

**Mankind's Pathway
to the Coming Age of Peace**
Studies in 1 Chronicles

David Gooding

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



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Pattern and Purpose in History

'Man shall sit on throne of the Lord'

Readings: 1 Chronicles 29:22–23; Revelation 3:21

Being asked to lead the Bible studies of this particular week, I have chosen the book of Chronicles. It hasn't altogether escaped me that Chronicles is not every believer's favourite book in the Bible, and there are certain reasons for that.

Don't get me wrong. True believers, of all ages have believed Chronicles to be the inspired word of God. In comparatively recent times, if you were caught with a Bible in the Soviet Union or some other eastern European countries that could have spelled for you long terms of imprisonment or even death itself, and our dear fellow believers in those countries would dare to possess a Bible, knowing that they ran the risk of giving their lives for it.

I suspect that most of the Lord's people, if it were necessary, would go to the stake for their belief that the Bible is the word of God, and that would mean laying down their lives for the belief that Chronicles is the word of God.

But going to the stake for faith in the inspiration of the book of Chronicles is one thing; actually reading it, that's another thing altogether, isn't it? Those impossibly long lists of names and other such things, and the fact that it seems to us to be very ancient history, disincline us sometimes to put our faith into practice and actually read the books of Chronicles. I have chosen them in this conviction; that, not only is the word of God inspired—all Scripture is given by inspiration of God; I have chosen it in the extra conviction that all Scripture is profitable for teaching and instruction, and guidance in the way of holiness (2 Tim 3:16).

The setting and content of the books of Chronicles

The books of Chronicles in our English Bible come somewhere about the middle of the Old Testament; but in *Tanakh*, the Old Testament in Hebrew, they come at the end and are remarkable and famous for their tremendous summing up of history. Their vista of history and of the purposes of God in history is breath-taking. It starts from Adam in 1 Chronicles 1:1, and takes history through until the return of the Jewish nation from exile under the command of Cyrus, and probably a little bit beyond that, through its genealogical lists, down to somewhere about the fourth century before Christ.

We shall not have time to consider the whole two books of Chronicles; we must content ourselves with a bird's eye view of first Chronicles. But even there, its sense of the sweep of

history and the purpose of God in history is absolutely astounding and breath-taking. It tells us of the rise of Israel out of the nations, and God's ways with Israel, until there came a time of unparalleled blessing and glory and peace and wonder—the golden age of the reign of a king called Solomon. It was the reign that all Israel remembered, to which they looked back; it was the very dawning, as they felt it, of the promised age of bliss.

In the course of his description we shall now read how the writer of Chronicles pinpoints the wonder of the age to which they came under Solomon by how he describes Solomon and his reign. Let us read, therefore, two Scriptures, one from the Old Testament and then one from the New, which will tell us of the relevance of this study to ourselves as we live in this advanced age.

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, and they anointed him as prince for the LORD, and Zadok as priest. Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD. (1 Chr 29:22–23)

And now a verse from the New Testament to show us the relevance of these things to ourselves. The two books of Chronicles are the last of the Old Testament in the Jewish Bible, and here we read from the last book of the New Testament the words of our risen, glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Rev 3:21)

Looking forward and looking back

When I was young, people normally travelled by train because in those far-distant days very few had motor cars. And because they travelled by train very extensively, they became experts in their fashion on the way you ought to seat yourself in a railway carriage. In those days the carriages had benches going across the width of the carriage, one looking one way and one looking the other.

My uncles, who were renowned for their wisdom, said that the proper and best way to sit in a railway carriage was to sit facing the engine. Then, when you looked out of the window, you could meet the landscape coming towards you. It was a view of the future, with all its potential—it was where you were going to that would be the important and valuable thing. So, these uncles of known wisdom held that you should always sit facing the engine in your travels.

Some aunts, likewise of notable sagacity, held that it was far better to sit with your back to the engine, watching the landscape gradually recede from you and looking back to where you'd come from as you journeyed to you knew not where. They thought it was preferable to shut your eyes to what you might meet when you eventually got to wherever it was that you were going, and look at the wonderful past that you had enjoyed and which was now flowing from you.

And so the argument raged and eventually became a kind of a metaphor in the English language. The younger generation held it very strongly that as you go through life there's no

sense journeying with your back to the engine, just looking to the past. They said, 'You want to look to the future, to go the way the engine is going and to anticipate all the wonderful novelties and glories and developments that await you in the future.' And there's a lot to be said for that view, for we cannot relive the past—no good raking over the old ashes of what's gone by. We have to travel with our eyes to the future, to the coming glory.

And yet, you know, there do come times when it is good for our souls and our spirits to sit down and look back to the past; to ask ourselves, 'Where exactly am I now in my spiritual experience, how did I come to be here anyway, and what were the influences that first set me on the Christian pathway? What were the visions of the men and women that went before me, that I imbibed in my youth and held sacred and dear, and for which I enlisted, so to speak, in the army of God? How well have I held on to those early visions, and how well am I doing now? Am I still travelling on the main line, or have I gone down one of the many sidings in the track and got myself lost? Or is it so that in this last year or two I've run out of steam, and am fast going nowhere in particular at all?'

On those occasions it is profitable indeed if, under the Lord's gracious guiding, we sit down and for a moment look to the past. That's why I have chosen Chronicles. We're going to look deep into the past; and you who fear what's coming and think that it's going to all be dour history, listen to the voice of the Shepherd himself as he comes to sit beside you this very week in Northfield.

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Rom 15:4)

I pray God in my heart that this week will be precisely that. As we look back to the past and retrace those decisions—those wonderful goals and visions that once we had—that, through the comfort of God's holy Scripture, written in the past for our learning, we might receive a tremendous access of hope in our hearts; a renewed sense of the goal to which God's Spirit is leading us and a greater conviction that our goals and visions are not based on mere fancy or theological eccentricities.

These are the great, deep purposes of God; and by God's grace we shall 'gird up our loins,' prepare our minds for action, and go forth in his grace to walk more deliberately towards the goal that God has set for us (1 Pet 1:13).

The challenge of the return from Babylon

I think you know it was so for the people for whom the book of Chronicles was first written. We don't know exactly when it was written, but we know something of the conditions. Their grandfathers, at least—perhaps even their great-grandfathers, had rediscovered the Bible, the Old Testament prophets. It happened like this. For many centuries after the reign of great King David the nation of Israel had gone down, steadily down, down, down, down. Yes, there had been one or two revivals, but on the whole they had gone downhill and compromised with the old idolatrous interpretations of the universe that were around them, compromising the truth of the one true God and salvation only in him. As a result, God had

had enough of them and turfed them out of Jerusalem. They lost their city and they lost their temple and were taken down to Babylon, there to spend an exile of seventy years.

But as that exile period began to come to its end there arose a new generation of men inspired by prophets like Daniel. They rediscovered the Old Testament Bible and it began to work in them a tremendous hope. They discovered Isaiah, who said that, yes, though the throne of David was destroyed and the temple in ruins, God would one day send the Messiah to them. That was a new thing going round the homes and dinner tables way back in Babylon in those days, when these men caught sight again of the vision of the prophets, and said to one another, 'It's true, the Messiah is coming; the prophecies are going to be fulfilled and God will take us back to Jerusalem.'

And, discovering the glorious affirmation of the prophets that the Messiah would come of the seed of David according to the flesh, a shoot should grow out of his roots and the great house of David be restored, they plucked up courage in both hands and left their prosperous homes in Babylon, made the long trek across the wilderness and came at last to Palestine, believing the promises of God.

They started to build, and they built the temple, and then eventually they built the city. But times were difficult; the Messiah didn't come and some of them began to lose hope. You see, there were all sorts of practical difficulties. All around, the little nations were against them, dogging their steps every time they tried to build anything; and then very often the imperial government was against them. There were the sheer practicalities. It was marvellous to have an old fellow like Nehemiah come along with tremendous enthusiasm, and say, 'Let's build again the old city of Jerusalem.' But when you had built it, what did you do with it? You've got to earn your living, haven't you? Earning a living meant being a farmer. You couldn't farm in the middle of Jerusalem, and you had to be on your farm looking after the cows and the milk and the grass and things. This business of Jerusalem—who was going to live in it and maintain it if it would involve taking your share of camping in Jerusalem away from your business?

Well, it got a bit tiresome in the end, and you know how things are, don't you? With the pressures of life, there were some who said, 'Well, that was a tremendous burst of enthusiasm, all that talk about the coming of Messiah. But he's not here yet and you've got to be practical—you can't always sit with your back to the engine, looking back to those prophets and imagining the Lord's coming. You've got to get on with life as it is. Why don't we be realists and abandon all those promises?'

The challenge to each generation

My brothers, my sisters, I first came for a visit to Ireland in 1948, and then I came to live here, for my betterment and good, in 1959. In those days I constantly heard people talking about the wonders of the *1859 Revival*. I even met one man whose grandfather had been in it and blessed by it. I heard them talk about W. P. Nicholson and the wonderful mini-revival then. It was a habit of preachers (to keep the congregation awake and stop them falling asleep!) to ask those who had been saved through W. P. Nicholson to put up their hands, and when they did that a whole forest of hands went up. What marvellous memories they were to look back upon, to that nineteenth century and to the beginnings of this one, and the marvellous

evangelical awakening that happened as people discovered the glory of salvation and the personal Saviour, as distinct from mere formal religion, the glory of his word and the wonder of the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. What an explosion there was of evangelism—an explosion that sent missionaries by the score out to the furthest parts of the world.

I don't hear so much about the 1859 Revival now. You don't hear so much about W. P. Nicholson. Of course you don't; the boys that remembered him are gone, aren't they? Gone to glory. We're a different generation, but we've got the same vision. The glorious prophecies, not only of the New Testament but also of the Old, grip our hearts, strengthen our spirits and open our eyes ever more clearly to the glories that God has designed for us and await us in the future. Says the hymn writer,

The eternal glories gleam afar
To nerve my faint endeavour;
So now to watch, to work, to war,
And then to rest forever.¹

Sometimes it is difficult to maintain the vividness of our Christian hope. Life and its necessary toil in our busy world brings us down to the bare, grinding facts of life, doesn't it?

Here, this week, we have an opportunity to sit down and ask ourselves, 'Just where am I; how did I get here and what were the visions, the enthusiasms that I inherited from my spiritual forebears?' We shall look back to the Old Testament and feel a certain kindredship with the people for whom this book was written. For, as they perhaps were beginning to lose hope, telling themselves that they were a modern generation and that the old ideas could no longer work in theirs, God sent them a book that, in the first instance, wasn't about the future, it was about the past.

Why would God talk to them about the past?

Because therein lie the springs of hope. They found that this glorious hope that their fathers and grandfathers had built before them, as they discovered the true meaning of the prophets, was not something recently invented in the last century or so; it was a great purpose of God that had gone through the whole of history. As they traced it to its roots and watched it develop from its earliest time, they would see that this hope was no invention of man, not some religious fairy story; this was real. This is a purpose that God has been working at ever since he created Adam upon the earth; from all the glorious ages that were before the time of Abraham, the time of Joshua, the time of David and Solomon—that star-studded history of heroes of the faith. They were glorious in themselves, but prototypes, early stages of the great universal purpose of God. And as sure as he fulfilled it then, so sure he would be to fulfil it in the future. Reading of those times and catching those visions, they came away with renewed hope to wait for the coming of Messiah.

And so should we. As we delve back into Old Testament history, we shall find our hope of the Lord's second coming. It's not something that was invented by eccentric theologians in

¹ James G. Small (1817–88), 'I've found a Friend; O such a Friend!'

the eighteenth century. We shall find ourselves going back. Back even beyond the Reformers, back to the apostles, back to the Lord Jesus Christ himself and, if you Christians won't be offended, back to the Old Testament, the purposes and plans that God had in his mind ever since he created Adam upon the face of the earth. So, that's our diet this week: *looking back to the past to find hope for the future.*

God's intention from the beginning

Now, the chronicler is notorious for his sense of proportion. If you dare one of these days to read the first nine chapters of the book of Chronicles and wade through all those long lists of names, you will find that he is interested particularly in certain events. Certain things strike him, as he looks back over the years and over the centuries, as standing out and being tremendously significant. The people, therefore, ask the question of the chronicler.

'How did we get here, my good fellow? Sitting in Palestine with a temple that we've done our best to rebuild, and a city, and running out of steam anyway—how did we get here? Do tell us.'

The chronicler will say, 'Well, you got here because of Adam, actually. It goes a long way back—our hope goes back to Adam. When God created him, he created him with magnificent prospects and purposes in mind.'

As the psalmist put it,

What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet. (Ps 8:4–6)

This was God's intention. He made mankind, and his role was to be God's viceroy in the universe, set over all the creation of God to be his representative, his kingly man.

'It went wrong,' you say, 'and Adam fell.'

Yes, we know that. Genesis told us that long since. It didn't mean that God gave up his purpose.

The significance of Judah

Skating very rapidly over the centuries the chronicler comes to chapter two. In chapter one he's told us about Abraham and about Jacob. Now, as he comes to tell us about the sons of Israel, look how he expands himself. In chapter two, beginning from verse three we have 'The sons of Judah'. Then, when he comes to chapter three, 'These are the sons of David' (v. 1), and David, of course, was the king of Judah. In chapter four he still talks to us about the sons of Judah, if you please. Coming right down to chapter twenty-three, he concentrates these many, many, many verses on Judah and its king.

This is what interests him, and even the most cynical and hard-baked Jew back in Palestine, who has lost all his hope, if he knew anything at all, would find his heart move at the mention of those names. 'David, yes. Ah, Judah.'

David was a favourite of Israel in his day, wasn't he? As a youth he went out with his sling and staff to meet the great tyrant and champion Goliath. He felled him with a stone and cut off his head with his sword, and from that very moment David was the darling of Israel. All the young ladies sang the local lyrics that were composed about David, 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands' (1 Sam 18:7). Everybody was agog, for the girl that got David had got a marvellous prize.

He did write a lot of lyrics himself, didn't he? You can tell his influence; we sing them still. 'The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures . . . And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever' (Ps 23:1-2, 6). Oh, what a sense of God he had. This is young David tending his sheep, and eventually he became king of the nation; knowing God as his shepherd and life not leading to a dead end. Mercy shall follow him all his days, and when life here is done there's a glorious future in the house of the Lord forever.

Man sitting on the throne of the Lord

As king, David had not only united the nation but extended the empire out through the Gentiles until at last, when he died, David bequeathed to Solomon, his son, a vast empire that could have developed, had God so willed, to rival the empires of Babylon and Egypt. That wasn't God's intention at the time. But it was such a great empire that when at last they made Solomon king in his own right (as distinct from being vice-regent) and sat him on the throne, the historian says, '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' (29:23). Did you notice what we read?—'Then Solomon sat *on the throne of the Lord.*'

At that, you say, 'Come, come! You're like some preachers we know; they get a little bit warmed up and excited beyond what they should say. Did you really mean that Solomon sat *on the throne of the Lord?* What can that mean?'

Well, presumably he sat on the throne that God had ordained. Solomon was anointed messiah in the name of God; God had set up his throne and sat Solomon upon it. It was a wonderful age of peace and prosperity.

I can only imagine, as the people got first Chronicles and the writer took their vision back to the past, they'd have said, 'Yes, it's marvellous, but it sounds a bit like a fairy story. We haven't got any king now, have we? We were promised by Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel that one day God would renew the house of David, but he hasn't done it yet, has he? The centuries are ticking by—can we still believe it?'

It's a pity they didn't know what we now know, isn't it? They could have known it; Isaiah had said that one day God would raise up a David to sit upon his throne—the Messiah himself. And when he did that, he would not only unite Israel, but he would have an empire over the Gentile nations that stretched from shore to shore. In his day the nations would learn war no more, there should be nothing but peace. If they lost their faith in that glorious, glowing hope, then remember this; it was little more than three centuries later that there came a man born of the line of David according to the flesh (Rom 1:3). My dear brothers and sisters, that man who worked as a youth in a carpenter's shop, whose hands were calloused with the use of the saw and the plane, sits this very moment, as you and I sit here, upon the

very throne of the Majesty on high (Heb 1:3). That is the wonder of it; not just that he sits on a throne ordained of God, carved with ivory and a few lions on its steps.

This man of the seed of David according to the flesh, 'came to his own, and his own people did not receive him' (John 1:11). They put him to a tree, and Pilate wrote his accusation across his head, 'This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews' (John 19:19).

The Jewish leaders came to Pilate and they said, 'Look here, sir. This is an insult to us. Don't write that he is the king of the Jews. Write that he said, "I am King of the Jews."'

But Pilate grew tired of all their manoeuvrings, and said, 'What I have written I have written.'

He died with the title across his head, 'This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' On the third day God vindicated his claim and raised him from the dead. He is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Oh, my brothers, my sisters, get hold of it. This is God being true to his plan. He had it in mind ever since he created Adam and before; and if Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord in his day it was but a prototype of this infinitely more glorious thing: the man Jesus Christ sitting on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Gentiles shall believe in the Lord Jesus

I'll tell you something that Isaiah said, and Paul quotes what he said in his Epistle to the Romans.

As it is written,

'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.'

And again it is said,

'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.'

And again,

'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.'

And again Isaiah says,

'The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.' (Rom 15:9-12)

When this shoot should come out of David's roots and God should raise him from the dead, then the Gentiles would come to him and he would rule over multi-millions of Gentiles. Tell me, has it happened?

Well, sometimes when I talk to my Jewish friends I remind them that while I began life as a Gentile, I don't believe in just any old god. I believe in the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. And who brought me, an uncircumcised Gentile, to believe in the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob? None other than Jesus of Nazareth!

Paul saw the movement start in his day, as hundreds and then thousands of Gentiles began to come to hear the glorious message of the gospel; that God at last had sent David's Son. He died as our Saviour and now is seated at the right hand of God. And since that day, multi-millions have come to own his sway.

If you are a Gentile I have Scripture for commanding you to start rejoicing, if you've never rejoiced before. 'Rejoice, you Gentiles, with [the Jewish] people' (v. 10). Brothers and sisters in Christ, if they share the same Messiah, rejoice with them. This world is not going to end in some cataclysmic disaster, with God defeated. The plans that God laid deep in eternity and began in history have come to their first great fruition in our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, who is now risen from the dead and seated on the right hand of God.

Reigning with Christ

And now I've got to say something that I don't know that you're going to believe—not if you take it literally. And it's this, that not only is our blessed Lord risen, ascended and seated on the throne of God, but if you are a believer, one of these days you shall sit with him on his throne. It sounds fantastic, doesn't it? We should need God's Holy Spirit's help to take it in, to grasp it. Here sits the blessed Lord Jesus at the right hand of God upon his Father's throne, heir to the universe, Son of the Maker, destined to rule eternally. That, in a way, is conceivable; but you reign, you sit on the throne of God?

But then the clear statement of holy Scripture comes, doesn't it? Listen once more to our blessed Lord speaking to his people. 'To him that overcomes, I will give to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down on my Father's throne' (Rev 3:21 KJV).

Nor is that a one-off promise that we could possibly have misinterpreted by reading it all out of proportion. A whole string of Scriptures will come to our minds:

'If we endure,' says Paul, 'we will also reign with him' (2 Tim 2:12).

The choirs of heaven, as they sing the praises of the Lamb, say:

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)

The Revelation chapter that talks about the millennial glory of our blessed Lord repeats it. These martyrs for the faith, they were raised and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years (Rev 20:4).

And among the last promises of holy writ are these. In describing the eternal state with all its never-ending glories:

Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence . . . They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever. (Rev 7:15;

22:4–5)

Just before you go out, look twice at the dear believers, the dear sister that's sitting by your side, won't you? And when you've taken her face in, say to yourself, 'There goes a princess of God, who is one day destined to sit with Christ on his throne.'

I say it again; this hope is not some eccentricity thought up by nineteenth century theologians. This is a hope rooted deep in the counsels of God, brought to fruition in early prototypes in the Old Testament. Already now the beginnings of its major stage have begun, with our Lord seated at the right hand of God. Thank God, it is soon to be translated into actuality for all his people, when the Lord shall come and take us home to share his eternal glory.

You say to me, 'Is it as easy as that? How actually, and in practicality, shall we arrive at such tremendous exaltation and glory?'

We could begin to answer that question, couldn't we? And where better could we read about it than in the first book of Chronicles, for David and then Solomon were the first kings that brought Israel to the peak of their bliss, peace and glory. First Chronicles will trace for us the steps by which God took King David from his early beginnings, put him on the throne, extended his empire, and eventually gave him a son that sat upon the throne of the Lord.

The programme was not automatic. At every stage in the advance there were big moral and spiritual questions to be faced. As we read those lessons we shall find that God has mapped out for us the pathway that we too must follow if we would overcome, as the Lord Jesus overcame, and sit with him one day upon his throne in glory.

That, then, shall be the general drift of our studies. May God in his grace attend them, and by his Holy Spirit's power bring to our hearts the conviction that these are no fairy tales; these are no myths. 'These are the true words of God' (Rev 19:9).

The Rise of Israel from the Nations and the Emergence of God's Obedient King

Reading: 1 Chronicles 10

Hello once more and a very good morning to you. It is a great pleasure to see you all present, and your eager faces betokening your desire to come to the word of God and to be encouraged in your hearts by what the Lord will have to say.

For those of you who were not here yesterday, let me just point out that in this current series of Bible studies we are considering the books of Chronicles, under the general title of 'Mankind's Pathway to the Coming Age of Peace and Glory'. Today we are to consider the rise of Israel from among the nations and the emergence of God's obedient king.

So, let's begin by turning to Scripture, and we return this morning to the first section. These famous chapters, I dare not say *infamous* chapters, are full of those impossibly long lists of names, and they are genuinely difficult, aren't they? Happy is the man who is not called upon to read them out in public! But some of the difficulty is this; that the books of Chronicles stand at the end of the Hebrew Bible. They belong to the third division, the Writings, the *Ketuvim*. They stand appropriately at the end, because in their account of things they take the grand view, following the sweep of history from the very word 'go' and the creation of Adam right down through all the Old Testament history to the point of Israel's return from exile, and perhaps one, two or three generations beyond that.

Because that is so, the books of Chronicles will refer to past people. They won't always tell you the story of those people, for the simple reason they haven't got the space to do it. To do that would mean rewriting the whole of the Old Testament, and here they count on your knowledge of the Old Testament. You are expected to know all about first Samuel, and second Samuel, and goodness knows what—tough going, isn't it!

It could be embarrassing if you had the Lord Jesus to lunch one of these days, and innocently asked a question or something, and he would turn round, as he was accustomed to do, and say, 'Have you never read what David did, when he went into the house of God and took the bread of the Presence?' (see Matt 12:3–4). And you go, 'Oh, dear me, I hope he won't ask me when I last read that story.' He was always doing that, wasn't he? 'Have you never read . . . ?' And the only escape from such embarrassment was to make sure you'd read it in good time before the Lord asked you the question.

And so, when the writer of Chronicles says it all began with Adam, he doesn't tell you the story of Adam all over again. He expects you to know that, and to know who Abraham was

and what he did, and how one generation led to another, and what the affairs were around the names that he records.

So, we come back this morning to those lists of names. Yesterday we noticed that, as the chronicler begins his story with Adam and proceeds, he spends very little time indeed on summarising the affairs of men and things until he comes to Israel—that is, Jacob and his sons. Once beginning that story, he fills a tremendously large space with the tribe of Judah, in particular with the family of David the king, and once more with the names of the people of Judah. That is where the chronicler's interest in history lies: the emergence from the nation of Israel of the tribe of Judah and, pre-eminently, of the lion of the tribe of Judah, which in the first place was David, and then his son, Solomon.

The significance of the sons of Levi

Today, we notice that the writer has another major interest. He records the rise of Israel, but he doesn't give every tribe of Israel the same space and the same publicity. Just as he gives tremendous prominence to Judah and David, so from chapter six onwards he gives an equal prominence to the sons of Levi. We won't read the names so you won't get hurt! But look at chapter six; the whole of its eighty-one verses are about the tribe of Levi. In chapter seven he begins to talk about other tribes, but look what happens when he comes to chapter nine. He's talking here about the people that inhabited Jerusalem, presumably after Israel came back from the exile. At verse ten he begins to talk of the priests, and then at verse fourteen of the Levites; how David organised them, where they lived and what their tasks were. In fact, the whole of the rest of chapter nine, right down to verse thirty-three, is once more concerned with the priests and the Levites.

David's prime ambition

In the subsequent history, the chronicler is going to remind us of one of the chief interests of King David. Great warrior that he was, nevertheless deep in his heart, as the prime object of his ambitions, was this, that one day he should build a temple to God in Jerusalem city, and in that temple the praise of God should be carried on daily. It was to be no hit and miss affair. This was a whole nation, organized down to its last man and led by the priests and the Levites to think it their chief purpose in this life to praise almighty God their Creator, to enjoy God and to sing his praise. And, as a sober theologian if I may dare to suggest, to get excited about God, so seeing his wonders to wish to praise him not only with our vocal cords, but with our hearts; and not only with our hearts but our hands and our feet and our body, and live the whole of life to the praise of God.

That was David's ambition. Political power took a very secondary place with David compared with that ambition. So much so that, when he got to retiring age or before, he took semi-retirement (as a good many men would be well-advised to do!) and made his son vice-regent with him, so that the son could look after the administration of the nation while David would give himself to his life-long ambition of preparing the temple and orchestrating the Levites in their worship, so that life might be one great act of worship of God. With their lives organised around the temple, and as the glory of God took hold of the people, their

activity, as they went about their farming and their business, should be an expression of the character of God, so that Israel might be known among the nations as a priesthood to God. First to worship God, then to tell the glory of the Lord to all who lived around, who came in contact with them. Hence this emphasis on the Levites.

I know you haven't read it recently, but wouldn't you be proud if your name should happen to be in this list?

You'd tell everybody in the neighbourhood, 'Did you know my name is in the Bible?'

'Where?'

'In Chronicles.'

It wouldn't surprise me that they had never read it, but you would be hasty to show it to them, wouldn't you?

'There's my name—that was my granny; that was my grandfather.'

You'd have to be aware of the question that would follow that.

'Are you living like they did?'

Saul did not sit on the throne of the Lord

But now we must notice how this section of Chronicles comes to its end. Before King David was king there was another king, the first king in Israel. We read what happened to him in chapter ten.

We saw yesterday that when the chronicler comes to describe the tremendous glories of the golden age of peace and plenty that occurred under David and then under Solomon, he gives vent to what appears to be an exaggerated expression. He says that when they made Solomon king the second time, then *Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord*. We took him to mean that, in the first place, this was simply the throne that God had instituted. Being the king chosen of God to follow David, when Solomon ascended that throne he was sitting as God's representative on the throne of Israel that God himself had established. We rejoiced at the chronicler's sense of history. Beginning with Adam, made in the image of God, and following the long travail of history down the road, he comes to the point when at last a man sits on the throne of the Lord.

We all know that the golden age didn't last. The chronicler is going to tell us; we don't need to tell him that all earth's proud empires shall likewise pass away. We should perhaps be sitting here in a mood of pessimism, did we not know that one day in Bethlehem, the town of David, King David's greater son would be born. Jesus Christ the Lord was born in Bethlehem, crucified at Calvary, and raised from the dead. We rejoiced yesterday with all our hearts to think that our blessed Lord Jesus at this very moment sits in the absolute sense on the throne of the Lord. And then we allowed ourselves to rejoice and enjoy the stupendous fact that, according to the promise of the New Testament, just as he overcame and sat down on his Father's throne, one day, if we overcome we shall sit down with him on his throne and reign with him for all eternity (see Rev 3:21).

So, there was a king before David—a king of Israel appointed by God to govern his people, but he never sat on the throne of the Lord. You'd be sorry for Saul, wouldn't you? Poor man, he never wanted to be king in the first place; he tried to be, but he never sat upon

the throne of the Lord, and that was for an obvious reason. 'He died,' says Scripture, 'for his trespass which he committed against the Lord, and because of the word of the Lord that he hadn't kept' (1 Chr 10:13). As king of Israel, Saul himself turned rebel against God. Given his word to obey, Saul disobeyed and didn't keep it. How could God possibly put on the throne of the Lord a man who was prepared to disobey God to his very face?

Amidst all the wonderful euphoria of thinking about the age that should be, and how the church shall reign with Christ and sit with him on his throne, as he overcame and sat on his Father's throne, we must remember the terms of salvation. In the days of his flesh, Son of God though he was, our blessed Lord Jesus learned obedience by the things that he suffered. Being made perfect and qualified, he became the author of salvation to those who obey him (Heb 5:7-9). It stands to reason, and it is utterly unthinkable that God should ever put upon the throne of the Lord those who are not prepared to take his word seriously and obey it. How can he put on the throne of the Lord men and women that positively trespass against him?

Placed as king by God himself, supposedly to obey God and to bring the people to obey God and deliver them from the power of the devil, Saul at last succumbed to the sophisticated temptations of 'his satanic majesty', went over to the other side and enquired of an evil spirit. He died, and all his house died, and he never sat on the throne of the Lord. Perhaps you think in your heart that that's tough justice. Well, it is tough being king of a nation; surely it is. And if your task as king of the nation is not simply to lower the income tax at the election in order to curry favour with the people, but your task is to get the people to obey God, then you certainly have a tough time to face.

How can it be done? But, you see, unless somebody can get people to obey God, there never will be a paradise, will there? It's no good delighting ourselves with little fairy stories. The chaos of our present world is directly attributable not simply to the mass murderers; it's attributable to the fact that in every heart there lies what the Bible technically calls 'the flesh', which 'is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be' (Rom 8:7 KJV). We are rebels against God. Unless that rebellion can be overcome, and men and women made priests of God—a kingdom to obey God and priests to worship and serve him—how will there ever be a paradise of any sort whatever?

What was the problem?

I feel sorry for Saul. I don't think he ever understood the problem, did he? Where does the difficulty lie? By the very first word that he pens in his book, the chronicler reminds us that 'Adam' is the difficulty. Created by God and put in a paradise with every conceivable blessing around him, such as his age of innocence could then enjoy, he fell and ruined the paradise. How did he manage to do that? Well, not by beating up Eve every morning before breakfast or anything ludicrous and lurid like that. Satan had more sophisticated designs and temptations, and tricked our first parents into that fatal attitude both towards God and to creation; that fatal stance of independence of God.

'Take that fruit, my dear,' said he.

'No, no,' said Eve. 'We're told we may eat of all the other trees in the garden, but God has said . . .'

'Oh, nonsense. Nobody nowadays takes that to be the truth. That's Sunday school stuff. Grow up, woman and make up your own mind. You don't need to bother about the word of God. The fruit's nice, isn't it? Good for your stomach and good for your mind, to make you wise. Good for your heart and eyes—it's good to look at. That's life, woman, take it. Bother God and his word! The only reason why God lays down his rules is to keep you down. He knows that in the day you eat it, you shall be as God, and independent.'

It was that grasp at independence, rebelling against God's word that introduced chaos into our world. It is at the root, and responsible for the vast 'tree' of iniquity and disorder, violence, jealous, envy and every other hateful thing that turns our potentially paradisiacal world into a minor hell.

Saul was appointed king to rule people like that and bring them back to God. How on earth would you do it? It wasn't that God didn't train him. I like the stories that we are told in first Samuel about God's efforts to train Saul for the kingship. They might strike your modern sophisticated mind as being a little simple; they're certainly not the techniques of the Harvard Business School of Economics and Politics. But then, sometimes the simpler things get at the root of the matter more quickly, don't they?

Saul and Samuel (1 Sam 9–10)

Here was Saul, a farmer's son. His father had some donkeys and they went astray. They had never intended to go astray, of course, but you know what donkeys are. Dumb, mindless beasts, as stubborn as they can be. Once they get an idea into their big heads, there's no getting it out of them. It can be a very simple idea, but they'll put their feet down and fight for their way.

So his father asked him to go and find them, and he set out. It sounds like a comparatively easy task. You could easily find where they've got to, bring them back and get them behaving as they should. He went here, but they weren't here; he went there, but they weren't there; he went somewhere else and they weren't somewhere else. In the end he was getting all muddled up himself round the intricate lanes and villages of the terrain.

So he said to his servant, 'Look here, I'm not sure where we've got to now. Where on earth are we? We'd better pack up thinking about these donkeys. It would be a bad job if we ourselves got lost in the process. Let's go home.'

Said his servant, 'Well, sir, it just so happens that we're near to a city where there's a prophet. Wouldn't it be an idea, sir, if we were to consult the prophet and therefore consult God?'

'Well, that's a thought; it hadn't occurred to me before,' said Saul. 'Now we're here, we might as well. But, half a minute, we haven't got any money to pay the chap, and you know these prophets, they cost a lot! My bread is run out, my bank balance is down, and I've nothing with me to pay him. What do we do?'

'Well, it so happens,' said his servant, 'I've got a bit of spare cash in my pocket.'

'Oh, marvellous man. Then let's go, we'll take advantage of that,' said Saul.

So in they went to the city and there were some girls standing there; bright young women, like they generally are.

'Could you tell us where the prophet is?'

'Well,' they said, 'you've just come in the nick of time. We've got a feast today, the prophet is coming to bless the sacrifice and *the people won't eat until he comes.*'

(I hope Saul was listening. That was part of his training—the people won't eat until he comes, and they won't sacrifice either.)

'So, go up,' said the young women (9:13). 'He's going up to the high place there, and you'll come across him.'

This was marvellous, an extraordinary coincidence. So, on they went and as they were entering the city they met an elderly gentleman.

'Ah, sir, excuse me. Could you tell me where the prophet's house is?' said Saul.

'I am the prophet. I was expecting you,' said Samuel.

'Expecting me?'

'Yes. God told me last night that you were coming.'

'Really? Is life like that? Is there a living God that knows about me, knows even about my stupid donkeys and the mess I'm in trying to find them and get them back again? Is there a God who condescends to take notice of even the little details of life like that?'

'Come,' said Samuel to Saul, 'the people are waiting, and I've got something tremendous to tell you. God is going to give you the chief post of honour in the whole of Israel, Saul (v. 20). So come and sit down, man, for I've told the cook, and the cook has prepared a double portion for you.'

As he filled his mouth with good old beef, he had no doubts about it then. I wonder did the message get hold of his heart, that the God who was calling him to be king was the God who was prepared to stand behind him. If Saul would learn to trust him, God would order the circumstances and bring back the donkeys.

'What is that you said, Samuel?'

'Don't worry about your donkeys, Saul. We know where they are. God knows where they are. We've found them and they're going to come back.'

The next morning, being anointed (10:1) and about to go back to face this onerous task, he was told by Samuel, 'Look, there are three circumstances going to happen that will put you in peculiar need. As each one arises, you will find that God has anticipated it, Saul, and he will make provision for you.'

And so they came to pass (v. 9). It was an extraordinary exhibition of the government and the providence of God in this man's life. God was desperately trying to teach him that if ever he was going to rule for him, he must know the rule of God in his own life. If ever he's going to get people to trust and obey the Lord, he must learn to trust and obey the Lord himself. With the responsibilities that were to be on his shoulders, sometimes it would be a big order to dare to trust the Lord.

So, having been put through his schooling, Saul faced his examinations, and the first one was this.

Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do. (10:8)

The Philistines—Saul waiting for Samuel at Gilgal (1 Sam 13:8–13)

'Do you remember, Saul, when you came to seek me, the people wouldn't start the sacrifice until I came? Now, this time, *you are not to start the battle until I come and offer the sacrifice.*'

And there was Saul, and there were the Philistines coming out in their battalions with all their armour, and when the people of Israel saw them they got collywobbles in the stomach and began to run away (vv. 5–7).

Saul said, 'What shall I do? What shall I do? I can't let the people run away from me. I shall be left without any people. I must start—where is this prophet?'

But he didn't appear, and he seemed to be late. So *Saul offered the burnt offering* and was about to commit the people to battle when the prophet appeared and said, 'What have you done? You have acted foolishly' (vv. 11, 13).

Yes, he was a fool, wasn't he? You see, to start with, the Philistines weren't going to have any battle, they were just on manoeuvres. There never was a battle. And the second thing was that the Philistines were armed to the teeth, whereas the Israelites, poor little souls, had very little more than a few, sort of, pea shooter things. If Saul had taken the armies into battle with the Philistines that day, Israel would have been cut to ribbons. How could God entrust the people of God to a man like that, who would jeopardise the lives of thousands of his followers simply because he couldn't trust God's word and do what God said?

If you were going into an operation to have your kidneys taken out, or something, and the anaesthetist didn't turn up and the surgeon said, 'Well, no matter, I'll go ahead without the anaesthetist,' would you appoint him head of the college of surgeons?

Saul couldn't keep the word of God. He wasn't to be entrusted with the lives of God's people, then.

The Amalekites—Saul's failure to completely destroy them (1 Sam 15)

A bigger test came. There was an outstanding enemy of the people of God and of God himself. It was the nation of Amalek and their king. When God was bringing Israel out of bondage in Egypt and taking them to their promised inheritance, the Amalekites said, 'No, you don't,' and lifted up their hand in defiance, not only against Israel, but against God's very throne itself. God swore that he would have war with them from generation to generation until Amalek was no more (Exod 17:16).

So the second test of Saul's kingship was this. Said the prophet in the name of God, 'I want you to go with your army and obliterate Amalek. *Spare nothing.*' (1 Sam 15:3). It was a positive, clear command. As the people returned from the battle with Saul at their head, Samuel went to meet him.

'How's it gone?' said Samuel.

'Very well,' said Saul. '*I have performed the commandment of the Lord*' (v. 13).

'You've done everything! Really? What's all this bleating of sheep and lowing of oxen that I hear?'

'Well, it's like this, you see. Don't get upset, Samuel, but you know what the people are, and how difficult it is sometimes. If I were to insist that they obey Scripture they might all

forsake me. The people wanted to spare the flocks, and what we propose to do with these flocks is to offer them in sacrifice to God. Won't that be nice, Samuel?'

And Samuel said, 'Stop! Do you suppose you can carry on being king when you take an express command of almighty God to destroy the rebel that would overturn God's throne and you compromise with him? And, having disobeyed the command of the Lord and spared the rebel do you suppose you're going to offer your disobedience as a sacrifice to God? You can no longer be king' (v. 26).

It's true to the logic, isn't it? 'Man shall sit upon the throne of the Lord'; but on whose authority, and on what conditions? Could the Lord have me sitting on his throne, only to find that I'm not even prepared to carry out his word? I want to go my own way, spare the rebel, and then offer it all up as a supposed thanksgiving to God.

Our Lord himself once observed the seriousness of those who are in office.

Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:19)

David and Goliath (1 Sam 17)

Saul had to be deposed. Even then, God loved him. He couldn't be king any more, but God sent him a saviour. Saul was a very big man, as you know, and trusted in his being a big man. He had a big-sized brain and big-sized armour, he was master man.

One day there came out of the camp of the Philistines a colossal great chap. He had come to threaten the people of God and denounce the God of Israel as a mere nothing. When Saul saw this bigger man, Goliath, he skulked away into his tent absolutely scared stiff.

Then David, with his bright ruddy cheeks, came from the sheep, and said, 'Saul, I'll go out and kill him.'

Saul said, 'You can't go out. He's a big man. Look at him.'

'Yes, I will,' says David. 'I'll tell you the secret, Saul. I'm a farmer's boy and I keep the sheep. One day there came a lion to kill the sheep, and another day a bear. I couldn't possibly have mastered those enemies of the flock myself, but there's a God and I trusted him. Little shepherd boy that I was, I dared to trust him, and I went out and God gave me the victory over those evil beasts. I delivered the sheep. I know God, Saul. I know these are only the small things of life, but it's in the small things where you learn to obey God and trust him. Now the big crisis has come and that same God, whom I have proved, I will now find to be real.'

'Take my sword,' says Saul. 'That'll help!'

Goliath had a spear like a telegraph pole. If David had gone to him with Saul's sword ('Goliath, let me come a bit nearer. Put that thing down while I cut your head off!'), he wouldn't have got within yards of him before Goliath would have skewered him on the end of his spear.

Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.' (v. 45)

'For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men' (1 Cor 1:25). That was how the battle was won, and God saved Saul and the nation.

The aftermath

Then what did Saul do? He showed a very curious, but easily credible reaction of the human heart; he wouldn't have his saviour. Proud, trusting his own self, his own wisdom and power rather than David's God, he so persecuted David, anointed of God though David was, until David was forced to run away to the Gentiles, and the nation of Israel was left without their messiah (27:1-4).

The Philistines got Saul in the end. They cut off his big head, stripped off his armour and put it in their temple, and nailed his body to the wall of Beth-shan (31:9-10). A triumph for Philistinism, but the Philistines lived in a world where God didn't really count. Not the living God; it was the biggest man that ruled the show.

You'd feel sorry for Saul, wouldn't you? You would shed tears for the nation of Israel, Saul's descendants. Unable to save themselves, God gave them David's greater Son, born in Bethlehem, come to be Israel's Saviour. 'He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him' (John 1:11). They put him to a cross, and Israel has lost her Messiah to the Gentiles these past two thousand years. But, thank God, Israel shall yet again be restored; the Messiah shall come again.

You say, 'What better was David than Saul? Wasn't David full of mistakes?' Yes, he was. The inspired historian doesn't attempt to show that David was sinless. But, in spite of all his failure, in his heart there was a burning desire to please God and obey him (see 1 Sam 13:14). He was conscious himself that all his strength and his wisdom reposed in God. As we said at the beginning, he was a man consumed with this ambition to build the temple of God in the very midst and heart of Israel, and so to organise the priests and Levites that the nation would not only come to obey God, but their lives should be centred on God, and their daily occupation be the praise of the Creator.

David's greater Son and God's final King

So far for David, but in our closing moments we move over to great David's greater Son; and what Saul could never do Jesus Christ has, and will yet perform.

I'll tell you first the marvellous story of God's true final king; how by obedience he proved himself worthy of the throne. What a story that is.

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:6-8)

A mere martyr's death could have been a glorious end; men have been known to covet the death of a martyr. But consider the death of our Lord Jesus, and explain to me, if you can, the death that he was asked to die. God's perfect, sinless Son, who had never gone astray from his Father's will; the death he was asked to die was for a world full of wretched rebels, the likes of you and me. And whereas in Gethsemane he showed the anguish of his spirit, faced with such a task of bearing our penalty, he said, 'Not my will, but yours, be done' (Luke 22:42).

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. (Phil 2:9–10)

Ah, but I can tell you more of his successes. You will remember the glorious vision that was given to John the apostle and recorded in his book of Revelation chapters four and five. John was given to see the creatorial throne of God and all the hosts of heaven bowing in their worship to the worthiness of the Creator who sits upon the throne. The logic is very simple.

Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created. (Rev 4:11)

Why worthy? Because of his creatorial rights. Not a thing that moves, not a grain of sand in all the vast universe, has any other reason for existence than it should serve the pleasure of God. Anybody hearing that announcement must perceive its logic.

If that is the *raison d'être* of the universe's existence, it's gone astray, hasn't it? —'We have turned—every one—to his own way' (Isa 53:6). But God has his plans for the redevelopment of the universe, and God isn't going to wait forever. He is determined that the new heavens and new earth are not to be ruined again by that self-same rebellion on the part of his creatures.

And so the scroll is delivered, that has pronounced the judgments of God upon a godless world, that God might clear the world of its sinners and start again. And the cry is heard,

Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? (Rev 5:2)

You say, 'Why doesn't he start at once the judgments that shall clear the world of rebels? God has the right to do it.' Ah, but God is not merely concerned with his rights; he's a God of power and of justice. Having created his creatures, God will be loyal to them to the last. Hear the name announced of the great sovereign king who is worthy to take the book, and hear again the terms of his worthiness. The king himself, slain by rebel hands, is offering the rebels pardon from God, obtained by that very slaughter.

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. (vv. 9–10)

Ah, but not only *redeemed them by his blood*, but redeemed them *from every tribe, language, people and nation*. Not only forgiven them, but *made them a kingdom*, a people that long to obey God and have found the resources wherewith to obey him. Not only a kingdom, but *a kingdom of priests* to worship him, to love him, to grow excited about him and want to serve him. A kingdom of priests to worship him, and to go out and proclaim the glories of him that has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet 2:9).

Chaotic as this world may still be, God's great work of restoration has already started. *The Man* is in his place and he's on the throne of God. He shall yet bring the whole universe to the feet of the Creator and yield it to him, perfected and under his control.

But it's a startling thing that, before heaven, earth and hell, the worthiness of the Lamb to rule is put in terms of what he has made of you and me. Did you get that? *'You are worthy to rule, because you've made those people in Northfield a kingdom.'* Is it true, or is it just religious talk? Is it true in your heart, if I could open the door of your heart and look inside? I say again, is it true, my brother? Would you say to me, *'In spite of my failing, yes, this is what I desire and nothing more than this; to live to God's glory and praise and to obey him'*?

Could you add, *'There's not one command of Scripture that I know of that I'm not prepared to obey'*? You see, God not only saves you, and one day he wants to put you on the throne of Christ, but it must be our chief ambition here and now to obey him.

May God help us to learn these ancient lessons; so simple, so vivid, so deeply probing, so real. And today may he enthuse us with love for the Saviour, so that in our heart of hearts we may again crown him Lord of all, and say to him in our prayers, *'Oh, thou Son of David, thine we are, and on thy side for now and for eternity.'*

The Founding of Jerusalem and the Unification of God's People

Reading: 1 Chronicles 11:1–9

This morning, my dear brothers and sisters, I labour under a number of difficulties. The first is the sheer size of the passage that we must try to comprehend in our thinking. I must therefore try to restrain my enthusiasms and concentrate on pointing you to the text of the word of God itself, and not waste too much time with my effusive comments.

The second difficulty is that as I try to concentrate your attention on the historical David, this morning, perhaps beyond all other mornings in your studies this year, you will be making the immediate jump down the centuries from David, king of Israel and Judah, to David's greater Son; and as I speak of the old David, you will be thinking of the new. I shall find it very difficult, therefore, to restrain you to the Old Testament, and, to be honest, I shan't try very hard!

The third difficulty I shall face is the sheer topic that faithfulness to God's word now obliges me to discuss, and that is the unity and the unification of the people of God. It is on the one side a glorious topic and my task, as helped by God's Holy Spirit, would be to enflame your hearts with sheer admiration and worship for the divine genius of Jesus Christ our Lord. He can and will yet unite men and women of the most disparate origins, differences in temperament and culture, of race and geography, and unite them all into that harmonious choir that one day shall sing his worth, and praise his God and Father for eternity.

A glorious topic on the one side; and yet we shall not be able to think about it, shall we, without thorny pains pricking our hearts and consciences for the sad divisions that rend the people of God asunder nowadays, and have done throughout the centuries. Pray for me, that nothing I shall say shall convey a 'holier-than-thou' pharisaic attitude. My dear brothers and sisters, I am part of the problem. Pray that nothing shall be said but what, under the guidance of the 'great shepherd of the sheep', shall tend to promote the unity of the flock for which he died (Heb 13:20).

We are studying, as you know, the first history book of the Chronicles, under the general theme of 'Mankind's pathway to the age of peace, prosperity and glory' and yesterday we considered the first great stages in God's programme. The rise of Israel out of the nations, the elimination of the disobedient king, and the discovery and installation of God's obedient king, David—that genius who was raised up of God to lead his people in various stages to the age of peace and glory that broke out under the reign of his son.

Unification is essential for peace

We come now to the second stage of mankind's progress along the path that should eventually lead them to the golden age of peace and glory, prosperity and the praise of God. The chronicler is not concentrating our attention on too much detail. From the vast detail of history he selects those major stages that had to be passed through if Israel were ever to come to their period of glory. The second stage that is now before us, makes its major message clear from the very first verse: 'Then all Israel gathered together to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh."' It is the unification of the people of God under the rule of King David, the shepherd king.

Obviously, it stands straight to observation and logic; unless somebody could unite the warring factions amongst the people of God, there would be no age of peace and glory and prosperity. This, therefore, was a number-one kind of priority, the unification of the people of God. The chronicler, you may decide, makes it sound very simple, because he omits (I suspect deliberately) the fact that, for the first seven years that David reigned over Judah and Benjamin in Hebron, the nation was divided; for the successors of Saul made their base with the help of their strong army commander Abner in the city of Mahanaim. And for seven years, 'there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David' (2 Sam 3:1).

The chronicler says almost nothing about it. It's not that he doesn't know that sad episode in their history; but instead of focusing our vision on the unhappy divisions, the warfare and the wounds, he wants to concentrate our attention on that sheer genius of the man that was King David of Bethlehem. In spite of past history, the psychological difficulties, the political animosities and the wounds that he suffered in all the many battles that had taken place, the sheer genius of this man under God was that he was able to weld the people of God into one great unity. Say 'hallelujah' in your heart that such a man appeared and brought his people together.

I know the cynics will tell you that the unity achieved under David and Solomon didn't last very long and, sadly, that is true. With the death of Solomon there came to the throne in Judah a certain Rehoboam; and because of his foolish conduct the nation split asunder once more, into the two tribes and the ten. They never overcame that sad division until the time that the ten tribes were taken away to Assyria and the two to Babylon. But we Christians can't afford to boast it over our ancient brothers, the Israelites, can we? How soon it was after our blessed Lord's departure that his people began to split and fight. We are heirs to a very long and sad history, and one on which I shall not need to concentrate your attention this morning.

Is there a man, is there a solution, and is unification possible? There had better be my dear brothers and sisters! If the people of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ, can never be unified, you may as well abandon all talk of heaven. It's going to be achieved, and this morning, through this ancient paradigm and prototype, God will direct our attention to David's greater Son, the man who has it in his power to unite his people, and one day shall unite them perfectly. There shall be no discord in the choirs of heavenly praise.

How did unity come about?

What, then, was the secret of the unity that was achieved at this time? By what formula, by what compromise, did they come at it? There was no formula, there was no compromise. The secret of the unity of God's people was David himself; 'Then all Israel gathered together to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh"' (11:1). You shouldn't miss the implications of that little geographical note, 'all Israel.' That is, the ten tribes, the eleven tribes, as well as the one—'all Israel came.' Note where they came—they came to Hebron, of all places on earth.

They didn't say, 'Now, look here, David. We're prepared to consider negotiations with you, but we can't stick those Judahites. As for your family—Joab and company, and your relatives there in Bethlehem—they are an obnoxious crowd of people. They've done us a lot of harm and we're not prepared to sit down with them. We will sit down with you, so you come out of Hebron and we'll meet you half-way, and we'll effect a compromise.'

They didn't say that. Then 'all Israel' came to Hebron. What enabled them to overcome all these old wounds and divisions? The answer is simple: it was the sheer attractiveness of the person of David. They came to him, saying, 'We are your bone and your flesh,' a delightful Hebrew idiom. In our modern English we would say, 'We are your very flesh and blood.' 'Blood is thicker than water,' they tell me. Underneath all family ties, ties of kinship, family relationships are perhaps stronger than everything. And here come the Israelites, they are talking politically, but they're using this metaphor, 'We are your very flesh and blood, David.' It was a miracle in this way; they felt that they were related to David. They weren't just his subjects; they were part of him. His very flesh and bone, they said. How could they be separate from David? And so, they came on those grounds to make him king.

United under the captain of our salvation

I can't help it, can you? Our minds are racing ahead to David's greater Son, the cure for the divisions of God's people. It's Christ, isn't it? Don't you find it in your heart now, as God's Holy Spirit reminds us of his word? You want to come to the risen Lord, the whole lot of you, and say, 'We are your very flesh and blood, Lord. We're part of you. We're on your side.' Isn't that true? I do not know what hurt you have suffered in the battles of life, and in religious battles. But if you're a child of God, I am sure that this is what you'll want to say to him this morning in your heart, 'Blessed Lord, we belong to you, we are bound up in your very life.'

The amazing thing is, when we come and talk to our Lord like that, he replies in absolutely astonishing language. If we say, 'But Lord, we're one with you,' his reply is, 'But, my dear brothers and sisters, I am one with you!'

You see, God had some great fantastic scheme, and the scheme was that he should bring many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). If you've pondered the proposition recently, you will have realised what a difficulty faced even almighty God. How do you get people from Ballynahinch and Limerick and bring them to glory? It's a mighty long way, isn't it? Not geographically, but socially, morally and spiritually. How would God get many sons to glory? He didn't issue us with a visiting card and say, 'Now, this is my address. If ever you happen to get to glory, knock on the door and I'll come and let you in.'

Says Hebrews 2, he provided us with a captain of our salvation, a file leader who would go on ahead of us and mark out the way, and bring his many sons to glory.

That is the charge that God has given to our blessed Lord Jesus, and then it would seem that God sat down in his wisdom to contemplate, 'Now, what would be the fitting way to do that? If I give them a file leader, it's no good giving them somebody who hasn't any idea of the difficulties that they go through, or their wounds and sufferings along the road. I must give them a file leader who understands the difficulties and the obstacles, who can come alongside them, get them over the obstacles, and bring those many sons to glory.'

For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified *are* all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren. (Heb 2:10–11 KJV)

There are some expositors who say that that means, because we are now regenerate and children of God, we are one with Christ, who is the Son of God. That's not what the writer of Hebrews means. It's not *our elevation* that leads our blessed Lord to call us his brothers and sisters, for in that sense there shall be an eternal distinction between us as sons of God, and him, the Son of God. It is *his condescension*, my brothers and sisters—that stupendous condescension— because he who came to sanctify us, and we who are sanctified, are all of one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. What magnificent grace!

Perhaps you don't understand it? Could you imagine the Lord of glory in the company of all the high angels, the archangel himself, and in front of the Father, daring, condescending, to call me a brother of his? There are some dear folks and they wouldn't have me in their Christian fellowship (God bless them, they must go according to their conscience), but the blessed Lord of glory is not ashamed to call me his brother. If you ask me, 'Why isn't he ashamed?', I could think of a thousand and one reasons why he should be; but, in spite of it, he is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters and become one of us. And, dear fellow believer, if he calls you his brother or his sister, I must treat you as a brother and sister of the Lord, for if I don't receive his brothers and sisters I reject him.

Uniting under the one who had fought for them

Then all Israel gathered together to David at Hebron and said, 'Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, even when Saul was king, it was you who led out and brought in Israel.'
(1 Chr 11:1–2)

They are talking of David as a military commander, and how he had led out the troops to battle and secured the victory; it was he who had brought them home in peace. They hadn't forgotten Goliath and the terrible threat he posed to the people of God; they couldn't forget how David went out and met him alone and then took the other Israelites with him to share the victory over the Philistines. 'It was you that won our battles,' they said. How could they

forget it? It was this that was bringing them to Hebron. Even though Saul was king, it was David who had fought for them.

It's this that brings us to our Lord, isn't it? You can't forget it, my brothers and sisters, can you? Even in the days when Satan ruled and had his dominion over us, it was Christ who went out to the battlefield for us. Do you owe your salvation to anybody other than Christ? Doesn't the surge of relief come up in your heart just now as you remember Calvary and the great battle that he won for you? It brings you to Christ with an undying and eternal loyalty. So, in coming to make David king, they were but acceding to what God himself had said, '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"' (v. 2).

There used to be a chorus in my youth, 'Make Jesus king', and then real theologians got to work on it and they said, 'Nonsense.' Theologians have that way at times. I sometimes pray that God will give them a little bit more poetry in their souls, but that's another story! They said, 'Make Jesus king? Of course not—it's God that made Jesus king.'

Amen. Yes, he did. He raised him from the dead; and whereas the world would have put above his cross the title for his crucifixion, 'He said he was King,' God raised him from the dead, set him at the right hand of God, and demonstrated him to be the Lord of all.

That didn't mean that everybody automatically accepted him as such, did it? On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down and spoke to the crowd through Peter, he said that they'd better do now what God had done and, in their subjective sense, own and receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour and King, for the reason that God had made him king and given him the charge to feed his people. The great desire of the shepherd king, owner of the flock, was that all the sheep might compose one flock.

So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD. And they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the LORD by Samuel. (v. 3)

This will remind us straightaway that our blessed Lord Jesus has done the same for us, his people, hasn't he? In that lovely, simple ceremony that he himself ordained the night before he was betrayed, he took the bread and said, 'This is my body,' and he took the cup and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood,' holding up the cup of the new covenant and passing it to his people (see Luke 22:19–20). In response to his request—indeed, his command—we meet as the people of God to celebrate the new covenant. Then we think not only of its glorious provision, 'Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more' (Heb 10:17 KJV), but we think of that gracious promise, 'I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds' (v. 16).

My brothers and sisters, here is the genius of the King; his power to get us to obey him and get all his squabbling little children together, willing to obey him. Hear him. 'This cup is the new covenant; take it, drink it. I grant you forgiveness, and I propose to write my laws on your heart.'

Is there a man or a woman in Christ that would rise up and say, 'No, no, forgiveness is what I want, but I'm not prepared to obey his commandments'?

We don't say it, do we? We behave sometimes like it; hence the wisdom of our Lord that calls us constantly to celebrate that central festival of Christianity, which is the covenant that the Lord Jesus has made with us, his people. There is no place on earth perhaps more calculated to unite God's people as when they take bread and wine in remembrance of the Lord Jesus. Being many, we are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf.

We would remember we are one
 With every saint that loves Thy Name;
 United to Thee on the throne,
 Our life, our hope, our Lord the same.²

What cruel devices there have been that have banned genuine believers—known to be genuine believers, godly of life and habit—from partaking of the Lord's Supper simply on grounds of minor differences.

Jerusalem: the city of David

So, they anointed David king according to the word of the Lord, and then David did another thing that was a stroke of genius to unite his people. He knew the difficulty that some of them had in coming to Hebron, with all its historical associations, so what he did was this. He got his army together and united not just the Judahites—that wouldn't have been a positive thing to do; he united the armies of all Israel and led them to a town that was still occupied by the Jebusites, a place called Jebus. They took Jebus and David made it the capital city for all the people of God, whether they came from the far north in Dan, or from the south in Beersheba. All the people, whatever their tribes, could now rejoice in Jerusalem—it belonged to Dan, it belonged to Judah, it belonged to Ephraim.

What do you suppose they called it? What would we have called it, do you suppose, if we had been in charge? You'd want it called something and I'd want it called something else; we would have our names by the million, wouldn't we? Named after doctrines; named after anything but the name of Christ—shame on us. They called it 'the city of David'. That was his headquarters. It was the city of the great king, and all the tribes came and felt at home. It became their very heart. Such a stroke of genius, the foundation of Jerusalem; for Jerusalem city, in spite of all its wars and troubles, lasts still, doesn't it? And still, as God's prophetic word has taught us, it remains a great centre point of human politics, destined to play a very dramatic part in the times before the Lord Jesus shall return. But it's the name of a city that's gone beyond mere politics and has become the name of the eternal city of God, destined to be the high capital of the universe for all eternity.

I am therefore not lessening your respect for those prophecies that tell us that one day Jerusalem shall be restored. Our blessed Lord himself concurs with the prophets Zechariah and Daniel, and informed us that the Jerusalem of his day should be downtrodden as a nation—as it was in AD 70 and later. It should be downtrodden as a nation until the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled.

² James G. Deck (1802–84), 'Lord, we would ne'er forget Thy love'.

They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. (Luke 21:24)

Jew and Gentile—one new man

Those earthly and political things are not on my mind this morning. I want to address your attention to the use that the New Testament makes of this idea of the city of Jerusalem, in its moral and spiritual and heavenly aspects. Writing in Ephesians, Paul is wanting to enhance our Gentile estimate of the superb grace of God. He talks bluntly,

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. (2:1–2)

'You were once,' says he, 'a lot of hopeless Gentiles. We Israelites are the true Jews. This is our covenant and promise; the Messiah is coming to us. We are a superior crowd.' Then he says,

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace . . . So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. (vv. 13–15, 19)

It has been God's great pleasure to take of the Jew and of the Gentile and not just put them together, but of the two, to make one new man, thus making peace. Gentiles in Christ and Jews in Christ—fellow citizens of that eternal city.

In Galatians, Paul uses the same method. He says, 'But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother' (Gal 4:26). What is he talking about? Well, he's talking about the basic conditions for being a member of the eternal city of God, and for being amongst the people of God. What are those basic conditions? Is it by being circumcised and keeping the law that you might qualify to be a member of the heavenly Jerusalem? No, indeed not; the very opposite is true.

The righteousness which is of God by faith

If we would be members of that great city, then we must follow in the path and the footsteps of Abraham and come to know that justification by faith that Abraham knew, even before he was circumcised. It is not by our efforts to keep God's holy law that we are saved and admitted to the heavenly community.

To think that by our efforts we become heirs to the great inheritance is to follow that mistaken road, when Abraham took Hagar and fathered a slave boy. God is determined that his heavenly city shall not be peopled with slaves but with free-born sons, whose right to be in that eternal city is not on the basis of their own efforts to keep God's law. It is not on the

basis of their own righteousness that they have worked out better than somebody else, but on that simple, straightforward basis that they were ruined sinners like everybody else. They found the righteousness which is of God by faith, even the righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ our Lord. If you're built on that foundation, then you are a free man and a free woman, free citizens of the eternal city of God. Everybody that is justified by faith is built on the foundation of that eternal city. You may have a job following the dull preacher, but here are some occasions to rejoice and shout 'hallelujah'!

The apostles came out one day and they said to the Lord, 'Lord, we've been out on a gospel mission and even the demons are subject to us in your name. It's marvellous, Lord, demons being subject to us.' Some people do get a fixation on demons, don't they? They see them everywhere. Our Lord had to calm their excitement, and he said, 'Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven' (Luke 10:20). Go on, my dear folks, rejoice in it: your names and my name are already registered as citizens in that eternal city.

It was this that strengthened Abraham in his pilgrimage. He wasn't to live long enough to see the literal land of Canaan and enjoy the literal Jerusalem city as his portion here. He was going off into eternity long before those things came to Israel's possession. The thing that sustained him in his pilgrimage was this, 'He was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God' (Heb 11:10). One day we shall be there. It is written that when Abraham and all those that have gone through life on their pilgrim way get home, 'God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city' (v. 16). And the Lord Jesus will not be ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters (2:11).

Have you experienced much suffering for the sake of Christ? With my childish faith, may I use the metaphor that God himself uses? One day you'll get home to glory; you're met by the Lord himself and he conducts you around the bulwarks of the eternal city. What would happen if you turned to the Lord and said, 'Well, Lord, it's all right, but I thought you would have provided something better for me after what I sacrificed for you.' If that ever could be said of almighty God, then God would be 'ashamed to be called their God.' See what they endured for him, and when they get home to that glorious city, and when they've explored its unending riches, God is already confident that he shall have no cause to be ashamed to be called their God. He has prepared for them a city, and to that city all the redeemed shall go as free-born citizens of glory.

David's mighty men

Differences in rank in the service of God

So, the people of God were one under David, but that didn't mean that they were all monotonously the same. Already there was difference in rank and in office among the people of God, and there shall be eternally (see 1 Chr 11-12).

There are differences in rank that are brought about by our Lord's own sovereign choice. Whatever reward I shall get it'll be timely, but nevertheless it won't be to sit on one of the twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. That reward has already been set; the

apostles are going to get that. And as for sitting on the right or the left hand of the Lord, that's not up for grabs; God has already decided who shall occupy that position. We're happy to content ourselves that, being members of the body (to change the metaphor), we occupy the positions which he has given us.

You can take the biggest giant in the whole of Christian history, and, when it comes to it, the major significance of his past and office is this, that he pleases God. And take me, a little whipper-snapper of a chap, with a tiny little gift; I have the same possibility as that other fellow with his mountain of a gift, for God has put me in the body 'as it pleased him' (1 Cor 12:18 KJV). Just imagine the thought of it: that I, for all eternity, shall be able to fulfil the function of pleasing God just by being what he made me to be.

There will be differences because of our loyalty to the Lord, because of the suffering that we have endured; and since some suffer more than others they shall have bigger positions of responsibility. It is not necessarily great knowledge of the word of God that secures the position in the realm of Christ. It is, if we suffer with him we shall be glorified together (Rom 8:17). The blessed Lord who redeemed you with his blood shall never overlook any moment that you've spent for him and sacrificed for him; any battle that you had to fight for him; any occasion on which you were called to take courage in both hands and stand for him and bear the consequences. He shall not overlook one drop of it, and shall reward you. His sense of percentage of reward is that you get one hundred percent—have I got that right? No, ten thousand percent is the going rate for reward in the eternal city (Matt 19:29).

There was reward among the warriors of David for fighting to bring people under David's rule, but there were no rewards for men who fought to defy the people of God. There was such a situation in David's day, when as yet the eleven tribes followed the house of Saul and just the tribe of Judah followed David.

Abner and Joab (2 Sam 3:12-39)

Abner, captain of the host of Israel, decided it was time to bring over the eleven tribes, so that they might be subject to David, and he came to make negotiations to bring over the tribes and unite them all under David. Joab was the commander-in-chief under David (though David is not to be blamed for that). Joab saw what Abner was proposing to do, but there had been long fights between Abner and Joab, and old wounds had been inflicted (v. 30). Joab couldn't forget it, and he was determined they would never sit down with Abner. There's more than a little suggestion that Joab was afraid that, if Abner came across with the armies of the eleven tribes, he might put Joab's nose out of joint and he would have to play second fiddle and not be the supreme general. Personality clashes were in the offing and Joab settled the matter by tricking Abner to come to the city and knifing him dead to stop the unification of God's people and keep them divided. At Abner's funeral David made it abundantly clear to everybody that it was not of the king, and God would deal with the evildoer (vv. 37-39). We need to learn the lesson too, don't we?

Bringing the ark to Jerusalem

There was one final thing that David did in order to bring the people of God together. He said, 'Let's go up all together and bring the ark of the Lord to us (to Jerusalem city)' (1 Chr 13:1-3). He attempted it, but it didn't go well and ended in a mini-disaster. We shall have to learn that lesson too, shan't we?

We shall have occasion tomorrow, God willing, for that story that went wrong in the first place; eventually it went right in the second place. We shall be able to dwell not merely on the mistakes but on the gracious way that the mistakes were put right, and what it all signifies.

So, let our morning meditations cease here. Clumsy has been my exposition, raising all sorts of serious questions and difficulties, perhaps probing deep wounds. But, my brothers and sisters, have we not felt through it all the heartbeat of our blessed Lord Jesus, who died to gather all the people of God into one, who lives to intercede for them, that they all might be one? Not simply in some organisation, but one in that profundity, 'That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us' (John 17:21).

What a magnificent story this is. Does not your heart beat for joy? We began by thinking of the Lord Jesus, who became one with us, and he's not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters. Then, that infinitely more astounding thing, if it be possible; not merely is he one with us, but we are one in him and in the Father, and one with all who, through simple faith, by the grace of God and the sacrifice and Spirit of Christ, are one with him; in him and in the Father.

And now may the Shepherd of the sheep himself use our study for the furtherance and the eventual attainment of his heartfelt desire.

The Coming of the Lord to Jerusalem and the Unification of God's People

Reading: 1 Chronicles 10:13–14; 14:1–2; 18:1–2, 13–14; 23:1–2; 29:22–23, 26–28

Once more a very good morning to you. By the laws of both the Medes and the Persians,³ this morning we ought to advance in the book of first Chronicles to section three. But we have some unfinished business left over from yesterday in section two, and therefore I must ask your pardon and forbearance if we linger for the first part of our meeting in that particular section of the book of Chronicles.

Some of you may wonder why I talk about 'sections of the book'—what does it matter anyway? And so let's begin by looking at the way the chronicler himself has arranged his story so that he will map out for us the theme of the book, the major stages on mankind's path to the golden age of peace and glory.

In the first stage, he traces the history from Adam; then the rise of Israel from the nations; the first disobedient king and his displacement by the king of God's own choice—the king who was not only obedient himself but was able to organise the nation of Israel to function as the kingdom of priests that they were designed to be.

The five major stages in First Chronicles

The first stage

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)

On that triumphant note, the first section ends. The first great necessity in mankind's pathway to the golden age of peace and glory was that there should be found a king who could lead them. The rest of the stages of the book are the development of the reign and power of that king.

³ 'which cannot be changed'—a humorous aside to the references in Esther and Daniel.

The second stage

And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, also masons and carpenters to build a house for him. 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, David was not only king, but now he was established as king. In this confidence, he married a number of wives and built himself a royal dynasty with many a princely prince. So ends the second section.

The third stage

After this David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and he took Gath and its villages out of the hand of the Philistines. And he defeated Moab, and the Moabites became servants to David and brought tribute. 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. (18:1–2, 13–14)

The third section ends in chapter 18. That chapter describes for us two series of remarkable victories that God gave to David over the surrounding nations. Then, once more, a list; but this time not a list of his wives and his princely sons, but of his officers of state who would be at his side in their positions as David executed judgment and justice to all his people.

The fourth stage

When David was old and full of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel. *David assembled all the leaders of Israel and the priests and the Levites*. For David said, 'The LORD, the God of Israel, has given rest to his people, and he dwells in Jerusalem for ever. And so the Levites no longer need to carry the tabernacle or any of the things for its service.' Thus they were to keep charge of the tent of meeting and the sanctuary, and to attend the sons of Aaron, their brothers, for the service of the house of the LORD. (23:1–2, 25–26, 32)

Chapter 23 will bring us to the final stage of David's reign in Israel, when he went into semi-retirement, in the sense that they made Solomon vice-regent over Israel with his father. Solomon should look to the affairs of state and David would spend his retirement years doing what really lay in his heart. He would prepare the material for the building of the house of the Lord that should take place under Solomon and the orchestration of the worship and praise of the Levites, so that when the house was built they might have had practice and be able to enter fully into their glorious ministry of conducting the praise of God at the centre of the people's life.

The fifth stage

And they made Solomon the son of David king the second time, and they anointed him as prince for the LORD, and Zadok as priest *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)

When those preparations were completed, chapter 29 brings us to the end and these verses sum up the magnificent reign of David, first in Hebron and then in Jerusalem:

Thus David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. The time that he reigned over Israel was forty years. He reigned for seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. Then he died at a good age, full of days, riches, and honour. And Solomon his son reigned in his place. (vv. 26–28)

So, then, there are five major stages in this book. Yesterday we were considering together the second stage and found it to be about *the unification of God's people*, and we saw at once the logic of the story. If the destiny is to bring Israel and the world to the golden age of peace and glory, there can be no peace and glory unless this King David can succeed in unifying the people of God. While the people of God remain warring and fighting and jangling and wrestling with one another, how could there be any reality in the hope of a golden age of peace and glory? The unification therefore of the people of God, in section two, is one of the major stages in mankind's pathway to glory.

God will deal with the nations

The next stage, stage three, deals with an altogether different topic. Not the unification of the people of God, but *the subjugation and the pacification of the nations of the world*. Again, that is easy to be accounted for in the logic of the story. If there is any reality and validity in this hope that one day God will bring mankind to a glorious age of peace and wonder and plenty, then not only must the people of God be unified, but God will have to deal with the unruly nations and all the vast and lesser upheavals and evil: the endless conflicts, blood-shedding, and the persecution of the people of God.

If there's ever going to be an age of glory, the question of the problem of evil in the world will have to be solved, and there's no good being starry-eyed about it. Here, if anywhere, we must be realists. This is a problem that has plagued mankind ever since Cain slaughtered Abel, and the problem is with us still; we have the evidence of it in our province.⁴

We shall therefore be all eyes and ears alert, when we come to section three, to ask what God's method was. What was his programme for the subjugation and pacification of the nations, and what lessons can that teach us? What hope can it inspire in our breasts as we wait for that wonderful day when King David's greater Son shall come with clouds and take over the kingdoms of this world, and they shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (Rev 1:7; 11:15).

That is, then, the kind of ground that lies before us, and how far we shall get, who knows! But before we come on to section three there is a matter of some importance at the end of section two.

⁴ Referring to 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland.

The two stories of bringing the ark to Jerusalem

Here we shall find some immediate profit from a little literary study, because this morning we are to consider David's first attempt to bring up the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem (1 Chr 13; 2 Sam 6). It ended in the severe discipline of God upon the people, and so it had to be postponed for a while. When we come to 1 Chronicles 15 we shall have virtually the same story; David's second attempt to bring up the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem. This time, by God's grace, it succeeded, accompanied with great sounds of joy (v. 16).

As we consider those two narratives of the bringing up of the ark to Jerusalem, we should notice that one of them is in stage two, which is concerned with the means and methods of *the unification of the people of God*. The other very similar story occurs in stage three in Chronicles, but not in Samuel. It is concerned with this other even greater matter, *God's solution for the warfare of our world*; his programme for the subjugation and pacification of the nations. We shall try to take care to expound these two stories, similar as they are, according to their different contents.

So, for a moment, we think again of the topic that concerned us yesterday, the unification of the people of God. Our hearts were filled, were they not, with the genius of that ancient King David that took the warring tribes—the one tribe of Judah and the eleven tribes that had been under Saul—and, in spite of the long wars that were between them, brought them together in peace and harmony and unified the people of God. We studied his secret.

The secrets to the unification of God's people

The people's love for David

Firstly, we found that the secret to the unity of the people of God in that day was David himself. He had that ability to charm the hearts of the people and to provoke their loyalty and their love in such a wondrous fashion. Even when he gave a sigh one day, not expecting anybody to be listening—'Oh, that someone would give me to drink from the well of Bethlehem'—three of his men, just hearing the faintest whisper of the desire of his heart, thought it not excessive to take their very lives in their hands and go to Bethlehem, defy the enemy, get the water and bring it to David. (Bethlehem at the time was garrisoned by the Philistines, 2 Sam 23:14–17).

What a magnificent man he was to inspire such loyalty; not mere begrudging obedience on the part of the people, but willing loyalty and love that would lead to the endangerment of life and, if need be, to laying it down. David, for his part, thought it a magnificent thing. So highly did he value that love and loyalty that he wouldn't actually drink the water.

But he would not drink of it. He poured it out to the LORD and said, 'Far be it from me, O LORD, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?' (vv. 16–17)

And we learned the lesson quickly yesterday, didn't we? The secret of ending the strife and the bitterness that has plagued the Lord's people, and the secret of unity, is the blessed Lord Jesus himself.

The establishment of Jerusalem as their capital city

Secondly, it was David's genius in leaving Hebron, his capital city, taking Jebus and founding the city of Jerusalem, so that all the tribes might feel that Jerusalem belonged to them and not to any particular other tribe. They were all equally free citizens of the city of Jerusalem, and it gave the nation a heart.

We thought then of the significance of Jerusalem city in history, and not only in history; for the most part we thought of the Jerusalem that is above, which is the mother of us all (Gal 4:26). Our hearts leapt as we left the dreary scene of wrangling and strife, even amongst God's people, and thought of that wonderful, eternal Jerusalem city, where all God's people shall dwell at last in harmony in the service of God.

We saw that in that reign of David there were differences in rank in the service of God, but the clock allowed us just a few minutes to think about it.

Bringing up the ark

Thirdly, the last secret of the unification of God's people was to bring up the ark. When the nation was united under David and they had Jerusalem as their capital city, David consulted very wisely. It wasn't an arbitrary, despotic, tyrannical decision; it was a united decision upon everybody in the whole of the united twelve tribes that they would go and bring the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem.

What a magnificent idea, and if you've got any concept of what that ark stood for, your pulse will race along a little bit more just now. It was the ark of God, the Lord of the whole earth: 'He sits enthroned upon the cherubim' (1 Chr 13:6). Wasn't it a magnificent suggestion that they should invite, so to speak, the very God of heaven into the centre of their city? Says David to his friends, 'Then let us bring again the ark of our God to us, for we did not seek it in the days of Saul' (1 Chr 13:3). In other words, they didn't seek the Lord. 'Let's cure that,' he said, 'and put that right. Let's put the living God at the centre of our city and seek the Lord.' That remains, of course, the great secret of Christian unity, doesn't it?—when we make the Lord himself the centre to which all of us seek.

His attempt to do this didn't succeed too well and led to an instance of very severe discipline upon the people.

God is omnipresent but he chose one place on earth where he should dwell

We must try to understand it, so let's start once more then with the idea of the ark. The Israelites believed, like you believe, in the omnipresence of God—you can't go to a part of God's universe where God isn't. He is the omnipresent God. In his psalm, David says:

If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me.
(Ps 139:8–10)

You can't go to any stretch of time or eternity where God is not there.

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very

well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (vv. 13–16)

But while Israel believed in God's omnipresence (existing everywhere), as well as his omniscience (knowing everything), they had this special belief, and it wasn't idolatrous either. There was a place on earth—just one place—where the living God had consented to come down and presence himself. It was just one place. God had indicated it to Moses when he commanded him to build a tabernacle.

And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. *There I will meet with you*, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel. (Exod 25:21–22)

'Don't you go and build any other place, Moses,' says God. Don't have any other temple. Don't have a temple to Jehovah in every city or village. There is just one place on this earth, and one place in your nation, where you can come and find God's presence there in that specialised form.'

It must have been a very eerie thing for the high priest, if he believed it, to pull aside the curtain one day in the year, enter into the most holy place and stand, as he felt, in the immediate presence of the living God. It was magnificent.

The centuries rolled on, of course, and one day the ark was replaced by a person. John records the event in magnificent language. 'The Word, through whom all things were created, by whom all things are made, became flesh and dwelt [tabernacle] among us, and we beheld his glory' (see John 1:3, 14).

It was as if John came alongside that magnificent 'tabernacle' and reverently got hold of the edge of the outer wrappings, pulled them back a little bit and looked inside, and saw that glorious person in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col 2:9). Like the veil in the tabernacle, where God dwelt on the other side. What days they were. God's omnipresence was undiminished, of course; but now, in that very special sense, there was one place on earth where God's presence was known in its special sense. '*There I will meet with you.*' Oh, it was magnificent. He lived amongst fallen men and women in their grubby sins, little innocent children could come and nestle on his knee or touch him, and all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily in him.

Ah, that age was to see another tremendous thing, wasn't it? At the last, when the soldier took a spear and plunged it into his side, there came out blood and water (John 19:34). That blood alone had solid and eternal value so that we might come and meet with God:

He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. (Heb 9:12)

Christianity is a historic religion, ladies and gentlemen. Let's never forget it. Where will you meet God? *'There I will meet with you,'* said God, *'from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony.'* The ark is upon that bloodstained mercy seat. The proposition, therefore, that David should bring up the ark to Jerusalem was wisdom indeed, wasn't it? Would God come? Would the omnipresent God deign to come and make his presence specially here, in this place?

And as I talk of that, your minds are racing on. As Christian people, I can't stop you from thinking of Christ again, and of his gracious word, can I?—*'For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them'* (Matt 18:20). You don't have to be a vast throng—*'where two or three are gathered to me, there I am.'* *'To me'*—the Lord of eternity, Lord of the galaxies, Lord of the universe, the blessed incarnate Christ and man of Calvary, now risen from the dead.

Can't you see clearly the secret of the unification of the church? It is the known presence of the Lord and our seeking for it. Oh, my dear brothers and sisters, allow the preacher in me to get the better of the exegete. It is so easy to lose sight of it, isn't it?

I was in a country, let it be nameless, and one elder was telling me of the difficulty they had of getting people out to the meetings of the church. He said that believers say, *'If you can't put on a better show than they put on the TV, we shan't come.'* There could be there the slight suggestion that when the dear folks are coming to meet the Lord, they're coming to a show. May God help us to get, or to regain if we've lost it, the sense that when we come, we come to meet the Lord and to wait upon the living God.

Uzzah

It led, so we are told, to a case of severe discipline. It was not that David wasn't sincere, or that the people weren't enthusiastic. They had colossal enthusiasm; you could have heard the shouting miles away.

And David and all Israel were rejoicing before God with all their might, with song and lyres and harps and tambourines and cymbals and trumpets. (1 Chr 13:8)

Don't blame them for getting excited, because it was real. If God, so to speak, was coming into the city, why shouldn't people burst forth in excited praise? Why did it go wrong? Because, as David later told the Levites, *'The LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not seek him according to the rule'* (15:13). *'Dear oh dear,'* you say, *'does God turn out to be a legalist after all? Is he so fussy?'* But there it was; and we learned the fact that the living God, in all his graciousness, comes to meet us, but he comes on his own terms. When Israel forgot to do it according to the ordinance, it led to a case of severe discipline, and Uzzah died. David was displeased (13:11).

True fear of the Lord

We shall have to ask what was so serious about the fault. But we shall first draw the lesson that, when God comes, we must learn the true fear of God. He is a living God. Says the writer to the Hebrews, *'Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire'* (12:28–29).

God isn't Tom Smith round the corner; he's not Harry Brown or anybody else. He's not just a spiritual advisor; he's not just a president of the council. He's the living God, Creator of heaven and earth, 'whom no one has ever seen or can see' (1 Tim 6:16). It stands to reason that, if it's God we have, the first thing the Holy Spirit must impress upon us is the holy fear of him.

The Corinthian believers won't mind me saying it now because they're in glory, but they got into a shocking state of affairs in Corinth. They were a temple of God, and the Holy Spirit dwelled among them, but it is evident as you read Paul's letters to them that they had lost their fear of God. They were riding roughshod over the ordinances laid down by the apostles, and engaging in grossly unworthy behaviour at the Lord's Supper. Paul had to remind them that if they were to go on like it God must discipline them, because God is real and the covenant is real. In our worldly, superficial day, pray that God will restore to us a sense of the awesomeness of his presence, so that we might cultivate a proper, healthy sense of the fear of the Lord.

The trouble started when they brought the ark on a new cart, like the Philistines did (1 Sam 6:7); they meant it well, but here was a very great danger. The ark, being a wooden box overlaid with gold and filled with the tablets of stone and other sacred objects, it was in the first place desperately easy for Israel to regard it as a magic box. With all the wonderful powers this box had, all you had to do was to bring the box, and 'hey presto!' It was like a ray gun; so if you've got the Philistines coming against you, out came the box and you pointed it in the direction of the Philistines. It was bound to dissolve them.

And so the early chapters of first Samuel tell us that in the days of Eli, Eli's sons, the priests, were grossly self-indulgent and immoral men who had lost their sense of God absolutely. But when the Philistines came against them, Israel said,

Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, *that it may come among us and save us* from the power of our enemies. (1 Sam 4:3-4)

They'd become pagans in their thinking, as though the ark was a lucky charm or a magic box. 'Let us bring the ark, *that it may save us*'—but no, 'it' ever saved anybody. They had the symbol, but they had lost the reality. And, of course, when they brought the ark against the Philistines, and Hophni and Phinehas were beside the ark, you can guess what happened, can't you? God allowed the ark itself to be taken and go into the Philistines' hands (v. 11).

David must be taught that the ark isn't a magic box. It was only a symbolic meeting place with the living God; the living God's not magic. The living God is not an algorithm, a step-by-step solution. The living God is not a formula; he isn't even a text of the Bible, is he? You can quote the phrase, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst,' but God is more than a formula, and if we should be indulging in sinful and careless living, just to quote the verse doesn't mean that we know the presence of the living God. David had to be taught that.

In the medieval times, the so-called Christian church collected relics. They were bones of dead saints and things, and anybody who had these relics was mighty powerful. Therefore, the governments at the time tried to collect as many boxes of relics as they could, because in

the eyes of the masses the one that had the most relics was the valid government. So they fought over relics like wild animals, to get the biggest and the most potent relics, and the bones of the best saints. What a horrible superstition it was.

David learned the lesson

When David was driven out into exile by his son Absalom, there came some of his friends, and, lo and behold, they'd got the ark with them (2 Sam 15).

They brought it to David, and said, 'Your majesty, you're going to win now, because we've got the ark. When the people see that, they'll say, "David is the one, he's got the ark."'

'You'd better take it back,' said David (v. 25).

The first attempt to bring up the ark (1 Chr 13)

We wait now to see what God decides. It isn't just a question of having the box; it was bowing to the government of the living God. It was important, therefore, that they should seek God according to the rule, the ordinance (15:13). That was not legalism; that was God himself. God isn't there for us to use him. God's method of transport for the ark was that he should have a whole series of men who were devoted to him, chosen by him, sacred, sanctified and holy, and they would carry the ark upon their shoulders. If the people wanted God to come to them they didn't go and fetch him themselves; they had to let the Levites bring the ark. But this time they brought up the ark on a cart, if you please.

Let me compare great things with small. Say you've just invented some kind of milking machine and it's going to be the last wonder in the world. The question is, how do you get it advertised and the whole thing known, so that you might spread the news of your milking machine throughout the whole country?

Somebody says, 'I know; why don't we invite the queen to come and do a little advertising for us?'

So, you send a message to the queen, 'Good morning, Elizabeth. Hope you're well. Now, we have a scheme here. We have invented a new cow-milking machine, your majesty, and we thought it would be a marvellous thing if you would come, please, and open our factory and speak some good words for us. We've got it all arranged, and what is more, if you get on the plane at Heathrow, we'll buy the tickets, and we've got quite a decent farm carriage here, a halfback, and we'll meet you at the station. You needn't worry about the programme, we've got it all lined up; we'll have you speaking here and speaking there, and there's quite a decent bedroom, so please come.'

What do you think the queen would say? Well, she won't need your pick-up to start with; for if the queen comes she'll probably come on the Queen's Flight, and she'll have her own limousine. And it's not you who will tell her what to do; she will tell you what she is prepared to do.

God is not there to be used, is he? We don't write the programme for him. We respectfully lay our programmes and our suggestions at his feet and wait on his condescending grace to come to us.

The result of putting it on a cart was that the cart came upon a piece of uneven ground and the oxen stumbled, and the ark began to fall. Uzzah, with very good intentions, the best in the world, put out his hand to steady the ark, and in that moment God smote him.

You say, 'That's unfair, because he meant it well.'

Yes, but if you went outside and made contact with high-power electricity, your good intentions wouldn't matter a lot. They'd kill you. Such is the holiness of God.

But, behind the severity of the discipline there were two wonderfully positive messages, weren't there? The oxen stumbled, and it looked as if the throne of God was going to tumble on the ground. Can I give you a little advice? If, when you get home to glory and see the throne of God, you get the impression that the throne of God is beginning to fall over, don't, whatever you do, run up to it and try and hold it up. You should run from it as hard as you can run, because if the throne of the God of the universe falls over you'll never keep it up. It will crush you.

And in that lies the whole difference between heaven and hell, salvation and perdition. You see, the idea of idolatry is that you have to hold up your God; the idea behind the true God is that you don't hold him up, he holds you up.

God will carry and God will save

So, from our stern lesson, let's learn again the wonderful story of the gospel. Through Isaiah, God is trying to show the people the difference between idolatry and the true God. God pictures an ancient town, and in that town there are big idols. A dust cloud appears on the horizon as the enemy comes to storm the city, and the inhabitants of the city collect their wares in order to flee from the approaching enemy, lest they be overwhelmed. So they get all their pots and pans together and put them on the donkeys to carry them. The poor old donkeys are buckling at the knees under the weight of all the paraphernalia, and they're about to flee when they turn round, and there are their idols.

You can't leave your idols behind, can you? So, in the last-minute hurry, they take the idols down from their perches and put them on the poor old donkey's back. Already overloaded and his knees nearly bent to the ground, instead of helping them to escape, it bogs them down.

'That's idolatry,' says God. 'You'll have to carry me, if I I'm an idol. The true God is the other way round. I carry you.'

What a gospel there is in discovering the reality of the living God. My grey-haired sister, join with me in my old age, will you, in thinking just a moment of this magnificent God.

Listen to me . . . [you] who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to grey hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. (Isa 46:3-4)

When we discover him, the God who made us and who is waiting to be God to us, we don't have to carry him, he carries us.

Our lesson today, therefore, will point us to the power of God. We must now ask the question, by whose power shall I rise one day and sit on the throne of the Lord? Oh, thank God I don't have to try to pull myself up by my own bootstraps, and somehow climb to those magnificent heights.

Paul's first prayer in the Epistle to the Ephesians

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (1:16–21)

He's going to tell them that they have been raised up and are already seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (2:6). But first, let's look at Paul's prayer.

The hope to which he has called you (1:18)

Oh, that God's Spirit in this very moment would open our eyes yet further. My dear fellow believer, what is the hope of your calling? What did God have in mind when he called you? The glory of it exceeds all our powers of rhetoric to describe, doesn't it?

Called—we who are but nothing, called to salvation, called to forgiveness, called into his family, called into the fellowship of his Son, called to his very throne, and one day we will sit on the Saviour's throne, even as he overcame and sat down on his Father's throne (Rev 3:21).

The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints

What are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints? God is already counting his riches, isn't he? Think of the riches in this tent, relatively few in number though we may be, and God has spent the infinite value of the blood of Christ on every one of you dear fellow believers.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Rom 8:29–30)

Oh, the wonder of the wealth and the glory of the riches of God's inheritance in his saints.

The immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe

We could do with praying with David, couldn't we, that we may discover more of the reality of God; and not my purposes for him, but his purposes for me. When he exerted that colossal, infinite power that raised Jesus from the dead and set him at his own right hand, God was unleashing power towards you and me. Already we are seated with him in spirit in the heavenly places, and one day we shall be there bodily.

The ark in the house of Obed-edom

The whole incident had one delightful outcome. For the moment, the bringing up of the ark publicly to Jerusalem proved impossible, and so David took it aside to the house of a certain Obed-edom (1 Chr 13:13). I wonder what his wife said when the ark turned up at the front door! Were they able to get it in with the cherubim above it? Did they have to empty the sitting room or something? I don't know how they manoeuvred the furniture to get the ark in. To have the ark in your home, and obviously in central place, that made a certain disruption of the programme, but there it was. And do you know what? For the months that it was in the home of Obed-edom, God blessed them.

Paul's second prayer in Ephesians

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. (Eph 3:14–21)

Christ dwelling in your hearts through faith

You say, 'He dwells in me already; he has dwelt in my heart ever since I trusted Christ as a teenager.' Yes, he has, but he wants to do more than that. He wants to come and take his residence in us so that he becomes the centre of our very personality within us. Christ dwelling within—it's so wonderful as to be beyond words, that Christ could be prepared to come and dwell in my heart.

You say, 'What does it mean?'

I can't tell you what it means. For us to grasp what that means, we shall need God to strengthen us inside our personalities by his Holy Spirit, so that we may experience what it is to have Christ take up his residence ever more within us. Magnificent, isn't it?

'Mr Preacher, you were supposed to be talking about the unification of the Lord's people. Haven't you wandered from your topic?'

Well, if I have, I'm coming back to it!

Would you have the Lord's people join together and have unity in the church and in the home? How shall we achieve it? By 'bringing up the ark,' my dear brother! Not just into the church, but into the heart. Listen to the prayer. 'That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge' (vv. 17–19).

Mark it well. If we would have cohesion amongst the people of God, then it starts with the Lord Jesus dwelling in my heart. And when I have opened my eyes to see the stupendous grace that the Lord of heaven would come and dwell in my heart—the very 'ark of God' in my person—I shall discover presently that you've had that kind of experience too. He dwells in you, and in that woman over there, and him, and him, and him, and him. And being in our hearts, the blessed Lord will unite us. Those awkward personality difficulties that all of us suffer from, and I more than anyone, that keep us jarring with one another, by the grace of his presence will be gradually resolved, and they'll disappear, won't they? If we can take our personality difficulties and our sins to the Lord Jesus to sort them out, and as he lives in me and he lives in you and he lives in each believer, we come to realise, together with all the people of God, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and are drawn by the sheer reality of the life of Christ within us, filling us with all the fullness of God.

It is good that we observe the ordinances of Scripture; although the mere commands by themselves will not produce the end we seek. It is the Lord's command and we must obey the ordinance. But if we would be united as the people of God, here it is—it's the 'ark of God' in our homes, the living Lord Jesus taking up his residence in our hearts.

May the Lord bless our study for his name's sake. Amen.

The Coming of the Lord to Jerusalem and the Problem of Evil and its Solution

Reading: 1 Chronicles 14:8–17; 16:7–36; 18:13–17

Hello and a very good morning once more to you all. It is a very great encouragement to see so many of you here on this day of holiday, and for you who are here perhaps for the first time, just let me point out to you the topic of our morning study sessions.

We have been in process of studying together the first book of Chronicles under the general title of 'Mankind's Pathway to the Coming Age of Peace and Glory'. We have entitled it thus because the first book of Chronicles, and then the second, are notable for the delightful description they give of that magnificent age of peace and prosperity, wealth and glory, that took place as a result of the double kingship; first of David and then of King Solomon.

The historian becomes quite animated as he goes into the detail of all the wonderful, glorious experiences into which God brought Israel in that age of peace and wealth. Of course, it didn't last, but as Christians we read those Old Testament descriptions of that golden age and we immediately think in our hearts, led by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, of the glorious age yet to come, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come and bring his people to an age of eternal glory and wealth.

So, then, as we have studied first Chronicles, we have tried to mark what are the major stages by which mankind, starting with Adam, shall eventually arrive at that glorious position described at the end of Chronicles, 'Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD' (29:23).

We found that stage one was the rise of Israel from among the nations. Israel, that nation through whom God's purposes have been planned all down the centuries, through whom Messiah himself has come, still has a future in the plans of God.

And then in stage two we noticed that the fall of Israel was eventually followed by the rise of that special king, David. The disobedient King Saul was put aside, and in his place God instituted David, the man who himself learned to obey God. God gave him that genius to bring Israel as a nation to the point where they were in practice what God had made them in principle; a kingdom of priests, to obey God and to conduct life as a great paean of praise, an orchestra of worship to the living God.

Then we noticed that, with the rise of David as king, stage three was the unification of the people of God. When David became king the people of God were divided, and obviously there could be no age of peace and glory so long as God's people remained divided. So, as a

very necessary and early stage in this pathway to glory, David united them; and we have spent some longish time studying the means and the methods that David used.

This morning, we move on to another subject, and that is *the subjugation of the enemies of God and the pacification of the nations*. We shall see as we read why I have described this third section of the book under those terms. Indeed, I have called it 'The Coming of the Lord to Jerusalem, and the Problem of Evil and its Solution.' The section runs from 14:8 to 18:17.

David's relationship to the nations

This is the story of David in his relationship, not now to the people of God so much, as to the nations. It begins with a story of two raids; two attacks that the Philistines made to try and unseat David from being king of Israel (14:8–17). They have heard that the Lord had appointed him, and he was anointed king over all Israel, and the Philistines immediately sensed the threat. If David succeeded to sit on the throne of Israel and unite the nations, then their little Philistine empire was doomed, and so they wanted to nip this thing in the bud. Before David could get firmly established on the throne of Israel they sought to attack him, destroy the Lord's anointed and stop his kingdom ever taking permanent shape.

Under God's leading, David on these two occasions went out and overcame the Philistines, thus securing the first step in the security of his throne. As that section begins, so it ends in chapter 18, with two series of remarkable triumphs over the Gentile nations that lay around Israel. From the very start, these nations had been a threat to the very existence of Israel, and it was obvious that if ever Israel were to be brought to an age of peace and glory and settled circumstance, these hostile nations would have to be put down and subdued and pacified, otherwise Israel would never have any permanent peace. And so chapter 18 tells us in summary of all the many little local Gentile nations that David went against, and the Lord gave him victory wherever he went (v. 13). His kingdom was established and the pathway cleared of obstacles so that Israel might proceed to their wonderful promised age of peace and glory.

David's psalm of thanksgiving to God

The end of this third section is concerned with God's triumph through David over the nations. We shall further see that David and the people had just brought up the ark of the Lord into Jerusalem, with tremendous joy and lifting up of the voice, and shouting, and trumpets. When the ark of the Lord was installed in Zion, the city of the great King (Ps 48:2), David ordained that the Levites should daily sing the praise of God before the ark of God in the city of God, Jerusalem.

So let's take a few moments to read David's great prayer and praise to God (16:7–36).

Christian belief in the Lord Jesus as the Messiah

I don't know, ladies and gentlemen, whether you are much given to talking to Christian people about their spiritual position. If you're not, I could recommend the occupation to you. You will find that they reply to you in terms that are a little puzzling, for at first they seem contradictory. Try it after this session.

Turn to the person next to you, if you happen to know that he or she is a Christian, and ask them, 'Now, what is your present spiritual position?'

And you mustn't be surprised if they'll say, 'My present spiritual position? Why, good friend, do you know what? I'm seated with Christ in the heavenly places.'

You say, 'Really? Do you mean that literally? It can't be true, can it? Are you saying you're in heaven, where Christ is?'

They'll say, 'Yes, precisely. You see, when God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, he set him at his own right hand, far above principalities and powers and every name that is named, both in this age and that which is to come. And the Scripture tells me that, when God raised him from the dead and seated him there, he raised and seated me too (Eph 2:6). Isn't that marvellous? I'm seated with Christ in heavenly places.'

You say, 'Well, that is marvellous. So you're saying, are you, that you're not on earth? You're not seated down here at all; you're in heaven already!'

'No, I'm not in heaven, I'm seated on earth. In fact, I've been seated this last hour and a half on some very hard benches in the tent at Northfield, where gravity adds to the pain of my posterior!'

And you'll say, 'Well, how do you make sense of that? One minute they say they're in heaven and the next minute they say they're on earth. I mean, what kind of people are these Christians?'

And it's not only when they talk of their spiritual experience they'll talk like that. Should you ask them, 'Now, tell us, all those marvellous promises of the Old Testament that one day God would send the Messiah into the world, what do you believe about that? Have they been fulfilled?'

And you'll find these Christians say, 'Oh yes, we know the Son of God has come. Jesus is the Messiah, and the Messiah has come' —

Rejoice and be glad, the Redeemer has come.

Go look on his cradle, his cross and his tomb.⁵

And you say, 'Oh, is that so? Well, he must be here already.'

'Oh no,' they'll say. 'No, he hasn't come yet.'

'Wait a minute, I thought you said he had come.'

'Well, he has come, but he hasn't come yet.'

That's a problem for present-day Jews

If you've met Christianity for the first time, it sounds distinctly odd. Of course, believers find no trouble with it. They might even have attempted to explain to you the apparent contradiction, for they're used to this idea that the Scriptures of the Old Testament that prophesy the coming of the Messiah have not been fulfilled all at once. It has been fulfilled in part by the first coming; it will be fulfilled completely by the second coming.

But, you see, for many folks that is a very big difficulty, and not least for our Jewish friends. Perhaps I've told you before that I had a fellow student at one stage trying to learn

⁵ Horatius Bonar, 1808-1889.

Hebrew, as I was. He happened to be a Jew. His parents had been eliminated by Hitler, and he himself had escaped.

He would say to me, 'But, David, you say your Jesus is the Messiah and the Messiah has come. It can't be true, for the Old Testament said that when the Messiah came, he would put down evil, and your Jesus hasn't put down evil, has he now?'

Of course, I had to agree. Evil has gone on unabated since our blessed Lord Jesus came and since he ascended. And if I tried to tell him that there were two comings, a first coming and a second coming, he would say, 'Nonsense, you've made that up.'

So, Orthodox Jews to this day, with the Bible in their hand, believe in the prophecies that talk about the coming of the Messiah, but they will say he hasn't come at all. They are still waiting for the coming of Messiah.

'Jesus isn't the Messiah,' they say, 'because look how he suffered. No, we wait still for the Messiah. The Messiah hasn't come yet.'

If, on the other hand, you go to the Liberal Jews and say, 'Do you believe in those Old Testament prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, and the Messiah is still to come?', they'll say, 'Of course not; you shouldn't take those prophecies literally. They were metaphorical and all those prophecies about the coming of Messiah have already been fulfilled long in the past. None of them awaits fulfilment in the future.'

If you try to tell them that there is a future, and Messiah hasn't come yet in that sense, they find it difficult.

'Already' fulfilled prophecies and 'not yet' promises

So, to sum up what Christians think and the way they interpret the Old Testament, you could put it like this. Christians know and have experienced that the Lord has already come, and a great part of the prophecies about him have already been fulfilled. As a result, they already have eternal life, they already have access into the holiest of all, and already they are seated with Christ in heavenly places. They are absolutely sure of the *already* part of their salvation.

At the same time, they will frankly admit that there are many aspects of salvation that they haven't got yet. There are the *not yet* promises; promises as valid as any of the others, but they have not yet been fulfilled and we must wait for their fulfilment.

Normally, believers find no difficulty with that. They have been taught to argue that if God has fulfilled those parts of the prophecies about Messiah—about his suffering, his death and resurrection—then it is absolutely certain that God will go on and fulfil the next bit, and the *not yet* will one day become the *now achieved*.

When doubts arise in our hearts

For some believers, it's the *not yet* bit that proves difficult sometimes. It did for our early fellow believers, didn't it? The Hebrew Christians had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. They had professed faith in the Lord Jesus, and hoped to experience a marvellous messianic reign of peace and glory and plenty. But they found that faith in the Lord Jesus as Messiah didn't put an end to suffering; it increased it. And when they found their homes broken into, or when they found themselves facing the hungry jaws of a lion in the Roman Colosseum, then their faith began to wobble.

It's understandable that they asked themselves, 'How does it come that believing in Christ means more suffering than before?' And then the insidious thing would come into their hearts, 'Can it be true? Is Jesus the Messiah after all?'

It doesn't always take severe persecution to do that for believers. Sometimes believers run into long periods of physical and emotional suffering, and they plead to the Lord to heal them, and he doesn't. And as the weary years go by, they begin to wonder, 'Is it true, or is Christianity merely a psychological self-deception?'

That's where Scripture comes in. In the Old Testament, God has given us many a picture, many a type, many a prototype, so that, going back and reading of God's past ways with his people, we may have comfort from the Holy Spirit and from the holy Scriptures.

David's experiences of 'already' and 'not yet'

That is what we shall do this morning. We're going back to King David and his experiences of God, and we shall find he too had this same kind of experience. In the first chapter that we are to consider we shall find David overflowing with joy and triumph. The Lord had come to Jerusalem; all his ancient promises and the covenant that he made with Abraham have all been fulfilled (ch. 16).

'We have arrived. Marvellous! The Lord has come. The Lord is in our midst.' As we listen to David, we shall share some of his joy and enthusiasm.

And as we come to chapter 17 we shall find David in his *not yet* experience. He hadn't arrived quite as far as he thought he had.

God says to him, 'David, do you want to build me a house? Thank you very much, but not yet, not yet. I have plans for you; large, great, vast plans stretching out into the distant future, David, and I must ask you to wait with my *not yet*.'

And as we see David in that experience we shall learn of God's ways, and through the comfort of the Scriptures we shall have hope. 'We have not followed cunningly devised fables' (2 Pet 1:16 KJV). This pattern of themes—the *already* and the *not yet*—has long since been laid down by God in Scripture so that we may grasp it and not lose our nerve and faith when the *not yet* period seems to last so long.

David's 'already' (1 Chr 16)

When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king and was now sitting on the throne of the united nations, the Israel of God being joined together, the Philistines decided that they must nip this thing in the bud (2 Sam 5:17). If they let David get established, his roots deep and his throne secure, they could see that it spelled the end of their Philistine dominion in those parts. One of these days, they would have to bow the knee to David and own him not only as king of Israel but emperor of their world, and they were not prepared to do that.

So, in the early days of this new king being on his throne, they rose up against the Lord and against his Anointed (Ps 2:2), to do their very utmost to unseat David and to destroy his kingdom before it became too advanced. The Lord specifically guided David with his divine

providence; David went out against the Philistines and they were defeated (2 Sam 5:18–19; 1 Chr 18:1).

The ark is brought to Jerusalem

And then a wonderful thing happened; the Lord himself came to Jerusalem. David and the elders of Israel and the Levites all went to the house of Obed-edom. With great solemnity and with overflowing joy, they brought up the ark of God out of the home of Obed-edom into the city of David, and put it in a tent that David had prepared. It was a spectacular day in Israel.

If you can use your holy imagination for a moment, consider yourself watching at the gates of the city of Jerusalem this fair, fine morning, and in the distance comes this marvellous procession. There are the Levites in their white garments, walking in stately, measured steps; and on their shoulders the throne and footstool of God, with its overarching cherubim. Seated on the cherubim, though unseen by the literal eye, is the God of the whole earth, the Lord of heaven, earth and sea.

Oh, what a thrill goes through the crowd, as the boy asks his parent and the girl asks her mother, 'What's happening, Mum?', and Mum says, 'The Lord is coming, my dear.'

Fancy being there and seeing it happen; to watch the Lord coming to Jerusalem, received and set in the place of eminence that David has prepared for him, the throne of God established and the Lord reigning.

Even as I speak, you Christians are thinking of other things that one day you shall see. One day you will see him, my brother, my sister, not on some golden box with metallic cherubim, but you will see him coming in the very clouds of heaven to establish his throne eternally. What joy there will be, what ecstatic shouting, what praises of God, what hallelujahs, when the Lord comes and we see him, and the throne of God is established. For long centuries God's people have been taught to pray, 'Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Matt 6:10). One day the prayer will be answered and the Lord shall come.

The appointment of the Levites

So the ark was received, and you can see the significance it had for David and for Israel at large by what happened next. David organised and orchestrated the Levites so that every day, on behalf of the nation, they should surround the throne of God, now established in Jerusalem, sing their praise for God, and make known his great judgments and the marvellous things that he had done.

What had he done? What filled their hearts with such joy and wonder? Let the priests tell us.

'Many centuries ago, God made a covenant with Abraham and with his seed to give us this land, but there have been many long, and sometimes dreary years since that first promise was made. When the nation was taken down to Egypt, and was in bondage for four hundred years, many of them had given up hope that ever the promise would be fulfilled. God sent Moses and he brought them out of Egypt to the verge of the promised land, but poor old Moses could get them no further, and they thought it was the end of things. Then God raised up Joshua, and he brought them in.'

And that seemed marvellous at the time, but it turned out to be not the final thing, for though the nation was in the promised land, they were constantly attacked by their enemies, troubled and tried, destroyed and cut to pieces. Much troubled by the Gentile nations around them, some thought there would never come a day when Israel would possess the land God had promised them.

But then, with exulting joy, they will tell you, 'It's happened; the Lord has come and established his throne in Jerusalem. We're in possession of the land, and all the enemies shall be subdued. Tell the nations that,' say the Levites, 'herald it abroad; let the nations know that the Lord has come. This is the beginning of his reign, already arrived.'

David's 'not yet' (1 Chr 17)

You can understand David's fervour, now that God has fulfilled his promise.

'Well,' said David to Nathan, 'I am dwelling in a beautiful mansion, with a sealed pinewood ceiling and all that, but the ark and throne of the Lord is just in a tent up the road. That's hardly dignified enough for the Lord of the whole earth, to have his throne in a tent, is it? I think I'll build him a really good permanent house, a temple of stone; none of this temporary affair any more. We've arrived, and I'm going to build him a temple. I'll put the ark and the throne of the Lord in this permanent temple.'

And Nathan said, 'What a jolly good idea, David. Do go ahead with it.'

But that night the Lord spoke to Nathan, and he had to eat his words and come back to David the next morning and say, 'I'm sorry, I made a mistake. The Lord has been talking to me, David, and he doesn't care too much for your scheme.'

'Why ever not?' said David.

So the Lord spoke through the prophet's voice to David.

'David,' said he, 'this scheme of yours to build me a permanent house, did I ask for it—was that my suggestion?'

'Well, no, Lord,' he said, 'but don't you think it's a good idea?'

'Now listen,' said the Lord. 'Man *shall* sit upon the throne of the Lord; but wait a minute, David, who is manager here? Whose plan is this? I've never asked anybody all these years to build me a permanent house. In the time of your ancestors I brought them out of Egypt, and I've been content with a moving tabernacle because the people had not yet arrived at the destination I had in view for them. I walked in a tent with them all those years, and even since they got into the land I was prepared to dwell in a tent. I walked every mile with the people, David, to bring them to the goal I had in mind for them, but I've not arrived yet, and I'm not for settling down. You may think that what I've already done is wonderful, but that's only a beginning. I've got plans for you that go over the edge of the most distant time you could think of and into eternity, and I'm not settling down until I get you there.'

It wasn't God being mingy and jealous. That was God adhering to his purpose, *Man shall sit upon the throne of the Lord*. But according to whose plan?

Said God, 'David, tell me something. Did you think up this scheme? Was it that you had an idea one day, when you were shepherding a few sheep? You thought, "This is a miserable business here, seeing after a few smelly old sheep in a meadow. I should have better things to do than this."' "

'Was it you who came to me and said, "I have a scheme, Lord. I wonder if you would take me from being a shepherd boy, make me king of Israel, and set me as the head of a big empire"?''

'It was my idea. I thought of it first. You would never have dreamed that, from being a little shepherd boy, you would rise to sit on the throne of Israel. Now you think you've arrived, but I have ideas for you that stretch into eternity. One of these days, David, I'm going to build you a house. You don't need to talk about building me a house; I'm going to build you a house, a royal dynasty. A whole succession of kings will come from you, and to one of your descendants I shall be a Father and he shall be to me a Son. I'm asking you to wait, David, until I'm finished with you.'

I wonder how much David understood. Did he realise what God meant? He would build him a dynasty, a succession of kings. Some of them would be poor enough and have to be disciplined, as God said they would. But one day, in David's own city of Bethlehem, a Saviour would be born, who was descended from David according to the flesh (Rom 1:3). The wonder of it is that God already had it in his mind that one day there would be born to David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11). God would not merely father him and be a kind, fatherly guide to him; the one that should be born would be the eternal Son of God, become flesh, and dwell among us.

What ideas God had for David. Had he realised it at the time, that Jerusalem business would have faded a bit, compared with the glory of this, wouldn't it? One day, God's own Son, Son of the Father, heir of the universe, would come to Jerusalem in the line of King David, and set up his throne. He knows it now, doesn't he? How grateful David is now that he didn't get building that house of the Lord himself. He was content to wait for the *not yet*, and embraced the marvellous and glorious promises and purposes of God yet to be fulfilled.

When David understood it in part, and gave up his notion of building a permanent house at that juncture, he went in and sat before the Lord. 'Oh Lord,' he said, 'what shall I say? From those humble origins, in your grace and purpose you elevated me to the throne, and not only to this little throne in Jerusalem, but you have spoken to your servant of a great one yet to come. All I can say is, thanks be to God for it; and since it was your idea, please fulfil what you have promised and execute your plans to the full.'

Our experiences of 'already' and 'not yet'

Do you see the pattern in holy Scripture itself? That was the way of God with Israel and it's the same with us. Using those early historical events as a prototype, we turn now to see the plan that God has unravelled for us as the centuries have passed by.

Our 'already'

We're far more advanced than David ever was. One day the 'ark of the Lord' came to Jerusalem in another sense, didn't it? It's a marvellous story, 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). The eternal Son of the eternal Father took flesh and blood, and the Lord came riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey.

What a tremendous moment that was, when the thousands that had followed him from Galilee, and the thousands more at the gates of Jerusalem watched to see what was happening. Over the crest of the Mount of Olives came this great crowd, and in its centre was one sitting on a donkey. The cry went out, 'The Lord is coming', fulfilling the long prophecies of Scripture, given for instance by Zechariah,

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (9:9)

Now it was happening in front of their eyes. You can imagine the ecstatic excitement of the crowd, as they watched the King coming, and they shouted, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!' (John 12:13). It was a coming of the Lord, wasn't it?

And what happened then?

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.' (Ps 2:1-3)

The Lord coming to Jerusalem

Like those old Philistines at the first, some of the Gentiles came against the Messiah, to put an end to his reign before it began. And not only Gentiles but also enemies from within Israel itself. In this very city of Jerusalem they did it; Herod and Pilate, and the leaders of the nation, Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, gathered together, determined to nip this thing in the bud. Before this idea of Jesus being the Messiah and planting his kingdom took root, they would destroy him.

What happened then?

He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.' (vv. 4-6)

God laughed at their puny ideas, raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in heavenly places. 'The Lord has come to Zion.'

Someone will say, 'That's how you Christians talk. You say he was the Messiah, come to set up his reign in Jerusalem, and then when he didn't do that you imagine that it wasn't the earthly Jerusalem God had in mind, it was the heavenly Jerusalem. Isn't that a bit of a cop-out?'

No, it isn't. The Lord's first coming—what would it involve? It would involve his coming to Jerusalem; it would involve his sacrifice at Calvary, but that wouldn't finish it. To finish the first stage of his coming, he must die and ascend and go into heaven. That isn't a cop-out, that's a fulfilment: 'But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself' (Heb 9:26).

You see it in the question of his sacrifice, don't you? He came to fulfil all those long sacrifices of the Old Testament, and when he died on the cross he said, 'It is finished.' But that couldn't be the end of it. To complete that first coming he must not only die and rise again, he must ascend into the very presence of God, and he has done that. Oh, the marvellous triumphs of the Lord, 'Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.' And what a fulfilment it is, far beyond anything David would have ever achieved—the Lord coming to Jerusalem, being rejected and crucified, risen, and now seated on 'the hill of Zion'—in the very presence of God himself.

I bid you, rejoice. Just think of the things that have already been achieved for you by his first coming. Can you count them? *Already* the work is finished, the sacrifice done; redemption's cost has been paid by that one sacrifice for sin forever. At the end, 'the consummation of the ages', he has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and he's entered in and sat down at the right hand of God. Oh, marvellous fulfilment. Those Christians that we talked of at the beginning were not talking nonsense. *Already*, you have access into the holiest of all, into the very hill of Zion.

Our 'not yet'

But then there's the *not yet* for us as well, isn't there? And this is where some of the early believers were in difficulty. Take the two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). Their difficulty was this. They thought that, at our Lord's first coming, he would put down all rule and authority; all the enemies of the people of God should be destroyed and Christ would reign, and he didn't do it. And they said to the stranger who came to them on the road, 'We had hoped that this Jesus would prove to be the liberator of Israel, and he hasn't done it.' Their hopes were almost dashed, and our Lord came alongside and had to explain to them the difference between the *already* and the *not yet*. The plan of Scripture was that first he must suffer for sin, and only then enter into the glory of his coming reign. So much has been fulfilled; for the rest, we wait.

Sometimes you feel that the waiting period is long. You watch the evil of the world increasing, and the persecution of our fellow believers in many parts of the world is as terrible as it ever has been. You watch the daily sorrows, griefs, illnesses and diseases that afflict your loved ones. Our loved ones are taken and still the Lord doesn't come. Do you ever feel, my brother, my sister, that the Lord is slow to fulfil his promises (2 Pet 3:9)? Do you ever find your heart crying, 'How long, Lord? How long before you rise up and smite the evil, and put down wicked men?'

O Lord Jesus, how long, how long
Ere we shout the glad song?⁶

⁶ H. L. Turner (1845–1915), 'It may be at morn, when the day is awaking'.

Who planned it all?

There's a cure for that kind of feeling, isn't there? We could do what David did (1 Chr 17:16). As he heard God expound the wonderful future he had in store for him, he went and sat in the presence of the Lord and surveyed the situation, and we could do the same.

Let the Lord talk to our hearts in these closing moments. You, my dear sister, you, my brother, are saved and on your way to glory. Already you are seated with Christ in the heavenlies; you have access into the very presence of God. You are redeemed and at peace with God, but you are going through all sorts of trials and tribulations while you wait for his coming again.

Now, tell me, by whose design is all this being carried out for you? Was it your idea? Could you think up a better plan and programme than God has?

Was it you that came to God, and said, 'You are supposed to be a God of mercy; would you not one of these days consider sending your Son to bear my sin instead of me?'

That wasn't your idea, was it?

What raised the wondrous thought,
Or who did it suggest,
That blood-bought saints to glory brought
Should with the Son be blest?⁷

And as we sit down and think, the wonder begins to fill our hearts. 'It wasn't my thought. I never imagined any such thing. It was God's own will; he chose to send his Son, and even while I was his enemy, while I was yet a sinner, Christ died for me.'

But part of it was your idea. You went to the Lord one day and you said, 'Lord, thank you very much. You have redeemed me, you have forgiven my sins through the death of Christ, and I'm justified and reconciled with God.'

And then, did you say, 'Lord, may I make a suggestion? You could improve it a little bit. One of these days, you could think of making a mansion for me in glory. Would you consider that, Lord?'

That wasn't your idea either, was it?

'I found you,' says God, 'I've raised you up and already seated you in spirit with Christ in heavenly places. And one day the blessed Saviour, who's engaged in preparing a place for you, will come again and receive you to himself.'

Can you say, 'Well, Lord, if that's your idea, then I've got another suggestion to make. Would you ever consider, when I get home to heaven, letting me share the throne of your Son along with him?'

That wasn't your idea either.

Father, the thought was Thine,
And only Thine could be—
Fruit of the wisdom, love divine,
Peculiar unto Thee.⁸

⁷ George V. Wigram (1805–79), 'What raised the wondrous thought . . .?'

God himself has mapped out the salvation and redemption, and the future glory that goes staggeringly far beyond anything we could possibly have imagined, and he's already set us a long way on the road to its fulfilment.

'It's taking a long while before it happens in full,' you say. 'Lord, how long have I still got to wait?'

I think he might come back to you and say, 'My dear, how long do you suppose I've spent planning it for you? This wasn't an idea that suddenly came into my mind one day. You were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world; I watched over your conception in your mother's womb; I wrote all your members in my book (Eph 1:4; Ps 139:16 KJV). And when you wandered from me, I followed you patiently, tracked you down and brought you to myself. I've had this plan in mind for all eternity, and I want to tell you,' says God, 'every step of your journey, I've walked it with you. Whatever life feels like to you, I've not left you down here and sat in my glorious heaven, letting you find your way to heaven the best you can. Let me tell you, I've come down and walked with you all the way through the wilderness. I'm walking with you still, and I give my guarantee that I shall not forsake you even when I land you in that heavenly realm of glory. It's my scheme and I've done so much already, can you not trust me with the timing of this final part?'

What can you say to God when he talks to you like that? All you can do is to go humbly into his presence and sit before him, absolutely astounded and overwhelmed by the purposes the eternal God has for us, his creatures, who are now his children.

'Lord, your promises have me open-mouthed and altogether confused; but Lord, you've said it—do what you yourself have promised.'

So may God encourage us as we wait this 'little while'. We have so much of the *already*. Let us grasp firmly the promises of God that are not yet fulfilled, and in the faith that he has fulfilled the past, and will fulfil the future, humbly thank him for his glorious plan and pray that he will fulfil his word in us, to his eternal glory.

⁸ George V. Wigram (1805–79), 'What raised the wondrous thought . . .?'

Putting Down the Last Enemies and Advance Preparation for the Temple

Reading: 1 Chronicles 22:5–10; 29:9–23

My first pleasant duty is to thank you all, my brothers and sisters, first for your attendance here in the mornings of this week, in spite of many impediments in the road.⁹ Thank you too for your interest, and for the way you have patiently sat for so long; doubtless stemming from your conviction that the word that we are studying is nothing other than the word of God; such that, if God opened the heavens and spoke to us direct, he would speak to us in appropriate terms from the book of Chronicles. Thank you for the help that you have given me, by your interest, in leading your studies.

I have one criticism of the morning studies. That is, the lecturer who led them in these past days was so inefficient that he allowed himself to get the programme all out of step. We're stuck with him now; we can't change it. Next year, here's hoping that you manage to get a more efficient lecturer. The best we can do today is to attempt to make good the damage. That means we shall have to try and cover at least two sections of the book of Chronicles.

Let's make a vigorous start, therefore, and read one set of verses from section four (22:5–10), and then another from section five (29:9–23).

As you will know very well by now, we have been studying the first book of Chronicles, under the general title, 'Mankind's Pathway to the Coming Age of Peace and Glory'. We noticed that it is divided into sections, each section tracing one of the stages along the pathway that should lead mankind to that blissful age that is yet to be; an age so blissful that the ancient prototype of it, the reign of Solomon, is described in these terms, no less, 'Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD' (29:23).

Our hearts have been moved and our imaginations vivified as we have thought of that ancient prototype, and it has made us think of the more glorious reality. For, since the day of the ascension, a man has sat upon the throne of the Lord; a man as truly human as we are. Not on some ancient, gilded seat in Jerusalem city, but on the very throne of the universe. And yet to that wonderful man, who, being human, is truly God, God has given the supreme place in the universe, and 'seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all

⁹ This is another reference to the difficulties sometimes caused by the Troubles in Northern Ireland in those days.

rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come' (Eph 1:20–21).

Not only is that true, but the glorious fact is that, in raising Christ from the dead, God has put forth his power towards us, and in spiritual status we are risen with him too and seated with Christ in those heavenly places (2:6). And where we are already spiritually, one day we shall be physically, for the gracious promise of our Lord is this, 'To him who overcomes, I will give to sit down with me on my throne, even as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne' (Rev 3:21). The ages that must roll before that is finished may be long.

David's final battles

Before the age of peace and glory could be brought in, David, the military king, had to subdue his enemies and rule them with a rod of iron. So shall it be for our Lord when he comes again in power and great glory to execute the judgments of God upon our world. He's not doing it now, but then he shall rule the nations with a rod of iron; his millennial kingdom will not be quite the age of unspoiled peace and glory that sometimes it is made out to be. The promise is that, when he rules the nations with a rod of iron, we shall be joined with him in his government, and he goes so far as to say that we too shall rule the nations with a rod of iron.

The activities of David eventually gave way to the reign of peaceful Solomon. It is towards that great goal of undisturbed peace and glory that the books of first and second Chronicles direct our attention. We come this morning, then, first to section four in the proceedings, which is concerned with the last enemies that David had to put down before Solomon ascended the throne of peace. If you care to take your Bible again into your hand, you will notice that section four of first Chronicles has four major stories. Let's think of those four people, shall we?

The first one is the son of the king of Ammon, and we shall discover that he was a sneering cynic. If we're going to think of opposition to God's plan to bring mankind to an age of peace and glory, the number one enemy you'll have to encounter is the cynics, who will try to debunk everything about it and tell you that it's 'a cartload of old nonsense'. The second lot, the sons of the giants, were God-defying giants. And the third enemy was a vain, proud king.

Let's think of what those three enemies do. The sneering cynics, in the end, mock God himself. The defiant giants defy God; the proud king displaces God and puts his own glory where the glory of God should be.

Thank God that the section ends with that other son, the son of David, son of God—and what does he do? He's no cynic, he's no giant, he's no proud king; he builds, positively builds, for God.

The four major stories

1. In chapter 19, there is the story of the son of the king of Ammon; a sneering cynic who proved himself an enemy of David. He was a sinister king, as we shall presently discover, with many evil machinations and oppositions in his breast.

2. In chapter 20, we have another group of enemies that had to be put down; these were the defiant sons of the giants.

3. In chapter 21, we have another king; proud, dark, evil and sinister beyond all adequate description, none other than 'his satanic majesty'. You will gather the sophistication of Satan's opposition to the plan of God that he not only stirred up Gentile enemies like the king of Ammon against David and his throne, but infiltrated the very heart of David himself. In David's high capital, Jerusalem, Satan insinuated into the very heart of the king, a proud attitude that brought judgment both on the king and on his people.

4. Those three ugly enemies are discussed in some detail in this section, but, thank God, the section ends with another son. Not the son of the king of Ammon, nor yet the son of the giants, but David's son, Solomon. Being David's son, he was also in some sense a son of God. Of him, David said, 'My son is young and inexperienced' (22:5).

Story 1: Hanun, the king of Ammon's son

The first great enemy in the last group is the sneering cynic, with his deliberate misinterpretation of the kindness of David. Nahash, the king of Ammon died, and David said in his heart, 'I will show kindness to Hanun, because once upon a time his father showed kindness to me' (19:2). That is historically true. When David was in exile, fleeing from the throne, then, amongst others, the king of Ammon supported him with material provisions.

Now he was dead and David thought to show kindness in return to the dead king's son, but, listening to his advisers, the new king cynically and deliberately misinterpreted the kindness that David would have shown them.

Said his equally cynical ministers of state, 'You don't suppose that he really means kindness by this, do you? All he's doing, with his front of sympathy and gifts, is coming to spy out the land. He'll rob you of your country, your possessions, and your throne.'

With a throne and a crown to defend, but at the first not being bold enough to come out in open warfare and defend it, he turned to cynicism and debunking the whole thing. He took the messengers that David had sent to convey his kindness, shaved their beards and cut off their clothes in the middle and exposed their shame. He humiliated them and showed contempt for David and his throne; he debunked the whole thing by his deliberately cynical misinterpretation (vv. 4-5).

You mustn't be surprised at it, of course, because the Ammonites had shown this tendency throughout history. They mocked the people of God, and through them they mocked God himself.

First Samuel 11 tells us the story of how, when Saul was newly elected king, the Ammonites took advantage of his weakness. When they came to Jabesh-gilead, the men of Jabesh offered them a treaty.

But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, 'On this condition I will make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all your right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel.' (v. 2)

It was, of course, a humiliating thing to have one's eyes put out; and for a soldier to have his right eye put out, he could no longer draw his bow and aim it properly. The whole thing was an intended insult to Israel, shaming the people of God.

At a much later date, when the people of God came back from exile, they were trying to rebuild, first the temple and then the city:

Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, 'What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?' Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, 'Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!' (Neh 4:1–3)

Tobiah was quite an influential man in his day, and he couldn't think of any better tactic for the moment than to pour scorn on the whole thing. 'What are these feeble Jews doing? Just look at this absurdity.' It's like someone today saying, 'These gospel halls,' or something of that order, 'that these people have built here—why, even if a fox went up and wagged its tail, it would knock the whole thing over.' Making a mock of the people of God.

So, this son of Ammon was no exception to the rule. He deliberately misinterpreted David's kindness. Now, it is an interesting fact that at this period in history (David's wars with Ammon), it was the time when David himself fell into grievous sin and gave the enemies of the Lord grounds for blaspheming against God. The chronicler doesn't record that episode. It isn't because he wants to whitewash David (he's about to tell us of a most grievous sin that David did), but because it's not strictly the point at issue.

The people of God are failures in many respects, are they not? Which one of you, being a professed Christian, can put your hand up and say that you have not at times done something that's been a failure, a fault, a sin? And you cover your head and blush with shame as you think how it could have been taken by the devil and the enemies of God, and laid as a reproach upon God's name itself.

But ultimately, that is not the point. If the critics and the cynics like to criticise the people of God, there's plenty of material to hand. The serious thing is that their criticisms and deliberate misinterpretations go beyond the people of God to God himself. The sad thing about this present king of Ammon and his cynicism was that his father loved David and supported David in his exile. Maybe, in our terms, he had been converted and become at least a supporter of the cause of God. But his son turned out to be a cynic.

I do not wish to probe any wounds and hurt parents, themselves believers, whose children have turned out to be cynics. It can happen, can't it?

It arises, of course, from the same source as it arose with Ammon. Ammon resented what God had done through Israel. Originally, God had said to Israel, 'Don't attack Ammon, let him be,' (Deut 2:19). But Ammon, in their folly, had come out to attack the people of God, and God had given some of their land to the Israelites, and they never got over it. They had resentment in their heart to the ways and claims of God, interpreted through the people of God.

Now we find in this story that Ammon's king was trying to preserve his own crown. The thought that someone would come and take his crown from him so he would no longer be king, take his wealth and all his glory, was too much for him. Not being bold enough to be a giant and put his fist in the face of God, his opposition took the form of cynicism.

Cynicism, ladies and gentlemen, is the weak man's defence of himself against the claims of God. Our world has become very cynical. You'll find that the scientists, faced with the self-evident marvels of the Creator's kindness and the endless examples of design complexity in the universe, are determined *ex hypothesi* not to admit design. When they're in their laboratories, yes, they presume that each part of the body has a purpose, but when they're outside they spin this philosophy that there is no purpose. They're not prepared to admit *intelligent design* behind the marvels of the universe. Why not? At heart they fear to admit the existence of an almighty Creator and designer, because if there is a Creator and designer it carries the implication that one of these days each one of us must take our 'crowns' and lay them at his feet.

Then they're faced with the phenomenon of the human mind. It's a marvellous thing; far more than a mere physical brain.

'A mind? No, no,' say some of them. 'There's no such thing as a mind. It's sheer 'stuff', atoms and juicy chemicals and things, that's all it is. There's nothing more. You may think you have freedom of choice, but that's simply in your genes. You are nothing more than a physical, material machine, and that's that. There's nothing more to it.'

What debunkers they are of life's wonders and marvels. Debunking the gifts of God and reinterpreting them. 'Look at that,' they say, "'Nature, red in tooth and claw.'"¹⁰ It's nothing but a hideous zoo that we live in.'

And when it comes to morals, modernism debunks morals as well, doesn't it? It says they're mere social customs, and morals have to be adjusted to the present age. There are no absolute morals. If you start admitting absolute morals, you'll have to admit an absolute God who set them. They're determined to misinterpret God's universe.

And what is the end of this kind of 'intelligence', so to speak, the cynic at his work, debunking God's creation? The great peak of intellect, as he applies it to studying the universe around him and the human phenomenon, is this: 'One day the earth will be finished, and there is no hope for you. There's nothing beyond it; when the earth goes "phut!" that's the end of everything, the end of the show. There is no hope.'

He's now used all his marvellous intelligence, the gift of God to him, to understand the universe and make sense of it. He comes to the conclusion with his debunking that the material world will just collapse at the end, one way or the other, and it will drag down man's intelligence with it. There'll be nothing human intelligence can do to stop it, and brute, mindless matter will smudge it out. So much for human intelligence. What a disastrous reinterpretation of the universe that is, and you can see its relevance to our topic.

Ladies and gentlemen, is there a coming age of peace and glory? Is there a wonderful eternity ahead of us? Is there a God? Is there a purpose in life? What is the very glory of the life we have around us now, anyway? What are its values? In modern man's attempt to

¹⁰ Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, 1850.

escape God and his claims upon us, the cynic is prepared to reduce everything in the end to meaninglessness and nothing. Beware of the cynic.

You'll notice that Ammon, the cynic, got other people to fight his battles for him. He called upon the Syrians, and when they were defeated by David they didn't give up; they went on fighting (19:16).

Have you ever found that? I've found it many times. I'm asked sometimes by believers if I would have a word with their son or daughter. They've gone off to university maybe, and they once made a profession of salvation but now they're nowhere. And so, as prayerfully as one can, I try to help. You'll find that these young folks have hired a lot of enemies to fight God. They call in the scientists, and tell you that science has made it impossible to be a believer; so you cite a whole list of scientists who are believers.

And then you ask, 'What is this difficulty that science has created that proves there is no God?' They can't answer, of course, because science hasn't proved it anyway; so enemy number one is laid low.

But then they turn to social anthropology or something; and when that won't do, to social science, and then to philosophy. You quote them a whole list of modern philosophers who are believers in God, and philosophy gives up.

Do you suppose they give up then? No, their difficulty wasn't intellectual to start with. It was the old cynicism, defending the heart that, for one reason or another, doesn't want to yield its 'crown' to God, and that's a sorry thing.

They took the crown off Ammon's head (20:2). Where did he get that wealth? Where did he get those jewels, those diamonds, that gold? The whole thing was a gift from God; the universe, the gold, the pearls, the silver, everything in it is a gift from God. Indeed, when God made man, he crowned him with glory and honour and set him over the works of his hand (Ps 8:5-6). See what damage sin wreaks in the human heart. Because man wants to keep hold of the crown without acknowledging God, in the end he reduces his own crown to insignificance, and tells you there's nothing in it. 'Life is meaningless, morals are anybody's guess, and there is no hope.'

The first enemy we must face is cynicism. May God help us to pray for the cynics, that God may open their eyes to the wonder and the wealth of his creation, the reality of his existence, and the glory of the hope that lies beyond. We only keep our crowns when we hand them over to the God who gave them.

Story 2: The sons of the giants

Then there were the sons of the giants; they weren't weak cynics, using cynicism to try and protect their inner interest. They were God-defying giants like Goliath, who stalked on to the stage of history dressed in all his big man's armour. Super man with all his accoutrements, sword and shield and all the technology of the day that would demolish everybody, and he defies the living God.

We shan't spend much time on it; we know what happened to Goliath. There will come a couple of giants at the end of the age, when man's proud and limitless defiance of God reaches its peak (Rev 13). There shall come the so-called 'beast' and he shall stand in open defiance of God, presenting himself to be God —

And the man of lawlessness [sin] is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. (2 Thess 2:3–4)

We've watched his predecessors on the stage of history. Alexander the Great, some of the Roman emperors, Hitler, Marxism with its hideous atheism; and we've seen the slavery that such giants bring the people under. That series shall reach its head in the coming day, with the man of sin openly defying God and then deifying himself. At the manifestation of his coming, the Lord Jesus shall destroy him with the breath of his mouth.

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. (v. 8)

Story 3: The proud king

We can leave them there and come to a much more subtle obstacle put in the way by Satan himself (1 Chr 21:1). At this very late stage Satan insinuated an attitude of pride into the heart of David the king, that he should take glory to himself. David commanded Joab that he should go and number the people. Even Joab, who wasn't renowned for his godliness, protested and said, 'But no, your majesty, why would you have the people numbered? Why would you do it?' (see v. 3). Why did he want to know how many people he had? Hadn't God made the promise that they would be as the sand of the sea shore? Why should David want to know their exact number?

Yes, that's a good question. God knew how many. Why did David need to know?

You say, 'He needed to know how many Levites he had so he could organise their music.'

Do you think that was the answer? There was no harm in numbering the Levites; nor soldiers, if it was necessary for the campaign. But to know how many people he had in all his kingdom, David had fallen to the gratification of pride. It's no accident that this example is the king himself. There are some sins so sophisticated that the drunkard doesn't do them—the drunkard is very rarely given to pride, you know. It's people in high office in the church who are in greater danger of yielding to pride. It's a lovely thing to serve the Lord; it's wonderful to find the joy that comes from the genuine appreciation of God's people; but how easily we topple over that narrow band into doing it for our own glory.

And here was an insidious sin indeed, for it would have ruined the whole age of peace and glory. This was the very sin of the devil, the 'anointed guardian cherub' (Ezek 28:14). Standing in the very presence of God, he sought to deflect the very glory of God for himself. That is cardinal sin number one; for if the cynic mocks God and the giant defies God, the proud servant displaces God. 'Man shall sit upon the throne of the Lord'—for whose glory?

Pride affects us all

My brothers and sisters, we have to learn this lesson before we get home, don't we? Fancy having a whole ten cities given to you to rule, or a galaxy or two in the age to come! You run it at first for God's glory; then you do it because you enjoy it (no harm in that); and then, slipping a bit more, you puff out your own chest and take the glory to yourself. I mustn't judge your hearts, for I know that we all have that tendency to live and work for our own

glory; it's innate in the human heart ever since the fall. We shall have to guard against it all the way home to glory.

Here in David's story is an example of it. You see, when David yielded to pride, the people were affected, and that can happen. When preachers get undue fame and are idolised, then it harms the people of God who go after them and treat them like their idols. God's discipline fell upon the nation, but David, thank God, recovered. It happened like this.

As the discipline happened and the pestilence came, his eyes were opened to see the angel with a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem, and his conscience was touched and his heart smote him. Going out into 'no man's land' under the sword of God, he said, 'Oh God, what have these sheep done? It's not their fault; it's my fault. Let your discipline fall on me, that the people may be saved' (see 1 Chr 21:17).

And God, in response, spared the people, but instructed David what he was to do. He was to go to the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, buy it, raise an altar to the Lord, and offer a sacrifice upon the altar.

Satan's temptation of the Lord Jesus (Luke 4:1-12)

As I say that, we can't help thinking of great David's greater Son. Son of God though he was, even the devil dared to tempt him. When he couldn't persuade him to engage in independence of God and turn stones into bread for his own satisfaction, he came with a much more subtle temptation to our blessed Lord and tempted him at the ground of his spiritual activity.

He said in effect, 'Now, you're a very good young man. I was stupid to get you to act in independence of God. I admire the way that you refuse to live for your own gratification and you refused to make the stones bread. You are a lovely spiritual young man and, since you have this determined attitude to be dependent on God, I could suggest a way in which you could do it spectacularly. When the people are there at their worship in the temple, why not come up on the pinnacle and cast yourself down? God has said in his word that he'll give his angels charge over you, so you'll come to no damage. They'll bear you up so you don't hurt your foot against a stone (vv. 10-11; Ps 91:11-12). What a demonstration of faith in God that would be. Step out in faith, young man, then all the people would come and admire, and say, "This is magnificent."'

They would have done. Just imagine if the Lord had jumped off the pinnacle of the temple half-way through the service. Well, that would have been the end of the service, with all the people rushing out to see this marvellous stunt. Our Lord saw through his sophistication.

'But who said I was to jump off the temple? You tell me to jump off in faith. Who said, "Jump off the temple"? It is written "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (v. 12). If God tells me to jump off the temple then I shall launch out in faith, but if God hasn't said, "Jump off the temple," then it's for God to command, not me. I shall not put him, in that sense, to the test and say, "God, I'm going to step off here and you'll have to come behind or else there'll be a disaster; so you'll be advised to come and help me.'"

No, no, that's to get our roles reversed. We don't take the commanding seat and God has to come up behind. Man shall sit upon the throne of the Lord, but not for his own glory.

Our blessed Lord was proved to be sinless. We should never forget that, when the sword of God's judgment was drawn against us proud sinners and we stood under the judgment of God, our blessed Lord walked out into 'no man's land', and he said, 'These sheep are my sheep. Lord, let your sword fall on me, but spare the sheep.'

David prepares for the building of the temple

When it was over, and he had bought the threshing ground, David said, 'This is the ground where the temple shall be built' (22:1).

And, of course, we can see the parable. The great eternal temple will be built on what ground? It will be built on the ground of Calvary, and all its praise and all its activity shall arise from that spectacular Saviour who, for our sake, took our sin and bore its shame, and gave the glory to God.

'What shall I say?' said he, as he stood facing Calvary and the cup that he must drink for our sake, and the suffering for our sin.

Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name. (John 12:27-28)

And with those words on his lips he went to the sacrifice of the altar at Calvary. On that ground the glories of heaven shall be built, and its praises rise forever.

If I'm not mistaken, there is a practical lesson for us. We can never add anything to the sacrifice of Christ; nothing that we can do can atone for our sins. Nonetheless, we are called upon to make sacrifices, and Paul puts it straight to us. It's not that he goes down on one knee and beseeches believers to yield their bodies as a living sacrifice. There'd be something wrong with God, if I, as a preacher, had to implore you to live sacrificially for Christ, otherwise you wouldn't do it. What's wrong with Christ, if you are not ready to yield your bodies a living sacrifice for the one who died for you?

'No, no, I shall not do that,' says Paul. 'I exhort you, like a general with his troops, by the mercies of God, that you yield your bodies a living sacrifice' (see Rom 12:1).

David would not accept the ground as a gift

So, David went to offer a sacrifice, as he was told. Ornan, the Jebusite, said, 'I'll give it to you, David. I'll give you the ground, and I'll give you the animals, and I'll give you the wooden implements, and I'll give you everything. It's a gift, David.'

Then Ornan said to David, 'Take it, and let my lord the king do what seems good to him. See, I give the oxen for burnt offerings and the threshing sledges for the wood and the wheat for a grain offering; I give it all.' (1 Chr 21:23)

He didn't know any theology, or he might have preached to David at that stage, 'Don't worry about that sin of yours, and that pride of yours; salvation is a gift by faith.' That wasn't the medicine David needed to cure him of his proud attitude and taking the glory to himself. David had learned his lesson.

But King David said to Ornan, 'No, but I will buy them for the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, nor offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing. (v. 24)

The answer to the temptation of pride is to yield the sacrifice that costs you the last penny you've got. The Christian pathway to glory is the pathway of sacrifice and self-giving, so that the glory might be God's.

Story 4: The King's Son

It is a relief after that to come to Solomon, son of David, son of God. 'My son, Solomon,' said David, 'is young and tender' (22:5 KJV). Thank God for that; he hadn't learned to be cynical yet, he hadn't grown into a God-defying giant, and he wasn't old enough yet to be vain. He was young and tender. 'And God has told me that he shall build God a house,' said David (v. 10). Oh, thank God for such a son and for such a constructive attitude to life.

What is the eternal temple going to be built of? Here's the wonderful news. When we leave this world, we shan't say, 'Thank God that's over. Let's leave it all and go up to heaven and find a temple that's been built out of materials we never saw before.' It isn't going to be that.

The materials for building the temple

Says David, 'I've prepared the materials, Solomon. All I want you to do is put them together and erect what I've already prepared. They came from many a battle, many a struggle and many a sacrifice. They came from raw life; from the things of this world, this life, the family, the business.'

And such are the materials out of which God is going to build the eternal tabernacle. The eternal tabernacle is not some fairy castle. It's real, and the marvel is that when God planned to build a temple for eternity, he didn't start with the best material he could possibly get hold of; he started with what are old factory rejects. Sorry if I insult you, but I think the whole lot of us are factory rejects! We don't carry the labels, 'sleeves the wrong length,' 'buttons in the wrong place,' or anything like that; but all of us are marred, substandard, and some of us are broken. The magnificence of the grace of God is that, instead of doing something completely new, he takes us as we are, redeems us, and by his grace and through his Spirit and the gifts he has given in the church, he seeks to remould us. He's going to finish it one day, when every single one of us will be conformed to the image of his Son. Magnificent, isn't it?

When folks ask me, 'Shall we know each other in heaven?' I reply, 'Will you know yourself when you get there? Will you know who you are? Of course you'll know who you are.'

You say, 'I hope I forget my sins.'

You won't! As the choirs of heaven sing, 'Worthy is the Lamb, for he was slain', will you find yourself saying, 'Why was he slain? I can't remember now why he was slain'?

You'll remember that he was slain for you, a sinner. You'll remember it for all eternity, and you will remember the ways of God with you in life. He redeemed you, brought you to the Saviour, cleansed you, sanctified you, justified you through the cross of his Son and sanctified you by his Spirit. He came in his Spirit and lived within you; and you made the

Lord a home in your heart. It began his gracious work of redemption and forming you, until one day you shall shine as a jewel in the very temple of God.

But the building of the temple is not committed merely to the likes of you and me. God had appointed his man to build the temple. Delightful, young, tender, son of man, son of David, son of God, in all his unspoiled innocence and devotion to God that Solomon was, we bypass Solomon and we think of our Lord. 'Consider him, none other than the Son of God,' says the writer to the Hebrews (12:3; 1:2). How wonderful he is.

Moses was commanded to build God a dwelling place and Moses was a servant in that dwelling place, but not so the Son. The Son is not a servant; he's the Son over his own house (3:6). Everything has to be made by somebody, doesn't it? But he that made all things is God, and Jesus is the Son of God. The whole universe was made through him, and for him (Col 1:16).

He that made all things is God, and you're God's idea; and though we have wandered and are broken, God will be loyal to us. His kindness to us is not to be debunked. It is real, so real that he gave his Son for us, and the architect of the universe has us in hand. As Son over the Father's house, he will put us together and make us into an eternal temple of the living God.

That is the programme. What should be our response? David spent the days of his early retirement freed from the sheer politics and the fighting, able to concentrate on what is, after all, the goal of living. Politics and commerce take second place there. His goal was to prepare the material for the house of the Lord, training the Levites and the administrators for the work they would have to do when the temple was built. The whole of life was organised around God's great building.

That was David's idea, and the greater-than-David is doing it now with us; training us as priests to learn how to worship God. We stumble a bit at the moment, don't we, but it's going to be better later on.

It's like a housewife, training to be faithful in the small things and then in the colossal thing of bringing up a family for God. Or training the businessman how to control the unions and the employees and be fair and just.

The whole purpose of life is in being trained and forming character, and the righteousness of God being built into the hearts of those that seek his kingdom, until the day comes when the blessed Lord Jesus shall put it all together and life for eternity shall be around the person of God. The manifestation of God shall work its way through and express itself to all his people and all their activities shall come back to the worship of him.

What will it be to dwell above,
And with the Lord of glory reign?¹¹

What will it be like? I don't know, because God has to speak to us in metaphors, but Solomon's reign can give us a little glimpse. On the throne was a man of perfect wisdom, solving life's problems and giving answers to the questions of the universe.

¹¹ Joseph Swain (1761–96).

How lovely it will be to be at the table with the Lord Jesus as he girds himself and waits on us and serves us. We shall ask him the whys and the wherefores. 'Lord, why did you allow this, why did you take me that way, and why are there galaxies in space?' and hear him explain it.

It was marvellous, sitting down with Solomon at his table. Now and again he'd give a lesson in botany, and say, 'Have you considered the hyssop that springs out of the wall?' He would encourage you to explore some of the magnificent works of God. 'Look at this bit of hyssop—do you see its botanical marvel? Look at that cedar tree; learn to wonder at the glory of God who made it.' And then he spoke of the animals (1 Kgs 4:33).

What will it be to dwell above with the very Lord of creation and let him explain? I'm looking for time off from singing in the choir, to have a private session with the Lord; or, if there are still any galaxies there, to go round and explore them.

I'll ask him, 'Lord, why do you have all these galaxies here?'

You say, 'It's not going to have galaxies.'

How do you know? There's going to be a new heaven and a new earth, and the God that created our world and our universe will not be hard up with ideas for a future universe. He's going to put it into your hand, if you prove faithful now under his discipline (Heb 12:5–6), and you shall reign and administer it with Christ. What joy that's going to be.

They brought the treasures of the nations to Solomon (1 Kgs 10:11–12). They made supports for the house of the Lord and for the king's house, and musical instruments out of the almug¹² trees. When Solomon reigned, there was such music as they'd never heard before. 'The half was not told me,' said the Queen of Sheba (v. 6).

Oh, what shall heaven be? 'There is singing up in heaven, such as we have never heard.'¹³ And it will not be just the notes, it will be the texts—those magnificent words, as the redeemed sing their gratitude to God for the blood of the Lamb.

I must not allow my excited imagination to go further; you'll do that yourself. 'What will it be to dwell above, and with the Lord of glory reign?' — It shall be all joy and wonder. Is it possible for us to know a little bit of the joy of heaven on earth already? Yes, it is!

When David assembled the people at last and they'd made all the preparations, then David commended them to the Lord in prayer and there was tremendous joy. I simply reinforce what you have found in life; the most tremendous joy in life is joining with the Saviour to prepare the materials for the great house of God that is to be.

I look forward to seeing you in glory, my brother and sister. We shall talk about Northfield, maybe; and how proud you will be, with the right kind of pride, to take me to see your 'crown of rejoicing' (1 Thess 2:19 KJV).

Perhaps we shall be walking around the streets one day and glimpse a particularly beautiful precious stone, the glow refracting the glory of the light in all its manifold colours.

'That's a beautiful precious stone, look at it. That's the biggest diamond that ever was, I should imagine.'

And with your holy boldness, and yet humility, you will say, 'I quarried that for God. He was a 'rough old diamond' when I found him, but by God's grace I got him out of the mire

¹² Red sandalwood.

¹³ Johnson Oatman Jr. (1856–1922).

and the mess. I rescued him for God; then I polished and cut him and look how he shines now.'

Your 'heaven will be two heavens in Immanuel's land'¹⁴ won't it? And I shall say, 'It must have cost you a lot. Did you ever get your fingers cut when you were polishing the old diamond?'

'Well,' you say, 'yes, it did cost me a lot.'

But you won't speak of that, will you, because all that you had was God's to start with. All the gift, all the material, came from him; it was simply a question of giving him back what he gave, and the glory is his. But he'll give you the joy for all eternity that, in some way or other, near or remote, you co-operated with the glorious Son of God in preparing the eternal temple of God.

My prayer for myself, and for you therefore, would be what David prayed to God.

Oh God, we are but pilgrims. Life is temporary; it will not come again on this planet. What shall we do with it? What shall we make of it? God, keep us from being cynics. Put it into the heart of your people and in their imaginations forever, that they will give you what they are and all that they have in the great work of building the eternal temple to God's praise.

So may God bless his word, for his name's sake.

¹⁴ Anne R. Cousin (1824–1906), 'The sands of time are sinking'.

About the Author

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