the passage stresses in its account of the intercession of Moses. This is the weapon which is mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds and the spreading of confusion in the ranks of Amalek. The battle with Amalek is rich in spiritual lessons for us. In the first place there were two levels on which it was, and had to be, fought. There was the visible, material level, on which the hosts of Amalek had to be met, sword with sword, and vanquished on the field of battle; but there was also another level, on which Moses recognised that he had to do battle in the unseen, and lay hold on God for victory. Moses went up into the mount with the rod of God in his hand. It is difficult, in view of the obvious spiritual application of these verses, not to think of Moses in prayer on the mount, although it does not say that this is what he was doing. As a matter of fact, he held up the rod of God, as a standard-bearer holds up a standard in the midst of battle, as if to rally the unseen hosts of the Lord to the help of the Israelites, and to claim the mighty advocacy of the angel of the covenant.

83) 17:8-16

In the work of the gospel the battle must be fought on these two levels also. There is the level of the preaching and the hearing of the Word, but there is also the raising of the standard, so to speak, claiming the mighty advocacy of the Son at God's right hand against the powers of darkness that blinds the minds of them that believe not. If the rod signifies anything so far as Moses is concerned, it must surely represent all his being's ransomed powers taken up at the behest of God and used in His Name. The power of a consecrated life in the place of prayer is truly incalculable; it can bring water out of the rock, turn stones into bread, and banish the powers of darkness from the lives of men. But even the mighty Moses' hands grew weak and faint; it is a costly business to win battles for God in prayer, and natural weariness takes its inevitable toll. This is precisely where fellowship comes in. Moses needed Aaron and Hur to hold up his weary hands, so as to keep them steady till the going down of the sun. Here is a deep and challenging lesson for those who are not called to be leaders of God's work but rather to be the support and strength of those who are, in the deep inner fellowship and harmony that those know who have shared and assumed the discipline of the Cross.

84) 18:1-12

Reference has already been made to 1-5 in the Notes on 4:18-31. It is made clear here that Moses had sent back his wife and family to Jethro. This circumstance raises in a very real form the question of 'help meets' really being a help, rather than a hindrance, when the service of the Lord is concerned. It was suggested in these earlier readings that part at least of the explanation for the delay in Moses' departure for Egypt was the fact that his wife did not share his enthusiasm and dedication for the service of the Lord. It may be asked whether such a partner is either a 'help' or 'meet' (suitable) for a man of God. Moses' meeting with Jethro here is instructive from several points of view. On the one hand, here is a man who does not belong to the chosen people, and is not within the covenant (although in fact he shared a common descent with Moses from Abraham, through Keturah, Abraham's second wife, Gen 25:1, 2), yet as soon as he heard of the Lord's deliverance of His people from Egypt, he made instant response and 'rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel' (9), and acknowledged the Lord to be the true God (11). He was obviously a kindred spirit, spiritually at one with Moses, and his glad-hearted reaction to Moses' news typifies the response that many honourable and devout people, who have never heard the real gospel of grace, make when it first breaks upon their consciousness. To them it is like cold water to a thirsty soul. We may note something else, however. It was Moses' recounting of God's victory that brought the conviction to Jethro's heart that the Lord was God. This is the germ of New Testament proclamation - the telling forth of the mighty acts of God, and this bears its own self-authenticating witness in the hearts of those who hear. And, on any estimate, Moses had something to tell!

85) 18:13-18

Here is an incident full of instruction for the spiritual life. We see Moses sitting judging the people, dealing with their problems from morning till night, problems, difficulties and disputes which had arisen during the course of their pilgrim journey. We must suppose that this is not merely one isolated instance, but an illustration of what the man of God was repeatedly called upon to do. And Jethro, looking on, realises that this is much too heavy a burden for one man to bear alone. His words in 18 "Thou wilt surely wear away" show a real understanding of the situation and a basic compassion of heart that reveal him to be a man of real spiritual stature, and a godsend to Moses at this particular juncture. The incident has much to teach us, in several ways. It recognises, for one thing, that problems do arise in the spiritual life that call for wise pastoral advice and instruction, and that people need such pastoral care. It is no answer to this that we ought to depend on God alone for guidance and advice and counsel in the problems and difficulties of life, for to seek the help of God's appointed servants (who after all are given to the Church for the 'equipment of the saints', Eph 4:11ff) in our needs is not to depart from utter dependence on Him, but simply to make use of His appointed means for giving us help. To be unwilling to do so is more likely to reveal a secret pride and a spirit of self-expression and independence far removed from the spiritual dedication and 'far-ben-ness' it claims to represent. But God's servants are only human, and this sort of ministry takes its inevitable toll of spiritual, nervous and physical energy. This ought to be remembered with the same understanding as was shown by Jethro here.

86) 18:19-27

A useful parallel to this delegation of authority by Moses is the story in Acts 6 which records the appointment of the first deacons in the New Testament church, and serves as an eloquent commentary on the meaning and significance of the Old Testament counterpart. It is clear that Jethro was of the opinion, after seeing Moses sit through that long and exhausting day, that a good many of the problems did not really need Moses to solve them, and that someone else with appropriate experience and authority could have attended to them just as well it is just as clear that, although there was certainly no thought of Jethro rebuking Moses on the issue, he was nevertheless the mouthpiece of the Lord on this occasion, to warn Moses about his real priorities. "Be thou for the people God-ward" (19). This in fact was the conclusion the apostles themselves came to about their own situation: "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word". This they regarded as their priority; it was what they were 'for'. It is in fact one of the dangers of the Christian ministry that the tyranny of many inconsequential tasks laid upon God's servants sometimes obscures, and indeed prevents them from fulfilling, their real calling as servants of the Word. It is not that the other things are not important; many of them are. The point that is being made is that they are not their work, but others', and the others must fulfil them with all their might. Moses accepted the advice, and set about appointing men to share with him in the burdens he bore. And what a standard he set (21)! Not gifts, but grace, was the criterion; the ability referred to was moral not intellectual or social - men who feared God, men of truth, hating covetousness, men of character and integrity. God grant that this will ever be the standard for us.

87) 19:1-6

This chapter and the next bring us to a high point in God's dealings with His people, the giving of the Law at Sinai, and there are issues of fundamental importance that must be grasped, if a true understanding of Israel's experience is to be possible. In coming to Sinai, Moses had returned to the place where God has first met with him (see 3:12). When we compare the earlier chapter with this, it seems to become clear that right from the outset of Israel's pilgrimage Moses had had this one object in view, namely to get to Sinai, and to the rendezvous appointed by God. This is the significance of 3, which tells how Moses went up into the mount without any express command from God. He did not need any express directive to do so, for had not God already said that He would meet with him there? It was as if Moses were saying, "Lord, here am I. Thou didst say Thou wouldst meet with me here. I have accomplished the first task. What next wilt Thou have me to do? Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth". What God did say to him (4-6) is central to a true grasp of the significance and purpose of the Law that was about to be given to the people. The emphasis is first of all on what God had done for them in delivering them from Egypt, and it is on the basis of this that the summons to obedience is given. It is hardly possible to over-estimate the importance of this; everything in our understanding of the Old Testament as a whole depends upon it. For it means that the message of the Old Testament is not "This do and thou shalt live", but "I have given you life (in redeeming you from Egypt), therefore this is how I require you to live, this is how a redeemed people should live". The Law, in other words, was to be the expression in the people's lives of the salvation of God, not the condition of that salvation.

88) 19:1-6

It is worth pausing for another day at these verses to consider particularly 4-6. The picture in 4 is especially graphic, and the nature of the metaphor underlines not only the fierce tenderness of the Divine love - with what gentleness does the eagle care for its young, and with what devastating swiftness would it retaliate against any interference with them! - but also the purpose God had for them, for the eagle teaches its young to soar to the heights. In view of all the testings and disciplines Israel had passed through, and were to, following this, it may well be that there is a suggestion here, in using such an illustration, that these were, and were to be, used by the Lord in teaching His people how to rise above circumstances in the strength He could give them. In the light of Israel's subsequent history, 5 is all the more moving and sad, for they fell so far short of what they were meant to be, and could have been, had they obeyed the voice of God. They were to have been a people unto Himself, His peculiar treasure, and in such a blessed relationship of filial obedience, to have been a kingdom of priests which, amongst other things was to have meant a gospel ministry among the nations of the world, becoming a light to lighten the Gentiles. When they failed in this - and they summed up all their long history of failure and rebellion in crucifying the Son of God - the New Testament Church displaced them in the purposes of God. And herein lies a lesson for the Church today; for it is only a holy people, set apart unto God, that can fulfil the function of a kingdom of priests. There is no other way to be a light to the Gentiles.

89) 19:7-15

There are two points to note here. First, there is the response of the people in 8 to the word of the Lord recorded in the previous verses. In view of all that follows we may well be tempted to agree with the commentators who say that this could have only been a facile and superficial reaction lacking in seriousness. And yet, the Lord seemed to take them at their word, and we should realise that in fact this is the only possible response anyone can make to the coming of the Word of God. The critical and all-important matter is the implementing of it. It was within their power to do so, as it is within ours. The second point relates to the preparation of the people. Two things are stressed, the need for personal sanctification and the danger of presumption. As to the first, they were not only to be cleansed (outwardly and inwardly) - this is symbolised by the ceremonial washing of their clothes - but also separated from the highest and best in natural relationships (15) and thus separated unto God. As to the second, the emphasis is on the holiness of the Divine love. Israel must learn - as we also must - that the majesty of God is a terrible thing, never to be regarded lightly or presumed upon in any way. The sublime language of the Shorter Catechism in the answer about the nature of God, "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable, in its being, power, wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness and truth" is thought by some to be defective because it does not include any mention of love; but this is not because it was forgotten or discounted but because these other attributes are necessary to set the Divine love in its full light and perspective. Our God is a consuming fire, even in His love. How needful for such a reminder today!

90) 19:16-19

According to promise (11) God manifested Himself on the third day, in an awesome demonstration of majesty and glory. We should compare this passage with the divinely inspired comment on it in Heb 12:18 ff. In making the contrast between the old and the new, however, the Apostle does not mean to suggest that when the old covenant is superseded such a disclosure of the Divine majesty is nullified as an experience for the Church. It is a misunderstanding of the contrast between the two covenants to suppose that that should ever change. Indeed, the need for the recovery of such a sense of the holiness of God is very great in our time. What do we suppose that Pentecost was for the first disciples? Was there not fear, as well as joy, in their experience? Think of the terror of the Damascus Road encounter or of John's on the Isle of Patmos. One has only to recall to mind the history of revival movements in the past two or three centuries to realise that the brooding of the Spirit of God has always produced this overwhelming sense of awe and fear and wonder. There are some things that the replacement of the old covenant by the new does not change, and the unchanging majesty of God is first among them. The trumpets sounding forth on the mount are doubtless those to be heard at the coming of Christ (1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:52), and this association of ideas is some indication of the cardinal importance of the giving of the Law in the economy of God. It was undoubtedly an event of the greatest magnitude.

91) 19:10-25

The burden of these verses is the insistence on the unapproachableness of the Divine holiness. It almost seems as if Moses, on being commanded to go down again to charge the people (21) against breaking through unto the Lord to gaze, and thus perish, protests to the Lord that they had already been well warned about this, and that it was not necessary to do so again. But God knows our hearts better than we do ourselves, and realises the propensity within us for carnal presumption and irreverence. It may be that He could see, as Moses could not, hidden attitudes of resentment among the people and the priests (24) that they should have been excluded from the holy ground, and were even then tempted to break through and gaze. The events following the giving of the Law, particularly the tragic episode of the golden calf, show how needful this repeated warning was, and how far the people were from a reverent and submissive spirit. It is only the pure in heart that can see, or gaze upon, God, nor does He will to disclose Himself to carnal curiosity. It is salutary for us to be confronted with this attitude, in a day when entrance into the Divine presence is made with a casualness that sometimes amounts to irreverent intrusion, as if God were our chum, not our King. If God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable, in His being, power, wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness and truth, how should we suppose that we can presume upon such majesty?

92) 20:1

There are two further points in relation to the significance of the law that need to be considered before dealing with the commandments themselves. The first is this: Before the Law was formally given, what was the situation in Israel, and on what basis were moral judgments made? The answer to this can only be that they had the Law written in their conscience. There is a light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Since the Fall, however, that light has become distorted; sin has marred the writing of God on the hearts of men, thus necessitating another writing of the Law on tables of stone, standing over against the life of man, confronting them with the holy will of God. The second point is: If the Law was not meant to be a way of salvation, then what was it meant to be? Paul answers this question in Gal 3:19 where he says that "it was added because of transgressions", that is, in relation to the fact of sin. What does this mean? To answer this we must remember that God's supreme purpose in His dealings with mankind is to rid the world of sin, through His appointed Redeemer. But men do not look for a Redeemer until they feel their need of One, that is to say until they become conscious of sin. But sin has clouded men's eyes, and made them insensitive to its seriousness. Therefore the first need is to bring in something that will reveal sin to men. Thus God gave the Law, for by the Law is the knowledge of sin (Rom 3:20). It is when men try in earnest to fulfil the Divine law that they realise how far short they fall, and that they therefore need a Saviour to do for them what they can never do for themselves. The Law is therefore our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ (Gal 3:24). This is the deepest significance of Exodus 20.

93) 20:1-2

The commandments given by God to Moses on the mount are ten in number, the first four concerning man's relation to God and his duty to Him, and the remaining six man's relation to his fellows (compare the similar division of the Lord's Prayer in Matt 6:9-13). We are surely meant to learn from this order that when a man honours God, and His Name, and His Day, and worships Him with heart and soul, he will not violate the other commandments. The first commandment, as indeed is the case with the others that follow, does not stand in isolation by itself, but in relation to what God has done in His mighty work of redeeming the people from Egypt. Grace is therefore first, and obedience is required as the necessary response to that grace. In this respect, it corresponds to the claim that Paul makes in Romans 12: 1, 2 for consecration of life based on the mercies of God revealed in the Gospel. Obedience to God is something that a redeemed people owe to Him as their reasonable service. It is this fact that helps us to see that the Ten Commandments constitute a law for all men, not merely for the people of Israel. God lays superlative claims on all mankind because in Jesus Christ God loved a world, and gave Him for the life of the world. Nor does God have two standards, one for those who believe in Him, and another for those who do not. His tender mercy is over all His work, and so also, therefore, are the demands of His law.

94) 20:3

There is a sense in which the first commandment - "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me" - includes all the others within itself, and indeed sums up the whole meaning of the gospel. For it tells us that God must be first, and be given the glory in men's lives. And this is precisely what the gospel is designed to achieve, and it alone can. It was for this that He came, and lived and died, and rose again and was given a name that is above every name, the Lord Jesus. And it is far from the mark to think of this commandment with its reference to 'other gods' as speaking of primitive tribal deities, and therefore being in its primary intention a mere parochial warning to a particular people to adhere to Jahweh. Even on the level of tribal deities, however, we must remember that dark powers stood behind the idols of wood and stone. Nor can we forget Paul's own words on the subject, "There be gods many and lords many" (1 Cor 8:5). What is a man's god? It is that which has the central place in his heart and life, and if this is so, then there are gods many and lords many today also, The words of the hymn,

"Is there a thing beneath the sun
That strives with thee my heart to share?"

...are a sufficient indication of how wide and extensive our idolatry can be. Think of the rich young ruler, whose money was his god (Luke 10:25-30) and the rich farmer, who worshipped himself (Luke 12:16-21). When we withhold the love and obedience of our hearts from Christ, and refuse Him indisputable control of our lives, for whatever reason, we are guilty of violating the first commandment. We do not understand either the gospel or the Commandment aright if we do not realise that Christ requires us to set Him on the throne of our lives. The alternative to this is idolatry.

95) 20:4-6

The second commandment prohibiting the making and worshipping of graven images is clearly connected with the first, but as clearly distinct from it, and should not be confused with it. What is forbidden here is the use in worship of anything that detracts from the fundamental reality expressed in our Lord's words, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth". No mere representation of God is permitted, since at best it can only be like Him, a mere approximation, and not He Himself, and therefore misleading and ultimately distorting. If what Moses says in Deut 33:26, "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun" is true, then any attempt to make a representation of Him, however noble in conception, must necessarily fall short of the mark, and therefore mislead. This is something that has not always been remembered in people's desire for aids to worship. 'Images' of whatever sort, whether ikons, statuettes, or pictures, so easily tend to gather worship to themselves, because they become confused and idealised with what they are meant to signify. God knows how weak we are and how we need help in our spiritual lives, but it is much safer to restrict ourselves to His appointed means of grace and help than to fabricate our own. He has given us His Word, and the sacraments, and worship and fellowship, as means of strengthening our faith and nourishing our spiritual lives, and when these are used as He has ordained, the need for other aids must surely become superfluous. Not that even here can we be immune from the danger of violating this commandment; for a wrong use of the Sacraments can become a particularly terrible idolatry. The simple memorial of our Lord's death can, and has in the Roman Church, become a horrible and dangerous perversion of the truth as the sacramental elements are made the object of worship. This is idolatry, and violates the commandment.

96) 20:4-6

Two further points must be noted here. One is the recognition the Bible makes in scathing irony (such as in Ps 115:4 ff) and elsewhere) of the emptiness and futility and mockery of idol worship, and its consciousness that such idol mockery can be taken up and used by dark powers so that idols of wood and stone can be invested with the demonic, and lead their worshippers from mere ignorance into dark and terrible bondage to the devil. The other point relates to 5b and 6. If the visitation of the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation is difficult to understand or accept, we should remember two things: one is the fact of the solidarity of mankind. No man lives unto himself, we are members one of another in a solidarity that comes from our connection with Adam, the father of the human race; the other is that the moral structure of the universe makes this 'visitation' inevitable. This is how things are in human life. On the other hand, the entail of good is incomparably more powerful than that of evil (6), and can lay the foundations of many generations (Isa 58:12).

97) 20:7

The prohibition in the third commandment is against a wrongful use of the Divine Name in the making of oaths, as seems clear from our Lord's comments in Matt 5:33-37, that is, false swearing as well as vain or profane swearing. To invoke the name of God is to involve His character, and therefore to take it in vain is to insult His majesty and glory. This is a word of wide application, not only in the careless use of the Divine name in the unthinking expostulations of secular speech (as is regrettably common) but also in what can only be called the 'religious jargon' that is prevalent in so much Christian conversation nowadays. This is also a careless and indiscriminate misuse of the Lord's name which violates the commandment because it is used unthinkingly. One thinks of the 'Praise the Lord' attitude, so rife and so irreverent on many lips that has debased a noble and worshipful attitude of heart and spirit, and made it an offence to thoughtful people. To mouth a meaningless 'Praise the Lord' on every conceivable occasion is not necessarily a sign of grace in the soul. One recalls men in the Forces during the war who could not speak four words without an ugly, filthy swearword.

This in them was often not so much a sign of depravity as of lack of intelligence and ability to speak the English language - a lack of ordinary vocabulary. So it often is with this unthinking and irreverent larding of conversation with religious phrases and exclamations, and it can only be called taking the name of the Lord in vain. There was the man, for example, who unthinkingly said, 'Praise the Lord' when hearing of a sorrow and tragedy. True, one learns to praise the Lord in sorrow, but you do it, not say it unthinkingly. Jesus did not say, 'Praise the Lord' at the grave of Lazarus; He wept. There is something very important and fundamental to learn in that.

98) 20:8-11

The commandment about the Sabbath Day has been the subject of so much controversy - not to say confused and wrong thinking - that it is imperative for us to be clear in our minds as to its precise importance and significance. It is sometimes taken for granted, for example, that the Sabbath commandment is in a different category from the others, in that it refers to an institution rather than a fundamental moral law, as those which follow it do. But this is highly debatable, and an arbitrary distinction which is scarcely substantiated by the Old Testament itself, which gives far more prominence to the Sabbath commandment than to any of the others. Furthermore, the implication that, because it is different from the other commandments, it is somehow more restricted to the Jews and therefore less applicable to the Church or the world, is demonstrably false, since the concept of the Sabbath is traceable to the order of creation in Genesis 2, and therefore as universally applicable as the institution of marriage or the doctrine of work. Not only so: while it is true that men may hold, and have held, legalistic conceptions of Sabbath observance (our Lord Himself criticised the Pharisaic attitude of His day) it is neither logical nor honest to brand any serious attempt at honouring the law of God as legalism. One does not - or ought not to - bring a charge of legalism against a man for making it a point of honour to be absolutely honest ('Thou shalt not steal') or absolutely pure ('Thou shalt not commit adultery'). Why then should a similarly strict and thorough obedience to the Sabbath law be regarded as legalistic?

99) 20:8-11

A distinction that must be kept in mind is that between the particular enactments of any law and its sanctions. There are, for example, some enactments associated with the Ten Commandments that are no longer binding today. In Moses' day capital punishment was administered for some violations of the law, such as adultery. This is not done today; but it is the penalty that has changed, not the law itself, whose sanction remains unchanged. It is still wrong to commit adultery, nor is it any less heinous in God's sight now than it was then. In the same way, surely, although the extremely heavy penalties visited upon Israel for violation of the Sabbath are not exacted today, the sin is just as great, and the sanction at the heart of the commandment unchanged. In the same way, although it is true that believers do not live by the commandments, but in the Spirit (the reason why we do not steal being not that the commandment says we must not, but that as believers indwelt by the Spirit, we do not want to), the sanction of the commandments is still binding on us. It is still wrong to steal, to kill, or commit adultery. And since in every believer there is always also a dark, unbelieving side ('Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief') he can never safely dispense with that sanction; it must ever be there to lead him, again and again, as a schoolmaster, to Christ. And the sanction of the fourth commandment was never needed so much as today, when even in the Church man's assertion of his independence of the will of God is so rampant and uninhibited.

100) 20:1.2

We come now to the second table of the Law, and to man's duty to his fellows, which flows, and is meant to flow, from his duty to God. It is interesting and significant to see that man's first 'social' duty lies within the context of the family. How children and young people behave towards their parents at home is a fairly reliable indication of how they will conduct themselves outside the home. The command to honour father and mother is taken up by Paul in Col 3:20 and Eph 6:1 in terms of obedience. So far as Paul is concerned, then, the Old Testament commandments are not abrogated in the new economy of grace, but are made just as binding - a point which is often overlooked in the debate between law and grace. To honour, however, is not the same as to obey. Paul qualifies the idea of obedience with the words 'in the Lord', from which we may learn that when a young person's duty to parents in obeying them conflicts with his duty to God, not only ought he to obey God rather than his parents, but in fact he will ultimately honour his parents more by obeying God and disobeying them, than in obeying them against the will of God, for in so doing he will thereby point the parents back to their original function, which is to lead their children into obedience to God. Not that this should ever give young people the right to ride roughshod over their parents' feelings and affections. Our Christian profession does not entitle us to be unnecessarily offensive, even in decisive disagreement with parents' point of view. It is possible to disagree with them and therefore - when obedience to them conflicts with the will of God - to disobey them honourably; but we must ever see to it that it is honourable, and not dishonourable, obedience that characterises us. More of this in the next note.

101) 20:12

It is one of the problems in young Christians' lives that they sometimes find so little sympathetic understanding of the experience into which they have entered at conversion, particularly when a conflict of duties (such as was mentioned in the previous note) arises. The temptation in such circumstances is to react violent against the parental attitude and preach rather unwisely to them, creating a turmoil that might have been avoided if they had been a little more patient and circumspect. One could go so far as to say that although we are not meant to hide our light under a bushel but rather bear testimony before others, we are far more likely to make an impression on parents by the quality of our lives than by any number of words, however eloquent or persuasive. The thought of young people confidently telling their parents that they are all wrong spiritually (however true it may be in fact) is not a happy one. Converted wives are warned in Scripture (1 Pet 3:1-4) not to preach at their unconverted husbands; "they may be won over", says the Apostle, "without a word being said" (NEB). This is just as applicable in the young people/parents situation and should be noted with great care.

This commandment is, as Paul says, the first commandment with promise (Eph 6:2, 3). Prosperity, then, and long life, will come to those who keep it. The converse is also true; those who dishonour their parents prematurely shorten their lives and bring misfortune upon themselves. With this solemn and challenging thought we leave the fifth commandment.

102) 20:13

The sixth commandment is rendered in the RV "Thou shalt do no murder". A useful distinction is thus indicated between killing and murder. The point that is being made is that of the sanctity of human life as belonging to God, given by Him, and to be taken only by Him. It is thought by some that this must necessarily exclude any possibility of capital punishment being in accordance with biblical ethics, but this is not so. It is clear from both O.T. and N.T. teaching that judicial powers are vested in magistrates to exact the supreme penalty. Underlying this issue is the question whether punishment is to be thought of as corrective, remedial and reformatory only, or whether the idea of retribution has a lawful place in it. If the former, then obviously capital punishment is unthinkable, for the death penalty ipso facto excludes the possibility of future reformation. But is there no such thing as retribution? Of course there is; it is an objective reality, at the heart and foundation of the universe. In a letter to T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis once wrote, "The modern view (of punishment) by excluding the retributive element and concentrating solely on deterrence and cure, is hideously immoral. It is vile tyranny to submit a man to compulsory 'cure' or sacrifice him to the deterrence of others, unless he deserves it." Put thus, the validity of the idea of retribution becomes obvious and inevitable. It is the measure of the confusion and sentimentality of modern thought that it should regard retributive punishment as barbarous and ethically questionable.

103) 20:14

The seventh commandment is designed to preserve and maintain the sanctity of marriage and family life. It is because in marriage a man and a woman are made 'one flesh' that adultery is so unthinkable, for it violates and vitiates something God has brought into being. By implication, of course, the commandment applies to all kinds of sexual impurity, and our Lord Himself extends its challenge from act to look and thought. "Out of the heart", He says, "proceedeth...adulteries, fornication, lasciviousness..." There could hardly be greater need for such a reminder than today, for the whole of our society has fallen a victim to the commercialism of highly efficient business interests intent upon making profit from the lusts that have been fanned in the hearts of men. Cinema, T.V. and press alike pander to this, and must be held as guilty in the sight of God. The incitements to impurity in the imagination are legion today, and the adultery that can be committed by a thought or with a look is made much more likely by the deliberate feeding of men's lusts. It must surely be a duty incumbent upon Christian people to make definite protest against the immorality that makes its insidious claims on the minds of so many at the firesides of their homes through T.V. and radio, minds that are being conditioned to the idea that unfaithfulness to the marriage bond is a glamorous thing, and that purity and honour are old-fashioned. The need of society today, in relation to this commandment, is for men and women, and perhaps especially young men and women, who are proud of the ideal of chastity and proud and unafraid to stand for it in face of the ridicule of their fellows, and thus to bear testimony that it is not loss, but gain, to die to sin and to the tendency to impurity and uncleanness which is a reality for all of us. True life and fulfilment lies not in the gratification, but in the transformation, of lawless and imperious instincts.

104) 20:15

The Scriptures recognise a man's right to own private property, and are prepared to safeguard that right zealously. No man, says the commandment, has the right to appropriate unlawfully another's property, whether that property be money or valuables, reputation or character. G. Campbell Morgan points out that ultimately there are only three ways of possessing anything; one, by free gift from another; two, by toil and labour; three, by theft. The eighth commandment recognises the first two of these, and forbids the third. It is a commandment of wide application. We steal, according to the Scriptures, when we appropriate for our own use what does not belong to us. A worker steals from his employer when he fails to give him honest and adequate work for the pay he receives; an employer steals from his employee when he fails to give adequate pay for the work he does. But a man may also steal from God as well as from his fellows. When he withholds from God what is His rightful due, either in money, time or talents, he is robbing God (see Mal 3:8) of what belongs to Him, and is guilty of violating this commandment. "To appropriate for our own use what does not belong to us..." "Will a man rob God?"

105) 20:16

The commandments in the second table of the Law really present a wonderfully noble doctrine of the dignity of man. Killing is forbidden because man is made in the image of God; adultery is forbidden because it violates the sanctity of family life; stealing is forbidden because man has a fundamental right to his own property. Now, in the ninth commandment, it is his honour, character and reputation that are to be safeguarded against attack. This is a commandment that can be broken in many ways. Perjury and slander, as well as violating the law of God, are also punishable at law, and rightly so, for the untold harm and injury they can inflict upon innocent people. But tale-bearing, with its 'snowballing' effect, the creation of false impressions by innuendo, tone of voice, gesture, or even knowing silence, unworthy imputation of motive, are just as heinous in the sight of God, and just as harmful to innocent lives, besmirching character and dragging it sometimes irretrievably into the mire. Hearts are often broken and lives brought to a premature grave by such malicious and merciless practices, sometimes too under the cloak of sanctity and zeal for righteousness. How careful we must be, in handling the good name of our brother, lest we be betrayed into speaking ill of him! The all-important question, of course, is motive. If we want to believe ill of him, if we want what we have heard of him to be true, then we have already borne false witness against him in our own hearts; and we shall soon bear false witness against him to others. Well might the wise man of old say, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov 4:23).

106) 20:17

The tenth commandment is the one on which our Lord based His devastating interpretation of the others in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5). It points to the true understanding of them as being inward rather than outward, and it is all the more surprising that Israel in the old economy, and the Pharisees, including Saul of Tarsus, in the new, should have so consistently missed its significant emphasis on inwardness. It is, of course, a fundamental word, not only showing us where the real thrust of the commandments lies, in the hearts and thoughts of men, but also where obedience to them must be fulfilled, for safety's sake as well as for the glory of God. The New Testament counterpart of this word is "Be content with such things as ye have" (Heb 13:5). This is important, for the essence of a wrong desire is not only that it will not be satisfied, but that it cannot be satisfied. The more it is fed, the more voracious and craving does its appetite become. Even if it were given the whole creation, it would still want more; it is all-consuming, and born of hell itself. This is why a covetous spirit, that hankers after what must ever in the nature of things remain out of its reach, is so soul-destroying and disintegrating. Some people eat their hearts out for what they can never hope to attain or possess, in an unavailing attempt to "keep up with the Jones's" or for some other reason, coveting place or position, possessions or recognition, and making their own lives, and the lives of all around them, miserable in the atmosphere of discontentment they effectually create. This is the commandment of God to them: Thou shalt not covet!

107) 20:18-21

These verses record the Israelites' reaction to the overwhelming sense of the Divine presence. We are told that the people drew back, but Moses, on the other hand, drew near to the thick darkness where God was. There is something for us to learn from this twofold reaction. The thunders of Sinai had made Moses afraid too (see Heb 12:21), but his fear had the opposite effect from that of the people. How was this? There are two kinds of fear, then, inspired by the presence of the living God, craven fear, born of unsubmitive hearts and spirits, and godly fear that longs to draw near and worship, and fall down before Him. Israel's fear of the 'numinous' expressed itself as a desire to escape, in the kind of way in which Adam and Eve sought to hide themselves from the presence of God in the Garden, and for much the same reason. This is more akin than we might realise to the objection some people have against 'personal religion'; it is much too real for them, and makes them uncomfortable. They do not really want a living God at all, and they recognise in 'personal religion' a warning that they might be drawn inexorably into a commitment they do not want, and have no intention of making. This is how it was with Israel; in another minute or two they might have been committed irrevocably to this mighty all-consuming God. On the other hand, however, Moses found himself compellingly drawn into the darkness where God was. Moses was afraid, and he was not afraid. This is not something that can be explained so much as experienced. It is, paradoxically, at those times when we most fear God that we also love Him most and are most drawn to Him, O to be touched by the fear that draws us on and on into the mystery of the presence of God!

108) 20:22-26

"In the remainder of chap.20, and in the three chapters which follow, we have a series of laws delivered by God to Moses, immediately after the delivery of the Decalogue, which constituted the second stage of the revelation, and stood midway between the first great enunciation of abstract principles in the Ten Commandments and the ultimate, minute and complicated elaboration of rules to meet all cases which fills the three books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This immediate revelation appears to have been at once committed to writing, and in its written shape was known as 'the book of the Covenant' (24:7), and regarded with special veneration", (Ellicott). These verses here contain laws relating to the worship of God. The keynote is twofold: reality and simplicity. On the one hand, since the living God had manifested Himself to them from heaven, no mere representation of Him (23) was either possible or necessary. On the other hand, the furniture and accoutrements of worship were to be of the simplest, since God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. That this was a needful warning, yet nevertheless neglected, is seen from the later history of Israel, who showed a remarkable propensity for being beguiled from this simplicity by all manner of false worship. It would be good for the Church to remember this too. The man who is in touch with God through the only Mediator, Jesus Christ, needs no 'aid to worship' other than the Holy Spirit. God has given us His Word, and it is in submission and response to its teaching that we offer our truest worship. Could it be that, when men find worship difficult if not impossible without some extraneous aids, it is because this obedience is being neglected or withheld?

109) 21:1-6

This chapter sets forth laws that concern the rights of persons, as the following deals with those concerning rights of property, and thus elaborates the general theme of the dignity of man which we have seen to underlie the commandments given by God to Moses. The question of slavery as such is not under review in these verses, and there is no discussion as to whether it is right or wrong, morally defensible or not. But within the institution of slavery, and accepting it as a fact, the impressive thing to note here is the difference in conditions that obtained in the congregation of Israel as compared not only with the rest of the ancient world, but also with the much more modern slavery conditions in the 19th century Christian West. What we are meant to see is not the harshness of slavery as such, but rather the grace and the consideration that breathe throughout these merciful enactments. In Israel the bond-servant was not to be regarded as a mere chattel; he had rights as an individual personality, and these rights were to be faithfully observed and honoured. The message that comes through is that of learning to treat other human beings as human beings, and not to trample on them, or use them. It is the intensely humanitarian note that we are to grasp here. Elsewhere, slaves had no kind of rights, and could be disposed of at the whim of the master in any way he chose. The thought of giving consideration to a slave was quite foreign to heathendom. There is a concealed kindness and humanity even in the provision mentioned in 6, by which a slave could bind himself to his master forever. It would surely be better to be a slave to a kind master than be left to fend for yourself in an unfriendly world for which you felt yourself inadequate. Security means much to most of us, and security is what is offered in this merciful legislation.

110) 21:7-11

The rights of a maid sold to be a slave were even more carefully guarded than those of a man-servant. Not only was she to go free after six years, if unmarried, but if married, she was entitled to the same rights as a free wife (10). The 'these three' in 11 probably refers to the possible courses open to the slave owner with her: either that he marry her himself, or give her to his son in marriage, in both of which cases she would have all wifely rights and privileges, or sell her to another Hebrew ('redeemed', 8). If none of these courses were followed, she must be allowed to go out free. The point that is made, however, is that whichever course might be followed, she would be protected, and her interests safeguarded. This is something that was quite unknown in the ancient world, where women had no rights at all. Once again, there is no discussion about the institution of slavery, as such; it is taken for granted. But within its context, everything is wonderfully gracious and merciful, with human rights defended and human dignity safeguarded. In no way was the maid to be taken advantage of. What strikes one most forcibly here is the reality of a God Who cares for the weak and the defenceless, and undertakes to watch over their interests. And that is a lesson worth learning.

iii) 21:12-19

These verses deal with killing and murder. For general comment on the subject, see Note on 20:13. Here, a distinction is made between accidental, unpremeditated killing and deliberate, premeditated killing ('presumptuously', 14), between murder, that is, and culpable homicide or manslaughter. For the latter, provision was made in the form of a place of refuge (13) where he would be safe from the harshness and implacability of avenging relatives. This provision was later extended to six cities of refuge (Numb 35:6 and Josh 20. No such provision however was made for the deliberate killer. He must die. In view of the categorical nature of such pronouncements, it should be noted that no sentimental ideas about reverence for life influence the scriptural position against capital punishment, Throughout this chapter the dignity of human life is very prominent, and we can hardly suppose that reverence for life has been forgotten; it is simply that the Scriptures think more reverently of the life that has been violated and murdered, than of the life which violates and murders. This is the realism of the Scriptures which is a healthy corrective to the sentimentalism of modern idealism. There is another point that arises in connection with the infliction of the death penalty for offences other than murder that is of some importance, but we shall deal with it in the next note.

112) 21:12-19

The death penalty was inflicted for smiting parents, stealing (15, 16), and for such matters as breaking the Sabbath, adultery, and so on. We do not do this nowadays, and the law is very substantially modified in those directions. But this is not to say that these severe penalties were wrong then. Israel in those days was a people under discipline, and God had begun to fulfil His purposes in and through them. And where you have a new thing being established, the disciplines have necessarily to be very strict. When the New Testament Church was born it was very important that its purity should be safeguarded, because it was purity alone that could enable it to go forward. It was for this reason that God visited the sin of Ananias and Sapphira with such severity. God does not ordinarily smite with death people who tell lies, but on this particular occasion He did so, for so much depended on the purity of the fellowship. To have left their sin unchecked would have been to leave an evil leaven that would have affected the entire fellowship disastrously. In the same way, God had a special purpose for His people at this particular time; everything depended on their being a certain kind of people, and it was therefore of the utmost importance that the hedging-in by the law should be of the most stringent nature. A modern parallel existed in the former Soviet Union. Communism regarded itself as having a mission in the world, and it was therefore important to safeguard the purity of the Movement against corruption. It is not surprising, therefore, that the death penalty had been inflicted in Russia for crimes like profiteering. The sin was against the State, and therefore could not be tolerated. This is the kind of emphasis we have in these verses, and in this situation.

113) 21:20-32

Again, in these verses, it is the concern for the rights of slaves that is the chief lesson. It would be easy to miss this point if we allowed ourselves to be preoccupied with what we deemed harsh treatment meted out to them by masters (20, 26). The ancient world as a whole did not even recognise the possibility that injustice could be done to slaves, at all; they were simply possessions, chattels to be used or abused without giving much thought to the matter. The principle of justice expressed here is that of exact retaliation, life for life, eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. In our reaction against the seeming harshness of this, we should remember that it was anciently instituted as a limit upon undue punishment and overmuch vengeance. It would be by no means uncommon for many lives to be taken for one, in a bitter and implacable spirit of revenge. A distinction may be intended between 20, 21 and 26, 27; in the first the reference seems to be to a merited chastisement that accidentally became over-severe, while the second seems to indicate an inexcusable assault, which forfeits the master's further right to own the slave. Fine shades of responsibility are drawn throughout in relation to cases that are different, as for example in 28,29 when a man is gored to death by an ox. If the ox has not hitherto been dangerous, its owner is 'quit' when the beast is stoned and killed; but if he has already been warned that it is dangerous, and neglects to take proper safeguards, he is held fully responsible and must pay the penalty of death or, alternatively, whatever fine the relatives of the slain man require. Knowledge brings responsibility and culpability when that knowledge is neglected. For an obvious spiritual application of this principle, see Hebrews 2:1-3.

114) 21:33-36

The legislation now passes from rights of persons to rights of property. First of all there is the matter of careless neglect. The particular instance is that of leaving a well uncovered so that it becomes a hazard to man and beast, but the illustration is of wide application to all sorts of situations today. Damages may be claimed in civil courts, and awarded, for loss incurred through another's carelessness. The principle lying behind all this is that of thoughtfulness, and this is a much to be desired grace in any age. Many of our country's by-laws are directed against the thoughtlessness of careless and selfish people, as for example litter laws and noise abatement. Paul sums up the whole matter, and the whole Old Testament law in the words, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour" (Rom 13:10). That is enough for today - a short comment, but one that surely speaks volumes!

115) 22:1-15

Further matters concerning the rights of property are dealt with in these verses, theft (1-4), damage done through trespassing on another's property (5, 6), the law of deposits (7-13) and legislation anent borrowing (14, 15). This is full of interest, and it is easy to see how practical the application is for our own day, in many directions. We are by no means dealing with a dead letter. Indeed, when one sees that the constant and undeviating emphasis and requirement throughout is restitution, it becomes clear that the Mosaic legislation is in advance of our own, for not even yet, in the early years of our enlightened twenty-first century, does our law provide for restitution. It is useful in this connection to remember that when a crime is committed, two distinct matters are involved. On the one hand, the law has been violated, and justice requires that its penalty be visited on the guilty party. On the other hand, however, an injury has also been done, to the person and property of the plaintiff, and it should surely be clear that in order for justice fully to be done, that injury must be repaired and restitution made. In fact, however, only the first of these two matters has usually been dealt with in law; the guilty criminal is put in jail, but his unfortunate victim may have no redress save by an action for damages in a civil court, expensive to conduct, and problematic in its outcome, or by means of an insurance cover, which also costs money. Either way, he stands to be out of pocket. Happily, legislation is now being instituted which will make restitution for injuries done to innocent people. But thus far back, Moses insisted upon such justice being done, and antedated by many centuries the tardy legislation of our own system.

116) 22:16-31

There is a great deal in these verses that needs and deserves careful and detailed study, but there is a certain advantage in taking them together first of all, in order to see and appreciate the common theme that runs right through them. It may be aptly summed up in the words we find at the end of 27, 'for I am gracious'. It is the grace and compassion of the Lord Jehovah that shines through each separate enactment. One can only marvel at the gentleness and tenderness with which those that tend to be wronged in society are regarded and cared for by God. We do well to remember this. It is one of the great lessons to be learnt from the Old Testament and it gives the lie to those who often dismiss the Old Testament Scriptures as harsh and legalistic and lacking in the love of the New. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Divine provision for the wronged maid is a case in point, and one finds oneself thinking instinctively of the harsh censorious attitude of the Pharisees towards the woman taken in adultery, in contrast to the Lord's gentle dealing with her and to the spirit of 16, 17. It seems clear from 16 that this act is regarded by the Lord virtually as marriage, and this being so, the man is not allowed to contract out of his responsibility in the matter. Whether or not actual marriage is unsuitable is something decided not by him, but by the maid's father. He has forfeited his right to pronounce on the suitability of the match. He must think in terms of responsibility now, not suitability. And he is responsible to God Who cares for the defenceless maid and is her Protector. It can hardly be denied that such a lesson is in urgent need of being stressed in our day.

117) 22:16-31

We will now look at the other enactments in this passage. The harshness of 18 needs to be understood in the light of two considerations. One is that all trafficking with evil spirits is forbidden upon the strictest penalties (the biblical opposition to spiritualism is not that it is false, but that it is wrong). See Deut 18:9-14. The other is that what was said earlier about the stringency of the death penalty for crimes other than murder may well be taken to apply here also (see Note on 21:12-19). It was essential for the very existence of this new people of God that they be kept pure from the influences that God had condemned in the nations surrounding them. The strictures in 19 and 20 are surely obvious to all. The case of the stranger (21) is of practical application in numerous situations today, whether in society in general (as in the case of overseas people coming to live among us) or in the life of a congregation. A stranger has often few rights, and is always in danger of being imposed upon. Without friends, and unfamiliar with the customs of a country or a situation, he is often an easy prey. The basis of the compassion that is to be shown, significantly, is the remembrance of what we ourselves once were, and our own experience as strangers: that should be sufficient incentive for us to want to spare others that distressing experience.

118) 22:16-31

We continue to look at the various enactments. The widow and the fatherless are not exempt either from the exploitation of evil men; but God's special care is towards them (see Deut 14:29, 16:11-14, 24:17-21), and beyond all legal penalties that can be visited on those who hurt them lies the Divine sentence of wrath and punishment certain to fall upon them for their heartlessness. The word about lending for usury in 25 is not so much a condemnation of the principle of lending for interest (see Deut 23: 19, 20) as to prevent a man driving a hard bargain with his own kith and kin. Compassion, not an eye to business, must be the characteristic of our dealing with our brother (see also Deut 17:7-10). The word 'gods' in 28 should read 'God'. The 'first fruits' enactment in 29-31 is designed to make us recognise that all life belongs to God, and in giving our first-fruits to Him we are in token giving it back to Him.

119) 23:1-9

These verses, in continuing the application, and explication, of the Ten Commandments, enunciate various provisions for the administration of justice. The emphasis throughout is on impartiality. They are applicable both to courts of justice and to personal relationships. Neither witness nor judge must allow himself to be influenced away from the truth so as to cause a miscarriage of justice. Witnesses are warned against inventing or circulating an untrue report - either by word, or by gesture, or by silence, for there are many ways of conveying a false impressions!- (1), and those who judge are warned against being influenced by the voice of the multitude (2), or biased by sentimentality on behalf of the poor so as to be partial to his cause (3), or, on the other hand, be prejudiced against him or indifferent to his cause just because he is poor (6). There must not, as we sometimes say, be one law for the poor and another for the rich. Accusers are especially warned against making false charges (7) which, even though disproved, may blight the innocent party's name, soil his character, and shorten his days (Meyer). This is just as applicable in the law court as in private life, and the harm 'false matters' can do is as great in the one as in the other. The strict justice of these verses is beautifully infused with the idea of mercy in the enactments of 4 and 5. The same God Who demands that justice shall be done has no thought that justice is incompatible with compassion or love, or made the excuse for the lack of mercy. What wisdom and balance we find in the Word of God, and how reliable a guide to true and worthy behaviour!

120) 23:10-13

The principle underlying the fourth commandment is now applied in what is known as the institution of the Sabbatical year (see also Lev 25:1-7). Every seventh year the land was to lie fallow, and no cultivation was to be done, nor sowing nor reaping. This merciful provision was meant to make provision for the poor, who might gather all in the fields that grew of itself, and to save the soil from exhaustion and keep it fertile as a land flowing with milk and honey. In an age when rotation of crops was unknown, this remarkable legislation seems to have anticipated the principles of modern agriculture by many centuries. The Sabbath principle is seen here to be necessary and good for the poor, for slaves, for strangers, for animals, and even for the soil itself, if it is therefore so basic to the welfare of man and nature alike, it can hardly be regarded as a mere Jewish ceremonial ordinance to be abrogated, neglected or despised with impunity. It is perhaps not without significance that our age, which has seen the most widespread neglect and secularisation of the Lord's Day, has become known as the age of anxiety, with something like 60% of all hospital beds in Britain occupied by patients with psychological rather than physical disorder and disease, George Philip, in a Note on this passage, quotes a story told of native carriers "who would go so far in one day's journey and then refuse to go another inch. They said they had to stop to let their spirits catch up with them." We could hardly doubt that this represents a crying need in our time.

121) 23:14-19

Three national feasts are now enjoined upon Israel, the feast of unleavened bread, or the Passover, the feast of harvest or first-fruits, sometimes called the feast of weeks, and Pentecost (from its taking place seven weeks after the Passover, giving rise to the word 'Pentecost' which means fifty), and the feast of ingathering, or Tabernacles. It is significant to note the position of these feasts (or festivals) as included in, and following, the Law. This has something important to teach us, namely that, being religious observances, and involving the offering of sacrifices, God requires of His people more than obedience to His laws, and that man's duties are not fulfilled simply by keeping them. God desires worship, adoration, fellowship from man, and the willing giving of himself in devotion and surrender to God. It is not difficult to discern the spiritual illustration these feasts give of Christian life and experience. The Passover foreshadows the Passion and victory of our Lord, the Feast of Weeks the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (it is wonderfully suggestive in this connection to see that the Passover is reckoned as the beginning of harvest), and the Feast of Ingathering (Tabernacles) the final consummation of the Kingdom. Thus, past, present and future in Christian experience are all covered by the three feasts. On the one hand, we are to have as the basis and foundation of our spiritual lives the solitary dignity of the shed blood, and thus our past is dealt with. Then, we are to have, as a constant working principle, the reality of Pentecost; our present must be empowered by the gift and presence of the Spirit. And finally, we are to have, as the goal of all our striving, the coming glory of the Kingdom; our future must glow with the reality of the blessed hope (For further reference to the feasts, see Lev 23 and Deut 16:1-17).

122) 23:20-23

The Book of the Covenant which has occupied our attention from 20:22 up to this point, concludes with a series of promises. Conditional upon keeping the covenant, Israel will be assured of the guidance and protection of the Angel of God, they will have God's help against all their enemies, they will have the ultimate possession of the entire country between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean on the one hand and from the desert to the Euphrates on the other, they will have a blessing on their flocks and herds, and a blessing upon themselves, escaping sickness and enjoying long life. The Angel in 20 must surely refer to the Angel of the Covenant, Christ Himself - of Whom else could it be said that God's Name is in him (21)? Nor should this cause difficulty in our minds, for a belief in the doctrine of the Trinity with its affirmation of the eternal Sonship of Christ commits us to the idea of His pre-incarnate activity in history. Leaving aside for the moment the implication of Israel's warfare in 22, 23, we may worthily take these verses as an illustration of spiritual work in the kingdom of God. As George Philip comments, "It will be a way of war, for territory held by the enemy must be wrested from him. What a description of the work of God in the ministry of the Word unto the saving and healing of lives. But it is a particular kind of war with unseen powers at work. God is with His people against all who bar the way. Our part is to obey. We are the servants. He alone is the Master."

123) 23:24-28

One relevant application of these verses with relation to spiritual life is that God undertakes to lead us to our proper place in His purpose and will for our lives, but only if we are truly-obedient to His voice. We have no kind of ground for supposing that His good and perfect will for us will be fulfilled in spite of our rebellion and neglect of holy things. Whatever predestination means, we can hardly suppose that it does away with our moral endeavour and ethical response to God's Word. The question of the ejection of the heathen tribes of Canaan to make way for Israel arises here. It is sometimes objected that there can be no justification of Israel's displacement of these tribes, and still less of their grim and bloody overthrow of them. But it should be noticed here that it is God Who says He will do these things to the tribes. Israel was therefore only the instrument in His hands for the fulfilment of His will and the execution of His judgment on them. Their being cast out is therefore analogous to the destruction of the cities of the plain in Genesis 19, and took place for the same reasons. Their cup of wrath was filled to overflowing, and God could not abide them any longer. They had reached a depth of depravity which rendered it necessary for them to be utterly destroyed (24), lest evil be perpetuated in new generations. This is made explicit in Lev 18:25 and Deut 9:4, 5. Israel was therefore used in a judicial capacity as the rod of the Divine anger against the sins of these peoples.

124) 23:29-33

Two further comments on this deeply interesting appendix to the Book of the Covenant. The promise to Israel was that the heathen nations would be driven out 'little by little' (29), rather than all in one year. Not only is the reason for this significant (reminding us of Christ's parable in Matt 12:43-45 about the demons returning to take possession of the house of the human heart when once it had been swept clean) as indicating that God works on the principle of displacement, but also the illustration that it gives of the spiritual life suggests that advancement is to be thought of in terms of steady progress and growth rather than sudden, once-for-all victories (not that the latter do not occur, but if the analogy of natural growth be accepted as valid, then it should be clear that steady, and indeed imperceptible development is the norm for the human body, and also for the soul. Dramatic and sudden changes for the better in health usually take place when there has been a history of disease that has been treated drastically in order to effect a cure, but even then what has happened is merely a restoration to health; growth and development still require to follow in order to attain complete fitness). When we are healthy, we do not maintain our progress by fits and starts, but imperceptibly, on the 'little by little' principle. The other point here is the delineation of Israel's boundaries, In fact, Israel did not ever occupy as much as God gave her here, because she did not 'possess' it by driving out her foes. This also is a parable of spiritual life. God has given us all things in Christ, and we are complete in Him; but we enjoy only as much as we make our own by the appropriation of faith, and it does not really become ours, although it is ours in title, until we do. There is such a thing as faith's unclaimed inheritance.

125) 24:1-8

The account of the Book of the Covenant being completed, the narrative now continues at the point it paused, 20:21. Moses recounted all the words of the Book (chs 21-23) to the people, who responded, "All the words which the Lord hath said will we do". Whereupon Moses wrote all the words of the Lord (4), and solemnized their acceptance of them by a sacrament by which they were bound, through blood, to their obedience. There is something very moving here, to understand which goes far to explain much of Israel's later unsatisfactory conduct. In ch 2 we read that the people had withdrawn from the presence of the Lord (see Note on 20:18-21); their hearts were not really in it, yet they said that they would obey, and allowed the sacrament of blood to be administered to them. Their hearts were not really deeply touched; they acted a lie,-and this explains their later faithlessness. They did not really mean business, but went through the motions unwillingly, or with no real intention of implementing them. The covenant was broken in principle even as it was made with them. The parallel for today is surely obvious. It is so easy for people's emotions to be stirred without their wills being touched or made captive to the word of God, and even for minds to be assent to the truth and lips acknowledging it without the heart being in it. This is both the tragedy and the explanation of much that is unsatisfactory in Christian experience and service today. May we learn deeply from this solemn spectacle.

126) 24:9-18

Moses, Aaron and his sons, and seventy of the elders of Israel, went up into the mount, 'and they saw the God of Israel' (10). The description given of this wonderful manifestation, with its emphasis on colour and clearness (10), seems to speak, as one commentator puts it, of 'the milder glories of God's character, as reconciled with Israel, in contrast to those more terrible Manifestations which accompanied the giving of the Law, and had filled the hearts of the people with awe" (Meyer). Verses of Scripture and lines of hymns come naturally to our minds as we think of this; as for example Paul's well known words 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God...'(Rom 11:33), which speak of mystery in light rather than in darkness; or F.W. Faber's words:

'How beautiful, how beautiful
The sight of Thee must be,
Thine endless wisdom, boundless power,
And awful purity.'

It may be that the Divine purpose in so revealing himself to them was to prompt them to think, 'Here is a God Whom we can love and adore for His beauty and loveliness, as well as obey'. Surely the impression of a cloudless blue sky is meant to suggest that although we must never forget the holiness and majesty and the consuming fire that burns in God, there is a place of fellowship with Him to which we may come where our Communion with Him is unclouded and inexpressibly lovely, where we can 'enjoy' Him in a sheer rapture of beauty and adoration. Is this what the Psalmist means when he says, 'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness'?

127) 24:9-18

There is another thought in these verses that must occupy our attention before we go further. It has been pointed out that throughout the chapter there is a series of concentric circles with each coming nearer to God; the people (3-8), the seventy elders (8,11), Joshua and Moses (13), and finally Moses alone (18). There is something important for us to learn in this. We can draw as near as we allow ourselves to come, that is, by the quality of our lives and consecration. It is we ourselves, as much as God, who settle how closely we may approach His presence, and at what point unsurmountable barriers are erected to prevent us coming any closer. There are some who, by the quality of their spiritual lives, inevitably relegate themselves to the foot of the mount, and others who by the very white heat of their passion for God press on and into the very presence of the Most High. Fellowship with God is a moral question. No-one can complain - to change the metaphor - "God has not opened my eyes to see Him in that way". We see so little because we do not want to see, and in this measure we finally become unable to see, having resisted the truth of God until our eyes become clouded. The Psalmist's words assume a new kind of significance in this connection, "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest and causest to approach unto Thee". It is true that the Divine sovereignty is ever the determining factor in the human situation, but human responsibility is inexorably real within that sovereignty, and men are accountable for their unwillingness and refusal to enter the intimate fellowship with God for which they are destined.

128) 25:1-9

From this point onwards to the end of Exodus, the main subject matter is the Tabernacle with, first of all, the Divine command concerning its construction (25-31), then - after the tragic parenthesis of Israel's idolatry with the golden calf and the subsequent need for their restoration and renewal - the account of the fulfilment of the Divine pattern in its preparation and building (35-40). There are probably few parts of Holy Writ so fascinating as this to study or more enriching in spiritual nourishment, when once we realise that the key to a true understanding of its meaning is the witness it bears to Christ. Nor is this a matter of forcing an arbitrary exegesis upon the mass of building detail recorded in these chapters; for the Old Testament witness to Christ does not depend for its validity upon the establishing of any particular series of 'types' more or less obviously pointing to Christ, but upon the meaning and significance of its various component parts in relation to the over-all purpose of God in redemption that the Scriptures themselves reveal. This is one of the first points we need to look at in our study of the Tabernacle, and particularly the position it takes in the historical development of Israel. It will be useful, however, first of all, to become acquainted with the general format of the Tabernacle, and this should be done with the aid of a competent Bible Dictionary. We see that it had three compartments: an outer court, in which stood a brazen altar, and beyond it, a laver; a second, called the holy place, in which, on the right, stood the table of shewbread and on the left the golden candlestick; while beyond them, and in front of the curtain leading into the holiest of all, stood the golden altar of incense. The holiest of all contained the Ark with the tables of the law within it, and the golden mercy seat resting upon it. Such is the building which is now to occupy our minds and instruct our hearts in the things of God.

129) 25:1-9

The position which the Tabernacle takes in the historical development of Israel is important. First of all the Law was given them, then the Tabernacle. This was all part of the necessary teaching God had to give His people, in the long preparation for the coming of the Redeemer from the stock of Israel. By the law comes the knowledge of sin, and knowledge of sin leads to the consciousness of the need for a Saviour. In the experience of Israel the law was meant to bring them to an end of themselves, and the institution of the Tabernacle was an act of mercy to reveal how men guilty and defiled by sin could enter into fellowship with a holy God. Seen thus, the construction of the Tabernacle is a necessary next step after the law; and this order, it may be noted, is followed by Paul in his exposition of the gospel in the Epistle to the Romans - first the sin of man, as revealed by the broken law, then the grace of God, setting forth Christ as the only sacrifice for sin.

The Tabernacle, we are told (2) was to be made from the willing offerings of the people. This may in fact be a testimony to the truth that atonement for sin, if it is to be real and effective, must come from man's side; for it is man that sins and man must make amends. On the other hand, however, sin presents such an infinite problem that only a God could ever deal adequately with it. It is the mystery of the Incarnation that God, as man, in the Person of the God-man, should for man make atonement and effect an eternal reconciliation, restoring man to fellowship with Him. In the fulness of the time, the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us!

130) 25:1-9

The emphasis on the willingness of heart with which the people were to give their offerings not only reveals the only kind of offering that is acceptable to God, but also serves to set in glaring contrast the often dubious and sometimes deplorable expedients resorted to at the present time for exhorting support for the work of the Church. When one thinks of the shamefully low per capita figures for Christian giving within the membership of the Church of Scotland, so that the Church is not able to meet its ongoing commitments, and when it is remembered that so much of this 'princely' sum, even, is given unwillingly and grudgingly after much pleading and cajoling, it becomes clear that it is in the heart of the Church's life, not its pocket, that the real problem lies, and requires to be dealt with.

The pattern Moses was shown in the mount (9, 40) for the construction of the Tabernacle is surely meant to suggest the pattern of gospel redemption. God's desire was to dwell with His people (8), and this is possible only in one way, through atonement and reconciliation. How else would it be so necessary to stress the Divine pattern? God allowed Moses to have a glimpse of the plan that was laid down in eternity for man's redemption and His dwelling with His people (Heb 8:5), and instructed him to work by it. The New Testament parallel to this in the story of the Transfiguration of Christ shows Moses speaking with Christ concerning His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. It is striking to realise that at the great moments of this man's life he is always found near the Cross!

131) 25:10-22

The description of the furniture in the Tabernacle now begins. It is interesting to see that the Divine instructions given to Moses begin with the Ark and work outwards, whereas the actual approach to God which the Tabernacle symbolised and made possible was of course from the outside inwards. The way into the holiest, into the presence of God, can only be by sacrifice and by blood. We should bear in mind that the point of the Tabernacle is to show forth the conditions upon which fellowship with God is possible for sinful men - this is the force of 22. The first and central condition is expressed by the symbol of the Ark. The Ark was the Ark of the Covenant, and it is only because of the covenant of grace into which God has entered with sinful man that there can be any fellowship with God. Everything is based on the covenant. As the Shorter Catechism says, "God, having out of His mere good pleasure, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the state of sin and misery, and to bring them into a state of salvation by a Redeemer". Inasmuch as we are in fellowship with God at all, we are men and women of the covenant. Furthermore, the Ark contained the tables of stone on which were inscribed the law of God. Here, then, is the heart of true worship and fellowship. God meets with us, and has fellowship with us, in and through His Word. This means that fellowship with Him is not so much a mystical experience as moral and ethical, relating to our response of obedience, to His Word and will. For when He speaks to us, He means us to take seriously what He says.

132) 25:10-22

Associated with the Ark and resting upon it was the mercy seat of pure gold (17), with golden cherubim overshadowing it. This harmony of justice (represented by the inflexible demands of the Law) and mercy delineates the mystery and the glory of the everlasting gospel, foreshadowing Him in whom mercy and truth are met together, and righteousness and peace have kissed each other (Ps 85:10). Significantly, on the Day of Atonement the high priest was to enter the holiest with the blood of the sin-offering and sprinkle the mercy-seat with it, thus typifying the cost by which that harmony is achieved. The word 'propitiation' in Rom 3:25 ('hilasterion' in the Greek) is the word used in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the LXX) for the mercy seat over the Ark, and means either 'place of atonement' or 'means of atonement'. Thus clearly, then, does the heart of the Tabernacle foreshadow Christ and His atoning work as the only way to God and into fellowship with Him.

The Word, the covenant, the blood - this is the threefold significance of the Ark and of the-holiest of all, and only on this basis is fellowship with a holy God possible, and at no less a price than the shedding of blood. In this connection it may be fair to suggest that the golden cherubim (taken by some to typify the redeemed, at one with Christ, and standing on His merits, and by others to symbolise 'the arch-angelic protection of the divine revelations of righteousness demanded, and mercy proffered on terms of worthy sacrifice') represent the wonderment in the minds of heavenly beings at the sight of so great and so merciful a provision for the sinful sons of men. We have apostolic warrant for saying that the angels desire to look into such things! (1 Pet 1:12).

133) 25:23-30

Moving outwards from the innermost sanctuary to the next compartment of the Tabernacle known as the holy place, we find three further articles of furniture, the table of shewbread, the golden candlestick (described in 25:31-39), and the altar of incense (described not at this point, but much later, in 30:1-10). We learn from Lev 24:5-9 that the shewbread - 'the bread of the presence' - consisted of twelve cakes or loaves laid in two rows on the table every Sabbath day, with frankincense on each row. The symbolism here is various. That there were twelve loaves is surely meant to speak of the twelve tribes of Israel, and of the fact that they were ever before the Lord, and upon His heart. This again stresses the note of fellowship, and God's desire for His people, a note further emphasised by the symbolism of the table itself. 'Thou preparest a table for me', says the Psalmist, 'in the presence of mine enemies', and this table in the wilderness is the eloquent assurance from God that His people will never want through all their pilgrimage. The details of the preparation of the bread given in Lev 24 are 'typically' suggestive; the wheat harvested and ground at the mill into the fine flour required speaks of Christ, our God-appointed wheat (John 12:24), sifted by suffering, ground and bruised fine in the mill of God's judgment against sin so that He might become the bread of God's presence (Fuller), the bread of life for all His people (see John 6:33-58).

134) 25:31-40

The golden candlestick is next described. The whole intricate structure was to be made of pure, beaten gold, all of one piece, from the one talent of gold. The gold would thus pass through two processes of discipline in becoming the finished candlestick. This is of deep 'typical' significance in relation to the word it speaks about Christ, the light of the world. Gold in itself symbolises purity, and Christ was without spot or blemish, but He was 'made perfect' through suffering, that is, He entered into His destiny as a Saviour and Redeemer only by passing through the fires and disciplines of suffering. Not otherwise could He become the captain of our salvation. Some have seen in the shape of the candlestick a picture not only of Christ as the light of the world, but also of Christ as the true Vine, with the branches of the candlestick representing those that are engrafted into Him by the Spirit. This is both legitimate and fruitful as an interpretation of the type; indeed, one can think of the believer's association with Christ not only in terms of the light (Jesus said, 'Ye are the light of the world', Matt 5:14, and Paul speaks of our 'shining as lights in the world', Phil 2:15), but also as branches of the Vine. A very challenging lesson thus emerges: the same process used to fashion the central shaft of the candlestick was used to fashion the branches, and this speaks of our becoming effective lights in the world and fruit bearing branches only by sharing in the sufferings of Christ (see Phil 3:10ff, 2 Cor 4:7-12). The disciplines of the fire and the hammer are ever necessary in making us what we are meant to be in the service of God,

135) 26:1-14

The curtains or, so to speak, the soft furnishings of the Tabernacle are now described. First of all, the inner curtains of fine twined linen (1-6), then on top of these, curtains of goats' hair (7-13), with outer coverings of rams' skins dyed red, and of badgers' skins. The simple explanation of these elaborate coverings must surely be that they gave adequate protection to the furniture of the Tabernacle beneath them, but we may just as surely see a deeper significance in the arrangement. Without going into possible meanings of the various colours mentioned here -the blue is held to speak of Christ's deity and holiness, the scarlet of His humanity and His sacrifice, the purple of the royalty of His divine humanity - we may note that the beauty of both the furniture of the Tabernacle and its inner furnishings was hidden, and that from the outside it must have looked very ordinary, not to say drab and dull. It was only when one penetrated to the inmost places that its value and its beauty were perceived. Two lessons may be gathered from this. The first is that to many outside the family of God the Christian faith seems dull and uninteresting, perhaps even forbidding. The Scriptures tell of the joy and the blessedness of the Christian life to those who taste and see that the Lord is good. How should eyes that are blinded by the god of this world perceive the beauty of holiness until they are opened by grace? The other lesson relates to believers. The life that leads to fellowship with God is one which to many Christians seems unattractive and forbidding, with its inexorable summons to take up the Cross and die daily. And from the outside, the challenge of discipleship does tend to daunt the irresolute spirit. But to those who know the constraint of the Spirit driving them in, the Cross becomes a gateway into an incomparable sweetness and beauty of experience beyond all understanding and almost beyond belief. This is one of the things meant by the phrase, 'the treasures of darkness'.

136) 26:15-30

The boards, sockets and bars constituting the framework of the Tabernacle are next described. The resting of the boards on sockets of silver is suggestive, especially when it becomes clear from 30:11-16 and 38:25-28 that the sockets were made from the ransom silver. It is thought that Peter makes a reference to this in 1 Pet 1:18, "not with corruptible things, as silver and gold", and the association of ideas is fruitful for spiritual application. It is difficult also not to see in the framework of the Tabernacle a picture of the Church as well as of Christ, and in this connection one very practical lesson stands out, in the way in which the various component parts are said to fit together. "Ye are the body of Christ", says Paul, "and members in particular", and one of the marvels and mysteries of every true fellowship is the way in which the most diverse types of people harmonise in an enriching unity of love and purpose, with each making his distinctive and unique contribution to the whole. It is Denney who says: "It is worth mentioning that, as a synonym for Christian, the word 'saint' is never applied in the New Testament to an individual. The ideal of God's people cannot be adequately realised in, and ought not to be presumptuously claimed by, any single person". Only together will God's people realise the meaning, and show forth the reality of sainthood (cf Eph 2:21, 22; 3:18; 4:16).

137) 26:31-37

The inner veil and outer hanging are now described. The first of these has particular significance for us as specific reference is made to it in the New Testament, for it is the veil which in the Temple of our Lord's Day was rent in twain from top to bottom when He died on the cross. That it was rent from the top downwards is meant to teach us that it was an act of God more than of man, and that it was He Who consecrated a new and living way into His presence for sinful man through the rending of Christ's body (Heb 10:20) in the sufferings of the Cross. Thus the veil which acted as a barrier in the old economy (the high priest only was allowed to penetrate beyond it, and that but once a year, on the Day of Atonement) becomes, by its rending, an open door for all believers into the presence of God, and into fellowship with Him. The Old Testament picture therefore, while suggesting fellowship with God, points beyond itself to the ultimate and only possible realisation of what it promised, in Christ.

The pillars for the outer hanging were also overlaid with gold but the sockets were of brass (bronze) not silver. Brass speaks of divine judgment (cf Numb 21:9), and it is therefore significant that here, at the threshold of the holy place, we are reminded as also by the brazen altar of burnt offering and the laver of brass, that entrance into fellowship with a holy God is through judgment as well as mercy, The cross of Christ constitutes the supreme display of the Divine mercy precisely because it reveals also the reality of the Divine judgment on sin.

138) 27:1-8

We come now to the description of the brazen altar. Brass, when used symbolically in Scripture, speaks of judgment, and the brazen altar here symbolises the Cross on which Jesus died when He bore away the sins of the world. The altar had horns at its four corners (2), and the sacrifice was bound with cords to the horns of the altar when it was offered to God. This altar stood as the first object an Israelite would see when he entered the outer court of the Tabernacle, as a constant reminder that approach to God is possible only through sacrifice. The instructions with regard to the offering of sacrifices on the altar may be seen in detail in Leviticus chapters 1-5, a cardinal and central point in which is the action of the offerer in placing his hand on the head of the animal offered in sacrifice, symbolising his identification with the sacrifice as well as the 'transfer' of his sin to the animal. There are thus two ideas involved. The animal becomes the substitute for the one who offers, and this bears witness, in symbol, to the truth that our acceptance with God depends on Another's life laid down in death. In the second place, the offerer identifies himself with the sacrifice, and in so doing proclaims, as it were, that it is his death that takes place, in his substitute and representative. He therefore dies to sin in the ritual that he fulfils, and this is its whole point. Paul describes this position exactly in the words, "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him Who died for them and rose again" (2 Cor 5:14,15).

139) 27:9-21

The court of the Tabernacle, which comprehensively enclosed the brazen altar, the laver (30:18ff), and the holy place with its furniture, was in length 150 ft and in breadth 75. On the east side was the gate of the court which, with curtains of 15 cubits hanging on either side, was 20 cubits or 30 ft wide. The hangings of the court were of fine twined linen (9), but those for the gate included the blue, purple and scarlet which, as we have already seen (see Note on 26:1-14) symbolise Christ's deity, royalty and humanity. The presence of these colours at the gate is a symbolic reminder that the only way in to the Father's presence is through the Son.

The last two verses of the chapter (20, 21) serve as a fitting transition from the description of the furniture of the Tabernacle to the garments and duties of the priesthood. Oil, in Scripture, symbolises the Spirit, and without His presence and power the whole elaborate ritual of the Tabernacle and its sacrificial system and priesthood would be empty, barren and meaningless. This is just as true in the New Testament anti-type - where the Holy Spirit is not, all worship is vain, and fellowship with God merely a doctrine to be believed instead of an experience that empowers and transforms life. The associated idea of light in these verses reminds us both that Christ is the light of the world (through the power of the Holy Spirit by Whom He offered Himself without spot to God) and that when our spiritual experience is touched and directed by the Holy Spirit we too shall shine, as lights in the world. Apart from this all profession of faith is vain.

140) 28:1-3

These verses form the introduction to the Divine instructions concerning the priesthood. They are extraordinarily rich in spiritual application and it will be profitable to study them with some care. We note first that it is not Moses who is chosen to minister in the holy place, but Aaron his brother. This does not, of course, mean that Moses was unworthy for such a task. It is differentiation of function that is stressed, and this is also seen in 3, which speaks of those appointed to make the garments. To each man his God given task. This is a New Testament doctrine of the greatest and richest kind of significance, as we may see from 1 Cor 12 and. Rom 12:3-8. We are all different from one another, and meant to be so, in function and service. It is not a question of superiority or inferiority. Each of us has different duties in the kingdom of God, and we must be intent on doing to the best of our ability what God has given us to do. The gifts that men have are gifts, and not to be taken pride in or used for personal advancement (this is the point about the phrase in 2, 'for glory and for beauty' - it is to show forth His glory and beauty, not ours), but for the good of the Body, His Church. Since this is so, it is both useless and dangerous for one member to covet another's place or gift, for in so doing he is both trespassing beyond bounds, and at the same time neglecting his own. To see things in this light is to come to a true assessment of one's importance - we all have a part to play, and only a part, and if God has appointed us not only a small, but also an unobtrusive, part, we must content ourselves with it, and realise that only in glad acceptance of it will true happiness and peace - and wholeness - ever be found.

141) 28:4-14

The garments and accoutrements - for glory and beauty - are now described in detail. The colours (5) are those of the curtains of the Tabernacle itself, and speak of Christ as they do. Both the divinity and the humanity of our great High Priest are foreshadowed in them, and the aptest commentary on the chapter as a whole must be the relevant passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews, especially 2:14 - 3:6; 4:14 - 5:10; 7:11 - 8:6; 9:11ff. The ephod is described as being a superb blending of the multi-coloured material. It was a tunic consisting of back and front pieces joined only at the shoulders, and bound round the waist by a curious (i.e. cunningly embroidered) girdle. Two onyx stones set in ouches, or clasps, of gold, had engraved upon them the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (presumably six names on each stone), and these were fixed to the shoulders of the ephod. The symbolism here is passing beautiful and comforting, for the children of Israel are represented as borne into the presence of God on the shoulders of the High Priest. This speaks of the power of Christ to uphold His people, to carry them through every stress and strain, and over every difficult road. They are on His shoulders, and therefore underneath them are the everlasting arms. The New Testament parable of the lost sheep and the shepherd finding it and laying it on his shoulders, carrying it home rejoicing, comes forcibly to the mind. May this bring solid reassurance to some faltering and discouraged soul today.

142) 28:15-29

The spiritual application of the instruction concerning the breastplate is likewise full of comfort and assurance, nor does it merely repeat the message of the ephod. Once again the names of the children of Israel are written, but this time one on each of the twelve jewels set in the breastplate. Here, the names are represented as lying on the heart of the high priest, and this speaks to us of the personal love and care that Christ has for His people. All are precious to Him, we are meant to understand, and each with a different, unique preciousness, as is signified by the differing stones. We add two comments from brother ministers on this passage which are worthy of careful thought, the first by George Philip: "Thus the names of the people lay on the heart of the high priest as well as on his shoulders as he ministered before God on their behalf. Strength alone can be a cold and comfortless thing, but strength that has a heart of compassion and care is a mighty shelter indeed. The word judgment here (15) does not signify punishment, but rather God's verdict, utterance or guidance to the people. We have a Saviour and great High Priest touched with the feeling (that is more than knowledge or understanding) of our own infirmities, and He will make His will known to His people." That is surely enough food for thought for one day, and we shall leave the second comment for the next note.

143) 28:15-29

The second comment is by William Still: "May we not say that whereas the Lord Jesus bears all His sons equally on His shoulders into the presence of God (the message of the ephod), on His heart He bears them according to their choice and fitness for service and according, therefore, to their nearness to His heart? If anyone doubts that this is a legitimate inference, let him consider our Lord's persistent choice of three of the twelve (cf the raising of Jairus' daughter, the transfiguration, and Gethsemane), His 'favouritism' for the beloved disciple, John (John 19:26, 20:2, 21:7). A further word about the distinction between the names by birth on his shoulders, and on his breast by tribes: the one speaks of strength, the other of love, but there is strength and love in both. What is the difference? The one is fundamental, the other conditional. There is a love God bears all His children (John 3:16). But there is a love He bears those who love Him with all their heart. This is their reward. See Proverbs 8:17a. This was the love Jesus bore John, and Peter and James. Does Jesus bear you this love? Have you won it? (see also John 14:21,23)."

144) 28:30

The Urim and the Thummim are fascinatingly mysterious phenomena, and we wish that more was known about them. What is known is that they were means of ascertaining the mind of the Lord in matters of guidance. The Hebrew words may be rendered "Lights and Perfections", and there may be an association of ideas in Psalm 43, in the words, "O send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me". There are a number of references in the Old Testament to the use of these 'instruments' which make it clear that their use was for ascertaining the mind of the Lord (cf Numb 27:21, Deut 33:8, 1 Sam 23:9-12, 28:6, 30:7, 8, Ezra 2:63, Neh 7:65). The distribution of these references shows that there seems to have been no occurrence of Urim and Thummim guidance between the time of the early monarchy and the post-exilic period. In the prophetic age there would have been no need of them, since God was always raising up men of His choice to say, "Thus saith the Lord". It has been held that the Urim and the Thummim were two stones set in the breastplate of judgment, and that when the Divine guidance was sought one or other of the stones glowed with a supernatural radiance signifying the Lord's will. It may be that something of this nature is indicated in 1 Sam. 14:41, which in the RSV reads, "If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim; but if this guilt is in thy people Israel, give Thummim". On the other hand, others have held that this speaks of the casting of lots (see AV rendering of the verse). However, if the casting of lots was involved in the Urim and Thummim, it could not have been done in the ordinary sense of the term. By casting lots, you could always get a reply one way or the other; but in 1 Sam. 28:6 we are told "The Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets". But see Prov 16:33. All interpretation here must necessarily have an element of conjecture in it, since we do not in fact know what the Urim and Thummim were, nor how they worked; and it may be the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in having concealed this from us to indicate that we are not meant to have guidance in this way now, but have a more sure word of prophecy (2 Pet 1:19).

145) 28:31-35

There are two points to note particularly in this account of the priest's robe. First of all, as to the robe itself: this, it would seem, was seamless, made of one piece of material, with the opening at the top bound round the neck by woven work like a habergeon, or suit of mail. It can hardly be coincidence that such emphasis is made in the gospels on the seamless robe of Christ (Matt 27:35, Mk 15:24, Luke 23:34, John 19:23,24), nor can we doubt the association of ideas here, in a section of Scripture which speaks so much of Christ. If the seamless robe has one special significance, it is that it speaks of the 'unbrokenness' of Christ's life, and of Him Whose 'goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting' (Micah 5:2). The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of 'the power of an endless life' (7:16) in relation to Christ's eternal priesthood after the order of Melchisedec, and we are thus reminded that He is the same yesterday, today and forever (7:25). The second point concerns the ornaments on the robe, the bells and pomegranates. The pomegranates not only added to the beauty of the robe, but also, being a sweet and fragrant fruit, denote the sweet savour of the gospel, as a savour of life unto life (so Matthew Henry). The bells on the border of the priestly garment would sound out as he went about his office in the holy place, in such a way that the waiting people outside would hear them, signifying to them that all was well with him, that he was not consumed by the holiness of the Divine majesty, and that his offering on their behalf had been accepted. In this sense, we may well apply the words of Ps 89:15, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound". Gospel bells they were indeed, speaking of His entering within the veil for us!

146) 28:36-39

The mitre or head-dress of the high priest was a turban made of white linen, and adorned by a plate of gold inscribed with the words 'Holiness unto the Lord'. This inscription gathers up into itself the whole meaning of the worship of God's people. 'Be ye holy', it proclaimed from God 'for I am holy'. The words 'unto the Lord' signify something further, namely that all the people's worship was to be for His pleasure, to bring joy and delight to Him (Ps 149:4). But there is something else. Aaron was to wear this mitre in order to bear the iniquity of the holy offerings made by the people to God, and this was a recognition that even the best of our gifts are unworthy and tainted with sin, and therefore in themselves unacceptable to God. This unworthiness the priest himself was to bear, and thus secure the people's acceptance before a holy God. In this the high-priest was the type of Christ the only Mediator between God and man, in Whom and by Whom alone we can offer ourselves and the gifts we bring in the presence of the Divine majesty. As Matthew Henry puts it, "The divine law is strict; in many things we come short of our duty, so that we cannot but be conscious to ourselves of much iniquity cleaving even to our holy things; when we would do good, evil is present; even this would be our ruin if God should enter into judgment with us. But Christ, our high priest, bears this iniquity, bears it for us so as to bear it from us, and through Him it is forgiven to us and not laid to our charge".

147) 28:40-43

Again, as in 2, the priestly garments are said to be, 'for glory and for beauty'. Here however the garments are of plain white linen, not the gorgeous colourings mentioned earlier in the chapter. White robes in Scripture, however, are in fact emblems of glory, in that they typify righteousness and holiness and majesty (cf Dan 7:9, Mk 9:3, John 20:12, Acts 1:10, Rev 4:4, 6:11, 7:9-14, 15:6, 19:8). We should bear in mind that white light contains all the colours of the spectrum. We are certainly not meant, therefore, to think of absence of colour here. It is to be noted that the garments for the priests were designed principally for covering rather than for ornament and the obvious inference here is that this was meant to stand in sharp contrast to heathen worship, which was then, and still is even today, so often characterised by nakedness and indecency and sensuality (see also Exo 32:25). In the worship of God there must be an absence of anything to excite the senses or stir wrong desire. This is a good argument for austerity in worship, and is just as relevant for the higher forms of aesthetic appeal as for lower sensualities. For the same reason, it is an indication of how important seemliness of dress is in the house of God. It is true that the Scriptures say, "Rend your heart and not your garments" (Joel 2:13), and "The Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam 16:7), but when the garments and the outward appearance tell something significant about the heart, the Lord looks on these too, and takes exception to them. This is the point suggested here, and we do well to note it with care.

148) 29:1-9

We come in these verses to the consecration of the priests for the service of the sanctuary, Three distinct matters are mentioned, which together provide a fruitful lesson for all who would serve the Lord. First of all we are told of the sacrifice by which the priests were hallowed (1-3), then the washing with water (4), and finally the anointing with oil (7). The 'typical' significance of this is very telling. First of all, a man who is going to serve the Lord aright must first be rightly related to the sacrifice of the Cross. Until a man is rightly related to Jesus Christ - and this is possible only through the sacrifice of the Cross - he can have no real message to preach, he has nothing to say. This is the foundation of the Christian religion. In the second place, that man must be washed 'with water', that is, until he himself is cleansed by the word that has been committed to him, he had better not minister in holy things. A man whose life does not match his doctrines is a living lie. Thirdly, for his effectual service, he needs above all the unction of the Holy Spirit of God, signified here by the anointing with oil. Power for service is the fruit and effect of the Divine anointing. This is something distinct from the Spirit-Baptism by which we are incorporated into Christ in regeneration. There is but one baptism, but there are many fillings and anointings, nor must we presume to turn our hands to the service of the Lord without His enduement, To preach without this holy unction is to have a ministry that is barren of real fruit for God.

149) 29:10:25

The sacrifices mentioned in 1-3 are now described in detail. They are three in number, and these should be compared with the fuller descriptions of the various offerings given in the opening chapters of Leviticus. The importance of these offerings for us is that they typify and illustrate different aspects of and insights into Christ's atoning sacrifice for sin. The sin-offering (10-14) and the burnt-offering (15-18) are to be carefully distinguished, the latter being a sweet-savour offering (Lev 1) while the former was a non-sweet savour offering (Lev 4). This is an important distinction underlining a deep truth in relation to Christ's atoning work. In the Atonement there is involved the twofold issue of the punishment of the offence of sin and the repair of the injury done by sin. Here, the sin offering speaks of Christ's death as the expiation of the guilt of man's sin - He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him - hence the blood of expiation put on the horns of the altar and poured out there (12), the burning of the innards on the altar itself (13), and the burning of the flesh and skin without the camp. All this speaks of sin judged by the inflexible holiness of God. The offence of sin is punished. On the other hand, the burnt-offering is a sweet savour to God (18); it speaks of the repair of the injury done to the Divine majesty by human sin, and that injury is repaired by Christ's offering of Himself without spot unto God on our behalf His offering was that of a life utterly well pleasing to God, and it 'made up for' all that we, by our sin, had failed to offer to Him. The injury done by sin is repaired, and atonement thus made.

150) 29:10-25

The following words by an old commentator on the meaning of the burnt offering are worth pondering: "The Cross, as foreshadowed by the burnt offering, had an element in it which only the Divine mind could apprehend. There was a voice in it which was intended exclusively for, and went directly to, the ear of the Father. There were communications between the cross of Calvary and the throne of God, which lay far beyond the highest range of created intelligence....(The Cross) was the place where Christ's love to the Father was told out in language which only the Father could hear and understand....There is that in the cross which passes far beyond the loftiest conceptions of saints and angels, namely, the deep-toned devotion of the heart of the Son presented to, and appreciated by, the heart of the Father."

The third offering is called 'the ram of consecration' (cf Lev 8:22). Some think this refers to the peace offering (cf Lev 3), but the additional reference to it in Lev 8:22 makes this unlikely. The reference to consecration seems to concern the priests themselves, who are sprinkled with the blood (21) and have ear, hand and foot anointed by it. As the aforementioned commentator beautifully puts it, "A bloodstained ear was needed to hearken to the divine communications; a bloodstained hand was needed to execute the services of the sanctuary; and a blood stained foot was needed to tread the courts of the Lord's house. The twofold sprinkling of the blood and the anointing oil (21) speaks of the twofold reality of the Christian experience, justification by the atoning blood of Christ and sanctification by the outpouring of the Spirit. The 'filling of the priests hands'; as the ritual in 23 and 24 is called, seems to indicate that the service they rendered was not of themselves, but of God. As the hymn puts it, "We give Thee but Thine own, whate'er the gift may be".

151) 29:26-37

These verses speak of the wave-offering (26) and the heave-offering (27), which, after their particular ritual was fulfilled, became the portion of Moses, Aaron and the priests. The instructions are plain enough not to warrant special comment, but they afford two important lessons for us. On the one hand, they speak of the provision that God makes for those who are separated unto His service. "No man", says Christ, "hath left house or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time..." God is no man's debtor, and sees to it that those who lose their lives for His sake shall find them. Those who enter most fully into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings experience most the rewards and blessings of His grace. In the second place, there is a 'typical' significance in the fact that it was of the things wherewith the atonement was made (33) that the priests were to eat; for this speaks of the believer's participation in Christ's death and resurrection, and his feeding upon that incommensurable virtue. Not only so: the priests partook of the offerings together, in fellowship, and shared in the Divine provision and bounty in a communion of saints (cf. Paul's fruitful word in Eph 3:18 about comprehending with all saints the multidimensional love of Christ). What a fellowship we have with one another, in Him!

152) 29:38-46

The consecration of the altar was to be followed immediately by the establishment of the daily sacrifice. Two lambs were to be offered every day, one in the morning, the other in the evening; partly, as Ellicott says, "in expiation of the daily sins of the nation, but mainly as a sign that the nation daily renewed its self-dedication to Jehovah, and offered itself afresh to be a 'reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice' to Him. Meat and drink offerings were to accompany the burnt sacrifice - signs of the gratitude due to God for His perpetual mercies, and acknowledgments of His protecting care and loving kindness. At the same time incense was to be burnt upon the golden altar before the veil, as a figure of the perpetual prayer that it behoved the nation to send up to the Throne of grace for a continuance of the Divine favour." But there is a further thought: someone has said that the morning and evening sacrifices were to encircle the daily life of Israel, to hedge them in unto God - and then, as a blessed consequence, the Lord's presence with His people. This is the ultimate possibility for the spiritual life - to be so encircled and encompassed by the spirit of worship that our hearts and lives are touched with the beauty of holiness. "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us" prayed the Psalmist (Ps 90:17). This, we need to understand, is how it comes about.

153) 30:1-10

The golden altar of incense is next described. This altar was positioned in the holy place, in the second compartment of the Tabernacle, in front of the veil which separated the holiest of all from the rest of the construction. It is something of a mystery that its description should be left to this point, and not given along with the other parts of the tabernacle furniture. One possible explanation is that, in following the description of the high priest's functions and duties, the altar of incense has a connection with the high priestly work. When we recall that Scripture speaks of the altar of incense as being associated with prayer (Rev 8:3,4, Luke 1:9, 10), and that the high priest foreshadowed Christ, the inference that the altar represents the intercession of Christ for His people is not only legitimate but inevitable. As the brazen altar in the outer court represents His atoning work on earth for us, so the golden altar represents His intercessory work in heaven for us (of Heb 1:3, 7:25). Thus the tabernacle has a twofold message about sin; the brazen altar tells the sinner that there is a way into the presence of God and the golden altar proclaims, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father". The subject of Christ's heavenly work for His people is a very wonderful one, but we must be careful how we think of it. We must not emphasise it in any way that detracts from His finished work on earth on the cross. Ultimately considered, all blessings flow from the cross, and nothing can be added to that work, or needs to be. How then can we speak of His heavenly work? One commentator helpfully illustrates: "The act of child-bearing is necessary to constitute a woman a mother; but this does not mean that henceforth, to those who resort to her as 'mother', she is always giving them birth. Her act of child-bearing is, for them, a finished work. What they now enjoy are other complementary ministries of motherhood. In the same way, beyond Christ's finished work on earth there lie other complementary ministries of grace which He fulfils for His already reconciled people."

154) 30:11-16

The atonement money is now discussed. Reference has already been made to this passage in the Note on 26:15-30, which refers also to 38:25-28. We should note two points in particular. In the first place, something needs to be said about the need for this ransom money being paid. It was to be paid when the children of Israel were numbered throughout the tribes. One has only to think of the solemn story in 2 Sam 24 to realise that numbering the people was an activity fraught with danger. Nor is the reason for this hard to understand, for it tended to encourage Israel to trust in the arm of the flesh instead of in God in her battles and campaigns. The true antithesis to such an attitude is expressed in Ps 20:7, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God", Thus, even when commanded by God, it could be safely carried out only under the protection of Divine grace, symbolised here by the ransom money. Secondly, it is particularly emphasised that the half-shekel of silver was a flat-rate contribution; the rich were not to give more, or the poor less; but all were to be the same, this signifying that so far as atonement is concerned all men are on the same level, and in the same need, rich and poor, high and low. As Paul puts it in Rom 3:22, 23, "There is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God".

155) 30:17-21

The laver of brass stood in the outer court between the brazen altar and the entrance into the holy place. It speaks essentially of cleansing, and reminds us that there is more to sin than guilt; sin is also pollution, uncleanness. There is a daily cleansing required by every blood-washed believer. We walk in a sinful world, and it is inevitable that we should become stained and begrimed by contact with that evil world. Thus, again and again, we need cleansing, not from the guilt of sin, for that is once for all and forever settled, but from its defilement and power. It is this aspect of spiritual experience that is illustrated by the laver. Cleansing is spoken of in the New Testament variously, as being by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7), by the washing of water by the Word (Eph 5:26) and by the Holy Spirit (2 Thess 2:13, 1 Pet 1:2). We should not attempt to anxiously to classify different types of cleansing by these agencies, but rather be content in the recognition that the death of Christ is the fount of all cleansing, and that that cleansing is mediated to us by the Word and Spirit of God. We are told in 38:8 that the laver was made from the polished brass looking-glasses of the women. This has a deeply suggestive symbolism, for is not the Word spoken of as a mirror (2 Cor 3:18, James 1:23)? The laver, it might be said, showed men themselves, reflecting what was amiss in their lives, so that they could the more readily seek the cleansing without which they dared not approach a holy God (20,21, 'that they die not'). Toplady preserves a true insight in his words, "Wash me, Saviour, or I die".

156) 30:22-33

The composition of the anointing oil is now described, and its application to every article of furniture in the Tabernacle and on those who took part in its service. This symbolism abounds in obvious spiritual lessons. On the one hand, oil is ever a symbol of the Holy Spirit in Scripture, and we may therefore learn that without His presence and anointing, no worship or service is acceptable to God. The Tabernacle, we may say, was to be saturated and drenched with His presence, and, what is more, with the fragrance of His presence. The ingredients of the holy ointment were myrrh, cinnamon, calamus and cassia and olive oil, and these could not but fill the place with a sweet-smelling savour. This is a needed reminder to us today who tend to think more in terms of power than of sweetness when we think of the Spirit of God. In the New Testament Church, the power of the Spirit was certainly evident in extraordinary measure, but there was also a wondrous attractiveness in its corporate life, and great grace was upon them all. Another important lesson that emerges here is that all the various pieces of furniture, each speaking of some aspect of Christ, needed the anointing oil to make them fulfil their function in so doing. Here is a solemn challenge indeed. Orthodoxy of doctrine, however faithfully it sets forth Christ, will not avail if it lacks the holy unction. Neither propitiation (the brazen altar) nor cleansing (the laver), nor light (the candlestick), nor nurture (the shewbread) will be communicated to men if the Spirit of God is not present. The letter killeth; it is the Spirit alone that giveth life. One final lesson: the genuine anointing oil was not to be simulated or imitated, or used for any other purpose than the worship of the Tabernacle. This bears its own compelling lesson. Nothing can ever be a substitute for the genuine article.

157) 30:34-38

The ingredients and composition of the incense are now described. Its association with the golden altar on which it was to be used makes it clear that it also speaks of the intercession of Christ (see Note on 30:1-10). As such, it emphasises the sweet smelling savour that the prayers of the Son are to the heart of the Father. The reference in Rev 8:3 shows that it is Christ's mighty intercession which makes the prayers of His people prevail at the throne of grace. But if the incense offered speaks of Christ, it also speaks of the offering that we make of ourselves to the Lord. The obligatory and acceptable adoration of God by His people - this is the only reasonable response that can be made by a people who are the objects of such love and care as His. In this respect the golden altar with its incense represents the consecration of Romans 12:1, 2 as Romans 3 represents the altar of burnt offering, Romans 6 the laver, Romans 8 the candlestick and the shewbread. True consecration is ever a sweet-smelling savour unto the Lord (37). Nor must we forget where this incense was offered - on the threshold of the holiest of all. This reminds us again that the primary aim in the tabernacle worship was fellowship and communion with God. The sweet-smelling incense would percolate into the holiest of all, and this is what the love-offering of the believer's consecration does - indeed, this, for the believer, it may be said, is the 'way in' to fellowship and communion with Him. Alas, so often in our unconsecrated lives erect another 'veil' which prevents that communion, impoverishing our lives and bringing grief to His holy heart. Finally, there is a warning (37, 38) against the secularisation of that which is set apart and holy unto the Lord - a much needed reminder for the religious life of our day.

158) 31:1-11

The appointment of the workmen, Bezaleel and Aholiab, for the execution of the work of the tabernacle is full of interest and significance. There are two things in particular that we must distinguish. The Divine endowment for service on the one hand, and natural potential and aptitude on the other. 'Wise hearted' in 6 refers to those who had special knowledge for the task in question, either by natural gift or by training (in Hebrew thought the heart was the seat of knowledge, just as today we identify it as the seat of the affections). Certainly Bezaleel and his companions must have had the natural aptitude and training for this work, and it is generally on this basis that men are chosen for particular jobs, and especially so in the work of the kingdom of God, and this is the natural gift of God. But this alone does not qualify them for holy service. Naturally talented men who lack the endowment of God for service have, it is safe to say, done more harm than good in the life of the Church. Natural gifts need a fiery baptism in order to qualify them for usefulness to God. This serves on the one hand to warn us of the danger of setting too much store on natural gifts as such, as if their possession necessarily gave the assurance of success; and on the other to remind us that, after all, God is the author and source of men's natural gifts and talents, and bestows them with the intention of making use of them for His own purposes. We need to guard against the tendency to belittle and despise gifts or training, as if these were something unworthy. It is true that God can, and does, use all sorts of unlikely material in His service; He used Balaam's ass on one notable occasion, but He does not usually use asses, animal or human, in the furtherance of His purposes, but rather duly prepared instruments. And so it was to be here.

159) 31:1-11

Two further points should be noted here. The first is that, in the experience of some, the latent potential and aptitude for service does not evidence itself until after the anointing of the Spirit has been given, and after the experience of conversion has brought new life to the soul. Only then does the warping of the personality caused by sin become straightened, and man come into His own, into his true destiny as the new man God has made him. In the liberation he experiences, all latent possibilities, hitherto held in bondage, are set free too. The other point is the fascinating question of the relation between art and culture and religion. On the one hand, we do not need to read very deeply to realise the artistic competence implied and involved in this work. In the devising of textiles and fabrics and the blending of colours whole industries involving highly-skilled techniques spend vast sums today, and we can hardly think that in those far-off days it came easily or naturally to the children of Israel. On the other hand, we should note particularly the strict limitations imposed by the Divine will on the creative spirit. Everything was to follow the pattern shown in the mount. Modern cultural theory, as expressed by the decadent aesthetes of our time, maintains that the creative spirit gives of its best only when it is free from all restraint. But this is the exact antithesis of the Christian position, which asserts that it is only in captivity to the Divine will that men become free. Men are but men, and must be made to remember their creatureliness - this was the point about the prohibition regarding eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden, and why precisely a limit was placed upon Adam. It is precisely in the realm of modern technological brilliance that our generation has been tempted with feeling of god-like power. And what is true in technology is just as true in the world of culture.

160) 31:12-18

It is perhaps significant that these verses enjoining Sabbath observance follow immediately upon the insistence in 11 that Bezaleel and his companion should work in strict conformity to the Divine pattern. The comment in the previous Note about the prohibition placed on man to remind him of his creatureliness is relevant here also. The 'imposition' of a day of rest was, as in Gen 3, the test of their submission to God, and the remembrance of their dependence upon Him. This, when gladly received and accepted, was to become a source of inestimable blessing to the people of God. Not only was it to be one of the chief signs that marked them out as the people of God - it is still the same today - but it was to be a source of well-being and refreshment, that wellbeing and refreshment flowing directly from their submission to God. For, contrary to all carnal and natural estimates, utter dependence upon, and submission to, God does not result in either dreary bondage or cramping restriction and frustration, but freedom and liberty. As Chesterton puts it, we become taller when we bow. This is the real issue in Sabbath observance; to think of it in terms of puritanical narrowness and joyless legalism is to miss the point. Rather, since the Sabbath is the Lord's Day, and designed primarily for the enjoyment of the blessings He desires to give His people, to desecrate it is to refuse fellowship with Him and prefer independence. And this was the primal sin in the Garden of Eden.

161) 32:1-6

This chapter records a disastrous episode in Israel's history which, but for the agonising intercession of Moses, would have led to her rejection by God. The lessons it teaches us are many and solemn. It is worth noting at the outset that the trouble began because there were some in the congregation of Israel who gave voice to their criticism of their God-appointed leader. There is a wealth of contempt in the words, "as for this Moses...." It does not need many with such a spirit to spread disaffection and do untold harm; and this in fact is what happened (cf Acts 6:1). There are two points in particular which we need to note in these verses. On the one hand, it comes with a startling shock of horror that almost at the moment when, up in the mount, Moses is receiving the Divine blue-print for Aaron and his sons, and the plans for a life of honoured service are being unfolded, Aaron is jeopardising his whole future down among the people. Solemn and frightening thought indeed! On the other hand, in the very moment that God is telling Moses in the mount that the people's gold will be required for the construction and service of the tabernacle, that gold was being prostituted to unholy ends and fashioned into an idol. This was the tragedy then, and it is so often the tragedy today, that the gold of men's lives is being put to base and unworthy uses. Jesus once said, "Render unto God the things that are God's". How tragic it is to see gifts and qualities and energies given to sin that were always meant to be used for God and for His service!

162) 32:7-14

Aaron appears to have weakly and ineffectually tried to give a religious and spiritual slant to the people's base action by calling their disgraceful exhibition a 'feast to the Lord' (5); but not thus easily can idolatry be made to look respectable, and God dramatically intervenes to call it by its proper name (7,8). The words with which He denounces them are ominously significant, calling them to Moses not 'my people' but 'thy people', as if having disowned them for their sin. Nor is this an exaggerated form of words, for, as 10 makes clear, this is what was in the Lord's mind, as He proposed to Moses to begin all over again with him and make of him a great nation instead of Israel, thus initiating a new line. Moses' reaction to this marks him out as one of the greatest of men. Even in the context of the outbreak of Divine wrath against His people it is possible to see how this must have been a test for Moses' integrity of heart. If it was, he instantly and resolutely died to it, died to the prospect of becoming the father of a new line of promise, and to the honour and fame it would undoubtedly bring him; and out of a selfless love for the people he challenged God and - dare we say it? - in faith contradicted Him, speaking to Him of Israel as 'Thy people' (11). The significance of this 'Thy' is seen in the verses that follow, for Moses pleaded on their behalf, not any extenuating circumstances, as if to suggest they were not quite so bad as to merit such drastic treatment, but the covenant (13) and His own faithful word and oath to them. And such was the effect of his agonising and audacious intercession that the Divine intention was changed (14), mysterious and inexplicable though this be to all our notions of the sovereignty of God, As James puts it, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much", Never was such intercession needed so much by Israel as at that time!

163) 32:1-20

It is impressive to realise that before ever Moses went down to the people or they were aware of the Lord's anger against them the effectual intercession of their leader had been made on their behalf, and the Divine sentence against them annulled. "As for this Moses...."they had said in contempt, and this was the stature and calibre of the man they had so basely maligned. And now we see him down among the people, first crashing to the ground the tablets of stone with the law of God written on them -was this a gesture of despair on his part, or of anger, or are we to see in it a symbol of the law Israel had broken and spurned? - then taking the golden calf and grinding it to powder, scattering it on the water and making them drink of it. Two thoughts are prompted by this, one that the gold that had been ear-marked for the work of the tabernacle was ground to powder and scattered, lost to them and lost to God. In the same way the gold in some lives is permanently lost to God. The other point is that, in making Israel drink of the dust-strewn water, Moses obliged them to partake of the bitterness of their sin, as if to write the memory of it indelibly on their hearts. One further point should be mentioned, that of the contrast between Joshua's uncomprehending hearing of the noise of Israel's orgy and Moses' instant realisation of what was going on. What kind of noise rises from the Church to the ears of God today? Is it the voice of them that shout for mastery, as praying men and women storm the ramparts of heaven for victory in the battles of the kingdom?

164) 32:21-29

Moses loses no time in dealing with the situation. First Aaron, as the fabricator of the idol, then the idolaters themselves, are summarily dealt with. The fundamental and woefully pathetic weakness of Aaron is exposed here (22-24), and all the more graphically alongside the moral and spiritual stature of his brother. Did he really think that such inane excuses could possibly carry weight with Moses, let alone with God? It is a measure of the ineffectualness of Aaron's character that the people should have ever approached him in the first place about making the calf or that he should have even for a moment countenanced their request. Moses' dealing with the people was grim and thorough, but not too grim if we take 'so great a sin' (21) as seriously as God took it. George Philip writes: "In every work or movement of defection there are two distinguishable groups which need to be dealt with differently. There are ringleaders, and those who are beguiled and enticed. When the disciplinary word and work is operative those whose hearts are genuine, though beguiled, are quick to see their error, and hurry back to the side of God. This they must do in a clearly defined way, by taking their place at the side of God's man....Then, the ringleaders who refuse to stop their idolatry are to be rooted out and put to the sword as a matter of policy so that, the evil root being destroyed, the poison will no longer spread among the people". This is the force of Moses' resounding challenge in 26. He in effect excommunicated the entire camp by standing in the gate, and summoned them to form a new band of consecrated people (cf Heb 13:12, 13). There must be a clean break with idolatry, before there could be any further possibility of going on with the Lord.

165) 32:30-35

Any interpretation of the previous verses as showing harshness in Moses' dealings with the people must surely be contradicted by the evidence in this passage of the tenderness and compassion with which he made intercession for them before the Lord.

This is one of the most moving passages in the Old Testament, with Moses prepared to be blotted out of God's book of life for the sake of Israel. We should remember that Moses had been hearing a great deal about atonement during his forty days and nights in the mount with God, but it is significant that here (30) he does not speak of the sacrifice of an animal to make atonement for their sin. He said, "Peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin", the implication being that he himself was prepared to be the victim, and lay himself on the altar on behalf of Israel. In this he surely breathed the spirit of Christ, as Paul did centuries later (Rom 9:1-5). And, it would seem from 33 and 34, God took the will for the deed, for the people's life was spared. Not that any man could ever make atonement for sin - God alone, in Christ, can do so - but the self-sacrifice with which Moses offered himself points us away to Him Who came in the fullness of the time to accomplish this unique work. It is to be observed, however, that a distinction is made between the forgiveness of sins and the suffering of their consequences. The Lord plagued the people because of the calf they had made (25). Furthermore, forgiveness notwithstanding, the presence of the Angel is meant, as 33:3 makes clear, to convey that it was not going to be quite the same as before, in their relationship with God. God would still be with them, but it was to be a 'withdrawn' presence, to remind them that He means His people to take His grace seriously, on pain of punishment. (See John 14:21, 23 for an understanding of the kind of presence and sweetness of fellowship we may forfeit by our carelessness and sin).

166) 33:1-6

The full force of the change of relationship between God and the people is seen in a comparison between 2 and 3 here and 23:20-23, where He had promised to go up with them by an Angel in whom was His Name. This latter signified the Divine presence, whereas now it was to be a mere angelic presence and protection, more than adequate still for protection and safety, but with the priceless privilege of intimacy of fellowship withheld. We shall see later in the chapter how this dark judgment was turned away from the people - again by the intercession of Moses - but the very statement of it here underlines the solemn possibility of its happening, and the very real danger of its happening, in spiritual life. It is possible for God's people to forfeit the inestimable blessing of His presence through sin. This needs to be carefully distinguished from such an experience as is expressed in the words "When we in darkness walk, nor feel the heavenly flame....", which refers to the loss of only the sense of the Divine presence which, however, may be nearer than ever at such a time, though we do not realise it. Rather, what is indicated is what David bears witness to when he cries, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me", and Paul when he voices his dread of becoming 'a castaway' or 'disqualified'. It is possible, he indicates elsewhere (1 Cor 3:15), for a believer to suffer loss by the carelessness of his life, and what is spoken of here is some indication of the nature of the loss. How solemnly this word warns believers against carelessness and complacency in the things of God! We lose far more than our integrity when we sin against Him.

167) 33:7-11

The tabernacle in 7 cannot of course be the tabernacle whose description has occupied the last few chapters, for as yet it had not been constructed. This is the tent of meeting, called here the tabernacle of the congregation, in which worship was held up to that time. We can hardly doubt that his pitching it without the camp was a gesture in relation to Israel's sin with the calf, similar to that in 32:26. Here it has a very profound significance in view of the fact that the cloudy pillar, fraught with the Divine presence, came down upon it. For this showed Israel very plainly that the presence they were like to forfeit by their sin was nevertheless with Moses, the man of God whom they had spurned. This is a pattern that has often been repeated in the life and experience of the Church. When through sin and unfaithfulness the word 'Ichabod' seems to have been written over a Church or denomination, it is not uncommon for the presence of the Lord to be manifested in a separated (not separatist!) group which has lived in faithfulness to Him and His Word. Nor can that presence be hid when it is there, or denied; only there seems often to be a marked unwillingness to recognise or admit its significance, and one can only assume that, having lost the blessing of God's presence they have become little interested in learning from those who have it how it might be wooed back. The secret is told in 11 - fellowship with God. To know Him like this (cf Phil 3:10) is to invite and bespeak His presence in all we do and where ever we go.

168) 33:12:17

In these verses we see how Moses interceded for the restoration of the Divine presence and would not take No for an answer. It is a very wonderful passage, revealing a magnificently daring faith storming the throne of grace, and refusing to be content with anything save the highest. There are two things in particular that we should note. The first is that Moses' prayer was very brief. Even supposing that these verses merely sum up the gist of what he said, it is still short and to the point. There is an important lesson in this. It is not the length of the prayer that matters, but the quality of the man who prays it. All the significance of the statement in 11 needs to be read into this prevailing. It was what Moses was, not what he said, that moved the hand of God, in the sense that had he not been the man he was, nothing he could have said would have availed. And yet - this is the second point - what he said is also highly significant, for he pleaded God's own word to him, and in all daring held Him to it. This is the kind of praying God delights to honour. God had said, "I know thee by name, and thou hast found grace in My sight", and now Moses was saying, "Treat me, then, as someone whose name You know and who has found grace in Your sight". Daring ground indeed, but safe and sure, for He is the covenant God Who commits Himself irrevocably to His people.

The significance of 16 should not be missed. The distinctive characteristic of a true people of God is that He is with them, and it is this that marks them out among other men. Moses saw that the Divine presence with them was a simple and categorical necessity if they were to fulfil their true function in the world. Nothing less would enable them to bear their testimony in the world. It is ever so. One of the tragedies in the life of the Church, and the explanation of much of its ineffectiveness, is that so many of us lack that distinctive characteristic and seem so little different from other men.

169) 33:18-23

This also is a wonderful passage, and Moses' daring faith rises to new heights as he beseeches God to show him His glory. Doubtless even as he asked he knew that it was impossible, for no man can see the face of God and live. But what God did say to him is full of significance. It was as if He said, "Moses, how glad I am with this intercession of yours. You are in the position in which I can withhold nothing from you that is possible for Me to give, but it is not possible for this to happen. If I revealed My glory to you, the world would disintegrate. You are not ready yet for that one day, Moses. One day, but not yet, not yet! But I will let you see all that man can bear to see". And Moses was set in the cleft of the rock by the hand of God, and was given to see the 'after-glow' of the Divine glory. And even this was overwhelming enough to make his face shine (34:29). But there is something else to learn here. Moses asked to see the glory; but God said, "I will make all My goodness pass before thee" (19). In the light of what we now know in the fulness of the gospel, it can surely be said that His goodness is but glory in disguise, for God has given to men the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6), and Christ was goodness incarnate walking among men. And of that incarnation not only could John say, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father" (John 1:14), but also Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that Moses, with Elijah, viewed its glory on the mount of Transfiguration. Glory, then, is goodness, and goodness glory, and both seen to perfection and in fulness in Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us.

170) 34:1-5

There are three points to be underlined in these brief verses. The first is that the restoration of the presence of God to His people and the renewing of the covenant with them is associated with the renewed giving of the law. The moral law had to be delivered afresh since it had been violated. It is interesting and significant to see the interaction of grace and law here. The law is first of all a revelation of the Divine character before it is an enunciation of His requirements from His creatures. It is when what He is becomes obscured that what He demands is neglected. In the second place, this reminds us that when we grieve the Spirit of God and lose fellowship with Him because of our sin, we must go right back to the beginning again. Here, it is as if God were saying to Moses: "I am not in a hurry, Moses. We will go right back to the beginning and start all over again". The real answer to the question put in the words of the hymn, "Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?" is "exactly where you lost that blessedness, at the point of your sin, and to that point you must now return". But it is not quite the same as before. Something is always lost by sin, even when it is forgiven. The first tables of stone were the work of God (31:18, 32:16), but these were hewn by the hand of Moses, a subtle and significant indication that things were now different. Thirdly, we are presented with the wonderful picture of a man toiling up the mount of God and God coming down in the cloud to meet him. This is the real meaning of worship and fellowship. If this could be true of our coming together in the house of God - and it could be, as it needs to be - how completely would our services be transformed, and with what holy awe and expectation we would come to His house!

171) 34:6-9

The revelation of God given 6 and 7 is the answer to the prayer of 33:18 and the fulfilment of 33:19. This, then, is what the glory of God, and His goodness, is like! The Apostle John's words come irresistibly to mind, "We beheld His glory, full of grace and truth". We should ponder well each wonderful phrase here, for this is the God with Whom we have to do, the God of penitents and Saviour of sinners. In 7, the phrase 'clear the guilty' should perhaps be taken with the idea of forgiveness, reminding us that God's forgiveness does not consist in His simply overlooking sin. Guilt is not thus cleared; it is assumed, taken by Him to His own holy heart, and destroyed at infinite cost to Himself. Nor, having been thus dealt with, are its consequences necessarily nullified; there is such a thing as the entail of sin, which can have repercussions to the third and fourth generations (7b). Moses' response in 9 is striking and significant. It is as if he said, "If Thou art such a God as this (6, 7), Thou art the very God to deal with this stiff-necked people. Thou canst do something with them. Go among us, then, and take us for, and make us, Thine inheritance". This is certainly no ground for complacency but, rightly understood, a source of wondrous comfort and assurance to every difficult and warped spirit. God can do something with us, and make something of us - that is what these verses proclaim.

172) 34:10-17

Here is God's answer to Moses' plea in 9. The covenant is renewed, and He takes them for His inheritance. It is impressive to look back to see the extent of Moses' intercession for the people. In 32:11-14, it was deliverance from the destruction of Divine wrath; in 32:30-35 it was forgiveness that was won; in 33:12-17 it was the restoration of the Divine presence; and now here, the renewal of the covenant Prayer wrought a complete reinstatement. What a lesson in effectual intercession! It was the daring of a consecrated faith. "Concerning the work of My hands, command ye Me" (Isa. 45:11). One recalls the earlier remarkable word in the account of the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, when, after a series of statements in which it is said that 'Moses did according to the word of the Lord' it is recorded in 8:13 that 'the Lord did according to the Word of Moses'. The patriarch knew the secret of how to move the Hand that moves the world. Such is the evidence of this passage.

173) 34:10-17

But, although the covenant is renewed by sheer grace, it lays inexorable demands upon the covenanted people, as can be seen in 12-17. These verses bear witness to the separation that must mark men's lives when they are in earnest with the Lord. That this particular kind of warning given here was necessary is shown by the ease with which the Israelites had corrupted themselves with the golden calf, with only the influence of their Egyptian contact in the past. If influence could do this to them, what would direct contact with the Canaanites do? God knew what was in them, knew too that grace must wage a relentless warfare against the lawless powers of darkness within man that seek to enthrall him and drag him down. Let us see, then, a gospel outline in all this. God's grace in Christ is unconditioned, and the summons to holiness of life is not the condition of salvation, but its fruit; but God intends that the fruit of all covenanted relationships should be seen, and 'every branch that beareth not fruit He taketh away'. (John. 15:2)

174) 34:18-26

The commands concerning the feast of unleavened bread (18), the dedication of the firstborn (19, 20) and the other feasts (22, 23) had already been given to Israel (Exo 12:14-20, 13:1-19) and the reason for their repetition here is that, the people having been reinstated in the Lord's favour through the intercession of Moses, He now proceeded to re-lay, as it were, the foundations of their religious life. That none should appear before God empty (20) was meant to signify that the offerings brought to Him were the token of their total submission to Him, their witness to the fact that they were not their own. There is an important principle enshrined in this which is of wide application, and it is seen, for example, in the laws concerning tithing. The people were to give a tithe as a recognition that all they had belonged to God. The tithe is a symbol, a token: it proclaimed that they were God's own possession.

175) 34:18-26

This is also the point of the Sabbath command (21), for its observance was the token that all their days belonged to Him, and that, for their part, they were honouring the covenant and that they were a people set apart for Him. Not even earing (ploughing) time or harvest were to be exceptions to this, a fact which is important for our modern, highly sophisticated age. Do Christian farmers in fact suffer for honouring the Sabbath? What is said in 24 about keeping the feasts would surely be applicable here. If God was prepared to guard His people's land while they observed the feasts, surely He will look after the crops and provide weather for harvesting for those who honour His day. A cynic once wrote to the Press the following letter: "Dear Sir, I have been trying an experiment. I have a field of corn which I ploughed on Sunday. I planted it on Sunday. I cultivated it on Sunday. I cut it and hauled it to the barn on Sunday. And I find that I have more corn in the acre than has been gathered by any of my neighbours this October". The Editor printed the letter, and added one sentence of comment underneath: "God does not make full settlement in October" - Editor.

176) 34:27-35

This is the passage which forms the basis of Paul's exposition in 2 Cor 3:12-18 of the contrast between the old and the new covenants. This is made more difficult for us by the A.V. rendering of 33, which reads 'till Moses had done speaking with them', and thereby exactly reverses the meaning of the original which has 'when Moses had done speaking with them'. What is being said is this: As Moses came down from the mount from his holy converse with God, the skin of his face shone, reflecting the radiance of the Divine glory that he had been privileged to behold (34: 5ff). This was so evident and awesome that Aaron and the people were afraid to approach him (30). Moses delivered the Lord's commands to the people (32), and when he had done speaking with them (i.e. when his official intercourse with them was finished) he veiled his face (33). This means that whenever he spoke for God he unveiled his face, but at other times he wore the veil except when he went into the presence of the Lord and spoke with Him. In 2 Cor 3, Paul says that Moses thus veiled his face so that the Israelites 'might not see the end of the fading splendour' (RSV), i.e. lest they should see the glory fading and - presumably - consider the law which Moses was giving them to be of only passing importance and significance. The point Paul makes is that the use of the veil was a symbol of the fact that Israel did not see that the old covenant was transitory, and that its glory was to be lost in that of the new. But the simplest and most obvious lesson here is that the 'shining' is a symbol of the moral glory and transformation that can be seen in the face and life of those who are touched by His grace.

177) 35:1-3

It is surely significant that we have a further reiteration of the fourth commandment at this point, at the beginning of the vast operation of constructing the tabernacle, which now is to occupy the remainder of the book of Exodus. There are important lessons for us in this. For one thing, as we saw in 31:17, the Sabbath was a sign of the covenant between God and Israel and of the nature of the relationship existing between them; and its emphasis here is meant to bear witness to the truth that all true and worthy work for God must issue from a true relationship with Him. On the one hand, in this connection, it stresses the necessity of our resting from our own works in order that we might work the works of God, that is, it signifies the cancellation of the energies of the flesh so that the work might be done in the Spirit. Merely human enthusiasms in God's work are excluded. On the other hand, we are reminded that it is from the basis of rest that we can best work for God. Not only must we rest from our works so that He can work in us and through us, but also we must rest from ourselves in order to become all we are meant to be in the presence of God. As has been said, the secret of effectual service is not overwork, but overflow. And that overflow comes best and most naturally, and certainly most fruitfully, from the rest of faith, to which the law of the Sabbath bears witness.

178) 35:4-20

It is highly instructive to see the order in which this chapter develops. First of all (1-3), worship and communion with God on His holy day; then sacrificial giving from willing hearts; then costly and careful service; and all prefaced by the giving of the Word from God. This has something of the greatest import to teach us in the life of the Church today. The recovery of the Word of God is the first necessity if ever there is to be a recovery of interest in the Church's work, for this is the only real source and inspiration of a true stewardship. One of the saddest and most humiliating aspects of Church life at the present time is the constant complaint about the lack of finance for the Church's work, with its average per capita givings little more than a pittance. If we are to believe the teaching of these verses, the remedy for this deplorable situation lies not in further, better-organised appeals and streamlined, business-like techniques, but in a recovery of interest in the gospel on the part of the Church's membership, and in a revival of evangelical faith in Christ. It is the Spirit of the living God alone that can move the hearts of men and make them willing, and He works in the context of the Word of the gospel. What James Denney once said about missionary interest is true also of the whole range of Christian work today: "If there is little missionary interest in the churches, depend upon it, the reason is that there is little evangelic interest. The wonder of that redeeming revelation that made the first disciples Apostles has faded away, and we must revive it by standing where the Apostles stood, and seeing Christ in the awful and glorious light in which they saw Him, if new life is to enter into missionary work". How needful for such words to be written with a pen of iron on the life of the Church today.

179) 35:21-29

A comparison of the givings of the people with the instructions given to Moses in the mount will show how closely those instructions were followed in the response the people made. It was all in accordance with what the Lord had commanded. This raises an issue of great interest. The work of the tabernacle's construction was hemmed in by firm Divine restrictions, and the question that arises is whether these in fact serve to cramp and stifle human initiative and creativity. From the merely human standpoint this might seem to be so, and indeed many artists and aesthetes would insist that such limitations would be disastrous. But it is part of the paradox of spiritual life that it is precisely in being captive to the word and will of God that men find truest freedom, both in personal life and in service. If man is made in the image of God, and for God, how could the Divine will be in any way restrictive for him? Must it not rather be in the deepest sense perfect freedom? On the contrary, trouble always starts, and restriction in his work ensues, when men's own ideas are intruded into the service of God, things which He has not commanded, and which He will not own. Why are we so unwilling to model the life of the Church on the 'pattern shown us in the mount'? This is so often the simple explanation of our barrenness. The moment we take God at His word, and take His word seriously, fruitfulness will begin to be seen, and creative originality and versatility too. After all, He is the Creator God.

180) 35:30-35

Comment has already been made on the appointment of these workmen, in the Note on 31 1-11 which see. Here we content ourselves with noting the detailed excellence and beauty of the work which they were to accomplish. There was nothing merely utilitarian in the whole conception. When we remember that this was the house in which God was to dwell, a spiritual application becomes helpful and fruitful. 'Your body', says Paul, 'is the temple of the Holy Ghost' (1 Cor 6:19), and since this is so, and since also God is pleased to dwell among His people (Col 1:27 may be fairly rendered 'Christ among you'), we may understand the care and concern God has for His people, in seeking to fashion them for His glory. He is not content with an initial salvation for them; they must go on to perfection, to maturity of character, and not be satisfied with living in the shallows of spiritual experience. And with what patience and with what grim determination does He apply His gracious disciplines to the wayward and, too often, intractable material of our lives, in order to recreate in us His own image. Nothing less than the plenary power of the Holy Spirit is sufficient for such a task. But He is able (cf 2 Cor 3:18, Phil 3:21) and He will not be content with less in us His people.

181) 36:1-7

The response to Moses' call to work and give was remarkable and overwhelming, and the great enterprise of constructing the tabernacle was begun with enthusiasm and dedication. And all that we have already said by way of applying the ancient pattern unfolded in these chapters to the situation obtaining in the life of the Church today is borne out by what is said here. Not only was there no need for repeated and insistent appeals for gifts and work; the people brought, and wrought, 'much more than enough for the service of the work.' (5), and had to be restrained from bringing any more. Some have suggested that Moses' words in 6 about those who 'made' work, i.e. wove material for the curtains and hangings, as opposed to those who gave of their gold and silver, may perhaps have been the humbler, poorer members of the community. It may be that this is to read more into the words than we are entitled to do, but it does serve to underline the important truth that generous giving is not necessarily an evidence of wealth. The easy assumption that some make in face of the very liberal giving of Christian people whom they know that they must 'be well off and well able to afford it' is simply an evidence of how little they understand the real motives that underlie their generosity. Some people give so much and so liberally not because they earn so much more than others, but because through simpler, more disciplined, and even sacrificial living, they have so much more to give. It is in faithfulness, not in possessions, that they out-do their fellows.

182) 36:8-39-43

This extensive section virtually repeats the substance of chapters 25-31; 36:8-38 corresponds to 26:1ff; 37:1-24 to 25:10-39; 37:25-29 to 30:1ff; 38:1-7 to 27; 38:9-31 to 27:14ff; 39 to 31:10ff. The Notes on these passages should be consulted again, for revision. We shall not repeat the lessons already discussed, but content ourselves with a number of general observations. We note first that the order of construction is different from the order of the instruction given by God to Moses. It is not easy to detect any significance in this, and in view of Moses' repeated insistence to the people that the pattern shown on the mount must be observed, we can hardly imagine that Moses would proceed with the work in any wrong way. It may be however that in giving the instructions about the furniture of the Ark before those about the outer coverings, God was teaching the Israelites - and us - that the inner realities represented by the Ark, the Table and the Candlestick, were fundamental, and that the heart of the religious life of His people was to be fellowship with Him, not outward incidentals. What point indeed in having an elaborate structure - ancient or modern - without a heart, without an inner dynamic or inspiration?

183) 36:8-39:43

This long passage refers not to the actual building of the tabernacle, but to the preparation of all the various materials; its erection is described in chapter 40. It does not therefore need much imagination to realise that, with such a vast number of component parts, great and small, to be arranged in order, the camp of Israel must have had at times a rather disordered and disorganised look. And yet the overall design was present in the mind of Moses, and he got the people to work steadily towards it. Doubtless there may have been times when he would wonder whether anything would ever emerge from such a welter of seemingly unrelated parts. Christian work is like this; it is not always easy to see, however bright the eye of faith may be, the shape or form of what is not yet in existence except in the word of promise and in the mind of those to whom the promise was given. Yet faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, and one's eye must be on the far distances rather than on the immediate scene. Let us learn from the building of the tabernacle that, if we adhere to the Divine instructions, order will surely emerge from the seeming disorder of all the preparatory work, and God's purpose will be fulfilled for His glory.

184) 3:8-39:43

The virtual repetition of the earlier chapters in this section is meant to teach the obedience of Moses to detail. The instructions of God were carried out meticulously, and everything merely human was refused and rejected. This is how God said it should be, and this is how Moses decided it would be. God has His Divine order for His people and His work, and every desire after approximation to it meets with His delighted blessing and benediction. But when something is repeated in Scripture, it is meant also to write on our minds the more decisively the importance of the truths concerned. We can gauge therefore the importance of "the pattern shown in the mount" for this particular work of God.

Another lesson that stands out in this passage is the harmony with which the people set about the task of building the tabernacle. There was no dissension. They had a common aim, and something higher than their own ends to grip and inspire them; this was a unifying power in the congregation of Israel. It is the lack of such a unifying inspiration that has spelt such disunity among the churches today. The need is for men's hearts to be gripped afresh by the gospel, "according to the pattern shown in the mount". This alone can bring us near to Christ and, nearer Him, we shall be nearer one another.

185) 36:8-39:43

One further lesson needs to be noted. We have already said that this was a preparatory work, the getting ready of the materials for the building of the tabernacle. But it may be said that the actual building of the tabernacle itself was also a preparatory work in the sense that, once completed, the tabernacle fulfilled a significant function in the life of Israel. In the most ultimate sense, Moses could have hardly understood the full implications of what he was engaged in, in that the tabernacle was but one part of the overall strategic plan of Divine redemption, one element in God's sovereign purpose, as indeed is the whole book of Exodus itself. It is only in the light of the whole that the various parts are truly understood. It is the commander-in-chief who is in command of the over-all strategy. He does not necessarily tell the junior officers of the field regiment all that is in his mind. He tells them their duty, and expects them to get on with the job. Do we always know, are we always aware of what it is we are doing and being prepared for, in the work of the kingdom? Did Moses? Did Israel? Perhaps only dimly. But they were obedient, and this is the all-important thing. And if He has given us a pattern to work on, it is not necessary for us to know all that He purposes to do; it is ours to obey, and do what lies to our hand with all our might. It is obedience here that ensures His presence, and that is all that matters,

186) 40:1-33

The final chapter of Exodus speaks of the upraising of the tabernacle and the down-coming of God among His people. Looked at from the wider spiritual standpoint, there is a fruitful message here in the contrast Exodus presents with Genesis. Genesis records the fall of man, and his expulsion from the presence of God (and ends with the grim and sombre phrase 'a coffin in Egypt!'), but Exodus speaks of 'the way out' of this tragic situation and of the restoration of fellowship. Thus together the first two books of the Old Testament present a complete picture, in embryo, of the meaning of redemption, and it is this that is amplified and explicated in the fulness of the New Testament's teaching. Commentators underline the fact that after the assembling of all the materials of the tabernacle, a pause seems to have ensued, and Moses did not proceed to its setting up, but waited for direct and specific command from God to do so, this being determined for the first day of the first month, almost a year after Israel had come out of Egypt. There is a great deal of significance in this; we are not only to do God's will, but also do it at His time. To wait on the Lord is fundamental in Christian service, and frequently means to wait for Him. When His time comes, His directive is clear and unmistakeable. In Christian work we must get the timing right. The oft-repeated 'Thou shalt' in 1-16 is matched to the equally frequent 'as the Lord commanded Moses' in 17-33, and are thus given the completed picture of purposeful activity - human activity guided, directed and controlled by the Divine hand and will. On the one hand, the Divine command, on the other, the obedience of faith, and the result - the descent of the glory of God's presence. A potent and dynamic equation indeed!

187) 40:34-38

These brief final verses represent the climax of the book, the culmination of the long preparation, not only of the Tabernacle, but also of the people, and another stage was completed in the Divine programme. And when all was done, the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. There are two points to note here which are of fundamental importance in any application we make of the story of Exodus to our own spiritual situation. The first is the fact that at the heart of the tabernacle and its worship there was the God-given Word of law and grace, symbolised by the Ten Commandments written on the tables of stone within the Ark. Ultimately, it is this that God honours and vindicates with the coming of His glory, and when the Word of God is reinstated in the heart of the Church's life, there will be some hope of spiritual renewal. Every spiritual awakening in the history of the Church has in fact been associated with the recovery of the Word of God. The second is the absolute obedience to God's commands on the part of Moses and the people. The down-coming glory may in fact be said to be the ultimate reward of long and costly obedience will of God. Nothing less will bring the fire of God down to earth. In spiritual life there is no substitute for obedience; neither earnest work and endeavour, elaborate organisation, or even importunate prayer itself, will avail if at the heart of everything obedience to the will of God is lacking. The recovery and reinstatement of the Word, and a total obedience to its summons - this is the pattern for Divine blessing, and the law of spiritual harvest.

188) 40:34-38

Two final observations will suffice to bring our studies in Exodus to a close. The first is this: the Divine glory came down into the midst of a people who had fallen into gross idolatry, and whose sin had kindled the wrath of God against them. If this be so, if the enormity of the golden calf could be forgiven and forgotten, must there not be hope for the Church in our day and generation, soiled and marred as it has become, if only there be a renewal of gospel-obedience? If the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, may it not also return, with power, to a church that humbles itself in repentance and in a determination to new obedience?

The second lesson, with which we conclude, is that of the abiding presence of the glory with the children of Israel throughout their journeyings (38). This is the ultimate in spiritual experience. Moses was right in 33:15 - all would have been useless if God had not given them His presence for the journey, Nor is it otherwise in the work of the gospel; it is only in the fellowship of the Spirit that that work can be done, and where that conscious fellowship, which mediates and communicates the Divine presence, is wanting, worship will be vain and preaching will be vain. There is all the difference in the world between worship and service, however orthodox and evangelical, that lacks the holy unction of God and that which is touched and transformed by it. To know the latter, as Moses surely did and we must covet to do, is to be prepared to pay any price to have it continue. May it be so with us, for His great Name's sake!