

Understanding the Old Testament

An Overview of Genesis to Joshua

David Gooding

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Genesis

The topic for this series of talks is 'Understanding the Old Testament'; more particularly the relationship between the New Testament and the Old Testament. For this first session we will be considering the book of Genesis.

Trust the professor, or trust Christ?

Let me begin by recounting to you an experience I had in my youth that has been formative ever since in my reading of the Old Testament. As a student, I studied Greek and Latin and, when I had finished the course, cash came unexpectedly in which I saw I could spend by attending a year's course on Hebrew. So I went to listen at the feet of the professor of Hebrew. He not only tried to teach us Hebrew, but in addition gave us the benefit of his thoughts about the Old Testament. He told us, for instance, that it was quite impossible to think that Moses wrote the first two chapters of Genesis.

I was all ears, of course, to find out what the reasons were, and he said, 'That first chapter of Genesis is plain, straightforward monotheism. It preaches one God who made the whole universe. It's impossible that Moses wrote that.'

'Why impossible?' we wondered.

'Well, you see,' he said, 'religion has evolved like the whole universe has evolved; so religion evolved. The first people were animists, like the modern Japanese Shintoists are animists. They felt that the tree was alive—it had a spirit in it, or the mountain had a spirit in it, and so they personalized all the features surrounding them. That's how they began.'

I don't know who told him, but that was his official verdict.

And then he added, 'Then, it evolved a bit further, you see, and they came from animism to polytheism. Polytheism means 'many gods,' and they deified what they saw: the sun god, and the moon god, and the storm god; and there are water gods, and the gods of the crops, and all these things. And then, of course, evolution being unstoppable, they proceeded to the next stage which was henotheism. Henotheism means that each nation had its own particular god. So, for instance, in Athens they appropriated Athena as the great goddess of Athens. From this henotheism, they then evolved to monotheism, the idea that there was one God of the whole universe. And that being so, Moses could not have written Genesis 1, the early stories of creation, because they presume just one God, and people hadn't evolved that far in those days. It was not until after the exile, when the Jews were taken to Babylon and they mixed with the other nations, that they came gradually to the idea that there was one God among the many.'

How Jesus talked about the Old Testament

I listened to this; it was all new to me, and he was after all a professor. It got a little bit at my faith, and disturbed me. And then I came to a decision. I would study what Christ, our Lord, said about the Old Testament, and if there were to be a conflict between him and the professor, I would choose to trust Christ. I hadn't been long searching through the New Testament—I began at Matthew—before I came across a very interesting statement by our Lord. It is given in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 19, at which point our Lord was discussing the question of divorce with various Jewish rabbis. At that stage in my life, I wasn't considering divorce, so I was not interested in the matter! But I was interested in how he talked about it. In verse 4, we read, 'And he answered and said, Have you not read, that he which made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.'

I found that intriguing. First of all, our Lord's challenge to the rabbis, 'Have you not read?' The challenge comes to us still, doesn't it? It would be embarrassing if our Lord said to us this morning, 'Have you, Bob, and you, Jean, have you read this particular part of the Old Testament?', and you had to say, 'Well, sorry, Lord, I didn't think that was important, so no, I've never read it anyway.' 'Have you not read?' Christ is expecting us to be conversant with our Old Testament. 'Have you not read,' says he, 'that he which made them'—that is God—'made them from the beginning male and female, and said'—God said it, the creator of heaven and earth said it—'For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, that the two shall become one flesh.' Here is our Lord affirming the written record of Genesis that it was God the creator who made this remark.

Let's look back at Genesis and see what the remark was. This is Genesis, chapter 2, and this chapter has told us about the creation of woman from the side of man, and how God brought her to Adam. Then in verse 23 we have Adam's response: 'And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Thus far, we have Adam's response to this lovely apparition who was Eve, but notice the next verse. That couldn't have been said by Adam, could it? 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother,' for Adam didn't have a father and a mother. So, we conclude in the first place that verse 24 must have been penned by the inspired writer of the book of Genesis. Let's call him Moses; Moses said it: 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.' 'Ah, but,' says Christ, 'since that was the inspired writer of the Old Testament who said it, it was in fact God our creator who said it: 'He which made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother"' (Matt 19:4).

And you will say to yourself, 'What on earth was a twenty-year-old student thinking about divorce for?' Ah, but it had an impact in such a detail to have the authoritative word of our blessed Lord Jesus, that behind this verse stands God, the maker of the universe. This put me in the position where I had to decide. Should I trust the professor, or should I trust Christ? I'm glad I learned to trust Christ. I have since discovered over many years that what the professor was saying bordered on factual nonsense. I'm glad I trusted Christ, and learned not only to trust Christ, but his inspired apostles, whom he inspired to write the New Testament.

The book of Hebrews says, 'By faith we understand the worlds were made by the spoken word of God' (11:3). It is interesting how the writer uses the plural 'the worlds,' if you like, 'the ages,' our present world. But it tells us this; that in the creation of the universe, each stage was initiated by the spoken word of God. There are two words in Greek for what, in English, becomes our English word, 'word.' This particular phrase in Hebrews 11 uses the Greek for a spoken word, and, of course, it agrees exactly with the account given in Genesis 1, where each stage of the creation is initiated by a spoken word of God. 'And God said . . .'.

Three New Testament doctrines based in the Old Testament

So, with those encouragements in our hearts, I want to take three basic New Testament doctrines and show how, in order to establish those doctrines, the writers of the New Testament appeal to the Old Testament as their authority. And what we shall learn from that is that, as much as we value the New Testament and give it pride of place in our thinking, nonetheless we must as believers take seriously the Old Testament, and should observe how many of the Christian doctrines are based on the Old Testament. Therefore, the practical implication is that we should study our Old Testament and know it well.

The three basic doctrines I want to discuss with you are the New Testament doctrines of (1) justification by faith, (2) the great inheritance we have in Christ, and (3) the necessity of justification by works. In all three cases we shall find the New Testament writer appealing to the Old Testament, first of all as authority for the doctrine that he is teaching, and secondly as an explanation of the doctrine he is teaching.

So, let's begin with Abraham. In Romans, Paul has enunciated the great doctrine of justification by faith and not by works, but to clinch the matter in chapter 4, verse 1, he appeals to Abraham. 'What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, hath found?' And he is about to cite to us the absolutely foundational word 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness' (v. 3 KJV). Here is Paul establishing the basic doctrine of salvation by citing Abraham and appealing to what the Old Testament says.

Then, in Galatians 3, we shall think about the glorious inheritance that we have in Christ, and Paul reminds us of this by citing the covenant that God made with Abraham. 'Brethren, I speak after the manner of men: Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it hath been confirmed, no one maketh it void, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ' (Gal 3:15-16). So, Paul has now gone on beyond justification by faith to exhort us to see what an indescribably wealthy inheritance we have through Jesus Christ our Lord. 'What inheritance?', you say. And for this purpose, Paul appeals to the covenant that God made with Abraham in that same chapter 15 of the book of Genesis.

And then we shall come to James, chapter 2, in which he says, 'You claim to be justified by faith, and without works. Well, that's marvellous, you know, but you ought to note as well that a man is justified by works and not by faith only' (see vv. 14-26), at which our faces fall, maybe. How has James dared to utter any such thing, and becloud the issue by seeming to deny what Paul says? Paul says, 'We're justified by faith without works' (see Rom 3:28). How can James possibly say that we have to be justified by works and not simply by faith? And, of

course, to understand it, James will refer us back to what Abraham did with Isaac, once more in the book of Genesis (see chapter 22). Am I getting my point across? That to understand fully some of the basic doctrines of the New Testament, we shall have to go back to the Old Testament.

The doctrine of justification by faith

So, let us first think of that matter of justification by faith, and we're coming back now to Romans, chapter 4. 'What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, hath found?' And he proceeds to quote for us the basic text, that if Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God. Then verse 3 says, 'For what saith the scripture? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness' (cf. Gen 15:6). The plain, straightforward statement for Abraham, let me remind you, is not here cited as a type of a Christian, or as a parable, or as an exhortation. He is recorded as an actual man who walked on two legs on this earth, centuries ago, and Abraham was justified, for 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness' (KJV). Abraham was justified by grace through faith in those far-off centuries, an actual person.

It is not merely, however, that Paul cites that particular verse, Genesis 15:6. It is the fact that, according to Genesis, Abraham was eventually circumcised, as were all the male members of his household. That is recorded in Genesis 17. 'Ah, but,' says Paul, 'you must be careful reading it, because the very order of the chapters is not only history; it is inspired history, authoritative history.' So, when was Abraham justified? Was it after he was circumcised or before he was circumcised? You say, 'What difference does that make?' Well, it makes a whole world of difference, because if Abraham was first circumcised and then he was justified, people might have said, 'There you are, you have to be circumcised first, and then you can be justified.' Just like some people say, in Christian terminology, 'You have to be baptized first, and that makes you a child of God, and then you are justified eventually, we hope.'

'No,' says the New Testament, 'please observe the historical order. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness"' — that is Genesis 15. It wasn't until some thirteen years later that Abraham was circumcised. Why was he circumcised? Romans chapter 4 says it was the seal of the righteousness which he had by faith, and then it adds another interesting thing. After Abraham, all who were his physical descendants were circumcised. 'Yes, but,' says Paul, 'don't let that mislead you, for circumcised though they were on the eighth day after birth, yet their justification before God had to be on the same principle as Abraham their forefather.' That is, their justification would not depend on the fact that as babies they were circumcised, any more than in the Christian dispensation, our justification before God depends on the fact, if it is a fact, that we were baptized as babies. It demands personal faith in God such as Abraham exhibited.

And perhaps you have a question. You say, 'Well, if Abraham was an actual man, and he was justified by faith, how does that correspond to my experience, because when God came to Abraham he said, "Abraham, I'm going to give you a son," and "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness."' How is that relevant to me? God didn't come

to me the night I got converted and said, "You're going to have a son," and I believed, and I was justified, so how is Abraham's case relevant to my case? Well, at the end of Romans 4, Paul explains how Abraham's experience is relevant to our experience. God said, 'Abraham, I'm going to give you a son,' and Abraham said, 'Thank you very much, Lord.' But he didn't have a son at once, and the years passed by, and one day Sarah apparently, I don't know whether it was over breakfast or whatnot, she said to Abraham, 'Abraham, my dear?'

'Oh, yes?'

'I've been thinking.'

'That's very good. What have you been thinking, Sarah, my dear?'

'Well, I've been thinking about this promise that God says we're going to have a son.'

'Yes, isn't it wonderful?'

'But I don't know about that, because God seems to have overlooked something.'

'Oh?'

'Yes, he says we're going to have a son, but I'm barren, you know, Abraham. I think God has overlooked that.'

'Oh, I never thought about that. Well, what now, then?'

'Well, I think when God said you're going to have a son, he didn't just mean it like that, "You're going to have a son." It was an exhortation to us to do the best we can, to use our own resources.'

'Well, my dear, it's a good idea, but we don't have any resources, do we?'

'Oh, yes we have.'

'Oh?'

'Yes, we've got the slave girl Hagar. You could take her and father a child.'

'Oh, that's a good idea,' said Abraham, and he took Hagar, and fathered Ishmael.

And God said, 'Well, he's a nice enough chap, Abraham, and I shall bless him, but that's not what I meant. When I said, "You're going to have a son," I meant you're going to have a son, and I will give him.'

And God left Abraham, says the end of Romans 4, and left Sarah, until Abraham was now an old, old man, and as far as fathering any son went, he could see it was quite impossible. He was beyond it. And God left him deliberately to make the point that when God said, 'I'm going to give you a son, Abraham,' it was not by Abraham's effort, or his works, or using his own resources. It was a gift of God, to bring life out of incipient death. And Paul uses the analogy here to press home upon us what it is that we are to believe. When it is said 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness,' what similarity is there between us and Abraham? Well, Abraham had to believe God would bring life out of a dead body. And righteousness shall be counted to us, says Paul in Romans 4, if we believe on him that raised our Lord Jesus from the dead (see vv. 23–25).

That's a very interesting analogy, and helps us to see what is meant by the term 'faith.' When it is said 'we are justified by faith,' what does that mean? I have met folks who come to the conclusion that they've tried to believe, they've done their best to believe, and they've started out nearly every day by saying, 'Lord, help me to believe,' and they've failed, as they feel they don't have strong enough faith to believe and be saved. And if you say to such people, 'I'm absolutely sure I'm saved,' they'll say in reply, 'You must have very strong faith.'

They think that justification and salvation depend on the strength of your faith. That isn't so, is it? We're called upon to believe in God who raised our Lord Jesus from the dead.

Would you allow me a very crude analogy? Suppose we were living in those terrible three days when the body of Christ lay in a grave, and we said to ourselves, 'You know, if Jesus doesn't rise from the dead, there's no salvation. He'll have to rise from the dead.' 'Well, what can we do about it?' Somebody says, 'We'll stand round the grave, and we'll all hold hands, and we'll say, "I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe," and eventually the force of our faith will bring Christ up from the dead.' Utter nonsense, of course. It's not the strength of our faith. It's the faith in God doing what for us is impossible, to raise our Lord Jesus from the dead. Similarly, when we're justified by faith, it's not the strength of our faith; it's the one in whom we place that faith, namely God, who raised our Lord Jesus from the dead.

But these are elementary matters, aren't they? I repeat, my purpose this morning is to show that the great basic Christian doctrine of justification by faith appeals for its authority and its explanation to the Old Testament.

The doctrine of our great inheritance in Christ

And now we come to a second basic thing, and that is the great inheritance that we enjoy in Christ. For a long discussion of this doctrine, you might consider Galatians 3, where Paul says, 'Brethren, I speak after the manner of men: Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it hath been confirmed, no one maketh it void, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ' (vv. 15–16). Let's come to the end of that argument in that same chapter: 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female: for you all are one . . . in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise' (vv. 27–29).

I pause on those verses because it may be that I have the task to convince you that you are far more wealthy than hitherto you have believed! So, I've got to prove to you that you are Abraham's seed. How on earth did you become Abraham's seed? Well, let me ask you, have you put your faith in Christ? You have! And have you been baptized into Christ? You have! So, if you've been baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ, just as a person can put on a big gown like the Muslims wear that obliterates all distinctions. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male or female. You have put on Christ, therefore you are Christ's. If you are Christ's, let me ask you a question: is Christ the seed of Abraham? Well, if Christ is the seed of Abraham and you've put on Christ, you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

What promise? For that, we come back to that same Genesis chapter 15, where God said to Abraham, 'Not only am I going to give you a son, but he shall inherit,' and God specified the areas that Abraham's seed should inherit. And Abraham had the good sense to say, 'Lord, thank you very much, but how shall I know that I'm going to inherit it?'; and God didn't rebuke him for that. Sensible Abraham, promised this gift of great inheritance here on earth, he wanted to know from God, 'How can I be absolutely sure that I'm going to get it?' So God told Abraham to make a covenant sacrifice, and in those far-off days if you made a covenant,

one of the ways you did it was to get a number of animals, to cut them in pieces, or birds or what have you, and lay the pieces in two rows. And then the parties to the covenant had to walk between the two rows. It was a solemnization of a covenant, the guarantee that the covenant terms would be honoured.

Now, if the covenant was such that two parties both had something to fulfil, then both of them had to walk between the pieces. That's simple, isn't it? You've won the lottery or something, which you shouldn't, as a Christian, but you have, perhaps, and got £10 million, and you determine to build the biggest house that ever a man could live in. And you go to the builder, and you say to the builder, 'Now, I want a house. Not just any old house, I want it this, and this, and this, and this, and this, and you specify the terms,' and the builder says, 'And that will cost you £5 million!' He specifies the cost, and if you agree, you both have to sign the deal. If, of course, the covenant wasn't a covenant like that, but a covenant like, say, your uncle Sam in America who's made it good. He's got five or six ranches, seven or eight houses, bank balances galore, shares and preferential shares. And Uncle Sam dies. You try to be sad, but you jolly well hope he's named you in his will. And you go along and you listen to the will, and Uncle has given you three ranches.

'Any conditions?'

'No, it just says, "I like Mary, so I'm giving her this."'

'What do I have to do to get it?'

'Well, just receive it.'

That's what we call a one-party covenant. Only one party had something to fulfil, and he did it by his will, and signed the will. God said to Abraham, 'Abraham, I'm not only going to give you a son, but to your seed I'll give this great inheritance.' And when Abraham asked how he would know, God said, 'This is how you'll know. We'll have a covenant, Abraham.'

So Abraham had to prepare the animals, and he cut them in pieces, and he put them in two rows, and then we're all on edge to see who's going to walk between these pieces. If Abraham's going to have something to fulfil to gain this inheritance, he'll have to walk between the pieces, and we watch Abraham. Abraham? The man fell asleep. Dear oh dear, you shouldn't fall asleep in meetings like this, should you? He fell asleep, poor chap, so he didn't walk between the pieces. Well, who walked between the pieces, then? According to the record, the symbol of the very presence of God walked between those pieces. It was God's gift, God's unconditional gift to Abraham and to his seed.

Abraham and his seed, therefore, shall inherit this great inheritance, but now comes the point: who is Abraham's seed? And Paul answers, in the inspired New Testament: the seed, as God intended it, was Christ. You say, 'Isn't that a bit far-fetched? How can the seed be Christ?' Well, my reply to that would be simply this, that Abraham himself was told in the preamble to that covenant that he and his descendants for the next 400 years would never possess the land. They wandered in it like strangers, as though it wasn't theirs. They had the title deeds, yet they didn't possess it. Some eventually possessed it under Joshua for a while. It ended, first with the Assyrians, and then with the Babylonians. Multitudes of the descendants of Abraham have never enjoyed possession of the land. The only hope that Abraham will have it, is that his seed, Christ, will one day inherit it; not only the land

designated in that covenant, but the whole earth from shore to shore, and heaven as well. For the seed, says Paul, intended in that covenant, is Christ.

You say, 'How on earth do I get into that, then?' Let me come back to my analogy. This is your uncle Sam who left his great estate, and presently there comes a message from a solicitor in Belfast. He's acting for this aforesaid Sam, and you are invited to attend the reading of the will, and as the will is read, the solicitor says, 'Now, all my deposits go to Sally, and my houses to George, and my shares to Andrew, and my yacht to Naomi, and the rest of my estate, I give to Ruth.'

And I say, 'Go on, solicitor, go on.'

'No,' he says, 'that's the end.'

'No, it can't be,' I say, 'you haven't mentioned me yet.'

'Well, who are you?'

'Well, I'm David, of course.'

'I'm sorry, there's no David in the will. You're not in it.'

I say, 'That can't be true. I know my uncle Sam, and he thought a lot of me, and I'm sure he would have left me something in his will.'

'Well,' he says, 'your name's not here.'

'Well,' I say, 'write it in then, solicitor, write it in.'

No good, is it? If the seed to whom the promised inheritance is given is Christ, how do we get into it? As many of us have been baptized into Christ, we've trusted Christ, we have put on Christ like a man puts on an overflowing robe; then, if we are Christ's, we are the seed, Abraham's seed, referred to in that covenant, and therefore we too are heirs according to that great promise. You say, 'But if you look at Genesis, Mr Preacher, that is only a few acres in the Middle East, and I'm not interested in that. Mine is a heavenly portion.' Oh, I see, so you're interested in a heavenly inheritance? Well, actually, so am I. You're not interested in the earth? Oh, half a minute, let me ask you. You're very spiritual, so you're interested just in heaven, but Christ, is he interested in the earth? Is the story true that he shall ask of God and he will give him the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession? Is it true that he shall reign from shore to shore? He shall inherit all things. Oh, what a wonderful thing it is to be told by that very covenant of God to Abraham and to his seed, we shall inherit because we are in Christ. Therefore, we are Abraham's seed according to the covenant.

The doctrine of justification by works

And finally, James comes along to tell us that it's not merely true that we're justified by faith, we have to be justified by works. And from that there has arisen endless discussion; how do you reconcile the two things, justified by faith, justified by works? I was brought up by learned and well-meaning people. They solved this problem by this little statement. 'We're justified by faith before God. We're justified by works before men.' That sounded to me very good, until I read the Old Testament. For the example of justification by works that James quotes is once more from the book of Genesis, when Abraham was justified by his works when he offered up Isaac on the altar, and on that occasion, there weren't any other people there. Not even Sarah was there. And what is more, when Abraham put Isaac on the altar and raised his hand to slay Isaac, and the Angel of the Lord intervened and told him to stop, he added, 'For

now I know,' it was the Angel of the Lord talking, God himself, of course. 'Now I know that you fear me' (see Gen 22:11-12).

You say, 'But that's silly talking like that, because God knows in advance. He knows my heart.' Well, so he does, but there are different kinds of knowledge, aren't there? I know as I stand here that at the South Pole it's very cold. I know it because I've read it in books, and from what the scientists say I know it's very cold at the South Pole. You could reason it out, couldn't you? I don't know it by experience. I've never been there. God knew I was going to exist, you know. He foresaw it. I'm glad he wasn't content with that kind of knowledge. I'm glad he insisted that there should be an actual David Gooding born into this world. God knows our hearts, of course. He will eventually demand actual evidence that our faith is in God.

James, therefore, is very helpful when he points to Genesis and the story in Genesis, because the story will explain what otherwise could be a difficulty to us. When God came to Abraham and demanded that he be justified by his works, notice what it was that God asked him to do. He didn't say, 'Abraham, now look here my good man, I've blessed you abundantly. Look at the thousands of sheep and goats and camels and things you have. Abraham, couldn't you increase your contribution to Oxfam a little bit? I mean, you ought to be interested in some charities or something.' Well, I don't know that he wasn't, but it wasn't that kind of thing that God asked him to do. To find out what it was and what was implied, one must read Hebrews 11, which describes Abraham going up the mountain with Isaac, and points out that all the promises of God about the future were all vested in Isaac. 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called' (v. 18), and God had promised him that, in Isaac, his descendants would be like the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore; and now God was asking Abraham to offer up Isaac and slay him on the altar.

But all his future was in Isaac, all he had lived for and hoped for was in Isaac. If on the top of the mountain he put Isaac on the altar and slew him, he was left with nothing but God. We're told that Abraham went up that mountain. I'm not sure he was singing hallelujah all the way, but we're told he logically worked it out. God had promised all the future in Isaac. Well, if God was asking him now to slay Isaac on the altar as a sacrifice to God, he would do it, but God couldn't break his word, and that would mean that God would have to raise Isaac from the dead, that's all. You see, this matter of being justified by faith, ultimately God will test it before himself. Is my faith solely in God? Was Abraham's faith solely in God, or was it partly in Isaac? Says God, 'We'll settle it, Abraham. Give me Isaac.' Those are the realities of faith. And when Abraham turned, he saw a ram caught in a thicket by its horns, and offered it up as a burnt offering, as a substitute for Isaac. And he came down the mountain and called the place, not 'the place of my tremendous victory, and my marvellous faith.' No, no, no. He called the place 'Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide.' So God will test our faith, that it is truly in him.

You say, 'When it comes to it, tell me, what standard does God require when he puts me through the examination as to whether my faith is in God one hundred percent or not?' I mustn't tell you that he's content with seventy-five percent, may I? God is not in the job of pretending, but oh, thank God, let me cite you one incident. When our Lord entered Gethsemane, he took three of his disciples and asked them to come near, and then to pray,

and he went further to pray. They ought to have prayed, shouldn't they? They fell asleep. He came and pleaded with them to wake up and pray. They did their best and fell asleep. Were they real disciples of Christ? They meant well. I have to tell you this, that a few hours later Christ went to Calvary and paid the cost not only of their faults as sinners, but to cover the shortfall of their devotion to him.

Marvellous, isn't it? How else should we survive the tests that God will bring in our lives, to show to God that our faith is in him and in him alone? Oh, often we come short, and at the end of the day, we have to say, 'Lord, I tried, you know I tried. I have come short, but thank God for the sacrifice of Christ that covers not merely my transgressions as a sinner, but the shortfall of my devotion as a saint.'

Three basic doctrines from the New Testament. We see how they are rooted in the Old Testament, and therefore we should be stimulated when we get the chance to study the Old Testament in detail. So God bless our study, for his name's sake.

Exodus

In this session of the talks on 'Understanding the Old Testament' we devote ourselves to a study of the book of Exodus. I want to raise the practical question, why should we bother to study Exodus? After all, we're Christians, aren't we, or if we're not, we ought to be. 'We're not under law,' says the New Testament. Why study a book that tells us at great length how Israel came to be under God's law? And anyway, we're saved, aren't we? We're forgiven, we have the assurance of the New Testament that there is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus, and we're waiting for the Lord Jesus to come from heaven and take us home to one of the many mansions. Why should we bother about Exodus? It's ancient history, is it not? I want to try to answer that question and give reasons why we should study the book of Exodus.

I have provided a listing of some of the details of the book of Exodus (see Appendix). This is included in order to suggest that the book of Exodus is not a haphazard collection of stories. It is an integrated whole, and the various parts of Exodus are linked together in what you might call logical coherence. This synopsis offers some of the leading ideas that will help to get the book of Exodus as a whole into your mind.

The historical basis of Christianity

With that, we come back to the question, why study the ancient book of Exodus? One reason should be that Christianity is not a philosophy. Anybody can think up a philosophy. Christianity is based on God's revelations of himself in history, and therefore Christianity is rooted in that history that is recorded in the Old Testament. So, one of the reasons why we should be interested in Exodus is to consider the historical basis of Christianity. To help us study the accuracy of Old Testament history, one could begin by reading the book entitled *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* by Professor K. A. Kitchen.¹ Not all agree with him, of course (there are very few things about which archaeologists all agree), but here is a wealth of up-to-date archaeology and history of the Old Testament. It is worth getting a copy if you can persuade your grandmother to give you this for a Christmas present. If you haven't got it already, you would do very well.

¹ K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

The self-revelation of God's name

The second and vastly more important reason why we should study the book of Exodus is because it contains a record of the majestic self-revelation of the very character of God. The story is early given of how Moses's attention was drawn to a bush in the desert (ch. 3). It was just an ordinary bush, of which there are thousands in such a desert. However, this desert bush was aflame with fire, and to Moses's astonishment, though it burned, it was not consumed. He drew near to learn what was the reason for this, and heard a voice saying, 'Moses, don't come any further, and take your sandals off your feet. The place whereon you stand is holy ground.' It was the God of the universe who had come down to this desert, and his very presence in the burning bush set it alight with an unearthly fire. God came to commission Moses to release Israel from the grip of Pharaoh, and lead them out towards their great inheritance.

Moses said to God, 'Now, look, when I go to my people in Egypt and tell them, "The God of your fathers has appeared to me, and has come down to bring you out of Egypt," and they say to me, "Yes, but what is his name?" What might I say?' What is the personal name of God that tells out his very character and himself, that name which, when he divulges it to us, sets up an intimate fellowship, as it is with friends? You know a Mrs Smith? Oh well, there are thousands of Mrs Smiths. It is when she says to you, 'Sir, you may call me by my personal name,' that you count it a privilege, and it sets a relationship. May I call God by his personal name? It's this that is afoot. God's self-revelation of his name: 'I AM THAT I AM' (Exod 3:14). Knowledge of God as the great I AM; constant, always faithful, who never changes as to his character, who has come now to honour his covenant with Abraham, to bring out his people, set them free, and lead them to their inheritance. That name, and belief in that name, would be an essential if ever Israel were to break free of Pharaoh. They would need great faith in Moses to challenge the almighty Pharaoh. They would need greater faith in the I AM and the reality of God if they were to escape the claws of the Egyptian monarch. 'Tell them,' says God, 'my name: I AM THAT I AM.'

Our Lord himself used the same tactics, didn't he? In the Gospel of John, we hear him talking to us about another sinister prince. The prince of this world, he calls him, who holds people enslaved (see John 12:31; 16:11). What will be the secret of delivering them from his grasp? Among other things, it will be the declaration of the personal name of God. In John 17, as he gives account of his ministry, our Lord says, 'I have made known your name to the people you have given me out of this world' (v. 6). And once more he says it at the end of his prayer, 'I have made known thy name, and will go on to make it known, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them' (v. 26). So Moses went to Pharaoh, and he said, 'Your Majesty, you see, you are to let the Israelites go.'

'Oh, really?'

'Yes, because God appeared to our ancestor, and long before we came into Egypt, God had purposes for us, and he told us we would be here as a nation for rather a long time, but then he would come down and bring us out. So, Pharaoh, you must let the people go.'

'It's an interesting idea,' said Pharaoh, 'but as for this, what did you say? There was a purpose behind your coming? That's absolute nonsense, you know. And what did you say? This God of yours has come down to bring you to an inheritance? Now, look here. This is

sheer mythology, you know. There isn't any inheritance for them, and as far as your Israelites are concerned, let me tell you what life is. Life is work, and eat, and then sleep, and then work, and eat, and sleep, and perhaps a game of golf or something now and again, but that's what it is. There's no divine purpose in this past, and certainly no inheritance in the future.'

There are many that live under that notion still. What is life? Is there any purpose behind our coming into this world? Any divine creatorial purpose? And is there an inheritance beyond it, incorruptible and undefiled, that fades not away? Or is life for us simply being born, growing up, working, eating, sleeping, working, eating, sleeping, game of rugby, perhaps, golf or something, getting married, and then oblivion? What will keep us and inspire us is to know God and his personal name, the I AM who is behind our entry to this world and who waits to receive us in the next.

The revelation of the name of God, therefore. You will remember the reference our Lord made to it in the gospels when challenged by the Sadducees over the question whether or not there was a resurrection of the dead (see, e.g. Matt 22:23–33). The Sadducees were highly religious, but they didn't believe in the resurrection. What was the point of religion, then? Well, just to make you nice, of course, and behave well, and get on in politics. There's no heaven, no resurrection, according to the Sadducees. They asked Christ for evidence, and he said, 'Don't you remember what God said to Moses? In declaring his name, he said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"' (v. 32). What's that got to do with it? Well, let me use a little illustration. If you came to me and said, 'You're old, aren't you?' Well, yes, I fear I am. You say, 'Did you know Spurgeon?'² I say, 'Excuse me, I'm not that old. He was dead before I was born. Did I know him? Well, of course not. I didn't know Abraham either.' If you went to God and you said, 'Tell me, God, did you know Abraham?', God might well reply, 'What do you mean, "Did I know him?" I know him now. There he is, look.' For the God who made us, and redeemed us through Christ, is eternally loyal to us, and when we come to know him through Christ, it's an eternal relationship.

Passover as a prototype of redemption

But let's get another reason for studying Exodus. Exodus provides us with a prototype of redemption, and studying a prototype can be very helpful in coming to understand the final product. I was taken by some notable friends of mine down to the shores of Newcastle just recently, and we were there to celebrate the first flying of an aeroplane from Murlough Bay down to the very sands by Newcastle. And as we stood there, trying to imagine this first aeroplane, the Red Arrows came and gave a display.³ There was a mighty difference between the Red Arrows planes and the first plane that was invented and flown here, but that first plane embodied a principle that is still incorporated in the most majestic airliner that flies

² Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–92), pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, was England's best-known preacher for most of the latter part of the nineteenth century.

³ In 1909, engineer and inventor Harry Ferguson made the first flight in Ireland and was the first Briton to build and fly his own aeroplane. In 1910, he made the first engine-powered flight over two miles along Newcastle beach. An annual festival of flight held in Newcastle featuring an RAF Red Arrows acrobatic team display over the beach commemorates this first aviation.

above your head at 35,000 feet. It's called an aileron.⁴ And so the Passover, as described in Exodus, serves as a prototype of the great redemption that God has provided in Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the Upper Room just before he died, our Lord gathered with his apostles and said, 'With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not eat it, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God' (Luke 22:15–16). This presents us with a problem, doesn't it? The Passover wasn't a prophecy. As the Jews celebrated it year by year, it was a memorial of something that happened in the long distant past. It wasn't a prophecy. How, then, could Passover be fulfilled? Well, in the same sense as your modern airliner takes the original principles embodied in those primitive planes and carries them to vastly higher levels of engineering, so the Passover became a prototype of a vastly more important means of redemption through our Lord's sacrifice.

What does Jesus' death mean? Was it simply a martyr's death? No, indeed, though it was that, it was infinitely more. The Passover as a prototype will help us to perceive some of its significance, and so the New Testament treats it. John has a very vivid description of what happened when our Lord surrendered his spirit on the cross. There came a Roman soldier with a mighty great hammer, and he went to the first criminal, who was still breathing, and bashed the hammer on his legs, breaking them so he couldn't run away even when he was taken down from the cross. The soldier went to the second criminal and likewise broke his legs. And then you see the same man as he comes to the central cross, intent on breaking Jesus' legs as well, and then he pauses. He puts down his mallet, and does not break his legs.

Why didn't he break his legs? Well, he was dead already, of course, so the soldier thought it wasn't necessary. Yet there was a deeper reason. It was written about the Passover sacrifice in the book of Exodus that 'you shall not break a bone of it' (Exod 12:46, quoted in John 19:36). Is it important that none of our Lord's bones were broken? Yes, it is indeed important, and at that point in his Gospel, the writer says now, 'He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth' (John 19:35 ESV). The soldier went against his commands from Pilate, and didn't break his legs. Though the soldier knew nothing about it, there was a restraining power over him. The Bible had said of the Passover sacrifice that no bone shall be broken. John tells us that this is the great Passover sacrifice.

Come with me, if you will, to the church at Corinth. They were a lively bunch, not short of words to speak, and not always complimentary of Paul, either. And they had got a curious idea about the Christian gospel. They thought because the Christian gospel says that we have forgiveness through Christ's blood, and that there is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus, therefore it didn't matter if you sinned. And in particular, there was one member of the church at Corinth who had sexual relations with his father's wife. Whether the father was dead or not, in Greek morality, this was outrageous. 'You can't do it,' says Paul. 'Why can't I? I'm saved, am I not? And forgiven? And there is no condemnation?'

You can't do it. Listen to the prototype. When they kept the Passover meal, simultaneously they had to keep the feast of unleavened bread. Leaven, as the rabbis taught, pictured moral corruption. If you come to God through Christ as your Passover sacrifice, whose blood

⁴ An aileron is a hinged surface in the trailing edge of an aeroplane wing, used to control the roll of an aircraft about its longitudinal axis.

cleanses you from sin and delivers you from Satan, you have to keep the feast of unleavened bread. You can't have one without the other. It means that sexual licence is out of court. Now, it is true that there is forgiveness for Christians who fall, but falling will require repentance. Let us therefore not only celebrate Passover, and our Lord's dying as our Passover lamb, but seek his grace to live a life of holiness.

And I'll tell you another thing about Passover. You had to eat it, of course. You talked about 'eating the Passover.' You had your bit of roast lamb and unleavened bread, but you couldn't just eat it any old how. You had to eat it with your shoes on your feet, your staff in your hand, and your loins belted around. I've often thought that must have been very difficult. From time to time like you, I have been to parties, stand-up parties where your hostess urges you to take liberally of the sausages, and the olives, and the sandwiches, and the sausage rolls and things. Mighty difficult to balance a cup of tea in one hand and a plate in the other hand, with slippery things upon it. Very difficult, and I've often imagined how difficult it must have been to add a staff in your hand in order to eat the Passover, but thus it was required. You couldn't eat it unless you had shoes on your feet, a staff in your hand, and your loins belted around.

Why? Well, because eating that Passover meant that you were now about to begin a journey to the promised land; the glorious inheritance. It could be a long journey, but this is what Passover meant, and it had to begin that night. It wasn't optional. And Peter, in his first Epistle, reminds us that we have been redeemed not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, and then he adds a simile, 'as of a lamb' (1:18-19). You'll see, he's thinking of the Old Testament lamb of the Passover, and just before that he says to us, 'Gird up the loins of your mind' (v. 13 KJV). Well, modern people don't have loins anyway. At least, they're not conscious of having loins. Loins, if they meet the term at all, are in the butcher's shop; a loin of meat. What on earth are 'loins of your mind'? So, the modern translations do their best to cut the metaphor out and bring it to reality. 'Prepare your minds to do some serious thinking,' which isn't bad, is it? 'Gird up the loins of your mind'; prepare to do some rigorous thinking. The implications of being redeemed by the blood of our Passover Lamb means that we have to think hard about the journey on which we are now set.

Suppose you could come, in one of these magic carpet affairs, way back to the time when Israel were already gone from Egypt six months to a year, and you're flying over the pyramids, and when you land, you come across old Zechariah. Well, he's a Jew, of course, one of your friends. Perhaps he is even selling carpets. And you say, 'Oh, Zechariah, I'm surprised to see you here. Why aren't you with all that other crowd of your fellow nationals on a journey across the desert?'

'Well,' he says, 'I've nothing against religion, but they're really overzealous. I'm redeemed, but I think Egypt is a nice place to be in, and I don't see the need for this rigorous journeying across the Sinai Peninsula.'

'I see. So you don't see the need, so you're in Egypt. I see. Well, how do you think you're going to ever get into your inheritance?'

'Well, I don't think about that.'

'You don't think about it? Well, how on earth are you going to get there, then?'

To be redeemed with the blood of Christ, we have to prepare our minds to do some very serious thinking. It involves a journey, to be deliberately taken. The journey can be pleasant, it can be tough. It is to occupy our thinking on our road towards our great inheritance. And I cite it because it is one more example of the way that the Passover recorded in Exodus becomes in the New Testament a prototype, an example, a parable if you like, of our redemption through Christ, and the implications of being redeemed.

The goal of redemption

The person who claims to be redeemed, but is not concerned about making progress in the spiritual life, raises a very big question as to whether he or she realizes what redemption is about anyway. What is the purpose of redemption? It is given us in Exodus 19, where God comes to Israel and tells Moses to tell the Israelites, 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians,' says God, 'and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself' (v. 4ESV). What is the goal of redemption? You say, 'It was the great inheritance.' No, it wasn't. The goal of redemption was God himself. 'Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto me from among all peoples: for all the earth is mine: and you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation' (vv. 5–6).

Peter cites this in 1 Peter 2. 'God has shown his stupendous mercy,' says Peter, 'and he has made us a people who once were not a people, but now are the people of God, and we have a task to show to the world at large the virtues of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light' (see vv. 9–10). You see, that wasn't always clear to the Israelites, for the simple reason that they forgot it. There was a time when, under God's discipline, God said to Moses, 'Moses, look, I promised you the promised land, and in spite of your sin, you can have it. It's a good land, flowing with milk and honey, so you can have it. The only thing is,' says God, 'I shan't come with you' (see Exod 33:1–3).

What would you have said to God if he'd made that proposition to you? 'I promise to everybody who trusts the Lord Jesus that they will come to heaven. Okay, so they will but I'll have them know that I won't be there to meet them.' If God made you that proposition, what would you say? It's rather blunt, isn't it? Wouldn't you say rather, 'Well, God, I'm sorry about that. I had been looking forward to meeting you, but if you can't come, well, heaven is a good place to go to, and we shall enjoy it very nicely.' Yes, it would be serious to mistake the goal of redemption, to suppose it were heaven, when of course it is God, and God all the way. For that reason, when God redeemed Israel he came down and asked them to build him a tabernacle, so that he might come and dwell among them even as they travelled. They wouldn't have to wait until they got to the promised land; God would dwell with them, and walk with them.

And centuries later, when David proposed to build God a permanent temple, built in one place, God said to David in effect, 'David, I suggest you leave the timetabling to me. Have I ever asked until now anybody to build me a temple? Ever since I took Israel out of Egypt?' Now, listen to what he says. 'I have walked with them' (see Exod 29:45; cf. Lev 26:12). What a

metaphor for God to use. God walking? God walking with this bunch of ex-slaves, in a tabernacle that was movable on purpose; God walking every yard of every mile.

Realities the tabernacle symbolizes

What a magnificent thing it is, isn't it? May I reassure you, if you need reassuring as a believer, this is God walking with you every footsore mile home to heaven. Which brings us, of course, to the—I nearly said the word, and in some circles, it's become a bad word—the tabernacle. You say, 'Oh boy, you are old, because this is an old-fashioned truth, this tabernacle.' The trouble is, it's given in detail, and it's given twice, first of all in detailed command how to build the tabernacle and its furniture, and then in detailed description of how the command was carried out, so much so that the tabernacle occupies about one-quarter of the whole of the book of Exodus.

Let's grasp its original, practical purpose: that God might walk with his people. But why should we study it? Well, God thought it was important. Hebrews 8:5 says that God commissioned Moses to make the tabernacle, and charged him that he was to copy exactly the model shown him on the mountain. I must not trouble you with the technicalities of the vocabulary, but scholars do puzzle as to what exactly was this model that God showed Moses on the mountain. You could use the Greek word of an architect's model, for instance. When an architect is asked to build a big public building, or a bungalow for me, he might make a model of it. God showed Moses a model—and the Greek word could be translated that way—'showed.' It was to give Moses some idea of the heavenly things: God, in his mercy, as they journeyed, filling their minds and imaginations with heavenly things. It isn't bad going, you know.

'Set your affection on things above,' says the Epistle to us Christians (Col 3:2 KJV). Well, how do you do that? 'Set your thoughts,' the Greek actually says. What is heaven like? You'll recall the story of Genesis, when God made man and woman, and put them in the garden, and they broke God's command and sinned and were cast out from the tree of life. When Israel were redeemed, God came down and dwelled in the tabernacle, and the priests were allowed at least into the first division of the tabernacle. I wonder what they felt like. Yes, imagine a young priest, and his mama has got him all scrubbed up and the right clothes on, and he's going in for the first time ever, into the holy place. When he gets in, he sees cherubim all around the place, on the roof, on the side curtain, on the veil. If he knew his Old Testament—well, let's hope he did—he would have remembered that when Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, God sent cherubim to guard the way of the tree of life, so the guilty man might not come to it. Here, when he gets into the holy place, are cherubim galore, and they're not preventing his entrance. 'Oh, that thing there looks very much like a tree.' Well, it was. It was a lampstand, actually, but made to look a tree, with blossoms, buds, and fruit. Made to look as if it were alive; a symbol of the tree of life. There is such a tree, isn't there? We don't know really what it's like botanically, but we're told in the last book of the Bible about the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.

Would you let me think about it? I need some help, for I'm a bit of a clodhopper. I need someone to stimulate my imagination as well as my logical thinking. I feel eternally grateful

to God, because he's condescended to my level and gives me symbols of great eternal realities on which I can feast my imagination.

The tabernacle's redemptive purpose

I don't mean by the term 'imagination' that these realities themselves are not real. Can you imagine what it would be like to have dinner with Her Majesty? I don't make a habit of it, all that fuss, but can you imagine what heaven is like? What will it be to dwell above and be with the Lord of glory to reign? We'd need some help with our imaginations. The New Testament tells us at length why the Holy Spirit devised the grand plan of the tabernacle building itself in the way he did it, for the tabernacle building that Moses built had two compartments. There was the first compartment, called 'the Holy Place'; then, there was a big veil, and after that big veil, there was the second compartment, called 'the Most Holy Place,' which was the place of the immediate presence of God.

Why did the Holy Spirit design it that way? Well, he tells us in Hebrews 9 that he did it on purpose. He put up a veil there so that the way into the second compartment, where stood the throne of God, was not open. Only the high priest, and he only once a year, was allowed beyond that veil; the ordinary priests never were. Why was that? The Holy Spirit tells us straight: their sacrifices weren't enough to cleanse the conscience and make someone fit to stand in the presence of God. But then, we gather, our Lord came, and for thirty-three years he acted like the veil. You say, 'What do you mean?' Well, with the veil in the tabernacle, a priest could come up so far and look at the veil with its beautiful colours: blue, purple, scarlet, cherubim on it—beautiful! I wonder, what is that saying about God? When our Lord came in a body of flesh and blood, and little children nestled on his knee, plucked his beard, maybe, and the prostitutes came and listened to him, touched him, and in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (see Col 2:9). What grace, that our Lord should act thus as a veil.

He doesn't act like that now, for at Calvary the veil was torn, the flesh of Christ was torn, and when our Lord ascended into glory, for a believer there's no veil now. Hebrews 10:19 says that because of Christ, we have boldness to enter into the holiest of all. Marvellous, isn't it, this old tabernacle? I for one am grateful for it, for I need simple illustrations. How near may I come to God? I can come, if you take the analogy of the tabernacle, past that first veil, you see, into the very presence of God.

There's many a believer who doesn't have that assurance. You do, I hope. I travel in countries where churches hold a different view. If you go into an Orthodox church in Russia or Eastern Europe, two-thirds of the way down the aisle, there's a wall right across. There are three doors in it. Sometimes in a service, the middle door is opened and there's a light inside. Only the priests are allowed in. The people have to stand outside. They don't have boldness to enter into the holiest. The last one I was in, there were some priests chanting; the door was open, but there was a widow woman, an elderly widow woman clothed all in black, on her knees on the floor, kissing the ground. I couldn't help but remember the hymn 'Why stand we then without, in fear? The blood of Christ invites us near.'⁵ We have boldness to enter the holiest of all.

⁵ Horatius Bonar, 'Done is the work that saves' (c.1866).

We've known it a long time. My dear Christian friends, there are multitudes who profess the name of Christ who have no such assurance, and are not allowed to have such assurance by their religious authorities. And those of us who enjoy the wonderful liberty of the children of God, even now to enter the holiest of all, must find ourselves ready by this means or another to bring that liberty to all God's people.

I'll tell you something else. The Israelites were allowed to build the tabernacle. That made a change from building bricks in Egypt. Could you be asked to build heaven? You say, 'No, no, no. Build heaven?' Just ponder the fact. Heaven will be a lot of people. Might I be allowed to contribute to the edification of the citizens of the eternal city?

So may God bless these few observations as to why we should read, even as Christians, the book of Exodus.

Leviticus (1)

This is the third session in this series of talks on 'Understanding the Old Testament' and we start today with the book of Leviticus. We ask, as we have already done on the other occasions, why on earth should we, as Christian people, study Leviticus? Goodness me, you can get to heaven without studying Leviticus, can't you? But why on earth should we study it? And then there's the added phenomenon that, of course, in large sections, it goes into detailed anatomical structures of the insides of animals, and that is perhaps not in the best Western taste. So, why should we study it? Doesn't the New Testament itself say that all the animal sacrifices that Leviticus talks of are all passé? We no longer need them, anyway. We have a far better sacrifice, namely the sacrifice of our blessed Lord, so why should we bother with these ancient institutions?

God's holiness and the sacrifices for sin

Let me mention the fact that among our Jewish friends there is a tradition that Leviticus was the first book that they gave to their children to study. And you might ask, why of all books should you give Leviticus to your children to study? But, of course, the book of Leviticus is not simply about the sacrifice of animals. It has as its major theme the holiness of God, and therefore our obligation to be holy ourselves. So the famous chapter 19 of Leviticus hammers home by constant repetition, "You shall be holy, for I am holy," says the LORD.' Time after time God repeats through those instructions, 'I am the LORD. I am the LORD. I am the LORD. Be you holy, for I am holy.' And this is an exhortation that is repeated for us in Peter's first Epistle, where Peter quotes this exhortation: "Be you holy, for I am holy," sayeth the LORD' (see 1 Pet 1:14–16).

Immediately we see that Leviticus has practical implications for us as Christian believers, and, therefore, God, in his mercy, wishing to make his people holy, instituted the sacrifices such as are described in the early chapters of the book. One of the things these sacrifices do is to help the Israelites, and therefore us, to analyse what sin is. For if we are to take God seriously, and follow his injunction to 'be holy,' then, of course, we shall need to know, living in this present evil world, what sin is, and how God would analyse it. And so, in the early chapters of the book, we are given an array of sacrifices that help us to see some of the basic implications of sinfulness.

The sin offering

For instance, in Leviticus 4, we have directions for the sin offering, and the offering they had to bring varied according to who it was who had done the sinning. If it were a private individual, such and such an offering was required, and it was normally less than some of the other sin offerings. But if a priest sinned, so as to bring guilt upon the people, he had to bring an offering as large as, if not bigger, than the whole congregation brought. It establishes the principle that the gravity of sin depends on who does the sin.

If an ordinary citizen sins, that is serious enough, but if the judge, who is responsible for the law and its interpretation, sins, and he has convicted many other people of similar wrong behaviour, then obviously it's a much more serious defect than if the private individual sins. That is why James gives us some advice in his Epistle. 'My brothers,' he says, 'Be not many teachers.' Why not? 'Well, knowing this, that we shall receive the greater condemnation' (see Jas 3:1). It is a risky thing that I do now, in standing publicly to teach God's word, because if a teacher sins, who has told other people how they ought to behave, then he shall receive the greater condemnation. That is as relevant to us today as it was to ancient Israel.

The guilt offering

There is another offering for sin at the beginning of Leviticus, and it is called the 'guilt offering,' or the 'trespass offering.' Like the sin offering, it has a gradation of offerings to be offered, but here it is not a question of who does the sin. It is rather a question of the damage sin does. That is an exceedingly important thing, which is why in everyday business transactions, if a man sins, according to chapter 5, it is not enough to bring a sacrifice. He must first restore everything that he has falsely taken. In other words, he must, as far as he is able to, correct the damage that his sinfulness has done. The directions for this sacrifice show the compassion of God, for in certain respects it is written 'but if the person's means are not sufficient'; what then? That is a serious aspect of sin, isn't it?

Take, for instance, a teacher, and he is not only a confirmed atheist, but, like some professors whom we know a lot about, is determined to break other people's faith. This teacher takes a delight in trying to destroy the faith in God that some of his pupils have, and with one of them, succeeds, and turns him into an atheist. Both live on for a while. Then the young man whose faith he was broken and turned into an atheist, dies. The teacher lives on, and gets converted in later middle life. What then? Can he undo the damage he's done? Where now is the young man whose faith he broke? The damage that sin does is a serious matter, and justifies the advice that the Old Testament gives: 'Break off your wrongdoing, before it is meddled with' (Dan 4:27).

And, moreover, there were positive responsibilities, and failure in them was regarded as a trespass before God. So the section begins, 'If anyone should hear the voice of adjuration' (see Lev 5:1), that is, he is put on oath in a court, for instance, and is charged with speaking the truth, then, says Scripture, he must stand with the truth publicly. There's a very famous occasion in the New Testament where that happened. Matthew tells us that when our Lord stood in the high priest's court, various witnesses brought charges against him. He said nothing himself. He remained silent. The high priest, president of the court, complained, and

since our Lord still said nothing, he put him on oath and charged him by almighty God that he told the court what he claimed. Christ then had a decision to make, didn't he? He knew quite well, as everybody knew in the court, that if he told the truth, that would be an end of him. They would crucify him. What should he do? But the Scripture was clear. If someone is put under oath to speak, then he or she must stand with the truth. Surely you find that welling up in your heart at this moment to admire the Lord Jesus who, knowing full well the consequence of his confession, confessed the truth (see Matt 26:59–66). We have it easy in this country, of course. We must remember our brothers and sisters elsewhere who find themselves in situations where to tell the truth would mean execution.

Being holy as God is holy

So these chapters, then, fit into the scheme of Leviticus, which is that God now takes his redeemed people, rescued from slavery in Egypt, and begins to teach them what it means to be holy. There is another category in the early chapters of Leviticus: not only of the guilt that sin produces, but a slightly different category of the defilement, or the uncleanness, that sin produces. This is not necessarily something that we constantly think about, but, for instance, in the New Testament, the Epistle to the Hebrews warns believers lest a root of bitterness should arise among them, and many be thereby defiled (see Heb 12:15). When arguments arise of serious depth and sow discord among the people of God, and people get involved, almost inevitably—watch this feature carefully—there is a danger that many will be defiled. And you will not need me to remind you that believers in this modern age are assaulted at every level, in this unclean world, with the possibility of mind and emotions being defiled.

But, of course, these sacrifices help us on the positive side. The very first chapter of Leviticus is given over to the description of the burnt offering that Israel had often to provide. It was called the 'burnt offering,' or the 'ascending offering' because amongst its features was this, that the whole animal had to be sacrificed, except for its skin and certain other parts. It stands first, and reminds us of our duty as redeemed people to devote ourselves entirely to God. Though, of course, we often come short of it, we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. But Israel came short of it, and were allowed to bring this particular offering to make atonement for them (Lev 1:4). That puts us into the practical situation: lack of keenness for the Lord is first of all sin. It is easy to get the impression that so long as I have not murdered my mother-in-law, if I had one, or cheated the bank, or failed to pay my income tax, or done some other horrible thing, then I'm okay.

But that is not necessarily so. In his address to the churches in Asia Minor, our blessed Lord is on record of saying of one church, 'You are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other. I can't stick this neither-hot-nor-cold attitude. I shall vomit you out of my mouth,' says Christ, 'that behaviour is so distasteful' (see Rev 3:15–16). What would you think, not that I've ever done it, but if I went to a recently married husband and wife, and I said to the husband, 'You must be a fortunate man to get a wife like that. You must be madly in love with her.'

And he replied, 'Well, of course I'm not against her, and when she gets up, I open the door for her. And then, on the other hand, I'm not madly keen on her.'

‘Oh, I see. You are neither hot nor cold.’ What a charge to bring against us, if the speaker is Christ himself. ‘Of course, I’m not against Christ, but I’m not like some of these others, madly keen on him.’ I repeat, Christ says it is so distasteful to him that he will vomit such people out of his mouth.

I need say no more to make my first major point, that the sacrifices at the beginning of Leviticus help us to analyse what sin is. Therefore, in Israel, morning and evening, as the Israelites went about their daily work, in the temple the priests offered what is called the ‘continual burnt offering,’ the *tamid*. In the morning, they sacrificed a burnt offering, wholly to God, and in the evening, they offered another *tamid*, the whole of it for God, to atone for Israel as they got occupied in this, and that, and the other, and their devotion to the Lord slipped a bit, or more than a bit. ‘I beseech you,’ says Paul in his famous passage in Romans 12:1, ‘that you present your bodies, a living sacrifice to God.’ That is only your rational service. If he gave everything for me, how shall I not give everything to him?

What the sacrifices symbolize

But these sacrifices at the beginning of Leviticus and elsewhere do not merely help the Israelites and us to analyse sin. They were God’s answer—sacrifices for sinners who came short. Sacrifices, therefore, that while they couldn’t put away sin, they symbolized, even in those far-off days, God’s provision for his failing people, and become for us, as Christians, prototypes of our blessed Lord Jesus. If you fear that I am now about to go off into the quagmires of fanciful interpretation, let me cite you some actual statements of the New Testament. Ephesians 5:2 says, ‘Walk in love, even as Christ also loved you,’ says Paul, ‘and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odour of a sweet smell.’ That is a description given particularly of the first offering. As the whole of it ascended to God, it was a sacrifice of a sweet smell, a fragrance that caused rest, that God should be satisfied.

When we think of it, what a story this is, and what a very careful and rich and heart-moving illustration and prototype. As sinners came and offered their burnt offering because of all their shortcomings, it moves us to think of our blessed Lord, who never came short, cost what it may. As he knelt in the garden of Gethsemane, and the stones hurt his knees, he prayed his heart out, did he not? ‘Father, Abba-Father, you love me. By your love I plead, let this cup pass from me.’ And secondly, he prayed, ‘All things are possible within your power, Father. By your very power I plead, let this cup pass from me,’ but added triumphantly, ‘nevertheless, thy will be done.’ And amidst the moral fury, the bad smell of human behaviour at Calvary, there came up to God a fragrance.

Look at him, sinless himself, and giving himself for the very people who had nailed him to the tree. Don’t you admire the Lord Jesus? You’ll see God is beginning, by these pictures, to move our centre from ourselves to Christ. When we fail as believers, as we often do, it is the devil’s tactic to get us constantly thinking about ourselves, and what we’ve done wrong, and how rotten we are, and all such things. Well, there is time for repentance, of course. But if we go on thinking of ourselves like that we shall become very much like ourselves in that state, which isn’t always a good thing. What is God’s attitude when we have sinned? He says that through the sacrifice of Christ we can have forgiveness. ‘Oh, we know that.’ ‘Yes, but,’

says God, 'let me show you the wonder of the Lord Jesus; that where you failed, he didn't, and doesn't.' God does it to provoke our admiration in his Son, and what was involved in his sacrifice for us, until our admiration becomes worship, and we become like what we worship. Hence the wisdom of our Lord's request to us before he left, that we should meet regularly and remember his giving of his body and his blood for us, that we may admire him and worship him, and little by little become like him.

The sacrifice of Christ for our sins

Let me illustrate that to you, if I can, by taking one particular sacrifice. This is Leviticus 4, and it begins like this: 'And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any one shall sin unwittingly, in any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and shall do any one of them: if the anointed priest shall sin so as to bring guilt on the people' (vv. 1-3); verse 13, 'and if the whole congregation of Israel shall err, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly'; verse 22, 'when a ruler sins'; chapter 5 and verse 1, 'and if any one sin.' What happens if anyone sins? That's a theme taken up in the New Testament, isn't it? John says, 'This I write unto you so that you don't sin,' and then he adds, being a realist as he is, 'but if anyone sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world' (see 1 John 2:1-2).

What if anyone sins?

Let's think for a moment, therefore, of this central sacrifice. If anyone sins: if a priest sins, if Tom Jones sins, or Maggie Brown sins, or whoever, what happens? Well, I'll tell you what happened in Israel's day. If a priest sinned, then it began a journey. We must be reminded that these sacrifices, though as described on a page might look dull and uninteresting, were full of drama and symbolism, so that as people saw the sacrifice and understood what happened to it, they should be moved both in their consciences and in their imaginations. You say, 'I find it very difficult, sir, particularly when I read what they had to do with some of these sacrifices. You know, they had to cut them up, and then disembowel them, and worse than that, they had to investigate the kidneys, and oh dear, dear, dear, the innards of animals. That isn't a sort of a normal drawing room subject to get on to.'

Well, first let me point out to you that in the Hebrew language, the Hebrews talk of our psychological and spiritual experiences in terms of the physical organs of our body. Now, if you don't like that, well, it's not for me to apologize. They did it anyway. And the New Testament uses that same language. Writing a letter to the church at Thyatira, in the book of Revelation, our Lord says to that church, 'I shall deal with you and your flagrant idolatries and disloyalties, so that everybody shall know that I am he which searcheth the kidneys and hearts' (see Rev 2:23; cf. Jer 17:10).

Now, I'm sure you have a modern translation that gets you out of that difficulty, and it says nothing about kidneys. The delightful, Old English Authorized Version translates it, of course, into technical terms. 'I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts,' it says. Nothing to do with the reins you have on a horse to guide it. *Reins*, in Old English, is the English

equivalent of the Latin *renes*, which means ‘kidneys,’ as you will recognize, of course, if your Aunt Matilda is diagnosed with having renal failure. Well, you know what that means. Her kidneys have failed. ‘I am he which searches the kidneys and hearts.’ Your modern translations will have something like ‘I am he who searches the minds and hearts,’ but it’s good for us to know what lies behind it in the Greek, ‘I am he who searches the kidneys and hearts,’ because Hebrews thought of psychological things in physical terms. Kidneys are, to the Hebrew, our inner thoughts and thinkings and motivations—why we do things, and our motives can be healthy or unhealthy. ‘I am he who searches the inward motives. I search the kidneys.’

Says Paul, writing to the Philippians, ‘I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ’ (1:8). I can guarantee your modern translations don’t put it that way, and find some modern substitute for it, but that’s what Paul originally wrote. How does that make sense? Well, I don’t know about you, but if you get some very moving experience, maybe a shock, or some special delight, or you feel a special affect for somebody or other, it can get you in the lower part of your anatomy, so to speak, and produce all sorts of feelings there. ‘I long after you in the bowels of Christ.’ Your blessed Lord was no unfeeling monster. He had his feelings. ‘Is your eye evil?’, says Christ in his parable (see Matt 20:15). That’s nothing to do with witchcraft. For to a Hebrew, the evil eye represented jealousy. If some gifts are being distributed, and you see what the other chap has got, and you look at him jealously, the Hebrew would call that an evil eye.

What if a priest sinned?

So, for the ancient Israelite, the details of these sacrifices were not gruesome. They carried their meaning, and so I suggest to you that is why we need to read these early chapters of Leviticus, to use our imagination and to observe the drama of the occasion, and what it will signify to us. So, let us take Leviticus 4, which is the sin offering. If a priest sinned, what happened then? Well, he had to have an anointed priest to act for him, on his behalf. ‘Let him offer for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin offering. And he shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tent of meeting before the LORD; and he shall lay his hand upon the head of the bullock, and kill the bullock before the LORD’ (vv. 3–4).

Oh, how dramatic it is. The sacrifice is specifically described. It must be a young bullock. I hesitate to say now what I am going to say, because some of you may be farmers and more knowledgeable than I, but I was a farmer’s boy for four years, and observed the ways of young bullocks. They were full of life. I envied them sometimes, jumping all around the place, not to any particular advantage, but that was life, you see. You mustn’t draw too close an analogy between young bullocks and young people, but then they do both have a lot of life! ‘And you shall bring a young bullock.’ If that young bullock caught the smell of blood, it could be difficult to control it, to bring it before the Lord. And now the text uses a very violent word. Not ‘sacrifice’ it, ‘kill’ it. It’s the first stage in the journey, to have to stand by and see a young bullock, full of life, killed. It will be a solemn reminder that sin is a murderer.

And then the blood was taken by the priest, and he had to take it inside the holy place, right up to the veil—this was part of the journey—from the altar where it was killed, and its

blood was taken inside, as far inside as any ordinary priest could ever go in those far-off days, right up to the veil. What a thing it is in the drama. What happens if anyone sins, if we sin, for instance? We get a bad conscience, and perhaps we feel we'd better not get too near God just yet. Drawing near wouldn't be a good thing to do, perhaps. 'No, no,' says God, 'if you have a sacrifice for sin' —being our Lord Jesus—'what you want to do now is to come as close into the presence of God as you can get.'

Wonderful, isn't it? 'And the priest shall take of the blood and splash it on the veil' (see Lev 4:5), and here I must use the shorthand of the New Testament, which tells us that the veil was a divinely-engineered symbol of the humanity of Christ, who became human that he might pour out his blood for us. Oh, the tremendous journey! We can scarce follow the priest, but what we see in this has implications for us. The blood on the veil—that is Christ in life *for* us, *for* the sinful priest, not merely in his perfection, but carrying, so to speak, the blood which he has scattered across the veil. Christ in his life for us, in his humanity. He is human still. And then the priest turned round and put some of the blood on the horns of the incense altar, and anyone who knows the symbolic language of the Old Testament will know that that was the place where the priest stood daily to offer prayers at the time of the burning of incense on the behalf of his nation. It was therefore the altar of intercession.

What if I sin?

What happens if I sin? Well, I am to realize that my sin is a murderer. It killed Christ, but because it killed him and he died willingly for me, I have access to God, and Christ in his life was *for* me. Ah, but now Christ is risen, at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us, or for me, failing sinner though I am. Yes, our present Lord in heaven is interceding for me. Then, the priest came out with the rest of the blood, and poured out the whole of it at the base of the altar. Just one sin, but the whole blood. The hymn writer encapsulated the idea for us:

Teach me that if none other
Had sinned, but I alone,
Yet still Thy blood, Lord Jesus,
Thine only, must atone.⁶

The only way was for Christ to give his blood for me.

That wasn't the end of the journey, for in sacrifices where the blood was brought into the holy place, the animals had not to be burnt on the altar; they had to be taken away outside the camp, and there burned to ashes. I am now on very safe ground, yet I stand here afraid that you will accuse me of wild symbolism. Well, this bit isn't wild. The Epistle to the Hebrews says 'the bodies of the sacrifices, whose blood was brought into the holy place, were taken outside of the camp. Jesus, therefore, so that he might be a sacrifice for our sin, suffered outside the gate' (see Heb 13:11–12). You will remember it, won't you? When he died, he didn't die as a great hero, surrounded by the mass bands of Israel, singing his triumph as a noble hero. He

⁶ Lucy A. Bennett, 'O teach me what it meaneth' (1908).

was found by the highest court in the land to be guilty of heinous sin, was hustled out of the gate of the city to Golgotha. He suffered outside the gate.

My dear brother and sister, what effect does this drama have upon you? Think now of the reality, not simply the Old Testament picture. Do you see Christ carrying the cross they put on him, hustled outside the gate, taken to Golgotha, crucified with that wild, gruesome crew? And you say, 'Christ, did that for me?' How moving it is. I fancy if I've read your heart aright, when the Holy Spirit has brought that home to you, you will say, 'Well, God help me. I never want to sin again. I will go forth in this world unto Christ outside the gate and stand with him, because he did this all for me.' This is, in God's word of Leviticus, the initial stages in what the book has to say about our becoming holy, as God is holy.

Leviticus (2)

This is the fourth session in this series of talks on 'Understanding the Old Testament' and I recur to the book of Leviticus once more, and we shall read there in chapter 6. Now, as we have discovered in our earlier sessions, the book of Leviticus is a foundation for many Christian doctrines that are enunciated in the New Testament. But in this session I shall not be talking about profound doctrines, because the book of Leviticus also supplies us with some very practical reminders of our responsibilities. And so let us read a short passage from chapter 6, beginning in verse 8.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the burnt offering: the burnt offering shall be on the hearth upon the altar all night unto the morning; and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning thereon. And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put upon his flesh; and he shall take up the ashes whereto the fire hath consumed the burnt offering on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar. And he shall put off his garments, and put on other garments, and carry forth the ashes without [or outside] the camp unto a clean place. And the fire upon the altar shall be kept burning thereon, it shall not go out; and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning: and he shall lay the burnt offering in order upon it, and shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings. Fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually; it shall not go out. (vv. 8–13)

The Lord give us good understanding and application of his word.

The priests' practical responsibilities

The offerings are described for us in the early chapters of Leviticus, and its details are directed to the people in general, because they would need to know what kind of sacrifice to bring for their various offences. There follow here what are called the 'laws of the offering,' and they should be distinguished from what is told to the people, because these laws apply to the priests. The offerings were an elaborate series of ceremonies, sacrifices, prototypes (though Israel scarce knew it) of the sacrifice of Christ, and the people would need to know what sacrifice to bring for particular sins and offences, and what sacrifices to bring for a thank offering, or a vow. But behind the scenes, the priests were responsible for all the practical things that had to be done to make this system of sacrifices feasible. So the first thing that the priests are told here, in this special part for them, was the law of the burnt offering, and we're told 'the burnt offering shall be on the hearth upon the altar all night unto the morning' (v. 8).

And the thing is repeated in verse 13, as you notice, 'Fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually; it shall not go out.'

Keep the fire burning

So here we have instructions to the priest how to keep the fire burning. It was only a ceremony, or, in New Testament language, a type, but it had its practical implications. The fire, which originally came down from heaven, had to be kept burning at all costs and at all times. When the tabernacle moved, the fire was put in a specially designed holder so that it could be transported, and then, at night, when the evening sacrifice was required, it could be added to the wood on the altar. The fire should never go out. It was the priest's job to see that it never went out.

You just imagine, here comes a couple who have become conscious before God of their lack of devotion to God, and they have in fact been compromising his unique deity, and have joined in some idolatrous practice. Now they are repentant of it, and they come to offer God their burnt offering, and what a thing it is. Can you picture them standing there by the priest, with their offering; and they kill the offering, and the priest takes it, gets its blood, dismembers the thing, and puts it on the fire? What a heart-warming experience as the priest pronounces the forgiveness of God, and as they stand there and watch the sacrifice burn, the heat of it, of course, is warming them.

Now suppose, because some priest hasn't done his job, halfway through the service the fire begins to blink, and then goes out. It would be embarrassing, wouldn't it? I think, by comparison, of the best man at a wedding, who is in charge of the ring. And you can imagine, when the point comes in the wedding ceremony, that the officiant wants to pronounce them man and wife, and the bridegroom is meant to say, 'With this ring, I thee wed.' Of course, the best man is supposed to supply the ring, so he feels in his pocket. 'Well, it's not in that pocket. Oh, where is it? Oh, it's not there either. What on earth has come of it?' That would be very embarrassing, wouldn't it? Suddenly he remembers he's left it at home. It's not that the ring is in itself anything; it's what it symbolizes that is important. It would be desperate, if when the moment arrived for the sacred ceremony, he had forgotten the ring.

Remove yesterday's ashes

So it was with the priests. They had to keep this fire burning. How did you keep it burning? Well, the fire had to be kept burning all night until the morning. Then, in the morning, 'the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put upon his flesh; and he shall take up the ashes whereto the fire hath consumed the burnt offering on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar. And he shall put off his garments, and put on other garments, and carry forth the ashes without [or outside] the camp unto a clean place' (Lev 6:10-11). The one thing that could stop the fire burning is the ashes of yesterday's sacrifice.

Now, I must call upon my superior wisdom, because a lot of people nowadays don't have fires in their grates, but it used to be the responsibility of the head of the house, when I was a youth, to keep the fire burning in the hearth. Papa would come down in the morning, and there was yesterday's fire still a bit of a glimmer, and he tried to take a shortcut. Instead of

removing the ashes, he tried to poke it and get the thing going. Generally difficult, because the ash would tend to stifle the flame, and the thing would go out. So the priest, when he came in the morning, had to take away the ashes of yesterday's sacrifices, so that the fire should not go out, and then he had to have another sacrifice.

When it comes to practical things, preachers are allowed all sorts of licence. The one that springs to my mind is the importance of having new experiences of Christ. I know Christ is the same, and what I learned of him sixty years ago is still true. But if we try just keeping that up, and relying upon it to supply the fire of devotion to the Lord, we might find yesterday's ashes tend to put the fire out. I need new material. Is that not obvious? How do we come by new material about the Lord? Something that shall make our hearts burn within us once more? That is what the two on the road to Emmaus said after Christ had taken them through the Old Testament and begun to expound it, and it all began to make sense. As they returned that night to Jerusalem, they said, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us by the way?' (Luke 24:32). By God's grace, I have known such experiences. I don't pretend they are easily come by. We shall have to work to go on with the Lord, and let him teach us ever more of his ways.

Gather the wood

'The fire upon the altar,' says verse 12, 'shall be kept burning thereon, it shall not go out; and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning.' Now, as far as I'm aware, there was no redemptive virtue in the wood. The sacrifice itself would remind us of the sacrifice of Christ, but the wood was simply there to make the fire burn. Gentlemen that are old enough to know the responsibility of keeping the fire burning in the grate, and to get it burning before the wife came downstairs and all that, will know the thing to do is to scrape away the ashes first, and then to put the wood on, because it easily catches light. Whereas, if you put a lump of coal on, you'll put the flame out. Likewise, you had to put the wood on the altar, and burn wood on it every morning.

There were some people in Israel who had the responsibility of bringing the wood offering. That was hard work, wasn't it? Cutting down the trees and splitting the wood. There was no pretence that it didn't mean much work to burn wood on it every morning. So must we, to keep the fire burning. Study, of course, can be hard work, can't it? Or perhaps it isn't for you. It always was for me. And so sacrifice can be hard, and disciplining our time can be difficult, but as priests of the Lord, we must see to it that there is wood, so to speak, ready to be burned.

Arrange the wood

And then it says, 'He shall lay the burnt offering in order upon it' (v. 12). Well, that's common sense, such as every Boy Scout knows, of how to keep a fire burning, and in my day every farm labourer would know how to do it. If you wanted to burn up half of a tree, you had to be careful which way you put the wood. Otherwise, you would get the fire burning the middle out, and all the rest of the branches would be outside, and they wouldn't burn up, and then it was a terrible difficulty sorting them out. You had a kind of expertise in knowing how to put

the wood in the right position so that it would all catch fire and produce the maximum flame and burn up the stuff. And if we would keep the fire of our testimony going with God-given zeal and burning grace, then we must think how to order the sacrifice of Christ. Not that we're in control of his sacrifice, but when witnessing, which shall we present first, and which second? Because you can stop a conversation with an unconverted man very easily by landing a lot of truth on his mind that he couldn't possibly understand, but it doesn't really have any effect.

Suppose I'm talking to my friend, and I say to him, 'Well, you know, you must be prepared to suffer for Christ. I mean, that will be true of the church in the great tribulation, you know?'

'Oh, really?' says he.

'Well, some people think believers will go through the tribulation, and some people think they won't go through the tribulation, but, you see, well, there's Gog and Magog to come.'

Well, okay, that's all for the appropriate occasion, to discuss Gog and Magog, but not necessarily as you're leading someone to Christ and hoping his heart will catch afire with the glory of Christ's gospel. You have to put the wood in order, and then the burnt offering in order. The priests became expert at it. You imagine having to get a bullock and cut it all in pieces. Well, you would have to be a skilled butcher to do it, probably, wouldn't you? Then you'd have the big leg and thigh of a bullock, and you'd have to get that on the altar, and get it in the precise place where it didn't put the fire out, but how would it burn? Because you weren't roasting the sacrifice, you were burning it and that was a different thing, wasn't it? With all its blood and wetness, you had somehow to get it there and burn it. It was a difficult task. The priests became expert in, and they had to do it a certain way. They threw on the leg of a lamb or a bullock, and could land it in exactly the right place so it didn't put the fire out, but could catch the fire and burn.

Burn the fat

'And he shall lay the burnt offering in order upon it, and shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings' (v. 12). Why so? Well, here you must forget for a moment all the spiritual interpretations of the fat. You put the fat on because it helped the fire to burn, didn't you? In my youth, you see, people tried to light the fire, and it didn't go very well, and they poked it and it didn't flame. It was quite a bad thing to do, but they would go out and get a lot of paraffin, and throw it on the fire. They had to be very careful it didn't scorch their eyebrows off and explode in their face. But paraffin helped the thing get going. So it was with the fat. None of the Israelites were allowed to take the fat from any offering. It was the Lord's. But one of its uses was to keep the fire burning. Fat was regarded in ancient Israel as the best of anything. You talked about the fat of your wheat, for instance, meaning the best part of your wheat. The most luscious part, the very good wheat, was the fat of your wheat. Fat represents the health of the bullock. My brothers, my sisters, if we want to keep the fire going, how shall we do it? We shall bring and prepare to sacrifice the best we have, the best we can do. Is that too much?

'He . . . shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings' (v. 12). The peace offerings were an elaborate system. They could be used in thanksgiving to God for all his benefits. They could be the basis of a meal, where you invited your friends around to celebrate with them God's

goodness to you, and you could make a feast for others. The best we have, given over to Christ to keep the fire going. Our zeal for the Lord, our zeal for the lost, our persistence in Sunday school teaching or whatever it is we do for the Lord, our persistence in looking after the elderly believers; but it will require the best we have. 'Fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually; it shall not go out' (v. 13).

Our practical responsibilities

They were busy priests, weren't they? It wasn't just the question of leading the singing when the nation came together. It did involve that, particularly with the Levites, but behind the scene, the priests were kept very busy at hard work to keep the whole system of these divinely given symbols in use. The fire shall be kept burning. It shall not go out. You say, 'Mr Preacher, aren't you aware that it is God who gives the fire?' Yes, I'm aware of that. It was God that gave the fire in the first place for the Israelites, and they offered their first sacrifice. Fire came down from heaven and consumed it, and that fire was never to go out, but, you see, one of the ways in which God took care that the fire should not go out was the instructions given to the priests that they keep the fire burning. The ashes of yesterday taken away and new material put on the fire.

Have you got tired of reading Ephesians? Well, try Ezekiel. It depends who you are, doesn't it, but that also is in Scripture, or a bit of Isaiah or something. We do need new material from time to time. We must be prepared for the hard work. Take, for instance, our singing of gospel songs. Well, it's good that it comes from the heart, but if we want it to convey the gospel to our unsaved friends, wouldn't it be wise of us to do a little bit of practice, how that we could all sing the same tune for the same hymn, so to speak, and not half-way through run off in different directions? You say, 'That won't convert anybody, our singing.' Well, I know that. The wood they put on the altar had no power of forgiveness, but it was a practical necessity for keeping the fire burning. That will be costly. It will take all the fat you've got. The best given for the Lord.

So may we learn from the book of Leviticus, not merely its doctrinal passages, though they are supremely important, but the practical hints that were given to the priests and the Levites in those ancient days. They also speak to us of our practical duties to keep the fire burning. How thankful we are for every occasion when, as we listen to his dear Son through his word, we have found our hearts burning as he spoke to us. We can thank the Lord for the inspiration of his Spirit, and ask him for special grace in the practical responsibilities of serving him faithfully, even as his priests of days far-off, who were burdened with the responsibility to keep the fire burning. It is a great honour to make any contribution whatsoever to the Lord's divine work and witness in this world. God is the one who blesses us and selects what each one of us particularly needs from this day forward, that there may be found in our lives spiritual growth and maturity, increased knowledge and increased zeal, so that we in our generations will not allow the fire of the testimony to go out in this province and throughout the world. May the Lord help us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Numbers

In this series of talks on 'Understanding the Old Testament' we come in this session to study the book of Numbers. Like the rest of the Pentateuch that we have so far studied, it raises the question for us Christians, why should we bother to study it and take it seriously? I mean, you can get to heaven without knowing the book of Numbers, and since, if we are believers, we are assured of getting into that glorious heaven of God, I repeat, why should we study or take seriously the book of Numbers?

First of all, there is the basic reason that we believe this book to be inspired of God. Secondly is the fact that if we take our New Testament seriously, we shall find it referring to the book of Numbers every now and again, and inviting us to consider the detail of the histories in that book. And thirdly, there is the analogy: the book of Numbers in Hebrew is simply called *bamidbar*, meaning 'in the wilderness.'

Israel's journey in the wilderness

The term 'Numbers' we owe to an ancient translation of the Hebrew into Greek, but in Hebrew it is called simply 'in the wilderness.' It is the story of Israel's journey, not completely from Egypt, for they had left Egypt and come to Mount Sinai, where they had become seriously disorientated about the goal they should be aiming at, and nearly perished under the judgments of God. In God's mercy, they were given another opportunity, and the book of Numbers, therefore, declares what happened to them in the wilderness. They were in the wilderness when the book of Numbers begins. They are still in the wilderness when the book of Numbers ends. It's not until Deuteronomy, and then the book of Joshua, that they cross the Jordan and enter the promised land. So, for Israel, the story of the book of Numbers is the story of their journey, and we find it, therefore, interesting to ourselves because we too are on a journey, and we're not yet at the goal.

What was the nature of the journey? Well, for Israel, of course, it was basically geographical. You left Egypt, put your nose in the direction northeast-north, or something, and walked one foot in front of another, and you got there eventually. But it was more than just a geographical journey, wasn't it? This was a journey of discovery of what they were themselves. I don't know what they thought of themselves when they began, but if you listen to them at the Red Sea, you'd have thought that they were such a pious group of believers that you've never met the like of them in all your life. They sang praises to God until their lungs would burst. But then they journeyed, and from time to time they discovered that they

weren't quite the nice people that they thought they were. Under the disciplines of God, they had to face themselves, and much correction needed to be done.

It was not only a journey of discovery of themselves, it was a journey of discovering what God was actually like. Part of their creed held that God was perfect, and as they came out of Egypt and saw the triumph that God provided for them at the Red Sea, they were full of praise of God, genuinely praising out of gratitude to the Lord. It wasn't long thereafter when they discovered that God wasn't quite what they thought he was, and they got so upset about God and what he had allowed them to endure. Those of us that have been a long time on a Christian journey will recognize the relevance of this. There have been times when our hearts have been full, brim-full, of worship. There have been other times when God's ways with us have been a puzzle and painful. The book is realistic anyway, and we must prepare ourselves, as we read the book in detail, that on this journey there came some ferocious disasters, which reminds us of the hymn 'God hath not promised skies always blue.'⁷ For that reason, surely, God had it inserted into the chapters that deal with the preparations for the journey: practical preparations and spiritual preparations.

Blessings and difficulties

God also had it recorded that from time to time, Aaron the high priest was to gather the Israelites together and speak to them, and bless them in the name of the Lord. As a preparation for our study, let's read that blessing in Numbers 6:22–27.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise you shall bless the children of Israel; You shall say unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. So shall they put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.

I wish I had the powers of an Aaron, that now in these moments I could repeat this blessing until it got right into our very hearts, to bring the divine comfort and strengthening that we need, whatever stage in our journey we have reached.

The priestly blessing

'The LORD bless thee' (v. 24). You see, if it should ever happen that the enemy of souls should insinuate into their hearts that God was not a God of love and cared little for them, then it might invalidate the whole journey. The thing that would be vital in the testings that would come upon them was the preservation of the blessing of God, God's attitude toward them. 'The LORD bless you and keep you' — this is the number one requirement, in all that hazardous, howling wilderness, to be kept by the power of God. For however prosperous life may be, should it be that we lose the sense of the grace and the keeping of God, then we should be lost indeed.

⁷ Annie Johnson Flint, 'What God hath promised' (1919).

'The LORD bless thee, and keep thee. The LORD make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee' (vv. 24–25). Being of a simple mind myself, I do admire the way that the ancient Hebrew dares to speak of God in ordinary, everyday language as though he had a face. 'The LORD bless thee and . . . make his face to shine upon thee.' What a delightful notion. When I think of that, I think of a little child I knew. It was her father's birthday, and Mum had given the child the necessary cash to make her think she was buying Daddy a present, shaving cream or something of little actual value. And here's the little one coming to Daddy, and she's going to give a present. Look at her face. It is all shining, isn't it? And it challenged me to ask, when did I last look up into the face of God and sense the face of God shining towards me, because of the grace, the 10, 001 graces that he has provided for me?

'The LORD make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee,' so that we may revel in the inexhaustible wealth of the grace of God. 'The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee' (v. 26). Now, I have myself found out how difficult it can be in some nations, because they don't have the gestures that the English were taught to adopt so that they might be loved everywhere around the world! There are some nations where, if you shake your head sideways, you are not saying no, you are actually saying yes. To say no is to lift your head back, that you are denying the request, or whatever. You need to know what the gestures are, don't you? 'The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace' (v. 26). I hazard the guess that this has to do with our prayers, when we come to the Lord with our prayers and requests, and wonder what his answer will be. If you went to an ancient monarch with a request, and he were to lift his head backwards and not look at you in the face, you would know he was refusing: he wasn't even listening to your request. As a practical manoeuvre, it was good if, when you came to him, and before you issued your request, you got hold of his beard so he couldn't lift up his countenance away from you, but would listen to your request.

So, here, lifting up the countenance upon you is to look you full in the face, evidence that he has heard your prayer and will deal with it as seems best to him. 'The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.' Well, to pray to see his wisdom, and then be left without answer, or seemingly so, can be profoundly disturbing. 'The LORD bless you . . . So shall they put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them' (v. 27). God's provision, therefore, put here amongst the chapters that deal with the practical provisions for the journey, and dealing with the spiritual challenges that would come.

Failure to enter the promised land

What were those difficulties? Let us concentrate on some of the major difficulties that are related in this book of Numbers. In chapters 14 and 15, Israel quite quickly arrived at the border of the land of promise, and sent twelve spies in to reconnoitre the land. Ten of them came back with a miserable report. It was a terrible land: it ate up its inhabitants, was occupied by ferocious enemies and it was suicide to try and go in. And what did the people do? They said to Moses, 'Look here, Moses. We wouldn't have come if we'd have known it was like this. We're not going in.' And they spoke of making a captain over them and going back to Egypt. Two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, tried to comfort the people and encourage them. Yes, there would be fighting to be done, and fighting against people that seemed to be giants. 'But God

is with us,' they said. They failed to convince the people. The people point-blank refused to go in.

So, what were the implications of this refusal? Well, it made a nonsense of the whole journey. It made a very big question mark over the reality of their faith. For the original gospel message to them was that God had not only come down to deliver them by the Passover lamb, and by the power of God's Spirit at the Red Sea, but that God would go before and strengthen them in the fight that they needed to face as they entered the promised land. And two doubtable warriors like Caleb and Joshua rejoiced at the opportunity. 'Chasing a few giants? I'd think it a dull afternoon when I didn't have to chase any,' says Caleb. No, they refused to go in, and suggested making a captain for themselves to lead them back to Egypt. It must be evident to us that this did not merely question their faith in that moment. It questioned whether they had really believed God's promise from the start, for he'd come down to bring them out of Egypt and into their divinely given inheritance.

Two chapters in the New Testament are devoted to comment on this stage in Israel's experience, and the Holy Spirit himself who inscribes the lesson, sums it up this way:

And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that were disobedient? And we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief. (Heb 3:18–19)

Now, there are different words for 'unbelief' as there are for 'belief' in the New Testament. The word used here for 'unbelief' is a word that means basic unbelief. The apostle John uses the same word in its positive form when he says 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life' (John 3:36 KJV). But in the second part of that verse where some of our English versions will say 'and he that believeth not the Son . . .', John uses the same word that is translated in Hebrews as 'were disobedient.' It means, literally, to fail or refuse to be convinced—wilful disbelief. It was a gospel they didn't believe, and it was serious, was it not? They came out of Egypt on the promise that God was bringing them to their inheritance. Faced with the inheritance, they point-blank refused to go in. What did that show you about their initial profession of faith?

'We have become partakers of Christ,' says the writer to the Hebrews, 'if we hold fast . . . unto the end' (Heb 3:14). It could be a little tricky to understand the logic, couldn't it? How do you make a past thing depend on a future thing? 'We have become . . . if we hold fast to the end.' Ah but the evidence of genuine faith under God's mercy is that it will in the end persevere. How would you sum up the experience of these people when, faced with their inheritance, they now refuse to go in? They hadn't really believed in this matter of the inheritance. The writer to the Hebrews cites the warning of the Holy Spirit to those who have become slack, perhaps because of persecution, and become faint-hearted, that nonetheless they were to pull up their spiritual socks and persevere, and God would see them through. It is the mark of a genuine believer that he holds on to faith in Christ.

You say, 'But what about Peter? Did he not deny the Lord?' He did indeed, and that's why he had a high priest who prayed for him, not that his testimony should not fail—his testimony was ruined. He didn't pray for him that his courage shouldn't fail—that was shattered. He prayed for him that his faith shouldn't fail. What a remarkable thing our blessed Lord did for Peter in the hour of his trial. He said to Peter, 'Yes, you will deny me. Before the cock crows,

you will deny me.' Peter didn't believe it—didn't believe Christ. He said, 'No, Lord, you've got that bit wrong.' When he denied the Lord for the third time, that old cockerel crowed. And now Peter believed Christ, more than he had ever done before. He had no option, had he? The thing had come true. And then to his mind would come the word of the Lord Jesus, 'When you are restored,' not 'if you are,' 'strengthen your brethren,' so he would have a ministry, in spite of his failure (see Luke 22:31–34). So our blessed Lord, our great high priest, does work for the maintenance of our faith.

Korah's rebellion

But let us pass on to another notable transgression in the course of the journey, and this is the one that is recorded in Numbers 16. The ringleader of this disobedience and rebellion against Moses, and against God, was Korah. Now, the Epistle by Jude cites three names of three grievous apostates.⁸ There was Cain. He was bad enough; he slew his brother. There was Baalam. He perhaps was even worse. Finally, there was Korah. He was the worst of the lot, for Cain, whatever could be said of him, wasn't the high priest; nor was he a priest. Baalam was bad enough: he was a religious man, though a false prophet and a false priest. What of Korah? We should nowadays describe him as being in holy orders. He was a Levite, a junior servant in the tabernacle hierarchy of priests and Levites; and that he should lead a revolt is astonishing. He and his accomplices came to Moses and Aaron, and they said to them, 'You take too much upon yourselves, Moses and Aaron, for every one of the Lord's people is holy' (see Num 16:3).

That was true, but Moses had been appointed by God as the apostle of their faith. What Moses said and wrote was the inspired word of God, was it not? I hope you believe it. And to say that just anybody can be a Moses is quite false. And as for Aaron, it wasn't open just to anybody on the Day of Atonement to go into the most holy place on the behalf of the nation. It was limited to their great high priest. Korah denied both, in the cause of some spiritual democracy or something. I have known various university theological departments. What fearful things have been done and said in many of them. Some of them deny the existence of God, some deny the literal resurrection of Christ, some deny the doctrine of the atonement, and many deny the inspired authority of holy Scripture, and have destroyed the faith of many. We are not short of Korahs in our modern age. This was one of the perils of the wilderness journey, and it had to be faced. I must not spend time on its gory details, but among the judgments of God upon Korah and company was the challenge to them to take censors, put incense on them, and stand there publicly burning their incense, and see what God would do. And when they did it, the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them whole (see Num 16:31–33).

As a result of the fire that burned, Aaron the high priest was told to go and take from the embers what was left of the censors, and to beat them out and nail them on the sides of the big altar (see Num 16:35–40). You can see the effect of that, can't you? When you came in seriousness to that altar, you would see these censors, and if you were younger you might

⁸ For a series of talks from the New Testament book of Jude on false teachers exemplified by Cain, Balaam and Korah, see *Jude* by David W. Gooding available online from Myrtlefield House.

ask, 'Well, what are they there for?', and you would be told the story of the rebellion of the priestly Korah against Moses and Aaron.

The New Testament refers to Korah in two places. In the Epistle by Jude, we are told about Korah's 'gainsaying' (v. 11 KJV)—that's good Authorized Version language, and I still know mine. Also, in Hebrews 12, it says we are to think about our Lord who endured the 'contradiction of sinners' (v. 3 KJV). They both represent the same Greek word, which means 'to speak against,' but in the sense of rebellion. It is the fact, isn't it, that whenever we come to the cross of Christ, and see on that cross our blessed crucified Lord Jesus, how can we fail to remember what the human race did to God's Son? Consider him who endured the contradiction, the rebellion of sinners—but then we have to correct the thing a little bit—sinners against themselves. It was suicide to do what Korah did. It's eternal suicide to do what the nation did to our blessed Lord. 'Consider him . . . lest you be wearied and faint in your minds' (v. 3 KJV). For the Hebrews to whom these words were written had been recently enduring persecution of all kinds, including the loss of their possessions, and the danger was to faint under it. Consider him who endured that rebellion of sinners against himself, lest you be weary and faint in your mind.

The waters of Meribah

Let's come to Numbers 20. Here is an instance where the Israelites had run out of drinking water, and on appealing to God, Moses had been told to take his rod with Aaron and speak to the rock, and the water would come forth. But Moses seemingly lost his temper, understandably perhaps, with all the complaints, the endless complaints, of the people that he was trying to lead. So he collected the people, and he and Aaron took the staff, and instead of speaking to the rock, they smote it, saying, 'Hear now, you rebels; shall we bring you forth water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and smote the rock with his rod twice: and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank . . . And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, Because you believed not in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them' (Num 20:10–12).

Let's pause to take it in. Moses, after many years of faithful, sacrificial service to God and his people, made this mistake. It carried consequences. Neither he nor Aaron was allowed to bring the nation into their promised inheritance. And Moses pleaded with God more than once to reverse the decision and let him lead the Israelites into their promised inheritance. Moses had devoted his life to the scheme, and not to be allowed to enter into its triumph was a very bitter pill. But God was insistent. Neither was allowed to do it. Don't worry, you'll meet Moses in heaven, probably Aaron as well. He's gone to heaven, good man. Yes, well, be careful if you should meet him in glory, if the conversation gets anywhere near to water out of a rock; find some other topic you could get on quickly, because it was a sore point with Moses! He didn't lose his salvation, but he wasn't allowed to take the people into the land.

Why was it? What was so wrong? Here were people and they were complaining once more. But there are complaints and complaints, and some people complain even if a flea bites them, in the work of the Lord, and others get struck down with fever. Moses had just about had enough, but here were the people, and they'd run out of water. This time, had Moses eyes

to see it, they were not rebelling against God. They were faced with the reality: their little children had no water, their stock had no water. And Moses took the matter to the Lord, and this time the Lord, in his great compassion, understood their suffering and why they pleaded for water, and was going to give it to them.

He told Moses and Aaron to take the rod; be careful that you get the rod right, which rod it was. It was not the rod of God's judgment, that Moses lifted up over the Nile and turned it to blood. It was the rod that was set up before the Lord, and that, as Numbers has told us in an earlier chapter, blossomed and brought forth almonds, and confirmed the priesthood of Aaron. What an exhibition of the mercies of God it was going to be. In answer to the people's cry, there was Moses, there was Aaron, and there was the rod of his priesthood. It was going to be a magnificent example of the mercies of God that had provided a priest to intercede for them. Instead of that, between the two of them, they called the people rebels, instead of just speaking to the rock; and it would have listened to them, so to speak, and God would have given them water. But they belaboured the rock. Oh, God gave the people water, for he was merciful to the people, but Aaron and Moses had grievously misrepresented God.

As I speak as a teacher, I'm not unaware of the problem of rightly representing God to his people. What if I were over-harsh, and to people in trouble who were having difficulty carrying on believing that God cares for them; what if I simply diagnosed their trouble as sheer rebellion and rebuked them, and called them rebels? Oh no, it is a serious thing to represent God, and very serious if we misrepresent him. Moses didn't lose his salvation; we shall meet him in heaven. But it put a limit on his usefulness. What a thing this journey was.

Baal worship at Peor

And then, of course, we come to another problem mentioned in chapter 25, which tells us that 'Israel stayed in a place called Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab, for they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods; and the people did eat and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. And the LORD said to Moses, Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them up unto the LORD before the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.' Look down to verse 7: 'And when Phineas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it'—a flagrant case of an Israelite defying God by bringing a Midianite woman into the camp—'he rose up from the midst of the congregation and took a spear into his hand; and he went after the man of Israel, into the pavilion, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman . . . So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel.' Verse 10 says, 'And the LORD spoke to Moses saying, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy.'

Now, in some modern languages that happen to use English, the word 'jealousy' is a bad thing, but in Scripture, it can be a very good thing. A man that really loves his wife, what would you have him feel if some corrupt man steals his wife from him? And God being God, and having loved us, regards it as a fearful sin against his love if we should be disloyal to him. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul deals with this practical problem in Corinth. It was a customary thing

that if you invited guests to dinner, you might, instead of taking them out to the Hilton or whatever hotel is the latest in favour in the glossy magazines, take them to the temple restaurant, where the meat was fresh—it was offered on the altar just the other minute—and brought by the priests, and you could buy it and have it cooked. The steaks were marvellous. It could be a bit expensive, but what was the harm in it? And Paul has to argue the case with them. ‘You cannot fellowship with God, with the table of the Lord, and the table of demons’ (v. 21).

The reason? First Corinthians 10:22 says, ‘Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?’ Notice what he says now. ‘Are we stronger than he?’ The question carries a warning, doesn’t it? God will not permit forever in his people disloyalty that provokes his jealousy, and what is true at the physical level is true at the spiritual level. Let me cite you 2 Corinthians 11 (I read it at some length): ‘Would that you could bear with me in a little foolishness: nay indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ’ (vv. 1–3).

Our conversion to Christ is, in a way, like a wedding, isn’t it? ‘I’ve espoused you to Christ. You are not free to entertain other possibilities.’ You know what it is—well, perhaps you don’t—but an onlooker sometimes gets the impression of what is happening. Here is a dear lady, and, of course, there’s great competition, and her difficulty is making up her mind. ‘Shall it be George? There’s a lot to be said for George. His father is very wealthy, you know, manager of a shipping line. And it does look wonderful to find an extended taxi thing coming up to your door, and the official chauffeur opening the door for you. There’s a lot to be said for it. On the other hand, there’s Thomas. Now, George is nice, but he’s a bit crude, and Thomas is a delightful musician. Well, shall it be Thomas? Or, then, it could be Robert.’ There’s nothing wrong in sitting down and pondering the options, is there? But coming to a decision, and once the dear lady has said, ‘I will,’ then it is not freedom to envisage other possibilities, but disloyalty. ‘I’ve espoused you to one, even to Christ.’

Let me talk to my younger brothers and sisters. This is something that can get sorely tested in academic circles. Are we going to accept Christ and his word as the final authority, or shall we go off to modernism and regard holy Scripture as exchangeable for other ideas? It is not just an intellectual problem. It is a moral and spiritual problem. I’ve espoused you as a virgin to Christ. Pray God you may remain loyal to him, your Lord and your lover.

We have arbitrarily taken some incidents from the book of Numbers. I hope I have convinced you that Numbers is profitable for us Christians to study, and study intensely if need be. They were on a journey. It tested the reality of their faith. We are on a journey likewise. We cannot expect that the journey will do other than test the reality of our faith. And that being so, let me repeat the words again, ‘The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.’

Deuteronomy

The book that introduces our studies for this fifth session in our series of talks on 'Understanding the Old Testament' is the book of Deuteronomy. The title of the book, Deuteronomy, is not based on the original Hebrew. It is based rather on the ancient Greek translation of that Hebrew, and they who translated the book thought it appropriate to give it the name 'Deuteronomy' which, in Greek, means 'the second law.' That arose because of a mistake in translation. There was no second law. Rather, there was a repetition of the first law, which was required by the normal practice of covenants.

God's covenant with Israel

So, let us spend just a few moments at the beginning thinking of the term that is used in this book and elsewhere in the Old Testament, the term 'covenant' to describe God's relationship between Israel and himself. Much light was shed upon this topic by a discovery made at the beginning of the 1900s, the last century, when a whole lot—thousands in fact—of tablets were discovered which revealed that there had been an extensive Hittite empire, hitherto unknown to scholars. Among the many tablets that were unearthed, many were copies of covenants that the great emperor made with his puppet kings in various parts of his empire. Those covenants followed pre-set organization—organization that varied down the centuries as to the form that the covenants took. This discovery has been a tremendous help in finding external dating for the book of Deuteronomy, as elsewhere, that the law of God, called a 'covenant,' both in Exodus and in Deuteronomy, matches the order of a certain period in this Hittite empire.

Let me show what I mean. If you take one of the most famous emperors in the Canaanite empire, a certain Suppiluliuma, his covenants follow a standard form. First of all, Suppiluliuma tells everybody who he is. 'I am Suppiluliuma.' (You might need to repeat it, so people could get the spelling right!) And then he would add what he had done for people; generally, beaten them up pretty effectively. Then, there would be a section of the dos, things that people had to do, and then the don'ts. Then, Suppiluliuma would call upon the gods to recognize that the people had made this covenant, and deal with them if they broke it. Provision was also made that the covenant documents should be kept in a safe place, and from time to time the sub-king of each individual place was to bring out those tablets containing the covenant terms and read them in the ears of the people.

When scholars first discovered these things, they were not slow, of course, in seeing the connection of form between the covenant God made with Israel and the covenant of the aforesaid Suppiluliuma. For God begins the covenant by announcing who he is. 'I am the

LORD God. You shall have no other God but me.’ And then God announces what he has done for the people. ‘Who brought you out of the house of bondage, out of slavery.’ And then there is a list of the dos and the don’ts in the Ten Commandments, and their expansion in the literature. The Old Testament covenant, of course, doesn’t call upon ‘the gods,’ though it calls upon God to observe that the covenant has been made, and to insist upon its terms, even if they meant punishment for those that had broken them. The covenant document was then put in a specially constructed place—in the ark of the covenant—which was situated in the most holy place, and from time to time the documents were to be taken out and read in the ears of the people. It is precisely this that the book of Deuteronomy is. As with other covenants, it was not merely that the covenant terms were read, but they were explained, and then the laws that proceeded from those basic principles were enunciated, covering the whole of life, and that is exactly what we find in the book of Deuteronomy. It is an instrument of government, therefore.

Why should we, as Christians, trouble to read it? We’re not under any covenant, are we? Well, there are Christians, and very serious students of God’s word, who feel that the New Testament teaches that we, as Christians, are not in any covenant relationship with the Lord. They point out that in the original promise in which God says, ‘I will make a new covenant with my people,’ the new covenant is explicitly said to be made with the house, or tribe, of Israel and Judah, and they who hold this view insist that when Scripture says ‘Israel and Judah,’ lo and behold, it means ‘Israel and Judah.’ Nothing extraordinary about the claim, is there? That is what it means, ‘Israel and Judah’ and therefore people of this persuasion hold that the new covenant promised by God in the Prophecy of Jeremiah, and actually repeated in the New Testament, is a covenant that God will one day make with the nation of Israel, when they are restored and acknowledge our blessed Lord as their messiah (see Jer 31:31–34; Heb 8:8–12). Now that means it has nothing to do with us—we’re not Israel or Judah—but the church.

I say this with all seriousness. This is a viewpoint taken by many, not casually, but deliberately. This is what they understand the new covenant to be about. I hold a different view, as do many. For instance, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the writer, writing to his fellow Israelites, points out that the Old Testament sacrifices of bulls, goats, sheep and suchlike things could not possibly put away sin. They were only symbols. Because they were only symbols, then when it came to God’s dwelling place in the tabernacle, there hung a veil which obscured the most holy place completely, and barred entrance to it except for the high priest one day a year. For the rest, even the priests couldn’t come further than the first division within the tabernacle. Why? Because the Holy Spirit, says the Epistle to the Hebrews, was making it clear that their sacrifices weren’t efficient. They didn’t cleanse the conscience. How could they? They were but symbols.

A new covenant

But, to convince these Israelites that there was a way now for them to enter not merely the second department in an ancient building, but into heaven itself, he cites the fact that even God himself found fault with the first covenant as being inadequate and instituted a new

covenant through Jeremiah the Prophet, and the Epistle to the Hebrews cites it at length, and I have to permit you to enjoy the superiority of the new covenant over the old. 'There comes a time,' says God, 'when according to this new covenant, I will write my laws on their hearts,' meaning as distinct from the law written on tables of stone that told you completely what you had to do or not to do, but could not give you the power to do it with. The new covenant said it this way, 'I will write my law not merely on tables of stone, or merely on the pages of inspired Scripture. I will write it on their hearts, and on their minds will I inscribe it. And they shall not teach one another, "Know the Lord," for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.'

So as we read Deuteronomy we shall need ourselves, as Christians, to remember some of these contrasts. First of all, the law written on our hearts. In Second Corinthians 3, Paul explains to the Corinthians what has happened to them since Paul came and preached the gospel to them, and they got converted. It was nothing less than the ministry of the Holy Spirit writing God's laws on their hearts, so that it was in their nature to do them; that divine nature imparted to every believer. And they should not need to say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' because in a profound sense every believer would have personal, immediate knowledge of the Lord. That is a glorious thing, isn't it? We don't need to come through some intermediary, except that intermediary is the blessed man Christ Jesus, who is God incarnate anyway. We can know the Lord, each one individually. 'I will write my laws on their hearts, and on their minds will I inscribe them.'

And then, there is the measure of forgiveness. 'I will be merciful to their transgressions. Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.' We must be careful, of course, to understand that last statement. 'Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.' That does not mean that once we trust Christ, God forgets that we have been sinners. You know what, you'll never forget it, not for eternity, will you? God won't. When God looks at his dear Son, do you suppose God will say, 'I wonder what those marks in his hands and in his feet are? How did he come by them?' Nor shall we need to ask him. We shall remember, of course, distinctly remember that we were sinners, and that to save us, Christ bore our sins in his body on the tree.

What, then, does it mean, 'Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more'? The term is a semi-technical term. You will read it in the Old Testament in various places, where lists are given of how the kings of Judea, for instance, organized their civil service. There would be a major-domo, a man in charge of the palace. There would be a commander-in-chief of the forces, and among other things, there would be a remembrancer, as the quaint Old English has it, or coming to modern times, a recorder. But even that has a special meaning in legal terms, so had it already in Hebrew. The remembrancer, the recorder, was a man who kept the records, and if the king on occasion couldn't sleep, or some other such thing happened to them, he would call for the recorder, who would be required to read from the book. If the book said that such and such had done something against the king, the king might enquire, 'Have they yet been punished for that?', and if the answer was no, then the king would give orders that they had to be punished forthwith. That is what the Old Testament means by 'bringing sins to remembrance.' It is getting out the books, reading the records, noting

whether the punishment has been given, or rewards given, and proceeding to put the requirements of the books into effect.

Glorious, isn't it? I could think of pages and pages and pages of red ink against my name in heaven's book. The glorious thing is that God has promised 'their sins and iniquities, I will never rake up as in a law court and proceed to punish.' Why not? That is the Christian gospel, isn't it? Christ has already suffered for my sins, and paid the penalty:

Payment God will not twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.⁹

But there is another parallel between the ancient custom of taking out the document of the covenant and reading it. That is what we do for the new covenant on the Lord's Day, don't we? For we remember how, according to the gospels, as he gathered the apostles in the Upper Room, and as they were eating, he took bread, and then he took a cup of wine, and said of that cup, 'This is the new covenant in my blood. We should share it for many, for the forgiveness of sins.' And so saying, he handed the cup to his disciples.

This is reminiscent of the ceremony that happened when Moses, as God's intermediary, instituted the old covenant. The animal was slain, its blood taken in a basin, and holding it up to the multitude, Moses said, 'This is the covenant' —he wouldn't have called it 'old' —'now made between you and God.' They are sacred moments, are they not, when we meet with our blessed risen Lord and take that cup. 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.' Because Christ has suffered for us, we shall not have to pay the penalty of sin. Ah, but it has other things, doesn't it? It says, 'I will write my laws on their hearts, and on their minds will I write them.' Thus it is as we come as Christians to remember the Lord Jesus, and we take that cup, Paul advises us, 'Be careful that every one examine himself, because to do it casually, with no self-examination, to do it as just one of those things that happens, like getting on a bus or getting off it, would lead,' says Paul, 'to the Lord's discipline, because the new covenant, like the old, is a means of government.' Listen to it. 'I will write my laws on their hearts, and on their minds will I write them.'

So, as we read the ancient book of Deuteronomy, and read what God said, what Moses said about the old covenant, we shall want to apply it to ourselves —it is God's holy word. But we shall do so in the light of the vast superiority of the new covenant over the old.

Moses's final address to Israel

We shall also notice where the ceremony that we read of in Deuteronomy was held. It was held on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan. In other words, Israel had not yet invaded Canaan. They had not crossed Jordan yet. They came up on the east side of Jordan. They had to fight their way through some of those tribes, and God gave that territory to two and a half tribes of Israel east of Jordan, but the main promised land was west of Jordan. Now, at long last, they had arrived.

⁹ Augustus Montague Toplady, 'From whence this fear and unbelief?' (c.1792).

I feel strongly for Moses. If he had been broken-hearted, I could have understood it, because even as he addressed them, God reminded him, 'You yourself, Moses, will not be allowed to go in.' He mentions it three times over in his address to the tribes. Three times over. I think he's overcome it now, but it must have been a very bitter pill, surely. He'd given his life for them, laid down his career for them. Brought up in the palace, educated like a pharaoh, darling of the dear lady who had rescued him, and he'd given it all up to stand with his people, deliver them from Egypt and bring them into their promised land. You can imagine him setting out from Egypt, can't you? 'It won't be long now. We'll have to get across the old Red Sea, of course, but then if we put our faces sort of north-northeast and walk, and keep on walking, well, we shall be there, shan't we? Eleven days. Well, perhaps with all these people, given three months we should be there.' If anyone knew the Israelites, they hadn't got five minutes out of Egypt but what they were cursing him for bringing them out into the wilderness where there was no water. They got to Mount Sinai, and while he was up receiving the Commandments from God, and waiting for God to tell him the details so that he could build a tabernacle fit for God to come and dwell among Israel, Israel had perverted themselves completely, made a golden calf and talked of going back to Egypt.

Because of Moses's intercession and the mercies of God, they got through that. They pushed on and came to within a few yards, so to speak, of the promised land. Kadesh-barnea was the name of the place. At the people's suggestion, and Moses agreed, they sent spies into the land to know what kind of a land it was, and what the opposition was liable to be. There were twelve spies, and when they got back, ten of them said it was hopeless. It was a very nice land; in fact, some of them had grapes to show it, but quite hopeless, quite unrealistic. There were giants there, anyway, and we were like grasshoppers in their sight. Now, how they knew that, I don't know. Whether they had a word with a few giants and said, 'Now, how do we appear to you, old boy?' And they refused to go in. Moses pleaded with them, but it made a nonsense of the whole scheme.

The whole scheme of being redeemed from Egypt, if they now didn't go into Canaan, well, it made a nonsense of it, and raised a very serious question whether these people that refused to go in had ever really been believers. And our authority for thinking that is what the Holy Spirit himself says as he records the incident in Hebrews 3 and 4. Moses was disappointed once more, and God's sentence was that they were to turn and travel through the wilderness for the next forty years, until the men of responsible age that had refused to go in had had time to die and get out of the way, and the youngsters from twenty years would now grow up and they would go in. So Moses, who had given his life for them, and was now already elderly, was to tramp through the wilderness for forty more years.

You say, 'Well, Moses, in our Bible study we found out that God comforts those that are cast down, so don't worry, Moses.' Cheap advice, I should think. 'You'll get in one of these days, Moses.' So, they got along the wilderness, and then the people complained once again. They'd complained thousands of times, but now they complained once again. Moses lost his temper. Can you blame him? And when he should have spoken to the rock in the name of God and God would have given them water, he took Aaron's rod and smote the rock. Well, the water came out, for God had mercy on the people, but Moses and Aaron were told then, and several times thereafter, 'As a result, you will not go in.'

How do you suppose Moses felt, as he stood on the plains of Moab? 'Triumphant,' you say, 'because Israel were going in at last.' He confesses he pleaded with the Lord, 'Lord, let me go in,' and the Lord said, 'No.' Though God attended his funeral, and very few others, according to the record. It was with that weight upon his shoulders that Moses, in the book of Deuteronomy, addresses Israel, for now life would be more difficult for them. I say that advisedly, for sometimes we get the notion that tramping through the wilderness was bad enough. Now they'd crossed Jordan, they'd got into the promised land, and there were blessings on every side, and they enjoyed themselves immensely and never grumbled again. That isn't so, is it? Professor K. A. Kitchen, late of Liverpool, has reminded us that when Israel crossed over Jordan under Joshua, Joshua did not at once distribute to them their inheritance. For a long time, says the book of Joshua, he insisted that the army keep together. You've noticed, surely, how when they attacked Jericho, they didn't come and live there, and when they attacked Ai and other such places, like Hazor and Megiddo up north, they didn't settle down there. Throughout that sustained military campaign, ranging through the whole of Canaan, they continually came back to their military base at Gilgal. This we are explicitly told. We must disabuse our minds of the notion that, once over Jordan, they all entered into their glorious estates and enjoyed it immensely. No, they didn't, because Joshua could not have allowed them. Once they triumphed and took a certain place, he couldn't allow some of them to hive off and dwell there. Had he done so, by the time he'd gone up north, he wouldn't have had an army worth talking of. So, the first half of the book of Joshua is about Joshua's long years of campaigning to put down all the kings, rulers and authorities in the cities of that land and keeping the army together. It was only in the second half of that book that he began to allow them to settle down in their particular inheritances.

So now Moses, knowing it, of course, is preaching to the people how they must behave, and Moses has enough—I nearly said common sense—to know it's going to be more difficult now for Israel than it had been as they walked through the wilderness. 'How was that?', you say. Well, through the wilderness they didn't have to bother, really, about Amalekites and things of that order, unless the aforesaid Amalekites came and attacked them. They had to do some fighting from time to time, of various tribes, but otherwise they lived by themselves in the wilderness. That was difficult enough for Moses to keep them on straight lines, so that they still worshipped the one true God and didn't go off into paganism. What would happen now, when they actually entered Canaan and lived cheek by jowl with pagans? That was difficulty number one.

And then there was another difficulty. When they walked through the desert, of course they had their flocks, but very often they ran out of water, grumbled and were hard put. It must get a bit tiresome, mustn't it, if you're the woman of the house, and you had to look after the tent, and tent pegs; and after bashing tent pegs into the ground to make a tent, to have Moses telling you, 'Take it up, we're going to move tomorrow.' And cooking without mains gas and all that. Now they were going into the land, and they were going to enjoy farms, and there were olive presses that they hadn't built, and houses in fact, in some places, that they hadn't built. I don't know whether they had any chariots left, but now they were going to be quite wealthy, such wealth as their grandparents never did have. 'That would be lovely,' you say. Well, it would indeed, but it would carry dangers.

When I was a boy, long years ago, there were many men and women who had been out of work for ten years. When I went to live in Durham and lodged with Christian people, their husbands were miners. The women would sometimes tell me, 'David, in the bad old days, we had to get down on our knees and pray God for the next meal.' Well, but then came the war, and the miners were well off, and standards have improved beyond all recognition, haven't they? Thank the Lord for that. And yet, it can happen that when we're poor, we can be spiritual, and then when we get wealthy, we just don't have the time for spiritual things. It is a greater test of our spirituality to be affluent than to be poor. And you will remember what our Lord's final words to Laodicea were: 'You say I am increased with goods and in need of nothing. Knowest not that you're blind and naked. Why won't you come to me?' (see Rev 3:17-18). And so Moses preaches to them the whole of Deuteronomy.

Establishing the law then and now

Just before we finish we could look at one of the structures of this book of Deuteronomy, or at least one of the ways in which it has come down to us. The first section, chapter 1 onwards, comes to its climax in chapter 11, from verses 26-32. Let's read it together.

Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; the blessing, if you shall hearken unto the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: and the curse, if you shall not hearken unto the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which you have not known. And it shall come to pass, when the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shall set the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal. Are they not beyond Jordan, behind the way of the going down of the sun, in the land of the Canaanites which dwell in the Arabah, over against Gilgal, beside the oaks of Moreh? For you are to pass over Jordan to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God giveth you, and you shall possess it, and dwell therein. And you shall observe to do all the statutes and the judgments which I set before you this day.'

Let's remember our geography if we can. They were east of Jordan. They had to cross Jordan. They crossed Jordan very near to Jericho. They couldn't at once fulfil what Moses said because there were big cities—big by their standards—like Jericho, in the way. What they had to do was this. When they crossed Jordan and established the military camp at Gilgal, then they had to get up the mountains and over the top, and out into the plain, and go up north to the twin mountains Ebal and Gerizim. And there they were to hold an elaborate ceremony, and they were to get up on the mountains and read the old covenant, the law, and as they came to each individual bit—this is what you have to do and this is the blessing attached to it—all the people had to say, 'Amen.' And when they came to the prohibitions, and the penalties that would be attached to it, they were to say with equal gusto, 'Amen.' In other words, before they get into the land, they are being told one of the major objectives would be to establish the law in Canaan.

So then, in chapter 12 onwards, we get individual commandments of various kinds, filling out in practical details the implications of the general laws in the covenant. And this list of the general laws goes on until you come to chapter 27, and in chapter 27, look at verse 4.

And it shall be when you are passed over Jordan, that you shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaster them with plaster. And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt lift up no iron tool upon them. Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of unhewn stones: and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD thy God: and thou shalt sacrifice peace offerings, and shall eat there; and thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God. And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law. (vv. 4-8)

So then, they were to assemble, and they read the law, and the Levites had to answer, 'Amen,' to its pronouncement of the curses. Then they were to set others upon Mount Gerizim, and there, from Mount Gerizim, they read all those verses about the blessings, and the Levites similarly had to say, 'Amen.' It was a sense in which the conquests, therefore, were clearing the way so that as soon as possible they might establish the law, both its blessings and its cursings, in Canaan.

Though we belong to a new covenant, as aforesaid, as distinct from the old covenant, we too are responsible, are we not, to establish the law. Let me finish by reading you two passages from the New Testament that tell us explicitly of our responsibility. In chapter 3 of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul develops his doctrine of justification by faith and not by the works of the law. But, of course, many people misrepresented what he said and suggested that he was making the law of no effect. If you don't have to keep the law to get to heaven, for instance, why bother about the law? And if I'm saved by faith and justified by faith, what does it really matter if I don't keep the law? And Paul says at the end of that chapter, verse 31, talking of his doctrine of justification by faith, 'Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law.' The reason why many people have no assurance of salvation is because they haven't really learned to repent. Repenting means I face myself and say, 'I am so sinful that, for all eternity, I could never earn my salvation. I am a sinner, condemned by God's law. I couldn't improve myself.' It is then that God has a salvation for us, and that establishes the law. It doesn't say the law doesn't matter. It establishes the law because it tells of a Saviour who paid the penalty of the law for me.

And then as a believer, chapter 8, 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit' (vv. 3-4). I couldn't earn salvation by my Christian conduct, but my Christian conduct ought to show at least to some extent the reality of my new birth, that the Holy Spirit lives within me, and by his grace and power I shall be able to keep God's holy law.

So may God use these simple remarks to get us eagerly reading Deuteronomy and enjoying its relevance to us today.

Joshua: An Introduction

Final Salvation and Final Judgment

This is the seventh and last session of the present series of talks on 'Understanding the Old Testament.' I have much enjoyed being invited to come along, and my colleagues who organize these sessions invite me because they realize that associating with younger men and women helps to keep the old boy still alive, at least, and breathing. It was also judged appropriate that, as this is the last session of this last day, we should conclude with a short message, and so they asked me to do it. I think that is because I am notorious for preaching very short sermons.

I take the opportunity now to suggest one or two thoughts about the book of Joshua, for previously we talked of Deuteronomy. Now, let us look for a brief moment or two to one of the salient points of the next book, which is the book of Joshua, so we may begin by reading in Joshua chapter 4, verse 9.

And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood: and they are there, unto this day. For the priests which bare the ark stood in the midst of Jordan, until everything was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua: and the people hastened and passed over. (vv. 9–10)

Then, let us select some verses from chapter 8.

Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD, the God of Israel, in mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of unhewn stones upon which no man had lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD and sacrificed peace offerings . . . And all Israel, and their elders and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, as well the stranger as the homeborn; half of them in front of mount Gerizim, and half of them in front of mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded, that they should bless the people of Israel first of all . . . There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them. (vv. 30–31, 33, 35)

And finally in chapter 11, verse 12.

And all the cities of those kings, and all the kings of them, did Joshua take, and he smote them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed them; as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded . . . And all the spoil of these cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves; but every [human being] they smote with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, neither left they any that breathed. As the LORD commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua: and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses . . . For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, to come against Israel in battle, that he might utterly destroy them, that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses. (vv. 12, 14–15, 20)

Moses, be it said, was very good at commanding people. He wasn't quite so good at getting people to do what he commanded. In fact, as we thought earlier, he was not in the end allowed to take the children of Israel across the Jordan into the promised land, and though he besought God more than once to lift the ban and to allow him to enter, yet God remained resolute and Moses was not allowed to enter. It was Joshua that was appointed in Moses's place who led them across Jordan and into the promised land, and became their commander-in-chief while they subdued the land.

What Moses couldn't do, Joshua did

In the light of the passages that we have read, I want to suggest to you that one of the main themes of the book of Joshua is this: what Moses couldn't do, that Joshua did. You perhaps enquire, 'Why wasn't Moses allowed to take the Israelites into the land?' And one of the reasons is this: that on one occasion in the wilderness, when God told him to speak to the rock and the waters would come forth to assuage the thirst of the Israelites, he lost his temper, and instead of speaking to the rock he struck it, and struck it, if you please, not with the rod of God's judgment, but with Aaron's rod, the sign of his priesthood. It was God's intention that Moses and Aaron should take the rod of their priesthood—with the people in such desperate straits, famished with thirst, their little ones and their cattle—and speak to the rock; and by their intercessions the God who had appointed them would listen to them and bring them water for their asking out of the rock. Instead of which, as I say, Moses lost his temper, didn't speak to the rock but smote it, and turning to the people he said, 'Now hear, you lot of rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?' Oh dear, he'd certainly got overburdened with his responsibilities, hadn't he? It wasn't he that was going to bring them water out of the rock; it was God who was going to do it. The seriousness of the thing was that he misrepresented the character of God, and did it for people who were at the end of their tether in the sufferings that had come upon them.

Moses was not allowed, therefore, to take the people across Jordan and to lead them in their conquests; what Moses couldn't do, that Joshua did. And if you ask why Moses couldn't do it, well, I could shorten the answer by using technical terms. He was weak through the flesh. Wasn't he now, poor old boy, like us in the end? What Moses couldn't do, in that he was weak through the flesh, Joshua did, but that starts a whole rabbit a-running in my brain, for it seems to me there is a verse in the New Testament very much like that verse. It is found in Romans 8, 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending

his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit' (vv. 3–4).

Having listened this morning to the book of Deuteronomy, maybe you gathered the impression that the book, though inspired of God, is rather severe. Well, then, I hasten to tell you, Moses was good at commanding; he wasn't good at helping people to carry out the command. But what Moses couldn't do, Joshua did, and oh, I have a lovely message to tell you. What the law couldn't do, in spite of our most valiant efforts to keep it, Christ does for us. Glorious gospel message, is it not? God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, didn't excuse our sin, but condemned our sin, but bore our penalty, that we might receive God's Holy Spirit and find in him the power to begin to do and to behave as we should.

First the conquest, then the inheritance

It is sometimes suggested to us that the first half of Joshua, at least, is to tell us how Joshua took Israel into their inheritance, and how the Israelites had to fight for it. One notable victory is recorded. They surrounded Jericho, and do you know what? They adopted very curious tactics. They surrounded the city once every day, the procession being led by the ark carried by the Levites. I don't know what the Jerichoites thought, do you? They looked over the wall and said, 'Odd. I wonder what they're going to do now?' Well, they didn't do anything that day, nor did they do anything for six days. Very curious. On the seventh day, they surrounded the city seven times, then blew upon their trumpets and, if you please, the walls fell down.

So, how does that help us? Well, there are those who say that that represents a believer struggling against his besetting sin. Now, I don't expect you to answer publicly — this is a rhetorical question — but have you got a besetting sin? You know, one of those sins that you'd tried to master, and thought you had, and then it occurs again. So, this is a recipe, is it, for overcoming your besetting sin? What, to walk round the sin once at least every day, and then on the last day to walk round seven times and blow a few trumpets, and the besetting sin would disappear? Well, as far as mine go, I could wish that that were true. It hasn't proved true. It arises, it seems to me, because of a slight misunderstanding of what the first half of Joshua is about anyway.

Joshua was commander-in-chief. When he led the Israelites across Jordan, he established a place called Gilgal as the army headquarters, and as the headquarters for the people, and made no attempt whatsoever to let the Israelites enter their inheritance. They had to maintain themselves as his army as he led them round the country in various expeditions, and they took this city, and they took that city, and they took the other city. They put the inhabitants to death, and particularly the rulers of those cities. Never once did they try to settle down in those cities. That would have been perilous in the extreme for Joshua, as he led the troops and they conquered the city, to let a division of the army settle down there, and another settle over here. By the time they got up north to the country, they wouldn't have any army left. They made no attempt to do it. The first half of the book of Joshua is not leading Israel into their inheritance. It is clearing out the enemy and making it possible, tactically possible, for Israel eventually to enter their inheritance. Even so, that would itself demand further fighting.

But when I hear that, I rejoice, because Joshua made it possible for Israel to eventually enter their inheritance, for you couldn't enter into this or that city until you got into the land, could you? And you couldn't enter into this or that city until you had destroyed the authorities and the kings and the rulers and the principalities and the powers and the dominions. And the first half of Joshua is that glorious story, how that Joshua made it possible for Israel not only to enter into their promised land, but in the end, after many long years of fighting, to enter into their individual inheritances.

The judgments of God in perspective

And I'm tempted to say a lot of things more, but I promised, and I want to keep my reputation as preaching short sermons, and so I say no more, except to observe that Joshua will tell us what Moses couldn't do, that Christ has done. And I leave you with the image of the Jerichoites looking over their wall. 'What are they doing? They'll never come in here. What's that funny thing they've got at the front? "Ark," did somebody call it? That'll never come in here.' But the ark was the ark that had come through Jordan, and up the other side. There were no walls in any of the cities of Canaan that would keep the ark of God out if he decided to come in. What a message we have for this world, haven't we? 'God can't invade us. We don't believe in him.' But wait a minute, he's appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he has ordained, of which he has given assurance to everyone in that he has raised him from the dead. Our blessed Lord has been through his Jordan, and come out the other side. This world won't keep him out when he decides to return and execute the judgments of God.

But having said that, now I'm authorized by the organizers of this conference to say half a dozen sentences more. Our unconverted friends, and some of our converted ones as well, find Joshua a very difficult book. For therein we read from time to time that Joshua not only took a city—that is, he captured it—but he destroyed everything in it that breathed: men, women and children. Many people reading it say to themselves, 'How could that story possibly be inspired of God? Isn't this religion all over, and we can't trust it? The thought of God commanding soldiers to kill innocent babes. How can you possibly believe that's of God?' So says the world, but I notice the world isn't altogether consistent when it comes to slaughtering babies. The last count I heard was, I think, forty million babes, who could have survived outside the womb, being killed. 'Mothers have the right to do it,' they say. Really? One of the reasons God has against the Canaanites is that they made their children pass through the fire. That is, they sacrificed them to the gods. God stopped it by executing them.

In the religions of that ancient world, sexual rites were part of the religious service. I remember being in Greece some years ago, in Corinth, in Acrocorinth. The Greek guide got us in the ancient marketplace, the agora, of Acrocorinth, and behind her was the large mountain that stands by ancient Corinth. At one stage in her talk, she said to us, 'Now, see there,' she said, pointing to the mountain. 'There used to be a temple on that spot with 10,000 priestesses open to all comers.' And then she added, 'I think the Apostle Paul had a difficult time in Corinth.' I separated myself from the party for a moment and got behind an ancient monument, and praised God for the courage of a man like Paul who dared to go into such a

fashionable but sinful city and preach the gospel. If the results of sexual unfaithfulness have been the spread of HIV, AIDS, and many children have been left fatherless and motherless, and have contracted the disease, what would you have God to do with an ancient city and a country that practiced this thing quite liberally? How would you stop it if you were God?

At least, before I proceed further, we thought it good, so the organizers tell me—they thought it good—that next year when we come to them, if we come and haven't gone off to glory, we should discuss at length the question of the judgments of God, and whether there is such a thing. There is certainly final salvation, is there not, but is there such a thing as a final judgment? We need to know what Scripture says, don't we, and to seek God's help in coming responsibly to a balanced understanding of what Scripture says on this immeasurably important topic. There is a heaven. It will be eternal. Is there a hell, and will that be eternal? So, by God's grace, among all the other things that the organizers decide to do, I am allowed to say that they will put on some talks, and lectures, and time to think, and discussions, about this immeasurably important topic. And may God bless you all.

APPENDIX 1

New Testament Doctrines Based in the Old Testament

Session 1. Genesis

1. Justification by faith.
2. The covenanted inheritance.
3. The test of justification by works.

Session 2. Exodus

1. The self-revelation of God's Name.
2. Passover as a prototype of Redemption.
3. The tabernacle—symbols and realities.

Session 3. Leviticus (1)

1. God's holiness and sacrifices for sin.
2. The sacrifice of Christ for our sins.

Session 4. Leviticus (2)

1. The priests' practical responsibilities.
2. Our practical responsibilities.

Session 5. Numbers

1. Israel's journey—blessings and difficulties.
2. Failure to enter the promised land.

Session 6. Deuteronomy

1. God's covenant with Israel.
2. A new covenant.

Session 7. Joshua

1. What Moses couldn't do, Joshua did.
2. First the conquest, then the inheritance

APPENDIX 2

The Book of Exodus

A. THE PROCESS OF LIBERATION 1:1–17:16

Setting: Israel enslaved: Moses rejected as judge: Moses flees to Jethro

i. Prelude to Liberation 1:1–10:29

- Movement I** FIRE IN THE BUSH (3:2) promise to Israel of liberation and wealth.
1:1–6:27 LORD'S NAME = *God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob* —
Israel's privileged role as firstborn—
Israel's fluctuating faith—then they repudiate Moses.
- Movement II** FIRE ON THE EARTH (9:23) demand to Pharaoh: Let Israel go to serve God.
6:28–10:29 LORD'S NAME = *God of Nature*—the plagues as evidence—Pharaoh's fluctuating
unbelief—then he defies Moses and God.

ii. Liberation Effectuated and Maintained 11:1–17:16

- Movement III** THE LAMB ROAST IN FIRE (12:9) the *one plague more* as judgment.
11:1–13:16 THE LORD'S PASSOVER—Israel's firstborn NOT privileged—
Israel given great wealth—
Festival instituted lest Israel forget the true meaning of Liberation.
- Movement IV** GUIDING PILLAR OF FIRE (13:21) escape through sea and desert.
13:17–17:16 LORD'S NAME = *Man of War, the Lord who heals, the Lord My Banner* —
Route chosen lest Israel repent and go back—Israel's song of faith—
Then they rebel against Moses.

B. THE GOAL OF LIBERATION 18:1–40:38

Setting: Israel free: Jethro comes to Moses: Moses organises Israel's judges.

iii. The Goal Proposed 18:1–31:18

- Movement V** FIRE ON THE MOUNT (19:18) the Goal is God Himself—
18:1–24:11 proposal that Israel be God's special treasure and privileged priesthood—
the conditions: Law and Covenant.
LORD'S NAME = *The Lord who brought you out of Egypt*.
- Movement VI** THE CONTINUAL BURNT SACRIFICE (29:38–40) implementing the proposal —
24:12–31:18 Israel to offer wealth for sanctuary and daily sacrifice to God. ISRAEL'S NAMES to be
presented before God on jewels of breastplate.

iv. The Goal Rejected, Restored and Achieved 32:1–40:38

- Movement VII** BURNING WRATH AGAINST ISRAEL (32:10).
32:1–34:35 Israel's wealth set up as a false god and goal—the false Festival:
These be thy gods that brought thee out of Egypt—Moses' intercession.
LORD'S NAME = *Compassionate, Gracious, Loving, Jealous*.
- Movement VIII** FIRE IN THE TABERNACLE (40:38)
35:1–40:38 Israel repent, offer wealth, make and present Tabernacle and vestments—

ISRAEL'S NAMES engraved on jewels of breastplate—God's glory fills the Tabernacle.

THE TWO HALVES OF EXODUS : SOME COMPARISONS

<p>I</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Israelites reject Moses as judge: he flees to Jethro (2:14–22) 2. God’s Self-revelation in the flames of the burning bush (ch. 3) 3. Israel’s deliverance based on God’s covenant with Abraham (2:24). 4. Israel, God’s firstborn (4:22) 	<p>V</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jethro advises Moses how to organise Israel’s judges. Moses becomes the mediator of the law (ch. 18). 2. God’s Self-revelation in the flames of Sinai. 3. Israel’s status, role and behaviour dependent on the covenant at Sinai (chs. 19–24). 4. Israel, God’s special treasure from among all nations, priests, a holy nation (19:5–6).
<p>II</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Let My people go that they may serve Me</i> (9:1). 2. The <i>finger of God</i> intervening in the physical world (8:19). 3. God’s presence in the created world: the difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians is a sign to Pharaoh <i>that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth</i> (8:21–23). 	<p>VI</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Directions for the Tabernacle and priesthood (chs. 25–31). 2. The <i>finger of God</i> in the revelation of the Law (31:18). 3. God’s presence among his redeemed people: <i>a sanctuary that I may dwell among them</i> (25:8). Israel’s observance of God’s Sabbath rest after the creation of the world, a sign between God and Israel . . . <i>that I am the Lord who sanctifies you</i> (31:12–17).
<p>III</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Israelites ask Egyptians for gold and silver (11:2–3; 12:35–36). 2. <i>I have brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt</i> (12:17). 3. <i>You shall keep it as a feast (hag) to the Lord . . . forever</i> (12:14). 4. Sanctification of Israel’s firstborn to the Lord (13:1–2, 11–16). 5. The Lord <i>passes over</i> the door to protect the firstborn (12:13, 23). 	<p>VII</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Israel turns some of the gold into the golden calf (32:2–4). 2. <i>These are your gods which brought you up out of the land of Egypt</i> (32:5). 3. <i>Tomorrow is a feast (hag) to the Lord</i> (32:5). 4. Consecration of the Levites to the Lord (32:26–29). The sanctification of the firstborn (34:19–20). 5. The Lord puts Moses in the cleft of the rock and covers him with His hand to protect him (33:20–33).
<p>IV</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The Lord went before them . . . in a pillar of cloud by day, and by night in a pillar of fire</i> (13:21–22). 2. <i>You have guided them to your holy habitation . . . you will bring them into the place which you have made for yourself to dwell in, thy sanctuary . . .</i> (15:13, 17). 3. The Sabbath in relation to gaining one’s daily bread (16:22–36). 4. <i>They looked toward the wilderness and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud</i> (16:10). 	<p>VIII</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The cloud . . . was on the Tabernacle by day, and . . . fire by night . . . throughout all their journeys (40:38). 2. The making, presentation, and erection of the Tabernacle for God to dwell in. 3. The Sabbath in relation to building the 4. Tabernacle (35:1–3). So Moses finished the work (40:33). 5. <i>The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle</i> (40:34, 36).

APPENDIX 3

Understanding Leviticus

Study Questions

(A) Leviticus 23—The place of each feast in the series

The seven Feasts of the Lord were to be celebrated in a particular order.

If you think that that order is deliberate, then it will be helpful to try to understand what the significance of that order is.

- Decide first what the significance is of each feast individually
- Say in your own words how and why the place of each feast is significant for the meaning of the other feasts

(B) Leviticus 23—A prophetic question

Some Christians say that the history of redemption can be clearly seen in the order of the feasts.

Others disagree and argue that the order of both is not identical. We need to decide to what extent, if at all, the feasts and their order are prophetic of our redemption in Christ.

- List the feasts and what might be their New Testament counterparts in the history of redemption
- Decide whether you think that the feasts and their order is prophetic and give your reasons why, or why not

APPENDIX 4

Reading List

Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament*, Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995.

K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Merril F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1982

Merril F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, AMG Publishing, 2008.