

# **Three Creation Stories and Three Patriarchs**

*An Analysis of the Six Parts of the Book of Genesis*

*David Gooding*

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



**MYRTLEFIELD  
HOUSE**

[www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)

# Contents

1	<a href="#">The First Creation Story</a>	3
2	<a href="#">The Second Creation Story, Part One</a>	16
3	<a href="#">The Second Creation Story, Part Two</a>	27
4	<a href="#">The Third Creation Story</a>	34
5	<a href="#">The Rise of the Hebrew Nation From Among the Gentiles, Part One</a>	40
6	<a href="#">The Rise of the Hebrew Nation From Among the Gentiles, Part Two</a>	54
7	<a href="#">The Maintenance of the Hebrews' Vision and Their Development into Israelites</a>	66
8	<a href="#">The Development of Israel's Sons into a Nation</a>	78
	<a href="#">Appendix: Handouts</a>	87
	<a href="#">About the Author</a>	98

David Gooding has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

Copyright © The Myrtlefield Trust, 2019

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. You may not copy or download more than 500 consecutive verses of the ESV Bible or more than one half of any book of the ESV Bible. Quotations marked KJV are from The Authorized (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press. Scripture quotations marked RV are from the English Revised Version of the Holy Bible (1885). Other quotations are Dr Gooding's own translations or paraphrases

This text has been edited from a transcript of seven talks given by David Gooding in Charlottetown, Canada in April 2001.

All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce this document in its entirety, or in unaltered excerpts, for personal and church use only as long as you do not charge a fee. You must not reproduce it on any Internet site. Permission must be obtained if you wish to reproduce it in any other context, translate it, or publish it in any format.

Published by The Myrtlefield Trust

PO Box 2216

Belfast, N Ireland

BT1 9YR

w: [www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)

e: [info@myrtlefieldhouse.com](mailto:info@myrtlefieldhouse.com)

Myrtlefield catalogue no: gen.003/jf

## The First Creation Story

As we come to study God's word let us listen to what our Lord Jesus said.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. (Matt 7:7-8)

It is a law both of nature and of God's spiritual realm that what a person sows that will the person also reap. And we are told reliably that God does not mock us, nor is he mocked. He who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap eternal life (see Gal 6:7-8).

So let us turn to our topic, which is the book of Genesis. It is a large book indeed, and these few sessions might appear pitifully small, but there happens to be (at least in my reckoning) six major parts to the book of Genesis, and we will cover each of them in our time together.

### **The book of Genesis in six parts**

In the period covered from the creation of the world to the flood there are three creation stories, as your notes will record for you.<sup>1</sup> Most expositors will tell you that there are two creation stories, but if you will permit me my eccentricity, I think there are three, and they cover the period from creation to the flood. They do not contradict each other, but just as there are four Gospels in our New Testament that sketch for us the life of our blessed Lord from four different points of view, so the Holy Spirit has counted it wise to give us not just one count of creation, but three. They will look at creation from different points of view, and the second and the third stories point to implications that lie embedded in the creation tactics of God that had implications for the history that followed; and the Holy Spirit follows those implications and how they developed on each occasion.

The second half of the book is much longer than the first half, and it is likewise in three main parts. There is the story of the patriarch Abraham and the promised seed, which at that time in history was Isaac. Then in the second place there is the story of Isaac, himself now having become patriarch, and the story of the promised seed, which by this time is Jacob. Thirdly and finally there is the story of Jacob, now become patriarch, and his seed, which is no longer one but twelve sons; and the story is told of how they are at last welded in a firm family and tribal structure, and are in process of becoming a nation.

There are six major parts to the book of Genesis therefore, and we will to try to cover some of the salient points of each of those six parts.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the Appendix.

## **In the beginning**

If you care to take your text in hand, you will see that the first creation story begins in Genesis 1:1 and proceeds to 2:3. Let's read the opening words of this account.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (1:1–5)

And so the first account proceeds with a story of God's creative acts on six successive days, until it comes to the end in chapter 2.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation (vv. 1–3).

So this is the first account of creation, and as you see it is a coherent whole because it consists of this unbroken succession of creative acts of God on successive days. The second account of creation goes back to the beginnings once more: 'These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens' (2:4). From that point onward we read a second account of creation, but our task now is to consider the first account of creation and to mark at least some of the main features of the story.

### **Creation in stages**

If you believed that God is almighty and omnipotent and can do what he likes at a word, your first surprise when reading Genesis for the first time would be to find that when God created our universe he did not create it all at once. He could have done so, by definition. In actual fact, he didn't; he created it in stages. That is a very interesting phenomenon in the first creation story. Moreover, in the work of creation it soon becomes apparent that each succeeding stage adds complication and development in the course of the creative acts of God. And when you have a series that is increasing in complexity, you come at last to the climax of that series. And then, following Aristotelian logic, you come to what is the main purpose of the series. This particular series comes to completion on the sixth day with the creation of humankind, and thereby makes an exceedingly profound statement about the dignity of humankind being made as the pinnacle of the creation of God. That is a point to which we shall come back more than once in our studies.

## Creation by the word of God

The second thing that will strike us by the sheer force of repetition is that in this account of creation, we are constantly being informed that creation was by the word of God: 'And God said . . . And God said . . .'. The formula is repeated many times, but it is not merely a literary formula. It is telling us what lies primarily in the creation of the universe. The New Testament agrees with that and repeats it explicitly. Hebrews 11 says, 'By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God' (v. 3). And the opening verses of the Gospel of John, with their profound theology and philosophy, read as follows:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. (1:1-3)

These are powerful statements in God's word, both Old and New Testaments, to impress upon us what was primary in the creation of the universe: it was the word of God.

That in itself is exceedingly interesting. Doubtless it emphasizes that the world came into existence at the command of God. As the psalm puts it, 'For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm' (33:9). He spoke and it was done. All it required was the commanding fiat of the omnipotent God. But when we ponder this in the light of the New Testament, our attention is drawn to another feature about this creation by the word of God. The Gospel of John tells us that the Word of God was a person, so when the word of God was spoken, it was an expression of the mind of God.

There is a mind behind the universe. Many a Greek philosopher saw that, and some of our modern scientists are coming round to the older Greek view that there must be an intelligence behind the universe. But whereas the Greeks regarded that intelligence as impersonal, the New Testament reminds us that the Word of God was and is a person; and when the Word that brought the universe into being spoke, it imprinted on the universe some of the very character of the God who made it.

### *Information and the created world*

I am no scientist, but then a number of scientists write books that they hope moderately intelligent people will read, and I suppose in their generosity they account me to be among the moderately intelligent. And when scientists write books for humble laymen we do our best to understand them, even if sometimes we have a few questions to ask them to make things a little clearer. As you will know, one of the modern trends in scientific investigation (started, I do believe, by the engineers) is the development of information theory. This has arisen because now it becomes impressed upon us even from a scientific point of view that what we have, particularly in biology, is not just a bunch of chemicals that somehow got together and happened to make things; we have chemicals that are self-evidently carrying *information*. So we see that information has been implanted on the matter of our universe.

Let me remind you of that much shown picture of a model of the DNA double helix where chemicals are sorted in something like the sides of a ladder with rungs between them and then twisted around. The chemicals are so arranged, carefully in order, that they convey

information. That has been one of the marvels of modern scientific discovery, and it has revolutionized a lot of thinking.

Take the cell, of which DNA is a part. We are told that even if the DNA does not itself control the being that is produced thereby (as nowadays the more up to date scientists think), it does order the development of the materials within the cell to make what is required. And a marvellously ingenious operation it is. Think of the zygote—the seed from the mother and the sperm from the father. Both are miniscule, but being joined together they contain not merely chemical elements but the information necessary to form the foetus in the womb and to order the process of its development. (It is no use having a pair of eyes if you haven't got a skull to put them in.) They control the timing of the development and the timing of the birth. They will continue to control the growth of the child into maturity and all those wonderful things that happen to human beings in the course of life. The wonderful thing is that the original chemicals that came from father and mother disappear, but the information carries on, copied by the RNA. And not only in the course of the lifetime of the baby, but when the baby is born and grows up and becomes an adult and marries, the information goes on through them to succeeding generations. By this we perceive that though the chemicals are important, the information that is carried by the chemicals is much more important.

This is so interesting that Professor Paul Davies, a mathematical physicist of some renown, and not a believer in God as far as I understand from his most recent statements, nevertheless calls his recent book *The Fifth Miracle*, which title he borrows from day five in Genesis 1. Though not a believer in God, he hazards a guess that we may have been mistaken all these centuries to think that matter is the basic stuff in the universe. In his opinion the more likely scenario is that the basic stuff in the universe is not matter but information. So that is a suggestion from one modern scientist at least, but the word of God has been saying it for centuries. 'In the beginning was . . .' not matter, as the Greek philosophers would have suggested (and many people think still); 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' Creation was by the word, that is, the *command* of God. It was creation by the expression of God's mind and purpose that implanted the necessary information on matter in order that his purpose would be fulfilled.

Now there are very few here present who are old enough to remember what I shall now describe, but in the early days when washing machines were invented they were very simple affairs. They were big plastic or metal tubs, and inside them they had things that went round and round. Then at the top, generally on the right-hand side, was a slit, and you were presented with a piece of plastic a few inches square. This controlled the many different processes that the machine could do, because this piece of plastic had notches on it. When you wanted the process for the linens, you got the piece of plastic and put it in the right way round and behold the plastic controlled the old mechanism inside and made it do the right process for linens. Whereas if you wanted the process for colours or woollens, you took the plastic out and turned it round and upside-down and then put the other side in, and lo and behold, a different set of notches controlled the old mechanism for woollens and coloureds, if you please. Of course you don't remember it, but I do.

You might have shown me that bit of plastic and said, 'Gooding, what do you think that is?'

I would have said, 'It's a bit of plastic.'

'Yes, but anything else?'

'No, nothing I can see here except plastic.'

I should have been right shouldn't I? Put the thing under a microscope, and all you would have seen is plastic and nothing else. Yet it wasn't just plastic, was it? Why not? Because those notches on the side of the plastic were what engineers would call *information*. Those notches on the plastic were things that would carry the information that the engineer wanted to deliver to the engine to tell it how to go.

It's all right for the dear scientist to look down his microscope at cells, and all he sees is chemistry (and a little bit of electricity maybe) but it's not just chemistry, is it? These things are carrying information. That then is the striking feature repeated many times throughout Genesis 1. Here is creation by *the word*.

### *Information is non-material*

I want to stay with the notion of information for just a little while. If you are tired at the end of a week and you are just not interested in this, you could go to sleep now for the next three or four minutes quite unafraid, because when you wake up I shall still be talking. But I want to make the point now that information is non-material.

You say, 'What do you mean by that?'

Well, perhaps a woman's son has just graduated in his distant university, and she knows he's done well because he sent her a bit of a telegram to say he's done well. Now he's a modest fellow and he doesn't tell her all the good things his professor said about him, but a friend of his thinks she ought to know. So this friend has this idea in her head. Nobody else can see it of course. She can see this idea, and she now has got to somehow convey it to her friend's mother's head.

So how shall it be done? She could convey this information by all sorts of means. She could, in the old-fashioned way (long may it be preserved), sit down and write a letter with ink and pen upon a page. Or she could get on the old email and press a few keys. Or she could have it sent in Morse code, or by semaphore with flags. There are all sorts of ways she could use to convey the information.

Let's take the simple way. She decides to write a letter. And now she has a choice. There are a thousand or more languages in the world. It wouldn't matter which one she used, but she'll use the one she's sure the mother knows. So to do this she uses a lot of chemicals—ink in a pen, and writes marks on a page. But they are not just any old marks; they have to be letters. But then they do not just have to be letters: they have to be letters very carefully ordered according to what language it is, according to the rules of grammar and syntax (which now in our modern world are often forgotten, but they are still there). And mother eventually gets this letter with the information it is carrying, and the information goes into her brain. What goes into her brain? Is it the ink and the letters?

You say, 'No, they remain on the page.'

Oh yes, so they do. Well the paper doesn't go into her brain, does it? What does go into the woman's brain?

You will say, 'A whole lot of photons come down upon the ink and they bounce off the ink, and they go into the lady's eyeballs and down the retina and are translated into electrical impulses and that gets to the brain.'

That's a lot of stuff! Where is the information now? What happens next?

Suppose the signals had come down to you, an English speaker, in Russian. You wouldn't be able to understand them would you? You couldn't interpret them. So you have to interpret the information off the signals. What is information? It is non-material. That is an exceedingly important thing to remember, for when we read 'In the beginning God created', or 'and God said', it is the fact that, not only in issuing command, but in printing information on matter, God himself is spirit; he is non-material. And information is non-material even in our world.

Let's go back to the idea of the DNA coil. People commonly agree that it shows every characteristic of being a code. Being a code or a language has very interesting implications. The chemicals are carrying information, but the chemicals are very highly arranged and organized so that they shall carry the correct information. In technical language, they bear the features of *language* as distinct from *noise*. And when you hear a language of any sort, or see it written, you have to ponder the source from which it came.

Now here is an interesting thing to observe. You will have heard of the so-called SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) program, much advocated by the late Carl Sagan. At the expense of multimillions of the USA's money they have these great dishes pointing to outer space, and in particular to those areas of outer space where some scientists think intelligent life might have evolved. So they listen in to the signals that might be coming from these distant parts of the universe. They have to disregard what is just noise, for noise is marked by being random. They are looking for signs that, when analysed, would bear the characteristics of language. You might not know the language, but in any sophisticated analysis of sound, ordered language will show by its pattern that it is a language. And they still are hoping (and still paying the millions) that one day they would get in their receivers a first sound that upon analysis will prove to have the features of language. And what will that prove to them? Well the title of their project tells you they are in search of extraterrestrial intelligence, and when they get something that appears to be language they will conclude forthwith and at once that because it is language, it must come from an intelligent being. It is a highly rational supposition, because in all our experience language only comes from intelligent beings.

But if nature's chemicals in the cell show evidence of being a code that is carrying information, questions arise about the source of the information. If Carl Sagan were looking for extraterrestrial intelligence and he got sounds that were obviously languages, he would decide at once it comes from intelligent beings. And when we see nature carrying information as the cell does, is it not the rational and obvious conclusion that the information comes from an intelligent source?

'Yes,' says Genesis 1:1-'In the beginning, God created . . . and God said . . .'

'Yes,' says John 1:1-'In the beginning was the Word . . .'

'Yes,' says Hebrews 11:3-' . . . the universe was created by the word of God'.



*When God said it*

When you look at the following list you will notice that in the first six days the formula that begins each stage of creation is 'And God said'. That tells us that each stage in the creation did not develop automatically out of the previous stage but required a fresh input of information.

**The Days of Genesis (1:1–2:3)**

1:1–2	In the beginning		
1:3–5	AND GOD SAID	one day	Day 1
1:6–8	AND GOD SAID	a second day	Day 2
1:9–10	AND GOD SAID—animate		Day 3
1:11–13	AND GOD SAID—animate	a third day	
1:14–19	AND GOD SAID	a fourth day	Day 4
1:20–23	AND GOD SAID	a fifth day	Day 5
1:24–25	AND GOD SAID—animals		Day 6
1:26–31	AND GOD SAID—man	the sixth day	
2:1–3	And the heaven and the earth were finished . . . and on the seventh day God finished his work . . . and he rested from all his work which he had made.		Day 7

If it concerns the cell, for instance, it is true that the DNA in a cell changes (and cells themselves therefore change). All kinds of modifications give variety to human life, for example. But there is a level of change that has never been observed. Take fruit flies for instance. They are much loved of some scientists, because of course the dear fruit flies have a remarkably prolific rate of generation. You can have thousands of generations in a very short time.

During experiments, fruit flies have been bombarded with radiation of various kinds, and as a result their cells have suffered permutations of various sorts. Fruit flies that normally have two wings and two little appendages down by the stomach have been developed that instead have four wings, and all sorts of other curious anomalies. What has never happened in all these multi-thousands of generations of fruit flies, is for any fruit fly that has been born to not be a fruit fly (if you get my meaning). What I mean is that never has a fruit fly been known to turn into anything *other than* a fruit fly. To make a change of that kind, says Scripture, you would need an input of divine information. You don't get solid information that is necessary for any *kind*, in the world of life, without the input of special information. You don't arrive at information by accident. If you were to read some of the manuscripts I have written, you would come across accidental misspellings, which increase in number as my years increase. The misspellings never help the information forward. How could they possibly?

Notice secondly that whereas on those six days every day begins with 'And God said', yet on two of the days the formula is repeated. On day three the phrase 'And God said' occurs twice. Again on day six the formula occurs twice, and each time in a very significant place. For day three first has the dry land appearing by the creative command of God, but then in the second part of the day, for the first time, you meet animate vegetable life, as distinct from just matter. From inorganic matter you now reach organic matter, not just by simple microevolution. The bridge between the inorganic and the organic required another input of divine power and information.

Similarly in day six, the first part of the day is the creation of the terrestrial animals of various kinds. The second part of the day is the creation of man and woman. Do notice that between the creation of animals and the creation of man and woman there occurs another 'And God said'. Humankind did not evolve out of animals, not even by microevolution, and certainly not by macroevolution; it required another input of divine command and information.

### **The identity of the mind behind the universe**

We read in John 1:1, 'In the beginning was the Word'. If we listen to Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, we are told three things about Christ. We are told that 'all things were made' (literally, '*the* all things were made'), that is, the universe was made. Then three prepositions are used: 'in him', 'through him' and 'for him' (see 1:16–17). They are not repetitious.

#### *In him*

Where did this universe begin? It did not begin with the creation of matter. It began (if you will excuse the humble term) as an *idea* in the mind of Christ. Your wonderful new hospital began, not when they dug the footings to lay the foundations; it began in the minds of city councillors or doctors. It began as an idea that then had to be translated by the architects into plans. It then had to be translated again into actual matter. All creation began in Christ. He is 'the beginning' (v. 18). It is one of his titles in holy Scripture: 'These things says . . . *the beginning* of the creation of God' (Rev 3:14 KJV).

I think of this sometimes in my quiet moments, but I don't tell everybody, so don't you tell them! If you were to come across me one day and say, 'That's a peculiar kind of chap. Whose idea was he?' I have a ready answer to all your criticisms. I am Christ's idea. He thought me up. He thought you up as well; and most people would agree he made a good job of you, but that's another point. The beginning of the universe was in the mind of Christ.

#### *Through him and for him*

He was also the agent through which the idea was put into operation. All things were made 'through him'. And he is the goal. All things were made 'for him'.

That reminds me to point out the significance of the very first words of Genesis 1: 'In the beginning'. Those words tell us plainly that the universe had a beginning. That fact is of the utmost importance, because if the universe has always been and always will exist eternally, with no beginning and no end, you might regard it as one of those things that was just there. You wouldn't have to account for it, for it never had a beginning. You wouldn't have to ask

who started it, because nobody did, or when it would end, because it won't end. It would be just a brute fact that is there. But when something has a beginning you might ask, 'Well how did it begin? Where did it begin? Whose idea was it?' And when it starts to develop, that will immediately raise the idea that it must have had a purpose.

This notion has long since irritated atheistic evolutionists who resent the idea that the universe had a beginning. Some of them will admit it sounds too much like God. In my youth (in the dim and distant past but beyond the Palaeolithic Age) in the 1950s it was the current idea that the scientists were about to prove what they called the *Steady State theory* which said that the universe always existed and always will, and it is supplied by a small but permanently occurring access to energy and matter to keep it going eternally. They promised they were about to come up with the evidence, but the evidence never has come up. In fact the majority view now, even among scientists, is that the universe must have had a beginning. That raises the question: 'What is the purpose behind it?'

The thing at issue (and let us Christians take notice) is whether there is a purpose behind the universe or none at all. The more vigorous and extreme atheistic scientists (and not all scientists are like that by any means), like Professor Richard Dawkins of Oxford, will tell you that the universe has no purpose behind it, and therefore you as a human being have no purpose behind you either. You serve as a mechanism to perpetuate human genes, though what that is for they can't tell you because they hold that ultimately there is no purpose anyway. So what we are considering when we consider God's word about creation is not just merely abstract science. We are debating the very purpose of our human existence, whether it has meaning or not.

### **The pinnacle of creation**

Now with that let me come to the next feature, which I have already mentioned. The pinnacle of the succession of creative actions on God's part was man, the human being (male and female) made in the image of God. Naturally we enquire what the phrase 'the image of God' means. Doubtless it implies moral and spiritual likeness to God, but let us notice the immediate context of its use in Genesis 1: 'let them have dominion over . . . the earth' (v. 26). It was not to be king, but to be the administrator, to have dominion in that sense. It means to be in charge, to be God's viceroy of the world.

Sometimes I am asked by atheists, in Russia and elsewhere, why I believe the Bible to be true. And I freely confess my bias and prejudice and my inbuilt preferences. The Bible tells me that man was created by God at the pinnacle of God's creation to be his viceroy on earth, and to have dominion. What a magnificent concept that is. The lie was soon spread to Adam and Eve that God wanted to keep them down. It is a lie that has persisted to the present; it is the opposite of the truth. In making man and woman, God's concept was to place both of them in possession and dominion. The psalmist expresses that, doesn't he? We read the wonderful words of Psalm 8 that say, 'When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers . . . what is man that you are mindful of him?' (vv. 3-4). I suspect all of us have experienced that. Like the psalmist we have looked at the stars and the galaxies, and the more we know about them, the more and more huge they turn out to be. What are those billions of galaxies doing on the remote edge of the universe? 'What is man that you are mindful of him, and . . . that you care

for him?’ And at that point in the lyric you would have expected the psalmist to go off muttering something like, ‘We are but mere worms, little fleas that jump hither and thither in the dust!’ He does no such thing. He says,

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet. (vv. 5–6)

This is God’s concept of man: God’s viceroy.

You will tell me that man has failed in his responsibilities. We will consider more of that on another occasion, but the New Testament, looking at that failure straight in the face, has not abandoned hope. ‘We do not yet see everything in subjection to him,’ says the writer of Hebrews. ‘But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus [truly God but become truly human], crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death’ (2:8–9). And one day God shall put the universe under the feet of *the man* Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God as well of course, but the universe shall be put under the feet of the *man* Jesus. And when Christians contemplate it they have been known now and again to mutter ‘Hallelujah’ under their breath!

Listen to the atheist, and he will tell you that that’s a lot of nonsense. He will say there was no purpose and no plan; we are the accidental products of the mindless forces of the universe who happen to have evolved intelligence. Alas for that, because these mindless forces will one day destroy us and our intelligence. We’ll have the intelligence to be able to see what these forces are going to do, but in the end we shall not have the power to stop them doing it. And when they have destroyed us (and our famous intelligence included), the irony is they won’t even know they’ve done it.

Isn’t that a marvellous waste of intelligence, to consider the universe in that way and come up with the decision that our intelligence has proved in the end that the intelligence is insignificant, because it will be destroyed by mindless forces? That idea is wrong, but even if it were not, I would still hope it would be!

### **The organization of creation**

I come finally to another feature of the first chapter of the book of Genesis. It deals not merely with creation but with organization, which is important to notice because sometimes, indeed frequently, it is overlooked.

You will notice from time to time in chapter 1 the historian remarks that God ‘called’ a thing something. For instance, on day one he said, “‘Let there be light”, and there was light. . . . God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night’ (vv. 3–5). And then in verse 8 he made a firmament, and he called the firmament ‘Heaven’, if you please. And then in verse 10 he called the dry land ‘Earth’; and he called the gathering of the waters ‘Seas’. And we want to know of course, why God started calling things by these names.

---

1.	1:5	Evening and morning = one day	day = 24 hours
		He called the light Day	day = 12 hours of daylight
		He called the darkness Night	night = 12 hours of darkness

---

- 
2. 1:8 He called the firmament Heaven
  3. 1:10 He called the dry land Earth  
He called the gathering of the waters Seas  
Yet in v. 1 earth = our whole planet
- 

### He called the light Day

At first sight there seems to be a little confusion about this term 'day'. But with the excellent way you speak English here, you no longer find it confusing I'm sure.

I come back to verse 5. In one sense there was evening and morning, one day. *Day* is used for twenty-four hours. Then God called the light 'Day' and the darkness 'Night'. Now 'day' has a somewhat different meaning. It means the roughly twelve hours of daylight we experience. And the twelve hours of darkness he calls 'Night'. So the word 'day' is being used in two senses, isn't it? Sometimes it is used for the whole twenty-four hours and then simply for the twelve hours of light.

That is nothing odd; you say the same thing. Somebody might ask you, 'I hear your Aunt Matilda is coming?'

You say, 'Yes.'

'When is she coming?'

You say, 'Next *Thursday*.'

'Oh. Is she coming by day or by night?'

'She's flying in on Thursday night.'

Well it's easy isn't it? Infants can work that out. But it is interesting to ask why God used this name business. He called the light 'Day' and the darkness he called 'Night'. We are now thinking about the lighting system of our world. It is very interesting to ponder why God has done it as he has. Don't say that's the only way he could have done it. God could have made us phosphorescent like fish down in the deep sea, with little lights in our heads and things. Why has he done it the way he has? It is important to ask the question, 'How are things done?' It is even more important to ask the question *why* they are done.

I was walking one evening down a road with a psychologist on the left and a mathematician on the right (so I was in safe company). And the learned gentlemen had been discussing among themselves the difference between 'how' and 'why'. And the psychologist had decided, I think, that the mathematician hadn't quite understood, so he asked the mathematician a question. Pointing to the yellow lights that lit up the road, he said to the mathematician, 'Why are those lights yellow?'

And the mathematician began, and some minutes later he finished, with a tremendous explanation of all kinds of chemical and electrical terms and had us both bamboozled. Doubtless he was correct about what he'd said, but when he finished, the psychologist said, 'That's not *why* they're yellow at all. That's *how* they're yellow. The reason why they're yellow is because the city authorities decided that yellow lights were the best to use to light up the road.'

I can tell you how our earth's lighting system works. There is a light source. We call it the sun, and while it never actually switches off, the lighting system of our planet is so arranged (because of our dear old planet twizzling around) that we get rationed for light. For roughly

twelve hours we are twizzled into the light and enjoy it. The next twelve hours, whether we are ready for it or not, we are twizzled out of the light. Such is human life; we have to go and put ourselves on a shelf in a dark room to get over the day. And we do it every day.

Why has God done it that way? While our Lord Jesus was here on earth he had occasion to use the physical lighting system of our world as a parable for spiritual things. He announced he was going to Judaea to raise Lazarus from the dead. And the disciples restrained him. They said, 'Surely you're not going to Judaea again? But master just recently the Jews were seeking to stone you' (see John 11:7-8). He said, 'Are there not twelve hours in the day?' (Well, there are roughly in the Middle East.) 'If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.' (That is, the sun up in the sky.) 'But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles,' and then he added, 'because *the* light is not in him' (vv. 9-10). That is saying the obvious, but it is a profound observation.

The light, ladies and gentlemen, is not in us. Our number one necessity on this planet is for light, for both seeing how to do things, and for heat to maintain life. That is the basic necessity, even at the physical level. And God has so arranged it that the light upon which we are helplessly dependent is not *in* us. It is not in our planet. We are dependent for that light on a light source that is roughly ninety million miles outside our planet. We might be, as Genesis 1 puts it, in 'dominion' over the planet, but we are dependent on things outside our planet for life's very basic necessity. It is a lesson that people forget, isn't it?

### **He called the firmament Heaven**

God did another curious thing. He made a firmament between the waters beneath and the waters above. In other words, he gave us an atmosphere and space. You need it to breathe of course. But I wonder if you have ever seen yourself as you must look to any Martian explorer using a big telescope? Looking at us from his vantage point there is the round disc of the world, and there you are, and you are sticking out the side. And there's your Aunt Matilda on the other side of the world, and she is sticking out the other side. Isn't it funny? It's like cloves stuck in a heated apple. And those people at the North Pole are standing upright and the Australians, dear souls, are standing upside-down. Well they don't think of it that way around, but then they wouldn't. What a funny spectacle you would look like if you were looked at from outer space—sticking out, and only the skin of your feet on earth. Well, you might smile at that, but I am relating to you the facts. If the skin of your feet is on earth, where is the rest of you?

You say, 'Well, in the atmosphere.'

'You mean in that firmament thing?'

'Well, yes. If you like to use that old-fashioned word, in the *firmament*.'

You couldn't survive without that could you? You need it for breathing. You are only just on earth, you know.

Why did God call that atmosphere 'Heaven'? Didn't he know all the other connotations that the word 'heaven' would gather to itself in the course of history? It would sound odd if I told you that this morning as you walk out there along the pretty streets of Charlottetown, that most of you is in 'Heaven', but I would be literally explaining to you what Genesis says.

You say, 'But there is a difference between heaven where the birds fly and the real heaven.'

Well, yes, there is. Why did God use the same term? Well, ladies and gentlemen, we are made to live on the earth, but we are only just on it. For our very existence as human beings we need that atmosphere that God went and called 'Heaven'. What a parable it is.

### **He called the land Earth and the waters Seas**

Finally there is the matter of the dry land and the seas. God separated the waters from the dry land. And 'dry land' was a good name and 'the seas' a good name, but he called the dry land 'Earth' and the gathering together of the waters he called 'Seas'. But how odd, because Earth can be used to describe the whole planet, and yet it can be used in this other sense in which it isn't the whole planet; it's just the dry land. And the far bigger surface of the planet is occupied by oceans. Why did he call the whole thing 'Earth' and then also call only the dry land bit 'Earth'?

That also points to a remarkable fact. The ancients were largely afraid of the oceans and the seas. When the sea got rough they couldn't understand what kept the sea from running back over the earth. When the psalmist wrote upon the matter he talked about God who gave the sea its decree that it should not pass its boundary (Ps 104:6–9). When the Mediterranean got rough the ancients were afraid it might invade the land and turn Earth into chaos once more. But we don't fear the seas like that anymore, do we? But if the icecaps melted, or if the axis of the earth moved a tiny little bit, then many of the capital cities of the world would be engulfed. The sea is there to remind us human beings that though we are made in the image of God to have dominion, as Genesis tells us, we are not the ultimate controller. For the very survival of what we call the dry land, we are dependent on forces outside of ourselves and outside of our planet. They rest in the control of our Creator.

That is a marvellous lesson. It chimes in with what the rest of Genesis is going to tell us. Where did things go wrong? Well, they went wrong in the garden of Eden. And what sin did Adam and Eve do? They didn't start taking drugs before breakfast or anything like that. Nor did Eve poison Adam. Man fell when man was tricked into trying to reach independence of God. And Genesis says man is to be saved from the predicament that put man in. Yes, but the particular example of salvation that Genesis will discuss at length is that part of our salvation that is called by the theologians 'justification by faith'. In that phrase the term *faith* means man being brought back to a position of complete and utter dependence upon God.

So much then for a few meditations on some of the salient points in the first creation story. In our second session, when you have had time in the interval to recover from this one, we must proceed to some of the main points of the second creation story.

## The Second Creation Story

### *Part One*

After those very hasty remarks on the first creation story, we must come all too soon to the second in the early chapters of the book of Genesis. According to the majority view of the commentators, chapter 2, verse 4 begins the second creation story, which, according to them, extends to the rest of chapter 2 and the whole of chapter 3. Thereafter they feel that chapter 4 goes on sometime later to tell us about events not necessarily connected with creation. And they may well be right. I, on the other hand, hold the eccentric position that the creation story beginning at 2:4 continues not only through the rest of chapter 2 and 3, but carries on to the end of chapter 4, for I hold that chapter 4 continues one of the basic themes, perhaps the central theme of the second creation story. And to consider what that means let us look both at our Bibles and at our notes.

### **The theme of the ground in the second creation story**

In the course of chapters 2–4 the word ‘ground’ recurs many times. I have listed a few of the instances for you in the notes.<sup>2</sup> That the word occurs many times is not the only fact that makes it significant. At each of the central and most significant points in each of those three chapters, ‘the ground’ occurs.

So it is in chapter 2 that we are told that man is made out of the ground (see 2:5–7; 3:19). Again in chapter 2 we are told of man’s prime function, the reason why he was made. He was made to ‘work the ground’ from whence he was taken (2:5, 15; 3:23). I don’t know, but I suppose he was meant to work both that bit of the ground that lay around him and the bit of ground that he now walked on two legs. Then we come to the solemnities of chapter 3 when man sinned against God and ate of the forbidden fruit, and at the centre of the curse that was pronounced are these words:

cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. (3:17–19)

And the idea is repeated in verse 23: ‘. . . to work the ground from which he was taken.’

---

<sup>2</sup> See the Appendix—An Overview of the Major Sections, II. The Second Creation Story.



But notice how that theme recurs at the central point of the episode in chapter 4 when Cain finally defied God and, in spite of God's pleading, he refused to come to God in God's appointed way, and he murdered Abel. Then God pronounced another curse in relation to the ground, but upon inspection you will see that the two curses are not the same. Both involve the ground, but otherwise they are different. We have just read what the curse was for Adam. In the second creation story when he was made, his prime purpose was to till the ground. When he disobeyed God, he was not turned out of his employment, so to speak. He did not lose the purpose for which God had made him, but the conditions of his work were changed. Instead of being a gentleman's occupation, the work became, in large measure, hard labour. It was a kindly discipline of God for man in a fallen state. So Adam was told, 'When you till the ground, the ground is cursed and shall bring forth thorns and thistles. It will lead to the sweat of your brow.' But notice how different is the curse pronounced in Cain's case. Now it is, 'you are cursed from the ground . . . When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength' (vv. 11–12).

Cain immediately saw the solemn implication of that. I repeat, man was made to till the ground. Though occupations had differentiated by Cain's time, so Abel was a keeper of flocks, Cain was still a tiller of the ground. He was carrying on the purpose for which his father had been made. But when Cain defied God, God took away his job and said, 'You might as well get out, Cain. You were made to till the ground, but when you till it now it will not yield its strength to you.' And Cain said in his dismay, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground' (vv. 13–14). The New Testament speaks of 'the way of Cain' (Jude 11); he went out from the presence of the Lord; he had lost the very reason for which man was made.

As you see, that will contain a very serious message when we come to it. My point at the moment is simply to make it evident that the very centre of the most prominent part in each of the three chapters of the second creation story revolves around this idea of 'the ground'. On those terms I suggest that chapters 2, 3 and 4 group together as the second creation story.

### **A description of what life means**

What is the major point of the second creation story? We have seen some of the major points of the first. What different aspect now confronts us in the second?

This is going to be the story of man's fall eventually. Adam was told when he was made,

You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. (2:16–17)

In chapter 3 he ate of the fruit and began the long process of dying at every level. What do I mean by dying at every level? If we want to understand what *dying* means, we first perhaps ought to consider what *life* means. What is life? What is human life? What goes into making life with a capital 'L' (as the preachers say)? What are the ingredients of life?

What do you mean by life? Do you enjoy it? Marvellous. What do you mean? That you enjoy breathing? Well, people do breathe if they are alive, and if they persistently don't, after some time they die of course. But is breathing the same as life? Is that all there is to life?

I suggest to you that in Genesis 2, the first of the chapters of the second creation story, we have, not a *definition* of life but a varied and colourful *description* of this many splendoured thing that is life. And I invite you just to sit back and enjoy yourself a moment and contemplate that delightful thing with which our wonderful Creator has enriched us.

### **A material body: a non-material soul (2:7)**

What is life? We are told of man's make up, of what life means. Man has a material body: and then God 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living [soul]' (2:7). We notice two things then.

*A material body is an integral part of what it means to be human*

It is worth emphasizing this point because there have been, and there still are, sundry religions and philosophies in this world that have despised the human body. Greek philosophy, for instance, of the kind that Socrates and Plato embraced, despised the body. They invented the term *soma sema*, which means the body is a sepulchre. They held the view, inherited from Hinduism perhaps without knowing it, that material is bad; the soul is the important thing. The wise man therefore will so live as to keep as far away from his body as he possibly can, so that the soul shall not be defiled by the body.

That is still a prominent view in many theories of Hinduism, among other beliefs. In the early church some people were led astray by that idea as well, and Paul has to warn Timothy against those that forbid to eat certain foods and forbid marriage (1 Tim 4:3), as though marriage was somehow undignified and unclean and not one hundred percent good. And Paul described such doctrines in very strong colours. He said they are 'doctrines of demons' (see v. 1). It is God who has made our bodies, and God, if I may say so, is proud of what he has made.

God made the human body and, wonder of wonders to relate again, there came a time when God of very God took human form and became a human, with a human body. The artists, and particularly the poets and sculptors have waxed eloquent about the glories of the human form—not my form in particular, but the human form in the abstract, so to speak. Nobody has made a statue of me, I hope!

But I'll tell you our Christian hope. When the glorious morning of the resurrection comes we shall not be disembodied and say, 'Thank God, my old body has gone forever.' We shall have resurrected bodies, and the extraordinary thing to observe is that our salvation as human beings (I say it with baited breath) has changed the Godhead, for there were ages uncountable when the second person of the Trinity, as we describe him, did not have a body. Yet for our salvation's sake he took on a body. I nearly said, 'Who can believe it?' But we do. The second person of the Trinity, verily God yet became truly human, took a body like our bodies. He was made in all things like we are, apart from sin. And in his glorious resurrection he has retained a body, for when we speak of resurrection it is precisely of the resurrection of the body that we speak. His is a glorified human body; it is different in some of its qualities from ours, for the first Adam was 'of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven' (1 Cor 15:47 KJV). The first human body was a soulish body; a glorified human body is a spiritual

body (see v. 44). But 'as we have borne the image of the earthy', thank God, 'we shall also bear the image of the heavenly' (see v. 49).

Be careful who you bump into in heaven, won't you? It might be me! Though perhaps you will not recognize me at first, because I shall look so glorious. And so will you, incidentally. As C. S. Lewis would say, if you are sitting next to a believer you are sitting next to someone superior to angels.<sup>3</sup> And if you could see that dear sister who is sitting by your side as she will be in glory, you would be sorely tempted to bow at her feet and worship her, like John was when he saw an angel. The angel had to pick him up by the hair of his head and say, 'No, no, John, you don't worship angels' (see Rev 22:9).

Do you believe it? Oh, the wonder of the creation of the human body, and the wonder of the incarnation of our Lord. The fact is that he offered that body without spot to God on our behalf, and another glorious fact is we shall have a resurrection body like his. Let none of us despise the human body, even though from time to time we groan within it.

*A human being is not only body but also soul*

There lay Adam's body on the ground, complete in one sense but incomplete in another, for it was as dead as a proverbial doornail until God 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul' (Gen 2:7 RV). Nowadays there are those, and some evangelicals included, who tell us that man is monistic, in other words that man doesn't *have* a soul but he *is* a soul, and that therefore when the human body dies, nothing remains. And therefore *the person* is for a while not there but dead, so to speak, although they will be raised again when the Lord Jesus comes.

That won't do, even though perhaps it is an attempt to accommodate Christian doctrine to modern theories of physics. It is unthinkable for this reason, amongst others. If it were true that man does not have a soul and he is just his body, which has a sort of soulish dimension as part of the physics, then when our Lord died at Calvary, the man Jesus ceased to exist.

Is that thinkable? 'Today', he said to the dying thief at his side, 'you will be with me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43). *This* day you will be with me, not 'with me in a grave', but 'with me in Paradise'. And Paul the apostle tells us in 2 Corinthians 5 that while we are in the body we are absent from the Lord (see v. 6). In a sense we are. We are like resident aliens away from home. But Paul does talk about being absent from the body. 'So, Paul, we can be absent from the body, can we?'

'Yes indeed,' he says: 'absent from the body, present with the Lord' (see v. 8 KJV). And the thought has comforted the funerals of millions of believers. Paul says, 'I don't want to go through that state where my soul is naked—not clothed with a body. I prefer to go immediately at the Lord's coming so that mortality might be swallowed up of life, and I might be clothed upon with my body which is from heaven. But it is not escapism when I say I long for that eternal body. It is the Holy Spirit within who is the earnest of our inheritance, and so marvellous is the life of the Spirit and the enrichment thereof that a believer who has the Holy Spirit and senses those heavenly and spiritual and eternal joys, will from time to time long to

---

<sup>3</sup> *The Weight of Glory* (HarperOne, 2001), pp. 45–46.

be home, not as escapism or running away, but like the bulb of a daffodil longs to be a flower that is called a daffodil. That is why I long for it' (see vv. 1–10).

To be a human being is glorious, and this is part of what human life is—to have a body and soul.

### **Function, employment, work (2:5, 15)**

The next wonderful feature about human life is the ability to work. Perhaps you didn't immediately recognize that as a glorious part of life, because you are looking for the time when we can go to heaven when all our labours and trials are over and we safely reach that heavenly shore and sit down on a heavenly sofa and put our feet up on a heavenly footrest, and never do a stroke of work again! So to you heaven is really an old people's home!

That's nonsense of course, utter nonsense! When you get home to glory, you won't want to sit still, not with the eternal energies that you'll have! You'll want to work like God works. The Lord Jesus says, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working' (John 5:17). And I remind you that God doesn't have to work to earn a living, does he now? But he works. Why do you think he works? I must guard my language, but I nearly said he works for the fun of it! You imagine the sheer joy and exhilaration of creating a galaxy or two. Wouldn't you do it if you could? I hope we get time off from singing hymns in heaven, now and again, for if they still have galaxies (and there is going to be a new earth as well as a new *heaven*), I would like to go and inspect what that's all about. Wouldn't you? You just think of the endless ingenuity of divine creative wisdom. God expresses himself in his works, and as the sons and daughters of the living God, so shall you work for all eternity.

God made man to till the ground, and originally it was a gentleman's occupation, for we are told that God Almighty created a garden in Eden. That suggests that the rest of the world was not garden, doesn't it? God didn't make the whole world a garden; he made a bit of it a garden and showed Adam what could be done with the world: 'What about that, Adam? Just look at that: that's a daffodil there. And look at that tree. And what you could do if you arranged the flowers like this, and the trees like this. What a thing of beauty you could make of this earth and all its potentials!'

It was marvellous. Not that I've got much creative ability myself, but I am full of admiration for the marvellous ability that God has given to human beings to copy the Creator and engage in creative occupation, from the farmer who makes something of the world, to the person who makes a lovely tapestry or cookery or what have you. That work is glorious, isn't it? And think of the marvellous development of the earth and space. Would that it all had been done by believers in God, cooperating with God as sons of the Father. Alas that so much has been done by atheistic minds, but consider the sheer ingenuity of even those minds, which is a mark of the God given potentials of the human for work, for developing the world and the universe. Glorious work!

'Oh,' you say, 'me with my arthritic knees.'

Oh, well I know, my dear brother. I have them too, but we live as fallen creatures in a world where work under the disciplines of the Father has for us fallen human beings necessarily been turned into a severe discipline at times. But something of the joy of it still remains, surely?

Work then is part of life. It is not merely that 'If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat' (2 Thess 3:10). It is part of what it means to be alive.

### **The aesthetic sense (2:8-9)**

Did you notice what is said about how God made this garden? 'Out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is . . .' now notice the two descriptions: 'pleasant to the sight and good for food'. And I like the order that God chose to put those in—not good for food and then perhaps pleasant to the sight, but 'pleasant to the sight' first and then 'good for food'. Of course we need food to fill our stomachs and to give us physical satisfaction; without that we cannot carry on living. But which would you rate as the more important: beauty and aesthetic delight to satisfy the mind and the senses, or food to satisfy the stomach? Which would you think is the more important?

Sometimes Christians seem to have the view that food and all that kind of thing is jolly good, but art isn't. I don't know why that is. If you had a friend seriously ill in hospital and you wanted to take something to help him, what would you take? A bag of carrots?

You say, 'No, not a bag carrots; that might kill the man.'

Well, what then?

You say, 'A beautiful bunch of flowers.'

Oh, what would you do that for? What good are flowers?

'Oh, well, when the poor dear man looks now and again at these flowers, he will capture something of the beauty of them.'

Yes, it will make him feel better, won't it? It will revive the desire for life. Or maybe you come and play the harp for him. Aesthetic things can be more important than even food sometimes, can't they?

I don't know what the recipes will be like in heaven. Perhaps we shall eat, who knows? Our Lord said we shall eat and drink with him in his kingdom (see Luke 22:30), but I think food will not be the predominant thing anyway. But oh how wonderfully satisfying is the aesthetic sense, and even when it comes to dress.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm not criticizing yours; I wouldn't dare. I'm in no position to, but our Lord had distinct ideas on dress, didn't he? He said, 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,<sup>4</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these' (Matt 6:28-29). Oh, the beautiful colour! I do admire a God that hasn't made this a utility universe with everything in black and white. What a marvellous God who makes such colour! It is part of life. Imagine being born in a dark cell with no windows and no light. Would you count it living? Not to have any aesthetic sense is to lose a part of life.

### **Potential knowledge of moral values (2:9)**

As well as the aesthetic sense, there was the potential for moral values. God put there the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Admittedly he put it under a ban to start with, but there it

---

<sup>4</sup> Or 'card or spin', literally; that is, to prepare wool for spinning.

was—the potential for the understanding of moral value, the knowledge of good and evil, both in the sense of Hebrew inclusivism (that is everything there is) and in the moral sense of good and evil, ethically and morally.

That is a marvellous thing that God has done with human beings. After all, we are a little bit better than dogs, aren't we? Even your most beloved dog, Fido, has no potential for understanding morality. I think you will have observed it. You can train the dog not to go next-door and steal the joint of beef off the table in your neighbour's kitchen. You can train him not to do it by disciplining him every time he goes anywhere near the neighbour's door. So, (à la Pavlov's experiments) he gets the impression in his doggy mind that every time he gets too near the neighbour's door, that it is somehow associated with a painful posterior, so he desists. But you'll never teach the dog *why* it is wrong to steal the neighbour's food. You can't sit him down and say, 'Now Fido, don't do that again. I told you not to do it before, and you know it's wrong Fido dear.' That's no use. He hasn't got the potential for moral values. We do; and mightily important they are. We have suffered too long from psychiatrists who have said that, 'No, there is no ultimate right or wrong.'

I remember meeting a Christian psychiatrist from a large psychiatric hospital in England. A dear, vigorous, high-powered intellectual he was too. He had a reputation in that hospital for getting more cures than any other psychiatrist in the establishment. I heard him give a seminar at which he explained some of his success. He said, 'You know, when we are summoned to the court to deal with criminals, the judge or the magistrate will try to get us to say that the man didn't know the difference between right and wrong, and didn't know what he was doing, and so cannot be blamed.'

Now, in some cases that might be true, but in a lot of cases it isn't, because a moral sense is part of what it means to be human.'

This psychiatrist continued, 'If my patients get into tantrums and break a window, I make them pay for it, not to be stingy but to bring them back to what is a feature of being human—moral understanding and responsibility.'

To deprive a person of it and to say that they don't have it is to turn them into a cabbage, and not even to get us saved will God bypass our moral judgment. Be warned about those who use all sorts of psychological devices to bypass people's moral judgment and to make them give a profession of Christian faith. God will never do it. Part of being human is the potential he gives us to understand morality, because we need to understand God eventually, 'and in him there is no sin' (1 John 3:5).

### **Ability to sin and moral responsibility to God (2:16–17)**

Then of course there is moral responsibility in our relationship with God. He says,

You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. (2:16–17)

So man was forbidden, for the time being at any rate, to take the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. But now notice a very important thing about human life. He was strictly forbidden to take of that fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; but he found if he

chose to take it, he had the ability to take it. Do you follow the reasoning? He had no permission to take it, but he had the ability to take it; he could decide to take it. And the awesome thing is that he had the ability to go against God.

You say, 'That is sinning isn't it?'

Yes.

You say, 'Who gave him that ability?'

I repeat, it was not the permission to take of the fruit but the ability, if he so chose, to take it. There is only one answer to that. God gave him the ability, though not the permission.

Now, what does that mean? Well, in short terms God gave us *free will*, that is what it means. He didn't make us like bumblebees. If a bee or a mosquito alights on your forehead and stings you, you don't say, 'You wicked, immoral being,' and summon it before the magistrate, and say, 'He is guilty of stinging me.' Of course you don't. They are made like clocks, aren't they? They just go. Man isn't made simply like a clock. There are many automatic systems in a human brain of course. Thank God for the 'autopilots' in the human brain. But a supreme glory of a human being made in the image of God is that God himself gave us free will.

Why is that important? Well, there cannot be any true morality without free will. If I have no choice about a thing, and I do it without any choice, then if it is good you mustn't give me the credit because I couldn't help doing it. But if it is bad you mustn't blame me because I couldn't help doing it; I was programmed to do it. Therefore there is no morality if you are just programmed. If human beings were to grow up from being innocent to become fully moral human beings, they must have free choice. The awesome thing is that the Creator himself gave them the ability to choose to obey and please God, or not to (but not permission not to). And the awesome thing is that, at the great white throne, God himself will not override the choice of the men and women who have chosen to reject him but will honour their choice through all eternity, though it be eternal disaster. God will not remove our free choice, not even to save us.

Mark that well. For if he removed our free choice to save us, what he would save would no longer be a full human being but more like a machine. Moral responsibility then is part of what it means to be a human being and to be alive. And to have a conscience that is seared or completely dead, is to die at one level of human life.

### **The faculty of language (2:19-20)**

Then of course there was the gift of language. What a wonderful gift that is, as everybody knows.

You say, 'Where did you get that from out of this chapter?'

Well, I notice that God called the animals before Adam, and Adam named them (2:19). Implied there is that wonderful thing that we call *language*.

As a young man I worked under a professor of Latin who wrote a book on Latin syntax. It is not everybody's favourite topic, but would that more people studied it, because language is the expression of logic. And this professor pointed out that here in Genesis was a remarkable indication of language, for human language depended on the brilliant notion of somebody or

other (perhaps it was Adam) to use an arbitrary sound as a label for something or someone.<sup>5</sup> Of course in language you can get onomatopoeic words, you know, when you say, 'Bash!' and by the sound you imitate what has happened. Or something 'crashes', or it went, 'Bang!' All of these are words that imitate the sound, but that is a very small part of language. All sophisticated languages have developed this arbitrary system of using an arbitrary sound to label something. So you get the thing in the ground that comes up with a big trunk and has branches and leaves on it. All of us who speak English say what that is when we make the sound, *tree*. That's more than the Romans did. When they met such an object they called it *arbor*. Now that's different to the sound the Greeks made when they saw a tree; they called it a *dendron*. They are arbitrary sounds and, therefore, because of their almost limitless possibilities, are able to form vocabulary. Language is a marvellous gift. It is delightful, and I hope you like words and language.

What is more, many of the modern linguists (though not all of them) have shown that it would appear that human beings have an inbuilt linguistic faculty. Noam Chomsky, as atheist and communist as he could be, came round to the view that human beings have some inbuilt language faculty. The alternative view of the evolutionists is that human language evolved out of animal grunts.

The theory was that if a pig running around a rock suddenly came upon a lion, the pig went, 'Ooh!' And when it had done that many times, having met many lions, all the other pigs learned to recognize that when pig number one said, 'Ooh,' that meant 'lion!' And the notion was that animal language evolved out of that, more or less.

That is nonsense. Think of the subtlety of language; it doesn't matter which language we might discuss. Consider a five-year-old child. From a very young age a child can understand quite sophisticated logic. He or she can understand hypothetical conditions.

You say, 'What are they like?'

Well, mother says to her five-year-old, 'Now Tommy, if you are good this afternoon mummy will give you an ice-cream for tea.' That is a hypothetical condition, isn't it? 'If you are good . . .' (he mightn't be, of course) and the consequence will follow: he will get an ice-cream. And the little toddler understands that.

You try saying the same thing to your dog Fido: 'Fido, if you are good this afternoon, I'll give you a bone.' It doesn't understand; it lacks that facility for logic that lies behind language.

That is exceedingly important. Don't tell people they don't need to spell, or that they don't need to trouble about syntax. If you do that what you are saying is, 'Don't trouble about logic.' And God has given us the facility for language, with all of the poetry and the amazing beauty of it.

Don't say, 'It's just words!' We know that you mean words can be empty sounds without any real sincere meaning behind them, but the gift of language has been given to us so that ultimately we might converse and fellowship with him whose name is the Word. What a magnificent facility, to be able to hold conversation with the living God and with him who is the Word. The amazing thing is that the living God communicates to us with our language faculty.

---

<sup>5</sup> The professor was the late E. C. Woodcock, at Durham University at that time.



### **Man-woman relationship (2:18-25)**

Then of course there is another side to life, and that is the relationship between man and woman. Some say it is the highest possible form of life. It is certainly a pinnacle, isn't it? It is sacred because it is an example, in the lowly form of human life, of what relationship God had in mind for Christ and the church.

It was that way round when God created the relationship between man and woman. It wasn't that, having created this relationship for biological necessity, God subsequently thereafter thought, 'I know what, that could also serve as a sort of pattern for Christ and the church!' No, it is not that way round. Ephesians says that long before God created man and woman he had it in mind that we shall become children of God and corporately the very bride of Christ (see 1:3-14; 5:22-33). Modelled on that, God created human marriage; and what a glorious thing it is.

It was a disaster when the early church fathers got it into their heads that there was something undignified about marriage and commanded priests to be celibate. That is a distortion of the mind of God. Yes, it is true (as our Lord taught us) that to some he has given the special role of remaining single, but that is not the norm. 'Each has his own gift from God,' says the Apostle Paul: the gift to get married, or a gift to be single (1 Cor 7:7). Both have their advantages, in this way or the other way, for fulfilling life's chief purpose, which is to glorify God in our bodies.

### **Relationship to spirit world (3:1-7)**

Then chapter 3 will tell us that humans are made in such a way that they can be tempted by that evil spirit himself, Satan. In some sense we are midway between the spirit world and the animal world. We have bodies like animals have (angels don't have bodies normally, not in our sense of the term) but unlike animals we have spirit. To keep human being in balance we must have respect to both realms.

When human beings cease to believe in the reality of the spirit world, they are in great danger of descending to living merely like animals.

### **Music (4:21), metal-work (4:22), lyric poetry (4:23-24)**

Finally, if we progress to the civilization that rose from Cain's descendants, we read of other things, like the development of music, metallurgy and lyric poetry. Some people have argued that these things were invented by Cain's descendants and therefore must be wicked. That is not so. I daresay atheists invented pacemakers for the heart, for instance. We don't say, 'I shan't use them because they were made by an atheist.' And we don't say, 'Be careful; that wristwatch you have might have been made by an atheist.'

It is a sad thing that human ability in technology and in literature and in music and art express man's fallen nature and rejection of God's values. That is a sad thing. But the ability itself is a marvellous thing to be admired and to be enjoyed.

## Conclusion

What does it mean to be alive? It means all of these wonderful things. Tonight before we go to sleep let us bow our heads and give God thanks for the many splendours of sheer human life. Yes, you will tell me that you have more than that: God has given you eternal life, the very life of God. That is self-evidently more important, but do please remember the dignity that God has given to human life, not only in making us with all these many abilities and facilities and potentials and enjoyments, but in the way he has honoured humanity by his Son becoming human and carrying humanity above the angels to the very right hand of God. He shall remain human forever, though forever eternally God. And we are joined to him, and we shall bodily join him one day on the pinnacle of the universe. This is what human life means.

In our next session we must continue with unfinished business from this second study and briefly consider what happened when, first, Adam sinned, and then Cain rebelled. But for the moment let's bow our heads in gratitude to God and thank him for his word.

Our Father we do thank thee for this beautiful thing, this human life that thou hast given us. So often we take it for granted, Lord. Yet seeing it as we see it from our side as members of a fallen race, it has many of its glories lingering still around us. We bow our knees and hearts tonight before thee and give thee unfeigned thanks for the lovely thing that is human life.

For the wonderful facility of language that thou may converse with us in words, and we to thee in words, and have fellowship with him who is the Word of God. O how we thank thee for this glorious facility that thou hast given to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Help us as good stewards to use this life in all its parts, not merely for our enjoyment but for thy glory, assured through thy Son's redemption, resurrection, ascension and coming again, that this life is but the prelude, the antechamber, to that glorious eternal life that we shall share with thee in an undying eternity.

Already we bless thee. We sense the glory of it as we taste the firstfruits of it, through the Spirit thou hast given us, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and already tinged with the glory of our eternal inheritance. So we thank thee for thy word, and bless thee now, and pray thine evening grace and peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## The Second Creation Story

### *Part Two*

Before we examine the third of the creation stories that stand at the beginning of the book of Genesis, we ought to consider some of the leading points of the remaining two chapters that constitute the second story. In chapter 2 we saw how the historian, under the inspiration of God, gives us a detailed description of what human life is and means. Now we must follow the story on to chapter 3, which relates to the rebellion of man against God and the consequent judgment pronounced upon him, and then into chapter 4 where Cain defied God and the curse that was pronounced upon him.

### **The fall and its first effects**

So we come to Genesis 3 and the story of the fall. I wish to pick out simply the principle involved to show the tactics that the serpent used to deceive the woman. Coming to her, he said, 'Has God said, "You shall not eat of any of the trees in the garden"?' He was deliberately exaggerating a prohibition for tactical reasons.

And Eve said, 'Oh, no; you've got it wrong there. We may eat of all the trees of the garden except one.'

'Yes, that's the point, isn't it?' said the serpent. 'You see, that's God all over. He puts these lovely things in front of your nose, with all their promise of enjoyment, and then tantalizes you and says you cannot have them.'

The woman said, 'He's told us directly we mustn't eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if we eat of it, we shall die.'

'Oh come off it,' said the serpent; 'you don't believe that old stuff, do you, not nowadays in the modern world? The actual fact is that God wants to keep you down. That's what the truth is. You see, he knows that in the day you eat from it, you shall be as God, knowing good and evil, and then you won't be tied to the apron strings anymore. You have to make up your own mind about things. You shall be as God. God wants to keep you down!'

This is *the* lie; and, as you see, it is an attack on the character of God, a misrepresentation of what God is like. It is a lie that has been swallowed by multimillions of our fellow human beings, and a little bit of it sometimes resides in our own hearts and will come out in times of testing.

'Die?' said the serpent. 'My dear good woman, of course you won't. Just look at the tree.'

So Eve had another look at it and she saw that it was good for food. Stomachs are important and so is the palate. And then she saw it was beautiful to look at. That is our

aesthetic sense, isn't it? And it was desirable to make you wise. It had intellectual appeal. Here are three satisfactions the tree offered: physical satisfaction in its food, aesthetic satisfaction in its beauty and intellectual satisfaction in its effect.

'That is life, woman; take it' said Satan.

'Well, what about God's word?'

'Oh, come off it. We don't accept God's word these days. That is irrelevant. Go for life! Physical satisfaction, aesthetic satisfaction, and intellectual satisfaction: that is life.'

That also was a lie, all mixed up with the truth. These satisfactions were beautiful things designed by God himself, but if you put all three together they do not spell the sum total of life. As God tells Israel through Moses, and as one day the Son of God incarnate told Satan himself, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God' (see Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4). That is not God being stingy. It is God stating the truth that, if we are to have life to the full, then we cannot live without God. These lovely things, these God-designed satisfactions, were designed to lead us to him who is *the* life, so that we might form with him a fellowship that will outlast all the pleasures of earth. But to grasp at those satisfactions without God is the way to ultimate dissatisfaction and eternal hunger.

Let me tell you a parable. Let's say you are an office manager, and one of these days your secretary comes in to bring you your morning coffee. And when she hands you the cup you see her sort of bending her hand at a funny angle. You will think, 'What's wrong with her this morning? Has she got injured or something?' And then as she hands you the letters, you will notice something and you'll think, 'Oh, I didn't notice it at first. There is a ring on the dear lady's finger!' And you are meant to notice it of course. You say, 'Is that a ring?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, that wouldn't be an engagement ring would it?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, let me see it. Is that gold?'

'No. That's platinum.'

'Oh really? That was expensive. Oh, how beautifully shaped it is. And what are they, amethysts?'

'No, they're diamonds.'

'I see. That is an absolute work of art. That is marvellous! You must be very pleased with that ring.'

'Yes, I am.'

And then you say, 'And who is the very fortunate young man?'

She says, 'What young man?'

'Well the young man who gave you the ring.'

'No, I don't believe in young men,' she says. 'As far as I'm concerned there is no young man.'

What do you say next? You might say, 'Oh. I see, well, it is a nice ring. Will you please type this letter for me?'

There are millions of people like it. They take God's engagement ring, so to speak—all the lovely delights of life that were meant to lead us to him. The serpent has persuaded them not to believe in the God who gave the ring, which ultimately makes a meaningless nonsense of

life. And if people persist in it, when 'the ring' has gone forever, they will be left in darkness and an existence where music never comes, nor art ever enjoyed.

This then is the original lie on the part of Satan. John says, 'Do not love the world'. We are to use it of course, but that is not the same thing.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides for ever. (1 John 2:15–17)

Imagine a rich man who, when his son comes of age, takes his boy out onto the lawn in front of his mansion and says, 'There my boy is my present to you for your eighteenth birthday.' And there stands a super jet. The young man is delighted! And he climbs aboard and puts on the helmet and everything else, and through the cockpit screen waves his hand: 'Bye-bye father,' and he takes off and never comes back again. The father would curse that plane, wouldn't he? And when we take all the lovely things that God gives and, instead of drawing our hearts to God, they draw them away from God, then that is the essence of one form of worldliness. The great tragedy is that, drawing our hearts from God, they draw us from him who is the chief satisfaction and the very goal and meaning of life. To know him is eternal life (see John 17:3). The tragedy, John says, is that 'the world is passing away,' and what shall happen to those who try to enjoy it without God then?

### **The discipline of God**

So God's pronouncement comes on the serpent and on the guilty couple. Yes, it is judgment. He is now imposing a discipline. Life will never again be so satisfying as it could have been. Work will now be mixed with hard labour, childbirth with excessive pain, and human relationships will be somewhat maladjusted. The marvellous thing is that God didn't wipe the whole planet clear of humanity but, in his mercy to Eve who was deceived by the super-intelligence of the serpent, and in mercy even to Adam who thus rebelled against God, God pronounced his salvation. It would rejoice the heart, wouldn't it? And turning to the serpent he talked in these terms: 'he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel' (3:15). Adam perked up his ears. When he got the chance eventually to speak he grasped the point, and he called his wife's name 'Eve'. He says, 'She is the mother of all living' (see v. 20).

Why did he say it just there and not when he first met the woman? It was because he had grasped the implication of the gospel that God was now telling him, and the wonderful story of redemption. Let me tell you what you've heard many times so that your heart may wonder at it again. Aware of all Satan's strategies in advance, God had so made the human race that God himself could get inside the human race! And the seed of the woman would eventually prove to be the second person of the Trinity incarnate who at Calvary, in his burial and in his ascension and in his second coming, will eventually put the serpent where he ought to be. But he already became one of us.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might [put out of action] the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Heb 2:14–15)

Do shout ‘Hallelujah!’ And the next time you read the book of the Revelation you will come to chapter 13, which describes the great harvest that one day shall be reaped from this initial lie. By the strategy of the old serpent there shall come a world dictator who will convince the world that there is no God out there. The atheists and evolutionists have gone a long way already to promote the argument. And when people have shouted, ‘Hurrah, now we’re free!’ this dictator will suggest that to get the world to cohere together they must have some form of religion; they must worship some universally accepted ideal. What shall that be? The second beast—the false prophet—will suggest that they make an image to the beast and worship that. And in their frenzy they shall cry, ‘Who is like the beast?’ (see v. 4). The term ‘who is like’ is the Old Testament way of saying, ‘Who is like God? There is none like God.’ But the crowd throughout the world will then shout, ‘Who is like the beast? Who can resist him?’ It will be Satan’s final attempt to get man to try to be God. What a disaster it will be.

But just before this comes a flashback in history in chapter 12. It is a very brief summary of history that will put the beast into its context, for there John sees a great sign in heaven: a woman with child, waiting to give birth. The dragon is waiting there to devour the child as soon as it is born. If you should ask, ‘What child is that that the woman is carrying?’ the answer comes back, ‘It is he that shall rule the nations with a rod of iron,’ which is none other than the seed of the woman, our blessed Lord Jesus.

Now see the significance of the context. Here is man on earth trying to be God, and what is God’s answer? ‘Well, if man wants to be God, I’ll beat that by becoming man.’ God is a marvellous tactician, wouldn’t you agree?

The child was taken up to the throne of God before the dragon had time to devour him. He sits today at the right hand of God, and one day the serpent shall be finally crushed.

To Adam he gave the discipline of work. Then both Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden, lest they should put forth their hands and eat of the tree of life and live forever (see vv. 22–23). Some people are of the view that up to that point neither Adam nor Eve had thought of eating the tree of life, and they hadn’t eaten of it yet. And when they fell God said, ‘How fortunate. Let’s bundle them out of the garden before they think of eating of the tree of life, because one bite of that and they’d live forever.’

Well, that may be true. Very able expositors hold it. For my part I think it is slightly different. It raises the question whether human beings, even from the start, had inherent physical immortality. Did they? Did Adam and Eve, as they came from the hand of God, have physical immortality inside them, independently of God? I rather think not. The Bible says that only God has immortality (see 1 Tim 6:16). For Adam and Eve to live forever demanded that they should eat and continue to eat of the tree of life. When they fell, therefore, God excluded them from the garden so that they should not continue to eat of the tree of life, and thereby began the degenerative stages of human life on this earth.

Shout, 'Hallelujah' again (or perhaps don't if you couldn't stop once you'd started), because the promise is given by our risen Lord himself to the church at Ephesus: 'To him that overcomes I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God' (see Rev 2:7). God speed the day where we already have eternal life, for one day that eternal life shall irradiate our very bodies and we shall have a body incorruptible and immortal, like our Lord's.

## Cain and Abel

That story, and the gospel that came out of it, is followed by the very sad story of Cain and Abel, and Cain's defiance of God. You will know the story, so I come to its heart, and first of all to what was wrong with Cain and what was wrong with his offering.

The traditional view has been that, whereas Abel came bringing a lamb and shed its blood, which was the God-given way to God for fallen men and women, Cain brought simply an offering of the fruit of the ground. That is, he wouldn't come the way of redemption. In more modern times expositors have departed from that view, and they have said that what Cain brought to God was in the technical terms not a sin offering but what Hebrew calls a *minkah*, that is, a meal offering. He was a farmer; he brought of the fruits of the ground; and what was wrong was not that such offerings were out of place (they could be brought in the later Levitical law); what was wrong with it, they say, was that Cain was evil. So the Apostle John remarks in 1 John 3 that Cain was of the very devil. His works were evil, and bringing an offering to God was merely an outward veneer hiding an evil heart and life (see v. 12). Many folks have abused religion in this way, appearing religious externally as a kind of cover for their iniquitous practices in everyday life.

But it does seem to me that that more modern view itself is not quite satisfactory. For when the Epistle to the Hebrews comments upon the offering brought by Abel, it says, 'By faith . . .'. You notice it doesn't say, 'By faith Abel did a lot better works than Cain did.' No, it says, 'By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain' (11:4 KJV). When we read of faith in the Bible, true faith is always a response to God's word, and therefore when it says that by faith Abel offered the better sacrifice it must mean that he did it in response to God's word and brought the sacrifice that God had ordained. Certainly by offering that sacrifice in faith, according to God's declared will, Abel received testimony from God that he was accepted and that he was a righteous man (see v. 4). His works were an evidence of that righteousness which he had from God.

When God spoke to Cain, therefore, God first reasoned with him: 'No Cain; not that way. If you bring an offering such as is available to you, shall you not be forgiven? Shall you not be accepted, that is, in the sense of being forgiven?' (see Gen 4:6-7). But Cain wouldn't. Not only would he not bring the offering God asked, he murdered the man that would. That is like saying to God, 'If you won't have what I would like to bring, you won't have what Abel brings either.' God's reply to that was a curse on Cain, which was more serious than the curse on Adam.

Suppose you had a gardener (well, perhaps you do for all I know), and you are proposing to get away for a winter's cruise in the South Pacific or somewhere to get away from the winter

snows. And before you leave you say to your gardener, 'I want you to fill my wonderful glasshouse here with cucumbers and dahlias, but not tomatoes; I don't like tomatoes. I want cucumbers and dahlias.' And off you go on your cruise with your cabin on the top deck and all that. Then at last when summer has come to this part of the world you come back, and you go to meet the gardener and view the glasshouse. And there is not a dahlia in sight, nor yet a cucumber. But the place is coming down with tomatoes! You say, 'My good man, I thought I told you that I wanted cucumbers and dahlias. Didn't I?'

'Yes ma'am.'

'I thought I told you I didn't like tomatoes?'

'Yes ma'am.'

'What have you filled the place with tomatoes for?'

And the gardener replies, 'Well, I like tomatoes, and if you don't have what I like, you won't have the other things either!'

What would you say? You would say, 'Here are your cards my dear good man. Get going.'

And when Cain would not bring the sacrifice God ordained as a way of forgiveness and then murdered the man who did bring it, God, so to speak, gave Cain his cards. He said, 'When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you her strength. You might as well get out' (see vv. 10–12).

Cain, like Adam, was made to till the ground. That was the prime reason for his existence. Now he lost the very reason for which he was made, and in that moment he saw the seriousness of the curse pronounced upon him. He said, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear . . . whoever finds me will kill me' (vv. 13–14).

'No they won't,' says God. 'I've put a mark on you so they won't' (see v. 15).

There is something worse than death, as they who come to the lake of fire will find eternally. What is worse than death is to lose the very reason for which you were made and yet you continue to exist. The living creatures that surround the throne cry in the ears of the Creator, 'Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and *by your will* they existed and were created' (Rev 4:11). When rebel man was offered the way back after he had broken the will of God that was gospel indeed. When Cain rejected God and defied it, then he met the curse appropriate to it and went out from the presence of the Lord. Some shall do that eternally and find God turn his back on them for all eternity, to exist meaninglessly.

But a civilization arose amongst Cain's descendants. Does that mean that that civilization was altogether ruinously bad? Of course not. Music, the arts, metalwork and technology grew up; and we are grateful to them even to our present day. But there were aspects of that society that were exceedingly questionable. There was a certain Lamech who wrote lyrics, and they were number one in the charts. If we examine the words of the lyrics we see that they were a glorification of violence, of retaliation unrestrained that degrades the value of life (see vv. 23–24). Beware, young folks (and us old ones too), of the tendencies that have appeared in civilization. They appeared in Rome. Not content with the plays of Sophocles and Euripides, nor even the comedies of Plautus, for their entertainment, people invented the gladiatorial shows and rejoiced in seeing actual violence and killing in the Colosseum. Mark the progress of modern western society rejecting God and the values that come from God, and watch how



much it is a glorification of violence and a titivation of people's senses by having it produced in front of their eyes on the screen. That is human life losing its values and, under the general supervision of the god of this world, on its way to disintegration and perishing.

With that we must come to the third creation story.

## The Third Creation Story

In Genesis 5 you will see the beginning of the third account of creation. Here we must take some pains to observe the language that the Hebrew historian uses.

This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them [Adam] when they were created. (vv. 1-2)

### **The creature Adam**

You will immediately see the difficult linguistic problem. He ‘named *them* Adam’? I thought that Adam was his name and she was Eve. How does that come about? It comes simply because the Hebrew word *adam* can mean two things. It can mean the name of the first male human being—Adam, but it can also be the term of the species—human, or *man*, if I may use the term without being politically incorrect. One has to watch it these days. It is all right if you talk about foxes. You can talk about the species, fox. You don’t have to say ‘the species fox and vixen’, but when you talk about the human species, you have to be careful. So, ladies, do forgive an old man; I can’t get used to new customs. God called their name, Adam—man, that is, human being.

Therefore, in this third creation story it is important to follow the usage throughout the succeeding chapters. It is the story of man, this strange new creature, the like of whom there had never been before. There had been animals before, and there had been angels before. What was this new creature, man? I suspect the angels were mightily interested. There is a lovely bit of poetry coming from the lips of God in the book of Job that says when God laid the foundations of the earth, the morning stars sang, and the sons of God, that is the angels, clapped their hands with sheer joy! It must have been a fantastic experience to be Michael, let alone Gabriel, watching the Creator creating. I would have loved to have been there to see the Creator create a buffalo.

The angels must have been saying, ‘What on earth is that?’

And then to see him create an ant and say, ‘Just look at that nanotechnology!’

And here comes a giraffe. ‘Some neck, you know?’

And then a butterfly. ‘Oh, look at that for beauty!’

There were endless teeming forms of life, and as God did it the angels clapped their hands with sheer joy at the ingenuity and imagination of the Creator. Lastly there came this thing.

‘What on earth is that?’

And God informed them that this was man.

'Is he an animal?'

'Well, partly so. He's got a lot in common with animals.'

'He's not only an animal?'

'No, he is spirit too.'

I wonder if Michael said, 'We are spirits. You're not putting him above us, are you?'

'No. I made him a little lower than you,' God says.

'Well that's all right,' says Michael, breathing a sigh of relief.

How exciting to be alive in those days and to see this new creature, man! What a story man's story has been, for we who are Christians cannot forget the day when the serried ranks of angels saw the Son of the Father stooping and, for a little while, was made lower than the angels, and became human. I wonder what Michael said to Gabriel then. 'What, the Son of the Father lower than us?'

And what did he say when he saw that the Son of God, the Son of Man, was nailed to a cross and God didn't obliterate the planet right then? That the Son of God should die for simple man? The angels have not got over it yet. And what did Michael or the others say when they saw the *man* Jesus summoned, rising into glory and invited to sit at the right hand of God far above principalities, mights, powers and dominions (see Eph 1:21)? That the Son of God sits there is only reasonable, but for the man Jesus to be raised above angels?

Do you know, there is a rumour going around (and I for one believe it is true) that you who were sinners, humans, are seated with Christ in heavenly places far above principalities, powers, mights and dominions; and that one day where you are already seated spiritually, you shall be literally and physically seated with Christ? This is God's purpose for humanity redeemed through the man Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Lord. What a fantastic story this is.

### **Man is both flesh and spirit**

Here is the story of man's beginning, therefore, and 'he called *their name* man', and we shall have to adhere to that translation of the term when we come to chapter 6. It does not say, 'when *men* began to multiply', but 'when *man* began to multiply' (v. 1). This is talking about when this strange new creature called *man* began to multiply.

Verses 2 and 4 talk about 'the daughters of man' (the *benoth adam*). The daughters of man are human females. The Hebrew for human females would not be 'the daughters of men', meaning some daughters of some men, but 'the daughters of *man*'. And then we come to a verse that is a key verse for the understanding of this third creation story: 'And the Lord said, "My spirit shall not always . . ."' Now here comes another translational problem. The older versions, like the one from which I am reading, say, 'My spirit shall not strive with man for ever for that he also is flesh: yet shall his days be an hundred and twenty years' (v. 3 RV). This has been a verse much preached on by evangelists and others for centuries, and many a time it has been used very effectively in the preaching of the gospel to warn people who have heard the gospel and come to understand it, and have heard the Holy Spirit pleading with them to repent and trust the Saviour, but have prevaricated and dallied. And the preacher, using this verse, has warned them that if they persist in rejecting the overtures of the Holy Spirit there

might come a time when the Holy Spirit will no longer strive over them. In consequence, they shall never again have the desire to repent, nor shall they believe.

It is a solemn enough warning and, so far as it goes, is true in itself, but it is not perhaps what *this* verse exactly means. For if you listen to the preacher, he will say to the unconverted man or woman who is dithering over whether to repent and trust the Saviour or not: 'Don't linger, for if you do the Holy Spirit will cease to strive with you.'

'Why?'

'Because you have rejected the gospel.'

That's not what the verse says, is it? 'My spirit shall not always . . .' (whatever the verb is at that point) . . . with man'. Why not? Because 'he also is flesh'. It is commenting on man's constitution. It is what man is: man is partly flesh.

The verb translated in many versions 'strive with', in my humble opinion, following the authorities, should not be translated 'strive with' but 'abide in': 'My spirit shall not always abide in man.'

'Why not?'

'Because he is flesh.'

You say, 'What does it mean, *'my spirit'*? Is that talking about the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity?'

Well, no, not here it isn't. It is talking about the human spirit and every human being possesses a spirit, for that is what a human being is—part flesh, yes, but part spirit. We shall come to that in a moment, but as for the term 'my spirit' turn to Psalm 104 to see how that phrase is used.

When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your [spirit], they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. (vv. 29–30)

Here the psalmist refers to 'your spirit' because God is the source of all spirit, and human beings in their constitution are part flesh and part spirit. Look at Hebrews 12 for another reading.

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? (v. 9)

That is to say that God is the author of the human spirit, and whether a man is converted or unconverted, as a human being he is a compound both of flesh on the one hand and spirit on the other. And the writer, talking to Christians, says we know him as a Father who educates and trains, and if need be chastens us, but since he is the Father of our spirit shall we not be subject to him?

Or look at one other passage, this time in 1 Corinthians 2.

Who among men knows the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the things of God none knows, save the Spirit of God. But we received, not the spirit of the

world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God. (vv. 11–12 RV)

‘Who . . . knows the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him?’ A human spirit therefore is distinguished from an animal. I’m not being rude when I say you have things in common with animals. You have a dog, Fido, or whatever you call him, and if your dog should see you sitting at the table enjoying a beef steak, he knows exactly what is happening, because he has a stomach like you have a stomach; and he can sense the marvellous thrills that are tickling your palate and descending into your stomach. And because he has a stomach and knows all about that, he comes and wags his tail, if you’ll let him, and he’s begging to be given a piece of that steak. Okay, but you take him into your drawing room and you say, ‘Doggie, you have a look at that picture up there. It’s a Rembrandt, you know (I got it cheap). Look at it; isn’t that marvellous?’

And the dog looks at it but can’t make head or tail of it. So it tries the only techniques it knows. It licks it. Not much result from that. Smells it; no. It’s no good sitting your dog down and giving him lessons in art, because this is a part of you that a dog cannot understand; it doesn’t have a human spirit. Who knows the things of a man, save the spirit of a man, which is in him?

It is also true of God, of course. Who knows the things of God, except the Spirit of God? But how do we come to know the things of God, those things of the character of God that are deep? We shall need the Holy Spirit imparted, that the Spirit of God may witness alongside of our spirit that we are children of God.

### **Flesh, spirit, judgment and death**

So then to put things in a nutshell, this third creation story is concerned to discuss with us man’s constitution: flesh and spirit. It tells us the sorry story of how man, rebelling against God and led by the old serpent, died *spiritually*, as Paul in Ephesians 2 talks about us ‘being dead in [our] trespasses and sins’ (v. 1), and in Colossians, ‘alienated from God by your wicked works’ (see 1:21); alienated in your mind, that is, spiritually dead. It is not physically dead, and not necessarily morally dead, but spiritually dead because of the severance between the Spirit of God and the human spirit.

And here was the human race, after some centuries, now degenerate to such a serious extent that it was in danger of perversion, not merely by its violence and its passions run wild and uncontrolled, but because of the invasion of demonic forces threatening to play havoc with human succession. And God decided he’d had enough: ‘I will destroy man,’ not ‘men’, but ‘man’—the whole human race (Gen 6:6–7 KJV). ‘The end of all flesh is come before me,’ God says (v. 13 KJV).

Notice the term, talking now about men who are spiritually dead. What are they? God says, ‘My spirit, the spirit I gave them shall not always stay in man’. That is because when man has thus gone from God and is dead to God spiritually, God is not prepared to maintain him permanently as an aberration. So God brought judgment upon the world and destroyed the human race, except for eight people.

### **The manner of the judgment**

The manner of the judgment is instructive. When God destroyed man, this human race, he did not do here as he did with Sodom and burn them up; in this case he drowned them. Now you know (not because you practice it) what happens if you put a human body underwater and keep it there for ten minutes.

You say, 'What does happen then?'

Well, you haven't destroyed the person's body, but when you bring it out, where is the body's breath? Its breath is gone, and something more is gone as well, but the breath is gone, and you are left with flesh. And what happens to the flesh if you leave it? It goes rotten of course.

What an object lesson it was to make the punishment fit the crime, to make a physical death by drowning to illustrate the underlying spiritual malaise. Here is a human made by God as flesh and spirit, that in spirit he might have fellowship with his creator God who is spirit, but now the human has gone from God and is spiritually dead, and therefore progressively corrupt, even on the side of his constitution that is flesh.

### **The method of salvation**

God saved the human race. The method of salvation is also very instructive. He didn't save Noah and the seven other people *from* the judgment; he saved them *through* the flood. If Noah and company had gone through the flood they would have drowned of course. If they had gone through the judgment they would have perished. But God provided an ark inside of which they could come through the judgment and out the other side. It is a marvellous picture of our Lord, as it has been thousands of times observed by preachers and commentators galore. In Christ we have gone through the judgment: we have died with him; we were buried with him. Thank God, we come out the other side: we are raised with him to walk in newness of life.

### **Walking in newness of life by the spirit**

Time forbids my commenting upon the new earth and the new regime that God instituted, but let me just say two further things.

When the flood was over and the waters were abating, there came a point when Noah was to learn whether it was safe to come out, that is, whether the land was dry enough. He had only a window in the top story of the ark, so he couldn't see what was around. So he used a device that mariners in the ancient world used very often. When men went to sea in those days without compasses and such things, they kept birds onboard their ships. If they got out of sight of land and the fog came down, or the sky darkened and they couldn't see where they were, or how near or far the land was, they would let homing pigeons fly out, and watched where the pigeons went, for the birds by their instinct would go to land. The mariners would follow the birds.

So Noah used the same device. He used a raven, and that didn't do much good, but he sent out a dove, and the dove returned with an olive leaf in its mouth. Noah, being guided by the dove, came out of the ark at last into the world swept clean, to walk in newness of life.

And you Christians won't help yourself remembering it, even if I tried to stop you. Our Lord came to John the Baptist, didn't he? Not sinful himself, but standing alongside sinners in the waters of Jordan, as one day he would go to Calvary to take the place of sinners in death. You will remember what happened. Coming out of the water there came the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. And God said, 'This is my beloved Son', and immediately after this the Spirit led him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, and as he came through triumphant, being full of the Holy Spirit, he started his public ministry (see Matt 3:13–4:17). Thus is salvation for us through the death and burial and resurrection of Christ; as we walk in newness of life, not left to ourselves but led by the Holy Spirit.

### **The result of sowing to the flesh**

There was one further unfortunate incident. Subsequently, they were assured that God would never drown the world again with water, and they were given the covenant and the token of the bow in the clouds. Secure, but not always walking circumspectly, Noah got drunk, to his shame and the degradation of one of his sons. And Peter, in that famous passage where he comments upon Noah and the ark, and likens it to our Lord and the salvation provided by him for us, ends by saying, 'Now, my dear brethren, the time passed should have sufficed us to walk like the world walks in sinful self-indulgence. Haven't we done that enough? For surely that is the time that for us is passed, the pre-flood experience' (see 1 Pet 4:3). Now we are risen with Christ so that we shall walk in newness of life (see Rom 6:4). It is to be the effect of the grace of God that we sow to the spirit, and reap from there everlasting life. Let's be warned not to sow to the flesh, for if we sow to the flesh, though eternally secure, we shall reap the consequences. 'They who sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption' (see Gal 6:8).

## The Rise of the Hebrew Nation From Among the Gentiles

### *The story of Abraham, Part One*

In the notes you will notice a page with the Roman numeral IV, meaning that here is a conspectus of the fourth major part of the book of Genesis, as I understand it. Therefore the title is 'The Rise of the Hebrew Nation from Among the Gentiles'. In the actual text of Genesis this is preceded by the announcement: 'These are the generation of the sons of Noah,' and then, 'of Shem' (10:1, 21). Then at 11:27 we read, 'Now these are the generations of Terah', who was the father of Abram. Whereupon, against the background of the Gentile nations and the great cities that began to be built at that time, we have the story of the calling of Abram out from among the nations, to start a new nation. So now the Holy Spirit of God is telling us what has happened to the new world that emerged after the flood, the progress of the great Gentile nations with their mighty cities, and their very advanced civilizations; that is, advanced for that particular time in human history.

But dismissing them with a very few verses it comes to the long chapters that describe the beginning of this new phenomenon in history — the rise of a special nation. Called at this time the Hebrew nation, it was destined to play a dramatic role in the course of the history of the world right down to this present time with all the problems in the Middle East. That nation is specially distinct, not only for the moral law proclaimed from God through Moses at Mount Sinai, but for this above all, that it is the nation of whom came Jesus the Christ, according to the flesh. Because this nation is so special, it is important to trace its rise, its beginnings, via Genesis; and they are to be found in Terah, and more particularly in his son Abraham.<sup>6</sup>

### **A divine protest**

The Hebrew nation was a comparative latecomer in history; there had been big nations and big empires before they even started. In the first place the rise of this new nation is significant for this reason. It started with God's call of one man, and it was God intervening in history to raise up a protest against the idolatrous interpretation of the universe that had now become predominant among the Gentile nations. Stephen the Christian martyr says, 'The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran [that

---

<sup>6</sup> From this point in the transcript, the patriarch's name will usually be rendered 'Abraham', the name given to him by God in Genesis 17:5. 'Abram' is used when it appears in Scripture direct quotations or as part of discussions of events prior to those recorded in chapter 17. This is in keeping with the subsequent usage in all of the OT after Genesis 17 (even when 'Abram' is used in 1 Chron 1:27 and Neh 9:7 it is used in connection with 'Abraham') as well as with all NT usage.



is, when he dwelled still among the pagans], and said to him, “Go out . . .” (Acts 7:2–3). And if you ask what I mean by that, let me refer you to the Epistle to the Romans and chapter 1. It describes how all men originally knew the one true God, but ‘did not like to retain God in their knowledge’ (v. 28 KJV). They displayed a preference, a bias.

### **A preference for keeping God out**

Not all scientists are like the one I am about to quote; far from it, for this one is an extremist. Richard Lewontin is an American, a Marxist and an atheist, and in the last book he wrote he explains he is writing in honour of his deceased colleague, Carl Sagan. He explains why scientists like him devise such processes as they do and come up with results that he says are counterintuitive and sometimes apparent nonsense. He says they do it because materialism is absolutely basic, that is, materialism in its philosophical sense, the belief that there is nothing but matter in the universe: there is no spirit; there is no God. He says they form their experiments in order to prove that point. Well, if you form experiments to prove a point you are liable to prove it to your own satisfaction, of course. And then he adds, to explain why they do it: ‘for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.’<sup>7</sup>

There is one scientist determined to keep God out. He has his reasons for not allowing ‘a Divine Foot in the door’. Now, I repeat, not all scientists are like him, not even in their science. Many of them, and most of them perhaps, are open-minded. But it is the fact, according to Romans 1, that the nations originally knew God, but for their own reasons were not willing to retain God in their knowledge.

What happened then? Well, it is an interesting thing that when men stop believing in God they don’t start believing in nothing. You will find that it is very difficult to believe in nothing. I nearly said, ‘Have a go,’ but don’t really! It is quite difficult though. People get rid of God because they don’t like this idea of some omnipotent being controlling them and breathing down their necks and telling them what to do. ‘Man needs to be free’, as Karl Marx said. So get rid of God and then you are free.

Are you really? When men get rid of God in their thinking, they then turn round and observe that they themselves didn’t create the universe, which is an elementary observation, isn’t it? But it remains true. And they wake up to the fact that they don’t control the universe either. So what does control the universe? Where did it come from? And if there is no God, well, what is it that made our universe and then eventually produced us, and then one day will ‘unproduce’ us, so to speak? Unlike the old idolater, the modern idolater doesn’t keep images of gods in his drawing room or study, but he might as well. For when ancient people rejected the idea of God they proceeded to deify the forces of nature; they worshipped the sun-god and the moon-god, the storm-god and the fertility-god. They worshipped sex of course. In Greece they called her Aphrodite. They worshipped their own psychological feelings. They worshipped the god of pugnacious war—Mars. They talked about the god Panic. In other words, getting rid of the one true God, they then found themselves under the power of the forces of nature, which they proceeded to deify, and they became their slaves. The modern atheist does precisely the same thing when he gets rid of God.

---

<sup>7</sup> ‘Billions and Billions of Demons’, *The New York Review of Books* 44/1, 9 Jan 1997.

If you asked atheists what the ultimate powers are that control us human beings, they will reply like the ancient pagans did, only using different terms. They will say, 'The forces of nature of course: the weak atomic power, the strong atomic power, electromagnetism, gravity, anti-gravity (if there is such a thing), biology and this, that and the other.' These are great but mindless forces that, according to the atheist, produced us and one day will destroy us. And we do our best to try and manipulate them, and when we can't manipulate them we try to appease them.

But if you get rid of God, you don't find freedom in the universe. Now man, with all his intelligence, becomes the prisoner of mindless, material, impersonal forces. And early in history God raised up Abraham, and from him the Hebrew nation, to be God's appointed protest against this idolatrous interpretation of the universe. This was so that God might establish on earth one nation at least that pointed to the one true God creator, and to the freedoms that are obtained by those who believe in and serve and worship him.

### **The devolution of religion**

That doctrine of monotheism didn't evolve. Peace be to social anthropologists, but the theory that the monotheism known in Israel evolved has been proved historically incorrect. It was not that everybody on this planet first of all started by believing in animism and then evolved until they believed in polytheism, which then evolved into henotheism (that's one God per nation) and then eventually evolved from that to monotheism (that's one God over the whole universe) and then that evolved into atheism. There is no final evidence that it ever happened, and certainly Israel didn't get their monotheism by evolution, which you can see from the plain, straightforward history of their own Bible. They were forever departing from monotheism and going off and compromising with Gentile idolatry and having to be pulled back by the roots of their hair by their sundry prophets like Isaiah and company. In fact, so persistent was their habit of compromising with idolatry that, in the end, God sent them off to Babylon, which was the world centre of idolatry in that day, in order to cure them of it. And at last, finally after centuries, when they came back from their exile in Babylon, Israel had largely been cured of idolatry, as you will remember historically. So when our Lord Jesus arrived, there were no idolatrous statues in the temple, nor temple prostitutes either. Israel had at least been cured of idolatry. In Orthodox Judaism they remain cured until this day, thank God.

And why would God wait that long before sending his Son? Well what would be the use of sending the Son of God into the world and saying to everybody, 'This is the Son of God,' if people didn't know who God was, and thought God was another version of Zeus or Baal or Osiris or Amun or something? Since God was going to make himself known to man through the Son of God, he must first spend centuries establishing who God was, which was the role of the Hebrew nation, and thus of Israel, through the centuries. What we are reading in Genesis therefore are the beginnings of this tremendously important and historically significant movement.

## **Four promises God made to Abraham**

God made Abraham four promises. If we can gather them together, they will help us to see how the subsequent story in Genesis proceeds.

### **The promise of the land**

God promised to give Abraham the land of Canaan. Abraham had come out not knowing where he was going, but when he arrived in Canaan God informed him, 'This is the land I'm going to give you' (see Gen 13:14–15).

### **The promise of descendants**

Then God promised Abraham seed, that is, descendants. It's no good inheriting a land if you are an old boy like Abraham was and you don't have any children. What can one man do with a whole country that he has inherited? And Abraham made the point to God and said, 'You've given me all this, but you've given me no seed.' And God said, 'Yes Abraham. I'm going to give you seed' (see 15:1–6). And thus a covenant was made with Abraham and his seed to give them the land, which involved giving Abraham seed (vv. 7–21). So the early chapters of this fourth major part of Genesis are going to tell you of the birth of that seed that eventually should inherit the land.

### **The promise of blessing on his seed**

Then God promised Abraham, 'I will bless you' (12:2). Now, of course he blessed Abraham, but when you come to the story of Isaac, the fifth part of the book of Genesis, you find the great emphasis turns on God's *blessing*: his blessing on Isaac and then the blessing that Isaac pronounced upon Jacob and the blessing of God as Jacob experienced it.

### **The promise of blessing upon all the world**

Finally God promised Abraham that 'in your [seed] shall all the nations of the earth be blessed' (22:18). That was finally fulfilled, at the first level, in the sixth and final part of Genesis, when Abraham's seed, Joseph by name, not only blessed Egypt—the great world empire at that time—and saved them from starvation, but all the surrounding little nations were blessed likewise through the wisdom granted to Abraham's seed.

These four promises of God are now developed and fulfilled, at the first level, in the course of this history.

## **A wife for Isaac**

We might once again take a bird's-eye view. This great movement out of the Gentiles to form a new nation with Abraham had begun, but notice what is said immediately after the climax of Abraham's experience on Mount Moriah. Genesis 22 is the record of the sacrifice of Isaac (the seed), the son of Abraham.

So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba [‘the well of the oath’]. (v. 19)

Now notice what the historian has done.

Now after these things it was told to Abraham, ‘Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: Uz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.’ (Bethuel fathered Rebekah.) These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother. (vv. 20–23)

At the dramatic point in the unfolding story of Abraham after we have come to the sacrifice of the son, then the historian says Abraham was told about his Gentile relatives that he had left behind when he was called out of the Gentiles. At that point Abraham began to think. His son Isaac was getting to the time when he should be married. Of course, parents like to see their sons married before they, the parents, die. Abraham was told about his relatives and he got an idea into his head. In chapter 24 he says to his servant, ‘Now promise me that you will not take a wife for my son Isaac out of these nations around me (horrible lot), but go down to my relatives and find a bride for my dear Isaac’ (see vv. 1–9). And you know the lovely story, how he went and came across the girl and gave her all sorts of presents and earrings and beautiful dresses and things, and then the question was put. ‘My master,’ said the servant, ‘is blessed of God, and he has camels and cows and sheep and has silver and gold and goodness knows what else. And he has one son that he loves, and he has given everything into his hand. Would the girl be willing to become his wife?’

And the question was put to the family, and the family said, ‘Let the girl speak for herself.’ ‘Will you go with this man?’ they said, talking about the servant.

And she said, ‘I will go.’ And thus began the second big movement out of the Gentiles, in the prototype of Genesis, as a Gentile bride came out of the Gentiles to be joined to the son and heir of Abraham.

You will allow an old man to step aside from serious exposition, won’t you, and just indulge his fancy? For when I read that story I can’t help but think of the proposal made by the serpent to the woman, and then contrasting it with the proposal made by Abraham’s servant to this other woman. The serpent said to the woman, ‘My dear you must grab all you get, for God wants to keep you down.’ And she believed the lie and, along with Adam, discovered that they were naked. They had fallen to the level of the animal. But Genesis is only halfway through when God, in picture form, has his answer to that. Against the proposal made by the serpent to the woman, here comes the servant’s proposal to the woman: ‘My master is rich, and he has one son, and he has given to his son all he has. Would you be the bride of my master’s son?’

Isn’t it a lovely picture? That is God’s answer to the lie: ‘My dear, he doesn’t want to keep you down.’ The gospel is not just forgiveness; the gospel is an invitation to humanity to rise in the universe and become queen to God’s King, to become the loved bride of the Father’s Son, of whom it is written that ‘The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand’ (John 3:35).

I don't wonder why Paul says, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel' (Rom 1:16). Do you? What a message it is. We look from the atheism that tells you that when the mindless, purposeless forces that made you have destroyed you, then that's the end of you forever, to the gospel that says, 'You shall reign with the Father's Son for all eternity!' What a gospel we do have.

### **Prototypes in the second half of Genesis**

We come now to think of Abraham and the rest of Genesis prototypically. You say, 'What do you mean by that big, long word?' Well, imagine you hear that a firm is building a super-duper jet that is capable of carrying five hundred passengers at once, and you go to the factory to see it. There it is beginning to be built, and it's a mass of metal and wires and wheels. You can't make head nor tail of this big thing the designers had in mind, so what they'll do is to say, 'Well it's easier perhaps for you if we show you a model.' And they show you a model they've made as a prototype for people to see. And of course it's not the real thing; it's only a small model, but looking at it will help you grasp the big, real thing. It will show you what to look for when you go back out on the factory floor.

And Old Testament history is like that. God, who knew the end from the beginning, knew what he was going to do in Christ. He has given us prototypes here in history—early fulfilments at the lowly level of things that one day would be fulfilled at the highest level. Looking at the prototypes, the models, you can find help to understand the great reality, and so it is in the second half of Genesis.

### **The history of each patriarch and the promised seed**

From Abraham onwards there are three main parts in Genesis—sections four, five and six. In each of them you have a patriarch. In the fourth section, Abraham was the patriarch and the promised seed is Isaac. In the fifth section, Isaac is the patriarch and the promised seed is Jacob. In the sixth and final section of the book, Jacob is the patriarch and the promised seed are all twelve sons (and in particular Judah and Joseph). It is a very interesting study therefore to ask yourself what happens to the promised seed in that historical development in those successive parts of Genesis.

You know what happened to Isaac, don't you? Isaac was sacrificed on the altar to God. And what happened to the promised seed under the next patriarch? When Isaac became patriarch what happened to Jacob? Well, he started off in the land and then had to run away and went to the Gentiles; and there he lived among the Gentiles until the Gentiles got heartily sick of him, and he ran away and came back to the promised land. There he faced all kinds of difficulties. His sons created an absolute scandal by the atrocities they inflicted upon the Gentile tribes around them until the name of Jacob stank in the world. This was what happened after the promised seed had come back to the land.

What happened to the promised seed in the sixth and final section? Look at Joseph in particular. In Joseph all the nations of the world were blessed, and the sons of Jacob (and Jacob himself) discovered that the Joseph they thought was long since dead was still alive, and the Gentiles believed in him. And he had become the administrator over the then known world.

How interesting that is. Do you see any sort of *prototypical* hints? I think I do, for the promised seed is Christ. In the full reality, the promised seed is Christ. The promised seed under Abraham (which was Isaac) was brought by the father and laid on the altar. What a story that is.

What happened after Christ was crucified and raised from the dead, and Israel refused to repent? They were scattered among the nations as our Lord said they would be, and they were away from their homeland for centuries. Eventually Jacob, being disliked by the Gentiles, had to run back; and he only had one place to go so he came back to the promised land. You say, 'He was now restored, and it was all marvellous.' No it wasn't. Jacob's sons created an absolute scandal amongst the nations, using religion as an excuse for atrocities committed upon the local tribes. A sorry business that was.

Israel that were scattered have now come back, particularly since 1948. But the land was promised to Abraham and his *seed*, and according to Galatians 3, the seed 'is Christ' (v. 16). The title deeds to the land are vested in Christ, and Israel cannot thumb their noses against Jesus the Christ and tell God, 'We will not have your Son,' and then claim that God has given them the title deeds to the land. The land is Christ's. Though they are back in the land, they are largely not yet restored. What will their restoration depend on? We find the answer in the last part of Genesis.

Poor old Jacob had now become the patriarch, and his boys that had sold Joseph to the Gentiles pitched Jacob a lie. They came back with his clothes all stained in blood and persuaded Jacob (I wonder if he really ever believed it) that Joseph was dead and his dreams come to nothing. 'Shall he rule over us? We shall see what will become of his dreams' (see Gen 37:20). And Jacob, that is, Israel, lived to see the day when he discovered, 'My son Joseph is still alive! I will go and see him before I die' (see 45:28). And Israel discovered the God-appointed deliverer in his son who was appointed to reign and to rule over the house of Israel, and found him received by the Gentiles and with a Gentile bride. Oh, if you're not careful you'd start to think all sorts of things, wouldn't you! But you can believe that, for the day is coming when Israel, after all their trials and tribulations, shall be brought to realize that the great promised seed is alive and is the master administrator of the world.

I cite these things to provoke your interest if you have not quite thought along that line before. Genesis is a book of history but a book full of prototypes. And the prototypes are interesting because they are early versions, early models and fulfilments at a lowly level, of the great reality that is fulfilled at the higher level. We can see the coming of the promised seed, his death at Calvary, the scattering of Israel among the nations and then their return (still in unbelief), and finally Israel's reconciliation to their greater than Joseph, but coming to realize he is not only their Saviour but the Saviour of the world. You'd almost dance, but please don't get me into trouble and dance, not here this morning!

That is a marvellous story. It is the watermark of inspiration in holy Scripture. But with that now we must come to Genesis's story about literal Abraham, biographically speaking.

## **An overview of Abraham's story**

Now let's look at a much clearer outline of the fourth section of Genesis, which points to five elements in the story of Abraham.<sup>8</sup>

### **I. Background to Abraham's Call out of Gentiles 10:1–11:26**

- A. The great cities of the Gentiles (10:8–12).
- B. The city and tower of Babel (11:1–9).
- C. The other Semitic nations and Abraham's forebears.

### **II. First Major Period 11:27–15:21**

- A. Denies wife among the Egyptians.
- B. Main issue: goods–vs–life.
- C. Justification and inheritance by faith without works.

### **III. Second Major Period 16:1–19:38**

- A. Despairs of wife and takes slave-girl, Hagar.
- B. Main issue: the works of the flesh–vs–the life of faith.
  1. Abraham and Sarah's fleshly attempt to produce the promised seed.
  2. Lot's daughters and the maintenance of Lot's seed.
- C. Justification by faith apart from the works of the law.

### **IV. Third Major Period 20:1–22:24**

- A. Denies wife among the Philistines.
- B. Main issue: security: in man or God?
- C. Abraham, justified by works, discovers the anchor of the soul.

### **V. The Sequel: Rebekah's Call out of the Gentiles 24:1–25:11**

- A. Winning of wife for Isaac.
- B. Abraham's other wives.
- C. Abraham's death and burial.

Now we are coming to plain, straightforward history. This is Abraham's biography. There is, in the first part, the background to Abraham's call out of the Gentiles. Then we have the first major period, the second major period and the third major period. Then there is the sequel: the winning of a wife for Isaac, Abraham's other wives, and Abraham's death and burial. But I want now to concentrate on the first, second and the third major periods, taken biographically.

### **Abraham's wrong treatment of his wife in each of the three major periods**

In each of those periods you will see Abraham behaving in a wrong way towards his wife, Sarah. In the first major period he denies his wife, and the result is that Pharaoh takes her into his harem, and only the grace of God delivered her. In the second major period he despairs of

---

<sup>8</sup> These notes are also in the Appendix – Section 4 in Depth.

having a son by his wife and takes the slave girl Hagar (admittedly at Sarah's suggestion). There were some sorry results of that. In the third major period, once more Abraham denies his wife, Sarah. The result is that she is taken by a Philistine king and, apart from God's intervention the paternity of the promised seed would at that stage have been in doubt.

### **The main issue to be faced in each of the three major periods**

In those three periods of Abraham's biography certain very big issues had to be faced. In the first one the main issue was the comparative value of goods (possessions, substance) as distinct from life. In the second major period the main issue was the works of the flesh or the life of faith. In the third major period the main issue was whether security was to be found in man or in God.

### **The major doctrine in each of the three major periods**

In each of these three major periods a major theological doctrine comes to light and is taught. In the first major period it is justification by faith. In the second major period it is the doctrine of justification by faith apart from the works of the law. And in the third major period we have the doctrine of justification by works.

Therefore we need to pay attention to these biographical details of Abraham's life, for we shall find them expounded and quoted in support and explanation of the basic Christian doctrines of the gospel, particularly by Paul in the Epistle to the Romans and the Epistle to the Galatians, and by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

## **The first major period: Goods versus life**

The issue then in the first major period is going to be justification by faith and the inheritance by faith. The great doctrine that 'Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness' is enunciated in Genesis 15 and repeated all through the New Testament; it is not only justification by faith but also the inheritance by faith.

But the lead up to that story is this other big issue of goods versus life. To put it in a nutshell, if Abraham and his seed were one day to be given a vast inheritance by God as their possession, including a large territory in the Middle East, then before they were entrusted with owning this vast wealth they had better be taught the value of things. They would need to learn that, in the ultimate accountancy, life is far more important than goods.

If that is a lesson that Abraham had to be taught, we need to be taught it too, don't we? For we too have a great inheritance, one that is 'imperishable, undefiled, and unfading' (1 Pet 1:4). My, you are going to be wealthy when you get to heaven! Before we get there, to make it safe for God to take us to heaven and give us this eternal inheritance with its incalculable wealth, we too have to be taught what life's true values are and that, in the end, life is more important than goods.



## Goods versus life

Let me rehearse the story as it comes in chapter 12 onward. There came a famine in the land, and Abraham went down to Egypt. When he got to the borders he was looking very intently at Sarah, and he said, 'Sarah you are beautiful, really beautiful.'

And Sarah was rejoicing at the news.

But then Abraham added, 'You know, you are so beautiful that when we come to Egypt Pharaoh might desire you, and he might kill me to get you. So, I tell you what Sarah, if you don't mind, when I come to Egypt I'll say you're my sister. Then Pharaoh will take you, and he won't kill me. And what is more, I might get a lot of money.' (I wonder what Sarah thought of that bit.)

Well, that's what happened. When he got to Egypt they said, 'Who is this beautiful woman?'

Abraham said, 'That's my sister.' That was only half the truth of course. She was his sister, but a half-sister (see 20:12). And they reported to Pharaoh, and he took Sarah, and the story says he gave Abraham wealth, flocks and money. And Abraham was saying, 'Marvellous. This was a very good bargain.'

And then Pharaoh found out (the story will tell you how), and when he found out this lie, they got hold of Abraham and Lot, his nephew, and Sarah, with all their accumulated wealth, and he was so disgusted he had his guards take them to the border and boot them out of the land.

'Never mind,' said Abraham, for now he was coming out of Egypt and he had tremendous goods. He was very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold (see 13:1-4).

And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions [or, 'goods'] were so great that they could not dwell together. (vv. 5-6)

Now they had all this wealth. They had so much cattle that they couldn't all dwell together: there was not enough grass to go around. So Abram very magnanimously offered Lot the first choice. 'We'll have to part,' he said, 'but now you choose where you would like to go.' And Lot, dear man, looked around, and he looked towards Sodom and the cities of the plain, and there was a lot of grass in those days before Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. And Lot was a sensible, down to earth chap with his feet on the ground. And if you've taken on a lot of cattle, you have to have grass; there's no denying it. And you can't live without milk, can you now, for your cornflakes and things? So, you had to have cows and you had to have grass. After all, you cannot be so heavenly minded you're of no earthly good.

So Lot moved towards the plains. It was a sensible business consideration. But it had a snag. The men of the city were exceedingly wicked; and though Lot came through the temptation so much so that the New Testament calls him 'righteous Lot' (see 2 Pet 2:7), he moved into the city amidst all that perversion. And he lost his children, didn't he? And the man who had set out with Abraham 'looking for the city that has the foundations' (see Heb 11:10) ended life living like a caveman with a caveman's morals.

Business is a very important thing, and we must always face it seriously as stewards, but when it comes to life it can never be the final and ultimate consideration. If we make it the sole compass bearing in our decisions, we run big risks.

Before the destruction of these cities, Lot and his family got caught between rival groups of kings. One group decided they'd had enough of serving under the leading king of the other group, and their rebellion led to war with its usual sad results for the civilian population.

So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way. Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner. These were allies of Abram. When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. Then he brought back all the [goods], and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his [goods], and the women and the people. (14:11–16)

What a marvellous writer of stories is the inspired author of Genesis. The very order of the list of what they brought back is copying the order of priorities in their minds. They 'brought back all the *goods*, and also . . . Lot with his *goods*, and the women and the people.'

Now Abram was going to face a very big test. The king of Sodom was going to come out to him and say, 'Abram, we're very grateful to you for what you've done. Now, I propose to reward you, my man. You give me the people, and you take the goods' (see v. 21).

Which would he choose? Would he take the goods and hand back the lives, that is, the people? For Abram's training, and because of the seriousness of the temptation, God in his mercy sent forth the great priest-king Melchizedek. Before the temptation assailed Abram, he came and brought forth bread and wine, and he blessed Abram by the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth (see v. 18–19). It was a marvellous experience for Abram as that high priest spoke not merely words, but awoke in his mind, spirit and imagination the sense of the reality of who God is: the supreme Creator, and possessor of heaven and earth. And he made the wealth of God so real to Abram that when the tempter came and said, 'Abram you take the goods but give me the life,' he replied,

I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share. (vv. 22–24)

This was God's merciful education of Abram his servant so that he would begin to get his proportions right in life: life is more than goods; people are more valuable than things. It is not that God is asking us to go without forever, but the wealth that God will give us in our inheritance is so vast that before we get home to heaven we too need to be taught comparative value. Goods (possessions) are good and necessary. Life (people) is far more important.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? (Mark 8:35–37)

We are taught by no one less than our Lord himself that, in that sense, if we try to keep our soul (our life) in this life we shall lose it. If we are prepared to lose our soul (our life) for Christ's sake, we shall keep it. In view of what? In view of the coming kingdom of God. We live in this world. We must have its necessities, but our goal is the world to come, the age to come; and therefore in our decisions our prior consideration must be people—life in the kingdom of God and its righteousness, lest we spend ourselves too much on things that are passing away and will eventually perish.

### **Justification by faith**

Abram came through his test and God came to him in chapter 15 and said, 'I am your shield; your reward shall be very great' (v. 1). Abram, practically minded as ever said, 'Thank you very much, Lord, but incidentally, you have given me a lot of wealth, but I have no son. What's the good of all this wealth when I've got no one to leave it to? And when I die my steward here will be my heir.'

And God said, 'No he shan't. Look at the stars and see if you can count them. I am going to give you descendants as many and more than the stars.'

And Abram believed God. He believed in the Lord, and it was 'counted to him as righteousness' (v. 6). That is a seminal verse that is repeated again and again in Paul's Epistles of Romans and Galatians. Here the terms of our justification are laid down. It is by faith in God and not by our works.

You know the story so I need not emphasize it, but on that occasion there was more promised to Abram than justification, but he was justified. And there was more than the promise of seed. That day God made a covenant with Abram and with his seed, to give the land he had promised in that part of the Middle East as a possession.

God said, 'I'm going to give it to you and your seed Abram.'

Then Abram, sensible man that he was, said, 'Thank you Lord, but tell me how shall I *know* I shall inherit it?'

If somebody promised you one million pounds, you would say, 'Thank you very much. How will I be sure I'm going to get it? Just to be sure, what bank account are you going to put it into? This is my account number; can I tell my bank manager when it's going to come?' That would be a sensible response to a promise like that. When God said, 'I'm going to give this vast inheritance to you and your seed,' Abram asked how he would know he was going to inherit it.

God made a covenant with Abram on that day (15:7–21). The covenant sacrifice was prepared, and the presence of God walked between the pieces as he made that covenant with Abram to give the great inheritance to Abram and his seed. It was a one-party covenant. It was an event in history.

When we come to Galatians 3, Paul calls our attention to this event. He is arguing that justification is by faith and not by the works of the law, and he quotes Abraham's experience:

Abraham 'believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness' (v. 6). And was Abraham circumcised before he was justified? If he'd been circumcised before he was justified you might have argued that circumcision was necessary for justification.

'No,' says Paul, 'read the history. Abraham wasn't circumcised until after he was justified' (see Rom 4:9-12, Gal 3:7-9). And that shows that the works of the law are not necessary for salvation, and we Gentiles can be saved in the exact same way that Abraham was justified. Praise the Lord and hallelujah! But then Paul goes on to argue that it is not only justification that is by faith; it is the inheritance and the blessing of Abraham, and the promise and the covenant. Paul says they are all on the same ground, for when you trust God and you are justified, what do you get along with your justification? Well, you get the promise and you get the inheritance, and you get the covenant.

You say, 'What covenant?'

The covenant God made with Abraham and his seed.

You say, 'What's that got to do with me?'

Well, in the first place, nothing. Paul says that when God said to Abraham, 'To you and your seed have I given it', the seed 'is Christ' (see Gal 3:16). The majority of Abraham's descendants never did inherit the land; and those that did only inherited it for a few centuries. The seed that God meant to give the inheritance to was Christ. And God made a covenant with Abraham. Paul says, 'The law, which came 430 years afterwards, cannot alter that' (see v. 17).

In human experience, once a covenant has been made, signed, sealed and settled, it cannot be changed. Suppose you go to a builder and say, 'I'd like you to build me a house.'

He might say, 'What kind of a house?'

'Well, a small thing, you know, five bedrooms, six bathrooms and two garages.'

And he would say, 'Okay, but I shall have to charge you two million for that.'

And you sign an agreement. But once he's signed it, he can't add extra conditions, can he? He can't come along and say, 'I really meant not two million but seven million.'

And God, having made a covenant with Abraham to give the inheritance to Abraham and to his seed, signed it, sealed it and settled it. The law, which came 430 years afterwards, cannot be added to it as a condition of fulfilment. It was given to Abraham and to his seed by a one party, unconditional covenant and the promise of God.

Take a Will for instance. Your great Uncle Sam dies, and you and members of the family go to hear the lawyer read the Will. And the lawyer looks at the Will, and he reads it out, and your great uncle has left Tommy his house, Wendy his two cars, Johnny his stocks and shares, Sylvia his antique furniture, and so on and so forth. And the lawyer comes to the end of the list, and you haven't been mentioned. You say, 'Hold on a minute; you haven't mentioned me.'

He says, 'Who are you?'

'I'm Gwendolyn,' you say. 'I'm sure my uncle would have left *me* something. I mean, I was his favourite niece.'

'Well,' he says, 'I can't see anything here.'

You say, 'Can you read it again?'

So he reads it again. 'Sorry,' he says, 'there's no Gwendolyn mentioned here.'

'That can't be true,' you say. 'I'm sure my uncle would have left something to me.'

'Well he hasn't said so.'

'Well write my name in then!'

But no lawyer would do it, no matter how big the fee. Once a covenant has been made you can't add people's names in.

So, if God made a covenant with Abraham to give this great inheritance to him and his seed, and the seed is Christ, what's that got to do with us?

Well, you should say, 'Hallelujah!' Christ is going to inherit it; of course he will. That region in the Middle East, and along with that some more acres as well (and the whole world) shall be given to him. And as he comes to the end of Galatians 3 Paul says, 'I'll tell you a lovely thing. You see, as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ like a man puts on a garment. You are in Christ and you are Christ's!' (see v. 27) Contain your joy if you can! Because if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed. When all the promises that were made by God to Abraham's seed, and sealed by the covenant, come to Christ, then they come to you. 'And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's [seed], heirs according to promise' (v. 29). It is true! Not only are you justified and sanctified in Christ, but listen to the holy word: 'heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ' (Rom 8:17) for all eternity. And all that the Son inherits is yours by faith because you have been placed in Christ. Do shout hallelujah, and to God be the glory!

You see then how important it is to get this basic question right about the comparative value between earthly goods, and life and people, and eternal life at the end.

Let's break off our study there and commend ourselves to the Lord.

Our Father we thank thee for these vivid lessons from thy word and for the realism that shows us that Abraham was a man like as we are, subject to the same tests. For the way these stories are true to life we thank thee and pray thy grace now. Help us, Lord; make real to us the glorious salvation we have in Christ, the wonder of the inheritance of which we already have the earnest. And help us Lord in the affairs of life that this may weigh heavily in our decisions, that we may be good stewards of the earthly riches that thou dost give us. But ever and again make the eternal life, the eternal children of God, and thine affairs and those of thy Son, our chief values and the more important element in all our decisions. For his name's sake. Amen.

## The Rise of the Hebrew Nation From Among the Gentiles

### *The story of Abraham, Part Two*

#### **Our studies so far**

We were thinking about what I have called the three major periods in Abraham's life. We thought about Abraham and his significance, and the significance of the nation that sprang from him. We have thought of that historically, in the history of the world. And then we thought of the patterning of the last three major parts of Genesis, each concerned with a patriarch and a promised seed. We looked at them not only historically but prototypically, that is, as historical events that were in themselves an early form of the fulfilment of God's purpose. But that early form is a foreshadowing of the final fulfilment at the highest possible level.

Then we turned to think of Abraham's life biographically and doctrinally. We observed that in each of these three major periods of his life he behaved wrongly with regard to his wife, and as a result not only does God graciously correct him, but in those passages there is enunciated a basic doctrine that still holds good to this present day. So we saw in the first major period from chapter 12 onward that Abraham denied Sarah to save his own life, and also by that means he obtained a vast amount of goods. In the subsequent stories we see God at work beginning to train Abraham. If Abraham is to be heir of the great inheritance, and wealth unimaginable is to come to his seed in that inheritance, then first Abraham must be taught comparative values: that in the end, important and necessary as goods are, life is more than goods and people more than things. We have to learn that too. Before God introduces us finally to our glorious inheritance—incorruptible and undefiled, that fades not away—and we inherit fabulous and unimaginable wealth, God has to train us in this vale of tears to get our proportions right and to learn to value life beyond goods.

The great doctrine enunciated was justification by faith, which forms the Old Testament case law, because if Abraham was justified by faith it sets the legal precedent. If anybody else is going to be justified, they can and must be justified the same way that Abraham was justified. That isn't a type or a parable. Abraham was a real man that walked on two legs, and he was literally justified by faith before God. It creates the legal precedent for everybody else that follows. If we would be justified before God it must be, as Abraham was, on the principle of faith. That said, not only was he justified, but on that same occasion he received the promise of the inheritance, guaranteed to him by God through the covenant that God made with him and his seed, guaranteeing to give them the inheritance eventually. That inheritance too was given, not as a conditional promise but an unconditional covenant so that Abraham could be sure of its eventual fulfilment.

Paul reminds us of those twin doctrines in the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. In Galatians he proves once again that Abraham was justified by faith, but not only justified. By faith also he received the promises of the inheritance and the covenant. Then Paul proceeds to apply the lesson to all believers in Jesus Christ our Lord. We are not only justified by faith and not by the works of the law but, thank God, we too receive the promises of Abraham. We receive the inheritance because it is guaranteed to us by that very same covenant that God made with Abraham, because the covenant was made with Abraham and his seed. And as Paul remarks, the seed God intended to name when he formed the covenant and said 'to you and to your seed I have given it'; that seed was Christ (see Gal 3:16). That is not Paul inventing ideas out of the blue, for as God told Abraham at the time the covenant was made, 'Your descendants will not come into the inheritance for the next four hundred years' (see Gen 15:13).

Abraham himself didn't inherit it actually, nor did his descendants, for four hundred years. They spent most of that time in Egypt, then they came again under Joshua and inherited it for a while; though at the Assyrian invasion the ten tribes were taken away from Canaan; and at the Babylonian invasion the two tribes went into captivity in exile. Many of them, perhaps most of them, never came back. A minority came back under Ezra and then under Nehemiah, and the state of Israel was set up generally as a vassal state, first under the Persians, then under the Greek Ptolemy's and Seleucids, and finally under Rome. It was only a small part of the nation that returned, and the rest were still among the Gentiles. After AD 70, there began the long process, made faster by Hadrian in the 130s onwards, when Israel was scattered among the nations. Therefore only a tiny proportion of Abraham's descendants have inherited the land to this present day.

Does that mean that the promise was all in vain? 'No indeed,' says Paul, 'for when God said "to you and to your seed, I have given it", by the "seed" he meant the promised seed that is Christ, and Christ shall inherit it' (see Gal 3:16).

In times past, some of my brethren have been a little bit disturbed about me. They say, 'Why are you interested in any earthly inheritance? That's for the Jews. You ought to be more spiritually minded and be content with heaven.'

Well, the Lord knows I shall be glad to get to heaven, but is it worldly to be interested in an earthly inheritance? I rather think not. Tell me, is Christ going to inherit it? Is that rather unspiritually-minded of the Lord Jesus? I thought in Psalm 2 God invited him to, 'Ask of me, and I will give you the uttermost parts of the earth as your possession' (see v. 8). He shall have it one day.

Jesus shall reign where e'er the sun  
Does its successive journeys run<sup>9</sup>

He is the Son of the Creator, the Lord for whom it was made; he shall inherit, and not just this portion either, but the whole earth. And the marvellous thing is that when he inherits it, we shall inherit it too. To tell the truth, you are multimillionaires. Marvellous. And we come into the terms of the covenant because we have been baptized into Christ. We are in Christ, and

---

<sup>9</sup> Isaac Watts (1674-1748), 'Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun' (1719).

we have put on Christ. 'And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's seed, (because you are in Christ, and he is the promised seed of Abraham), and therefore you are heirs according to that promise (see Gal 3:29). Yes, and you should shout hallelujah over that!

## **The second major period: The works of the flesh versus the life of faith**

We come now to the second major period of Abram's life where again he misbehaves in regard to Sarah and, at her suggestion, takes the slave girl Hagar and fathers Ishmael. I suggest that the main issue at stake in this period is the works of the flesh versus the life of faith.

In the chapters in this section that deal with the story of Lot, it is easy to see the works of the flesh are all too evident. Lot eventually took up residence in Sodom where he largely lost whatever influence he had and was involved in the disgraceful happenings when the two angels came to rescue him and his family from Sodom before the judgment fell. He barely escaped with his life and was saved 'so as by fire' (see 1 Cor 3:15). He was saved, and the Holy Spirit with the generosity typical of him, says in 2 Peter 2, 'the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations' (v. 9 KJV). For he was a 'righteous man' (v. 8) in the sense that he was justified by faith, as Abraham was. But he sowed to the flesh and of the flesh he reaped corruption (see Gal 6:8). He ended up in a cave, living like a caveman; and it is best to draw a veil over what happened in that cave.

### **The flesh manifested in Abraham's experience**

It is not so easy to see in this period of Abraham's life that there was likewise a manifestation of the flesh. It might escape us when we first read the story because it is done in the context of what you might call *religion*, in the context even of the promise of God. Abraham and Sarah, believing in the promise of God that he would give them a seed, fell into a misunderstanding of what was meant by the term when God gave them the *promise* that he was going to give them a son.

I have to admit that it was at Sarah's suggestion that Abram did it. I don't know if it went exactly like this, but one morning or afternoon Sarah started talking to Abram and she said, 'Abram dear, I've been thinking.'

'You have?' he said. 'And what might you have been thinking about, my dear?'

She said, 'About this promise that God made us that he's going to give us a son.'

'Yes,' said Abram, 'isn't that marvellous? He's going to give us a son.'

'Well I don't know about that,' says Sarah. 'I think it isn't quite so marvellous as you might think. You see, the Lord has forgotten something.'

'Oh really, Sarah?'

'Yes. He has overlooked the fact that I'm barren; I can't have a son. And what's more, you know, he's contradicting himself. First of all he says we're going to have a son, but then he's shut up my womb so I can't have a son.'

'Oh,' said Abram, there's a point. Well what should we do?'



‘Well, I think this myself—that when God promised he was going to give us a son, he didn’t mean it that “just like that I’m going to give you a son”; he meant that we should use our own resources as best we know how to. And God helps those that help themselves.’

‘Oh,’ said Abram, ‘but my dear we haven’t got any resources, have we?’

‘Yes we have,’ she said.

‘Well, what?’

‘We’ve got my slave girl Hagar.’

‘Oh,’ said Abram.

In those days it was customary amongst the nations around that a man would have a chief wife and then many slave girls. And if the chief wife was infertile, the chief wife could decide to give one of the slave girls to her husband, as Sarah now put it, ‘that I have a child by her and I shall be built up by her’ (see Gen 16:2). The slave girl’s son would be counted the son of the chief wife. Sarah was going according to local custom and the ethics and traditions of that time in history and using her own resources to fulfil the promise. So, Abram took Hagar, and Ishmael was born.

It didn’t turn out quite like Sarah expected because when Hagar saw she was with child she began to put on airs and graces. When Sarah would say, ‘Put the kettle on for tea,’ she said, ‘I can’t; I’m carrying Abram’s child, you know? You make the tea.’

Oh! Sarah wasn’t having that kind of talk from a slave girl. Who did she think she was? It was a rather bitter experience for Sarah, but then it had been her suggestion, hadn’t it? And so she made life so hard for Hagar that she ran off. And an angel of the Lord found her in the desert and said to her, ‘My dear, this is no place for you to be in your condition. You had better go back to Abram’s home. You will have a son, and I will bless him.’ Then he added realistically, ‘And he will be a wild donkey of a man. His hand against everybody and everybody’s hand against him.’ But God himself put the girl back into Abram’s home (see vv. 7–15).

There followed some uncomfortable years. You can imagine this ‘wild donkey’ of a boy. I don’t think Sarah was very pleased, and it wouldn’t have been so bad if Abram had had the same view as Sarah, but he had grown rather fond of the boy, and in the end pleaded with God to accept him as the promised seed. I don’t know what Sarah thought of that either. And God said, ‘No Abram. No, not Ishmael. I shall bless him. He will be a big nation, but that’s not what I meant by the promised seed. You see, when I gave you a promise, it was an unconditional promise about what I was going to do for you. It wasn’t a covert suggestion that you should do your best and by your own resources have a child and thus fulfil my promise. You’ve done your best, using your resources, and you’ve produced Ishmael. That’s not what I meant by my promise’ (see 17:15–21).

And to press the lesson home upon him, God now left Abram. You see, originally Sarah was barren but Abraham was still virile. Now God left him for thirteen years until, so far as fathering a child was concerned, he was beyond it. Now there was no question of their own resources. If that promise was to be fulfilled it must be by the direct intervention of God bringing life out of their virtually dead bodies. ‘That’s what I meant by *promise* when I made the promise,’ God says. And eventually Isaac was born by the intervention of God doing precisely that.

### **The significance of God's promise to Abraham (Rom 4:13-24)**

You will be aware how Paul expounds the significance of these things both in the Epistle to the Romans and in the Epistle to the Galatians, when he says that Abraham was justified by faith.

What does *faith* mean when Scripture says you are 'justified by faith'? You might well ask the question because when Abraham was justified by faith the thing that God asked him to exercise that faith about was that God would give him seed—a son in other words—and descendants; and Abraham believed the Lord, and his faith was counted for righteousness. When we are asked to believe God in order to be justified, we don't have to believe that God is going to give us a child, do we? So how can there be a parallel between Abraham and us?

In Romans 4, Paul does the logical thing. He has just proved that we have to be justified by faith, like Abraham was justified by faith. If you then put the question to Paul, 'But what do you mean by faith? How is there any parallel between Abraham's faith and ours?' Paul will bring out the implication of the Genesis story, that is, God promised to give Abraham a son, and then left him. And Abraham, being a sensible chap, 'considered his body now as good as dead' (see v. 19). Don't follow those old manuscripts which put in, 'He *did not* consider his body . . .'. Of course he did; he wasn't an ignoramus. He could see exactly what the situation was. He considered his body now as good as dead, and came to the realization that if ever he were to have a child, it would be a miracle of God's gift to bring life out of death. *Faith* means utter dependence upon God. How is that in any way parallel to us? Paul says,

But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (vv. 23-25)

Our faith is in God who raised Jesus from the dead. What kind of faith is that? What does our faith have to do with the resurrection?

Well, allow me a little thought experiment. Suppose you and I were standing around the sepulchre in which the body of the Lord Jesus was lying during the three days following his crucifixion; and we had come to see that if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, there would be no salvation for us. For if he is not risen, you are yet in your sins. If he is not risen then God has not accepted his sacrifice; there is no forgiveness. And coming to realize that as we are standing around the grave of Christ we might be saying, 'Well, we hope he does rise. Now what can we do? Well, we have to believe. What does that mean then? I know, let's join hands and start believing and say together, "I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe"', and if we can believe strong enough, his body will come out of the grave.'

Well, that's absolute nonsense, isn't it? Faith is not an expression of our power that produces the result. Like Abraham, who could see the result must be by an interposition of God's power, we have learned to put our faith for justification, not in us, nor in the strength of our faith, but in the power of God that raised our Lord Jesus from the dead. At that you should shout 'Hallelujah' again!

There are some people who are dear believers who, in times of affliction or perhaps in times of depression, wonder if they are really saved after all. Then they try to remember, 'Well

when I first believed, did I believe the right way round, and was it the right kind of faith? Oh, I can't remember. Perhaps it wasn't the right kind of faith. That means I'm not saved and never have been!

You may think that extreme, but I have known people come privately to talk to me who are in terrible nervous conflict over that issue of whether they have believed the right way round. They are not aware that what they have got into their heads is the idea that faith is the work we do; and we have to do it at least seventy-five percent correct or else it isn't valid. And they are trying desperately hard to believe with the right kind of faith.

What a lifting of a burden it is when people see what true faith is: it is abandoning trust in myself or my effort and relying absolutely and totally on what God does, on the God who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. For when he died, my dear brother, my dear sister, he died bearing your sin in his body — all of it! And he paid the price. He was delivered for our offences, and God raised him from the dead to show to all and sundry (and to you in particular) that God had accepted his sacrifice. God had done it, and done it to demonstrate to you that your account has been cleared before God. It was not your faith that did it; it was the power of God that did it. It is marvellous. It is no wonder that Paul says, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ' (see 1:16).

#### *The institution of circumcision (Gen 17)*

Therefore, in this part of Genesis God institutes the rite of circumcision. It was a good and godly rite, though it was not a condition for being justified, for Abraham was justified by faith at least thirteen years before he was circumcised, Paul comments on that fact in Romans 4: 'He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised' (v. 11). His descendants were asked to be circumcised, first as a token that they were *physically* descended from Abraham, not as a means of their being justified. It was also a token of their willingness to keep God's law, but not as a token that they were going to keep the law in order to be justified.

Circumcision, as the New Testament would interpret it, was also a symbol. 'For we are the circumcision,' Paul says, 'who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh' (Phil 3:3).

What does he mean by 'confidence in the flesh'? He goes on to say, 'I could have confidence in the flesh, if you looked at it from a worldly point of view for I (let me remind you) was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee of the strictest kind, touching the righteousness which comes by the practice of the law and all its rituals, found blameless' (see vv. 4–6). Notice that, he does not say *sinless* but *blameless*. He came behind no one in the Judaism of his day. He was sincerely trying to keep God's law for salvation, until he met Christ and found out all that religious attainment by his own effort was what God calls 'trust in the flesh'. And he says 'I booted it out and count it as worthlessness that I might gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness which is my own, which is by the law, but that which is through faith in Jesus Christ' (see vv. 7–9). That is good Christian gospel!

True circumcision then, at its deepest level of meaning, is this same thing: giving up trust in the flesh, that is, in my own religious effort, and receiving from God the righteousness which is 'of God'. Notice it is the righteousness of *God*, not the righteousness of Christ. It is

the righteousness 'which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith' (v. 9). So Abraham was eventually taught that lesson.

### **The inheritance through the freeborn son**

That brings us back to Hagar and her son—now grown up. And you will remember it was the angel of the Lord that had sent Hagar back, and Ishmael was brought up in Abraham's home. I can't imagine what kind of a trouble he was; and it was a sore lesson inflicted upon Sarah. Abraham however pleaded with God: 'Please accept Ishmael.'

'No, no,' God says, 'I meant what I said. I'm going to give you a son; he is the promised seed.' And in Genesis 21 the promised seed, Isaac, is born of Sarah, the free woman. He is born a freeborn son, not of the slave girl but of the free woman (see Gal 4:23). Isaac began to grow up to be a toddler, and Ishmael began a little rough horseplay with him, and Sarah saw her darling Isaac being roughly handled by Ishmael. And with all the protective instincts of a woman, Sarah wasn't going to have that. She went to Abraham in the imperative mood that sometimes Sarah adopted and said, 'Abraham, you will cast out that slave woman and her son. The son of the bondwoman will not inherit along with my darling Isaac' (see vv. 8–10). Abraham didn't altogether agree, but this time God told him to listen to Sarah, and out went the bondwoman and her son, and God looked after them and gave them a good future.

As Sarah said, it was to protect Isaac's inheritance. What does that show us? It shows us that the heir to the inheritance was not to be the child produced by the slave woman—by Abraham and Sarah using their own resources. The heir to the inheritance was to be the freeborn son of the free woman. And Paul expounds the story as a figurative prototype. He says, 'My dear brethren, don't you listen to those false teachers who tell you it's enough to believe in Christ to start with, but thereafter your inheritance depends on your own efforts, and you must keep the law and be circumcised and all of that. Do not give in to them, for we are not sons of the slave woman but are the sons of the free. Stand fast in the freedom for which Christ has made you free' (see Gal 4:31–5:1).

This is marvellous. This is justification by faith. *Faith* is faith in the power of God, not in my effort. The inheritance is given to the freeborn son—justified by faith and born of God's Spirit, not by the efforts of the religious to keep God's law. That is the lesson that Abraham had to learn.

Notice another thing Paul says in this regard. Abraham was justified by faith and was looking forward to the birth of the promised seed. But until the promised seed came, which was a number of long years, God put Hagar and Ishmael back into Abraham's home until the promised seed Isaac came. Then what happened? Well, the next thing in Genesis 21 is that when the promised seed came, the slave woman and her son got thrown out. Paul asks us to see a certain correspondence in that. Start with Abraham again and that lovely covenant of God, in which he covenanted to give the inheritance to Abraham and to his seed. But there followed an interval of centuries until the promised seed, our Lord Jesus Christ, actually came. And what did God do in between? He interposed the law from Sinai as a temporary measure, until the promised seed should come. It was never intended as a means of salvation, of course, but as a form of discipline for God's people. But when the promised seed came and our blessed Lord was born and offered as the sacrifice on the altar (like Isaac was bound upon the altar)

and finished the work of redemption, then the slave woman was cast out and the freeborn sons of God, through faith in Christ are brought into their inheritance (see Gal 4:21–31).

### **The third major period: Security in man or in God?**

We now have a third period in Abraham's life to consider. In that third period, starting in chapter 20, Abraham denies his wife Sarah once more. And the Philistine king, Abimelech, took her because Abraham said she was his sister, and thus Abraham imperilled the paternity of the promised seed. God revealed it to the Philistine, and he came in disgust and rebuked Abraham: 'Why did you do it?' And Abraham said, 'I did it because I thought, "There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife"' (v. 11). For Abraham was a pilgrim, a resident alien: a *nomad* (to quote the official technical term), whereas the Philistines were living in garrison cities with walls. Though he was a powerful sheik, Abraham was wandering from place to place, and though he was a believer himself and feared God, he seriously worried whether God could possibly protect him when he came amongst people like the Philistines. They might slit his throat before they thought in order to get this beautiful woman. And he thought that God wasn't 'in this place'.

It is a feeling I get sometimes. I think it is fairly easy to live as I should amongst believers because they fear God, but what about out in the big world where they'd slit your throat economically or academically as soon as they'd look at you? Are you going to live right out in the open? Is God in *this place* as well? Abraham wasn't quite so sure about his security if God's fear wasn't in the place, so he took things into his own hands once more to try and guarantee security; and he had to be rebuked by a Gentile king.

We shall find the theme of security runs through this part of Genesis. We have already touched on the opening story of chapter 21 where, when the promised seed Isaac was born, Sarah, with her maternal instincts, looked to ensure the security of the inheritance for her son Isaac, so that it should not be shared with the son of the slave woman. It is natural for parents, isn't it? It is natural that mum should be concerned for the security of her darling son and his future and inheritance, of course it is.

And after that comes a story of this Philistine king once more, and he came to Abraham and said, 'Now, look here Abraham; I've got a proposition to make to you.' Though he was the king of a city and Abraham was a nomad, yet Abraham was very powerful. He had enough servants to make an army, as we read in chapter 14. With a loose cannon like that roaming around the place, the Philistine king feared that when he died this powerful sheik might attack his son and do him damage. How could the king secure the future for his son? So he came to Abraham and said, 'Make a covenant with me that you will be loyal to my son when I am gone' (see v. 23).

You know, fathers are like that, aren't they? I expect you who are now fathers were thinking of other things when you were youngsters. Then you got married and you had a son. That altered things, didn't it? Now what about the security for your son and his future? It is natural to want security.

And Abraham expansively said, 'Yes, my dear man, I'll swear you an oath in the name of God that I'll not injure your son; I will be loyal to him.' And then Abraham said, 'As a matter of fact, your servants have stolen my wells.'

'Oh have they?' the king said.

So then they made a covenant to guarantee and *secure* the water supply, which was an absolutely number one necessity if you lived in the desert like that. And they swore an oath, and they called the name of the place *Be'er Sheva*, which is Hebrew for 'the well of the oath'. And Abraham dwelt there at the well of the oath, in security.

Then God came to Abraham, and he said, 'Abraham, what about your son; and what about your future? What about security for your future, Abraham?'

And Abraham said, 'Well, Lord, thank you very much. You have given me Isaac, haven't you? And you have promised me all these marvellous future blessings in Isaac.'

'I see,' said God. 'So tell me, Abraham, where is your faith for security for the future? Where does your faith lie? Is it in me or in Isaac?'

'Well, of course it's in you, Lord.'

'Really? It's in me, Abraham?'

'Yes, Lord.'

'Right. Shall we just demonstrate that? Please, will you give me your son?' (see 22:1-2).

And as the writer to the Hebrews points out, there was Abraham, and all the promises of God were centred, vested in, Isaac. And Abraham is now an elderly man without any hope of future sons; all his future now depends on Isaac (see 22:17-18). And God has asked the man to give up Isaac and be left with nothing but God.

Yes, but in the training through which God puts his people, ultimately it is important that our faith be tested as we think of the future and the question of security arises. Where is my faith for security? It is vastly important, painful though the process might be, that we be taught practically to put our faith for the future and for security in God, and in God alone.

Then Abraham offered up Isaac. He that had received the promises, to whom it had been said 'in Isaac shall your seed be called' was offering him up to God and was left with God alone. Abraham found the biggest security that a man can ever possess for time or eternity, and he celebrated it! He called the name of the place Jehovah-Jireh: 'the Lord will provide', and, 'In the mount of the LORD, it shall be seen' (v. 14 KJV).

Look at it from the eternal point of view. When you get home to heaven and you see all the riches and say to yourself, 'Now, can I be sure about my eternal future? I mean, eternity is a long while, isn't it? Shall I find myself turned out of these riches one of these days? How can I feel secure about my future?'

What will your answer be? By the time you get home to glory, God will have taught the lesson beyond dispute: that our security depends on God and God alone. But the doctrinal point that is now raised is the important point of justification by works.

### **Justification by works**

We should stop just for a moment to ponder the significance of justification by works. This is a doctrine that is not quite so popular in evangelical circles as justification by faith. But Abraham offered his son Isaac on the altar at God's command, and James says,

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was [made perfect] by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'—and he was called a friend of God. (2:21–23)

Let's make an initial distinction so that we do not get ourselves confused. By way of a thought model, think of the birth of an infant. I am told by the experts that it used to be that when a baby was born, the midwife or the doctor would hold the poor, unfortunate infant upside down by its heels and deliver a sharp smack on that part of the anatomy that is built for the purpose. And the babe would let out an enormous yell! And everybody was pleased.

You say, 'How could they be pleased to hear a baby cry?'

Ah, but you see, the fact that it cries is the evidence that it is alive. Isn't that so? But now do please make a distinction. The crying is the evidence that the baby is alive; it isn't the means by which the baby got life. The baby did not get life by crying; it got life when the seed and the egg came together, and the zygote was formed. We make a distinction then between the condition of getting life and the evidence that you have got life.

'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness' (Rom 4:3, quoting Gen 15:6). He was a true believer and was justified by faith. That wasn't a promise that just said, 'Abraham, you believe today, and I promise you that if you go on behaving very well you might possibly be justified at the end.' That is nonsense. He was justified there and then by faith. If he had died then he would have gone to glory, like the dying thief (see Luke 23:32–43). But God didn't take him home just then and, being justified by faith, Abraham was asked to justify his profession of faith by his works. And James makes the point very clearly. He says, 'You know, you'll say to somebody or other, "I've got faith. You have got works, but I've got faith." And your friend has the right to reply, "Okay. You've got faith, and I have got works. That's lovely. Now, you show me your faith. Go on. Show me faith".' James says that without works you'll have a job doing that (see 2:18).

Faith is invisible, and people have the right to ask us for the evidence that our faith is there and is real. We get salvation by faith. But wait a minute. God will require of us that presently we give evidence that the faith is real faith. He will require us to justify our profession of faith by our works.

When I was a boy in the dim and distant ages past, I was taught a neat little rhyme by my superiors to explain these matters. It went like this: 'We are justified by faith before God; we are justified by works before the world'. That sounded eminently sensible to me, but it was only partly right. It is true that the world has a right to ask for works as the evidence of our faith; but in the story of Abraham who was it that asked for the evidence? It wasn't Sarah, was it? It wasn't the Philistines. And it wasn't Abraham's servants. He left the whole lot behind that day and, at God's command, he climbed the mountain, put his son upon the altar and raised the knife to slay his son; at which dramatic point the angel of the Lord called out of heaven, 'Don't lay your hand upon the child, for . . .'. Now listen to what the angel of the Lord (indeed, the second person of the Trinity) said: 'Don't kill the lad, for *now I know* that you fear God.' Do check that in the actual text of Genesis, which I'm quoting. 'Now I know that you fear [me],' the Lord says, 'seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me'

(22:12). It was God himself who was asking for the evidence. And you say, 'Oh, but that's silly because God must have known from the start that Abraham was a true believer.'

Well so he did of course.

You will say, 'How can God then ask for evidence and say *'Now I know'*? Didn't he know it all along?'

Yes, but there are two kinds of knowledge. Standing here right now, I know it is mighty cold down in the Antarctic.

You say, 'How do you know that?'

Well I read it in a book, and I can work it out with a little knowledge of climate and so forth that it must be freezing cold at the South Pole.

That is one kind of knowledge. I have never known by personal experience what it is to shiver in the cold of the Antarctic.

God knew that I, David Gooding, would one day exist. He knew that with his foreknowledge. I am glad that he was not content with that (perhaps you're not, but I am). I am glad he didn't say, 'I foresee that Gooding's going to exist, so he doesn't need to exist after all.'

So God insisted, not on knowing in advance Abraham would believe, but on knowing it by actual experience. And what it is for the divine patience to have to put up with such a one as Gooding, and what it is to bring this man to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. He knows the practical experience of having a son by that name. God knows our hearts, yes to be sure he does, but God demands to know by experience of our works that we demonstrate to him that our faith is genuine.

You say, 'What kind of works was Abraham asked to do in order to be justified by his works?'

Well, God did not say, 'Abraham, look. If you are really a believer, be a bit kinder to those Philistines, and look after the poor.'

I suspect Abraham was kind to the poor, however it was a bigger test than that, for he that had received the promises was now being asked by God to deliver up Isaac in whom the promises were all invested. What was it demonstrating? It was demonstrating that Abraham's faith was in God and only in God. God asked him to surrender Isaac, therefore, so that all Abraham's hope and confidence for the future should be in God.

Sometimes God will lead us as believers to that same kind of mountaintop where all he has given us seems now to be taken from us, and we are left with God alone. It is a painful but a blessed place, because to find yourself bereft of all save God is to be made conscious of his promise: 'because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 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' (vv. 16–17).

And the writer to the Hebrews emphasizes the point that James is making. Having endured and come through the test, and shown by his works that his faith in God was genuine, Abraham received the promise. And on that occasion God not only gave the promise but he confirmed it with an oath saying, 'By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD' (v. 16), 'that by two unchangeable things', says the writer to the Hebrews, '. . . we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this



as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain' (6:18–19).

*There* is security for you! If our faith is like an anchor in God himself, then let the world collapse; let the whole universe collapse, and the galaxies go to nothing. And what are you left with then? You are left with God, and God's unbreakable word, enforced by his oath in the name of a God who cannot lie, so that we might have strong encouragement and a hope like an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast for now and eternity.

## **Conclusion**

These then are the three periods of Abraham's life. They include three mistreatments of his wife, but also the wonderful lessons that God taught him in God's course of education: justification by faith; then the trials of faith explaining to Abraham what faith really is; and finally the challenge to demonstrate his faith by his works, that his faith was in God. It was the painful but blessed preparation of Abraham for the great eternity that lies ahead.

## The Maintenance of the Hebrews' Vision and Their Development into Israelites

### *The Generations of Isaac*

We come now to the fifth major part of the book of Genesis, which begins, 'These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham' (25:12). The generations follow for a few verses and cease in verse 18. Then comes the major section of this fifth part.

These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. (vv. 19–20)

What follows now in this fifth part of the book of Genesis is told from Isaac's point of view. It begins with 'These are the generations of Isaac'; and you will see when it comes to its end it says,

And Isaac breathed his last, and he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days.  
And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him (35:29).

This is the historian doing what he tells you he is going to do. This is Isaac's story, and he is telling it to us. Jacob figures much more prominently in these chapters than Isaac does, but at this time it was Isaac who was the patriarch. Just as in the previous section it was Abraham who was the patriarch and Isaac was the promised seed, now in this fifth part of the book, it is Isaac who is the patriarch, and Jacob is the promised seed. When we come to the sixth and final part of Genesis, I shall have grave difficulty in convincing you (and most of you will go home unconvinced) that the final part of Genesis is Jacob's story.

And people will say, 'It cannot be because Joseph is the one who is most prominent in that final part. And we don't like Jacob anyway; we like Joseph. It's got to be Joseph's story.'

Well, all right, you believe so, but the writer of Genesis will have it his way in the end. It is told from Jacob's point of view, because in the last part of the book Jacob is now the patriarch and the promised seed are his twelve sons, and Joseph in particular.

### **Isaac's story**

This then is going to be the story of Isaac. We shall come to him and the birth of his two sons Esau and Jacob eventually. Jacob will figure predominantly in the chapters that follow, but

many believers have found his story more difficult to interpret than their favourite story of Abraham and Isaac. After all, Abraham is justified by faith, and that is a foundational doctrine for us nowadays. Abraham's experience is quoted in the New Testament where we learn its importance. And he was justified by works, giving us an example to show that we eventually must be justified by works too, and thus demonstrate our faith is genuine.

But what shall we make of Jacob? What lessons does he teach, if any? If we try somehow to make Jacob teach the same lessons as Abraham, we get it all in a muddle and tied round our necks and nearly strangle ourselves. Because, truth to tell, Jacob is not just a ditto repeat story of Abraham; it has a different message to tell us.

### **Different lessons from different patriarchs**

Of the four promises that were made to Abraham: the promise of the land, the promise of the seed, the promise of blessing and the promise that in him and his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed, the first two were fulfilled under Abraham's patriarchate. He received the covenant giving him title deeds to the land. He received the promised seed towards the end of his life. In Isaac's story, in which Jacob predominates, the fulfilment of the third part is seen: 'I will bless you.' It will raise the whole question of what God means by this term *blessing*; and sure enough Jacob needed to be taught it, for he had some funny ideas about God's blessing to start off with. He had to be disciplined and trained by experience to learn what God's blessing is.

### **The gates on the city Abraham looked forward to**

One easy way to understand the stories about Jacob in this fifth part of the book is to use the hint of a phrase in the New Testament. Hebrews 11 says that Abraham 'was looking forward to the city that has [the] foundations, whose designer and builder is God' (v. 10). When in the book of the Revelation an angel took John to see the Lamb's wife, he took John and showed him the great eternal city. Its first function is to be the tabernacle of God, and its second function is to be the bride of the lamb. He saw the city and was impressed, among other things, by the foundations of the walls of the city. And on these mighty foundations he saw written the names of the apostles of the Lamb (see 21:9–14).

Abraham looked 'forward to the city that has *the* foundations,' and in the life of Abraham and Sarah we are taught twin foundational doctrines of all the great community of the redeemed—the Jerusalem that is above, 'the mother of us all' (Gal 4:26 KJV). The twin foundations are justification by faith and justification by works.

But when John was shown the city it not only had twelve foundations but twelve gates. Gates are the way in and the way out, of course, but in an ancient city in the time of Jacob the gate of a city was not merely the place by which you entered and exited. The gate of the city was a place where the elders sat to administer the city and all its affairs. In Israel you will find the remains of ancient cities, and then in some of them you will see the gate. It is a large structure, enclosing a square or other piece of ground; and round the walls are the seat-like ledges upon which the elders of the city would sit in order to govern the affairs of the city. Therefore when we think of a *gate* of a city in the Old Testament and in the symbolic use that

is made of cities in the New Testament, the gate speaks not merely of the way in to the city; it speaks of the government and administration of the city.

Now it is the fact that when John was shown these gates, there were written on them the names of the tribes of Israel; and in this section of Genesis we shall get the story of how those tribes got their names. The names were given to the boys by Jacob's two wives, Leah and Rachel, and then the two handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah. This is a very interesting part of history. I don't know whether their mothers knew what they were doing when their children were born and they named them, but just think of it: their names shall be inscribed on the gates of the eternal city forever.

In many cases when those mothers named those children, they named them very carefully, for the matter of the conception of the children, their birth, and the family relationships were sometimes very difficult. They took them to God in prayer and felt they saw the answer of God to their prayers in the birth of their children, and the education of their children, and in their relationship with their husband. They encapsulated that experience of God in the names that they gave their children. That experience is going to be built into the government of heaven, eternally. For if Abraham and Sarah teach us the foundations upon which that eternal community are built—justification by faith and justification by works—Jacob and his wives will prove to be an example to us of how God is training his people to reign with Christ.

That is spectacularly wonderful, isn't it? 'Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we are to judge angels?' (1 Cor 6:2-3). Do you not know that 'if we endure, we will also reign with him' (2 Tim 2:12)? We are being trained and prepared to take over the administration of the universe with Christ.

What are the lessons that we must learn if we shall be prepared to reign with the Lord Jesus? Our Lord himself pointed to them and said, 'One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much' (Luke 16:10). This is the training ground for according to our faithfulness so will be the measure of responsibility given to us in the coming government of Christ.

These then are exciting lessons, so let us begin with Isaac, because this is his story.

### **Isaac in the land; maintaining the vision**

Overlook for the moment the story of the birth of Isaac's twin children, Esau and Jacob, and come to chapter 26 where God speaks to Isaac.

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. And the LORD appeared to him and said, 'Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.' So Isaac settled in Gerar. (vv. 1-6)

Isaac is in the land with a renewed promise of the blessing, but it was difficult, for Abraham was such a tremendous spiritual giant. Little Isaac grew up under the shadow of the big oak tree that was Abraham. It was Abraham who had had all the experiences of God. Sometimes it is bit difficult for the next generation to grow up under fathers who have been such spiritual giants, because when all is said and done they become the dominant personality in the home, even if they don't try to be. Sometimes the sons feel that they'll never be as good as their fathers, so they hold back and don't get involved. And not having the vivid experiences of dad, they find when daddy's gone it is difficult to stand for the position that dad occupied, and to carry on the tradition.

Isaac seems to be a little, retiring fellow. You never read of any marvellous exploits he did when he became patriarch. He was asked to stay in the land because the vision given to Abraham was that God would one day give them the land, but not just yet, and he had to maintain that tradition and stay in the land. That was difficult when there was a famine because, while the promises of God for future blessing are marvellous, that is for the future, and you have to have bread and butter to live now, because if you don't live you can't hold the promise. You can't go to heaven without eating porridge (or cornflakes, if you like), can you? You have to start here on earth, and to survive on earth long enough you have to eat; you have to be down to earth. You first have to live here and then go to heaven. And staying in the land with the promise of blessing in the future while there was a famine was tactically difficult.

And more than that, when Isaac dug wells the powerful Philistines who lived in their cities came and took them over (like the big chain stores do the little corner shops). They drove Isaac's flocks away. So poor old Isaac had to dig other wells, because water was the number one necessity in those days.

And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, 'For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.' From there he went up to Beersheba ['the well of the oath']. And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, 'I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake.' So he built an altar there . . . (vv. 22-25)

His was a vivid and genuine experience of the provision of God in the workaday world of getting a living so that he could stay in Canaan and maintain the vision, in hope.

Then the Philistines made a covenant with him.

They said, 'We see plainly that the LORD has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD.' So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. (vv. 28-31)

The emphasis here is on the blessing of the Lord in the affairs of daily life and business and maintaining the patriarchal family in a hostile world.

### **The question of the blessing**

In the next chapter we find that Isaac is now old, and he is responsible as patriarch to pass on the blessing. In the eastern world that is much more significant than a father just saying, 'I wish you every success, my boy.' It is a somewhat religious ceremony in which the patriarch would impart to the chief son and heir the blessing, including of course a lot of material blessing: property, goods, cattle and so forth, and pass the bigger amount to the son of his choice; thus passing on the blessing in the name of God.

So, feeling the weight of his responsibility, Isaac sought to put himself in the right frame of mind to pass on the blessing. You can't just do it cold, can you? I mean this is the blessing of God, so you want to feel the blessing and be in the right mood to pass it on. So he decided he was going to bless Esau. Well, that was a little difficult for Rebekah, because when she was with child and there were twins within her, she consulted the Lord, and the Lord said that the older should serve the younger (25:23). The younger was God's choice for carrying on the line of Israel, not Esau. That privilege was to be given to the younger son, Jacob.

Esau was a manly kind of a fellow — all hairy on the arms and chest, and he used to go out and do the hunting and get the venison. And Jacob? He stayed at home, and he made porridge. Okay. Nothing wrong in making porridge but, you know, that was in Isaac's eyes somewhat of a lesser job for a man to do. But Rebekah loved Jacob, while Isaac loved Esau.

I don't know whether Rebekah had ever told Isaac that God had told her it was Jacob who was to be the son to receive the blessing and the pre-eminence and the privilege of carrying on the line of Abraham that should lead eventually to the promised seed — Messiah. But if she had told him he seems to have forgotten it, for he proposed to bless Esau. Now how would he do it? He says to Esau, 'My boy, I am getting old, and I shall soon pass on, and I have to bless you, my son. Now go out and get some venison and make a beautiful venison meal, such as my soul loves' (see 27:1–4). He was going to eat this venison, which was of the field that the Lord had blessed. And ingesting the venison with its beautiful taste, and the gravy and the sauces and all that, he would feel very blessed. He would then be in the right mood to hand down the blessing of the Lord to Esau. That is what he felt was appropriate. Perhaps you detect that his idea of *blessing* was a little limited.

What happened next was a story of deceit, for Isaac decided who to bless by being guided by his senses. He had five of them, like most of us do: sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. Well, his sight was now dim, so the sight, which was the best of the lot, couldn't help much. So he trusted his other senses, and all of them in turn deceived him; and therein stands a big lesson.

### **The difference between blessing and what can come with it**

How would you determine what blessing is? What is *blessing*? How could you judge if you had got any of it? If you went home and told your friends that you were blessed by the Lord at this conference, what would the blessing be? What do you mean by *blessing*?

Here we have to be very careful. Perhaps we ought to study our human psychology a little bit. Sometimes when people who have been outright sinners get saved, strong emotions follow. Some people hear the word of the Lord: ‘Your sins are forgiven you’, and in repentance and faith they receive the word of the Lord, and know themselves to be forgiven. Then, as a reaction, they feel tremendous relief and joy coming in their hearts. Sometimes the emotion leads to very physical feelings, and people even shed tears for joy. (Tears are funny things, aren’t they? Sometimes we shed tears in sorrow and sometimes we shed tears for sheer joy. They are a bit ambivalent, though some people like a good cry.)

You notice the order, don’t you? First comes the word of God that brings the spiritual blessing: ‘Your sins are forgiven’. Then comes the feeling in the heart—the emotions, and then the sensations of joy and perhaps even tears of joy. Sometimes after that experience, as the years go by, naturally the feelings and the sensations depart a bit, and you find people hankering after the feelings: ‘Where is the blessedness I knew | when first I sought the Lord?’<sup>10</sup> And they can’t bring themselves to weep at every gospel message they hear, or to have all those lovely sensations. And because they lack the sensations and the emotions they think they have lost the blessing.

That wouldn’t be true, would it? When some dear believers want to get blessing from the Lord they think the way to go about it is not to have too much of the Bible, but to work up the emotions. They have a marvellous emotional time, and they feel that is a blessing. Oh, but let Isaac tell you to be careful about measuring blessing by your sensations, or even by your emotions. How does the blessing come? It comes from God of course. It comes through his word and by his Spirit. As the Holy Spirit makes the word of God true in our hearts and our experience, it leads to that deep experience. Sometimes the emotions are removed, and sometimes the sensations follow; but the main thing is God’s word applied by his Spirit with a spiritual blessing. We are in danger if we confuse blessing with psychological sensation.

### **The deception of Isaac**

See what happened to Isaac as he asked Esau to go and get the venison and cook it, so that he might eat it and enjoy the venison, ‘such as I love,’ as he said. Rebekah heard of this and quickly instructed Jacob. And you know the story. She cooked a goat or a lamb and titivated it up like a restaurant would do, and made it taste like venison. And she dressed Jacob up with the skin of the goat on the nape of his neck and on his arms and forearms, and sent him in to Isaac with this supposed venison.

And Isaac, being dim in the eyes said, ‘Who are you?’

And he said, ‘I am Esau.’

‘You don’t sound much like Esau. Are you sure you’re Esau?’

‘Yes. I’m sure I’m Esau,’ says he (the old liar).

Isaac’s eyesight wasn’t too good so he had to depend on his hearing. ‘Well that’s funny,’ he said, ‘that voice is like Jacob’s, but never mind.’

So his hearing deceived him.

‘Come in,’ he said, ‘so I can feel you.’

---

<sup>10</sup> William Cowper (1731-1800), ‘O for a closer walk with God’ (1772).

So here came Jacob, supposedly Esau, and held out his arms. Isaac got hold of these arms, and they seemed solid enough: real, solid things that were full of hairs. And being convinced now by the sensation of touching, he says, 'Well, that seems like Esau.'

It wasn't, you know. Touch was deceiving him; funny how that works. So he took the venison. Oh, it tasted real and good, but the taste deceived him. It wasn't venison. It was chicken or something.

So he had another test up his sleeve. 'Come near,' he said, 'and let me smell you.' Well, that's not a sense I would have thought of using. The smell of somebody who has been out hunting wouldn't have convinced me of the blessing of God too quickly! But anyway, that's what he did, and then he said, 'your smell is of the smell of the field that the Lord has blessed' (see v. 27). He was deceived by his senses all the way down the line, and he blessed Jacob.

'All right,' you say, 'but it was in God's foreordained will.'

Yes, but God isn't responsible for the way Jacob went about it (nor how Isaac went about things either). You don't have to deceive people to get God's blessing. The lesson is that when it comes to blessing, yes, God blesses us with material things like he blessed Isaac, but the essence of blessing is the word of the Lord. Blessing is his gracious promise made real in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, made real through the word of God. Let the emotions follow if they will, but if they don't, never mind. Let the sensations come. Don't be afraid to weep for joy if you have to. But let us not put our faith in the emotions, still less in the sensations. Let our faith be rooted in God and his word and his promise applied by the Holy Spirit. This is true blessing.

And with that the story goes on to draw our attention to Jacob.

### **The blessing and Jacob's lessons in business**

Jacob was the twin of Esau, and the twins struggled in the womb before birth. There began their struggle for power, and the Lord said that Jacob should be the greater of the two. 'Two nations' he said to their mother, 'are in your womb' and 'the older shall serve the younger' (25:23). Now Esau, as an individual, never served Jacob all his life through. The nation of Edom that descended from Esau eventually served David, king of Judah, until eventually under the successive monarchs, Edom revolted. But Jacob was the chosen vessel to carry on the line through which Messiah would eventually come. And to get the blessing his mother thought she had to steal it by deceit, and she got the blessing.

#### **The right motivation for work**

As you enter Jacob's story you will find his life is not necessarily all about singing hymns, but about business deals and marriage contracts and trade secrets, and commerce and rearing sheep and other such things. These are the basic lessons of life. We are being prepared to reign with Christ by being trained in our day-to-day affairs.

That is what the Lord Jesus said, as I understand him. 'When you go to work,' he says, 'don't you do as the Gentiles do when they go to work.'

Oh really? How do the Gentiles go to work then?



‘Well they go seeking for food and clothes. Don’t you be like that; you seek first the rule of God in your life, and his righteousness’ (see Matt 6:25–34)

What does that mean? When I was young I thought that meant that when you go to work you first ought to give out a few gospel tracts or something, and so put the Lord’s work first, and then your own career second. That is not quite what the Lord meant. He is talking about what our attitude should be to our daily work. The Gentile’s attitude as they go to work, their prime motivation and their prime dividend, is food and clothes. Don’t you be like that.

You say, ‘Half a minute, Lord. What on earth would you go to work for if you didn’t have to get food and clothes?’

Is that your prime motivation? Surely not. ‘When you go to work,’ says our Lord Jesus, ‘let your prime motivation be to seek the kingdom, that is, the kingly rule of God in your life.’ Making that your first motivation for going to work, and living in daily work according to the rules of the Lord’s kingdom, will build into you his righteousness, that is, a righteous character. That is where Christian character is formed, for the most part; it is in the home looking after the children and cooking the dinner; in a business, in the office, at the old computer, teaching at school or whatever it is. Wherever it is, there let our first motivation be that we are seeking God’s rule in our lives.

I needed to be taught patience (I still need to be taught it); I quickly get frustrated. And I learned in the Bible that you should be patient. But it’s no good just reading it in the Bible; you don’t become patient by reading in the Bible that you should be patient. Some Bible scholars I know of are some the most impatient souls under the sun. How do you learn patience? Well first of all you learn that you have to be patient. Then, in my case, the Lord sent me to teach students in a university. That will teach you patience, or at least try your patience! Of course most students are noble people; but there are others.

It is valuable experience as we try to carry out the Lord’s rules and principles of living in our daily work. Work is not only the means of providing food and clothes. The Lord knows you need those things, of course he does. That is the normal way of providing them, but daily work is about more than that; it is about developing a Christian character. We need it, good Christian friend, for we are being trained to rule with Christ and, along with him, to put into practice the rules of the kingdom of God. How shall we be in a position to impose them if we have not learnt to keep them ourselves?

I was at dinner in a home far from here with a good Christian man who is now retired. He told me his story. In his professional life he was a company secretary (a mix between an accountant and a solicitor) and therefore had to be present at the board meetings with the directors. And on this occasion, the income tax people had become worried about certain practices that the board of directors had been following in order to cheat the income tax inspectors. The inspector demanded a meeting with the directors; and my good friend, the company secretary, had to attend. The question was eventually put by the income tax inspectors, and the chairman of the board asked my friend to give the answer. My friend said, ‘I knew in that moment that if I told the truth it would be the end of my job.’

What would you do? He had a wife and children and a house and a mortgage. If his prime motivation in being in business was to get food and clothes, he would have told a lie along with the directors, and kept his job. By God’s grace, this noble man saw that the reason God

sent him into business was that he might have practice in keeping the rules of the kingdom of God, and thus building into his life a sound character. He answered with the truth, and he lost his job. If he had told a lie he'd have kept the goods and the job, but he would have lost the prime thing for which God sent him to work.

### **Jacob and the government of God**

Jacob's life is full of all sorts of bargains and business deals. You have to do them to live in the commercial world, of course you do; but the question of the principle upon which they are done is absolutely vital.

And Jacob did another thing besides getting the blessing from Isaac. He was cooking this pottage stuff one morning when Esau came in from hunting, and Esau was very hungry. 'I'm ready to die!' he said, with that typical exaggeration of men in the Wild West wearing their cowboy hats. 'Give me that pottage. I'm about to die!'

Jacob was a businessman, wasn't he? 'Well yes, Esau,' he said, 'but you see, the price of pottage has gone up very considerably, and there is such a demand. Of course I will have to charge you quite a bit for it.'

'Well I don't care what you ask for,' Esau said. 'Now give it!'

'Well,' he said, 'I'll tell you what Esau, what about your birthright?'

Now the birthright came to the elder son and was, of course, worth a tremendous amount of money. The elder son got a double portion of the inheritance, and you could sell a birthright, or half of a birthright, for cash. When Jacob asked for that as the price of the pottage, Esau, silly chap, counted a full stomach worth more than all the promises of God for the future, and he sold his birthright for a bowl of pottage.

You might say, 'Well that was a good business deal, Jacob. You did very well!'

As a Christian, what would you say about that? Suppose you had a business friend who was much given to alcohol, and he got himself into sore difficulties through his drinking and was bankrupt. And when he was hard up for \$10,000 he came to you and said, 'Old chap, I'd like \$10,000, if you wouldn't mind?'

And you say, 'Well yes the money market's grown tight. What could you give me in place?'

'Well, I don't know; I haven't got any cash.'

And you happen to know that the painting on the wall is a Rembrandt. And you say, 'What about that painting? I'll give you \$10,000 for that painting on the wall. It's a funny old dull thing anyway, isn't it?'

And because he's desperate, he sells you a Rembrandt for \$10,000 when it's worth about \$50 million or some astronomical sum. It is legal, but is it right? These are exceedingly practical questions, aren't they?

You say, 'Our preacher today is obviously not a businessman.'

You've got that much right. But I remember the words of the Lord, 'seek first the rule of God'. Is it fair and just to drive bargains like that?

Well, Jacob had to run off because Esau was threatening to murder him. So he went off in order to seek his living. It was his first time away from home, though he was pretty old. And now he had gone out to find himself a job and get a wife perhaps and settle down. He

journeyed and came across a certain place, and because he was very tired (and he couldn't scheme anymore), he took a stone for his pillow and he lay down to rest. And he dreamed, and look, there was a stairway (see 28:10–12).

Now notice how it is described. The bottom of it is on earth, and the top reached to heaven. It wasn't let down from heaven with the bottom nearly reaching earth; it was the other way round. The bottom was here on earth, and the top was reaching towards heaven. And he saw the angels of God ascending (because they were going out from the divine presence) and descending (coming back to the divine presence). And God was standing, not on top of the ladder, as some translations have it, but beside the ladder at the bottom, as you see from what Jacob said when he woke up. He said 'Surely the LORD is in . . .' not in heaven. Jacob had believed for a long while that God was way up there in heaven, which was very convenient. When he was pushing a hard bargain with Esau it was nice to think that God was a long way off. He woke up to the fact that God was 'in this place' (right by my elbow). God is in this place, and I didn't know it,' he says. 'This is the house of God. This is the *gate* of heaven' (see vv. 16–17). And Jacob wasn't thinking that this was the way into heaven. He didn't want to go to heaven just yet. He hadn't got married yet. He wanted to get married before he went to heaven (a lot of people do). What he was seeing was the house of God, the administrative centre of God's government with all the armies of the heavenly civil service going out from the presence of God and coming down to God as they fulfilled their tasks. This is the gate of heaven where the centre of God's *government* is situated.

Remember that the name of his boys would one day go on the gates of the eternal city. Here is Jacob being trained and having experience of the government of God in his daily life. When Jacob woke up he said, 'Well Lord, this is marvellous. I heard what you said in my vision that you'll be with me and bless me and multiply me. Now, Lord, if you'll really do that and bless me where I go, and bring me again in peace, then God shall be my God and I'll give you ten percent of it all' (see 28:10–22). He was a businessman to the last. I am glad he took God seriously, aren't you? He took God in partnership in his business.

### **Jacob's business deals with Laban**

And so he went down to his relatives in Haran, and you know the love story that followed. He saw this beautiful girl, Rachel. He fell in love with the dear lady. Her elder sister wasn't quite so good-looking, but she was a good soul. He worked for Rachel for seven years, as a business deal with Laban. Then it came to the wedding night, and he woke up the next morning and found it wasn't Rachel after all. It was Leah! He went to Laban and said, 'Now this is downright unethical. I worked for you for seven years to get Rachel, and you have deceived me and given me Leah.'

'I don't know what you're upset about,' said Laban, 'but it is not our custom in our country to give the younger before the elder' (see 29:15–26).

Laban perhaps didn't know what he was saying, did he? What voice was that out of Jacob's past? Jacob the *younger* had stolen the blessing from his *elder* brother, Esau, and thought God was blessing him in the deed. Now he begins to find out that the wheels of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small, and what a man sows he reaps. God is now beginning to teach Jacob what blessing is. You don't get God's blessing by cheating. There is

no need to cheat. And he had to have Leah, and then he worked seven years further for Rachel, under the training of God.

Then Jacob prospered looking after Laban's flocks. He was still a businessman. He had a notion, a scheme. He went to Laban and said, 'I have a scheme, sir. Look here, it's not enough, at my time of life, to work for wages. Some people are content to work for wages, but you can't build up capital that way. You know that from your experience. You can't build up capital if you just get wages. So, I'll take the speckled sheep and look after them, and you separate all the pure bred white sheep, and then when I look after your herd of pure whites, you shall have all the produce from them that are pure white. I shall keep the odd one or two that come out speckled' (see 30:25–36).

Laban rolled his eyes and couldn't believe his ears at Jacob proposing a thing like that. He couldn't make it out; it seemed foolproof to him. Of course Jacob had up his sleeve what he thought were trade secrets (vv. 37–42), and whether they actually worked or whether it was a providence of God, who can say? But he had his trade secrets that Laban didn't know anything about. And if you have got trade secrets, shouldn't you use them? Well he used them, and as a result he got speckled sheep by the thousand, and any ones that weren't speckled he put them aside so they should not have a chance to breed anyway until the vast majority were speckled, and just a few stragglers were white. By the time he'd finished, most of Laban's capital was in the bank in Jacob's name. And when his brothers-in-law saw this, it says that their countenance fell, and they were not disposed toward Jacob as before. And Jacob got so afraid he had to run away (see 30:25–31:55).

There is absolutely no justification for the Holocaust or any other persecution of Jews, but sometimes Jewish traders in many countries have managed to get so much of the capital of a country into their hands, like they are doing in Russia at the moment, that the Gentiles rise up against it, regarding it as having filched their capital from them. In his case, it ruined Jacob's family relationships, didn't it? It spoiled the family relationship until he had to run away. What was all this getting of capital by such doubtful means worth?

I think his wives knew better. Theirs was the job of building the family; and as we said before, they brought these family matters to God in their prayers, and as their children were born and they experienced the answers of God in family life, they encapsulated their experience of God in the names they gave the boys (see 29:31–30:23). Whether they knew it or not, they were building character for eternity. Those boys' names will go on the government gates of the eternal city.

### **Jacob meets Esau again**

Jacob was on his way back. Where else could he go? There was nowhere else. But going back meant meeting Esau. What would he do? Esau had now grown powerful, and Jacob heard that Esau was coming to meet him with a great throng of men. What should he do now? And Jacob thought to himself that he would appease Esau. Brave man that he was, he sent across a whole herd of sheep and camels and cows. They went across in front. Then, feeling that might not be enough, he sent another great herd across. Perhaps God was standing by his side saying, 'Make sure Jacob old boy; just send another batch.' He sent three batches across, and then his wives and children. He sent a vast lot of stuff—cattle by the thousand. And if Esau

said, 'What are these?' the drivers were to say, 'They are a present.' The word is the Hebrew word for *blessing*. 'They are a blessing,' they were to say to Esau (see 32:1–21)

'That's right, Jacob,' God says, 'give it back. You stole the blessing from Esau, didn't you? You thought that was me blessing you, but you got it by stealing it. Give it back, Jacob. You don't have to steal from Esau to get my blessing.'

Back they went. And eventually Esau said to him, 'I don't need them.'

'Oh, but take them. It's a present, a blessing, from me' Jacob said (see 33:1–11).

### **Jacob and the angel of the Lord**

Before crossing over and meeting Esau that night a man wrestled with Jacob there. It was the Lord himself, and Jacob tried to wrestle with God and manoeuvre God into a position.

'Let me go,' said the angel.

'I won't let you go until you have *blessed* me,' Jacob says. He was trying to manoeuvre God into blessing him.

Do you know my brothers, my sisters, you don't have to manoeuvre God to bless you. You don't have to twist God's arm to get him to bless you. It is his determination to bless you anyhow.

The angel touched Jacob's thigh and withered the muscle so that the very leg muscle necessary to wrestle was now gone, and all Jacob could do was to hang on in dependence upon the angel of the Lord.

'Bless me,' he said.

The angel said, 'What is your name?'

Now it was no good dressing up in goatskins and bringing imitation venison and pretending to be Esau. He was held in the arms of God and dependent on God. And with the angel asking the question, 'Who are you?' he replied, 'I am Jacob.'

What a blessing that is when God takes us into his arms and we can't move, and God makes us face ourselves and own our shortcomings and our waywardness and learn the lesson of faith, which is to depend on God. And that night God blessed him, not with great herds of cattle but with the supreme blessing of changing the man's character. 'You have been called Jacob so far; you shall be called Israel' (see 32:22–32).

Now a prince with God, he was on the way to producing the nation that will bring in the Messiah; on the way to producing the son through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed, through Joseph in Egypt, and eventually the Messiah. Jacob is now beginning to be a ruler for God. That is blessing.

When he got back to the land there were difficulties enough and scandals that his sons perpetrated in the name of religion. There were trials of bitterness yet to come that he had never anticipated. But before Jacob went home he learned what God's blessing of him was and what God had always intended it should be. And before he died he saw such unimaginable blessing that nearly broke his heart by the very wealth of it.

What that experience was we shall have to leave to our final session when we consider the final stage of the book, which will be told from Jacob's perspective and will be the story of the real blessing into which God brought Jacob.

## The Development of Israel's Sons into a Nation

### *Jacob the Patriarch*

We come now to the final major part of Genesis. It is a long and very important part of the book, and I do not propose to expound it in its detail or indeed in any proportion as it deserves. Moreover, it is one of the best known portions in the book of Genesis. It contains the story of Joseph, who is a favourite character with most believers, both for the beauty of his behaviour but, more importantly, because he is such a clear prototype of Jesus Christ our Lord. If Adam in the garden proved a very unsatisfactory administrator and had to be turned out of the garden, the book of Genesis does not end without telling you at some length of the most famous administrator in the whole of the Old Testament. Joseph rose to be second in command under Pharaoh. He was never a political ruler; he was an administrator. By the skill of his administration he saved Egypt from famine, and not only Egypt but also the surrounding nations. Joseph went through the prison and eventually came to the glory, which reminds believers of the Lord Jesus who went as an innocent sufferer to the cross and to the grave for our sakes, and is risen and one day shall come in glory. And the whole universe shall cry that he is worthy to take the kingdom, the power, the glory, the riches and to administer the universe for God.

Therefore in one sense I do not need to expound Joseph at length, but I would like to make a point that I mentioned earlier. Joseph is the predominant centre of this section of the book, but the story is told from Jacob's point of view.

### **Jacob's story**

In the last page of the notes I have set out the details of the last section. It is in four parts, and at the beginning of every major part of this last section the topic is Jacob. At 37:1 we are told Jacob dwelt in the land. In 42:1 Jacob saw there was corn in Egypt. And at 46:1 Israel took his journey. That was a fateful step indeed, but Jacob was counselled by God that he should take his family down to Egypt. It was the beginning of a four hundred year stay in that land. He needed to be sure that it was in the mind of God that he should transfer the growing tribe and extended family to Egypt. We are told in 47:28 that Jacob lived in Egypt. And when Jacob dies, as he does at the end of chapter 49, then half of chapter 50 is taken up with the burial ceremonies as his body was taken back to Canaan with Joseph and an Egyptian escort, as the Egyptian Gentiles helped to take back Israel to the promised land. And when we have been told that, Genesis is virtually at an end.

In this part of Genesis Jacob is now the patriarch. In the fifth part, Isaac was the patriarch and Jacob was the promised seed, but in this section now Jacob is the patriarch and his children are the promised seed, and special attention focuses of course upon Joseph. But you will notice the thing that I have underlined in the notes is that the figure of Judah is central to each of the four parts. That is something that ought not to escape our notice, for though Joseph was the key to the solution of the problem that presented itself in this part of the book, yet he was not the only key. Judah himself was the key at one of the most important parts of the section. It was the twin ministry of Joseph and Judah that secured the fulfilment of God's promise and intention for Jacob and his sons. For now you will notice a very big difference in the experience of Jacob from the experience of both Abraham and Isaac when they were patriarchs. Abraham had two sons— Ishmael and Isaac. At God's instruction Ishmael was sent away with God's blessing, but he was not accepted to be the line of the seed, which should eventually bring in Christ. Isaac, when he became patriarch, had two sons— Esau and Jacob, but Esau was not chosen to be the promised seed and to carry on the line that should bring in Messiah. God's choice was Jacob, and Esau eventually went away. But when it came to Jacob as patriarch, then the position was reversed. Jacob had twelve sons. It wasn't a question of selecting one and guiding all the others away. The problem now is the very opposite; the problem was how to keep all twelve sons together. For now the situation had come when God was going to transform the patriarch and the promised seed into an extended family, and thus into a tribe and eventually into a nation, the nation destined for glory, the nation destined to receive the manifestation of God at Mount Sinai, to receive the service of God in the tabernacle, the giving of the law, the priesthood, the prophets and eventually the Messiah. It was to be that the nation would be a brilliant testimony for God on the earth.

So now it was not a question of selecting one son and sending the others away but of keeping all the sons together and eventually forming a nation for glory. But that was some problem. If you've had no experience of keeping the Lord's people together, well try to be an elder. All of them are destined for glory . . . in heaven, but getting them to live together on earth harmoniously, can be a very, very different story! And keeping those twelve boys together proved a difficult thing in this part of Genesis.

### **From a family to a nation**

You know the story of how the brothers' animosity flared against Joseph. Some people say that Joseph was a prig and deserved his brothers' disfavour because he brought their father an evil report and told tales out of school. It is a very questionable interpretation, for when our Lord was on earth, his brothers hated him. And do you know why? Christ says, 'Because I bear witness of them that their deeds are evil' (see John 7:7). Was Christ telling tales out of school?

Joseph's brothers hated him for his dreams of administrative superiority, and even Jacob had his doubts about those dreams. His brothers were uneasy because the chance was the dreams came from God, and they weren't going to have Joseph rule over them. 'Who does he think he is? The nasty little brat is just his father's spoiled boy with his coat of many colours!' But they decided to make sure that it wasn't God who sent the dreams. First of all they talked

of killing Joseph, but then they cast him into a pit. Eventually they sold him to the Gentiles, and he was lost to the Gentiles for some years. And Jacob's heart was broken as the brothers came back and showed him Joseph's coat all stained with blood. It was the blood of an animal of course, and they said, 'Here, Jacob, see the evidence. We don't know what's happened. It looks as if some wild beast has devoured him.'

Well, certain wild beasts had but not ones that walked on four legs. I do wonder how much Jacob really believed it (see Gen 37:1–36).

But told from Jacob's point of view, what a story it is. Jacob was now back in the land with twelve sons and his daughter. His favourite boy was the firstborn son of his favourite wife, Rachel, and she was now dead. And hadn't God promised to bless him? He was back in the land and circumstances had compelled him to give away a great deal of his wealth to Esau, and then his sons had made a scandal of their behaviour amongst the nations in Canaan; and now his favourite son was gone. Then there arose a famine in the land, and Jacob heard that there was bread in Egypt, and he sent ten of his boys down to Egypt to get some corn.

Joseph saw them, and they did not know it was Joseph. He said, 'You are spies; that's what you are. You've come to spy out the land.' It was not to reap spite on them but to bring them to repentance. How could he honestly fall on their necks and kiss them while they were still unrepentant of their deed against him and against their father?

They said, 'No. We're not spies.' And they talked of their family back home.

'What did you say about your father? And you've got how many brothers?'

And they told him.

'Right, you've got one other brother, a boy?'

'Yes, he's a little one; he's with his father.'

'Okay. Here's your corn. But now you'll not get any more unless you bring that little brother with you when you come back next time. And you will leave one brother with me.'

And they departed and went back home to Jacob and said, 'That man there, he talked roughly with us; and now that we've come back we've found our money in our bags. But, father, he said that the next time we go we must bring our little brother Benjamin with us.'

'Why did you tell him about your brother Benjamin?' said Jacob. 'Why must you go and blab it out?'

'Well he asked us,' they said.

'He'll never go!' Jacob said.

But the famine was very sore, and the food ran out—in the very land where God had promised to bless Jacob. He said, 'Go and fetch some more corn.'

They said, 'But no, Dad, we must take Benjamin with us.'

'You'll not take Benjamin,' he said. 'If Benjamin goes and is lost I can't bear to think what will happen. Joseph is dead; Simeon is in prison in Egypt, kept as a hostage; and now if anything happens to Benjamin, it will bring down my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. You'll not take Benjamin!'

But the famine raged. And at last they said, 'Well, Dad, we shall have to take Benjamin.' Reuben said, 'I'll be surety for him.'

'Shut up,' said Jacob, knowing the character of Reuben.



Then Judah stepped forward. 'Dad,' he says, 'I will go surety for him, and if he doesn't come back, take my life for his.'

Forced to it, Jacob let Benjamin go; and what a sad note it is that follows. As much a schemer as ever, Jacob says, 'Well now when you go back to that man in Egypt, here's a little present to take: a little nutmeg and some spices.'

Pathetic and sorrowful, isn't it? He didn't know who this man was and thought to influence him with a little spice and nutmeg. Granted they were valuable things in the ancient world, but what on earth would they mean to Joseph who had the key to ever granary in the whole of Egypt? But here is Jacob, thinking he had to . . . well, *bribe* would be an unpleasant word, wouldn't it? But he let Benjamin go (see 42:1–43:14).

### **Twin roles for two brothers**

You say, 'What was God doing to Jacob in his old age? I thought God had promised to bless him, and in him and in his seed all the nations of the world would be blessed? Now he's lost a quarter of all his sons. Joseph is gone. Simeon is gone, and now Benjamin is gone.'

They got to Egypt, and you know the story of how Joseph gave them a feast, and abstained from weeping in their presence when he saw Benjamin, his true blood brother of the favourite wife of Jacob. Then he showed some knowledge that was amazing to the men, because Benjamin's portion was more than anybody else's portion.

When they left, Joseph secretly told his steward to put his cup into Benjamin's sack. He heard them muttering among themselves, 'God has looked upon the sin that we did with our brother Joseph'. Were these men really genuine? When the cup was discovered would they ditch Benjamin like they had ditched Joseph? Were they really repentant?

He had the cup put in Benjamin's sack, and when the men were gone he sent his officers after them. And the brothers said, 'No we haven't taken your cup, and if the cup is found in anybody's sack then let that man be taken.' And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.

What would they do? They came back to Egypt protesting to Joseph.

'No,' he said, 'you are free. You go. You said it: the man in whose bag the cup is found shall be my slave forever. All right, let that be so.'

He was testing them again, wasn't he? Would they ditch their younger brother at last and go back to their dad, with a 'we couldn't help it' story on their lips?

Then, perhaps to Joseph's amazement, Judah stood forth to speak for the rest: 'Sir,' he said, 'I cannot do this. I cannot leave Benjamin here, for if we go back and Benjamin is not with us, it will bring our father's grey hairs down to the grave. I can't stand by and see my father killed for the loss of Benjamin. Please, sir, take me in the place of Benjamin.'

Judah was offering himself as a substitution to suffer vicariously on behalf of, not only Benjamin but of Israel and the whole family. Judah then was a key to the situation. He joins Joseph in their twin roles. Joseph, by his innocent suffering, comes at last to the throne though 'he had done no evil, neither was there guile found in his mouth' (see 1 Pet 2:22). He was falsely accused and rejected by his brethren, and falsely accused in Potiphar's house. Then in God's good time the innocent sufferer was brought to his position of glory as chief administrator in Egypt. This was innocent suffering. But with Judah it was vicarious suffering on behalf of Israel and the rest of the family. It is a twin picture of our Lord: an innocent

sufferer like Joseph, but of the tribe of Judah, and as king giving his life as a ransom for many. What a story that is.

### **A change of character**

What a transformation of character we see when we look at Judah. When Joseph had been sold down into Egypt, Judah was the chief boy. He was to be head of the tribe of Judah, you know, destined (whether he knew it or not) to begin the royal line of Judah. He was some chap, and when he went on the town on a Saturday night you should have seen him all dressed up in his best with a big hat and his staff and a signet round his neck. He was the head of the family, was he not? Some boy on the town he was, and he went down to the Gentiles to have a good time.

Well, isn't that what kings do? I mean, what else would you do if you were a king? You would have a jolly good time and pleasures galore, wouldn't you? He found a woman, and you know the story. He married a Gentile and had three sons by her. He married the first son to a Canaanite woman, and that son died without a child. He married the second to her, and he died as well. He promised the third son to her, but didn't give the boy to her when he grew up. This Gentile woman was more concerned with the line of Judah than Judah was himself. It's odd, isn't it? All he was doing was thinking of pleasure. When he heard the facts that his daughter-in-law had committed adultery, Judah was all for having her brought out and burned; that is until she produced the evidence that convicted him (see 38:1–30).

What a concept of kingship. Is it from this man's line that God's king will eventually come? He'll have to learn a different lesson about what it means to be king, won't he? We see the preparation of the line to become the line of the royal sceptre, not holding it for self-indulgent pleasure. In the end Judah is brought to the position where he is prepared to stand out in front of Joseph, not knowing it was Joseph, and offer himself as a vicarious sacrifice in the place of Benjamin, to save Israel from death.

Our blessed Lord is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Some of his disciples came to him and said, 'Grant us whatever we ask.'

He said, 'What would you like?'

And they said, 'Let us sit one on the right-hand and the other on the left in your kingdom.'

That was their concept of kingship and ruling. He said, 'You don't know what you ask, gentlemen. Can you drink of the cup that I drink?'

They said, 'We don't care what we have to pay. We're going to have the chief place!'

He said, 'Well, gentlemen, in the first place it is not mine to give. It is for those that have been appointed by my Father. But anyway, what do you think it means to be first?'

'We thought it meant sitting on a throne and bossing others around.'

He said, 'Actually, you see, the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many' (see Mark 10:35–45).

We hear the Lion of the tribe of Judah showing us what the path to the throne is, what it means to be first, and what it means to be king. It means not only to be the servant of all, but to give himself as a vicarious ransom for all.

And Genesis tells us of Judah's vicarious suffering, along with Joseph's innocent suffering. As Peter observes,

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. (1 Pet 2:21–24)

It is exemplified and prefigured in Joseph, the one who suffered innocently. And when he came out he was glorified. He certainly brought his brothers to repentance, but he never retaliated, not to his dying day.

## Jacob and the blessing

They are wonderful pictures of our coming Lord and of the family of Israel, but it is the story of Jacob. It is the story of the man who thought God was going to bless him and who had the promise that in him and his seed would all the nations of the world be blessed. He thought the way to get at it was to cheat Esau and to drive a hard (and doubtful) bargain over the birthright, and then steal the blessing, and get all of Laban's capital into his own bank by doubtful means, serving himself and thinking it was God's blessing because it seemed to work. He had to be taught the opposite. God made him give back far more than he stole from Esau. And now in his old age he loses Joseph; and he loses Simeon; and now he's lost Benjamin—three sons, a quarter of them—gone. What is God doing?

Have ever you seen a mother with a child who has got something that he treasures but it is positively dangerous? And mum says, 'Drop that,' and the child won't. She takes her hand and unwinds one of the child's fingers, then another and then another. And the child thinks she's horrible! God had to do that with Jacob. When he heard that Joseph was alive, being instructed by God, he went down to Egypt. Then he saw what God meant by *blessing*, and that 'in you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed'. He saw his son Joseph, second only to Pharaoh in the whole of Egypt, with the key to every granary in the province!

I find myself a little grateful to God that he didn't put the key in Jacob's hand, or at least in his unconverted days. Goodness knows what Jacob would have done with the corn in Egypt, before he got converted, so to speak. But you could trust the key in Joseph's hand, couldn't you? And Jacob as an old man was there to see it and was astounded at the actual blessing that God had originally intended. And Jacob need never have got up to his tricks to get it either. That is the poignancy of it. If only he could have seen in advance the glory that God had prepared for him, we imagine his earlier behaviour might have been very different. He could have afforded to have given Esau a bit more money for that birthright, couldn't he?

## Jacob blesses Pharaoh

Jacob was introduced to Pharaoh, the great Imperial Majesty; and the text says 'Jacob blessed Pharaoh' (47:10). And surely 'the lesser is blessed by the greater' (Heb 7:7 NIV). And he did so in the conscious dignity of God's blessing. Was it not his son who had saved Pharaoh and the whole of Egypt and the surrounding nations? Jacob, as the patriarch, blessed Pharaoh.

It is a wonderful story, isn't it? It reminds me, and perhaps you too, that it is a good and practical thing to keep our eyes on the glory that God has destined for us. We have been blessed 'with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places' (Eph 1:3). 'What will it be to dwell above | And with the Lord of glory reign?'<sup>11</sup> It is real, my brothers and sisters! The reality of that coming glory will have its reflex action on our behaviour now as God trains us in the affairs of life to be faithful stewards, to be prepared, if need be, for innocent suffering, if in our little way to suffer so that others might be saved.

### **Jacob blesses Joseph's sons**

Eventually the story tells how Joseph brought his sons in to see the patriarch Jacob who was now pretty blind. Joseph brought in his two sons, born of the daughter of the priest in Egypt. Manasseh being the elder and Ephraim the younger, he guided them to his father's hands so that the patriarch might bless them. And Jacob, nearly blind, says to Joseph, 'Who are these?'

And Joseph said, 'They are my sons.'

Jacob says, 'You know, I never expected to see your face again, and God has given me to see your very children' (see 48:1-13).

'Who are these?' It is a prophetic prefigurement, according to Isaiah the prophet in chapter 49 of his prophecy. As God finishes his chastisement and brings them to the glory that he intended for them, there will come a day when Israel the nation shall see the swarms of the redeemed being brought back to Zion, and Israel shall say, 'Who are these, for I was left a widow without children? Look at these multitudes of children that God has given me' (see vv. 21-22). It is the story of Israel told in advance, when Israel, repentant at having rejected their God-given Messiah, are reconciled and Israel comes to see that the one whom their theologians say was a blasphemer and is rightly dead, was in fact the Messiah, and they shall be reconciled to him. 'For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?' (Rom 11:15)

Oh to stand with Israel in that coming day and see the vast multitudes brought to God, those who are truly the seed of Abraham, as Paul would put it (see Gal 3:29), through the Messiah that Israel once rejected.

### **Jacob's final blessing**

The final words are given to Jacob on his deathbed as he called his twelve boys round him and blessed them. From what he says in his blessing you will see that he is now a realist. These are the boys forming the nation, destined for glory eventually with Messiah, but some of them were not quite ready for glory, not yet. Some of them were bright sparks, with gnarled characters. And dear old Jacob, even on his deathbed, told them a few home truths. They would need to be trained and have a lot of defects in their characters put right. He blessed them in the hope that God would one day purify the nation and bring them to glory.

It's good when you've read what Jacob says to the twelve sons, to turn to the Jacob of the New Testament—the Epistle of James (that is 'Jacob' of course). James writes 'to the twelve

---

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Swain (1761-1796), 'What will it be to dwell above?'

tribes' (1:1). Some of the things he says are highly reminiscent of what Jacob the patriarch said to his twelve boys when he was on his deathbed. But there I must leave it.

When Jacob died, the Egyptians heard the mourning, and the Pharaoh provided a contingent of Egyptians and the vehicles to take Jacob back to the promised land; and Joseph went with them. And when he got back there the local Canaanites heard the wailing, and they said, 'This is the wailing of the Egyptians.' The Prophet Isaiah tells of the time when Egypt will be converted, along with Assyria, and the three (with Israel) shall form a triumvirate as the people of God (see Isa 19:16–25).

### **The last days of Joseph**

When that is over, Genesis is over, except for the last days of Joseph. The brethren were still suspicious of him and thought he was going to retaliate. He said, 'Not so, my brothers; you may trust me. But this I ask, that when I die you will take my bones back to the land promised to us.'

I wonder what Pharaoh thought of that, when his grand vizier, Joseph, came in with a request to His Majesty. 'Your Majesty, sir. When I die . . .'

'Yes,' says His Majesty, 'we'll build you a marvellous mausoleum here when you die!'

'Thank you very much, Your Majesty. That will be a great honour, but my people are going to leave Egypt one day.'

'Really? What for?'

'Well, God has promised them the promised land, and they are going back according to God's promise?'

'Is that so, really?' said Pharaoh. 'Do you believe that kind of thing, Joseph?'

'I do, sir; and I would like it that when my people go back to Canaan, they should take my bones with them.'

'What, not leave them with all the fame of your sepulchre here in Egypt?'

'Yes, Your Majesty. You see, the future is with Israel.'

I wonder what His Majesty said about that.

'The future lies with a half a dozen chaps like your brothers who are keeping a few sheep down in Goshen? Is that what you're telling me?'

'Yes, Your Majesty. The future is with Israel.'

So it came to pass that when Israel left at the Passover, they did what Joseph had said, and they took the bones of Joseph with them (see Exod 13:19). Those hard old bones were practical evidence in front of their eyes that God was in process of fulfilling his promises; and one day the future would be with Israel indeed, and particularly with the Lion of the tribe of Judah, descended from that man who was willing to be the vicarious sufferer and thus became a prefigurement of Christ, the one who died for us at Calvary. History has already proved that true, hasn't it? Egypt did not prove to be the future of the world. The future is still with the Lion of the tribe of Judah, a reality to which Joseph pointed.

## Conclusion

Forgive the superficial way in which I have commented upon these things, but there is gold in these hills. May God use our studies this weekend not only to cheer our hearts with our riches that are in Christ but to provoke us to a deeper study of God's word here and elsewhere, that the risen Lord may do for us what he did for his disciples on the road to Emmaus. As with knotted brows we try to understand God's word, may the risen Lord come alongside and speak to us and interpret to us throughout the whole Old Testament Scriptures, 'the things concerning himself' (Luke 24:27).

Shall we pray.

Our Father, we thank thee for these times together and the encouragement that thou hast given us as we have thought to study thy word, and beyond the sacred page to seek thee, Lord. Thank you Lord for your presence and for the grace of thy Holy Spirit. We thank thee for putting it in the hearts of our friends here to organize the sessions.

And now we pray thy blessing as we go. Give us travelling mercies and safety we pray. Bless the assemblies to which we go and cause them Lord to shine even more brightly for thee, enriched in their worship and empowered in their evangelism. Help the elders of each church and its servants and its Sunday school teachers and all its members in all that they do for thee. And cause us Lord in what time remains, whether thou shalt call us home, or when the Lord shall come, to learn life's lessons under thy fatherly training, that we may partake of thy holiness and thus be trained and prepared when the Lord Jesus comes, to greet him with joy, and suffering with him here, to reign with him then.

We ask these things for his name's sake. Amen.

## APPENDICES

### Creation

#### *What We Know by Revelation*

1.	The universe had a beginning	Gen 1:1; John 1:1–4
2.	The universe was created by God’s word	Heb 11:3
3.	God is other than the universe: not part of it. The Word ‘was’; the universe ‘became’ cf. ‘before the world was’	John 1:1, 3; John 17:5
4.	The agent in creation was God, no less	John 1:1–3
5.	The universe was made in stages, not all at once	Gen 1:1–2:3
6.	Each stage was initiated by a word of God	Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26
7.	The universe is upheld by God’s ‘powerful word’	Heb 1:3
8.	History was intended to make progress towards a goal cf. the phrase ‘the fullness of time’ Creation to be eventually ‘released’	Gal 4:4 Rom 8:20–21
9.	The beginning, agent and goal of the universe is Christ	Col 1:16–17; Heb 1:3
10.	Stages in the ‘progress’ of humanity: a. The Word became flesh: The resurrection, ascension, glorification of the man Christ Jesus. b. Creatures of God by receiving Christ become children of God: The formation of the body of Christ Their eventual glorification	Col 1:18 Rom 8:29–30
11.	The new heavens and the new earth	Rev 21

## Genesis: First Account of Creation

### **The Days of Genesis (1:1-2:3)**

---

1-2	In the beginning		
3-5	AND GOD SAID	one day	Day 1
6-8	AND GOD SAID	a second day	Day 2
9-10	AND GOD SAID—animate		Day 3
11-13	AND GOD SAID—animate	a third day	
14-19	AND GOD SAID	a fourth day	Day 4
20-23	AND GOD SAID	a fifth day	Day 5
24-25	AND GOD SAID—animals		Day 6
26-31	AND GOD SAID—man	the sixth day	
2:1-3	And the heavens and the earth were finished . . . and on the seventh day God finished his work . . . and he rested . . . from all his work that he had done.		Day 7

---

---

### **Names with multiple meanings**

---

1.	1:5	Evening and morning = one day He called the light Day He called the darkness Night	day = 24 hours day = 12 hours of daylight night = 12 hours of darkness
2.	1:8	He called the firmament Heaven	
3.	1:10	He called the dry land Earth He called the gathering of the waters Seas Yet in verse 1 earth = our whole planet.	

---

---



## An Overview of the Major Sections

### I. The First Creation Story (1:1–2:3)

- A. Creation, not all at once, but in a progressive series of creative acts: *and God said* (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). Creation by the word of God.
- B. Not only creation but organization (1:4–5, 7–8, 9–10, 14–18, 26–28).
- C. Creation as distinct from subsequent maintenance and development (2:1–3).
- D. The pinnacle of the series: man, made in God's image, to be God's 'viceroy' (1:26–29).

### II. The Second Creation Story (2:4–4:26)

#### *The Generations of A. The Heavens; B. The Earth (2:4)*

- 1. Unifying theme: the ground (2:5–7, 9, 19; 3:17, 19, 23; 4:2–3, 10–12, 14).
  - a. Man's substance: out of the ground (2:5–7; 3:19).
  - b. Man's function: to till the ground (2:5, 15; 3:23).
  - c. The curse upon Adam: 'cursed is the ground because of you; . . . till you return to the ground' (3:17–19, 23).
  - d. The curse upon Cain: 'you are cursed from the ground': Cain forfeits his *raison d'être* (4:11).

NB: the difference between the curse pronounced on Adam and that pronounced on Cain:  
Adam: 'cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you . . . By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground . . .' (3:17–19).  
Cain: 'Now you are cursed from the ground . . . When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. . . . Cain said to the LORD, . . . "Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden' (4:11–14).
- 2. Descriptions of what life means:
  - a. man's 'basic materials': a material body and a non-material soul (2:7)
  - b. function, employment, work (2:5, 15)
  - c. aesthetic sense (2:8–9)
  - d. potential knowledge of moral values (2:9)
  - e. ability to sin and moral responsibility to God (2:16–17)
  - f. relationship to animals (2:19)
  - g. faculty of language (2:19–20)
  - h. man-woman relationship (2:18–25)
  - i. music (4:21)
  - j. metal-work (4:22)
  - k. lyric (4:23–24)
- 3. The meaning of 'life' and 'death'; the fall, its effect and consequences; sacrifice and the values it protects.

### III. The Third Creation Story (5:1–9:29)

#### *The Generations of A. Adam (5:1–6:8); B. Noah (6:9–9:29)*

- A. Begins: This is the book of the generations of MAN
1. Hebrew *adam* means:
    - a. The name of the species i.e. man, human being
    - b. The name of the first male human being, Adam
  2. In 5:1–2 *adam* = human being. NB. 'he blessed them and named them Man (*adam*) when they were created.'
  3. So in 6:1–7:
    - a. 'man began to multiply' (6:1)
    - b. 'daughters of man' = female human beings (6:2, 4)
    - c. 'My Spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh' (6:3)
    - d. 'the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth' (6:6)
    - e. 'I will blot out man . . . man and animals' (6:7)
- B. The development of the human race from Adam:
1. man's constitution: spirit and flesh (6:3)
  2. man's perversion (6:1–6)
  3. the nature and effect of man's destruction by water (6:13; 7:23)
  4. the means of man's salvation: the ark (6:13; 7:23)
  5. cf. the leading terms of 1 Peter 3:17–4:6: flesh and spirit
- C. The new beginning for the human race in Noah (6:9):
1. sacrifice: the basis of security (8:15–22)
  2. the new mandate (8:15–9:17)
  3. the covenant and its token rainbow (9:8–17)
  4. Noah's indiscretion (9:20–29)

**The section ends with the death of Noah (9:29)**

### IV. The Rise of the Hebrew Nation from Among the Gentiles (10:1–25:11)

#### *The Generations of A. The Sons of Noah (10:1–11:9) and of Shem (11:10–26); B. Terah (11:27–25:11)*

1. Nimrod and the great and famous cities: Babel, Erech, Accad, Calneh, Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, Resen (10:8–12). The building of the city and tower of Babel (11:1–9).
2. The call of Abram, the promise to make a nation of him, and the purpose of it: *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* (12:1–3; 18:18; 22:18).
3. The promised seed (12:7; 15:1–6; 18:10–18): the birth (21:1–7), sacrifice (22:1–19) and marriage (ch. 24) of the promised seed. The covenants made with Abram and his seed, of inheritance (15:7–21), and later of circumcision (17:1–27).

4. The three major areas in Abraham's training and testing:
  - a. Chs. 12–15: The choice between 'goods' and 'life'; the denial of Sarah, the choice of Lot, the capture and recovery of Lot, the ministry of Melchizedek, justification by faith and the covenanted inheritance.
  - b. Chs. 16–19: Faith in the promise or the works of the flesh? The taking of Hagar instead of Sarah and the birth of Ishmael; the covenant of circumcision, the seal of the righteousness of faith; the renewal of the promise; Lot's experience in Sodom, its destruction and Lot's rescue.
  - c. Chs. 20–24: The search for security; the second denial of Sarah; the birth of the promised seed, and the expulsion of the bondwoman and her son; Abraham's oath granting security to the Philistine and his son; justification by works and God's oath granting security to Abraham and his son; the purchase of a burial-ground for Sarah; the second 'calling-out' from the Gentiles—a bride for Isaac.

**The section ends with the death of Abraham (25:8–11)**

## **V. The Maintenance of the Hebrews' Vision and their Development into Israelites (25:12–35:29)**

### ***The Generations of A. Ishmael (25:12–18); B. Isaac (25:19–35:29)***

1. The pre-natal struggle of Esau and Jacob; Jacob's election; Esau despises and sells his birthright (25:20–34); Isaac's struggle to maintain himself in the land, his denial of Rebekah, the fight for water, the renewal of the promise (ch. 26); Isaac's blessing of Jacob, Jacob's deception, Esau's anger, the nature of blessing (ch. 27).
2. Three periods in Jacob's life:
  - a. In the land of promise (25:19–27:34).
  - b. Out of the land among the Gentiles (28:1–31:55).
  - c. Back again in the land (32:1–35:29) but still attended by many difficulties in his relations with the surrounding tribes.
3. The subject-matter of Jacob's training: leaving home to make a future for himself; the vision of the house of God and of the gate of heaven; marriage-deals; the birth and naming of his children; the need to amass capital; trade-secrets, their use and abuse; the jealousy and anger of the Gentiles; Jacob's flight; problem of reconciliation with Esau; wrestling with the angel, the vision of the face of God, Jacob becomes Israel; the abuse of religion by Jacob's sons.

**The section ends with the death of Isaac (35:28–29)**

## **VI. The Development of Israel's Sons into a Nation. They Become a Blessing to the Gentiles Through Joseph the Saviour of the Egyptians and of the Hebrews (36:1–50:26)**

### ***The Generations of A. Esau (36:1–8, 9–43); B. Jacob (37:2–50:26)***

1. The welding of Jacob's twelve sons into a nation. Unlike what it was with Abraham and his sons, it was not a question of taking one of Jacob's sons and discarding the rest, but of taking all twelve of his sons and welding them into a cohering nation. At first the brothers' treacherous jealousy against Joseph and his dreams of administrative supremacy, and the irresponsibility of Judah (ch. 38)—head of the tribe destined to bear the royal sceptre—and his mercenary attitude (37:25–27) threatened to divide and scatter Jacob's sons before they could be developed into one nation. But they are preserved, re-united and made a blessing to the nations through Joseph's innocent suffering and Judah's readiness to suffer vicariously (44:18–34).
2. Jacob's rediscovery of Joseph, and his recovery of his sons Simeon and Benjamin. The preservation of the twelve sons and their families, the beginning of their multiplication into a nation in Egypt, and the maintenance of their prophetic hope in their future destiny.

**The section ends with the deaths of Jacob (49:33–50:13); and of Joseph (50:26)**

### **Section 3 (5:1–9:29)**

#### *The Creation, Constitution, Development, Destruction and Salvation of Man*

<b>I. Genealogy</b>	<b>5:1–32</b>
Adam to Noah	
Man made in the likeness of God (5:1)	
<b>II. Perversion</b>	<b>6:1–8</b>
Of the human race	
<i>I will blot out man</i> (6:7)	
<b>III. Sons of Noah</b>	<b>6:9–12</b>
Noah righteous, perfect	
His three sons: <i>all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth</i>	
<b>IV. The Flood</b>	<b>6:13–8:22</b>
<b>V. God’s Blessing on Noah and his Sons</b>	<b>9:1–7</b>
Man made in the image of God (9:6)	
<b>VI. God’s Covenant with Noah</b>	<b>9:8–17</b>
<i>Never again . . . destroy all flesh</i> (9:15)	
<b>VII. Sons of Noah</b>	<b>9:18–29</b>
Noah’s drunkenness: his sons’ behaviour!	

## **Section 4 (10:1-25:11)**

### *The Call and Training of Abraham the Hebrew*

- |  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| <b>I. Background to Abraham's Call out of the Gentiles</b>           | <b>10:1-11:26</b>  |
| A. The great cities of the Gentiles (10:8-12).                       |                    |
| B. The city and tower of Babel (11:1-9).                             |                    |
| C. The other Semitic nations and Abraham's forebears.                |                    |
| <b>II. First Major Period</b>  | <b>11:27-15:21</b> |
| A. Denies wife among the Egyptians.                                  |                    |
| B. Main issue: goods-vs-life.  |                    |
| C. Justification and inheritance by faith without works.             |                    |
| <b>III. Second Major Period</b>                                      | <b>16:1-19:38</b>  |
| A. Despairs of wife and takes slave-girl, Hagar.                     |                    |
| B. Main issue: the works of the flesh-vs-the life of faith.          |                    |
| 1. Abraham and Sarah's fleshly attempt to produce the promised seed. |                    |
| 2. Lot's daughters and the maintenance of Lot's seed.                |                    |
| C. Justification by faith apart from the works of the law.           |                    |
| <b>IV. Third Major Period</b>  | <b>20:1-22:24</b>  |
| A. Denies wife among the Philistines.                                |                    |
| B. Main issue: security: in man or God?                              |                    |
| C. Abraham, justified by works, discovers the anchor of the soul.    |                    |
| <b>V. The Sequel: Rebekah's Call out of the Gentiles</b>             | <b>24:1-25:11</b>  |
| A. Winning of wife for Isaac.  |                    |
| B. Abraham's other wives.  |                    |
| C. Abraham's death and burial.                                       |                    |

## **Section 5 (25:12–35:29)**

---

<b>I.</b>	<b>The Names of the Sons of Ishmael</b>	<b>25:12–18</b>
-----------	---	-----------------

---

<b>II.</b>	<b>Isaac in the Land; Maintaining the Vision</b>	
A.	In the family: God’s sovereignty: human struggle, faith, greed, profanity, BIRTHRIGHT SOLD.	25:19–34
B.	Among the Gentiles: God’s sovereignty: human fear, envy, strife, covenanting.	26:1–33

---

<b>III.</b>	<b>The Question of the Blessing</b>	<b>26:34–33:17</b>
A.	Esau enraged: Jacob pretends not to be Jacob: steals blessing from man.	
	<b>Bethel</b>	
B.	Flight to Laban: God’s government: Human love, deceit, faith, rivalry.	
C.	Flight from Laban: human cheating, rivalry, love, faith: God’s government.	
	<b>Peniel</b>	
D.	Esau reconciled: Jacob admits being Jacob: wrestles with God for blessing. Jacob gives Esau a blessing (33:11).	

---

<b>IV.</b>	<b>Jacob Back in the Land: Attempting to Fulfil the Vision</b>	
A.	Among the Gentiles: human cruelty with human frailty: God’s insistence on repentance.	33:18–35:8
B.	In the family: God’s power and sufficiency: human weakness, suffering, faith, sin, BIRTHRIGHT FORFEITED (see 1 Chron 5:1–2).	35:9–22

---

<b>V.</b>	<b>The Names of the Sons of Jacob</b>	<b>35:23–29</b>
-----------	---------------------------------------	-----------------

---

---

## Section 6 (36:1–50:26)

---

<b>I.</b>	<b>Generations of Esau: <i>Esau went into a land away</i></b>	<b>36:1–43</b>
<hr/>		
<b>II.</b>	<b>Jacob Dwelt in the Land</b>	<b>37:1</b>
A.	Joseph's dreams: Joseph sold: Joseph's coat, false evidence: Jacob's false deduction: <i>please identify.</i>	37:32
B.	JUDAH goes down: <i>the prostitute</i> : false dress: Judah's signet, cord and staff: <i>please identify</i> . . . Judah's CONFESSION: Judah's sons!	38:25
C.	Joseph in Egypt: Potiphar's wife: Joseph's garment: false evidence; Joseph interprets dreams: Pharaoh's signet, chain, robes: Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.	39:1– 41:52
<b>III.</b>	<b>Jacob saw That There was Corn in Egypt</b>	<b>42:1</b>
A.	First expedition: climax: Jacob: <i>Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin?</i> No!	
B.	Second expedition: climax: JUDAH, as surety, pleads to be allowed to suffer as substitute for Benjamin.	
C.	Joseph made known: sends for father: climax: Jacob discovers truth: evidence of wagons: decides to go to see Joseph.	
<b>IV.</b>	<b>And Israel Took his Journey</b>	<b>46:1</b>
A.	Beersheba–well of oath: God: <i>I myself will go down with you . . . and I will also bring you up again.</i> Names of sons–Egypt.	
B.	JUDAH sent in front to arrange meeting with Joseph: climax: Jacob blesses Pharaoh.	
C.	Joseph's treatment of Egyptians and of Israelites: Joseph buys all Egypt and Egyptians for Pharaoh: Israel prospers.	
<b>V.</b>	<b>And Jacob Lived in Egypt</b>	<b>47:28</b>
A.	Takes oath of Joseph: <i>Do not bury me not in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers</i> ; Joseph introduces his sons to Jacob: <i>Who are these?</i> (48:8–9). Jacob blesses them.	
B.	Jacob's prophetic blessing of twelve sons: JUDAH to have the sceptre (49:10); final charge regarding burial.	
C.	Jacob dies: taken back to Canaan and buried there: Egyptians accompany and join in mourning.	
<b>VI.</b>	<b>Joseph Returns to Egypt</b>	<b>50:14</b>
A.	Renewed promise to preserve brothers.	
B.	Dying charge: <i>God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham . . . carry up my bones from here</i> (vv. 24–25).	

---



## 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.