



# Your Biography

As revealed in the  
seven saints of Genesis

*Desmond Ford*

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***Dedication***

To Gill, my right hand

# ***Table of Contents***

Chapter One: Your Biography

Chapter Two: Adam & Abel

Chapter Three: Noah

Chapter Four: Abraham

Chapter Five: Isaac

Chapter Six: Jacob

Chapter Seven: Joseph

Chapter Eight: Your Biography in the First Six books of the Bible

Chapter Nine: The New Testament

Conclusion

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Your Biography*

We are incurably absorbed in ourselves—and why not? If we don't look after ourselves, who will? Of course, even good things, vital things, can be overdone. Is it possible that we might miss something of inestimable value by our self-fascination?

The ancient Greeks made much of the aphorism 'know thyself'. But they also pled for the recognition of what they called the 'mean'. Moderation, according to Plato and Aristotle, was the real key to success and happiness. They warned that the best way to undo was to overdo.

There is an old book that transcends the wisdom of the Greeks as much as the sun does the stars in our heaven. It endorses the maxim 'know yourself' and praises the 'mean' under the label of 'temperance'. In one place, listing the virtues of the very best life, 'self-control' is the climax of nine virtues.

But these two are not the total of wise counsels regarding the self-life. There is another, quite unknown to the Greeks, and quite unwelcome to most who dwell on this planet. 'Deny yourself' was a totally foreign exhortation to the ancient world. And it is equally unpopular in the twenty-first century of our era. Only some very slick advertising could tempt moderns to consider it.

Yet, is it not true that those who have excelled in any field have usually disciplined their habits and practices beyond their contemporaries? Can one be a great musician, a great artist, a great architect, a great leader of men and women, or a great anything without self-denial? How many hours a day are consecrated to their art or field by most of those who stand head and shoulders in achievement above their fellows?

Study the lives of those who have contributed most to the wellbeing of humanity. Did Abraham Lincoln live a broad and variegated life, or a narrow constricted one? What was the case with Winston Churchill in World War II, or Franklin D. Roosevelt? Has anyone ever learned a foreign language without denying sloth and ease?

In the days when the world was being swept by polio, and fear threatened all communities, did Jonas Salk dream up his vaccine while fishing, or was it the result of unparalleled devotion to science? Edison

often conducted hundreds of experiments before finding the secret he longed for which would advance civilisation. He was not notorious for absorption in any of those activities that seem to swallow up so many men—drinking, gambling, profligacy and the like. He was even grateful for his deafness. Success has its price, and part of that price is vigorous self-denial.

Not slick advertising, but only the charm of goodness and wisdom can lure us to self-denial. We have to be sure it is worth it. The most compelling power comes from fellow humans who live outside the square to the great benefit of their fellows. Mother Teresa drew thousands into lives of sacrifice by her towering example. Nothing is so convincing and so powerful as goodness.

What is your supreme ambition—to make money, to be famous, to reach the summit of power, or be loved? This tiny book will offer you insights into the only life that is worthwhile, the only life that is truly a success.

People influence us, voices melt us, looks stir us and deeds inflame us. In the greatest book of all time we have scores of biographies—biographies of the worst of men and biographies of the best. Here are records of men and women who led lives without parallel and records of many who followed the wide and easy path. And all these tell us about our own experiences, our own faults and our own possibilities. Blessed are those who read, learn and profit by the virtues and vices of others. We only have one short life—too short to learn everything by our own experience. Let us learn from the experiences of the past.

In a marvellous way the Bible contrives to guide us by picturing through the lives of men and women of the past our own potential. If you are a believer or an unbeliever makes no difference, your photograph can be found within the pages of Holy Writ. In the following pages you will recognize the lineaments of your own countenance and the ups and downs of your life to date. If you have launched into the sea of the Christian life, all of its characteristics will be portrayed in what follows.

From childhood we have heard the names Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau and Joseph. The oldest stories in the world probably regaled us at a very young age—the stories of the Flood, the Tower of Babel, the wanderings and adventures of the first Jew, Abraham, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the most exciting of all—the

story of the rejected Jew who saved the famishing world with the bread of life—Joseph. There is much more in all of them than meets the eye. And we have not even named the greatest history of all, which began and ended with a miracle, and which took four books to record.

Some modern writers have sensed the heights and depths of the ancient narratives. Even Hollywood has drawn upon them. Who has not read or watched the modernised fictional sketch, drawing from the lives of the first two brothers—Steinbeck's *East of Eden*. The recurring moral of the book is encapsulated in a Hebrew word meaning 'thou mayest'. Cain had been told that if he did well he would be accepted, but if not sin was crouching at his door like a tigress ready to devour him. The challenge was to overcome that threat by wise choices. Steinbeck saw in the opening pages of the Bible a clue for avoiding tragedy. At the close of the novel the Hebrew word is invoked again in a blessing from the father (Adam) upon his surviving son (Caleb).

Even humour has been borrowed to make relevant for today the stories of long ago. We have been admonished to find pertinent wisdom in the story of Noah and the Flood. For example:

1. Don't miss the boat.
2. Remember that we are all in the same boat.
3. Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark.
4. Stay fit. When you're 600 years old someone may ask you to do something really big.
5. Don't listen to critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done.
6. Build your future on high ground.
7. For safety's sake, travel in pairs.
8. Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.
9. When you're stressed, float awhile.
10. Remember the Ark was built by amateurs, the Titanic by professionals.
11. No matter the storm, when you are with God, there's always a rainbow waiting.

To find the open sesame of wisdom we need to understand that every life presented in Scripture tells us of the possibilities of our own. Even the most mature of Christians admit that they have often denied their Lord as

surely as did Peter. They have even betrayed him, as did Judas. And, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, our every sin crucifies the Lord of glory afresh. To be aware of these heights and depths in the Bible is to make that book shine as never before. We want to know the truth about ourselves, and this is the only book that tells the whole story. Never read the Bible as though it were only about yesterday.

The first book of Scripture revolves around the lives of seven key characters: Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. We associate Adam with human rebellion and the entrance of sin on our planet. But the last one, Joseph, is a hero whose history records no failures and no rebellions like Jesus. The seven lives sketch for us the biography of every true Christian.

Would you know the passage through which you must pass if you are a new Christian? Study these seven lives.



## CHAPTER TWO

### *Adam & Abel*

Adam's life is the life of sin. His first words, a reply to God's enquiry, are these: 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid'. His words reveal guilt, fear and self-centredness, the characteristics of every sinner. His initial response to the divine confrontation is not sorrow for his apostasy, not a confession accompanied by a plea for forgiveness. And his last words are those of self defence and the passing of the buck, blaming Eve. He also blamed his Maker. 'The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it'. Again, the words ring a bell within us. Who has not tried to justify himself by putting his guilt onto others?

The second life is Abel's. His is a life of conflict—conflict that results from his habit of giving God his place by worship and offering of sacrifice. Observe how Cain manifests envy, enmity and aggressiveness when God evaluates the offerings of the brothers:

The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it".

Genesis 4:4-7, NIV

Apparently, Adam and his family had been given specific instructions about worship, but Cain deviated from these by choosing his own way. And that way led to the first murder. Abel died for his faith.

When a sinner finds God, his obedience is faith in action. But it will always be costly. Untold millions have died because they chose to worship God's appointed way. So the second character in our series of seven is a warning beacon. It tells us to count the cost of choosing to follow God. This is what Christ meant when he warned that he had come not to bring peace, but a sword. He elaborated his statement by predicting that families would be split because of worship choices. And as if looking back to the story of Cain and Abel Christ foretold that his followers might be slain by their own family. See Luke 21:18.

How shocking is the first account of Adam's family! We might have expected verbal controversy, or even backsliding, but murder seems so over the top! How realistic Scripture is! The person reading the Bible for the first time will still be in his or her first quarter hour when anger, enmity and fratricide are met. The doctrine of original sin and depravity and its consequence are highlighted that early. It is as though God was whispering, 'Do you really mean that prayer of consecration? Do you know that from a worldly standpoint it could cost you everything'.

It was with good reason that the Jewish race early came to believe in life after death. Jewish history is a very bloody one. What took place at Masada in 72 A.D., was but representative of millenniums of slaughter. Only if the present life is recognized as a drop in the bucket compared to what is to come does genuine religion make any sense. When the New Testament describes Christ's resurrection in detail it is in order to make the point that Christ is 'the firstfruits of them that sleep'. Our real life is around the bend. It follows this short episode of existence. And one hour of the world to come will more than compensate for any tragedies experienced now.

As we consider God's ideal for the new believer, it is vital we give due importance to the privilege and duty of worship. It teaches that the professed follower of God who does not worship him properly is capable of the most dastardly deeds. Do not separate Cain's murder from his earlier problem—his failure to worship according to God's order. If we wish to leave our fallen estate in Adam, the adoration of God at his appointed time has to be primary in our practice. To fail here is to fail everywhere. This is why in the very centre of the Bible is a whole book of worship praises which we call the Psalms.

Few understand the importance of the first narrative after the Fall. But it is the clear teaching of Scripture that unless God is given first place in our time and attention we cannot resist sin. Our frantic, unbending lives today are the root cause of our worst failures. Hospitals, jails and divorce courts are full because of this folly. Immediately tied into Creation is the appointed day of adoration of the Creator. See Genesis 2:1-3. This is the first religious institution in Scripture, and what is first is usually of special importance and predictive of later uses.

We might have expected a thousand things to be found after God's interview with our first parents. God, in his wisdom, introduces us to

fellowship with him. One of the reasons is this: if we choose to go the way of penitence like Adam and Eve, it must begin with adoration, for life will be tough. The life that is really the easiest always seems to be the hardest. Only the faith engendered by time with God gives the strength to endure with joy.

The Hebrew words that begin verse three of Genesis chapter four literally mean 'at the end of days'. A set time for worship is thus indicated. Have you ever thought what life would be like if it had no interruptions, no periods of rest, no times to lift the head and think about the eternities? If, as the Bible clearly teaches, worship is our very first duty, then God's appointed time for that must be faithfully recognised. Emphasis is here given to this matter because its almost universal neglect has loosed a cataract of evils upon the human race. Your life will be a mess unless you give God time.

One of the greatest of nineteenth-century theologians was James Morison. His commentaries on Matthew and Mark are superb, and in the former we find a very valuable comment on the necessity of a special day for worship. He is expounding Christ's words in Matthew 24:20: 'But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day'. Here are his words:

He was not anticipating a new state of things in which there would be no sabbatical day whatever. By no means. It would be very far from desirable, in the present condition of human nature, that our weeks should be without their special day of solemn pause. It would be sad indeed if the world's worry were to go on uninterruptedly, especially amid the competitive forces and consequent 'fastness' of commercial and highly civilized communities. It would be spiritually and morally and even physically disastrous, if, amid the continual stretching and straining and bending toward earth and earth's things, there were no periodical parentheses of seasons, frequently recurring, during which the worldly bow might be unbent, and the thoughts and energies of the man turned systematically upward and heavenward. ...

He (the believer) would remember that the institution of the Sabbath is hedged round and round, not only in spirit, but even in letter, by the peculiar position which the statute appointing it occupies in the innermost list and moral summary of the whole

body of Jewish statutes, the Decalogue. The rest of the statutes of the Decalogue hold good for all dispensations. And why not this too?  
*Matthew*, pp. 470-471

So the first duty of human beings is the worship of their Creator. For this reason the first four commandments of the Decalogue are about this. Obviously if all who love God are to meet together there must be an established time on which this is to be done. And it would have to be a time free from secular work. One cannot sweat at labour and worship God in thought and word at the same time. Genesis four is telling the new Christian that only if God is given his right place in adoring worship will all else be right.

How strange that today a multitude of professed Christians think the fourth commandment is no longer relevant! G. Campbell Morgan tells us that from a purely worldly viewpoint Christ's death was the result of his Sabbath reforms. One does not clean out a neglected shed and then burn it down. Christ's seven primary miracles were on the holy day in order to show his esteem for its right use and abolish traditional errors. The wisest of Bible commentators and preachers have recognized this. J. C. Ryle, Anglican spiritual giant, is very emphatic when he writes as follows:

We must not allow ourselves to be carried away by the common notice that the Sabbath is a mere Jewish ordinance, and that it was abolished and done away by Christ. There is not a single passage of the Gospels, which proves this. In every case where we find our Lord speaking upon it, He speaks against the false views of it, which were taught by the Pharisees, but not against the day itself. ... He shows that the seventh day's rest was not meant to prevent works of necessity and mercy, but he says nothing to imply that it was to pass away. ... we have no more right to break the Sabbath day, under the Gospel, than we have to murder and to steal.

The Sabbath was made for man's benefit, and not for his hurt. It was appointed to promote man's best and highest interests, and not to debar him of anything that is really for his good. It requires nothing but what is reasonable and wise. It forbids nothing that is really necessary to man's comfort.

The man who can find no pleasure in giving God one day in the week is manifestly unfit for heaven. Heaven itself is nothing but an eternal Sabbath. If we cannot enjoy a few hours in God's service once a week

in this world, it is plain that we would not enjoy an eternity in His service in the world to come.

*Luke*, Vol. 1, p. 162; Vol. 2, pp. 122,120

The good bishop goes so far as to say that our attitude to the fourth commandment is a sure test of the state of our souls. And those who understand that the physical rest of that day is an outward sign of the rest of heart and conscience believers find in the gospel can only say, 'Amen'. Such will minimise the problems that being believers will bring, and instead they will rejoice in the eternal glory and joy that awaits them.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Noah*

Noah's life is a picture of finding salvation from the storms of existence. He believed God about a coming Flood, despite the fact that he had never seen anything like the cataclysm predicted. He is prepared to be different. His life and character are poles apart from those known to all his contemporaries. It takes a lot of courage to go against the stream and to bear up against ridicule.

It is of considerable interest to find Noah's name as the climax of the series in the genealogy spanning from Creation to the end of the old world and the beginning of another. Many have written upon this phenomenon and we quote one:

The significance of the meaning of Bible names has impressed Bible students for centuries. The Reformer Ursinus, author of the Heidelberg Catechism, is credited with being the first to draw attention to the teaching of the gospel in the meanings of the names of the ten antediluvians mentioned in the genealogical table of Genesis 5, which takes us from Adam to the flood. Taking these names as they appear in the genealogical line, and reading down their meanings to make one connected line of thought, we read:

Adam	Man
Seth	Appointed
Enos	Wretched, fallen man
Canaan	Lamenting
Mahalalel	The Blessed God
Jared	Shall descend
Enoch	Teaching, dedicated, disciplined
Methuseleh	His death shall bring
Lamech	Power
Noah	Rest, comfort

L. F. Were, *The Certainty of the Third Angel's Message*, p.181

Not all scholars are agreed on the precise meaning of all ten names, but the weight of evidence is sufficient for the teaching of Ursinus. In some cases the Bible itself gives us the meaning of certain of the names here listed.

At the birth of his son, Lamech, after naming Noah, said, 'He will comfort us in the labour and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed' (Gen. 5:29). Moses's summary is more interesting. He wrote: 'Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God' (Gen. 6:9).

How important that clause 'and he walked with God'. It is stated only about a few saints in the Bible. When Enoch walked with God for 300 years, the Lord took him home. So it is no light thing to walk with the Almighty.

Noah has much to teach us. We all wish to be accepted by our neighbours. We pause before we do anything that will not find endorsement from our fellows. Yet the greatest people who have ever lived have been non-conformists. It makes one stop and think.

Another distinctive characteristic of this patriarch is found in 6:22, 'And Noah did everything just as God commanded him'. Everything? Yes, everything. See also 7:5 and 7:16. We are told about the murderous tyrant Herod that he did many things John the Baptist advised him to do. But certainly he did not do 'everything'. The platitude that 'if Christ is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all' is a searching one, but it could save us for eternity.

But didn't Noah get drunk? Yes, says the record. It was after the Deluge when Noah was experimenting in agriculture. He is never condemned for this lapse, and at that stage of history it could have been an accident. Who knows how powerful was the fruit of the vine after the earth's transformation?

Anyway, God judges us all by the tenor of our way, not by the occasional good or bad deed. Otherwise we would be sunk, every one of us.

Noah's experience suggests on a very large scale the upheaval that comes to each of us when we begin to take God seriously. When it looks as though we will land in trouble without remedy because we choose to follow God, we find marvellous redemption instead. Salvation is for all who will trust and obey. Noah's is the life of salvation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Abraham*

More people in the world today reverence Abraham than anyone else who has ever lived. Jews, Muslims, and Christians claim him as their spiritual father. Scripture calls him ‘the father of the faithful’, ‘father of many nations’, ‘heir of the world’ and ‘friend of God’. To him, in one sense, we owe the Bible, the gospel and the Saviour of mankind. All three can be traced to Abraham. If you doubt his importance ask this question: How many chapters in the New Testament are devoted to just one person other than Christ? And then read Romans four.

A single verse in Abraham’s biography helped launch the Protestant Reformation and has been the seed of thousands of sermons, articles and books. Here it is: ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness’ (Gen. 15:6). This is an amazing and wonderful verse in many ways. It contains three words, which appear here for the first time in the Bible; ‘believed’, ‘counted’, ‘righteousness’. The first use of any word or term in Scripture is usually prophetic, indicating the way it will be used for the rest of the inspired Word.

When Paul set out to illustrate the gospel he began with this sentence. See Romans 4:1-3. An exile in the desert who lived in tents, guided all his goings and doings by a sevenfold promise from God. By age seventy-five, he had farewelled the land of his nativity—Chaldea. Sustained by the divine pledge that he would father many nations and inherit the world (Gen. 12:1-3, Rom. 4:13), he wandered for twenty-five years without an heir, waiting for his elderly wife Sarah to bear him a son. Years later, God tested him by asking for that son back, and Abraham was ready to obey, believing that God would raise his sacrificed son from the dead. See Hebrews 11:19.

He was a praying man, even interceding for the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. He prayed for his son Ishmael at a time when Ishmael’s future was very cloudy. And his prayers for Isaac would have been beyond number.

Abraham was surrounded by the dead. At one hundred years of age he was withered, and his wife more so. Both, from all appearances, were as good as dead. The only land he owned was a small plot he bought as a



burial site. But ‘against hope he believed in hope’, counting that God could there and then raise the dead. He ridiculed impossibilities, and poured contempt on all improbables. It had to be so for he was to be the father of all who would trust the promises of God. His experiences had to be such that millions looking back could say, ‘Abraham endured this and this; was tempted and tried by all these tests, and hung on in faith despite being next door to death’.

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be’. Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why ‘it was credited to him as righteousness’ (Rom. 4:18-22, NIV).

In Romans chapter four, Paul sets out how the promises came to Abraham independently of the ceremonial and moral laws and his own inherent bodily strength. Circumcision—as a sign of God’s everlasting covenant with Abraham and all the faithful—was yet future when Abraham said ‘yes’ to God. The Decalogue, in its two-table form, was centuries in the future, and as for his health, he looked as though a breeze could blow him over. And this is where the story is crucial for you and me. We, too, are credited with righteousness if we commit ourselves to God, despite any failures in the outward signs of religion, despite moral failures and despite our spiritual and physical weaknesses. Glory to God! There is no excuse for unbelief. God will accept all who trust him, whatever their condition.

The life of conflict that began with our initial assent to God is now spelled out in more detail. Even Abel’s worship would not have been possible but for his faith in the promises of Genesis 3:15. God, in Eden, had foretold the coming of a Deliverer who would crush Satan and win the great controversy between good and evil. Had Abel’s life been prolonged, it would have mirrored Abraham’s as regards trust in the divine promises. And, thereby, along with the story of Abraham’s years of trial, our maturing Christian experience would have been portrayed in symbol and type. All who believe in Christ as their substitute and representative are ‘Abraham’s seed’. See Galatians 3:26-29 and Romans 2:28-29.

And what does this mean in practical terms? It means that throughout all of our Christian life we are called upon to trust God despite adverse circumstances within and without. We regularly step out upon a seeming void and find a rock beneath. Like Moses we too 'endure as seeing him who is invisible'. Like Abraham, we will step out from our comfortable world and become pilgrims, not knowing whither we go on this planet. Assured of an ultimate Heaven, we trudge through the sands of desolate years. Despised by unbelievers, we rejoice that we are privileged to suffer for Christ's sake.

This faith, which becomes the channel for saving grace, is not unreasoning fanaticism. It is buttressed by overwhelming supports. The character of him who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, who is immutable, who is the source of all love and caring, who has sustained millions over the centuries, who inspired Scripture, who went to Calvary—this is the One we are called upon to trust. He is a wounded God, for only the wounded can minister to the wounded. He is not a smiling, complacent, obese Buddha, but one who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, who still has our human nature, including his scars—this is the One on whom we rely.

Spurgeon loved to tell the story of a man who in midnight darkness thought he was near a precipice. Inch by inch he went forward, but ultimately grabbed on to a projecting tree root till his strength weakened and he let go and fell—not to death, but to a green sward only inches away. Spurgeon also reminded his listeners of the African explorer, Mungo Park, who one day was hopelessly lost. Despairing, his eyes perceived a beautiful tiny moss only feet away. Calculating that a God who could create such marvels hidden from the eyes of most humans could also care for him, Mungo stumbled on to safety.

The requirements of God for salvation are not too heavy for the weak, not too huge for the little and not too small for the full-grown. Romans 10:13 promises that even those who can only call shall be saved. The eternal gift is for the poor and the rich, the illiterate and the educated, the blind, the deaf, the lame and the dumb and even for those who are almost simpletons. He has lowered the bar over which we must jump—so low that none need fail of obtaining the priceless gift.

Remember the gospel that invites us is the good news that 'makes the heart to sing and the feet to dance'. It is the discovery of buried treasure.

It is like working at the job from only 4:00 p.m. on, and yet being paid for the whole day. It is being invited to a feast by the joyous father of the ne'er do well who has stumbled home in rags. It is to be granted the peerless gem of justification—not just forgiveness but acquittal. And that is not just acquittal, but the imputation of Christ's spotless and everlasting righteousness. Ours is the verdict of the Last Judgment now. Ours is eternal life now. And three thousand promises are ours. Though we stumble and fall a thousand times, though we be weak while pursuing, God is able to keep us and to perfect all that concerns us. None can pluck us out of his hands, praise God!

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Isaac*

We have looked at the life of sin (Adam), the life of worship and conflict (Abel), the life of salvation (Noah) and the life of faith (Abraham). Now, we turn to the life of sonship—the fifth colour in the rainbow of Christian experience, or the fifth chapter in Christian biography.

Isaac's life is one of sonship. When we have implicit faith in the love of our father we respond with filial affection and obedience. Isaac knew that he had been miraculously born after twenty-five years of trustful waiting by his father and mother. He remembered also that his father had told him of his laugh of joy as he contemplated what God would do. See Genesis 17:17. Many centuries later Christ had referred to this when he said: 'Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad' (John 8:56, NIV). No wonder Isaac was given a name meaning 'laughter'.

Perhaps the most significant line in the history of Isaac is found in Genesis 22:6, 'The two of them went on together'. This, of course, is a prefiguring of the fact that God and his Son would go together to Calvary. At the time of his proposed sacrifice Isaac was a strong and virile young man, but his father, many summers after his hundredth year, would have been weak. The son could easily have overcome the aged patriarch, but instead he submitted to the preparations for what seemed his certain death.

To understand the distinctive character of Isaac we should consider Genesis 24:63, 'He went out to the field one evening to meditate'. The word translated 'meditate' can also mean 'pray'. Isaac is a spiritual man of mild disposition. But no follower of God can escape trial. His trials are as special as his temperament.

As a child Isaac was mocked and laughed at by a half-brother. On reaching maturity, he was called to be a sacrifice and walked to the place of execution as a lamb appointed to the slaughter. In later years when sojourning by wells of his own digging, the Philistines disturbed his peace time and again. He moved away rather than fight. His son Esau grieved him by a polygamous marriage with the heathen. We are not told that Isaac rebuked him.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph fill most of Genesis from chapter twelve onwards. Isaac attains to the greatest age, but less is recorded of him than of any of the others. About twelve chapters each are devoted to Abraham, Jacob and Joseph, but to Isaac Scripture only gives a single chapter apart from some sparse occasional verses elsewhere. He does not succeed in reflecting the many triumphs of faith that characterised his father, but his failures are much less than those of his son.

We are surprised when Isaac repeats the sin of Abraham by lying about his wife out of fear of the heathen. And there are other minor blemishes perceivable, for which we can each thank God. None of the giants of faith in Scripture were without infirmities. Only in a very few places are their biographies without blemish. Joseph and Daniel are exceptions to the rule. There are spots on the sun, but we rejoice to walk under its beams. And the characters of the faithful in Scripture encourage us by their infirmities, for we all have a host of these. Were all the men and women of Scripture like Joseph and Daniel, we would be mightily discouraged, and perhaps throw in the sponge.

A hallmark of Isaac's story is the frequent reference to wells. See 25:11; 26:18,19,20,21,22,25. His name is linked with them just seven times. In Abraham's case it was the altar that marked his pilgrimage. All Christians need both—the altar of worship and the wells of living waters from divine revelation. While a cistern has water, it does not have running water. The well has living water. See the margin of Genesis 26:19, where 'living' is the alternative to 'springing'. Only when we come to John's Gospel do we find the real significance of the symbol:

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him". By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.  
John 7:37-39

Andrew Jukes in his *Types in Genesis* offers profound counsel to all who read the story of Isaac. Here it is:

Such is Isaac's course, that is the path and experience of the spirit of sonship in us; very different to the energies of faith, freed from the peculiar struggles which mark each stage of Abraham's history;

differing widely too from Jacob's path, knowing nothing of that long toil for flocks and children in the far country; but coming in at once to rich blessing, as Abraham's heir inheriting all faith's good things; yet with its special blessings having special trials of its own, first mocked and laughed at, then called to be a sacrifice, to give up as an obedient son his own will in everything, to be even as a lamb appointed unto death, only in the act of perfect self-sacrifice to find deliverance; then, when fruitful, to be pained, at home by its own seed, abroad by seeing the living waters which faith had opened choked by aliens; such is the path; for there is no form of spiritual life which in its progress towards the perfect man must not be tried to the uttermost.

The form of the trial varies with the growing form of the elect life. For that which tries us at first is not the trial of the riper and more advanced spirit; but a cross and trial there must be at every stage, to purify the elect from the hereditary evil which still so perseveringly cleaves to him.

Many therefore are the inward groans and deaths, which must be passed through in the journey towards perfection. For as the vine draws its sap from the impure earth, and so yields a fluid fruit, first sour, then sweet, which, being crushed in the wine-press, is then turned into wine by fermentation, and thus by successive stages advanced into a more powerful and enduring form of being; so in the great change of man's renewal unto God, the new life, growing out of and in part and for a season sustained by the defiled and earthly nature, is dissolved and purified by successive changes and ferment, till it is transformed and rectified into that which is immortal.

But there are many stages in the labour, and many times does nature halt before this final rest. And often do we think the work is done, and the promised rest is come, while yet we are far indeed from seeing it. But it shall come at last to those who by grace yield themselves to God in everything.

pp. 309-310

As we pass through the study of the special seven characters of Genesis we find much reflective of our own nature and experience. The failures we may shun, but it is our privilege to prayerfully aim at the successes. Overshadowing the whole, we behold a wonderful providence which begets, sustains and preserves faith, and those who cherish it.

Were we called upon to fight Muhammad Ali, the prospect would freeze the strongest of us. But consider what our attitude would be if God guaranteed that however many times we were felled, ultimately we would be declared the winner. The person that never makes a mistake never makes anything, and the real winner is the one who rises up from every fall and fights on. When we remember, as it is our privilege to do, that Calvary covers every fault, every failure, every sin, of the believer, then our courage is constantly renewed.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Jacob*

The sixth in our biographical series is Jacob, the supplanter, who became Israel—prince with God. The twelve chapters regarding him are priceless and contain many surprises. The biggest surprise is the way the Lord God refuses to give up on this tricky rascal who deceived his father and his uncle Laban. Unlike his father Isaac, Jacob fell into polygamy and endured household strife for many years. Yet God did not pass him by. At crisis periods God visited him and assured him of heavenly help and ultimate joy.

It is a shock to learn that both Esau and Jacob were in their seventies when Jacob by fraud secured his father's blessing. Commentators are agreed on that fact. The event was to cast its shadow over Jacob's life for decades, and only his wrestling bout with a heavenly visitant gave him peace. Obviously we cannot afford to let our moral guard down, however old we may be.

Despite the overwhelming evidence of divine patience and mercy in this story, we also find justice given its place. What the Old Testament worthies sowed, they also reaped. Isaac's preference for Esau deprived him of Jacob's presence for over twenty years. Rachel's scheming led to her loss of her beloved son for the rest of her life. As for the cardinal deceiver, Jacob, he was to be deceived by Uncle Laban and then by his own sons. These sons, who lied to their father about the missing brother Joseph, invoked a slaughtered lamb in support. Jacob had used the same in his deceiving of his father. The old movies of two generations ago insisted that, 'crime does not pay'. Scripture everywhere teaches that, 'sin does not pay'.

Arthur Pink has given us an excellent summary of this truth which Scripture announces so plainly in Galatians 6:7:

Pharaoh, king of Egypt, gave orders that every son of the Hebrews should be drowned (Ex. 1:22), and so in the end he was drowned (Ex. 14:28). Korah caused a cleft in the Congregation of Israel (Num. 16:2,3), and so God made a cleft in the earth to swallow him (Num. 16:20). Again, we read of one Adoni-bezek that he fled, "and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his



great toes. And Adoni-bezek said, Three score and ten kings, having their thumbs and great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table; as I have done, so God hath requited me!" (Judges 1:6,7).

Wicked Ahab caused Naboth to be slain and the dogs came and licked up his blood (1 Kings 21:19), accordingly we read that when Ahab died he was buried in Samaria. "And one washed the chariot (in which he had been slain) in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood" (1 Kings 22:38). King Asa caused the prophet to be placed in "the house of the stocks" (2 Chron. 16:10, R.V.) and accordingly we read later that God punished him by a disease in his feet (1 Kings 15:23).

Haman prepared a gallows for Mordecai, but was hanged upon it himself (Esther 7:10). Saul of Tarsus stood by and consented to the stoning of Stephen, and later we read that at Lystra the Jews stoned Paul (Acts 14:19)—this is the more noticeable because Barnabas who was with him escaped.

But the most striking example of what men term "poetic justice" is the case of Jacob himself. First, he deceived his father, and was, in turn, deceived by his father-in-law; Jacob became the younger for the elder to deceive Isaac, and has the older daughter of Laban given instead of the younger for a wife. Second, we may mark the same principle at work in Jacob's wife. In deceiving Jacob in the matter of Leah, Laban tricked Rachel; later we find Rachel tricking Laban (31:35). Again, we note how a mercenary spirit actuated Jacob in buying the birthright from Esau for a mess of pottage; the sequel to this was the mercenary spirit in Laban, which caused him to change Jacob's wages ten times (see 31:41). ... Jacob deceived Isaac in regard to his favourite son (Esau), and so was Jacob deceived in regard to his favourite son (Joseph).

*Gleanings in Genesis*, pp. 58-59

The distinctive feature of Jacob's life apart from the foregoing is his years of service. Hosea 12:12 says that 'Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep'.

In Genesis chapters 29 and 30 we have the history of his service under Laban. Note particularly these verses where he is speaking to his master:

I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. I did

not bring to you animals torn by wild beasts, I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. This was my situation; The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes. It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times.

Genesis 30:38-41, NIV

The introduction to Jacob's story is found in Genesis 27 where almost the whole chapter details Jacob's obeying his mother's command to attire himself like Esau, and to pretend to be his brother bringing the savoury meat Isaac loved. And so he stole his father's blessing under false pretences. The burden of that deception would weigh on him for decades. Immediately, he began to suffer for his sin. Isaac commanded him 'Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother'.

For two days he journeyed in dangerous country. Exhausted after forty miles of walking, he paused in his flight outside the town of Luz, which later was known as Bethel because of the divine vision there given. Says the record:

Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There stood above it the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham, and the God of Isaac, I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you".

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it". He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven".

There and then he pledged his loyalty to the God who had promised to be with him. See Genesis 28:11-22.

The mystical visitation of the night suggests the tenor of his thoughts before falling asleep. Jacob had been raised by pious parents, and it was not possible that he could long delay his confession to God of his sin. The dream was a consequence of that, and it transformed Jacob's inner being. God was not his enemy. God was his friend. God would be his guardian through all that was to come. Despite his transgression, his confession was accepted, and he was numbered among those on whom the divine covenant was bestowed.

This episode is of tremendous consequence. Christ referred to it when speaking to Nathanael. 'You shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man' (John 1:51). Later, Christ told the Jews that Jacob's grandfather had rejoiced when told he was to be the progenitor of the Messiah. Now he identifies the stairway (ladder) seen by the grandson as a symbol of himself.

Clearly, Christ viewed Genesis quite differently to many who profess his name today. He saw it as an inspired record of divine dealings with sinners whom God yet loved and wished to redeem. The cataract of evil found in the chapters of the Bible's first book would be very discouraging to readers if the promised Messiah were not also seen in those pages. A disease must be correctly diagnosed before cure can be offered, and until we see the heinousness of sin, its blasphemy, its ingratitude and its folly, we are not ready for the gospel.

When Paul alluded to the experiences of Abraham, he told his readers that the ancient record was not only important for the patriarch but that it was written also for their sakes—our sakes. See Romans 4:23-24. So it is with the later records of Genesis. We who believe are counted as part of Abraham's family. Jacob, too, is our ancestor, like Isaac. And the promises given him are for us today.

May I offer a personal illustration? Fifty-five years ago when I, my first wife Gwen and two children were preparing to leave Australia for America, I plucked a promise from the promise-box. As we pushed the children in their pram towards the College where I was teaching, the little scrap of paper was unrolled. I read aloud the words: 'I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land'. In the decades that followed I preached in many countries and fifty

times crossed the Pacific in connection with appointments in Australia and New Zealand. God kept his word, and the promise nerved me for the adventures of faith lying ahead.

Jacob certainly stood in need of his God-given encouragement. Within days he would not only meet his wife-to-be but her father, a treacherous, scheming skinflint. After seven years of service he believed the promised wife was his. But in the morning after the ceremony he found himself with another woman. Uncle Laban had cheated him. Now he was lured into polygamy, for he still wanted his Rachel, and was told he could have her on condition that, following the second ceremony, he would toil another seven years. Thus a Pandora's box was opened as every reader of Genesis discovers.

The Christian can survive the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' if convinced that God's providence is over all, even over his or her mistakes. Arthur Pink has set forth this truth in the following words describing the consequence of the dream at Bethel:

The remainder of the long journey seems to have passed without further incident, for the next thing we read of is that Jacob had actually come into that land which he sought. And here we find a striking proof that the Lord was with him indeed, for he was guided to a well where he met none other than the daughter of the very man with whom he was going to make his home!

It was not by chance that Jacob lit upon that well in the field, nor was it by accident that Rachel came to that well just when she did. There are no chance happenings or accidents in a world that is governed by God. It was not by chance that the Ishmaelites passed by when the brethren of Joseph were plotting his death, nor was it an accident that they were journeying down to Egypt.

It was not by chance that Pharaoh's daughter went down to the river to bathe, and that one of her attendants discovered there the infant Moses in the ark of bulrushes. It was not by chance that upon a certain night, critical in the history of Israel, that Ahasuerus was unable to sleep and that he should arise and read the state-records which contained an entry of how Mordecai had foiled an attempt on the King's life. So, we say, it was not by chance that Jacob now met Rachel.

*Ibid.*, p. 53

But divine leading is never meant to guarantee that there will be no trials, no tests, for the believer. We all desire our faith to grow, but it grows best in seasons of trial. Chapters 30 and 31 tell us more of Jacob's troublous times with his uncle. He feels forced to connive in order to defend himself, and mercifully his flocks increased to the despair of Laban. Uncle Skinflint was determined to vanquish Jacob, and to the threatened Jacob came a timely word from God:

Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.

(Genesis 31:3)

The absconding Jacob was pursued by a now murderous Laban. Then God spoke to the angry uncle, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad' (31:29). He recognised he was out of his field. It was no use trying to cheat God. So Laban and Jacob covenanted together to respect each other and, after kissing his grandchildren and his daughters, the defeated uncle left for home.

Surely there would be peace now! No. Trials do not come to an end until we do. Jacob learns that Esau with an armed force is coming to meet him. Again Jacob schemes to avoid catastrophe. He sends gifts ahead to placate the brother he had cheated repeatedly. But what he needs is assurance from God that all will be well. And God gives it. We are told in 32:1 that the angels of God met him. Alexander Maclaren has a message for us concerning this event:

God's angels meet us punctually at the hour of need. Jacob is drawing nearer and nearer to his fear every step. He is now just on the borders of Esau's country, and close upon opening communications with his brother. At that critical moment, just before the finger of the clock has reached the point on the dial at which the bell would strike, the needed help comes, the angel guards draw near and camp beside him. It is always so. "The Lord shall help her, and that right early". His hosts come no sooner and no later than we need. If they appeared before we had realized our danger and our defencelessness, our hearts would not leap up at their coming, as men in a beleaguered town do when the guns of the relieving force are heard coming from afar.

Often God's delays seem to us inexplicable, and our prayers to have no more effect than if they were spoken to a sleeping Baal. But such delays are merciful. They help us to the consciousness of our need. They let us feel the presence of the sorrow. They give opportunity of proving the weakness of all other supports. They test and increase desire for his help. They throw us more unreservedly into his arms. They afford room for the sorrow or the burden to work its peaceable fruits. So, and in many other ways, delay of succour fits us to receive succour, and our God makes no tarrying but for our sakes.

It is his way to let us come to the edge of the precipice, and then, in the very nick of time, when another minute and we are over, to stretch out his strong right hand and save us.

*Maclaren's Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol.1, p. 218.*

But despite the divine gesture of support, Jacob's heart, so like our own, still trembles. Then dawns the greatest crisis of his life, and the record is meant for all ages, but especially for those living on the edge of eternity.

He comes to the brook Jabbok of Trans-Jordan. He is on the edge of Esau's territory and close to where his first vision occurred decades earlier at Bethel. He is so near home, and yet so troubled and uncertain. Does God wipe his hands of this typical man of little faith? No, he intends to give him the greatest blessing of his life. God is so much better than we have ever hoped, though we are so much worse than we have ever suspected.

Genesis 32:9-12 gives us the first recorded prayer in the Bible. It comes from an earnest heart and has not a tincture of legalistic formality. This man praying knows God is his only hope. And he also knows that he, Jacob, does not deserve any help. In the heart of his supplication he says, 'I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant'.

Then comes the night of wrestling referred to elsewhere in Scripture as the time of Jacob's trouble—a time predictive of later episodes when God's people would desperately seek divine aid. Let us notice the inspired account:

So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak".

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me". The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome".

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name". But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared".

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.  
Genesis 32:24-31

Surely there is nothing like this in the literature of four thousand years! What is it doing here in the ancient records of the Jewish patriarchs? If Genesis is but an uninspired scribbling of ancient myths, why include something so bizarre as this? What does it mean? Why is it not explained? And why is it drawn upon in later Scriptures as having significance for believers on the edge of threatened extinction? We offer the views of two thoughtful expositors. First, we hear the following from Alexander Maclaren:

Jacob's subtlety and craft were, as is often the case, the weapons of a timid as well as selfish nature. No wonder, then, that the prospect of meeting his wronged and strong brother threw him into a panic, notwithstanding the vision of the camp of angels by the side of his defenceless caravan of women and children. Esau had received his abject message of propitiation in grim silence, sent no welcome back, but with ominous haste and ambiguous purpose began his march towards him with a strong force. A few hours will decide whether he means revenge. ...

Now Jacob has come to a point where he knows that his own power can do nothing. With Laban, a man of craft like himself, it was diamond cut diamond; and Jacob was equal to the position. But this wild Bedouin brother, with his four hundred men, is not to be managed so; and Jacob is driven to God by his conscious helplessness. ...

[In the account] there are two well-marked stages. In the first, which is represented as transacted in unbroken silence, "a man" wrestles with Jacob, and does not prevail; in the second, which is represented

as an interchange of speech, Jacob strives with the “man” and does prevail. Taken together, the two are a complete mirror, not only of the manner of the transformation of Jacob into Israel, but of universal eternal truths as to God’s dealings with us, and our power with him. As to the former stage, the language of the narrative is to be noted, “There wrestled a man with him”. The attack, so to speak, begins with his mysterious antagonist, not with the patriarch. The “man” seeks to overcome Jacob, not Jacob the man. There, beneath the deep heavens, in the solemn silence of night, which hides earth and reveals heaven, that strange struggle with an unknown Presence is carried on. ...

What, then, was the meaning of this struggle? Was it not a revelation to Jacob of what God had been doing with him all his life and was still doing? Was not that merciful striving of God with him the inmost meaning of all that had befallen him since the far-off day when he had left his father’s tents, and had seen the opened heavens, and the ladder, which he had so often forgotten? Were not his disappointments, his successes, and all the swift changes of life, God’s attempts to lead him to yield himself up, and bow his will? And was not God striving with him now, in the anxieties that gnawed at his heart, and in his dread of the morrow? Was he not trying to teach him how crime always comes home to roost, with a brood of pains running behind it? Was not the weird duel in the brooding stillness a disclosure that would more and more possess his soul as the night passed on, of a Presence which in silence strove with him, and only desired to overcome that he might bless? ... The close of the first stage of the two-fold wrestle is marked by the laming of Jacob. The paradox that he who could not overcome Jacob could yet lame him by a touch, is part of the lesson. If his finger could do that, what would the grip of his hand do, if he chose to put out his power? ...

God mercifully restrains his hand, in his merciful striving with men. Desiring to overcome them, he desires not to do so by mere superior power, but by their willing yielding to him.

That laming of Jacob’s thigh represents the weakening of all the life of nature and self, which had hitherto been his. He had trusted to his own cunning and quick wittedness; he had been shrewd, not over scrupulous and successful. But he had to learn that “by strength shall no man prevail”, and to forsake his former weapons.



So we come to the second stage, in which Jacob strives with God and does prevail ... did the stranger wish to go; and if he did, why could not he, who had lamed his antagonist, loose himself from his grasp? ... God desires to go, if we do not desire him to stay. He will go, unless we keep him. ... The desire to retain God binds him to us. All his struggling with us has been aimed at evoking it, and all his fullness responds to it when evoked. Prayer is power. It conquers God. We overcome him when we yield. When we are vanquished, we are victors.

*Ibid.*, pp. 222-228

It is vital to see that the same truths Paul stressed in 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10 have their roots in the story of Jacob's night of wrestling. The apostle could declare: 'He said to me, "my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness". ... When I am weak, then I am strong'. The power of Christ only rests on the one aware of his infirmities. This is the lesson of Calvary.

But there is more to be said. In Jeremiah chapter thirty the prophet foretold a great deliverance for God's people. The words sound strange:

'How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it' (v. 7). Then comes the promise: 'So you will be my people and I will be your God' (v. 22)—the covenant promise that occurs and recurs throughout Scripture until its last usage in Revelation 21:3, when Heaven dawns.

The New Testament particularly emphasises that the people of God will have a final time of trial, a worldwide Calvary, bringing such pain and stress as never before known. See Revelation 13:11-18 and 11:7-19. One of Christ's parables forecasts the same (Luke 18:1-7).

How marvellously profound is Scripture! The first book of the Bible has many events that prefigure the last experiences of Christ's church. The murder of Abel is the first. Noah's Flood is another. The calls out of Babylon and later from Sodom and Gomorrah also have meaning for believers in the Last Days. See Revelation 18:1-4 and 11:8.

Passion Week, as recorded in the four Gospels, presents in miniature a pattern of the last events of world history. It tells of Christ's last proclamation of the gospel (the Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem), the polarising of the nation, the rising crescendo of antagonism to Jesus, then his preliminary time of trouble in Gethsemane succeeded by the ultimate

agony on the Cross. In his sermon that comprehended both the fall of Jerusalem (symbolising the end of Judaism as known) and the end of the world, Christ used key words and phrases that recur in the narratives of his Passion—for example, ‘watch’, ‘betray’ and ‘hour’. It was his way of telling us that his last hours prefigure the final trial of the church, his body, at the end of time. Hendrikus Berkhof comments:

In all synoptic Gospels, statements about the future are summarized right before the Passion story. The themes dealt with are watchfulness, oppression, decrease of love, flight, and finally spectacular natural phenomena and the coming of the Son of Man in glory. It is conspicuous that all these themes recur in the following chapters which deal with Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection ...the meaning is obviously that the future will show—on a larger, and eventually world-wide scale—a repetition of what has happened in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.  
*Well-founded Hope*, pp. 23-24

As we consider these truths that are so vital as time reaches its end, we perceive how important it is to understand the mysterious experiences of Jacob. His life is exemplified by service, but there is always a price to pay for serving. As the church serves its Master by proclaiming the Gospel Commission, it will ultimately polarise the world and create a murderous backlash. Jacob was near home when he feared for his life because of the approach of Esau and his well-armed men. He had crossed Jordan and was only hours away.

But would he make it, or would he and his loved ones perish because of his sins of long ago? The church, knowing that it has been condemned and anathematised, will wrestle with God, pleading that her failures and sins might not lead to her fall and the dishonour of Heaven. If God grant that we might live to that hour, may we remember the confession of Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 and the experience of our forefather Jacob. The last lesson from the Cross will be taught in that day. God grant that we may be good students. Our real enemy will be not those who approach determined on our death, but rather the enemy within—our fallen nature, which the Bible calls the flesh.

Arthur Pink, again, has some good counsels for us as he meditates on Genesis 32:

In the above incident then—together with its setting and sequel—we have a most striking and typical picture of the “flesh” in the believer, its vitality and incurability, God’s marvellous forbearance toward it, and dealings with it and victory over it. First, in choosing the present for Esau we see the character and activities of the “flesh”—devising and scheming. Second, in Jacob’s experience we are shown the worthlessness and helplessness of the “flesh”.

Third, we learn that our nothingness can be discovered only when we get “alone” with God. Fourth, in the Man coming to wrestle with Jacob we see God subduing the “flesh” in the believer, and in the prolongation of the wrestle all through the night we have more than a hint of the patience he exercises and the slowness of his process—for only gradually is the flesh subdued. Fifth, in the touching of the hollow of Jacob’s thigh we are enabled to discern the method God pursues, namely, the bringing us to a vivid realization of our utter helplessness. Sixth, in the clinging of Jacob to the God-man we discover that it is not until he has written the sentence of death on our members that we shall cast ourselves unreservedly on the Lord. Seventh, in the fact that Jacob’s name was now changed to Israel we learn that it is only after we have discovered our nothingness and helplessness that we are willing and ready for God to command and order our lives for us.

*Ibid.*, p. 91

Never forget how the narrative closes. It tells of the sun rising and shining upon the limping Jacob. Wordsworth’s comment is beautiful:

The passage of Jabbok—the brook of wrestling as its name indicates, was to him like “a laver of regeneration”. The sunrise after that lonely night of darkness, dismay, and conflict, was like a bright dawn, a spiritual resurrection from the grave to a life of light and glory.

Nightmares never last. Every midnight gives way to morning. The caterpillar, which after its grave-like chrysalis becomes a beautiful butterfly, is an image of the glory that awaits every believer after death when Christ returns. Hallelujah!

Many great Christian hymns call for the spirit of self-emptying exemplified in the story of Jacob. Over 150 years ago, a blunt but kindly evangelist told a pretty socialite that she was a sinner and needed God.

Charlotte Elliott was deeply offended, but through the following night the question kept recurring. Was the man right? The next morning she wrote *Just as I am*:

Just as I am, without one plea  
But that thy blood was shed for me,  
And that thou bid'st me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not,  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about  
With many a conflict, many a doubt;  
"Fightings within, and fears without",  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,  
O Lamb of God I come, I come.

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
Because Thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.  
Just as I am, thy love I own  
Has broken every barrier down;  
Now to be thine, and thine alone,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come

In the movie version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, ex-footballer and alcoholic, Brick, complains to his father, Big Daddy, that he had grown up with an abundance of gifts of things, but never love. In the same outburst he says life demands meaning and purpose. He almost seems to be echoing Jeremiah 45:5: 'Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not'. In the play, Tennessee Williams has Big Daddy explain why his wife had filled a downstairs room with purchases from around the world that were never used. He says that unlike animals we know we shall die, and we are always looking for something to give us immortality.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Joseph*

When we come to the narrative concerning Joseph, the last of the seven chief characters of Genesis, it is made clear from the beginning of his story that he had never suffered like Brick from a lack of parental love. Jacob loved Joseph above all his sons. This is why a special garment was given him. But Joseph's great interest is never in things. He is dedicated to God. And his elevation to rulership over Egypt typifies immortality.

Having been loved from infancy, the mature Joseph took naturally to love for God and man. In response to the temptation from Potiphar's wife, he exclaims: 'How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' Though his brothers aimed at his murder, and ultimately sold him into slavery, he forgave them freely and provided generously for their future. Yet this same man had endured much pain and sorrow throughout his life. Speaking of his early years in Egypt we are told: 'They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons' (Psalms 105:18). Yet, consider how he must have felt earlier when, having sought his brothers with love in his own heart, he found nothing but hatred from them. How must he have felt when cruelly thrown by his brethren into a muddy cistern?

Things seemed to go no better in Egypt. Because of the false accusations of a jealous woman he was placed in an Egyptian prison. To other inmates he recalled: 'I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon' (Gen. 40:15).

Think of his gracious words when he revealed himself to his stupefied brethren: 'I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ... to save your lives by a great deliverance' (45: 4, 5, 7). How many professed Christians of today could have responded similarly to such wickedness?

The Epistles of John, especially the first, set forth what the life of a mature Christian should be like. In 1 John 3:11-15 John says some things that are really shocking. He tells us that the real evidence of our belonging to God is that we can love those who hate us. He also says that if we are true lovers of God and humanity we can expect only hatred as the world's

response. In the succeeding chapter he writes: 'Let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love' (1 Jn 4:7-8). About fifteen centuries before Christ, Joseph already knew and practised this gospel of love. He is the pattern, God's ideal, for all believers. But his is a life of suffering with glory to follow. A rejected outcast, slandered, and suffering, he is at last honoured, exalted and reigning. As the seventh of our series he epitomises in himself all that truly converted Christians can expect from a life of love—pain, opposition and hatred before the final glory. Life with all it offers of pain and joy is but our chance of learning love. But genuine love is like that of Christ's—on the Cross of Calvary! Very early in his ministry Christ set forth a verbal scale of ascending Christian experience, and at the peak was this:

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:10-12

He repeated this warning several times in the months that followed. During Passion Week he addressed the Pharisees thus:

Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Matthew 23:34-35

The Epistles are filled with the same message. For example consider 2 Corinthians 6:4-10:

As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses, in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness in the Holy Spirit

and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as imposters; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Compare with that his own abridged catalogue of sufferings in the eleventh chapter of the same Epistle. And in the centuries following, those who knew by experience the truth of these warnings echoed them. Here are some typical examples from bygone days:

Expect persecution; bear it; profit by it.

True godliness is usually attended with persecution.

Christ died to take the curse from us, not the Cross.

Piety will not shield us from suffering.

The way to heaven, though full of roses in regard of the comforts of the holy, is full of thorns in regard of persecutions.

Before Israel reached Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, they must go through a wilderness of serpents and a Red Sea.

Saints carry Christ in their hearts and the Cross on their shoulders.

It is too much for a Christian to have two heavens—one here and one hereafter.

Despite these woeful statements it is good to remember that Christ, in speaking of the future, promised his followers three things: (1) persecution, (2) joy and (3) his continual and sufficient presence. If we have to carry a Cross he always carries the heaviest end. Thus the Christian life is characterised by faith, hope and love, regardless of the hatred of the world.

The Beatitudes follow the same path as the seven chief characters of Genesis. The blessings rest successively upon:

1. the poor in spirit
2. those who mourn
3. the meek
4. those hungering for righteousness
5. the pure in heart
6. the peacemakers
7. the persecuted

Our first parents were poor in spirit after their confrontation with their Judge and Saviour in Eden; Abel and his parents mourned over the hatred and behaviour of Cain; Noah meekly withstood the catcalling and hateful aspersions of the antediluvians as he laboured on the ark; Abraham hungered for righteousness and found it (Genesis 15:6); Isaac was a man of spiritual purity willing to die as a sacrifice to God; Jacob became a peacemaker towards Esau and Laban and others; Joseph endured a life of suffering, rejection and persecution till elevated to the throne of Egypt.



## Chapter Eight

### Your Biography in the First Six Books of the Bible

The opening chapter of the Bible follows a similar course to the seven men of Genesis and the seven beatitudes. Its order is chaos—the Holy Spirit bringing light, separation of the chief constituents of the creation, fruitfulness, light-bearers, life abundant, service and rest. Genesis chapter one is a Bible in miniature, as Spurgeon pointed out over a 100 years ago. It begins with chaos as the outward sign of sin and the symbol of the unconverted heart. Next, the Spirit moves bringing light to the darkened world and the sinful mind. Then come the separations—the light from darkness, the water under the atmosphere, the waters above (the clouds) and the sea from the land. This typifies the distinctions between good and evil that the converted must make. Next come the lower forms of life—vegetation and fruit trees. The new believer brings the early fruit of the Spirit, which is sorrow for sin, faith, hope and love. In consequence, the converted begin to shine like the stars of heaven for they are the light of the world. Now comes life more abundant, and ultimately a man and woman in the image of God called to service, ruling over the creation in love and wisdom. So they enter into the Sabbath rest of satisfaction, peace and joy.

We have travelled from the Fall of Adam, the beginning of worship and conflict with Abel, entering into full salvation with Noah, the walk of faith with Abraham, the experience of sonship with Isaac, the life of service with Jacob, and the life of suffering with glory to follow with Joseph. Marvel at the symmetry and wisdom of inspired Scripture.

We have been studying our own biography in the chief characters of Genesis. But we would be remiss if we did not point out that these same men also have much to tell us about our Saviour. Romans 5:14 tells us that Adam was a 'type of him who was to come'. The first Adam was a son of God (Luke 3:38), made in the image of God and the head of the race. On the sixth day he fell into a deep sleep, and his bride was made from that which came from his side. So it is with Christ, the Son of God, the image of God and the head of the new race. He, too, fell asleep on Calvary. His side also was opened, and the blood and the water that issued from his side typified that which would make his bride—the church.

A type is like a parable. It does not walk on four legs but is typical in certain respects only. The virtues of the patriarchs pointed to those same virtues much magnified in the One who was to come. Abel, the young good shepherd murdered by his brother, pointed to Calvary where the greatest Shepherd of all time (also a young man) was slain because of the sins of his Jewish brethren.

Noah's family was saved because of the righteousness of Noah. Genesis 7:1 says that God saw in Noah righteousness, and consequently his family was rescued from the Deluge. Noah made the saving provision for the believing few and thereby typified the work of Christ. He was the saviour of the ancient world.

Abraham is called the father of the faithful, and in Isaiah 9:6 we find that one of the titles for the coming Redeemer was 'the everlasting Father'. The name Abraham means 'father of a multitude' and such also is Christ. Abraham was king, priest and prophet, to his own family and thereby typified Christ. He is called the heir of the world and so again pointed to Jesus.

The story of Genesis 22 is a preview of Calvary. This is the first time the word 'love' appears in Scripture. Isaac is called the only son of Abraham though Ishmael was his half brother. For three days under the sentence of death Isaac trudged towards Mount Moriah with his father. Calvary is the same geographical site, and it was to there that Christ chose to walk with his Father. Earlier, Christ had told his followers that the Father never left him alone. Isaac was a willing sacrifice, and so was Christ. He carried on his back the wood on which he was to be offered, as Christ would carry his cross. Isaac was delivered from the place of death as though by resurrection, and Hebrews 11 tells us that this also pointed to our Lord.

When we read of the mysterious night of wrestling as Jacob neared home we should think of Gethsemane where the Saviour wrestled with God on our behalf.

When Arthur Pink wrote on the life of Joseph he found over eighty parallels with the life of Christ. Here was a beloved son, begotten by an 'ancient of days' (Jacob was very old when he fathered Joseph), hated by his brethren whom he loved, betrayed by them to Gentiles, cast into suffering through no fault of his own, wrongly accused, but ultimately, in days of famine, lord over all the land and saviour of the world with the bread of life.

It is not by chance that the first book of the Bible opens with 'In the beginning'. And, similarly, it is not by chance that the sixth book of the Bible has for its central figure the man Jesus. Yes, our version says Joshua, but Joshua is only the Hebrew form of Jesus. It is not by chance that the first book of the Bible begins with God and closes with a coffin. It is the book of sin. It tells us where we all start, and what is the world's biggest problem. Never forget that our sins cause us more pain and regret than God's darkest providences. The five books that follow Genesis tell us of God's way out of sin, sorrow and death, and they, too, each have an inspired plan of their own.

The Bible has a supernatural unity and symmetry. Think on this verse:

When the house was built, it was with stone prepared at the quarry;  
so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the  
temple, while it was being built.

1 King 6:7

In other words, the plan for the temple and its constituents were precursors of the actual building. So it is with Scripture. It existed fully in the mind of God before scores of human writers were employed to make it available to us. The famous anatomist Cuvier said that a truly complete organism was governed by three laws: (1) each and every part is essential to the whole; (2) each part is related to, or corresponds to, all the other parts, as in the human body hand corresponds to hand, eye to eye, etc; and (3) all the parts of such an organism must be pervaded by the spirit of life. So it is with this most wonderful of all books.

Consider these marks of divine planning:

The Bible begins with God (Genesis 1:1) and ends with man 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all' (Revelation 22:21).

Man's first words to God are 'I was afraid ... and I hid myself' (Gen. 3:10). But his last recorded words were: 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus' (Revelation 22:20).

The first brothers in the Old Testament are Cain and Abel, and one kills the other. The first brothers in the New Testament are Andrew and Peter, and one brings the other to Christ.

God's first question in the Old Testament is: 'Where art thou?' (Gen. 3:9), while man's first question in the New Testament is. 'Where is he?' (Matt.

2:2). God's first question is his seeking of man, but the first question in the New Testament is man seeking God.

The record of the old creation begins with the words 'In the beginning'. When John's Gospel introduces God the Son as the author of the new creation he begins the same way. See John 1:1.

Compare Genesis 5:1 with Matthew 1:1. The Greek translation of the first corresponds with the Greek translation of the second. The first begins the genealogy of the appointed human line that led to the beginning of the new world after the flood. The second gives the genealogy of him who was the source of the last creation.

The middle book of the Bible is Psalms. On each side the books before and after God speaks to man, but in Psalms man is speaking back to God.

One of the greatest books ever written is T. D. Bernard's *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament*. If you read it, you will never be the same again, and you will never again have a doubt about the inspiration of Scripture. Bernard shows how all the books of the New Testament fit together like fingers in a glove.

Many other examples could be given, but these are sufficient to show that the Bible has a marvellous unity and plan. This is easily recognised in its first six books, which present the biography of every redeemed soul. Genesis is the book of sin, recording how evil and its fruits began. Exodus is the book of redemption, and shows that deliverance can only come through the blood of the Lamb of God. Leviticus is the book of worship, and it points the way into the very presence of God. Numbers is the book of pilgrimage, recording the ups and downs, the failures and successes of the delivered people. Deuteronomy (the law repeated) is the book calling to obedience as the key to the believer's pilgrimage. Obedience is faith in action, and without it the claim to faith is a lie. Joshua is the book of victory, as Israel's hosts are led by the man with the drawn sword—the Man from above. So the six books take us from that book that ends with a coffin to the book that tells of the land of milk and honey—a land made for spiritual giants who were once the pygmies of slavery.

Let us now consider the books one by one. The opening book of the Bible reminds one of the results of throwing a stone into a pool. After the Fall the circle of sin is continually enlarged. The firstborn son is a murderer, and his descendants are a sorry lot. Following a single chapter, the record is astonishingly dismal, for the thoughts of men's hearts are

only evil continually. Violence fills the earth, and men take wives of all they wish. The commandments of God are ignored, and God determines to wipe out the rebel race except for a remnant.

After the Flood, men disobey God's command to scatter, and instead they set about building a tower to reach to heaven itself. This was egotism personified. Again, God must act in judgement. Next, he calls the man who is to be the father of a special nation to whom the Scriptures will be entrusted, and from whom will come the Messiah. Compared with their predecessors, the new leaders are saints, but compared with the New Testament standards they leave something to be desired. Shocking indeed is the record about Sodom and Gomorrah where God cannot even find ten just men, but in some respects the chapters about the fathers of the tribes of Israel are even worse. See Genesis chapters 34,37 and 38. The chosen leaders are killers and murderers.

Of course there are rainbows in the book. There are glorious records of the sacrificial willingness to serve shown by Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph. Each of these stands out, almost in loneliness, compared with the narratives before and after them. Remembering that a disease must be diagnosed before it is treated. We see the vital importance of Genesis, and each of us is led to prayerfully examine his own heart. All the characters of Scripture portray what each of us is capable of doing and being. Even the born again Christian has an old nature, called the 'flesh' which, if not under the control of the Holy Spirit, can lapse into terrible evils. Calvin was so right when he said that the path of sanctification is often a tottering, a limping and a crawling along the ground.

## **EXODUS**

Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers are each linked to its preceding book by the Hebrew particle for 'and'. We are meant to study the Pentateuch as one great book with five divisions.

Exodus, of course, signifies 'the going out'. God has not forgotten his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and now he appears to implement their redemption. It is to be no slight task, for Israel has been calloused by her long association with the heathen. They are not only capable of backsliding, they do so repeatedly, and God is tempted to wipe them out. But the glory of the book must not be missed. Israel is to leave

the land of her captivity because of the blood of the Passover lamb. Sheltered behind the bloodstained doorposts and lintels, even the worst of the Israelites is safe when the plagues against idolatry are loosed.

Now instructions are given for the rearing of a portable temple. Here priests will minister, and once a year the High Priest will rehearse Calvary with the sacrificial blood being taken into the very presence of God. But the Temple would have no meaning whatever, but for the Decalogue pronounced before its building commenced. That Decalogue was placed within the Most Holy Place, in the sacred ark under the golden mercy-seat.

Once more, we are intended to see ourselves in the motley redeemed company. God has said, 'Whosoever will, may come', and all who believe his promises are delivered from their past and given a new spiritual bill of health. We, too, are saved from the slavery of our vices and failings when we accept the greatest gift ever offered to mankind.

Read again the hymn, 'Just as I am'.

So with Exodus we leave our Adamic past behind and begin to serve and worship like Abel of old.

## LEVITICUS

Now the worship begun in Exodus is delineated in fine detail. Its legislation first reveals the true nature of sin. The Hebrew words used encompass rebellion, crookedness and falling short of the mark. Sacrifices are required even for sins of ignorance. Remember once Christ prayed 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'.

The key word of the book is the Hebrew word for atonement, and it occurs scores of times. The chapter that uses this term most often is the one near the centre of the book, Leviticus 16. Every fifty years, the great Jubilee was ushered in at the close of the Day of Atonement. On that day, Israel for once in the year fasted as well as prayed. Their High Priest did everything on that day. Only when he was ritually clean did he offer the blood of the Lord's sacrifice and take it into the second apartment to sprinkle over the mercy-seat. Only once a year did the High Priest venture there, only with blood and only for a few seconds. Hebrews chapters 9 and 10 explain how those procedures typified Calvary.

For centuries, on the evening of the Day of Atonement, Israel's high priest was separated and kept up all night. During the night he was

interrogated by the elders, and his clothes were repeatedly changed lest he defile himself accidentally.

In the morning when the cock crowed, the sacrificial fires were lit. Everything now was in the hands of the one man—Israel's priestly representative. In the Gospels all of these points are included in the Passion story. We are told how Christ was kept up all night before Calvary, interrogated by Caiaphas and his crew, how his garments were changed several times till he was spreadeagled naked on the cross. Even the cockcrow and the fire is mentioned, so that all readers might know that Jesus was their true High priest, and that Calvary was the antitypical Day of Atonement which brought mankind's reconciliation to God. Even the minor feature of the high Priest leaving his garments in the sanctuary after the work was over, and his adorning himself with glorious garments before appearing to bless the waiting congregation is referred to—see Leviticus 16:23 and compare John 20:5-7.

When the Christian, who has found Christ, seeks to worship him properly, he is taught by the Holy Spirit the meaning of Christ's atonement and what his own reaction must be. He will hate sin, and constantly look to Jesus lest he loses his way. His comfort will be in the assurance that his sins of the past, present and future have all been atoned for. Now he can experience the joys of Jubilee—freedom and a debt-free inheritance.

## **NUMBERS**

Numbers is a sad book. Israel fails again and again, and grumbling becomes second nature. Judgments fall, but repentance is always transitory. Ultimately, Israel rebels climactically and finally, at the border of Canaan, Kadesh-Barnea, the Israelites are condemned to wander and die in the wilderness, instead of entering victoriously the land of milk and honey.

Nevertheless, the patience, mercy, grace and love of God shines out repeatedly. When the judgment of the fiery venomous serpents is decimating Israel's ranks, God orders that a brass serpent be put on an uplifted banner-staff (like a cross) so that whosoever in repentance looks might live. When the judgement tide of death is drowning row after row of rebels, Aaron takes incense and runs between the living and the dead until the plague is stayed. Canaan might have been reached in eleven days,

but rebellion and ingratitude prolonged the pilgrimage for forty long years until Israel's multitude bleached in the desert.

Many a Christian is like the little boy who was asked why he fell out of bed so often. His answer was: 'Because I go to sleep so near to where I get in'. Many Christians forget that they are not to be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease. They must be alert, looking to Jesus, and in response trusting and obeying. 'For there's no other way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey'.

## **DEUTERONOMY**

Deuteronomy is not a history but a homily. It is the farewell oration of Israel's great leader Moses. And it repeatedly calls for love and gratitude to God, who has not only redeemed the slave race, but also so often tolerated their wilful rebellions with patience. Now the Decalogue is repeated with minor changes required by the change of time and place. It is made clear that while salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, the redeemed respond by whole-hearted commitment to their Lord.

There are two great heresies about salvation. One is legalism—the heresy that we can earn our redemption. The other is antinomianism, that being saved we can now fulfil the lusts of the flesh despite our obligations. The New Testament, as well as the old, is very clear that the true Christian has the faith of Abraham, but serves like Isaac and Jacob, and loves like Joseph.

The second half of most of Paul's Epistles has to do with the ideal life-style of those who have been forgiven and justified. A typical passage is Ephesians 4:1-2:

Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love. ...

See also the following chapter verses one and two:

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Deuteronomy reminds us that the only way to the heavenly Canaan is by that faith which always obeys in love.



## JOSHUA

This, the sixth book of Scripture, bears the name of Jesus, but in its Hebrew form. It is, despite aberrations and failures, a book of victory, of being led in triumph by the heavenly Captain with the drawn sword. At its commencement Israel is told that there is no need for discouragement and stumbling. See Joshua 1:5-9 for God's counsel to him:

No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you maybe successful wherever you go. Do not let this book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Time after time the new generation is called upon to exercise the faith that the preceding generation had failed to practise. Thus they cross Jordan, and so Jericho is won. Chapter ten tells of the miraculous victory at Gibeon and the following conquering of the southern cities. In chapter eleven, the northern kings are defeated, and chapter twelve gives us a list of defeated monarchs. The conquered land is divided among the tribes by lot, though the taking possession of the portions was a slower affair. The book closes with Joshua's farewell to his leaders and the renewal of the covenant at Shechem.

Among the closing verses we find this: 'Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the elders who outlived him' (24:31).

The history warns us that it is not inevitable that we should backslide and suffer recurring defeats. All God asks is that we look to him in gratitude and gladly trust and obey. Then we shall learn as an earlier Christian leader has written that:

In the way that leads to the city of God there are no difficulties which those who trust in him may not overcome, there are no dangers that they may not escape, there is not a sorrow or a grievance, not a human weakness for which he has not provided a remedy.

Some murmur when their sky is clear and  
wholly bright to view,  
If but one speck of dark appears  
in their great heaven of blue.  
And some with thankful love are filled,  
if but one streak of light,  
One ray of God's great mercy,  
gild the darkness of their night.

Here, too, are many pictures of what we are, have been, or could be. Have we not all denied our Lord as surely as Peter? Have we not betrayed him time and again for less than thirty pieces of silver? Have not many of us had a sudden confrontation with Christ like Saul (Paul), and had our lives turned around? Did not many of us in our earlier days ask with Pilate 'What is truth?' And have not some of us known exile from loved ones and friends because of fidelity to the Saviour, as did John on Patmos?

## **Chapter Eight**

### **The New Testament**

Each New Testament book has something to tell us about our pilgrimage. Even the Gospels, which present four different pictures of Christ, have instruction for us. In Romans 5:17 we are told that it is our privilege to 'reign in life through ... Jesus Christ'. The first of the Gospels presents Christ as King, and the whole account not only tells us about Jesus, but about the possibilities for our own lives. Mark presents Christ as a servant. Consider how Mark 10:42 assures us that we, like our Lord, are called to serve:

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many".

Luke, unlike Matthew, traces Christ's genealogy not back to the first Jew, but to Adam the first man. And the Christ he presents is the universal Son of Man. In this Gospel Jewish allusions are reduced, and the characters in Christ's parables emphasise our common humanity. We, too, are called to live in the world as a brother or sister to all, shunning narrow racial or religious prejudices.

John's Gospel does not stress the human depths of Jesus, as do the other Gospels. Rather it emphasises the divine depth of John's Lord. And it is in this Gospel that Christ says: 'I have set you an example' (13:15). It is our supreme privilege to live and move among others as those who are sons and daughters of God, already viewed by him as reigning in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). Our affections are centred on things above (Col. 3:1). We remember that Paul wrote calling for behaviour that reflected that of God the Son. See Philippians 2:5-9:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, ... he humbled himself and

became obedient to death—even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place.

In Acts we learn that we are missionaries to the world fulfilling Acts 1:8: ‘You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth’. We are but stewards, whose happy duty is to obey and our possessions are to be dedicated to Christ. The Great Commission is addressed to all believers, not just to the disciples of old. The Christian whose life is self-centred, who thinks what he has is his own, is only a false professor. Such a person does not possess Christ. Each of the following New Testament books has a message for us. Some give warnings as in Galatians and I and 2 Corinthians. Others give us encouragement as 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and still others tell us how to live.

Dr W. Graham Scroggie in his little book *Christ the Key to Scripture* sets out what each Epistle means to us:

In Romans we are justified in Christ Jesus.	(3:24)
In 1 Corinthians we are sanctified in Christ Jesus.	(1:2)
In 2 Corinthians we are vindicated in Christ Jesus.	(12:19)
In Galatians we are liberated in Christ Jesus.	(2:4)
In Ephesians we are exalted in Christ Jesus	(1:3;2:6)
In Philippians we are exultant in Christ Jesus	(1:26)
In Colossians we are complete in Christ Jesus	(2:9,10)
In 1 Thessalonians we are hopeful in Christ Jesus	(1:3)
In 2 Thessalonians we are glorified in Christ Jesus	(1:12;2:14)
In 1 Timothy we are made faithful in Christ Jesus	(1:18,19)
In 2 Timothy we are triumphant in Christ Jesus	(4:6-8)
In Titus we are made exemplary in Christ Jesus	(2:7,8)
In Philemon we are made gracious in Christ Jesus	(15,16)
In Hebrews we are enriched and empowered in Christ Jesus.	(13:20,21)
In James we are made consistent in Christ Jesus.	(1:22-27)
In 1 Peter we are submissive in Christ Jesus.	(2:19-23)
In 2 Peter we become intelligent in Christ Jesus.	(1:3-8)
In 1 John we learn the secret of abiding (2:24-28) in Christ Jesus.	
In 2 John we are made zealous in Christ Jesus.	(8-11)
In 3 John we are seen to be true in Christ Jesus.	(3,4)
In Jude we are preserved in Christ Jesus .	(1:24)

pp. 44-49.

We could add that in the Bible's last book we are translated in Christ Jesus.

All these New Testament messages are not only about us, but about Jesus. He is found on every page, sometimes as much as twenty times. We are meant to remember that 'Christ received is holiness begun; Christ cherished is holiness advancing, and Christ counted upon as never absent would be holiness complete'. He is our Lord, our life and our righteousness. Instead of looking to self and circumstances, our adoring gaze is to be riveted upon him.

Whosoever faces the Son will find all the shadows fall behind him. Do this, and your biography will be cherished for evermore.

## CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages we have considered many wonderful things, the chief of which is God's unfailing love for people who do not love him. We have thought upon his miraculous dealings with the patriarchs, his patience with their faults and his answers to their desperate prayers. It all seems too good to be true—therefore this appendix.

Close examination of Genesis gives overwhelming evidence of its supernatural inspiration, and the existence of a God who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. Think about this, for example. A man at the behest of God leaves his estates in a great city and wanders like a gipsy in a desert land. His only dwelling is a tent. At 75 he is promised a child, one who would be his heir and heir of the world! For twenty-five years nothing happens, and then, when he is 100-years-old, Isaac is born to him. Isaac means laughter, and both the parents and the son often laughed with joy over God's miraculous dealings with them. Now notice the early promise made to the wanderer. It is sevenfold and it contemplates miracles!

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Genesis 12:2,3.

Can you swallow that? But it happened. This wandering Bedouin has become the most revered man who ever lived. Jews, Muslims and Christians claim him as their father. And from this gipsy has come the blessed gospel whereby all may find eternal life, the Messiah through whom the gospel's promises are implemented; and the greatest of all books—the Bible, which is the key to everything worthwhile—beginning with the Jewish race, then the Scriptures, and then Christ and his gospel.

Over a hundred years ago R. W. Church wrote on this topic:

All around was darkness, with them was this little speck of light. All round were "gods many and lords many"—gods of the mountains and the valleys, of the heavens and of the earth, of the living and the dead, worshipped and trusted in by each nation, or tribe or household. Out of them all, they had been selected to know the name

of the One Almighty and Eternal. They, they alone, knew the truth about the world, its origin, its government. ... But from the first they were taught, that they knew this in order that the world might know it. ... How was it to be—how the knowledge and the blessing with which they were charged was to be passed over from them to the multitudes of the heathen—how the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs with them—this was not told them. ... This is one of the things which makes the religious history of the Bible unique in all that we know in this world. ... Is there not something perfectly overwhelming to mere human judgment in the audacity with which Psalmist and Prophet—the Psalmists and Prophets of an obscure race, cut off by barriers physical and moral from the great scenes of human history—dare to claim for their faith, for their God, what no one else dared to do—the inheritance of all the nations, the spiritual future of all mankind?

*Pascal, p. 59*

Is Church exaggerating? Decide for yourself after reading a few Old Testament predictions that are typical of many others:

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.

Psalm 22:27-30

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths". The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Isaiah 2:2,3

My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. ... My name will be great among the nations.

Malachi 1:11

These verses and many others are just an expansion of the ancient promise given Abraham, the ancient desert nomad: 'In thy seed all the

families of the earth shall be blessed'. That promise is repeated several times throughout Genesis, and is enough on its own to prove the inspiration of the Bible

Despite the Old Testament imagery, the intent of these passages is clear. The truth given to the Jews was to be offered to all nations. Let the atheist explain.

Much more must be said in this vein. What was the truth uniquely held by the Jews? Thomas Cahill has written a timely book on this topic. Its title is, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels*.

Dennis Prager, in the magazine *First Things* of November 1998, wrote a splendid review of Cahill's book conveying its essence in a few pages. Here now is a list of the gifts given the world by the Jews—an omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient God, Science, Education, Meaning, Sacredness of Individuals, Freedom, the Sabbath, Sympathy for the Underdog, History and time, the delegitimation of all political structures, a moral code—the Decalogue, spirituality.

Let us consider just a few of these. Science with its stress on universal laws only became possible with monotheism. While there were many gods, science was impossible. The preliminary to science was education. The Jews, the people of the book, prized education, and their representatives have led the world in this matter. If one investigates the chief professions in America, the dominant position of Jews in all such is staggering. Legal firms, university professors, science, media outlets, financial and medical systems and other professions all possess a vastly disproportionate number of Jews at the top. Science and education go together, and we can thank the Jews for both. Or should we say, thank Abraham for both?

### **History and Time**

All religions in the world before Judaism believed that time is cyclical. This has tremendous implications. It means that the theory of the Law of eternal recurrence is accepted. Everything that happens has happened an infinite number of times before. Therefore no individual and no action, has importance, for they cannot change the future. Says Prager:

If all is a circle, nothing we do matters, none of us matter, life does not matter. It will all happen again. What we do doesn't matter—for



our actions to matter they must be able to influence the future. But the future cannot be influenced if everything happens over and over again.

*Ibid.*

The biblical view of time is like an arrow having an origin and a final target. The Jews taught that God created the universe and time, and that one day the earth will be renewed and all evil abolished. Christians call this eschatology. Prager continues:

If, on the other hand, the Jewish view is adopted, everything matters—every act I engage in matters, and therefore I matter—so much so that each of us challenges history by everything we do.

*Ibid.*

### **The Moral Code**

Never before Judaism was there a moral code just like that of Sinai. Hammurabi of ancient Chaldea had a moral code, but it did not match that of the Jews. Imagine a law that even rules over your thinking. According to the tenth command in the Decalogue, it is sin to even think wrongly!

No religion ever had a Sabbath before. Life was a continual grind of sameness except for feasts. The idea that worship was primary, and required a set time of sufficient length independent of unnecessary work, was something new to the world, and of tremendous consequence for good. This law helped make civilisation possible. It protected the toiling multitudes.

In modern times we have lost much and engendered terrible risks by neglecting this command of God. Industrialisation not only sowed the seeds for climate change, but gradually impoverished humans spiritually. Things became the new idolatry. One of the consequences we know well. While most people die later than in earlier centuries, they also experience a prolonged time of infirmity before death. Those who don't exercise will have to take time in hospital, and those who do not rest and worship, enjoying change and spiritual inspiration, court a gradual devolution and greying of life. God spent more time and gave more space to the fourth commandment than any other in the Decalogue. Why? Because he loves us.

High on the list of the gifts of the Jews is meaning. Every modern enquires 'Does life have any significance?' Are we mere clots of coincidental molecules? Are we just the product of time, plus matter, plus chance? Is my love for my wife and child just a chemical phenomenon? Does any one thing have more value than another? Are morals just an agreed upon convenience? It is literally impossible to live sanely unless one believes that there are real values and real truths. Judaism provided what no other faith could offer with validity.

Abraham and his gifts are a historical phenomenon that cannot be explained in natural terms. Not only was the patriarch's gift of a son supernatural, but his subsequent influence on all mankind. Some may deny the first (God's son), but none can deny the second—the enrichment of all nations through Christ, the Bible and the gospel.

Therefore, there are perfect grounds for meditating upon the personal implications of Genesis and succeeding books. Here is one of the best of Heaven's methods of teaching us about ourselves, our experiences and our eternity.

Lest some should think that this author's suggestions are lone ones, and detached from the conclusions of Bible students in other years, we offer a typical example from nearly a century ago—an example that summarizes what this little book has offered:

In these seven men (Abraham to Joseph) shine forth seven colours, 'the various shades of the true light of life, seen through the triangular prism of human nature, from the red of Adam to the regal purple of Joseph'.

Each book of the Bible, besides being the account of certain happenings, has its own peculiar purpose. Each is the illustration of some one important truth. Not only so, but these are set forth in such a way, that each follows the other in order of development. Were the sun to rise suddenly into the overhead sky, its rays would blind, not light us. But an all-wise Creator ordained that the dawn should be a gradual process, with little light increasing to much. So it is with the teaching of the various books of Scripture, which are graded to perform a progression of truth, just in the order in which we are able to apprehend it.

The book of Genesis is the account of man, and of all that springs from him. The various forms of life, which have their origin in the

first man, Adam, are there set forth. But all that pertains to Adam bears the taint of his sin, hence the absolute necessity of redemption. This is displayed in the book of Exodus, when a redeemed people go out from the bondage of Egypt on the ground of the shedding of blood. Redeemed people, however, need access into the presence of the Lord, and must be taught the way into the sanctuary. This is the import of the book of Leviticus. Moreover, as those redeemed by blood, we take our place as pilgrims from the scene of bondage through the world-wilderness, our hopes set upon another land, the eye of the soul seeing a city which is invisible. But there are trials by the way, disappointments sometimes, and seeming defeats, from all of which God has many useful lessons he would have his people to learn. This is the experience of Numbers.

Again, the people of God, reaching Kadesh-Barnea, near to the land of promise, shrink back from entering into their possessions. Reaching it for a second time some thirty-eight years after, they now desire fully to enjoy the land God has given them. For the accomplishment of this, there are laws, which must be observed, hence the book of Deuteronomy.

Having attained to this experience, learning, as ever, by the things they suffer, they go on to know practically resurrection life, to wrestle against principalities and powers, and to be victorious as they follow their blessed Leader, the Man with the drawn sword who ever precedes them. The various books of the Holy Scriptures, then, besides recounting actual happenings, convey spiritual truth set forth in progressive order, thus witnessing to precision and plan in the inspired Word.

R. D. Johnston, *The Arithmetic of Heaven*, pp. 32-33, 30-31

You have as good grounds for believing in God and his inspired book as you have for believing that you and the world are realities

# Your Biography

**We are incurably and necessarily interested in ourselves, but none of us fully know ourselves.**

Furthermore, most people consistently miss the only approaches to life which will yield satisfaction, joy and immortality. But for those who earnestly and prayerfully study the Scriptures, keys to reality are discovered unlocking life's mysteries.

The Bible is a marvelous picture-album and the potential of every life is there sketched. The chief seven characters of Genesis portray the various stages in every believer's walk of faith, and the opening six books of the Bible do the same. In this book you will find uncovered heights and depths of the inspired records never seen before.

The appendix offers unassailable evidence for the divine origin of the Bible.



Dr Desmond Ford is the founder of *Good News Unlimited* and has written many books on Jesus and his gospel. Good News Unlimited is a global Christian media ministry that spreads the Word like wildfire through simple gospel content. Because Word Spreads Fast.  
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