

Title: GENESIS: The Method of Faith
By: Ray C. Stedman
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GENESIS: The Method of Faith

by Ray C. Stedman

This Bible is given to us to read. It is a great book, a tremendous book. Let us begin at the first of the Bible and go through it all, book by book – from Genesis to Revelation – and look at the setting, the message, and the relationship of each to the whole. This will be a zoom-lens view, book by book. Such a panorama is one of the most helpful ways to understand and see the divine pattern of revelation. One of the most powerful and unanswerable pieces of evidence for the truth of inspiration is to see the divine pattern that runs through the Bible. How can this be explained apart from God – that a book as diverse in its authorship, written under equally diverse conditions should have such a remarkable pattern of truth unless it comes from one divine author?

We are so familiar with the Bible that we scarcely consider what an ancient book it is. There is a Greek philosopher named Herodotus, a teacher and scholar who lived some three hundred years before Christ, who is called the father of history; he is the first historian whose writings have been preserved to us. Anyone who has studied something of ancient history knows about Herodotus. But the outstanding thing about the Bible is that Moses, who wrote the first five books of our Bible, had finished his books and was in his grave a thousand years before Herodotus saw the light of day.

That's how ancient Genesis is. It is the book of beginnings. It takes us back into the very dawn of human history and yet as we read it, it is as up-

to-date as tomorrow morning's newspaper. That, again, is a mark of the divine afflatus behind this book, the in-breathing of God. The Bible has so much color and life about it in these revelations of early human life. Those who are familiar with archaeology know that these cylinders and slabs and potsherds from the past give us but the faintest glimpse into the bare facts of life in these ancient lands. There is little of human interest about them. There is no color, no life, no flesh. But when you open the pages of Genesis you discover here that these men come alive. Abraham is better known than some of our more distant relatives. Isaac and Joseph, with others, are familiar household names to us. We feel that they're people we use to know back where we came from. They are as close to us as that, because this book has so marvelously preserved for us the color, the depth, the flesh and the tone of life in those days.

Genesis is not only a history. Obviously it would have little significance to us if it were only that. But the book of Genesis is one with a tremendous message which can be declared in one statement: It reveals to us the inadequacy of man without God. That is the whole purpose of the book, and, as such, it strikes the keynote of all subsequent revelation of God. It reveals that man can never be complete without God, that he can never discover or fulfill the true meaning of his life without a genuine personal relationship with an indwelling God.

Now this inadequacy is revealed to us in three realms, realms in which each of us live:

- First, it is revealed in the realm of natural relationships, through what we call the natural sciences: cosmology, the study of the universe, its origin and make-up; then geology, about the earth, all the manifold aspects of it that we think we know so much of today; and biology, the study of life itself in all its manifestations. These natural relationships circumscribe our contact with the physical world around us.
- The second area is the realm of human relationships. This takes in what we call sociology, psychology, psychiatry, along with all the other “psychs” that are made so much of today.
- And then, finally, the realm of spiritual relationships – theology, soteriology and philosophy.

In all three of these vital areas, including many of the particulars with which we are concerned, the book of Genesis reveals that man apart from God is totally inadequate. This one message echoes throughout the book like the sound of a bell.

Let me show you what I mean:

The first two chapters are largely concerned with **the world of nature**. This book opens with the greatest material fact in our life today – the fact that we live in a universe. We become aware of this when we step out under the stars at night and look up. Even the most ignorant of us ponders what is out there – the unending stars, these brilliant lights in the heavens. We wonder at the movement of the heavenly bodies. Man has stood and gazed in awe and wonderment at this sight for centuries.

At last we have begun to probe out into the universe around us and have discovered that we live in a great galaxy, a diffuse body of stars and planets – millions of them. Our own galaxy is three hundred thousand light years across and it’s just the home base of us in the universe. First base is out yonder and center field is *way* out. In this great ball park, we know of over a million bases out there, galaxies like ours. Our minds begin to blow a fuse when we start thinking like that, yet Scripture opens with this – right on that very note.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” {Gen 1:1 RSV} – and man. That is the story of the beginning – of Genesis.

We are in a universe which is mainly mystery to us. We know very little about it, and, in any direction we choose to go, we soon come to a place where we can go no farther. I was talking with a nuclear physicist one time and he was telling me something of the complexity of the nucleus of the atom. He says that it has become so “astronomically” complex that we simply cannot begin to grasp all that we are discovering about the fundamental elements of matter. It is right on this point that the Bible begins – with the answers to questions that scientists cannot answer –

- What is it that keeps the universe going?
- Where did we come from?
- Who made us?
- Why are we here?

Yet, in spite of the fact that the study of the universe is the theme of science today, science hasn’t found an answer to any of these questions.

Now to these questions, Genesis supplies answers, the only answers that fit. It reveals to us that the key to human life (including the material universe and the mystery of our own nature – plus that invisible realm of spirit life we know little about) is spiritual, not physical or material. That is why we can never know ourselves or the universe or God by studying nature. We’ll never understand it that way. Ultimately we run up against a closed door. It becomes so complex we cannot grasp it. Why? Because the Bible tells us the key is in the spiritual realm. When we take this book and open it up, we discover that we are moving past all the discoveries of science today, into a realm to which science has not yet come, where we have answers to these questions.

It was no less a person than Albert Einstein who put his finger squarely upon the inadequacies of science when he said, “Science is like reading a mystery novel.” You go down to the drug store and buy a dime novel (of course they cost more now) and take it home and you go to bed at night. Everybody else has left the house and it is dark. You get into bed, snap on the light, prop yourself up with pillows and start reading. In the first chapter there are two or three murders, with several bodies lying around. The whole of the story begins to fo-

cus on “who done it.” Clues appear as you read on. In about the third chapter you’ve decided that the butler did it. Continuing on, the finger of guilt points more and more to the butler. But then you reach the last chapter in which suddenly all the previous evidence is upset and it wasn’t the butler after all. It was the little old lady in tennis shoes who lives on the third floor. She did it. Now Einstein says science is like that. It is always struggling from hypothesis to synthesis from a few clues here and there, but it never gets the answer. And then suddenly some new light comes along that throws the first estimate all off, and all the previous answers seem of little value.

The interesting thing about Genesis is that it starts right where science leaves off. It gives answers addressed to faith, admittedly, but never faith that is a violation of human reason. Science is always facing the past. Genesis begins where science is seeking. If we look at it this way we see that there is no essential conflict. Here is a book that is simply dealing with matters science has not wrestled with – and, indeed, cannot wrestle with – the key to the mystery of human life.

Now in Chapters 3 - 6 **the realm of human relationships** is seen. Here you have the entrance of man into the picture. This book reveals that the basic unit of society is the family. For ten to twenty thousand years of human history there has been absolutely no variation in that pattern. The family is still the basic element of human life today. When a society forgets that fact and begins to destroy family life, the foundations of the nation crumble because a nation is an extension of the family. The nations of the world are simply great family groups.

Consider for a moment the uniform reaction of Americans on the day in 1963 when President Kennedy was assassinated! There never was a time when the whole American nation felt so like a family as when John Kennedy lay in death. We were all one people. A crisis disclosed that our nation is nothing more than a gigantic family.

Inside the nation, inside the family revealed in the Scriptures is the single individual. But when the family crumbles, the nation begins to fall.

These chapters also reveal the failure of man in this basic relationship, because man tried to be man without God, and the result of course was the introduction of the principle of sin. Sin is the mon-

key wrench which has been thrown into the human machinery that makes us behave the way we do.

As you read the account here you’ll see how Cain rejected God and became a murderer. He went out and founded a civilization that ended in apostasy and the flood. When Lot tried to move away from God, to get away from the influence of God in his life, he wrecked his family as a result. This life pattern in Scripture is given again and again, and though we live some thousands of years after these events, it is the same story today isn’t it?

Every generation has been repeating the same cycle. We see it all around us in our nation of lovely homes, new cars and gimmicks – yet riddled with strife, violence, and almost unmentionable immorality. Increasing crime rates and broken homes on every side all result from, and testify vividly to, man’s failure to live successfully on the level of human relationships apart from God.

Finally then in the last part of the book, which is one large section beginning with the middle of Chapter 6 through Chapter 50, you have **the realm of spiritual relationships**. It is the largest part of this book because it is the most important to man – his spirit and its relationship with God. This is the story of five men. If you remember the lives of these five men and what they mean, you will have most of Genesis right in the palm of your hand. They are Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Genesis reveals in the story of these men what man is always seeking. Do you know what it is?

We think that we are seeking after things. But we know that things aren’t what we really want. All the restlessness and rush of the age in which we live can be understood as an attempt to focus upon three goals:

- First, righteousness, the sense of being right. This is why we are always attempting to justify ourselves. When anyone accuses you of something, what happens? You start justifying yourself. You want to be right. Man is forever seeking righteousness.
- The second is peace. We want a sense of well-being inside. A chrome-plated economy based on *education* leading to *high standards of living* is surely a cheap substitute. How often the word peace is flung at us in these days, leaving

only a hunger for the real thing. Man is ever seeking peace.

- And the third thing is joy. He wants a sense of gladness, of happiness out of life.

Those three are the unseen, almost unconscious, goals of life – righteousness, peace, and joy. Where are they found? Romans 14 says “The kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,” (Rom 14:17). Only God imparts these things to men, and this is the story of this book.

Now it reveals how men who did not believe or obey God sought these things in vain. Jacob for a time, as you know, refuses to obey God and insists on doing things on his own. Out he goes and becomes a wanderer and a hired servant of his uncle. He ends up being not only a deceiver but deceived, and life falls apart at the seams for him. Even Abraham falters occasionally – he goes down to Egypt and falls into lying and adultery, and again, life falls apart.

But if this book, Genesis, reveals the inadequacies of man without God, it also reveals the adequacy of man with God. That is the great message. In natural relationships you see that man with God is sovereign. If I had only known Adam back in the days before the fall! What a rich character he must have been. What tremendous power and knowledge he must have had of the secrets of nature. When we look at the New Testament and read of the miracles of the Lord Jesus walking upon the water, changing the water into wine, stilling the storm with a word, we say to ourselves, “That is God at work.” But the Old Testament says, “No; that isn’t God, that is man. That is what man was intended to be – the sovereign, the king of the world.”

You find it reflected in the eighth Psalm: David says, as he is looking into the heavens, “What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?” And then he answers his question, “Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet,” (Psa 8:4, 6). You only see that in Jesus. That is why the writer of Hebrews says, “We do not yet see every thing in subjection to him. But we see Jesus...” (Heb 2:8b-9a) who, as a man, is the fulfillment of God’s intention for man to be sovereign of the earth. In the garden before

Adam fell, you see him as the lord of creation. He knew its mysteries, he controlled its activities. Man cannot do that any longer today. We have the urge to do so, but we can do it no longer.

In the realm of human relationships, the book of Genesis reveals that man with God is seen as living at peace and in harmony with other men. One of the most beautiful stories in this book is of Abraham dwelling under the oaks of Mamre with the Canaanites all around him, the men who had for many years been his enemies. But God so worked in the life of that man, Abraham, that even his enemies were made to be at peace with him. The story of Abraham closes with the Canaanite tribes coming to him and saying. “Thou art a prince among us” {cf, Gen 23:6 KJV}. So it is fulfilled what God says elsewhere that when a man’s ways please the Lord he makes even his enemies be at peace with him {cf, Prov 16:7}. This is the key. This is the secret of life in all our relationships.

Then in the spiritual relationship, Genesis declares that man in fellowship with God begins to know supreme happiness – the righteousness, peace, and joy that men always crave. Realization comes only as he discovers that the indwelling God is the answer to all his needs.

This is revealed in the lives of five men. Let us quickly review these:

1. Noah is a picture to us of regeneration. Noah is a man who went through death in a figure. He was on both sides of the flood. He was preserved in the ark through the waters of judgment, through the waters of death, to come out into a new world and a new life. The imaginative writers of our day are always trying to write a book to depict what would happen after an atomic holocaust had completely wiped life off the face of the earth and what it would be like for a new couple to start out in such a world. Yet none of them seem to realize that is exactly what happened in the story of Noah and the flood. None of them seem ever to have caught the romance of Noah and his family starting afresh in a new earth. Nevertheless, they are a picture of regeneration. The beginning of life as a Christian is the passing from death into life (in Christ) just as Noah did in the flood.

2. Then comes Abraham. And what does Abraham teach us? Justification by faith. Here was a man who lived by faith. Everything that he did was given to him – not by any merit of his own, not by any effort of his own. But as God led him along and Abraham stepped out on the promises, he found that God’s promise was true. Eight times that man’s faith was dramatically tried. If you are ever in a trial of faith, read the life of Abraham. You will find in his life similar circumstances to the ones you are going through. Abraham teaches us what it means to be justified, to be the friend of God by faith.
3. Then comes Isaac. Isaac is a beautiful picture of sonship, what it means to be a son of God. If there ever was a boy that was spoiled, pampered, and petted by his father, it was Isaac. He was the son, preeminently so. In the glimpse this book gives of him you see what it means to be the darling of a father’s heart. And I think there is no message more needed in this day than that which is so beautifully exemplified in Isaac, how God looks at us and calls us the darling of his heart. “Beloved, we are God’s children now,” says John, “it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him,” (1 Jn 3:2). We shall be like Christ.
4. The story of Jacob follows. Jacob was the rascal, the schemer, the man who thought he could live on his own, by his wits, and by his own efforts. He went out trying to deceive everybody and ended up being deceived. Jacob is a beautiful picture of sanctification, that marvelous work of God in which we in our folly, attempting to live life in the energy of the flesh, are led into the very situations that drive us into a corner where at last, like Jacob wrestling with the angel, we discover God speaking to us and we give up. And when we give up our trying, we begin to live. That is what Jacob did when he gave up at the Brook of Peniel {Gen 32:22-32}, knowing Esau was waiting with a band of armed men ready to take his life. He wrestled with the angel of God at the brook; it was there that God broke Jacob. And, as a broken man, limping the rest of his life, he became Israel, prince of God. What a lesson that is. Some of

us are going through this very experience right now. What an encouragement to us!

5. Now the last picture is Joseph – glorification. The man loved of his father and mistreated by his brethren. While living through this earthly relationship he is suddenly lifted from the darkness of a prison house into the glory of Pharaoh’s throne to reign and rule as the second person in the kingdom. Now this is the picture for us of truth for the believer: What do we look forward to as death comes upon us? Isn’t it that we are translated out of the darkness of this earthly existence, from the prison house in which we have lived our years, suddenly to the very throne and presence of God himself.

It is all there, isn’t it? The pattern fits so beautifully. We discover what God intended for the believer and the method by which man reaches God and appropriates all this. It is revealed in this book as the method of faith. “Without faith it is impossible to please God,” Hebrews reminds us (Heb 11:6). As you believe, it all becomes true. Not as you intellectually give credence to it, but as you step out on it and act upon it, it all becomes true in experience.

The final message of Genesis is that **God is absolutely necessary for the completeness of life.** Without God you cannot understand the world around you. You can’t understand yourself or your neighbor or God himself. You will never have any answers without God, but if you have fallen away or excluded God and found misery and heartache and darkness and futility and emptiness and boredom – all the things that are a result of man attempting to live without him, Genesis declares that if you return on the principle of faith in God you will find help, spiritual health, and happiness, in every realm of life. God is the secret of human life. This is the first note in the Bible and it is also the last.

Prayer

Our Father, we pray that you will give us the urge and the motive to give ourselves to the writings before us. How many difficulties and troubles we could avoid, how

many heartaches we could pass by if we only knew what you intended us to know in this book. May our hearts be open with a readiness to seek and to search and to find and know that we are in a universe – not silent, not mechanical, not empty in which

there is no echo to our cry – but a universe uniquely disposed by a Father, with a father's heart. As we believe this and learn to walk by faith, you fill life for us to the full. We ask that this may be our experience in Jesus' name. Amen.

EXODUS: Design for Deliverance

by Ray C. Stedman

The Old Testament is particularly designed of God to make the great truths of the New Testament come alive for us. We need this to happen in our Christian experience. So many of these truths are simply academic knowledge, as far as we are concerned, until they come alive when we see them interpreted in the dramatic presentations of the Old Testament. This is especially true of the first five or six books of the Old Testament, for here God lays out the foundational pattern of his workings. In a panoramic view of Scripture, the first six books, Genesis through Joshua, trace out God's pattern of working in human life. His pattern will be exactly the same in your life as it was in the lives of Adam, Abraham, Moses, David and all the others. It will follow the pattern that is developed for us in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua. In these books we will see how God moves in our lives.

It is necessary therefore when we are studying in these books to relate each one briefly to the others.

- Genesis is the book that reveals the need of mankind. Genesis is all about man – man's creation, man's sin, the new world that followed the flood, and man's slow journey through time, groping after God. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph – four men who followed God – set forth the need of men for justification, sonship, sanctification, and glorification. Most significantly, Genesis ends with the words "a coffin in Egypt." All you can say about man when you have said everything there is to say, is that he lives in the realm of death.

- But Exodus is all about God. Exodus is God's answer to man's need and God's supply for man's sin. It begins immediately with God's activity and throughout the whole course of the book you see God mightily at work. The book is the picture, therefore, of redemption, of God's activity to redeem man in his need, in his sin, in his degradation and misery. As such, it is a beautiful picture and contains tremendously instructive lessons to us of what redemption is; that is, what God has done, is doing, in our lives, and what he intends to do with us – the steps that he will be taking.

Now redemption isn't complete in this book. You will never get the full story of redemption in Exodus. You must move on into Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Then the full picture develops as you come into the book of Joshua, where you find Israel brought into the land and into the place of triumph and victory over their enemies – a picture of the triumphant, victorious Christian experience.

Israel, then, is a picture of the people of God, of the church of God, and of you as a child of God. These books are marvelously designed of the Holy Spirit for they describe actual historical events which occurred in such a way under the overruling government of God that they act out for us great redemptive truths. This is why Paul says in writing to the Corinthians, "These things happened to them as a warning [literally, types] but they were written down for our instruction," (1 Cor 10:11a RSV). Therefore, it is well to give heed to them.

The book of Exodus opens with the birth of a baby. God's finger is in evidence at the very beginning of this book for this is the story of a baby

born under the sentence of death, but whose life was marvelously preserved by the intervening hand of God. With a delicate twist of irony that is wonderful to observe – I hope none of you miss it – God the Holy Spirit moves in such a way that, despite the law of Pharaoh to put all the Hebrew male babies in Egypt to death, Moses is not only saved, but Pharaoh hires Moses' own mother to take care of the baby! Such a design is surely one of those delightful expressions of the humor of God. If you haven't yet discovered that God has a sense of humor, there is a great discovery in store for you. Humorous glimpses appear throughout the Old and New Testaments. I can't read my Bible without occasionally breaking into gales of laughter over some of the clever ways in which God, through these ironic twists, adroitly turns the tables on someone. Such is the case in the story of Moses.

The interesting pattern is that when God wants to do something, he almost invariably starts with a baby. We don't. We think babies aren't very important. Back in 1809 the whole world was anxiously awaiting the news of the battles of Napoleon who was threatening to be the world dictator. He was the Hitler of his day. Napoleon held the whole world in fear of his tyrannical desires and egomaniacal impulses. But that same year there were babies being born in houses and families around the world – and what babies! In England there was Tennyson, Charles Darwin, and Gladstone, who was later to become prime minister of Great Britain. Over in this country, in a Kentucky log cabin, Abraham Lincoln was born. Also Oliver Wendell Holmes and still other men who, upon coming to manhood, were giants who shook and changed the world. All this is to say that when God wants to change history, he doesn't start with a battle, he starts with a baby.

So God began with this baby. As Moses grew up he was raised in the court of Pharaoh and had access to all the learning of the Egyptians; he was trained in the best university of the greatest empire of the world of that day. He was the foster son of the king himself and every privilege, every advantage was his. But when he came of age, God spoke to him and he realized that he was intended to be the deliverer of Israel. So he went out, trying to do his job, he thought, and ended up murdering a man and having to flee into the wilderness. As you trace the story through you find that Moses left the land of Egypt and herded sheep for forty years in the

wilderness. Here it was that God found him and dealt with him in the remarkable confrontation of the burning bush. God called him back to his original task, for which he was completely unprepared until he learned that God himself is all it takes to do anything in his name.

Coming back to the structure of Exodus, you can understand the story of the book if you remember four things. The whole book centers around four great events:

- The first one is the Passover. Chapter 1 through 14 lead up to it and climax in that great event.
- The second event is the crossing of the Red Sea, which is described for us in Chapter 14.
- The third great event is the giving of the Law at Sinai, and
- The fourth is the construction of the tabernacle in the midst of the camp of Israel.

These four events sum up the book of Exodus.

The first two events relate closely to each other, as do the last two. The Passover and Red Sea are but two aspects of one great truth – the deliverance of God's people from the bondage of Egypt. They portray in the Christian experience one great thing, that which we call conversion or regeneration, the deliverance of an individual from the bondage of the world; and if you want to know what God did with you when you became a Christian, study the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea. We'll explore these in a moment.

The other two events also tie together. The giving of the Law and the construction of the tabernacle are absolutely inseparable. Remember that the pattern of the tabernacle was given to Moses when he was on the mountain with God, at the same time that the Law was given. We must understand why these two are inextricably linked together – the Law and the tabernacle. We shall see why shortly.

First, let's come back to **the Passover**. You know the story – how God called Moses, challenged him, and sent him back to Egypt. At first he was reluctant to go. There are wonderful lessons in

all of these stories. Here, for example, when God said to Moses, "Moses, I want you to go down and deliver my people." Moses said to God, "Oh, Lord, I can't do that; I can't speak; I am not eloquent; I am not able to talk. I can't stand before Pharaoh." God didn't rebuke Moses for saying that. He wasn't angry because that was merely Moses' human inadequacy displaying itself. There is nothing wrong with that. We were made to be that way. God never holds us guilty for feeling inadequate when he asks us to do something. But then God said to Moses, "I know you can't talk but here's what I will do. I'll be a tongue for you. I will speak through you. You go down to Egypt and I will be your tongue and I will speak through you." And Moses said, "Well, Lord, I think you had better get somebody else." Then it says, "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses" (Exod 4:14a RSV). The first time Moses was saying, "I can't do this. I am just a man." And God says, "Yes, I know, I made you that way. But I will do it through you." When Moses, the second time, said, "Well, Lord, you had better get someone else," what he was really saying was, "Lord, I can't do this and I don't think you can do it either." When Moses challenged God like that, the anger of God was kindled against him.

Now that is a good point to remember whenever God challenges you to do something. He is never concerned when your initial reaction is to draw back. But after he has reminded you that he is with you to do this thing in you and through you and then you draw back, you have insulted God because you have said, "I don't think you can do it either."

Now Moses went on. He went down to Egypt, taking the rod of God with him, and immediately came into conflict with Pharaoh. Nothing is more dramatic in all the Old Testament than this tremendous conflict of wills between Pharaoh and Moses, the representatives of Satan and God. God had to move in mighty power against Pharaoh and it is almost incredible to read the story of how God would send some dreadful plague throughout the land of Egypt. And then we read, "Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let the people go." Again and again this took place.

There were nine plagues in all, and Dr. Graham Scroggie points out that each one of those plagues was directed against one of the gods of Egypt. God was ruling in judgment against the

gods of Egypt by these terrible catastrophes that gripped the land. If you are interested in the scientific aspects of this, I recommend that you read a most fascinating book, *Worlds in Collision*, by the Russian scientist Emmanuel Velikovsky. He has some very interesting theories as to why these plagues and other stirring events of Moses' day occurred. I am not saying that everything in his book is true, but it is a fascinating approach to the story.

As we move on, God has all the people together. He has sent Moses to them and at last Pharaoh's heart is overcome. His will is overwhelmed by the display of the power of God. He consents, after the death of his first-born, to let Israel go. It is very important to notice that when Moses went down to Egypt, the people of Israel were not a nation. They became a nation when they passed through the Red Sea. That is the meaning of those words from First Corinthians, "all were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea," (1 Cor 10:2 RSV). They were made a body in the sea. They were a disorganized mob before. They came out a unit, a unit in Christ, when they passed through the Red Sea.

This is a beautiful reflection of the truth that every Christian discovers. Before he becomes a Christian he is simply an individual struggling to make his way through life. But when he has gone through the experience of the Passover, when he has seen the blood of the Lamb nailed to a cross for him – sprinkled on a cross for him – and has rested in the fact as the people of Israel rested in the symbol of the blood of a lamb sprinkled on the doorposts of their houses on the night of the Passover, and until he has passed through a Red Sea experience, burning his bridges behind him and moving forward onto a Christian stand, having declared himself for God – thus symbolically passing through the waters of the Sea – he will never fully understand that he has now become part of a body, the body of Christ, and that he is joined together in a living unit with all other Christians. This is pictured for us in the book of Exodus.

The Passover is a picture of the cross of Christ. What a beautiful story it is! How the angel of death passed through the land and all the first-born were slain, all but those Israelites who by faith – simply by faith – took the blood of a lamb and sprinkled it on the door-posts and lintels of their houses. They were then perfectly safe within the house. This

pictures for us the simple act of faith by which we rest on the fact that Jesus Christ's dying has settled our guilt before God. The angel of death passes over us. The angel of judgment will never pass our way because we are resting under the blood of the Lamb of God – a wonderful truth.

But that is not the whole story. Remember the Passover is never of value until the Red Sea experience is linked with it. **The Red Sea** experience immediately followed the Passover. They left the safety of their homes, went out into the wilderness and came to the shore of the sea. They were still in Egypt when they got to the edge of the sea, and the case looked hopeless to them. It looked as though there they would lose all they had gained. The people began to cry out to Moses and ask him why he had brought them here to die in the wilderness. Moses' answer is wonderful. He says, "Stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord," (Exod 14:13b RSV). It was a cry of faith. But God's word came immediately and said, "Go forward. Don't stand still, this is not the time for that. Go forward." "Well," they said, "where? The water is in front of us, the Egyptians are behind us. Where can we go?" And Moses said, "Never mind, God says go forward, now go forward."

The Lord had told him to stretch out his rod over the sea and when he did, the waters rolled back and they passed through safely onto the other side while the Egyptians, following them, were caught in a rush of the waves and were drowned in the sea.

What does the Red Sea typify in your life? Well, it typifies your break with the world. Egypt is now on the other side. Once they got through the Red Sea they were in the wilderness, true, but they were out of Egypt. Now there was a river of death that had rolled between them. Exactly the same river of death that has rolled between you and the world when you claimed Jesus Christ as your Lord.

Now, notice something about this. When they were going through the Passover, they rested in their houses. They didn't do a thing. They simply sat there. They were depending upon the work of another. When they came to the Red Sea, though, it was God's power and God's might that rolled the waters back and made the escape possible, but activity was demanded of them. Their wills were challenged. They were asked to move through.

Here is the reason why many professions of Christian faith never materialize into anything. There are people who are willing to sit under the Passover blood, who are willing to receive Jesus Christ as Savior, but they are not willing to walk through the waters of the Red Sea. They never take that step which burns their bridges, cuts them off from the world. In their mind and thinking they are still back in Egypt. They will not move forward through the Red Sea, and until that happens they are still under the bondage and control of Egypt.

Notice, in Chapter 15, that it was only as Israel came through the Sea that they began to sing. The first thing they did when they walked through on the other side was to break into song. There had been no songs in Egypt. That was a place of bondage, of heartache, of misery, and of unremitting toil and danger. But when they came into the wilderness and onto the far shore of the Red Sea, they broke into song. Real deliverance brings a song. Have you a song of deliverance?

I see this pattern worked out so frequently in life today. A young man came to me not long ago. He was having a struggle with drinking and evidently had come to a crisis in his life. He wanted to be set free. Somehow he realized that there was strength in Christ to set him free. He came to me and we talked together. He bowed his head at last and received the Lord. But about three weeks later, I got a telephone call from him and he was back in the same old mess – exactly the same. I called him over and we sat down again together. I said, "What happened to you when you went home three weeks ago after you said you had received the Lord? Did you do anything about this?" He said, "No, I didn't. I just went home." I said, "What were you expecting to happen?" He said, "I don't know. I just went home and I guess I just forgot about it." I said, "If you had made a decision to enter into some business relationship, if you had decided you wanted to get into a certain job and there were certain necessary steps to take, would you then go home and forget about the whole thing?" "Oh, no," he said, "I would start moving in that direction." "Well," I said, "do you think you can convince me that you have really made a decision for Jesus Christ and that your life is going to be under his control, if, when you have made it, you go home and sit down, fold your arms and forget about it." He replied. "No, I guess not."

Decision is one thing – decision brings the power of God to bear on our lives and sets us free from the guilt of the past and we can rejoice in that. God’s word is true. But there is also the experience of passing through the Red Sea, that call to move forward, and cut off your ties with the world, and take steps that will allow the river of God’s judgment to flow between you and the ways of the world. When you take that step, you move out into that place where God dwells within you. As you see here in Exodus, Chapter 15, God never touches his people, or comes among them, until they have passed through the Red Sea. When they have passed through, then God dwells among them.

Annie Johnson flint wrote a beautiful poem that says,

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

Have you come to that place? Well that is where many need to come, because until they do, they can never really know the dwelling of God in their life.

As we read on in Chapter 15 a most interesting picture develops. We have the story of the waters of Marah, the place of bitterness. This immediately follows the crossing of the Red Sea. In order to cure these waters, Moses cut down a tree which the Lord showed him, threw it into the water and the water became sweet (Exod 15:25). In terms of the picture of our lives that this story portrays, you will see that this comes in just the right place. What it is telling us is that the cross, the great tree upon which the Lord Jesus hung, is God’s answer to the bitterness of life:

- When we have been through the Passover, trusting in his blood,
- Then through the Red Sea, cutting ourselves away from the things of the world,
- We discover then that the cross is forever the answer to all the bitterness that sin may have brought into our life in the past.

God’s answer to bitterness in any person’s experience is this experience of the cross – cutting away

all the unhappiness of the past and all the frustrations of the present by sweetening the waters of our life.

Immediately following this they came into the wilderness, and there the manna falls. Here is the beginning of God’s fatherly care. Didn’t you discover that when you became a Christian? The minute you became a Christian, and cut off your former life, and had passed through the Red Sea, didn’t you immediately discover God’s fatherly care? He watched over you. He fed you and bore you on eagles’ wings, as he did here to these Israelites. But, even so, there was the murmuring of the people. There is so much of that in our lives, complaining against God, isn’t there?

Then comes the battle in Chapter 17, the first battle with the flesh. This is always a startling thing to new Christians. After then have gone through the glory of the Passover, the Red Sea, the mighty deliverance from sin in their lives, the sense of his fatherly love in the giving of the manna, and have found fellowship with Christ in the new life, they discover they still have a battle with the old flesh. It can be a shocking realization. But here it is. Amalek comes and fights with Israel, but God declares unending war with Amalek (Exod 17:10), “For the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other” (Gal 5:17a RSV). You can never make peace with Amalek.

So, as we come through the typical teaching of this book to Chapter 19, we arrive at Sinai; that is, **the Law** and **the tabernacle**, the third and fourth major sections of Exodus. Let us bring these two together. At Sinai we have, of course, the giving of the Law. Now what is the Law? It is simply a picture of the holiness of God, that is, the character of God. Let me put it another way. It is the unchangeability of God, the unrelenting character of God. This is why the Law and the giving of the Law is a time of terror, because there is nothing more terrible to human beings than to face squarely up to the fact that God is absolutely unchangeable, that nothing will change him. This gives wonderful comfort to us when we think of his love and care and grace, but it is frightening when we think of his holiness, his anger, and his wrath. This means that God can never be talked out of anything. God can never be bought off. We cannot get him to lower his standards in any degree. The Law is the absolute, irrevocable standard of God’s character,

which is what we discover as we come into the experience of the Lordship of Christ – he is absolutely unchangeable. He will never lower his demands in our life.

Now the Law by itself, therefore, is a frightening thing. God’s holy character terrorizes us. Do we really take seriously what God says to us about himself? Listen: “You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (cf, Matt 5:48 RSV). Do you take that seriously? Well, most of us spend a lot of time trying to water it down somehow. Be perfect! That is frightening! How can I be perfect? God’s answer to that question is the tabernacle – the ritual and the sacrifice connected with it. That is why on the mountain, yes, the very same mountain on which he gave the Law, which is the revelation of his character, he also gave the tabernacle, his provision for dwelling with man. For in the tabernacle, God dwelt among his people.

I like to visualize the camp of Israel. You remember they were divided up, all the tribes; some on the east, some on the north, some on the west, and on the south. They were arranged in orderly fashion. Right in the center was the tabernacle. Over it, and over the whole camp, was the great cloud by day and the fiery pillar by night. I have often thought the camp of Israel must have looked very much like the city of Los Angeles, lying out there in the desert, spread out in a fashion, and over it a cloud – of smog, of course, in Los Angeles – but in Israel it was a cloud which betokened the presence of God. Here was God dwelling among his people. He could do it only by a most intricate system of sacrifices and rituals and a very complicated procedure of bringing the people into his presence.

If you went into the camp of Israel, you would pass through all the tribes on whichever side you entered and find your way at last to the center of the camp, where the Levites were. As you continued through the Levites you would come to the tabernacle. At first you would pass through a great gateway into the outer court where you would find certain articles – the brazen altar and the brazen laver – and then there was an inner building with a veil across the entrance into which no one dared enter unless he were a priest. The priests alone went into the holy place. Behind another veil inside the holy place was the Holy of Holies. The only piece of furniture in it was the ark of the covenant including the cherubim of mercy with their wings

touching each other over the ark. Into that place, we are told, only the high priest could go, and he only once a year, under the most rigid and precise conditions.

Now what does all this teach? Simply that God is absolutely changeless and holy. He can dwell among people only under the most rigid conditions. The trouble with the tabernacle was that it only permitted the people to come before God representatively, but, actually, they were excluded from his presence. The common people could never come before him. Only the high priest could, and he in fear of his life, and only once a year, that’s all. That is the restriction of these Old Testament rituals.

You see, the trouble with the Old Testament and the saints of that time was not the Law. There was nothing wrong with the Law. The Law is absolutely good. Paul says so. Sometimes we speak of the Law as though it were wrong, but it isn’t. The Law was absolutely good. It still is. The trouble was with the tabernacle, and the system of sacrifice. It wasn’t complete enough. It wasn’t real enough. It was only shadows, just pictures. It could never really do anything. That is why, when we come to the book of Hebrews, the whole book is dedicated to teaching us that the Law of God is still unchanged, but the approach is completely different, for we come to the One who is the antitype, the reality, symbolized by all these shadows. We read in Hebrews, “we have confidence to enter the sanctuary” (Heb 10:19b RSV) without any fear whatsoever, for in the blood of Jesus and by means of the cross, God has set aside all that separates, and has brought us near to himself.

The great message of the book of Exodus is that by means of the cross, God has made it possible for a holy, unchangeable God to dwell with us. The whole of the tabernacle is a picture of God’s dwelling with his people. The great truth for us here is that God has now settled so totally the problem of sin in us, absolutely settled it, that as Paul says in Romans 8, “There is now no condemnation” {cf, Rom 8:1}, none whatsoever. None whatsoever! We have perfect access to the Father through the Son, and God’s indwelling Spirit will never leave us or forsake us. He has taken up his tabernacle in our hearts and lives.

One of the things I am in perpetual enmity against is the practice among Sunday School teachers (for they are the ones most guilty of this) of

teaching children that a building is the house of God. The reason I don't like that is primarily because it is not true. There was a building which was the house of God in the Old Testament, the tabernacle, but it was a mere shadow. The temple in Jerusalem took its place. It, too, was a shadow. But when you come into the New Testament you never find a building designated as the house of God. The house of God in the New Testament is a human body. "You are the temple of God," Paul says (cf, 1 Cor 3:16). Therefore, you are never out of church. I think we have taught our children one of the most deadly of errors when we teach that a building is the house of God. When we say that, it is very difficult for them to grasp the idea that their bodies are the temples of God.

That is what God wants us to learn – that we are never out of church. That Jesus Christ himself is dwelling in your body which is his temple, and it is built exactly like the tabernacle. It has a three-fold structure:

- The outer court is this body of flesh and bones which we see.
- The holy place is the soul – the realm of emotions, mind and will. That area in which we have free intercourse one with another as we talk and share experiences together.
- But deep at the center is the Holy of Holies, your spirit; in that place the Spirit of God dwells.

So each of us is a walking tabernacle. This whole book of Exodus is to impress upon us, as we read it through, that great New Testament truth – the glory of living with God himself in the midst of our life and the demands that truth makes upon us, the responsibilities it brings upon us and the privileges it gives us. The great need is for a walk resting upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, alone, making this all possible for us.

Still, Exodus isn't enough. We need to go on into Leviticus and see what this demanding Law does to us in its effort to correct us and guide our lives. In Leviticus you will find another great truth which, if you have not yet learned, will explain why you find yourself bound, hampered, and fettered in a continual up-and-down experience.

Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, how much we thank you for this mighty word of truth. When we think, Lord, how it has come to us through the instrumentality of prophets and apostles, of fishermen, of common, ordinary men like ourselves, who wrote by your inspiration, and how it has been protected and passed on to us at the cost of blood and toil and sweat and tears and death, we are amazed. Lord, help us to value this word and to believe it and to walk in its light, knowing that here is the word of liberty, the word of knowledge that can set us free. We thank you for it in Christ's name. Amen.

LEVITICUS: The Way to Wholeness

by Ray C. Stedman

Have you ever embarked on a journey through the Bible, only to get bogged down in the book of Leviticus? You go through Genesis in fine style, learning about Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the things that happened to them. Then you get into Exodus where you have such dramatic incidents as Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh in the court of Egypt, the opening of the Red Sea, and the giving of the Law. Then you start into Leviticus. After you have plodded through the offerings you get into the priesthood, the ceremonies, all the restrictions of diet and specifications for the dress of the high priest, and various other strange functions and feasts. About that time, your interest evaporates, you run out of gas, and that is the end of your reading through the Bible. Isn't that right?

I know this book is a bit difficult. It does appear to be very dry. It could be called "the dryness barrier," but if you can penetrate the dryness barrier, you will find the Bible a fascinating book indeed to read all the way through.

Leviticus reminds me of visiting a factory without a guide. When I first came to this area, I went to San Francisco where a friend of mine had a large steel products factory. I went into the factory to see what they were doing. My friend was busy at the moment and couldn't come with me, so I went by myself. My first impression as I stepped into the huge building was one of tremendous clamor. The noise was fantastic! Great machines were pounding away, big trip hammers were smashing down, and other machines were grinding up metal and spitting out parts. I couldn't even hear myself think. My second impression was of mass confusion. Nobody seemed to know what they were doing. Men were running here and there, paying no attention to one another, some getting in the way of others, and the machines were all working away with no apparent harmony or connection at all. Then my friend joined me and began

to take me through the plant. First, he showed me one area and explained what they were doing there, and then a certain machine and what it did. We continued in this way until we ended up in the shipping department. When I saw the final product, I understood the factory. It all made perfect sense. I was no longer confused.

This is what you may experience with the book of Leviticus. You come into it and find many strange ceremonies and sacrifices, many odd restrictions, diet problems, and various other difficulties which all seem to be so meaningless. But then you discover that they have a very complex, intricately articulated relationship moving toward a purposeful end. That end is stated clearly in this book, and if you want to understand Leviticus, one verse right near the center of the book will help you:

You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine. (Lev 20:26 RSV)

That is the purpose of the book of Leviticus. God is saying to these people of Israel, "I have separated you from all the nations around you in order that you might be mine." When we Christians read his, we must understand that we are the people of God today. What God said to Israel he also says to us, for in the new relationship we have in Jesus Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile; there is but one man, one body in Christ. The promises which appear in picture form in the Old Testament belong also to us who live this side of the cross.

Perhaps you were turned off right away by the word *holy* in this passage. I don't know what you think *holy* means, but you probably read into it things from your past experience which make it unpalatable to you. Most of us associate it with

some kind of grimness. We think “holy” people are those who look as if they have been steeped in vinegar or soaked in embalming fluid. I used to think of the word that way, and holiness was not attractive to me at all. It repelled me. But I ran across a verse in Scripture which spoke of “the beauty of holiness,” (Psa 29:2 KJV) and I asked myself, “What in the world is beautiful about holiness?” When I found out, I had to agree that holiness is indeed a beautiful thing.

But most of us react initially to this word as did the little girl who happened to see a mule looking over the fence at her. She had never seen a mule before, and she said to it, “I don’t know what you are, but you must be a Christian – you look just like Grandpa.” Others associate it with strangeness, apartness, as though holy people are weird, peculiar individuals who live out in the desert somewhere, remote from the rest of us. They are *different*.

But the Bible itself suggests none of these ideas concerning holiness. If you want to get at the meaning of this word, you must go back to its original root. This word is derived from the same root from which a very attractive English word comes. This word is *wholeness*. So *holiness* means “wholeness, being complete.” And if you read *wholeness* in place of *holiness* everywhere you find it in the Bible, you will be much closer to what the writers meant. We all know what wholeness is. It is to have together all the parts which were intended to be there, and to have them functioning as they were intended to function.

That is what God is talking about. He says to this people, “you shall be whole, because I am whole.” God is complete; he is perfect. There is no blemish in God; he lives in harmony with himself. He is a beautiful person. He is absolutely what a person ought to be. He is filled with joy and love and peace. He lives in wholeness. And he looks at us in our brokenness and says to us, “You too, shall be whole.”

That word *wholeness* has power to awaken desire within us. We long to be whole people. Don’t you? Don’t you want to be what God made you to be, with all the ingredients of your personality expressed in balance? That is what the book of Leviticus is all about. In fact, so is the whole Bible.

We are so aware of our own brokenness, of our lack of wholeness. We know how much we hurt

ourselves and each other. We are aware of our inability to cope with life. We sometimes put up a big facade and try to bluff our way through as though we are able to handle anything. But inside, half the time, we are running scared. That is a mark of our lack of wholeness. We also know our diabolical power to irritate, to enrage, and to inflame others – and ourselves. But this great statement in Leviticus 20:26 declares that God knows all about human brokenness and hurt. He knows that we are that way. He sees this in sharp contrast to his own wholeness. And his love reaches out and says to us, “You shall be whole; for I am whole. That is my purpose,” he declares to his people.

Man has lost his way. He was made in the image and likeness of God. When man first came from the hand of God, he was whole. Adam functioned as God intended man to function. He was functioning in the image and the likeness of God. But now we have lost that likeness. We still have the image, but the likeness is gone. T. S. Eliot says,

All our knowledge brings us only closer to our
ignorance,
And our ignorance brings us closer to death.
But closeness to death does not bring us closer
to God.

And then he asks this question:

Where is the life we have lost in living?

Isn’t that the question so many millions are asking today? Where is the life I have lost in trying to live? Why don’t I know the way out? How come I am so up-tight, so hurting, so broken?

God determines to heal man’s brokenness and to make man whole again. And he knows how to do it – he says so: “I have separated you from the peoples.” (cf, Lev 20:24 RSV). It is a process of separation. The reason we are so broken is that we are involved in a broken race. Our attitudes are wrong. Our vision of life is twisted and distorted. We believe illusions, take them to be facts, and act upon them. We are following phantoms and fantasies and delusions. So God must separate us. He has to break us loose from conformity to the thought patterns and attitudes and reactions of those around us. He has to deliver us from all that, straighten out our thinking, set our minds and

hearts aright, and correct our tangled, fouled relationships.

This is a process which takes infinite patience and love, because it is voluntary – God never forces us into it. It can occur only to those who trust God enough to respond to his love. When I was a boy in my early teens, I once tried to entice a female deer out of a thicket into a little clearing to get her to take an apple from my hand and eat it. She was a wild doe, and very much afraid. She saw the apple and obviously wanted to come and take it. She would venture a few steps toward me, but then would become frightened and retreat into the woods. Then she would come out again, stand still and look around for a minute, then start grazing as though indifferent. I stood perfectly still, holding out the apple. She would come a bit closer – then a twig would snap and she would disappear back into the bushes.

Now, it was perfectly possible for her all along, if only she had known it, simply to walk right up and grab the apple and start eating it. I would not have hurt her at all. I wouldn't have tried to capture her nor do anything else to her. But she didn't know that.

I was there a long time, at least half an hour, trying to get her to come out of the woods. Finally, she came about halfway toward me and stood there with her neck stretched out, trying to muster the courage to reach for that apple. Just as I thought she was going to do it, a car passed nearby and she was gone. I had to eat the apple myself.

That strikes me as such an apt picture of what God contends with in reaching out toward man. It takes infinite patience and love to impart the necessary understanding to fearful, hurting men and women like us.

That is why God gave us his book. He starts in kindergarten with us. He starts with pictures and shadows, with visual aids, in order to show us what he is going to do some day. All the ceremonies and offerings of the Old Testament are shadows and pictures of Jesus Christ. So Christ is here in the book of Leviticus. God shows us, through his people Israel, his way of healing human hurt. This is God's way to wholeness.

“Well,” someone might say, “I thought Jesus Christ was God's way to wholeness.” That is exactly true. He is. But his availability is not limited to us, you see. Men and women before the cross were also hurting and broken and fragmented, just

as we are. They needed Christ also and he was available to them. The way they saw him was through these pictures. Thus, as they understood what these pictures depict, and laid hold of that, they came to the same joy and peace that we have.

If you do not believe that, read the Psalms and see how much David understood of the presence and the grace of God in his life. He was a man who was healed by God. He came to understand that God was his strength and his very life, and that God could meet every need of his heart and work out all the tangled relationships in his family and in his personal life. All this is reflected in the Psalms he wrote.

Leviticus, then, is full of Christ. All the sacrifices, the rituals, and the ceremonies pictorially describe Jesus Christ and his work, and how he was available to men and women then. And as we read this book from our vantage on this side of the cross, we will learn a great deal about how Jesus Christ can meet our needs now. Therefore, this is not just a historical book. It isn't just for “news.” It is a tremendously practical manual on how to live as a Christian.

But there is even more: when you read the book of Leviticus and understand what it is saying, it will help you to understand yourself. You see, in Jesus Christ God took upon himself the form of man. Jesus came to this earth, God in the flesh, and dwelt among us as man – man as God intends man to be. He came to where we are. And everything that he was and did as man is what we also are or can be. So, as you read this book, you will understand more about yourself, and about what your great, crying needs are, and about how you operate.

We are a mystery to ourselves. We don't even understand how we think. We are baffled by our own experience. Don't you feel that way?

Remember the way Paul expresses this in Romans: “The good things that I want to do I cannot do; and the evil things that I don't want to do are what I do,” (cf, Rom 7:19). This is a picture of life. It is a very penetrating, probing analysis of what is going on in your life and mine. This is what the book of Leviticus shows us – the reasons why, the understanding of ourselves. It is designed to meet the hurt of man, just where we are. And as we learn how to accept the healing of God, it will show us what we can be.

Because that is true the book falls into two basic divisions:

- The first part speaks to man's need. It reveals where we are as people, and sets forth God's answer to that need.
- The second part reveals what God expects from us in response.

First comes God's provision, and then the performance which results from that provision.

In the first sixteen chapters, there are four elements which set forth **man's need** and reveal what we are like:

1. The first is a series of five offerings. I am sure that God gave us five fingers on each hand so that we can remember the five offerings:
 - First is the burnt offering,
 - Then the meal offering,
 - The peace offering,
 - The sin offering, and
 - Finally, the trespass offering.

These are all pictures of what Jesus Christ does for us, but they are also pictures of the fundamental needs of human life. They speak of the two essentials for human existence – love and responsibility. We can never be complete persons if we are not loved, nor if we do not love. Love is an absolutely essential ingredient of life. Nothing harms or distorts or disfigures or blasts a person more than to deny him love. But there is another essential too. In order to be whole, in order to have self-respect and a feeling of worth, we must have a sense of responsibility. We must be able to accomplish what is worthwhile. So, we need both: love and responsibility.

2. The second element in these chapters is a priesthood. This priesthood is provided to help us handle the emotional and intellectual problems we face in trying to work out the relationships involving love and responsibility. We constantly run into emotional and intellectual problems; we get upset, turned off, or turned

on, excited or depressed – we have all kinds of emotional problems. And we get puzzled and bewildered, baffled and uncertain as to what to do – all kinds of intellectual problems. So, a priesthood is provided to help us with these problems.

In the Old Testament this priesthood was the sons of Levi. That is where Leviticus got its name. But for us, the priesthood is not only Jesus Christ, our Lord and High Priest to whom we can freely come, but it is also each other. In the body of Christ we are all made priests, one to another (cf, 1 Pet 2:5). That is why we need each other. Basically and fundamentally we cannot get along without each other, because we have these problems with which we must have help.

3. The third element is the revelation of a standard by which we can tell the difference between the true and the false, the phony and the real, the helpful and the hurtful – between death and life. Isn't it strange that man in his natural condition cannot tell the difference? That is why there are thousands and thousands of people who are doing things which they think are helpful but which end up to be very hurtful – and they do not understand why! When the results begin to come in they cry out, "What happened, what has gone wrong? Why am I in a mess like this?" It is because they could not tell the difference. So, a God of love tells us the difference. He sets forth a standard by which we can distinguish between that which is essentially hurtful and that which will actually help us.
4. Finally in this first section there is an opportunity to respond – voluntarily. We need that, too. God never imposes his will upon any of us. We constantly need help. We need to be brought to a place where we can recognize this. Then we have to answer in some way; we must give a response. This opportunity was provided in the Day of Atonement. If, when we thoroughly understand our need and God's provision to meet it, we then say "No" to him, he will let us do so. We might never return to that point again. But God always gives us a long period of preparation in which he leads us

into a full understanding before our rejection of him can become final.

The second section of the book, Chapters 17 through 27, describes **the performance which is possible** on the basis of the provision God has made, the kind of a life that can be lived on this basis. But notice the order! God never mentions performance to us until he has fully discussed provision. He never speaks about our behavior until he has made clear the power by which we are to act.

I must admit that we in the church often get this backwards. And a great deal of damage has been done to people by insisting that they act according to a certain behavior pattern without giving them any understanding of the power by which to do so. There are times when, in all sincerity and because the Scriptures are not understood very well, people are taught that they must live up to a certain standard before God will accept them; that they must produce, come through, or God won't love them. That is totally wrong! That is the lie of Satan! That is deadly legalism – yet we have all had our part in it.

But that is what God is here to correct. He never does that. He always helps us first, and once we understand the basis upon which to act, then he sets forth for us the pattern, the standard of performance.

Here again there are four elements:

1. First, there is a need to understand the basis for wholeness. This basis is blood. Anyone who has read the Old Testament knows that it is full of blood. There are all these strange sacrifices, thousands of them offered every year – bulls and calves and goats and sheep and birds of all kinds, offered up all the time – a veritable river of blood flowing through the Old Testament.

Many people, looking at this, say, "Christianity is nothing but a slaughterhouse religion."

Why all this bloodshed? Because, by this means God is trying to impress us with a fundamental fact. He is telling us that the issues of our life run very deep, that they can be solved only by a death, that the basis for wholeness is a life given up, that we will never make it merely on the basis of our natural life.

We must somehow discover a new kind of life. And we have to give up the old before we can have the new! That is what he is telling us. We can't have both! The struggle of the Christian life is that we keep trying to hang on to the old way of life and refuse to accept the new. This is what the blood speaks of.

2. The second element is the practice of love in all the relationships of life. The Bible is intensely practical. It is not nearly so concerned about what you do in the temple as about what you do in the home as a result of having been to the temple. So this book goes into the relationships within the family, among friends, and with society in general. It shows us exactly the kind of love relationship that God makes possible for us in all these areas.
3. The third element in this last section is the enjoyment of the presence and power of God – man in relationship to God, worshipping God, and turned on by a living, exciting God! We can learn here what the temple portrays about our relationship to God and about how to think of him. The most important thing in life is to know the living God who is behind all things!
4. The last element is an awareness of the issues at stake and their importance; of how our entire life stands in the balance at this very point, and a decision is expected of us. There is a choice that we can make. And God brings us finally to that very place and helps us to see that in the final analysis it is entirely up to us to choose. God never says, "I'm going to make you leave your misery." Rather, he says, "If you prefer being broken and don't want to be healed, you can stay right where you are. But if you want life, then this is what is ahead." God never forces his will upon us. But he sets the choice before us, makes it very clear, and then expects a response on the basis that he has given.

In closing, we should return to our key verse: "You shall be whole because I am whole, and therefore I am separating you from the peoples in order that you should be mine." That, finally, is what God is aiming at. He wants us to be his. Here the verb tense becomes very interesting. In our English text, this is in the future tense: "you

shall be mine.” But the Hebrew has a strange usage, very different from English. You can put all three tenses in one word, and that is what we have here. God is saying, “You were mine, you are mine, you shall be mine.” “Mine,” he says, that’s all: “Mine!” It includes all the tenses of life – the past, the present, and the future.

If you pursue this idea through the Bible, you can see how true it is:

- Many of you know from your own experience that after you became a Christian, became God’s, you realized that there was a sense in which you had belonged to him all along. Paul, the apostle, says, “He [God] set me apart before I was born” (cf. Gal 1:15). And yet he was a blustering, threatening enemy of Christianity until his experience on the road to Damascus. But, looking back, he knew that he had been God’s all along. “You are mine,” God says. “Even though you are an enemy, even though you are against me, hostile to me, and fighting me, you are MINE!”
- Then, in the present tense, God looks at us in our brokenness, our hurting condition, our fragmented, flawed, imperfect state, and he puts his hand upon us and says, “You are mine, right now, just the way you are. You belong to me”

A friend of mine told a story recently of a true incident which I think is so illustrative of this: He told of a children’s service at a rescue mission in a midwestern city a few years ago. Children were putting on the program, and one little boy was to give a recitation. He was only about five or six years old and he had a deformity; he was a humpback. As he walked across the stage to give his recitation it was evident that he was very shy and afraid, and very much aware of his condition. In fact, it was the first time that he had ever tried anything like this and it was a great struggle for him.

Two older fellows had come into the back of the room intending to ridicule the service. One of them called out to this boy as he walked across the stage, “Hey, bud, where are you going with that pack on your back?” The little

boy was completely demoralized, and he just stood there and sobbed.

A man got up out of the audience and came up to the platform. He knelt down by the little boy and put his arm around him. He said to the audience, “It must take a very callous and cruel person to say something like that to a little boy like this. He is suffering from something that is not his fault at all. In spite of this deformity, he was trying for the first time to venture out and say something in public. This remark has cut him deeply. But I want you to know that I love him just the way he is; this little boy is mine, he belongs to me, and I’m proud of him” And he led the boy off the platform.

That is what God is really saying to us. He sees our hurt and our heartache and our longing and our brokenness, and he says, “You’re MINE!”

- But that isn’t all. Because of his power and wisdom, God says, with that wonderful hopefulness of a loving father, “You shall be mine – healed, made whole, with all your blemishes and deformities corrected, all your faults straightened out, all your iniquities set aside, all your tangled relationships unsnarled. You shall be whole, for I am whole.”

That is what this book is about, that is what the Bible is about, and that is what Jesus Christ is about.

Not long ago, I had the encouraging experience of talking with three people who I would have said were absolutely hopeless two years ago. They were hostile and rebellious and so torn up inside that they could not get along with themselves nor anybody else. No one could even talk to them much less reach them with the truth. They were ruined, literally ruined. But now the healing has begun. It is very evident that they are on their way to wholeness. God is correcting the problems of their lives. And that is what he is doing here with us.

I don’t know anything more suggestive of this activity for us than the Lord’s table. This event tells us of how God, in love, began the process of healing. It portrays for us how he began to reach out to us in the cross, in the suffering of Jesus, and how he broke the power of darkness and began to set us free. Our Lord Jesus gave us this event to

teach us the meaning of these ancient sacrifices: a life poured out for us, a life given up in order that we might have a new basis of living, in order that we may be his.

Prayer:

Our heavenly Father, each time we come to the Lord's table, we ask you to make it very rich and meaningful to us. May we, in our mind's eye, see the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who has broken through the sin barrier, broken through the fear barrier,

and now reaches out to us in tender, forgiving, accepting, understanding love, and who offers us everything it takes to straighten out the tangled relationships of our lives. Lord, help us to understand this and to lay hold of it, to give thanks for it. We know that for many, the healing has begun and is still progressing. For some, it is just beginning. There may be some for whom it has not yet started. We pray that in your love, Lord Jesus, you will reach them and heal them. We ask it in your name, Amen.

NUMBERS: The Incomplete Christian Life

by Ray C. Stedman

The Pentateuch – the first five books of our Bible – trace for us the spiritual journey of an individual from sin into belief and to glorification in Christ. The whole Old Testament was written so that we might see in a vivid way what the New Testament declares to be true. The New Testament confirms this. The New Testament says that all these events involving Israel happened as an example to us, and were written down for our instruction (1 Cor 10:11) since they are pictures of what we will go through, as we move along with Jesus Christ:

- Now, the book of Genesis is a picture of humanity in all its strident, clamant need. It portrays what we look like as a result of the fall of man and the consequent need for God in our life. From Exodus to Deuteronomy, we have the way from Egypt to Canaan as a picture of the way the Christian will move from the slavery of sin to the freedom of victory in Christ, victory in the midst of his enemies. This is precisely the spiritual journey God has called us to, so these books become exceedingly helpful for us. If you read the Old Testament as nothing but a history of ancient events concerning people who have long since disappeared, it will be the dullest, most boring reading you can find. However, if you read it as a picture of what is happening in your life, vividly displayed in terms of these people of old, you will find fascinating reading indeed.
- The book of Exodus is a picture of God's delivering power. There we have the three great events in the early life of Israel – the Passover in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. These corre-

spond with God's work in us. Like the Israelites in the Passover, where the blood was sprinkled for them, we too realized that the angel of death had passed over us in the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross and by that event, we were saved. We too moved out across the Red Sea when we openly declared our redemption in Christ and cut off the ties that bound us to the world. We came into the wilderness and heard the Law of Moses when we began to learn, perhaps for the first time in our lives, the kind of God with whom we had to deal, a God of utter holiness, of complete righteousness, utterly consistent with himself.

- Then in the book of Leviticus we learn how to worship, what it is this kind of God demands, and how a God of such surpassing holiness can dwell with men and women like ourselves. Here we discover the means by which God makes possible the necessary intercourse between God and man.
- Now we come to the book of Numbers:

In Numbers we have dramatically set forth what is perhaps the hardest lesson a Christian has to learn – to trust God instead of his own reason. This is where we struggle, isn't it? We think that what we want to do and the way we want to do it is the right way. The hardest struggle we have, even as these Israelites had, is to learn to believe that God knows what he is talking about and that what he tells us is the truth, and is for our good, and to operate on that basis despite what friends and others around are telling us concerning the right way. Proverbs puts it so graphically, "There is a way

which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death,” (Prov 14:12 RSV). The book of Numbers is a picture of that experience in the believer.

You will recognize, of course, that it is the experience of Romans 7 where the unhappy, defeated Christian, who is his own worst enemy, is being disciplined by God because God as a father loves him. He is experiencing in the midst of this discipline the fatherly love and care of God and protection from his enemy. That is what the book of Numbers portrays. It is a picture of people who have come out of Egypt but who have not yet reached Canaan. They had the faith to follow God out of the bondage and slavery of sin but have not yet come into the fullness of liberty and rest in the Holy Spirit – Canaan being a picture of the Spirit-filled life.

This book falls into three divisions:

The first is included in Chapters 1 through 10, and is a picture of **God’s provision for guidance and warfare**. These are the two critical needs of Israel in their march from Mt. Sinai, where the Law was given, until they came north across the wilderness of Paran to the edge of the promised land, the land of Canaan. On the way they would need guidance, because this was a trackless wilderness; moreover, they would need protection, for the wilderness was occupied by fierce, hostile tribes that opposed them every time they turned around.

All of this, you will recognize, is an exact picture of our need, isn’t it? We need guidance because of the clever subtleties of the world in which we live and the ease with which we can be misled and derailed; and we need protection because of the enemies among whom we dwell, those within us and round about us, who would defeat us if they could.

In this section that begins with the arrangement of the camp, note two things –

- The position of the tabernacle with the tribes on every side, and
- A numbering of the armed men of Israel.

These are pictures for us of the need for defense against the enemies of God. God provides all the strategy and resources necessary to meet every enemy that comes our way. There is not only the or-

der of the camp (the tabernacle surrounded by the tribes), but also there is the cloud over the camp by day and the pillar of fire by night – all of which (tabernacle, cloud, and pillar) picture for us the great truth of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We have God in our midst. That is a great truth. He is able to direct and to lead us through the wilderness of the world by the guidance of the Word. We are led by the cloud and the fire, just as Israel was led, and we are to be obedient to that leading. This is all the potential we need to get us from the place of the Law (the knowledge of the holiness of God) to the rest in the Spirit which the land of Canaan represents. We have everything we need, just as Israel had all that they needed.

But what happened?

Well, the major part of this book, from Chapter 11 through 21, is a description of **the murmuring and rebelling of the people**. It is a most remarkable fact, but one every pastor and parent is fully aware of, that rebellion and willful disobedience to God always begin with murmuring and critical complaining. Whenever you find yourself beginning to complain and murmur and whisper and carrying on a carping campaign against the circumstances in which you find yourself, you know that you are on the threshold of rebellion, because it always begins there. Notice that there are three kinds of murmuring – three levels of complaint – that occur throughout the wilderness journey.

1. There was, first of all, the complaint of the people against the circumstances. They complained about the manna and about the lack of water; they complained about the meat and about the wilderness itself. They were always murmuring. This was their favorite outdoor sport, it seems, and they worked at it day and night. Nothing was right, not even the manna, the miraculous supply of God every day.

I wonder if you know what manna typifies in your life? Well, it typifies the Holy Spirit. For the manna, it says, tasted like oil and honey mixed together into a thin wafer. Oil and honey are both symbols of the Holy Spirit.

On this they were to feed. But it was just a thin wafer. It wasn’t enough to satisfy them – although it was enough to sustain them – because God never intended them to live so long

in the wilderness. He intended them to get on over into the land of Canaan and begin to feed upon the abundant food there. But they got sick of manna. Who wouldn't after forty years, when it was only intended for a few days? Manna for breakfast, manna for lunch, manna for supper. Nothing but manna, manna, manna – until finally they began to complain and rebel. Yet it wasn't God's fault. Manna was never intended to satisfy. It was merely a temporary provision until they could get into the fullness of the land, just as God never intended you to live on the experience of the meager contact with the Holy Spirit you get in a defeated Christian experience. Go on into the land of abundant living. That is where you will find satisfaction.

They also complained about the lack of meat, so God gave them meat for a month until they were sick, and then they complained about the abundance of meat. So on it went. In murmuring they always thought about Egypt and this is a picture for us of a degenerating Christian experience. All they could think of was the meat, the melons, the cucumbers, leeks, onions, and garlic of Egypt. Imagine dreaming of that kind of food! But that is what Egypt meant to them. They had no thought of Canaan because they had no knowledge of it. All they had heard were sermons about Canaan. They had no experience of it. All they could remember was the world out of which they had come. As Major W. Ian Thomas puts it in his book, *The Saving Life of Christ*,

What are these a picture of? A cucumber is 12 inches of indigestion! Leeks and onions and garlic have a very peculiar property about them. They are the kind of food you eat in private but everybody knows about it in public.

Now this murmuring against the circumstances in which they found themselves was met by the judgment of God in three forms – fire, plague, and poisoned serpents.

I wonder if you can see in each of these a picture of the inevitable result of whining, complaining, and murmuring as a Christian. When we begin to complain about where God has put us and the kind of people he has put us

among and the kind of food we have to eat and all the other circumstances of our life, we discover that the fire of gossip, scandal and slander; the plague of anxiety and nervous tension that takes its daily toll of our life; and the poison of envy and jealousy are released in our own life to sap our strength. These things are inevitable.

2. Not only did the Israelites murmur against their circumstances, but there were several times when they murmured against the blessing of God. Imagine that. They came at last to the edge of the land of Canaan, standing on the very border line at Kadesh-barnea, and there God said to them, "Now move forward. Possess the land." They had sent out the spies and had learned that it was a land flowing with milk and honey. The spies had brought back grapes so large that they had to carry them on a stick between the shoulders of two men, the bunch was so heavy. But they also knew that it was a land full of giants, and because of the giants they were afraid to go forward. They thought the giants were greater than God, so they refused to go on into blessing. They resisted God's efforts to bless them. They were glad to get out of Egypt but they were unwilling to go on into Canaan. This is why they wandered for forty years in the wilderness. The inevitable judgment to them was that if they would not go into blessing, they must experience the full results of a failure before moving on in God's program.

Many, many Christians are living right here today, square in the middle of a howling wilderness, living on a minimum supply of the Holy Spirit – enough to keep them going, and that's all. They spend their lives in complaining, unending murmuring against their circumstances, yet still are unwilling to move on into the land that God has fully provided for them. This is the problem of so many. While you can be sustained in the wilderness, you will never be satisfied, never. And that is why the wilderness experience is always marked by a complaining heart and an unending criticism of something or someone. In this book it never ended until a new generation was ready to enter the land. God said, "Not one of you older than twenty years who went back at Kadesh-barnea

will ever enter this land, except two men,” (cf, Num 14:29-30). Those two men – Caleb and Joshua – were men of faith who went on.

Thus it isn't until we make a new beginning in our lives, when we come to the end of ourselves and it seems almost as if we begin again in the Christian life, that we can go on after we have resisted the work of the Spirit in taking us into the land. This is why so many Christians never seem to come to victory until they have a crisis experience, a new beginning, and then they enter into the land.

The Israelites had one other occupation in the wilderness besides murmuring, and that was burying. The mark of the wilderness is that it is a land of death. Did you ever think how many Israelites died in those forty years in the wilderness? This book begins with a census of Israel, and it totals 603,000 men alone, men able to go out to warfare, who are at least twenty years old. Six hundred and three thousand. Most of those men were married. That meant an equal number of women, as well as all the children that were in that camp. Many have estimated the total population at that time to have been well over two million people. Yet in the wilderness, in the space of forty years, one million two hundred thousand of them died, an average of 82 per day, so there was nothing but a great big funeral going on all the time. The wilderness was one huge graveyard. No wonder they had to move so often. You can imagine why, as literally scores of people would die every day through that forty years' time. What a picture of what Romans says: "To set the mind on the flesh is death," (Rom 8:6a RSV).

3. Finally, there is one other form of murmuring here; murmuring against authority. They murmured against circumstances; they murmured against God's effort to bless them, and they murmured against the authority of God expressed through Moses! They said, "All the people are holy. Moses and Aaron, why do you put on airs as though you were better than we are? All of the people of God are holy, in their own eyes," {cf, Num 16:3}. They judged themselves by their own standards and thus rebelled against the properly constituted authority in their midst. They resisted with all their

strength the suggestion that these two should be anything more than they.

Have you noticed that this is another characteristic of the defeated Christian? He always thinks he is holy enough, that he is as holy as he needs to be, and he resents anyone else who seems to be ahead of him or to exercise any authority. He resists any attempt to suggest to him that he ought to be more than he is. That is what these people did.

God met this attitude with the severest judgment of all. There is that dramatic account of the rebellion of Korah and Abiram when they openly challenged the authority of Moses and Aaron. God divided the camp in half and said, "Moses and Aaron you stand over here. Korah and your group, stand over here, and the people stand there," {See Num 16:20 ff}. And then he said, "Stand back. I am going to show you who is in authority here." He led Moses to say, "If these people live out their lives as normal ordinary men, then it is a sign that God is not with me, but if God does something absolutely new and the ground opens up beneath them and swallows them alive, it is an indication that God is with me." And as he said the words, the ground opened up beneath Korah and Abiram and all their families, and they went down alive into the pit. Thus God established his authority through Moses by this remarkable judgment. When we rebel against authority, God judges with the utmost severity.

Through all this, interestingly enough, the murmuring went on, in spite of the severity of this judgment, until two things took place. One was associated with the rebellion of Korah and Abiram and the other was in connection with the serpents that came and bit them at the time they complained about the food:

- Do you remember what Moses did to stop the rebellion at the death of Korah and Abiram? All the leaders of the twelve tribes took rods and put them before the Lord. Aaron's rod was included among them, and when they came back in the morning, they found that Aaron's rod had grown branches, the branches had blossomed and the blossoms had grown fruit and there were almonds hanging on the branches, all taking place overnight. Of the

twelve rods, only Aaron's blossomed. This is a picture of the resurrection life. In this, God is saying that the only ones who have the right to bear authority are those who walk in the fullness and power of resurrection life.

- Then when they murmured about the food, he sent poison serpents among them. In the third chapter of John, our Lord makes reference to this story. Moses cured the effects of the poison by lifting up a brazen serpent on a pole, and all who looked at it were healed. By that God was saying the only cure of sin of any kind, even sin in the Christian, is a look again at the cross and the way it utterly repudiates all human endeavor and human worthiness by putting Christian living solely on the basis of the resurrection life of Jesus Christ. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life," (John 3:14 RSV)

The latter part of the book, Chapters 21 through 36, is a remarkable record of **protection in spite of failure**. Here you find victory over the enemies around, the outward forces of King Arad, Sihon, Og, King of Bashan, and the attempts of Balaam, the false prophet, to try to undermine the people of God which resulted only in greater blessing. All of it is simply saying to us, in the most vivid language God can find, that though we are disobedient, though we are rebellious, though we turn and refuse to go into blessing, though we

wander in a wilderness of defeat and despair and barrenness year after year after year – nevertheless, the Holy Spirit will never leave us.

Even in the midst of our weakness, he grants us protection from our enemies and deliverance from complete defeat. What a remarkable book. But what a picture of what Paul sums up in the poignant phrase, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24 RSV). That is why we need to move on into Deuteronomy, where we get the second law, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Prayer:

Thank you, Father, for these graphic things not only written down for us, but lived out in the lives of men and women like ourselves. Thank you also, for this marvelous book so accurately preserved, so skillfully recorded by which we may learn the truth, if we only give ourselves to it and discover what life is all about. Teach us, Lord, to step out of the barren wilderness of our own frustrated lives and begin to rest upon the glorious provision of the indwelling life of our Lord Jesus; to get out of the wilderness into the land, to give up the frustration of an imitation Christian and begin to enjoy the fullness of a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. We thank you for this provision in Jesus' name, Amen.

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DEUTERONOMY: The Law That Delivers

by Ray C. Stedman

Deuteronomy is the last of the five books by Moses. It is a pastime of scholars today and a supposed mark of intelligence to raise the question of whether or not Moses actually wrote these books. There are those who maintain that Moses really wasn't the writer, but that the Pentateuch was made up by some unknown editor who went through ancient books and abstracted various parts, putting them together in a collection. They say we now have nothing more than a collection of writings by unknown authors whose names have been totally lost to us, and that Moses' name was simply added as the author. This is what is called "the documentary theory of scriptures." Anyone who studies comparative religions in high school or college will probably be exposed to it. Fortunately, it is a theory that has already been very well answered and exposed as false. Amazingly, though, it is still being taught in many places as though it were true.

I remember that Dr. Ironside told me years ago of listening to an outstanding liberal speaker at the University of California at Berkeley who said something like this to the listening young men:

Young gentlemen, I am regarded, at least in some circles, as an authority on the documentary hypothesis of the Old Testament books of the Pentateuch and many questions are asked me regarding the so-called books of Moses. Much is being said today about the assured results of higher criticism and the critics tell us that it is now certain that Moses did not write the books ascribed to his name. But I want to say that after having examined all the evidence very, very carefully, and having worked in this field for many years, my conclusion is that if the five books of Moses were not written by

him, they must have been written by somebody else named Moses.

The ordinary and usual concept that these are the books of Moses is a very authentic one. The book of Deuteronomy is the last great word from the mighty man of God, just before his death. It begins with a word about Moses and that he delivered these words to Israel beyond the Jordan, in Arabah wilderness, and it closes with the account of the death of Moses. It says that God ordered Moses to go up into Mount Nebo which overlooked the promised land. But because of his disobedience to God in striking the rock with a rod instead of speaking to bring forth water for the people in the wilderness, he was not permitted to enter the land himself. But he went up into the mountain and saw the land. And although there was not a single sign of deterioration in his physical body, he died, and God buried him there; no man knows where Moses is buried.

But before he left, he preached this tremendous message that we have recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. This great sermon was delivered at the end of forty years of wandering in the wilderness. This was a new generation of people who were camped just across the Jordan River, not far from the City of Jericho. The message looks ahead to the life that will be theirs when they have entered into the land. They are through with the wilderness and ready to enter the land of Canaan.

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Now let me remind you that these five books of Moses are what might be called God's visual aids to demonstrate what is happening to us in our own spiritual life. As God leads the people of Israel out of Egypt through the wilderness into the land of Canaan, they reproduce in all their journey the exact same problems, same obstacles, same enemies, and the same victories that we will be encountering all through the journey of our spiritual life. The bondage depicted by Israel as slaves of Egypt is the same as the bondage to the world we experienced before we were Christians. And the land of Canaan, flowing with milk and honey, pictures a life filled with continual victory, which can be ours in Christ. All this is God's way of picturing for us what is happening in our individual lives. If you read your Old Testament with this key in hand, it becomes a simply luminous book. Every story in it has a direct relationship to you and there are marvelous lessons to be learned.

In my own experience, I could not understand the mighty truths declared in the New Testament until I saw them visually demonstrated in the Old Testament. As these stories come to life for us and we see how they apply to our own experience, then the New Testament truths which are so familiar to our ears become living, vibrant, vital experiences.

Moses' great sermon in Deuteronomy falls into three divisions. (Every good preacher has three points to his message.)

- The first four chapters review God's love and care of Israel in the wilderness. Most of these people waiting to enter the land had gone through only part of the wilderness journey. They were only children when, forty years earlier, Israel had stood at Kadesh-barnea and refused to enter into the land. Many of them are now just young men and women -- twenty or thirty years of age. They need to be reminded of what God has done during the wilderness journey.

So Moses' first task is to recite to them the wonderful care and love of God watching over them, as he led them with a pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day, and guided them through the trackless, howling desert. He tells how God brought water from the rock to slake their thirst in a vast and waterless area. And how he delivered them from their enemies again and again; how he fed them with manna that did not fail. Imagine it! For forty years God fed more than two million people every day with manna that fell from heaven. What marvelous evidence of his loving concern for this people.

- The second division is a great resume of the law. The Ten Commandments appear in the Bible for the second time here, beginning with Chapter Five, Verse 27. Here are the laws on divorce, on faithlessness and the penalty that was extracted if any were caught in some suspicious situation. Here are the penalties for idolatry, and for sorcery and the warnings of God against falling into the terrible, terrible deeds practiced by the tribes that then inhabited the land.

It is essential to understand that the land into which these people were coming was inhabited by people who were utterly given over to lewd and obscene practices. The book of Deuteronomy is a mighty revelation that God expected his people to live in the midst of a sex-saturated society, among people who were completely committed to the most vile practices. I think this is encouraging to us who are being asked to live in just such a society today. And yet God expected his people to keep themselves completely from these things and to be a holy people in the midst of sex-mad nations. Then, at the end of this section, there is a recapitulation of the sanitary laws, which are also found largely in the book of Leviticus.

- The third division of the book, Chapters 27 through 34, is a mighty revelation of the future, both in terms of blessings and of curses upon Israel. The twenty-eighth chapter is one of the most amazing prophecies ever recorded. This prophetic passage is fully as complete and remarkable in its detail as any other prophecy in scripture. It is a prediction of the entire history of the Jewish people. even, after they ceased to be a nation and were scattered over the face of the earth. Here you can find the entire record of all that Israel has gone through in these long, long centuries.
 - First, there is the prediction of the Babylonian dispersion; when Israel would fail to heed the prophets and turn to other gods, God would send them out into captivity. This happened, as you know, under Nebuchadnezzar.
 - Then there is the prediction of their return to the land and how, after centuries, they would fall again into the terrible sin of rejecting the Messiah. A strange nation would come in from the west, the Romans, who would be hard and cruel people. They would burn the

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cities, destroy the inhabitants and disperse them again, to the ends of the earth.

- Israel would wander for many, many centuries as a people without a land, but God would at last gather them again and there would be an ultimate restoration. All of this is precisely predicted in the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy. There are predicted blessings for the obedience of the people -- wonderful blessings. And there are curses that would come upon them if they disobeyed the word of God.

The key to this book is in its name: Deuteronomy means "the second law." The first giving of the law was in the twentieth chapter of the book of Exodus, where you have the Ten Commandments. Why was it necessary for the Holy Spirit to give the law twice? Why do you find the Ten Commandments once in Exodus and again in Deuteronomy? And all the sanitary regulations and the dietary regulations are reproduced in Deuteronomy. Why? From the book of Romans in the New Testament we learn that the law of God has two functions. In Paul's great argument in Romans, the law is also brought in twice. It is introduced first in Chapter One and then again in Chapter Seven. And in the third chapter there is a specific statement of what the law was designed to do. Most of us think God gave the law to the human race to keep us from doing wrong and to make us do right. If you ask the man on the street what was the purpose of the Ten Commandments, he would probably say, "It is to keep us from doing wrong." But this is not the reason the law was given. God never dreamed for a moment that the law would keep anybody from doing wrong. The reason the law was given is set forth in Romans:

"Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law..." [Why?] "... so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (Rom. 3: 19RSV)

That is the reason the law was given in the first place. It was given to man to reveal the sinfulness of his acts. Because there is this amazing faculty about the human heart: we never think that what we are doing is wrong. It is always what the other fellow does that is wrong, isn't it?

It's remarkable the different expressions we have for this. We have a whole category of words that use

apply to things we do and quite a different set for what everybody else does.

- Others have prejudices -- we have convictions.
- Others are stingy -- we are very thrifty.
- Others try to keep up with the Joneses -- we are simply trying to get ahead.

And so it goes all the way down the line.

Now what does the law do? Well, the law comes in and applies the same terms to everyone. The law says,

- "You shall not murder."
- "You shall not steal."
- "You shall not covet".
- "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and have no other gods."

And the law is absolutely impartial in its application. When we are confronted with the law of God, we can no longer deceive ourselves. We have to admit that what we are doing is wrong. God said that the law was given so that every mouth might be stopped. There is nobody who dares to stand up to God and say, "Well, others may be wrong, but right here you've got someone that leads a good, clean, moral life." The law says: No!

"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23 KJV)

Therefore, the cross of Christ becomes the answer to what man did. What Jesus did on the cross is the answer to what we have done. "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree," {cf. 1 Pet 2:24}. That is set forth so beautifully in the books of Exodus and Leviticus in the sacrifices of the lamb, the goat, the oxen, the calf and the other animals. They are pictures of the blood Jesus Christ shed for the transgressions and sins we have done. There is no way for a sinful man to deal with a holy God except by some payment, some ransom, or some justification being rendered to him for man's sins. It is the law that makes us aware that we need to make this payment.

But the law comes in again in Romans Seven. Once our sins are settled, isn't that enough? Once we discover through the law that we have done what is wrong in God's sight and are guilty before him, isn't that enough? No!! There is another purpose of the Law. Paul says,

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**What then shall we say? That the law is sin?
By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law,
I should not have known sin.
(Rom. 7:7 RSV)**

It is not sins here, but sin. Not what I have done, but what I am. If it had not been for the law, I would not have known that I am under the grip and influence of an alien, satanic philosophy which is in itself sin.

I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. (Rom. 7:7-8 RSV)

Paul continues:

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? [Was it the law that did this?] By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. (Rom. 7:13 RSV)

He says, not only do I realize that I have done things which merit the just wrath of God, but that I am a sinner indeed and have received Jesus Christ as having paid the price on the cross, thus settling the debt for my sins. But it is also through the law that I understand that I not only do things that are wrong, but what I am is wrong in God's sight. The answer to this, we discover from the book of Romans, is in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He died to pay for our sins. But further Paul writes:

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (Rom. 5:10 RSV)

I learn that it is the presence of a living Savior within my heart, who dwells within me, and who makes available to me everything that he is, that is the answer to what I am.

- I need what he did because of what I have done.
- But I need what he is because of what I am.

This is what the book of Deuteronomy illustrates for us.

If you read carefully through Deuteronomy you will find two themes running throughout this entire discourse that are not found in Leviticus or Exodus:

The first great theme is **of man's utter weakness and inability**, even though he is cleansed, to do anything in himself to please God. There is nothing he can do in himself. His sincere, dedicated efforts to please avail nothing. "The mind that is set on the flesh...cannot please God," as Paul puts it, {Rom. 8:7a, 8:8b RSV}. Right along with this is a wonderful parallel theme – the theme of God's abiding presence. God himself is the answer to the demands of the law in us. He himself takes up residence with us in order that he might meet the demands in himself. What he demands of us, he himself supplies.

Let's look at a few passages so that you may see this yourself.

1. First in Deuteronomy 6 you have the theme of man's weakness. Moses says:

"When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord our God has commanded you?'" (Deut 6:20 RSV)

In other words, why do you do these things? Why do you go through all these ceremonies? Why do you kill these lambs and goats and sheep? Why do you go up to the tabernacle? What is the purpose of all this? When your son asks you that, what do you say?

"then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt;'" (Deut 6:21a RSV)

That is where we begin. That is what we are. We are no better than slaves.

"We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes; and he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land..." (Deut. 21-23 RSV)

He brought us out so that he might bring us into the land. These are all symbols by which God is teaching us what it takes to get us out of Egypt and into the land. That was the explanation they were to make to their sons.

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2. Further on Moses explains:

“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession...” (Deut 7:6a RSV)

A people for his own possession where he himself will dwell.

**“...but it is because the Lord [Jesus] loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”
(Deut. 7:6b-8 RSV)**

It wasn't anything in you; you have nothing. It was God who did it – not man.

3. And in Chapter Nine, there is this elaboration:

“Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land'... (Deut. 9:4a RSV)

“Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land; but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, (Deut. 9:5a RSV)

**“Know therefore, that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people.”
(Deut. 9:6RSV)**

4. Near the end of the book, in Chapter 29, Moses said:

“You know how we dwelt in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed; and you have seen their detestable things, their idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold, which were among them. Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away this day from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations...” (Deut 29:16-18a RSV)

After forty years of training in the wilderness he says, “Watch out. You never get to the place where you can stand on your own. Never!

“...lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This would lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. The Lord would not pardon him, but rather the anger of the Lord and his jealousy would smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book would settle upon him, and the Lord would blot out his name from under heaven.” {Deut. 29:18b-20 RSV}

You see man never gets to stand in his own strength. God never makes us so strong that we no longer need him. Never. We are continually dependent upon him. This is the great lesson taught in Deuteronomy, just as it is also taught in Romans 5 through 8.

Accompanying this theme is that of God's abiding presence as the strength of the believer:

1. Back in Chapter Seven:

“If you say in your heart, 'These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?' You shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt,” (Deut. 7:17-18 RSV)

When you are up against problems in life – giants, difficulties, and various trials you say to yourself, “I don't have any strength in myself, I can't do this;”-- what should you remember? That God does it. God is in you. God is there to meet that problem. God is there for living. He is there for the problem of your life.

“...remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs, the wonders, the mighty hand, and the outstretched arm, by which the Lord your God brought you out; so will Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. Moreover the Lord your God will send hornets among them, until those who are left and hide themselves from you are destroyed. You shall not be in dread of them; for the Lord your God is in the midst of you, a great and terrible God.” {Deut. 7:18b-21 RSV}

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What a statement!

2. Then in chapter eight:

“And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.”(Deut. 8:3)

Does that sound familiar to you? Those are the very words Jesus used in the wilderness when he explained to the devil why he did not, would not, and even could not – in that ultimate sense of obedience – turn the stones to bread. He said “You don't understand how I live. I don't live by doing remarkable signs to make everyone look up in amazement. Man doesn't live like that. Man lives not 'by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.' But God is in me. That is what makes me strong.” (cf, Matt. 4:1-4)

3. Again the theme of God's presence:

“You are the sons of the Lord your God; [therefore] you shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, [There he lives. There he dwells.] out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth.” (Deut 14:1-2 RSV)

4. Even in the midst of the sanitary regulations for Israel, where he is giving orders to the people, governing the uttermost limits of their life he says:

“You shall have a place outside the camp and you shall go out to it; and you shall have a stick with your weapons; and when you sit down outside, you shall dig a hole with it, and turn back and cover up your excrement.” (Deut. 23:12, 13 RSV)

Why?

“Because the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to save you and to give up your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy, that he may not see anything indecent among you, and turn away from you.” (Deut. 23:14 RSV)

The presence of the living God is the secret of a satisfying life.

Chapter 30 contains one of the most remarkable passages in the Bible. Here is a marvelous explanation of the “dynamic” that keeps the law. What is it that makes it possible for a man to obey the law? In the first part of this chapter, Moses recounts the law again. He tells the people of the blessings that will come and warns of cursings if they disobey. Then he says, Deuteronomy 30:11-14:

“For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you...” (Deut 30:11a RSV)

Every man who falls short says, “It is no use. The law is too hard for me. I can't do that.” Moses says it is not too hard for you.

“...neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’” (Deut. 30:11b-13 RSV)

That is, who can bring this near to us so that it will come into our very lives? Now listen to what he says:

“But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.” (Deut. 30:14 RSV)

What does that mean but the indwelling life of God himself! And these very words are picked up by the apostle Paul when he writes about the two occasions when the law was given – the first law in Exodus and the second law in Deuteronomy:

Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it. (Rom. 10: 5 RSV)

But Israel found it utterly impossible to live by the law on that basis. Now Paul says, again quoting from Moses – this time in Deuteronomy:

But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” (that is, to bring Christ down) (Rom. 10:6 RSV)

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But what does it say? The word is near you on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Rom. 10: 8-9 RSV)

There it is. The two great things are the death of the Lord Jesus and the raising again from the dead, making his life available to others. This is what Paul calls “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2) fulfilling by another principle the righteousness which the law demands.

You know that old illustration of the plane – the law of gravity continually holds us down to our seat, but the law of aerodynamics overcomes the law of gravity. It doesn't cancel it out. It simply overcomes it. You simply step into a plane and sit down. You don't have to cling to your seat; you don't have to hang on to the sides of the plane in order to stay aloft once you are in the air. You just rest on the fact that there is a law at work that is keeping you from fulfilling the law of gravity. If you were ever to get to the place where you thought you had it learned and you said to the stewardess, “Will you open the door please? I think I will go on by myself,” you would be very literally “jumping to a conclusion!”

But in this quiet, continual, confident resting on the fact that God is the ample provision of all that he requires from us, there is the ability to fulfill the

righteousness which the law demands. And that is what the book of Deuteronomy teaches. The Israelites are taught the principle, at least in shadow, of how to live in the land.

The only book that could possibly follow this is the book of Joshua in which the people are led into the land.

Prayer:

Our Father, what marvelous truths you have unfolded to us in this great word. How feebly we apprehend it, but teach us, Lord; teach us by your Holy Spirit. Teach us, young and old alike. Teach us to be dissatisfied with life in the wilderness. Lord, make us to be fed up with this continual barrenness, this empty, frustrating experience of trying to do something on our own, and struggling and failing all the time. Make us desperately ready to listen, and to heed this delivering word, Lord: how we can be set free from this wretched man and made to walk in fullness of your Spirit so that the righteousness which the law demands might be fulfilled in us. Not by us, but by the Lord Jesus working through us in his blessed, risen life. We pray in his name, Amen.

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JOSHUA: Guidebook to Victory

by Ray C. Stedman

The book of Joshua (whose name means “God is salvation”) is packed with practical lessons – challenging concepts to help grasp the principles of a Spirit-led life. The key to the book is given to us in the New Testament: “these things ... were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come,” (1 Cor 10:11). What the people of Israel went through in their actual historical experiences become patterns, or metaphors, that we can apply to the spiritual battles in the spiritual pilgrimage in which we are engaged. These experiences have an exact and accurate application to us.

Joshua is one of the two books of the Old Testament that every Christian should master. (The other is the book of Daniel.) These messages are primarily designed to help Christians withstand the first full impact of the battle of the world, the flesh, and the devil. If you feel the force of the opposing powers; if the tremendous, subtle deceptiveness of the principalities and powers against which we are engaged have come upon you so that you sense that you are in the conflict (Eph 6:12), these books will be especially important to you.

The fact that Joshua follows the book of Deuteronomy is certainly in the wisdom and care of God. Deuteronomy prepares us for Joshua by introducing us to the great second law of the spiritual life – “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2) – which will lead us into the experience set forth in Joshua as the book of victory.

The book of Joshua falls into three main divisions:

- Chapters 1 through 4 concern the entrance into the land and all that involves. If you are struggling right now with how to enter into a life of victory with Christ, how to move out of the wilderness of doubt, restless wanderings,

and mere subsistence into the full blessing of the Spirit-led experience, then this is the section you ought to be concerned with – Israel’s entrance into the land – out of the wilderness and into Canaan.

- Chapters 5 through 21 cover Israel’s conquest of the land through many battles and conflicts as they came into the land of promise.
- Chapters 22 through 24, including many passages from Joshua’s own lips, set before us the perils and dangers in the land that we must guard against in order to remain in the place of victory that the land represents.

The land of Canaan is a picture, as we have mentioned, of the Spirit-filled life – the life that God intended for every Christian to live. There are no exceptions to this. The Spirit-filled life is not just for certain advanced saints, but is provided by God for every one of his people. Beginning in Chapter 1 we have a marvelously descriptive picture of it:

“Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people into the land which I am giving to them, ...” {Josh 1:2a RSV}

The land is given to the people of Israel, just as the life in Christ is made available to you absolutely without effort on your part. In the third verse you will notice that although the land has been given, it still needs to be possessed: Title to it is the gift of God; possession of it is the result of an obedient walk.

“Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses.” {Josh 1:3 RSV}

The idea is, you can have all that you will take. You can have every bit of the spiritual life that you want. You will never get any more. God will never give you more than you are ready to take. So if you are not satisfied with the degree of your real experience of victory, it is because you haven't really wanted any more. You can have all that you want. “Every place where the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you.”

Then the land is described as abundant and far-reaching; a land in which you will find all you need, in every area of life; “a land flowing with milk and honey,” (Exod 3:8):

“From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory.” {Josh 1:4 RSV}

But we find that it is also a land of both conflict and victory:

“No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.” {Josh 1:5 RSV}

One of the first things we learn in coming into this place of walking in the Spirit is that although it is a place of conflict, every conflict can be a victory. There need not be any defeats. It is a frontier, if you like, and there is nothing more exciting than life on a frontier. This life is especially frontier living in the victory of Christ.

The secret of living in the land includes both a promise and a presence; an obedient heart and an empowering spirit. God said:

“Be strong and of good courage; for you shall cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous...” {Josh 1:6-7a RSV}

It is going to take courage. There can be no drifting aimlessly along with the crowd. You are going to have to walk against the current.

“... being careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success.” {Josh 1:7b-8 RSV}

There is the greatness of the book of Joshua! There is the promise! The written word must be our constant, prescribed meditation and study so we may “know the truth and the truth shall set us free,” (cf, John 8:32).

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” {Josh 1:9 RSV}

And there is the accompanying presence of the Holy Spirit: an obedient heart brings an empowering spirit. That is life in the land.

In Chapter 2 we have the remarkable and intriguing story of Rahab and the spies that were sent out by Israel. When these spies came into the house of Rahab, she hid them under some flax drying on the roof. While the men of the city were searching for them, the spies learned a most startling secret from Rahab:

“I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted and there was no courage left in any man, because of you; for the Lord your God is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath, ...” {Josh 2:9-11 RSV}

How long before the spies entered into this city had these events taken place? Forty years. In other words, for forty years the inhabitants of Jericho had been a defeated foe. Their hearts were melted.

They were defeated before the armies got anywhere close. Israel could have gone in at any time and taken the land.

How long have you been waiting to enter in and take a defeated foe in your life?

Next we read of the spies:

They departed, and went into the hills, and remained there three days, until the pursuers returned; for the pursuers had made search all along the way and found nothing. Then the two men came down again from the hills, and passed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun; and they told him all that had befallen them. And they said to Joshua, “Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands; and moreover all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of us.” {Josh 2:22-24 RSV}

After three days they came back and told this story. Notice the opening verse of Chapter 3: On the third day, “early in the morning,” they prepared to go into the land. Here is a reminder to us that on the third day, early in the morning, the resurrection took place. And it is in resurrection power that they entered in to take the land of Canaan, picturing Christ in his risen life working in and through us to make us victors over all that defeats, hinders, and fetters us.

Between the Israelites and the land, however, there still flowed the Jordan River. This account of the crossing of the Jordan is very similar to the story of the crossing of the Red Sea. In many ways the two crossings picture the same thing: death. Any man venturing into the Red Sea without the waters having been parted would have gone to his death. So the crossing of these waters is a picture of death.

Now, as you may already know, the crossing of the Red Sea is a picture of Christ’s death for you and me – when he cuts us off from the world in all its attitudes, ways, and opinions. In other words, when you became a Christian, you changed your ideas and sense of values. Your baptism was an expression of the fact that you were passing out of one life into another, and that your whole attitude was changed. That was the Red Sea – his death for you. But the Jordan is a picture of your death with Christ, when you bring your Adamic life to an end; when all that you are in Adam comes to an end –

your reliance on yourself, your desire to have your own program, to live and make your own decisions, and set your own goals – and you discover that you can’t have his life with your program. If you want to hold onto your program, then you can have only your own, fallen Adamic life. But if you want his life, then you will also have his program, which is one of victory. You cross either the Red Sea or the Jordan River when you accept the principle involved in this. But crossing the Jordan is what you do when you let go of your own program, make up your mind, and say, “All right, if this is what you want for me Lord, this is what it will be.” That is what happened with Israel when they went into the land.

You cross the Jordan the same way you crossed the Red Sea:

And the Lord said to Joshua, “This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.” {Josh 3:7 RSV}

By faith – that is all – by obedience and by faith. God is saying to Joshua, “By the same way I led Moses to bring Israel through the Red Sea, so I will lead you to bring Israel through the Jordan.” The same way! You experience the life of Christ for every living moment in the very same way that you claimed the death of Christ for your sins. The faith that got you out of Egypt is the same faith that gets you into the land. As Paul writes: “As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him,” (Col. 2:6).

Was it any harder for Israel to cross the Jordan River than to cross the Red Sea? No, they just walked down, the waters rolled back, and they went right through. The same thing. No problems.

And it is no different, you see, to walk into the land. It is simply believing that God is in you and that what he said about you is true – that he has cut off the old life (you agreed to that) and he has given you a new basis that will work. You believe it and you walk out on that basis and say, “Thank you, Lord, for being in me to do through me everything that needs to be done.” And you enter the land.

In Chapter 4 you read that two memorials were set up by Israel:

- One was twelve stones on the bank of the river for a continual reminder to them of the principle of faith to which they had now returned after years of wandering in the wilderness. I believe this memorial is representative of the Lord's Supper which is a continual reminder to us of that principle of life by which we are to live.
- The other memorial was a series of twelve stones in the middle of the river which were to be placed where the priests stood while all of Israel passed over to the other side. The stones were put in place before the waters came back. This is a picture for us of how Jesus Christ stays in the place of death long enough for every area of our lives to pass out of the control of self and into the control of Christ.

In Chapter 5 we come to the second section of the conquest of the land. What a mighty story this is! As the Israelites contemplated moving in to take possession of this land, they saw the tremendous city of Jericho with its huge walls. While Jericho was the first visible obstacle in their pathway, it was not the first thing that Israel had to deal with. They had something to do in their own lives first. God never begins his conquest with the outward problem. You will discover that he begins with you; you are the first problem.

There are **three things that the people of Israel had to do** before they could destroy the enemy in the land:

1. First, they had to be circumcised. The whole generation that had been circumcised in Egypt had died in the wilderness. A whole new generation had grown up uncircumcised, so when they came into the land, the first act was circumcision. As we know from the New Testament, circumcision is a picture of a surrendered heart – a heart in which the reliance on the flesh has been put aside, cut off – a circumcised heart (Rom 2:29).
2. The second thing they needed to do was to celebrate the Passover for the first time since they had come out of the wilderness. The Passover is a remembrance of the night when the Lord and the angel of death passed over the

houses of the Israelites back in Egypt because they were protected by the sheltering blood of the lamb. It also pictures a thankful heart that looks back to that day of deliverance when Christ became our Passover sacrifice for us.

After their celebration of the Passover came a new food. The manna that had sustained them in the wilderness ceased on the day after they came into the land, and they began to eat of the satisfying corn and food of the land. As far as I can discover, the nearest thing that we have to manna today is cornflakes. How would you like cornflakes for breakfast, lunch and supper every day for forty years? They were plenty tired of cornflakes when they got into the land of Canaan. And in fact, it was never intended to be their food for forty years. They had fed on that which sustained their strength but never satisfied them. But when they came into the land, they found that which satisfies.

3. Finally, before their conquest began, Joshua had to plan the strategy for taking the city of Jericho. He must have been a perplexed and bewildered man. How could he take this huge, walled city with this "army" of people, untrained in battle. As he looked out in the moonlight over the city, he saw a man standing there with a drawn sword, and said to him, "Are you on our side or on the side of the enemy?" The man said, "No; but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come," (Josh 5:14). That is, "I haven't come to take sides but I have come to take over. It isn't your job to plan the strategy of battle. That is my job. I have given the city of Jericho into your hands." Then the man told Joshua the most remarkable battle plan that has ever been arranged. He was to have the people simply march around the city once a day for six days and on the seventh day, seven times, and then to blow a long blast on the trumpets and the walls would fall down. That was all there was to it.

As there were three preparations that needed to be made before engaging in battle, so in this section there are **three major obstacles** to be overcome before the land is won. These picture for us the

three types of problems which confront us as we walk the Christian life:

1. The first one is Jericho – with walls about 300 feet thick and 60 feet high – an immense fortress, and outward challenge, a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. It pictures for us those problems, most frequently occurring at the beginning of our experience of walking in the Spirit, when we are confronted by something that has baffled and mocked us for years. Maybe it is a habit that we have had for a long time and have never been able to overcome. Maybe it is a circumstance in which we live that is a constant threat to our spiritual life and nothing that we do seems to change it. It may be some situation in which we are placed, somebody that we have to work with, or some problem that seems absolutely insurmountable to us.

There is an amazing thing about this type of problem. When we follow the strategy outlined here – simply walk around it, displaying the ark of God (the presence of God) while shouting and playing the trumpets as a display of triumph – the walls fall down. When there is a complete change of attitude towards a problem of this nature, the problem disappears. It isn't the visible obstacle that is the problem, but our attitude toward it; as soon as the attitude changes, the problem dissolves.

But God had Israel march around for seven days. Why that long? Well, it took them that long to change their attitude toward Jericho. All that time they were thinking, "What a huge place. How will we ever take this place? What an absolutely insurmountable fortress." Day after day, while walking around this city, they had time to think about God in their midst, the power that he had displayed, and what he could do. Gradually their attitude changed so that on the seventh day they shouted in triumph and the walls fell down. There was nothing to it when they obeyed.

2. The second obstacle in their path is the little city of Ai; but first, there is the story of the sin of Achan. He coveted something that was forbidden. He took it and hid it and when they went up against Ai, Israel was utterly defeated. Joshua fell upon his face before the Lord and

said, "What is the reason for this?" (cf, Josh 7:7). God said to him, "Joshua, get up off your face. Don't pray to me now. There is sin in the camp. Go search it out." Finally, after searching through all the ranks of Israel, they filtered down to Achan and his family and Achan confessed.

Ai, then, is a beautiful picture for us of those inward problems arising out of our own lusts for that which God says we cannot, and must not have. We play the hypocrite and then discover that we are prey to every evil force that comes our way. We have no power to stand. We experience failure and defeat, as Israel did. But the minute this sin was confessed, they went up to Ai and it was no longer a problem. It was a battle, but no problem. Through it, they gained victory over the problem of the flesh.

3. The two battles of Gibeon and Beth-horon comprise a third picture for us of the special attacks of Satan upon the believer:

- Gibeon is the story of deception. The Gibeonites dressed themselves up in old clothes, took old moldy bread and tattered wine skins, and rode emaciated donkeys out to meet Joshua, (Josh 9:3 ff). When Joshua met them, he said, "Where are you from?" "Oh," they said, "we are from a country far away. We have heard of the mighty prowess of Israel and we have come over to make a treaty with you." Joshua said, "How do I know that you are what you claim to be?" They said, "Well, look. Look here at our provisions. We took this bread fresh from the oven just when we left, and look how moldy and dry it is. And our clothes – how ragged and tattered they are. We have traveled so far that our donkeys are all worn out." Joshua believed them and made a pact with them. When they had signed the treaty, Israel walked over the hill and there was Gibeon! They had been trapped and deceived by an angel of light – by a Satanic deception which appeared to be right, and good, and trustworthy, but was not. They had to stick by their treaty and spare the Gibeonites, and as a result, the Gibeonites

became thorns in their side throughout the rest of Israel's history. That is the story of Gibeon, the angel of light.

- Then comes the account of Beth-horon when all the kings of the Canaanites banded together and came roaring down in a tremendous league of nations against Joshua. It was a mighty battle, and although Israel was greatly outnumbered, God gave the victory in the remarkable manner of arresting the sun in its flight, thus making the day of battle to last until victory came – the long day of Joshua.

Here is a picture of what happens when the devil comes as a roaring lion in some overwhelming catastrophe that seems to shatter us, to shake our faith, and make us cry out, “God, what is happening to me? Why should this happen to me?” And we seem to be swept off our feet by this terrible, staggering thing.

But Joshua stood fast in faith, depending upon God to simply work a miracle. And God worked a miracle. “The righteous will never be moved,” we are told (cf, Prov 10:30). This is why Paul tells us in Ephesians that when the enemy comes like this, we are to just stand still – that is all – stand on the promises of God and the enemy will be defeated, (cf, Eph. 6:13).

The rest of this section (Chapters 11 through 21) is simply a mopping up operation. After the battle of Beth-horon, the land was practically theirs although there were individual victories. The victories of Caleb, Othniel and the Josephites and the setting aside of the cities of refuge all contain wonderful lessons of the audacity of faith – taking what God has promised and using it in individual lives.

In the last section we learn of **the perils that beset us**, how to stay in the land, and certain particular hazards. They are threefold:

1. First of all comes the account of the misunderstood motives that were ascribed to the Reubenites, the Gadites and half-tribe of Manasseh. They built an altar on the wrong side of the Jordan, causing indignation among

the other tribes of Israel. To them, this was idolatry and disobedience to God's command. So they gathered themselves together and came to make war against their own brethren. When they got there, the Reubenites, the Gadites and half-tribe of Manasseh were tremendously upset. They cried out, “Before God, this is not a rebellion. Let us explain,” {Josh 22:21 ff}. Then they explained that they were afraid that some time in the future the Israelites in the land might say to the tribes outside the land, “What have you to do with the Lord our God? God has made the boundary here at the Jordan River. You don't belong to us. You are outside our nation.” So they said, “We have built this altar not for worship or sacrifice, but simply to remind us that we belong with the people on the other side of Jordan” (vs. 28).

It is a wonderful picture for us of the peril of improper criticism, of ascribing wrong motives to people. If there is anything that will drive us out of the land of victory, it is to become engaged in a controversy over misunderstood motives.

2. The second peril is incomplete obedience. Although the land had been given to the people of Israel, they did not possess all of it, but left some of it unconquered. As Joshua warns the people as he nears the end of his life, the uncaptured people whom they permitted to live were to become snares and thorns to them throughout the rest of their history (Josh 23:12-13).
3. Finally, Joshua appeared before the people with a great message challenging them to walk before the Lord their God, saying, “Choose this day whom you will serve,” (Josh 24:15b RSV). He is saying: “You think you can go on in a sort of neutral position between following the devil and following the Lord. You can't do it.” This is exactly what Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters;” (Matt 6:24a RSV). You must serve either God or Satan. You cannot serve both. There is no intermediate ground. Here is Israel's response:

Then the people answered: “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods; for it is the

Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, and who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land; therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.” {Josh 24:16-18 RSV}

Brave sounding words.

But Joshua said to the people, “You cannot serve the Lord;” {Josh 24:19a RSV}

You cannot do it. The greatest peril of all in the Christian faith is false confidence. You say, “Well, certainly I can do what God wants. I’ve got what it takes. After all, I know the Scriptures. I have been raised in the right church. I can certainly walk faithfully and honestly before God. Don’t talk to me about apostasy, defeat, back-sliding. I can serve the Lord.” Joshua says, “You cannot serve God.”

This greatest lesson of the spiritual life is that you have no strength in yourself to stand, no matter how long you have walked before God. You can never have a moment of strength to stand by yourself. Your strength comes out of weakness and your sense of dependence. Your sense of your constant need of God’s strength is the only thing

that will keep you. Joshua, the wise old man that he was, said:

“You cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God;” {Josh 24:19a RSV}

“If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.” {Josh 24:20 RSV}

But the people said, “No, Joshua, you don’t know what you are talking about. We are going to serve the Lord anyway.”

That is why the next book, the book of Judges, is the book of defeat.

Prayer:

Our heavenly Father, what marvels of knowledge and wisdom are wrapped up in this remarkable book that you have given to us and how inconceivably poverty stricken we are because we do not know it. We neglect it. We do not listen to it. How we stumble on from defeat to defeat in bitter disillusionment, often scarcely realizing what the reason is because we are so woefully untaught by the Spirit. Teach us now to open the book and ask the blessed Holy Spirit himself to make it real to us that we may understand it, grasp it, and walk in the strength of it, for we pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

JUDGES: The Pattern of Defeat

by Ray C. Stedman

There is hardly any book of the Bible that can compare to Judges in color and intrigue. You wince as you read how Ehud the judge went to visit the king in his summer palace and slid his dagger between the fifth and sixth ribs of the king so that the fat closed around it and he couldn't draw it out again. You cringe when Jael drives the tent stake through the skull of Sisera and pins him to the ground – and worry with Gideon when God cuts his army down from thirty-two thousand to three hundred, and sends him into battle. As you go through the book, you watch the terrible prophecy of the orphan Jotham fulfilled in God's strange and mysterious workings against Abimelech, the false judge.

Perhaps your heart sinks with mine when Jephthah's daughter comes out to meet him coming back from the battle and he remembers the vow that he had made that the first person he met as he came home he would sacrifice to God, and he has to fulfill that vow. Perhaps you glory with Samson as he wreaks havoc among the Philistines with that tremendous God-given strength of his, and yet wonder at his naive folly in allowing the Philistine maiden to worm the secret of his strength out of his heart, and finally destroy him. Doubtless you turn with revulsion from the story of the Benjaminite perversion that marks perhaps the darkest and blackest chapter in all the history of Israel.

It is, to say the least, a very interesting book to read. But in broader perspective it is essentially the story of a deteriorating nation, and, as such, it is a picture for us of deteriorating Christian life.

Now the interesting thing about the books of Joshua and Judges is that they both take place in the land of Canaan. In the light of the New Testament revelation that is given to us, all these things – although they are reputable accounts of actual history – nevertheless also serve a dual purpose as pictures of the spiritual encounters that we will be up against. “These things,” as the Apostle Paul says, “were written down for our instruction” (1 Cor 10:11 RSV), God retraces in our lives the very circumstances, the very battles, and the very conflicts that we find Israel going through.

In Joshua, the land of Canaan is the picture of the Spirit-filled life. The land signifies the understanding and application of the principles of victory over sin through the risen life of an indwelling Lord. God's whole purpose for the believer is to get him out of Egypt – the world and its ways, the place of slavery and bondage – through the wilderness with all its defeat, barrenness and fragmentary enjoyment of God's resources, into the land with its promise, supply and victory.

This is brought out so clearly in the book of Judges. While Joshua is a book of victory (under Joshua – which means “Jesus” – there was consistent victory when the Israelites faithfully obeyed him). Judges is a book of defeat and of failure. It is the first in a series of books which sets before us the warning spots, the danger signals, and the perils that lie along the pathway of a believer. The pattern of defeat that is described in the book of Judges is presented to us over and over again.

The principle that always meant defeat in the lives of the nation of Israel is given to us in the very

last verse of the book. If you miss that, you miss the key to the book:

In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25 RSV)

Notice that it does not say, "Every man did what was *wrong* in his own eyes." These people were not trying to do *wrong*. They were not essentially rebellious people determined to thwart the will of God in their lives. At this stage of Israel's history these people were very determined to do right, but they were trying to do what was right in their own eyes. The pattern of peril in this book of Judges can be simply put this way: They were given over to the folly of consecrated blundering. They were consecrated, dedicated blunderers – meaning to do right but ending up all wrong.

I can tell you that no pattern repeats itself more frequently in my counseling sessions than this. Many, many times I have heard people say, "Oh, I don't know what went wrong. I meant to do right. I did what I thought was best. But everything seemed to go wrong."

This was the problem with Israel in the book of Judges. As the verse says, there was no objective authority in their life. There was no king in Israel in those days. Actually they did have a king: Jehovah was their king, but they did not take him seriously. And when they did not take him seriously, they had nothing else to do but to take themselves seriously. So they did what they thought was right, guided by their conscience, dedicated to an earnest effort to do what was right, but always ending up wrong.

In the first two chapters of the book we see **the pattern of defeat** that will repeat itself again and again, in cycle after cycle of frustration. Each time God in his grace comes in and delivers the people, only to have them enter another cycle of defeat. It begins in the first chapter:

Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and its villages, ... {Judg 1:27a RSV}

The discouraging story of defeat contained in the book of Judges also takes place in the land, which is simply an indication that victory in the Christian life is not an automatic thing. Just be-

cause you know the great truths of deliverance through a risen Christ doesn't mean that you automatically enjoy them. This is one of the greatest problems Christians struggle with. They think that because they have come to a place where they understand, perhaps for the first time, the great delivering truths of Romans, Chapters 6 through 8, that these truths are automatically working in their lives. It is a great shock to them to discover that although they know the truth, it isn't very visible in their experience. There can be a great gap between what we know and what we actually experience.

The tribe of Manasseh failed to obey God when he had commanded them (as they came into the land) to drive out all the tribes of the Canaanites. Look at Verse 29:

And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them. {Judg 1:29 RSV}

Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them. {Judg 1:30a RSV}

Again in Verse 31:

Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon, ... {Judg 1:31a RSV}

Or the inhabitants of other villages. Look at Verse 33 referring to Naphtali (that's not soap; that is the name of a tribe of Israel):

Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Bethshernesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, {Judg 1:33a RSV}

The Amorites pressed the Danites back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain; {Judg 1:34 RSV}

That was just the beginning of the story of the defeat of Israel. They did not take God seriously about the threat their enemies posed to them, but instead, moved in among them. God had said that they were to drive out every inhabitant of these Canaanite villages. They were not to mingle with

them or have anything to do with them. They were not to marry with them or associate with them.

But when Israel came to some of these villages, instead of mounting armed warfare against them, they went in and investigated the towns. What they saw seemed quite innocuous. The villages did not seem particularly dangerous and the people seemed to be very fine people. So they said, "We will let you stay in this village. We'll start another town right next door." They allowed these tribes to retain their villages in among the cities and villages of Israel. They settled for less than total victory.

Have you ever done that? As a Christian, have you ever settled for less than total victory in your life? Did you stop smoking, for instance, or drinking, or wearing overshoes in bed, or all those other terrible habits that you had as a non-Christian? But when it came to other matters such as a hot temper, or worry, or self-confidence, or pride, you said to yourself:

- "Oh, I have improved so much over what I used to be that by comparison these are just trivial things. Surely God is not going to make an issue out of these." And you allow them to stay there, with defenses protecting them:
 - "After all, I am Irish,"
 - Or "I am only human."
 - Or "My whole family does this. This is just the way I am, and you are going to have to accept me this way."

You are settling for less than total victory.

Now look at **the next step in this process**. In Chapter 2 we see God's grace as he warns them about results of this practice:

Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you into the land which I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my command." {Judg 2:1-2a RSV}

God warns them. He continues:

"What is this that you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become adversaries to you, and their gods shall be a snare to you." {Judg 2:2b-3 RSV}

And what did Israel do?

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were round about them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. {Judg 2:11-12 RSV}

The next step was open idolatry. The Baals and the Ashtaroths were the gods of the Canaanite tribes. Baal was a male god. Ashtaroth was a female god. These were fertility gods. You can almost see how easily this idolatry came about. The Israelites didn't mean to do it. They knew that God had commanded that they were not to bow down before any idols. They knew the Ten Commandments. They didn't intend to get trapped like this.

But what happened? They had been farmers in Egypt where irrigation was a means of watering the land, so they weren't used to dry land farming. They didn't know quite how to handle the crops nor what to do. When their crops came up the first spring, then, they were of rather poor quality and straggly. In contrast, the Canaanite tribes had wonderful fields of grain. The Israelites said to them. "Well, what do you do? What is your secret?" The Canaanites said, "It is very simple. We have certain fertility gods and we bow down to them and offer them sacrifices. Then they bless our crops. If you ever expect to get abundant crops in this land, you are going to have to adjust to our ways."

- Have you ever had any pressure like that put on you?
- Does anyone ever say to you, "Look, if you are ever going to get ahead in this company, you are going to have to give up some of your relig-

ious ideas. You'll have to come around to our way of doing things"?

So the Israelites gave in.

Of course, along with this advice the Canaanites taught them how to plant their crops properly, how to fertilize the soil and so forth, so that next spring, sure enough, after they had bowed down to the gods of the Canaanites, they found the crops were wonderful. The Israelites said, "There must be something to this fertility business. We'd better worship these gods after all." They forsook the God of Israel and bowed down to the Baals and Ashtaroths. Now what is not recorded here is that these were sex gods and worshipping them involved not only bowing down before dumb idols that could not speak, act, or think, but also involved the Israelites in licentious practices. Thus they gradually drifted off into idolatry.

The next step in the cycle is God's grace again. The whole pattern is of man's unutterable folly in disobeying the simple Word of God. God in his arresting grace puts block, after block, after block in the path of these people trying to alert them to what is happening. In Chapter 2, we read how God dealt with their disobedience:

They forsook the Lord, and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them; and he sold them into the power of their enemies round about, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them; and they were in sore straits. {Judg 2:13-15 RSV}

Have you every had the Lord's hand against you? Have you ever sensed that he was against you in everything that you did? What you thought you were doing in dedication and sincerity was so against what he had said, that since you hadn't taken him seriously, you discovered his hand was against you. This is what Israel discovered; nothing seemed to work out right. They found themselves in bondage. One after another of the tribes around them was allowed to rule over them. These tribes came in and made slaves out of them – sub-

jected them to servitude and bondage for year, after year, after painful year.

But God's grace comes in again for deliverance:

Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the power of those who plundered them. And yet they did not listen to their judges; for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed down to them; they soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the Lord, and they did not do so. Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; {Judg 2:16-18a RSV}

That is why this book is called "Judges." Over and over this story is repeated. God raised up Othniel; and then Ehud; and then Shamgar – judge after judge until you come to the last judge, Samson. Twelve judges altogether, all representing God's intervening grace in attempting to keep these people from the folly of their own senseless disobedience.

God will intervene continually, again and again, in our own lives to stop us from the folly of not taking him seriously about these enemies that afflict us.

The revelation of man's perpetual folly is seen, as we continue in Chapter 2:

But whenever the judge died, they turned back and behaved worse than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them; they did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. {Judg 2:19 RSV}

The total result is that the book of Judges is nothing but a record of Israel's continuous decline. Look at the first verse of the book, where Israel is calling out:

"Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" The Lord said, "Judah shall go up; ..." {Judg 1:1b-2a RSV}

They were saying, "Lord, we are here to do battle against these enemies and we want you to

say who is to go up first against them.” In the last chapter of the book they are asking exactly the same question under exactly the same circumstances, except this time the enemy is no longer the Canaanites, but their own people, the tribe of Benjamin:

The people of Israel arose and went up to Bethel, and inquired of God, “Which of us shall go up first to battle against the Benjaminites?” And the Lord said, “Judah shall go up first.” {Judg 20:18 RSV}

This marks the decline of the people from battling against their enemies, who were also the enemies of God, to battling against themselves. This happens so often in Christian experience. As you read through this book you’ll find in each cycle the pattern is exactly the same, bringing them lower and lower until they finally come out at that black and revolting episode which is described in the last two chapters, the perversion of the Benjaminites.

If you take this book and lay it along side the first chapter of Romans you will find that exactly the same pattern is followed:

1. First there is idolatry. Paul says, “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them,” {Rom 1:19 RSV}. They had no excuse, ...
2. But what did they do? “Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.” (Rom 1:22-23 RSV) – idolatry.
3. Then you will find that they turn so far from God that, as it is said, “God gave them up.” Three times it is repeated {Rom 1:24, 1:26, 1:28} that they gave themselves to their own licentious practices until they learned to practice perversions among themselves, marking the lowest stage of human folly.

The great lesson of this book, then, is that we must take God seriously about the enemy. Jesus Christ has come to save us from our sins – not to allow us to settle down to live all our lives with them. He has come to drive them out from us, and

to separate us from them. If we do not take God seriously about these things that we call trivial we will experience an inevitable sequence, taking us step by step away from the intervening grace of God, onward to a course that brings us at last to moral collapse.

I think this is the answer to those sudden moral collapses of men and women who have apparently been outstanding leaders for God, who present, on the outside at least, a fair and happy prospect that looks as though their spiritual life is strong. Then suddenly we read of some terrible moral collapse. What has happened? There has been an inward deterioration, exactly along the pattern of the book of Judges.

I think there is not one of us who isn’t asking himself, as I am asking myself,

- “Is this happening to me? Am I kidding myself?”
- In some area of my life am I saying, “Well Lord, this really isn’t very important. Why do you bother me with this matter of an impatient spirit, of an unforgiving spirit against someone, or a tendency to dwell on lustful things?”
- Or we say, “In this matter of my confidence in my own ability to do something – after all, there are lots of Christians you bless with that kind of a spirit – this isn’t very important, is it Lord?”

If this is my attitude, I am exposing myself to peril and will discover that unless I heed the intervening grace of God, and listen to his warning voice, I shall discover, sooner or later, that, as in Judges, so in my life, there will be moral collapse.

Now I trust that, as we read this book as God intended, we will see ourselves here. But let me remind you, also, that the book of Ruth is the next book.

Ruth, one of the loveliest books in the Bible, took place during the very same time as the book of Judges.

Prayer:

Thank you, Father, for your faithfulness to us. Lord, how rich is your grace; how in-

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finite is your patience; how long you delay and warn, beseech and urge, and try to turn us back. How wonderful is your saving grace that sends again and again a Savior into our life to restore us and to bring us back. Lord, we pray that we will give heed to this voice, this blessed one who has come into our hearts and lives to redeem

us, to save us, and to deliver us. Help us to walk with him and know the glory of a life of victory, so that with the Apostle Paul we can say, "Thanks be to God who in Christ always leads us in triumph and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere," (2 Cor 2:14). In Jesus' name. Amen.

RUTH: The Romance of Redemption

by Ray C. Stedman

When Benjamin Franklin was United States Ambassador to France, he occasionally attended the Infidels Club – a group that spent most of its time searching for and reading literary masterpieces. On one occasion Franklin read the book of Ruth to the club when it was gathered together, but changed the names in it so it would not be recognized as a book of the Bible. When he finished, they were unanimous in their praise. They said it was one of the most beautiful short stories that they had ever heard, and demanded that he tell them where he had run across such a remarkable literary masterpiece. It was his great delight to tell them that it was from the Bible, which they professed to regard with scorn and derision, and in which they felt there was nothing good.

The book of Ruth is certainly a literary masterpiece. It is a beautiful story of a romance. I wonder how it would be featured in some of our romance magazines today. I can almost see the headline; it would be something like: HOW ONE WOMAN FOUND HAPPINESS – IN THE ARMS OF SECOND HUSBAND! It is a book that inflames the imagination, because all through it is entwined the captivating theme of love and romance.

Although it is a beautiful story in itself, it is the story behind the story – its meaning and significance – that is simply fascinating. The book of Ruth is one of those beautiful Old Testament pictures that is designed by God himself to illustrate the dramatic truths of the Christian faith expounded in the New Testament. It is a word picture in the Old Testament illustrative of the truth we find in the New Testament, as First Corinthians tells us:

Now these things happened to them as a warning [literally, as a type] but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. (1 Cor 10:11 RSV)

It is the story of the romance of redemption.

The four divisions of this book trace for us the four major steps of the work of redemption. The book begins with **an introduction of the characters:**

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years; and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was bereft of her two sons and her husband. (Ruth 1:1-5 RSV)

In those five short verses we are introduced to a series of personalities who are the keys to this book.

One of the clues to making the Old Testament a living book is to learn the meaning of the names of

the characters who are featured in prominent places. God has hidden away great truths in these names. The story of Ruth begins with a man whose name was Elimelech. *Elimelech* means “my God is king.” In that one name the whole doctrine of man – “My God is king” – may be comprehended.

This book begins with God, just as the Bible begins with God – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” (Gen 1:1 RSV). The Bible never argues the existence of God. The God of the Bible is the God who is, the God who exists. From beginning to end you will never find any apologetic dissertations on whether or not God exists. The Bible starts with the fact of God. The existence of God is a matter that rests wholly upon the innate revelation given to the human heart.

Man either admits that God exists or he denies that God exists – one or the other. He is built to recognize the existence of God. There is no hope for him if he doesn’t, because as Hebrews 11 tells us, “For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists,” (Heb 11:6b RSV). God is. And it isn’t difficult to believe that God is. Light from God is streaming to us from all around. It is more difficult to believe that God isn’t. Only those who are educated beyond their intelligence finally talk themselves into believing that there is no God. The whole story of man begins with that great fact that God is.

But there is more: “My God is king.” It is the “God who is” who is my God. That means that the “God who is” is available to me as a man. The God who exists and created the universe has made himself completely available to man. Hebrews 11:6 goes on to say “whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Jesus said, “seek and you will find;” (Matt 7:7b RSV). If a man never finds God, it is because he never bothered to seek. Any man who wants to come to God – discover the realities of God, grasp the fact of God, and experience the person of God – needs simply to begin to seek God, because God makes himself available step by step to the man who begins to look. Then he becomes “my God” and this is the relationship that man in his innocence had with God. In the eighth Psalm we read David’s remarkable statement:

**When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which thou hast established;
what is man that thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man that thou dost care for him? (Psa 8:3-4 RSV)**

Then the Psalmist answers his own question:

**... thou ... dost crown him glory and honor.
Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands;
(cf, Psa 8:5-6a RSV)**

Here is the third facet of that name “my God is king.” Man was given dominion over all the universe that God had made, but only as he himself was subject to the dominion of the God who made him. As he subjected himself to the dominion of “my God” (all that you are is available to me), he began to exercise dominion over all the rest of the world. As he was subject to dominion, he was given dominion. This was exactly the relationship into which Jesus Christ came. After quoting the verse from Psalm 8, the writer of Hebrews said,

... we do not yet see all things in subjection to him. But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels ... that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one. {cf, Heb. 2:8b-9 RSV}

We see Jesus. When Jesus Christ came, he came not to act as God, but as a man, subject to the dominion of God. All dominion was given to him. As he said:

“All power in heaven and on earth is given unto me.” {cf, Matt 28:18 KJV}

Why? “Because,” he said, “I am totally subject to the dominion of my father.” That is the true relationship of man with God. Thus when Adam walked in that relationship, all the universe was subject to his dominion because his “God was king.” That is man in his innocence.

Now Elimelech married a woman whose name was Naomi, which means “pleasure.” In the joining of these two names you have the entire doctrine of the fall of man. When Satan came to Eve in the Garden of Eden, he said to her, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’”

(Gen. 3:1 RSV). In the clever phrasing of that question he suggested that God was denying that which would bring pleasure to her. Then he dangled the fruit in front of her and said, "It looks good, doesn't it? I'll tell you something. It tastes better than it looks. And if you will take of it, you will find that it will make you wise." The devil in his cleverness did not lay before Eve a temptation which she could obviously see through. He offered her a very delightful proposition. He suggested to her that if she would take of this fruit – which God in his sovereignty had forbidden them to take as a test of their obedience – she would be given the ability to become like God. She would be entering into a new domain where she could step out into her own independent activity and be "god" without God. Satan offered man pleasure.

When "my God is king" married "pleasure" he stepped outside of the limits God had placed upon him. He sought his own pleasure before he sought his own God. We read in the New Testament that such are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God," {2 Tim 3:4 RSV}. This is the spirit of the age, and has been through the centuries. In the marriage of Elimelech to Naomi we have a picture of the fall of man.

Now this couple had two children whose names were Mahlon and Chilion. *Mahlon* means "sick," and *Chilion* means "pining away."

Imagine naming your children that! How would you like to go visit this home and ask about the boys, Mahlon and Chilion? There is little Mahlon lying in the corner, sick, pasty-faced with a temperature, hovering between life and death. Little Chilion is nothing but skin and bones – wasting away.

When these boys grew older, they went into the country of Moab. While they were there (we read) the boys married girls who were Moabites. Their names were Ruth and Orpah. Now, *Orpah* means "fawn" – a little young deer; we also use the word in English to mean a superficial kind of love – *fawning* upon someone – a kind of surface love or attention. *Ruth* means "beauty."

The next thing we read is that Elimelech died, Mahlon died, and Chilion died. All three died – and this is exactly in line with the picture in Scripture of the results of the fall. After Adam and Eve were excluded from the Garden of Eden we read that they had a son, Abel, who was murdered by his brother Cain. Then we read of the generations of

Adam. Adam had a son whose name was Seth. Seth died. Seth had a son whose name was Enos. Enos died. Enos had a son. He died – and he died, and he died, and he died. All down through that chapter the bell of death rings out again and again. When "my God is king" marries "pleasure" the result is death. Here in the land of Moab these three men died and left behind three heartbroken, lonely widows.

Now the heart of the story really begins with these three widows in the land of Moab. We read that Naomi decided to return to her home in Bethlehem in Judah. Both of these girls made a promise to accompany her back into the land. As they started out along the road and got further from Moab, Orpah kept dropping behind. At last Naomi saw that Orpah's heart was really not in this journey – that she longed to go back into Moab. So Naomi kissed Orpah good-bye and sent her back. Naomi said to Ruth, "Do you want to go back also?" Then Ruth said those wonderful words that we often hear a bride say to the groom during the marriage service, standing at the altar together:

"Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God;" {Ruth 1:16b RSV}

In these two girls there is a beautiful picture of the two kinds of commitments that are made to Jesus Christ. Many, many times you will find that two people who at the very same moment and under the same circumstances, being confronted by the same truth, will make a commitment to Jesus Christ – but one of them is a soulish commitment. Such people are emotionally stirred for the moment. They are drawn by some superficial view of our Lord's person or his glory, or something that they hope to gain from their commitment. They do not actually meet the Lord in the sanctuary of their spirit. At the moment you can't tell the difference between this and a true commitment – they both look alike. But as the two walk on in the Christian life, one begins to hang back and at last, like Orpah, comes to the place where, as she says. "I can't go on any longer." We read that Orpah turned and went back to her own people and her own gods. It was only a superficial change that

had occurred; they had always been her own people and her own gods.

But in Ruth you see that marvelous commitment that says, “Where you go I will go.” I am wholly yours – body, soul and spirit. “Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God shall be my God. I will die where you die. I will never go back.” We read in Verse 19:

So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, “Is this Naomi?” She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, ...” {Ruth 1:19-20a RSV}

Naomi means “pleasure” but *Mara* means “bitterness.” She goes on:

“... for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.” {Ruth 1:20b RSV}

Elimelech married “pleasure,” but the result was “bitterness.” When “my God is king” marries “pleasure,” “pleasure” is turned into “bitterness.” Why had the women come to Bethlehem? We read that they “had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food” (Ruth 1:6). The Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and he said, “I am the bread of life,” (John 6:35). So they had come to the place where God visited his people and gave them bread.

From the bitterness in Chapter 1, we come to **the working of grace** in Chapter 2, Verse 1:

Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband’s, a man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. {Ruth 2:1 RSV}

The name *Boaz* means “strength” – a man of strength and of wealth.

And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, “Let me go to the field, and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor [or, grace].” And she said to her, “Go, my daughter.” {Ruth 2:2 RSV}

They arrived at Bethlehem, in the bitterness of their widowhood, with no help, or home, or hope. The only thing left to them was to take the place of destitution and bankruptcy. But somehow Ruth knows what to do when they go there, for she says to her mother-in-law, “Let me go to the field, and glean among the ears of grain that I might find grace.” She is looking for grace. On the long, weary road back these two women must have been talking about what they would do when they got to Bethlehem. Ruth must have said, “Naomi, we are both widows and we don’t have any husbands to watch out for us. How are we going to support ourselves when we get there? We have no money. We have no property that we can turn into money. What shall we do when we get there?” Naomi must have remembered the provision that the God of Israel had made for the destitute and the bankrupt in the Law:

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.” (Lev 19:9-10 RSV)

God had made provision for the poor. When Ruth and Naomi arrived in Israel, they took the place of destitution. They didn’t say to themselves, “We have been away and people will expect that we made our fortune in Moab. Perhaps we ought to open an account down at the store and live on credit for awhile. If we can act like we are rich, everybody will take it for granted that we are really rich and maybe we can work out some kind of a scheme to get by.” If they had done this, they would have faced catastrophe. But instead, Ruth took the place of destitution and went out looking for grace. And because she looked, she found it. If you seek for grace, you will find it.

So she set forth and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened [Just happened?] to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, ... {Ruth 2:3a RSV}

Have you ever discovered the glories of God's "happenings" in your own life? How many times have you thought something just happened by accident and then you discovered that it was by divine appointment that you were where you were?

- Remember little Zacchaeus up in the sycamore tree? (Luke 19:2). It just "happened" to be the tree that the Lord Jesus chose to stand under. And little round, fat, bald Zacchaeus, clinging to the branch of the sycamore tree, looked down and congratulated himself because he didn't want anyone to see that behind the businesslike facade he had built up was a seeking heart. And it just "happened" that the Lord Jesus looked up, saw him there, called him by name and told him to come down. Did it just happen? Jesus knew his name. Zacchaeus was there by divine appointment.
- When the woman of Samaria came to the well, she just "happened" to come at the noontime hour to find Jesus sitting there (John 4:7). It just happened – by divine appointment.
- When Nicodemus came at night, he just happened to find the Lord Jesus still up (John 3:1). He was probably very surprised to find him, not realizing that the Lord knew that he was coming and was waiting for him by divine appointment.

Then we have this wonderful story of "boy meets girl," and it never gets old, does it? Ruth was gleaning in the field and Boaz saw her. He said to his workmen, "Who is this maiden?" They told him who she was, and Boaz went down to meet Ruth. Now it doesn't tell us how it happened, but if you use your sanctified imagination you can see that it must have been a bit awkward at first. She was working away (picking up the grain here and there) and along comes this handsome fellow – evidently a wealthy man by his clothes. She drops her eyes, afraid to look up at him. He stands on one foot and then the other, clears his throat a couple of times and finally says, "Shalom." She looks up and says, "Shalom." Then he says to her, "Listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my maidens," {Ruth 2:8 RSV}. She is encouraged by this. He

goes on, "Let your eyes be upon the field which they are reaping, and go after them. I have charged the young men not to bother you," {cf, Ruth 2:9 RSV}. She wonders what is happening. So finally she asks:

"Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?" {Ruth 2:10b RSV}

Boaz says,

"All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before." {Ruth 2: 11b RSV}

"I may be a stranger to you, but you are not a stranger to me." You wonder how this all happened, but I have found out about you. This is the old, old story of a lost and guilty sinner meeting Jesus Christ. He may be a stranger to us, but we are not strangers to him.

As you trace through this wonderful chapter you find that Boaz tells his men to drop a little grain here and there so as to increase the bounty that she is gleaning out of the field. To her amazement she discovers that these workmen are undoubtedly the sloppiest workmen in the whole kingdom of Israel, because they leave huge quantities of grain on the ground. When she goes home that night with her apron full, she beats out the grain and comes to Naomi with a whole ephah. An ephah is probably a little more than a bushel of barley. Naomi greets her and says, "Where have you been working today?" Ruth says, "I gleaned in a field of a man whose name is Boaz."

Naomi's response was:

"Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead! ... The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin," (Ruth 2:20b RSV)

The Hebrew word for *nearest kin* means, literally, "one who has the right to redeem." If you look back at Deuteronomy 25, you will see what she is referring to:

"If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the

dead shall not be married outside the family to a stranger; her husband's brother shall go in to her, and take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his brother who is dead, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel." {Deut 25:5-6 RSV}

In other words the right of redemption is the right to bring life out of death; to restore life to that which was dead. Here is one who had the right to redeem.

Now, in Chapter 3, we read of **the clearing up of the debts**. In reading this through it appears that Ruth acts in a way that to us may seem presumptuous and very unmaidenly. But she is really acting quite strictly in accord with the law of Israel. When Boaz lies by his threshing floor at night, she comes, uncovers his feet and lies down at his feet. He discovers her there and asks who it is. She identifies herself and then he says to her:

"May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; you have made this last kindness greater than the first, in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich." (Ruth 3:10 RSV)

In this way she has laid claim to his right to redeem her, an action that is perfectly right within the law of Israel. So Boaz says:

"And now, my daughter, do not fear, I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of worth. And now it is true that I am a near kinsman, ..." {Ruth 3:11-12a RSV}

This is what she made clear by this act on her part. But Boaz knew something else:

"... yet there is a kinsman nearer man I. Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will do the part of the next of kin for you, well; let him but if he is not willing to do the part of the next of kin for you, then, as the Lord lives, I will do the part of the next of kin for you." {Ruth 3:12b-13 RSV}

There is **an obstacle that needs to be cleared** away before he can act as a redeemer. Turn to the

opening part of Chapter 4 and you will see how he demonstrated his interest and how he removed the obstacle.

And Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the next of kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, "Turn aside, friend; sit down here"; and he turned aside and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, "Sit down here;" so they sat down [as witnesses]. Then he said to the next of kin, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land which belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. So I thought I would tell you of it, and say, 'Buy it in the presence of those sitting here, and in the presence of the elders of my people.'" {Ruth 4:1-4a RSV}

The court is now assembled.

"If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you." {Ruth 4:4b RSV}

Can't you just see Ruth and Naomi hiding behind a bush listening to what is happening and wondering what the man will say? (I don't know what he looked like, but I rather think he had a long red beard and was probably about 75 years old.) And Ruth was holding her breath, because if this man redeemed the land, he also bought the right to her. To her chagrin and dismay the man replies. "I will redeem it." Poor Ruth – her heart doubtless sank within her. Then Boaz stepped in and played the card he had been holding in reserve:

"The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also buying Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the dead, in order to restore the name of the dead to his inheritance." (Ruth 4:5 RSV)

When the kinsman learned that, he said:

"I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance." {Ruth 4:6b RSV}

And Ruth's heart grew light again. Now what does this picture? Remember that we are told the Law has been given to men as an apparent redeemer (cf, Rom 7:10). Moses had said "If you

obey the commandments of the Lord your God ... then you shall live,” (cf, Deut 30:16). So the Law has the nearest right of redeemer, because it is something inherently involved with mankind. But there is one trouble with the Law. It can only redeem outwardly and never inwardly. It can only control our outward affairs and activities; it never touches the motives of the heart. When the Law is charged with the task of changing the inner nature of man – changing his motives so that he wants to do what is right – the Law must say “I cannot do it.” In Romans 8:3-4 we read:

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, {Rom 8:3-4a RSV}

... so that the righteousness that the Law demands might be ours in Jesus Christ.

When the obstacle was removed. Boaz moved to redeem Ruth:

Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon.” {Ruth 4:9 RSV}

All of it.

“Also Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from the gate of his native place; you are witnesses this day.” {Ruth 4:10 RSV}

The Lord Jesus left his glory in heaven and came to earth as our redeemer to die upon the cross. He bought all the fallen estate of Adam for every inhabitant of the earth, without exception. Every man, woman, and child in this world has been redeemed already by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has bought back all the fallen estate of the sons of Adam – whoever they might be – Mahlon and Chilion and Elimelech.

But where was Orpah in this picture? Ruth was ready to enter into all the value of Boaz’s ac-

tivity for her, and Orpah could have had it too. But because Orpah turned and went back to her own people, and to her own gods, she is never heard from again – she has no part in the inheritance. Though Boaz bought the entire inheritance of her husband as well as Ruth’s, Orpah is lost in this picture because she turned and went back to her own people and to her own gods.

But of Ruth we read:

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next of kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age;” {Ruth 4:13-15a RSV}

The boy who is to be born of this union, of the “strength” of the redeemer and the “beauty” of humility is to be a restorer of life.

This is the ministry of Jesus Christ, our restorer of life: he takes the dead, and the things of death in our life, and replaces them with vitality and life.

Then we read:

Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom [like any good grandmother] and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, the father of David. {Ruth 4:16-17 RSV}

... and of the Lord Jesus! It is written that Christ was David’s son. Ruth is one of the forebears of the Lord Jesus Christ, and her name becomes great in Bethlehem, as the people predicted that it would.

This child’s name, Obed, means “worship” – making our story complete.

When Elimelech, “my God is king” married Naomi, “pleasure” he fell into the bitterness of death. Out of that comes Ruth, in the “beauty” of humility, taking her place as a destitute stranger, dependent upon the grace of Boaz, “the strong one,” the one of wealth and strength. He redeems her and binds her to himself in marriage. When “beauty” is married to “strength,” the house is filled with “worship.” Isn’t that a wonderful picture?

Now turn to the second book of Ruth. Oh, I forgot – it's not in the Bible, is it? But it is written in many a life. Ruth was a woman redeemed by grace.

But imagine this scene: One morning Ruth says to her husband Boaz, "Dear, I am going into the field this morning." She picks up her bundle and starts out for the fields. Boaz says to her, "Ruth, where are you going?" And she replies, "I am just going out to get a little breakfast from the fields. I'm going to pick up a little grain here and there that we might have something to eat for a snack." How do you think he would feel? Here his wife whom he had redeemed out of bondage and slavery as a foreigner and taken into his house was saying to him, "Now I am going out to glean in the fields as I did before you redeemed me!"

This is exactly what we do to Christ, so many times. We are married to him who has given us everything. Christ is the one risen from the dead, the restorer of life, the one of wealth and strength, who has given us all our estate.

Don't you think Boaz would say to her, "Ruth, what is the matter with you? Don't you realize that you are my wife? I have given you everything I have. You don't need to glean in the field. You own the whole estate right along with me. All that I have is yours. Why do you go out to glean?"

Don't you suppose that the Lord Jesus looks at us sometimes in amazement and says,

- "What are you doing?"
- "Why do you keep coming to me and asking for the thing that you already have?"
- "Why do you ask for health and strength and grace and joy and peace? I have given you all this. All that I am is all that you need!"
- "Why keep begging for that which you already have?"

If we would begin to walk out upon this mighty transforming truth that God has given us here in the book of Ruth – that we are now married to him who is risen from the dead, married to the man of strength and of wealth, who has given to us all that he is and all that he has – we would see the incredible folly of our gleaning for insignificant scraps. If we saw what we were doing by that, our lives would be transformed. And the ones we live with at home would be the first ones to see it – then the ones at work – then the ones we encounter in the course of our daily affairs. Soon everyone would know that something had happened to us, and that we had begun to live in the glory and fullness of our redeemed life.

That is what I want for me. Won't you join me in the "beauty" portrayed in Ruth?

1 SAMUEL: The Death of the Flesh

by Ray C. Stedman

The Old Testament is wonderfully illuminating in presenting case studies in normal and abnormal living. Anyone who has taken a course in psychology knows that in the text the case studies illustrate the principles being taught, in terms of real people and incidents. The whole of the Old Testament is just like that. It is filled with the most fascinating case studies illustrating the principles God wishes us to know. Sometimes, however, they are hidden in enigmas. If you like such things as cryptograms and crossword puzzles and riddles, you will enjoy ferreting out these truths of the Old Testament. You have to read your Bible (at least figuratively) with the Old Testament in one hand and the New Testament in the other, comparing them constantly in your mind. The Old Testament accounts illustrate the truths that are set forth in the New Testament. In them you will meet yourself and your own case study.

First Samuel is the story of two men, Saul and David. These two men illustrate for us the two principles in the heart of every Christian believer seeking to walk before God. They are the principle of flesh and the principle of faith. Saul is the man of the flesh, and David is the man of faith – the carnal believer and the spiritual believer. The fact that both of these men were kings beautifully illustrates the supremacy of the will in human life. As the book of Esther shows, each one of us is a king over a kingdom. Our will is supreme in our life. Even the Spirit of God does not violate it. We are ruling over the kingdom of our lives and our affairs, over those things that concern us personally and also the things that have an impact and influ-

ence upon others. What you, the king, say and do, influences the whole kingdom over which you reign.

Here, in these two kings, the two principles which are in conflict in your life and in mine are illustrated. We see in Saul the ruin caused by the will that is set on the flesh. In David you see beautifully illustrated the blessing which is brought by the mind that is set on the Spirit. “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace,” (Rom 8:6 RSV). This conflict is illustrated in the book of First Samuel in the lives of these two men.

The book actually begins with the story of a third man, Samuel, who is the human expression of the voice of God to both Saul and David. (You and I have in our lives the expression to us of God’s will by the Word of God in those men and leaders in the church who teach and explain the word to us. God speaks to us objectively as well as subjectively. This is what is pictured by Samuel.) These three men mark off the divisions of the book:

- The first seven chapters give us the life of Samuel.
- Chapters 8 through 15 present King Saul, the man of the flesh.
- Then, in Chapters 16 through 31, David, the man of faith, is eminent as an illustration of the mind set on the Spirit.

Samuel was the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. The events of this book take place right after Israel had passed through some three hundred or more years of the rule of the judges. (During that time the little episode of Ruth occurred.) Samuel is the chosen instrument of God to close out the realm of the judges and to introduce the beginning of the prophetic ministry and the monarchy.

In the beginning, there is the wonderful story of a barren woman, Hannah, the wife of a man named Elkanah. This man had two wives. The other wife was a prolific woman, who taunted and mocked Hannah in her barrenness. The barrenness of Hannah is very symbolic, coming as it does at the beginning of this book, because it illustrates the spiritual state of Israel at this time. This people to whom God had manifested himself had fallen into a state of utter infertility and barrenness. The priesthood which God had set up with the tabernacle and the rituals – the means by which the people would have access to him – was beginning to disappear. The cause for this failure is found in the song that Hannah sang after her prayer to God was answered and God gave her the boy, Samuel. Every woman ought to memorize this glorious song. In it, Hannah indicates the problem with which the book is essentially concerned:

**“Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the Lord is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed.
The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble gird on strength.”
{1 Sam 2:3-4 RSV}**

The rest of the song magnificently sets forth the ability of God to exalt the lowly and to cast down the proud.

In this book is set forth the eternal conflict between the proud heart which finds confidence in itself and its ability to do things, and the humble spirit which looks to God in utter dependence, receiving all the fullness of divine blessing. That was the problem with Israel. The priesthood was failing, not because there was anything wrong with the priesthood (which was a picture of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ), but because the people refused to bow before the Lord. They refused to come for cleansing and to turn from idolatrous worship. As a result, their access to God was cut

off. The priesthood, then, was about to pass out of the picture as an effective means of mediation between the people and God.

At this point we have the familiar account of Samuel’s birth and childhood. When Samuel is just a little lad he is brought to the temple and dedicated to God. He becomes the voice of God to Eli the priest and is given a message of judgment. Later he becomes the voice of God to the nation – especially to the two kings, Saul and David. The first seven chapters tell us the story of Israel’s fall into decay. The ark of God, the very place where God himself wrote his name and where his presence dwelt, was taken captive by the Philistines into their own country. Eli the priest, because he did not make his sons obey him (which is a powerful word of warning about juvenile delinquents today) – even though his own heart was right – finds that his priesthood is taken away from him. And when Eli’s grandson is born, his mother names him Ichabod, which means “the glory has departed.” Here Israel reaches one of the lowest states in its national history.

We read then of the entrance of King Saul. In Chapter 8, Verses 4 and 5, the people demand to be given a king like all the other nations:

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, “Behold, you are old and your own do not walk in your ways; now appoint for us a king to govern us like as the nations.” {1 Sam 8:4-5 RSV}

The principle of the flesh is at work in the nation of Israel to destroy its communion, its fellowship, and its enjoyment of God’s blessing. The same principle is interwoven in every Christian life, and it may be expressed in many ways, which are clearly indicated throughout this book. The first is that they be given an authority like all the other nations. In other words, the desire of the flesh is to be religious in a manner accepted by the world, to conduct its business like the rest of the world does. If our mind is set on the flesh, we want to interject the principle of business acumen into the conduct of the church. We wish to adopt the salesmanship tactics of the world. We no longer rely upon the strategy of the Holy Spirit but we appoint a committee to plan out the program. Then we ask God to come and bless it and make it work. It is our program instead of his. This principle is continu-

ally at work, reflected in Israel's rejection of the authority and the sovereignty of God and their desire to be ruled like all the nations.

Well, this request was granted by God. Samuel was displeased when they asked for a king, because he knew that this was not God's program. Samuel prayed to the Lord and the Lord said:

“Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds which they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, hearken to their voice; only, you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.” {1 Sam 8:7-9 RSV}

This is always the way of God. I think one of the greatest lessons we can learn about God is that if we want something badly enough, he will give it to us. But we must also be ready to face the consequences. This is true about everything in life, isn't it?

Suppose I have before me two glasses filled with liquid that both look like water. One of them is water and the other is poison. I have a choice to make between drinking the poison or the water. If I choose to drink the poison, I no longer have any influence over what happens. The results are inevitable. Once I have made the choice, then I must accept the sequence of events that follows.

All through the Scriptures we find that this is the way God deals with men. If we want something badly enough, we can have it. But when we get it, we won't want it. If we start hungering and thirsting and clamoring after what we want as these people did, instead of relying upon God to give us what we need, we will discover that what we desired is no longer what we want. Our only recourse is to come back to God in repentance and ask him to give us what we need.

I will never forget hearing Dr. Ironside tell of an incident in the life of Dr. William Evans of the Hollywood Presbyterian Church. His little girl, who was about eight years of age, came home and said to him, “Daddy, I want to get some ballbearing skates. All the other children have ballbearing skates and that is what I want.” He said, “But

dear, you have a pair of skates.” She replied, “Yes, I know Daddy, but they are not ballbearing skates. They are rollerbearing skates. They won't go as fast as the others will.” He was a minister and did not have too great an income so he said, “Well, my dear, I'm afraid you will have to make do with the rollerbearing skates. We simply can't afford to buy any others right now.” But she wouldn't let him be. That night when he came home from his work, there was a little note at his place on the table. It said. “Dear Daddy, I still want the ballbearing skates.” When he went to bed that night there was another note pinned to his pillow. It said, “Daddy, would you buy me some ballbearing skates?” Well, he did what we would have done; he scraped up the money somehow and got the ballbearing skates. When he gave them to her, she was delighted. She threw her arms around his neck and hugged him and kissed him and thanked him. Then she put on the ballbearing skates and started out the gate and down the sidewalk and around the corner. That was the last time they ever saw her well and alive. As she went around the corner, the skates were too much for her and she slipped and fell down, hitting her head against the sidewalk. They brought her home in a coma. She died at the hospital before the night was out. “Since then,” Dr. Evans said, “when I want something of God and it seems as though he is not willing that I should have it but I keep crying out for it, the Spirit of God reminds me, ‘Are you asking for ballbearing skates?’”

This is what happened in Israel. It is a principle that is at work in all of our lives.

The tremendous story of **Saul** follows here. It is a fascinating story of a young man who, like so many young people today, was living his life without any regard or concern for what God wanted him to do. He was busy with his father in the donkey business. And donkeys take a lot of tending. Samuel was running and judging the country and they were glad to leave that all up to him. Saul and his father were too busy with the donkeys. It is wonderful to trace God's dealings with this man and to see how he reached him. Here is a young man who shuts God out of his thinking, has no time for him nor any real interest in him.

We all know people like Saul. How do you think God reached him? Well, he did the very ob-

vious thing. He went into the donkey business himself. He lost Saul's donkeys for him. When the donkeys strayed away, Saul was vexed. It didn't occur to him that God was involved; he thought only that someone had left the pasture gate open, so he set out to look for the donkeys.

After a long and fruitless search, he came to the town where Samuel lived. In Chapter 9 he was about to give up and go back home, when his servant said to him, "Let us go and ask the man of God who lives here where the donkeys are" {cf, 1 Sam 9:6}. Saul was not very anxious to do this. In fact, he desired to stay about as far away from the prophet as possible, because prophets were a very disturbing kind of people, and he wanted to get back home. But the servant prevailed on him to go up to see Samuel, and to Saul's amazement, Samuel was expecting him. God had told Samuel the day before that there would be a young man named Saul appearing upon his doorstep. Samuel had a great dinner prepared for Saul and thirty invited guests; and Saul, to his consternation, was the guest of honor. He hardly knew what was happening. Those troublesome donkeys had got him into all this and he wanted to get out of it as fast as possible. But Samuel took him aside as they finished the dinner and announced to him a stunning thing: "God has anointed you," Samuel said, "to be the king over Israel," (cf, 1 Sam 10:1).

Saul had been out looking for donkeys but ended up the king of Israel. And he wasn't at all interested in the job. But Samuel told him that he would have three signs indicating that God was with him, and then sent him home. Sure enough, each one of these signs was fulfilled: one, two, three.

The first one was that he would meet a band of prophets and the Spirit of God would come upon him and he would begin to prophesy. When Saul began to prophesy along with all the other seminary students – all those who were in this school of the prophets – the word went out through all of Israel. The people said, "Is Saul, the son of Kish, also one of the prophets?" (cf, 1 Sam 10:11). As Saul went on toward his home, he met his uncle, who said, "What has been happening?" Saul said, "I went out looking for the donkeys and I ran into Samuel, and he told me that the donkeys are safe at home," (cf, 1 Sam 10:14-16). Not one word about the anointing and the new commission that God had given him. Saul was out to make the most of his

life and he was not interested in what God wanted him to do, unless he could use God for his own purposes. So he said nothing.

But Samuel wasn't through. He told Israel that God had hearkened to their plea, and would give them a king according to their desire. Samuel calls all the people together to cast lots for the choice of the king. The lot is cast first upon the tribes and the tribe of Benjamin is taken. Then upon the family group and the family of Kish is taken. And then upon the individual and Saul is taken. The word went out, "Where is Saul?" No one could find him anywhere. Finally the Lord said, "He is hiding among the baggage." Sure enough, that is where they found him.

Now why was he hiding? Was it because he was so modest that he didn't want to have anybody make a fuss over him? Was it because he was shy and diffident? No, the record indicates that Saul was hiding because he was finding it rather inconvenient to do what God wanted. He wanted to live his own life his own way and he was trying to get away from the call of God.

But God had called him and he was crowned king. As he stood among the people, they raised a great shout and said, "What a king!" He looked like the very picture of a king: head and shoulders above everyone else, handsome as could be, a very wise young man in many ways and fair-minded in seeking justice. But now there is trouble with the Ammonite people up in the north. Saul sends out word to all the people of Israel to come together, and to his great delight, thirty-six thousand people respond to his call. They march up and utterly destroy the Ammonites in a great victory. And Saul begins to feel that maybe this matter of serving God is going to be all right. Maybe he can use it for his own advancement after all. But the next battle he faces is with the Philistines. Now the Philistines aren't a mere tribe of people who are tough only in their own limited area like the Ammonites. Saul is up against a nation which was the equivalent of the Soviet Union or the United States – one of the major powers of the world. The Philistines, when they heard of the little difficulty that Saul's son, Jonathan, had caused when he defeated their army at Geba, gathered thirty thousand chariots of iron, six thousand horsemen, and a multitude of people so vast that even the Philistines could not number them.

When Saul looked out his window and saw this great horde of people advancing upon him, he realized that this job of being king was not totally delightful. So he sent out the word again through all Israel expecting that the people would rally to his support as before. He waited, and he waited, and he waited. Finally a thousand people showed up, and then another thousand, and then another thousand. This happened to be the three thousand standing troops that he had already selected and he kept waiting for the others to come. No more came. He compared this pitiful three thousand soldiers with the multitude of the Philistines' tremendous force and sent for Samuel. Samuel told him to wait at Gilgal for him to offer a burnt offering to the Lord. The man of flesh depends upon his own resources until he gets into trouble, and then he calls upon the Lord. But God was ahead of Saul as usual, and Samuel delayed coming. While Saul waited, he kept watching his soldiers begin to slip away one by one and go back home. So the three thousand soldiers dwindled to two thousand, and then to one thousand, until finally only about 600 men were left. By this time, Saul was getting desperate, and when Samuel had not come after five or six days Saul took it upon himself to offer the burnt offering. The moment he had finished, Samuel came walking up. The old prophet was stern-faced as he said, "What have you been doing?" Saul said, "Well, I waited for you, but when I saw that the people were going back to their homes, I thought I ought to take action, so I finally forced myself to do the offering. I knew we did not dare go out to battle without going through this kind of a ritual and since you weren't here, I did it myself," (cf, 1 Sam 13:12). On hearing this, Samuel said to Saul:

"But now your kingdom shall not continue; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."
{1 Sam 13:14 RSV}

It was thus prophesied that Saul's kingdom would be taken from him.

As we read on, we find that God gave a great victory through Jonathan's faith and delivered the people from this vast horde of Philistines. When at last the battle was won, Saul built an altar. It is the first altar that we are specifically told King Saul

ever built. Here is a man who thinks the outward marks of faith are all that are necessary.

If you go through the external ritual – if you belong to a church, if you sing the hymns, if you say the right things, if you confess the right creed – that is all God expects. That is the principle of the man of the flesh. But God says that when you act on that basis, your reign over your own life is taken away. You no longer have authority in your own kingdom. You become the victim and the slave of an inexorable force which will grind you under its heel and bring you into subjection to it. This is what every man or woman who lives by the flesh sooner or later discovers. When we yield ourselves to that which we obey, as Paul puts it in Romans, we become slaves of that thing (cf, Rom 6:16).

This is what happens to Saul. After he builds an altar, God brings him to his knees, and gives him one last chance. At the beginning of Chapter 15:

And Samuel said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore hearken to the words of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I will punish what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way, when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.'" {1 Sam 15:1-3 RSV}

This was Saul's last chance, because if Saul had obeyed this command, he would have demonstrated that he was ready to allow the cross to do its work against the flesh – to crucify it and to put it to death. Amalek is a picture throughout all of the Scripture of the principle of the flesh which opposes the things of God. Amalek was that people about whom Moses had said to Israel, "Remember Amalek unto all generations. He will never make peace with Amalek," (cf, Exod 17:16). And Saul was given this commission to carry out. But did he?

And Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havalah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the

best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them; all that was despised and worthless they utterly destroyed. {1 Sam 15:7-9 RSV}

Worthless in whose eyes? I wonder if it wasn't the donkeys that Saul wanted to save. After all, he appreciated farm animals. He probably reasoned, "Why should we destroy these perfectly good animals?" He presumed to find something good in what God had declared utterly bad.

Paul wrote that we must "put off the old nature" {Col 3:9 RSV} with its ways of jealousy, perverseness, bitterness, envy, anger, intemperance, selfishness and all these things. But the mind of the flesh says, "Oh, some of this is worth keeping. I can hardly be a real personality if I don't have a hot temper and tell people off once in awhile." So we presume to find good in what God has declared bad.

The result was that Samuel came to Saul and asked him, "How have you been doing?" Saul said, "Wonderful. I have done everything the Lord said. I killed all the Amalekites and destroyed everything just as the Lord said." Samuel cocked his ear and said, "What do I hear? What is that sound of bleating and lowing outside the window? Why are those animals out there?" {cf, 1 Sam 14:14-15}. Saul said, "Well it is true that I spared a few; I thought God would be pleased if I dedicated them to him." That is an excuse we use, isn't it? What we desire to keep, we pretend to dedicate to God. This is what Saul tried too.

And Samuel said, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? {1 Sam 15:17a RSV}

"Why did you not obey the voice of the Lord?" {1 Sam 15:19b RSV}

And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord." {1 Sam 15:20a RSV}

**And Samuel said,
"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the Lord?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to hearken than the fat of rams
For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.**

**Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,
he has also rejected you from being king."
{1 Sam 15:22-23 RSV}**

No man can walk in the authority and the freedom that God has intended for his children when he rejects the authority of the Spirit of God in his life. That is primarily the story of Saul.

The story of **David**, starting in Chapter 16, is the story of the man after God's own heart. There are tremendous lessons in the accounts of David, his rejection, and his exile. He was chosen from the eight sons of Jesse. The seven eldest sons passed before Samuel and each one looked like a king in the making until God said to Samuel, "This is not the one that I have chosen." And last came the youngest and the skinniest one of all – David. God put his seal upon him. His choice was not according to outward appearance – God looked instead at his heart.

David was not set on the throne immediately as Saul was, but was tested and proved by struggle and adversity. This is the principle that God often follows with the man who learns to walk by faith. He is put through a time of obscurity, of testing, and of problems. Everything seems to go against him until at last he recognizes the great principle by which God's activity is always carried on – man can do nothing in himself but only in complete and utter dependence upon the God who indwells him. This is what David learned even as a shepherd boy, so that he could say,

**The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
he makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul. (Psa 23:1-3a RSV)**

We come to the testing of David as he comes face to face with the giant, Goliath. Israel was held in fear and cowardice by this giant who paraded up and down between the armies, taunting and mocking the impotence of the Israelites. No one dared to do a thing about him. He strutted in arrogant pride up and down, beating his chest and demanding they send someone out to fight. And no one dared to go. When little David came from his flocks to bring food to his brothers, he found the whole camp of Israel plunged into gloom and despair. He came in

and asked, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" {1 Sam 17:26 RSV}. That is always the outlook of faith. It is never shaken by the circumstances.

Word is brought to Saul of this young man in their midst. Saul asks David what he wants to do. David says, "I'll go out and fight him." Saul, thinking to be helpful, puts his armor upon David. Now Saul was about one and a half feet taller than David and the armor on the young lad began to clank and get in his way. David tried to move around and couldn't even take a step. Finally he said, "Bring me a can opener and get me out of this." David then went down to the brook and got five smooth stones.

Why five? A little later in the book of Second Samuel you will read that Goliath had four brothers. That is why he took five. He was prepared for the whole family!

David went out, threw the sling around his head, and Goliath fell to the ground with a stone right between his eyes, {See 1 Sam 17:41-47}. Someone has said his last words were, "Nothing like this has ever entered my mind before." Anyhow he went down. David took Goliath's own sword and cut off his head.

What a glorious picture this is of him who went up against the great enemy of mankind face to face and slew him with his own sword. We read in Hebrews 2:14 that by death the Lord Jesus slew him that had the power of death, even the Devil. David becomes here a picture not only of Christ, but also of the believer who lives the life of Christ.

This event is followed by Saul's great jealousy of David. From Chapter 18 on we have the story of the growing persecution of David by Saul – a living illustration of the principle that Paul declares in Galatians. He says,

... as at that time, he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now. {Gal 4:29 RSV}

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh ... to prevent you from doing what you would. {Gal 5:17 RSV}

So Saul persecuted David and tried to kill him. It was during this time that David wrote so many of the Psalms – those wonderful songs that speak of

God's faithfulness in the midst of distressing conditions. David was pursued and finally exiled from the presence of Saul.

In Chapters 21 and 22 we find the fullness of God's abundant provision made for him even in his exile. He is given the very holy bread of the tabernacle. This bread, representing the presence of God, is a picture of that secret ministering to everyone who is undergoing difficult problems, yet looking to God for deliverance. To such God gives the hidden bread, the bread from the very table of the Lord himself. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life," (John 6:35). "As I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me," (John 6:57). In his exile, David the king had a prophet, Gad, and a priest, Abiathar – whose resources were available to him even though he was hunted like a bird upon the mountains – just as when you are in trouble, hardly able to work out your own problems yourself, you can find in the Lord Jesus Christ (who is our prophet, our priest, and our king) all that it takes to bring you through the time of trouble to God's open door for you. This is what happened to David. He refused to act for himself. Twice he spared Saul as God delivered him into his hand. In a remarkable spirit of faith he waited for God to work out the problems.

At the end of the book, we see the end of the man of flesh. Saul, out of desperation, descends to witchcraft to try to determine the mind of the Lord after the Spirit of God has departed from him. Although witchcraft was utterly forbidden to the people of God, Saul calls up the witch of Endor and tries to get her to call Samuel up. God overrules this and sends, not an impersonating spirit, as the witch expected, but the true Samuel who announces Saul's impending death on the field of battle the next day.

True to the prophecy, Saul and his son Jonathan, David's bosom friend, are slain, and David, ever the man of faith, in the opening chapter of Second Samuel extols them both as men used of God, despite their many weaknesses.

The death of Saul well illustrates Paul's words in First Corinthians 3 concerning the carnal believer and his work,

If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. {cf, 1 Cor 3:15}

1 SAMUEL: The Death of the Flesh

So Saul joins Samuel in the life beyond, but as one whose earthly life is essentially wasted and whose opportunity for service in glory is thereby diminished.

2 SAMUEL: The Story of David

by Ray C. Stedman

Second Samuel is really a continuation of First Samuel (in the Hebrew Bible they are not divided and this is the first book of Kings) and it all centers on one man – David. The book falls into four simple divisions:

- Chapters 1 through 5 trace the road to dominion. David began his reign as king only over the tribe of Judah and it was not until seven years later that he was crowned king over all twelve tribes of Judah and Israel.
- The section in Chapters 6 through 10 highlights worship and victory – these two things also go together in the Christian life.
- Then in Chapters 11 through 20 is the record of David's failure and God's forgiveness, and their results in his life.
- The closing section {Chapters 21-24} comprises an appendix which sets forth some important lessons learned by King David in the course of his reign.

There are two ways of looking at the life of David:

1. You may look at him as a picture of Jesus Christ – and it is perfectly proper to do so; the Lord Jesus himself used this analogy. David was not only the forerunner and ancestor according to the flesh of the Lord Jesus, but in his reign he was also a picture of Jesus Christ in

the millennium. David went through a time when he was rejected, persecuted, hounded and harassed. But in the time of his exile he gathered men around him who became his leaders, his commanders and his generals when he did become king over the land. Thus David was a picture of Christ in his present rejection, forsaken by the world, gathering in secret those who will be his commanders, generals, and captains when he comes to reign in power and glory over the earth. Christ will come to establish his kingdom, to rule and to reign in righteousness as the Scripture says, and David is a picture of that too. As God develops this and brings it to pass we can also see in the present world scene that God is bringing Christ to his throne at last, where he shall reign in righteousness.

2. David is not only a picture of Christ, but he is also a picture of each individual believer. It is only as we read from that point of view that the book comes alive and glows with truth for us. If you look at these Old Testament books as if they were mirrors, you will always find yourself there.

Psychologists tell us that in our dreams we are always present no matter what the dream is about; we are the central object. You may take the form of a donkey or a cow or some other object, but whatever you dream about, you are always in the center of your dreams. The amazing thing about Scripture is that you are always in the center of that too. "These things

were written,” Paul says, “for our instruction” (1 Cor 10:11 RSV), that we might understand ourselves as we see events worked out in the lives of these characters in the pages of Scripture.

The story of David is a picture for us of what happens in a Christian’s life as he gives it to God – a place of dominion and reign. Every Christian is offered a kingdom, just as David was offered a kingdom. That kingdom is the kingdom of your own life and it is exactly like the kingdom of Israel. There are enemies threatening it from outside. There are enemies threatening from within to undermine it. The kings of Israel were never able to get rid of the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Jebusites, the Perizzites and all the other “-ites” of that day. They form a picture for us of those internal enemies that threaten to undermine and overthrow the dominion that God intends us to have as we learn to reign in life by Jesus Christ. What are those enemies for you? Well, you don’t call them Jebusites and Perizzites. You call them jealousy, envy, lust, bitterness, resentment, worry, anxiety, and all the other “-ites,” “-isms,” chasms, and spasms that afflict us in our daily walk.

As we see David being brought by God to the place of reigning over his kingdom, we will see how the Holy Spirit is working in our lives to bring us to the place of reigning in life by Christ Jesus. What an accurate picture this is! David is called in the Old Testament “the man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam 13:14), just as King Saul, the first king of Israel might be labeled “the king like the nations around.” Saul, portrayed in First Samuel, represents the man of the flesh, the man who tries in his own right to please God by his good intentioned, highly sincere efforts to be religious. Yet everything falls apart. It never works. The Christian life is not just a shabby imitation of the life of Jesus Christ. It must be the real thing. It must be Christ himself living his life in you. As Saul is the picture of the flesh and its attempt to imitate, David is the picture of the man after God’s own heart – a believer in whom the spirit of God dwells and who is open to the instruction of the Spirit, who is taught to walk in the Holy Spirit.

The first section {Chapters 1-5} opens with **the death of Saul**, the man of the flesh. When Saul died, David was free to be king over the land. In our lives this is the picture of the time when we come at last to the full truth of the cross and what the cross means to us. It is the cross of Jesus Christ that puts the old man to death and brings to an end the reign of the flesh pictured here by King Saul. When at last it breaks upon our astonished intellect that God really means it when he says that he has utterly separated us from the life of Adam and linked us to the life of Jesus Christ – the old man has been crucified with Christ, has been nailed to a cross, has no longer any right to live – then we are standing right in the same place as David was in the book of Second Samuel and we are free to reign. King Saul is dead.

At first David was king only over his own tribe, Judah. For seven years he dwelt in the city of Hebron. But while he was king only over Judah, there was a fierce struggle going on between the rights of David and the house of Saul. In other words, the flesh dies hard. It doesn’t give up its reign easily. There is a fierce battle. At last we are told that David comes to the place where he is acknowledged king over all twelve tribes. He is free now to assume his God-given royal prerogatives over the whole of the land.

Chapter 6 begins **the second movement** in this book. Here are the results in David’s life when he comes to his full authority within the kingdom. His first concern is to bring back the ark of God. In First Samuel we read that the ark had been captured by the Philistine tribes. They had taken it and tried to set it up in their temple. But when the ark of God stood opposite the staring-eyed, ugly, grotesque fish god of the Philistines, the fish god could not stand it. He fell flat on his face and ended up with a broken neck. The Philistines realized that they couldn’t get away with trying to keep the ark of God in their own temple and they sent it to another city. It remained there until David became king. When he became king over all twelve tribes, his first concern was to bring the ark of God back from the Philistines into the central life of the nation of Israel.

What does this signify? When you first came to the realization that Jesus Christ had the right to be Lord over every area of your life, was it not

your desire to put him squarely in the center of your life? That is what is pictured here in David's desire to bring back the ark.

David built a brand new ox cart and set the ark in the middle of it and started back with all the people singing and rejoicing around the ark. It was a time of enthusiastic, utterly sincere, complete dedication and devotion to God. But then a terrible thing happened. As the ark was going down the road, the cart hit a rut in the road. It trembled and shook so much that it looked as if the ark was going to fall off. A man named Uzzah, standing by the cart, reached out his hand to steady the ark. The moment his hand touched it, the lightning of God struck him and he fell dead. David was nonplused; he didn't know what to do. Of course it cast a pall of tragedy over the whole scene, and all the rejoicing and the merrymaking was abruptly stopped. David was so sick at heart that he turned the ox cart aside, put the ark of God in the first house that was handy, and went back to Jerusalem – bitter and resentful against the Lord for doing a thing like this.

This was the first lesson David had to learn. It is recorded for us that David was very much afraid of the Lord when this happened and he became very bitter. But the truth was that it was David's fault that Uzzah had died. In the book of Leviticus there were very specific and detailed instructions on how to move the ark of God. Only the Levites were to do this. It was David's fault that the Levites had not been asked to move the ark. He was presumptuous enough to assume that God was so much on his side that he could get away with anything. He just put the ark on an ox cart and started to move it himself. Therefore, it was really David's fault that this all happened. David had to learn the very bitter lesson that sincerity in serving God is never enough. Things must be done God's way in accomplishing God's will.

Have you discovered that yet? Have you ever had some favorite project you felt, in the earnestness of your heart, would be a wonderful thing to glorify God? Perhaps you could even justify what you wanted by something in the Scriptures. You felt it was the will of God, so you determined to bring it to pass. But God blew upon that activity and the whole thing crumbled to pieces. Everything went wrong. You had to face the fact that all your cherished plans for doing something for God were utterly disintegrated.

I talked with a young man recently who was going through a time of resentment and bitterness for this very reason. He felt sure that he knew what God wanted him to do in a certain matter and he had determined that it was the will of God. He felt that he could foresee exactly how God was going to work, and had even announced to some of his friends that God would do a certain thing. But it all fell apart. He told me, "I confess to you that I feel God is unfair. He doesn't back up what he says." As we talked together, it became very apparent that he was going through just this kind of a trial.

David had to learn that too, and the death of Uzzah stands as a constant testimony that God never will compromise on this score. It is not his job to do our program. It is our job to be in such a relationship to him that he leads us in his program.

The next thing we read in this section is about the desire that entered into the heart of David to build a temple for God. The ark had been in the tabernacle – just a shoddy, rough old tent. So David reasoned with himself, "Here I live in a beautiful house of cedar and God's ark has to dwell in an old tent. Why don't I build a house for God?" (cf, 2 Sam 7:2). When Nathan the prophet heard of it he encouraged David in this, but God sent a message to Nathan and said, "No, this is not right." The reason was that David was a man of war. Only Jesus Christ or, in Old Testament terms, someone who pictures Christ as prince of peace, will ever build the temple of God among humanity. David had been the one chosen to represent him as the conquering king over all. And so God said, "No, it will not be David who builds the temple," {cf, 2 Sam 7:4-16}. God rejected David's plan to build the temple even though it was well intentioned, sincere, and earnest. David was not able to learn the lesson of Uzzah.

In this chapter is a beautiful example for us in the obedience in David's heart as he praises God and accepts this disappointment and the reversal of his own plans. He agrees that God is right and that the temple should be built by Solomon, his son.

The rest of this section is simply a report of David's victories over the enemies – the Philistines and the Ammonites. In other words, when God is in the center of David's life and his heart is ready to walk out upon God's program – not David's program, but God's program – there is no hindrance to victory. All the internal enemies and the

external enemies are in complete subjection to the man who walks in this relationship with God.

The next major section {Chapters 11-20} begins **the story of failure in David's life** – the black and bitter picture of David's double sin. Notice how Chapter 11 begins:

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go forth to battle, {2 Sam 11:1a RSV}

After the interruption of the winter season when proper and true battles were being fought for the Lord's cause, it was time for the king to go forth to battle.

David sent Joab, and his servant with him, and all Israel; and they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. {2 Sam 11:1b RSV}

That is where the failure begins. He forsook the post of duty. It doesn't mean that it is wrong, necessarily, but to be absent from the place where you belong is to be exposed to temptation.

The next part of the story about David can be told in three simple sentences: He saw. He sent and inquired. And he took:

1. Walking on the roof of his house he saw a beautiful woman taking a bath.
2. He sent and inquired about her.
3. And then he took.

In those three sentences you have a graphic tracing of the processes of temptation.

Any temptation in your life and mine will also follow this pattern. It starts first with simple desire. There is nothing wrong with the desire. It is awakened in us simply because of human nature. It may be along any avenue, but the desire is there, and it must be dealt with when it arises. Either it is put away at that point or it is formed into an intent.

David saw the beautiful woman, desired her, and then started to work out the way by which he could take her. He sent and inquired about her. This was followed immediately by the act, and

David, the man after God's own heart, is thus involved in the deep and black sin of adultery.

When it was accomplished, he refused to face the music, like so many of us try to do. Instead of openly confessing and acknowledging the wrong, and trying to make it right, he committed another sin to cover up. This is always the process of sin. If you commit one sin, you commit another to cover that one up, and ten more to cover up the second one. And so it goes. David sent for Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, and tried to trick him. But Uriah, in his simple faithfulness to God, confounded David, and ended finally in bloodshed. Joab, David's rugged and ruthless general, became a conspirator with David in this plot, and Uriah was slain in battle. Uriah was slain by the hands of the Ammonites, but David was the murderer.

So here suddenly, almost without warning, there breaks into David's life this double sin of adultery and murder. This is the man whom God had chosen to be the ancestor of the Lord Jesus. This sin is appalling to many of us and we wonder how a man like David could do this terrible deed. There have been many who have pointed the finger at David and said, "How could God ever pass over a thing like this?" But if you want to see what God means when he calls David "a man after his own heart," look at what happens in David's life when God sends Nathan the prophet to him. Nathan points his finger at David and tricks him with a little parable. When he comes to the punch line, Nathan says, "Thou art the man," {2 Sam 12:7b KJV}. Immediately David acknowledges and faces his sin. He no longer tries to justify it. He acknowledges his total wrong in this matter and it was at this point that David wrote Psalm 51. All of us have turned to this psalm at one time or another when we have been laden with guilt.

Not too long ago a man came to me after having been involved in the same kind of a problem that David had, and together we went over this psalm. I saw the Holy Spirit wash away all the guilt, the stain, and the ugliness of that thing in the man's life by using the words David wrote after his sin with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah had been discovered.

Now we see the results in David's life, beginning in Chapter 12. We are told that when Nathan came with this announcement, "Thou art the man," he said to David:

“Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.” Thus says the Lord, “Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun.” {2 Sam 12:10-11 RSV}

That was literally fulfilled by Absalom, David’s son. Nathan goes on:

“For you did it secretly [God says]; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.” David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die.” Then Nathan went to his house. {2 Sam 12:12-15a RSV}

This is a great lesson in forgiveness. There are a lot of people that ask God to forgive their sins and they think that therefore they should never have to suffer any results from their evil ways. But notice what God does with David. God forgives David after his confession. David’s life is spared, even though under the Law the penalty for this sin is death. God forgives David and thereby restores that inner personal relationship between them so that David has a sense of peace and freedom from guilt.

God deals with us not only in grace but also in government. In government he is concerned with the effect of our deeds upon others around us, and those effects go on regardless of whether or not we are forgiven. So David must face the results of his deeds and, as we learn in the New Testament, God chastens those whom he loves, (cf, Rev 3:19). The first result was that the baby born of this illegitimate union died, even though David pled with the Lord in a pathetic, poignant passage where he is torn with grief. Then the predicted results in David’s home, in his family, and in his kingdom take place.

The New Testament tells us, “Do not be deceived [don’t kid yourself]; God is not mocked,” Paul says, “for he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption,” (Gal 6:7a, 6:8

RSV). Your personal relationship to God can be restored immediately. That is forgiveness. But the evil results of every misstep in the flesh affect those outside yourself, beginning with those closest to you.

David was told that never again would his house know peace as a result of his sin. In the rest of this section, from Chapter 13 on, you can see how this was fulfilled.

The next chapter tells the dark story of Amnon, David’s son, as he sinned against his own sister, Tamar. This resulted in a black hatred born in Absalom, David’s other son, against Amnon. So there in David’s own family, among his own sons, was spread a bitter spirit of rebellion and evil and lust, created by David’s own failure. In the story of Amnon and his quarrel with Absalom – and finally in his murder at the hands of Absalom – you find that King David is utterly helpless. David cannot rebuke even his own son because Amnon is simply following in David’s footsteps. Amnon is only committing those sins of passion for which David himself had set the example by taking Bathsheba.

Next, we read of the uprising of Absalom. This handsome, brilliant, gifted young son of David fomented a rebellion throughout the whole kingdom and secretly worked against his own father in attempting to take the throne for himself. He finally was so successful that David, with all his court, had to flee the city again as an exile. Imagine that! The man whom God has set to be a king over Israel, the man who is to reign over all the twelve tribes, the man to whom God had given a throne, now has to flee like a common criminal because of failure in his own moral life. Throughout all of this, David’s heart is penitent and resting upon God. He is acknowledging the fact that these things are resulting from his own folly, and is trusting God to work it out. It is a beautiful picture of what the attitude of the heart should be when we fall into sin and failure, and evil results begin to come. There is never a word of complaint from David. There is never any attempt to blame God! There is no bitterness, but simply the recognition that God can still work this out, and he does. God restores David to the throne and Absalom is overtaken, conquered by his own vanity. His long hair (which he gloried in) is caught in the branches of a tree and Joab, David’s ruthless general, finds him there and kills him. In Absalom’s death the rebellion is crushed. But that is not the whole story.

In Chapters 18 through 20 is recorded the final result of David's sin in the rebellion of Sheba against King David. All of this stems from that one double sin on David's part. There is no peace the rest of his reign. He has God's forgiveness, God's grace to him, God's restoration, and God's blessing in his personal life, but he still reaps the results of his own folly.

There is a popular song that says "The Lord above has commanded that man should love his neighbor" but the song goes on to say "With a little bit of luck, with a little bit of luck, when your neighbor comes around, you won't be home." The Lord above has said that man should be faithful to his wife and never go out philandering, but "with a little bit of luck, with a little bit of luck, she will never find out." And so it goes, with an exquisite capturing of the world's philosophy about God's program: "You can get by. God's not going to bring these things to pass. If you eat of this tree, you will not die," Satan said to Eve. "And with a little bit of luck" things will work out. But, as God shows in the story of David, this philosophy is a lie.

Finally {in Chapters 21-24}, we have the epilogue, or appendix, to this book, which gathers up some of **the lessons that David learned** through the forty years of his reign as king.

The first is the story of the Gibeonites, which teaches that the past must be reckoned with. If there are things in our past that can still be corrected, we have a responsibility before God to go back and set these things straight. Many a man or woman, boy or girl, has learned that money he stole before he became a Christian weighs heavily upon his conscience. He must get the money together, perhaps that he can ill afford, and pay back a debt or theft that he was guilty of before he became a Christian – because God desires truth in the inward parts. He is not content with mere outward formalities. He wants the whole of the life to be right. In the story of the Gibeonites, David went back and corrected something that happened under King Saul. As Saul's heir to the throne, he had to set it straight.

In Chapter 22, you have the beautiful eighteenth Psalm. The key to this psalm begins in Verse 26. David sings:

**"With the loyal thou dost show thyself loyal;
with the blameless man thou dost show thyself blameless;
with the pure thou dost show thyself pure,
and with the crooked thou dost show thyself perverse.
Thou dost deliver a humble people,
but thy eyes are upon the haughty to bring them down.
Yes, thou art my lamp, O Lord,
and my God lightens my darkness."
{2 Sam 22:26-29 RSV}**

And then this figure which I always love. David sings:

**"Yea, by thee I can crush a troop,
and by my God I can leap over a wall.
This God – his way is perfect;
the promise of the Lord proves true;
he is a shield for all those who take refuge
in him."
{2 Sam 22:30-31 RSV}**

What does he mean? Well, simply that what you are to God, that is what God will be to you. If you are open and honest and perfectly forthright with him, God will be open and honest and perfectly forthright with you. If you are crooked, perverse, deceitful, and lying to God, he will cause all your circumstances to deceive you and lie to you. If you are pure in heart and see everything in the proper light, you will discover that God is this way to you, and will bring more of this beauty and purity into your own heart and soul. This is what Paul cries out for in Philippians when he says, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own," (Phil 3:12 RSV). "What I am to him, he will be to me," he is saying. This is exactly what David discovered.

The last chapter is the account of David's third sin recorded in this book – his sin of numbering Israel. A plague came upon the people of Israel when David, in his pride, began to reckon on his own resources, and upon apparent military might, instead of relying upon the grace and power of God.

What does this teach us? Well, one great truth: our old natures are always there, ready to spring into activity the minute we cease relying upon the Spirit of God. Sin never dies of old age. No mat-

ter how long you walk with God, it is still possible to fall. The only thing that maintains the spiritual life is the quiet, day-by-day, moment-by-moment walk in faith.

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for this glimpse into our own lives and hearts. May the truth

grip us. May we realize that these are not mere words to tickle our fancy or instruct our intellect for the moment, but these are revelations of what life is all about – the secrets of living. May we take them seriously and heed them and love you and serve you and yield ourselves to you, day by day. In Christ's name, Amen.

1 KINGS: How to Lose a Kingdom

by Ray C. Stedman

First Kings is the gripping story of how to lose a kingdom.

As we read these Old Testament books, the key to making them live and be vital in our lives is to see that they are visual aids by which God is showing us what is going on in our own lives. We can see ourselves in every one of these Old Testament stories and when we do, the words take on eyes and look at us. We discover that the words are aimed exactly and directly at us.

The view that the Bible gives of man is that every one of us is intended to be a king over a kingdom. The whole purpose of the Lord Jesus coming into our lives, which is the theme of the book of Romans, is that we might learn how to reign over the kingdom of our lives in God-given authority and victory. It is this that makes human life full and complete and fascinating when we learn to walk in God's power.

One of the overworked phrases constantly bandied about in Christian circles is "the victorious Christian life." Unfortunately that has been abused, distorted, twisted, and perverted so many times that it has lost much of its meaning for us. But if you take it in the freshness of its original intention, that is exactly what God has in mind for you – to learn how to walk in victory as a king over the kingdom of your life and thus find its intended fulfillment. That is exactly what these books of the Old Testament illustrate for us, especially the books dealing with the monarchy in Israel.

God called aside the nation Israel; he marked it out as his own people. He made, in a sense, a stage of the little land of Israel. He bid the whole world

to look upon that nation. What went on in that land is a portrayal of what is going on throughout the whole course of human history, and individually going on in each of our lives. If we see these books like this, they take on a tremendously intense meaning and purpose in our lives.

The book of First Kings holds the secret of success in reigning over the kingdom of your life. It is the secret of learning to be submissive to the authority and dominion of God in your own life. In other words, man can never exercise dominion over his life unless he first subjects himself to the dominion of God. If you yield to God's dominion, you are given reign over the areas in your own life. On the other hand, if you refuse the dominion of God in your own life, you cannot under any circumstances or by any means fulfill your desire to be in authority over your life. It is impossible! This is what these books teach us. That is why all through this book you will find that the spotlight is on the throne. It is the king that is the important one – for as the king goes, so goes the nation. In your life your will is king. What your will allows to enter in to control your life, determines how the kingdom of your life goes.

King Solomon, the successor to David, is upon the throne. David is still king when the book opens, but immediately he is confronted by the rebellion of another one of his sons, Adonijah. Adonijah attempts to gain control of the throne even before his father David dies. David, learning of this, acts to put Solomon on the throne. Solomon is anointed king while his father still lives and

in effect assumes the throne while David is still alive. This indicates **the first mark** of what a real reigning authority in our lives should be: Authority must come by the gift and hand of God. We cannot reign except as we are established by God. When we give ourselves to the authority of God, it becomes his responsibility to bring every circumstance, and every enemy, and every rebellion that would otherwise threaten our reign, under control. This is what he did in the case of Adonijah.

As we read on in the second and third chapters you see Solomon coming to the throne. He rules in power and might and glory. Solomon's reign marks the greatest extension of the kingdom of Israel and was particularly characterized by a display of outward majesty and power. But in Chapter 3, you also have the seeds of defeat. These are very, very important to notice. In Verses 1 and 2 we read:

Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt; he took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had finished building his own house and the house of the Lord and the wall around Jerusalem. The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been build for the name of the Lord. {1 Ki 3:1-2 RSV}

Then the all-important third verse:

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father; only, he sacrificed and burnt incense at the high places. {1 Ki 3:3 RSV}

Now here is a man who loves God. He loves him with all his heart. Solomon begins his reign with a wonderful expression of yieldedness and a desire for God's rule and authority in his life. He follows in the footsteps of his father, David. Nevertheless, he does two little things – which seem to be very small, trivial matters – that ultimately overthrow his kingdom:

1. He makes an alliance with the daughter of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, (which always pictures the world) and brings her into the central life of the nation of Israel; here an alliance is made with the world.

2. Then he also worships at the high places.

In the pagan religions of that day all the worship and rites were conducted up on the mountain tops. The pagan tribes had erected altars, many of which were the center of very idolatrous and licentious worship. Frequently, the altar was the place where the fertility of sex gods was worshipped in a sexual display. But the altars were also taken over by the people of Israel and used for the sacrifices to Jehovah. The ark of God was now in the city of Jerusalem in the tabernacle, where David placed it. But Solomon did not present his offerings at the altar in the tabernacle; instead he was offering in these high places. He was offering sacrifices to God, but on pagan altars. Outwardly there was much that was beautiful and admirable in this young man's rule, and, in general, his heart was set in the right direction. Nevertheless, there was an area that was not fully committed to God. There was a weakness in his fellowship. There was a lack of understanding that the secret of God's love lay in that inner yieldedness to his will, represented by a worship before the ark of the covenant. In many, many a life, there is often much outward yieldedness and commitment to the will of God, but in the private inner life there is a lack of warmth and a hunger after God.

It was here that the strength of David so vividly lay. Even though David fell into the black sins of murder and adultery, nevertheless, in the inner sanctum of his heart there was a deep and abiding commitment to the will of God and a hungering after the person of God. You see it breaking through in all the psalms of David. But this is lacking in Solomon, and this is the first indication that something is wrong in his life.

This story takes us into a description of the beauty and the display of the greatness of Solomon's kingdom.

The second mark of a God-given power and reign is given to us in Chapter 3 in the account of Solomon's dream, in which God appeared and told him to ask for whatever he wanted. Solomon, in a marvelous passage, asks not for riches or for honor, but for wisdom:

“Give thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to govern this thy great people?” {1 Ki 3:9 RSV}

In beginning his reign like this, Solomon indicated that he had grasped to a great extent what was a primary need in exercising authority within the kingdom that God had given him – wisdom.

When you come to the New Testament, you find that this is true. In the book of Hebrews the writer takes to task the people that he is writing to because he says, “When you ought to be teachers, when you have been Christians long enough that by now you ought to be able to teach others, you have need of somebody to take you back to kindergarten and instruct you all over again in the ABC’s of the Christian life,” (cf, Heb 5:12). He says the sign of those who are mature in Christ, and have learned to really walk in Him, is that they are able to discern between good and evil.

That is the problem today, isn’t it? Good looks bad, and bad looks good. Anybody can tell good from evil when good looks good and evil looks evil. The great problem is to identify evil when it comes smiling at you, dripping with solicitude, and seems to offer you everything you have been looking for. Christian maturity comes when we learn to exercise the spirit of wisdom to distinguish between good and evil. That which seems to minister to the spirit may actually be a clever trap of Satan to plant a seed of distrust in the heart and will eventually produce terrible fruit a few years later in life.

This wisdom is what Solomon asked for. God granted him his request. But there was one slight weakness in his request. He asked for wisdom that he might govern the people. We can only wish, as we read, that this fine young man had asked for wisdom to govern his own life first. That is where he began to fail. It is evident from this that God knows exactly what is in a person. He granted Solomon this wisdom but he also gave with it the circumstances that put wisdom to the test.

God does this with all of us. God knows exactly what is in us. He gives us essentially what is our basic, urgent, clamant cry to him. If we want something from God badly enough, he will give it to us. But he also puts us in circumstances that will bring out what is in us.

Along with the wisdom, he gave to Solomon riches and honor. It was the riches and honor that overthrew Solomon. As Solomon gloried and exulted in the magnificence of his kingdom, pride began to enter his heart. His downfall came as a result of this.

The first mark of rulership then, in order to establish your rule in the kingdom of your own life, is dependence upon God. The second is wisdom – insight and understanding of yourself – if you are to walk in the Spirit.

We have this demonstrated to us in Solomon’s wise judgment between the two mothers who brought a baby to him. They had both had a baby, but one baby had died. Both women claimed the living baby. Solomon was asked to decide whose baby it was. In a display of his wisdom to analyze other people’s problems he said, “Bring a sword.” Then laying the baby down before these two women, he said, “Now divide the baby in half. Give one half to one woman and the other half to the other.” The real mother immediately said, “Oh, no; don’t do that! Let the other woman have the baby.” But the other woman said, “No, that is fine. That is perfectly fair. Divide the child and we will each take half.” Solomon knew at once who the real mother was. Thus his wisdom was demonstrated.

Chapter 4, Verse 29, begins a commentary on how much wisdom Solomon was given:

God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and largeness of mind like the sand of the seashore, so though Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east [including all the so-called wisdom of the orient – the Chinese and Indian] and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Herman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol [these were the newspaper commentators of that day!]; and his fame was in all the nations round about. He also uttered three thousand proverbs [we have them recorded in the book of Proverbs]; and his songs were a thousand and five [of those we have only one: “The Song of Solomon” or “The Song of Songs”]. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles,

and of fish. And men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom. {1 Ki 4:29-34 RSV}

What a picture this is of what Paul says in First Corinthians, “we have the mind of Christ” {1 Cor 2:16b RSV}, and “the spiritual man judges all things” {1 Cor 2:15a RSV}. He does not need anyone to teach him, since he already discerns all things. He is able to analyze and understand all things.

In Chapter 4 you have **the third mark** of what it means to reign – orderliness. A kingdom is orderly. God is not the author of confusion for he does things decently and in order. Also in Chapter 4, Verse 20, is **the fourth mark** of authority:

Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. {1 Ki 4:20 RSV}

That is total control over all that God intended him to have.

Have you learned to reign like that in your life? This is what God wants you to have.

In Chapters 5 through 8 we find the account of **the glorious temple** that Solomon built. How marvelous was this beautiful building. The interior was even more glorious than the outside. The inside was entirely covered with gold. To have entered that sanctuary must have been a most amazing experience. Everything one touched was covered with gold. But the central glory of it was the Shekinah glory of God which came down and dwelt in the holy place when Solomon dedicated the temple. In a marvelous prayer, Solomon gives thanks to the grace of God and recognizes again the one great principle by which a kingdom must be maintained – the king’s obedience to the throne of God.

Then we have the story, wonderful in its detail, of the visits of the Queen of Sheba and the King of Tyre to Solomon, and the recognition by the nations of the glory of Solomon’s kingdom.

Then suddenly, at the beginning of Chapter 11, the whole story takes a quick turn in the other direction. We read of **the results of the seeds of evil** that were sown earlier in Solomon’s life:

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women: the daughter of Pharaoh, and Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, {1 Ki 11:1 RSV}

These are pagan tribes.

... from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods;” Solomon clung to these in love. He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and [in the greatest understatement in the Bible] his wives turned away his heart. {1 Ki 11:3 RSV}

This is the same man who in the book of Proverbs wrote, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing,” (Prov 18:22a RSV). This is the greatest example I know of, of a good thing carried to an extreme. One thousand wives! Somebody has said that he was amply punished by having one thousand mothers-in-law! But this also marks the weakness and the failure of Solomon as his heart was turned away from God.

Now notice where it first began: This man enjoyed all the magnificence of his rule, with the greatest glory of the kingdom committed to him. The outward magnificence here was evidence of God’s blessing upon his life. But his downfall began when his heart became captured by something that God had prohibited. This is exactly in line with the warning that Jesus gives in the Sermon on the Mount when he says, “Watch out where your heart goes, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,” {Matt 6:21, Luke 12:34 RSV}. The first step in moral decline always begins with your emotions.

What do you allow your emotions to center upon? What captures the central place of emotion in your life? That is where the decline begins.

Then we read it is followed by idolatry:

For Solomon went after Ashtoreth [the sex goddess] the goddess of the Sidonians, and

after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab,” {1 Ki 11:5-7a RSV}

Chemosh was the hideous image in which a fire was built and at the height of the religious festival children were thrown into the fire. It was Solomon who built this place where the rites centered on the worship of this grinning god.

... and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites [another fertility god], on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away ... {1 Ki 11:7b-9a RSV}

Three times in rapid succession in the rest of this chapter “the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon.” First Hadad, the Edomite the man of the flesh. Then in Verse 23:

God also raised up an adversary to him, Rezon, the son of Eliada, who had fled from his master Hadadezer king of Zobah. {1 Ki 11:23 RSV}

Then in Verse 26:

Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, [who later split the kingdom]. {1 Ki 11:26 RSV}

So these adversaries came in to overthrow Solomon and to accomplish his defeat. The chapter closes with Solomon “sleeping with his fathers” and being buried in the city of David – a sudden collapse to the glory and majesty of his kingdom.

I heard recently of a man who had exercised great pulpit power and a tremendous ministry in many ways for God and whose whole ministry suddenly collapsed. He was brought before his session on moral charges. It was discovered that there had been an unjudged affection in his heart that had been going on behind the scenes, year after year. Despite the outward display of power and authority that he exercised in his ministry, there was eating

away at his heart and emotions that seed which was to utterly overthrow his kingdom. This story is repeated again and again in lives everywhere.

Chapter 12 begins the second movement in this book – **the degradation and breakup of the kingdom**. Jeroboam split the kingdom, taking the ten tribes of Israel in the north to begin the Northern Kingdom. He reintroduced in Israel the awful worship of golden calves. Long before, while Moses was up on the mountain communing with God, the people came to Aaron and said, “We want to have a God that we can worship like the nations.” Do you remember what Aaron told Moses after he got down off the mountain? He said, “I told them to bring all their gold all their earrings and all their jewelry and I took all this gold and threw it into the fire. Lo and behold, a calf came walking out. We fell down and worshipped it, calling it Jehovah,” {cf, Exod 32:23-24}. It was not that they intended to be idolatrous. They simply wanted some visible evidence on which to center their worship. Now we come to the sin of Jeroboam. He is forever afterwards known in Israel as “Jeroboam the son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin.” Here it is not one calf, but two calves. It is the same sin multiplied, doubled in its intensity and power that is introduced into the life of the nation by Jeroboam.

Chapter 14 presents to us the story of the invasion and defeat of Israel by Egypt, the very Egypt out of which God had led this people. Egypt is again a picture of the world and its ways – its wickedness its folly, its futility, and its foolishness. We read in Chapter 14, Verses 25 and 26:

In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem; he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord ... {1 Ki 14:25-26a RSV}

He assaulted the place of worship first of all.

... and the treasures of the king’s house; he took away everything. He also took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made. {1 Ki 14: 26b RSV}

Do you get the picture? Solomon who knew God and sought to walk with him did not fully judge the emotions and attachments of his heart. He was finally undermined and went back into the ways of the world with all its foolish manifestation,

and so lost that inner glory and sense of worship where God was exalted in the inner temple of his own life.

After this the account tells of the various kings that come to the throne of Israel. Nadab is followed by Baasha and Zimri. Finally comes Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel.

The final part of the book, beginning in Chapter 17, introduces **the prophetic ministry** beginning with Elijah. There are other prophets who came before Elijah but they did not do miracles. Elijah begins the ministry of miracles in the Bible. The prophets who ministered to Judah, the Southern Kingdom, did no miracles because there God's testimony was still the central life of the nation. But in Israel, the Northern Kingdom, God's presence was rejected and in his place the golden calves were worshipped. The ministry of miracles here is a testimony to the people that God is still in their midst. God sought to shake them up to be aware of the fact that they have drifted away from him. Elijah's ministry is a tremendous revelation of God's dealings with the wayward human heart. First of all, in his ministry, he shut the heavens so that it did not rain upon the land for three years. Then he called down fire from heaven upon the sheriffs and others who were sent to arrest him and bring him before the king. As these miracles caught the attention of the people, there came a degree of repentance. They understood that God was using a harsh hand, as God sometimes has to do with us, in chastisement and judgment to wake us up and make us aware of how we are drifting away from central worship of him in the innermost part of our being.

When this happened there came at last the judgment of Baal, when the two philosophies in Israel came to a headlong clash up on Mt. Carmel. God vindicated his honor by sending fire from heaven to destroy all of Elijah's offering, including all the water that was poured upon the offering and the stone altar, and God reigned in mighty power. When that judgment was exercised, the heavens were opened again and rain poured down upon the land.

That is all a picture of us, of what happens in our lives when we resist the right of God to rule in our hearts. God brings us under chastening, and, at last, our stubbornness is broken. The willful rebellion is ended and we are humbled at last before

God. Then the rain of grace begins again and pours down upon our hearts to bring fruit and blessing once more.

Following this is the unusual account of Elijah's fear of Jezebel. I am always amused by this. Here is this fearless prophet, this rugged man of God who has faced four hundred priests alone on top of the mountain, now running in terror from one angry woman. He cries as he hides under the juniper bush, "Lord, I have had enough. It was bad enough facing four hundred priests of Baal but when this one woman gets after me, that is too much." She was threatening his life. This is amusing because he says, "Lord, I have had enough – take my life," but of course he doesn't really mean that. All he would have to do is walk out and find Jezebel and she would accommodate him in his wish. Instead he hides under the juniper bush. God deals with him in wondrous grace:

- The first thing that he does is to put him to bed and give him a good night's rest.
- Then God gives him a good square meal.
- Finally God teaches him the greatest secret that Elijah ever learned – that God does not always move through earthquake, fire, and thunder – but many times through the still, small voice of a changed conscience.

The book closes with **the story of King Ahab**, and his failure, his folly, and his self-centered desire for the vineyard of Naboth, bringing down the judgment of God. In Chapter 22 we learn how God works through what seem to be accidental circumstances. The two kings of Israel and Judah go out to battle. Ahab, king of Israel, in his Satanic cleverness tries to put the king of Judah out in the forefront of battle. Ahab dresses the king of Judah in his own armor in order that he might be mistaken for the king of Israel and shot at. But as King Ahab is complimenting himself on how he has tricked the king of Judah into being exposed to danger, we read that an arrow shot into the air (just by chance) by a warrior on the opposite side, finds its way to him and pierces through a crack in the armor into his heart. God's judgment is accomplished! God is the God of circumstances. God is the God of accidents. God is behind all the move-

ments of our lives. This is the revelation of this account.

As I close this book of First Kings, the verse that comes most prominently to my mind and thrusts itself upon my heart, is this:

**Keep your heart with all vigilance;
for from it flow the springs of life.**
(Prov 4:23 RSV)

Outward circumstances will never dethrone you from reigning in your life. Nothing you run up against in terms of outward pressures and outward circumstances will ever succeed in dethroning you. Your dethronement, your moving back into the slavery and bondage of the flesh and the devil, will come only as you permit some rival worship to enter into your heart and dethrone God. When your

emotions become attached to some place that is a rival to the worship of God, then the kingdom's days are numbered.

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray that we may learn the great lesson of this book for our own hearts – “that out of the heart flow the springs of life.” As we watch that central place of desire, we learn to know what we want most of all in life. Lord, whom have we in heaven besides thee and who on earth do we desire more than thee? We pray that we may answer this question in the loneliness of our hearts before thee. In Christ's name, Amen.

2 KINGS: A Wasted Life

by Ray C. Stedman

In the Hebrew Bible the books of First and Second Kings are combined into one book of Kings. They are quite aptly named Kings, as they trace the lives of various rulers of God's kingdom, beginning with Saul and David, down through the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. Then these two books trace out for us the various dynasties in Israel, the northern kingdom, and the single dynasty of the house of David in the southern kingdom of Judah. In each case, the spotlight is always on the king; it is what the king does in relationship to God that determines how the nation goes. The character of the kingdom is largely determined by the character of the king. When the king walked with God in obedience and humility, and worshipped and obeyed God in the temple in Jerusalem (or later in Samaria in the northern kingdom), God's blessing in prosperity and victory rested upon the kingdom. There was no such blessing for the northern kingdom because they had no godly kings. But in the southern kingdom, in the house of David, there was victory and prosperity when godly kings appeared from time to time. The rains came at the right times and the crops grew. The economy of the land flourished. There was victory over their enemies, even when the enemies came against them in allied forces. There was always victory when the king walked with God.

But when the king disobeyed and worshipped other gods, immediately famines broke out, droughts came, and invasions occurred. The land fell into difficult and extremely serious conditions. When the kings were in obedience, they were always types of Christ – such as David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Joash, and Jehoshaphat. They pictured something of the sovereign, kingly reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. But when they were in disobedience,

they were types, or pictures of the antichrist, the man of sin who is yet to appear upon the earth. This was the antichrist of whom Jesus himself said to Israel, "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive," (John 5:43 RSV). It is this man of sin, the quintessence of human evil, that is pictured by the kings of Israel and Judah when they walk in disobedience.

The thing that makes these books perennially fascinating to us is that this kingdom in Israel is a picture to each of us of the kingdom in our own lives. The nation of Israel was picked out particularly from the nations to be a representative of the individual human life. God chose Israel. Israel did not come into the position of prominence and favor in God's sight by their own efforts. God chose them. He formed them and molded them and produced a nation that would be a sample to all the world of what God is willing to do in any individual's life. As we read these books, we will find ourselves right in the midst of the problems and blessings and possibilities that are reflected in these books of the kings.

From the beginning there were always two divisions in the monarchy. Even under David this was true. When David first came to the throne, he was king only of Judah for seven years. It was not until after that seven-year reign that he became king over both divisions of the nation. This division between the ten tribes in the north and the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the south, where Jerusalem was located, existed right from the very start. Now it was intended to be this way, but they were all to be under one king. They represent the divisions in the human life. Everyone knows that there are two evident divisions of human life:

1. First of all, there is the body of which we are so aware. We take it around with us. We spend our time taking care of it, primping it, dressing it up, painting it, unpainting it, and doing all the things necessary to keep it looking good. Unfortunately most of life seems to be spent in taking care of the body. But, of course, there is more than a body to each man.
2. There is also the soul, the invisible part that contains the personality, and is so obviously gone when we look at the emptiness of a corpse and the terrible tragedy of death.

Here in the two kingdoms this division of life is acted out. The ten tribes of the north are representative of the body, while Judah and Benjamin, the two tribes of the south, represent the soul. It was in the southern kingdom that the capital city of Jerusalem was located, and the temple was in Jerusalem, and God dwelt in the temple.

We know from the Scriptures that in the human life there is not only a body and soul, but within the soul – so closely linked to it that only the Word of God can divide between the soul and the spirit – is this dwelling place of God. It is there that the Holy Spirit takes up his residence when he comes into the human heart. When this happens, man is as God intended man to be. Without the Holy Spirit dwelling in the human spirit, man is only an incomplete example of what he is supposed to be. But when God the Holy Spirit comes in, he takes up his residence in the human spirit, the temple of the body. In the New Testament, this figure is drawn for us as we are told that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). If we permit the Spirit of God to dwell within our human spirit he governs our soul, thereby adjusting and controlling the body and the outward life.

This temple of the Spirit was in Jerusalem and all the worship of the kingdom was to be there. It was never to be in any other place. There in the temple in Jerusalem God had put his name. Likewise, in each human being the human spirit is to be the temple, the place of worship. Remember what the Lord Jesus said to the woman at the well about the nature of God? “God is Spirit,” he said, “and those who worship him must worship [where?] in spirit and truth” {John 4:24 RSV}, “for such the Father seeks to worship him,” {John 4:23b RSV}. He can find lots of worshipers who are worshipping

him in soul – mere soulish, emotional worship. But he is not interested in that. He is looking for that worship which is centered in the deepest part of human nature, in the spirit, and this is figured by the temple.

In your kingdom your will is king and nothing can take place in your kingdom except as it passes by the authority of your will. Therefore, what your will does, determines what your life will be like. If you willingly, obediently yield yourself to the influences brought into your life by the Holy Spirit dwelling in your human spirit, you are like the kingdom when David walked with God. The land flourished in abundance and prosperity and the influence of that little kingdom reached out to the uttermost parts of the earth. But if, like many of the following kings, you walk in disobedience – if your will is defiant, and is set against the things of God; if you refuse his sovereignty and dominion in your life – then the same kind of evil invasions that fell upon this kingdom will come into your life. You will no longer have any strength to repel the inward corruptions that ruin and take their toll upon your life and the lives of those you influence. Thus the kingdom falls into ruin.

As we trace this ruin we notice that Solomon, the son of David, introduced the principle that began the deterioration of the kingdom. He fell in love with the daughter of Pharaoh. There was nothing wrong in his falling in love. God approves of that. But there was something definitely wrong with his falling in love with the daughter of Pharaoh. Pharaoh was the king of all Egypt, the very place from which God in grace and power had redeemed his people. (Egypt in Scripture is always a type or a picture of the world’s allurements to the human heart.) When Solomon brought the daughter of Pharaoh into his court, the door was open for alliances with other lovely girls in the tribes around Israel. Soon he had a thousand wives and along with them came their idols. The kingdom began to deteriorate under Solomon because he allowed the world to entice and allure him, to draw away his heart’s interest from the temple where his worship should have been centered. You can draw the parallel picture in your own life.

Then Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, actually split the kingdom so that the northern ten tribes were removed from the southern two tribes and a separate kingdom was set up in the north. If the northern kingdom is representative, as I have suggested,

of a man's body, then when our spirit loses fellowship with the Holy Spirit within, it isn't very long before the body begins to disintegrate. Fleshly indulgence sets in and bodily wrongdoing soon follows, as the first chapter of Romans tells us.

Then came Jeroboam, the son of Rehoboam. It was Jeroboam who introduced the great sin for which the northern kingdom was noted. Jeroboam set up two calves in Bethel and Dan to be the worship centers. Remember, when the Israelites were down at the foot of Mt. Sinai and Moses had gone up to the mountain to receive the Law, Aaron the priest led the people in the building of a calf of gold which they began to worship. And they called it Jehovah (Exod 32:5). It wasn't that they were denying Jehovah, their God. They were misrepresenting him by this calf which was like the gods of the other nations. They were calling it by the name of the true God. This was an abomination in the sight of God and was eliminated from the nation until the days of Jeroboam when he introduced the two calves of gold and said, "These be your gods, Israel. Worship here," (1 Ki 12:28).

This represents that form of godliness which denies the power of God. It is an outward conformity to Christian faith which lacks the inner response of the Spirit. It is quite possible to make a very good appearance of being a Christian – so much so, in fact, that you fool everybody but God. You can come to church, you can stand when everybody stands, sit down when everybody sits down, hold the hymn book at the right angle, bow your head at the proper prescribed angle and at the proper prescribed time, but inwardly there is no worship at all. This is exactly what is pictured here in the worship which Jeroboam the son of Nebat introduced into the northern kingdom.

From that moment on, these two kings, David and Jeroboam, become the representatives of the two spiritual principles that are traced throughout the kingdoms. They become the measuring sticks for the kings that followed. Time and time again in these books we read that a king either walked in the ways of David his father and served the Lord his God – tearing down all the false and abominable worship that Israel had fallen into – or they say he walked in the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and caused Israel to go whoring after the gods that Jeroboam had set up. Now in Israel, the northern kingdom, there were no godly kings. There was just a continual succession of kings murdering their

predecessors to gain the throne. But from time to time, God in his grace intervened by sending prophets in an effort to arrest the fall of the northern kingdom. In Judah, the southern kingdom, there were a few godly kings and these men stand out like lights in the darkness – the primary ones were Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah.

All through this time of decline God made various efforts to stop the corruption and decay of the kingdom. These centered largely on the ministry of Elijah and Elisha. The books of Kings are primarily noteworthy for the ministry of these two mighty prophets of God. (God never spoke to the nation through a king. He used the king in government, to control and to administer justice. The life and the character of the kingdom was due to the reflected character of the king.) When God wanted to speak to the nation, he sent a prophet. Hosea, Amos, Joel, Isaiah and Jeremiah were also prophets that ministered to the kingdoms, but the only ones that appear in First and Second Kings are Elijah and Elisha.

Elijah was a rugged personality. He went around wearing a leather girdle and dressed in haircloth. What a scraggly, mangy person he must have looked – a rugged, tough character. Time after time, he met the king face to face to deliver a message of judgment and his life was at stake many times. But he was faithful and God protected him. We have the wonderful story of how he met with 400 priests of Baal on top of Mt. Carmel and single-handedly defied the power of this abominable worship in Israel (1 Ki 18:20). He challenged them to a contest as to who could bring down fire from heaven. In a most remarkable scene he taunted them as they went about cutting their flesh and crying out to their god to send down fire, saying to them, "What is the matter? Where is your god? Is he out to lunch? Has he gone on a journey? Is he asleep? Why doesn't he answer?" When they had exhausted themselves, he called down fire from Jehovah that licked up not only the sacrifice, but the water that had been poured upon it and the very stones of the altar. Everything was gone. He won a mighty triumph for God. This was the character of Elijah. He was primarily the prophet of the Law. It was his ministry to bring the thunderings of the Law to the nation Israel, to try to wake it up to its shameful condition. Therefore, his was a ministry of love and of fire and of judgment.

When Elijah was caught up into heaven in a chariot of fire, his mantle fell upon Elisha. In contrast to Elijah, Elisha's ministry was the ministry of grace and sweetness and glory throughout Israel. Now why was this?

Well, if you study this carefully you will see that these two men together prefigure the ministry of Jesus Christ. When the Lord Jesus came to Israel, it was in a period of decay and corruption, as it was when Elijah came to the nation. Herod was on the throne as a vassal of Rome. The high priest's office had gone into the hands of the Sadducees (who were the rationalists of that day) and they had turned the temple into a place of corruption and commerce. The nation had fallen into dark and bitter times:

- The Lord Jesus' ministry to official Israel was in the power of Elijah. He began his ministry with the cleansing of the temple as he made a whip of many cords and, with his arm bared and his eyes flashing fire (gentle Jesus – meek and mild), drove the money changers out of the temple, turning over the tables and flinging the stuff out into the courtyard. That also marked the close of his ministry in thundering judgment to official Israel.
- But our Lord's ministry to the individual was the ministry of Elisha – the ministry of grace, of winsome sweetness, of compassionate tenderness and helpfulness.

There is another interesting comparison here, in that Elisha also seems to picture the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church after the day of Pentecost; Elisha's ministry also began with a man ascending into heaven. Elisha's very first miracle depicted the ministry of the Holy Spirit – the putting of salt into the water and the sweetening of the water. The miracle concerning salt, the miracle of the oil that kept flowing continually – which is another symbol of the Holy Spirit – and the miracle of the water suddenly appearing in the parched and barren famine-stricken fields all picture the Holy Spirit. Then, also, there was the miracle of resurrection when the little boy who died was raised from the dead as Elisha lay his staff upon him and breathed on his face. This was not mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. It was a genuine resurrection. Elisha also performed the miracles of healing leprosy, of feed-

ing a thousand or more people, and of recovering the lost iron ax head by making it float on top of the water. Miracles continued even after he was dead and buried. A group of men trying to dispose of a body were suddenly surprised by a mob of bandits. They threw the body into the tomb of Elijah and when the body of the dead man touched the bones of Elijah the man sprang back to life again. Why? All of this indicates the ministry of the Holy Spirit in a decadent life trying to win back a heart that has gradually drifted into the blindness and darkness of corruption. Even when everything looks dead and absolutely gone, the Holy Spirit is still able to transform death into life by a touch.

The book of Second Kings traces the decline of these kingdoms, and Israel goes first. It is taken captive by Assyria, and, under Shalmaneser, the northern kingdom is carried away into total and final captivity as we read in Chapter 17, Verses 13 through 18:

Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets." But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the Lord their God. They despised his statutes, and his covenants that he made with their fathers, and the warnings which he gave them. They went after false idols, and became false, and they followed the nations that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them that they should not do like them. And they forsook all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made for themselves molten images of two calves; and they made an Asherah [that is, a sex god], and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings, and used divination and sorcery, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah only. {2 Ki 17:13-18 RSV}

What a picture this is of the evil results of sin in the human life particularly as it affects the out-

ward bodily life. Have you ever noticed this? We speak of the marks of sin upon some individual and it is amazing how early those marks begin to appear when there is a dissolute, debauched way of life. I am not talking about the normal marks of old age. These come to all of us – even the righteous. You know the five B’s of middle age – baldness, bifocals, bridges, bay window, and bunions. These are just the normal marks of decay. I am talking about the marks of coarseness and vulgarity that mark the body of man when it is expended in high living, a dissolute life, overindulgence in food and drink, and all the other things that leave a mark upon the body. The body is first to go just as Israel was the first to go here.

Judah was next. Judah was arrested from decay for awhile by the glorious life of Hezekiah who arose in the midst of darkness. His father had been an ungodly king and his son following him on the throne was an ungodly king. But Hezekiah was marked by the grace of God. The kingdom had fallen into such decay when he came to the throne that his first act was to cleanse the temple. It took the Levites – the priestly tribe – sixteen days to carry all the rubbish and junk out of the temple before they could even begin to purify it for the services again. That is how corrupt the nation had become. Hezekiah also reintroduced the Passover. He also destroyed the great brazen serpent that the people had been worshipping. This was the very serpent that God had used for their blessing when Moses lifted it up in the wilderness (Num 21:8-9). But Hezekiah in fine sarcasm called it a piece of brass and destroyed it because it had become an object of idolatry. Many things that were once used in blessing become idols if we hang on to them because of the sentimental value.

Hezekiah’s life was miraculously extended when the shadow on the sundial turned back ten degrees and he was allowed fifteen more years of life. In those fifteen years, however, he had a son named Manasseh who became the worst king Judah ever had. Manasseh had the longest reign of any of the kings – fifty-five years of ungodliness. Thus some have said that Hezekiah is the man who lived too long. If he had accepted the word of the Lord to him about his death, Israel would have been spared the terrible deeds under Manasseh.

So the kingdom declined, and finally, Judah was carried away by Nebuchadnezzar into Babylon the symbol of corruption and defilement. For a few

years the temple remained in Jerusalem, but in the end it too was stripped and burned. The walls of the city were broken down, and all the people were carried away into captivity. The book closes with Zedekiah, the last king of Israel. After he was captured by the King of Babylon, his sons were slain before his eyes, and his eyes were put out. Then he was bound and taken to Babylon.

Zedekiah was the last king that Israel ever had. Later, in the tumult and the tremendous confusion in Jerusalem during the Passover week when our Lord was crucified, Pilate offered their king to the nation, “Here is your King!” {John 19:14b RSV}. But the crowd meant it when they cried out, “We have no king but Caesar,” (John 19:15b RSV). Yet it was Caesar’s governor who taught Israel its lesson by having this inscription written above the cross “Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews” (John 19:19b RSV). That poor people will never know another moment of genuine prosperity and blessing either spiritually or physically until they shall see “him whom they have pierced” {Zech 12:10b RSV}, and recognize the king that was sent to them in lowliness as Zechariah prophesied.

Now do you see what this book is about? It is a picture of a wasted life.

Here is a picture of an individual who is a Christian, whose foundation is laid by Jesus Christ, but who has built upon it with only wood, hay and stubble. In the secret place of his heart, in the will, he has refused to walk in obedience to the things revealed unto him through the Holy Spirit who dwells in the temple of his human spirit. As a result his life becomes more and more characterized by decay and corruption and defilement. It begins with the body and then becomes evident in the personality. Cruelty, hardness, and defiance set in, and, finally, the temple itself is burned. Paul tells us in First Corinthians that for each one there is the judgment of fire which will reveal our work; “the wood, hay, [and] stubble” {1 Cor 3:12 RSV} will be burned although the believer himself will be saved, “but only as through fire,” (1 Cor 3:15 RSV).

The whole lesson of Second Kings, of course, is that it need not be so. God is continually interrupting our lives with the evidence of his grace. God tries to arrest us in our stubborn deliberate ways. Yet we can go ahead. God will not stop us – just as he didn’t stop them. We can go on beating our way to the top of the heap, and, perhaps,

win the acclaim and approval of the world around us. But one day we shall have to stand naked before the one who loves us who gave himself for us and to whom we have denied the right to be God in the temple of our spirit. We have robbed him of his inheritance in the saints. In that day, John says, we shall be ashamed before him at his coming {cf, 1 Jn 2:28}. May God grant that the lesson of these books may come home to our hearts.

Prayer:

Our Father, we know that this is not recorded merely for our enjoyment, or for our astonishment, but, rather, for our instruction. All these things were written that we may see ourselves, and, seeing ourselves, make that adjustment by the Holy Spirit within, who causes our kingdom to flourish in abundance, in victory, in prosperity, in joy, in peace and blessing. In Christ's name, Amen.

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1 CHRONICLES: David and the Ark of God

by Ray C. Stedman

The books of Chronicles cover the same historical ground that the books of Samuel and Kings do, but from quite a different point of view. These books can be compared to the Gospel of John in the New Testament. If you are familiar with the four Gospels, you know that the first three – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – are what we call the Synoptical Gospels. These three parallel each other and cover the same general incidents, often from the same general viewpoint. But the Gospel of John is something quite different. When John sat down to write his Gospel, the last New Testament book written (probably about 90 or 95 A.D.), he employed a deliberately selective process. He says, “Jesus did many other signs ... which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ...” (John 20:30-31 RSV). He made no attempt to cover the whole of the Lord’s ministry. Instead, John carefully selected certain things out of Christ’s ministry to illustrate the great point that he wished to make – here is the one who fulfilled all the divine predictions of the coming of Messiah, the Christ, and furthermore, he is the Son of the living God. This was his purpose. The books of First and Second Chronicles are similar in their selective process.

The central points around which everything in these books gather are the king and the temple. The king was David. In one sense, he is the only king that appears in these two books. He is **God’s king**. The first book centers on him completely. The second book of Chronicles follows the house of David down through the time of the captivity, almost totally ignoring the northern kingdom, because this is the book of God’s king and the temple.

It is clearly evident that First Chronicles was written after the seventy years of Israel’s captivity in Babylon. It was probably written by Ezra, the priest, who also wrote the book that bears his name. Ezra was one of the great figures to come back with the captives to re-establish the temple and the worship of Jehovah in Jerusalem. It is with emphasis upon the re-establishment of the worship of Jehovah that this book is written, as well as for the purpose of covering the historical events.

The selective character of First Chronicles is evident right in the opening chapters. The first nine chapters are given over to a long list of genealogies. These are not merely the stringing together of a lot of names, however; these genealogies are of great importance. For one thing, they are some of the most helpful material available for anybody attempting to study the problem of biblical chronol-

ogy. If you are working in this area, you will certainly spend a great deal of time in these opening chapters of Chronicles. But they are far more than that.

I know sometimes we are tempted to hurry by these long lists of Bible names. We feel so much like a dear old Scotch preacher who was reading from the opening chapter of Matthew. He started out reading, "Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judah and his brethren," (Matt 1:2 KJV). Then he said, "They kept on begatting one another all the way down this side of the page and clear on to the other side." And he picked up the reading and went on from there.

Some of us also would like to dismiss these genealogies, but they are too important for that. If we read them in a hurry, we will miss the point of this whole passage. If you look carefully at them you will see that God is choosing and selecting, excluding and including, working toward an ultimate goal.

This genealogy is recorded so that we might see both the goal toward which the Lord works in human history and the principle by which he includes or excludes events. It goes clear back to the dawn of human history and lists the sons and descendants of Adam – Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel. We know the sons of Adam to be Cain, Abel and Seth, but here, immediately, Cain and Abel are excluded. There is no mention of them. The whole focus is upon the descendants of Seth, for from him eventually came the family of Abraham and the Israelites. Here is the principle of exclusion in action.

Then the line of Seth is traced down to Enoch and to Noah. The three sons of Noah are given – Shem, Ham, and Japheth. But Ham and Japheth are dismissed with just a brief word and the attention is focused on the line of Shem.

From Shem we trace on down to Abraham and his family. There is this constant narrowing process which then excludes Ishmael, the son of Abraham, and Esau, the son of Isaac, and focuses on Jacob's twelve sons, who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel.

As the genealogy goes on, it selects the tribes of Judah and Levi – the tribes of the king and the priestly line:

- It traces the tribe of Judah down to David, to Solomon and then to the kings of the house of David, into captivity.

- The tribe of Levi is traced down to Aaron, the first of the priests, and then to the priests who were prominent in the kingdom at the time of David.

In all of these genealogies there is one very choice incident that stands out. It is found in Chapter 4, Verses 9-10, where we read of Jabez:

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain." [Jabez means "pain."] Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that thou wouldst bless me and enlarge my border, and that thy hand might be with me, and that thou wouldst keep me from harm so that it might not hurt me!" And God granted what he asked. {1 Chr 4:9-10 RSV}

That little incident is put right down in the midst of a whole long string of names as a kind of spotlight on this individual.

Now there is always one principle that God follows in this process of selectivity:

- He includes a man whenever he finds an obedient heart. All the native disability of that man is canceled out and he is immediately made an effectual instrument for the working of God in human history.
- When God excludes a name, when he turns from a line or a family, it is always on the basis of the appearance of a disobedient heart. On that basis God excludes a man, regardless of rank or ancestry or privilege of any kind.

Wherever there is an obedient heart God begins a new line with him. Wherever disobedience occurs, that name is dropped. You can trace this principle throughout this entire genealogy.

This sets the pattern for the rest of the book. In Chapter 10 there is a brief account that completely covers the life of King Saul, the first of Israel's kings. Saul is dismissed in only fourteen verses. The reason is given in Verses 13 and 14:

So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord slew him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse. {1 Chr 10:13-14 RSV}

The rest of the book is all about David. David was a king after God's own heart – a king with an obedient heart. The book traces the whole course of David's life from the moment he was anointed king. In other words, this is the book that emphasizes God's king. David's first act after coming to the place of kingship in Israel is to take over the pagan stronghold of the Jebusites, the city of Jerusalem – God's city. This is the place where God had chosen to put his name among the tribes of Israel. Immediately following is a flashback to the time of David's exile and to the mighty men gathered around him there. These were men of faith and passion who were attracted to David by the character that he displayed. (One of my favorite Bible stories occurs here in Chapter 11, Verse 22. This is the story of Benaiah, Jehoiada's son, who, among other things, slew a lion in a pit on a snowy day.) These mighty men who gathered about David and shared his exile eventually became the leaders in his kingdom. All of this is a picture for us of the reign of the Lord Jesus in his coming to earth again. We are promised that we who share his sufferings now will also share his glory when he comes to rule over the earth to establish his kingdom of righteousness. Then the righteousness of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. In the beautifully descriptive language of the prophets, "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks" {Isa 2:4b RSV}; "neither shall they learn war any more," {Isa 2:4d RSV}; and "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," {Isa 11:9a RSV}. This is pictured for us by the magnificence, glory, and majesty of the reign of David as he gathers his mighty men and brings them to the throne to share his kingly power and glory.

The second emphasis of this book is on **the ark of God**. In Chapter 13 we are told how David went down to the Philistine city where the ark was being held captive, took it upon a cart and tried to

bring it back to Jerusalem. The unwitting departure of David from the principle of obedience is recorded for us here. He knew the Law commanded that the ark be carried only by the Levites, but in the exuberance of his joy and his zeal for God's cause, he thought God wouldn't mind if the ark was carried in another way. And what was the result? When Uzzah, walking along beside the ark, saw it shaking as it passed over a rough spot in the road, he reached out to steady it. When his hand touched the ark, he immediately dropped dead. David was tremendously shaken by this. But as he thought it over and prayed about it, he realized that it was all his own fault. He had neglected the word of the Lord.

There is no incident from the Old Testament that teaches more clearly the importance of a careful, precise obedience to what the Word of God says. I think it also teaches us that God is able to take care of his own cause. There are many today who, like Uzzah, are trying to steady the ark of God. They think it is going to be defeated by some challenge that is issued against it, and they become self-appointed defenders of the faith, little realizing that God is quite able to defend his own cause.

But David learned his lesson. He returned to obedience and asked the Levites to bring up the ark according to the Law; then the ark came into Jerusalem. Now here is a most remarkable and significant point: the tabernacle, which had been the home of the ark through all the journeyings in the wilderness, and the central place of worship for Israel during the time of the judges and the reign of Saul, was not located in Jerusalem. The tabernacle was located in the city of Gibeon. One would think that the ark should be returned to that tabernacle, since it had been taken from there. The ark belonged in the Holy of Holies in that tabernacle. But when David brings the ark back, he doesn't return it to the tabernacle. He brings it to the city of Jerusalem, the city of the king, and, by his own authority, he sets up a center of worship on the very site where later the temple was to be built. Thus he replaces the authority of the priests by the authority of the king.

These Old Testament books are beautifully designed by the Holy Spirit to be an application to our own spiritual life.

1 CHRONICLES: David and the Ark of God

- They cover the warfare that we engage in, the battles,
- The kingdom over which we rule, the difficulties which we encounter, and
- The spiritual principles by which victory is won.

These events are very significant to us.

The tabernacle was, of course, movable. It followed the people wherever they went throughout the wilderness journeys. It is a picture of God's grace that is ready to follow the believer despite the fact that he may be wandering about sometimes in a wilderness, sometimes in the land, sometimes in the desert – sometimes up and sometimes down. God's grace is still ready to follow, ready to support, and ready to minister in the priestly ministry of confession and forgiveness of sin.

Inevitably, in every Christian's experience, there is this up-and-down, trial-and-error time when we are so grateful for the priestly ministry of confession, of cleansing and forgiveness. But, at last, as we are led by the Spirit of God, we come to the place where we recognize the problem. The reason for this wave of up-and-down experience is that we have refused to allow the Lord Jesus to exercise his kingly lordship in our life. When at last we are led by the Spirit to the place where our stubborn will is broken, and we give up, once and for all, our insistence on running our own affairs, we recognize that this is the principle of God by which we must live. Now we may not always follow it faithfully even from there, but at least we realize that God is ruler over our life and Jesus Christ is Lord. In other words, "You are not your own, you are bought with a price" {1 Cor 6:19b-20a RSV}. Your life is no longer yours to plan, to program, or to work out in advance. You belong to the Lord and he becomes king in your life.

At that very moment, what is pictured here is fulfilled. When the king comes, the ark is fixed in the temple and is immovable from then on. All the blessing of God then flows to the heart that is in full submission to the lordship of Christ. The result is that the temple is a new beginning. It is no longer a continuation of the tabernacle – though much of the temple is like the tabernacle in its plan and design. As David made the new temple furni-

ture, it was different in many ways from the furniture in the tabernacle. This was a new beginning, a total change of government, resulting in a total change of behavior. Beginning in Chapter 18, where the ark is brought back and placed at the site of the temple, David's conquest over all his enemies throughout the whole of the kingdom of Judah is immediately recorded. Chapters 18, 19, and 20 are devoted to the victories of King David, beautifully describing what happens in the heart if Christ is crowned king.

The only dark picture in the book is in Chapter 21. One interlude is brought before us of David's sin; that of numbering the people of Israel. It is remarkable that the double sin of David – when he took the wife of Uriah the Hittite in an adulterous relationship and arranged the murder of her husband by sending him out in the forefront of battle – is passed over in total silence. That was David's personal sin as a man. That sin was his own weakness, his foolish willfulness as an individual. It had nothing to do with his reign as a king. But this sin of numbering Israel is an abrupt departure from the principle of dependence upon the strength and glory of God. Why did he number the people? He wanted to glory and gloat in the number of people that were available to him as king. He wanted to see his strength.

This is always the problem in any Christian circle when men begin to depend upon numbers. One of the great principles that runs through the Bible from beginning to end is that God never wins his battles by majority vote. When we think that the cause of Christ is losing because the number of Christians is decreasing in proportion to the population of the world, we have succumbed to the false philosophy that God wins his battles by numbers. He doesn't need numbers. He needs quality. Many, many times that is taught to us in the Word of God. Thirty-two thousand men respond to Gideon's call to the army. When Gideon looks out at them, he says, "That is a good number. I think we ought to be able to do something with that." But God says, "I am sorry Gideon, there are far too many. I can't work with that many." So Gideon sends those home who have just recently been married and the ones who are afraid. Neither of them are any good for battle. Twenty-two thousand went home. They had a large number of weddings! It must have been the middle of June or July in Israel. Gideon said, "Well Lord, you have whittled

me down to ten thousand men. I guess that will be enough.” God said, “No Gideon. It is still too many.” They were put to the test until the army was whittled down to three hundred men. And, with three hundred men, God delivered the nation (Judges 7:2 ff).

How many times we are taught this. Once the whole army of Israel stood in gloom and despair before the tauntings and the struttings of the giant Goliath as he paraded up and down before the camp, mocking the soldiers of Israel. But one little shepherd boy came with his sling, and with a single rock from the brook, God delivered the people. With the jaw of an ass in the hands of Samson, God slew the Philistines. All through Chronicles this same principle is repeated again and again. God’s method is quality – never quantity.

As a result of David’s departure from this principle and because the whole nation looked to him as king for an example by which they learned the principles of God, judgment was exceedingly severe upon David. A prophet was sent to David (1 Chr 21:10-17) and he said, “I will give you three choices. God has said that you can have three years of famine or three months for your enemies to overcome you and run rife through the land or three days of the plague and pestilence.” David did the wise thing. He said, “Who am I to determine anything like this. I will simply cast myself into the hands of the Lord. God is a God of great mercy. Let him do what he thinks is best.” The angel of the Lord came into the midst of the people and for three days he slew with pestilence throughout the nation. David saw the angel with his sword stretched out over the city of Jerusalem ready to slay there also, but David pleaded with God: “It is my fault. Why do you take vengeance upon these others? I am the one to blame.” Then God instructed him to buy the cattle and the threshing floor of Ornan and on these he erected an altar and worshipped God. The temple was later built on that site and the altar was placed where the angel of God stayed his hand from judgment. So the grace of God, you see, came even at a time of disobedience, and turned the judgment that fell upon David into grace and blessing.

The rest of the book tells of David’s passion for **the building of the temple**. Because he understood that a nation without a temple could never be a nation, he longed to see this temple built. A

people without God in their midst will never amount to anything. But David was a man of war, and God wanted a man of peace to rule over the nations of the earth (1 Chr 22:6-19). So God said to David, “No, it is your son who will build the temple. He will be a man of peace and he shall build it.” David had learned the principle of obedience so well that he said, “Yes, Lord, if that is what you want. Much as it is a disappointment to me, I will accept that.”

In grace, however, God allowed David to do everything for the temple but actually build it. He drew the plans. He designed the furniture. He collected the materials. He made the arrangements. He set up the order and ritual. He brought down the cedar poles from Mt. Hermon and Mt. Lebanon in the north. He dug up the rock and quarried the stones. He gathered in the gold, the silver, and the iron. He gathered it all together and then the book closes as the anointed Solomon and David reign side by side – a complete picture of the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Christ is both the mighty warrior, David, and the man of peace, Solomon.

What is **the message of this book**? It is the supreme importance of the temple in our lives; the authority of God. Over the three great doors of the cathedral in Milan, Italy, are three inscriptions:

- Over the right hand door is carved a wreath of flowers and over it is written, “All that pleases is but for a moment.”
- On the left hand door is a cross and over it is written, “All the trouble is but for a moment.”
- Over the main entrance are simply the words, “Nothing is important save that which is eternal.”

This is the very lesson of the book of Chronicles. It is the lesson of the whole of the Bible, “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of [by the authority of and by the ability of] the Lord Jesus [king in his temple],” (Col 3:17a RSV).

Prayer:

Our Father, may the lesson of this Old Testament book be written deeply in our

hearts. May we recognize that the marvel of this book is that it conveys in human language and through human institutions the revelation of thy workings in history, in individual lives and in our lives. May we, like David, be kings after thy own heart,

ready to walk in obedience to the very words of Scripture itself that we may demonstrate, as he demonstrated it, the glory of the kingdom over which Jesus Christ is king. In his name we pray, Amen.

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By: Ray C. Stedman
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2 CHRONICLES: God's King in God's House

by Ray C. Stedman

Tremendous riches are hidden away in the neglected book of Second Chronicles. As First Chronicles was all about King David, Second Chronicles is all about the house of David. The nation of Israel – the ten tribes in the north – is viewed only as it relates to the kingdom of Judah in the south. This book follows only the course of the kings of Judah, the descendants of David. Both First and Second Chronicles center on the temple, distinguishing these two books from the parallel historical passages recorded in Kings and Samuel. This book gives us a picture of God's king walking in the light of God's house. That is the secret of blessing in the kingdom.

David and Solomon were both types of the Lord Jesus, and together these two men, father and son, picture Christ as king over his people. But these books are also a picture of us as individuals. As we find in Hebrews, Jesus is the pioneer of our salvation (Heb 12:2). He is the one who has gone the whole course ahead of us. The principles by which he walked are therefore the principles by which we are to walk. He lived his life as an example. Of course, it isn't his example that saves us; it is his death that saves us. But it is the example of his life that teaches us the principles by which God expects us to walk after we are redeemed. These books picture for us our own will as king of our kingdom. The secret of blessing and victory in the Christian life is to subject the will to the temple of God, which is the human spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit. These Old Testament books, in exquisitely accurate pictures, show us

truths in the spiritual kingdom of our own lives. This is one of the great proofs, if not the greatest proof, of the divine inspiration of the Bible. How could men write books that are as wonderfully accurate as these in portraying the issues in the spiritual life? It is simply impossible in the flesh. It is the mark of divine activity.

The first nine chapters of Second Chronicles all center on **the temple**. The book opens with a visit of Solomon to the tabernacle in the city of Gibeon. The tabernacle, which had been the center of God's guidance to the people all through the wilderness journey, the days of the judges, the reigns of King Saul and King David, was located in the city of Gibeon. Solomon goes there to make an offering. But the account is immediately transferred from the tabernacle to the temple site which David had bought in Jerusalem.

This symbolizes the fact that when the Lord Jesus reigns as king in our life and we yield to his lordship, then we no longer have a relationship with the tabernacle which followed us in our up-and-down experience. We are now walking in a more permanent relationship in which God's king is ruling and walking in the light of God's house. It was in Jerusalem that God had placed his name.

The account goes on in the second chapter to show how the temple was built by Solomon, though planned and supplied for by David. It was Solomon, as a type of Christ as the Prince of Peace, who was given the honor of actually building the temple. He thus represents the picture completed in

the New Testament where the Lord Jesus himself is the builder of the temple of the human spirit. Remember, in Hebrews, we are told that Moses had honor in God's house as a servant but Christ had more honor – just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself (cf, Heb 3:3-6). Christ is the builder. He is the one who made the temple of our body which contains the sanctuary of the spirit.

This is pictured for us in the physical temple described here. What a beautiful place it must have been. It was small as temples go, but incomparably beautiful. The whole interior was completely lined with gold. Everything was made of gold. In one place in Second Chronicles it says that silver was counted as nothing in the days of Solomon {cf, 2 Chr 9:20}. The furniture, except for the ark of the covenant, was rebuilt completely. In other words, this temple is a new beginning.

Many of us have experienced this when we intelligently, conscientiously, and with permanent intention, yielded ourselves to the lordship of Jesus Christ. It was as though we had been born again. It was a new beginning, wasn't it? This is why certain groups feel there is a second work of grace. It is such a glorious experience of release, of relief, and of victory that they say it is really something new and different. It actually isn't. Rather, it is the fulfillment of all that was already there in potential. When I received the Lord Jesus, the Spirit of God came to dwell in my life. But he may be there for many months, or even years, before I enter into the fullness of what that means by a willing submission in obedience to the lordship of Christ.

This is what is depicted here in the new beginning in the temple. All is remade except the ark of the covenant – the guarantee of God needs no renewing.

The prayer of Solomon in Chapter 6 shows that the temple was also made for the restoration of sin. Whether the people were under circumstances of spiritual failure or the punishment of captivity, they were to remember that if they would pray in earnestness – genuinely confessing their sin – God would hear them, heal their hearts, and restore them to their rightful place. When Solomon had finished his prayer, while all the people waited outside in the temple courts, fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice on the altar. Immediately the temple was filled with a cloud of glory so that the priest could not enter. This was the sign that

God had accepted the offering and of the presence of God in this house.

It is immediately followed by an account of the tremendous conquests and glory of the kingdom. We have the account in Chapter 9 of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon. Hollywood notwithstanding, the account of the Queen of Sheba is a wonderfully illustrative picture of how God intended the whole of the earth to know the story of his grace. Jews, in the days of Israel, weren't sent out into the whole world as we are commanded to do now in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20). God's grace was displayed by the building of a land and a people and a place that was so wondrously blessed of God, so obviously different from everyone around, that word of it spread to the uttermost parts of the earth. People came to Jerusalem from all over the earth to hear and to learn the secret of God's activity.

This is a picture for us of God's own supreme method of evangelism. Every believer, wherever he is in the world, is to be living this kind of life with the Spirit of God inhabiting the temple and in control of the will. When believers are walking in obedience to the indwelling Spirit, their lives will so manifest the victory, the rejoicing, the blessing, the prosperity, and the joy of the Lord that people round about will ask, "What is there about these people? I want to know what this is all about." When the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon, she saw:

... the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, and their clothing, his cupbearers, and their clothing, and his burnt offerings which he offered at the house of the Lord, {2 Chr 9:3b-4a RSV}

When she saw all of this, "there was no more spirit in her," {2 Chr 9:4b RSV}. She said, "The half was never told me. I never dreamed it could be like this," {cf, 2 Chr 9:5-6}.

Have you ever had Solomon's experience? Have you ever had somebody say to you after coming to know you intimately, "You know, there is something about your life that drew me when I first saw you. Now I have learned the secret of it. In the inner place of your heart you are resting on the great sacrifice of the Lord Jesus." This is what Peter says:

but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; {1 Pet 3:15 RSV}

This is God's method of evangelism.

Chapters 10 through 36 go on to give us the record of **the kings of Judah** up to the time of the captivity of this kingdom. Nine of them were good kings and eleven were bad. Manasseh, who reigned for fifty-five years on the throne of Judah, started out as the worst king in Judah's history and ended up as one of the best, as God reached him, redeemed him, and restored him.

As you read through these accounts, the bad kings reveal the pattern of temptation and evil in a disobedient heart. There is a declining standard here:

- It begins with the infiltration of evil into the kingdom on a rather trivial level. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, in Chapter 10 was unwilling to follow the good counsel of the wise men of his kingdom. He asked the older men, "What shall I do? How shall I treat the people?" They said, "Your father was rather severe with them. If you are more gentle and more lenient, they will love you and serve you." But the young men advised him, "No, don't do that. If your father was strict, you be stricter." Rehoboam refused to follow the old men's good counsel. That is all he did. Yet that was the beginning of the evil that was in its final stages to destroy this kingdom.
- A little later, in Chapter 12, Verse 1, you will find a further lowering of the standards:

When the rule of Rehoboam was established and was strong, he forsook the law of the Lord, {2 Chr 12:1 RSV}

He turned a deaf ear to what God said. As a result, the kingdom was invaded by the Egyptians. The moment there is a turning away from obedience to the rule of God in the temple of God, there is an immediate weakening of the defenses of life, and the enemies come. It was only by God's grace that the Egyptians were turned back. When Rehoboam

humbled himself and returned to God, the Egyptians were repelled.

- The next bad king, Jehoram, appears in Chapter 21, Verse 4:

When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he slew all his brothers with the sword, and also some of the princes of Judah. {2 Chr 21:4 RSV}

Jealousy was next. First, there was the refusal to give heed to good advice. Then a deaf ear was turned to the Law. Now, the spirit of jealousy begins to assault the kingdom.

- This is immediately followed, as we read in Verse 11, by another downward step:

Moreover he made high places in the hill country of Judah, and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness, and made Judah go astray. {2 Chr 12:11 RSV}

In one sense, the high places did not yet represent idolatry. They were high hills where the people of Israel worshipped Jehovah. The problem was that *that* was not the place where God had told them to worship Jehovah. He had put his name in the temple and it was there that they were to worship and offer sacrifice. They were worshipping out on the hills because that was where their neighbors and friends were worshipping. They were simply down-grading and reducing the true worship of Jehovah to a lower level.

This, too, was quickly followed by invasion and by disease. As you read, you find that King Jehoram was immediately afflicted by an invasion from the Philistines – representing the desires of the flesh.

- The next bad king is King Ahaz. In Chapter 28, Verses 1-2, we read:

Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, like his father David, but walked in the

ways of the kings of Israel. He even made molten images for the Baals; {2 Chr 28:1-2 RSV}

Here is the actual introduction of vile, despicable practices of idolatry which were primarily sexual in nature. Israel was increasingly afflicted by these practices. The kings were responsible for introducing them, as we read of King Ahaz (Verses 3-4):

And he burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. {2 Chr 28:3-4 RSV}

The pattern is the same. Again, this is followed by invasion (Verse 5):

Therefore the Lord his God gave him into the hand of the king of Syria, who defeated him and took captive a great number of his people ... {2 Chr 28:5a RSV}

We sometimes wonder why we fall prey to so many of the afflictions and oppressions – neuroses and psychoses – of our day. It is because the defenses of the temple are destroyed. Some inner idolatry is weakening us and we find ourselves defenseless against these invaders of the spirit that bring us into depression, frustration, defeat, and darkness. All the way through this book there is a constant battle against the flood of wicked practices during the reign of these kings.

By contrast, the good kings reflect the grace of God in cleansing and restoring and they also reveal the instruments that he uses. There are five great reformations recorded in Israel as God seeks to arrest this deteriorating process in the nation and bring it back to the place of glory and blessing as in the days of David and Solomon:

1. The first of these periods of reformation was under King Asa found in Chapters 14 through 16. In Chapter 14, Verses 2-3, we read:

And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God. He took away the foreign altars and the high places, and broke down the pillars and hewed down the Asherim, [The sign of Asherim, a symbol of sex, actually signified the worship of the male sex organ.] and commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law and the commandment. {2 Chr 14:2-4 RSV}

This seeking is followed by deliverance, (Verse 9):

Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men [What an attack!] and three hundred chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. {2 Chr 14:9 RSV}

We may be put under pressure at times, but if the heart is obedient to the revelation of the Holy Spirit within the human spirit, the defenses are secure against whatever may come. As Isaiah says, “Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee,” (Isa 26:3 RSV). The principle of power is clearly declared when Asa, returning from the battle with the Ethiopians, meets the prophet Oded (15:2):

And he [Oded] went out to meet Asa, and said to him, “Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The Lord is with you, while you are with him ...” {2 Chr 15:2a RSV}

Did you hear that?

“The Lord is with you, while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.” {2 Chr 15:2b RSV}

The forsaking is never that he gives you over completely to be lost. He forsakes in the sense of not providing any power, or victory, or ability to walk. This is the same as the New Testament teaches, isn't it? It declares that God is fully available to you if you are prepared to be fully available to him. Paul says in Philippians, “I press on to make it [the power

of his resurrection] my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own,” (Phil 3:12b RSV) Or, “I long to be as fully available to him as he is prepared to be available to me.” That is always the secret of real power. This was declared to King Asa for his benefit and for ours.

Each of these kings who leads a restoration shows us a different principle of restoration. In Asa we find the determination to obey the Law. In Chapter 15, Verses 12-15:

And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul; and that whoever would not seek the Lord, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman. They took oath to the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with horns. And all Judah rejoiced over the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart, and had sought him with their whole desire, and he was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest round about. {2 Chr 15:12-15 RSV}

Here is a heart that has awakened at last to the fact that it had been drifting off into weakness, into failure, into assault by the enemies, into bondage and slavery again. The way of return is a renewal of the vow, a renewal of the determination, a hunger and thirst for the Lord, to walk in his sight. And immediately there is a return to rest.

2. Then in the reign of King Jehoshaphat, the next king on the throne of Judah, there is another time of restoration after a time of failure. Jehoshaphat cleans out the idols of the land. In Chapter 17, Verse 7-9, the second principle of restoration, the ministry of teaching, is set forth:

In the third year of his reign he sent his princes, ... {2 Chr 17:7a RSV}

And they taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord with them; they went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. {2 Chr 17:9 RSV}

That was the principle of this return – the ministry of teaching, followed immediately by deliverance. Look at Verse 10:

And the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, and they made no war against Jehoshaphat. {2 Chr 17:10 RSV}

Later, however, Jehoshaphat in weakness makes an alliance with Israel and there is an invasion from Ammon, Moab, and Edom – all types of the flesh. But God delivers him in a wonderful way.

It would be well worth your time to read this carefully. God says you don't have to fight these enemies of the flesh. Don't try to subdue with your will power all these evil desires – of bitterness, jealousy, revenge, and lust – all the feelings within yourself. Don't try to fight them. God says, “Believe. That is the way of victory. You are not capable, in yourself, of defeating these things.” Instead, “Stand still and you will see the deliverance of God.”

So God fought for them and these enemies were defeated. In Chapter 20, Verse 24:

When Judah came to the watch-tower of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and behold, they were dead bodies lying on the ground; none had escaped. {2 Chr 20:24 RSV}

Believe what God has done to the flesh in the cross of Christ. We do not have to fight the flesh. Nail it to his cross, rendering it absolutely worthless. When we believe and act on that principle, these things disappear. Even if they come back again five minutes later, they can always be overcome by this principle.

3. In King Joash, Chapters 23 and 24, you have the third principle of restoration. The third restoration of Israel was by the collection of taxes on all things. Chapter 24:4-5, tells us:

After this Joash decided to restore the house of the Lord. And he gathered the priests and the Levites, and said to them, “Go out to the cities of Judah, and gather from all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to

year; and see that you hasten the matter.” {2 Chr 24:4-5a RSV}

Here is something that had been neglected. No one had been paying the costs for repairing the temple, so it had fallen into such disrepair that the doors were actually shut. No sacrifice was being offered in the temple at all. Joash, realizing this, gathered in money to restore the temple.

Now, if the temple is the spirit, the restoring and repairing of it is a picture of the strengthening of the spirit. How? By what we call restitution – the paying of that which is owed. It may be an apology to someone, or the restoring of something wrongfully taken, or the putting back of something that has been wrongfully used. No matter what it may be, this is the principle of return and restitution.

4. Then in Hezekiah’s reign is the fourth principle of restoration, in Chapters 29 through 32 – the cleansing of the temple. When Hezekiah came to the throne, the nation had fallen on such terribly evil days that the temple had actually been filled with rubbish and filth. There was garbage throughout all the courts. Hezekiah set the people to cleaning the temple. They started carrying out the rubbish and it took them sixteen days, so much had accumulated. At last, when the temple was clean, they restored the worship and celebrated the Passover for the first time since the days of Solomon.

What does this picture? It is the cleansing of the temple of our spirit, the putting away of the filth that has accumulated, the turning away from ideas and concepts to which we have given ourselves, and the turning back to the worship and the cleansing of the Lord.

5. Then in Josiah, the last good king of Judah, you find the last principle of restoration. When Josiah came to the throne, the temple had fallen into complete disuse again. He set the people to cleaning it up and in Chapter 34, Verse 14, we read:

While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the Lord

given through Moses. {2 Chr 34:14 RSV}

This sounds incredible, but the people had actually forgotten that there was a copy of the Law of Moses in the temple. It had been so neglected in the land that it had been totally forgotten. When the priests went through the temple to clean it, they accidentally found the Law of the Lord, brought it to the king, and read it to him (34:19):

When the king heard the words of the law he rent his clothes. {2 Chr 34:19 RSV}

He commanded the men around him to inquire of the Lord what he should do. In Verses 29-31a, we are told:

The king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up to the house of the Lord, with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites, all the people both great and small; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord. And the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments ... {2 Chr 34:29-31a RSV}

So the last principle of restoration is that of a return to the hearing of the word.

But the people had gone a long way down. The patience of God was ended. The last chapter gives us the account of the terrible, dark days when Nebuchadnezzar took the city captive and set a puppet king upon the throne, who rebelled against him. Then Nebuchadnezzar set his brother on the throne, until at last he came to destroy both the rebellious city and the temple with fire.

Now go back for a moment to the early chapters and look again at that wonderful scene when Solomon, in all his royal robes of glory, is kneeling before the people and praying to the God of heaven. The whole kingdom is at peace. Solomon is reigning over the uttermost limits of the kingdom prom-

ised to Abraham, from the River Euphrates clear down to the River Egypt. All the peoples around him are at peace and the fame of this kingdom has gone out to the ends of the earth. People were actually making pilgrimages to the city of Jerusalem to see the glory of God. The fire of God comes down from heaven and the glory of God fills the whole of the temple like a cloud – what a marvelous sight. Then think of this final scene, with the

temple lying in ruins, the city destroyed, the people slaves and bondservants in a foreign country, and the whole of the land given over to its enemies.

This is the picture that God draws for us of what can happen when the heart walks in disobedience. Yet God's patience is visible in the whole story of this book – how he intervenes, again and again, to call his people back.

EZRA: The Way Back

by Ray C. Stedman

The books of Ezra, Esther, and Nehemiah cover the historical period of Israel's captivity in Babylon and the period immediately following their return to Jerusalem. Israel's return to Jerusalem from Babylon involved about fifty thousand Jews – much, much fewer than the more recent return, which is such a wonder of our own day. The biblical record accords great importance to this return.

In the Hebrew Bible, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are one book. I am convinced that the events of these two books run parallel to one another, a point of view which is a departure from the traditional view. Most commentators on the Scripture say that Nehemiah follows Ezra chronologically, but I believe that a careful study of these two books will indicate that the events covered by them were concurrent. Ezra is concerned with the building of the temple. Nehemiah is concerned with the building of the city and walls of Jerusalem. Now, the temple was the last thing to be destroyed when the nation fell into captivity. It was the last holdout, if we may put it that way, of the Spirit of God. It is the last place (the temple representing the spirit) to be destroyed in an individual's failure to relate to his God. The temple is also the first place where God begins to set about the work of restoration; and therefore the book of Ezra, which deals with restoring the temple, is placed first in the Scriptures. Notice the opening words of this book:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing. {Ezra 1:1 RSV}

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: {2 Chr 36:22 RSV}

The same words exactly! The book of Ezra begins right where Chronicles leaves off. This is one reason why it is felt that Ezra wrote both books. Ezra hence becomes a picture for us of the work of God in the restoration of a heart that has fallen into sin. Restoration can be on an individual basis. It can be on a local church basis, or on the part of any of the great God-honored denominations of our day. It can be the work of God in a nation, bringing it back from secularism and materialism to true spiritual knowledge and strength. In any case, it always follows the pattern depicted here in the book of Ezra. This is the picture of how God works when he sets about to restore the heart that has fallen into sin.

The book divides very naturally in line with the ministries of two men: Zerubbabel, in Chapters 1 through 6; and Ezra, in Chapters 7 through 10. Both of these men led the captives of Babylon back to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel, interestingly enough, was a descendant of David. He is of the kingly line. Ezra, descended from Aaron the priest, is likewise a priest. Clearly outlined here is the need for the work both of the king and of the priest in accomplishing restoration. The work of the king is to build or, in this case, to rebuild. The work of the priest is to cleanse. Both are essential in the work of restoring someone who has fallen into a sinful state.

Now look at Second Chronicles 36:22:

Restoration in the individual life involves rebuilding the control of the Spirit of God through obedience to the kingship and lordship of Jesus Christ. Thus, it involves his ministry as king in our lives. It means the recognition, again, of God's right to own us, to direct us, to replace our plans with his, to change us, and to make both the major and minor decisions of our life. But restoration also means cleansing. The spirit and the soul are cleansed by our great high priest who, when a human heart earnestly confesses its sin, washes away the guilt, tidies up the past, and restores us to a place of fellowship and blessedness in his sight.

Now, return from sin is always the work of God's grace. In the first verse:

The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia. {Ezra 1:1b RSV}

And Verse 5 says:

Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. {Ezra 1:5 RSV}

God always takes the initiative. No one, after falling into a sinful experience, would ever come back to Christ unless God brought him back. This is indicated so clearly in the case of these Israelites. When they had gone into Babylon, they became a different kind of people. Dr. J. Vernon McGee has pointed out that while they were in Israel they were sheep-keepers, or shepherds. When they went to Babylon they could no longer keep sheep, so they became shop-keepers, or merchants. And they became very successful too. So much so that this stereotyped image of the Jew is popular worldwide today – the merchants of the earth. In Babylon they started a number of chain stores – Macy's, Emporium, and some other leading department stores. They became so prosperous, so lost to materialism, that they did not want to go back to Jerusalem even though they were still slaves and exiled from their own land. Many of them refused to return when God opened the door. But the Spirit of God stirred up the hearts of some and made them unsatisfied with material prosperity. Mere things will never satisfy the deep-seated cry of the human spirit. When we feel that crying need, God the

Spirit is stirring us up to return and rebuild the things that make for spiritual strength.

Under **Zerubbabel** the first return takes place. This great kingly descendant led about fifty thousand people from Babylon back to Jerusalem. The account of that return is given to us in Chapters 1 and 2. When they came to Jerusalem, it was the seventh month of the year – just in time for the Feast of the Tabernacles of the Jews. This Feast of Tabernacles (also called the Feast of Ingathering) was the time when Israel dwelt in booths to remind them of their pilgrim nature. Incidentally, this feast looks forward to the eventual regathering of Israel from the vast worldwide dispersion for the millennium and is the feast that is mingled with tears of sorrow as the people saw the foundations of the temple being relaid.

1. Their first act was to build an altar on the original temple site in the midst of the ruins. Out under the open sky they erected an altar to God and began to worship and offer sacrifice as the Law of Moses had bid them. This is significant because the first act of a heart that really desires to return from wandering in darkness in the ways of the world to real fellowship with God, is to erect an altar. An altar is always the symbol of ownership. It is both the acknowledgment that God has sole right to us and the symbol of our personal relationship to him. Therefore, an altar almost invariably involves sacrifice, worship, and praise – the sacrifice of recognizing the truth, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:19b-20a RSV); the worship of again enjoying a restored relationship, when again the heart is ministered to by the only one who can meet its needs; and the praise of a rejoicing heart.

A man reminded me recently about an occasion when he took time off work to come talk to me about his prayer life. He had brought along sheets of paper on which he had written all the things that he had been trying to pray about. He had three or four sheets. At that time he had said, "I have a great deal of trouble with this. I find that it's hard to remember all these things and to go through these lists. It's so mechanical, so empty." I had suggested, "Why don't you just forget all this and spend

your time, for a few prayer sessions anyway, just praising the Lord.” He said, “I was mad. I took time off work to talk to you, and all you told me was, ‘Why don’t you spend your time praising the Lord?’ I wanted some advice for organizing my prayer life and handling it a little better. But after I got over being mad, I tried it – and I found that it worked. There was a sense of restoration, a sense of restored personal fellowship.” That is what God is after. That is why the altar is the important thing in this work of restoration.

2. The second thing they did was to lay the foundation of the temple. The work was met with mixed feeling, in Chapter 3, Verses 11-13:

And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people’s weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard afar. {Ezra 3:11b-13 RSV}

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever come back to God after a time of coldness and withdrawal – a captive of sin’s power – with a great sense of joy as the foundations of fellowship were relaid by the Spirit? Yet also with regret for the lost and wasted years? This is exactly what is portrayed here. Tears of joy mingled with tears of sorrow as the people saw the temple being relaid.

3. The third factor in this return under Zerubbabel is the opposition that immediately develops, as we read in Chapters 4 through 6. A force is at work in every human heart, as in world affairs, that immediately rises up to oppose everything that God attempts to do. A force is found in every human individual that resists with enmity and hatred the work of the Spirit of God. This force immediately manifests itself here, and

there is a great lesson in how it does so. This opposition first appears as friendly solicitude. Chapter 4, Verses 1 and 2:

Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers’ houses and said to them, “Let us build with you; for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here.” {Ezra 4:1-2 RSV}

Incidentally, this is the beginning of the Samaritans, who frequently appear in the New Testament. These Samaritans, worshipping the same God said, “Let us help you. We would like to join with you in this enterprise. You are rebuilding the temple. Fine. We would be glad to help.” They come with an earnest, open-hearted, friendly wish to participate in the work. A very subtle request, isn’t it? It is not very difficult to say “No!” to an enemy who breathes fiery threats of slaughter. But when he comes dripping with solicitude and offers to help in your projects, it is very difficult to say, “No.” The only way you can do it is with a heart that is willing to be obedient to the Word of God, as these people were. We read in Verse 3:

But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers’ houses in Israel said to them, “You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.” {Ezra 4:3 RSV}

That may have seemed a bit churlish, but it was not mere capriciousness that made them reply that way. God had commanded that Israel was not to fellowship with other nations, or to engage with them in enterprises that concerned the faith. What does this mean? – that it was wrong for one nation to intermingle with another? No, this has been twisted and distorted, and applied today to situations in which

it has no application. It means simply that God rejects utterly the philosophy of the world in carrying out his work in the world. There is a worldly religion. There is a philosophy that tries to interject worldly concepts, worldly philosophies, and worldly methods into the lives of God's people. God has simply made it clear that these are to be rejected. The philosophy with which the world would defend its actions and its attitudes is quite contrary to the work of the Spirit of God. The world reflects the spirit of the devil, who is the god of this age, in the philosophy, "Advance yourself. Do this for your own glory. Use religious ways to advance your purposes and win admiration, power, fame, or whatever your heart desires. Use religious ways to achieve self-satisfaction." God rejects this principle here.

The veil of friendship that was offered quickly turns to hatred. In Verses 4 and 5:

Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and made them afraid to build, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. {Ezra 4:4-5 RSV}

And in the next two chapters is the story of how successful they were in stopping the work of rebuilding the temple. By deliberately attempting to frustrate these people, by mocking them and taunting them, they discouraged Israel from doing work that God had commanded. These so-called friends even used legal means to undermine Israel's authority and right to build. This is what goes on any time anybody wants to stand for God. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, "the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit," (Gal 5:17a RSV). This is the picture that we have here, and the principle was quite successful. The work was stopped for sixteen years and the temple lay half-completed, overrun with weeds and grass. Again, worship ceased.

Then God sent two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. These two men were God's instruments to move the people's hearts. The minute the people began to turn back to God, he also turned the hearts

of the kings, Darius and Artaxerxes, and they issued the decree that started the temple work again. Finally the work was finished. In Chapter 6 we read that the first thing they did was celebrate the Passover, marking the beginning of their life under God. Similarly, you can never make sense out of your conversion unless you are in fellowship with the living God. You have nothing to celebrate. You have nothing to thank God for unless you are enjoying the glory and the light of heaven upon your heart. It is only when you are in fellowship, with the temple built, that the Passover can bring joy to you.

The latter part of the book concerns **the ministry of Ezra**, who also led a return to the land. Ezra was a most remarkable man, a priest of the line of Aaron. In Chapter 7, Verse 6, we are told:

... this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses which the Lord the God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was upon him. {Ezra 7:6 RSV}

Wouldn't you like to have that written of you, "the king granted him all that he asked"? What kind of man is this, whom a heathen gentile king regards so highly that he will give Ezra anything that he asks? The secret of this man's character is given in Verse 10:

... Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, {Ezra 7:10a RSV}

That is something else isn't it? We may be Bible students, but are we Bible doers?

... to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel. {Ezra 7:10b RSV}

As a result, Ezra could ask anything of the king and the king would grant his request.

Now this man is a man of the word. Therefore, God sent him to Jerusalem to strengthen and beautify the temple. That is the work of the Word of God in our lives. It strengthens and beautifies within us the place of our fellowship with God. Ezra came to Jerusalem and found an incredible condition. In Chapter 9 Ezra writes:

After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons; so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.” {Ezra 9:1-2 RSV}

What does this mean? They were simply starting the whole wretched mess all over again. This is what had broken the strength of the nation before. This is what had undermined the power of God among them and finally dispersed the people, broken up the tribes, and separated them into two nations. At last, as they had carried on this idolatrous practice, God had delivered them into the hands of their captors. Now, after seventy years, they hadn't learned a thing. The flesh never changes. No matter how long you walk in the Spirit, you will never get to the place where you cannot revert to the worst you ever were, if you depart from dependence upon the Spirit of God. They are right back to the same old ways. Ezra, in Verse 3, says:

When I heard this, I rent my garments and my mantle, and pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat appalled. {Ezra 9:3 RSV}

... until the evening sacrifice. {Ezra 9:4b RSV}

It was unbelievable.

As the book nears its close, Ezra prays to God and confesses this great sin. In his graciousness, God moves in the hearts of the people. The leaders come in broken-hearted contrition to Ezra and acknowledge the wrong. A proclamation is issued. The people assemble together. It happens to be a day when it is raining, but, despite the rain, the people stand, thousands of them, in front of the temple and confess their guilt – the fact that they had disobeyed God – and agree to put away the

wives and children they had acquired outside the will of God.

Now this is a hurtful thing, isn't it? It isn't easy. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “If any one comes to me ... does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children ... he cannot be my disciple,” (Luke 14:26 RSV). Our relationship with God comes first.

- It doesn't mean that a man is to put away his wife today. This is a symbolic teaching.
- It means that we are to put away whatever stems from the flesh, which is always pictured by these Canaanite tribes in the land.
 - But we love the flesh, don't we?
 - We like to feel angry and resentful toward others.
 - We love to nurse a grudge, cherish feelings of bitterness, or keep an unforgiving spirit burning away in our hearts against someone.
 - We love it! We don't want to give it up!

These things can cause physical ailments in us. Perhaps more than 50% of the nervous and physical problems that we suffer are due to wrong attitudes. But when someone points it out to us, we would rather go on having the problem than change the spirit or the attitude. It is hard, isn't it?

It was hard for the Israelites to put away their wives and children, but they realized that the only chance of being restored to the place of fellowship with the living God and finding the power of God manifest once again among them, was to be obedient to his word. Jesus said, “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; ... If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off ...” (Matt 5:29-30). Be ruthless in these things. Put them away.

As the book nears its close, Ezra prays to God and confesses their great sin. In his graciousness, God moves in the hearts of the people. The leaders come in broken-hearted contrition to Ezra and acknowledge the wrong. A proclamation is issued.

This is what Jesus meant when he said, “If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children ... he causes you to sin, cut it off,” {cf, Luke 14:26, Matt 5:30}. Be ruthless in these things! Put them away!

Prayer:

Thank you again, Father, for this insight into your word. Give us obedient hearts, that we may walk in ways pleasing to you and that the inner temple of our soul – our spirit – may be rich and radiant with your fragrance and presence. In Christ’s name. Amen.

NEHEMIAH: Rebuilding the Walls

by Ray C. Stedman

For a long, long time the only thing I knew about Nehemiah was that he was supposed to be the shortest man in the Bible – through a wretched pun on his name, “knee-high-miah.” I am glad to have discovered a great deal more about this man in the intervening years and I trust you have too. He is one of the great characters of the Old Testament, but perhaps not as well known as some others.

Ezra and Nehemiah are one book in the Hebrew Bible, for they are part of the same story. In fact, the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther all come out of the same general period of Israel’s history. They appear in our Bible in reverse order of the chronological order in which they took place. In other words, Esther actually happened when God first began to move in the midst of Israel’s captivity to return this nation to the land. That was soon after the halfway mark of the seventy years that Jeremiah had predicted the captivity would last. God raised Esther, a young Jewish maiden, to the throne of Persia as queen. It was her husband, King Ahasuerus of Persia, who is the Artaxerxes of the opening chapters of Nehemiah. This heathen king gave the command for Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to build up the walls of the city. Perhaps that accounts for a very interesting parenthesis that appears in this book in Chapter 2, Verse 6, when Nehemiah went to the king: “And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), ...” That queen, I believe, was Queen Esther, the Jewish maiden who had been raised to this prominent position by the grace of God.

Neither Artaxerxes nor Ahasuerus are the names of this king. That is what is so confusing. These are really titles. *Artaxerxes* means “the great king,” and *Ahasuerus* means “the venerable father.” These were not the king’s given names. It

may or may not be helpful to know that this Artaxerxes and Ahasuerus are also Darius the Mede of the book of Daniel. And then, to add to the confusion, Artaxerxes in the book of Nehemiah is not the same Artaxerxes as in the book of Ezra. Now do I have you thoroughly confused?

At any rate, in the history of these people, Esther – as an instrument of God’s grace – was sent to the throne of Persia and so moved the heart of her husband, the king, that he allowed Nehemiah, his cupbearer, to return to Jerusalem. Nehemiah began the work of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. Some twenty-five years later, Zerubbabel returned with about fifty thousand of the captives from Babylon, as is recorded in the book of Ezra.

God has reversed this order in Scripture. Instead of Esther, Nehemiah, and Ezra, these books are turned around and we have Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. Scripture is never concerned simply with chronology. It is concerned with the teaching of each book. In these three books we have the story of the way out of captivity, back to God. The book of Ezra begins with the building of the temple. The restoration of the house of God is always the first thing in the way back to God. Then comes the building of the walls, as we will see in the book of Nehemiah, filling the need for security and strength. Finally, the book of Esther comes as the revelation of the purpose of all this in the life of any individual. That gives you a quick survey of these three books.

The book of Nehemiah falls into two divisions. The first six chapters cover **the reconstruction of the wall**, while Chapters 7 through 13 deal with **the reinstruction of the people**. With those two you have the whole book.

Now what does a wall symbolize? One of the most famous landmarks in the world today is the Berlin wall, dividing the city in two. Ordinarily, though, a wall symbolizes strength and protection. In ancient cities the only real means of defense were the walls. Sometimes these walls were tremendously thick and high. The walls of the city of Babylon, as recounted in the story of Daniel, were some 380 feet thick and over 100 feet high – massive, tremendous walls. Therefore, the city of Babylon considered itself very safe.

What does it mean, then, to rebuild the walls of your life? Nehemiah is the account of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem is a symbol of the city of God, God's dwelling place and the center of life for the world. In an individual life, then, the rebuilding of the walls would be a picture of re-establishing the strength of that life. We have all met people whose defenses have crumbled away. They have become human derelicts, drifting up and down the streets of our large cities, absolutely hopeless and helpless. But God in grace frequently reaches down and gets some of those people and brings them out to rebuild the walls. This is the picture of the way the walls of any life, of any local church, of any community, of any nation, can be rebuilt into strength and power and purpose again:

1. The first step in this process is given in Chapter 1, Verse 4. It begins with a *concern* about the ruins. Nehemiah says:

When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days; and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. {Neh 1:4 RSV}

You will never build the walls of your life until you have first become greatly concerned about the ruins. Have you ever taken a good look at the ruins in your own life? Have you ever stopped long enough to assess what you could be under God, and compared that with what you are? Have you looked at the possibilities that God gave you in your life, and seen how far you have deviated from that potential?

Like Nehemiah, you have received word, in some form or other, of the desolation and ruin there. When Nehemiah hears this report about Jerusalem, he weeps and prays for days,

showing his intense concern. You will never rebuild the walls of your life until you first weep over the ruins.

2. This is followed by *confession*. In Chapter 1 is Nehemiah's wonderful prayer as he confesses that the nation has forsaken God, and acknowledges the justice of God's dealing with them.
3. That is followed immediately by *commitment*. Look at Verse 11 of Chapter 1. He says:

“O Lord, let thy ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants who delight to fear thy name; and give success to thy servant today,” {Neh 1:11a RSV}

To do what? You see, this man has a plan forming in his mind, even while he has been in prayer, of how to go about rebuilding the walls. He has something definite he wants to ask. He says:

“... and grant him [Nehemiah] mercy in the sight of this man.” {Neh 1:11b RSV}

What man? Well, you have it in the next verse:

Now I was cupbearer to the king. {Neh 1:11c RSV}

So here is a man who, out of his concern, and after the confession of his heart, commits himself to a project. He asks God to begin moving in the king's heart. Now this is always how any return to the grace of God must begin. We get concerned. Then we confess. Then we commit ourselves to action and ask God also to act in our behalf, for invariably in an enterprise like this there are factors over which we have no control, and God must arrange them.

At a men's conference some time ago, a man told how in the early days of his Christian experience someone had encouraged him to pray about the things that happen on his job, in his relationships with his boss and with his fellow employees. He said, “I didn't think praying was the right thing to do at first. But I tried it and I saw that it worked. You know, I thought it was quite an unfair advantage over

those poor heathen, but it worked so well that I could see that God had provided prayer for us.”

Nehemiah is well aware of this – God must move in the areas where Nehemiah cannot, so Nehemiah prays about going to the king. When he appears before the king, the king notes the sadness of Nehemiah’s face and asks what he wants. Since this is the very king whose wife is Queen Esther, he already has a great concern and knowledge of the Jews’ problems. He is responsive to Nehemiah’s plea for permission to return to Jerusalem.

4. The next necessary step in the program of reconstruction is *courage*. In Verse 9 of Chapter 2 we read:

Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, {Neh 2:9-10a RSV}

Do you recognize these names? Whenever you read of Ammonites, Amorites, Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, Perizzites, or any of the other “ites,” you have a picture of the enemy of God – the flesh. This satanic agency within man inevitably resists the work and the will and the ways of God. Here you have this same enmity; when the enemies of God

... heard this, it displeased them greatly that some one had come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. {Neh 2:10b RSV}

Immediately courage is needed. Whenever a man like Nehemiah says, “I will arise and build,” Satan always says, “Then I will arise and oppose.” Satan makes things difficult when we start turning back to God.

We see, also, the need for caution. When Nehemiah comes back to Jerusalem and rides about the city at night he doesn’t just start putting bricks on top of one another. He doesn’t rush out and get all the people excited to build the walls. If he does, he would fall into the trap of his enemies. The first thing he does is arise at night when no one else

knows, ride around the walls of the city, and survey the ruins. He takes note of exactly what needs to be done. He makes an honest survey of the facts. Then he begins to lay his plans. These three principles of reconstruction – a display of concern, confession and commitment, and courage with caution – are basic to rebuilding.

In Chapter 3 we learn how he went about this task of reconstruction. If the walls of your life are broken down – if your defenses have crumbled so that the enemy is getting at you on every hand, and you easily fall prey to temptation – I suggest you pay special heed to the process of reconstruction set forth in the book of Nehemiah. We learn,

- First of all, that the people were willing to work;
- Second, that they became involved and immediately started doing something.

Nehemiah, in the wisdom that God gave him, set each of them to work building whatever part of the wall was nearest to each of their own houses so that they were personally involved in the work.

The rest of the chapter describes how they went about building. It all centered on the ten **gates of the city of Jerusalem**. The people would be assigned a certain portion of the wall defined by the gates that gave access to the city. As you read through this chapter, you will find the names of these gates; the Hebrew names have great significance. I would like to quickly describe these for your own edification, and we can draw the lesson from each at the same time:

- First of all is the Sheep Gate. This is the gate through which the sheep were brought into the city to be sacrificed at the altar. The Sheep Gate, of course, signifies the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed on the cross for us, and, therefore, it reveals the principle of the cross. That is always the starting place for strength in your life. You have to recognize the principle of the cross – the fact that God will be moving in your life to utterly cancel out your own ego, your own plans, and your own self-interest. The cross is that instrument in God’s program

that puts the ego to death. That is where we must begin building for strength.

- The account then moves to the Fish Gate. Now what does the name “Fish Gate” suggest to you? Do you remember how the Lord Jesus said to his disciples, “Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17 RSV)? This suggests the witness of a Christian. Has that gate broken down in your life? Has the wall around the Fish Gate crumbled? If so, this gate for defense, and its wall, need to be rebuilt again, for the Lord Jesus said that every Christian is to be a witness for him. If this wall is broken down, you will find that through this the enemy will enter again and again. If you can never say a word for Christ, if there is never any witness in your life, then this wall is broken and the Fish Gate needs to be built again.
- The next gate is the Old Gate. You will find it in Verse 6. What does this gate symbolize? Well, I suggest that it represents truth. In many Christians’ lives this gate is broken down – they are no longer resting upon truth. Truth is always old, and it is upon old things that everything new must rest. Somebody has well said, “Whatever is true is not new, and whatever is new is not true.” These are the days when the old truth is being forsaken. Men are rapidly throwing away what the church has stood for. They are saying that we don’t need these things anymore. But if we allow this old truth to go, we find that the wall crumbles and the enemies outside gain access to our soul. The next gate is the Old Gate. You will find it in Verse 6. What does this gate symbolize? Well, I suggest that it represents God. Truth will never change. It was true when it was uttered. It was also true a hundred thousand years before it was uttered. And it will be true a hundred thousand years from now.

I often think of a story about the fellow who one day went to visit an old musician. He knocked on the musician’s door and said, “What’s the good word for today?” The old musician didn’t say a word. He turned around and went back across the room to where a tuning fork was hanging. He took a hammer and struck the tuning fork so that the note re-

sounded through the room. Then the musician said, “That, my friend, is ‘A’. It was ‘A’ yesterday. It was ‘A’ five thousand years ago; and it will be ‘A’ five thousand years from now.” Then he added, “The tenor across the hall sings off-key. The soprano upstairs is flat on her high notes. And the piano in the next room is out of tune.” He struck the tuning fork again and said, “That is ‘A’ and that, my friend, is the good word for today.”

That is truth. Truth is always the same. It never changes. We need to rebuild the old gates of truth.

- The next gate is the Valley Gate, and you can see immediately what it suggests. It is the place of humility, isn’t it? It is the place of lowliness of mind and humbleness of heart. God has said in every page of Scripture that he is against the pride of men. He looks for the lowly, the humble, the contrite, and those who have learned that they are not indispensable. They have learned to have a low opinion of themselves but a high opinion of their God. It is this attitude that he seeks. This Valley Gate often needs to be repaired.
- The Fountain Gate is next. That name reminds us instantly of the words of the Lord Jesus to the woman at the well, “The water that I shall give [you] will become in [you] a spring of water [a fountain] welling up to eternal life,” (John 4:14 RSV). It speaks of the Holy Spirit, which is the river of life in us – the flowing of the Spirit of God in our lives, to enable us to obey his will and his word.
- This is followed by the Water Gate. Water is always a symbol of the word of God. The interesting thing about this Water Gate (as opposed to the one in our nation’s capitol) is that it did not need to be repaired. Evidently it was the only part of the wall that was still standing. It mentions the people who lived by it, but it doesn’t mention its needing repair. The Word of God never breaks down. It doesn’t need to be repaired. It simply needs to be reinhabited.
- Then comes the East Gate. The East Gate faced the rising sun, and is the gate of hope. It

is the gate of anticipation of what is yet to come when all the trials of life and all the struggles of earth will end and the glorious new sun will rise on the new day of God. This gate needs to be rebuilt in many of us who fall under the pessimistic spirit of this age and are crushed by the hopelessness of our time.

- Next is the Horse Gate. The horse in Scripture is a symbol of warfare or, in this case, the need to do battle against the forces of darkness. “We are not contending against flesh and blood,” the apostle says, “but against the principalities, against the powers ... the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places,” (Eph 6:12 RSV). This is the battle!
- The ninth gate is the Muster Gate or, literally, the “examination gate.” This was evidently the place where judgment was conducted. We need to sit and take a look at ourselves every now and then – to stop and re-evaluate what we are doing.

That brings us around again in the last part of the chapter to the Sheep Gate, the gate of the cross. The cross must be at the beginning and the end of every life. Now, in this beautiful way, the book of Nehemiah is teaching us what needs to be done to strengthen the walls in our lives.

The next chapters, four through six, cover the persecution that arose from building the city walls. As I have already suggested, when you start to rebuild the strength of your life you will find that a force immediately arouses itself, both within yourself and outside yourself, and that resists God’s work in your life with every influence that can be used against you. The persecution revealed here can be summarized in three words – contempt, conspiracy, and cunning. The enemies tried to mock or heap contempt on what God was doing. When they failed, they attempted a conspiracy. They tried to involve the Israelites in a plot that would overthrow this work. When that failed, they tried to call Nehemiah away from his work by a very cunning scheme. But when you come to Chapter 6, Verse 15, you read this wonderful sentence:

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. {Neh 6:15 RSV}

An amazing record!

In the latter part of the book, Chapters 7 through 13, is the story of **reinstruction**. This is the way to retain strength once it is rebuilt.

In Chapter 8 we have the great calling together of the people by Ezra the priest that is recorded also in the book of Ezra. Notice the steps here. It began with the reading of the Law, Chapter 8, Verses 5 and 6:

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people [this is the way to preach] for he was above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God; and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. {Neh 8:5-6 RSV}

And Verse 8:

And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. {Neh 8:8 RSV}

This is nothing more or less than expository preaching. This was the first means of retaining the strength represented by the walls.

After this, the people celebrated the Feast of the Tabernacles, when Israel dwelt in booths made of tree boughs to remind them that they were simply strangers and pilgrims on earth. Next was the remembrance of the lessons of the past.

In Chapter 9 you have Ezra’s tremendous prayer, when he recounted what God had done in the life of this people. It is always good to stop and remember what God has taught you in the past. That is always a sure way to preserve the strength that God gives you. Following this prayer, the people signed a covenant and agreed that they would do what the Law demanded. They covenanted; they resolved that they would take the step of obedience.

I can tell you out of my own experience as well that you will never be able to retain the strength that God gives you until you are ready to be obedient to what he says. You must obey him whenever you hear and know what he wants.

In the eleventh chapter is the recognition of gifts among the people. There are the Levites, the gate keepers, the singers, and various others who ministered in the temple. Similarly, in the New Testament we are told to discover the gifts that the Spirit has given us and to put them to work. “Rekindle the gift of God that is within you” (2 Tim 1:6 RSV), Paul wrote to Timothy. If you want to retain your strength, start using what God has given you.

Then, in Chapter 12, in the dedication of the walls, the people gathered and marched around them with instruments, singing and shouting, playing and rejoicing, and crying out with great joy. There is nothing that will add more to your strength in the Lord than to express the joy of the Lord in your life.

The book closes with the matter of resistance to evil. Your strength will be maintained if you will take the attitude that Nehemiah took for God. He was ready to say “No!” to the forces that would destroy what God was doing in his life. Look what he had to do. In Chapter 13, Verse 7, having gone back to Babylon and returned to Jerusalem, he says:

I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah [this man was first mentioned in the beginning of the book as an enemy of the Jews], **preparing for him [the enemy of God] a chamber in the courts of the house of God.** {Neh 13:7b RSV}

He had allowed Tobiah to move right into the temple! What did Nehemiah do? He said:

I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. {Neh 13:8 RSV}

He went in and threw Tobiah’s furniture out into the street. And that isn’t all. He found that the priests had been cheated, so he restored the money that belonged to them. Then he discovered that throughout the city the people were violating the Sabbath. They were bringing in merchandise and selling it in the streets. In Verse 19 he says:

When it began to be dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and

gave orders that they should not be opened until after the sabbath. {Neh 13:19a RSV}

He kept them all out of the city. Then he discovered that some of them were waiting outside the doors all night, hoping that someone would come out and do a little business. So what did he do?

I warned them and said to them, “Why do you lodge before the wall? If you do so again I will lay hands on you.” {Neh 13:21a RSV}

Then he discovered yet another problem. The people were still intermarrying with the forbidden races around them. Nehemiah became violent. In Verse 25 he says:

I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair [What a man!]; **and I made them take oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.”** {Neh 13:25 RSV}

But that still isn’t all. He found that one of the fellows who was his foremost enemy, who had done more than any other to oppose the building of the wall, was Sanballat the Horonite. In Verse 28 we read:

And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; [So what did he do with him?] **therefore I chased him from me.** {Neh 13:28 RSV}

Now perhaps you feel that Nehemiah was too severe. But here, you see, is a man who has learned that there can be no compromise with evil. He has learned one of the greatest lessons that the Spirit of God can ever teach anyone – to say “No!” when it needs to be said.

It was on this very note that the Lord Jesus began his ministry in Jerusalem. As he came into the temple and found it filled with the money changers, who were defiling the house of prayer, he made a whip of cords and drove them out of the temple. There is nothing gentle about that!

Here is a man who is thoroughly angry, with sparks flying from his eyes, and yet he is perfectly justified in what he does because he is resolutely

saying “No” to that which defiles the temple of God.

Those who have made a mark for God throughout the history of the church have been those who have learned to say “No,” and have said it at the right time. You read the story of the Covenanters, of Martin Luther, of John and Charles Wesley, of all those who have moved against evil in the world, and they were always men or women who had learned to say “No!” They stood against anything that defiles the temple of God.

Now these are the ways by which strength is maintained in our lives also. As we come to the close of this book we see that the walls of Jerusa-

lem stand once again and God’s testimony is re-established in this city.

Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you for this look into your word, into the truth that affects our own lives. We pray that we also may learn, as Nehemiah did, to be disciplined, courageous, confident in you, and willing to say “No,” willing to be absolutely ruthless against the forces that would undermine and sap the vitality of our lives in you. In Christ’s name, Amen.

ESTHER: A Queen Under Control

by Ray C. Stedman

This little gem, tucked away in an obscure corner of the Old Testament, is a very rich book, and it is historical. Although there are unfortunately those today who suggest that some of the stories in the Old Testament are legends, there is substantial evidence that the events of Esther actually occurred. It took place in the days of Israel's captivity when as a nation it was under bondage to Babylon. During the days of that captivity a man arose who, as prime minister of Babylon, launched an attack on the Jews and tried to stamp out these people, just as Hitler tried in a more recent time. God moved in a wonderful way to deliver his people through Esther, who became the queen of this foreign kingdom.

In this book you have one of the most exciting stories of all time. It is more than simply a story of God's power in delivering the Jews. In one sense it is the most unusual account in the Bible because the name of God never appears in it. There is mention of neither heaven nor hell. There is no mention of anything particularly religious. It is the kind of story that you might find in the pages of a literary periodical, but here it is in the Bible. Many have wondered why that is so, and the answer is that this is a marvelous parallel to what is going on in our own lives. The thing that makes this book so fascinating is that this is our story. As we trace through the events of this book we can see how accurately it illustrates what is happening to us when God is at work in the human heart. Paul gives us the key in the New Testament when he says, "these things ... were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come," (1 Cor 10:11 RSV).

The story is that of a king and his kingdom. The king divorces the queen who is at his side when

the story opens, and thereby becomes a lonely man by his own decree. He is powerless to change the decree after it is issued, and in his loneliness he begins a search for a new queen. As we trace this story we will find that it runs exactly parallel to that of mankind. The book opens in a time of peace and blessing with the king throwing a great feast for his lords. There are hundreds and thousands of people there, and the feast lasts for six months. During this time the king has nothing to do but to lavishly display the glory and beauty of his kingdom.

Interestingly enough, we discover in the Scriptures that man was made to be king like this. We have seen this pattern before. Each of us is given a kingdom over which to rule. Our soul is the kingdom, including the faculties of mind, emotion, and, above all, the right to choose. Man's body is the capital city of this kingdom. The empire includes all that he influences and touches. The king, seated upon the throne of that kingdom, is the will. There is also a hidden member of our life – the inner life, or spirit, as we shall see. This is the deepest and most sensitive part of our being, the part designed to be in touch with God, the place where God himself is to dwell.

Now, as we see that this king had nothing to do but to display the glory of his kingdom, so also man, when he first appeared on earth, had nothing to do but display the glory of God who indwelt him and to rule in dominion over the earth given to him. But this king lifted himself up in pride and tried to destroy his queen. That is, he tried to disgrace her by summoning her to display her beauty before the whole court.

This is a picture of us, paralleling the account of the fall of man, when man chose to assert his

reason over the supremacy of revelation. In the palace of man's spirit, symbolized by the queen in this story, dwelt the God of glory and truth. It was there that the mind, emotions, and will of man were guided by fellowship with the living Lord, who dwelt in the royal residence of the spirit. Man was to subject his reason to revelation, and, in doing so, he would fulfill his destiny and utilize the full powers of his humanity in the purpose for which they were intended. However, as you know, there was introduced into life a principle that tempted man to assert the power of his reason over revelation. Man began to choose what he himself wanted to do, rather than what God wanted him to do, and with this came the fall.

This is portrayed for us in the opening chapters of Esther, when the king issued a decree that the queen was to be deposed from the throne. This decree became the law of the Medes and the Persians and the king could do nothing about it once it was issued. From then on he became a lonely king. In his loneliness he began to search for a new queen. The proclamation was sent out through all the kingdom to bring all the beautiful maidens before him. One by one they appeared, among them a beautiful girl named Esther, who was one of the captives taken from Jerusalem and brought over into the land of Babylon. With her was her cousin Mordecai. These two are the most important characters in this story. Esther pictures the renewed spirit that is given to man when he becomes a Christian, when he is regenerated, when his spirit is made alive in Jesus Christ. She is under the influence and control of her cousin, Mordecai, who throughout this book is a picture for us of the Holy Spirit and his activity in our lives. This man's name means "little man" – man in his humility – and he is thus a picture of Christ.

In Chapter 2 the Spirit is received when Esther, under the control of her cousin, Mordecai, is brought before the king and he falls in love with her. Because of her beauty, he immediately chooses her to be his queen and exalts her to the second place in the kingdom. In that scene you have a picture of what might be called the conversion of this king. He receives a new spirit, without understanding that the Holy Spirit also is involved – many of us today may have failed to understand this at the moment of our becoming Christians. But Mordecai is there in the background and we shall see how he becomes one of the prominent

characters in this story of the wonderful deliverance of the kingdom.

Now in Chapter 3 of this book we are introduced to the villain, a slimy character by the name of Haman the Agagite. As you trace this man's ancestry back through Scripture you discover that an Agagite is an Amalekite, and Amalek was that race of people, descendants of Esau, against whom God had said he would make war forever, (Exod 17:16). King Saul had been ordered to completely eliminate this people, but, in his folly, he chose to spare Agag the king of the Amalekites and thus perpetuated this faithless force in Israel. Throughout the whole of Scripture, this tribe of Amalekites represents the indwelling desire in our hearts that is continually opposed to all that God wants to do. This is what the New Testament calls "the flesh," and whenever the Spirit of God begins to move to bless us, this thing rises up to oppose the Spirit and do all it can in its subtle, clever, crafty way to hinder the work of God. Now that is Haman.

In Chapter 3 we read that as soon as Haman comes to wield power in a place of prominence just below the king, he is immediately antagonistic toward Mordecai. These two are instantly in direct conflict because Haman was "the enemy of the Jews." Learning that Mordecai is a Jew, he vows to eliminate him from the kingdom, and all through this account we read over and over again that the thing characterizing Haman is that he hates the Jews. Now why does he hate the Jews? Chapter 3, Verse 8, says:

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not for the king's profit to tolerate them." {Est 3:8 RSV}

In other words, here is a people who obey a different life principle. Just as the spirit of man indwelt by the Holy Spirit is immediately subject to a different rule of living, a different way of thinking, a different demand, so these Jews are obeying a different principle. Because they are God's people, Haman is furious in his rage against them, and he concocts a terrible strategy. This man was very clever, just as the flesh within us is very clever in its strategy to keep us under bondage. The story of

this book is about the way God works to get the wrong man out of control and the right man in. The reason we have problems as Christians – even after being born again – is that the flesh subtly and cleverly opposes all that God attempts to do in our lives. These words in Galatians accurately describe the whole struggle:

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. {Gal 5:17 RSV}

Now Haman immediately goes to work to persuade the king that, for the king's own benefit, he should eliminate these people. Haman, then, becomes the power behind the throne. He controls the king. The king does what Haman wants him to do, and issues an edict to eliminate the Jews from all the kingdom. Just so, in our lives the flesh continually strives to render inoperative the control of the Holy Spirit and to cause us to continually walk according to the old self-serving, self-loving, self-satisfying principles that prevail in the world around us. We read that when Haman and Mordecai come face-to-face this enmity begins. The Spirit is resisted and, at the close of Chapter 3, Haman has prevailed upon the king to give him the royal ring (the mark of authority and power) and to issue the edict which would destroy the Jews throughout the kingdom.

After he does this, the king in his folly thinks that Haman is his friend, and invites him in to have a drink and to pat him on the back. He congratulates himself on his cleverness with Haman. Often in our own lives we think that we too have displayed cleverness in standing up for our own rights and insisting that nobody walk roughshod over us. We feel that we have acted very cleverly, and congratulate ourselves for exercising control over a situation. Yet all the time we are unaware that in our utter folly we have done the very thing that will instead continue to wreak havoc in our lives and put us entirely at the mercy of this deadly enemy within, the flesh.

In Chapter 4 we have the story of how God begins to move. Mordecai is grieved. Haven't you had this experience of living with a grieved Spirit? The first thing that the Spirit of God does when we begin to walk in the flesh is to create a sense of

disquiet within, a sense of grief. It is deep within us. We hardly know how to put our finger on it. We know that something is not right, but we don't know what it is. Esther sees that Mordecai is very distressed and, not knowing what to do, she sends him a change of clothes, hoping that will take care of the problem. Many times when we are distressed and grieved in spirit because of our attitudes and our activities, we often think that some superficial change will correct the matter. We think the problem concerns only what we are doing, and not what we are.

Then Mordecai sends a messenger named Hathach (by the way, that means the truth) to convince Esther that she is up against a serious problem. He unfolds to Esther the whole deadly plot of this cunning Haman: how he is out to destroy the Jews, including the queen herself, although Haman does not know that Esther is a Jew. When Esther hears this she is disturbed and doesn't know what to do. Mordecai sends her further word, saying, "Now you must go to the king."

The problem is to get the king to understand that Haman is not his friend, just as the problem in our lives is to get us to really believe God when he tells us that the principles that characterize the flesh are not our friends. They are not on our side. When we get stubborn, belligerent, difficult, impatient – when we demonstrate qualities that characterize the flesh – we are not working for our own interests. We think we are. We think that these are the things that give us manliness, and humanity, and strength of character, and so on. And here we have a deluded king who doesn't know that his supposed best friend is really his worst enemy.

What Mordecai has asked Esther to do is a dangerous thing; to appear before the king without being summoned was in itself a sentence of death. So Esther sends word back to Mordecai, "You don't know what you are asking me to do. Don't you know that in asking me to go before the king like this you are literally sentencing me to death? The very moment that I step across that threshold, my life is forfeited. You are asking me to die." And she suggests that perhaps some other way can be worked out; and Mordecai replies bluntly, "Don't try to outwit Haman yourself. If you think you can outwit the strategy and cleverness of this man, you are wrong. He'll outwit you. He'll outmaneuver you. He'll move in behind you. He'll trap you. You will end up whipped." This is what

the seventh chapter in Romans so clearly teaches us. If we think that we can handle the flesh with our will-power alone, we are whipped.

This is one of the most difficult things to grasp about the Christian life. It is the most elusive thing to understand – that we must come to the end of ourselves, and that we must die to our own resources in order to handle the flesh. We cannot do this alone. We cannot do it by clenching our fists, or gritting our teeth, or signing New Year’s resolutions, or by determining we are not going to act in a certain way any longer. Esther must learn that the only one who is capable of handling Haman is Mordecai, and she must be willing to die to her own resources in order to handle this man.

As Esther faces this truth, she says:

“Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.” {Est 4:16 RSV}

“After three days and nights” – that certainly is significant, isn’t it? Three days and nights Jesus Christ lay in the grave on our behalf, dead for us. On the third day Esther puts on her royal robes and stands in the inner courts of the king’s palace opposite the king’s hall, waiting in fear and uncertainty, hardly knowing what will happen when the king sees her. But when he does, he sees her in the beauty of the resurrected life. “On the third day” she comes, on the day of resurrection, in power and glory, and his heart is captivated by her beauty. He says to Queen Esther, “Ask anything you want. I will give it to you, up to half of my kingdom.”

Then we find a strange thing taking place. Esther doesn’t ask him for anything; she simply asks him to dinner the next day and says to bring Haman along. What is the meaning of that? I think there is nothing more significant than this: we never can second-guess the Holy Spirit in the way he will handle a situation. We never know how he is going to work. The apparently logical response would have been that Esther immediately say, “Look, you asked me to make a request. What I want is the head of Haman on a platter.” But she doesn’t do that. Evidently in obedience to Mordecai’s orders, she waits. And while she waits, we discover that something interesting happens: Ha-

man is trapped by his own folly. Mordecai gives Esther directions to invite the king and Haman to dinner. After the dinner, the king asks her what she wants, and she says, “I want you to come back again tomorrow night for dinner.” Haman goes out walking on air, absolutely and completely thrilled with what has happened. He returns to his wife and his sons, and says, “I knew I was the king’s fair-haired boy, but now I discover that I am the queen’s favorite as well. I’ve got them eating right out of my hand.” He begins to boast of his exploits,

Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. {Est 5:9 RSV}

When the flesh within us boasts and becomes arrogant and proud, and we congratulate ourselves on the way we stick up for our rights and the way we can cleverly maneuver things around as we want them, there is One who remains totally unimpressed – the Holy Spirit. He is not at all intimidated by our cleverness. This grates on Haman and eats at his heart, and he says to his wife and sons, “I cannot live, I cannot stand it as long as this man Mordecai is in the court.” His wife says, “If he stands in your way, get rid of him. Hang him. Erect a gallows 75 feet high (that’s how high 50 cubits is) and in the morning go tell the king to hang him.” Isn’t that just like the flesh? If anything gets in your way, get rid of it. Don’t let anybody stand in your way. Move right on through. Assert yourself. Stick out your chest and walk right on in as tyrant – king of your world.

Well, it looks as though the wrong man is going to end up on the gallows, doesn’t it? But the plot is saved, and do you know what turned the trick? Pizza, late at night. At least that’s what I think it was, for we read,

On that night the king could not sleep; and he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. {Est 6:1 RSV}

He found how certain men, Bigthana and Teresh, two of his own guards, had plotted against his life. He read that Mordecai had found it out and reported it, so that these two men were put to death

as traitors against the king. This was recorded in the book and it was by the book that deliverance began to come, for there the king discovered who his real friend was. And as he read, he noted that he had done nothing to honor Mordecai.

Have you ever had that experience while reading in the book of memorable deeds about the most memorable deed of all history? You learn that One took your place and died in your stead and fought off all the powers of darkness and hell for your sake, laying down his life on your behalf; and it suddenly dawns on you that you have done nothing to honor him, nothing to thank him. When the king reaches this point he calls for whoever is in the outside court to come in – and who is there but Haman! He comes in and the king asks him for advice:

“What can the king do to the man in whom he delights?” {cf, Est 6:6}

Of course the flesh always knows who that is. Haman thinks, “Well, who else would be the king’s favorite but me?” Thus he thinks of the greatest honor he could possibly enjoy. He says to the king, “If you really want to honor the man in whom you delight, then give him your crown, your robe, your authority, everything you are, and set him on your horse. Then appoint some prince to lead him through the city and cry out, ‘This is the man in whom the king delights!’” So the king says, “Haman that is wonderful. Go do it for Mordecai.”

I would love to have seen Haman’s face right then! But the interesting thing is that he does it. He does it! He goes through with this grinding, humiliating thing. He takes Mordecai, his hated enemy, and puts him on the horse and leads him through the city. Can’t you see him calling out as he goes along, “This is the man the king delights to honor.” But in his heart he is burning with furious rage and envy against this man. The point is, however, that the flesh does it. It will do anything for the sake of survival. It will get religious. It will come to church. It will sing in the choir. It will preach. It will pass out the hymn books. It will take up the collection. It will usher. It will give a testimony. It will do anything in order to survive.

Recently a converted Christian actor, a wonderful Christian man, told me of being in a great church in New York City – and, as a member of the young people’s band, he went out with others to

give testimonies before a group. He said the language was exactly the same as evangelicals use but the whole thrust of it was to the exaltation of the people who were giving the testimonies. There was a brassy brilliance about it that marked it as something not genuine. He said, “I learned there how the flesh can do everything religious and still be the flesh.” That is what is pictured here by Haman’s action.

The next day the king, Haman, and Esther come together, and there Queen Esther reveals the perfidy of Haman. The king is horror-struck. He doesn’t know for a moment what to do. He goes out in the garden and paces up and down, just as you and I do when the spirit of God suddenly reveals to us that this thing we have been protecting and building fences around and excusing in ourselves is the great enemy of our souls. We realize, like the king, that a drastic change is called for. For it is a drastic thing to kill a prime minister, but that is what Queen Esther is asking for. The king knows that there can be no deliverance in his kingdom until this matter is ended, so he gives the orders: “Hang him on the gallows prepared for Mordecai.” So Haman is hanged on that gallows.

In Chapter 8 we read:

On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, {Est 8:1a RSV}

Mordecai is now in the place of power. This is the fullness of the Spirit.

- In Chapter 2 the Spirit is received.
- In Chapter 3, the Spirit is resisted.
- In Chapter 4, the Spirit is grieved.
- In the last part of Chapter 4, the Spirit is quenched.
- Now you have the fullness of the Spirit.

With Mordecai coming to power in this empire everything begins to change. Instantly another decree goes out, allowing the Jews to fight their enemies and slay them.

Just so, in Chapter 8 of Romans we are told that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has now been issued. It sets us free from the law of sin and death and when we act in obedience to that new law – standing against these enemies that are at work in our own life, refusing to acknowledge their power – we discover that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus lifts us up and gives us victory and power in the place where we were once defeated. Here at the end of the book we discover the same king and the same kingdom – just as you are the same person, living in the same home, among the same people, working in the same shop – but with a different government, a different management. Mordecai is now on the throne.

One brief passage in the book of Romans outlines the whole story of this book. It says:

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh [Haman-minded] but according to the Spirit [Mordecai-minded]. {Rom 8:3-4 RSV}

Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you for this beautiful story and pray that we might grasp it and understand it. May this book speak to us and teach us what is happening in our own lives, so that we may discover the victory that is available to us today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

JOB: The Hardest Question

by Ray C. Stedman

The gripping and challenging book of Job is perhaps one of the most fascinating books of the Old Testament, and it begins a new division in the Scriptures. The books from Genesis to Esther are all narrative books, and are vitally meaningful to us as living parables, as types worked out in actual history by which we can see what is going on in our own lives.

Job begins another section – the poetical books of the Bible – which also includes Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and the little book of Lamentations, tucked in behind Jeremiah. Job is a great poem. Some have said that it is perhaps even the greatest poem in all literature. Perhaps nothing that Shakespeare has written exceeds this book in beauty of expression. It is admired everywhere as one of the most beautiful writings that man has ever known. But it is more than an expressive, dramatic writing; it has a very great message, as we shall see.

It is a drama, an epic drama much like *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, the poems by Homer from the Greek world. But the book of Job is also history. Job was an actual, living person and these events actually took place, but God recounts them for us in this beautiful style so that we might have an answer to the age-old, haunting question, “Why does apparently senseless tragedy strike men?” Any time you get into difficulties it is well to turn to the book of Job. Here is a man who experienced an agony of human despair and desolation of spirit which accompanied the apparently meaningless, senseless tragedies that came into his life.

Now, the ultimate answer to that question is given right at the beginning of the book. At the opening we are handed certain program notes that explain to us something about the drama, some-

thing which even the actors themselves are not permitted to know. The answer given is that senseless suffering arises out of Satan’s continual challenge to the government of God.

So, as the book opens, we find God meeting with the angelic creation. Among them is Satan, who strides in sneering and swaggering, convinced that self-interest is the only real motive for human behavior. Satan’s philosophy is that the question “What’s in it for me?” is the only accurate explanation for why people do anything.

And here, in the presence of God, he asserts that anyone who claims that human beings act from any other motive is simply a religious phony; furthermore, he claims he can prove it. God says, rather patiently, “All right, we’ll test your theory.” Then he selects the man Job to be the proving ground.

In World War II at the opening of the war between Japan and the United States, it looked as though this conflict would be staged in the Pacific Ocean – very likely the islands of Hawaii, for the battle began at Pearl Harbor. But very early in the war, as you will remember, events took a sudden startling turn and without a word of warning the whole theater of battle shifted abruptly to the South Pacific. For the first time, Americans began to hear of strange names of islands, like “Guadalcanal” and others. There, in those quiet, obscure, out-of-the way corners of the earth, the greatest powers on earth were locked in mortal combat. The islands became the battleground for the great fight between empires.

And something like this happened in the story of Job. Here is a man going about his private affairs, unaware that he has suddenly become the center of God’s attention. For the time being all of

God's activity has focused upon him, and he has become the battleground for a conflict between God and Satan in which God is planning to pull the rug out from under Satan, and to reveal him as the phony that he is. Job is that battleground, and Satan immediately moves in with shock troops.

In Chapter 1 we read that, one by one, the props are pulled out of Job's life. It is as though some Western Union telegram boy delivers a series of messages to Job about terrible catastrophes. Hard on the heels of the first comes another one, and the messages keep coming in. First, all Job's oxen have been taken by enemy raids, and then all his asses have been decimated. Next, word comes that his sheep have been killed by a terrible electric storm, and crowding in after that is the news that his great herd of camels, true wealth in the oriental world, has been wiped out in a natural catastrophe. Then comes the heartrending news that his seven sons and three daughters were together in one home enjoying a birthday celebration when a great tornado hit and the house was demolished. All of his children were killed in one fatal blow.

Job takes it all in stride. At the end of Chapter 1 his response to this terrible series of tragic, senseless accidents is:

“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the LORD gives, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” {Job 1:21 RSV}

I wonder if we would have responded that way? Satan is somewhat taken aback, so he asks God to change the rules of the game. Satan has decided to attack Job more directly and petitions God for the right to strike Job's own body. This God grants. Without warning, Job is suddenly stricken with a series of terrible boils, or carbuncles.

There was a time in my life, during a period of about a year and a half, when I had some twenty-five boils on my body, though no more than two or three at one time. Since then I have had a deep sympathy for dear old Job. There is nothing more aggravating than a painful boil which is not relieved by any kind of medication. You can only grit your teeth and endure agony until the boil comes to a head, and heals itself.

Consider how Job is stricken with these from the top of his head to the sole of his foot. He

hardly knows what to do, but is determined to wait it out. As the malady continues, his wife is the one whose faith succumbs. She turns on him and says, “Are you still holding fast to your integrity? Why don't you curse God and die?” Job has to stand alone, but he is determined to be faithful. Then comes the final test, when he receives a visit from three of his friends.

At this point the whole book slightly shifts its focus. We now are no longer looking only at Job but also at his controversy with these three friends, and their discourse occupies the major part of the book. From their human (very human) point of view, they attempt to answer that same haunting question, “Why do senseless tragedies afflict men?” The major part of the book, written in beautifully poetic language, records the attempts by these men to come to an answer. And the three friends' answers are all the same. They answer the question of Job's problems with smug, dogmatic assurances that only one explanation is possible: he has committed some awful sin. They try to break down Job's defenses with arguments.

Now, they are not necessarily wrong in their explanation. There are tragic events – catastrophes, heartache, pain, and suffering – which do occur because of sin. Any time that we violate the laws of God's universe, including the laws of health, there is an immediate and sometimes violent physical reaction and much suffering comes from that. But the problem in his friends' arguments – and their evil – lay in their dogmatic assertion that this is the only explanation possible for all kinds of suffering.

They each take three rounds with Job. Each of them presents three arguments, nine arguments in all, and each plays the same tune. They try various approaches. First they try sarcasm and irony. Then they appeal to Job's honesty. Then they accuse him of specific crimes and misdeeds. Finally they act hurt and go away, miffed and sulking, proudly appealing to Job's conscience not to insult them any more. All the time they are attacking his integrity with the argument that if God is indeed just, then the righteous are always blessed and the wicked always suffer; therefore, if an individual is suffering, it must be because there is something wrong in his life. This is their argument. To these men, the explanation is a simple matter of cause and effect and is quite logical. It is neat and tidy

and explains everything – that is, unless you happen to be the sufferer.

At first Job is slightly irritated with these friends. But then he becomes angry and, finally, sarcastic. In the opening lines of his reply, he delivers a cutting piece of irony: “I am sure you alone are the people and wisdom is going to die with you,” (cf, Job 12:2). “You’ve got all the answers, you’ve solved all the problems, you know everything. So there’s no use talking to you any longer!” With bitter sarcasm he replies that their explanation of his suffering is in error. Resentful, he openly entreats them to understand. He says he can’t confess sin because he is genuinely unaware of anything he has done that has offended God. Moreover, he can’t believe in justice any longer because their arguments that the wicked always suffer simply are not true. He points out that many people who are very wicked, notoriously wicked, are prospering and flourishing and living in ease, and nothing horrible is happening to them.

Furthermore, he says, he doesn’t know what to do because God won’t listen to him; he doesn’t even have a chance to plead his case before God, and he complains that God hides from him and cannot be found. Eventually Job actually shouts at these friends in the turmoil of his confusion, bewilderment, anger, hurt, and frustration. He says he is afraid of this God, who is not the God he has known. He doesn’t know what has happened to this dear old friend whom he could always rely upon. Job has taken a strange turn in his attitude now that these awful things are happening to him. He is uncertain what to think or say.

The glorious thing about this dear man is that, throughout the whole book, he is utterly and completely honest. Confused and bewildered and puzzled by what is happening, he simply blurts out his thoughts. He refuses to admit things that he cannot accept: “All these pat answers don’t help at all!” In his desolation he expresses in various ways the ultimate cry of the human spirit. Some wonderful verses emerge from this discourse by Job. Stripped as he is to his very soul, he cries out again and again with some of the deepest expressions of the human heart. In Chapter 9 he says of God,

**For he is not a man, as I am, that I might
answer him,
that we should come to trial together.
{Job 9:32 RSV}**

In Hebrew, his words are literally,

**Would that there were an umpire between
us,
oh that there were a daysman, a mediator
between us
who might lay his hand upon us both.
(Job 9:32-33)**

That is the cry of a heart that recognizes that God is higher and greater and richer and holier than man, and man can’t reach him. It is the cry for a mediator to come between them.

Then in Chapter 14 comes another expression out of this man’s faithful heart:

**If a man die, shall he live again?
All the days of my service I would wait,
till my release should come.
(Job 14:14 RSV)**

“If I knew that after I die I would live again, I would gladly wait until that time to argue my case before God!” “If a man die, shall he live again?” This great cry – the question uttered by so many – wells up from the depths of this man’s desolation and suffering.

Then in Chapter 16 Job cries out,

**Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
and he that vouches for me is on high.
{Job 16:19 RSV}**

Earlier he had cried out for a mediator: “Oh, that I might have somebody step in between me and God.” Now at last, born of his desperation, “I realize now that the only one who can adequately argue my case for me is God himself. If any cause of mine is going to be fairly presented before God, God himself has to do it.”

In Chapter 19 comes another distressed cry, in which he sounds this note of awful intensity:

**“Oh that my words were written!
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
Oh that with an iron pen and lead
they were graven in the rock for ever!”
{Job 19:23-24 RSV}**

That prayer was fulfilled in this record, the book of Job. Then, at last, a ray of light shines in his darkness:

**“For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then from my flesh [“in my flesh,” in the
Hebrew] I shall see God.” (Job 19:25-
26 RSV)**

Out of the dark, deep distress of this man come these cries which find their fulfillment in the coming of Jesus Christ. He came to be mediator. He came to give assurance that man shall live again. He came to stand between man and God. He came to stand in the flesh upon the earth that man might see him face-to-face.

Now comes the final blow to Job, after all these so-called friends have had their chance with him and have tried to beat him down their arguments pounding him again and again like a club. Poor Job – bruised, defeated, puzzled, bewildered, and confused – now meets with a young man who happened to be standing there all along but who is only now interjected into the picture. His name is Elihu. Speaking for youth, he stands up to say, “You are all wrong. You friends of Job are wrong because you accuse him unjustly, and Job is wrong because he blames God for his difficulty. He is accusing God in order to exonerate himself.” Elihu points out the weaknesses in both arguments but still offers nothing positive to answer the question of Job’s misery.

But suddenly the Lord himself answers Job. In a whirlwind’s fury he comes to him and says, “Do you want to debate, Job? You have been saying that you want some answers to your questions and that I have been hiding and am not willing to debate with you. Do you want to debate your case? All right. First, let me see your qualifications. I have a list here of forty questions I would like to ask you, to see if you are competent to understand problems. These are very simple problems, very simple questions, and if you are able to handle these ABC’s, then perhaps you are able to debate with me the questions you have in your heart.”

Then, in Chapters 38 through 40, you have one of the most remarkable passages in all of the Bible. God takes Job on a tour of nature and asks him question after question about Job’s ability to deal with this kind of thing or that kind of thing in nature. Gradually these three chapters draw the picture of a vastly complicated, intricately intertwined

universe for which is required a tremendous super-human mind to direct all these activities, to keep life in balance and to answer all the questions that the Lord is asking Job to answer.

At the end of this overwhelming display of the wisdom of God, Job falls down on his face and says:

**“I had heard of thee by the hearing of the
ear,
but now my eye sees thee;
therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.”
(Job 42:5-6 RSV)**

God’s essential argument is that life is too complicated for simple answers. If you are demanding that God come up with simple answers to these deep and complicated problems, you are asking him to do more than you are able to understand. He is simply saying that only God can adequately deal with the answers to these kinds of questions. Therefore, man must take the position of trusting him – not arguing with him. God has displayed in the most amazing way his ability to work out complicated situations while keeping human life and the life of the entire world – with all their tremendously involved complexities – in beautiful balance. Now if you really see that, then you must trust God to work out these complicated problems of life.

Job, overwhelmed by the vast might and wisdom and majesty of God, falls on his face, repents, and learns the lesson that God wants him to learn. Only God has the right to use men for whatever purpose he desires. In other words, God does not exist for man but man exists for God. God is not a glorified bell-boy at whom we can snap our fingers and have him run up asking, “May I take your order?” We exist for him. We are God’s instruments for the working out of his purposes, some of which are so vastly complicated they are quite beyond our ability to understand. There are many questions which simply cannot be answered because our calculating machinery is so inadequate.

The last of the book is a beautiful picture of what James calls the tender mercies of God toward Job (cf, Jas 5:11). God says to Job, “Now I want you to pray for your friends – these three dear men, so stubborn, so sure that they had all the answers, so well meaning, so sincere, so dedicated, but such utter blunderers. Pray for them, Job.”

Then God said to Job, "How many sheep did you have?" Job said, "Seven thousand." God said, "All right, I will give you fourteen thousand. How many oxen did you have?" And he said, "Five hundred." God replied, "I'll give you a thousand. How many camels?" "Three thousand." "All right, Job, you will have six thousand camels. How many asses did you have?" "Five hundred." "I'll give you a thousand. How many sons and daughters?" "Seven sons and three daughters." "All right, you will have seven sons and three daughters more, doubled. Twice as many. Seven sons and three daughters in glory and seven sons and three daughters on earth." God restored twice as much to Job and he lived the rest of his life in blessedness and happiness. The account closes with the words,

And Job died, and old man, and full of days. (Job 42:17 RSV)

Now the remarkable thing about this book is the answer we are given: the fact that the backdrop to human suffering is the age-long conflict of Satan's challenge to God's righteous government of the universe. This answer is never given to Job, at least while he lives. At the beginning of the book you find God, Satan, and Job. At the end of the book, Satan has faded out of the picture entirely and God stands before Job with his arms akimbo, saying, "All right, I am responsible. Any questions?" The great lesson of the book is that there are times when we cannot be told the whole picture. There are times when God does not adequately explain life to us. There are times when we must trust that not all suffering occurs because we are bad, but because it can also be the source of some final good. The deepest note in the book may be struck when, out of the desolation of his heart and yet with the Spirit of God within him urging him on

to faith in the midst of his bewilderment and confusion, Job says,

**But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tried me, I shall come forth
as gold. {Job 23:10 RSV}**

That is the lesson of this book. Life is too complicated for us to handle alone. It gets so involved that we can't even be given some of the answers at times, but God is saying, "If you just take a look at all the problems that I keep solving on the very simplest levels of life and which even then are far beyond your ability to cope with, can't you trust me to work this one out as well?" In Romans Paul rejoices, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose," (Romans 8:28).

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for this look into Job's heart. Thank you for recording for us the struggles of this dear man as he frankly, openly, and honestly voices his doubts, airs his grievances, addresses you with his complaints. Lord, we hear ourselves, in our irksome petulance crying out to you, blaming you for our circumstances, unwilling to believe that you have a purpose behind them and are able to work them out. Lord, teach us to rest in you through the great and wonderful revelation that in every circumstance we are privileged to be instruments in the working out of victory over the enemy of man; to demonstrate once and for all that the only life worth living is a life lived by faith. We pray in your name. Amen.

PSALMS: The Worship of an Honest Heart

by Ray C. Stedman

There are 150 psalms in this book, making it the longest book in the Bible. Have you discovered that it is really five books in one? It divides very easily and obviously into five different books, and each of these divisions is closed by a doxology. You will find the first one at the end of Psalm 41, and every other section as well ends with this kind of doxology. Psalm 41 ends:

**Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting!
Amen and Amen. {Psa 41:13 RSV}**

These books were deliberately compiled with a special purpose in view. It has often been pointed out that the book of Psalms is the book of human emotions. Indeed, every experience of man's heart is reflected in this book. No matter what mood you may be in, some psalm will reflect that mood. For this amazing book records every one of man's emotions and experiences. Those who have discovered the "secret of perpetual emotion" certainly ought to get acquainted with the book of Psalms. For instance,

- If you are fearful, read Psalm 56 or Psalm 91 or Psalm 23 (you know that one, of course). And
- If you are discouraged, read Psalm 42 – one example among many.
- If you happen to be feeling lonely, then I would suggest Psalm 71 or Psalm 62.

- If you are oppressed, with a sense of sinfulness, there are two marvelous psalms for you: Psalm 51, written after David's double sin of adultery and murder; and Psalm 32, a great expression of confession and forgiveness. And then,
- If you are worried or anxious, I'd recommend Psalm 37 and Psalm 73.
- If you are angry, try Psalm 58 or Psalm 13.
- If you are resentful, read Psalm 94 or Psalm 77.
- If you are happy and want some words to express your happiness, try Psalm 92 or Psalm 66.
- If you feel forsaken, try Psalm 88.
- If you are grateful and you would like to say it, read Psalm 40.
- If you are doubtful, if your faith is beginning to fail, read Psalm 119.

And we could go on and on, because all 150 psalms have to do with experience.

Most of us think the psalms are David's work. In fact, more than half of them were written by David, the sweet singer of Israel, who was given by God the gift of capturing the emotions of his full life's varied experience and putting them in beautiful lyrical terms. These became the psalm book or

hymn book of Israel. Many of these psalms were written to be sung in public, which is why you will often find at the head of the psalm “To the chief choirmaster” or “To the choirmaster,” and in some of our Bibles is the word “Maskil” which is simply the Hebrew word for “psalm.”

You may be interested to know that one psalm, Psalm 90, was written by Moses, and two were composed by King Solomon. Still others were written by a nameless group called the sons of Korah who were especially charged with leading the singing of Israel. Also, a man named Asaph wrote many of the psalms, and even good King Hezekiah wrote ten of them. As you look into the book of Psalms, you can see that in many cases the titles refer to the author.

Now, the **five books of psalms** that I have already mentioned parallel the Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Bible. Those first five books were designed by God to give us the pattern of God’s working in a human life, or in the whole of creation, or in the whole of world history, and God always follows the same pattern, whether with an individual or with a nation. He takes them through the same steps. And those five steps were revealed by divine inspiration in the first five books of the Bible. The psalms follow the same steps, reflecting the reactions of the human heart to this pattern of God’s working in man’s life.

1. To begin with, the first book of psalms – Psalms 1 through 41 – is equivalent to the book of Genesis and has essentially the same message. It is the cry of human need. It is the expression in beautiful, poetic terms of the human heart’s deepest need. You will find that it follows closely the story of the book of Genesis. It begins in Psalm 1 with the picture of the perfect man just as Genesis begins with man in the Garden of Eden. Then in Psalm 2, you have man in his rebellion. It is a notable psalm, beginning with the words:

**Why do the nations conspire,
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and his anointed,
saying,
“Let us burst their bonds asunder.”
{Psa 2:1-3a RSV}**

It describes man in his rebellion, just as Genesis pictures him in the Garden of Eden. In the third psalm we see man in his rejection, and right on through in the following psalms in this first book. Then the grace of God is introduced. Here is the picture of God seeking man out in the darkness – just as he did in the shadows of the Garden, crying out, “Adam, where art thou?” – and moving to restore man to his lost estate. And as you read through this book you will hear the human heart’s expression of deep-seated longing, of its separation from God, its calling out to God in need.

2. The second book of psalms, Psalm 42 through Psalm 72, corresponds to the book of Exodus in the Pentateuch. Here is the experience of a new relationship. Just as Exodus tells us the story of Israel in captivity in Egypt – learning of the sorrow, the bondage, and the slavery of sin, and then learning something of the great grace of God in his power to deliver them, to bring them out of Egypt – the second book of psalms traces the same account, carefully capturing the theme of Exodus. Psalm 45 is the psalm of God the king, concerning God in his sovereign rule over man and man’s experience of God as king. And in Psalm 46 we read the promise of God’s delivering help – that God is a present help in time of trouble. In Psalm 50 the strength of God is exemplified and Psalm 51 reveals the delivering grace of God to man in his sin. And in Psalm 72, the last psalm of this book, God is pictured in his mighty, conquering power, setting man free from the bondage in which sin has enslaved him.
3. The third book of psalms, Psalm 73 through Psalm 89, corresponds to the book of Leviticus. Leviticus is the book of the tabernacle of worship, the discovery of what God is like when man comes before him and what he himself is like in the presence of God. And Leviticus is the book that reveals the inner workings of man’s heart: we see his need, his deep consciousness of his own sin, and the discovery of what God offers to do about it. And in these psalms, 73 through 89, the same pattern is carried out. Psalm 75, for instance, is an ex-

quisite expression of man's awareness of God's judgment in the inner heart. Psalm 78 is a record of God's unbending love: although God loves man, he will never let him get away with anything. He never compromises, he never bends; he gives in to man's plea for mercy, but is absolutely relentless in cutting away sin. Then, when man is ready to acknowledge his sin, and to agree with God's judgment concerning sin, God deals with him in love. Psalm 81 describes the new strength that God offers man, and Psalm 84 wonderfully portrays the continuous provision that God offers us.

4. Psalms 90 through 106 make up the fourth book, paralleling the book of Numbers – the wilderness book – which sets forth the experience of human failure. Throughout this book you will find victory alternating with devastating defeat. Just as in our experience, God steps in and delivers the Israelites in the desert – working mighty miracles and ministering to their needs, feeding them with bread from heaven, opening the rock for them so that water would flow – and then, in the next chapter, Israel murmurs and complains and falls into defeat. This pattern is pictured in the fourth book of psalms.
5. The fifth book, Psalm 107 through Psalm 150, corresponds to the book of Deuteronomy, the experience of the new resource in God. Here these psalms picture the person who has come to the end of himself, and is now ready to lay hold of the fullness of God. And this final book of Psalms is nothing but thanksgiving and praise, from beginning to end. It sounds one triumphant note all the way through and the closing part of it is a constant “Hallelujah, praise the Lord!” It is the expression of someone so excited that all he can do is shout “Hallelujah!” And that is the way the entire book of Psalms closes.

Now that is the experience of man as he learns to understand the pattern of God's work in his life.

It may be of interest to you to know that the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon form a separate section of the Bible. These are **the books of poetry**.

- In Job we read the cry of man's spirit, the deep cry of a man needing faith – needing trust in God – even though everything seems to go wrong, and everything seems inexplicable. When suffering reaches such an intensity that it seems senseless and no longer of any obvious value, then man's only recourse is quiet faith. Man was made to believe in God.
- Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes join together to express the cry of man's soul, and just as the soul has three divisions – the emotions, the mind, and the will – so these books express these divisions.
 - Psalms is the book of emotions.
 - Proverbs is the book of the will. And
 - Ecclesiastes is the book of the mind, the story of Solomon's searching examination of all the philosophies of men and concluding on the basis of human reason what is right and good.

Here then, you have the soul's expression of its need pointing to one great answer – hope. Just as the answer to the cry of the spirit is faith, the answer to the cry of the soul is hope.

- Then in the Song of Solomon you have, essentially, the cry of the body for love. Our deepest need as men and women is love. Children cannot grow up adequately and rightly unless they have love. And this cry of the body is expressed in the most beautiful love poem ever written, the Song of Solomon.

Many have had difficulty getting much out of the psalms. They read through psalms that seem to be filled only with David's cry against his enemies, or that seem to be only a record of handicaps and trials. Many are quite troubled by what are sometimes called the imprecatory psalms, those psalms that speak with bitter and scorching words against enemies, calling God's wrath down upon them, wishing that enemies be torn limb from limb and hung from the nearest lamp post. This disturbs people. “What kind of writing is this?” they say. “This doesn't agree with the New Testament's message that we are to love our enemies!” But I think we can understand even these troubling psalms if we will remember what the New Testa-

ment tells us about the Old Testament, that “these things,” Paul says, “were written down for our instruction,” (1 Cor 10:11). And if we put ourselves in the place of the psalmist, right into his world, we will see that the enemies that he faced then are the same enemies that we face today. The New Testament tells us that “we are not contending against flesh and blood,” (Eph 6:12). Sometimes people are confused about this, thinking that whoever opposes them is their enemy. But people are not our enemies. Rather, the principles of evil, the philosophies of the world, the attitudes of the flesh are our enemies; our real enemies are within us. Jesus said, “not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth,” {Matt 15:11 RSV} ... “for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication,” {Matt 15:19 RSV} and all these other things. There is your enemy. And if you read the psalms with this understanding, whenever you read “enemy” you will think of those temptations toward covetousness or jealousy or pride or ambition within yourself as the enemy that is spoken of in the psalms, and you will see that this severe language makes sense. We must deal severely with these things. They have no right to live in a Christian’s heart, in a Christian’s life. They have no right to be honored.

This is right in line with what the Lord Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount, “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away;” {Matt 5:29a RSV}. “And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away;” {Matt 5:30a RSV}. Now he doesn’t mean to do that literally; he simply means that we are to deal with temptation absolutely ruthlessly. Don’t entertain these things at all. And so these ruthless psalms are simply a picture of the way we must deal with the real enemies of the heart of man.

Let me give you an example: **Psalm 43** is a very brief psalm and we will look at it together so you can see what I mean. Here is the cry of the psalmist:

**Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
against an ungodly people;
from deceitful and unjust men deliver me!
For thou art the God in whom I take refuge;
why hast thou cast me off?
Why go I mourning
because of the oppression of the enemy?
{Psa 43:1-2 RSV}**

Now when you read such a psalm, don’t think of the enemy as being people – the neighbors across the back fence, or your overbearing boss. The enemies are within you. Think of them that way. And when you do, you are treating Scripture as it was intended to be treated. These are instructions for us, as Paul tells us. As you read this psalm, you can see how easily it divides itself:

- The first two verses record an attitude of attack. And who has not felt this way? These things within us, these burning jealousies, these desires to strike back at people and avenge ourselves and get even with them – these are the enemy. Such an attack ought to drive us, like the psalmist, to cry out, “Lord defend my cause against these things. Thou art the God in whom I take refuge.” And if you feel you don’t seem to be getting through to God right away, you can understand what the psalmist means when he says, “Why hast thou cast me off? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?”
- But now move to the second group, the third and fourth verses. There is an appeal from the heart, a prayer:

**Oh send out thy light and thy truth;
let them lead me,
let them bring me to thy holy hill
and to thy dwelling! {Psa 43:3 RSV}**

In other words, take hold of some promise out of Scripture, some light, some verse that speaks directly to your heart, some truth that you need to remember about the adequacy of Jesus Christ who has already put these things to death on the cross. Then you read:

**Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy;
and I will praise thee with the lyre,
O God, my God. {Psa 43:4 RSV}**

This means that your own soul will respond in prayer and praise.

- Then in Verse 5 is the application, as you begin asking yourself:

**Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within
me? {Psa 43:5a RSV}**

“Look, you’ve already gone through this, and we’ve seen what the answer is: God is adequate. All right then, why do you feel the way you do? Why are you going on with this disgruntled mood? Why are you still unpleasant and vexatious to everybody around you? Why do you snap at people so? Why are you disquieted?”

**Hope in God; for I shall again praise
him,
my help and my God. {Psa 43:5b
RSV}**

“Just hang on. It’s going to work out in a little while and you’ll feel a lot better. Just hang on.”

You see? Now that is using the psalms the way they were intended to be used.

Also, the psalms wonderfully reveal **the person of Jesus Christ**. Remember that on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection, Jesus said to the two disciples who were so troubled, “Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled,” (Luke 24:44 RSV). And here in the Messianic psalms you have a great picture of Christ. They give us an inside glimpse into some of the very same crises in the Lord’s earthly life that are described in the Gospels. For instance,

- Psalms 2 pictures Christ as the man of destiny, the focal point of all history. God says that every nation, every tribe, every people, every individual will find its value or its lack of value in how it relates to the Son.

**Kiss his feet,
lest ... you perish ... {Psa 2:12 RSV}**

- Psalm 22 records the Lord’s anguish on the cross. This amazing psalm takes you right to the cross itself:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? {Psa 22:1 RSV}

And he describes the scene of people standing at the foot of the cross, looking on him whom they pierced and numbering him with the transgressors; how they took his garments and cast lots for them; and how his own heart was broken as he felt abandoned by God. This is a vivid, beautiful description of the Lord’s prayer and experience on the cross, followed by the prayer of triumph in his resurrection.

- Psalm 40 is another of the prayers of the Lord and is quoted in the New Testament as a reflection of the person of Christ.
- Psalm 45, one of the most beautiful psalms, pictures the beauty of the character of Jesus Christ – the splendor of the king. And
- Psalm 72 is a magnificent psalm describing the reign of Christ over all the earth. It is one of the greatest shouts of triumph in the whole Bible.
- Psalm 110 is the great psalm on the deity of Christ and is quoted in the first chapter of Hebrews.
- Psalm 118 is the psalm of direction,

**This is the day which the Lord has
made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
(Verse 24)**

That day is when the stumbling block of men was taken and made to be the cornerstone on the day of resurrection (Verse 22).

All the psalms are designed to teach us to do one thing – to **worship**. These psalms reflect every human emotion, but they do so in a distinct and important way: they are emotions seen in relationship to God. Every psalm is written in the presence of God. This book, therefore, teaches us how to be honest before God.

- If you have a problem, tell God about it. Don’t hide it. Don’t cover it up. Especially, don’t get pious and sanctimonious and try to smooth it over.

- If you are angry with God, say so.
- If you are upset about something he has done, tell him so.
- If you are resentful, bring it out.
- If you are happy and glad, express that.

That is what worship is – a heart’s honesty. As Jesus said to the woman at the well in Samaria, “The true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth” (John 4:23). God is looking for that kind of worshiper. And as you worship in Spirit and truth, you will discover a new source of strength. If you can be honest before God, even about those troublesome problems of wrong moods and attitudes, you will find grace answering your needs.

There is an old story of a converted miser who had always been known as an exceedingly stingy individual. After his conversion, one of his neighbors sustained a serious loss. When the former miser heard about it, his immediate reaction was, “Well, they need help and food. I will go to my smoke house and get a ham and take it over to them.” But on the way to the smoke house his old

nature began to whisper to him, “Why give them a whole ham? Half a ham will be plenty.” And he debated this all the way to the smoke house. Then he remembered what he had learned in the presence of God. He remembered that he had resolved then and there that by God’s grace he would stand against all the evil qualities of his former life whenever they asserted themselves. The tempter kept whispering, “Give him half a ham,” and the old man finally said, “Look, Satan, if you don’t pipe down, I’ll give him the whole smoke house!”

Now, you see, that is adequate grace. Where sin abounds, grace abounds much more. And that is the purpose of the psalms: to bring us to grace.

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray that we may immerse ourselves in this marvelous book of experience and find here not only that which speaks of our own moods and attitudes, but also that which answers them in grace. We thank you for this revelation, written not merely with pen and ink, but with blood and sweat and tears, heartache and sorrow, happiness and joy – in the lives of men and women like ourselves. In Christ’s name. Amen.

PROVERBS: That Men May Know Wisdom

by Ray C. Stedman

No other book of the Old Testament appears to be quite as difficult to outline as the book of Proverbs. Like the dictionary, it seems to change the subject with every verse. As a matter of fact, though, the book of Proverbs is logically and helpfully constructed; and if you note the divisions of it, you can easily follow the argument of this book.

- Proverbs begins with a brief introductory preface in the first six verses.
- This is followed by a series of ten different discourses from a father to his son, filled with very practical exhortations on how to face some of the problems of life. That carries us over to the beginning of Chapter 10, and so far there have been no proverbs.
- But in Chapter 10 we have a collection of proverbs that are noted for us as the proverbs of Solomon, the wise king of Israel, the son of David. When Solomon became king he had a vision of God in which God asked him what his heart desired above everything else. Solomon asked that he be granted wisdom. Because he asked for this instead of riches or fame, God gave him all three. Therefore, these are the wisdom proverbs of the wisest king that Israel ever had. This second division runs through to –
- Chapter 25 which begins another collection of proverbs said to be the proverbs of Solomon which were copied down by the men of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, after Solomon's death.

- The book closes with a postlude in Chapters 30 and 31 that brings before us the words of two unknown individuals, Agur, son of Jakah, in Chapter 30, and Lemuel, king of Massa, in Chapter 31.

The book of Proverbs expresses the conclusion of the will of man. Together, the books of Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes give us the cry of the soul of man. In Psalms you have the emotional nature, which is one part of the soul function. Ecclesiastes deals with the function of the mind – the search of man's reason throughout the earth, analyzing, evaluating, weighing, and concluding on the basis of what is discoverable under the sun, that is, by human reason. But in the book of Proverbs we have the appeal to the will of man and the conclusion of the will; therefore, this book is all about the things man should decide, the choices of life. This is beautifully set before us in the introduction to the book.

First, there is a title in Verse 1:

**The proverbs of Solomon, son of David,
king of Israel. {Prov 1:1 RSV}**

And then we read the purpose of the book (Verses 2-6):

**That men may know wisdom and instruction,
understand words of insight,
receive instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice, and equity;
that prudence may be given to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth –**

**the wise man also may hear and increase in learning,
and the man of understanding acquire skill,
to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles.
{Prov 1:2-6 RSV}**

In other words, this is designed for man in every division and age of his life, from childhood through youth and maturity, in order to understand what life is all about. The book of Proverbs is very practical and is recommended especially for those who are just beginning to try to solve some of the mysteries of life. Also, if you are just moving out for the first time into contact with the world and its ways and mysteries, this is an excellent book of admonition.

Verse 7 gives the key to the whole book. And, since Proverbs is the book that deals with life, this is also the key verse to all of life and is one of the greatest verses in the Bible. It states the summary and conclusion of this book:

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge [or wisdom];
fools despise wisdom and instruction.
{Prov 1:7 RSV}**

This whole book approaches life from the position that God has all the answers – God is all-wise; God knows everything. There is nothing that is hidden from his knowledge. He understands all mysteries, sees the answer to all riddles. He sees below the surface of everything. Therefore, the beginning of wisdom is to reverence and fear God.

The “fear of the Lord” mentioned in the Old Testament isn’t a craven sort of fear that God is going to do something to you. There are two kinds of fear:

- There is the fear that God might hurt us, a fear experience by those who are trying to run from God.
- But the fear spoken of here is the fear that we might hurt him – that something we do might offend him or might grieve his loving heart in concern for us.

This word *fear* really means “reverence or respect.” Obviously, if God has all the answers, then the one who has the key to life is the man or woman, boy or

girl, who learns early to respect God and believe him and understand that he tells us the truth.

The greatest thing in my Christian experience is that here in the book of God I have found the truth. I can’t trust many of the other sources from which I get information and counsel and advice. I have found, through very sad experience sometimes, that what I thought was right was very wrong. But here is the source of truth – God has spoken. Therefore, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. It is not the end; it is the beginning. And only the man who has in his heart a continuing respect for God’s wisdom can begin properly to evaluate and understand life.

In Chapter 1, Verse 8, you have the beginning of the ten discourses to a son from his father. They begin with the child in the home, dealing with his first relationships. Then they move to the time when the child begins to broaden his experience and widen the circle of his understanding and make friends. There are very wise and helpful words here concerning a youngster’s choice of friends, pointing out the powerful influence friends can have at this age. Therefore, the most important thing for a child to learn as he grows up is how to evaluate and choose his friends.

Then, in Chapter 3, you have the young man as he grows up and leaves home. As he makes his way into the city, he is immediately confronted with all kinds of pressures and temptations. There is a thoughtful word of warning here concerning some of the temptations he will meet. It speaks very delicately and yet frankly about the pressures of sex and about what wrong steps in response to these pressures can do to a life. Also, there is an admonition concerning getting involved in wrong financial transactions. These are very practical warnings. The whole of this section is summed up in Chapter 3, Verses 5 and 6:

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
[There never was more valuable advice
given to youth than that!]
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
{Prov 3:5-6 RSV}**

This is a word to the young man or woman who wants to find the secret of life, who wants to be a success. I have never yet met young people who

didn't want to be successful. In my experience with young people no one has ever said, "My ambition is to be a bum down on skid row." The way to success is to trust in the Lord with all your heart, and although God has given you reason and expects you to use it, don't rely on that as the final answer. Where God's word or God's ways have shown you something different, trust that instead of what you feel. Here is the result (Verses 6-8):

**In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.
It will be healing to your flesh
and refreshment to your bones.**
{Prov 3:6-8 RSV}

How I wish that someone had given me those verses when I first began to move out into the world.

A young man sat in my study not long ago and told me a heartbreaking story. When he left his home and moved out into the city, he did what he thought was right and what he hoped would supply fulfillment to his life. But he drifted downward and got involved in dope until he was mainlining heroin and experimenting with LSD, having fantastic hallucinations. He ended up as a procurer for a prostitute on the streets of San Francisco before God suddenly awakened him and he realized what had happened.

That is the kind of thing that the writer of Proverbs is seeking to avoid by pointing out that life can never be understood except in relationship to God. Life is simply too big for us to handle by ourselves. No matter how good the advice seems to be, if it isn't consistent with what God has told us, it is not to be trusted. And that is the conclusion that is reached through these opening chapters. Chapters 8 and 9 personify the two ways of life. Wisdom is seen as a beautiful woman, calling those who follow her to come away into the place of victory and achievement and success in life, while folly, or foolishness, which thinks everything it does is right in its own eyes, is personified as an evil woman – attractive, alluring, tempting us to step aside into death. It is a marvelously beautiful poetic passage.

Beginning with Chapter 10 we have this first collection of the wisdom of Solomon – all very pithy, practical words of advice covering every

possible situation of life. Therefore, this is a book that ought to be read again and again, until its wisdom permeates your life. Much of it will be committed to the mind and memory, and you will be able to recall it in times of pressure.

This first collection is made up mostly of contrasts, in which the writer sets two things side by side and shows the good and evil results of various attitudes and actions. As you read this section through, you will see these antitheses. For example, in Chapter 10, Verse 10:

**He who winks the eye causes trouble,
but he who boldly reproves makes peace.**
{Prov 10:10 RSV}

That, of course, is the contrast between the sly, deceitful, stealthy look that is expressed in a wink, in contrast to the man who frankly and forthrightly speaks his mind, even though what he says is not very welcome. But the result of that kind of frankness is peace.

Also in Chapter 10, Verse 26, is a very expressive proverb:

**Like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes,
so is the sluggard to those who send him.**
{Prov 10:26 RSV}

Any parent who has sent his child on an errand and the child has dawdled along the way knows what this means. As vinegar sets the teeth on edge and smoke burns the eyes, so is the man who is entrusted with a message who dawdles along the way.

Chapter 11, Verse 22, is descriptively practical:

**Like a gold ring in a swine's snout
is a beautiful woman without discretion.**
{Prov 11:22 RSV}

Can you imagine that? An ugly pig with swill dripping from its mouth and a gold ring affixed to its nostrils! Gold signifies value – but in the wrong place. So is a beautiful woman who hasn't learned that beauty is not the outward form but the inward beauty of spirit.

One man gives freely, yet grows all the richer;

**another withholds what he should give,
and only suffers want. {Prov 11:24
RSV}**

There is the value of generosity over stinginess.
Then, in Chapter 12, Verse 4:

**A good wife is the crown of her husband,
but she who brings shame is like rotten-
ness in his bones. {Prov 12:4 RSV}**

These are self explanatory, aren't they?

Verses 16 through 22 give a little discourse on
the tongue and the dangers and the blessings of it:

**The vexation of a fool is known at once,
but the prudent man ignores an insult.
{Prov 12:16 RSV}**

That is, a fool blurts out what he feels and never
tries to control himself. He simply reacts to every-
thing that comes along. But the prudent man learns
to control himself, ignoring insults, and moving to
the heart of the matter.

Chapter 12, Verses 18-19, 22:

**There is one whose rash words are like
sword thrusts,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
Truthful lips endure forever,
but a lying tongue is but for a moment.
{Prov 12:18-19 RSV}**

**Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord,
but those who act faithfully are his de-
light. {Prov 12:22 RSV}**

Then, in Chapter 13, Verse 24, is that well-
known verse for parents:

**He who spares the rod hates his son,
but he who loves him is diligent to disci-
pline him. {Prov 13:24 RSV}**

That is the basis for the saying, "This hurts me
more than it does you."

Chapter 14, Verse 12, again refers to the un-
derlying secrets of life.

**There is a way which seems right to a man
[And how often we think that we know
the answers! But the whole counsel of
this book is that our own reason and
wisdom are never enough],**

**but its end is the way of death. {Prov
14:12 RSV}**

Therefore, "Trust in the Lord and lean not to your
own insight" {cf, Prov 3:6}, that is the application.
Then Chapter 14, Verse 31:

**He who oppresses a poor man insults his
Maker,
but he who is kind to the needy honors
him. {Prov 14:31 RSV}**

Here is the word on the need to recognize the unity
of life. The "I - It" relationship is an insult to
someone. The "I - Thou" is the only thing that ex-
presses the concern of a Christian.

Chapter 15, Verse 11:

**Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the
Lord,
how much more the hearts of men! {Prov
15:11 RSV}**

What a wonderful way to say that the deepest
mysteries of life are known to God. We don't un-
derstand Sheol. We don't know what Abaddon –
the pit – involves, but God does. How much more
does he know the secrets of the human heart, and
can tell us the right way.

Verse 17 of the same chapter is very pointed:

**Better is a dinner of herb's where love is
than a fatted ox and hatred with it. {Prov
15:17 RSV}**

Who would not prefer to sit down at a table where
there is only bread and water but a wonderful at-
mosphere of love, than to a table loaded with
goodies where everyone growls at each other?

Chapter 16, Verse 13:

**Righteous lips are the delight of a king,
and he loves him who speaks what is
right. {Prov 16:13 RSV}**

There are other verses in Proverbs about a
king. When you read them, remember that God
looks at every man as a king; therefore, this is
about you. God sees you as a king over the king-
dom of your life. If you read with this perspective,
these words on rulership and kingship will be of
great profit to you.

Verses 20 and 22 link together:

**He who gives heed to the word will prosper,
and happy is he who trusts in the Lord.
Wisdom is a fountain of life to him who has
it,
but folly is the chastisement of fools.
{Prov 16:20, 22 RSV}**

And what is wisdom? Well, it is stated in Verse 20, "He who gives heed to the word shall prosper."

In Chapter 16, Verse 32 is one that many of us need to hear:

**He who is slow to anger is better than the
mighty,
and he who rules his spirit than he who
takes a city. {Prov 16:32 RSV}**

That verse is often quoted but seldom believed. What a change it would make in life if we really understood that the man who learns to control his anger and subdue his own spirit, by God's grace, is a greater hero than the man who takes a city.

Chapter 17, Verse 15:

**He who justifies the wicked and he who
condemns the righteous
are both alike an abomination to the
Lord. {Prov 17:15 RSV}**

Yet how often we fall into that error – justifying the wicked and making excuses for people who do wrong, condemning the righteous and finding fault with them.

Verse 28 of the same chapter is very wise:

**Even a fool who keeps silent is considered
wise;
when he closes his lips, he is deemed in-
telligent. {Prov 17:28 RSV}**

Or, as someone has well put it, "It is much better to remain silent and let everybody think you are a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt."

Chapter 18, Verse 8:

**The words of a whisperer are like delicious
morsels;
they go down into the inner parts of the
body. {Prov 18:8 RSV}**

There is the explanation of why we love to gossip. What sweet morsels these are. How we love to

sink our teeth into the reputation of another; how good it tastes, and yet how evil to do.

Then in Verse 22 there is a word for lovers:

**He who finds a wife finds a good thing,
and obtains favor from the Lord. {Prov
18:22 RSV}**

This from a man who had a thousand of them!

Verse 24:

**There are friends who pretend to be
friends,
but there is a friend who sticks closer
than a brother. {Prov 18:24 RSV}**

This is a reminder that there is one who will tell you the truth, even if it hurts, and that is God. There are many friends who will tell you anything they think you want to hear, but they are no friends.

Chapter 19, Verse 3:

**When a man's folly brings his way to ruin,
his heart rages against the Lord. {Prov
19:3 RSV}**

Isn't that strange? When a man's own foolishness brings him into trouble, who does he blame? The Lord. Or, if he is married, he takes it like a man and blames it on his wife, as Adam did in the Garden.

Chapter 20, Verse 9:

**Who can say, "I have made my heart clean;
I am pure from my sin"? {Prov 20:9 RSV}**

That is a question that no one can answer, but anyone who asks it honestly is on his way to finding the Savior.

And Verse 27 of that same chapter is one of the most important verses in the Bible on understanding human life:

**The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord,
searching all his innermost parts. {Prov
20:27 RSV}**

That is what God made our spirits for: Our essential nature is to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He is the light. We are the lamp. When the lamp of the spirit holds the light of the Holy Spirit he searches the innermost part of a life and we begin to understand ourselves for the first time.

Chapter 21, Verse 9, gives a straightforward comment from a married man:

**It is better to live in a corner of the house-top
than in a house shared with a contentious woman. {Prov 21:9 RSV}**

And Verses 30 and 31 of the same chapter:

**No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel,
can avail against the Lord.
The horse is made ready for the day of battle,
but the victory belongs to the Lord. {Prov 21:30-31 RSV}**

God overrules. Someone once said to Napoleon, "Man proposes but God disposes." Napoleon, in his arrogant ignorance, replied, "No, Napoleon proposes and Napoleon disposes!" That was before the battle of Waterloo.

Chapter 22, Verse 6 is a famous verse:

**Train up a child in the way he should go,
and when he is old he will not depart from it. {Prov 22:6 RSV}**

I think this should really be translated, "Train up a child according to his way," which means "find out what is in a child and bring him up so that what God has hidden in him may be developed and brought out. And when he is old he will not depart from that."

Verse 16 ends this type of contrasting proverb.

Beginning with Verse 17 of Chapter 22, a different kind of proverb is brought before us. These are general discourses, two or three verses long, upon various subjects, and there are some very helpful words in this section. For instance, Chapter 23, Verses 13-14:

**Do not withhold discipline from a child;
if you beat him with a rod, he will not die.
[He may sound like it, but he won't be dying.]
If you beat him with the rod
you will save his life from Sheol. {Prov 23:13-14 RSV}**

That advice is for small children. When you talk about adolescents, that is a different thing; they may be bigger than you are.

Chapter 24, Verses 28-29 give a practical word on relationships with your neighbor:

**Be not a witness against your neighbor
without cause,
and do not deceive with your lips.
Do not say, "I will do to him as he has done to me;
I will pay the man back for what he has done." {Prov 24:28-29}**

Even here, you see, is a clear recognition of the golden rule.

In Chapter 25 the second collection of proverbs begins – those copied by the men of Hezekiah. Verse 2 is a wonderful one:

**It is the glory of God to conceal things,
but the glory of kings is to search things out. {Prov 25:2 RSV}**

If you want to have a royal experience, I suggest you start searching out things that God has concealed in his Word. That is the glory of kings – to find what God has hidden.

Verse 17 of that chapter:

**Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house,
lest he become weary of you and hate you.
{Prov 25:17 RSV}**

Very practical.

Chapter 26, Verse 2:

**Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying,
a curse that is causeless does not alight.
{Prov 26:2 RSV}**

Therefore, if somebody says something nasty about you and it is not true, don't worry about it. Nobody will believe it. Those who do are not important.

This chapter has some very helpful words about troublesome people in general:

- In Chapter 26, Verses 3 through 12 there is a series on fools and how to handle them.
- Verses 13 through 16 tell what to do about sluggards and what is wrong with lay people.

PROVERBS: That Men may know Wisdom

- Verses 17 through 23 concern meddlers and how to handle them.
- Then, Verse 24 to the end of the chapter is about the loveless – those who hate.

As we skim through quickly, we read this in Chapter 28, Verse 27:

**He who gives to the poor will not want,
but he who hides his eyes will get many a
curse. {Prov 28:27 RSV}**

No man is an island. We must not shut ourselves away from life. Those people who say they are too sensitive to visit the slums are coming under the condemnation of the truth in this verse. We need to see what life is like around us.

Chapter 29, Verse 1 is an often-quoted one:

**He who is often reprov'd, yet stiffens his
neck
will suddenly be broken beyond healing.
{Prov 29:1 RSV}**

Then, in Chapter 30 you have the words of Agur. No one knows exactly who this man was, but the words are very practical, concerning some of the wonders of the earth. And in Chapter 31 the

words of King Lemuel are recorded, concerning what his mother taught him on how to be a king. The last of the book is a wonderful description of a virtuous woman. Many feel this is King Lemuel's description of his own mother – and what a woman she was! If you are a young girl looking for a model woman, I recommend this passage to you. If you are a young man looking for a model wife, I suggest you read it through. It sets forth marvelously the strength and glory and beauty of womanhood and the unique contribution that women can make to life.

This is the book of Proverbs. You might read it through once a month. It has thirty-one chapters, which would fit every month that has thirty-one days. One chapter a day will do it. Why not try it?

Prayer:

Thank you, our Father, for this very practical book and for the admonition it gives our hearts to remember that life can never be understood, can never be handled, can never make sense until we approach it with trust in you and remember that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. We thank you in Christ's name. Amen.

Title: ECCLESIASTES: The Inspired Book of Error
By: Ray C. Stedman
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ECCLESIASTES: The Inspired Book of Error

by Ray C. Stedman

The book of Ecclesiastes, or “the Preacher,” is unique in Scripture. There is no other book like it, because it is the only book in the Bible that reflects a human, rather than a divine, point of view. This book is filled with error. And yet it is wholly inspired. This may confuse some people, because many feel that inspiration is a guarantee of truth. This is not necessarily so. Inspiration merely guarantees accuracy from a particular point of view; if it is God’s point of view it is true; if it is man’s point of view it may be true, and it may not. If it is the Devil’s point of view it may or may not be true, as well, but the Devil’s ultimate end, of course, is evil. Inspiration guarantees an accurate reflection of these various points of view.

Therefore the Bible does have much error in it. Whenever false views of men are quoted or set forth, the Bible is speaking error. Whenever Satan speaks, most of his statements are in error, and even the truth that he uses is twisted and distorted, and therefore is erroneous.

So it is quite possible to “prove” all kinds of utterly false things by quoting the Bible, because, in that sense, the Bible is filled with error. But the Bible always points out the error which it presents and makes it clear that it is error, as in the case with this book. Because of its remarkable character, Ecclesiastes is the most misused book of the Bible. This is the favorite book of atheists and agnostics. And many cults love to quote this book’s erroneous viewpoints and give the impression that these are scriptural, divine words of God concerning life.

But right away in its introduction this book is very careful to point out that what it records is not divine truth. It presents only the human view of life. You’ll find that over and over, throughout the whole course of Ecclesiastes, one phrase is repeated again and again: “under the sun,” “under the

sun.” Everything is evaluated according to appearances alone – this is man’s point of view of reality and is utterly exclusive of divine revelation. As such, Ecclesiastes very accurately summarizes what man thinks.

Ecclesiastes is not atheistic; to be atheistic is to be unrealistic, and the Bible is never unrealistic. An atheist is one who has convinced himself by long argument that there is no God, even though every inward testimony of his conscience and the structure of the universe around him are constant witnesses to the fact that there is a God. For the most part, only the educated man is an atheist. Or, the man who does not desire to face life’s realities, because he wants to convince himself that there is no God to whom he must answer. But this book is not atheistic, even though it is written from a humanistic point of view.

Ecclesiastes views God as men in general view God – as a not very vital concern of life, sort of a high-calorie dessert which you can take or leave. There is no understanding of God as a vital, living Lord, an authority in life with whom one can have a personal relationship.

The book opens with this introduction:

The words of the Preacher, {Eccl 1:1a RSV}

I think that it is to Martin Luther that we owe this translation of the Hebrew word, but, in context, it is not the best choice. The word can mean “preacher,” but I think it is much better translated as “debater” or “arguer,” and as you read this book you will see that it is a series of arguments set forth as man views the world around him. The debater was none other than Solomon, the son of David, king in Jerusalem, the wisest man who ever lived, according to Biblical record.

Solomon was in an unusual position to undertake the experiments and investigations reflected in this book, because during the forty years of his reign there was utter peace in the kingdom of Judah and Israel. There were no tribes around stirring up warfare or strife. Since he did not have to bother himself with military life, he had all the time he needed to pursue his investigations into the meaning of life. Furthermore, he had all the wealth he needed, and he had a keen, logical, discerning mind which had gained for him the reputation as the wisest man in the world. He had all that he needed, and he set himself to discover what life is all about. Therefore, the value of Ecclesiastes is that it sets forth life from the standpoint of the natural man, apart from divine revelation.

As you read through the book you'll notice that it all centers on this text (Verse 2):

**Vanity of vanities, says the Debater,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.
{cf, Eccl 1:2 RSV}**

Unfortunately, that word *vanity* doesn't mean today what it used to. At least, we seldom use it in quite the same sense. To us, *vanity* is conceit over personal looks. We think that a woman who spends a half hour primping before a mirror every time she goes through her bedroom is a victim of vanity – or a man, if he does the same thing. And of course that is true.

I think of the woman who said to her pastor one day, "I must confess to you, pastor, that I am suffering from a terrible sin. I suffer from the sin of vanity. Every morning before I leave, I admire myself in the mirror for half an hour." He said, "My dear lady, it is not the sin of vanity you are suffering from, it is the sin of imagination."

But *vanity* here in Ecclesiastes means "emptiness, futility, meaninglessness."

The Debater has completed his survey of life, and he gives this conclusion at the beginning of the book. He says everything is futile, empty, meaningless – there is no sense to anything.

He supports this conclusion with a series of arguments that he has gleaned after sifting through the philosophies of life. And perhaps the most interesting thing about this book is that all the philosophies by which men have attempted to live are gathered together here. There is nothing new under the sun, the book says – and how true that is. Here

we are, almost thirty centuries removed from the time of the writing of this book, and yet nothing more has been produced in the world or in the ideas of men than what is reflected right here:

First there is what we might call **the mechanistic view**, or the scientific outlook if you prefer. This outlook sees the universe as nothing but a great, grinding machine, and the Debater in his investigation of it is lost in the monotonous repetition of nature's processes. And yet, in many ways, this is a most remarkable passage. Some revelations here are of scientific import and were written long before men of science ever discovered these things. Notice, for instance, the circuit of the wind:

**The wind blows to the south,
and goes round to the north;
round and round goes the wind,
and on its circuits the wind returns.
{Eccl 1:6 RSV}**

Men didn't discover the circuit of the wind until centuries after this was written.

And then there is the evaporation cycle of circulating waters:

**All streams run to the sea,
but the sea is not full;
to the place where the streams flow,
there they flow again. {Eccl 1:7 RSV}**

That is, the rivers run down to the sea, evaporate, come back up to the mountains again as rainfall, and run down to the sea again. The writer has discovered this in his observation of nature, and he says all this is vanity, empty. He feels the utter weariness of this endless circuit. So what is his outlook? Life goes on and we are lost in the meaninglessness of the universe. Nothing is to be heard but the clanking of gears. You may recognize this philosophy to be very common today, and the end of it is emptiness. What is man in the midst of a universe like that? Just a tiny speck with no meaning or significance at all.

In Chapter 2 the writer examines **the philosophy of hedonism** – the pursuit of pleasure as the chief end of life. What gives life meaning? Well, millions today say, "Just enjoy yourself! Have a good time, live it up, do as you like, seek pleasure.

That's the purpose of living. That's why we are here!" But the Debater says:

I said to myself, "Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was vanity. {Ecc1 2:1 RSV}

Then he proceeds to itemize pleasure. He says that first he tried pleasure in the form of laughter, or mirth. Maybe this is what is needed to make life thoroughly enjoyable. So he sought out opportunities to give himself to genial, gracious, laughing, happy company. But he says that after a time, even this yielded a weariness of spirit.

Then he says he tried the acquisition of possessions; perhaps meaning comes from wealth:

So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; {Ecc1 2:9-10a RSV}

And he gave himself to the accumulation of wealth and possessions. (How many are living on that level today!) He says it too was emptiness of spirit and didn't satisfy his longing.

And then he says:

I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly [That is, he considered opposites in the realm of ideas]; for what can the man do who comes after the king? Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. {Ecc1 2:12a, 2:13a RSV}

He says, "This is better, at least. Here is something that is interesting: pursuing all these various ideas about life. Ah, but," he says, "I found that it comes out at the same place." The fool and the wise man alike die. And as far as their lives are concerned, one is as utterly insignificant as the other. It doesn't make any difference.

Then, he comes to this terrible conclusion:

So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a striving after wind. {Ecc1 2:17 RSV}

Here is a man who has given himself to pleasure, to possessions, and to the pursuit of wisdom in the realm of ideas, and he says, "I hated life. I

hated all my toil. I turned about and gave my heart up to despair." That is what he came to, isn't it? Just as it is what anyone will come to: only despair.

Then in Chapter 3 he views life from what we might call **the existential viewpoint**. That is a popular term today. It is fashionable to believe in existentialism and it is, of course, thought to be something new on the stage of world ideas. But it is nothing new at all. It is as old as the thinking of man. Actually, we might call this viewpoint *fatalism*, because there is always a fatalistic element in existentialism.

We in America can hardly realize why existential thinking has so powerfully gripped the minds of people in our world. The popularity of existentialism was born at the end of World War II, when Europe was left in shambles. The great cities of Europe were in ruins, and all that men had previously pinned their hopes on – in government and religion, as they knew it – had been powerless to arrest the catastrophe and terrible chaos of World War II. At the end of it, men were left with utterly shattered hopes concerning what they had believed in. They asked one another, "What can we trust? We can't trust religion. It did nothing to stem the awful tide of tyranny under Hitler. And we can't trust government, because it is the very tool of such power. So what can we trust?" And somebody suggested that the only thing that we can trust is our own reactions to life as we live through things. We experience feelings and reactions to events, and even though no two of us may have the same reaction, at least each person's reaction is real to him. So they said, "All we can really trust is our own reaction to events, to existence." And that is existentialism.

Now this writer says, "I tried that. I discovered that I reacted to events, that I had certain inescapable experiences in life." We read that there is:

**a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep ... [and so on.] {Ecc1 3:2-4a RSV}**

The writer sees that all these events come upon us. And he sees also that man has a desire for

something deeper, for finding significance, for finding meaning in life:

He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, {Ecc 3:11a RSV}

In other words, man can never rest with simply external explanations of things. He has to look deeper. Eternity is in his heart. And this writer says he saw all this. He saw that events of life are inescapable and are experienced by all men – but he saw that all men go to one place when it is all over. All turn to dust.

And there is nothing better for man than to enjoy his work,

... for that is his lot; who can bring him to see what will be after him? {Ecc 3:22b RSV}

He sees futility, hopelessness. What's the use?

In Chapter 4 he turns to **capitalism**, of all things. Here he sets forth the competitive enterprise of life. When we Americans hear the word "capitalism" perhaps we think it is a wonderful word. We think it describes the vigorous young insurance executive out to join the million-dollars-a-month club, or some high-powered executive in business who is building his own empire. We admire this. We say, "Capital is the answer."

Remember that the Word of God always ultimately looks at life as it really is. And capitalism is not a final answer to things. It may be a better answer than communism, and I'm convinced that it is, but this writer says he tried this competitive-enterprise approach and saw that it resulted in injustices and oppression. And he discovered that selfish motivation lies behind it, resulting in inequities. So, he says it all comes to the same thing:

Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king, who will no longer take advice, {Ecc 4:13 RSV}

What good does it do to get to the top of the heap when a young man at the bottom with nothing but a few smart ideas can surge ahead of you? What's the difference? What is the good of it all?

Then in Chapter 5 he tries **religion** – religion which recognizes that God exists – and he tries to do good and to be good. And yet he points out that there is no practical value to it. Religious people can do very unethical things and oppress the poor. Furthermore, there is no power in deadly, religious formalism to arrest wrongs or change inequities. He says, then, that religion of that sort doesn't work either. It comes to the same thing – emptiness and vanity.

Chapter 6 sets forth his experiments along the line of **materialism** – the philosophy of "the good life." His conclusion is that even though a man has everything,

If a man begets a hundred children [children are wealth to the Hebrew], and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but he does not enjoy life's good things, and also has no burial, I say that an untimely birth is better off than he. {Ecc 6:3 RSV}

If you have everything, but in trying to satisfy yourself you discover that there is still a craving that these things can't meet, then you are no better off than if you had never been born. It all comes out to the same thing.

In Chapter 7 Solomon approaches life from the standpoint of **stoicism** – a cultivated indifference to events – and his conclusion is that in order to view life this way, aim for a happy medium. Be moderate in all things:

In my vain life I have seen everything; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness [righteousness doesn't always pay], and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evil-doing [wickedness sometimes does pay, judging by evidence "under the sun"]. {Ecc 7:15 RSV}

Therefore he says:

Be not righteous overmuch, and do not make yourself over wise; why should you destroy yourself? Be not wicked overmuch, neither be a fool; why should you die before your time? {Ecc 7:16-17 RSV}

That is, aim for a happy medium. How many times have you heard these verses quoted as exactly reflecting what the Bible teaches? But, rather, these are the words of a man looking at life who says the best policy is “Moderation in all things” – avoid extremes as much as possible, don’t volunteer for anything, try just to get through. That is his viewpoint.

Chapters 8 through 10 and the first eight verses of Chapter 11 are a connected discourse examining what might be referred to as **the wisdom of the world**, or **the common-sense view of life**. In Chapter 8 anyone approaching life from this point of view is exhorted to master the power structures of the world in which he lives. He says, “Try to understand who is an authority and who isn’t, and do your best to be on the right side at the right time.” That is his philosophy. You recognize that, don’t you? Here is his conclusion:

then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out; even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out. {Ecl 8:17 RSV}

Now he says, “I don’t offer you much hope along this line, but if you get on the right side and get in good with the powers that be, you will at least get along pretty well, but you won’t find any answers to life. It’s all futility, don’t you see?”

Then in Chapter 9 he examines the world’s value judgments and points out again that they all come to the same thing:

Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all. {Ecl 9:11 RSV}

Here he says, “You see these men who say, like Benjamin Franklin, ‘Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise,’ and, ‘A penny saved is a penny earned.’ All these things,” he says, “have an aura of wisdom about them – but they don’t really work. I have seen times when the race was not to the swift and the battle didn’t go to the strong nor bread to the wise nor riches to the

intelligent. It doesn’t always work. I have seen some very stupid rich people.” So these worldly values and judgments are not accurate, and they too all end in death:

For man does not know his time. Like fish which are taken in an evil net, and like birds which are caught in a snare [suddenly, unexpectedly, with a heart attack] so the sons of men are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them. {Ecl 9:12 RSV}

What difference, then, do worldly values make?

In Chapter 10 he exhorts us to maintain discretion in life – be temperate, diligent, cautious, accommodating – try to get by as best you can. But this is only an enlightened expression of selfishness, which is the motive underlying it all. We read in Chapter 11 that success is simply a matter of diligence – in order to get something out of life, you need to work and apply yourself:

In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good. {Ecl 11:6 RSV}

But then he concludes:

For if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity. {Ecl 11:8 RSV}

You see? He has proved his case hasn’t he? All the way through it is the same thing: Life lived apart from God all comes out to the same thing.

At this point comes **the change in viewpoint**, the recognition that life is meaningful and significant when the person of God is enthroned in it. This is Solomon’s true conclusion to all of his findings, and it begins this way:

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. {Ecl 11:9 RSV}

That doesn't mean punishment. It means examination: God will bring you into an examination of your life. But "Rejoice!" (That is Solomon's very word!) The Debater's final conclusion is thus directly opposite his previous conclusion. Six times in this account you find him playing one string on his violin, over and over again. The only thing he has to say to the man who approaches life without a genuine commitment to God, is this: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you must die."

There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in his toil. {Ecc 2:24 RSV}

Again:

So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should enjoy his work, for that is his lot; who can bring him to see what will be after him. {Ecc 3:22 RSV}

And again:

What I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life which God has given him, for this is his lot. {Ecc 5:18 RSV}

Similarly:

And I commend enjoyment, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat, and drink, and enjoy himself, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of life which God gives him under the sun. {Ecc 8:15 RSV}

Also:

Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already approved what you do. {Ecc 9:7 RSV}

And yet again:

**Bread is made for laughter,
and wine gladdens life,
and money answers everything.
{Ecc 10:19 RSV}**

Practical isn't it? And devilish. Do you see? When you hear people talking this way today, when you see worldly man thinking and acting on the basis of "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die," don't blame him. What else can he say? This is the inevitable conclusion of any approach to life that erases God from the picture. And there is nothing more descriptive of utterly blind pessimism than those words. Think of it. Eat, drink and be merry. In other words, live like an animal. This denies the glory of manliness and manhood. It reduces man to the level of the animal. It is the most hopeless statement one can ever make. "What is life? Nothing at all. Utterly insignificant. Without any meaning. Utterly futile. All that we can do, therefore, is to make the best of it. Eat, drink and be merry. Life goes out like a candle flame in the end." Utter pessimism rules in a life that is lived without God.

Now contrast that with what the writer says in the last chapter:

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, {Ecc 12:1a RSV}

And he goes on to describe in a beautiful, poetic passage what death is:

Before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, {Ecc 12:6a RSV}

And he teaches this final conclusion:

The end of the matter; all has been heard. {Ecc 12:13a RSV}

What is his final advice?

Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole of man. {cf, Ecc 12:13b RSV}

"Wait!" you protest. "You left out a word! It says, 'this is the whole duty of man.'"

No, I didn't leave it out. The translators put it in. That word doesn't belong there. The Hebrew says, "this is the whole of man" or "this is what makes man whole," if you like. "Fear God." Now that doesn't mean that you are to be afraid of him, but to have a loving respect that obeys him.

Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole of man.

This is what makes man whole. And the secret is to enthrone God in the days of your youth. If you want to find the secret of living so that the heart is satisfied and the spirit is enriched and fulfilled according to God's intention for you, then "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come." Enthroned God in the center of your life and you will discover all that God has intended your life to be. And you will be able to rejoice all the days of your life.

I can remember well when as a teenager I would wonder from time to time whether these Christian ideas that I knew were right, and would feel allured and enticed by other ways of thinking. And I felt the awful uncertainty of not knowing which was right. What is the answer to life's questions? Looking back upon that time I have great sympathy for young people; I see their deep inner desire, just as I felt it then, not to waste their lives but to live significantly. Every young person feels that. But now, from the perspective of more than thirty years, I can say that God in grace led me to commit myself, as it says in Proverbs:

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.**
{Prov 3:5-6 RSV}

I sing with the hymn, "Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come," but I can also say, "'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."

I can testify to the fact that the Debater's conclusion is apt: Life is fulfilled only when God is enthroned in the center of an individual's life and that individual acts in obedience to his ruler. But the philosophy that begins and exists and ends in the dust, and then says that the dust is everything – that this is all life is intended to be, that vanity is everything – is utter folly.

The Debater's conclusion is that everything is indeed vanity unless you put God in the center of life.

Prayer:

Thank you, Father for these words of wisdom, and for having recorded it for us in this ancient book so that in our hunger for fulfillment we need not go down all these paths ourselves. We can believe this word to be genuine and accurate, and build our lives upon it. We pray that our young people will have the courage to believe this word and to act upon it – to enthrone you as the Lord of life, and thereby live their lives in grace and strength and beauty. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

SONG OF SOLOMON: A Love Song and a Hymn

by Ray C. Stedman

I hope you are discovering the magnificent character of the Bible, its keen insights, and how deeply it probes into human life. The Scriptures were given to us so that we might understand ourselves and our God, and the Old Testament books make a tremendous contribution to such an understanding.

The Song of Solomon is regarded today as probably one of the most obscure and difficult books in the Bible. But it may surprise you to know that throughout the Christian centuries it has been one of the most read and most loved books of all. During the dark days before the Protestant Reformation when the Albanese fled the Catholic church and John Huss led his small bands of Christians up into Bohemia, this was one of the books of the Bible that was frequently read, quoted, referred to, and memorized. It was a great comfort to them. In the days after the Reformation, in the time of the bitter persecution of the Covenanters of Scotland, out of which came the Presbyterian Church under the leadership of John Knox and others, this again was one of the most frequently read and most often quoted books. It brought the Covenanters great comfort and sustained the spirits of those men and women who were hunted like animals throughout the mountains and glens of Europe.

This is the last of the five books of poetry in the Old Testament. Job is the first, then Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and last, the Song of Solomon. Each of these books reveals one of the basic elements of man:

- Job is the voice of the spirit, the deepest part of man's nature, which is why the book of Job is perennially a puzzle to us. In the words of one

of the Psalms, it is one of those books in which "deep calleth unto deep" {Psa 42:7 KJV}, you can't read it without recognizing its profundities. It is almost impossible to exhaust them. Here is the voice of man crying out through pain and struggle for God. Job says, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him," (Job 23:3 RSV)

- The books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes form a trilogy which sets forth the voice of the soul. The soul of man is made up of three parts: mind, emotion and will; and in these books you have the expression of these elements in man's character.
 - Psalms is the book of the heart, of the emotions, and in it you will find reflected every emotion known to man. This is the book to turn to whenever emotion is strong in your life to find an answering psalm that will reflect and meet your mood. That is why the Psalms have always been such loved portions of Scripture.
 - The book of Ecclesiastes is the voice, or expression, of the mind of man. It is a penetrating inquiry into life, searching after answers, and in that book all the philosophies that man has ever discovered find their expression. Ecclesiastes speaks of man searching for answers. And the answer it comes up with, because it approaches life only on the level of the intellect, is that all is vanity and emptiness; futility is stamped upon all things. That is what the mind discovers without Christ.

- The book of Proverbs is the expression of the will in man, summed up in the most quoted of the proverbs, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him [that is the choice of the will], and he will make straight your paths,” (Prov 3:5-6 RSV). The mind and the heart together must apply knowledge to the direction of the will to choose the right way. All through Proverbs you will find the emphasis is on the appeal to the will.
- Now if the book of Job is the cry of the spirit, and Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes the cry of the soul, the Song of Solomon is preeminently the cry of the body in its essential yearning. And what is the essential yearning of the body? For love. Therefore, the theme of this book is love. It is an eastern love song, an oriental love poem, and there is no use denying that. It is frankly and fully that. It is a revelation of all that was intended in the divinely given function that we call sex. It is sex as God intended sex to be, involving not just a physical activity, but the whole nature of man. For sex permeates our lives; Freud was right about that.

But sexual response and impulse touches us more than physically. It also touches us emotionally, and even spiritually; God made us that way. There is nothing wrong with this. But this is where Victorianism went astray. It was pushed to extremism by the enemy. (This is always the devil’s activity – to push attitudes toward sex into extreme positions.) So sex went into prudishness, as though it were some unmentionable subject, as though it were something that should be kept locked up in drawers and hidden away behind curtains. But that is not the way you find it in the Bible. In the Bible, sex, like every other subject, is handled frankly and dealt with forthrightly. It is set forth as God intended it to be. So first and foremost, the Song of Solomon is a love song describing with frankness and yet with purity the delight of a man and his wife in one another’s bodies. There is nothing pornographic or obscene about it, nothing licentious. As you read though it, you can see how beautifully and chastely it approaches this subject.

The book comes to us in what we would call musical play form. The characters in this play are Solomon, the young king of Israel – this was written in the beginning of his reign, in all the beauty and manliness of his youth – and the Shulammite. She was a simple country lass of unusual loveliness who fell in love with the king when he was disguised as a shepherd lad working in one of his own vineyards in the north of Israel.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon tells us that he undertook expeditions to discover what life was like on various levels. Once he disguised himself as a simple country shepherd lad, and in that state he had met this young lady. They fell in love, and after they had promised themselves to each other, he went away and was gone for some time. The Shulammite girl cries out for him in her loneliness.

Then comes the announcement that the king in all his glory is coming to visit the valley. While the girl is interested in this, she is not really concerned because her heart longs for her lover. But suddenly she receives word that the king wants to see her. She doesn’t know why until she goes to see him, and discovers that he is her shepherd lad. He takes her away and they are married in the palace.

The play is set in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, and a chorus of singers, referred to as the daughters of Jerusalem, asks certain leading questions from time to time during the account of the events leading up to the courtship, betrothal and marriage. The Shulammite girl addresses them on three occasions. It is interesting to note that the word *Shulammite* is the feminine form of “Solomon.” Therefore we would call this lady Mrs. Solomon. She is the bride, and we read of her encounter with this young man their courtship and the strength and the methods and the delights of love.

The language of the book is highly poetical and figurative and there may also be some difficulty determining who is speaking at any one time. But you can distinguish the different speakers in this way: the bridegroom always refers to her as “my love,” and the bride calls him “my beloved.” And as each describes the other you can see the passion and the rapture of love. Here is the language of love as she describes him:

**My beloved is all radiant and ruddy,
distinguished among ten thousand.
His head is the finest gold;
his locks are wavy,
black as a raven.
His eyes are like doves
beside springs of water,
bathed in milk,
fitly set.
His cheeks are like beds of spices
yielding fragrance.
His lips are lilies,
distilling liquid myrrh.
His arms are rounded gold,
set with jewels.
His body is ivory work,
encrusted with sapphires.
His legs are alabaster columns,
set upon bases of gold.
His appearance is like Lebanon,
choice as the cedars.
His speech is most sweet,
and he is altogether desirable.
This is my beloved and this is my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.**
{Song 5:10-16 RSV}

And he describes her in similar language:

**You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love,
comely as Jerusalem,
terrible as an army with banners.
Turn away your eyes from me,
for they disturb me –
Your hair is like a flock of goats,
moving down the slopes of Gilead.**
{Song 6:4-5 RSV}

Now you can see how figurative this language is. If any young swains were to take this literally today and try to pass this language along I am sure they would be misunderstood. But this is the impressionistic approach and there is beauty of expression here:

**Your teeth are like a flock of ewes,
that have come up from the washing,
all of them bear twins,
not one among them is bereaved.**
{Song 6:6 RSV}

That means that she didn't have any missing. She had a full set and they had just been washed.

**Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate
behind your veil.
There are sixty queens and eighty concubines,
and maidens without number.
My dove, my perfect one, is only one,
the darling of her mother,
flawless to her that bore her.**
{Song 6:7-9 RSV}

Obviously, this is the language of love.

The book describes married love as God intended it to be. It is important to see that. For the full abandonment to one another in mutual satisfaction which is described in this book is possible only because it is experienced within that total oneness which only marriage permits. That is strongly emphasized throughout this book by a three-fold warning which the bride addresses to the unmarried girls – the chorus referred to as the daughters of Jerusalem. Three different times the bride, turning from her rapture and her delight with her love, gives these girls the secret of this delight:

**I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem ...
that you stir not up nor awaken love
until it please. {Song 2:7, 3:5, 8:4 RSV}**

This is the secret of delight like this in marriage. What does she mean? She means, do not prematurely stimulate love. Wait until it develops on its own. Do not arouse it by artificial means before it is ready. Let it begin of itself in its own good time.

It is monstrous to watch foolish and even fatuous mothers who encourage their children to ape adults in dancing and dating and petting even before they enter their teens. Why? Because they are trying to stir them up to adult activities, the activities of love, before their time. It is like trying to open the bud before it is ready to open; you simply destroy it.

We are seeing the results of much of this in our own society. For the young people who want the best in love, the greatest, the most, this book teaches them to leave off petting and necking and so forth until they can say, as this bride says,

**He brought me to the banqueting house,
and his banner over me was love.**
{Song 2:4 RSV}

Or as the bridegroom says:

**Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death,
jealousy is cruel as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a most vehement flame.
Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.**

{Song 8:6-7 RSV}

God has ordained that all these delights reflected here be a part of the experience of men and women, but only in the relationship which makes it possible, which is marriage. Therefore, this book is a powerful plea for chastity and purity in life until the time of marriage comes.

But of course we have not heard the deepest message of this song until we pass behind the description of this purely physical human love, perfect as it is, to read it as an expression of communion between man and God, between Christ and his church. From the very earliest Christian centuries, this book was taken in that way. Even the Jews took it allegorically in that sense. The preface to this song in one of the Jewish books, or Targums, reads something like this:

This is the Song of Solomon, the prophet king of Israel, which he sang before Jehovah the Lord.

You see, he wasn't singing just a purely human love song. He sang this before Jehovah. This was a song about his own relationship to his God, and the early church fathers took it in that light. It was because of this interpretation that this song was such a comfort to the persecuted saints of the Reformation and the post-Reformation periods.

Someone has well said, "If you love Jesus Christ, you will love this song because here are words that fully express the rapture of the heart that has fallen in love with Christ." When you read the book of Ecclesiastes, you read of man's search throughout the world for something to satisfy his heart, and the message of that book is simply that if a man gains the world it isn't enough. His heart is still empty because the heart is greater than its object. But the message of the Song of Solomon is that Christ is so tremendous, so mighty, so magnificent, that the heart that has fallen in love with him will never be able to fully plumb the depths of

his love and his concern and his care. The object, Christ, is greater than the heart.

Every passage in this song, therefore, can be reverently lifted to this higher level of a heart enraptured with its Lord. Taken thus, it reveals a highly significant truth: It reveals that marriage is the key to human life. This is not to say that those who are not yet married should be discouraged by that. For, regardless of whether you find marriage or not on the physical level, this is still true.

What is marriage? Have you ever thought about marriage? About what lies behind the institution of marriage? It has been my privilege many times to marry people, and I have to deal with certain state laws. Marriage is not the product of human society. It is not something that people invented after they began to live together. Marriage goes back to the very dawn of the human race. Marriage is an absolutely integral part of human life, and physical marriage, between man and wife, is simply a picture of a deeper relationship that is true of everyone.

This principle is discussed in Romans 7, as the Apostle Paul opens that great argument with an illustration of a married woman. While she is married, she is bound by the law to her husband. And if, while she is married to him, she falls in love with another man, she will gain the stigma of an adulteress, that is, she will expose herself as breaking the basic law of life. But if the husband dies, then she is free to be married to another man {cf, Rom 7:1-3}. Why does he say all this? Because it is an illustration of what happens in the life of every one of us. Paul says we were married to the old life, to the old Adam. We were joined to an evil man. And that is the problem with human life. Man was made to be mastered and he simply cannot exist without a master. Every one of us has a master whether we like it or not. The whole story of the Bible is that it is either God who masters us or it is the devil. It is one or the other. Both Christ and the apostles make it very plain that the whole world, every man and every woman, is mastered by another force, either God or the devil. This is why Jesus said that no man can serve two masters {cf, Matt 6:24}. You can't give yourself to both of them. There must be a choice in life. Either you hate the one and love the other, or cling to one and separate from the other. You can't do both.

So man must be mastered. In other words he is made for marriage since marriage is a picture of the

mastery of one life by another. And this book says that the master who was made for man, the master that God intended for man to have, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Man mastered by Jesus enters into his fullness and glory, all that God intends for man.

As you read in this book of the rapturous delight that the bride and the bridegroom experience in one another you are reading a magnificent and beautiful description of what God intends the relationship to be between himself and each individual. That is why the great commandment is, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,” (Matt 22:37 RSV). That is the first and greatest commandment, for out of that flows everything else, including loving your neighbor as yourself. So this book is very important in that it deals with a very important relationship. In Christ we have the true bridegroom, and the church is his bride, as Paul puts it in Ephesians:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, {Eph 5:25 RSV}

He goes on to describe the work of Christ for his church and then he says again:

This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church; {Eph 5:32 RSV}

So the love of a husband and wife is a picture of the love of Christ and his church. In other words, the love of a husband and wife is simply a manifestation and a picture of that deeper love which is God’s intention for human life.

So in this book we have a picture of what God will fulfill in the heart and life of one who loves him. Listen to these beautiful words of the bridegroom to the bride:

**“... for lo, the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth,
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtledove
is heard in our land.
The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.” {Song 2:11-13 RSV}**

There is the springtime of life. But it doesn’t lie in the past. It lies in the future. One day this whole world will experience a springtime like that. The Lord Jesus Christ, returning at last to claim his waiting bride, will greet her in words very much like those. The springtime will come, the time of singing, the time when earth shall blossom again and the curse will be lifted and the flowers will appear on the earth. This is a picture of what can take place in the heart of one who falls in love with Jesus Christ and enters into springtime. The cold winter of loneliness, misery, and selfishness is past and the time of singing has come.

Prayer:

Thank you, our Father, for this beautiful little passage that sets forth so magnificently all the possibilities of satisfaction that are your intention for the human heart. Oh Lord, that we might enter into this kind of a relationship with you, that our hearts might sing like this concerning you who have come and won us, who have overcome all our prejudices and our wrestlings against you, so that we cry out, “Nay but I yield, I yield, I can hold forth no more; I sink by dying love compelled and own thee conqueror.” In your name we pray. Amen.