
THE BOOK of First Chronicles

The latest edition of the IVP Bible Dictionary says that 'Chronicles tells the story of Israel up to their return from exile, concentrating on matters of importance concerning her religious life'. This is an apt, if brief, description of its contents. The books are historical, but certainly the emphasis throughout is on the spiritual significance of Israel's history, and it is this that constitutes the supreme value of what is written in them. A good deal requires to be said by way of introduction to our study, and in the first few Notes we shall concentrate on giving a reasonably adequate background that should prove helpful in studying this part of God's Word.

I) 1:1-54

1 and 2 Chronicles, separate in our Bibles, form one book in the Hebrew Bible. It is interesting to realise that although there is common material in Kings and Chronicles, they belong in fact to different parts of the Old Testament. In the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Kings belong to the books of the Prophets - the former prophets, as opposed to the latter prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, etc. But the books of Chronicles do not appear in that grouping, but stand together with Ezra and Nehemiah, apart from the other historical books of the Old Testament. They are contained in what is sometimes called the Hagiographa, the sacred writings (the Kethubim, as the Hebrew word has it). The question of the relation that Chronicles bear to the earlier books of Samuel and Kings is one that we shall have to discuss, and will, in the Notes that follow.

Four definite and clear-cut divisions are easily discernible:

- 1 Chronicles 1:1 - 9:44 Genealogical material
- 1 Chronicles 10:1 - 29:30 Reign of David
- 2 Chronicles 1:1 - 9:31 Reign of Solomon
- 2 Chronicles 10:1 - 36:23 History of Judah up to the Captivity

It is clear from this brief analysis that the main emphasis in the double book is on David and Solomon; and that as to the remainder of the history up to the time of the Exile, it is Judah's fortunes that are in view, the southern kingdom, not the northern kingdom, Israel (which was taken into captivity in 732 BC by the Assyrians). In Chronicles the history of the northern kingdom is scarcely mentioned, and where it is mentioned it is in relation to Judah, and not dealt with as a subject by itself. It is the southern kingdom's fortunes that are in view: the rebellious kingdom of Israel is dismissed quickly and set aside.

2) 1:1-54

The writer of Chronicles (held by long tradition to have been Ezra the scribe) is selective in his choice of material, and he writes with a particular purpose in view. The subject matter covers roughly the same ground as that covered in 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings but with a particular emphasis. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the Septuagint, uses as a title for the book a word which means 'omissions', things left aside or left unnoticed in the other books. In this sense it may be thought that Chronicles furnishes to the others. This is a rather generalised statement, however. It is true that some of the materials in Chronicles does this, but there is more to it than that. Chronicles, as has been said, is found among the 'sacred writings', and this suggests that what is written is written from a religious point of view, and with a specifically religious significance. For example, the emphasis throughout is on Judah, not Israel. The line of promise that runs through the Old Testament from Malachi is a line of promise associated with Judah. The messianic hope rested in Judah, and it is the house of David that is in view. Furthermore, in David's story, the emphasis is not so much on his warlike exploits, with all the thrilling stories we find in 2 Samuel, as on his concern to prepare for the building of the Temple. And when we come to the story of Solomon's reign in 2 Chronicles, we find that the interest is almost exclusively upon his actual building of the Temple.

3) 1:1-54

The selectiveness shown by the Chronicler in the arrangement of his material has a great deal of significance. We need to bear in mind that the book is dated to Ezra's time, that is to say, the post-exilic era, and therefore Chronicles is an interpretation of history, written for the returned exiles, and written, moreover, to show them the real purpose and function of their previous history in spiritual terms, to show that the real point about Israel's history was precisely not the material expansion of the kingdom but their spiritual significance as a people, and that their real calling was not to a great kingdom in the world, in the material sense, but a spiritual one, with its heart in the temple and the temple worship. When we take this as a key to the understanding of the book, it becomes very illuminating to read through these chapters. What we have in 1 Chronicles is a recall to spiritual priorities. This is something of tremendous importance, and it is this that makes the book essentially different from 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, because it gives a spiritual slant on history and tells the returned exiles how to think of their own situation, and to see the purpose of God in bringing them back to their own land.

4) 1:1-54

George Adam Smith, the great Old Testament scholar, writing about the return of the exiles, has this to say: 'Cyrus of Persia was responsible for sending this people back to the land solely as a spiritual people. He did not allow them to set up again the house of David, but by his decree the Temple was rebuilt.' We read in Ezra and Nehemiah how the exiles became totally concerned with and preoccupied with the rebuilding of the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem. In other words, theirs was a spiritual task. In the post-exilic years the emphasis was no longer on the kingdom as such, or even on the house of David as such, in terms of a great earthly kingdom, but precisely upon spiritual realities, and particularly upon the Temple. This is what distinguishes Chronicles so decisively from 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. Some scholars have suggested that because this is so, the writer has manipulated historical facts to suit his purpose. But this is a facile and unnecessary view of the situation, and somewhat similar to the view that New Testament critical scholars used to take of John's Gospel in relation to the other three. For decades it was assumed that John's Gospel is not a very reliable document from a historical point of view. It is a spiritual gospel, it has been said, and therefore we cannot rely upon it as a historical document. But it is interesting to know that most recent New Testament scholarship now sings a very different tune, recognising the historicity and historical integrity of God's writing. This is just as true with the relationship between Chronicles and Kings. The fact that Chronicles is giving a spiritual interpretation does not mean that it is not also historical. It is more than historical, not less.

5) 1:1-54

When we turn to the first section of Chronicles (1:1-9:44), we find nine whole chapters of names, and we might ask ourselves, with some justification 'What on earth are we supposed to get out of all these lists of names? Can there possibly be any spiritual nourishment, or indeed any spiritual significance, in them?' This is a fair question, and if we believe that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and profitable, we are entitled to ask where is this spiritual profit in such a passage. But the more one reads the biblical genealogies, the more one realises there must be some significance in them, and it is our task to find out that significance as best we may. We examine the Chronicler's list with this in mind. The first four verses give single names, from Adam to Japheth; and these four verses cover in fact, the first ten chapters of Genesis, and a very large period of time. Look on to vv 24-27. Notice what is being done. The Chronicler is taking the Old Testament Scriptures and tracing a thin red line first from Adam to Abraham, and then to David, and then to Zerubabel, in 3:19. Then, in v 34 we follow Abraham's family, and presently we come to Jacob, or Israel, as he is called (2:1ff). The Chronicler traces these family trees one by one; and it is very interesting that he deals briefly with the unimportant ones first then concentrates attention on the important ones. More on this in the next Note.

6) 1:1-54

Let us take a quick glance through these chapters to get their flavour. Look at 1:1, Adam, Seth, Enoch - no mention of Cain or Abel, because it was through Seth that the line of promise developed. The writer is being selective. Japheth and Ham, although interesting in their own way, are not the real line of promise, so 17 gives Shem's line in great detail, leading right down to Nahor, Terah, the father of Abraham, and then Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now we have the sons of Seir, (Edom) in 38, but they are a sideline because they are not the line of promise; and so we go on to the sons of Israel (2:1ff), and the sons of Judah. Notice in 15, 'David the seventh'. The line is taken from Judah right down to Boaz, Obed, Jesse, the father of David and David the seventh son of Jesse. Then, in chapter 3, the sons of David born to him in Hebron; from there, the sons of Solomon; Solomon's son was Rehoboam, and the line continues from Solomon right through the kings of Judah to Zedekiah, the last king (16); and then the captivity; and then the line through the captivity and beyond. Later on in chapter 4 we go back to the sons of Judah and deal in some detail with the various sons of Judah; then in chapter 4:24 the sons of Simeon; chapter 5:1, the sons of Reuben; 5:11, the sons of Gad; 5:23 the half tribe of Manasseh; 6:1ff the sons of Levi; and in 7:1ff the sons of Issachar and 7:13 the sons of Naphtali; 7:14 the sons of Manasseh; 7:20 the sons of Ephraim; 8:1 the sons of Benjamin. And so all the patriarchs' genealogies are dealt with, and we finish off with the house of Saul 9:39. Then, in chapter 10 the death of Saul and David's accession to the throne.

7) 1:1-54

What is all this about? Why these genealogies, and what their significance? Well, if Chronicles were written to show the returned exiles the true spiritual significance of their past history - and we are suggesting that this was the purpose in view - it is clear that their being recorded here has the express purpose of reminding them of their lineage and their roots in the providence and purpose of God; and what the writer is saying to his first readers is precisely this: 'You belong, you are not rootless, you have a place in the purposes of God, and in His destiny for His people. God has always had a purpose for you, and you must recognise that purpose.' It is precisely for this reason that the Chronicler takes them back to Adam, and shows them that right from the beginning and dawn of history God has been working His purposes out as generation succeeded generation, and that in all the bewildering ramifications of the families God has been steadily, inexorably at work. What is more, He shows them how God has been at work, he shows the divine principle of selection and election in operation. We have already mentioned that selection is evident: no mention of Cain, or Abel, both of whom are mentioned in Hebrews 11, interestingly enough, but for this particular purpose they are left aside, because he is dealing with the line of promise, Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Shem; then Ham and Japheth are gently put to the side with a brief mention, and Shem and his line are unfolded down to Abraham. Then we see God taking this man, to whom He gave the promises that were to be fulfilled in his seed; Isaac, Jacob and the twelve patriarchs follow right down through Boaz, son of Rahab the harlot, to David, and from David right through the kingdom to the Captivity, and then after that, the return with Zerubbabel, still in the line of promise.

8) 1:1-54

What the Chronicler is saying, then, to his readers is this: 'Do you not see the significance of where you stand? You belong, you are not a rootless people'. We know from Ezra and Nehemiah how disheartened the returned exiles were, and how easily discouraged, and how, for a long spell, lasting almost quarter of a century, the work of rebuilding the temple was set on one side and ceased, through black discouragement and despair; yet God sent prophet after prophet to stir them up. And now here is another, reminding them, showing them where they were, who they were and intended to be, and to be about. It is rather like Paul's 'rooting' of the Ephesians in the eternal counsels of the Father's will: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him, having in love predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will'. Thus did Paul anchor the Ephesians in the immutable counsels of the Eternal will, and what a source of security this would give them! That is what the Chronicler is doing, he is stirring them up, bidding them recognise their calling. Going right back to the beginning he says, 'The God whom we worship is a God Who is not haphazard, but One Who has worked according to plan, and I would that you would see your place in that plan. You stand in a noble succession, you belong to the purposes of God.'

9) 2:1-55

Two things become plain as we continue to plough through the Chronicler's lists of names. The first is that he is being selective in his record, and that this reflects a divine principle of selection operating in the history of the chosen people. We have, for example, a strong emphasis on Judah and Benjamin and, later on, Levi, compared with other tribes, for these were the tribes that were to figure largely in the ongoing purposes of God in redemption. What is more, the principle of inclusion or exclusion in the divine purposes, while sovereign ('I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy') is also that of character. Obedience to the Lord, or disobedience, is ever the criterion (cf 3, 7; also 5:1). This is a theme which unfolds throughout the book: on the one hand, the writer gives his readers the enormous encouragement of reminding them that they 'belong' and are within the purposes of God as a people, but on the other, he adds, as it were, 'But, oh, co-operate with Him, walk with Him, keep in with God and obey His voice, otherwise there will be rejection'. Indeed, it was precisely the failure to do this in their national life that led to the Captivity. The message here is clear and plain: 'Recognize God, give Him the glory, give Him His rightful place, and all will be well.' The other thing is this: we see so many people being given a mention in history in God's book. This may seem a banal, almost trite and obvious comment, but if we bear in mind the suggestive parallel between God's book and the Lamb's book of life, with names recorded in it, it illuminates the situation. We should think of the lasting significance of going down in history with honour, like Jabez, for example (4:10), or Caleb, and - by contrast - the dishonour for ever associated with the name of Achan (7) or Reuben (5:1). What is likely to be written in the book of God about our lives?

10) 3:1-24

This chapter begins with the family of David (1-9), following the same pattern as that of the previous chapter; but then it takes up Solomon, David's son, and gives the succeeding generations right down to the Captivity and beyond, to the return of the exiles under Zerubbabel (19). The significance of this is that it is, of course, Messiah's line. This is certainly the Chronicler's preoccupation, and who shall say that he did not, under the impress of the divine inspiration, see far into the future, beyond those he mentions here, down to Mary and Joseph, and the birth of Jesus in the fullness of the time? At all events, it is this history that he is concerned in detail to unfold, drawing solemn lessons from and the principles it unfolds, for his readers, the post-exilic community who, above all else, needed to learn the lessons of history so as to avoid further pitfalls and disasters. It is in this sense that we also must learn to read the history of the Old Testament, and understand the ways of God with men and nations. It is striking to realise that in the brief compass of 10-16 the whole tragic history of Israel's decline from the glory of David's and Solomon's time to the obscurity and humiliation of the Captivity is encompassed; and - still more impressive - that in such a context, the mysterious outworking of the line of promise took culminating in the coming of the Messiah, born of this line (see the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, Matthew giving Mary's ancestry, Luke giving Joseph's) and that some of these otherwise unknown names recorded here appear also in these New Testament family trees. This must surely put a new and significant complexion on what we might otherwise call 'dull and uninteresting lists of names'!

11) 4:1-43

The next 'list of names' concerns the family which carried on the line of promise, that of Judah, and this gives it its own particular interest. To say, as one commentator puts it, that these genealogical notices are 'almost like a gathering of genealogical pebbles rolled together from various quarters, consisting of older and younger parts that are kept together only by the common connection with the tribe of Judah' is true, but is also a rather superficial assessment of the Chronicler's intention to focus attention on this particular tribe that was to play such an integral part in the ongoing purposes of God. Could we ever know too much about the forebears after the flesh of the eternal Son of God, the Saviour of the world? It could just be that this is why there are a number of highly illuminating and thought-provoking references in this chapter, that light up the 'list of names', making it sparkle - the reference to Jabez (9, 10), the craftsmen in 14, the 'daughter of Pharaoh' in 18, the families that wrought fine linen in 21, the curious reference to Moab (cf RSV) in 22, the reference to the potters, that 'dwelt with the king for his work' in 23. These intriguing hints are worth a closer look, and we shall examine them more closely in the Notes that follow.

12) 4:1-43

Jabez (9, 10) is mentioned only here in Scripture (unless the reference in 2:55 to the families of the scribes has also to do with him - perhaps it was these scribes themselves who recorded this snippet about the founder of their tribe. They were men of letters, after all). Here is an extract from a book called 'Men who Prayed', by Henry W. Frost, which says so much for our encouragement: 'Jabez! Who is he? Did you ever hear of him before? No, not in the scriptural record. Nor will you ever hear of him again. Who then is Jabez? Abraham you know, and Moses you know, and many another saint you know; but who is this man? Well, this is the answer: Jabez is the man who prayed. That is his only distinction. But it appears that with God this was very much, for he interrupts his narrative to tell us this in detail. So it is worthwhile to learn what we can about him. And what appears is this. First, he was a man in a crowd, for his name occurs in a long list, containing hundreds of names. Second, he was a commonplace man, there being no mention of his father, mother, wife, sons, daughters, city or pursuits, his only reputation being that he was somewhat more honourable than his brethren. Third, he was a man who had a bad beginning in life, for his mother had good reason to give him the name Jabez, which means sorrowful; and hence he probably was one who had a somewhat unhappy continuance in life, for it could not have been exhilarating, to say the least of it, to be called 'Mr Sorrowful', all of his days. And finally, he was a man who, through prayer, had risen above his circumstances, conquered his difficulties, and turned his sorrow into joy. This is not a long history but, after all, it is a great one. For it reveals the fact to all the world that no one need be the victim of environment, mentally or spiritually, provided he prays. So cheer up, my humble, unknown, discouraged friend. Whether you may ever be great in men's eyes or not, you may be in God's eyes, which is infinitely better. And, remember, all you have got to do to reach this end is this, to kneel down beside Jabez and to pray.'

13) 4:1-43

In 14, 'Charashim' literally means 'workers in wood or metal or stone', and the phrase is therefore equivalent to 'the valley of craftsmen'. In 21 reference is made to the families of those who wrought fine linen, while in 23 we have the potters and gardeners. We may wonder at these random references, but when we remember the Chronicler's concern in writing his book, and the detail with which he later describes the building of the Temple, it becomes clear that these are no random references, but are made in relation to the needs of the Temple and Temple-worship - linen for priestly garments, craftsmen to forge and carve the various Temple appurtenances. One recalls what is said in Exodus 35/36 about the workmen commissioned for the building of the Tabernacle - Bezaleel was filled with the Spirit for his work - and we readily link this with Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12/14 about the gifts given by Christ to His Church, and the whole range of activity in any congregation of the Lord, requiring many skills and gifts for its proper fulfilment. Surely this is what the Chronicler has in mind in making special reference to them.

Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh (18) is interesting. 'Bithiah' means 'daughter of Jah', that is a convert to the religion of Israel. 'Daughter of Pharaoh' may be simply equivalent to 'daughter of Egypt'; if, however, the reference is to a literal daughter of Pharaoh, converted to the faith of Israel, what romance this conjures up in the mind! How and where would Mered, her husband, have met her? The Chronicler simply mentions the fact, without comment, and it is idle to speculate; yet it is something he regarded as worth recording, as something we ought to take note of, as is the cryptic reference to Moab in 22. The NEB has 'who fell out with Moab (quarrelled with Moab) then turned to Bethlehem', while the RSV has 'who ruled in Moab and returned to Lehem'. Another alternative reading has 'who married into Moab then returned to Bethlehem' - one recalls in this connection the story in the opening verses of the book of Ruth. 'Ancient things' indeed!

14) 4:1-43

There is a further phrase in 23 worthy of notice and comment: 'there they dwelt with the king for his work'. This opens up a great thought for us concerning the work of the kingdom of God. The potteries and the linen guilds, we are meant to understand, were royal establishments. The work done there was to be used for the Temple and its worship. In this sense these craftsmen were engaged in royal work. This is how we need to think of even the lowliest tasks in a congregation's life: it is all royal work, dwelling with the King, and done in His presence. Maclaren says: 'The vigour of our Christian life largely depends on our keeping vivid the consciousness of our communion with Jesus and the sense of His real presence with us', and later adds, 'The potter's work went to Jerusalem. It was for the king. What can be too good for him? He will see it, therefore let us put our best into it.' They dwelt with the king in the sense of being provided for by his bounty. 'For his work' this is the supreme aim and inspiration, to please him, and when this obtains, then the provision will surely be bounteous. God is no man's debtor. It could hardly be doubted that if these were the sentiments that informed our Christian service and commitment, the name of Christ would be magnified among us, and men would take note that we were companying with Him.

15) 5:1-26

The opening verses of this chapter refer to a very sad and sordid episode in the history of Jacob's family (see Genesis 35:22) in which Reuben defiled his father's bed, and took his father's concubine; for which sin God shunted him out of the line of promise, and his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph. This loss of the birthright has been said to have two possible interpretations: either it was a carnal substitution, made vindictively by Jacob, in favour of his favourite Joseph, Rachel's son, and which was set aside by God in favour of Judah; or it was a legitimate choice by Jacob, in the circumstances, which was later overturned by God by reason of the failure of the tribe of Ephraim (one of Joseph's sons), as noted in Psalm 78:9-11, 67, 68. Of the two, the latter seems the more likely interpretation. Either way, however, it is surely significant that Judah, who became the bearer of the line of promise leading to the Messiah, was a son of Leah, not of Rachel. Despite the beauty of the love story in Genesis 29 of Jacob and Rachel, with all our natural thoughts gravitating towards Rachel as Jacob's true bride, the line of promise did not lie there at all, but with the fourth son of Leah. Is not this rather remarkable? 'Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart'.

16) 5:1-26

The latter part of the chapter, from 10 onwards, is full of interest. Here is a war episode from the days of Saul the king, that we do not hear about elsewhere in Scripture. The sons of Reuben, and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, were valiant men, able to wear buckler and sword. It is said of them in 20 that 'they were helped, for they cried to God in the battle, and He was entreated of them; because they put their trust in Him'. And in 22 we are told that the war was of God. This is all very remarkable. Here is a snippet of history from a very grim and barbarous time, a time of much violence and bloodshed; and in the midst of it, this jewel of trust and faith and prayer. And because there was trust in God, because their eyes were toward Him and they cried to Him in the battle, He made bare His holy arm to bless and prosper them and give them the victory. This is a prime example of the kind of emphasis that the Chronicler is intent on making. This is an interpretation of history in its essence, and it has a great deal to say to us in our day and generation. We need not suppose that the sons of Reuben were particularly saintly as a people. They were all warlike tribes, and an unprejudiced reading of Kings and Chronicles makes it surely clear that these were barbaric times which saw some terrible atrocities and cruelties perpetrated - all that can be conceded - but in the midst of it all, a Godward look, and because of this, God vindicated their faith and intervened on their behalf.

17) 5:1-26

In contrast, however, to the situation described in the previous Note, 23-26 unfold a very different picture. A like valour in war, a like excellence on the field - but with this all-important difference: unbelief, disobedience, transgression (25), with the inevitable consequence of defeat, humiliation and disaster. Once again, it was God Who did it (26), as on the earlier occasion. This is the message the Chronicler is proclaiming: when a people are rightly related to God, they prosper, and when they are wrongly related to Him, things go wrong. When we do wrong, things go wrong, and when we do right, things go right. These are the lessons. Let us think hopefully, therefore, about our own situation in the land at this time, because if there is a crying to God in the hour of crisis, He can yet be entreated because men put their trust in Him. Just as we need to learn from these verses that 'God's laws are not to be flouted or flagrantly disobeyed with impunity - God has spoken and caused to be written down many words, but to the wilful and heedless He at last speaks in deeds, not words; then, there is nothing to argue about, only sorrow, affliction and disaster to lament', so also we may discern that the task and function of God's people in time of crisis is to pray for the nation, that God will in wrath remember mercy, and yet deliver in answer to our cries (cf Amos 7:1ff).

18) 6:1-81

This long chapter deals with the family of Levi. Once again, there are all sorts of interesting features to intrigue and occupy our attention. The first 15 verses give the line of Levi from the beginning right down to the time of the Captivity, Jehozadek in 15 being the father of Joshua the high priest who returned from exile with Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:2). One sees the force of the genealogy being written when one realises that this book was placed in the hands of the returned exiles, showing them their direct line back to Levi and to the patriarch Jacob. It is the idea of continuity that is being stressed. Amram (2) is the father of Moses and Aaron, and we see in 4ff the Aaronic line of the priesthood through Eleazer and his family. Some of the names conjure up memories of stirring times in the history of Israel - Zadok the priest (8), who along with Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon king (1 Kings 1:39, 40); Azariah (10) who fulfilled the priestly office in Solomon's temple; Hilkiah (13) who was involved in the dramatic discovery of the book of the law in the near-derelict Temple in Josiah's day, a discovery that led to a widespread national awakening and reformation.

In 16ff, we have the families of Gershom, Kohath and Merari, the sons of Levi, to whom were given certain duties in relation to the care of the Tabernacle: the Kohathites were given the care of the most holy things (Numbers 4:4-15); the Gershomites were given the care of the hangings of the Tabernacle (Numbers 4:21-28); the Merarites were given the care of the outer structure of the Tabernacle (Numbers 4:29-33) - responsibilities which well explain the detailed record of their families by the Chronicler, who had a particular interest in the worship of Israel.

19) 6:1-81

A further responsibility was given to the sons of Levi, in relation to the praise of the sanctuary (31ff). The three men mentioned in 33, 39, 44 - Heman, Asaph and Ethan - were the choir leaders, leaders in the service of song, Heman and his choir were in the centre, Asaph and his choir on the right, Ethan and his choir on the left. This, then, was a threefold choir, and presumably Heman, in the centre, was the conductor of the whole. It builds up a marvellous picture of the praise of the sanctuary (we can see the names of these choir leaders in the titles of some of the Psalms - Psalms 80, 88, 89). An interesting point is brought out by one commentator. Heman, we are told in 33, was a 'singer', but the word would be more accurately rendered 'a minstrel', because it implies singing in which the singer himself supplies the accompaniment with an instrument of music. They played and sang at the same time, with stringed instruments - not an organist and a choir, but minstrels who all had their own instruments. A Salvation Army band, or an orchestra, seems to be nearer the mark than a single organ! And how magnificently these Psalms that they sang must have rung out in the Temple courts, and how worthily the Temple worship must have been served, with such a rich wealth of beauty!

20) 6:1-81

Three further points may be noted about these singers in 32: 'they waited on their office according to their order'. First of all, one recalls Paul's interesting phrase in Romans 12:7, where he speaks of various forms of service in the Church: '... or ministry, let us wait on our ministering' - it is that kind of waiting that is in view here, and it means that they gave themselves utterly to the work in hand. These men were absolutely wholehearted. They were given over to the praise of God and the service of song. In the second place, the 'office' that they fulfilled was the office of praise. This is what they were there for, to lead the praise of God's people. In the third place, they waited 'according to their order'. There is an interesting and significant word in Colossians 2:5 that illuminates order. Paul speaks of 'joying and beholding your order'. The Apostle almost certainly has in his mind's eye the picture of Roman legions with their rigid discipline, and every man in his proper place, keeping rank (cf 1 Chronicles 12:33). In choir singing the singers really need to 'keep rank'. There is no room for the individual who wants his voice to be heard either above, or behind, or ahead of the others. The whole point about a choir is that the resultant sound should be a unity. This is surely a picture of the Lord's service in general. Is there anything in our Christian experience that corresponds with this? Is this how we labour in the kingdom of God? Do we wait like this, in total self-giving, completely given over to the work of the Kingdom, giving it wholehearted dedication and devotion, keeping order, keeping rank, not sticking out like a sore thumb but taking our place and staying in our place, with the ranks unbroken?

21) 7:1-40

This chapter records the genealogies of Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim and Asher. One obvious emphasis is the repeated insistence that they were valiant men of might (2, 5, 7, 9, 11, 40). The significance of this is surely that it was recorded by the Chronicler for the sake of the first readers of his book, the returned exiles, who are thereby reminded of the tradition in which they stood, and urged to be up and play the man, 'Look how your forebears lived and fought, look at their valour, and follow their inspiring example'. We know from other parts of the Old Testament that the returned exiles tended to be low-spirited and easily discouraged, and the pressures around them disheartened them deeply. Hence the reminder that their forebears had a warrior spirit. The reference in 15 to the daughters of Zelophehad, underlined by the Chronicler, makes it clear that the incident, recorded fully in Numbers 27 and Joshua 17, was of sufficiently striking a nature to be remembered. The story is a moving one, and we are hardly surprised that the Chronicler makes this reference to it: the law of inheritance in Israel was that sons inherited, and Zelophehad had no sons, only daughters. Was the inheritance, then, to pass to others? The daughters appealed to Moses, and the Lord decreed through him that the daughters should inherit; and this became the principle for all future time. The incident emphasises the rights of minorities and the under-privileged, and bears testimony to the reality of God's care for those who are defenceless and have nobody to stand up for them - surely a word of encouragement to the returned exiles who felt themselves so vulnerable in face of all the enemies around them. And, just as God had said 'the daughters will inherit', so He was, in effect, saying to the exiles, 'You also will inherit, and I will see to it that your interests in the land are protected.'

22) 7:1-40

There is a curious and somewhat obscure reference to the sons of Ephraim in 20-22. No one quite knows what to make of this incident, which seems to have involved a border raid involving the rustling of cattle from the men of Gath, who retaliated by the slaying of Ezer and Elead, the sons of Ephraim. It is nowhere else recorded, and it is now impossible to decide exactly when it took place. If Ezer and Elead were the immediate sons of Ephraim, the raid must have taken place from Egypt before Israel were led out by Moses; it could, however, refer to descendants of Ephraim, in which case it could have taken place much later, when the tribes were settled in the land. No one can be sure. In 22 we are told that Ephraim mourned many days, and that when a son was later born to him, he called him Beriah 'because it went evil with his house'. These words remind us of what is said of Ephraim in Psalm 78:9-11, 67, verses which contain a terrible indictment of the tribe. Perhaps the Chronicler is hinting at this in what he says here of Ephraim, and indicating the presence of some fateful characteristic in them that made for a very chequered history, and led to their rejection in favour of Judah (see Note for Sunday, 2nd Nov). All is not dark, however, in the genealogy of Ephraim, and one redeeming feature is seen in 27, where in the list of his descendants we find the illustrious name of Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' successor and the great general of the advance of Israel into the Promised Land.

23) 8:1-40

Now we have the tribe of Benjamin, stretching from the time of the patriarch right down to King Saul (33). In contrast to the brief, sometimes cursory genealogies of many of the other tribes, Benjamin is given a long and detailed account. One reason for this prominence must surely be because of Benjamin's faithfulness to Judah. When the kingdom was divided after the death of Solomon, and Rehoboam, Solomon's son came to the throne, Jeroboam in the north seceded and drew the ten tribes with him, but Benjamin remained faithful to Judah in the south and formed the southern kingdom, which preserved the line of promise. There can be little doubt that the prominence of the tribe of Benjamin dates from this time, and that this explains the Chronicler's interest in them. There is a real lesson for us here: it is all a question of associating with - 'keeping in with', as we say - the right people. To get in with the wrong people leads to impoverishment and loss. As Paul says, evil communications corrupt good manners. A simple and elementary application of this could be to new converts in the spiritual life: one of the things they have to learn is to make the right associations. If they do not associate with the right people, they may well come to grief and make shipwreck of their faith.

Another point worthy of note in this connection is this: it is a striking fact that the prominent characters in the New Testament story came from one or two tribes in particular, not from many. Saul of Tarsus was from the tribe of Benjamin, John the Baptist was of the tribe of Levi, but we do not find descendants of, say, Naphtali or Zebulun figuring prominently in the record. There is more than a little significance in this. Right associations pay real dividends. One sees this at work in the wonderful entail of grace in prominent evangelical families in the history of the Church. Four generations after William Booth founded the Salvation Army, there are still Booths prominent in the work; similarly, today there are still descendants of Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission serving Christ in the gospel. Faithfulness and purity at the family source conditions the lower reaches of the family river's flow. It is possible, by our faithfulness, to 'raise up the foundations of many generations' (Isaiah 58:12).

24) 8:1-40

Further to the thought of the entail of grace mentioned at the end of the previous Note, we may see another kind of entail in 8, in what is recorded of Shaharaim. The RSV's clearer rendering makes the point for us: 'Shaharaim had sons in Moab after he had sent away Hushim and Baara his wives ...'. It was expressly forbidden to the Israelites to marry outwith their own people, yet here is a man divorcing his wives and taking another from Moab, raising a mixed family of sons, whose names indicate Moabite influence (Mesha (9) is similar to the name of the king of Moab in 2 Kings 3:4, Malcham is the name of a Moabite idol, Jeremiah 49:1). Here, then, is a man who is responsible for introducing an alien, idolatrous strain into the body of Israel by his disobedience to the laws of God, and establishing an unholy entail among the Lord's people. It can hardly be accidental that the Chronicler mentions this fact. Here, once again, we see the seriousness of having one's name recorded in the book of God in a derogatory way. No man lives unto himself: his actions can have repercussions far beyond his own family and his own time.

The genealogy climaxes in the family of Saul, son of Kish (30ff) which is the story with which the Chronicler is to begin his detailed account of his people's history. The lessons of that life, as we shall presently see, bear marked similarities to what has just been said (cf 10:13ff). It is the writer's penetrating interpretation of the facts of the history that is so full of instruction for us.

25) 9:1-44

The first verse of this chapter completes the sweep of biblical history from the beginning up to the time of the Captivity. What follows at 2 must therefore refer to the returned exiles in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, for whom the Chronicler was first of all writing (this is made clearer in the RSV than in the AV. This seems to be confirmed by the appearance of a very similar genealogy in Nehemiah 11. We may therefore say two things: on the one hand, the writer is concerned to give the setting of the story he is about to tell, in the chapters which follow, that of David and Solomon, and means to say that this is the background against which he tells it. On the other hand, he is emphasising that the returned exiles stand in organic succession to these earlier generations. It is the continuity of God's dealings with His people that is in view. At this point - i.e. after the exile - God takes up His people again. It is the same work He is doing now as He was doing before the Exile, which has come and gone, and now He begins with them again. One readily sees what a sense of destiny and of purpose this consciousness would give to the exiles - and if they had that, they could surely go on. It is also significant to note that the people of God that are taken up again here are, in fact, a remnant - Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh, and from these tribes not all, but only some members. This bears witness to the narrowing-down process that goes on all the time, in the biblical doctrine of the remnant.

26) 9:1-44

There is something of great importance for us to see in these verses. We mentioned earlier the reference to the mighty men of valour, but here the emphasis is different. It is said of the returned exiles that they were 'very able men for the work of the service of the house of God' (13, see also 18, 19, 26ff). We see a transition from men of war to a spiritual ministry and a spiritual function. The significance of this could hardly be over-estimated. The exiles did not return to the land - and God did not bring them back - to re-establish the monarchy and restore the status quo. They became, in a way that had hardly been true of them before, a religious community. This raises an important consideration: let us recall the circumstances in which Saul (of whom we shall be reading presently) was anointed king. The people, after Samuel had been, under God, the means of their deliverance from the Philistine yoke, came to the prophet and said, 'We would have a king to be as other nations'. But the whole point of Israel's calling was that she should not be as other peoples, but rather God's peculiar people, and therefore different from all other peoples. The desire for a king was, therefore, in itself basically to contradict their whole election and calling of God. But they were determined, and finally God let them have their way. Ultimately this was why Saul had to come to grief, it was inevitable that he should have done so - not in any fatalistic sense, to be sure, for he was responsible for his sin and failure - but because God's name had to be vindicated. They had been wrong in asking for a king; indeed there are good grounds for supposing that the whole period of the monarchy was a mistake, and that it was never intended by God. Significantly, after the exile, there were no more kings. It was to be a different kind of existence for them, and a fulfilling of their spiritual calling, with all the emphasis on the integrity of true work in the house of God: whatever the apportionment of work and service given these men mentioned here, it needed able, spiritual and dedicated men to give themselves wholly and without reserve to His service.

27) 10:1-14

Having, then, surveyed the entire genealogical history from Adam down to the post-exilic period, the Chronicler now goes back in that genealogy to his main subject, which is the story of David, and he introduces it with a preface concerning the reign of Saul. The record is taken almost verbatim from 2 Samuel 31, with the addition of two brief but very significant verses. Saul was the Lord's anointed, and could not simply be passed over without being mentioned - the Chronicler had too strict a view of history to allow him so to do but the reference is very brief. We see in 1 Samuel that many chapters are devoted to Saul - and a sad and sorry story it is - but the difference here is that the Chronicler is recording the significant movement of God's working in history, and from that point of view Saul does not really come much into the picture. When a man gets out of the divine will, there is not very much of significance happening in his life. That is the message here, and that is why the Chronicler simply passes by the events recorded at such length in the history book of Israel. That is a very challenging and solemnising thought, is it not?

28) 10:1-14

The story of what the men of Jabesh-Gilead did for the slain king's body is an interesting one (11, 12). They felt that 'they owed a real debt to Saul'. 1 Samuel 11 describes how the relationship developed between them, through the deliverance that Saul accomplished for them, before he began to go wrong, and when he was walking with God. There is something very moving in their reaction. They knew of Saul's moral and spiritual declension, knew that the Lord had forsaken him and that the kingdom had been taken from him and given to David. Knowing this, they nevertheless, 'for old times' sake' remembered him, salvaged his mutilated body and gave him a decent burial. Does not this reflect the pity and compassion of God for someone who had gone terribly wrong, as if He were anxious to sift out the gold that still remained in a life that had become largely dross. If this be fair comment, it gives a wonderful picture of the tenderness of God. He does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men, and even when they go wrong, and have to be punished, He punishes them with tears in His eyes. It is a beautiful touch: even though Saul had drifted so seriously away, beyond the hope of recovery, God used the men of Jabesh-Gilead to express His sorrow and grief over one of His creatures who, sinful and rebellious though he had been, was nevertheless still the object of His love and care. What a story and what a God!

29) 11:1-9

This chapter begins the Chronicler's account of David's reign. But his concern is with that reign not in its general pattern, but rather in its relation to the building of the Temple, and the ongoing purposes of God for David and his line. A word about the outline of this chapter, and the next, which will be seen to belong to it in its subject matter, will be helpful at the outset. This chapter divides at 9 (the first 9 verses parallel the passage in 2 Samuel 5:1-10, with which it is almost identical) then from 10 to the end of the chapter we have a list of David's mighty men. This list is paralleled in 2 Samuel 23:8ff, with some variations, some additional names appearing in Chronicles. The next chapter (12) divides into two sections, 1-22 giving a list of David's warriors in his outlaw days, and 23ff giving an enumeration of the tribes that rallied round him to make him king. The two chapters clearly belong together.

As to 1-9, we should notice that the Chronicler makes the record of David's being made king at Hebron follow immediately upon Saul's death, recorded at the end of chapter 10. If we compare, however, the parallel passage in 2 Samuel 5, we find that several chapters elapse between the two events, and that the bloodshed, strife and violence of 2 Samuel 2-4 are passed over. The writer is being selective again: he is concerned not with these bloodthirsty feuds, but with the main outlines of David's reign from a spiritual point of view. In this sense, as we have already seen, he is not giving a simple unfolding of historical fact, but taking a straight line through them to a spiritual understanding of the times.

30) 11:1-9

The tribes enumerate three reasons for crowning David king: first of all, their common descent (1); secondly, the fact that David, even when Saul was king, had been their commander-in-chief (2a); and thirdly, and most importantly, he was the Lord's anointed. It may well be that from a human standpoint, the murders of Abner and Ishbosheth, recorded in 2 Samuel 2-4, were contributory factors in David's accession, but one is prompted to remark how much more simply, and how much more smoothly, the divine purposes might have been unfolded, if human scheming and intrigue had been left out. This is a lesson that we see repeatedly in the history books of the Old Testament - as if men felt that God could not be trusted to fulfil His purposes in His own way, but had to be given a hand through their sinful, and often shameful, intrigues. The Chronicler's point, however, is to underline that these purposes were fulfilled (2b, 3b). The next step (4) was the establishment of a worthy capital for the united kingdom, and Jerusalem was the obvious place. The fuller account of its capture is recorded in 2 Samuel 5:6-12. The reference in these verses is to the confident belief of the Jebusites that their citadel was impregnable, and to the daring and resourceful way in which David's men stormed it, by crawling-up the 'gutter' or water conduit which the Jebusites had constructed to bring water into their stronghold from the Gihon spring outside the walls of the town (this tunnel can be seen today by tourists, thanks to the effective archeological excavations in and around Jerusalem).

31) 11:10-44

The passage begins to record the exploits of three of David's mighty men (of 2 Samuel 23), but in fact only two are mentioned, Jashobeam (11) and Eleazer (12) - the third being Shammah (2 Samuel 23:11). It looks as if the Chronicler has omitted two verses from the account of their exploits (if in fact he was borrowing from the 2 Samuel record) and telescoped some of the details (compare 2 Samuel 23:11 with 13 here). But in fact he is splendidly careless of these details, and is not very interested in them as details. His concern is different, as we may see in 10: they showed themselves strong in David's support in the matter of his kingdom. That is the important thing for the Chronicler - the loyalty and devotion of these men, and from a spiritual point of view their participation in the work of the kingdom. We need always to be remembering to whom this Chronicle was first written: it was for the benefit of the returned exiles under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, who were engaged in rebuilding the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem. We know from other parts of Scripture that they tended to become disheartened and low-spirited. This is why he writes here concerning men who showed themselves strong and loyal in the support of David. It is as if he were saying: 'Look how it was with your forebears and how they set to work loyally and faithfully. Go and do thou likewise.' That being so, and that being the spiritual lesson, we need to ask ourselves: Are we like this? Do we show ourselves strong in the work of the kingdom? Or are we hindrances? As the Rev. William Still once put it, 'Are we on the way, or in the way?'

32) 11:10-44

The question that is prompted by this list of David's mighty men is: Where did these men come from? A lesson of considerable importance emerges from the answer we give to this. The parallel passage is 1 Samuel 22:1, 2: the cave of Adullam is the 'hold' referred to in 16, and it is here that David clearly had his 'headquarters'. The phrase 'cave of Adullam' has become a proverb: any group of disgruntled and discontented people coming together in a common cause are said to constitute a cave of Adullam. The phrase is used in a derogatory sense, and frequently made a charge against evangelical folk who, dismayed and disappointed by the poor fare they have found obtainable in their own churches, have gathered together in an evangelical fellowship (we ourselves, in Holyrood, have been so described). It is true, of course, that there are some people who have discontented spirits and dispositions, and would really be dissatisfied wherever they went; but the considerable majority of folk do not really fall into such a category, but have rather been grieved away by the spiritual barrenness and prayerlessness in the situations in which they have found themselves, and from which they have been virtually driven away, because of resentment at the protests they have made. What are such people to do? Are they to acquiesce meekly, without any hope of redress? Or are they to look for spiritual food for themselves and, even more important, for their children? This is never an easy question for people to decide, and it is not one that the minister to whom they come can decide for them. But, and this is the important thing, the motley crowd of men who gathered to David, who became captain over them, were not allowed to remain a motley crowd. He trained them, disciplined them, licked them into shape; and they became the basis of his mighty army. They were fashioned into a fighting-machine of the first order. We have only to read through this record of their exploits to see what they became under the discipline that David exercised among them. Which thing is a parable; and those who contemptuously label what they call 'gathered fellowships' (surely a misnomer, for what living fellowship is not 'gathered') in this way had better examine what they produce in terms of disciplined manpower, for the ministry and the mission-field. The Church's need for an army like David's mighty men is very great indeed.

33) 11:10-44

We have only to look on to 12:23-40 to see the significance of the work that was accomplished at Adullam, and to see the justification for caves of Adullam in general, if this be the fruit that they produce, in terms of men shaped and fashioned into instruments of spiritual warfare - men mighty in valour (12:25), men who had understanding of the times (12:32), men expert in war, men who could keep rank, men of single heart (12:33). That is what came out of David's Adullam! Again, we should bear in mind the conditions to which the Chronicler first wrote these words: when we think of the dispiritedness in the time of Zerubbabel, which required the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah to correct the doubleness of heart, and those who were out of step, we begin to see the force of these chapters. This was their first meaning and intention, and their message speaks its word down the ages to our present time. It was a very motley crowd that returned from Babylon, in the very nature of the case. Captivity does something to people, and the returned exiles were all at sixes and sevens spiritually. But the Chronicler is saying, 'That does not matter, if only you are prepared to submit yourselves to discipline, as David's men did, and be licked into shape. This is the force, point and purpose of biblical ministry, it is for the equipment of the saints, the fashioning and disciplining of them, for the service they are to render (Ephesians 4:12).

34) 11:10-44

We cannot pass from this chapter without looking at the wonderful story in 16-19 about the water from the well of Bethlehem. It is a choice jewel, and it is eloquent in the many lessons it has to teach us all. The story is well known, and the loyalty and love which it expresses are moving to see. Sometimes it needs only a slight circumstance to reveal a whole character, and this story is just such a circumstance, for it sheds a flood of light on the relationship existing between David and his men. It is not possible to lick a motley crew into a fine fighting force without discipline like steel; and we may be certain that David spared them nothing in their training. But the discipline was applied in such a way that they became men who would have done anything for him. The first lesson the story teaches us is the grace of loyalty. David was clearly a man who could inspire loyalty in others, and some of his men in particular gave him the highest kind of loyalty. There are two constituent elements in this: one was love for his person, and the other was respect for his authority and position. There is a great deal for us to learn here, when we translate it into the realm of Christian work. In the divine economy, God raises certain men to positions of leadership in His work. This is a position given by God. It has privileges, certainly, but it has also very considerable responsibilities, not to say liabilities. When one is in that position, it is the responsibilities and the liabilities that one is overwhelmingly conscious of. When one is only aspiring to that position, however, it is the privileges that are dominant. This should be realised more often than it sometimes is. Now, God calls others round His leaders to form a working nucleus. This is the history of every true ministry; and one of the things that God expects and requires is a spirit of loyalty. But this is not invariably given. We see in the New Testament how Paul met with people from time to time who challenged, and even repudiated, his authority, and for the sake of the kingdom he was obliged to deal very firmly with them. This has far greater importance than we might think. We all owe this kind of loyalty, and when it is withheld, it causes not only needless distress and hurt but also harm to the work of God. Between David and his men there was a spirit of utter loyalty. Thus far had the costly discipline brought them!

35) 11:10-44

There is, of course, another side to all this. The loyalty must be recognized and valued and appreciated, and it is a grave fault and sin in the leader when it is not. David, at all events, recognized the loyalty and love that these men gave him, and he felt he could not drink the water from Bethlehem that they had brought, much as he would have loved to do so, it was too precious, representing, as it were, the blood of those who had put their lives at jeopardy to obtain it. And he poured it out before the Lord. Would David's men have thought this was a waste of their costly effort, or a slight to it? We think not! They would surely recognize that it was David's supreme tribute to their love and loyalty, since giving it to the Lord represented the value he placed on what they had done. Such a spirit is all the more lovely and moving when we set it over against some very different attitudes recorded in Scripture. One recalls, for example, how deeply Paul was grieved by the attitude of Alexander the coppersmith, who 'did me much evil' (2 Timothy 4:14), and how the apostle John spoke of Diotrephes, 'who loveth to have the pre-eminence' (3 John 9-11), and who caused so much trouble in the fellowship. How very different is the spirit shown in this lovely incident, and what a spirit of self-sacrifice and love: they gave themselves to their leader, and he gave himself to the Lord, in response to their self-giving. How do we react to all this? Do we consider such an abandonment of love to be fanatical, extreme, foolish? Remember Mary of Bethany's similar abandonment, and what Jesus said of it (Matthew 26:6-13).

36) 12:1-40

We have already made passing reference to some of the notable verses in this chapter. Let us consider them once again. It is a useful exercise to go over the chapter marking in red the notable and impressive statements - in 8, 15, 18, 22, 32, 33, 38, 40 - to see the overall picture that is presented to us. The best and truest way to describe the spirit of the chapter is to say that these were days of spiritual awakening and holy enthusiasm. The words with which the chapter closes - 'there was joy in Israel' - express very well the spirit of exuberance that ran like a groundswell throughout the nation, infecting all alike with the sense of wanting to dare all for God. How else, for example, could what is described in 15 have been even attempted, let alone accomplished? In 18, the Spirit of God is expressly identified as the source of the dedication and commitment of the children of Benjamin and Judah. It is the sense of movement, and of things happening, that is so wonderful, and this is surely the dominant characteristic in a true work of God when it reaches floodtide. A minister of the gospel much used of God once said, 'The truth is, you can do an awful lot with very little when the spate comes'. How true this is, and with what yearning and longing do we covet such a situation today! Indeed, it would not be far off the mark to say that this is what is indicated in the wonderful 103rd Psalm which we studied the other Sunday morning, when it spoke of youth being renewed like the eagle - the restoration of the spirit of eager and heroic endeavour that is capable of making us soar heavenwards, making us young again and ready for anything! Nor is this to be thought of as a mere emotional flurry, lacking in either depth or direction, for - as 32 makes clear - 'understanding of the times' indicates a wise and perceptive discernment of every situation, and 'keeping rank' (33) shows the essential order and discipline of the whole movement. What a glorious picture: Lord, do it again, among Thy people today!

37) 13:1-14

This chapter represents a very important milestone in the history of Israel. David had just restored political unity to the nation and consolidated it by the establishment of his capital at Jerusalem. Now his object was to re-establish religious worship among his people, and for this he must restore the Ark to its proper place.

The significance of the Ark is that it was the symbol of the covenant between Jehovah and Israel. Its loss to the Philistines (1 Samuel 4) was rightly regarded as a disaster involving the loss of the divine favour. After its capture and its subsequent return to Kirjath-jearim little is heard of it - a fact of considerable significance in relation to the failure of Saul's reign and the collapse of his house.

It is clear that the Ark had an almost sacramental significance for Israel, and its presence was associated with the presence of the Lord with His people, and this is what explains David's desire to have it in the heart of his capital. His concern was, in fact, for a return to the things of God on a national level; it was an attempt to renew the nation in spiritual things. This is what gives the chapter such relevance for today, for are we not seeking to do just this, to rehabilitate the waste places of our land and restore lost heritages?

38) 13:1-14

Against this background and in the light of this worthy purpose and intention, the summary judgment of Uzzah appears at first sight a hard and severe penalty. Surely it was a well-meant action? Ah, it was the sin of presumption. One of Israel's great lessons was to learn the unapproachable majesty of the Holy One. The Ark was the symbol of God's presence and there were Levitical ordinances designed to secure the strictest reverence for it. It was to be carried by Levites (Numbers 4:5, 15, 19, 20), but not to be touched, on pain of death. The instructions were clear, and what happened on this occasion was a neglect of God's law.

The return of the Ark was the first step in the inauguration of a new era of worship; but if breaches of the divine Law were to mark this, and these breaches left unpunished, where would it have led? To begin wrongly is to jeopardise all that follows.

Not only so, the prevailing attitude indicated neglect and carelessness, not to say presumption, in the matter of returning to God. They were lacking in seriousness. The Ark had been neglected for long years by the nation, and now it was being casually treated. Viewed in this light, the divine reaction to it becomes not only reasonable but inevitable.

39) 13:1-14

We cannot turn back to God in a moment, casually, and resume intimate relationship with Him as if there had been no estrangement. There is a Cross set at the heart of history that is what our estrangement cost God, and we may not lightly esteem it! An easy familiarity with holy things amounts to not much less than blasphemy and angers the holy Lord of the Scriptures.

One is reminded of the well-known passage in Hosea 6 - immortalized in the famous Scottish paraphrase:

'Come let us to the Lord our God
With contrite hearts return',

which unfortunately fails to convey the real import of the prophet's words. The point that Hosea is making is not that Israel were showing an attitude of repentance, but that their so-called submission to God was fitful and evanescent, and based on a totally inadequate understanding of God's holy requirements. 'In a day or two', they assured themselves, 'all will be well'. But God was not 'taken in' by this kind of contrition, which disappeared like the morning cloud and the early dew. It invited, and brought upon them, His anger and judgment.

Someone has entitled this chapter: Doing a right thing in a wrong way. It was a right thing to want to bring back the Ark to Jerusalem, especially since it symbolised the presence of God; but to do it in a casual and careless way, lacking in seriousness, lacking in a burden to fulfil God's holy Word, was to do it in a wrong way. Obviously there is a big lesson for us here. We are living in days when a great deal is being spoken about revival, and quickening, and the coming of the Spirit. We are often assured that if only certain conditions are fulfilled by believers, revival must come. But the great danger is that we shall be led, in our enthusiasm for national renewal, into an easy-going and complacent assumption that a mere gesture of repentance and contrition is all that is needed for the coming of God's blessing on the land.

40) 13:1-14

David was at first angry with the Lord for dealing thus hardly with Uzzah when he was intent upon such a good work, and well-meaning people are often impatient today of the timely warnings that some of God's more discerning men, the true prophets of our time, give to the Church in its too facile and optimistic programmes for revival. It was only later that he became afraid, as he realized that his casual, albeit well-meaning, approach to holy things was wholly unacceptable, indeed offensive, to the Lord. It is to our shame that this fear, which is the beginning of wisdom, is at a discount in much of the life of the Church today. It is, of course, good when there is an enthusiasm for the things of God in young or old, but Christians are, after all, under the discipline of the Scriptures, and it does no good to be neglectful of them. If David had brought to this programme the spirit and attitude that, for example, is expressed in Psalm 119, he would have acted very differently than he did, and he would certainly have understood the visitation upon Uzzah. It still remains true that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Such fear is a holy, reverential thing: it can be accompanied with a great joy and sweetness, but it is never flippant, never superficial. It is a measure of the superficiality - not to say insincerity - when, after it may be long years of lukewarm low-level living, they are suddenly galvanised by some striking appeal into attending a long-neglected prayer meeting where they proceed to voice confident clichés to the Almighty about opening the windows of heaven and pouring out blessings; as if the holy, terrible God of the Scriptures could be hoodwinked by pious jargon and pretty speeches. There is a significant statement in John 2:24 which we do well to remember. There were men who believed in Jesus' name when they saw the miracles that He did, but Jesus did not commit Himself to them, for theirs was not a faith that could command His respect or confidence. He knew what was in man. Is this a word that might be written over a good deal of our thinking and speaking about national revival?

41) 13:1-14

Bunyan, in *The Holy War*, preserves a true biblical insight when he represents the citizens of Mansoul as having to plead again and again with Emmanuel to return to them after He had been grieved away by their carelessness and neglect of Him. They learned to their cost that, once withdrawn from them He was not thus easily to be wooed back when they happened to be so inclined. They were proved in much heart-searching before He chose to return. This is why we are warned so solemnly against grieving the Holy Spirit of God. It is not a light thing to lose His presence. It is interesting that in the parallel passage in 2 Samuel 6 the ultimate restoration of the Ark is recorded immediately following the story of Uzzah; the Chronicler, significantly enough, interposes another chapter before he deals with it. It may be that his intention is to suggest that a period of time was necessary for David to get his ideas sorted out. Leastways, this seems to be the significance of chapter 14, to which we turn in the next Note.

42) 14:1-7

The opening verses of this passage are very interesting. King Hiram of Tyre's alliance with, and friendliness towards, David proved to be a message to his heart from God that He had confirmed him king over Israel, and that the Lord's blessing and favour was upon him. One recalls the words in Proverbs 16:7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him'. It is all the more striking, in view of this, that the Chronicler goes on, in 3ff, to record, without comment, David's practice of polygamy. It seems that his accession to the throne of the United Kingdom was a signal to him to take more wives to himself. It would be easy to interpret this as the sign of David's increasing power and prestige - a considerable harem being one of the prerogatives of eastern monarchs. It is certainly true that eastern rulers followed this practice, and that the increasing number of wives marked increasing power. But we should remember that Israel was called to be different from other peoples, and certainly this was meant to apply also to her rulers. The teaching of the Word of God is quite explicit about this, as also about monogamy (cf Deuteronomy 17:17); and this can only be interpreted as one of David's blind spots. It may be that his accession to power brought with it the temptation to indulgence along this line, although it is true to say that even in his days of fugitive existence this was one of his darker characteristics. One has only to think of the grave and distressing problems that arose in his family life through the sons born of these unhallowed unions into which he entered to realise how serious this weakness in him proved to be, and how deadly its effect on the kingdom as a whole. If the later years of David's reign are any indication, we may well believe that he lived to regret his earlier alliances. He learned the hard way that we transgress divine laws to our own confusion and loss.

43) 14:8-17

These verses record two incidents which followed upon David's accession to the throne. It is not without significance that the Philistines came to attack Israel as soon as they heard of David's anointing (8). In spiritual terms - and this is the Chronicler's emphasis, always - it is true to say that whenever there is an enthronement of the Lord in heart and life, the enemy is likely to make an attack. This explains a great deal in spiritual life, and it should encourage us, rather than dismay us. Samuel Chadwick once said, 'Every man's Pentecost is a signal for Satan to gird himself'. The important thing to remember is that God is greater than Satan, and that when He allows Satan to come against us, we should rise to the challenge and gird on our spiritual armour, in the knowledge and confidence that He can give us the victory. In the Acts of the Apostles, the day of Pentecost was followed by persecution, but that persecution was taken by God and thrust into His service, and there was a fresh accession of spiritual power. This was followed by more persecution, which in turn was turned to good account as, with the scattering of the disciples (Acts 8:4), a great movement of evangelistic outreach was the result. With God, we are invincible: that is one of the lessons we learn here. There are only two incidents recorded, but we need not suppose they were the only such incidents: rather, they are typical of the kind of experience that was David's in those days. That they have important lessons to teach us will become plain as we continue to study them in tomorrow's Note.

44) 14:8-17

How did David enquire of the Lord (10)? We are not told, but we may suppose that use was made of the strange and fascinating Urim and Thummim (cf Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65) one of the recognized methods of discerning the Lord's will in Old Testament times. No one quite knows how the Urim and Thummim worked: some think they were devices on the breastplate of the high priest, and that God indicated His will by the supernatural gleaming of one of the precious stones on the breastplate. Others think that the reference here is to the casting of lots, which was another way of enquiring of the Lord (cf Proverbs 16:33). From time to time also we read in 1 and 2 Samuel the words 'Bring hither the ephod' as a source of guidance (cf 1 Samuel 23:9). What is interesting for us, however, is to notice that God guided quite differently in the two incidents. In the first David asked, 'Shall I go up against the Philistines ...?' And the Lord said, 'Go up, for I will deliver them into thine hand' (10). It would have been easy for David to have assumed that God would always guide in the same stereotyped way each time; but God does not so do, and therefore we need to be sensitive and open to the divine will, and not make facile assumptions, as if we were seeking to pigeon-hole God and confine Him within our own petty ideas and notions. It could well be that He will lead us in different ways against the same enemy, and we may not say, 'The Lord said "Do this" last time, so obviously that is what to do this time'. When David enquired of the Lord the second time, the leading was quite different: 'Go not up after them'. God is never stereotyped, never dull either. He is full of surprises, and this is what makes the spiritual life so exciting and thrilling.

45) 14:8-17

The modern renderings of 15 give added insight into the meaning of the Chronicler's phrase 'a sound of going'. The NEB has 'a rustling sound', the RSV 'a sound of marching'. If we follow the former, the reference would then be to the coming of the wind into the trees - a symbol of the breath of God and the activity of the Spirit; if the latter, the marching would symbolise the hosts of the Lord. Either way, it refers to the supernatural help of God for His people. This is what we must learn to count on and trust in, if we are to fight the Lord's battles.

Here, then, is a word about divine guidance: the first time David enquired, the answer was Yes, the second time it was No. And we need to be prepared to take No from God as well as Yes. The No that God spoke on this occasion had a wonderful development concealed in it. What if David had rashly said, 'Ah, but I must go up', and in very rashness and eagerness to get at the Philistines, ventured forth against the will and purpose of God? He might have been defeated; he would certainly have missed the glory of the victory that God had in store for him. But he obeyed: he 'did as God commanded him' (16). That was the all-important consideration. And that is what is the distinguishing mark of the true man of God.

46) 14:8-17

There is a lesson for us in considering the two chapters, 13 and 14 together, before passing on to the next; for in the one we have, as it were, David under family discipline, and in the other David in relation to the outside world. The contrast thus presented is interesting and significant, for it tells us that God deals with domestic issues domestically, and with the outside world in a different way. David was under discipline in the events recorded in chapter 13, it is true, but he was God's man, and when the discipline was working in him, God was working in other ways too, and His purposes were being furthered. And - in spite of what we read in chapter 13 - David's heart was towards the Lord, and seeking His will. This is the paradox of the Christian life. There is one sense in which we are brought again and again under the discipline of the Word, and the Lord may deal with us very firmly and very severely in certain matters; but this does not necessarily mean that we are rejected by Him for the moment as instruments of His purposes. If this were so, it would mean we could never come to the point when we were usable in God's hands. We are both under discipline and usable at the same time, and necessarily so, otherwise the work of the kingdom would never be done by human means. This should be an encouragement to us. We do not belittle or neglect the disciplines that come upon believers' lives. When we are neglectful of God's Word, when we do right things in the wrong way, when we are careless or superficial, the Lord takes a dealing with us. But that is within the family; and His work is still to be done. And when our hearts are towards Him, when we are willing though feeble, willing though frail and broken, and prone to make mistakes, He still takes us up and uses us for His kingdom. This never enables us or allows us to excuse our mistakes: He will see to that, and He will discipline us. But it should save us from despondency and despair, and make us feel we should be up and doing, and be the best that we can be for Him, as David did, if what is recorded in the next chapter is any indication.

47) 15:1-24

This chapter stands as a companion piece to chapter 13, and if we took as a title for the latter the words 'Doing a right thing in the wrong way', here the title must be 'Doing a right thing in the right way'. The first point to be made is that in the parallel account in 2 Samuel 6 this second attempt at returning the Ark to Jerusalem is dealt with rather differently than here. For one thing, the circumstances of the return are referred to very briefly in the Samuel account, whereas here a lengthy explanation is gone into (1-24) before the actual return is described (25-29). For another thing, Michal, David's wife's scorn and contempt are given considerable treatment, whereas here this is dealt with in a single verse. This is in line with the religious viewpoint of the Chronicler; he is not particularly interested in Michal's attitude, but he is interested in David's motivation, hence the detail. The second point is this: the force of the detailed instructions given in these verses is that David is now concerned to do the thing in accordance with the teaching of the law of God. The explicit instructions given in Numbers 4:5, 15, 19, 20 as to how the Ark of the covenant was to be transported every time it moved now assume a cardinal importance for the king, and we see him now as one who has put himself under the discipline of the Word. Such is the significance of the passage. The judgment recorded in chapter 13 has produced this effect!

48) 15:1-24

The names of the various Levites given in 5-7, 11, 16, 17, 19ff are those mentioned also in 6:16ff, the sons of Gershon, Kohath and Merari, to whom was committed the organisation of Israel's worship. David is clearly basing his orders and instructions to his people on what he has learned in the reading of the law (cf Numbers 4:4ff). All things were to be done 'decently and in order' - this is what the Chronicler considers important in his record. They had not so done it the first time 'according to the pattern showed in the mount' (Hebrews 8:5), but in a careless, slipshod way (13) that had brought judgment on them, as we have already seen. Again, we must remember the Chronicler's first readers in the post-exilic community, who needed precisely this reminder of the importance of doing things God's way, and in accordance with His holy laws. This emphasis on the Law is very significant; for so often, in the life of God's people, it is the neglect of the Word, rather than the neglect of religion that has brought disaster and barrenness upon them. One thinks of the graphic illustration of this that is provided in the later history of Israel, in the time of Josiah, when the book of the law was discovered in the Temple and brought to the king, who read it, and was so convicted by its contents that he caused it to be read to all the people. This was the beginning of a great and widespread movement of reformation in the land. The very fact that in this nation which was still, even in its declension, a religious nation, the book of the law could have fallen into such disuse that it had become virtually unknown, is an eloquent testimony to the validity of the point the Chronicler is intent on making here.

49) 15:1-24

Following on the thought of yesterday's Note, it would be a very interesting exercise to go through the history of the people of God from the time of Solomon onwards to the Captivity, to see the relation between moral and spiritual declension on the one hand and neglect and forgetfulness of the law of God on the other, as distinct from the practice of religion. So often, even in the days of the better kings, and in times when a more responsible spirit prevailed, there was little emphasis on the law of the Lord, but merely a renewal of religious ceremonial and observance of the feasts, such as the Passover or Tabernacles. Of the good kings, only Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 17:7-9) and Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:18ff) seem to have seen the need for teaching the law to the people. It may well be that this is a consideration that has not been given due weight in an assessment of the reasons for Israel's decline. It can hardly be controverted that all this holds a lesson of vital import for us today. For it would be true to say that the Church has still the lineaments of religion, with its forms, ceremonies and liturgies - indeed, there seems to be an increasing emphasis upon such things but there is less interest in the making the Word central and integral to its religious life, and even less awareness of the fateful consequences of such a neglect, or of the fact that religion without the Word has always spelt declension and barrenness in the life of God's people.

50) 15:25-29

The reference at the end of 25 prompts the comment that the real source of joy is living by the Word of God and in obedience to that Word. In 26 we find a phrase not found in the account in 2 Samuel: 'God helped the Levites'. It is the kind of comment that the Chronicler delights to make, and is inspired interpretation of the situation. It is a very suggestive word. We need to bear in mind the fear with which the Levites would approach the task of taking the Ark to Jerusalem this second time, remembering as they did what had happened to Uzzah. What the Chronicler means is that God helped them in the sense of reassuring and encouraging them, as if to say, 'Do not be afraid, you sons of Merari and Kohath, you are doing it the right way now, and there is nothing to fear. In My will there is freedom and joy'. It must have been quite some procession to Jerusalem, that day (27, 28) with the entire people of Israel rejoicing in the presence of God. Clearly the Spirit of God was regnant in the whole situation. And surely part, at least, of the rejoicing and joy was relief that things had gone well this time, and that the anger of the Lord was turned away. Fear and joy must have mingled together in their hearts - and is not this the usual combination where the Spirit of God is truly at work?

51) 15:25-29

But what are we to say of Michal, who despised her husband as he danced before the Lord? Real dedication to God is generally regarded by the ungodly and the lukewarm as being fanatical and unseemly. It is not unseemly to get emotional about a General Election, it is not unseemly to shout one's head off at a football match, it is only unseemly when you dance before the Lord. This is something that we as believers have to learn to live with. If real dedication is generally regarded as extremist and fanatical and unhealthy and morbid, and even carries with it the imputation of mental imbalance, it is because real dedication and devotion to Christ is always a source of embarrassment to people who are not dedicated to Christ in that sort of way. We remember how on the day of Pentecost the Apostles were regarded by some as being intoxicated. When Paul made his impassioned plea before King Agrippa, Festus the governor thought that he was beside himself, and that much learning had made him mad. This is how it was with Michal; and doubtless it must have been very painful for David to have found this attitude in her. The parallel account in 2 Samuel 6 makes it clear that certain grim consequences came upon Michal for her attitude to David, but the Chronicler passes over these things and simply records it for us at the end of the chapter.

52) 16:1-6

The first three verses of chapter 16 conclude the account of the establishing of the Ark in Jerusalem. Scholars think that 'flagon of wine' in v 3 may be more accurately translated 'a cake of raisins'. But we are not concerned about the actual details of what was handed out. More important is the hand-out itself and the enlargement of David's heart. There is something very interesting and important here. When men commit themselves to the known will of God and live by the Word, things tend to happen to such men. Nobody obeys God's Word without things happening to him. God is concerned to reproduce the image of His Son in us whom He has redeemed by His grace, and the way He does it is through the discipline of the Word; and when we obey the Word, receive it and pay heed to it, that is the way that God's transforming continues and develops in our lives. That is what happened here. David had submitted himself to the disciplines of the Word of God, and was going to live in obedience to it. It changed him, it opened his heart; and we begin to see why David is called a man after God's own heart, for we see the grace and the generosity and the largeness of the man, when he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. He did not have to do what he did, but out of the generosity of his heart, out of the love of his heart, wrought in him by obedience to the Word, came this generous spiritedness.

53) 16:1-6

We need to see that this also is the answer to financial problems in the life of the Church. Given obedience to the Word of God, hearts will have a certain attitude to finance. We ought not to have to work at people, to get money out of them. What we need to do is to submit our hearts to the discipline of God's Word, and learn to obey it, then these things will look after themselves. Repeatedly in the Old Testament we find the people giving with a willing heart. There were times when the officials had to say, Stop, we have plenty, we have more than we need, do not give any more! That is how it was in the Old Testament times, when God touched the hearts of men and women. That is what happened here.

Furthermore, we see from 4-6, in the arrangements David made that this obedience to the Word of God, to the law of God, was not a passing fancy, but something that was going to continue, David was going to continue as he had begun; having rediscovered the Word of God, he was now going to proceed to live by it continually. That is the force of these verses.

54) 16:7-22

The great song of praise which follows in these verses is a combination of three different psalms from the Psalter: 8-22 give us Psalm 105:1-15, with one or two marginal changes in wording; 22-33 give us the whole of Psalm 96; then 34-36 give us Psalm 106:1, 47, 48. It is interesting to realise the kind of background that the Psalms have in the real history of the time. David is speaking here under the impress of the Spirit of God, as He proclaims the name of God and His marvellous works. The important thing for us to realise in this is that when a man is seeking the Lord's will, as David surely was, his mind and spirit are awakened to discern the meaning of that will for his life, and the purpose of God for His people. This is the characteristic note that rings through his utterance. David recognizes that he has a message for the world, and that it must be made known (8). This is the discernment that being in the will of God gives a man. It gives him vision, his eyes are opened, and he begins to see the far horizons. Furthermore, it is God's deeds that constitute Israel's message to the world (12) - this is what Israel was called upon to proclaim. And so it is also with us: God's deeds in Christ, what He has done in Christ for men's salvation, constitute our message to the world. And when we are living in obedience to His word and will, that message lays hold upon us, and we feel that we cannot but preach it forth and tell it out to men. We should notice also the emphasis in 15ff on the covenant, and on God's faithfulness to it - the wonder of His unfolding purposes in taking them, an insignificant people and making them something for His glory, and the reality of the power that did this in them and for them. This is the message: and given hearts that are in His will, this will always be true. And what He did then, He can also do today. When lives are lived in obedience to the will of God, there is nothing that God cannot do for us and in us.

55) 16:23-33

These verses are substantially the same as Psalm 96, which occurs in a section of the Psalter which celebrates the Lord as King (cf 31). It is this that constitutes the significance of David's words at this point and in this context. The scholars tell us that the phrase 'the Lord reigneth' in 10 could well be translated 'the Lord is become king'. It is very true to say that the Lord had become king in David's life (the point, as we have seen, that the Chronicler is making in his record is that David had submitted his life to the obedience of the Word). There had been an enthronement in his heart of the will of God, and consequently he could sing these words with meaning and joy. This indeed is the heart of everything. It is this that creates a situation in which the mighty works of God can be meaningful and significantly told forth and proclaimed. It is this that opens the heart and awakens the vision, and gives the joy, and the burden for the souls of men.

Derek Kidner, in his commentary on Psalm 96 observes: 'The build-up of repeated words and phrases (e.g. "sing ... ascribe ... he comes ...") gives the psalm an insistent vigour and contributes to the air of almost irrepressible excitement at the prospect of God's coming'. This is very true, and it underlines what becomes true in the spiritual sense also: where there is a coronation, an enthronement, of Christ in heart and life, there is ever the expectation of things happening, an expectation of days of the Son of man in power and glory (cf Acts 2:33).

56) 16:34-36

Finally, we have the transcription of Psalm 106:1, 47, 48. It is a great utterance, and it will do no harm to read through the whole Psalm, although David quotes only these three verses. Its spirit is surely much in his mind as he gives thanks to the Lord. What we can say is this: the inspiration of true worship is always the reality of the mighty works of God. We do not have to work up a spirit of worship, all we need do is consider what God has wrought for men in His Son Jesus Christ: if this does not stir worship in our hearts, nothing can and nothing will. But if once the sense of what we owe to Him really grips our hearts, then worship, praise, gladness and joy will fill us to overflowing. C.T. Studd once said, 'If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice is too great for me to make for Him' - that is exactly the spirit of David's utterance in these verses: certain things follow inevitably from the awareness of what God has done. The fountains of the great deep are broken up within us, and our hearts go out to Him in worship and unstinted service. Paul worthily expresses this in his moving words in Romans 12:1 - '... living sacrifices ... our reasonable service'. Kidner comments: 'The prayer of 35 has behind it the frank confession of national sin on the one hand, and of divine forbearance on the other, which have dominated the Psalm. It is the kind of praying which God delights to answer. Its inclusion ... in the Psalmody which the Chronicler incorporates in the account of David's procession with the ark underlines the fact that penitence is never out of place in praise, nor praise in an act of penitence.'

57) 16:37-43

The final verses of the chapter round off the story. David has 'got the message' from the judgment meted on Uzzah, that obedience to the word and will of God is paramount, and so his instructions are that all should be done according to what is written in the law of the Lord (40). True worship was therefore established at Jerusalem. We may take the last phrase of 43 - 'David returned to bless his house' as representing a formal blessing pronounced by the king upon his household; but we could just as truly take it to mean that, in his state of utter obedience to the will of God, David's very presence blessed his whole household, because he had become that kind of man. Every true act and attitude of obedience to the known will and word of the Lord will make us the kind of people that will be a blessing to others wherever we go. If we have received this word, and if, in receiving it, it makes us live more truly and more closely to the law of God, nothing is surer than this that, wherever we go - in our homes, at our work, and among those with whom we gather day by day - we will be a blessing to others, and God will bless them for our sakes. That is what living in accordance with what is written in the law of the Lord does for those who take it seriously.

58) 17:1-10

This chapter brings us to one of the central concerns of the Chronicler's presentation of the story of David - the Temple. It is one that is full of interest and important teaching for us. First of all there is David's desire to build a house for God (1). In the parallel passage in 2 Samuel 7, something is mentioned that the Chronicler here omits: 'The Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies'. This is an important point to note in relation to our proper understanding of what David set about doing at this time. There is a clear reference to Deuteronomy 12:10ff, as to when to build a house where God's honour would dwell. This underlines the significance of David's action and attitude here as being adopted in the light of that word. David is - such has been the Chronicler's message - intent on living by the Law of the Lord and by its instructions. Clearly, David has learned the lesson of the judgment that fell on Uzzah when he made his first attempt to bring back the Ark to Jerusalem, and was determined to maintain the attitude which he adopted after that distressing experience. It says a great deal for David's consecration that this should have become his supreme concern, and this is one of the great lessons we may learn from him for our own ongoing Christian lives.

59) 17:1-10

When David first broached the subject of building the Temple to Nathan the prophet, the latter indicated that it was the right thing to do, and that he must go forward with the assurance of God's blessing on the project. But that assurance was then overruled by the direct intervention of God (3, 4). It would be easy to suppose that this constituted a rebuke to the prophet, as if to say, 'Nathan, you have misguided David, and given him the "go-ahead" without thinking'. But this is to misunderstand the situation. Rather, what we must say is that Nathan gave his counsel in all good faith, and in the inevitable way in which a prophet of the Lord in these particular circumstances would do, judged by normal spiritual categories, this is the most likely thing for him to have said - after all, human judgment under the control of the Spirit is the normal means by which divine guidance comes. Paul says, 'Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is'. Nathan was right in what he said, so far as he could know. It is sometimes the case, however, that God intervenes to overrule this natural line of leading, because sometimes His sovereign will is not accessible to ordinary channels (cf Philippians 3:15). This is particularly true where the will of God and His deeper strategy may not be fully discerned or appreciated. God is greater than our hearts, after all! This serves to explain why the normal lines of guidance in Paul's experience in Acts 16:6ff were overruled and a special vision (of the man from Macedonia) given him. There was, in fact, nothing to suggest that David was not in the will of God in his desire to build a house for Him; and the natural (and spiritual) conclusion for Nathan to have drawn (from his knowledge and awareness of the words in Deuteronomy) was to assume that this should be the way forward for David. There was no way for either David or Nathan to know the deeper divine purpose except by a supernatural revelation, supervening upon the normal processes of determining the divine will.

60) 17:1-10

Such, then, is the Chronicler's insight, as he discerns the spiritual issues of God's dealings with His people. And the issue here is: What is the house of God? Buildings, or people? Unquestionably, David was concerned to build a magnificent edifice (built in Solomon's time, the Temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world); but it still remains a question what God really wanted. The contrast presented between 4 and 10 is very dramatic and impressive: not 'thou shalt build me an house', but 'the Lord will build thee an house'. God and David were really thinking about different things: David was thinking of a building, God about a dynasty. With David, it was sticks and stones and gold plate, with God it was a people for His Name. We know, from the progress of biblical revelation, that this was something that dawned only very gradually in the thinking of God's people - the New Testament sees it flowering in all its glory in the Pauline conception of the Church as an habitation of God through the Spirit, and in the Petrine idea of living stones being built up an spiritual house - but it may well be that here that divine strategy in the long-term sense was struggling to break through into the consciousness of David and Solomon. How much they grasped and discerned we may not know, but what we do know is that large numbers of his descendants, right up to our Lord's day (and, dare we say, in our own) never discerned this vital distinction between buildings and people. In Jesus' time, the Temple was everything; and this explains the barrenness of so much of the religious life of His time. It took the effusion of the Spirit at Pentecost, and the days following to bring a new concept into the situation.

61) 17:1-10

The Lord's words to Nathan in 5 are striking, and one wonders how much of a reflection there is in them of the wonderful mystery of the Incarnation, concerning which John says 'the Word was made flesh and "tabernacled" among us'. Not a magnificent palace but, as the hymn says, 'in the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed the Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ'. What a fascinating suggestion there is here - the line goes right from this point to Bethlehem and the humble circumstances in which the Son of God was born into the world, in an outhouse, a stable, a cattle shed. All this raises the interesting question of the antithesis between magnificent buildings, whether temples or cathedrals, and humble meeting places. We know that the great cathedrals of our land are monuments raised to the glory of God by workmanship dedicated to that glory, but we must also recognize that true worship is not related to the magnificence of its surroundings. The purest kind of worship can take place in the humblest building and in the stateliest cathedral alike, and neither the magnificence of the one nor the tawdriness of the other need necessarily be a barrier or a help to worship. For God dwells among His people, and this should serve to remind us - not to demolish our cathedrals, for that would be an act of wanton vandalism - but to keep things in proper perspective, and distinguish between the aesthetic (or the unaesthetic) and the spiritual.

62) 17:1-10

In 7ff, the I.C.C. commentary suggests that what is implied is that David's honour is great enough in what God has done with him, without the added credit of building the Temple. We may think, however, that that is an unwarranted inference to make here, although it is a point worth considering. In fact, no explicit reason is given in this passage as to why this prohibition was laid on David with regard to the building of the Temple; but significantly, in 22:8 and 28:3 David indicates that it was because he had been a man of war that the prohibition came. There is no mention of this in this chapter, and one can only suppose that David got more out of Nathan's words in retrospect, looking back on this divine intimation, than he did at the time. It is often only later - and sometimes much later - that we can see the real significance of what God says to us and does to us and with us. The reason given by God was that David's hands were reddened with blood. This teaches us that the lives we live condition the service we render. Some life-attitudes are a disqualification for service. Sins may be forgiven, but service may be affected. Is this too hard on David? Not so: it is, on the contrary, an indication that the 'military-kingship' idea, though blessed by God, was only a second-best for Israel. God permitted it, and blessed them within the limits they themselves imposed on the situation; but His kingdom was really of a spiritual nature, not warlike. It is a solemn thought.

63) 17:1-10

Another reason for the prohibition may have been that the time was not ripe for such building. Alexander Maclaren comments: 'The fact that David's reign had been largely occupied with fighting for the existence of the kingdom showed that the time for engaging in such work, which would tax the national resources, had not yet come'. This is fair comment, and we can hardly dispute it. One wonders in this connection whether there may be an application of this to matters like spiritual awakening and revival. We may work towards it, but we cannot dictate when it will come. There is a need for national repentance before it could ever be, just as there is a need for discernment to see what God wills at any particular time. But more: in this prohibition there was surely a divine corrective to David to let him see the real purpose in God's dealings with him - not a building, but a people, an habitation of God through the Spirit, a living house (1 Peter 2). How much of this David discerned we have no means of knowing, but it is certain that down the ages a good deal of misunderstanding has existed in men's minds as to this distinction. A ready example suggests itself: a home is a place for living in, but it may become an idol to the house-proud, and when it does, it becomes unlivable in. And what was designed as a place where people could relax and be themselves becomes a place where they are on tenterhooks all the time and frightened to move. The same applies to church buildings: it is possible to be so inordinately proud of church buildings that they cease to be functional and become almost objects of worship. People matter more than things, even if the things cost a great deal. Fabric is expendable; souls are precious. That is the perspective we are given here.

64) 17:11-15

For the promises and assurances mentioned in these verses see Psalm 89:19-37. More important still, let us look at what God is saying in them, in relation to Nathan's words in 4-6. It must have been a deep blow for David and frustration to have had his desire to build the Temple denied. But instead, God promised him something infinitely more wonderful, namely the establishing of his house for ever (10). In effect, God is saying to him, 'David, you are not to build, but do not break your heart over that: consider, rather, what I am going to do with you' - and unfolds the promise-laden programme in 11-15. From which we may learn that God's frustrations and denials sometimes prepare the way for great and abounding blessings, bigger and greater than we could possibly comprehend. There is a verse we sometimes quote to those who have been faced with frustrations and disappointments of one kind or another: 'God having provided some better thing for you' (Hebrews 11:40). A word of grace and comfort indeed! And, as we shall see in the verses that follow, David got the message, and his heart went out in purest worship and exultation and praise to his faithful, covenant God.

65) 17:16-27

David's words in these verses need not so much to be expounded as savoured, for the sheer beauty and purity of the worship they express. The sense of the marvellousness of what God has revealed to him, and the sense of his own unworthiness and nothingness mingle in almost every sentence. Words failed him, as we might say (18). But he was not stupefied: he was awed to worship, it is true, but his mind was as clear as a bell, as we see in 23, where faith rises to claim the proffered grace, and we see David closing with it, his hands going out to God who has offered him such benison, as he says: 'Do as Thou hast said'. And in that act, he makes a great submission of heart to God's plan and purpose. One readily thinks of David's illustrious descendant, who in the fullness of the time was visited by the angel Gabriel and told of an unspeakable mystery: 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing that shall be born in thee shall be called the Son of God' (Luke 1:35). And Mary said, 'Be it unto me according to thy word'. What God needs, and all He requires, is our submissive co-operation. He visits us with His amazing promise, and whispers in our hearts, 'This is what I am going to do with you, and in you, and through you'. God grant that we may be like David, saying 'Do as Thou hast said', and submitting in willing co-operation with His strategy and divine purposes. We can, of course, miss His purposes, we can have our ears closed by other considerations, so that we do not even hear Him when He invites us into this marvellous partnership. If we do, He will find another for His will, but we will be the losers, not He, for His purposes will be fulfilled with or without us. Mary was submissive, and that was all the door God required into a world of need; and when we are submissive, who shall say but that this will open a door for God into the vastness of human need today.

66) 18:1-17

A first glance at this chapter indicates that it is a summary of David's campaigns, with not a great deal in the way of spiritual illumination to take from it. But it is the context in which it is set that gives it its significance. We have just read in chapter 17 that David was forbidden to build the Temple because he was 'a man of blood' - from which we may gather that the primary intention of God was the peaceful establishing of His kingdom rather than by violent and bloody warfare. Nevertheless, in the situation that now obtained, namely that David was in fact a man of war, and accepting the limitations set upon the situation by his warlike attitude, God continued to bless and prosper him. This is not so contradictory and paradoxical as it may seem. There is good ground for saying that the period of the 'kings' - from Saul to Zedekiah, almost 500 years - ought never to have been, and was not God's primary intention for His people (cf Israel's insistence on having a king, to be like other peoples, when the whole point of their being called of God was to be different from other peoples - 1 Samuel 8); but when it became, through the people's determination, inevitable, God accepted the limitations that they placed on the situation by their attitude, and still blessed them within these limitations that they had set. It – the new situation - became unalterable, but God did not forsake them. It is in this light that we require to understand the continued divine blessing upon His people. The ultimate issue of the kingship idea was to be captivity; but in the meanwhile God was prepared to work on with them, within His permissive, rather than directive, will. This is why at one and the same time we can read of God's refusal to allow David to build the Temple because his hands were red with blood, and yet also read here that the Lord prospered David and preserved him whithersoever he went.

67) 18:1-17

What was said in the previous Note serves to explain how David could go forward conscious of the blessing of God upon him, as a man after God's own heart within the new situation, and indeed 'fight the Lord's battles'. We need to remember that throughout the entire Old Testament history there is one over-mastering purpose - the fulfilment of the promise of redemption. Part of that promise was the establishment of the chosen people in the land. God had given them, and - given this limitation of the divine initiative that we have referred to - we can truly say the ongoing campaign of conquest was really a matter of fighting the Lord's battles, and that - within His permissive will - they were fulfilling in part His redemptive purposes in and through His people. Here, then, in David, we see a man with a sense of destiny, and of being caught up in the divine purposes, and inspired by the consciousness - however dimly and partially - of God's redemptive will in the world, and of his - David's - part in it. He had just received a mighty word from the Lord through Nathan about his future and the future of his family, which had touched the deep springs of his soul (cf 17:16ff), and this provided the motivating power and the inspiration of his ongoing campaigns in his warfare for the Lord. With this understanding of the situation, the chapter begins to gleam with light. David knew what he was doing, and where he was going. Like Paul, he could have said, 'I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air' (1 Corinthians 9:26). This is an absolute essential in spiritual life and service.

68) 18:1-17

There are some particular lessons worthy of note in this chapter. The David we see here is a very different David from the man we see in the wilderness in 1 Samuel. There, he was under discipline, but here he has come into his own. In one sense, of course, it is true that fresh disciplines succeed one another in the spiritual life - we are never really free of them - but in another, it would be as true to say that we pass from discipline to fulfilment (a possible title for the chapter could be 'From struggle to triumph'). In individual life and in the Lord's work alike this happens: the inspiration of the Lord's great purposes, and our submission to them, brings us eventually from the one to the other. What is His purpose in our lives? To make us perfect, to bring us into our true destiny; and when we co-operate with Him by our obedience and submission, we do in fact emerge into a higher and fuller experience. We reach a new level, indeed a new dimension, of effectiveness and fruitfulness. And so it is also in the Lord's work and service. The Lord puts a fellowship under discipline, He trains it, as David trained his men in the cave of Adullam, fashioning it, knocking it into shape; then there is a fulfilment, and one sees the fruit of it, as God takes it a step further in His sovereign purposes of grace, then through more struggling and more battling, to further fulfilment. That is the pattern we have in this chapter.

69) 18:1-17

Another thing we see in David's experience here is a significant movement from defence to attack in the Lord's battles. Hitherto, it had largely been a case of defending the kingdom against the enemy. If we go back to Samuel's day, we see that the Philistines were overwhelming Israel, the Ark was taken, and kept from Israel for long years; and from that point onwards, Samuel's lifetime was spent in thrusting the invaders back, and defending the land against them. It was much the same in Saul's day, and in some measure up to this point also in David's. But now, it is aggressive warfare, carrying the battle into the enemy's camp. This is true in spiritual experience and in Christian service also. There are times when we are involved almost completely in repelling the invaders, and we battle defensively against Satan, glad indeed when we are able to hold our own. But the grace of God means to lead us out into positive, aggressive warfare against the powers of darkness, and make inroads into his kingdom in our lives and in the lives of others. Is it not a tremendous thrill to be conscious of gaining ground against our enemy, and advancing and capturing positions long held by him?

Above all, there is the blessed assurance that the Lord is with us. This is underlined twice, in 6 and 13. This is the promise and provision of God for a man after His own heart. And it is all of a piece with what has gone before, and indeed cannot be separated from it: 'The Lord preserved David whithersoever he went'. When a man is submissive to the Lord's will and is conscious of his destiny in that will, he becomes invincible, he cannot be got down. As the saying is, 'A man is immortal until his work is done'. This is certainly true of David here.

70) 18:1-17

In connection with the thoughts expressed in the past reading or two, it may not be inappropriate to make the following comment: sometimes we are urged to put pressure on people to enter the Lord's service, either for the home ministry or the mission-field abroad. But a better case could be made from Scripture for almost dissuading people, with the advice, 'Do not go, unless these things are true of you'. Unless the constraint and inspiration of a great divine plan and purpose is upon a man, he had much better remain where he is, and stay at home. Unless there is a total submission to that divine will and purpose, and a wholehearted obedience to what God requires, he had better not go any further with it, because if these things are not there, what prospect would a man have of emerging from struggle to triumph, either in personal life or in the Lord's work, what likelihood of passing from defence to attack? And above all, what assurance would he have of the Lord's preservation in all the way he should take? But, given these things, we have a situation in which the voice of God may well be heard saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And if ears are open to that voice, it may well mean that all these things will become true, at least in some measure. That is the way God works in people's lives, and these are the kind of lessons that can be learned from this rather ordinary record of David's campaigns. The Lord not only preserved His servant, but was seen by his enemies to have preserved him, and seen in such a way that they were prepared and eager to bring him gifts and to do homage to him. Let us see here the rightness of the man of God: when we do right, things go right, but when we do wrong, things go wrong. That is a very important lesson to learn.

71) 19:1-19

We have in this chapter another glimpse into the battle-programme, as it were, of king David. The incident originated in a desire David had to show kindness to a neighbouring royal house. The link the story has with what has gone before is this: we have spoken of David having a sense of purpose and destiny in the will of God, and of his response to this in submission to that divine will, which brought the subsequent blessing of God upon his campaigns. This did something to David - as a sense of destiny in the will and purpose of God and a response in submission and obedience will inevitably do - in terms of imparting a certain nobility of character and integrity to his life. God's purposes are always deeper than we can know at any given time. In any particular situation we may be confronted with a crisis-challenge in which we know that the one right thing to do is to obey God, whatever it costs us; and there is a sense in which that fills our whole horizon at the time - naturally and inevitably so. But God is also working behind the scenes, and working more deeply than that conscious experience. He is conforming us to His image, and the obedience we offer to the challenge works a sanctification in us in the deeper reaches of our personalities, imparting virtue and dignity - even royalty - to us. It makes us bigger men and women. What we see in this chapter is the attitude and demeanour of a truly noble man.

72) 19:1-19

Several lessons emerge from this incident that we shall do well to heed. One is that it is unwise and unrealistic to suppose that kindness always wins. David's compassion for Hanun was sincere and heartfelt, it was the outgoing of a heart of flesh in a warm and spontaneous sympathy for another in his bereavement. Sometimes hearts are touched by such kindness, but sometimes they react in this ugly and churlish way - especially if they have been 'got at', as Hanun was, by others intent on sowing seeds of dissension and suspicion. We only have to read the Beatitudes to recognize that kindness does not always meet with a ready response. 'Blessed are the peacemakers' yes, but peacemakers have been known to be deeply hurt for their pains. We may apply this also in more general terms in relation to the gospel itself. We are called upon to proclaim the love of God to men, but it is a mistake to suppose that the simple preaching of that message necessarily wins a ready acceptance. There will be those who will misunderstand, and those who will resist bitterly. And it is as well that we should be realistic about this. David's gracious and magnanimous act met with a rough and churlish rebuff, and Hanun and his men submitted David's servants to an unwarrantable indignity, all of which leaves us the lesson that to love always makes us very vulnerable. This can never be allowed to mean that because of the risk of being snubbed we will not be prepared to show that love which is commanded in the gospel. This is what taking up the cross means. When God sent His Son to men, they spat upon Him. That was their reaction to the self-giving of God. And if this is the way the Master went, should not the servant tread it still?

73) 19:1-19

C.S. Lewis has a notable passage on the vulnerability of love (in 'The Four Loves') which is well worth thinking about:

'To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.

'I believe that the most lawless and inordinate loves are less contrary to God's will than a self-invited and self-protective lovelessness. It is like hiding the talent in a napkin and for much the same reason: "I knew thee that thou wert a hard man". Christ did not teach and suffer that we might become, even in the natural loves, more careful of our own happiness. If a man is not uncalculating towards the earthly beloveds whom he has seen, he is none the more likely to be so towards God whom he has not. We shall draw nearer to God, not by trying to avoid the sufferings inherent in all loves, but by accepting them and offering them to Him; throwing away all defensive armour. If our hearts need to be broken, and if He chooses this as the way in which they should break, so be it.'

74) 19:1-19

There is something else that we can learn from this chapter about David. It is clear that his men were abominably treated by Hanun. To shave off the beard was an unspeakable indignity, and to cut off their garments in the way described was a calculated insult. And we see David here sheltering those who had been humiliated: 'Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown, and then return' - as if to say, 'then you can return to Jerusalem without fear of being laughed at'. Ah, love covereth ...! Here is David's royalty coming through once again, and it poses a greater challenge than at first might appear. We suppose there is a sense in which the basis of humour is the incongruous spectacle that we sometimes present to the world. A man slipping on a banana skin makes us laugh, because of the indignity of the sight. It is salutary and healthy not to be over-sensitive about this, and it is always good when we can take a laugh at ourselves. But we need to be careful, lest our laughter at others cross the bounds of the seemly and the reasonable and become malicious. In this kind of situation, one soon learns to know the people who have royal hearts, because they will be quick to jump to the defence of those whom they may sense are going to be hurt at others laughing at them. This is a realm in which Christians can often be very insensitive, and sometimes cruel. We may enjoy laughing at another's indignity, especially if we feel they need taking down a peg. But David's heart went out to these men. Doubtless they looked very odd, and rather laughable; but see the generosity of that kingly heart, as he sheltered them.

75) 19:1-19

A final lesson we may gather from this chapter relates to the strange perversity of human nature that makes it so difficult for some people to receive kindness. David's offer here was manifestly without ulterior motive, and made in the goodness of his heart, to repay a former kindness. And yet, all sorts of unworthy designs were imputed to him by the Ammonites. Sometimes it is in fact the fear of such ulterior motives that makes men suspicious of genuine and unfeigned goodness, sometimes it is the complicated processes of thinking that go on in our hearts and that finally make us incapable, it would seem, of accepting the simple truth when it stares us in the face. Christ's word about becoming as little children has a very real relevance in this connection! Sometimes also – and this is even more complicated - it is the mysterious and disintegrating workings of inferiority complex in the deeps of our being that makes us distrustful of goodness and kindness offered to us, and tempt us to spurn it even when we most need it. And when we are courageous enough to examine this strange perversity within our hearts, we may learn to our dismay that it is more allied to a spirit of pride than we would care to admit. Because, of course, to receive means and involves taking the lowly place, and our secret hearts say, 'anything rather than that'. This is something that will bear thinking about.

76) 20:1-8

This is a brief chapter which at first sight is no more than a recording of some of David's exploits and campaigns. But there are one or two significant lessons to be gathered from it, on comparing it with the parallel section in 2 Samuel 11. We have seen how the Chronicler has been following the history unfolded in 2 Samuel, but selecting for his own particular purposes some incidents and omitting others. He obviously borrows the opening of the record in 2 Samuel 11, and also underlines the fact that David tarried at Jerusalem; but he omits altogether the story of what follows from that tarrying, namely the sorry, tragic and terrible account of his sin with Bathsheba. We have repeatedly pointed out that the Chronicler is selective in his choice of material: it is David's religious career that is his interest and subject matter. And for this purpose - his relation to the Temple and its worship - it is clear that the record of this awful moral lapse does not come into the Chronicler's reckoning. This does not mean, and we must not take it to mean - that he had any concern to whitewash David, or to pretend either that the awful thing never happened, or that it was not important. But the problem is answered simply by the consideration that it is the religious significance of David's reign as a whole, and that, in spite of his great sin, the main and general direction of David's life was right in the sight of God. In this sense, he can truly be said to have been a man after God's own heart. More on this subject in the next Note.

77) 20:1-8

What was said in the previous Note about the main direction of David's life being Godward serves to explain some of the striking statements made in the Psalms by David concerning himself, such as, 'I have walked before Thee in the integrity of my heart'. If we did not understand the Scriptures properly, we could easily fall into the error of supposing that David was simply being self-righteous. But he is not making any extravagant claim to perfection or sinlessness, simply bearing witness that the general direction of his life has been right in the sight of God. And the sin with Bathsheba, great and terrible as it was, is not mentioned here, because it was forgiven and forgotten. This is one of the biggest - and often most difficult - lessons for people to learn. It is a common experience in pastoral work to find people who simply do not seem to be able to believe that God can forgive and forget, and - as a direct corollary of this - cannot forgive themselves for some terrible sin they have committed. This becomes the chief problem in their lives, which clouds and paralyses them for a good part of their lives. What we have here, then (or, rather, what we do not have here, for the Chronicler is silent about David's sin) is a lesson of great encouragement and comfort for those who find it difficult to put the past behind them, when God has put it behind His back.

78) 20:1-8

We will need to say something about the interesting and intriguing reference in 4ff to the giants. There are several significant references in the Old Testament to these prodigious figures - the sons of Anak, the Nephilim, the Rephaim - and one readily recalls the spies' encounter with them in their foray into the land of Canaan (Numbers 13) and their gloomy report to Moses on their return. Clearly, they belonged to the tribes that inhabited Canaan before the settlement of Israel there, which denotes that they had ancient lineage and history. The first reference to them is found in Genesis 6:4, and this is probably where our thinking about them should begin. There are two differing interpretations of this Genesis reference. Some interpret it as the marriage of the godly line of Seth (the sons of God) with the ungodly line of Cain (the daughters of men), that is to say a union of believers with unbelievers, leading to a consequent dimming of the witness to the truth of God and the conformity of the people of God with the world. If this is the true understanding of the verse, it is something amply substantiated in Scripture, and church history alike. Others, however, have questioned the adequacy of this interpretation, because the context in Genesis 6 shows that it was when this union took place that the crisis-point was reached and God uttered His sentence of doom upon the world; and it may well be questioned whether the union of the godly line of Seth with the ungodly line of Cain would have been in itself so desperate and final in God's eyes as to bring such a sentence of judgment. A most sinister and fateful interpretation is therefore placed on Genesis 6:4, namely that what is in view is some kind of union between angelic beings (sons of God) and humans, an unholy, unnatural and blasphemous offence for which the only answer or remedy would be judgment. We shall comment on this idea in the next Note.

79) 20:1-8

The interpretation referred to at the end of the previous Note is regarded by many as fantastic and absurd. But we should be chary of dismissing it out of hand. The phrase 'sons of God' is used elsewhere in Scripture as referring to angels (Job 1:6, 2:1); Peter speaks of 'angels that sinned' (2 Peter 2:4), and Jude of 'angels that kept not their first estate' (Jude 6). These are important verses, and what they may indicate in relation to Genesis 6:4 may best be described as the 'demonising' of humanity, and that the 'marriage' here referred to is the possession of men by dark powers, resulting in grotesque and terrifying parodies of humanity, often with seemingly superhuman strength. The giants and men of renown of ancient days have their counterpart today in the evil geniuses that have trodden down hapless millions down the ages of history, the Neros, the Borgias, the Stalins, the Hitlers - Churchill called Hitler 'a maniac of ferocious genius'. The idea of demonic personalities is not in the least fantastic, but only too real in our modern world, and the demonisation of humanity something with which we are having increasingly to reckon within society. It is true, of course, that pagan mythology is full of stories of gods marrying humans and having children of their unnatural union. We rightly regard these stories as myth and legend, but how did they arise? What if once, in the dawn of history, something of this nature really happened, and that Genesis 6 bears witness to the judgment that came upon it? It is perhaps significant that it is the Chronicler that includes this reference to giants in his picture of David, for it is a religious picture he is painting, and cleansing and purging the land from all that ought not to be is a religious matter.

80) 21:1-8

The story recorded in this chapter (with the parallel account in 2 Samuel 24 - which see) is from one point of view plain and straightforward, but it presents a considerable problem of interpretation. David commanded Joab, the captain of his host, to number the people. Joab protested as to the wisdom of the exercise, but David insisted, overruling his protest, and the census was taken, involving a period of between nine and ten months. But the Lord was displeased with David for so doing, and His anger was visited upon king and people, as the rest of the chapter makes clear, the prophet Gad being used of God to announce the punishment. The problem for us is this: what was the sin involved? The mere taking of a census could not of itself have been wrong, since this was provided for in the Mosaic legislation in Exodus 30:12. Yet it was so ill-advised at that point, apparently, that even Joab, who could hardly be said to have been a spiritual man, saw the unwisdom of it and protested against it. Clearly, there are hidden issues here that need to be explored. We should note first of all that the Chronicler introduces the chapter with a reference to Satan's work in the matter (1). Interestingly, the parallel account in 2 Samuel 24 does not say this, but refers directly to the Lord's action against His people. A contradiction has been imagined here, but it is better to understand that both God and Satan were involved, in much the same way as the mysterious interaction of the Divine and the demonic in the opening chapters of Job. Satan got at Job, but it was by divine permission and ordaining that he did so. More on this in tomorrow's Note.

81) 21:1-8

The fact remains, however, that Satan got in, and was given place to. It may be that the door of opportunity was opened to him through David's great sin which, as we have seen, the Chronicler does not even record, although there is a simple reference in 20:1 to David's tarrying at Jerusalem 'at the time that kings go out to battle' - the fateful 'being in the wrong place at the wrong time' which 2 Samuel 11 makes plain was followed by dire consequences - and it could just be that the writer, in bringing chapters 20 and 21 together so closely, wanted us to 'put two and two together' also, and see the real, underlying cause for this sad error that David made. There is a deep truth in all this for human experience, even in the context of the forgiveness of sins. Sin can be forgiven, but the consequences of sin can often go on and on and on. This is one of the terrifying things about the spiritual life: a man may sin and get out of fellowship with God, then weep his way back to Him in penitence and contrition, and find forgiveness, reinstatement and restoring. But two things can also be true at the same time: one is that the sin may well have continuing and ongoing consequences, the other is that a door may have been opened to let Satan in, and all sorts of troubles may begin to make themselves felt in the context of the Lord's work. This is how it was on this occasion.

82) 21:1-8

The answer to the question, 'What was the nature of David's sin' must lie in some attitude or motive on David's part, which was clear to his officers, though not obvious to us. It has been suggested that his action was motivated by worldly pride and a desire for increased military glory; that prosperity and power had led him to wish to organise his kingdom more perfectly as a worldly power among the nations of the earth, and the first step would be to place his army on a warlike footing by numbering the people. If this be so, then David was pursuing a course of action that was foreign to Israel's calling as God's peculiar people. One recalls much earlier in the story how the people came to Samuel, saying, 'Make us a king that we might be like other nations'; and how, despite Samuel's solemn warnings, they were determined to pursue their fateful course. So it was here, it would seem, with David. He had tasted the intoxicating exhilaration of military success and power in the interests of God's kingdom (and there is no doubt that he had become a great warrior), but he began, obviously, to think of this as an end in itself, not simply as a means to an end, as God had meant it to be; and therefore he was in danger of being deviated from the real purpose of God. It was a temptation to deviate from the divine ideal because of merely earthly and human considerations - pride and vainglory, and personal advantage. He had tasted the heady draught, liked it, and wanted to consolidate himself in it. It was not, therefore, so much the numbering of the people, in itself, as what it signified on this occasion in David, that was the serious and perilous issue.

83) 21:1-8

There is a principle involved here which applies both to the Church as a whole, and to individuals. It is all too possible, as we know, for the Church, through pride and vainglory, and through forgetfulness of her calling, or unwillingness to face up to the implications of that calling, to depart from the real purpose of her existence, and as such come under the chastisement of God for her sin. Church history reveals that this happened again and again. Emil Brunner, in a book entitled 'The Misunderstanding of the Church' points out that the ecclesiastical and established structure or institution of denominations has often, in fact, killed the life and vitality of the Church, and that God's people constantly need to be recalled to their true function, task and commission. There are times when the Church is so full of 'other things' that there has been no room for Christ, no room for the Scriptures, or for prayer, and prayer has been regarded as slightly odd and off-centre, and meetings for prayer treated with great caution and reserve, so great is the Church's misunderstanding of itself. When this is so, it becomes just like the world: it becomes a worldly organisation, barren of any true life. The same applies in the life of the individual. A true believer may lose his early zeal and devotion - and it may happen so inwardly and secretly that for long enough he himself is not aware of it. But somewhere, at some point, there is a turning away from the rigour of the challenge that is his calling, and sooner or later the outward change becomes evident. There are things he does, and there are things he allows, and there are attitudes he adopts, which would have been simply unthinkable in earlier days. And he looks back with self-conscious embarrassment to these days when Christ was all in all to him, and he lived in a pilgrim spirit. Then, Christ and the world to come were at the centre of his experience, but now everything is different, and he has become a respectable, evangelical worldling who has lost his zeal, his devotion, his fire, his glowing testimony that marked him off as a man of God. A glory has departed from his life. That is how it was with David. Has this something to say to us - and of us - also?

84) 21:9-17

David, for long enough, was impervious to any counsel, and his mind closed to advice and caution. This is one of the ways in which one can identify the activity of Satan in a believer's life. His attitude of near fanatical determination, in face of Joab's protestations, digging in his heels in sheer stubbornness and determination is very significant. A man in his right senses would surely have listened to reason, but then, he was not in his right senses, for Satan was at work in him, blinding his mind to the reasonable and acceptable will of God. One learns through experience to recognize the hidden activity of the evil one in this kind of fanatical drive and determination that is sometimes evidenced in God's people. But, mercifully, the erring king was brought to book, and brought to his senses, and the verses which continue the story show that he was, in his penitence, prepared to commit himself to the judgment of God rather than to the fury of evil men because he knew that God's judgments were right and just, even though they were very painful: 'Let me fall into the hand of the Lord ...' (14). We might feel that this was a terrible thing for God to do. Yes, but God would say that this was a terrible thing for David to do. And the punishment fitted the crime: David was concerned to have more and more self-aggrandisement, in the form of a great and mighty army, and God decimated his army, as if to show David that He knew exactly what was going on. It was a costly way for the point to be made, but then, sin is a costly thing - for man and for God. It cost God the blood of His Son, and it can hardly be thought that it will cost us less.

85) 21:18-30

The remaining verses of the chapter show that this sad and tragic judgment had a gracious issue. This is, in fact, the deepest lesson of the chapter. David suffered the chastisement of the Lord, but it brought him to his senses, and the sacrifice on the threshing floor of Ornan (or, Araunah, as it is called in 2 Samuel 24) has a deep significance for us. Its meaning is that David realised that he must be squared with God before things could ever be right again. That is lesson enough for us, surely: we must needs get right with God from our backslidden estate and, thank God, there is a sacrifice that speaks more powerfully and effectively than that of bulls and goats - 'If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the world' (1 John 2:1, 2). That is our provision, and it is a complete one. But we should notice something else also: David's chastened and contrite spirit. Here is godly sorrow that works repentance indeed (2 Corinthians 7:10, 11). The words in 24 (see also 2 Samuel 24:24) speak of the moral transformation that had taken place in him through purging, and constitute a recognition that the Lord is worthy of the greatest sacrifice we can bring Him - the sacrifice of our hearts, minds and wills. This tells us two things: one is that the real goal of sacrifice, and of chastening and chastisement, is not death, but life. God chastises us unto good, to do something in us. These words speak of life that has come anew to David: to speak like this (24), and feel like this, is life indeed. The second thing we learn from this is that the goal of all God's dealings with us is to bring us here, again and again, in ever deepening measure, until all pride and arrogance, all the worldliness and self-seeking in us, are done to the death. God grant we also may build such an altar to the Lord as David did!

86) 21:18-30

We see from the first verse of chapter 23 that the end of David's life is now in view (the remainder of 1 Chronicles dealing with his last days), and 2 Samuel 24, which records this story of the threshing floor of Araunah virtually ends the record of his life. It may be fitting, in this regard, to look at the contrast between the end of David's life and that of his predecessor Saul's. Saul's last days were marked by the awful confession 'I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly', very different from David's 'I will not offer burnt offerings without cost'. These contrasting statements define the two possibilities that lie before us all in life, and urge us to make sure that the one, rather than the other, will be true of our lives.

Our final lesson in this chapter relates to the last three verses (28-30). 29 and 30 are clearly an additional comment which could be placed in parenthesis, while 28 is the main statement, therefore 22:1, 'This is the house of the Lord God ...' follows closely on 28 and belongs to it. This should be compared with 2 Chronicles 3:1 to see the significance of what David is saying. It is very wonderful: the Temple was to be built on Mount Moriah, on the site of the threshing floor of Ornan, and that place, which marked the sin and failure of David, and his repentance and contrition, and God's gracious dealing with him, became the foundation of the Temple of God. There is surely an enormous symbolic significance in this, and the Chronicler is just as surely underlining the fact that the house of God in the spiritual sense is always built on this kind of foundation, on the principle of sacrifice. How wonderful that the magnificence of the Solomonic Temple should have emerged from such an experience as is described in this chapter! Does this not give us encouragement to hope that when we go wrong and bitterly repent of it and seek to get right with God, this gives Him a foundation on which great things may yet be built?

87) 22:1-5

The building of the Temple being the Chronicler's main theme, this is an important chapter for his presentation of his message. What David did here (2ff) seems to have been in anticipation of Solomon's own action, as we see from 2 Chronicles 2:17, where the latter did precisely the same. What David prepared, Solomon continued as a matter of clear policy. The lovely words in 5 clearly indicate that this was David's swansong, but also, if we are to believe the Chronicler, it was the culmination of his career. It is thought by some commentators that these verses belong to a time between Solomon's appointment as king and David's death (Solomon was anointed king before his father died - a usual custom in ancient days, and it happened several times in the history of the later kings). One sees the paternal, even patriarchal, attitude on David's part, in 5, giving to Solomon the benefit of all his years of experience and wisdom, in order that the work that he had so set his heart on might be prepared properly for its execution and worthily fulfilled when the time came for Solomon to do so. The words in 5, 'I will therefore now make preparation for it', are more literally translated 'Let me now prepare for him', and is 'the expression of an earnest desire, and self-encouragement to an arduous task, rather than of mere resolve' (Ellicott). It could almost be rendered, 'Oh, let me then prepare for him'. Viewed thus, it is easy to understand this as the culmination of David's reign.

88) 22:6-10

Here are David's instructions to his son Solomon. In 1 Chronicles 17 we pointed out that the reason for David's being prohibited from building God's House was not given in the first instance by Nathan then, but it is given here, as also in 28:3. Nevertheless, although he was frustrated in his great desire, God gave him something even more wonderful, in that he established his house and his dynasty. The strength of David's desire is expressed in 7, where 'mind' in the Hebrew indicates not so much his mental attitude as the earnest longing and the desire of his deepest heart. This serves to underline the depth of his disappointment at his 'disqualification' spoken of in 8. But this is surely eclipsed in the beautiful words in 9, 10. This was not mentioned in chapter 17 either, and we must suppose that David had meditated much on this prohibition, and that in his meditation had 'got the message', as we say, and heard this wonderful promise, as joy seeking him through pain. Nor should we miss the import and significance of that promise. Rest was to be given to Solomon, and through him, in order that he - and the people - might be given over to work (10). Put like this, we see a spiritual principle of great significance standing out. It is this: we work best for the Lord from a position of rest. We cannot really serve the Lord worthily until we ourselves have been brought into rest and peace. This, we may say, is why so much feverish activity in the Christian life is so non-productive. Such, then, is the symbolism of the incident for us, and this is what it teaches. This is how the kingdom is built and extended. When we are brought into the rest of God, when we are delivered from the battles that are so much the lot of the believer, when we get into the open ground of Christ's victory, then, at that point, we can significantly serve the Lord and labour for Him.

89) 22:6-10

There is a very important lesson for the spiritual life in the interpretation given at the end of the previous Note. Is it not precisely our preoccupation with all sorts of other things that prevents us from serving God meaningfully? We are too taken up with tensions, problems, and this, that and the other. We have no peace, we have no freedom to serve the Lord. The secret of effective service is not overwork, but overflow, as someone has said - not feverish activity, but the natural and spontaneous overflow of a full heart. When we are in a position of rest, and rest is not an inactive thing, but an invigorating reality - then we are in a position in which we are set free and liberated to work, and to work effectively. Do we see the juxtaposition? Peace and quietness to Israel, and therefore freedom and opportunity to build the house of the Lord. This may be a short comment, but it is very much one of the most important lessons we can ever learn in spiritual life.

90) 22:11-13

Here we have David's solemn charge to Solomon. Someone has pointed out that there is no trace of envy in David's heart over Solomon's privilege in being appointed as the builder of the Temple, no sense of chagrin in having been passed over in favour of his son. Rather the opposite, for there is the tremendous desire to do all in his power to further the work for Solomon, the desire, indeed, to fulfil his own appointed part in the work, even though it was to be only a preparatory work, not the building itself. This opens up the whole question of one's allotted task in the work of God's kingdom. Paul uses a particular word in Ephesians 1:10 in this regard, when he speaks of the 'dispensation (or, stewardship) of the fullness of the times'. It is of this that he says, 'In Him also we have obtained an inheritance'. 'Inheritance' here does not so much mean something which we inherit through someone's will (the modern meaning) as 'an allotted part' (the word Paul uses is that from which we derive our word 'clergy' - a clergyman is one who has been given an allotted task in the kingdom of God). This is precisely what David bears witness to here. He recognizes that he has been given an allotted part in God's ongoing purposes - not the building of the Temple (that was Solomon's allotted part) but the preparation of the materials for it. It is a tremendous thing when we learn and recognize that we all have a part - and only a part - in God's purposes, and that it is our wisdom to be content with it, and seek to play that part with all our hearts and all our might. We cannot, after all, be of more use to God than He chooses to make us; and if we are discontented with the part given us, we not only put ourselves out of joint in our petulant craving for a job that is not ours, but also we will very likely fail in the part that has been allocated to us.

91) 22:11-13

David's words to Solomon in 11 are very significant. The RSV rendering makes it read 'The Lord be with you so that you may succeed ...', which gives it a more graphic thrust. Prospering depends on the Lord's presence. If we can say of a Christian, of a servant of God, that the Lord is with him, then we can be sure that that man's work will prosper. This is the beginning of all fitness for the Lord's service, that He should be with us. And that means the cultivation of our spiritual lives. If we can make sure of this one central reality, that in whatever we do, and in all we do, God is with us, then in that sense that is the key to true spiritual prosperity. We should also note the words 'as He hath said of thee' in 11. If we have a conviction that our service is appointed for us by God, then this will give us both encouragement and incentive to work on faithfully. It is the kind of assurance that is implicit in Paul's words to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:18ff; 2 Timothy 1:6ff about the 'prophecies that went before on' him. This is what enables a man to keep on keeping on, through thick and thin, through all the oppositions and every possible discouragement. 'As He hath said of thee' - if only this be true, we must surely go on.

92) 22:11-13

In connection with what is said in 12, we should look on to 2 Chronicles 1:7-12, where Solomon's meeting with God is recorded. It is very probable that this dramatic charge given him by his father, which must surely have stuck deeply in his heart and remembrance, is what prompted his request for wisdom. As to 13, there are clear echoes from earlier parts of Scripture, in the emphasis on the need to heed and obey the Lord (cf Joshua 1; Deuteronomy 4:1, 31:6). Prosperity, Solomon, if you obey It is a big 'if', but a real one. David obviously was harking back to Israel's earlier days; and his use of Scripture in his exhortation to his son raises an interesting and important consideration. David's life was a life lived in the light of God's Word, his mind and heart were steeped in it, so that when he spoke to his son, he spoke in biblical terms - not so much in the sense of quoting texts to him, as speaking so biblically that he was simply an echo of the voice of God to the men of earlier generations. Happy the son who has such a father, and happy the son who heeds such fatherly exhortations!

93) 22:14-19

Here is a further enumeration of David's preparations for the building of the Temple. The phrase 'in my trouble' in 14 may be rendered 'by my hard and painful labour', that is to say, 'over a long period of time I have prepared for the house of the Lord'. This seems the likely interpretation; and it means that here is the 'rationale' of David's accumulation of wealth over the years - it was all for a greater purpose than personal aggrandisement. It almost seems as if the Chronicler means us to see the meaning of David's whole life and lifetime of activity as leading to this. Often we do not at the time see the force or meaning or significance of things that happen to us; it is only later that the plan becomes clear. Then, we can look back and marvel at the way God has led us, and the way that events have shaped all for the higher purpose that suddenly unfolds. This is how it was with David. But there is something else also: David's words in 14 indicate that he identified with this larger work of God whose end he was not permitted to see. He had only a part to play. Some sow, and others reap, and enter into their labours. This presents a wonderful lesson of challenge and encouragement for spiritual life, especially in relation to the work in which we are engaged at the present time in our own land. If there is anything in the suggestion that we may have come to the kingdom for such a time as this, it must surely mean that the work to which we are committed in our little corner has significance in relation to the larger plan and purpose God has for the country in our day and generation. He has given us a part to play in it, and says to us, 'Be up and doing, and do it with all your might'. Even if we do not see the overall plan, or the importance of our particular contribution, it will surely mean much - nay, everything - that we fulfil honourably and in integrity.

94) 22:14-19

In relation to the thought expressed at the end of the previous Note, here are some fine words by Alexander Maclaren: 'David is a very conspicuous example of a law which runs through all our work for God. None of us is privileged to perform complete tasks. One soweth and another reapeth. We have to be content to do partial work, and to leave its completion to our successors. There is but one Builder of whom it can be said that His hand shall lay the foundation of this house, and His hand shall also finish it. He who is the Alpha and Omega, and He alone, begins and completes the work in which He has neither sharers nor predecessors, nor successors. The rest of us do our little bit of the great work which lasts on through the ages, and having inherited unfinished tasks transmit them to those who come after us. It is privilege enough for any Christian to lay foundations on which coming days may build. We are like the workers of some great cathedral, which was begun long before the present generation of masons were born, and will not be finished until long after they have dropped trowel and mallet from their dead hands. Enough for us if we can lay one course of stones in that structure. The greater our aims, the less share has each man in their attainment; but the division of labour is the multiplication of joy and all who have shared in the toil will be united in the final triumph. It would be poor work that was capable of being begun and perfected in a lifetime. The labourer that dug and levelled the track, and the engineer that drives the locomotive over it are partners. Solomon could not have built the Temple unless through long, apparently idle years, David had been patiently gathering together the wealth which he bequeathed. So if our work is but preparation for those who come after, let us not think it of slight importance, let us be sure that all who have any portion in the toil shall share in the victory, that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.'

95) 22:14-19

In the light of the foregoing quotation, and the comments in the previous Note, the summons in 16 is stirring and moving, 'Arise, therefore, and be doing'. This is what all who have gone before us say to us, and this is the challenge of such a situation. The Lord was to be with Solomon, and the princes (17-19) were to be with him too. Always, when God does a work, and lays His hand upon a man, there is gathered around that figure 'a band of men whose hearts God has touched'. What an encouragement this is to all who have caught even a glimpse of what is going on in the land today. There is so much to encourage, if only we had eyes to see it. Even in the context of the growing secularisation of society, and the decline in the life of the institutional Church - with crisis in membership, finance, manpower, and all the rest - we can know that God is in control, and that He delights in doing the impossible. Man's extremity, we say, is God's opportunity, and our present parlous situation of crisis may be the very framework in which He chooses to move in mighty power and make bare His holy arm. Who knows but that we may be nearer the longed-for breakthrough than we could ever have realised? Let us take heart, rise and play the man. Let us be up and doing (19).

March on, my soul, with strength!

96) 23:1-32

The next five chapters deal exclusively with David's arrangements for the service of the Temple that was to be built by Solomon. In this respect, 2 constitutes a summary of what follows: the princes, the priests and the Levites are enumerated, group by group, although in reverse order - Levites in 23:3-32, priests in 24:1-31, singers and porters in 25:1-31 and 26:1-32, princes in 27:1-34. There is a sense in which we are back to lists of names again, but we saw in earlier chapters how some lessons of significance and importance could be gathered from them; and we shall try to see something of the point in the Chronicler's giving them, in relation to his purpose in emphasising the worship of the Temple. The enumeration of the Gershonites, the Kohathites and the Merarites in 7ff is similar to the lists in chapter 6, as also, further back, to those in Numbers 3ff. This has significance for our thinking, as we shall see presently, because David's concern was to do things according to the word of the Lord. This was the point of the exercise. We should notice that in 3 the Levites were to be numbered from the age of 30 upwards. This is in line with Numbers 4 (which see); but further on, in 24, the age limit is reduced from 30 to 20, while in Numbers 8:24 we read that the limit is 25. This variation invites some comment, and we shall continue to think about it in the next Note.

97) 23:1-32

The original stipulation as to age in Numbers 4 is 30, then, later in Numbers, 25; here it is, first 30, then later 20 (in each case, however, the retirement age is 50). Some commentators simply maintain that these are variant readings, from different sources; but this is hardly satisfactory. Rather, it may mean that differing conditions as time went on required changes in the age limit. If, for example, David discovered that the elaborate arrangements ultimately required more men for their worthy fulfilment, then the age limit would be lowered and more men would be brought in. If, however, the duties proved to be less onerous than he at first thought, perhaps younger and less experienced men could do them. This, at least, is one possible understanding of the disparity in the figures. Perhaps it may help in this connection to think of the upper age limit. Here, there is unanimity, and retirement at 50 without option was mandatory. In these ancient days, it may well be that at 50 a man was considered to be 'past it', as we say; but nowadays, when life-expectancy is so much more than it was even a hundred years ago, with people living much longer because of improved medical and social conditions, retirement age is higher, and many men are extremely active at 65 or even 70. This makes the variation of ages very understandable. But more important for us is to see that there is a principle at work here, which we shall look at in tomorrow's Note.

98) 23:1-32

The principle involved is this: There is no question in this passage of any legalism at work, or any question of standing by 'the laws of the Medes and the Persians', as if they were unchangeable, in terms of saying, 'Moses said in Numbers 4 that 30 was the age limit, and therefore 30 it shall be forever'. Rather, there is evidence of adaptation of the letter of the law, to preserve the principle enshrined in it. This is important. It is true that ancient usage does give a sanctity to old custom, but ancient usage ought not to make old customs inviolable. What was in this sense good enough for our forefathers may not in the same way be good enough for us. Having said this, however, we must point out that there can never be any question of revising the moral law, which is constant and unchangeable. Furthermore, we need to distinguish between the sanction and the penalty of the law. In Old Testament times, Sabbath breaking was punishable by death; but it is not so in New Testament times, still less now. But it is still wrong to break the Sabbath: that does not change, though the penalty may have. A hundred years ago you could be hanged for sheep-stealing, but not today. In this sense there has been a radical revision; but it is still wrong to steal a sheep, just as wrong as a hundred years ago. It will always be wrong, though the punishment may change. It is the principle, then, that is important.

99) 24:1-31

The subject of this chapter is the courses into which the duties of the priests were divided, by rota. In earlier times, before the kingdom was established, there would be plenty work for the priests to do in all the various sanctuaries where sacrifices were offered, but now that worship was to be centralised in Jerusalem, thus bringing all the priests into the city, there would obviously be a superfluity of them, necessitating the introduction of some rota system (this is another example of adjustment through changing circumstances). The 'courses' thus set out carried on into New Testament times, and here is an interesting reference to it in Luke 1:5ff (which see), in the reference to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist fulfilling his priestly duties 'in the order of his course'. A comparison of Luke 1:5 with 24:10 here shows that the eighth (of the twenty-four) fell to Zacharias. This can open up a very fascinating study, in relation to the possible time of the birth of our Lord at Bethlehem. It is sometimes said that no one really knows when actually Jesus was born (and that December 25th is simply observed as the 'official' birthday), but it may well be that this brief reference to the course of Abijah affords an important key. This is something which we looked at some years ago at a Harvest Thanksgiving service, in a reference to the ancient Feast of Tabernacles, and in tomorrow's Note we shall summarise what was said then.

100)24:1-31

What was said at the Harvest Thanksgiving was this: The course of Abijah was eighth in the lots, and if we take the first lot to start at the beginning of the first month of the Jewish year, then since Abijah was eighth in order, his turn would come in the second part of the fourth month. It was then that the angel came to Elisabeth, and announced that she would bear a son. John the Baptist was conceived at that time (Luke 1:24), and Elisabeth, Luke tells us, hid herself for five months, then in the sixth month - that is, six months after Elisabeth's experience, the angel Gabriel appeared to the virgin Mary, foretelling the birth of Jesus. This, the sixth month after Elisabeth's encounter with the angel, makes it the tenth month of the Jewish year, which makes the time of Jesus' birth fall in the second half of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar; and the second half of the seventh month marks the time of the feast of Tabernacles (which was celebrated from 15th-21st of the seventh month). It will be recalled how Jesus stood up in the Temple on the last great day of the feast and cried 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink ...'. The likelihood is that it was on His birthday that He did so. In this connection, is it not interesting and significant that John, in his wonderful Prologue to his gospel says, 'The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us (for so is the word "dwelt" rendered literally)'. Is there a hidden reference to the feast of Tabernacles here, and is John quietly saying to us that that feast, which celebrated the goodness of God in the harvest, symbolised a much greater harvest, which sprang from the 'seed of the woman that would bruise the head of the serpent', and which was consummated in the birth of Christ?

101)25:1-31

This chapter deals with those who were appointed for the praise of the sanctuary (see Notes on 6, which has already dealt with these names, and their appointment to the work of the threefold choir in the Temple of God). It introduces us once again to the interesting and instructive theme of the ministry of music. There is no doubt that in the ancient Temple, music played a very substantial part in worship, and since this is so, we need to try to relate this to our thinking about the place of music in the Church today. Some men are spoken of as being 'barren puritans' because they are 'against' elaborate music and choirs in the House of God, and the question may well be asked: 'Does not this chapter contradict such an attitude?' The answer must surely be: Not necessarily. It is all a question of balance; for quite certainly, in the more recent past, music has tended to take an undue part in worship, and sometimes an improper, even idolatrous, part in the life of a congregation. To have been brought up (as I was) in a church whose choir (a very good one) won cups and shields at music festivals was to have been made very aware that in course of time the only real interest was the choir singing - not the worship, not the preaching, not the Church, but only the performance. In such a situation, it is easy for the idea to develop that the Church existed for the choir, and that the drawing principle was the music, not the worship of Christ, and that it drew people who were not so much interested in the Christian Faith as in the singing. It is really inappropriate when the handmaid usurps the place of the lady of the house, giving herself airs that are not proper to her station. First things first, this is the true biblical order, and when it is achieved and maintained, all other things will fall into their due place.

102)25:1-31

There is a point of interest to note in 4, in the list of names of the sons of Heman. Two commentaries, saying much the same thing, point out that 'the last nine names....are for the most part improbable or impossible names. But if we take the consonantal text (in the original Hebrew vowels do not appear in the text) and occasionally divide the words otherwise, we get the following:

'Be gracious unto me, O God, be gracious unto me,

Thou art my God whom I magnify and exalt

O my help when in trouble, I say,

Give an abundance of visions'.

This cannot be accidental. The most reasonable explanation is that some early scribe saw the possibility of reading this petition in the names of Heman's sons, and altered the vowels slightly and the spacing for his purpose. If this be so (and the two commentators make this point), then this verse of a hymn would be an example of what is said in 3 of those 'who prophesied with a harp, to give thanks and to praise the Lord'.

There is a delightful touch in 6 - the picture of a father keeping his sons in order at the choir practice is a very human one. In 7, the idea of 'instruction' in singing prompts the reflection that it is perhaps quite biblical to stop a hymn in midstream and ginger up the congregation a little if it seems to be dragging the tempo! In 8, the distinction between teacher and scholar should not be missed: the distinction is there, and the two are not the same, neither are they on the same level, despite what modern trends seem to suggest.

103)26:1-32

Now we come to the porters or gatekeepers (1-19). Two things may be noted in this otherwise straightforward and uneventful list of names. One is in 5, an intriguing reference, in the words 'for God blessed him'. The reference is, of course, to Obed-Edom (4), whose care of the Ark (mentioned in 13:14, cf 2 Samuel 6:11) is clearly important to the Chronicler, and worthy of mention. The other is the repeated reference in 6-9 to 'mighty men of valour' - these also were of the family of Obed-Edom, and it prompts the reflection that the nature of the divine blessing that came on this man was that he was enabled to raise up a family who were strong (literally and spiritually) to serve the Lord. We may never know just how much our acts and attitudes of faithfulness to the Lord will influence our families down the years. In 20ff, two lots of treasure are mentioned, the treasure of the house of God and the treasure of dedicated things, supervised and administered by the Gershonites and the Kohathites respectively. Each man to his appointed task - this is the message, and it is not difficult to carry this idea through to the great Pauline doctrine of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12, with its members in particular fulfilling different functions for the wellbeing of the whole.

104)27:1-34

In 1-15 we have the disposition of the army, with the chief fathers and captains of thousands and hundreds, the officers. In 16-24, the tribal princes are enumerated; in 25-31 the king's treasurers, and in 32-34 the king's counsellors. These are all spoken of as having already been organised, and in all probability they refer to those who were by David throughout his reign.

To look back on these chapters (23-27), we may underline two main lessons of significance. First of all, David's care and preoccupation was to do all things according to the word of the Lord; and we are able to link all these passages and all these enactments with earlier statements, particularly in the book of Numbers, about the ordering of the priests and the Levites. And - we must remember - the Chronicler is holding up David's example to the returned exiles and saying, 'This is how David did it, and this is how you must do it: follow the teaching of the word of God in rebuilding the Temple'. Enthusiasm in the things of God is not enough: that enthusiasm must be under captivity to the word of God. The second lesson underlines the importance of the worship of God, the vertical dimension, as distinct from the horizontal. It is from the one that the other inevitably flows. If there is health and rightness in the vertical relationship, this will make its impact on all other human relationships. The Chronicler saw clearly that if only true worship could be established in the life of the people, everything else would fall into place. This - a spirit of true worship - must be seen more and more to be the central reality in our services, for this is what 'makes' them, and makes them times of blessing and enrichment to all who attend. This is the message that comes through these chapters: 'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness'.

105)28:1-8

This chapter records David's calling of a general assembly to ratify the choice of Solomon as his successor, and to acquaint the people with the project of building the Temple and encourage their support in the venture. The thought of the first verses goes back to 23:1, 2 (which see), and what intervenes between that point and this interrupts the ongoing narrative. Here, then, is the same assembly as in 23:2. The long statement in 1, which enumerates all who had been involved in David's own reign and had been faithful and loyal to him, and whom he now wished to be loyal to his son Solomon, really underlines the king's desire to 'preserve the succession', and to 'make over' to him all that he himself had known of love and loyalty from these men. This was surely a very natural desire on David's part, but there is also something more: David was deeply conscious of God's ongoing purposes in his family, and his concern was that Solomon should continue in that line, and be given all he needed to enable him to do so. This sense of family destiny is especially evident in 4, and one senses the awe in David's voice as he utters these words, and goes on in 5 to speak of Solomon in the same terms, sovereignly chosen as he was to continue that succession. What was implied, at the very least, so far as the people David spoke to were concerned was that loyalty to Solomon would be regarded as obedience to the Lord, for if Solomon were the Lord's anointed, then loyalty and obedience would be the only appropriate response. After all, it was not Solomon's kingdom, or David's either, but the Lord's, and they were but stewards in His work.

106)28:9-10

David had already exhorted Solomon in terms similar to these here, in 22:6ff. But it had been a private exhortation: but this is something different, in that it was done in public, before the people. The drama and solemnity of the scene must have been considerable, with the newly appointed king being adjured in public to be up and doing in the work of the Lord. There is a sense in which it must have put him 'on the spot', in the same way that a public profession of faith puts a man on the spot. It is important to realise that this exhortation and admonition is based on the givenness of the divine appointment that David has just spoken of in 5-7. And since that is so, 'Know thou the God of thy father ...'. It is a personal relationship with God that is referred to, involving communion with Him and love towards Him. This is the only true and adequate basis for serving Him. We cannot serve a God we do not really know! One readily thinks of Jesus' challenge to Peter, 'Lovest thou Me? Feed my sheep'. This was really a tremendous thing for a man to be able to say to his son, but when one thinks of the sense of personal communion with God that breathes in so many of the Psalms, it is easy to see that this was the only thing that would get Solomon through. There is a sense in which what is said in 10 hemmed Solomon in, and 'cornered' him into service, in much the same way as Paul felt himself under a divine compulsion: 'Necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is me, if I preach not the gospel'. And - for our encouragement in face of such a challenge - we must not forget that God's commands are His enablings!

107)28:11-21

The 'pattern' in 11 and 19 seems to echo Exodus 25:40. If so, the 'writing' in 19 is the account in Exodus of the Tabernacle and its construction, and David was caused to understand the modifications of this pattern suited for the Temple, by means of God's hand upon him, that is, by inspiration. In this connection, 'by the spirit' in 12 may refer to the inspiration of the Spirit, or, alternatively, if we follow the marginal reading, 'in his spirit', it means that it was in his mind and heart that the divine disclosures came to him, as he meditated on Scripture, as if to say, 'All this ... the Lord made me to understand in Scripture' (19). The exhortation in 20 takes up 10, expounding and elaborating it. It is not difficult to hear in these words the voice of experience: God had been with David in this way, and he could assure his son that the same God would be with him also. 'Even my God', he said. What assurance, and what authority! We pointed out earlier that David's counsels to Solomon had been couched very much in the language of earlier Scriptures (ch 22) and referred to passages such as Deuteronomy 4, Deuteronomy 31, and Josh 1; but here he seems to go even further back, to Genesis 28:15, to the covenant words spoken by God to Jacob. So great and deep was David's consciousness of being caught up in the sovereign purposes of God for the world. Given that consciousness, who would not be willing (21) to be given a share in their fulfilment!

108)29:1-9

The princes of the kingdom are now called upon to give liberally to the Temple project, that it might be furthered and fulfilled. In this, David is once again following Moses' example in Exodus 35. The response was generous, open-hearted and immediate (6ff). Two things should be noted. The first is the power of example. David led the way (3-5), and inspired his people to follow his lead. David's own liberality must surely have rubbed off on them, for there is nothing quite so infectious as the power of a good example. The second thing is the sense of progression in this whole section of Chronicles. We have seen how David had a desire and determination to do all things after the pattern shown on the mount. It is this that provides the inspiration and the motivating force for a true work of God, and it is this in them that produces the willing giving. This is the real essence of stewardship. What is needed for a true stewardship of time, talents and money is inspiration. Only this will 'produce the goods'. But inspiration itself is not something that comes from within: it is not self-generated, but comes from without. With David and his people, it came from faithfulness and loyalty to the Word. Where this obtains, resources will be forthcoming for all necessary work; and there will be joy too (9). Giving, in such a situation, is a grace, not a trial!

109)29:10-19

These verses represent one of the most wonderful utterances in all the Old Testament. Their immediate context is, of course, that David is acknowledging that all the liberal giving by the people has come from God Himself, and that the glory for it belongs to Him alone. But the words, in any context, are an outburst of sheer and glorious worship, and they give us some idea of the immense emotion that stirred the king's heart at this great holy convocation of the people. It seems almost an impertinence to try to expound such an adoring and homage-laden utterance. The word 'blessed' in 10 has the force of 'speak well of', and David surely does so, as he extols the greatness and glory of the God of Israel, and surely we, who live in greater light than David could have known, are able to invest his words with even deeper and fuller meaning as we think of His greatness, power and victory manifested in Christ, in His Incarnation - how great He was in stooping so low, for us men and for our salvation! in His passion and victory, in which He is shown as a glorious Redeemer (one readily thinks of the words, 'Sing, my tongue, how glorious battle glorious victory became' - and in His exaltation at the Father's right hand (Jesus takes the highest station, O what joy the sight affords!) We would really need a Handel and a Bach combined to do justice to such a libretto as this! It is something to imagine that this is the kind of praise we shall offer Him in glory - and all the more wonderful, therefore, to realise that it was first offered by a man on earth!

110)29:10-30

Three further points must serve to conclude our study in 1 Chronicles at this time. The first relates to what is said in 18. It is a prayer for the deep wellsprings of their hearts to be kept always pure and fresh - as if to say, 'Lord, let it always be like this with us. Let this spirit, that is animating us now, always control us'. A highly significant and important prayer, in view of the fact that it is very easy for the first inspiration to fade and grow dim and cold, leaving only an empty husk. Are we in the position of having to pray, 'Where is the blessedness I knew, when first I saw the Lord?'

The second point relates to the gladness and the joy that manifestly filled the hearts of the people. It is true that there is an essential solemnity about real worship, but solemnity is not the same thing as sadness or dolefulness, and unless there is a note of abundant joy and gladness in that solemnity, it is not biblical worship. To be sure, this is far from any kind of flippant, irreverent expression (which would be very unfitting for those whose hearts the Lord has touched), but there is a gladness and joy about true worship that bears the unmistakable hallmark of heaven itself. The kind of self-giving spoken of in these verses leads to true joy. We find ourselves when we lose ourselves in Him!

Finally we should notice the curious and striking expression the Chronicler uses in 30 - 'the times that went over' David. This refers to the varying happenings in his life, the vicissitudes, the extremes of fortune and condition that characterised his life. It is an interesting and suggestive word, indicative almost of sections of 'time', each section with its definite characteristics and its special opportunities and responsibilities - some work to be done, some lesson to be learned, some sacrifice to be made. If this be a worthy interpretation, as we believe it is, how great our need to be sensitive to the opportunities and challenges our 'times' hold out to us. The men of Issachar, we read in 12:32, had understanding of the times. Do we have that understanding? What of our 'time' at Holyrood? Have we made the most of it? Do we redeem the time? That is the question the Chronicler leaves with us, as we reach the end of his first book.