

God's Great Salvation

Lessons from the Lives of Old Testament Characters

David Gooding

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



MYRTLEFIELD

HOUSE

www.myrtlefieldhouse.com

Contents

Introduction	3
1 Rahab	4
2 The Gibeonites	10
3 Deborah, Barak and Jael	16
4 David and Solomon	24
About the Author	31

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

Copyright © The Myrtlefield Trust, 2020

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Sometimes Dr Gooding gives his own translations or paraphrases.

This text has been edited from a transcript of four talks given by David Gooding in Frances Street Gospel Hall, Newtownards, Co Down, N Ireland at the Ards Missionary Conference, 1991.

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

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

w: www.myrtlefieldhouse.com

e: info@myrtlefieldhouse.com

Myrtlefield catalogue no: ot.003/bh

Introduction

In our first study we shall learn what true conversion is. *The story of Rahab* illustrates the principles involved. She turned to God from idols, to serve the living and the true God and to wait for her deliverer from the coming judgment. We shall consider what brought Rahab to that point of change of loyalty; how we may prove God true to his covenant, and how we can remain uncompromised as we wait for Jesus, our Deliverer.

In *the story of the Gibeonites* we will be reminded of ourselves, who once were sinners of the Gentiles; but our blessed Lord came and preached peace to those of us who were afar off, as well as to those that were near. We have been incorporated into the people of God and the body of Christ. How shall we show that our faith is genuine? Will God fight for us? We shall revel in the fact that now, in Christ, we are seated spiritually in the heavenlies with him, and one day we shall bodily be with him where he is.

The stories of Deborah, Barak and Jael will illustrate our Christian ministry. We shall consider how Barak, under the wise guidance of the inspired prophetess, adopted apparently foolish tactics and was used of God to gain a tremendous victory. He took captivity captive, and distributed the spoils amongst his followers. That will remind us of our blessed Lord Jesus, Son of God most high—so high he could go no higher. But if he would go up he would first have to go down: he descended into the lower parts of the earth, waged the mighty conflict, took captivity captive and gave gifts to men. Those who once were his enemies, he has distributed amongst his people as gifts to the church. We need each other in the great battle.

In our final study we shall consider *the stories of David and Solomon*. They were God's viceroys, the Lord's anointed, who sat upon the throne of the Lord. The glories of those few fleeting years in which Israel knew peace and prosperity will raise our hearts and minds to the future; to the glory of our Lord's millennial reign and to the even greater glories of the new heaven and the new earth. As we think of the coming of the Lord we shall see the deeper significance of the ark of the Covenant being brought into Jerusalem. May we, as David did in his last days, be challenged to prepare treasure for the building of the house of the Lord.

Rahab

Reading: Joshua 2

Our first study in this series will give pride of place to Rahab, once of Jericho, now high nobility in the ranks of heaven. Her past, you will remember, is beshadowed and dark. But for all that, our blessed Lord Jesus—who came into this world to save sinners, and was called ‘Jesus’ because of it—was not ashamed to confess publicly to the world that Rahab was one of his ancestors. One day we shall see her in all the glory of heaven itself and stand by, open-mouthed at the grace of God, as the blessed Lord Jesus owns her before the wondering worlds not only as his redeemed, but part of his pure and spotless bride.

Rahab calls our attention in these modern days for another reason. There has arisen in some parts of the world doubt as to what genuine conversion to Christ is, and on what terms any one of us may find salvation. It is a discussion that has vexed the church of God in America; and since America’s perturbations tend to come our way in the course of fifty or so years, one day it might perturb us as well.

What do you have to do to be saved?

Do you, for instance, have to repent in order to be saved? No, says this revived old doctrine. You don’t have to repent in order to be saved—that would translate salvation into a gospel by works. All you have to do is believe: ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved’ (Acts 16:31). But you don’t have to repent.

Do you have to receive the Lord Jesus as your Lord and Master in order to be saved? No, says this view. You merely have to accept the Lord Jesus as Saviour—if you have to accept him as Lord of your life that would change the gospel from being a gospel of faith into a gospel of works. What happens, then, to that verse in Romans 10:9 that says, ‘If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved’? Does not that say you have to accept Jesus as Lord in order to be saved? No, say these people. Then they become learned and quote Greek, ‘the word there means you shall confess Jesus simply as the Son of God and own his deity; but you don’t have to accept him as Lord of your life. At least, not in order to be saved. You can trust him as Saviour and continue to live in a worldly fashion. You will be a worldly Christian if you do, but you are guaranteed salvation.’

Those who declare that you have to repent as well as to believe, and that you have to accept the Lord Jesus as Sovereign Lord and Master, are accused by these other teachers of peddling ‘Lordship salvation’.

What true conversion to God is

You will have noticed that Rahab conforms to Paul's classic description of what conversion and salvation are. He gave it in his record of what had happened to the Thessalonians when he came to Thessalonica and preached. He says, 'You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven . . . Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come' (1 Thess 1:9–10).

Mark how well Rahab illustrates the principles involved. She turned to God from idols; not merely to save her skin, she turned to God from idols, to serve the living and the true God. Listen to her as she is talking to the men in her house on that tense, desperate night before the armies came to assault the city. 'I know your God; I have come to see that your God is the Lord of heaven above, and the Lord of earth beneath. He is the supreme Lord, and I want to be on his side' (see Josh 2:9–13).

She had heard what God had done to the Egyptians, when Pharaoh stuck out his hard, stiff neck and refused to bow and own the sovereignty of God in his life. The news of what happened to Pharaoh had come to the ears of Rahab. Now the armies of God were encamped on this side of Jordan, and Rahab could see what was going to happen. This was not some petty little deity come to squabble over the possession of Jericho. This was the high Lord of heaven above and earth beneath, and he was coming with his armies to repossess what was his anyway. Rahab had the wisdom to see that neither the physical barrier of Jordan in flood, nor the man-made ramparts of Jericho would suffice to keep out the Lord of heaven and earth if he chose to come down from heaven and repossess the world. In simple faith, with a hitherto pagan mind, she came to what true conversion is: she turned from her idols to serve the living and the true God.

It was not open to her, in the sense that we do, to wait for God's Son from heaven as deliverer from the coming wrath; but she did it in principle. Joshua was a blessed prototype of our Lord, his name means 'saviour'. As captain of the hosts of God, he had come to execute the wrath of God on Jericho city. Because she had been converted and changed sides, it altered Rahab's waiting and her expectation of what was going to happen. The coming of Joshua and the armies would spell destruction for Jericho, as he expressed the wrath of God. For her it was a question of waiting for God's saviour to come and deliver her from the coming wrath.

Rahab not only fits into Paul's description of what a genuine conversion is; she is explicitly chosen by the writer to the Hebrews, and then by James, as an example to us of what is involved in salvation. 'By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies' (Heb 11:31). It was through faith, not by works, that Rahab perished not. When they knocked at her door she didn't slam it in their face, she received them in peace; and in receiving them she received the God whom they represented. James is quick to tell us what was involved, '. . . was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?' (2:25). Yes indeed! It was a very risky thing that Rahab did. When the king of Jericho sent to enquire whether she had any strange men around the place, she had to make her decision: was she going to betray them, or would she stay with them?

Whose side was she now on?

Of course, it is a question that everyone has to face. It was a question that Peter put to the crowd on the Day of Pentecost when, perturbed by the power of the Holy Spirit as Peter had been preaching, they were cut to the very quick, and came to Peter and said, 'What shall we do?' (Acts 2:37). They had, in a sense, come to faith, for they had come to believe that Jesus is the Christ; and with that conviction that Jesus was the Christ there had dawned on them the appalling implication of what they had done. They had murdered God's Christ! 'What shall we do?' they asked.

Peter didn't say, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.' They had already believed that Jesus was the Christ and they had murdered him. Now what should they do? 'I tell you what you will do,' said Peter,

Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.' (2:38-40)

It might have been inconvenient for some of them to get converted like that. Just imagine one of the Sanhedrin coming up to Peter privately and saying,

'Sir, I really did appreciate your message this morning. I think there is some truth in it. We shouldn't really have murdered Jesus, and I want now to be saved. But I couldn't be baptized myself. You see, I am a relative of Caiaphas and it would have all sorts of repercussions in our family if I got baptized. So please can I be saved, but I don't have to be baptized in the name of Jesus, do I?'

What would you have said if you were Peter? What Peter said was,

'You have publicly in this city cried, "Away with him, we will not have him". Now if you say you repent, you will publicly confess that you were wrong and that Jesus was right. You cannot stand with the Sanhedrin and yet say you take sides with Christ.'

(You couldn't say you disapproved of gassing Jews if you still carried on as an officer in Auschwitz.)

Rahab had to make her decision. It was now a question of where her fundamental loyalty lay. That is what is involved in conversion. Where does our fundamental loyalty lie — with the Lord Jesus, or with the world? To say you can be saved without deciding that question is misleading indeed.

What brought Rahab to that point of change of loyalty?

Let us think for a moment of her past. Her profession we know. It pandered to men's desire to have pleasure without love; to have love without loyalty. We live in a modern world that has gone far in adopting those same attitudes. Sad as that was, it was perhaps but an outward expression of the attitude of heart that had riddled Canaanite society as a whole. Their ancestors had once known the true God, so Paul tells us in Romans 1; but when they had not

wanted to retain the knowledge of God in their hearts they still wanted God's gifts. They wanted to enjoy all the gifts with which God has equipped our bodies. They wanted his external gifts but they didn't want to be responsible to God.

'They were not thankful,' says Paul (v. 21). Always to be dependent on somebody else and always to be obliged to render thanks to somebody? No, indeed not! To be under responsibility to use God's gifts according to his laws — that was not for them. It was more fun to disobey his moral law, so they pushed God aside and made their own gods. One of them was Aphrodite, the goddess of sex; and sex became their goddess. The result was that it dehumanized, depersonalized and brutalized society.

The God who judged Jericho and Canaan for such sins as the sacrifice of their infants on the altars of their gods, will judge a modern society who follows the same god and is prepared to destroy millions of unborn children in the process.

Pleasure without love; love without loyalty. It is a disease that attacked Israel herself later on. She was the very wife of Jehovah. She wanted to enjoy his gifts, but she got tired of him and loved the world. It is an ailment that can afflict us too. Let us be careful. One day we shall meet Rahab; and if we were to bring up in conversation her physical past, she might turn round and ask about the deeper things of the heart, and say, 'were you always constant in your love to your heavenly Father, and to our common Bridegroom?'

'Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him' (1 John 2:15); 'You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?' (Jas 4:4). How lovely are God's gifts; but if we should try to enjoy God's gifts without the Giver we devalue the gifts and, in the end, depersonalize them and they come to dust and to ashes.

How did Rahab get saved?

What did salvation involve for her? You say, 'She got saved because of the fear of judgment.' Yes, that is true; but there is more to it than that. She had hidden the spies, and now the time had come to let them go. A big question surged up into Rahab's mind. She had let a lot of men out of her house in the middle of the night. When they had been there they had said sweet, lovely things, but when she let them go she never heard of them again. No loyalty! What if these two spies were another couple of chaps like that, making all kinds of promises? When they came back with the armies, would they really save her? What if they were like the ordinary fellows she knew about all too well? Now that she had broken her links with her town folks, she was trying to stand with God and his people—but where would she find security, and life itself?

In her desperation she sought around for the only ultimate security there is. She said to herself, 'If I can make these men swear an oath by the Lord God of heaven and earth, would he not make them somehow be true to their promise?' A poignant scene: a woman who had not known much about loyalty — a lot of so-called love but very little about loyalty — was about to cast herself on the soul's great adventure. 'Is there a real God who made heaven and earth, and me included? Is he a God of love, and what does love mean? Would that God be loyal to me?'

Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death. And the men said to her, 'Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.'
(Josh 2:12–14)

'Please swear to me by the Lord; give me a sure sign,' she said. So they gave her their word. What a lovely thing; a soul getting converted, getting saved, by discovering the true God. By discovering that God is love, and love means loyalty. She staked her everything on that, and proved God true to his oath.

We have deeper occasion to trust that oath. The Cretans had always been liars (Titus 1:12). They trusted nobody, because nobody ever told the truth anyway. Salvation came to them and they discovered a God who cannot lie (v. 2); a God who says he will punish sin (e.g. Ezek 18:4, 20), and he is not fooling. He will do as he said—you can be sure of it. He is the God who sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world (John 3:16; 1 John 4:14). What kind of love is this? We see it exhibited in symbol when we partake of the Lord's Supper. The transcendent Lord gave his Son to die for us, rather than we perish. And to comfort our little hearts he gave us a covenant, 'This is the new covenant in my blood' (Luke 22:20). God cannot lie; he will keep his promises (see Heb 6:13–20).

He by Himself hath sworn,
I on His oath depend;
I shall, on eagles' wings upborne,
To heaven ascend.¹

The love and the loyalty of God

And now what? As the spies disappeared into the darkness the anxious period began. They had suggested that she should take the cord by which she had let them down and put it in the window, so that the advancing armies could see which was Rahab's house. I don't know how long she waited. If I had been Rahab, I wouldn't have bothered to lock the door before I put the cord in the window! I would want Joshua, at least, to see whose side I was on. The unspoken pledge of loyalty, 'I was loyal to your spies; you now be loyal to me.'

When the army came she was delivered; but not to go back to her old ways. Scripture gives us indications that it was not so. She was not only incorporated into the people of God, she became the wife of a certain Salmon, and therefore mother of that steady citizen, Boaz. Boaz with Ruth became the great-grandparents of David, the illustrious king; and, as such, Rahab was an ancestress of our blessed Lord (Ruth 4:18–22; Matt 1:5–6).

As we wait until the Lord shall come, God grant that he may see the token of truth, unobscured, in the window of our life and behaviour. By God's grace we are the Lord's and will be loyal to him.

¹ Thomas Olivers (1725–99), 'The God of Abraham praise'.

The Lord is coming

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Matt 24:30)

But with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. (Isa 11:4)

Whenever you start to think of the future and prophetic things in God's programme, first put on your helmet to guard your thoughts!

Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on . . . for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.' (1 Thess 5:8-10)

[We] wait for his Son from heaven . . . Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1:10)

If we see Rahab one day in heaven, we shall not despise her or her doubtful beginnings. What are we, had not the grace of God saved us? We should be the more careful that, when we get there, we are found uncompromised in our loyalty to the Lord Jesus—'betrothed to him' as a betrothed girl to her husband-to-be (see 2 Cor 11:2). Let not Satan compromise our intellectual, spiritual or moral loyalty to the Saviour.

The Gibeonites

Reading: Joshua 9–10

The ancient Gibeonites have had a very bad press. These were the men who not only told a very big lie but actually engaged the lie to prove to Israel (they hoped) that they came from a long way off, when all the while they came from just round the corner. The Israelites were deceived into making a covenant with them, and, says holy Scripture, '[they] did not ask counsel from the LORD' (Josh 9:14). If they had asked the Lord, he could have told them that all this business about worn out shoes was a charade.

Israel has got the blame from a whole succession of preachers; many a sermon has been preached, warning us not to fall into the very same trap. These are sermons that we all need to hear. The sermon that has been preached on this chapter goes like this.

'The most dangerous time in believers' lives is when they have just secured some notable victory. Elated by that victory and confident, they face the next step in life and forget to ask counsel of the Lord. Trusting in the strength of their recently won victory, they don't think to consult the Lord. They proceed, independent of him, and make decisions that in the end prove disastrous; the results can often remain while life lasts.'

We must heed the exhortation from this sermon; but whether you could ever get it out of this story that is another question altogether! Keep hold of the sermon, but don't base it on this story.

God himself fought for these people

He said that when the Israelites came into the land, any city that was far off could have mercy shown it, on certain conditions (Deut 20:15); but every city that was near at hand had to be destroyed. The Gibeonites were near at hand; so they lied, and pretended they were from a distance (Josh 9:6, 8–9, 22). They ought to have been destroyed, but in independence of God the Israelites let them live. When Israel had promised to let them live, the Southern kings joined a confederacy to fight the Gibeonites and to destroy them, because they had gone over to the other side. When the great confederacy of the kings came up against the Gibeonites, not only did God command Joshua to come and fight to protect the Gibeonites, but God himself fought for them. He rained down monstrous great stones out of heaven upon the enemy, and thus saved the Gibeonites.

Did God sit upon his throne in heaven and say, 'Look what those Israelites have gone and done! I was intending to destroy those Gibeonites and they have gone and sworn an oath with them, so now I shall be obliged to save them'? Do you think that is true? I hope not, and I will

tell you why. God has saved me and I hope, when he did it, he wanted to. Indeed, I know he intended to, and wanted to save me.

The matter is getting complicated. They told a lie and we can't defend that.

Why did they tell the lie?

Joshua had sworn an oath in the name of the Lord, and they knew they were safe. How would they have answered, if Joshua had asked them why they had told the lie? They would have told him, 'We heard what Moses said!' What did Moses say?

In Deuteronomy 20, Moses said that, on certain conditions, cities that were very far away could be offered a covenant of peace. If they fulfilled the conditions, they could be spared. Cities that were near at hand, however, must be absolutely destroyed. The Gibeonites had heard what Moses said, so they knew that their only chance of surviving these terrible judgments would be if they could persuade the Israelites that they came from afar. So they set about it, as best they knew how, and they made a successful charade to convince the Israelites that they came from far away. On those grounds they were spared. But they told a lie; they were not from far away.

So what would you have done if you had been an ancient Gibeonite, with the very threat of the law of Moses hanging over your head if you were near at hand, but knowing that there was mercy if you were from far away? You say, 'I would not have told a lie.' So, you would have waited to have your throat slit!

On what grounds did you get saved?

Do you remember the former days?

You [were] Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands . . . separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ . . . he came and preached peace to you who were far off . . . (Eph 2:11–13, 17)

Some of us were very far off. I am not thinking in geographical terms but in spiritual terms. Gentiles, with no part in the Messiah, 'children of wrath' (v. 3). But through God's great mercy Christ came and preached peace to those who were far off, as well as to those that were near. Being a Jew, and near; or a Gentile, and far off—ultimately it makes very little difference, 'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Rom 3:23). Perceive the wonder of God's mercy, that his own Son should become incarnate and come and preach peace. Like the Good Samaritan, he came to where we were.

'We have been brought near by the blood of Christ,' and now he has taken Jew and Gentile and of the two has made one new man, thus making peace. We are forgiven, incorporated into the people of God and the body of Christ, and have access in one Spirit to the Father (see Eph 2:13–18).

The covenant with the Gibeonites

But they told a lie! Yes, but we should notice this about these Gibeonites: they were genuine men. The Israelites were to offer peace to a city that was far off, on certain conditions. Did you notice what the conditions were? If the people wanted peace they had to hand over their city; they had to undertake to be servants of God's people for the rest of their days.

You will notice that when the Gibeonites came in their funny get-up, they asked the Israelites to make a covenant with them so that they should be allowed to live. The Israelites said, 'We can't do that—perhaps you come from around the corner.' They didn't argue, but notice what they said, 'We are your servants' (Josh 9:11). They heard what Moses said: the condition of being spared was that they should be willing to become servants (Deut 20:11).

So [Joshua] did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel, and they did not kill them. But Joshua made them that day cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place that he should choose. (Josh 9:26–27)

For centuries the Gibeonites and their descendants were known as servants of the people of God and servants to the altar. They were genuine men; they didn't just say this in order to save their skin.

Did you get converted in order to save your skin; to escape the wrath of God? That's a very good reason, but how would I know that you are genuine? Well, I should know it if you have given up your right to your 'city', and handed it over to the Lord. You have become a servant to the people of God and serve them without murmuring and without reserve. And, above all, you have become a servant to the altar.

What do I mean? The gospel is this, '... one has died for all, therefore all have died; ... that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised' (2 Cor 5:14–15). This is the mark of whether we are true, or whether our confession of faith is a mere say-so to save our skin.

God was for them

Gentiles, far off in their sins, now forgiven, with a covenant from God to allow them to live, and when their enemies came God fought for them. The southern kings heard that the city of Gibeon had surrendered to the enemy, so they created the southern confederacy and came to attack—not the Israelites but the Gibeonites. Gibeon was a very large city, like a royal city. This royal city had given up its claims to another king, so the southern kings came in force to attack them for what they regarded as treachery. When that happened, God fought for them. He sent Joshua, who faced the army in battle and scattered them. As they ran off in confusion, God rained down stones from heaven upon them, and there were more that died from the hailstones than from the sword of the Israelites (Josh 10:11).

He is still the same God. If he has given you his word of pardon and his covenant, then he will fight for you to the end. 'If God is for us, who can be against us?' (Rom 8:31). There is a vast confederacy against us; tribulation and persecution, man's evil intent. There are the many difficulties and vast forces of nature; famine, thirst, death, height, depth—the almost

immeasurable forces of the universe, and the very devil himself. But, if God is for us, who can be against us?

A miracle

Joshua saw the enemy retreating and the hours of the day spinning by very fast. In order to complete the job of mopping up the enemy, Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and the moon likewise to stand still until the victory was completely won.

He said in the sight of Israel, 'Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon.' And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. There has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD heeded the voice of a man, for the LORD fought for Israel. (Josh 10:12–14)

How could that possibly have taken place? What cosmology would allow such a thing? How could the earth stop on its axis and make the sun look as if it stood still? I am sorry, I cannot solve this great mystery. I believe the story, not because science says so; I believe it because it stands in Old Testament Scripture.

A bigger miracle

'There has been no day like it before it or since' — *that the sun stood still?* No, no — *'that the Lord heeded the voice of a man'* (10:14). Just imagine what he is saying. A mere mortal man lifted up his eyes to heaven and commanded the sun and the moon to stand still, and God listened to him and did what he said. The God of the multi-million galaxies listened to the voice of a man and altered heaven's face. Joshua established a record in his day; there was no day like it.

While there had been no day like it up to the time that the Book of Joshua was written, some centuries later there came another man. His name also happened to be *Joshua* in Hebrew, *Jesus* in Greek. He stood—I am not sure exactly where he stood. Was it in the Upper Room before they left to go to Gethsemane; or the dark streets of Jerusalem, infested with the very spirit of Satan that was conspiring to destroy him at Calvary; or was it in the Garden? I can't tell you for sure. But this I can tell you, this holy man stood on earth and, lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, 'Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed' (John 17:5). And God listened to his voice. The next day he lay in a grave, but three days later God answered his prayer and raised him from the dead; and on the fortieth day he exalted him to his own right hand in the heavens.

What a marvellous story! Can you believe it, the story of our redemption? No wonder it is a scandal to the Greeks. It tells us that the very Godhead has been changed, and he whom we call the Second Person of the Godhead has become human and remains human eternally. And what is more, when our blessed Lord rose from Olivet, heaven saw something it had never seen before—a real human body in the very presence of God in his exalted heaven (Luke 24:50–51; Acts 1:9–11). May God enlarge our hearts to take in the wonder of the story.

Something more marvellous still

When he came to the end of his prayer, standing there with two feet on the ground he said, 'Father, *I desire*² that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory' (John 17:24). God heard that prayer as well, and one day it shall be fulfilled. One day the large throng of the redeemed shall be 'caught up . . . to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord' (1 Thess 4:17). The 'moon' of the church, to the 'sun' of Christ, they shall see his glory and reflect that glory forever. That isn't bad for people who started a long way off, now made near and forgiven. Even now, as we wait physically to be transported to those heavenly realms, in another sense we are already there.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins . . . and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind . . . even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:1-6)

One other lesson

When the day was done and the enemy had either been destroyed or taken to their fortresses, Joshua went back to where five of the confederate kings were. In their attempt to escape they had got themselves into a cave. When it was reported to Joshua, he told the people to put a rock over the mouth of the cave and seal them in. And then, when the battle was over, Joshua came back and commanded that they take the stone away and let the kings out. He laid them down on the ground and commanded his captains that they should be destroyed. Was it not a bit bloodthirsty? Can you believe that it was of God? Is it not that the Israelites were semi-savages out of the wilderness, who came up and destroyed the beautiful civilizations that they didn't understand—just like the Goths and the Vandals sacked Rome in later centuries? Were they just a bloodthirsty lot, who loved slitting people's throats?

Actually, most of the time the Israelites didn't want to slit anybody's throat; they preferred to settle down and marry them! That was why God had commanded that they destroy every city that was near at hand, lest they should choose them for wives. There was no danger with the Gibeonites; they were genuinely converted and they had given up their pagan ways, so there was no danger to Israel from them. But there would have been danger if Israel had not slain these kings who were quite unrepentant. If they would enjoy their inheritance, then God made them execute the enemy. God left them some enemies to deal with. Of course, they would never have caught those kings if God's stones had not come down from heaven and obliged them to take shelter in that cave. But when they were brought out of the cave God said to the Israelites, 'You slay them.'

With the great victory of Christ through his cross and resurrection, God has, so to speak, put our enemies into our hand, and God guarantees us eternal security. But we do have to fight, 'Put to death therefore what is earthly in you' (Col 3:5). And here is our danger. In our security we say we have the oath of God, that we shall never perish. And sometimes we would

² KJV, 'I will'. If we have any concept of who God is we shall not pray like that, but our Lord did.

spare the old enemy. In our false sense of security we let it breed. By God's grace we must get after the enemy (and mostly it is inside us) and put to death the sins of the body. So Joshua took those kings and hung them on a tree and made an exhibition of them. God has done the very same thing (see Col 2:13–15). As we sit at the Lord's Supper, God has portrayed what our sins did to Jesus, and now God wants us to deal with those sins—we have to put them to death.

The battle is hard, and it will not be finally won until we get home to glory. But, 'be of good cheer,' for the Lord says to us, like Joshua said to his captains, 'Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous. For thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight' (Josh 10:25). One day the victory will be complete!

Deborah, Barak and Jael

Reading: Judges 4–5

The prophetess Deborah gave to Barak the word of the Lord that guided his tactics in the notable victory which he scored over the Gentile Canaanites.

Jael, wife of Heber, delivered the *coup de grace* to the enemy. As Sisera, the captain of the host, fled away, he came to her tent and she offered him hospitality. Jael lulled him to sleep, and when he was snoring contentedly she took a tent peg and hammered it through his brain.

To see these things in their context and bring out their significance, I would like to read at some length. Firstly some passages of history, then a passage of prophecy and finally a passage of doctrine.

History: Judges 4:1–3, 10–15; 5:1–12, 19–21

Prophecy: Psalm 68:8, 11, 17–18

Doctrine: Ephesians 4:7–17

History

A scary moment for Barak

I think I would have been scared if I had been Barak when he received the command from Deborah, in the name of the Lord, that he was to lead his army of ten thousand men down Mount Tabor on to the plain to meet the enemy. I should have considered it a form of military suicide to adopt such strange tactics. These men who had been oppressing Israel for many years were not primitive savages, running round like ancient Britons, painted blue and dragging their wives by the hair of their heads; these were a sophisticated people. If you go to Israel even today you can see the remains of their civil engineering. The pool at Gibeon was a great shaft, which the Canaanite engineers had created as part of the defence system of one of their cities. How they managed to do such an extraordinary feat of engineering with the tools that were available to them in their day, who knows. They were not primitive savages; they were in the forefront of technological advance. The commander of their forces, Sisera of Harosheth of the Gentiles, had at his command no less than nine hundred chariots made of iron. This was on the threshold of the Iron Age, and the Canaanites were at the forefront of the technological development.

A word from the Lord

When the word of the Lord originally came through Deborah the prophetess, that Barak was to lead the armies of Israel against the Canaanite Gentiles, as a military commander and responsible for the tactics, Barak did the very wisest of things—he took his ten thousand men and marched them up the mountain of Tabor. Yes, there were ten thousand of them but they were scarce of shield and spear. They had to face these Canaanites armed to the teeth with the very latest technological warfare, nine hundred chariots. And what ideal territory it was for iron chariots, a flat plain!

Had Barak dared to bring his unarmed infantry down on to the plain, Sisera would have run rings round them with his chariots and turned them to mincemeat. Therefore Barak had very wisely adopted the tactics any sensible military commander could think of; he took his troops up Mount Tabor. The Canaanites, of course, could not drive their chariots up that rough hillside. If they wanted to capture this great Israelite force, then they would be obliged to dismount and come on their feet up the mountain. Israel would then have the advantage, and they could hurl down rocks and spears and stones on their heads.

Here was Barak with his troops up Mount Tabor, when the word of the Lord came. ‘Rise up, Barak, and lead your troops down the mountain.’ It was surely suicide. Where did the man get the courage from? The answer is to be found in this, Deborah was a prophetess. She brought him the word, ‘Take your troops down the mountain—does not the Lord go out before you?’ (4:14). Taking courage in both hands, and daring to trust the word of the Lord, Barak took his troops down the mountain.

What could have been suicide and carnage turned into a glorious victory. The Lord, who commands the universe and all its array, brought a sudden flash storm (like he has done two or three times down the centuries), and the rain coming down off the hillsides turned the little wadi of Kishon into a raging torrent that overflowed its banks, and the plain into an utter quagmire. The nine hundred chariots were useless; they got bogged down, like Pharaoh’s chariots at the Red Sea, and sank up to their axles. Now, instead of being an advantage, they became a horrible disadvantage. The Israelites swarmed round them, hacking them to pieces. When Sisera saw what had happened he abandoned his chariot and ran for his life as fast as he could, arriving eventually at the tent of Jael, where he met his end.

Poetry and the bigger picture

So much for the sheer facts. When the battle was over, Deborah was moved to write a poem of praise, along with Barak, while it was still fresh in their minds. They had believed the Lord; he had communicated his word that this was the tactic to be adopted. But what was bursting their hearts with wonder was that they had become part of a cosmic struggle. Granted, their words are poetic and must not be forced beyond their intention, but listen to them. ‘The kings came, they fought; . . . the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera’ (5:19–20). What might have seemed to the historian just another skirmish amongst tiny tribes in the Middle East was, in fact, part of a cosmic struggle in which the transcendent Lord of the universe was involved.

In her poetry, Deborah puts the whole thing into its context. Notice how, at the beginning of her poem, her mind was led back to the great event in history, the appearing of God, the self-revelation of God, on Mount Sinai.

LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. The mountains quaked before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel. (vv. 4–5)

She is thinking back to that august occasion in the history of Israel (and the history of the human race), the repercussions of which are with us still. After they came out of Egypt, this wonder happened. As they were assembled at the bottom of Mount Sinai the transcendent Lord, the Creator of the universe, who himself is independent of the universe, came down on Sinai to reveal himself to his people (Exod 24). The light, the glory, the majesty, the awe, the holiness of that self-revelation of God etched itself indelibly on the mind of Israel, and now on our minds. When the transcendent Lord, author and sustainer of the universe, stood on Mount Sinai, planet earth shook (Ps 68:8). Scarcely able to bear the weight of its Lord, the mountain was on fire.

Before the revelation of the supreme Lord, Moses said, ‘I exceedingly fear and tremble’ (see Heb 12:21). They thought of the uniqueness of God and of his person. Said God to Moses, ‘You saw no form; you heard only a voice’ (Deut 4:12). He is the indescribable God who confounds and goes beyond all human conception. This was the true God, as distinct from the miserable idolatries in which the Gentile nations were sunk. The real God, as distinct from the idolatrous interpretations of the universe adopted by the Gentiles in their day—and by Gentiles still in our modern day.

Freedom and a covenant

They remembered his grace—what a story! The God of Sinai had brought his people, who had been slaves in Egypt—grinding out each day in their slave labour to build the store cities and the treasure houses of Egypt, under a Pharaoh who didn’t recognize the transcendent Lord—God had come down and broken their bondage and brought them out, and brought them to himself. There at Sinai he made his wonderful proposition to them.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests . . . (Exod 19:5–6)

They were given the privilege of entering the thrice-holy presence of the uncreated God, and of being his witnesses to the world.

The new covenant

Not only do we hope one day to be in his heaven, but this very day,

[We] have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled

in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant . . . (Heb 12:22–24).

By God's grace, though we stand here in time on earth, in spirit already we have come to the great heavenly Zion and the fellowship of the saints of all ages, and the person of Jesus, the transcendent Lord.

An unshakeable kingdom

He has promised that one day he will shake, not merely the earth but the heavens as well (Heb 12:26); so that all that is temporary and unworthy shall depart, and the supreme Lord and his eternal world shall be left.

. . . the removal of things that are shaken . . . that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. (Heb 12:27–29)

A new form of slavery

With grief in her heart Deborah then remembered what had happened. Israel had once more come under the heel of tyrant oppressors. They were out of Egypt, delivered from the house of bondage; but in actual fact these many years they might as well have been in Egypt, for the Canaanite Gentiles had oppressed them.

How did it happen? It happened because Israel chose new gods. Living among the Canaanites, little by little they lost their grip on the great revelation of God at Sinai, lost their grip on his holy revealed words and law, and came to accept the standards, the outlook, the aims and goals of the Gentile society around them. We must not suppose that the Gentile society of that day was always vicious. There were some horrible and black immoralities; infant murder, as they offered their infants on the altars of their gods. But then modern society does a similar thing, only it doesn't kill them a few minutes after they are born; it kills them before they are born.

They were generally a very civilized society; we have talked about their civil engineering. Israel compromised with their standards and took on the same goals in life. They made new gods and found themselves in bondage. Then God demanded a return to his holy word; he demanded that men and women stand up and trust his word. Thank God, he did not abandon his people, but led the forces of their armies and brought them victory.

Prophecy

Now we move on from the history to the prophecy. Some centuries later a psalmist was musing upon this very story (Ps 68). He starts with the great procession of God from Mount Sinai at the head of Israel's armies, and records how God had led his people from Sinai through and across Jordan into the promised land, defeated the enemies and given his people their inheritance.

Then he thinks of the stories of their battles in the days of the Judges; how God was obliged to deliver his people, and how he did it magnificently. When we read his poetic account we notice a change. There is no mention of Deborah or Jael, and Barak has faded from the scene. Instead it says:

You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there. (v. 18)

Now no longer Barak, it is the Lord himself who has ascended up on high and led captivity captive. It is obvious now, as we read it, that something bigger is going on in history. The psalmist is thinking of bigger things. What bigger things?

Doctrine

Grace that saves

We find the key to it as we turn to the passage of doctrine that we read in Ephesians 4. In that letter Paul was thinking of his converts in Ephesus. Every time he thought of them they filled his heart with joy (1:15–16). He remembered the tremendous work that God had done among them. Living in that city, the Gentiles were sunk in their miserable idolatry. It was an architectural wonder; people would go in their thousands to see the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, one of the seven wonders of the world. It looked beautiful, but it was a den of idolatry. Ephesus was the centre of occult practices, and renowned for it throughout the world. It was a miracle of God's grace that these people were delivered and saved from idolatry, brought to know the living and the true God, and united with his people—one in the body of the Lord Jesus.

Growing in grace

As Paul thought of them and prayed for them, he was aware that not every battle was over yet. Some of them were spiritually little children. The great aim would be that they would grow up into Christ, who is the head, and become spiritually mature. Paul was a realist. As he thought of that, and the environment in which they lived, he perceived that there were great forces in Ephesus, pressurizing them to conform to the Gentile way of living. These forces would seek to detract them and deviate them in their doctrine and belief by all sorts of cunning infiltrations, whereby they would lie in wait to deceive God's people and to stop them growing up into Christ who is the head (4:14–15). As Paul, with a pastor's heart, thought about them, he longed for them that they should not succumb to their Gentile environment, but grow up into Christ.

How could God ascend?

As he saw the pressure against them, his heart turned to his Old Testament and to great victories God had wrought for Israel in a past day. He came upon Psalm 68 that begins by talking about how God had delivered his people in the days of Deborah, and brought them

back to his great revelation at Sinai. Then he came across this phrase: ‘You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men . . .’ (v. 18). He paused in his reading and said to himself, ‘What can it mean—“You ascended on high”? How could God ever ascend anywhere? He is supreme.’ Being a good Jew, he believed that God was not a mere idol who could get off his seat and be elevated; so how could the transcendent Lord ever go up?

He first descended

Then, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, he saw it; the wonder of it moved his heart to worship. If God ascended, it must be that before he could ascend he would first have to descend. What a story; a wonderful thing has happened. The supreme Lord, who could go no higher, first descended. We think of it with awe, especially at the Lord’s Supper. How far did he come down? The phrase, ‘in the depths of the earth’ is used in Psalm 139:15 for the virgin’s womb. He not only came down to our earth, he descended to becoming human; ‘Lo, he abhorred not the virgin’s womb’.³ For our sake, to fight our battle, to break the power of the prince of the air, to deliver us from the authority of darkness and translate us into his glorious light, he first descended.

And now He’s risen,
Proclaim the joyful story,
The Lord’s on high,
And we with Him are raised to endless glory,
And ne’er can die.⁴

When Barak was bidden to rise up and face the enemy, he descended Mount Tabor. The Lord had gone out before him, so Barak overcame the enemy, turned the tables on them and spoiled them. As Deborah said, ‘He took captivity captive’ (Judg 5:12; Ps 68:18 KJV). The people that had once held Israel in captivity, now Barak took them captive. And the Psalm adds, ‘You received gifts from people’ (NIV). Like any exultant general, having defeated the foe, he would take the spoils as well. And Paul gives us a further slant on the great battle, ‘When he ascended . . . he gave gifts *to* men’ (Eph 4:8). How can you say that, Paul? The Psalm said, ‘You received gifts *from* people!’ Paul tells us that the victorious general would first take the spoils from the enemy, and then he would give them out as gifts to his people.

The spoils of victory

Our blessed Lord first descended, he led captivity captive; he turned the tables on his enemies. Now risen, he distributes the spoils of his victory in the form of gifts to people. What kind of gifts? Paul enunciates them, ‘Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers’ (Eph 4:11 KJV). Why do we need them? Because we are involved in the battle; it is the knowledge of the true God versus idolatry. And here are gifts from the risen Lord, empowered by him to build

³ From Frederick Oakley (tr.), ‘O come, all ye faithful’, 1841.

⁴ Margaret Carson, ‘My chains are snapped’.

us up, so that we in turn will become strong to serve and to do the job that God has given us. We are to grow in grace, become mature believers and grow up unto him who is the head—in spite of all the pressures of our contemporary Gentile society.

That is what the Roman generals did. When they went back to Rome they had a celebration. The great general rode along, and to his chariot he chained his choice prisoners. The citizens of Rome watched the procession and said, 'What a general he must be, to be able to subdue thugs like that and make them our slaves!'

Paul describes himself in 1 Timothy 1:13, 'Formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent' — 'I was a thug, I persecuted the church of God, I blasphemed the name of Jesus, I tried to stamp it out. But he had mercy on me, until all I could do was to bow my knees and say, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"' (See Acts 9:6 KJV.)

The once-time enemy and persecutor of the church was subdued and conquered by the risen Lord. And then? He was given back as a gift! Thank God for his gift of the Apostle Paul—how he thrills our hearts as he points us the way to spiritual freedom by his great doctrines of justification by faith and eventual glory with Christ.

Christ does not content himself with giving just Paul as a gift to his people; but also every one of us here, surely! I am not suggesting we were thugs, but we were on the other side, weren't we? We were in the enemy's kingdom; now he has redeemed us, made us his friends, given us to the church and we need each other in the great battle.

Priorities

The sorry thing is that sometimes the Lord's people get preoccupied with other goals. When the battle was being fought under Deborah and Barak, and the Israelites were being knifed on the very plains, Dan didn't turn up (Judg 5:17). What happened to Dan? Why did he stay with the ships? Why didn't he join the battle? There was a lot of good business to be done in the ships.

And Reuben thought about coming; but then he decided he couldn't leave his sheep so he went on with his farming (5:15–16). There's nothing wrong with the shipping business, nor with farming; but if there ever came a time when we made farming and shipping our goals in life, we could fall to being like the Gentiles and forget the great battle to which we are called.

Let the Lord speak to us. In this great battle to deliver the souls of men, Christ has descended to the very cross. He is now ascended. He has saved us from the enemy and now he wants to give us to his people that we may join in the battle under the leadership of him who is exalted far about all heavens. 'Grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ' (Eph. 4:15), and give your gifts to the mutual edification of one another. He calls us to the battle, be it in Sunday School, the home or the day-to-day business.

Lurking Gentiles

Jael was a defenceless woman. Sisera said to her, 'If anyone asks if there is a man here, say No' (Judg 4:20). She had invited him in, but it put her on the spot when it became obvious that he had come into her tent to hide. Can you imagine her husband coming home and saying, 'Is there a man here?' and her saying, 'No'—then he finds this chap lying on the ground! She had

to make up her mind what to do. So she gave him a nice bowl of milk, and when he was asleep she took a tent peg and put it through his brain. Thus ended the Gentile!

Be careful when you go home, and go into the kitchen or the study. Have a look to see if there is an old Gentile lurking around the house, with a Gentile way of looking at things! 'No longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding' (Eph 4:17-18). If you should find one, grab a tent peg and put it straight through his brain.

David and Solomon

Reading: 1 Chronicles 1:1; 10:13–14; 14:2–3; 18:14–15; 23:1; 29:9–16, 18, 22–23

For our final study I thought it might be appropriate to choose a topic that will raise our hearts and minds on to the future; to the glory of our Lord's millennial reign, and to the even greater glories of the new heaven and the new earth.

The books of Chronicles have this distinction in the Hebrew canon, that they come at the very end of the Old Testament. Very appropriately, so you might think, for they just about sum up the whole of Old Testament history from the time of the very beginning — the time of Adam — up until the time of Israel's exile in Babylon. They are a survey, therefore, of the whole of Old Testament scripture and of the ways of God with his people.

A golden age

At the very heart, occupying the pinnacle of the story, is their account of that brief but spectacularly glorious and majestic period that was the early years of Solomon's reign. It was during those few fleeting years that Israel knew and enjoyed peace and bliss, and growth and prosperity, such as had never been known before in the whole of the nation's history. It was a veritable golden age and the historian marks the wonder of the pinnacle to which Israel had arrived when he records the extraordinary fact that *Solomon sat upon the very 'throne of the Lord'* (29:23).

He means, of course, that the throne of David was the throne that God himself had given David. It was the Lord's throne, in that sense. Solomon, upon his accession, sat upon that throne that God had given to David his father. The historian has been careful to make us understand that David and Solomon were in a very real sense the viceroys of God himself. David was none other than 'the Lord's anointed' and Solomon, in those years of peace and glory, sat upon the throne of the Lord, in the sense that he was the viceroy of almighty God himself ruling amongst his people.

It was a veritable golden age. One cynic will tell you that this is merely the chronicler in his old age looking back and idealizing the past, like we all do. We throw a halo of idealism on the past. But it is not; for the historian is careful to tell us that up until that time there had not been such glory, nor had there ever been since. Another cynic will say that it was a time of glory, but it didn't last. The historian is honest, and tells us himself that it didn't last. Indeed, if we had the time we could read his second book and see why that early paradise did not last; what were the things that upset it and what, according to the historian, have become the evils

of society that will have to be rooted out before there can come the great age of glory and peace under our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

The glories of that age remained for generations and for centuries in the minds of Israel's prophets. So much so that the glories of Solomon's age formed the adjectives and the nouns and the verbs by which the prophets talked of the coming great glorious messianic age. The memory of Solomon's period of grandeur became for Israel and the prophets a guarantee, a pledge, of the greater glory that shall be when David's greater Son would come. The prophets were not led astray, they didn't get so starry eyed that they simply imagined castles in the air, spun out of spider webs! The historian could tell us that, in Solomon's day, Solomon sat in some sense on the throne of the Lord.

A throne in heaven

We have arrived at a time when we can say it in every conceivably possible degree of meaning. As sure as we sit here, there sits a man on the throne of the Lord. He is hidden from us by a veil that took him from the sight of his apostles as he ascended; but he sits there on the throne of the Lord, a real man with a body and arms and legs as we have, though perfect.

We do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death. (Heb 2:8-9)

This ancient historian, with his visions of grandeur, will not lead you astray or give you merely a pipe dream. When he is recording for you the glories of Solomon's era, he is offering them to you as a prototype of the glory that one day you shall yet see.

I love to think of the glories of Solomon's reign, and use them as a kind of little child's thought-model to think of bigger things. We are told that when Solomon came to the throne he administered justice. The old criminals that had survived from David's era were put down and under his administration people got justice. His wisdom in the law courts was proverbial (witness the story of the two prostitutes whose case was solved by his brilliance). What a day it will be—and it is coming—when politicians will no longer tell lies or even half-truths, and businessmen shall no longer cheat, and workmen shall no longer do a shoddy job. None of us will seek merely our own interests but the good of others. This is not some grand yarn, spun to put us to bed and keep us from crying in the dark. It shall happen, 'But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (2 Pet 3:13).

Days of prosperity

Under Solomon's wise administration everyone had plenty. Gone were the days of famine. Through his international trade there was wealth on every hand. Gold was the thing in Solomon's day, and there was not only wealth of money, but wealth of mind. That is a very attractive feature of his day. He was a genius at interpreting the wonders of nature. If you were asked to the royal table, Solomon would start talking about the wonders of hyssop.

Whereas you might have thought that hyssop was a very ordinary thing, and you wouldn't look twice at it, by the time Solomon had finished expounding to you the botanical wonders of hyssop you would have been amazed. What wonders of nature, from hyssop to the great cedar tree, 'He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish' (1 Kgs 4:33).

Nature, imperfect as it is, is a subject that keeps many a wise mind enthralled. What will it be when the Lord comes, the Lord of Nature, the very Word whose original idea creation was and is. He shall escort us round his universe and tell us its wonders. Nature shall no longer groan, subject to a bondage to corruption; her fair face spoiled with tears and torn with thorns. What a day, when nature shall be released into the very glory of the children of God, and be able to yield to us things that nature cannot yield now; when we are at home with the Lord of Creation and he tells us the wonders of nature, as nature was meant to be, expressive of the very mind of God.

We are told that people came from the East to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Among them came the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10). She brought all kinds of exotic gifts; among other things, she brought almug wood.⁵ Solomon's workmen made musical instruments out of it (vv. 11–12). I wonder what kind of tone almug wood would make if it were turned into a Stradivarius! I imagine it would have been wonderful for the time. There was music in Solomon's court, and there will be music up in heaven such as you have never heard! Think of the exotic people that will be there, the Queen of Sheba among them; folks from Ireland, and from every tribe, tongue, people and nation, each with their wonderful and individual experience of the Lord. What a choir it shall be; what music shall endlessly fill those celestial halls!

A temple, a house, and a home

The greatest thing of all about Solomon's reign was that Solomon was allowed to build God a temple and in the very eyes of the nation the transcendent Lord deigned to come to live in a house round the corner. I know you will tell me that there isn't going to be a temple in heaven, and you are perfectly scriptural. 'And I saw no temple in the city,' says John; but listen to what he adds, 'for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb' (Rev 21:22). The whole great New Jerusalem will be a tabernacle where God shall reside, and through which he shall make himself known to the nations of the universe. Inside that great tabernacle there shall be no inner shrine, for the Lord God and the Lamb are the shrine thereof.

We had to be on this little planet to learn our lessons; distant enough from the immediate presence of God as not to be overawed, but free to make serious moral decisions without being unduly pressured, so that we might grow up as moral men and women. When we step into that city we shall be in the immediate, unveiled presence of almighty God. That is what it will mean to be at home with the Lord. No longer exiles, but 'away from the body and at home with the Lord' (2 Cor 5:8).

⁵ Red sandalwood.

The road to glory

By what stages did Solomon in his day come to this great age of peace and prosperity and glory? The historian tells us of five elements that went to make up that glorious age—five elements that in their day were spread along the course of history. It may not be spread like this nowadays, but the five elements remain.

1. The nation of Israel, King David, and David's Greater Son

If you look back at the early chapters, from chapter 1 to the passage we have read at the end of chapter 10, you will find that it is mainly a list of names—genealogies galore. Starting with Adam, and developing the course of the human race from him, the historian very soon comes to what, for him, is the most significant thing in these chapters. And that is, the rise of Israel from among the nations; and presently the rise from among Israel of their most famous king, King David.

That is where I would put my hope, if I were surveying history and asking if there was any evidence or ground for hope that one day the human race will see an age of bliss and glory and plenty. I wouldn't put it in the United Nations. May God help them in this difficult time in history, when they grapple with the problems of a world becoming ever smaller, and therefore ever more explosive. They try to grapple with problems that now must be grappled with at world level, as our little planet becomes one great world village. But I would not put my final hopes in them, for the evidence is ambivalent; politics has been as much a curse as it has been a blessing.

I would put my hope on this extraordinary phenomenon among the nations—the rise of Israel. A tiny little nation, but raised up of God in those far distant days with a mission to the world. A mission to protest against every idolatrous interpretation of the universe; to stand for the fact of the great Creator, and man is made by a personal Creator in the image of that Creator. And when she has not compromised herself (she has, alas, many times) that is Israel's message to the nations.

In her day, ancient Israel needed to protest against the crude idolatries of the ancient world that represented mankind as being controlled by the sun god and the moon god and the stars and the storm, and other such physiological processes. The result of the interpretation of the universe was that mankind was reduced to slavery. Men and women lived in fear, bowing down like slaves to these gods that were not gods. They were powers in the universe but not gods. Israel, in the name of God, said that man is not a slave to the universe or to its forces. Man is made in the image of the Creator; made to have dominion.

We still need to preach it, for our modern world is fast running away from its Creator, thinking itself to be sophisticated. It gets rid of God, but if you examine its position it is just as much in slavery as the ancient world was. Ask the atheist what it is that controls human life and destiny and he will tell you it is energy; the weak atomic power and the strong atomic power, electro magnetism and gravity. Mindless, heartless, vast powers; but they don't know what they do. All the atheist can hold out as a hope is that one day these mindless powers will destroy you, and when they have destroyed you they won't even know what they have done. And then he tells you that in another fifty to one hundred million years these powers will

destroy the very planet on which you live, and all human life will then be a thing of the past. They have no hope. That is one of the saddest things you could say about the world—they have no hope. May our compassion go out to them. We have a message of hope; God's great mark in history, in the rise of Israel.

But more important still, the rise from Israel not only of David, but David's greater Son. It is a unique nation whom God raised up to be his mouthpiece, and her prophets pointed the way to the great Saviour of the world. It was through Israel that he came, and he remains still the only credible name in the whole of history that offers himself as the Saviour of the world.

2. A united nation, a capital city, and the New Jerusalem

The second great stage in their history was a stroke of genius of David when he became king; he united the nation. They took an old Canaanite city called Jebus, captured it and turned it into the capital city for his people, and they called it Jerusalem. So David, by that stroke of genius, provided his nation with a capital city and a heart—a city where everybody, no matter what tribe they came from, felt they were at home. It was their city! It united the nation that had hitherto become fragmented; a nation that soon afterwards fragmented again. But for that brief period in history the nation was united in their glorious capital city, and united around David. They called it 'the City of the Great King'. However much they quarrelled amongst themselves, Israel loved David.

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. 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.'" 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. And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem . . . (11:1-4)

The two tribes and the ten gave up their quarrelling and they united under David in that lovely city. It was David that founded it. What a history it has gathered round its head in the centuries, and what a history there will yet be. That city shall yet be a troublesome stone to all the nations. One day all the nations of the world shall come against it—Antichrist's last fling to defy God and his Christ. And then the Lord shall come.

But just now, our minds go to a greater Jerusalem still, 'Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother' (Gal 4:26). Can you believe there is going to be a heaven of bliss? You understand that the first thing that will have to happen is that everybody will have to be united. Will that be difficult? It is difficult to unite the world, but what about believers? Can we, who know the realities of life in the church of God, dare to believe there is going to be a paradise of bliss one day? Or is it all religious moonshine? No! Scratch a true believer and, however prickly the surface, underneath you will find a heart that loves the Saviour. What a genius Christ is for bringing people together. We can say to him in a far deeper sense, 'We are bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh.' We are not only forgiven by him, but eternally united with him in the very body of Christ. That new Jerusalem is no myth; it is already being formed.

Saviour, if of Zion's city
 I by grace a member am,
 Let the world deride or pity;
 I shall glory in his name.⁶

3. The ark, the throne of God, and the coming of the Lord

The third great thing was the bringing up of the ark into Jerusalem. To see the significance of that, you will have to remember how the Israelites viewed that ark. When they stood in their serried ranks and watched the Levites, solemnly clothed in white, bringing that ark of the Lord upon their shoulders, they actually believed that the Lord himself sat enthroned on the cherubim that were on the mercy seat upon that ark. So that, as they saw the ark coming, what filled their hearts with ecstatic wonder and delight was this—it was the Lord coming, they were witnessing a coming of the Lord.

No wonder David danced and humbled himself. It wasn't before an empty symbol of a box; he believed that God was enthroned on the ark and that the Lord had come to Jerusalem. It was a *coming of the Lord*. Our minds will travel to Bethlehem when, in a far nearer sense, the Lord came. Our mind will go to Jerusalem city to see that wonderful figure riding the donkey into Jerusalem as Zion's king. But we look higher still, and as sure as those crowds saw the ark coming into Jerusalem city,

I shall see him descend from the sky, Coming for me!
 Coming to bring to this weary world peace . . .
 Coming to reign as our glorified Lord,
 Jesus is coming again!⁷

4. Enemies, victories, and resurrection

What happened next? There were two more periods before the temple was actually erected. Immediately following the coming of the Lord on the ark to Jerusalem, David set about putting down the last enemies. Solomon could not be allowed to reign yet. There were enemies still; the dark king of Ammon, that old mocker of God's people. There was finally Satan himself who, in those last moments, gained a victory over David. But then, by God's mercy, David recovered and Satan's effort was defeated.

The enemies had to be put down, and therefore David had to reign until the last enemies were defeated. So it is written:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep . . . For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death . . . O death, where is your sting? . . . Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 15:20, 25–26, 55, 57)

⁶ John Newton, 'Glorious things of thee are spoken', 1779.

⁷ Anon, 'Jesus my Saviour to Bethlehem came'.

The mockers shall be silenced and Satan himself consigned to the eternal burnings. The last enemy that is destroyed is death—and then what? The great and glorious new heavens and new earth shall come, and the eternal city of God shall be erected.

5. Priorities, collecting treasure, and building for eternity

When David was older he voluntarily abdicated and made Solomon his regent. Why did he do this? So that he could get on with the job that was nearer to his heart than anything else on earth. Not his great victories, nor his great palaces; not even the question of power was anything to him, such as the pursuit upon which he spent his last days to the full. And that was preparing the treasure for the building of the house of the Lord and organizing the people. So that, when the day dawned and the temple was built and the presence of God descended and filled it, the people might be ready, each in his or her place, and the glory of God might fill them and express itself through them. Their many and variegated gifts would hold forth and come back to God in a never-ceasing stream of glory.

For that, David gave his last moments. As he stood there with the pile of treasure that had been collected, and the people standing around him waiting for the day when the temple would be erected, he was moved to pray.

And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. (29:13–15)

What bearing do these words have upon us? What would we do with our life, if today it should dawn in our hearts that it is but a shadow and soon will be gone? God invites us to join King David and his hosts in preparing the material that shall adorn the eternal city of God.

He gives us the grace, the energy, the time, the salvation, the knowledge of his word, and the fruit of the Spirit to collect the material, quarry it, polish and shape it, by our preaching, our prayers, our pastoring, our love, our kindness and our care. We are God's fellow-workers, but let us take heed how we build.

If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. (1 Cor 3:14–15)

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. His international teaching ministry is marked by fresh and careful expositions of both testaments. He has published scholarly studies on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John 13–17, Acts, Hebrews and the New Testament's use of the Old Testament.