

1 & 2 Chronicles

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A Myrtlefield House Transcript



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Contents

1	Approaching the Study of Chronicles	3
2	The Rise and Reign of David	12
3	Obedience, Unity and Spiritual Growth	18
4	Question Time	29
5	A Dwelling Place for God	36
	About the Author	00

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This text has been edited from a transcript of talks given by David Gooding at the CMML Bible Study Seminars, Greenwood Hills, USA from 7 to 10 June 1999, together with a concluding message (chapter 5) on the same theme given at a Rise Up and Build conference in Dearborn in 1997.

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Published by The Myrtlefield Trust
PO Box 2216
Belfast, N Ireland
BT1 9YR

w: www.myrtlefieldhouse.com
e: info@myrtlefieldhouse.com

Myrtlefield catalogue no: chr.004/dw

Approaching the Study of Chronicles

It is a great pleasure to be with you here once more. The years have been long since I last had the pleasure of being with you. Thank you for your grace in asking me to come again.

Our objective in this week's seminar is, as you know, to study together the first and second books of Chronicles. On our last occasion we studied together 1 and 2 Samuel; the year before that, 1 and 2 Kings. There is much in 1 and 2 Chronicles that will be virtually the same as in Kings and Samuel, but of course 1 and 2 Chronicles are not the same books. Though they contain much the same material in places, the author is using this same material for slightly different purposes. So while it will be good for us to notice and to remember what we found in previous years, and have found since, in Samuel and Kings, it will perhaps be even more important to notice the difference between the books of Chronicles and those of Samuel and Kings.

Similarities and differences

Not only is there the difference in the selection of material, so that Chronicles omits a great deal of what Kings tells us, but even where Chronicles is telling us the same stories as are told us in Samuel and Kings, it will be wisdom on our part to notice the difference of emphasis that often occurs between those books. Sometimes that difference can be startling. For instance, to take the king who goes by the name of Abijam (or sometimes Abijah) in the book of Kings, he's an unmitigated rascal, or worse. In Chronicles, he has one of the leading speeches conveying the message of God at that moment. It will be important therefore to see why that difference is.

To mention just one other example, in Kings you will read of the faults of the good king Hezekiah, but you'll not read of those faults so much in Chronicles. And the order of the things that he did accomplish for God is rather different in Chronicles from what it is in Kings. We study these differences not to cast doubt on the inspiration and authority of the books of Chronicles, but rather as guides to perceiving what the special message of Chronicles is. We may rest assured, simply because it is in the canon of holy Scripture, that Chronicles is there because it has a message to give that no other book gives in quite that same way.

Even at first glance, we'll notice that when the nation divided, as they did in the reign of Rehoboam, the books of Kings follow the history of the Israelite kings until the ten tribes were carried away to Assyria. But the books of Chronicles, while they record the split between the two tribes and the ten, they thereafter omit the history of the Israelite kings except when they impinge on the history of the Judean kings. That gives a very different emphasis to the second book of Chronicles compared with the first and second books of Kings.

Inspired—but difficult!

I'm aware that 1 and 2 Chronicles are not necessarily the favourite books of all believers. There are reasons for that, of course. First of all, we encounter those first nine chapters full of names, mostly unpronounceable, about whom nothing is known except their names. They are for us just names on a bit of paper. When 1 Chronicles gets going, it gives us histories that we can dip into and consider and ponder, but then there are another eight or nine chapters at the end, full of names again. There have been some—though they do not readily confess to it—who when they come to these chapters in 1 Chronicles, affirm their belief in inspiration and pass on to the more interesting chapters! So they are difficult books.

We do, and have to, believe that they are given by inspiration of God. To study such books and to give of your time and energy and thought will require considerable faith that these books are indeed inspired of God. There are many who would lay down their very lives for the sake of the truth that these books are inspired by God—they believe all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. But some believers seem not quite sure about the next bit, 'all Scripture is . . . profitable for teaching' (2 Tim 3:16). If we decide that some books are more profitable than others for teaching and that it is right for Christians to concentrate on those books, that is distinctly questionable. Not all the books of the Bible were written to all believers in the first place. The pastoral epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, were written, not to all the people of God, but to Paul's fellow workers—men who had shared his labours and experiences and were at the battlefield in different countries, and who would need special advice, teaching, exhortation and wisdom, to fit them for their particular task.

It is right that we lesser mortals should listen in and profit from what God had to say to them, but I quote it simply as an example that, while all Scripture is given to all the people of God, different parts will appeal to believers at different stages in their careers and according to their particular responsibilities. You would not feed steak to a baby: steaks are for those whose stomachs have grown and whose taste is developed and who need the strength that such a diet gives. But with that proviso, we are called to give ourselves to the study of books like 1 and 2 Chronicles. As I say, it will require faith. We must not expect that we shall get voices from heaven every five minutes, though the whole thing is a voice from heaven.

But in order to understand it, we shall need a lot of hard work. We shall need to love the Lord our God with all our minds. You cannot get out of a computer what you don't first put in. Likewise, you cannot get out of God's word its significance, if God's word doesn't first get in to both our brains and our hearts. In my experience at least, we will in due course reap the reward for the toil of getting to know these books in their detail, even when they appear dry and difficult and barren maybe; so that one knows them inside out, while often as yet one does not see the particular meaning. One may have to say to the Lord from time to time, 'Well, thank you, Lord, for saying it, but what is the point of it?' It will take great faith and powers of endurance.

Importance of the historical level

So now I begin by going over briefly some things about how we will approach our study. Since the main topic of the two books is the building of the temple at Jerusalem, we shall find it easy to see in the narrative many foreshadowings of Christian themes. But we shall run into

difficulties and frustrations and confusions if we do not make sure that we have first understood these books at the historical level. Let me just underline that. I am not saying that typology is wrong. There are those that say that it is false hermeneutics to use these historical books of the Old Testament as though they were types of this, that and the other; that typology is a somewhat suspect method of interpretation and that the wise should not engage in it—unless the New Testament actually indicates that such and such a story, or event, or institution can be understood typologically. For my part, I think that is very restricted hermeneutics. There is much more than one level to God's inspired word.

But if we are to understand the higher levels and the larger levels of God's word, it is a sound principle that we start at the basic level, the ground floor. In the first and second books of Chronicles, the basic level is the historical level. That will be important. It very often happens that here and there in books like 1 Chronicles, there's a story that has been much publicized by preachers and students, because it has lent itself easily to interpretation as a type, and therefore these things come swimming into our minds with ease. There's no harm in mentioning the type and sometimes our perceptions at that level of interpretation can profitably lead on to beginning to see how the first basic historical level fits together. But in these studies, we shall make a point of trying to emphasize, first and foremost, the historical level. Now why is that important? Well let me cite one illustration outside of Chronicles—an incident well known to believers—to show that there's more than one level of meaning, and it would be important to start at the historical.

The example of Abraham and Isaac

The famous story in Genesis 22 of how Abraham was commanded to take his son Isaac and offer him on an altar as a sacrifice to God has often, and quite rightly, appealed to believers as a picture of the Father and the Son walking harmoniously together to the place of sacrifice at Calvary; and how the son, in obedience to the father, allows himself to be placed on the altar. Not only Christians have seen it so. Even rabbinic Judaism saw in that story the glimmerings of redemption and would tell you that Israel is redeemed by the blood of Isaac, who offered himself as a sacrifice in sheer obedience to God.

We see however that the New Testament calls our attention to the first floor meaning of that story. James 2 reminds us that the first historical lesson of Abraham and Isaac's sacrifice is what we call justification by works: 'Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?' (Jas 2:21). It would be important to notice that—lest starting too soon with our typology, we forget that it had a basic meaning at the level of justification by works. The story at that level becomes exceedingly valuable in helping us to perceive what the doctrine of justification by works means. When I was a youth—not so long ago as some of you think!—I was taught that a person is justified by faith before God and by their works before people. That is, God sees our faith and so long as we're believers, he accepts us and we are justified. People on the other hand, who can't see our hearts, are called to see our works; so we're justified before God by faith, but before people by works. That sounds a very helpful and convincing mini interpretation—but it can't be absolutely true, because if you take the story itself at the historical level, Abraham was justified by works before whom?

AUDIENCE: God

DWG: God, of course. When Abraham had bound his son to the altar and lifted the knife to slay his son, and the angel of God called out of heaven to stay his hand, the voice said, 'now I know that you fear God' (v. 12). God demands works as evidence of our faith. It will be useless my turning around to God and saying, 'But, God, you know I'm a believer. What do you need evidence for?' It's not given to us to reply thus to almighty God. He demands works: we're responsible to provide them. 'Now I know you fear me.' It is not that the Philistines know, or Sarah knows, but 'now I know that you fear me.' So that lesson in Genesis, interpreted at the basic ground floor level of history, carries not just a moralistic meaning but a deeply spiritual meaning and practical at the same time.

The Epistle to the Hebrews quotes that same story, not just to repeat what James is saying but to explain to us what justification by works is all about. It is not that when you profess to be a believer, you now do a few things like visiting the sick, though that may be involved. As Hebrews 11:17–19 points out, Abraham was there ascending the mountain, about to offer Isaac his son, in whom were all the promises of God. All his future depended on Isaac. He had believed God while as yet Sarah was barren. He had believed God when he was now decrepit and past being a father; and his faith in God had been the means of his justification. And his faith now was in the promises of God—or was it? If God had come to Abraham and said, 'Abraham, now when it comes to the future and all those glowing promises that I've made to you, where is your faith for those things? Is it placed in Isaac, by any chance, or in me?' And Abraham would have said, 'Oh, in you, Lord, of course.' 'What, in me only? Well then, you'll give me Isaac, won't you?' The works were required to show that the faith, as at the beginning, so now was in God and God only. There lies a lesson for us. As life progresses, the faith that we exercised in God for salvation at the beginning will eventually be tested.

Our faith for everything must be in God and therefore Hebrews 6 emphasizes that particularly, when it lets us see that it was after Abraham had offered Isaac on the altar that he received the word of God, confirmed by that oath and that tremendous blessing, 'Surely I will bless you and multiply you' (v. 14). Having endured, he received the blessing and the promise. You'll notice when it came—not in Genesis 15, when first he was justified, but in Genesis 22 when, by his works, he'd shown his faith was in God alone. We are exhorted in that sense to follow his example, for in so doing we come to a hope that is like an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast. To stand on the mountain, bereft of everything else but God, is the securest place in the whole universe. For if our faith for security must be in God plus something else, that something else will crumble into dust.

So here are three Scriptures in the New Testament that take that story at what I call its ground floor level. Abraham was justified by faith, literally so. That isn't a type of anything: it is a legal precedent, and it applies to us all. If he was justified that way, so must we all be justified by faith. And his being justified by works is also a legal precedent which shows us how God will lead us likewise.

But you say, 'What has happened to the typology? Are you telling us now that you mustn't take the story of Abraham and Isaac as a picture of the Father giving the Son as a sacrifice at Calvary?' Well if we dared to say it, we would be excommunicated from our assembly! No, I'm not meaning that at all. The fact that that story is about justification by works does not

cancel out its typical meaning, or rather its prototypical meaning. In fact, the importance of this prototype of the sacrifice of Christ is only seen to its full significance when we see it is in the context of justification by works. This is a point of some hermeneutical importance as we come to a book like Chronicles.

What do I mean by saying we shall run into trouble if we don't first start at the ground floor of history? We should notice from the literary point of view how the story is told us in Genesis 22. Abraham is called to take his son and goes to the mountain, where he binds Isaac on the altar. Verses 10–11 say, 'Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven . . .'. But now notice that the angel eventually spoke again, verse 15: 'And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven'. Why didn't he speak it all at once? It would have saved a little time, wouldn't it? Why twice, with an interval, and what happened in the interval? Something very important happened. In verses 12–13 the angel completes his first message: 'He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked'.

Follow the drama of the piece, if you can, in your imagination. Here was Abraham and he had lifted up his hand to slay his son. Where was he looking at that moment? Looking straight down to his son bound on that altar where at that particular point he was about to plunge that knife. When the angel of the Lord spoke, Abraham looked up and he looked around and saw there was a ram caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.

So now a very interesting thing comes to light. God has said to Abraham, 'Take your son and offer him up as a burnt offering' (see v. 2). Now the angel calls out of heaven and says, 'Don't lay your hand on him.' But notice what the angel doesn't say. He doesn't say, 'Abraham, you know that sacrifice that God called for, he didn't really mean it. He doesn't want any sacrifice and you can go home.' No, the sacrifice of burnt offering from Abraham had to be completed, not aborted. Surely God was testing Abraham and saw his heart, but the sacrifice had to be completed and was completed. It was then and not before that the angel spoke a second time out of heaven and said, 'By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you' (vv. 16–17). What then is the significance of the fact that the sacrifice was completed? You say that Abraham offered up that sacrifice of the ram as a thanksgiving that his son was spared. No, he didn't. The text says explicitly that he offered him up for a burnt offering instead of his son. The sacrifice of burnt offering had to be completed, but it was completed in the body of a substitute.

That was important for Abraham. It could be more important for us too. God demands our work as evidence of our faith. What standard does he require? We know what the burnt offering meant: the whole of the thing was to be offered to God, matching the requirement of the law, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might' (Deut 6:5). If that is the standard required and I, as a believer, am required by God to demonstrate before him, by my works, that my faith is genuine, what standard will satisfy God? Now you may ask another question, as I ask myself: where in all this could I

possibly stand? As our blessed Lord observed to the apostles whose strength gave out in Gethsemane, 'the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak' (Matt 26:41). How often have we had cause to lament that in the presence of God! Sure he knows our heart, sure he asks for evidence, but what one of us would say that the evidence since we have been converted has been one hundred percent? Where would we be in this context of justification by works, if the sacrifice demanded depended simply upon us? In Abraham's case, the sacrifice was completed, not aborted, but completed in the body of the substitute. So must it be with us, for God does look upon our hearts, demands our works, but thank God for a sacrifice of a substitute that covers the shortfall of the sacrifice in our personal obedience.

So excuse that long sermon but it was meant to illustrate what will be an important principle in our interpretation of 1 and 2 Chronicles. Yes, of course, we shall find all kinds of things that, as prototypes, point us to our New Testament, to our Lord, to the church which is his body and the eternal dwelling place of God. But we shall be wise first of all to try to understand it at the historical level, otherwise we could get ourselves into muddles of various kinds if, when following our prototypical line, we found it didn't always fit in with the context.

Historical setting of 1 & 2 Chronicles

That explained, just let me remind you of what you already know. These books were written during the postexilic period and, in the first place, for the benefit of those who had returned from exile in Babylon in accordance with Cyrus's decree. Therefore an understanding of Ezra-Nehemiah and the three postexilic prophets will be exceedingly helpful. Similarly, we should remember what possibly was still in the future for those returned exiles, namely the fearful persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes, who did for the temple what no other pagan emperor had hitherto done.

Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the temple. That was bad enough. Antiochus Epiphanes didn't destroy it: he did something worse. He placed the abomination that makes desolate in the Most Holy Place itself. These returned exiles, or their descendants, would one day have to weather that particular storm. It would be difficult, particularly when the high priests in the nation sided with Antiochus Epiphanes and would have persecuted those who wished to be loyal to their traditional Old Testament faith. We must have our eye on that. How would 1 and 2 Chronicles have helped the people of that time?

Temple and tabernacle

As I've already said, in our study we will also have to be aware of similarities and differences. In one sense, Solomon's temple was like the tabernacle of Moses. Both were built as a dwelling place for God. What would be helpful to us is if you bring your knowledge of the tabernacle to Chronicles; and then not be tempted too much to talk about the tabernacle, but to see the difference between the temple and the tabernacle. That is crucial to what Chronicles has to say.

The genealogies

As to the historical detail, when we come to the genealogies, we have to try and understand what they contribute to this book. To help us do that, we shall consider which two tribes occupy the largest place in these chapters. But in addition to that, we ought to notice that the genealogies seem to give us grounds for thinking that they do not come up to the time of David and stop there, nor do they come up to the exile and stop there. Some of the genealogies are going right on into the postexilic period. Why would a writer do that? Why, if he's going to start his history by talking about Saul and then David, would he bring the genealogies right up almost contemporary with his readers?

If any of you preachers have ever done any such thing in your expositions, say, of the New Testament, and extended Matthew's genealogies down to your grandfather, you might be pleased to tell us why you ever did conceive of doing such a thing! There would be a certain point in doing it. The genealogies weren't just ancient history to the people for whom these books were written, but their present history or just the immediate past. Old grandad and his great grandad were linked to the great purpose of God in the whole of the history of the world. It's a very important thing to get into our own heads, and to see our own little lives, not merely in the context of me and mine and perhaps my father, but in this context of the history of all the redeemed from Adam onwards, and what the purposes of God have been in the long centuries of history that lead up to us.

The trajectories of the books

I'd like now to offer some observations on the books themselves, and what we could call the trajectories of the two books. This is an important concept, as I understand hermeneutics, and particularly of literary and historical books. Although old Aristotle is not approved of necessarily by modern literary critics, he had some sensible things to say. In the analysis of a Greek tragedy or a book of poetry, he talked of the *action* of the work, by which he did not mean all the activity described in it, but the one great action that begins at the beginning and goes on through, and finds its logical conclusion in the end. That's what he meant by saying that a work of literature, framed the proper way, has a beginning, a middle and an end. At first sight that doesn't seem to be profound, but then when you listen to some preachers, you can see the wisdom of it!

This idea of an action trajectory of a book can be very helpful, even when applied to a biblical book. What is the book about from beginning to end? How does it get from the beginning to the end? Where in fact does it start, and does it just end where the writer hadn't any more material, or is it deliberately written as one whole? If one looks at the first of these two books, and doubtless you've seen it yourself many times, 1 Chronicles begins with Adam, the first man. It is unusual in the historical books by the phrase in 1 Chronicles 29:23: 'Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king in place of David his father. And he prospered, and all Israel obeyed him.'

It is open to question what exactly that phrase means: 'Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD'. Obviously it does not mean the throne in heaven; so does it mean the throne that the Lord provided, or something like that? There it is at any rate, unusual except that there's another place in Chronicles that uses a similar thing (see 2 Chr 18:18). How, or by what stage,

do you come from Adam, the first man on earth, to a point where a man sits on the throne of the Lord? It's worth asking that of the first book of Chronicles. By what kind of movements, by what steps, do you come from the first man to the point where a man sits on the throne of the Lord?

That becomes relevant in history, but now of course it becomes immediately relevant to us at our level. We have our Lord's own authority for it: 'To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with my Father on his throne' (see Rev 3:21 KJV). These are breathtaking words; for if there was a stage in history, starting with Adam, where man sat on the throne of the Lord, a throne that was in some sense the throne of the Lord, that prototype fades into the background as we consider the fact that, as we sit here today, a real man, as human as we are human except for our sins, is actually sat on the throne of the Lord over the whole universe.

Our Christian gospel is a gigantic thing. May God help us never to lose the fantastic wonder of it. Preach morality of course, my brothers, but there's something in the gospel bigger than morality, for when we get home to glory, questions of morality won't arise as they arise now. You're going to behave when you get home: you will not need to question your morality! But these wonders won't cease and what a gospel this is for mankind. We are not the product of accidental, mindless, purposeless forces. We are created by God, and in his redemptive purposes not only is our blessed Lord, man, seated upon the throne of God, but here is his promise: 'To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with my Father on his throne.'

If those words are true, the whole concept and prospect beggars our wildest imagination. But if it is true, we surely need to ask by what steps will the likes of you and me rise from being sons of Adam to the point of sharing the very throne of the Messiah. So that if this is the *action* of 1 Chronicles—historical and only a prototype as it is—nonetheless it has an immediate lesson to us, the importance of which is overwhelming and will give energy to our study in seeking out the stages by which, in the first book of Chronicles, you get from Adam, the first man, to the point where man in the form of Solomon sat upon the throne of the Lord.

The building of the temple

Though that is so, it would perhaps be true to say that this topic is not the first big topic of 1 Chronicles, though it is part of it. When one comes to the zenith of the book, the last stage of 1 Chronicles and the beginning of 2 Chronicles, you will find there at great length what the very heart and summit of the book is. For the last section of 1 Chronicles is the account of the preparations which David made for the building of the temple of God. As we said, and to that we shall have to recur, building a temple was somewhat different from building a tabernacle. The temple was not a portable shrine where God was pleased to dwell as he walked through the wilderness with Israel. The temple was the end of the journey, when all planned up to that point had been fulfilled and God himself entered into his rest. This was goal achieved, time to take the staves out of the ark, journey's end. Not to end with some setting sun, as some missionary films do! But journey's end with the rising sun, a sun that shall never set—God entered into his rest. That in itself is a very big prototype. The first book of Chronicles is preparation: the second book is the actual fulfilment and achievement.

A dwelling place for God

But what about the temple itself? As you know, under the instruction of your New Testament, one of the major purposes that has resided in the heart of God from eternity is that God should have a dwelling place inside creation. Let me emphasize that preposition, *inside* creation. We are neither Hindus nor Buddhists: we believe that God existed before creation. We are not pantheists: creation isn't God. It's not true to say that everything is God. That is false. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, but he was there before the beginning. In the beginning, the Word already was, and God created the great universe. The question is, how could almighty God, transcendent and infinite, get *inside* his creation? Do you perceive the difficulty? When Solomon at last stood at the inauguration of the temple, he himself perceived the problem. He was a theologian in his way, and having done his best to build a house that was magnificent, yet he shook his royal head and said, 'But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!' (1 Kgs 8:27). How do you get the infinite in the finite?

That was God's problem. The permanent temple was the first expression of this great eternal purpose of God, but it was only a prototype. The reality is yet to be. We know what it is, of course, for we've all read our Ephesians! It is tremendous stuff: no wonder that when you arrive at Ephesians 3 and open the prison door and look inside, you'll find Paul dancing round the cell! He had been given the privilege of announcing to the Gentiles this great, secret purpose of God—to have a dwelling place of God through the Spirit. The building work is already going on. In some sense, you are already a dwelling place of God, but the building is under construction and the work is going on. The day will come when the top stone has been placed and it will be complete. That doesn't lessen either the mystery or the wonder of it. How will you get the infinite in the finite? I don't mind how many redeemed there are. You could multiply as many millions and billions and trillions as you liked. They'll still be finite, won't they? How will you ever be a suitable and worthy and capable dwelling place for almighty God?

No wonder there was a little bit of a fuss as to who was going to build the prototype. You'll remember how David would have given his right arm for the privilege of building that temple. He wasn't allowed to, but he was told that he would have a son and of that son it would be true: 'He shall be my son, and I will be his father' (1 Chr 22:10)—a prophecy and a promise which was fulfilled at one level in Solomon, but found the bigger fulfilment which God had always had in mind, when there was born into our world a descendant of Solomon. Of him, in the absolute sense, it is true that God is his Father and he is none less than the Son of God. He shall build the temple. He's already building it, and one day it will be complete. Therein is your problem solved, for the blessed Son of God, though human—he will have a body for all eternity—is the Son of God; and the Son of God is infinite and God is in him and he in us. These are some of the lessons that await us in the first book of Chronicles.

The Rise and Reign of David

As we noted in our last session, God said to David, 'He shall be my son, and I will be his father' (1 Chr 22:10). In its limited sense, that applied to Solomon. In the New Testament, Hebrews 1 takes that same promise and shows how its full intention was the coming of our blessed Lord, the son of David according to the flesh, but shown and demonstrated to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. It is the Son who builds the eternal dwelling place of God. You will doubtless have already noticed therefore that 1 Chronicles records first of all the stages of David's rise to power and the exercise of his government. Let's trace that actually in our texts.

From Adam to David

The first chapters are the genealogies largely, and they arrive eventually at an incident in history. Chapter 10 records the war with the Philistines and what happened to Saul. There's no account of Saul's anointing or preparation to be king, merely an account of his final disastrous days. Defeated by the Philistines, he committed suicide and the Philistines came and dishonoured his body and put his armour in the house of their gods as a glorious trophy that their gods, so they imagined, had defeated the God of Israel. And then we read,

So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance. He did not seek guidance from the LORD. Therefore the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse. (1 Chr 10:13-14)

So here is God's king, David, at a crucial moment in history, when the rule is transferred from Saul to him. That is the first stage, therefore, in these chapters from Adam. They come quickly to the rise of Israel from among the nations and then the rise of kingship in Israel, and now to David, the first true king.

David established

Look, if you will, to chapter 14.

And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, also masons and carpenters to build a house for him [that is, a royal palace for David]. And David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel, and that his kingdom was highly exalted for the sake of his people Israel. (vv. 1-2)

So at the end of chapter 10, David is appointed king and now here, feeling himself established, David takes more wives and begets more sons and daughters, as a very wealthy monarch would do—to build a royal house in the sense of sons who would be his royal princes. It was part of a political manoeuvre. That is the second stage therefore in David's reign.

David's victories and rule

Now look over to chapter 18.

And the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went. So David reigned over all Israel, and he administered justice and equity to all his people. (vv. 13–14)

Now not merely established, but as the context will make clear when we study it, David by this time has risen to be not only master of Israel, but virtually emperor over many Gentile nations—'all his people'. Now there follows, not a list of his sons as in chapter 14, but a list of his officers of state. He is established as virtual imperial monarch, in charge of justice and equity over all Israel and indeed beyond its borders.

David's last years and preparations for the temple

Now look at chapter 23.1

When David was old and full of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel. (v. 1)

A lot of history has passed of course, much of which Chronicles doesn't record: that's left to Kings and Samuel. So David is by now old and he makes his son Solomon, king—not outright king, but as co-regent with his father. And while Solomon was given responsibility for running the politics of the day, David gets on with what was in his heart. For in his closing years of life, he devoted himself to what he loved most, that is, preparation for the building of the temple.

David transfers the kingdom to Solomon

The final stage in 1 Chronicles comes in the last chapter, at the dedication of all the material that had been made ready for the temple.

And they ate and drank before the LORD on that day with great gladness. And they made Solomon the son of David king the second time [meaning now he was made king fully in his own right] . . . Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king in place of David his father. And he prospered, and all Israel obeyed him. (29:22–23).

Key features of each stage

Five stages therefore in the rise to power and reign of David. The question that will exercise us is: what are the contents of those stages? What did they signify? What were the developments? What was the course? What lessons were learnt? What were the necessary preparations for the ruler who should build the house? I have put this in a table, starting at the bottom simply to give the idea that this is an ascending trajectory. The top is going to be

the preparation for the house. So we have an ascending trajectory through five stages, starting with Adam and culminating with a man seated on the throne of the Lord.

The Trajectory in Five Stages

Culmination: Solomon as king in his own right, seated 'on the throne of the LORD'		Temple Completed and Dedicated (2 Chr 6 & 7)	
Stage	Elements	Development	Difficulty
5	David appoints Solomon as co-regent.	David prepares the materials for the temple.	
4	David reigns over Israel and administers equity and justice.	David defeats Israel's remaining enemies.	David's census provokes divine displeasure.
3	David perceives God has established his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.	Ark of the covenant brought to Jerusalem.	David's premature suggestion to build a permanent house for the Lord.
2	All Israel anoint David as king. Nation united.	David founds Jerusalem as the nation's capital city.	False attempt to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem.
1	Genealogies from Adam to Saul, notably Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Judah and Levi.	Rise of Israel among the nations.	Disobedience and death of Saul.

The focus of the genealogies— Judah and Levi

Now let us notice the first of those stages, beginning with the genealogies. I do not propose to spend a long time on them, but we notice some of the features at the beginning of the book. We start with Adam, and we very soon come to Noah and the genealogies of his sons. But then we come, as you see already by 1:27, to Abraham. The proportions of the genealogy are significant. This part of 1 Chronicles is tracing history, showing how Israel came to the point it was. It starts with Adam of course, but moves very quickly into the rise of Israel—in other words, the Hebrews—marked by Abraham coming out of the Gentiles. Then Abraham's genealogy is that of Ishmael and Isaac, and almost immediately (v. 34) we read of the sons of Isaac, Esau and Israel. Esau's genealogy is given almost the same as in Genesis. That brings us down to the end of chapter 1. By chapter 2, we come to the sons of Israel. There they are: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad and Asher. So one chapter to the Gentiles, half of it to Abraham and his children; and now concentrating from chapter 2 onwards on the descendants of Isaac and Jacob and coming to Israel, father of the nation as such.

But look at verse 2:3. Instead of starting with Reuben or Simeon or Levi, you start with Judah, and Judah fills the rest of the chapter. Then we have the sons of David in chapter 3; and chapter 4 is, if you please, about the sons of Judah. You could not mistake the proportions, could you? It is clear, judging by the genealogy, that the chronicler is interested in Judah and his sons, and in particular the son David and his son. David is going to be the king. It will eventually be that king's son who will build the temple.

We should not find it strange when we come upon Scriptures like this, with their emphasis on David. We know that our very gospel is described in our New Testament as 'the gospel of God . . . concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh' (Rom 1:1, 3). Responding to hostile Jews in the synagogue of Pisidia, Paul says that he is turning to the Gentiles, 'For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles" . . . And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying . . . the Lord' (Acts 13:47-48). Scripture being fulfilled in front of your very eyes! And Paul in his joy writes to Timothy saying, 'Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel' (2 Tim 2:8). Our connection as Gentiles with God's way of redemption is through the son of David. We learn many a lesson from Abraham, but it was not in Abraham's house that God raised up the Messiah as a sign to attract the Gentiles. It was in the house of David.

But that is by the way. Then in chapter 5 you come to the rest of the tribes, well some of them. You come to Reuben and his sons and the children of the half tribe of Manasseh. Then, strikingly, chapter 6 is a very long chapter of eighty-one verses all about Levi. In chapter 7 you have now the rest of the tribes as you see them there named, and then you come to chapter 8 and you have Benjamin and his people.

Then in chapter 9, we read both of the exile in Babylon and of those who subsequently returned.

And Judah was taken into exile in Babylon because of their breach of faith. Now the first to dwell again in their possessions in their cities were Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the temple servants ['Nethinims' KJV]. (9:1-2)

You remember what trouble Nehemiah had in getting people to volunteer to come and live in Jerusalem when he had rebuilt the place. They had their farms and their families to see to, but some were persuaded to come and live in Jerusalem, and here they are, the list of them. So you've got the Levites and then priests and all the keepers of the tabernacle and so forth, filling chapter 9 right to its end.

Just names, or significant to God?

You couldn't possibly escape the emphasis and proportions of these chapters, could you? They all are important, but of supreme importance and relevance to our study are first Judah, and in particular the house of David; and the Levites, even more than just the priests. Why the significance? What is it we're given in these long genealogies? You start with a list of names, you get bored stiff before you get to chapter 3, and can't pronounce half of them! For us, they are just names on a bit of a paper: the generations of humanity that have been washed up on the shores of this planet. Each one of them is a name representing a life—some baby

who would grow up with all its hopes and fears and ambitions and careers, but now nothing much more than a name on a bit of a paper to you. And what will you be to anybody in another thousand years, another name on a bit of paper perhaps? What is the significance of humanity in the history of our world, and you one amongst the trillions that have inhabited it; just seventy years and gone forever?

Who will make sense of it and stop the hideous clash of war and hatred and greed and exploitation, and make sense of human life and history? Is history going anywhere? Ah, here's a story. Here is the man and his name is given as of the tribe of Judah and he's the man, not merely going to subdue the enemies, but he's going to make the preparations for the great temple of God. And he will organize the Levites and the service round that temple. The choirs and harpists and incense makers and showbread cooks, and porters and gatekeepers. David thinks it's worth semi-retiring from politics to do that. What would you do if you retired? Have you got one thing more than another you would like to do when you retire? What would you do that will be significant for eternity?

David served as his life's crowning thing to prepare the material for the temple and to train the Levites, and to write the songs for the Levites to sing, and teach them how to sing properly and praise the Lord properly. Because there's a temple that's going to be built and all things should be one great orchestra of God's praise and delight. God in the midst of Israel, in the temple, expressing himself through his people and all their varied gifts, and all the gifts of his people coming back, in all their activities, in praise to God.

New Testament fulfilment

So the focus is on Judah and the king of Judah, and on the Levites. You will not find it difficult to understand the relevance of this to our New Testament gospel, will you? Who shall take the book, who is ready to open the seals of God's judgment on this earth and bring back earth to God? And when there is none found worthy or able to take the book, John wept much—as any intelligent man might, if there's no answer to earth's problems. Well, the name was found. It was the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lamb as though it had been slain; and he's ready to take the book and unleash the judgments that should break the opposition and bring back the universe to God (see Rev 5). Why is he worthy?

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth. (Rev 5:9–10)

Not only has he redeemed us but he has made us a kingdom and priests. This is genius. To take mankind—lost and broken and disordered in activity, thought and ambition, producing the cacophony that we hear around us still—to take it and not just redeem men and women so that they escape final perdition, but to make something of them, to organize their lives, to take their abilities and purge them and mature them, and unite the whole. That's some job, I tell you, to unite the whole in the great orchestra of God's eternal praise, not just in word, but in heart. Not just in word and heart, but in activity, so the activity of all the redeemed shall be one vast, delightful orchestra of praise to almighty God.

That's what Chronicles is talking about, as a prototype of the bigger thing. It isn't a fairy tale. And I've an impression that some of you will say, 'No, it isn't a fairy tale, because Christ has already begun to do it for me.' You know it in your hearts that Christ by his genius has taken you—broken and condemned and disordered as you were—and not only redeemed you by his substitutionary death and delivered you from condemnation, but has made and is making and will make something of you, as he trains you and prepares you for your part when the great permanent and eternal temple arrives. You say, 'I hope it doesn't arrive too soon, because I think I'd like a little bit more time.' Do you know, when I was a youth, I thought seventy years was a long time. Don't give in to that impression. You'd like the Lord to come, wouldn't you? There are some days when I feel I hope he doesn't come too soon because I've rather a lot of lessons yet to learn.

The five stages

But what about the stages? Will this prototype turn out to tell us what are the essential stages in the programme? We will notice that each of these stages follows a certain pattern. You start off with what you might call marvellously good and right—here the rise of Israel from among the nations, and the rise out of the nations of the tribe of Judah, and then the rise of the king that is to be, and the Levites that he has now so he can organize them when the time comes.

Marvellous progress in human history. It is not to be dismissed as something Sunday schoolish. The rise of Israel out of the nations is historically a uniquely significant thing. It is God's protest against the idolatrous interpretation of the universe, the worship of nature gods and the forces of nature. Your modern atheist hasn't anything else to worship but the forces of nature, poor chap. And they control him, they'll be there in the end. So the rise of Israel in its protest against the idolatrous interpretation of the universe and the forces of nature is no insignificant thing. And within Israel, the rise of the tribe of Judah and the king—until something went wrong at the level of the kingship. You will have noticed from the table that that pattern is repeated in each of the first four sections of the book. First, the great advance in the stages of God's programme, and then something goes wrong. Sometimes out of the wrong, God in his wisdom brings eventually something positive, but we shall find that pattern repeated.

Obedience, Unity and Spiritual Growth

In our previous session, we briefly surveyed the first stage. And when I use the word 'stage', let me remind you that we discovered that the first book of Chronicles is from Adam at the beginning, to the time when the man Solomon sat upon the throne of the Lord. We were asking ourselves by what experience, by what pathway, in what stage did mankind come from Adam and his beginning to a time when a man should sit upon the throne of the Lord? That is an important question to answer historically, of the pathway from Adam to Solomon, but an even more important question when we think of the whole future of humanity and God's purpose for it. It is summed up of course in Christ who, being man, now sits at the throne of God, and holds out to us the promise that he will grant to those who overcome the right to sit on his throne, even as he overcame and has sat on his Father's throne.

As we observe it in history, we shall at the same time be thinking of ourselves in this age. What are the necessary stages by which we hope to sit one day on the throne of God with Christ? We found in the first stage two major things. First there was what we may vaguely call what was right. That is the rise of Israel from among the Gentile nations. There we would look if we would find sense in history. Let us be warned against historiographers who think they can tell you that history as a whole has a special pattern. Marx would have told you that. He thought he saw patterns in all of history, dialectical materialism, or historical materialism as he liked to call it. That has proved to be the nonsense it always was. To give a pattern of the whole of history, you would need to know the whole of history; and none except God knows that. While we don't try to say that we can give you a pattern of the whole of history, we can point to a very definite pattern in history in one direction arising in the Middle East, being the rise of Israel.

That has proved to be unique in many ways and has as its chief claim to our attention that it was the nation through whom the Christ according to the flesh, was born. A nation who had a special role for God in history, the nation of the patriarch Abraham and the great lawgiver Moses, and of the great King David and the nation of the prophets—all of them in their way contributing to the education of the nation, until the time when it was ready for the Messiah to come. Therein lies a pattern within history of the profoundest significance, and Israel as a nation is not finished yet. 'For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable' (Rom 11:29). Israel shall yet fulfil the distinctive role that God has given to that nation. Though some of the branches, as Paul would say, have been cut off, that does not mean that God has forsaken and given up the people whom he knew aforetime, but there shall come the point when the deliverer shall come out of Zion and so Israel as a whole shall be saved. Here is the

most significant pattern within history and in it and on it lies mankind's hope. That, therefore, is good and we passed over it unduly quickly.

We saw that, within that rise of Israel, the chronicler gives the greater proportion to the genealogies of Judah and then of David's house within Judah and also equally the proportion given to the Levites, and we saw the significance of it. If there was going to be any sense made of the endless generations of human beings upon the earth, and the trillions of individuals, then it will call for someone who can bring mankind back to God and redeem them and then make something of them, for God. It reminded us of that passage in Revelation 5 which tells us of the one who is worthy to open the book and to loose its seals and purge earth by God's judgments because, before the judgments are released, he has been slain and has redeemed us to God by his blood, out of every kindred, tribe, tongue, people and nation; and has made us a kingdom and priests.

Let us not forget that second bit. Let us hear nobody in the Christian community saying that worship is pointless. His qualification to take the book and to reign universally is in part this, that he makes his redeemed people a kingdom. Men and women that have learnt willingly to obey God, and then have learnt to live as priests and to fulfil their priestly function, first of all to God and then to the nations around them.

So this first stage is rightly occupied then, if man is ever going to sit upon the throne of the Lord and fulfil what is God's great purpose within human history—that is, one day to build a permanent dwelling place for himself inside creation. If that is going to be fulfilled, then it will have to be fulfilled through the greater than David, David's son. He shall build the temple. Praise God he has come—the one of whom it can be said in the fullest possible sense by God, 'I will be his Father and he shall be my Son.' He is in process of building that house already.

A question of obedience and Saul's failure

But then we noticed that, while the genealogies record that tremendous step forward which is the rise of Israel from the among the nations—their witness against the idolatrous interpretation of the universe and the worship of the powers of nature, their witness to the true God of heaven, and so forth—that was followed by a grievous going wrong. Saul, the first king, proved to be a disaster in that he committed a trespass against the Lord.

He broke faith with the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance. He did not seek guidance from the LORD. Therefore the LORD put him to death. (1 Chr 10:13–14)

Man shall sit upon the throne of the Lord, but not the likes of Saul. Does anyone suppose that God Almighty is going to hand over the throne of the universe to someone who will rebel against the word of the Lord, to someone who has not learnt to obey? Saul not only disobeyed the Lord, he went over to the other side and enquired of an evil spirit. He most certainly will never sit upon the throne of the Lord. So we might sum up that lesson. Man shall sit upon the throne of the Lord, declares Chronicles, but by whose authority shall he sit? And therein lies a big story. Just as the first man, Adam, sinned, so did the first king and in the same manner—

a disobedience to the word of God. As we apply that lesson to ourselves, let's underline it. We would have had no hope of ever sitting upon the throne of the Lord. We were once disobedient, we came under the condemnation that as by one man's disobedience, sin entered into the world. By that same act of disobedience, the many were constituted sinners. Blessed be the name of the Lord that by the obedience of one, and the one great act of obedience in Gethsemane and the cross, the many shall be constituted righteous (see Rom 5:12, 15–16).

Our example—the obedience of Christ

Therein is all our hope, but let us then remember the practical side of this question. The Lord is in process of making us a kingdom and his people who obey. Here is an emphasis that we should not allow to escape us. We frequently and very rightly say that he who believes has eternal life. That is blessedly true, but allow me to read a verse which you will know but which is not quite so commonly quoted.

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience . . .

Not that he was ever disobedient and had to learn how to obey, but he learnt what it means to obey. Obeying God in the glory of heaven will be a comparatively easy thing. Obeying him here on earth is something else, and our Lord learnt by practical experience what it means and what it costs to obey God in a runaway world of rebellion. But now listen to what else it says.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect [in the sense of 'having qualified'], he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. (Heb 5:7–9)

Paul, the great expositor of justification by faith and not by works, tells us at the end of his epistle that the gospel is made known for the obedience of faith (Rom 16:26). That is an emphasis that we should not allow to be lost. Justified by faith, we certainly are, and from conversion onwards, we are being taught to obey. Repentance and faith can in some senses be described as an act of obedience. We bow to God's word and accept it. We obey his command to repent and to trust the Saviour. Repentance towards God, owning God to be right and his condemnation to be just, and accepting his command to bow the knee and profess Jesus as Lord.

As we begin the path, it will not be by our merit that we share Christ's throne, but the evidence that we are really the Lord's is that we learn to obey. There is no possibility that people who have throughout life carelessly disobeyed the Lord should share the throne with him, is there? At least I put it in the form of a question, but the lesson of Saul reminds us that if a man will deliberately and positively disobey God and go over to the other side, there can be no thought of his sitting on the throne of the Lord.

David established as king—unification of the nation

That said then, we move on to the next stage and let me remind you how it begins and where it ends. At the end of chapter 10, Saul was slain and the kingdom turned over to David, the son of Jesse. The second stage goes on until chapter 14, when at a certain point we read:

Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, also masons and carpenters to build a house for him [a house in the sense of a royal palace]. And David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel, and that his kingdom was highly exalted for the sake of his people Israel. (14:1-2)

So now he was not only king, but established, and began himself to build a royal house, in the sense of a royal family. What were the elements then in this stage? Reason would suggest that this stage ought to show progress upon the first stage, taking things further. What, then, is the next major bit of progress on the pathway to sitting upon the throne of the Lord, on the pathway to the building of the great temple of God and the organizing and achieving of the worship and service of God, on the part of God's people? If I would put one word on the progress part, it would be the unification of the people of God.

This stage alas, like the first one, ended with a very sad lapse—the attempt to bring up the ark in the wrong fashion, which was met by the judgment of God. And I hasten to declare that the going wrong eventually taught Israel, and David in particular, a very important lesson and the wrong was put right when the third stage dawned. We still have a loving God who can make our mistakes, in the end, serve the purpose of our further education and help us to be victorious at last.

First then, the good piece of progress: the unification of the people of God. What has that got to do with the great purpose of the book, the building of the house of God, the organizing of the Levites and the priests and the people in the worship and service of God? Well, if that is the job of the man who sits upon the throne of the Lord eventually, then we can see at once why the next absolutely indispensable thing is that he should know how to unify the people of God. How shall the praise of God ever resound to God's acceptance unless the people of God eventually are unified?

In saying that, I'm realist enough to know how difficult that is to achieve here upon earth. God have mercy upon our frailty. How countless are the causes and the occasions of the disagreement among the people of God. We must come round to seeing the seriousness of division and disunity among the people of God. What Paul urges of us is not to keep the unity of the body, but to keep the unity of the spirit. There is one Holy Spirit, dwelling in every believer redeemed by the blood of Christ. Yes, we must take our stand for truth, but let us ever keep in mind the necessary objective—the unity of the people of God. How else shall the choirs of heaven function? How then was it achieved at the level of history at this stage, this second stage in the first book of Chronicles?

United to a person

First of all, let it be said that the unity of the people of God was achieved through a person, and Israel's love of a person: that is David. Let us follow therefore the elements that are given us in the text and allow ourselves to concentrate on some of the detail.

Then all Israel gathered together to David at Hebron and said, 'Behold, we are your bone and flesh'. (11:1)

In the past seven years, David had been king in Hebron over the two tribes, but the ten tribes had gone their way under Saul's progeny. The tribes had still remained divided but now the great move forward was made. The nation as a whole unified — lovely words to read: 'Then all Israel gathered together to David at Hebron'. For the ten tribes that took a great deal of grace and humility — to abandon their own capital cities and come over to what was at that moment David's capital city, Hebron. What was the secret of it? Their sense of utter, vital life unity with David — 'Behold, we are your bone and flesh'.

That is a Hebrew way of explaining the way they felt — not just subjects in his kingdom but veritable members of David, of the same bone and flesh. You cannot read it without observing that the same thing is true of the people of God. What is it that unites them? What is it that will unite them eternally? Oh, my brothers and sisters, it's that sense that each believer is joined to Christ, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Christ is more than the unifying centre with us. Beyond what this Hebrew metaphor by itself means, there is the wonderful fact stated for us clearly in Hebrews that he is not ashamed to call us his brothers. How is that? Why isn't he ashamed to call us brothers? The answer is in Hebrews 2:11:

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers.

Some theologians take it to mean that because we have been so elevated to become children of God and are children of the Father, we're one with Christ, because he's a son of the Father. That may be what the writer means. We've been so exalted that he isn't ashamed of us anymore. But there would remain an un-crossable chasm at that level between Christ and us. We are children of God, but not in the sense that he is Son of God. I take it that the argument is the other way round. It's not on the grounds of our exaltation that he's not ashamed to call us brothers; it's on the ground that he is one of us, truly human, born of a virgin, genuinely one of us. It is not our exaltation but his condescension that is the amazing thing. Isn't that why you love him? Isn't it why, amidst all the thousand and one things and opinions that we hold, this tugs at our heart? For your salvation, he became a man like you, sin apart. And because he is genuinely one of us, when he calls us brothers, the term means what it says: it is not an insincere exaggeration. He is genuinely one of us. How all the more easy it is for us to accept him as Lord and King. He is not some extraneous despot called in to come and govern the savages, but one of us. It is lovely.

A victorious King

The first ground for the unifying of Israel was Israel's appreciation of David as being one of them. Then notice it says that in time past, even when Saul was king, it was David who led them out and brought them in. The term is of course to do with leadership in warfare. He led them to the battle; he was the secret of their victories and never more so than when he met the giant Goliath and thereafter. When Saul and Jonathan were skulking in their tents, yellow with fear and panic at the sight of Goliath, it was David who led them out and conquered the giant and led Israel's armies to victory. It speaks at once to our hearts. What hope would we have in this world, in this universe, what victory could we ever claim over the powers of nature, let alone the powers of hell, were it not for him who came to lead us in the battle and fight our battles for us? We celebrate him who could say, 'In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world' (John 16:33).

I think of a colourful metaphor used by Paul in Colossians, when the very hosts of hell surrounded our Lord's cross and, as it would seem, would defy God to pardon us sinners. Satan, you know, is more interested in morality than we think he is, and in the topic of justice and righteousness. If God had dared to forgive us just by an act of power—as the governor of the universe, to choose arbitrarily to forgive us—Satan would have gone down to the abyss shouting that God had been defeated. God had been unjust. And the answer was that man on the cross, who took the long record of debt that we ourselves had signed by our own conscience, knowing we were sinners, and in our own conscience agreeing with God that we were sinners, indisputably sinners, the long record written out against us and signed in our handwriting, so to speak, by our conscience, he took it, wiped it out and nailed it to his cross (see Col 2:13–15).

For us in might came forth the mighty one;
 For us He fought the fight, the triumph won:
 The victory is ours.¹

Thanks be to God to give us such a victory through our Lord Jesus Christ over the powers of death itself. He is one of us—a real man. His death was real, so was his bodily resurrection. I like the words that the risen Lord said to his apostles when they thought they saw a spirit and he said, 'Touch me, and see. A spirit doesn't have flesh and bones, as you see me have. It is I myself' (see Luke 24:36–39). For the Lord to be 'I myself', he had to have a body, and he had a body in resurrection and will have it eternally. And the victory is given to us too. Oh, how you could go on and you preachers do it far better than I! He fought our battles, therefore we love him. We have no other leader to hide behind. It is Christ, the winner of our battles, who compels the love of his people and thus draws them together.

A Shepherd King

Then we read,

¹ Horatius Bonar (1808-1889), 'Blessed be God, our God.'

And the LORD your God said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over my people Israel.' (11:2)

So first of all, they saw that God had made him both Lord and Christ, so to speak—as Peter announced to Israel on the day of Pentecost—and they agreed with God and made him their king. That is the situation for us too, isn't it? And God said, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel'—a lovely term for a king. There were many kings in the ancient world who liked to regard themselves as shepherds, shepherd kings. That, in theory, was the role of a king—not to be a tyrannical despot but to be a shepherd of the people. How far many were from fulfilling that ideal, I'll leave you to recount! But how lovely to hear our Lord as the shepherd king speaking those beautiful words,

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (John 10:27–29)

As you will have observed, those words were not spoken to believers but to the unbelieving Pharisees. Notice the situation. Our Lord was claiming to be the shepherd king of the people of God. The Pharisees despised him, 'You, a shepherd?' And if I might say it in all reverence, here was Christ advertising himself as a shepherd: 'Yes, I'm a shepherd. What would you require of a shepherd? If a shepherd is going to be a real shepherd, one of the first qualifications is this: that he must keep his sheep. I'm telling you, gentlemen, I am the shepherd. Just look at the security I can give my sheep.' He was talking to Pharisees: they need to hear it still. This is the shepherd rightly advertising himself to his enemies. 'This is the kind of shepherd I am. I give my sheep eternal life and they will never perish.' The way to unity was rule: yes, he's a king. But notice the kind of king. He's a shepherd king who feeds, guides, cares for and knows his sheep.

A new covenant

So the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and David made a covenant with them that he should be their king and they should be his obedient servants. Let me remind you, if I may, that central to the life of the church is a celebration of a covenant which our blessed Lord Jesus has made with us, his people. That is sometimes forgotten, and in some places denied. For there are those who, for various theological reasons, feel that the new covenant which our Lord made at his cost is not for the church. (I do not have time now to discuss it. If people want to discuss that matter, it could well be brought up in question time.) When Moses made the covenant that he was given to make as a mediator with Israel, he took a basin with blood and said, 'Behold, the blood of the covenant' (Exod 24:8). When our Lord sat at the table with his own, a few hours before Calvary, he took a cup of wine and said, 'this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many' (Matt 26:28). This is the cup of the new covenant.

What are the terms of the new covenant? You say, 'Forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness. "I will not remember their sins anymore"' (see Heb 8:12). You've got it absolutely right, at

least the third bit of it! But you've omitted the first term of the covenant which is, 'I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts' (Jer 31:33). When the blessed Saviour offers us the cup of the new covenant, as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, and we take that cup, we are in symbol saying, 'Yes, Lord, I stand by your covenant. Fulfil that covenant in me yet still further, and write your laws on my heart ever more deeply.' Paul points out that it would be a serious thing to come to that supper, take that cup of the new covenant, with no intention of carrying out the Lord's will and command, and unrepentant of sin. So they made a covenant with David, or he rather with them. It is likewise that which brings believers together in their covenant union with the blessed Lord Jesus.

United to a place

Then David did a second thing for the unifying of the people of God. He took the combined forces of the united twelve tribes and went to Jerusalem, that is, Jebus, and they took this city that hitherto had been occupied by Canaanites ever since the days of Joshua. They captured the city and formed it into the new capital city for the people of God (11:4–9).

That was a stroke of genius. David already had a capital. That was Hebron, where the two tribes made him king. When the ten tribes' leaders came to David to make him king and to submit to David's rule, had David been a little bit like me, he might have said, 'Well now, gentlemen, I'm glad to see you eating humble pie. I told you that this is what it would have to come to in the end and I'm glad you've seen sense and come; and now you will give up your capital in Samaria and recognize Hebron as your capital.' But, he didn't. He chose a place that had never been occupied by Israel ever. Together they took it. They set up Jerusalem as the capital for all the tribes, without distinction. Judahites or Ephraimites, people from Beersheba in the south to Dan in the north, could regard Jerusalem as their capital, just as much as it was Naphtali's capital and Benjamin's capital. It hadn't been anybody's capital before, until David made it the capital. And so Jerusalem became the unifying city to which all the tribes equally belonged as of right.

Jerusalem

Time will fail me, like it failed the writer to the Hebrews on another occasion, to say all that ought to be said about Jerusalem. This is not a fairy story we're reading. This tactic of taking Jerusalem and setting it up as the capital city of the people of God has had mighty repercussions down through history, that are with us still. And in the plans of God and their future fulfilment, it has a pivotal importance. It would be difficult to exaggerate it. They called it the city of David. They got that right too. It was not just a city—it's David's city and thus it lasted. It was sacked by the Babylonians but rebuilt under Nehemiah. It was assaulted by Antiochus Epiphanes, but it was cleansed of idolatry by the time our blessed Lord came to Jerusalem and to the temple. Oh, what earth-stirring days they were, when at last, deliberately, the Lord took a donkey and rode on it and, accompanied perhaps by thousands of people who had followed him from Galilee, added to by the hundreds who had come out of Jerusalem to meet him, he came over the brow of Mount Olivet to the acclaim of the humble, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' (Matt 21:9); deliberately fulfilling the

prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, 'Behold, your king is coming to you . . . humble and mounted on a donkey'.

According to the plans and the prototypes of God, this is how it should happen, and that's how it did happen. He came as Jerusalem's King to his capital city on earth, son of David and rightful heir. They rejected him but even so, the key transaction of all time and eternity happened. It's not a myth, it happened here on earth just outside the gates of Jerusalem city. That city, he said, would 'be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled' (Luke 21:24), at which time the nations of the earth will be gathered against Jerusalem in their attempt to wipe from the earth this testimony that Israel has borne to the living God and to the hope of a coming Messiah. Then the Lord will come, as Zechariah 14 plainly declares, the enemy will be defeated, and the Lord will reign.

Another Jerusalem

But there's more than that. Jerusalem becomes a prototype of an even higher thing than the earthly city—the Jerusalem that is above. Abraham was given the covenant of inheritance that his seed should inherit certain acres in Palestine—as they have and will put to the full one day. But Abraham, though he was father of those who had the earthly inheritance and believed in it with all his might, looked further. He looked for a heavenly fatherland, a fatherland in heaven, says the Greek. That was Abraham's ultimate prospect: 'he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God' (Heb 11:10).

To that city belong all who trust the Saviour. The city's foundations are inscribed with the names of the apostles anyway, and of the Lamb, and me fancies, in my wilder moments, that Abraham and Sarah laid the foundations! What will be the foundations that keep that great eternal city together, and what foundations will keep the community itself, the people, built into an eternal unity? The foundations are those laid by God in the experience of Abraham and Sarah—justification by faith and justification by works. And then there are the gates of that city. Just as the gates in an ancient city were the place where the government sat to carry on the governing of the city, so the eternal city shall have gates; and on the gates will be the names of the children of Israel, for we are being prepared, not only to be members of that eternal city, but to reign with Christ. So then, the unification of the people of God.

Spiritual growth and gifts

There is one other topic that I must deal with and I shall deal with it in brief. Amidst the unity, there was diversity. It is not that every citizen was monotonously and indistinguishably like another citizen, and when I think of the differences in heaven, I'm somewhat glad. It would be monotonous to have how many trillions all looking exactly the same. You couldn't distinguish one from another! You say, 'We shall all be like Christ,' and so we shall. Does that mean we shall all be identical and indistinguishable? You won't know Abraham from Lot and Lot from me? No, surely not. We shall all be like Christ, what there is of us, and some will arrive in heaven as spiritual babies, won't they, and some will arrive in heaven, as Paul indicates in Colossians 1, as spiritually mature grown-ups. 'I want to present everyone,' he says, 'grown up' (see v. 28). That is important, isn't it? If we are to share Christ's administrative throne, then we must grow up into him who is the head. Think what that means in his divine

wisdom and power and control. 'Oh, grow up,' says Paul, 'you haven't got the time to fritter away. You've got to grow up into the full measure and the stature of Christ. He shall rule the universe.'

If you want to take part with him, we shall all be in the reigning house, but we won't have equal responsibilities given to us. Within Israel there was a diversity. There were the armies loyal to David, but within them there were people who had distinguished themselves in one way or another. There were the first three, then there were the thirty, then there were others mentioned and each was given his place in the rule and kingdom of David, according to what their loyalty, service and sacrifice had been for him. That is important. In the accounts of what they did, there are accounts of great valour that distinguished the one from the other. Perhaps you say, 'But how could I ever have been a great warrior? Surely they were given special gifts to start with?' You hit it on the head. We've not all been given the same gifts. You say, 'That isn't fair then.' Tell me, is it fair that you're going to heaven at all? It's not a question of fairness. It's God's grace that will see you in heaven. It's God who has placed the members in the body, even as it has pleased him. I'm never going to be an apostle: I've discovered that I'm rather late to be an apostle! And the apostles, so our Lord told them, are to sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel—so that's twelve jobs already gone and I shan't get one of them!

Pleasing God—loyalty in suffering

As far as gift is concerned, Paul points out that whether you have a big gift or a little gift, you can be all equal in this—that the job of any gift is to please God. You, my fellow believer, can please God by being what God has made you to be; and I in my little way can please God if I will do what he made me to do, and not try to be somebody else. The man with the big gift can do no more than please God. Well, I can do the same, by God's grace. That's the first thing to be reminded of, but don't let that lull us into carelessness, for it's not merely gift that counts, but the willingness to suffer. It's if we suffer with him, we shall reign with him. It's not knowledge that necessarily counts. It's loyalty and the willingness to suffer for Christ.

In that respect, the chronicler records the different circumstances in which different groups of people came to David. Some came when it was a very popular thing to do. Well, I'm glad they came. Some folks get converted amidst thousands of others getting converted and it's a very popular thing to do. Well, that's a good job they get converted then. But others came to David when it was a decidedly unpopular thing to do.

Some came when he was in Ziklag, a little toehold that was given him by the Philistines when he was fleeing like a partridge on the mountain, to escape Saul's attacks and determination to hunt him down and assassinate him. Some came when he was in Hebron, only king over the two tribes. Some came with all Israel. It's all recorded, and we likewise are writing our history, not merely for now but for eternity. We are writing today what, at the judgment seat of Christ, will determine what role we are given to play in the coming economy. Some came against great difficulties. Some came across a river in flood: they risked their lives amidst physical obstacles. Some came against the obstacles of their family life. The Benjamites, belonging to the family of Saul, came to David—with grace overcoming the pull of nature. How easy it has been for some of us to come to Christ. With others, how difficult.

A year or two ago, we had a letter from Tajikistan in response to our messages in the Russian press. Tajikistan is a predominantly Muslim country. This letter came from a student. He had been led to the Lord by some Baptist believers. He'd seen our advertisement of free literature and wrote to ask for it and said, 'You know, when I came to Christ and was baptized, my brothers beat me unmercifully to try and persuade me to renounce Christ and continue to follow the Prophet. My father got knives and cut my back to try and force me to renounce Christ. Could you please send me some literature to tell me why we have to suffer so much when we come to believe in Christ.' What could I say, who had it so easy? This too shall count. Not just great gift, but what we have been prepared to suffer for Christ.

Suffering isn't always being tied to a stake with fire underneath your feet. Suffering can be of other sorts in our polished civilization. Being prepared to take a lesser salary for the sake of the sheep of God's flock. To be prepared to face endless criticism, as elders must do, for the sake of the Lord and his people. But who shall tell of all the other ways that we're called upon to show our loyalty to our King. This too will be written, and is being written in God's book of record. All the people of God shall be one, as members of the Jerusalem that is above. Some will have rule over ten cities and some over five and some over one—if I may use the metaphor our Lord himself used, whatever the reality which lies behind it. But by our life and faithfulness, we are determining now maybe, on our side of the thing, what role we shall fulfil in the coming kingdom of Christ.

We break now for a few moments and then we shall proceed to the questions and contributions. Shall we just pray.

Sovereign Lord Jesus, thou who hast redeemed us with thy blood and fought our battles for us, and has deigned to call us thy brothers, help us now to listen to this word of exhortation from thee, we pray. Foster within us the love that thou hast implanted. Show us ever increasingly thyself and thy glory and give us hearts to obey thee and to serve thee, not counting the cost. That when the day of thy glory comes, we might hear thy word of commendation and be appointed to serve thee eternally. For thy name's sake. Amen.

Question Time

After that brief interval, we're to be given a time for questions and further contributions. We don't wish to be legalists, so by the law of the land, anything is permitted! But if our questions were directed to the parts of the book that we have already studied that would help us to concentrate our minds and make sure that we have all understood as best we can what we have been studying.

This time is not merely for questions, but for further contributions. This is a cooperative effort. We are together waiting on God. We shall help each other as best we can, according to what the Lord has given us, but let us not lose sight of the fact that we are waiting on God to hear what the Lord will say to each one of us. It is good that we help one another, as the Lord shows us different things according to our different personalities and backgrounds, so that, with all the saints, we might come to know 'what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge' (Eph 3:18–19).

Unity and Discipline

AUDIENCE: You stressed the theme of unification in relation to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In a practical way, how does that get accomplished when there are believers who dearly love the Lord Jesus Christ, but who have differences on certain doctrinal issues that may cause them to be divided one from the other? For instance, without getting into any details, there was a young brother in the assembly a number of years ago, who dearly loved the Lord but who had certain doctrinal things concerning dreams and revelations of God, which were not found in the Scriptures. In the process of time he led some of the people in the assembly away from the assembly into other churches. Of course, the elders and others were concerned about this situation. Here's a dear brother and I loved him and we could have fellowship along certain lines, but there was a time in our life when we had to separate one from another. So the person of Christ, while he unifies, he himself said he comes with a sword and his teaching would divide. How do we handle that on a practical level?

DWG: Well you, sir, probably have much more experience than I do, because I suspect you may well have been an elder in that church. My immediate comment is that the positive way to unity is loyalty to the Lord Jesus. That is what produces it. Having said that, the New Testament gives us many practical exhortations and guidance as to what happens if believers in one sense or another misbehave. For instance, in the matter of sexual immorality, Paul who pleads for the unity of believers in 1 Corinthians, nonetheless deals with the question of a man that is called a brother and professes to be a believer. If he commits certain grievous sins, he must be disciplined. Likewise for exploitative commercial practices—covetousness, as Paul

would call it—a man who has a ruinous reputation in the world as a ruthless businessman who keeps not very close to business ethics, is such a contrary witness to the spirit of Christ that a church has the right to discipline him.

Now it is certain that in the course of history, some Christian churches have exercised the business of excommunication for the most trivial things, and sometimes for personality disagreements. But it is necessary for the serious things laid down in the word of God and for preserving the unity of the people of God. If a man persists in breaking the practical unity of a church because he has a few special doctrines, that in itself is a serious thing.

My final comment would be that in this fallen world, our object must be positively to obey the Lord. So if people accuse me of being sectarian because, for instance, I believe in believers' baptism and not infant baptismal regeneration, and they accuse me of being separatist, I say that I must obey the Lord. I try in that sense to be positive. We're not obliged, in loyalty to the Lord, to go along with every wind and flight of doctrine and enter things that are no profit, as we see from Paul's letters to Titus and Timothy.

AUDIENCE: This would be the liberal element, both within the church and out of the church, which would cry for unity but compromise on the truth. We cannot put up with that: the unity must be in the Lord Jesus Christ and in honour of what he has said in his word.

DWG: Yes, we must be loyal to the Lord in our doctrine. That is most certainly so. The Apostle John talks about those that have gone out from us, who never were of us, people that deny the deity of the Lord Jesus. Loyalty to Christ demands that they be excluded and other such things that you meet. That is undoubtedly so. The other side of that question is that some people have gone to the other extreme. For instance, take the basic symbols of the bread and the wine. I can't say what your practice is in America, but I know parts of the world where, if you don't belong to our denomination, you're not allowed to take the bread and the wine.

Now that seems to me to raise a very serious problem. The bread and the wine are emblems of our Lord's sacrifice and if we ask on what grounds do we partake in the actual benefits of his sacrifice, then the answer is through faith in Christ solely. To deny the symbols of those benefits to people who already have the reality, simply on the ground that they don't agree with your methods of church discipline or church governance, that seems to me to be getting towards danger signs and signals. These are things which Paul, who wrote Galatians, might be very uncomfortable with it—if you add them to faith in Christ as a condition for partaking in the holy emblems.

If a man who claims to be a believer has so grievously sinned that he has, so to speak, forfeited all credibility as a believer, that's another matter, but a believer who is walking godly before the Lord, but holds a different view of church government or something from what I might hold myself, to deny him on those grounds of participation in what is the representation of the basic matter of salvation, would seem to me to raise a very serious question. We must guard against both extremes, would be my answer.

The throne of the Lord

AUDIENCE: *I have a technical question. Perhaps you can comment on the use of the phrase 'the throne of the Lord' in 1 Chronicles 29:23; 'the throne of his father David' in Luke 1:32; and then 'the right*

hand of the Majesty on high' in Hebrews 1:3. If there's a difference or perhaps you can just comment on that.

DWG: Some highly respected theologians would say there is a very big difference between those. There is the throne of his father David. That is the literal throne of the nation of Israel and Luke 1 is talking about that. It's the throne of Israel in the day when Israel will be restored at the second coming and that throne will be set up on earth. That Christ is the heir to that throne over Israel is a separate thing from the throne of his Father, upon which he now sits. And also, from the phrase used in Matthew 25, that when the Lord comes with his holy angels and the glory of the Father and shall sit upon the throne of his glory—that this is our Lord's exalted throne (see v. 31). So they make a difference—our Lord seated on his own throne in glory and our Lord, so to speak, sitting on the throne of Israel on earth. Now far better theologians than I hold that view. I myself find it a little bit difficult, unless you're going to think in terms of an earthly big seat in Jerusalem!

You don't have a queen here so your honoured and respected President sits on any old seat perhaps! But we keep a special seat for the Queen in England and when we speak of her ascending the throne, we could mean one of two things depending on the context. We do refer to a big chair that is kept in London at a certain place, and the dear Queen climbs up on this chair and sits on it sometimes with a crown on her head. She ascends a very literal chair in London. But in another context, when you talk of the Queen ascending the throne, you mean when she began her reign. So I can say that the Queen now occupies the throne of England, even if at this very moment she is probably in bed! She's not sitting on the throne, that literal chair, all the time. Now therefore when we read these terms in Scripture, I think we have to use our judgment as to what is being implied.

If our Lord is seated on the throne of glory in heaven—on the Father's throne—does that mean there's a big chair up in heaven somewhere and he sits on this big chair, or is this a metaphorical phrase which tells us that he occupies the throne of the universe, the throne that is rightly God's? If therefore it means that he occupies the position of government, that is as King, I don't see why we shouldn't also apply it in that sense in relation to the throne of an earthly Israel, without necessarily sitting on a big chair in Jerusalem.

A voluntary unity

AUDIENCE: To get back to the question of unity, it just struck me that in the illustration you used of David uniting the nation, David became the focus. None of the people that came to him were forced to come. They came of their own volition, out of a love for him, and I think that we could take the same thing and apply it as far as the church today is concerned. That as we draw closer to the Lord, it is affection for him that's going to draw us closer to one another and result in unification.

DWG: Thank you very much for that comment. That is so, and it's a positive way of producing unity. All I would add is that we, because of the naughtiness of our hearts, can sometimes persuade ourselves that we love the Lord and are being loyal to him, when there isn't a great deal of evidence in our lives. 'If you love me,' he says, 'you will keep my commandments' (John 14:15). But that said, it is certainly the person of Christ that is the key to our unity and

you can see it among the people of God. If the Holy Spirit takes a passage of his word and talks to the heart of the believers, it's got to be a very cold heart that doesn't respond to Christ.

AUDIENCE: Said in a negative way, the verses that come to my mind are 1 Corinthians 11:18–19, 'For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.' Can you comment on that verse regarding unity?

DWG: Well that is, as you know, a difficult verse. I tend to take a very practical way of thinking about it. You will recall that our Lord said to his disciples, 'For it is necessary that temptations [in Greek the word means 'stumbling blocks'] come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!' (Matt 18:7). It is in that sense inevitable in this world that such things will come. The original meaning of the term 'factions' is not merely difference of doctrine, but party spirits that split the church. Perhaps in one sense, because it is a fallen world, that is inevitable and the Epistles are warning that such things will happen in the last days. They will come, professing to be members of the church, but 'having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions' (2 Tim 4:3).

But in God's mercy such things can turn out to be of benefit. For example, when you get serious wrong doctrine about the person of Christ and there comes a split, it does in that sense serve to emphasize what is vital to the Christian faith. So John in one of his letters refers to certain individuals:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.
(1 John 2:19)

John presumably is speaking of 'us' in the sense of apostles. These were men who were professing teachers in the church—professed, therefore, to be in sympathy with the apostles, but in fact they weren't, and took to teaching doctrines that contradicted the very foundation of apostolic faith. They went out, both doctrinally and then physically. It served to make clear that they were not genuinely of us. That is sometimes very necessary in the church. If you get folks that in the name of Christian theology teach that Christ was mistaken and that Christ was a sinner like everybody else, and deny his bodily resurrection and deny his atoning sacrifice and deny his literal coming again, then if you don't take a stand against it, you are indeed compromising the fundamentals of the faith and confusing the world outside as to what Christians stand for. So at that level, yes, and in that sense it is inevitable, it seems to me, that such heresies will come; and they have come in the course of the church.

AUDIENCE: Yes, that is certainly true, that they voluntarily gathered themselves to David, but I can't help but think of the mixed multitude that went out from Egypt along with the Israelites, drawn by the sensational workings of God amongst his people. Similarly, the church will attract those who do not know Christ, or do not have a desire for that. That'll manifest itself in time.

DWG: Oh, surely, it will indeed. As Jude put it, there were ‘certain people [who] crept in unnoticed’ (v. 4). True believers don’t do that. If you’re a true believer, you don’t need to ‘creep in’, but some do that and then come up with their permissive morality.

Jerusalem Metaphors

AUDIENCE: I have a question and I’d like to know, in Galatians 4:25–26 it seems to talk to us about the new Jerusalem being our mother; and in Hebrews 12:22 the new Jerusalem seems to be a meeting place; and then in Revelation 21 it seems to be a bride. Could you make a little comment upon those three distinctive verses?

DWG: At first sight, it seems a little confusing. But it’s important to remember that when these terms are used, they are being used metaphorically. It is possible to have metaphors that on the surface appear contradictory, but are not contradictory in the truth they represent. So Christ is a stone, but he’s also a bridegroom and he’s a shepherd, and in addition to that, he is a whole host of things. Now at first sight, how can you be a bridegroom if you are a stone? But these are different aspects of his character, expressed in those different metaphors.

Now when Paul says the Jerusalem that’s above is the mother of us all, he is using Old Testament and taking the story of Abraham and Sarah and Isaac as a prototype. He says that Sarah represents the Jerusalem which is above, which is the mother of us all and is free. How does that make sense? How can Sarah be the mother of us all? In Hebrew thinking, you could use the term ‘son of’ to represent somebody ‘who shows the same character as’. So a son of Abraham is a person that shows the same kind of faith as Abraham showed. A child of Sarah would be somebody who shows the same kind of faith as Sarah showed. Abraham and Sarah were the two people in whose lives God hammered out the principle of justification by faith, daring to believe the word of God, the promise of God, as distinct from trying by your own effort to produce the promise of God, instead of trusting God to do his work.

And Paul says that when Abraham and Sarah concocted that scheme of trying to fulfil God’s promise themselves, by Abraham’s taking of Hagar the slave girl, the product was not a freeborn child, but a slave. He was a child of a slave woman, who was a slave technically in the family. That wouldn’t do for God: God wants a child born of a free woman. And the child Isaac was born of the free woman, Sarah. Because Sarah corrected her former mistake and, instead of trying by her own effort to effect the promise of God, she learnt to trust the God of the impossible, and eventually produced Isaac by God’s own power. In that same sense, those who insist on trying to keep the law for salvation and rely on their own merit, only produce in themselves slavery; whereas those who follow Sarah and Abraham and learn to put faith in him who justifies the ungodly, their faith is counted for righteousness. Forthwith, they form part of the great community that shall inhabit eternity. A community of all, like Abraham and Sarah, whose very foundation is that same faith in God.

So that’s one aspect of the community. All who are there will be built on that foundation. But secondly, Hebrews 12 says, yes, it is a meeting place where God himself shall dwell. It is interesting to notice in passing that the writer to the Hebrews doesn’t say we *shall* come to it, but he says we *have* come to it. We have already come to it. We are already citizens of heaven — ‘our citizenship is in heaven’ (Phil 3:20). While we don’t indulge in mysticism, we have a

certain amount of communion—at least I do, I hope you do—with Abraham and Sarah. For instance, I say to myself as I read Genesis, ‘Good old Abraham, I know what he’s talking about. I’ve had that experience.’ We’ve already come to that glorious city. One day we shall be literally, physically there. So these are different aspects. On the other side, of course, we’re not there yet and, like Abraham, we are pilgrims still looking for the city whose builder and designer is God.

Genuine salvation v ‘believism’

AUDIENCE: This afternoon, you used the terms ‘justification by faith’ and ‘justification by works’. I wonder if you could comment on the teaching today of the lordship of Christ required from salvation, versus easy ‘believism’. In other words, there are those that say you cannot be saved unless you first make Christ the Lord of your life, as opposed to those that say that all you have to do is believe and you’re saved.

DWG: Well the shortest comment is that the only way of salvation is to confess Jesus as Lord. I myself was brought up by God-fearing men who thought that repentance was a Jewish term, and to preach repentance was to preach works; and that in the day of grace, this was inappropriate, so we mustn’t preach repentance: you only preach faith in Christ. They meant it well, but this was dispensationalism gone to seed. We read that Paul went about everywhere—he told the church at Ephesus, and that was certainly a Gentile church predominantly—preaching repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus. We must preach repentance. Secondly, yes it is through faith in Christ, and that involves confessing him as Lord.

Now I can’t speak with any authority of what happens over here, but someone told me at one stage when he was discussing this thing that he was persuaded of this doctrine that you can be a believer without confessing Jesus as Lord. When I quoted to him Romans 10:9, he gave me the explanation that had been given him: that here the word ‘Lord’ doesn’t mean Lord of our lives, it simply means you confess Jesus as Jehovah, because in Old Testament Hebrew, the name Yahweh, Jehovah, is in the ancient Greek Septuagint translation translated in Greek as *Kurios*, which means Lord. And that comes about because Jews, by the time the New Testament was written and by the time those early translations were made, wouldn’t pronounce the name Yahweh. Anywhere that it occurred in the text, they said *Adonai*, which means Lord. They do it today still. So the Greek translators being Jews translating into Greek, put *Kurios* for Yahweh.

So to come back to what my friend said, ‘Romans 10:9 simply means that you are to confess that Jesus is God—Jehovah—not that he’s Lord of your life’, I found that bordering on the comical. Fancy coming to God and saying, ‘Now, Lord God Almighty, I now declare I do believe that Jesus is your Son, the Son of God—in fact, God incarnate. But I’m not intending just at the moment to make him Lord of my life. Thank you for salvation. I can have salvation if I merely admit that he is the Son of God.’

Really? You want forgiveness of sins: what are you being saved from? Well, the first commandment is ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength’ (see Deut 6:5). Fancy coming to God and saying, ‘I believe that Jesus is the Son of

God, God incarnate. I'm obliged by your law to love him with all my heart, mind, soul and strength. Thank you, God, but I don't need to do that. I'm here for forgiveness and I'm going to ask for forgiveness with the intention for the moment of carrying on with the biggest sin there ever is and could be—for not loving him with all my heart, mind, soul and strength.' It's one thing to say that I want to love him with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, but I'm a weakling, have mercy on me. But to say that I don't need to receive him as Lord of my life—that I can be forgiven even if I've no intention for the moment of loving him as my Lord and God—would be a complete and dangerous nonsense.

AUDIENCE: The problem we have today is children going to camp and they come home and they claim that they were saved; but it's not really clear what had happened, and they're not really clear what had happened. And so it becomes a danger, because later on when they grow up a little bit more and they want to be baptized and come into fellowship and you ask them, 'Well how did you get saved?', there's no real clear understanding in their minds as to how they got saved, or really why or how they know they're saved, so it's a real problem.

DWG: Well I'm sure that is so, sir. Our Lord is on record saying that little children can believe (see Matt 19:14), and I have a sister whose age is undisclosed, but she's older than I am and she says she was saved when she was five and has lived now for eighty years to prove the truth of it!

But on the other side, we don't always help young people if we force them into professions of salvation when they haven't understood what's happening anyway and therefore, when they grow older, they feel a bit like hypocrites and they feel there was nothing in it. They're much more difficult to reach then than they would have been if one had let them develop naturally.

Well, thank you for those questions.

A Dwelling Place for God

Closing message

Now shall we take our Bibles and read, first of all, some portions from the books of 1 & 2 Chronicles.

For David said, 'Solomon my son is young and inexperienced, and the house that is to be built for the LORD must be exceedingly magnificent, of fame and glory throughout all lands. I will therefore make preparation for it.' So David provided materials in great quantity before his death. Then he called for Solomon his son and charged him to build a house for the LORD, the God of Israel. David said to Solomon, 'My son, I had it in my heart to build a house to the name of the LORD my God. But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "You have shed much blood and have waged great wars. You shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood before me on the earth. Behold, a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of rest. I will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies. For his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever. Now, my son, the LORD be with you, so that you may succeed in building the house of the LORD your God, as he has spoken concerning you.'" (1 Chr 22:5-11)

Then Solomon said, 'The LORD has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. But I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in for ever.' (2 Chr 6:1-2)

Now therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you have spoken to your servant David. But will God indeed dwell with men on earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you, that your eyes may be open day and night towards this house, the place where you have promised to set your name, that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers towards this place. And listen to the pleas of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray towards this place. And listen from heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive. (vv. 17-21)

And now arise, O LORD God, and go to your resting-place, you and the ark of your might. Let your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let your saints rejoice in your goodness. O LORD God, do not turn away the face of your anointed one! Remember your steadfast love for David your servant. As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. (6:41-7:1)

May God give us good understanding of his word.

The world's beginning

In his magnificent address yesterday morning, John Lennox called our attention to the beginning of things², announcing with the authority of God's word that this world of ours did not always exist and is not eternal. This world had a beginning, and in the beginning it was God who, by his divine and creative word, commanded this world to appear. And by his informative word, he filled the universe with the necessary information for its age-long development. This morning I want to take you to the other end of things, and ask you to stand in your imagination at the point when our particular part of the universe, and probably the universe as a whole, come to their end.

It is a very interesting thing to me, to watch the change in the outlook of the scientists over the short span of my little lifetime. In my youth, somewhat after Queen Victoria was dead, the scientists had confidently proclaimed to the world that the universe is eternal. It is constantly being supplied with energy that will keep it going for ever. They dignified their theory with the label 'The steady state theory', and one of the national newspapers announced that in a very few months or weeks, they would supply the evidence that proved the steady state theory to be correct. But the evidence never came. In fact, it diminished.

The world's end

Now the majority view of the cosmologist is that our world not only had a beginning, but one day it will have an end. That's very interesting, because the Bible has been saying it for years! The Day of the Lord will come, and the heavens and the earth that are now, will be dissolved (see 2 Pet 3:10). And amidst the climactic burning of atomic fusion or whatever, our present earth and the heavens will disappear. It doesn't matter how long it is in the future, the main point is that our present world is temporary. It was never designed to be anything else but temporary—a stepping stone only. There's something more magnificent and eternal. It is a thing to be etched into our hearts. It is difficult when we are younger—easier when you are in the honoured position of a septuagenarian!—to observe that life is temporary. How fleeting it is, and it will give place to eternity. What we do in this temporary life will determine our status in the eternal world.

What's the point?

So stand with me, if you will, at that point when earth has now disappeared, and ask yourself that provocative question, 'So the old world has gone, so what? What has it all been about? What has it been for?' Do you remember that vivid illustration we heard yesterday about Aunt Sally's cake? The scientists analysed it and could tell us all its ingredients but the scientists couldn't tell us what the cake was for. It was only Aunt Sally herself who could tell you why she made it. What's the world been about? And not only what is creation for, but the whole long development of history, what has that been about?

² For further details see John Lennox, *God's Undertaker*. Lion Hudson, 2009

It is still a marvellously exhilarating thing to observe the progress that mankind has made on the earth, not least in technological things. My brother, my sister, what do you think of earth's progress? You say it's a wicked thing. Really? Well, I notice some of you are wearing watches. I notice you have computers and these portable telephones, whatever they're called. And you seem to use them and approve of them, so I gather you approve of technological progress. Where is it all leading? Is it a wasted venture? Where is history and all mankind's progress going? And superimposed is the most important question — what has been the point of redemption?

Redemption

As we stand at the beginning of a new year — all or most of us people redeemed by the blood of Christ — we do well to ask ourselves at this point, why has Christ redeemed me? What is it for? Peter himself, in his grandfatherly way, would tell us that we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot, foreknown before the foundation of the world (see 1 Pet 1:18–20). You have been redeemed at immeasurable cost. God has paid the precious blood of Christ for your minutes, your seconds, your hours, your months, your years, and soon they will be gone. So Peter says, 'conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile' (v. 17). Time is not to be wasted. All of life, whether sacred or secular, must be geared into the predominant purpose of God — why he made the world, why he maintains it, why he has facilitated man's progress and, above all, why and for what purpose he has redeemed us.

God's purpose

So if we want to know what the purposes of God have been, let us stand in our imagination with John, the great seer and writer of the Revelation, as he stood in his vision, at the edge of time where eternity was about to begin. And he said, 'I saw heaven and earth flee away and no place was found for them' (see 20:11). Then what? What has God salvaged? What, if anything, has God got out of time, for eternity? When the scaffolding of earth disappears, what has God been doing all the time? God is left with what his heart has been set on to produce for eternity. Says John, 'I saw it with my own eyes. I saw a new heaven and a new earth, and I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, having the very great glory of God, adorned as a bride for her bridegroom' (see 21:1–12).

So what has God got out of it? A city, a holy city — the new Jerusalem. If it's called the new Jerusalem, what was the old Jerusalem? Well, Jerusalem was the high capital of the Davidic kings, founded by the great David, as the centre that unified the nation. It formed, for them, a capital city that bound the whole nation together, the centre and heart of the nation. But for David and Solomon and its subsequent kings, it was also the administrative centre of the nation and of the empire that God had given them. And as we watch with John the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, we see that it's a city and it's going to be a Jerusalem, only a new Jerusalem. And it has twelve gates. Now in the ancient city, gates were more than just a way into the city. They were the place where the elders of the city sat to conduct the business of the city, and its external relationships and diplomacy, and to organize all the life

that took place in and outside the city. And as the angel pointed out to John, this great Jerusalem has twelve gates: it will be the administrative centre of the eternal universe that God is planning.

I'm delighted at that. I know we have to have old people's homes. Perhaps one of these days my legs and brain will get so wonky, I shall have to go to one. I'm not altogether looking forward to it; but some of my friends seem to think about heaven as an old people's home, and they sing lustily, 'When all my labours and trials are o'er,'³ and they sit down for ever in the heavenly old peoples home and put their feet up, and never have to do a stroke of work again. Well, it would be very nice for the first five minutes, but to spend a whole eternity in an old people's retirement home? Come, come, it would get a little boring, wouldn't it? You say, 'No, we won't do that: we shall stand up sometimes and sing a few hymns.' Well, that will be marvellous. I do look forward to it. I stood on the balcony yesterday listening to you singing and as the song came up it lifted my spirits, and I thought how wonderful it will be to dwell above and listen to the eternal choirs of heaven, singing their praises of God from their redeemed and utterly tuneful voices. But an eternity of singing, always singing and nothing else? It would get a bit monotonous, wouldn't it?

It will have singing too but it's going to be a city, an administrative centre. And according to the many parables our Lord Jesus told, God is going to use his redeemed people as the administrators of his eternal kingdom. And that casts its implications back on this life. What is life for? Get hold of this. Whatever career God leads you into—in secular things and all your spiritual exercises—should be geared to the purpose of God, for the task he has for you in the eternity to come. That is why the New Testament describes Christians as the body of Christ. And the context in which the New Testament talks of these things is exceedingly interesting.

God's administration

In Colossians 1, we are told that the whole universe was created in Christ and by Christ, and for Christ. And then it names particular things that were created, whether they be thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities (see v. 16). And the very terms that are used are pointing to elevated servants, created servants of the King himself, with responsibility over thrones and dominions and authorities to administer the great universe that God has created to the glory of God. Some of those great principalities and powers have remained loyal to God, some have rebelled. But now the Lord Jesus, who is not only head of creation because he made it, says Colossians 1, he is head of a new order for he is not merely the firstborn of creation, he's the firstborn from the dead, and risen, and glorified. The man Christ Jesus is going to have the whole universe of God subjected to him. He shall run it, and how shall he run it? And here is the marvellous and exciting and significant thing. It is not to angels that God has subjected that world to come but, says Hebrews, 'What is man, that you are mindful of him . . . you have crowned him with glory and honour, putting everything in subjection under his feet' (Heb 2:6-8). Man is going to rule and administer the great eternity for God.

³ Charles H. Gabriel (1856-1932), 'O that will be glory' (1900).

The body of Christ

And how will he do it? It will not be Christ and simply a series of created potentates, dominions and authorities—simply as creatures and nothing more. God has had a marvellous plan in mind and, since Pentecost, God has revealed what it is—an extraordinary new phenomenon in the universe, a thing that is called the body of Christ. It is formed of the blessed Lord Jesus and all who have trusted him, each one having been baptized in one Spirit into that body, and made to drink of the one Spirit (see 1 Cor 12:13). It is a magnificent and mysterious wonder, for now Christ administers the great eternity, himself the head, through people that are his very body and share his life and are part of him. They do not lose their personality, but at the same time, they're not completely independent. They are in Christ, members one of another, members of the risen head. They will form his administrative unit for all eternity.

It is exceedingly important to get hold of the idea that, in a New Testament church, the members are members of the body of Christ, sharing the same life of Christ. It is not just an arrangement for time: the body of Christ is eternal. It is being produced and will be completed for its task of being the vehicle of Christ's administration of the ages. And not only that, but as John saw this city coming down, the administrative headquarters of eternity, he heard a voice saying something else. This great city, the new Jerusalem, is to be the dwelling place of God. 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them' (Rev 21:3).

God's dwelling place

Let's pause at that moment then and consider the implication of it. We get so used to ideas that sometimes we miss their significance. Yesterday we were reminded that the universe had a beginning. God didn't have a beginning. God is independent of the universe. That tells us that God didn't need the universe as a place to live in. When he created the universe, it was not part of him. Pantheism says that the universe is part of God. That isn't true. God remains the transcendent Lord, outside and independent of his universe. The marvellous thing that now we learn from the New Testament, and from the passage we've read from the Old, is that God's purpose in creating this universe would be that one day the transcendent God might come and enter his own universe and live inside it, and be approachable to his creatures. That's stupendous, isn't it?

Christ in you

And I've yet something else to tell you. It was God's plan, not only to get inside this universe but, listen carefully, to get inside some of his creatures. Can you take it in? You say you can hardly believe it! You're a Christian, and don't you believe that already God has been active in his plans of redemption? Since you trusted Christ, Christ has come and dwells in you. Your very hope of glory is this—'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Col 1:27). We have known it ever since we were saved but let's pause this morning in our meditation to ponder the wonder of it. Frail little me, creature of God, and yet in God's great redemption plan, Christ the very Son of God has come and entered me, and lives within me. It's marvellous, isn't it?

Suppose you had the ability to make robotic lions or monkeys or such things. It would be an interesting way to spend a spare Saturday afternoon, manipulating the robots and getting

them roaring and prancing around. But you would be looking on from the outside of these things. You wouldn't know what they felt—what it's like to be a robotic lion or monkey. It would be fantastic if somehow you could get into their world, and into them. You say, 'I wouldn't want to do that. I'm a human being and I wouldn't want to descend to that level and be a robotic lion, and get inside a robotic lion.' No, I don't suppose you would. But can you take it in that the transcendent Lord not only made you as a creature, but made you that one day he might live in you? Can you explain why God would ever do that with you, my brother, my sister? That God's own Son should come from heaven to die for you and pay the debt of your guilt. That the Son of God should become human, and remain human, that he might save human beings, and that he might live in them, and they in him. One of the great goals of creation is this: the dwelling place of God is with man, and he will dwell with them. And what is the dwelling place made up of? Redeemed men and women—such a magnificent thing!

Solomon's temple—a prototype

Because it is so magnificent, I want to take you back to the Old Testament and that book of Chronicles which we've read from, in order to get you to study with me for a few moments what I shall call a prototype of God's eternal plan. Now, I know that in some quarters typology has gone out of fashion, but please notice I am not talking typology this morning. I'm going to ask you to consider the building of the house of God by King Solomon in the ancient world, not as a type, but as a prototype of God's eternal plan. What do I mean by that and how would it help us to use the Old Testament in that fashion? Let me use an analogy.

Suppose you took me to one of your famous aviation engineering firms and they were in the middle of producing the latest version of their super-duper jumbo jet. You say, 'Come along, Gooding, and we'll show you this marvellous wonder. It'll be able to fly not only up aloft, but into space and down again, and take you to Australia in three hours flat.' So in I go to see this wonder, but all I can see is a vast array of bits of iron and girders, and wires, and switches. It looks to me just a tangle of things and I can't make a lot of sense of it. If I asked what this is supposed to be, you would say, 'You'll have to wait to see the finished product to see what it's really like.'

And then a thought strikes you, 'What we could do is show you a model we've made of it.' That's what engineers do. When they're going to make a big jumbo jet, they first of all make a small model of it, and they test it in the wind tunnel and find out the weaknesses and modify the model here and there. The model gives you a kind of a picture of what the final reality will be. So I could understand now what this great machine is going to look like, and what this part here is for, and how this other part works. And I get some idea of what the big product will eventually be.

That's how God has worked in history. He had this purpose in mind to dwell among men, to have a dwelling place among men, even before he created the universe. We were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Before he flung the stars in space, he determined to create you, and then to redeem you, and then to regenerate you, and then to raise you to the level of sons and daughters of the Most High, and then to form you into a dwelling place in which he might dwell for eternity. That's why he made the universe. Ultimately, that's all it's for. But because this was in the heart of God as his eternal plan, in the course of history God

has made several models, so to speak—prototypes of the eventual reality—and one of those prototypes was the temple that Solomon made in Jerusalem city. So let's look at the prototype for a moment and ask some questions about it.

Why the temple?

If we asked Solomon, 'Tell us about this great temple you have built, what is it for?' 'Well,' says he, 'it's a dwelling place for God. It's a place for God to put his name there.'

What does that mean? When I go through the American countryside and see your beautiful homes with their spacious lawns, it always attracts my attention that on the front lawn there is a post box, and on the post box there's a name—Robinson or Smith or whoever. It's just a label. I don't know who Robinson is or what he looks like, or what kind of a person he is. The name is just a name. But when Solomon made the temple for the name of God, it isn't that he stuck the name of Jehovah on the front door and said, 'This is where Jehovah lives.' No, it was more than that.

The temple was built for the name of God so that as people came to that temple and saw the wealth and the magnificence of it, they would say, 'Is God like that?' As they watched the priests at their service and listened to the hymns the Levites sang; as they observed the ceremonies and saw the purity and holiness of the place; and as they listened to the priests expound God's word, and explain the meaning of redemption and sacrifice, and forgiveness through the blood of the Lamb, then people would begin to say, 'Is this what God is like?' That was why God had the house built.

When God built the universe, he built it in such a way that if you look at the universe you will see certain things about God. What will you see? As you watch the galaxies and the stars, and the sun and the moon, you will see his divine power, and his Godhood. Only a God could have made it. You'll be awestruck by his power. And then if you have the time and the brains, you'll be awestruck by the intricacy of the design. Look at that tiny little cell—the magnificent wonder of the mind of God that he made such a thing. You can see a lot from creation. There is a lot you can't see from creation, particularly as we look upon it now, with its death and dislocation, and disaster. And if a mother gives birth to a disabled child, what shall we see of God in that? Our God was not content to have just a physical creation to show out his glory. There is another way in which he wanted to show us what he is like.

He determined therefore to build a house. The prototype house that Solomon built for the name of God was so that people might come and see not just the building but its service and how God revealed himself in all its institutions. So that people might see something of the holiness of God, and the beauty of God, and the love of God, and how his heart pulsates for mankind to bring them forgiveness and redemption, and how they may have peace with him. That was God's idea.

From prototype to reality

We transfer it to ourselves. The New Testament tells us that, even now, angels and principalities and powers are being educated by watching the church—'so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places' (Eph 3:10). Just fancy that. And we are reliably told that when God

created the universe, the morning stars sang for joy, and the sons of God, that is the angels, clapped their hands. That would have been a wonderful thing—to stand at the dawn of creation and watch God building his universe through those successive days.

I picture to myself the archangels, Michael and Gabriel, standing around and Michael nudging Gabriel and saying, ‘What do you think the Almighty is doing now? And that blue planet down there, what’s that?’

‘Well, we call that earth.’

‘And what on earth are all these creatures?’

‘I understand that the Almighty is going to give man the chance to give them names, but that actually is a hippopotamus; and there are butterflies, and crocodiles, and lions.’

‘Wow, the sheer ingenuity of the Creator. Marvellous.’

And then there came man. I don’t know whether Michael got a bit nervous at that.

‘And what is this? It seems to have a brain, and can talk, and the Almighty is speaking to this new creature, and it can speak to the Almighty.’

‘At least we can take comfort in this, he’s lower than us. He can’t move around the universe like we can.’

Christ’s condescension

What an object lesson it was for the principalities and powers when, one day, they saw the Son of God, Son of the Most High, step down from his throne, and become man. And Gabriel says to Michael, ‘What is the Son of the Most High doing now, going lower than us? Why is he humbling himself like this, to be born in a little manger?’ What lessons the principalities and powers learned: the unexpected things of the heart of God.

But what did the angels say when they saw rebellious man take the Son of the Most High, pulling the hair from his cheeks and spitting in his face, and nailing him to a tree? Surely Michael expected that God would call upon the angels to intervene. What a lesson they learned when they saw that God seemed to do nothing and, at last, his Son cried, ‘My God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Matt 27:46). How can you explain it to any angel, that God would do it for a rebel human being? ‘Yes, but Michael, he loved them, you see, and he’s bearing their punishment.’ How can an angel take it in? What a God he is!

Christ’s resurrection

And then they saw the next wonder. God raised him from the dead, and raised him to his right hand. This was extraordinary. It had never happened in all the whole course of history in heaven before. The heavens had to open, and there came back, not simply the Son of God as he was in eternity past, but there came into the presence of the Father, the human Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God and man as well. And to Michael’s amazement, the man Jesus was asked to ascend above the angels and sit on the very throne of God.

If that wasn’t enough of wonder, what do you think the angels have been saying to themselves about you, as you sit here? When they understand that, in the purposes of God, when he raised Christ from the dead, he raised you from the dead; and when he set his Son at his right hand, he set you at his right hand, and that he has joined you with his Son for all eternity. What a lesson they have to learn. And that’s why God has saved you, and is building you into his house, a house for the name of God, so that for all eternity intelligent beings may

come and look at you. And as they look at you, the redeemed of the Lord, and watch your service and hear your praise and see your activity, they might learn what God is like, who has put his name within you!

Exceedingly magnificent

There was a difficulty, however. David said about his son that he was to build this house but the house must be ‘exceedingly magnificent’ (1 Chr 22:5). Of course, it had to be. If God was going to dwell in the house, the house couldn’t be some poor broken down bungalow or other thing. ‘The house of God has to be exceedingly magnificent,’ said David to his son. And I turn aside to tell you and remind you that if you are part of God’s house, you’ve got to be exceedingly magnificent too. It’s an unusual thought—fancy strutting out of the room this morning, saying, ‘I’ve just learned that I’m magnificent.’ But you’ve got to be: not with flashy, outward adornment, but exceedingly magnificent as sons and daughters of the Most High, built into the temple of God with the name of God on you, and the Lord Jesus living within you. Oh, my dear brother and sister, we’ve got to learn to behave, haven’t we? Our behaviour has got to be magnificent. Our reactions have got to be magnificent. Our personalities have so to be refined by the grace of the Holy Spirit that we are magnificent. That is God’s intent.

Infinity in the finite

But even when the temple was built, Solomon had a little bit of a problem, and he said to God, ‘Now I’ve built you a house, Lord, but will God indeed dwell on earth with men? The whole of the heavens cannot contain you. How much less this house that I have built.’ And the problem is a very big theological problem. Here’s this beautiful house in Jerusalem, how will the transcendent God come and dwell in a house like that? When the highest heaven can’t contain him, how will he get inside a little house like this? It’s a problem that Solomon had.

You see, when Solomon built that house, he wasn’t saying, ‘God is omnipresent, God fills the universe.’ So he does, but Solomon wasn’t saying, ‘I built this house as a symbol that God is everywhere.’ Certainly not. When he built that house and God came and presenced himself there, it was a question of God was in this house, here, and not there. Here, and not somewhere else. This was a unique dwelling place for God on earth, where God lived with men. That was the point of it. ‘How could God possibly do it,’ said Solomon, ‘when the highest heavens cannot contain him’ (see 2 Chr 2:6). And you say, ‘How can he come, therefore, and live in our hearts?’ How can you get God inside you when the highest heavens cannot contain him? Even if you got two billion believers and put them all together, they wouldn’t be big enough, because they’ll still be finite. How can you get God inside?

David’s greater Son

If we look at the prototype, the answer to that problem is to be found in this—the man who built the house was not just any ordinary man. King David had longed to build that house, but he wasn’t allowed to. God told King David that one day he would have a son, and that son would build the house. And this is what God said about David’s son, ‘I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. He shall build the house’ (see 1 Chr 17:12–13). The house was built by the son, not merely the son of David, but the son who stood in this special

relationship with God. God will be a father to him and he will be a son to God. When we turn the page of the New Testament, we discover that Solomon was but the prototype. When the reality came, it would be fulfilled in a far higher sense.

The builder of this house, this unique house, was to be literally the Son of the Father—God his Father, in the absolute sense, and he the Son of God, in the absolute sense. What a wonder it is. And Paul reminds us of the wonder, and so do the Gospel writers, that when Jesus Christ was born as a man, his body formed a temple of God—‘For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily’ (Col 2:9). This was the wonderful mystery. This was God coming inside his creation in the person of his Son—his Son, human and divine at the same time—and all the fullness of the Godhead dwelled in him bodily.

Here was God’s answer. The house was to be built by the one who is the very Son of God and God is his Father, in the fuller sense of that term. The wonder is, my brother and sister, that God has solved the great problems concerned with his purposes. He wants to dwell in us. First of all, he sent his Son, and all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him; and he joins us to his Son, and in his Son God can dwell in us as well. What a wonder.

The cost of the house

The house must be exceedingly magnificent. Look at the cost of it. You’ll see the wealth of it, the precious stones, the gold, the silver. Wonderful. When at last we get home to heaven, I’m looking forward to the Lord giving me, so to speak, a conducted tour around the glorious city, his dwelling place for all eternity. And I come to one bit, and that’s you, my dear sister! I say, ‘Lord, why did you incorporate that woman into your scheme? What’s so special about her?’ And the Lord might reply to me, ‘Well, perhaps you don’t know her history, but don’t you know how much it cost me, how expensive this woman has been? Have you any idea what it cost me to turn her from a rebel, proud, independent woman; what it cost me to redeem her, and all the grace to refine her through life and, at last, bring her home to glory? Think of the cost of it.’

And I say, ‘Lord, this is a marvellous house that you’ve got all of these redeemed people. What was your technique? How did you do it?’ And the Lord will say, ‘Well, you think of Solomon and his wisdom, how he managed to build that house through his superb wisdom. And how did I get these folks? Through my Son, wiser than Solomon. They were rebel hearts and my problem was how to break their rebellion, and how to make them loyal servants of mine. Philosophy couldn’t do it, miracles couldn’t do it. I solved the problem by my divine wisdom, the wisdom of the cross. And my dear Son was crucified for them, and when they saw that I loved them that much, to give my Son for them, they found it was impossible to rebel against me thereafter, and gave in. And they said to themselves, “If God is a God like this, I want to serve him and be like him for ever.”’ The wisdom of the cross.

A permanent house

The marvellous thing about that building in Solomon’s day was finally this—it was a permanent house. That is to be understood in contra-distinction to the tabernacle which preceded it. God didn’t always live amongst Israel in a permanent house. He lived in a

tabernacle or tent. And when King David said to God one day, 'I would like to build you a permanent house,' God said, 'I've never asked yet for a permanent house. Ever since I redeemed my people out of Egypt, and I brought them through the wilderness, I came and lived with them in a tent. I dwelled in a tabernacle, and it was a collapsible tent. You could take it down, for it was meant to be used on the journey, and I lived among them. Indeed, as they journeyed through the wilderness, I journeyed with them, and every step they took, I took. I didn't just remain in my heaven and say, "I've got a great inheritance for you in Canaan, please travel through the wilderness and do your best to arrive." To ensure they arrived, I came down and dwelt among them, and I was prepared to be on the move, and went through the wilderness with them, step by step, in a tabernacle that eventually grew old and had to be replaced and repaired. And I never complained, and I've gone from this city to that city, from that place to this place, all the while with my people.' And said God to David, 'I'm not finished yet, David. I'm still on the move. There's still a journey to be done, but when your son is born, then he shall build me a permanent house.'

The eternal reality

So at last Solomon was born and he built the permanent house. When that happened, Solomon assembled the people at the dedication of the house, and he said to God, 'Now, Lord, arrive and enter into your rest.' And a cloud descended, and God entered his rest—goal achieved, journey finished, a permanent house. And God himself had rest. Of course, it was only a prototype, but we shall see it one day. We have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and ever since we were redeemed, God has walked with us through our wilderness. Every step of the way walking with us, helping us in our progress, bringing us back when we stray, gradually bringing us nearer and nearer the great eternity. One day the great eternity will dawn, and then the Son of the Father shall build together all the materials that have been in preparation through all the long years of history. He shall put it all together and make God a permanent dwelling place for his eternal residence. What a time it will be and you'll see it, my friend. One of these days you will see in reality what John saw in a vision. You'll see the great dwelling place, the eternal dwelling place of God descended. You shall hear the voice from the throne that will say, 'It is done, finished.' God himself will enter into his rest, and his people with him. Wonderful, isn't it?

Building work in progress

So now we go out to do our work. We are still in the pilgrim stage, still in the tabernacle stage, still preparing the materials that the Son of God will one day assemble into the great eternal dwelling place of God. God help us to rise up and build, to prepare the materials. That we may reach the lost and preach to them the wisdom of God and the cross of Christ, to see them redeemed and brought to the Saviour. God help us to build character into the people of God, to help them to make progress, to lead them on to ever greater conformity to the image of God's Son. Let's rise up and build, for we build for eternity. We build the eternal dwelling place for the name of God. Who is sufficient for it? As we end our study, let us listen to Solomon in his prayer to God. 'Rise up, O Lord,' he says, 'and enter into your rest, and let

your priests be clothed with salvation. Do not turn away the face of your anointed one' (see 2 Chr 6:41–42).

Oh, my brothers, my sisters, if there's a grain of truth in all this, and we are being prepared for the eternal dwelling place of God, then this is sure: we shall need to lay hold of our salvation. 'Let your priests be clothed with salvation.' Listen to Paul as he writes to the Philippians, 'As you obeyed not only in my presence, obey now more in my absence, work out your salvation' (see 2:12). Lay hold on eternal life. Say to yourself daily, 'If I'm being prepared for that eternal dwelling place of God, what must I do today? How must I make progress today? How can I lay hold of your salvation and be clothed with your salvation that your great plan might work in my life, and I daily be nearer to your final goal?'

An intercessor

And there we may take comfort in this. Said Solomon to God, 'Do not turn away the face of your anointed one.' Picture him there, kneeling on his platform with his arms outstretched to heaven, pleading for the people of God that God would keep them loyal to himself. 'Do not turn away my face, the face of your anointed one. Hear my prayer and bless your dear people and conform them to your way.' And here too is but a prototype, for even as we sit here this morning and through every hour of every day of life until eternity dawns, there stands one in the presence of God with his arms outstretched before God, pleading for us. The very anointed of God, praying on our behalf that we might be conformed to his image, and one day taken home to see God's glory. And of this we may be sure, that God will never turn away the face of his anointed.

May God so inspire our hearts that the visions of eternity will become so real that they will grip our hearts and motivate us, that we might say to ourselves as we leave this conference, 'I've not much time left in life. God help me to make it count and gear me into your plans that every moment of my life here, in time, might tell and count for the preparations for the great eternity to come.'

About the Author

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