

# **How to Study the Bible**

*Helpful Ideas, Methods and Approaches*

*David Gooding*

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## What Does It Say? Why Does It Say it?

I must begin by explaining what I'm not going to do and what I am attempting to do in this seminar. I have not come to offer you a method of Bible study designed to eliminate all other methods of Bible study, nor to claim that my method of studying Scripture is the best or the only one that should be used. Far from it. Any method of Bible study that you find helpful brings you nearer the Lord and helps you to grasp the meaning of his word and the pulse of his heart. Any method that helps you is a good method, and if the comments I should make on methods of Bible study do not appeal to you or help you, please forget them. Nor am I suggesting that the methods that I shall be talking about will solve all difficulties. All I am doing and attempting in this seminar is to share with you some ideas, methods and approaches that I have found helpful over the years, particularly in the study of the narrative portions of God's holy word, which sometimes present a little difficulty.

When we study Scripture, we ask two basic questions. First, 'Exactly what is this Scripture saying?' Therein, of course, lies a lot of patient work with our Bibles, our translations, our dictionaries, and whatever else we can get, to establish exactly what is being said. And secondly, 'Why does it say it? What's the point of it? I hear what it says, but please tell me, what is the point of what it says?' So, we have the two basic questions 'What does it say?' and 'Why does it say it?'

### **An example from the epistles**

When we come to the Epistles in the New Testament it is comparatively easy to answer the question, 'Why does it say it?' by examining the passage in its immediate context and watching the thought flow of the logical argument. Let me take as one example the often-quoted phrase, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28) If we ask ourselves, 'What is the point of that remark?', and if we just take it out of its context, we might assume that it is about all sorts of things—that it is commenting on our church government, or on the use of gifts to the church or something. But if we turn back to its original context, we see that it is the climax of a long argument explaining on what grounds believers in the Lord Jesus inherit their great inheritance. That in turn, if we go to the larger context, will be found to be part of the argument that is establishing, 'How are we justified?'

The answer is, 'A person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ' (2:16). And, in order to prove that we are justified by faith, Paul proceeds in his chapters 3 and 4 to argue that not only is justification by faith, but the promises and the covenant and the inheritance—these are all by faith. In introducing the idea of the inheritance

and the covenant which guarantees the inheritance, Paul quotes from the Old Testament that the covenant was made by God to Abraham and to his seed (3:16). Being a good lawyer, he points out that the noun is a collective, not 'seeds' but 'seed' (KJV), and he argues that the seed in question, strictly speaking, refers to the Lord Jesus. So the great world inheritance promised to Abraham and his seed, and guaranteed by covenant, is in fact guaranteed and covenanted to the Lord Jesus under the terms of the covenant God made with Abraham.

Of course, if that great inheritance is covenanted by a legal covenant to Abraham's seed which is Christ, there's no good you arguing the case and saying, 'I should like to be included in this. I think God really meant to say, "To Abraham, to his seed, and to me."' That won't do. Once a covenant is signed, sealed and settled, you cannot add any provisions to it. At least, you can't add any conditions to it. But coming to the climax of his legal argument, Paul shows how it is possible for us to come into the benefit of that covenant and therefore into the benefit of the inheritance. He says:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (vv. 27-29)

In the ancient world, you could tell the difference between a Jew and a Greek by the vest they wore and you could tell the difference between a slave man and a free man by the clothes they wore. But when it comes to the ground upon which we inherit our great inheritance, all distinctions go. We inherit on this ground solely: we've been baptized into Christ, we have put on Christ, therefore we are in Christ and, being part of him, we are the legal heirs to the great promises covenanted by God to Abraham and his seed. So, even in the epistles, we have to take care not to read things out of their context, but to follow their place in the logical development of the argument.

That is a comparatively easy thing to do in the logical arguments of the Epistles. It is not always such an easy thing to do in those large acres of narrative that fill both the Old and the New Testaments. For instance, if you come to the Gospel of Luke and you are told that, when it came to the naming of John the Baptist, his father, who hitherto had been mute, wrote upon his slate 'His name is John', in spite of all the protests of the neighbours who wanted him called after his father Zechariah. And, at that moment when he wrote "His name is John" . . . his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God' (Luke 1:63-64). Well, that's a very pretty story and very impressive, but what on earth are you to make of it? So, the Baptist was called John. Well, that's very good to know. Will it matter to you whether he was called Elijah, or Elimelek, or Hephzibah, or whatever you like? What's the point of it? What difference does it make? There are many other stories in the narrative sections of holy Scripture where we can see what they say, but it can be difficult to see the point of them and what it is that we are meant to take out of them.

## The importance of context and thought-flow

It is in that area that I offer you a few little observations that I have found helpful in my own study of holy Scripture. I confess to the help and the importance of observing thought flow and context. Let me take some examples from ordinary life. Suppose you and I are sitting throughout the evening in the comfort of our lounge, and you are reading an improving book and I'm twiddling my thumbs. Suddenly, after the silence of an hour or two, I make the remark, 'Mrs O'Reilly is a beautiful pianist.' Well, you'll hear what I say and you will understand what I am saying, but you might be inclined to scratch your head and say, 'Why am I suddenly gifted with this information? What is the point of it?'

Ah, but suppose for the last half hour you have been rendering some work or other by master Chopin to the very best of your ability on the piano and, as your dulcet sounds die away, I am heard to comment, 'Mrs O'Reilly is a good pianist,' and your name happens to be Mrs Brown. You will be a strange person if you don't begin to suspect a connection of thought between my remark and your piano playing. I might have made it in an absent-minded moment, and it might have nothing to do with your playing, but then again —!

And so, when it comes to the narratives of Scripture, we will take an example in a moment to show how the same story put in a different context can carry a slightly different point and purpose. Sometimes when this is pointed out to those who believe in the inspiration of holy Scripture, they get a little uneasy. The historians in particular are very rightly concerned to know whether the gospels are historical narrative. My answer would be to assure them that they are absolutely and without question historical. These are not myths but history. Yet when they find that Luke, say, has put a story in a different context from what Mark has put it, and that sometimes the evangelists appear to have put stories in a slightly different chronological order, they think it weakens the claim that this is history.

So, let me use a delightful and classical story. I guarantee the historical truth of it, because I wrote it myself. I made it up myself, but for the moment we'll count it historical! It runs like this. 'Every Saturday Mr Smith was to be seen mowing his immaculate lawns with an old-fashioned hand-propelled mower.' Immediately you can see what it says but what's the point of what it says?

Let me put it in one context for you. 'In the great factory where Mr Smith worked, and in the office in which he was employed, there was an office manager, Mr Smith himself, a typist, and an office boy. The company doctor examined each and decided every one of them must take up some physical exercise. The secretary took up badminton, the office boy took up football, and every Saturday, Mr Smith was to be seen mowing his immaculate lawns with an old-fashioned hand-propelled mower.' Now if you ask what precisely the point of it is, you can see that this is a comment on the steps Mr Smith took to provide himself with physical exercise.

Let me put it in another context. 'In the gardening club to which Mr Smith belonged there were many different views on the style of garden that was most appropriate. The majority were for the modern look of gardens. They said formal lawns and flower beds were anathema. What you want to do is to plough them up and get back to nature, with an apparent disorder and a lot of the garden growing virtually wild. But every Saturday, Mr Smith was to be seen mowing his immaculate lawns with an old-fashioned hand-propelled lawnmower.' It's

exactly the same story, isn't it, but now I've put it in a different context, and you perceive it's a comment on the views held in the gardening club as to what kind of a garden was the best kind of garden to have in this modern world, and you see that Mr Smith is an old-fashioned traditionalist who, in spite of all modern theories about gardens and landscaping, prefers the old-fashioned lawn that has to be cut with an old-fashioned lawnmower.

It's the same story: I haven't altered a word. But putting it in different contexts brings out the different point of the story. We learn that what Mr Smith does is not necessarily possessed of just one significance, it is multi-significant. If that is true of our little lives and our little actions, how much more true is it of the actions of our adorable Lord, the significance of whose actions was so infinite that John says that if the whole would be written, the world wouldn't contain the books? (21:25). The gospel writers are not cheating and are not perverting history. They will take an action of our Lord, and one of them will put it in one context, and one of them will put it in another context.

### **Examples from biblical narrative**

Let us take as an example the story of the blind man who was given sight by our Lord Jesus. We will look first of all at Mark's account of it and, to put it in its larger context, we might go back to the story of the rich young ruler:

A man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' . . . And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (Mark 10:17, 21–22)

That led to a discussion between our Lord and his apostles, and our Lord's saying in verse 23, 'How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!' Whereupon Peter began to observe:

See, we have left everything and followed you. Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.' (vv. 28–30)

So, this episode of the rich young ruler has raised in Peter's mind the question of reward for sacrifice to the Lord Jesus. Now, if we look down to our story of Bartimaeus, the blind man, we shall see that in Mark it is immediately preceded by the story of the sons of Zebedee. Let us ponder, then, the effect of the larger thought flow, the question of reward for what you may surrender for Christ and the kingdom of God. When James and John come to the Lord Jesus, they are concerned about this matter of reward. We see how the idea of reward is coming down the thought flow of the chapter. But now see what happens when you follow

the sons of Zebedee story with the story of the son of Timaeus, and notice the superficial literary similarities.

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' And he said to them, 'What do you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?' And they said to him, 'We are able.' And Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.' And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' (vv. 35–45)

We will pick up the repetition of the idea—people following, coming to ask. It turns out James and John were concerned about their sitting down at the end of the road, and are asking to be given, and they don't really understand or know what it is they are asking for. You will notice Mark has made no reference to Zebedee's wife. He concentrates simply on the sons of Zebedee. At the end of that story, Mark adds the story of the son of Timaeus. Mark explains that his name in Aramaic is Bartimaeus, which means 'son of Timaeus'; so here are the sons of Zebedee, and here is the son of Timaeus, and they are coming asking.

Mark has chosen to describe Bartimaeus the blind beggar by one particular Greek word for 'beggar.' There are several words in Greek for 'beggar', but the word that Mark has chosen is cognate to the word that John and James are using. 'Give us,' they say. Mark says that Bartimaeus was a blind *asker*. He asked, 'Give me,' as he had been doing all his life because he was blind. When James and John came saying, 'Give us that we may sit,' our Lord said, 'You don't know what you ask'—asking blindly then. Mark's beggar story is of a man who was blind and asked. Jesus said to the sons of Zebedee, 'What do you want me to do for you?' He said the exact same to the blind beggar when he was called. So Mark, by his verbal contrasts and similarities, is building up a relationship between the two stories.

See its implication for the context. We've been talking about reward, and James and John have their eyes on the time when possibly they could sit down, and they're asking for the reward to be given them. They shall sit down; 'But,' says our Lord, 'in the first place, you don't know what you ask, and anyway, it's not mine to give; and thirdly, you have forgotten that the Son of Man has come not to be served, but to serve and to give his life. Not to receive, not to be given to, but to give. Have you any idea, James and John, and the rest of you,' he said to the twelve, 'what it will mean to sit on thrones of glory? The highest is the one who gives most. The highest ruler is the one who serves most.'

You see the Son of Man himself, highest of the high, is marked by his willingness to give his life. By contrast, see the blind man who had been sitting all these weary days asking,

asking, asking. This day, he asked it for the last time. He called out to the son of David who was passing by, and the Lord said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' He said, 'Rabbi, let me recover my sight' (v. 51), and in that moment, he was given his sight. He never went back to his begging. He stopped crying, 'Give me.' He who was sitting got up and followed him in the way. I wonder whether he was surprised at what he saw, that the son of David turned out to be the travel-stained, dust-laden man from Nazareth, who had come to give his life a ransom for many. So, you have a build-up of comparison between the two sons of Zebedee, with their idea of service and their request for reward, and the gentle correction of our Lord; and the example of the blind man who, when his eyes were opened, ceased his begging and followed our Lord on his way to give his life a ransom for many. That's Mark's story, very much about reward.

### **Same story, different context**

Now let's look very briefly at the context in which Luke puts it. The story in Luke comes much later in chapter 18. It starts in verse 18 with the same ruler coming and the same conversation, but we notice that when it comes down towards the end, Luke has no story of the sons of Zebedee. He plunges into the story of blind Bartimaeus and how he got his sight. But then Luke does something that Mark doesn't—he follows the story of blind Bartimaeus with the story of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, and then finishes the whole thing with the parable of the ten minas (19:11–27).

And what may Luke's point be? Well, if you put the story of Bartimaeus alongside the story of Zacchaeus, you will now find some different but equally interesting contrasts and similarities. Now you have two salvation stories side-by-side, for in the story of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, our Lord comments: 'Recover your sight; your faith has made you well' (Greek: 'has saved you') (18:42). It is a salvation story, then. So now, Luke has picked out and highlighted the fact that with Bartimaeus you are in the presence of a salvation story, and he adds another salvation story to follow it.

Let's think about the two stories. Bartimaeus was very poor and made his living by begging. Zacchaeus was exceedingly rich and made a lot of his living by swindling. Both of them have undesirable ways of making a living and, when we think of this matter, we remember the earlier context. 'How difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!' said our Lord. 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God' (Mark 10:24–25), to which the apostles replied, 'Then who can be saved?' Well, they say that in Mark of course, but now watch Luke at his job. 'Who then can be saved, if it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven? Goodness me, who then can be saved?' 'Well, I'll show you,' says Luke. There's this poor beggar, Bartimaeus. He can be saved, and he was saved, thank the Lord. And then there's the filthily rich tax gatherer, Zacchaeus. Could he be saved? Well yes, he was saved as well. Well, thank God for that. Salvation isn't just for the poor or just for the rich.

Our Lord was often criticised for going to dinner parties with highly rich tax-gatherers. But see God's salvation at work: putting Bartimaeus beside the rich tax collector, what a vivid contrast you have. The blind man making his living out of what he could beg from other



people. What a dishonouring way: it reduces a man's dignity. Then there was this other little fellow, horribly rich, making his living by what the Jews called 'a despicable profession' and, from his later confession, partly by swindling and cheating. What did salvation do? Well, thank God, it changed both men's ways of making a living—for salvation isn't much if it doesn't enter into the way we get our income. It restored both men to a dignified and God-honouring way of making a living. And Luke comes to the climax by adding the story of the parable of the ten minas, in which we are taught to regard all that we have as a sacred trust given to us by the Saviour, for which we will be accountable when the Lord comes. The same story, but because it's in a different context, it carries slightly different lessons and implications.

### **Variations on a theme**

Not only is the immediate context important but it can be helpful, in historical books, to watch how the writer develops variations on a theme. We can see this when we bring together four exceedingly well-known stories from the Gospel of Luke.

1. The story of the narrow door and those who, when the door is shut, stand outside knocking. They miss salvation (13:23–27).
2. The parable of the Great Banquet which tells of those who were invited but missed the supper (14:12–24).
3. The parable of the Prodigal Son which tells, finally, of the elder brother who refused to go into the banquet (15:11–32).
4. The story of the rich man and Lazarus, which tells of the rich man dining luxuriously in this life but, in the life to come, is denied so much as a drop of water to satisfy him (16:19–31).

We ask ourselves what all the four stories have in common, and then how they differ. Well, they are all stories of banquets, one way or another. In the first story, those that are shut out are imagined standing by the door and somehow able to see into the great banquet hall of eternity. They see the guests arrive, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and from north and south. They come and they sit down (in Greek it is the word you would use for reclining at a banquet) and take part of the heavenly banquet. The second story is about a banquet, the great supper. The third story is about the welcome-home banquet for the prodigal son, and the fourth story is about the rich man who dined luxuriously every day of the week. All stories about banquets. All the stories are also about those that missed salvation. There are differences too, for the four stories are not just simply repeating the same theme. If we compare and contrast them, we shall see that our Lord is analysing the reasons why people miss salvation, and not everybody misses it for the same reason.

Let us notice the first story and the last. In the first story, the people concerned miss it unintentionally, and when at last the door is shut and they stand outside, they are horribly dismayed and surprised. 'Lord, they say, there's been some mistake. Open to us.' They never intended to be on the outside. They miss it unintentionally, but the door is shut and there's no opening it. The last story is similar. The rich man likewise finding himself in hell is horribly

surprised. Like those who stand outside the door, he pleads, but in both cases the pleas are refused. The great gulf is fixed, and the man is on the wrong side. It is evident he missed salvation unintentionally.

What of the middle two? They miss salvation, but they missed it on purpose. Those that were invited to the great banquet, when the time came to be summoned to dinner, all with one accord began to make excuses. They missed it intentionally. The same is true of the elder brother who, hearing the sound of music and rejoicing and finding out that it was because the prodigal had come home, was angry and would not go in, and he missed the joy of the banqueting hall on purpose. Here is our Lord analysing that solemn topic, reasons why people miss, and will miss, salvation.

Taking the first and the last again, we see that they miss it unintentionally, but for the opposite reasons. When those that stand outside the shut door begin to argue with the master of the house, they reveal the reason why they had missed it. Their faith was in the wrong things. Listen to them. 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets' (13:26). But since when has that been the way into the heavenly banquet? 'I do not know where you come from,' said Christ (v. 27).

The rich man had failed to put his faith in the right thing. When he argues with Abraham, the secret comes out. Abraham says, 'I don't need to send anybody back from the dead to talk to your brothers, they've got the Old Testament' (16:29). 'I know,' said the rich man, 'of course I've got the Old Testament. Do you suppose that's going to be enough, for people to have the Old Testament?' The rich man had had the Old Testament and it said, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Lev 19:18). He'd never lifted a finger to help the beggar outside his door, but he didn't think it mattered whether you really believed the Old Testament or not, and he perished.

So the beginning story and the end story are about people that missed salvation unintentionally but for different reasons. The first lot put their trust in the wrong things and the last one failed to put his trust in the right thing. Similarly with the middle two stories. On the day of the banquet, those who made excuses showed why they missed it. They missed it on purpose because they didn't think it was good enough. They preferred their business, or whatever, to the banquet. The elder brother in the parable missed it, not because he thought the feast wouldn't be good enough, but for the very opposite reason. He thought it was too good; much too good a banquet to be put on for a scoundrel like his prodigal brother.

Well, you have known the stories long since. All I am arguing is that the gospel writers commonly will select other material of our Lord's teachings and actions so that they might illustrate a theme from different points of view, and so help us to analyse what lies at the heart of it.

## **Patterns and structures**

I turn now to the question of what I call patterns and structures, which again may help us to see context and point us to the significance of what is recorded. If you consider the overall structure into which John the Evangelist put his material you will find that, after his long

introduction, the rest of John's gospel is the story of certain visits that our Lord Jesus made to Jerusalem on the occasion of the Jewish festivals. Let's notice how this works.

'The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem' (2:13). It was a national festival. 'Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name' (v. 23). And while he was there, Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to speak to him privately (3:1-15). John tells us that Jesus and his disciples came into the land of Judea (3:22) and that he left Judea and departed again into Galilee, having had to go through Samaria (4:3-4). At the end of chapter 4 he constantly reminds us that our Lord had been on a journey to Jerusalem to the feast, and now he departed into Galilee, and the Galileans welcomed him (v. 45). And, as if that wasn't enough, John tells us this is 'the second sign that Jesus did, when he had come from Judea to Galilee' (v. 54).

You get the point, don't you? Our Lord Jesus has been down to Jerusalem on the occasion of a festival, and he's come back to Galilee. Get hold of the point. Now he's returned, what will happen next? Well, chapter 5 says 'there was a feast of the Jews' (v. 1). He went back to Jerusalem. He was down there some time. Chapter 6 says he came back to Tiberius and tells what happened then, and chapter 7 begins the third division with the words, 'the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand' (v. 2), and Jesus went once more up to Jerusalem (v. 10).

What is the point of observing the structure of a book like John? Because it takes the words and works of the Lord Jesus and puts them against a certain background to help you to see the point of them. We learn from the Old Testament that these great national festivals of Judaism were the time when the nation dropped its work and went up to Jerusalem to engage in the worship and service of God. These festivals were designed to remind them of the great acts of redemption performed by God in past ages, celebrated every year to keep the memory of salvation and the great acts of God fresh in their minds and to point them on to the great reality. 'So see,' says John, 'here go the pilgrims up to Jerusalem. But watch, here is God incarnate, and he's going up with them, only they don't know who he is. Now they've arrived at the temple and they're shouting their hallelujahs and singing their psalms and engaging in the worship of God in that temple. And God himself is standing incarnate by their side.' What is the Lord doing—watching the way they worship; or listening to the way they sing their hymns and psalms? What he is doing is reading their hearts. And presently, he begins to speak, and he says, 'These things are all lovely ceremonies, but I could give you the living reality of which all these symbols speak.'

So when, for instance, at the Feast of Booths they took the water on the last day and poured it at the base of the altar, and they had finished their great festival celebrations, then our Lord lifted up his voice and said, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. I can give you the reality of which these things were but the symbol' (7:37-38). They said, 'Who do you think you are, coming spoiling our lovely services with your impertinent remarks about our being thirsty and sinners, and all that kind of thing? You keep quiet and go away.' And when he wouldn't do that, they took God incarnate out of the city and nailed him to a tree, and then came back to the temple and got on with their worship. That was a strange state of affairs, wasn't it? And when we see that background and the structure of the thing, we begin to say to ourselves, 'Has it got any modern application?' For it is a message sometimes very necessary to nominal members of Christendom, who will carefully keep the formal festivals

of Christmas and Easter and Whitsun and goodness knows what, and engage in all the symbolism, but haven't got the reality. So you begin to see the point of our Lord's miracles and teaching against the background of his visits of inspection to the nation's worship and service.

### Other patterns

Let me finally call your attention now to some slightly different aspects of 'patterns' in the gospel records. One series of stories that form a kind of pattern is to be found in the Fourth Gospel where women are mentioned very prominently. These are stories which no other evangelist has or, if he has them, he hasn't them in anywhere near the same detail. I leave it to you to look these up. I think you will find that all these stories where women are prominent in the Gospel of John are stories dealing with one or another aspect of relationship.

The other series much-noticed by the commentators concerns the 'sign' miracles recorded in John's Gospel. Observing the series will help us to see more significance in the detail than otherwise we might see. If you list them — there are seven or eight of them depending on your point of view! — you will find some interesting things. Take, for instance, the account of Christ at Bethesda. At Bethesda there was a pool, and a multitude of weak people by the pool. There was one poor man in particular who had done his best for thirty-eight years to get into the pool and be healed. When our Lord came along and said, 'Do you want to be healed?', he was so obsessed with this pool that he said, 'Lord, I'm sorry, but I've no-one to put me into the pool.'

'Pool?', said Christ, 'I don't need any pool. Get up, man. I don't need to use such means as angels troubling the water' (5:6-8). This was the son of God, to whom the Father had given life in himself. He was the very source of life. He didn't need to use means like a troubled pool to cure the good man.

When you learn that lesson, later on John will tell you another story, how that our Lord came across a man who had been blind from birth. He made clay of dust with spittle, put it on the man's eyes and said, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (9:7). Well, surely not. How strange. Why 'Pool, yes,' in one place, and 'Pool, no,' in the next place? I'm not going to tell you the answer. You probably know it anyway, and if you don't, just putting the two stories together will oblige you to say, 'There must be some significance in this. Why will our Lord not use the pool here and insist on using a pool there?'

Take one other pair of signs. The official came to Christ asking the Lord to come and lay hands on his son and heal him. He found out that our Lord could heal at a distance. He didn't have to come all the way from Cana to Capernaum and lay hands on the child. He could just speak the word and the boy was healed at a distance. That created a certain temporary difficulty for the official because, as he stood in the street of Cana and our Lord said, 'Your son will live,' (4:50) he couldn't see that he lived. 'No,' said our Lord, 'and that's the trouble with you folks, unless you see signs and wonders, you're not liable to believe. And that means you're going to have a rough time this next twenty-four hours, old chap, because if you can't just believe because I say so, you won't get the evidence until you get home tomorrow.' The man had come to see the implications of this business, that our Lord could heal at a distance,

and that there are times therefore when we must take Christ at his word without further evidence. We must be prepared to walk until our life and experience show and demonstrate that his word was true. He is Lord of space and time, you'll see. He can heal at a distance.

And we've read the story, and we've learned it in chapter 4; and with all the wisdom we've gained, we come to chapter 11. There was a certain man in Bethany and he was sick, and his sister sent to our Lord, who was some distance away, and said, 'Lazarus is sick.' When our Lord heard that, he remained in the same place where he was (v. 6). We would say, 'Of course he did, he can heal at a distance; we learned that in chapter 4.' And then some days later the Lord says, 'Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there' (vv. 14-15). We say, 'Lord, why did you have to be there anyway? We thought you could heal at a distance. It made no difference whether you were there or not.' How will we explain that? Well, you know the answer of course. While our Lord was illustrating his power to heal a man at a distance in chapter 4, in chapter 11 he was demonstrating something completely different. He was going to demonstrate the great resurrection. He won't do that at a distance, my brother, my sister. If we grow sick and die while he's not here—and if he doesn't come soon, we shall die of course. We shall not be raised by his remaining at a distance and speaking the word. He will have to come.

All I'm doing is pointing out how John has arranged the series of material. He has deliberately put them in pairs so that we might consider two sides of the story and learn to see significance in details which otherwise might have passed us by.

Our desire and prayer is that the Lord will use these brief studies to open windows for us all upon these well-loved and well-known Scriptures so that we might see increasingly more significance in them, be able to enjoy them more, and more fully expound them to our own benefit and to the salvation of others through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## The Validity of Typology

I have found it helpful to notice the very many *different levels of significance* than can attach to one and the same thing in the Old Testament. A very obvious example of a double level of meaning is in Romans 4:3: ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’ We are told that Abraham was justified by faith, and his case is appealed to as the determining precedent. When the Bible tells us that Abraham was justified by faith, that is not a *type*; it is an actual instance of a literal man who believed God and was justified, just like we are justified. It is not a type but a piece of *case law*, as the lawyers would say. But then, when Paul comes down to verses 17–25, he draws the parallel at a different level between Abraham and us.

### ***What was Abraham asked to believe?***

Abraham was justified by faith; we are justified by faith, so the precedent says. But when Abraham was justified by faith, what exactly did *faith* mean? Well, it meant *believing God*. Ah, but believing God over what? In the context, God had said to Abraham that he would give Abraham offspring (seed, KJV), and Romans 4 goes on to point out how that involved Abraham’s faith. ‘He *considered* his own body . . .’ (v. 19)—not as the King James says, ‘he *considered not* his own body . . .’. He had a bit more sense; he *did* consider his body, and it was as good as dead. He considered that Sarah was beyond the age of childbearing; but in spite of it, and with his own body going into degeneration and apparent decay, he persisted in believing in God. It involved believing in a God who ‘calls into existence the things that do not exist’ (v. 17), a God who could bring life out of death. ‘Now that’s faith,’ says Paul.

### ***What are we asked to believe?***

Do I have to believe then in a God who can give me a child? In my case that would be a little irrelevant, so what does *faith* mean to me? I mean, if the case law precedent is going to say that you have to believe God to be justified, isn’t the faith going to be the same? And now at this level the faith is basically the same, but what am I asked to believe?

I am asked to believe in a God, ‘who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification’ (vv. 24–25). The same principle is involved, but over a different set of facts: believing in the same God and the same power that could call life out of death.

## Paradigm

In Abraham's case, it was giving life through his body and Sarah's body, both of them dead in the technical sense. In our case, it is believing in a God who raised Jesus, our Lord, from the dead. It seems to me that a suitable term to put over that second part would be that Abraham's case is a *paradigm* for us—a template, or a classical example.

The New Testament does appeal to such paradigms, doesn't it? Says Paul, talking to the Corinthians, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain' (1 Cor 9:9)—a piece of legislation that, when you first find it in the Old Testament, looks to be very humanitarian. It is concerned with literal oxen; the principle is established that the ox that labours hard at threshing the corn must be left free, unmuzzled, to bow its head every now and again and take a mouthful of the corn that it is threshing.

But Paul applies it at an altogether higher level. Does God care for oxen? In his Hebrew manner, Paul says, 'It doesn't simply mean that.' He's not denying that it had a validity at its time—it did refer to literal oxen with real horns; but now the same principle is applied at a different level. Now we think of 'oxen' on two legs, namely missionaries and things! '*In the same way*, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel' (v. 14). They go to work, not treading out literal corn; but they go to work, and the paradigmatic principle applies that they must not be muzzled. They must be free to live off the work that they are doing for the Lord. Again, it's not a type; it's a paradigm established by Israel's legal code.

## Prototype

I made the distinction in Talk 1 between type and prototype. You may not agree with my distinction, and there's no harm done. As a kind of practical distinction, I find it helpful as a bit of armour plating against the barbs that come my way from the very learned, who say, 'Ah, the type broke down there, didn't it?' And my reply is, 'But if you'd looked closer, you'd have seen that it wasn't a type to start with; it was a prototype.'

What I mean is that, as you trace with me the ways of God in redemption, you will see similar *patterns* emerging. The plain, simple reason is that sin is sin in any age. It tends to be very monotonous and unoriginal: sin is sin is sin. And the principles of redemption are basically the same in all ages. Therefore, as you read these stories of God's early phases of redemption with his people, you will see certain basic principles working in their history that subsequently you will find working at a higher level in redemption as we know it today.

### ***King David: An example of a prototype from 1 Samuel***

We find a very interesting prototype in the first book of Samuel, and I'm just going to relate to you the historic facts. If you can see similarities and pattern with anything else, you'll be all the richer; but I'm just going to content myself with relating what actually happened.

It is very interesting how God imposed David on his fellow men as king of Israel. God himself is king in the ultimate and absolute sense; he doesn't ask for anybody's permission. But when it comes to imposing one man upon his fellows as king, that's a different story. So Samuel tells us that there was a king called Saul, who was anointed of the Lord. He disobeyed

and fell into grievous rebellion and God determined therefore that his dynasty should not be established, and appointed David as king. Observe the very curious way he did it. If I may say so reverently, God had some options. He could have destroyed Saul, appointed David as king, and there would have been no difficulty. Alternatively, he could have let Saul live on to his last days, die a natural death, and then anoint David. Again, there would have been no difficulty, but God chose neither option.

At first sight it seems peculiar that he didn't destroy Saul. While Saul was still living and still king, God had Samuel go and anoint David to be king. When Samuel first heard it, he had the horrors. 'But Lord,' he said, 'how can I do that? If Saul were to hear of this, he'd have my head off. It's like treason, surely?'

What if Queen Elizabeth was on a visit to the Australians, and when she came home she found that the Archbishop of Canterbury had anointed Arthur Scargill<sup>1</sup> to be king in her place? Elizabeth would be upset. She'd say, 'I haven't died yet.'

Nonetheless, God told Samuel to anoint David; but he didn't immediately impose him on the throne, and that raised all sorts of questions. Some people began to love David when they saw the wonders that could be, by way of slaying Goliath for instance. Jonathan, the crown prince, began to love him. Recognizing David's superiority and that one day David would be king, he took off his belt and his kingly armour and gave it to David (18:3-4).

But Saul got jealous and David said to Jonathan, 'Your father is determined to kill me' (see chapter 20.)

'No,' said Jonathan, 'my father is a bit tetchy sometimes, but he doesn't mean any harm. You're not going to be rejected, David, that's for sure.'

'Yes, I am,' said David.

So Jonathan put the whole thing to the test, and there came that poignant moment when Jonathan came out to the field with his bow and arrows and shot the arrow to indicate to the Lord's messiah that he must go, and the messiah went. I'm talking history; I'm not talking New Testament—don't get wrong ideas! Messiah went and fell into the hands of sinful men, the Philistines. Why ever did he let himself fall into the hands of the Philistines, when he had Goliath's sword in his hand (see 21:9)?

You say, 'That was madness.'

Yes, it looked like it, but he had a choice. He could have used the sword to go back and cut Saul's head off, couldn't he? Had he done so, many in Israel would have shouted, 'Hooray!'. But he wouldn't cut Saul's head off, so he fell into the hands of the Philistines.

And then he went down into the cave (ch. 22). But he came up again out of the cave, much to Saul's annoyance because he thought he'd seen the last of him. David then came back to Israel and presented himself to various cities—Keilah and Ziph and others, which embarrassed them, for he showed that he could deliver them from their enemies, the Philistines (ch. 23). The question now was; would they transfer their loyalty from Saul to David? They were given this further chance to decide. When David had helped one particular city, he enquired of the Lord, saying, 'Saul is coming; will this city deliver me up into his hands?', and God said, 'I'm afraid they will' (see v. 11).

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<sup>1</sup> President of the National Union of Mineworkers, 1982-2002.



After this period, when David had come back from the Philistines and back from the cave and was now presenting himself again to his nation, finally the nation rejected him, officially and for the last time.

And what happened? The messiah, the anointed, went to the Gentiles, didn't he?

And what happened then? Well, the Gentiles came and Saul was finally defeated.

### *The true Messiah*

And there we might leave the story completely, if we didn't know a thing or two about the New Testament, and how God imposed his Son, the great Son of David, as his Messiah. 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power' (Acts 10:38); but he didn't enforce him, did he? He demonstrated his power to save.

In those early days there were many who fell in love with him. People like Simon Peter, who thought that the nation would receive him forthwith. When our blessed Lord said, 'I must go to Jerusalem, and I shall be rejected by the chief priests and scribes', Simon said, 'No, no, no. Get that out of your head. You're going to be successful. You're going to be received' (see Matt 16:21–22). But no, he wasn't, and the Messiah had to go; even as it was written of him, '[he] must be delivered into the hands of sinful men . . .' (Luke 24:7).

I wonder if Michael the archangel thought that the deity had gone mad, when he saw Jesus Christ, God's Son, delivered up into the hands of men as though he were a helpless victim, and nailed to a tree.

He died and was buried, and the high priests were jubilant for they thought they'd seen the last of him. But he came back and presented himself to his apostles, to Israel, and they had to make up their minds what they were going to do. Many did trust him (see Acts 2), but the nation finally said, 'No,' and the Messiah went to the Gentiles and was largely lost to Israel. Then the Gentiles came up and destroyed Jerusalem city (AD 70).

Well, you have your choice. You may think I'm fanciful. I haven't said that one thing is the picture of the other, have I? But who couldn't see it? It seems to me that the correspondence is there because the principles of redemption are the same. In the Old Testament they operate at a lowly level, and later on at a higher level.

### ***Abraham: An example of a prototype from Genesis 22***

Now let me return to the charge once more, that, if we go on seeing types and prototypes in the Old Testament, the danger is that we shall overlook the plain, straightforward, practical meaning of the text. To be sure, there is a danger.

I cite as my lesson Genesis 22, and I declare at once that I do believe it is a prototype. You may like to call it a *type* of how the father gave the son—he spared not his own son. How often we have listened to it with great profit, as our teaching brethren have expounded it to us.

'But,' says the other school of thought, 'nowhere does the Bible say that Genesis 22 was meant to be a type; and if you keep on talking about it as a type of the father giving the son, you are forgetting the plain, straightforward, and exceedingly practical teaching that Genesis 22 was meant to put across.'

And what is that?

'In the first instance, it is the great lesson on justification by works, is it not? And our brother James calls our attention to it urgently. We who believe in justification by faith, and preach it often, sorely need this straightforward, practical lesson of Genesis 22. Where people profess faith in God, they must be prepared to justify their profession of faith by their works. 'Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?' (Jas 2:21).

He was indeed. That is its number one practical lesson, and, when you read it, do notice what it says, because it doesn't square very well with that popular maxim that we are justified by faith before God, and justified by works before men. That won't fit Genesis 22, because, when Abraham offered his son upon the altar and was justified by his works, there weren't any other people around to see it.

And, more than that. When the angel called out of heaven in the name of God, he said to Abraham, 'Now *I know* that you fear God' (v. 12); not, 'Now Sarah knows,' or, 'Now the Philistines know,' but, 'Now *I know*.'

You say, 'But wait a minute, didn't God know that all the time? He knows the end from the beginning.'

Well, of course he does, but there are different levels of knowledge even in the most high, are there not? There's the knowledge that is *foreknowledge*, and there is the knowledge by actual *experience*.

When I come under test, and I am required to justify the profession of my faith by my works, it's no good my saying, 'Look here, God, you don't need to put me through this exam. You already know.'

God will say, 'I need to know by actual experience.'

God knew that I would be born one day. I'm glad he wasn't content with that kind of knowledge; I'm glad he insisted on knowing me by actual practical experience.

*What does 'justification by faith' mean?*

Let James tell us, for James also believes in both justification by faith and justification by works: 'When [Abraham] offered up his son Isaac on the altar . . . Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"' (2:21–23).

How is Genesis 15 fulfilled in Genesis 22? The issue at stake was whether Abraham believed God. Genesis 15:6 says, '[Abraham] believed the LORD': faith meant believing God and nothing else. Not his own efforts, nor Sarah's efforts—when they tried that, it went astray. It meant believing God and only God; staking everything upon God. The years went by and the promised seed was eventually born and all Abraham's future lay in that seed. But, did it?

Says God. 'Abraham, you say you believe me. Tell me now, where is your faith for the future: is it in me, or in Isaac? Perhaps we'd better get it settled, Abraham. You say your faith is in me, and solely in me? Then please, Abraham, give me Isaac' (see 22:1–2, 12).

Abraham demonstrated that his faith was in God and only in God: 'And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"' (Jas 2:23). Justification by works is the demonstration by our works that our faith is in God. I would be the last to wish to obscure that exceedingly practical lesson. I would want to enforce it, however, and say that James is not being arbitrary.

*A question of security*

Let us for a moment look at the actual text of Scripture in Genesis 21 and see the context in which that delightful story is given. These verses are a prelude to what we shall be told in chapter 22.

The king of the Philistines comes to Abraham and says,

God is with you in all that you do. Now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my descendants or with my posterity, but as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned. (vv. 22–23)

So here was the Philistine king coming to Abraham to seek security for his son. You should not forget that Abraham was a great sheikh; he was the man of faith *par excellence* and he was exceedingly wealthy. He had so many servants that he could raise an army from them to challenge the army of a collection of kings. To have a sheikh with that tremendous power and economic wealth wandering around the borders of your town could give you a fright at night, if you weren't careful!

Abimelech has a son and, like fathers are, he is concerned for his future. So Abimelech comes to Abraham, and says, 'Abraham, I know that God is with you, but do you think it would be nice if we could come to some agreement, because I'm thinking of my son and where I can find security for him, for his son, and for all my future. I want some security, Abraham. Would you please swear an oath that you will not deal falsely with my son?'

'Yes, of course I will,' said Abraham, and he swore an oath granting the Philistine king security for his son. It was called *Be'er Sheva* in Hebrew: Beersheba, 'the well of the oath'. It was concerned with security.

Now listen to the story. Where shall Abraham find security for himself, for his son, and for his future? Genesis 22 has another oath; it is where Abraham and his seed found security:

I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. (v. 17)

And the writer to the Hebrews picks up the story. Where shall we find security? 'Look, my brethren', he says, 'God, willing to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeability of his counsel, interposed with an oath, that we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, and a hope that is like an anchor that will never drift' (see Heb 6:17–19). Where would you find security in this world, security for your future? We find that security in God, in his word, and in his oath.

In response to God's command and invitation, Abraham took Isaac up the mountain and bound him on the altar and, as an elderly man, he was left with nothing except God and God's promise: 'On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided' (Gen 22:14).

Oh, my brother, my sister, you know better than I that we shall find security nowhere else. When I stand, stripped naked of everything I've ever hoped for and all I'm left with is God and his word, then, praise God, I have utter and absolute security. And in Hebrews 6 we have authority for saying so.

Can we not go further? I suspect if I wakened you in the small hours, and then said, 'Tell me why you are so sure of security in God,' I think I'd hear you say, 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?' (Rom 8:32). Forget typology for a moment, my Christian friend. It is the fact that you find your security not only in God, his oath, and his word; you find it in the fact that 'the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world' (1 John 4:14). Is it not so?

As you read that story again, not denying its literal level of meaning, your Christian instinct will make you think of another father and another son, another mountain and another sacrifice. It is a prototype, and the one level of meaning does not contradict the other: the one is built on top of the other.

### *Hagar and Ishmael*

One more thing about the book of Genesis and then we'll leave it. In the Epistle to the Galatians Paul comes round to using the story of Hagar and Ishmael as an illustration, an *allegory*. He takes the word that was spoken by Sarah to Abraham and confirmed by God: 'Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman' (4:30). Paul takes it as an authoritative word, indicating and illustrating the principle that, when it comes to salvation, you cannot mix works with grace. What is more, when it comes to our great inheritance, you cannot mix works with grace. Therefore, the law must go and salvation and inheritance are simply by grace.

Paul goes on to say, 'Hagar and Ishmael represent the Jerusalem that is now, which is in bondage with her children; Sarah represents the Jerusalem which is above, which is the mother of us all' (see vv. 25–26).

To read between the lines upsets some commentators. They say, 'Perhaps Paul was influenced by rabbinic methods of interpretation. We don't argue that way' [which is a pity!]. 'It wouldn't convince us, but it would convince the Jews of his day. Don't you go copying Paul, whatever you do.'

But is he so wildly off? We may ask, how did Paul get it into his head that Hagar and Ishmael had anything to do with it? Let's look at another verse in the previous chapter before we return to Genesis. 'Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made' (Gal 3:19). Grasp that, and then let your mind go back to the book of Genesis. At least we could be doing Paul the favour by approaching Genesis from a literary point of view, and not taking a story out of its context and arbitrarily making a type of it. Let's have the grace to look at the book as a whole and ask things about its literary order and construction, and if there is any *thought flow* from one narrative to the next. If we are at pains to do that, we shall notice that in Genesis 15 Abraham was given the promise of the seed, but then in chapter 16 we have the incident of Hagar and Ishmael.

## **Thought flow**

Let's imagine it happened like this.

Sarah was at breakfast one morning with Abraham, and over the marmalade she said, 'You know the promise that God gave us?'

'Yes, we're going to have a son,' said Abraham.

'Well,' she says, 'the Lord has overlooked something.'

'Oh, really?'

'I'm barren; and, if I may say so, God has acted a little contradictorily, Abraham. He promises that we're going to have a child, when he has closed up my womb, so it doesn't make sense. But, I have an idea how I can get the Lord out of this difficulty.'

'What is it?'

'You take my handmaiden, Hagar the Egyptian.'

That's what women did in that part of the ancient world. So Abraham took the slave girl and she conceived. But then the trouble started. When this slave girl saw that she was going to bear Abraham the promised seed, she began to get ideas above her station. When Sarah said, 'You shall peel the potatoes,' she put on her airs and graces, and said, 'I'm carrying Abraham's child.'

Sarah made life so rough that Hagar ran away. The angel of the Lord found Hagar and said, 'You must go back to Abraham's house. I promise you, you'll have a son and I shall bless him.' And then God had the frankness to tell her what kind of son he would be: 'He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen' (16:12).

So back she went into Abraham's household and Ishmael was born. Do you know, I sometimes imagine the many scenes there were in Abraham's tents in those days, when this 'wild donkey' was a toddler and then as a young chap grew up. Life was difficult for Abraham and Sarah. There were little scenes that embarrassed all the guests, but, in spite of much discipline, how will you tame a wild donkey? Abraham had to learn that 'the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot' (Rom 8:7). What a lesson it was.

God sent Hagar and Ishmael into Abraham's tent, and that's how it was until you come to chapter 21, which begins with the birth of the promised seed. It's told in the first seven verses, and when the promised seed is born and has grown up a few years, the very next story (vv. 8-21) tells us that Sarah said to Abraham, 'Cast out this slave woman with her son.' Abraham didn't want to do it, but God said, 'Now you will do it, for the promised seed has come.' So Hagar and Ishmael went out. Then chapter 22 tells us that the promised seed was sacrificed.

As a Christian, can you see any parallel? In Genesis, there's Hagar and Ishmael, and Ishmael was in Abraham's house *until the promised seed came*; then he was driven out; and then the promised seed died.

Paul is drawing the analogy now at a higher level. The law was given, but it wasn't the final answer to subduing the flesh, nor bringing justification by faith, nor the inheritance. It was added to teach Israel lessons about the incorrigibility of the flesh. The law was there until the promised seed should come, and when he came it was finished.

And what happened next? The promised seed was sacrificed, wasn't he? Paul isn't talking nonsense, nor even rabbinics; Paul is basing himself on the structure, thought flow, and the narrative flow of inspired holy Scripture.

### ***The start of the Hebrew nation***

One other little literary observation in Genesis 22. When the promised seed was sacrificed, Abraham came down the mountain (v. 19). He came back to dwell at ‘the well of the oath,’ where his security was. And then come verses 20–24, and a small genealogy telling us of the family of Abraham back down in Paddan-aram and Ur of the Chaldees. ‘Now after these things it was told to Abraham, “Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor”’ —and there’s the list of them.

Now let me ask you a literary question. Why do you suppose the author of Genesis has suddenly put a rather pedestrian genealogy at that point? Would you have done it, if you were a writer with any sense of climax and literary style? You have a world-shaking story like Abraham’s offering of Isaac, and then you come to a funny little genealogy.

You say, ‘Well, perhaps he thought people would be interested in it.’

I thought you held a higher view of inspiration than that! So, what is it there for? It will remind you at least that there was a genealogy like this before, in chapter 11. When Abraham came out of Ur of the Chaldees and eventually moved on from Haran, there’s a list of the family of the Gentiles out of which Abraham was called. That moment in history was the beginning of a movement which would be of incalculable significance in the affairs of mankind: *the first Hebrew coming out of the Gentile nations*. It’s not typology; this is a very big movement in history, and an exceedingly important part as evidence for our faith in the ways of God to start the Hebrew nation by bringing Abraham out of the Gentiles.

Ishmael was put there until the promised seed came, and when the promised seed came Ishmael was cast out, and then the promised seed was sacrificed. At that point, God says, ‘Do you remember those Gentiles? What about them?’

### ***A bride for Isaac***

Let’s carry on with the story. Sarah died, and Abraham said to himself, ‘My son Isaac is getting rather old. It’s about time he was married. Where would I get a bride for my son? Not from round here, of course.’ Then the thought struck him, ‘I wonder if there’d be a girl back amongst the Gentile people, who were my relatives once, who would be prepared to come out and be a bride for my son?’

So he suggested it to his servant and his servant went all the way back to Abraham’s Gentile relatives, and *from the second big movement there came out a bride for Abraham’s son*. God knows the end from the beginning, and what a wonderful thing this emergence of Israel out of the Gentiles is.

### ***The true Seed***

Then there came the giving of the law, and the prophets, and the kings, until the true Messiah came. With the sacrifice of the promised seed a door was opened for a coming out of the Gentiles, the like of which was utterly unprecedented. *Millions of Gentiles are being called out to be a bride for the promised seed*.

## Pattern

You're not imagining things. If you don't like *typology*, call it *literary criticism*. The book of Genesis was very carefully written by a literary author who knew what he was doing and ran his themes very carefully, with their minor and major climaxes and their harpings back to earlier things. Therefore, it comes about that there are other *patterns* in this book, aren't there?

When the Jews looked at the story of Abraham and Isaac, even they could see it had special meaning. Until this very present day, there are Jews who would tell you that Israel is to be saved by the blood of Isaac.

You say, 'What do you mean? Isaac was never killed.'

Ah, but he offered himself willingly to be killed, and by his obedience he earned merit by which Israel shall be saved. The rabbis call that chapter the *Akedah*, 'the binding of Isaac'. Through the merit of Isaac's obedience, they hope Israel shall be saved. They're not altogether on the wrong track, are they? (Ninety percent on the wrong track.)

We could tell them about another Isaac and his obedience to his Father. But here we are back in Genesis again, and God can't wait to tell the rest of the story. It would be a long time to wait for Calvary to actually happen, and there in history is God's answer in prototype, 'For as by the one man's [Adam's] disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous' (Rom 5:19).

What a delightful literary style the writer has, whoever he was. Was it Moses who wrote Genesis? And as for you gospel preachers, what a lovely story that is, if you went looking around for patterning. What do I mean by *patterning*? Well, stories that are different stories, but when you look at them they sort of repeat the pattern.

*In chapter 3, there's the story of the proposal made by a serpent to a woman*

It went like this. 'You know you could rise in the world if you wanted to, but God is all for keeping you down. If only you took the fruit of that tree, you would be as God. You'd rise in the universe,' said he. When she took the fruit, far from rising in the universe, to her shame she found she was naked.

And God can't wait, can he? It will be a long while to wait for the New Testament and for talk of the bride of the Lamb.

*In chapter 24, there's the story of the proposal by a servant to a woman*

The servant is saying to the woman, 'My master is exceedingly rich and he's got one son and he's given him all that he has. The proposal is, would you care to be the bride of my master's son?'

Oh, what a story, and if you can't see that's a type, well forget it. But let me just remind you of the New Testament. God's answer to Satan's lie is a story that runs like this. God has one Son and into his hand is given all that he has. Oh, dear sinner, would you not be saved, and would you not care to be part of the wife and bride of the Lamb? And when she said yes, the servant brought out clothes for her and undid all the nakedness of that early day.

Yes, I believe in the inspiration of Scripture. If I may give a simple public testimony, the thing that has kept me through my university days against the blasts of modernism has not been

theories of inspiration, good as they may be. The thing that has kept me in my faith that God's word is inspired is that, when you treat it seriously as literature, it is delightful, and marvellously and superbly organized, carrying a message that in its exactitude and wonder is self-evidently of God.

Shall we pray.

Lord, we thank thee for thy holy word; for thy divine and masterly skill in presenting thy message, and for opening our eyes to see, here and there at least, the watermark of divine inspiration. Behind all the brilliance and the attractiveness of thy holy word, we thank thee that these things are real. 'These are the true sayings of God.'

For thus buttressing our faith, we do praise thee, and ask that thou wilt make us ever more diligent students, who, professing to believe that thy word is inspired, show by our works and actual study of thy word that we do believe what we say we believe. Part us now with thy blessing, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING** was Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.