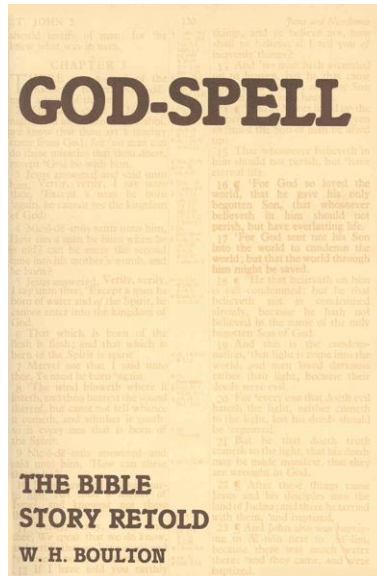


# GOD-SPELL



## THE BIBLE STORY RETOLD

W.H. BOULTON

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## INTRODUCTION

GOD-SPELL! What a strange title for a book which re-tells the story told in the Bible! It is not so strange as it seems; there is a reason for it, and that reason goes to the heart of the matter. The word “gospel” is well-known; it is part of the title of four books in the Bible, and occurs over a hundred times in the New Testament. That portion of the Bible was written in the Greek language, and its writers used the word *evangelion* which is represented in English by the word “gospel.” Why did the translators choose this particular word? *Evangelizo* means to declare good news, and *evangelion*, the good news itself. When the word “gospel” was selected to represent it the translators really made a happy choice, for in earlier days that word meant a good story. It should be noted that the Anglo-Saxon word for God is akin to that for good. To-day “gospel” means glad tidings, especially the good news concerning Christ, the Kingdom of God, and salvation. The second part of the word gospel is “spell,” another Anglo-Saxon word for “saying” or “story.” Thus the gospel involves the idea of God’s Story, and that is what it is desired to tell in as simple a way as possible.

In a very real sense the story told in the Bible is God’s Spell, or story. No one else could have told it, for it begins at a time when there was no man to write it down, and it finishes in a future which none but God could foresee.

The Bible is a wonderful book, and tells a wonderful story. Actually it tells many stories which combine to form a history, the greatness of which is not seen until the end is reached, and “the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.” In telling this story many thrilling incidents will have to be related; the best and the worst of men will be seen, and through it all one unchanging purpose will become apparent, beginning at the very beginning and ending with the introduction of “an end that will never end.”

May the blessing of the Almighty God, the Ruler of heaven and earth, rest upon this attempt to retell the wonderful story of the dealings of God with men.

*Note: Unless otherwise shown, all Bible quotations in this book are from the Revised Version*

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## GOD-SPELL

### CHAPTER I

#### IN THE BEGINNING

“IN the beginning God.” With these words the Bible story opens; they are the most important in the whole book. They centre on the truth that God is, and that He was before all things. Later He is said to be “from everlasting to everlasting.”<sup>1</sup> Much has been written concerning Him; long words such as omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient have been used to describe His attributes; they simply mean that He is all-powerful, is everywhere present, and all-seeing. If the words fail to convey a full realisation of what they mean, it is only what is to be expected. God is so great that man cannot really understand Him, yet each of the three words is necessarily true. Another expression concerning Him is “of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things”; which means that all things come from Him, are controlled by Him, and are to be for Him.

From His home in heaven God spoke the words, and sent forth the power, His Spirit, by which all things were made, for “in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” No one knows when that took place; even if it were millions of years ago, it was “in the beginning” that this first act recorded in the Bible took place.

To-day these words convey more than they did in the past, for our ideas of the universe are far greater than those of our forefathers. In the heavens above so many stars are to be seen that they

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 90:1 and 2.

cannot be counted, but their number is not to be compared with the immense numbers that cannot be seen with the naked eye. Yet, however numerous, and how ever vast, they may be (and our earth is quite a pigmy compared with some of them) God created them,

*Let there be Light*

A long gap separates the first sentence of the story from what follows. The earth was waste and void, and all was dark. Of the time that elapsed from the beginning to the end of the darkness the story says nothing. It really commences with what has been called the vision of the creative week. The word “vision” is well chosen. No man saw the events take place, but probably some “holy man of God” was given a vision of them in retrospect so that he could record with unfailing accuracy the first chapter of the story.

“And God said, Let there be light.” These were wonderful words with a wonderful result, “and there was light.” The Bible is not concerned with ways and means. As the days of the vision succeeded one another the various works were revealed to the seer. He saw the separation of the waters on the earth from those above by means of a firmament, or an expanse—the atmosphere. Then the great oceans and the smaller seas were formed, and the dry land appeared, so that grass, herbs, and trees might grow. Next the sun and moon appeared and, as the story says, “He made the stars also.” Next the waters brought forth great sea monsters and fishes, and birds flew in the heavens. Then the earth brought forth cattle, beasts, and creeping things. Finally God made man in His own image, the highest form of created life on the earth.

Reviewing the record it will be seen that there is an order in the events, a parallelism that may be presented thus:—

First Three Days.	Second Three Days.
1. Light	4. Sun, moon, and stars.
2. The firmament, or air, divides the waters.	5. Life appears in the waters and in the air.
3. Dry land and vegetation.	6. Land animals, and man.

The Bible uses two words in this part of its story which, though they may seem alike, are really different from each other; they are, “created” and “made.” In the account in Genesis, Creation is affirmed of three things; (a) the heavens and the earth, (b) the beginning of life, and (c) man. These were entirely new beginnings; of the other things it is said that they were made, or that they were brought forth. It will be seen that the three things of which *creation* is affirmed represent three stages. They are inanimate things (the heavens and the earth), living things (the animal kingdom), and human beings, capable of thought, reason, veneration, and worship. All who read these words belong to the last of these, the crown of earthly creation. It is for them to prove that they are worthy of being part of the last recorded creative act of God.

## *God rested*

Looking at the completed programme, it is said, “God saw every thing that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” It was good in plan, and good in nature. All that was necessary for the support of living creatures (who were living souls, for in telling the story the same word is used for soul and creature) was prepared before they appeared, and all else was made before man appeared upon the scene. When he was created he was given dominion over them all, for all had been made to minister to his requirements.

Two statements are made later in the Bible story which explain why God created the earth. It was not a mere whim on His part; He had a purpose in view. Isaiah states that God had formed the earth to be inhabited, and John, in the last book of the Bible, says that all things were created for God’s pleasure.<sup>1</sup> On these two sayings all the story depends, and until the earth is inhabited by a people who will give God pleasure, and nothing is opposed to His will, the story will not be finished.

The vision of the creative week concludes with the statement that God rested on the seventh day. He thereby instituted a principle that all can appreciate, the necessity of rest after toil, when quiet contemplation may follow active work.

## CHAPTER II

### FROM THE CREATION TO THE FLOOD

THE first book of the Bible story contains a number of sections called “generations.” The first of these commences a more detailed account of the creation of man. It reads thus, “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul,” The account is interesting and important. It tells what man is. So long as he breathes the breath of life he lives; if that process is stopped, he dies. No mention is made as to how long man was to live; later events decided that.

The man, Adam, was placed in a garden somewhere in the country known as Mesopotamia, through which the rivers Euphrates and Tigris (the latter is called Hiddekel in the Bible) flow. In that garden was all that man needed; trees, plants, and flowers, provided food and beauty, pleasant to see, to taste, and to smell; there were no weeds, no thorns, no thistles. But (and there are often “buts” in life), Adam was told that there was one thing he must not do; he was not to touch a tree which was called “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Concerning that God said “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”<sup>1</sup>

There was another special tree in the garden, the tree of life, a tree which had the property of giving life to those who partook of it.

In the garden Adam was alone; the birds and the beasts were good to look at, but they were not

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<sup>1</sup> Isa. 45:18; Rev. 4:11 (A.V.)

<sup>1</sup> Hebrew: dying thou shalt die.

companions for him. It was not good for Adam to be alone, so one night God caused him to sleep very soundly, and whilst he was asleep God took one of his ribs and fashioned it into a woman. She was the companion he needed, one who could be a helpmeet, for him. She was a joy to Adam and he named her Issha, which means taken out of man, for the man himself was called Ish as well as Adam. So the days passed pleasantly and happily, work was light and the garden beautiful.

### *The first sin*

Owing however to one of the creatures in the garden a change took place. Among the animals was a serpent, an observant creature, who approached the woman and asked "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" The woman replied that they might eat of all except of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; of which God had said, "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." She was not quite correct in this. "Lest ye die" implies a danger, not a certainty, whereas God had said "Thou shalt surely die." Then the serpent went further. "Ye shall not surely die," he said, and suggested that it was jealousy on God's part that had caused Him to give such a command, "for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil." It was the first lie in the history of the human race, and one which people still continue to believe, telling their fellows "ye shall not surely die," for you have immortal souls and cannot die. It is strange that people will not believe God, but insist on believing the serpent's lie.

The words of the serpent appealed to the woman. She listened, she looked, and she ate, for she desired to be wise. The taste was good, so she gave to her husband, and he also ate. They found the serpent's words to be true in one respect; they knew something they had not realised before, they knew they were naked, and they were ashamed. Sin is like that, it makes those who are guilty ashamed until the sin becomes a habit, then shame is dulled. Adam and his wife did the best they could for themselves, they made clothes from fig leaves, and hid in the garden.

As the day drew to a close they heard the voice of God speaking to them. Adam tried to explain why he was hiding, without telling what had happened. "I was afraid," he said, "because I was naked, and I hid myself." "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" came the reply, "Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" Then all the sorry story came out. Adam blamed his wife, and his wife blamed the serpent, but the simple fact was that both had disobeyed God's command. There were three parties to the sin and three separate sentences were passed upon them. The serpent was placed under a curse and condemned to go upon its belly. It is not said what it means of locomotion were before, whatever it was its progress in the future was to be sinuous, a word strikingly suggestive of sin. The woman was told that her sorrow and conception should be multiplied, and that she should be under the dominion of her husband. The multiplication was an indication of what was to follow. Sin had changed the whole outlook. The people who were to inhabit the earth when the whole creation would be for God's pleasure, had now to be a selection from the human race. Multitudes would be quite unsuitable, so there must be a multiplication of seed in order that the chosen ones should be sufficient for the purpose in view.

### *Death, the punishment*

As for the man, the sentence was explicit. The ground was cursed, and thereafter brought forth thorns and thistles, which caused toil and “the sweat of the face” until the penalty threatened should be received, “dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.” There is no mistaking the character of the penalty, it was death, and “the dead know not anything.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, as an apostle afterwards said, “Through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin.”<sup>2</sup>

The picture is not all dark. While God is just, He is also merciful and gracious, and He caused a ray of hope to shine through the gloom. Speaking to the serpent He said, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” It was a strange saying, an enigma, and probably its meaning was not very clear to Adam and his wife. Yet it suggested hope, a hope of the defeat of the seed of that which had led to sin, through a wound to the seed of the woman. As the story develops more will be heard of this hope.

Meanwhile other things should be noted. First of all Adam gave a new name to his wife; he called her Eve, because she was to be the mother of all living (Eve means “living”). The clothes of fig-leaves were superseded by clothes of skins. To provide these, animals had to be slain and blood shed. This too is a matter that will recur as the story advances, and will be found to be of profound importance. Sin made sacrifice necessary.

The chapter that records man’s failure is completed by the record of an important, and highly significant, event. Man had become like God in one respect, he had learned to know good and evil. But in another respect he was not like God, for he had not learned how to know the good and reject the evil as the wonderful beings called angels had done. God did not intend that a race of immortal sinners should live on the earth, so “He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden the Cherubim, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.” Thus separated from the tree, the man and the woman had to face the future, to live a life of sorrow and toil, until the dying process triumphed, and they returned to the ground from which they had been taken.

It was a sad beginning to what might have been a great story. Everything seemed to have gone wrong. But when God is at work there can be no such thing as failure. As the God-Spell is developed in future chapters it will be seen how human failure and man’s mortality will give place to success and immortality, and how man may attain to life and incorruptibility through the “seed of the woman.”

When Adam and Eve left the garden of Eden to face their new life it must have been with sadness and shame. They and the earth had been changed, and the thorns and thistles which grew were suggestive of the change that had taken place in themselves. There too weeds sprang up, the lusts that caused temptation. As James wrote long afterward they “were drawn away by their own lust

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<sup>1</sup> Ecc. 9:5.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 5:12.



and enticed.”<sup>1</sup> No outside tempter was necessary now; temptation came from within.

### *Cain and Abel*

In due time two sons were born to them, Cain and Abel. It seemed to Eve as if the prediction about the “seed” was to be accomplished and when the first of her sons was born she said, “I have gotten a man from the Lord.” She was quite wrong; the first child of a guilty pair was not the seed of the promise.

The years passed by, and the boys grew up; the elder tilled the ground, the younger tended the flocks. Sacrifice was already a way by which God was worshipped, and the two brought their offerings before the Lord. Cain brought the fruit of the ground, Abel the firstlings of his flock. Even at this early stage God must have indicated that the way of approach to Him involved the shedding of blood, for He rejected the offering of Cain, and Cain was angry. He could not show his anger towards God, so he vented it on his brother. He went with him into the field and killed him. Rage and jealousy caused the first murder. As Cain looked upon his brother, whose blood welled forth and stained the earth, he heard a voice saying, “Where is Abel, thy brother?”

“I know not; am I my brother’s keeper?” replied Cain.

“What hast thou done?” was the answer, “the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto Me from the ground.”

Remorse was useless then, and his doom was pronounced. The tillage of the earth was not to be for him; he was to be a fugitive and a wanderer, and a mark was set upon him to protect him from vengeance. He left his home and journeyed eastward to a country called the land of Nod, or “wandering,” where his descendants grew into a people separate from the rest of the sons of Adam.

### *Cain’s family*

The descendants of Cain were, from the human point of view, a go-ahead people. They followed the pursuits of cattle raising, cultivated musical arts, and learned the use of metals. But they were not the kind of people that God desired for His purposes, for though skilful and gifted, they had no desire to serve Him. The only other thing that is known about them is the Song of Lamech, who had killed a man. The song ran:

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;  
Ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech:  
For I have slain a man for wounding me,  
And a young man for bruising me;  
If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,  
Truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.”

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<sup>1</sup> James 1: 14.

There is nothing noble about this song; it speaks of blood-shedding and vengeance. After the allusion to Lamech the descendants of Cain do not appear again in the Bible story.

Abel being dead, and Cain rejected, the record turns to a new line of the sons of Adam, that of Seth. Centuries passed away, and nothing is known of what happened. The names of the fathers and sons in the direct line of Seth are given, and that is nearly all. Only two matters stand, out in the whole period. Enoch “walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.” He was “translated that he should not see death,” as a New Testament writer has recorded.<sup>1</sup> His son was Methuselah who had the longest recorded life of any of the antediluvians, and died in the year of the flood. The whole period is like a great cloud in which little specks of light shine through to show that history was being made, but what that history was we do not know.

When the story is resumed a dreadful picture is presented. Men and women gradually forgot the past, and cared nothing for God; they only thought how they might please themselves. The “sons of God” married the “daughters of men” instead of taking women of their own class. Mighty men, bullies and tyrants, arose who sought their own glory and advantage. They were ambitious, and through their actions the earth was filled with wickedness and violence. After enduring this for a long time God determined to give men a terrible lesson.

### *Only Noah saved*

Among the people there was one family that kept the true religion, and tried to serve God amid the corruptions of the times. It consisted of eight persons—Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their four wives. Like Enoch before him Noah “walked with God,” and God saved him from the calamity that came upon the world.

In order that he and his family might be saved, and animal life preserved in the earth, Noah was told to make an ark. It was to be about 525 feet long, 90 wide, and 50 high. In it he was to take the various kinds of beasts and birds by pairs or by sevens. It must have taken a long time to construct such a vessel, and during the whole of the period Noah was a preacher of righteousness, preaching to an unheeding world of the judgment to come. No one regarded him; the people probably looked upon him as a crank, and said that such things as he foretold never had happened and never would.

At last the time for the judgment arrived. Noah and his sons had finished the ark, had gathered in the animals as God had enjoined, and entered into the ark themselves. “And the Lord shut him in.” The people who had jeered at him looked on and wondered. Then the rain began to fall as he had foretold, earth movements took place, for “the fountains of the great deep were broken up.” Fear seized the hearts of those outside, but it was too late. The rain continued and the waters rose, until even the high hills were covered and there was no place to which the people might go to escape the flood.

It was the end of an era, and “the world that then was being overflowed with water perished.” Long

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<sup>1</sup> Heb. 11: 5.

afterwards Jesus said, “And as were the days of Noah so shall be the coming of the Son of man.”<sup>1</sup>

When the world of the ungodly had perished the rain ceased and the waters gradually subsided. Inside the ark they could tell that things had changed; there was no motion, so Noah opened the “window” of the ark to see what had happened. There was nothing to be seen but a watery waste. He let out a raven and it did not return; it found its freedom and kept it. Then Noah sent out a dove, but the dove came back, the conditions outside were not suitable for it. A week afterwards he sent out the dove again, and this time it came back with an olive leaf in its beak. The ground was dry, and Noah knew that at last he could leave the ark and renew the life he had been living before the flood, though he did not leave it until he was told by God that he might do so.

It was a new world that he gazed upon. The old evil days were gone; the violence of the past was ended. What would the future bring forth?

## CHAPTER III

### FROM THE FLOOD TO BABEL

WHEN Noah and his family left the ark, Noah built an altar and offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for their deliverance. So deep was his gratitude that he offered of every clean beast and every clean bird. It was the one way in which he could show his thankfulness, and God accepted it; He “smelled a sweet savour,” and gave a promise that has never failed, “while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not *cease*.” These changes still take place, and every time day follows night, and summer succeeds winter, it is a reminder of the promise which God made that never again should there be a flood to destroy man and beast from all the earth.

God also gave another sign; He “set His bow in the cloud” as a reminder that He had made an “everlasting covenant” with man. To-day when the rain falls, and the heavens are cloudy, the many coloured rainbow is sometimes seen arching the heavens. It reminds those who know the Bible story, of the promise that guarantees the future of the earth, because God has made an everlasting covenant to that effect.<sup>1</sup>

After the flood Noah adopted the life of a husbandman; he planted a vineyard, and made wine from its grapes. Some years afterwards he partook too freely of the wine and became drunk. In that state he lay naked in his tent. As he lay there Canaan, the son of Ham, came in and saw his grandfather. He told his father, who also went in and looked at the old man. He in turn told Shem and Japheth. They were men of a different type; they were sorry for their father, and, walking backwards so that they should not see him, took a garment and covered him. When the effects of the wine had worn off Noah realised what had happened, and in the spirit of prophecy pronounced these words,

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet. 3:6; Matt. 24:37.

<sup>1</sup> Allusions to an “everlasting covenant” will be found in the following passages:—Gen. 17:13 and 19; Lev. 24:8; 2 Sam. 23:5; 1 Chron. 16: 17; Psalm 105: 10; Isa. 24: 5; 55: 3; 61: 8; Jer. 32: 40; Ezek. 37: 26; Heb. 13: 20.

“Cursed be Canaan;  
A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.  
Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem;  
And let Canaan be his servant.  
God enlarge Japheth,  
And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;  
And let Canaan be his servant.”

This is the first prophecy, though not the first promise, in the Bible; and it is a brief epitome of the main lines of the history of the world.

### *People scattered*

More years passed by, and as the descendants of Noah increased in numbers they spread abroad. Some journeyed eastward and came to a plain in the land of Shinar, in Mesopotamia. It was a place of great fertility, with a soil that yielded abundant harvests. Here they determined to stay. They said “Let us make brick and burn them.” It was a country with practically no stone, and if they desired to live in settled communities, instead of in tents as Noah had done, they had to build with bricks.

Then they said, “Let us build us a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make a name.” They wanted a central organization in which they could develop the arts of government. The leader in this attempt was Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, who desired to establish himself as a mighty one in the earth, like the great men who had lived before the flood. He desired to be an autocrat to rule over men for his own benefit.

It is probable that the tower which was built at Babel (Babylon), the beginning of Nimrod’s kingdom, was a Ziggurat, a number of which have been found among the ruins of the country. They were the religious centres of those who left the worship of the God of the Bible. They named the place Babel, or Babilu. Nimrod’s was a despotism opposed to all that was connected with the God who had delivered Noah from the waters of the flood. Such a design was altogether opposed to the purposes of God, and He took steps to thwart the aims of Nimrod and his followers.

It is recorded that God came down and confounded the language of the people so that they might not understand one another’s speech. It was the beginning of another new order of things on the earth. Hitherto the people had been a more or less united community, able to converse with one another without difficulty. From that time they became divided into separate peoples, each speaking its own language. They had called their city Bab-ilu, which meant the Gate of God; it has since been known as Babel, which means confusion. The confusion of tongues put an end to their efforts to make a name and to establish themselves as a strong central power. Nations and peoples began to arise and the earth was divided.

## CHAPTER IV

### ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

WHEN the thread of the story is again picked up there are indications of a change in the methods of God's dealings with men. Now that nations had developed, a man, and through him a nation descended from him, were selected to keep alive the knowledge of the true God in a world astray from Him.

The beginning of this new phase is laid in Ur of the Chaldees. A great deal is known about this place to-day. It was in the south of Mesopotamia, and had been a royal city, for its rulers had borne sway over the peoples around. It had lost that position and others now ruled over it. Yet it was still an important place; many of its people lived in good and comfortable houses; and it was a centre of trade and commerce.

Among the inhabitants of Ur was a man named Terah. He had three sons: Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and a grandson, Lot, the son of Haran. Abram's wife was Sarai, Nahor's wife was Milcah. Haran died early, and when Terah decided to leave Ur, Abram and Nahor, their wives, and their nephew Lot, went with him. They travelled something like a thousand miles to a city named Haran. When they reached that place Terah would go no further. There was a reason for this. At Haran the people worshipped the same gods as those who lived in Ur, and no doubt Terah felt at home among them. He was getting old, and stayed there until he died.

Abram was not satisfied with Haran as a home; he had left Ur for a specific reason, and that reason prevented him from settling there. He had received a divine call: "Now the Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Until he arrived in the land that God had promised to show him, his wanderings could not cease. Nahor decided to stay, but as soon as his father was dead Abram continued his journey with his wife and nephew.

#### *The Land of the promise*

After they had travelled some eight hundred more miles they arrived at a place named Shechem, not far from the modern Nablus, or Samaria. When he arrived there God spoke to him again, saying, "Unto thy seed will I give this land," and thus Abram knew that his search was over, and that he had found the land that God had promised to show him. He built an altar there on which he offered sacrifices to God.

Gradually he moved southward into a portion of the country called the Negeb, a dry and sterile land which in times of drought cannot supply its inhabitants with food and drink. Such a time came and Abram went down into Egypt. There he made a mistake. He said that Sarai was not his wife but his sister. (She was the daughter of his father but not of his mother.) Being a beautiful woman the Pharaoh of Egypt took her into his harem, but God sent a plague upon him and his house which

caused him to let Sarai go. Abram had done wrong, and must have felt ashamed at what had happened, especially as Pharaoh had given him a great present of sheep, oxen, asses, and camels.

Abram returned to the land of Canaan and stayed near Bethel. He was now very rich, with great possessions of flocks and herds, and many servants. The scanty herbage of the district was not sufficient for his flocks and herds and those of Lot, and this caused strife between their respective herdmen. Abram wanted peace; God had promised to give him the land, yet he would not turn Lot away. So he called him and said, "Let there be no strife I pray thee, between me and thee," and with a true nobility of mind added, "Separate thyself from me, if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou take the right hand, then I will go to the left."

### *Abram and Lot*

Lot looked around and saw below them the plains of Jordan. They were green and fruitful, with an abundance of food for his flocks and herds, so he elected to go into the country around Sodom and Gomorrah. Thus another separation took place, and Abram and Sarai were alone in the Promised Land. More separations were to follow in the history of the family; the whole story is one of selection and separation.

When Lot had left him God spoke to Abram again. "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward, and eastward and westward, for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever ... Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it, for unto thee will I give it." Nothing could be plainer or more specific; the whole land of Canaan was promised to Abram as his personal possession.

As days and years passed by God revealed to Abram more details connected with the promise. Meanwhile Lot's choice of the district of Sodom brought him into trouble. He became associated with its people, and when an enemy from Elam and Shinar (Babylon) invaded the country he was carried away prisoner. News of the disaster reached Abram, who, gathering together all his servants, marched after the retreating army. He attacked them by night and recovered Lot and all the spoil that they had taken.

As he returned from this expedition he passed by Salem (Jerusalem), where he was met by Melchizedek, the king of the city and priest of God Most High. Melchizedek blessed him and received tithes from him. An important application is made of this incident in the New Testament, but that is hardly part of the story itself.<sup>1</sup>

The next glimpse we have of Abram relates to a most important incident in his life. He was getting anxious; God had promised him the land, and had said that his seed should possess it. At present he did not own a single foot of the land, he was an old man, and he had no child. In his anxiety Abram said, "Lord God, ... Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed." God told him to look up to the stars shining in the sky, and said, "So shall thy seed be." Then Abram referred to the personal aspect of the promise, "O Lord God, whereby shall I know that *I* shall inherit it?" A strange thing followed. Abram was told to offer a sacrifice of a heifer, a she goat, a ram, a turtle dove and a young pigeon.

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<sup>1</sup> See Heb. 7.

He was to divide each of the animals into two halves, and place them on the altar. Then he fell asleep, and “a horror of great darkness” came over him. As he lay asleep he dreamed and saw a smoking torch passing between the parts of the divided animals. It was God’s way of indicating that he had made a covenant with Abram.<sup>1</sup> There was now a covenant of promise between God and Abram, the terms of it being that Abram should inherit the Land of Promise. He has never done so, and nothing but his resurrection from the dead will enable the covenant to be fulfilled.

### *The birth of Ishmael*

More years passed by and Abram and Sarai still had no son. Then Sarai gave her maid, Hagar, to Abram, thinking that she might have a child by that means. Her hope was fulfilled, and Ishmael was born. He grew up to be a wild man, and though Abram was fond of him, God told him that Ishmael could not be the child of the promise. Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she ran away, but an angel told her to return, and she remained until the real child of the promise was born.

Before that time came God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, and that of Sarai to Sarah. The names mean the father of a multitude, and princess respectively. On the same occasion a great addition was made to the promise, for God said, “I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee ... all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession.” Thus to the assurance that he should have a resurrection from the dead there was added a promise of everlasting life. The covenant now involved everlasting life and an everlasting inheritance.

### *Angel visitors*

One day as Abraham sat in the door of his tent on the Plains of Mamre, three angels came to him. They looked like men, they had no wings such as are usually shown on modern pictures of angels. With true eastern hospitality Abraham ran to meet them. There was something majestic in their appearance, and Abraham bowed before them, requesting them to stay and partake of food. He told Sarah to make cakes of bread, while he himself killed a calf and gave it to one of his servants to prepare and cook.

When the preparations were complete the three men sat down to eat. As they were eating one of them said, “Where is Sarah, thy wife?”

“In the tent,” said Abraham.

“Sarah, thy wife, shall have a son,” said one of the angels.

Sarah laughed to herself in the tent. She was too old for such a thing to happen to her. But the angel, who was speaking for God, said, “Wherefore did Sarah laugh? ... Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

Sarah was ashamed to admit that she had laughed, and said, “I laughed not.”

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<sup>1</sup> For an illustration of the practice adopted in the making of covenants, see Jer. 34:18 and 19.

“Nay, but thou didst laugh,” replied the angel.

It was no use denying; God knows all that we do or say, and He knew what Sarah had done. But the statement of the angel was true, and Abraham and Sarah, though old people, far beyond the age when children were likely to be born to them, were to have a son. The promises of God cannot fail. It is recorded in the New Testament that Abraham “considered his own body, now as good as dead, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb.” yet “being fully assured that what God had promised He was able also to perform. Wherefore also it was accounted to him for righteousness. It is an example of the faith that is necessary if we would please God.”<sup>1</sup>

The angels had other tidings to tell. After the meal was over the three supposed men rose up to continue their way, and Abraham went some distance with them. They went in the direction of Sodom; where Lot and his family were living. Lot did not reside outside the city then; probably after Abraham had rescued him and the spoil of Sodom the people of the city had treated Lot with considerable respect, and he now lived inside the city gate. He was grieved for the evil ways of the people, but he continued to live there, surrounded by their wickedness.

As Abraham and the three men walked along one of them told him that Sodom and the other cities of the district were to be destroyed on account of the wickedness of the inhabitants Abraham thought of Lot, and said, “Wilt thou consume the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city ... That be far from thee to slay the righteous with the wicked ... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” It was a great thought, and a true one, for God will never do evil to the righteous.

“If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes,” was the reply.

Abraham thought. Perhaps he had been too sanguine. Fifty was a large number, so he said again, “Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous, wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five?”

“I will not destroy it if I find there forty and five,” was the reply.

Abraham felt encouraged. Gradually he reduced the number—to forty, thirty, twenty, ten, “I will not destroy it for ten’s sake,” was the last reply.

### *The destruction of Sodom*

Not even ten righteous people could be found in Sodom. Abraham went no further, but had he done so there were not even five. With a sad heart he returned to his tent to await the outcome of the visit of the angels to Sodom.

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<sup>1</sup> See Romans 4:19-23 and Heb. 11:6.



Two of them went there. They found Lot sitting in the gate of the city. He welcomed the visitors, invited them to stay the night, and prepared food for them. When it was dark the men of the city gathered round the house. They wanted to see the strangers who had come in, and abuse them. Lot was very worried, and did all he could to turn them from their purpose. It was no use; they threatened Lot himself. Suddenly the angels acted. By the powers they possessed they struck the men with dazzlings so that they could not see, while they drew Lot inside the house.

The angels told Lot what was to happen, and sent him to tell the men who had married his daughters. They only laughed at him; such a judgment would never overtake their beautiful city they thought, and when the time came the only ones who left Sodom were Lot, his wife and two daughters. The angels hastened them out, and told them not even to look back. "Escape to the mountains," they said, but in response to Lot's request they gave him permission to go to a little city named Zoar.

As soon as Lot and his family left Sodom the doom came. "The Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." Terrible clouds of smoke arose from the doomed cities, suffocating the people who were not burned in the conflagration, and spoiling the fertility of the surrounding country. From that awful judgment Sodom never recovered; even the site of the city is still disputed. As Lot and his family hurried away his wife looked back. She had enjoyed the bright life of Sodom, and regretted the loss of its pleasures and society. At once doom overtook her, and she became a pillar of salt.

Away in the distance, on the heights where he lived, Abraham stood, looking towards Sodom. The whole of the surrounding country was one mass of horrible smoke, telling of the awful doom of the place, and indicating that there had not been ten righteous men in the fated city.

It is not often that such catastrophes occur. Sometimes they do to show men that God cannot be mocked with impunity. Two illustrations have occurred already in the Bible story, the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jesus referred to both of them, saying in regard to the latter, "Even as it came to pass in the days of Lot ... after the same manner shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed."<sup>1</sup> Sin and sinners must be destroyed.

### *Isaac, the son of promise*

When the long promised son was born he was named Isaac, which means laughter. Abraham was then one hundred years old. Isaac's birth brought matters to a crisis in the home of Abraham and Sarah. Ishmael, who had been the only child in the household, made fun of his small brother, and Sarah determined to send him and his mother away. It was hard for Abraham, for he had grown to love Ishmael. However he complied with the desire of Sarah, and God told him that descendants of Ishmael should grow into a great, but wild, nation, a prophecy which has been abundantly fulfilled in the history of the Arabs. A little later the Bible story tells how Ishmael grew into a nation, and records the names of a number of its rulers; then they disappear from its pages because God had decreed that "in Isaac" Abraham's seed should be called.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 17:28-30.

Some years later a great trial came upon Abraham. He heard God calling to him. As he listened the voice said "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering." The agony of mind created by such a command must have been terrible. Was he to kill his son, the son on whom such wonderful promises depended? How could the promises be fulfilled? But there was no mistaking what the Voice had said, and Abraham determined to obey it. God had made promises which involved the resurrection of the dead; perhaps He would raise his son from the dead.

He started early one morning on his strange errand. Everything was prepared before he set out, even to the wood that was to be used to burn the sacrifice. For three days Abraham, Isaac, and two servants journeyed northward. They must have been days of anguished mind to Abraham. Talk must have been an agony; probably little was said on the way. The last part of the journey was performed by Abraham and Isaac alone, the lad carrying the wood that was to consume him, while Abraham carried the fire that was to kindle it. Suddenly Isaac said, "My father."

"Here am I, my son," said Abraham.

"Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

Where? The troubled father could only reply, "God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."

At last they came to the place for the sacrifice. An altar was prepared, the wood placed upon it, then the father bound his son prior to slaying him. Like Jesus, some two thousand years afterwards, Isaac was a willing sacrifice. Then, just as Abraham was about to plunge the knife into the heart of his son, the angel of the Lord called to him out of heaven, "Abraham."

"Here am I," he replied.

"Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me."

Thus Isaac was saved from death. Looking around Abraham saw a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. Hastily loosing his son, he took the ram and offered it as a sacrifice instead of his son. Then once again a voice was heard from heaven. It said, "By Myself have I sworn, because thou hast done this thing, ... that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven; ... and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed My voice."

And so one more item was added to the covenant, and God had sworn by Himself that the promise should be performed. In those days towns had walls and gates. So long as the latter were kept, no enemy could enter the town, and the inhabitants were safe. When a conqueror sat in the gate of his enemies he was master of the city. Thus Abraham was told that his seed should be a conqueror and rule over all his enemies. There is one thing more to be noticed. The voice had said, "Thy seed

shall possess the gate of *his* enemies.” “Seed” is in the singular number, not the plural, so that it referred to one particular individual. The New Testament shows to whom it applies, for the Apostle Paul wrote, “He saith not, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Thus the Bible story gets ever more interesting.

### *A wife for Isaac*

More years passed by and Isaac grew up to manhood. Sarah died, and it was necessary to bury her. Abraham had not a single foot of the promised land, and he had to buy a burying place for his wife, for he would not bury her outside the land of promise. He purchased the cave of Machpelah, with the field and the trees that were in it, for four hundred shekels of silver, and there he buried his wife.

Isaac grew up to be a quiet and peaceful man, who avoided strife whenever that was possible. The time came when it was necessary for him to take a wife. All around him were the women of the land, but Abraham objected to any marriage between them and his son. He called for the steward of his house and charged him to go to the old home at Haran and seek there a wife for Isaac. He was very insistent on two points; he made him swear by God not to take a wife for his son from among the Canaanites who dwelt in the land, and, not to take Isaac to the land from which he himself had come. Two principles stand out in this charge. The separation between Abraham and the people of the land was definite, and the break with the old country was equally so. There was no going back, and no affinity was to be sought with the people of Canaan. It is one of the fundamental features of the Bible story that those who are called of God must be separate from the world; in it, but not of it.

The steward went to the country of Mesopotamia where Nahor had remained. He prayed for God’s guidance in his quest. When he arrived there, Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel and grand-daughter of Nahor, who was drawing water at the well, acted exactly as he had requested that the damsel might act whom God had decreed to be the wife for his master’s son. As he marvelled at the success of his mission the damsel ran to tell her mother, and her brother Laban, about the man who had spoken to her and who desired to stay with them. They gave him a great welcome, but he refused to eat with them until he had declared the purpose of his journey. As he did so they recognised that the matter was overruled of the Lord. They said, “The thing proceedeth from the Lord; we cannot speak unto thee bad or good.” Then the servant brought out his gifts for Rebekah and her mother and brother. Her father, Bethuel, was still alive, but he took no part in the matter; he was either too old, or was incapacitated in some way. Finally Rebekah accompanied the steward to the land of Canaan, where she became the wife of Isaac.

After this Abraham died; old and full of years, for he had lived 175 years. His sons Ishmael and Isaac buried him in the cave of Machpelah, near Hebron, which he had purchased. Thus he was buried in the land that had been promised to him, but of which he had not yet received a single foot breadth. It is for the future to witness the fulfilment of the promise made to him.

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<sup>1</sup> Gal. 3:16.

## CHAPTER V

### ISAAC, JACOB AND ESAU

FOR a long time Isaac and Rebekah had no children, and when at last children were born, they were twins. Before their birth God told Rebekah "Two nations are in thy womb, ... and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." The elder was Esau, the younger was Jacob. They were very different from each other, and as they grew up the difference became more marked. Esau loved the wild life of the chase, and cared little for the higher things of life. Jacob was a "plain" man, gentle and quiet, and liked to be at home, but was very calculating where his interests were concerned. Isaac loved Esau for he liked the good things provided by his hunting, Rebekah loved Jacob.

When the lads grew to man's estate an incident took place which indicated their respective characters. Esau had been hunting, and came home hungry and faint. Jacob had prepared a dish of pottage and the smell of it filled Esau with a desire for food; he exclaimed "Feed me with that red, red pottage." Jacob saw his opportunity. "Sell me this day thy birthright," he said.

"I am at the point of death; and what profit shall the birthright do to me?" Esau replied.

Jacob made him swear, and Esau had his meal, rose up, and went his way.

What had Esau sold? what did the birthright involve? Remember the promises; the land, the blessing of Abraham's seed, the blessing of all nations, the conqueror sitting in the gate of his enemies. All this Esau despised, and bartered it for a mess of pottage. That was why God had said "The elder shall serve the younger."

A time of famine came in Canaan, and Isaac thought of going down into Egypt as Abraham had done. But God told him not to go; Canaan was his place even though he did not own any of it except a burying-place. "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee," said God, "for unto thee and unto thy seed I will give all these lands; and I will establish the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father ... and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Thus the promise made to Abraham was repeated to Isaac.

#### *The Blessing*

The peaceful character of Isaac was shown in his dealings with the men of Gerar, who, on several occasions, took possession of wells which his servants had digged. In a country like the Negeb a well was a priceless possession, but Isaac submitted. Later he removed to Beersheba where Abraham had dwelt. While he was living there Isaac was very ill, and thought he was about to die. He desired to bless Esau before his death, and sent him to hunt so that he might bring some venison, and receive his blessing. Rebekah heard what was said and determined that the blessing should be given to Jacob, whom she persuaded to impersonate Esau for the occasion. She took two kids from the home flocks, and by the use of flavourings, such as were usual in the country. made savoury meat for Isaac. She clothed Jacob in Esau's garments, and covered his hands and the

smooth of the neck with the skins of the kids. Thus arrayed Jacob went to his father, saying "My father."

"Here am I; who art thou, my son?" asked Isaac.

"I am Esau, thy firstborn," said Jacob, "sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me."

Isaac was surprised. "How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son?" he asked.

Jacob was ready with an answer. "Because the Lord thy God sent me good speed," he said.

Still not satisfied, Isaac said, "Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not."

The smell of the clothes and the roughness of the skin deceived the ailing man. "The voice is Jacob's voice," he said, "but the hands are the hands of Esau." He made one more attempt. "Art thou my very son Esau?" he asked.

"I am," was the reply. Then Isaac ate the meat and blessed Jacob. He gave him a blessing in all temporal things, said that he should rule over his brethren, and finished up with an expression that was included in the Abrahamic promise, "Cursed be everyone that curseth thee, and blessed be every one that blesseth thee," but of the inheritance of the land and the blessing of the nations he said nothing. He knew that Esau had sold his birthright.

Scarcely had he finished when Esau returned. He too had prepared meat such as his father loved, and going in, said, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's venison that thy soul may bless me."

"Who art thou?" asked the startled old man.

"I am thy son, thy firstborn, Esau."

Isaac trembled very exceedingly. Did he realise that he had tried to prevent the fulfilment of the prophecy that had been made before the birth of his two sons and in so doing had tried to alter the declared purpose of God? In his agitation he said, "Who then is he that hath taken venison—and I have blessed him." Then, probably remembering the promise and the sale of the birthright, he added, "Yea, and he shall be blessed."

Esau realised it all now. He cried out "Bless me, even me, also, O my father."

It was too late, he could not recover the birthright he had despised. Yet he continued, "Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father."

Isaac did what he could. He told Esau that he should live by the sword, and that in the end he should break the yoke of his brother. But of the blessing of Abraham, and of the promises, he said nothing.

The incident is a painful one, and reflects no credit on any of the four parties. Isaac intended to give his blessing to the son who so lightly esteemed the blessings of the Covenant with Abraham that he sold his right for a mess of pottage. Rebekah had contrived the deception practised on her husband, and Jacob had shared in it and lied to his father. Esau was angry because he had failed to gain that which he had despised and sold.

Isaac did not die then, he lived for many years, but the memory of the scenes in his tent must have been a bitter one. Rebekah lost the company of the son she loved. Esau was separated from the line of the covenant development. Jacob had to flee, for Esau threatened to take his life.

### *Jacob flees*

In view of Esau's threat Rebekah took steps to save Jacob's life. At her suggestion he was sent to Padan-aram that he might find a wife of her kindred. In sending him away Isaac gave him another blessing; this time it was the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant. "God Almighty bless thee," he said, "and make thee fruitful; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land of thy sojournings, which God gave unto Abraham," For the last time a separation was made in the family, and the promise was finally fixed in the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Leaving Beersheba, Jacob went to Bethel. Weary, he lay down to rest on the open ground. As he slept he dreamed that there was a ladder, or staircase, reaching from earth to heaven, on which angels were passing up and down. At the top he saw God who spoke to him, repeating once again the promise made to Abraham. "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou liest to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; ... and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Something more was added, "I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

It was a far reaching promise. Jacob was only a man and must die. The land was to be given to him as well as to his seed. He never received it, for "he died in faith not having received the promise,"<sup>1</sup> yet God assured him that He would not leave him until all was fulfilled. There is only one explanation, Jacob with Abraham and Isaac, must be raised from the dead to receive the fulfilment of the promise. When Jacob awoke he worshipped God, and named the place Bethel, which means the house of God.

Encouraged by the vision Jacob continued his journey till he came near Haran, where he enquired for his mother's brother Laban. While he was talking with the men of the place, Rachel, Laban's younger daughter, came to water her father's sheep. The men told him who she was, and Jacob kissed her, telling her that he was Rebekah's son. The news quickly spread, and Laban came and welcomed him to his house.

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<sup>1</sup> Heb. 11:13.

### *Working for Laban*

At the end of a month Laban suggested that Jacob should enter into his service, and asked what wages he would accept. Rachel was very beautiful, and Jacob had fallen in love with her. He answered Laban, "I will serve thee seven years for Rachel." Laban regarded this as a good bargain and immediately agreed. After the seven years, arrangements were made for the marriage. In those days customs were different from what they are to-day. At night Jacob was led to the tent where he supposed Rachel was, but when the morning came, he found that he had been deceived and had married Leah, the elder daughter. He loudly protested at the deception, but Laban told him that it was not usual to marry a younger daughter before the elder, and promised that if Jacob would agree to work for another seven years he should be given Rachel also. Thus the man who had deceived his father was himself deceived.

Leah had a number of children, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, but Rachel had none. She was envious of her sister, and as she seemed incapable of bearing children, she gave her handmaid to Jacob. She bore him two sons, Dan and Naphtali. Leah also gave her handmaid to Jacob, and she had two sons, Gad and Asher. Later Leah had two more sons and a daughter, Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah. Then at last Rachel had a son whom she named Joseph.

By this time Jacob was anxious to return to Canaan, and told Laban so. Laban did not want to lose him, for while Jacob had been in his service his flocks and herds had greatly increased. As before, he threw the onus on Jacob, saying "Appoint me thy wages and I will give it." So a fresh bargain was made. All the cattle, sheep, and goats, of a certain description were to be Jacob's, the rest were to remain the property of Laban. Under this arrangement Jacob's flocks continually increased, and however often Laban changed the terms of the contract the arrangement worked in Jacob's favour.

### *Jacob flees again*

Jacob found that Laban's sons envied him, and he determined to go away with all his possessions, taking advantage of Laban's absence for sheep-shearing to get away. One thing marred his going, Rachel stole the images of the household gods of her father. Jacob worshipped the One God of Abraham, El Shaddai, or God Almighty. Rachel had not risen to so pure a form of worship, she hankered after the gods, the teraphim, to which she had been accustomed in her father's house. Three days later Laban heard of Jacob's flight and hurried after him. On the way God spoke to him in a dream saying, "Take heed to thyself that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad." Sobered by the warning, he treated Jacob very differently from what he had intended. He expostulated with him, and then said, "Wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?" Jacob knew nothing of Rachel's theft, and answered "With whomsoever thou findest thy gods he shall not live." Laban searched for them but failed to find them; Rachel had hidden them in the camels' furniture on which she sat.

Disappointed in his search Laban had to return without his gods, after he and Jacob had made a covenant under which neither was to pass the point where they were to hurt the other, and Jacob was not to take any other wives in place of the daughters, of Laban. In making this covenant Laban said, "No man is with us; see, God is witness, betwixt me and thee." Yes, God sees all things, He is "all-seeing," none can get out of His sight. Yet Laban did not whole-heartedly believe in the God of Jacob, for he said, "The God of Abraham, and the god of Nahor, the God of their father, judge

betwixt us.” The word “judge” is in the plural, showing that the god worshipped by Nahor and Terah, was not the One God of Abraham.

### *Meeting Esau*

Safely away from Laban, Jacob had to face another trouble. He was returning to Canaan where he would meet the brother who had threatened to kill him. He was encouraged by meeting some angels at a place which he named “Mahanaim.” Messengers whom he had sent on in advance returned to tell him that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men. Jacob’s heart misgave him. He could not hope to cope with such a force. However, he did what he could; he divided his people and possessions into two bands, and, what was more important, he prayed to God for protection and safety, reminding God of His promises. It is not that God needs to be reminded of His promises, but He likes His children to approach Him in prayer, and speak of them.

That night Jacob lodged at Mahanaim. He prepared a bountiful present for Esau to appease the anger which he supposed his brother nursed against him. He sent the present and then his family across the River Jabbok, whilst he remained alone, thinking of the dangers of the morrow. Presently he found he was not alone; someone was with him. He probably thought it was an emissary from Esau, for he wrestled with him. Really it was an angel but Jacob struggled, putting forth all his energy in defence of his family. Gradually he realised that he was not struggling with flesh and blood. Towards day-break the angel said, “Let me go.”

“I will not let thee go except thou bless me,” replied Jacob.

“What is thy name?” asked the angel. “Jacob,” he replied.

“Thy name shall be called no more Jacob but Israel, for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed.”

“Tell me I pray thee, thy name,” begged Jacob. But the angel replied, “Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?” No name was given, but he blessed Jacob, now named Israel, a striver with God.

In the morning the two brothers met, and Jacob found that his fears were groundless. Esau had prospered and had forgotten the injuries of the past. His father was still alive, and probably had shown his old partiality for Esau while Jacob had been away. Esau fell on Jacob’s neck and kissed him, and it was only when Jacob pressed him that he accepted the present he had prepared. Men like Esau are not long troubled by the loss of spiritual privileges. Success in this life outweighs all such considerations.

The two brothers parted good friends, and Jacob went on his way until he came to Shechem, near the centre of the promised land. There he bought a piece of ground for money; God had not yet given him any portion of the land.

*The Promise renewed* Soon afterwards trouble arose between Jacob and the people of Shechem, and he went on to Bethel. There he erected an altar to the God of Abraham, and made his people



put away the strange gods they had treasured; including those that Rachel had stolen from her father. Here the promise was once more renewed, "I am God Almighty ... the land which I gave unto Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land." Thus the promises were emphasised in each generation, for they are the foundation on which the hope of the Kingdom of God is based.

Again Jacob journeyed south. Near Bethlehem one more son was born, but in giving birth to him his beloved Rachel died. She called the child's name Ben-oni, the "son of my sorrow," but Jacob called him Benjamin, the "son of the right hand." Jacob's family was now complete, twelve sons and one daughter. The sons were the heads of the tribes of Israel through whom the story of the Bible is continued until it reaches its climax.

Isaac died at the age of 180, and was buried in the cave of Machpelah by Jacob and Esau. After this, Esau, like Cain, Ham and Japheth, Nahor, and Ishmael, disappears from the Story. It was the last separation; henceforth the Story has to do with all the descendants of Israel.

## CHAPTER VI

### JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN

AMONG the sons of Jacob Joseph was his father's favourite; Jacob made no secret of his feelings, and clothed him in a way that marked his preference. Such conduct caused Joseph's brethren to be jealous, and they showed their feelings in their dealings with him. His father's favour, and his brothers' jealousy might have spoiled Joseph's character; that it did not is a great point in his favour.

The situation was made worse by two dreams that Joseph had. In the first, the brothers were making sheaves in the harvest field when the sheaves of his brethren bowed down to Joseph's. In the second dream, the sun, moon, and eleven stars made obeisance to him. When he told these dreams his brothers were more indignant than ever, and even his father expostulated with him, saying, "Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" His brothers nursed their jealousy, waiting for an opportunity to express it by action.

#### *Joseph sold into Egypt*

Such an opportunity soon came. As they tended their flocks they journeyed northward in search of pasture. One day Jacob sent Joseph to seek his brethren and see that all was well. He went to Shechem, and then on to Dothan. When his brothers saw him coming one of them said, "Behold, this master of dreams cometh," and suggested that they should kill him and take his many coloured coat to their father, telling him that they had found it. Reuben, the eldest, wishing to save him, suggested that they should content themselves with putting him into a pit, intending later on to rescue him. This proposal was agreed to, and Joseph was placed in a pit.

While Reuben was away from the party a band of Ishmaelite merchants came by. Their appearance suggested a new idea to Judah. Why kill Joseph? It will be no profit to us; let us sell him to the

Ishmaelites. The others agreed, and Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver.

When Reuben went to rescue him from the pit and found it empty, he said, "The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?" But he could do nothing, but joined in with his brothers; and together they dipped Joseph's coat in the blood of a kid to show their father. When Jacob saw it he said, "It is my son's coat, an evil beast hath devoured him." His sons tried to comfort him; but all he could say was, "I will go down to the grave to my son mourning."

Meanwhile the Ishmaelites had carried Joseph into Egypt, where they sold him to an Egyptian named Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. In his service Joseph carried out his duties faithfully, and earned the respect of his master. He was a good man, who desired to serve his God even in a strange land surrounded with the gods of a people wholly given to idolatry. His master found he could be trusted and placed him in charge of all that he had.

When things seemed to be improving a fresh trouble plunged him into greater distress. His master's wife fell in love with him, and constantly urged him to accede to her desires, but Joseph steadily refused, saying, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" She persisted in her solicitations, and when she would have held him he fled from the house. Then she did a still more horrible thing; she accused Joseph of having done by force what he had refused to do at her request. Potiphar was angry and cast Joseph into the prison where special prisoners were bound, thus making him a prisoner as well as a slave.

Once again the influence of a good man over his fellows was shown. The keeper of the prison marked Joseph's conduct and gradually committed the control of the prisoners to him. Over ten years had passed since Joseph had been sold into slavery, when two of Pharaoh's servants who had been placed in his charge had dreams. They were troubled because there was no one to interpret them. Then Joseph appeared in a new light. "Interpretations belong to God," he said, but suggested that if they would tell him their dreams God might enable him to supply the interpretation. They did so, and events proved the interpretations given by Joseph to be correct; one servant, a butler, was restored to the royal favour, and the other was hanged. Joseph took advantage of the opportunity to endeavour to improve his own lot. "Have me in thy remembrance," he said to the butler, "when it shall be well with thee, and bring me out of this house." But the butler forgot all about him, and Joseph remained in the prison.

### *Joseph promoted*

Two years later Pharaoh had dreams. They were strange ones, and made a great impression on him. He told them to the magicians of his court but they could not, or dared not, interpret them. Pharaoh was troubled and all his court knew it. Then the butler remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about him. Joseph was sent for in great haste, but urgent as was the call he shaved himself before going in to Pharaoh; the etiquette of the court prohibited anyone going before Pharaoh unshaved. Then Pharaoh told his dreams. He had been standing by the Nile and saw seven splendid cows come up out of the water. Then seven lean ones came up, the worst that had ever been seen in Egypt. As Pharaoh looked on, the lean cows ate up the fat ones, and yet were as thin as before. After that he saw a stalk of corn grow up with seven ears, full and good, but seven ears, thin and withered, swallowed the good ears.

Joseph gave the interpretation. God, he said, was showing what was about to happen. There were to be seven years of incredible plenty in the country, followed by seven years of dreadful famine. Besides interpreting the dreams, Joseph gave advice to Pharaoh. He counselled him to gather the surplus of the years of plenty and thus provide for the time of famine. Pharaoh was so impressed by the advice and the demeanour of Joseph, that he made him Grand Vizier of the kingdom, with power to do as he desired in all things. He invested him with the royal signet ring and the Order of the Golden Collar, an honour given to very few in the land. He also caused him to ride in the royal chariot, and changed his name to Zaphenath-paneah, which means “abundance of life.”<sup>1</sup> He gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of the priest of On, or Hierapolis, by whom Joseph had two children, Ephraim and Manasseh. Thus the rejected brother came to high honour in a land where he had been a slave and a prisoner.

The seven years of plenty came and there was joy in all the land. With light work and abundant harvests, plenty to eat and drink, life was pleasant. Then came the first year of the famine, and things were different. A second year, and a third followed, and the Egyptians realised how much they owed to their Grand Vizier. The corn he had stored up saved their lives and the lives of their beasts. One thing was not so good. They had been compelled to sell their land, their beasts, and finally themselves to Pharaoh in exchange for food, so that by the end of the famine everything in Egypt, except the possessions of the priests, belonged to Pharaoh.

### *Famine in Canaan*

The famine affected other countries including Canaan. In the south of that land, where Jacob lived, harvests were not too plentiful at the best of times; in a period of drought they were very scanty. Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt and wondered whether he should go there. But in a previous time of famine, God had told his father not to go to Egypt, so he determined to stay in Canaan and send his sons for food. He sent them all—all except Benjamin.

The ten men went. The oases on the way were dried up, and they wended their way over the dry wastes hoping to obtain the corn they needed. When they arrived in Egypt they were conducted into the presence of Joseph; they were not natives of Egypt and their request was one for the Governor to deal with. Joseph recognised them but they did not recognise him. They thought of him as a slave in Egypt, or perhaps dead; besides, he was dressed in Egyptian garments and was closely shaved, and it was about twenty years since they had sold him, a youth of seventeen.

As they bowed before him Joseph thought of his dreams. He answered them roughly, and accused them of being spies. They told him that they were members of one family, and that their father, an old man, and their youngest brother, were at home. For a time Joseph was obdurate and for three days he kept them under watch. Then he called for them and said, “This do, and live; for I fear God; if ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in your prison house; but go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses, and bring your youngest brother unto me.” They were seriously troubled, but they could do nothing. As they listened to him they felt that all this had come upon

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<sup>1</sup> Or, the substance of the land is this living one (Yahuda).

them for their treatment of Joseph, and said so between themselves, not realising that he could understand every word they said, for he had spoken to them through an interpreter.

They went back to their father leaving Simeon behind as a hostage. On the way one of the sacks of corn was opened, and there was the money that had been paid for it! The discovery made them more nervous, and when they arrived home and found that every man's money had been returned, nervousness gave place to something like panic.

### *More corn from Egypt*

The famine continued, and the corn they had brought was nearly spent. Jacob urged them to go for more, but Judah told his father that the man in Egypt had said that when they came again they must bring their youngest brother with them. It was a terrible trial for the old man. "Why did ye tell the man that ye had yet a brother?" he asked. Eventually Jacob was forced to agree; "Take your brother, and God Almighty give you mercy before the man. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

It was a sad company that took its way over the sandy road to Egypt. Fear of the reception they might get, anxieties about their father and Benjamin, the dread of meeting the great Egyptian who had been so austere and yet so determined to learn all particulars about their family, and the return of their moneys, greatly troubled them. At last they reached the city and were admitted to Joseph's presence. They were told that they were to eat with him. What did that portend? Was more trouble in store? When Joseph came in they bowed themselves to the ground, and gave him a little present Jacob had sent. Joseph asked, "Is your father well? the old man of whom ye spake?" To Benjamin he said, "God be gracious unto thee, my son." When they sat down to eat they were astonished to find that they had been arranged in strict order from the firstborn to the youngest. Everything was strange, and inexplicable; "the man" seemed to know all about them. But the good fellowship of the meal put all questionings on one side "they drank and were merry with him."

### *Joseph makes himself known*

When they left they were well satisfied. The great man had treated them kindly, and they had plenty of food for their households. Their satisfaction was soon dispelled, for a messenger overtook them asking peremptorily "Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good? Is not this it in which my lord drinketh and whereby he indeed divineth?" They looked at each other and at the messenger in amazement. None of them would steal anything from the great man's house. So conscious were they of their innocence that they said, "With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen." The sacks were opened, commencing with that of the eldest, and a cup was found in the sack of Benjamin, where it had been placed by orders from Joseph. They tore their clothes, and with every mark of dejection returned to meet the great man of Egypt. There he stood, stern, and seeming to look right through them. "What deed is this that ye have done?" he said, "Know ye not that such a man as I can indeed divine?"

It was Judah who replied in a noble speech that indicated how great a change there had been in him since he had suggested that his brother should be sold. With an eloquence born of grief he pleaded

the cause of Benjamin and his aged father. “When he seeth the lad is not with us he will die,” he said, and offered himself as a substitute.

Suddenly Joseph burst in upon his words. “Cause every man to go out from me,” he said. They were alone the great man of Egypt and the eleven sons of Jacob. As they gazed upon him, wondering what was about to happen, he spoke the startling words, “I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?” What a moment! Joseph whom they had sold as a slave was the ruler of all the land of Egypt!

As they gazed at him in wonderment he told them what had happened. “God sent me before you to preserve you a remnant in the earth.” It was the over-ruling providence of God to ensure the preservation of “the seed” that was necessary for the fulfilment of the “everlasting covenant” God had made with Abraham. The news spread through Pharaoh’s house, and Pharaoh invited the men and their father to make their home in Egypt. Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian Church, made effective use of the incident, treating it as a type of the things concerning Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>1</sup> Joseph provided all that was necessary; carts and waggons, with animals to draw them. The eleven men hurried away with the great news. “Joseph is yet alive,” they cried to their aged father, “He is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” Jacob’s heart almost stopped beating, so great was the shock of the good news. When he was convinced he said, “It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die.”

### *Jacob comes to Egypt*

Yet Jacob had his doubts. Isaac, his father, had been forbidden to go to Egypt. Ought he to leave the land of promise? But God appeared to him in a vision and said, “I am God, the God of thy father; fear not to go down into Egypt, for I will there make of thee a great nation; I will go down with thee into Egypt, and I will surely bring thee up again.” Thus his fears were allayed, he could still hope for the land of his desire. So he and his sons, and his son’s sons, and all that they possessed went down to Egypt.

As soon as they arrived Joseph took his father and his brethren to Pharaoh. They were allowed to settle in the land of Goshen, and, as they were shepherds, were given charge of Pharaoh’s flocks and herds. The king of Egypt at this time was not a native Egyptian, he was one of what are known as the Hyksos, or Shepherd, kings. Shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians, but the coming of Israel was a welcome event to the rulers of the country. They were from Canaan and would serve Pharaoh better than any native would do.

Pharaoh gave a special audience to Jacob. When he asked him his age, Jacob replied, “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years, few and evil have been the days of the years of my life.” The old patriarch then gave his blessing to Pharaoh, and retired to the land of Goshen. The district had been selected by Joseph and, was apart from Egypt itself. There Israel could increase and multiply, ready for the next step in the purpose with which they were connected.

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<sup>1</sup> See Acts 7:9-13.

### *Jacob's death*

The remainder of the years of famine passed by and the harvests of the land became normal again. Seventeen years later Jacob died at the age of 147. Before he died he blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, whom he treated as if they were his own; after which he pronounced blessings on his own sons. One point in connection with his sons must be recorded, that is the blessing of Judah, of whom Jacob said,

“Judah is a lion’s whelp;  
From the prey, my son, thou art gone up;  
He stooped down, he couched as a lion,  
And as a lioness; who shall rouse him up?  
The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,  
Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,  
Until Shiloh come;  
And unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be.”

The blessing of the dying patriarch added something to the growing promises. It pointed to one who should come, Shiloh—”he whose kingdom it is.” Over a thousand years afterwards a prophet foretold that the kingdom should be overthrown; and should be no more until he should come whose right it was, and the one whom the prophet had in view was to be a descendant of Judah. Six hundred years later still an apostle spoke of “the seed that should come to whom the promise was made,” the seed of Abraham, of Isaac, of Israel and of Judah.<sup>1</sup> Before the story is finished it will be seen why it is that “How many soever be the promises of God, in him (that is in the Seed) is the Yea, wherefore also through him is the Amen.”<sup>2</sup>

After his death Jacob was embalmed in accordance with the customs of Egypt. Before he died he gave instructions about his burial. “Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field which Abraham bought for a possession of a burying place.” Thus in death, as in life, his mind was set on the Promised Land. It was his great hope, and though, like Abraham and Isaac, God gave him no inheritance in it, he died in faith, not having received the promises, because God had purposed some better thing, namely that all the faithful believers of the promises should be glorified together.<sup>1</sup>

By permission of Pharaoh a great company set out for Canaan to take part in the burial of Jacob. There were chariots and horsemen, with all the pomp of Egyptian pageantry. A great mourning took place, and then Jacob was left with his dead ancestors to await the fulfilment of the promise.

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<sup>1</sup> Ezek. 21:27; Gal. 3:19.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 1:20.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. 11:39 and 40.

### *Joseph's faith*

The brethren of Joseph were fearful lest he should now requite them for the evils of the past. They entirely misunderstood his character. He recognised the hand of God in his life, and saw that his brothers' envy had been part of a divine plan to preserve the seed of the covenant. "Now therefore, fear ye not," he said, "I will nourish you and your little ones."

After a long and useful life in the service of his fellows, Joseph died at the age of no years. Like his father he looked forward to the hope of Israel. His last words were, "I die, but God will surely visit you and bring you up out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." He too longed for the country of the promise. All his glory in Egypt was as nothing compared with the hope associated with the promise. That had led him on, and accounts for his final charge, "God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence."

This is the last look at the history of the family of Jacob; when the Bible story is resumed it is as the history of a nation. The essential thing in the family history is the desire for, and the love of, the Land of Promise.

## CHAPTER VII

### ISRAEL IN EGYPT

NOW there arose a new king over Egypt which knew not Joseph." With these words the next chapter of the story opens. They imply more than they say. The Shepherd kings had never been popular with the native Egyptians; they were regarded as foreigners and oppressors, and were hated for both reasons. The memory of the time of the famine faded, but the oppression remained; the people were practically in servitude to Pharaoh. At last the discontent broke out, and after a terrific conflict the Hyksos were driven out, and a new Dynasty, the eighteenth, began. It was a king of this Dynasty that knew not Joseph.

The Israelites, the descendants of Jacob, had come from Canaan; so had the Hyksos kings, though their origins were further north. They were therefore regarded as helpers of the defeated kings, and probable enemies if trouble broke out on the Syrian border. So the new king placed them under taskmasters, reducing them to a condition of serfdom, compelling them to make bricks and build store cities. Two of these are named, Pithom and Raamses. In Egypt such labour was of a severe character; the labourers had to work from morning to night, hastened on by the rods of overseers.

### *The birth of Moses*

As the people multiplied Pharaoh tried to keep their numbers down. He gave instructions to the midwives who attended on the Hebrew women to destroy every son that was born, but they refused to do so. Then he ordered his own people to throw every male Israelite child into the river to be drowned. This command was carried out, though it was evaded in at least one instance. Before the issue of the decree a man of the tribe of Levi, named Amrarn, had had two children, a girl named Miriam, and a boy named Aaron. Now his wife had another child, a boy, and the father and mother

did all they could to save the child's life. For a time they kept him hidden in the house, and, when they could no longer do this, the mother prepared an ark, or shrine, of bulrushes, covered it with pitch, and put her little son in it, placing the ark at a spot where Pharaoh's daughter was in the habit of going to bathe. Miriam was told to watch and see what happened.

Pharaoh's daughter came down to the Nile and when she saw the ark among the flags by the river's brink, she sent one of her attendants to fetch it. As soon as she saw the child she was touched; she knew it was a Hebrew baby, and she knew her father's command, but she determined to save the baby's life and to treat him as her own son. Miriam then came forward and asked if she should call one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby. When Pharaoh's daughter agreed Miriam fetched her mother, who thus became nurse to her own child. Pharaoh's daughter, whose name, probably, was Hatshepsut, gave him the name of Moses, because, she said, "I drew him out of the water." The name is very much like a part of that of her father—Tuthmoses.

Tended by his mother, Moses imbibed a knowledge of Israel's past history and of the promises. Brought up in the court of Pharaoh he was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, for young princes were taught everything that was likely to fit them to rule. For forty years he lived in the court, gaining knowledge and experience that were to help him in his later career. Yet he never forgot that he was a Hebrew, nor the great promises concerning the future of his nation.

### *Moses forced to leave*

When he was forty years of age he reached a crisis. Going out one day to see how his brethren were, he saw an Egyptian taskmaster smiting one of the Hebrews. Looking around to see if he was observed, he slew the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. He thought his brethren would have seen in this the first act in a series that would have resulted in their deliverance. On the following day he saw two Hebrews striving together. As he approached he said to the one in the wrong, "Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?" He was startled by the reply. "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? thinkest thou to kill me as thou killedst the Egyptian?" Moses realised that the thing was known; perhaps it had become common talk among the Hebrews. There was no time for reflection; he fled, and crossed the desert to the land of Midian.

When he arrived there he saw seven young women filling troughs with water for their flocks to drink. Some shepherds drove them away, but Moses intervened and enabled them to water the flocks at once. The incident led to his staying with the priest, the father of the seven, and to his marriage with one of them. He had left Egypt, as he thought, for good, rejected by his own countrymen. Yet he was to return and the time he spent in the land of Midian was a preparation for the great work of his life. Two sons were born to him; otherwise the days passed uneventfully in the solitude of the desert.

Meanwhile things were growing worse for the Israelites in Egypt. The action of Moses probably caused their bondage to be increased, and when yet another king ascended the throne the condition of the people grew worse than ever.



### *A miracle in the desert*

At the end of forty years a strange thing happened to Moses. He was at Horeb, tending the flocks of his father-in-law, when he saw a bush apparently on fire and yet not burned. Fascinated by the peculiar sight he approached the bush. As he drew near he heard a voice saying, "Moses, Moses."

Startled, he replied, "Here am I."

The voice continued, "Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place where thou standest is holy ground."

It was the Lord, speaking through an angel. The Voice continued, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, for I know their sorrows." He proceeded to tell of His purpose to give them the land of Canaan, and to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians. "Now," he said, "I will send thee unto Pharaoh that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt."

Moses was not prepared for such a commission. Forty years reflection had enabled him to realise the difficulty of the task he had been so ready to undertake before. He gave many reasons why he should not return to Egypt, and then asked Whom he should say had sent him. The answer he received was a remarkable one. The Voice said, "I will be Who I will be. Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, 'I will be hath sent me unto you'." It was a strange name, but wonderfully expressive to people who think. The usual rendering of the Hebrew, "I am that I am" is a poor expression beside it. "I am" asserts existence, "I will be" declares a purpose. When it reads "I will be Who I will be" it makes this known, and only God can declare a purpose and be perfectly sure of carrying it out. The first stage in the development of the purpose was the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

### *Moses' commission*

God did not tell Moses that his task was an easy one—quite the reverse. It was a difficult one, and the difficulties were of two kinds; firstly that of convincing a nation of slaves that deliverance was at hand, and, secondly, of persuading Pharaoh to let his slave population go. So God encouraged Moses by a series of signs. First He told him to throw his rod upon the ground where it became a living, writhing serpent, which reverted to a rod when he took it by the tail. His hand became leprous, and then clean again. He was told that if these signs were not sufficient for the Israelites, he was to take the water of the Nile and pour it out before them and it would become as blood. Still unconvinced Moses said, "Oh Lord, I am not eloquent; I am slow of speech."

"Who made man's mouth?" asked the Lord, "I will be with thy mouth."

Still he objected. "Oh Lord, send I pray thee by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send," as much as to say send any one but me. This made God angry, but He replied, "Is there not Aaron, thy brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well, and behold he cometh forth to meet thee."

At last Moses was convinced. He said farewell to his father-in-law, took his wife and two sons, and

started for Egypt. On the way a peculiar incident occurred. The Lord sought to kill him, it is said. Perhaps a serious illness threatened his life. Moses knew the reason. During his stay in Midian he had not carried out the ordinance that was the token of the covenant God had made with Abraham; neither of his children had been circumcised. So Zipporah, his wife, took a sharp flint, and circumcised her two sons, saying "A bridegroom of blood art thou." It dedicated them anew to God, and hallowed him for the great work he had to do. He proceeded on his way, and, as he had been told, Aaron met him, and together they proceeded to Egypt.

When Moses and Aaron arrived in Egypt they called for the elders of Israel and told them of the commission they had received, and showed the signs. The people believed the glad message; they bowed their heads and worshipped.

### *Let my people go*

Moses and Aaron then went to the Palace from which Moses had fled forty years before, and entered into the presence of Pharaoh. They stated their message. "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Let My people go that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness." It was not a very drastic demand, but Pharaoh rejected it. "Who is the Lord?" he said. He knew, or thought he knew, Amon-Ra and the many gods of Egypt; he knew nothing of the One God of Israel. They tried to reason with him, but without effect. Pharaoh charged them with encouraging the people to be idle; keeping a feast was only an excuse to leave their work. The result was an increase in the burdens of the people; they must find their own straw and yet make as many bricks as before. The taskmasters and officers urged on the people, and beat them unmercifully. Expostulation was in vain, the only reply was "Ye are idle; therefore ye say, Let us go and sacrifice." It was so different from what they had expected, that the people turned on Moses and Aaron, and Moses turned to God and told Him how badly things were going.

God was over-ruling affairs for something much greater than a sacrifice in the wilderness. He reminded Moses of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and said, "I am Jehovah your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will bring you into the land concerning which I lifted up My hand to give it to Abraham, and I will give it to you for a heritage." But the people were too distressed to listen; the bondage was harder than ever. Moses and Aaron entered the royal palace again, where Aaron cast down his rod and it became a serpent. The magicians of Egypt, who had remarkable powers (Egypt was the cradle of magic), cast down their rods, which also became serpents. As they gazed at the writhing creatures Aaron's serpent-rod swallowed all the rest. But Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to take heed to the sign. Later on God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but it was a heart that had been already hardened.

### *The Ten Plagues*

Next morning Moses went to the Nile to meet Pharaoh, and told him that unless he gave permission for Israel to go into the wilderness the waters of the land should be turned into blood. Pharaoh refused, and the Nile, and other waters of Egypt ran like blood, and the fish that were in them died. The magicians were able to perform a similar operation, and Pharaoh's heart remained hardened. For seven days the phenomenon continued. It was a terrible blow for Egypt, for the Nile

was worshipped as a god. The God of the despised Hebrews had caused the Nile-god to be an enemy to his worshippers.

Again Moses stood before Pharaoh and demanded permission for Israel to go and serve Yahweh.<sup>1</sup> Again Pharaoh refused, and as Aaron stretched out his rod frogs seemed to come from everywhere, covering the whole land, and invading the houses. Egypt had never seen the like. The magicians also provided frogs, or appeared to do so, yet Pharaoh was sufficiently impressed that he begged Moses to put an end to the plague, promising to allow Israel to go and sacrifice. When the frogs died they were gathered into great heaps and the whole land stank. But when the frogs went, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.

Aaron was next told to smite the dust of the land that it might become lice. It is probable that “lice” is an incorrect translation, and that what really came were vast swarms of gnats and mosquitoes which made life a misery. This time when the magicians tried to imitate Aaron they failed. They said, “This is the finger of God.” They were beaten, but Pharaoh was not; his heart was still hardened.

On the fourth occasion Moses met Pharaoh and repeated his demand for the people to be permitted to go and serve their God. If Pharaoh still refused the land would be filled with “swarms.” What they were to consist of was not stated. This time an additional sign was to be given; Egypt should swarm with noxious things, but the land of Goshen would be entirely free from them. The “swarms” came; they were probably made up of various insects, including the scarab, or dung-beetle, which the Egyptians worshipped. If the Egyptians killed the insects they killed their gods! Pharaoh hastily called for Moses and Aaron, “Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land,” he said. Moses pointed out that they could not do that, they would have to sacrifice the “abomination” of the Egyptians, and would be in danger of being stoned. The Egyptians worshipped the bull, the cow, and the ram, three animals usual in Israelitish sacrifices. Pharaoh yielded. “I will let you go, only ye shall not go very far away”; he said, “intreat for me.” So the plague ceased — and Pharaoh hardened his heart once more.

The fifth plague was a murrain on the cattle of the Egyptians. Again the land of Goshen was free. When this plague fell Pharaoh sent to enquire what had happened in Goshen, and found that not a single beast had died there. Even that did not move him; he still hardened his heart.

The plagues were increasing in severity. When the next fell Moses and Aaron took handfuls of ashes from the furnace and scattered them in the air, causing boils and blains to break out on men and beasts. The magicians were so affected by them that they could not stand before Moses. This time God hardened the heart of Pharaoh.

When Moses next met Pharaoh it was with a much sterner message. “Thus saith the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, Let My people go that they may serve Me. For I will this time send all My plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth.” He threatened that a very grievous hail should sweep through the

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<sup>1</sup> The name Yahweh, usually represented as Jehovah, or the LORD, is based upon the name given at the Bush. “I will be who I will be.”

land, destroying all the cattle that were in the fields and every form of vegetation. Many of the Egyptians removed their cattle from the fields that they might save them. The thunders crashed, the lightnings flashed, and storms of hail swept the land. Egypt had never experienced such a thing, and all the while the land of Goshen was free from the plague. Pharaoh was cowed this time. "Intreat the Lord, and I will let you go," he said, "ye shall stay no longer." But when the hail and the lightnings ceased he again hardened his heart, though part of Egypt's harvests for the year had been destroyed.

An eighth plague followed. Moses said, "Thus saith the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before Me? Let My people go that they may serve Me; else I will bring locusts into thy borders." It was a terrible threat; it meant ruin for Egypt. Pharaoh's servants were impressed; they begged their lord to let the men go. Their fears communicated themselves to Pharaoh, and he called for Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, serve the Lord your God; but who are they that shall go?" Moses' reply was very far-reaching. "We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds, will we go." Pharaoh was torn between two desires. He knew that if they went with all their possessions they would never return. If he refused to let them go, the locusts would come and eat up what remained of the harvests of the land. The vacillation of his mind was shown by his reply. "So be the Lord with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones; look to it; for evil is before you. Not so; go now ye that are men, and serve the Lord, for that is what ye desire." It was an incoherent reply, but Pharaoh showed what he meant by his action in driving Moses and Aaron from his court. So the locusts came; the whole land was darkened by them, and they devoured every vestige of vegetation that was in the country. Pharaoh was beaten. "I have sinned," he said, "against the Lord your God and against you." Then a strong wind carried the locusts away, and "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart." He had gone so far that he must follow his path of refusal to the bitter end.

A ninth plague followed. An intense darkness covered the land of Egypt, except the land of Goshen. For three days the whole life of the nation was at a standstill. It was terrible. The sun was the chief god of Egypt. As Amon-Ra he was supreme, but in this conflict with the God of the Hebrews he could do nothing, he could not even appear dimly through the darkness. Again Pharaoh called for Moses and told him that they might all go, all except their flocks and herds. But there was to be no compromise and no concession. "Our cattle shall go with us, there shall not a hoof be left behind," said Moses. Another hardening of heart followed. "Get thee from me," Pharaoh said, "take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in the day thou seest my face, thou shalt die." Moses replied, "Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more." He left in great anger; he had spoken his last word to Pharaoh, he never saw him again; the last plague came unannounced.

### *The Passover*

Before the last plague fell upon the land other events of importance took place. The Israelites were told to ask of their neighbours jewels of silver and jewels of gold and thus "spoil the Egyptians." They were to prepare for an instant departure from the land in a night when all the firstborn of the land of Egypt should be slain.

Special preparations were made for that night. It commenced an epoch, and the month in which it

took place became the first month in Israel's new calendar. Every household was to take a lamb which must be of the first year and be without blemish. If the family was too small for a lamb, two or more families were to join together. When the lamb was slain its blood was to be caught and sprinkled on the door posts and lintels of their houses. The whole of the lamb was to be eaten; anything that was left over was to be burned. The lamb had to be eaten with bitter herbs, and all who partook of it were to do so with their loins girded, their feet shod, and their staves in their hand.

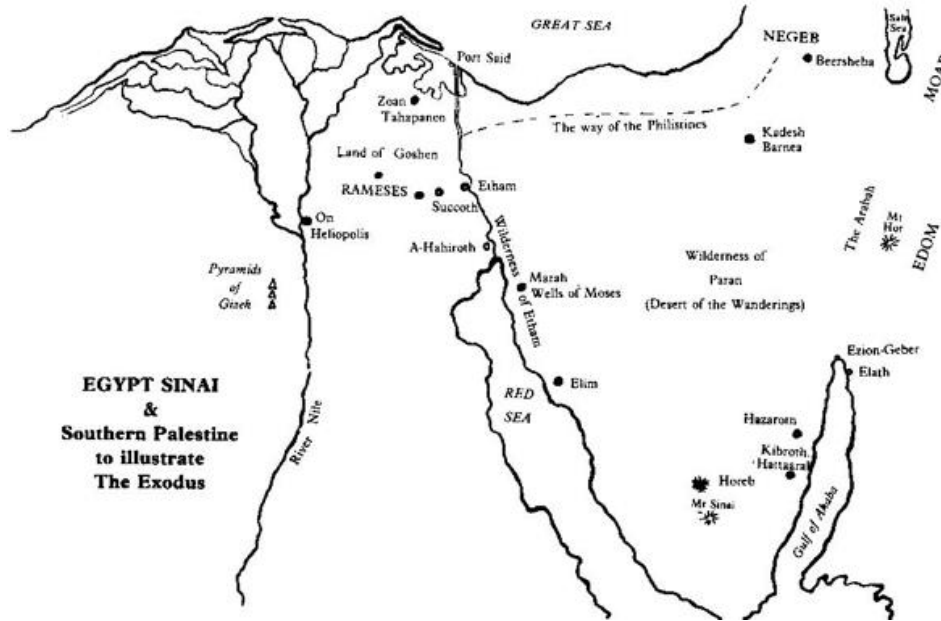
In the midst of these directions God gave Israel a warning of what He was about to do. "I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements." Only where the sprinkled blood was seen on the doorposts would there be safety. "When I see the blood I will pass over you." When Moses gave the instructions to the people he said, "The Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians, and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come into your houses to smite you."

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### *Death of the firstborn*

It was midnight. In Goshen the Israelites had slain their lambs, had sprinkled the blood as directed, and were ready to leave at a moment's notice. In the rest of Egypt most of the people were asleep, yet there must have been a sense of impending doom. They had gone through so much. Rumours of the terse words that Moses had addressed to Pharaoh must have passed from lip to lip. What did they portend? Why did not Pharaoh give way? Would they all have to die because of his obstinacy? "And it came to pass at midnight that the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of cattle; ... and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead." It was enough; the contest was over; Pharaoh was beaten.

He sent hastily to Moses and Aaron saying, "Rise up get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel, and go serve the Lord as ye said." There were no reservations now, all could go little ones and flocks and herds. He ended his message with a despairing cry, "Be gone, and bless me also!"



## CHAPTER VIII

### FROM THE EXODUS TO SINAI

IT is a night to be much observed unto the Lord for bringing them out from the Land of Egypt.” The Egyptians thrust their presents upon the Israelites as they left Goshen with their kneading troughs and unleavened dough bound up with their clothes. The event was deeply impressed on the national mind, and in the darkest days that followed, the memory of it was as a beacon light shining through the gloom. In the midst of the events of that night and day one memorial of it was incorporated into the legislation of the nation. The firstborn of Israel, whether of man or beast, were sanctified unto the Lord.

From Rameses the host marched to Succoth. Their destination was Canaan, but they avoided the direct route by Gaza. There were Egyptian garrisons on that road, and it was not desirable that any opposition should be encountered during the days that immediately followed, so they went towards the wilderness of the Red Sea. They did not go as a rabble of people; they marched in ranks like armed men, and they carried with them the bones of Joseph. In this way they went to Succoth, and thence to Etham in the edge of the wilderness. They were guided by a pillar of cloud, which assumed a luminous appearance at night, a pillar of fire, to give them light. It showed them that they were led by the Lord.

#### *The Egyptians destroyed*

They reached the shores of the Red Sea, where they encamped. News of their movements reached Pharaoh who had recovered from his panic, and regretted the loss of so many slaves. When he heard that they were by the Red Sea he gathered his chariotry together and started in pursuit. He knew there was no escape that way, they were “entangled in the land.” When his army drew near,

the Israelites realised the plight in which they were. They immediately lost faith and chided Moses for putting them in such a position, saying that it would have been better to have stayed in Egypt.

In these circumstances Moses showed the kind of man he was. “Stand still,” he said, “and see the salvation of the Lord. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” The pillar of cloud removed to the rear, giving light to Israel, but dense darkness to the Egyptians. As Moses stretched out his hand God caused a strong east wind to blow. It blew all night, and caused the bed of the sea to become dry land, and Israel passed safely over to the other side. That was “the salvation of the Lord.”

When the people of Israel had crossed, the Egyptians came to the edge of the sea and also attempted to cross. But the returning waters made the sea bed a quagmire and caused their chariots to roll heavily. Then the waters returned in full rush. The Egyptians tried to retrace their steps, but it was too late. Of all the array of chariotry that had started in pursuit, there remained not one. Israel were safe, and free. Moses sang an inspiring ode in memory of their deliverance, a song that has never been forgotten. It can be read in Exodus 15, with the refrain of Miriam and the women of Israel.

Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously,  
The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.

### *Bread from heaven*

After such a stupendous deliverance Israel should have been ready to face any difficulties. Yet as soon as they had reached the wilderness at Marah, where the water was bitter, they murmured. The bitterness was cured by casting in a tree that grew near by. Then they went to Elim where there were wells of water and palm trees. Afterwards they entered the Wilderness of Sinai where they murmured again. They forgot the hard bondage in Egypt, they remembered only the flesh pots. Now there was nothing to eat—why had they come?

God provided them with food, “angel’s food” it is called in one of the Psalms; the people called it manna. It tasted like wafers and wild honey. It had to be gathered every day, except on the Sabbath, as it would not keep from one day to the next, though that which was gathered on the sixth day kept fresh for the Sabbath. The glory of the Lord accompanied it on the first occasion, and the supply lasted till the wilderness journey was over. A pot of it was “laid up before the Lord” Even in this provision the contrariness of the people was manifested. Some gathered more than they required, thinking of the morrow; then it bred worms and stank. Others went out on the Sabbath and found none. They also murmured for water, and Moses was told to smite the rock, when water gushed out for the people to drink.

Soon afterwards their way was challenged by the Amalekites who came out against them. Joshua, the servant of Moses, was placed in charge of the host engaged in the fighting. As long as Moses held up his hands Israel prevailed, when his hands sunk through weariness Amalek prevailed. The difficulty was met by Aaron and Hur holding his hands up for him, and Amalek was defeated.

### *The Ten Commandments*

Three months after leaving Egypt the Israelites came to Sinai where they encamped. There God revealed Himself to them, and told them that if they obeyed His commandments they should be a peculiar treasure (a treasure acquired for a possession) unto Him, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In response to this the people answered, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." It was a momentous decision, the basis of a covenant which was afterwards made between God and Israel.

As they were gathered around Mount Sinai the Lord descended upon it in fire. Suddenly from the midst of the fire a Voice was heard; it was the voice of the Lord proclaiming the laws that formed the central feature of the covenant. In brief they may be summarised thus:

- I. Thou shalt have none other gods before Me.
- II. Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image.
- III. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
- IV. Remember the seventh day to keep it holy.
- V. Honour thy father and thy mother.
- VI. Thou shalt do no murder.
- VII. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- VIII. Thou shalt not steal.
- IX. Thou shalt not bear false witness.
- X. Thou shalt not covet.

Forty years afterwards Moses, referring to this occasion, said, "These words the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire ... and He added no more." No wonder when they heard the voice of God, and saw the awe inspiring scenes, they said to Moses, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us lest we die." Much was added to the law, statutes and ordinances of all kinds, but these were given through Moses, not by the audible voice of God.

Shortly afterwards God called to Moses to come up into the mount with Aaron and two of his sons, and seventy of the elders of Israel, though Moses alone was to approach near to the Lord. Then Moses wrote the words of the law and prepared an altar under the mount. Some of the "young men of the children of Israel," the firstborn, offered burnt and peace offerings to the Lord. Some of the blood was put in basins, and a portion of it was sprinkled on the altar. Then Moses took the book in which the covenant had been inscribed, and read the words of the Lord in the ears of the people, who again promised obedience. Then he took the rest of the blood that was in the basin and sprinkled it on the people, saying, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you." The story is becoming increasingly one of promises and covenants.

A remarkable incident followed. Moses, Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel had a vision of God, not amid mighty thunderings and flashing lightnings, but in peaceful beauty. Under His feet there was a pavement like a sapphire or a lapis lazuli, clear as the body of heaven, and there they ate and drank with God in the persons of His angels. It was a part of the ritual of covenant making. The peace of the occasion was symbolic of the future; they were guests of God. Afterwards Moses



went higher up the mountain, leaving Aaron and the rest to return to the plain.

The object of Moses' journey to the higher parts of the Mount was that he might receive two tables on which the Ten Commandments were engraved, further laws and ordinances, and the specification of a tabernacle that was to be prepared as the centre of the worship of God. All this time the glory of the Lord abode on the mountain; it was like devouring fire coming from the midst of a cloud. It must have been a time of ecstasy for Moses; for the rest of the community it was a time of test. There, with the representatives of Yahweh, Moses received the pattern of the tabernacle and its furniture, particulars of the offerings that were to take place there, and of the clothing the priests were to wear. When everything was arranged Moses and Joshua prepared to descend from the mount.

### *Idolatry*

All the time Moses had been in the mount nothing was heard of him by the people in the plains. The people, deprived of the presence of their leader, wondered what had happened to him. Gradually Questioning gave place to anxiety, and anxiety to fear. Suppose they were attacked? Nothing is more calculated to sap confidence than absolute and enforced inaction. At last they could stand it no longer. Their leaders came to Aaron saying, "Up, make us gods which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him."

Aaron made no attempt to argue with them; perhaps he too was anxious and worried. Had the devouring fire consumed his brother? So he told the people to break off the ear-rings from their ears, and of them he made a golden calf, using a graving tool to fashion it. They had already forgotten the words they had heard only a short time before, "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image." There was the calf, just like those they had seen in Egypt, and when Aaron said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt," the people accepted it, and the next day was appointed to be a feast to the Lord. Thus Israel were trying to mix two things that will not coalesce, the worship of idols and of the One True God. When the next day came they arose early to keep the feast and worship the golden calf. There was music and dancing, and the noise that accompanies the rejoicings of a crowd.

Moses was made aware of what had happened by God, Who told him that He purposed to destroy the people and make of Moses a greater nation. But Moses pleaded for Israel and God turned from His anger. Then Moses and Joshua came down to the plains. As they reached the lower slopes Joshua heard the noise in the camp. He heard it with the ear of a soldier. "There is a noise of war in the camp," he said. Moses knew better. Saddened, yet angry, he said, "It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, but the voice of them that sing do I hear." When they were closer and saw the people he threw down the tables of stone on which the commandments were written and broke them to pieces. Then he took the calf, ground it to powder, which he strawed on the water, and made the children of Israel to drink of it. He asked Aaron why he had done such a thing. Aaron's reply was a pitiful one. He told of the people's request and how he had obtained their golden ear-rings, and said, "Then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf." Surely it was the poorest excuse ever offered by a grown man.

It was no time for dallying. “Whoso is on the Lord’s side? let him come unto me,” said Moses. The tribe of Levi, his own tribe, responded. He commanded them to take their swords, go through the camp, and slay right and left. Three thousand men were killed.

### *Forgiveness*

On the morrow Moses addressed the sobered assembly. “Ye have sinned a great sin,” he said, “now I will go up unto the Lord, peradventure I shall make atonement for your sin.” He went, and his prayer for them was one of rugged eloquence. “Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold; yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin;—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written.” It was the simple prayer of a great man, who was ready to sacrifice himself for his people. Many centuries afterwards the Apostle Paul said a somewhat similar thing for the same nation.<sup>1</sup> God did not blot out the name of Moses from His “book,” it stands there in the book, or the story, as that of one of the greatest men who have ever lived, and when the story finds its sequel in the Kingdom of God, Moses will be among the greatest of those who will shine as the stars for ever and ever.<sup>2</sup>

It was necessary however to teach the people a lesson. The tent associated with the worship of God was removed to the outside of the camp. Solemn scenes took place at this crisis. Moses had passed through emotional experiences sufficient to cause any man to break down. He prayed that he might be shown how he might know God, and God promised that His presence should go with him. In response to this promise Moses gave expression to one of the outstanding truths of the Bible story. He said, “So shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.” It is a basic truth with many applications; the people of God must be separate from the world; in it, and among it, yet not of it.

The close communion that had been established led Moses to make a very bold request. “Show me, I pray thee, Thy glory,” he said. In reply God said, “Thou canst not see My face.” No man has seen God at any time. His Angels see Him, but He is beyond the powers of human sight, though by His Spirit, He is everywhere present. But God said, “There is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon the rock; and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand until I have passed by; and I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back, but My face shall not be seen.” At the same time God told Moses to prepare two stones to take the place of those he had broken, and to come up into the Mount alone. Moses went up and stood there. “And the Lord passed by before him.” As He did so He proclaimed His name and attributes. “Yahweh, Yahweh, El, full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children upon the third and upon the fourth generation.” It was a thrilling manifestation of the glory of the Lord, and it must have been the source of immense strength and encouragement to Moses in his difficult and arduous task.

One thing more must be noted. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Write thou these words; for after

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<sup>1</sup> See Romans 9:1-3.

<sup>2</sup> See Daniel 12:3.

the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.” It tells us something of the way in which the Bible story has been written, and it links it with the covenants of God.

### *The Tabernacle*

The rest of the first year was occupied in constructing the tabernacle. The materials were supplied by the people, who offered willingly of their substance, and placed themselves at the disposal of those who exercised the supervision of the work. The free will offerings were so abundant that the people had to be stayed from giving. By the end of the year the tabernacle was set up. The cloud, which had led Israel to Sinai, took up a position over the tent, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

All that can be done here is to describe the general appearance of the finished work. A visitor to the camp would have seen in the midst of an orderly array of tents, an enclosure, a hundred cubits long by fifty cubits wide.<sup>1</sup> It was separated from the people by hangings of fine linen, depending on brazen pillars filleted with silver, and was entered through a screen. Inside the enclosure were three things, an altar, a laver, and a tent. The altar was the one used for burnt offerings, where at the appointed times the priests offered the daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly sacrifices. Between it and the tabernacle was the laver in which the priests washed before entering the tent.

Over the tabernacle were curtains that protected it from the weather. First was a curtain of fine linen, blue, purple, and scarlet, embroidered with figures of cherubim. Above that was a covering of goats' skins, then one of rams' skins dyed red, and finally one of badgers' skins. All these were above the building itself, which was made of boards covered with gold, held together with pieces of wood that ran from end to end.

The tabernacle had a porch before it through which the priests passed into the first section, known as the Holy Place. Inside that there were three articles of furniture, a lightstand with seven branches, an altar on which incense was burned, and a table on which were placed twelve loaves, one for each of the tribes. Every evening as darkness fell the seven lamps on the lightstand were lit.

Between the Holy Place and the inmost sanctuary there was a veil made of blue, purple, and scarlet, with fine twined linen, embroidered with figures of cherubim. Lifting the veil aside, the Most Holy Place was entered. Within it was the ark of the covenant (a golden covered box containing the two stones of the law, a pot of manna, and, later, Aaron's rod), above which was the Mercy-seat, shadowed by the outstretched wings of the two golden Cherubim. There, from time to time, the glory of the Lord shone forth to signify the acceptance of the offerings for the people.

In and about the whole tabernacle the priests, clad in special garments, carried on the services, which varied according to the days. In his gorgeous robes, made “for glory and for beauty,” the High Priest was an imposing figure. There was much that was typical in all these things, but that is no part of the story itself; it has to be sought for by the interested enquirer.

Many laws and ordinances were given in connection with the services of the tabernacle and the

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<sup>1</sup> A cubit may be reckoned, roughly, at 1 foot 9 inches, though authorities differ as to the exact measurement.

conduct of the people, but these must be passed by. One notable incident took place soon after the tabernacle was finished. Two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, in the course of their duties, offered “strange fire” unto the Lord. Immediately they were struck dead by means of fire. It was a drastic lesson, and its importance is as great to-day as ever it was. So important was the lesson of the incident that Aaron was forbidden to show the customary mourning for the death of his sons. In the service of God men must offer, or do, just what He commands. Human thoughts cannot arrange the method of approach to Him He must be approached in the way He has provided, and no man can alter that. To-day the way is belief, repentance, baptism, and a general obedience to God’s commands. Any way that does not include these things is like offering strange fire on the altar.

One other principle connected with the tabernacle must be noted. It is the place of blood in all the sacrifices. The “blood of sprinkling” has been mentioned in connection with the Passover. In relation to the sacrifices it is said, “The life of all flesh is in the blood thereof.” It was not the mere shedding of blood that was taught by the sacrifices. It pointed to “the precious blood of Jesus Christ,” and it indicated that it is the life that matters, for when blood was poured out before God, it signified that He desired the life of those who would serve Him to be dedicated to His service. Any emphasis laid on the shedding of blood, to the exclusion of the importance of the life of the worshipper, is a great mistake.

## CHAPTER IX

### FROM SINAI TO THE DEATH OF MOSES

IN earlier days the firstborn had acted as the priest of the family, but the organisation of the people as a nation, and the institution of a set form of worship with many rites and ceremonies, made a special priesthood necessary. The response of the tribe of Levi to the question, “Who is on the Lord’s side?” marked them out as the ones for this service, and they were dedicated to that purpose. God said, “Thou shalt take the Levites for Me instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel.”

As the days passed the people began to murmur again. They had tired of the manna; to eat it day after day was too monotonous. They thought of the flesh they had eaten in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, and the garlic. The mixed multitude who had accompanied them, were particularly loud in their complaints, they wanted flesh to eat. God provided flesh; a strong wind brought huge flights of quails, which flew so low that they could be caught as they flew, wearied by their struggle with the wind. All night and all the next day the people gathered them. But when they had partaken of them a plague broke out and great numbers of the people died.

Moses’ life must have been an anxious one. Even Aaron and Miriam spoke against him on account of Ethiopian woman whom he had married. They were both rebuked by God, and Miriam was stricken with leprosy, which was only healed on the intercession of Moses. It was on this occasion that God spoke of Moses in a very remarkable way, saying, “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, I will speak with him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so; he is faithful in all Mine house; with him will I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches, and the form of the Lord shall be behold.” Fifteen hundred

years afterwards these words assumed an important significance when a prophet like unto Moses appeared before the people of Israel.<sup>1</sup>

### *Spying out the land*

At the suggestion of the people<sup>2</sup> twelve spies were sent to see the land to which they were going, to report on its produce, the people who dwelt there, and the sort of fortifications that guarded the cities they would have to capture. For forty days the spies journeyed through the land. On their return they brought, among other things, a specimen of the grapes of the country, a cluster so large that it had to be borne on a staff. The land, they said, was a good land; it flowed with milk and with honey, but the people of the land troubled them. There were giants among them, and they dwelt in cities that were walled and very strong. The goodness of the land was ignored, and the wonders of God's dealings in the past were forgotten. In vain two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, sought to still the fears of the people and to reason with them. It was no use. Suddenly the glory of the Lord shone in the pillar of cloud on the tabernacle. In a moment all was stilled, as God spoke to Moses threatening to send a pestilence among the people.

Once more Moses acted as an intercessor, and God's response to his appeal is one of the outstanding statements in God's Story. "I have pardoned," he said, "according to thy word; but as truly as I live all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> Note the surety, as truly as God lives!—God Who is from everlasting to everlasting, and Who inhabiteth eternity! So surely as He lives all the earth shall be filled with the glory of God. Centuries have passed since the words were spoken, and the earth has not been filled with the glory of the Lord. It cannot be so until the Seed of Abraham sits in the gate of his enemies, Lord of all the earth, when all the evil associated with sin shall be purged from the earth.

### *Faithless rebellion*

The generation that rejected the advice of Joshua and Caleb was not to be associated with any such results. They had despised the words and the power of God, and they had to bear the results of their conduct. Forty days had led to such a discouraging report; forty years were to be spent in the wilderness. During that time the spies and the faithless people were to fall in the wilderness. Only two adults escaped that fate, Caleb and Joshua.

When this punishment was announced the people refused to believe it, and proceeded to take matters into their own hands. They invaded the country of the Amalekites, but were defeated, and they sorrowfully realised that for forty years they must wander in an inhospitable land. Of that forty years of disgrace and punishment little is known. The route they followed is recorded, and the camping places are named, but that is all except references to a few happenings which must be narrated.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Acts 7:37.

<sup>2</sup> See Deut. 1:22-25.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from the A.V.

The first was the rebellion of Korah. In the encampment of the people around the tabernacle, the tribe of Reuben pitched near the Kohathite section of the Levites. Korah, a Levite, resented the position which had been assigned to him in the service of the tabernacle. Reuben was the firstborn of Jacob, and the tribe resented the comparatively unimportant place it occupied in the camp. So a party was formed, headed by the envious Korah and two leaders of the disgruntled tribe. Two hundred and fifty princes joined them; they seem to have been some of the firstborns who had occupied so important a place in the national organisation before the choice of the Levites.

At last the discontent broke out. "Ye take too much upon you," the leaders said to Moses and Aaron, "all the congregation are holy." Moses was very angry, but he appointed the following day for a test by which the Lord would indicate whom He chose. On the morrow the test took place. Korah and his company, with Aaron, and the two hundred and fifty princes attended, each having his censer in his hand. (The fact that the "princes" possessed censers suggests that they had been connected with the priestly functions in the past). When they had assembled round the door of the tabernacle, the glory of the Lord shone forth, and a voice spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them." Once more Moses acted as intercessor. "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin and wilt Thou be wroth with all the congregation?" The voice spoke again. "Speak unto the congregation saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram." With anxious forebodings the people did so. As the three men and their families stood there Moses said, "If these men die the common death of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, ... then ye shall understand that these men have despised the Lord." As the people looked the earth opened her mouth, and Korah and his friends, and all that pertained to them, perished, whilst the fire of the Lord consumed the two hundred and fifty princes that offered incense. Next day the discontent broke out again. They charged Moses with killing the people of the Lord, as though he had caused the earth to open and swallow them up. At once a plague broke out, a plague that was only stayed by the intervention of Moses and Aaron, the latter of whom took incense and made atonement for the people.

The rebellion of Korah was an opportunity to vindicate the position of Aaron. The prince of each tribe was told to bring a rod, which, together with that of Aaron, was placed in the tabernacle before the Lord. When they were examined next morning the rod of Aaron had budded and brought forth almonds. The rod was placed in the ark of the covenant as a silent witness to the choice of Aaron and his family to act as priests.

The forty years drew to an end and Miriam died in Kadesh, where again there was no water for the people to drink, and Moses was told to take his rod and speak to a rock that it should give water. Moses and Aaron gathered the people together to witness the miracle. But Moses erred, and instead of speaking to the rock he spoke to the people. "Hear now, ye rebels," he said, "shall we bring you forth water out of this rock?" as he struck the rock twice, and the waters gushed out. It was a lack of faith on Moses' part, he "believed not to sanctify" God, and it was a complete failure to magnify the God of Israel; he spoke as if he and Aaron were givers of the water. The people's thirst was quenched, but Moses paid heavily for his mistake. He was not to lead the people into the Promised Land. No one can omit to sanctify God without paying a penalty for such a failure.

### *The brazen serpent*

Now the journey was nearly over, the forty years had almost gone, and Israel had reached Mount Hor, on the edge of the land. There, on Mount Hor, Aaron died and was buried. After thirty days mourning for the dead High Priest the people continued their way. They found this last portion of the journey a terribly hard one. The king of Edom refused to let them pass through his country and they had to go around it. The hardships of the way caused more murmurings. This time punishment came by a visitation of fiery serpents. Multitudes of the people died, but Moses was instructed to make a serpent of brass and place it on a pole. Anyone who had been bitten by a serpent and then gazed at the brazen serpent as it was lifted up, was healed. This was another thing that found a much greater meaning fifteen hundred years afterwards.<sup>1</sup>

When Edom refused to allow Israel to pass through his land the host turned northward to the country of the Amorites. Here they were not only refused passage, but the king, Sihon, came out against them to battle. He was defeated and Israel took possession of his land. Then Og, the king of Bashan, came against them, and met with a similar fate, and at last Israel had a territory of their own, though not in the land they were seeking.

### *Israel blessed*

The triumph of Israel made Balak the king of Moab realise his danger. Against a people who had gained such victories he could do nothing. Away in Pethor there was a prophet named Balaam, who was reputed to be a man of wonderful powers, and Balak sent for him to come and curse Israel. At first Balaam refused. He wanted to go, for great riches were offered as an inducement, but God told him he was not to go. Balak then sent more princes and, at last, Balaam agreed to go. He quieted his conscience because God had said that if they called him he might go. The wages of unrighteousness were too alluring to be resisted, and even a rebuke from his ass, and one from an angel who came to withstand him, did not really influence him. Finally God told him that he might go, but that he was only to say that which God told him.

In the hands of the Spirit of God Balaam could not help himself. Four times he blessed the people whom Balak had hired him to curse. The incident illustrates a truth expressed long afterwards, that prophecy is not from man but from the Holy Spirit. But if an evil man, under the Spirit of prophecy, could not speak the words he desired to utter he could give advice that was likely to lead to the results desired. A religious feast was held in Moab. Such events were associated with much licentiousness, and the men of Israel fell into the trap. The attraction of the women of Moab was too much for them; they joined them in worship and in the orgies of the festival. Moses gave instructions that all who had taken part in the heathen rites were to be killed, and Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, earned a special commendation by killing a prince of the tribe of Simeon and a Midianitish woman whom he had brought into the camp. War was declared against the Midianites, and in the course of the fighting Balaam was slain.

By the conflicts which had taken place a considerable territory east of the Jordan fell into the hands

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<sup>1</sup> See John 3:14.

of the Israelites. It was a land suitable for pasturage, and two of the tribes, Reuben and Gad, and a part of another, Manasseh, had large possessions of flocks and herds. They asked for permission to settle in these countries; Moses granted their request on condition that they left their women and children, with their flocks and herds, in the strongholds of the land, while the fighting men went over Jordan to help their brethren to conquer their inheritance.

The time had now come for Moses to die. He had lived a long, active, and interesting life. He had been associated with the great movement that was to establish Israel in the land promised to Abraham in which they were to be the Kingdom of God. Like all men he made mistakes, and he had to pay the penalty. Before he did so he gave a final address to the people. He recited the laws, and told them that God would at some time in the future choose a place which should be the centre of their national worship.<sup>1</sup> He promised great blessings if they were faithful to God, and warned them of the terrible things that would happen if they turned to the idols of the nations. The great evils would culminate in their being scattered among all the nations of the earth, though even there they should find no ease, but experience trembling of heart, failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind. History has only too well shown what such predictions meant.

### *Moses' death*

One of the most striking statements made by Moses on this occasion was, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me." He told them that God would put His words into the mouth of this Prophet and added, "It shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto My words which he shall speak in My name, I will require it of him." These words found a wonderful significance some fifteen hundred years afterwards when Jesus, the Prophet like unto Moses, actually appeared.

Moses finished his address with the repetition of a song in which he set forth the purpose God had in His dealings with Israel, and pronounced a blessing on each of the tribes. When he had finished he went to the top of Pisgah to view the land he was not to enter. There it lay before him as a great panorama with all its variegated characteristics. It was, as he himself said, "a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven; a land which the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." Having satisfied his eyes with the beauty of the scene, the old man lay down to die. The angels of God buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, "and no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day."

He was a hundred and twenty years old. Forty years had been spent in Egypt gaining experience in governing people. Forty had been passed in the desert where he could commune in quietness with his God. The last forty had been spent in the great task of leading Israel out of Egypt. Finally he died in sight of the goal of his desires. There he sleeps until the God of the spirits of all flesh shall call him to enter the land which he saw but could not enter.

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<sup>1</sup> See Deut. 12:5 etc., and page 152-3.





### *Rahab and the spies*

Joshua commenced his leadership by sending two men to view the land. Immediately across the Jordan was the city of Jericho, and there the two men lodged in the house of a harlot named Rahab. The king of the city sent to fetch them, but Rahab, whose house was on the town walls, hid them on the roof, covered them with flax, and told the king's messengers that they had already left. When the messengers had gone she went up to the spies and told them that the fear of Israel had seized all the people of the district. Reports had reached them of the happenings in Egypt forty years before. In return for her help they promised that her life, and the lives of her relatives should be spared. She was to place a scarlet thread in her window so that they might recognise the house and spare all who were therein. Three days later the men returned to Joshua with the news that "all the inhabitants of the land do melt away because of us."

### *Crossing the Jordan*

Preparations were then made for crossing the Jordan. The priests were to bear the ark, and the people were to follow. As soon as the feet of the priests were dipped in the brink of the water, the waters rose up as a heap "a great way off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan," while those that flowed to the Dead Sea failed and were cut off, thus allowing the people to cross over the bed of the river. News of this event travelled through the country, and the inhabitants of Jericho and the districts around realised that God was working for Israel. Before the Jordan re-commenced its flow twelve stones were taken from the bed of the river and placed on the west side in a circle, at a place called Gilgal, a name which means a wheel or a circle, to be a perpetual reminder of the crossing of the river.

Safely across, an important ceremony took place. Circumcision, the token of the covenant made with Abraham, had not been practised during the wilderness journey. It was necessary for it to be performed now, for all that was to follow was related to that covenant. As in the case of the circumcision of the sons of Moses sharp flints were used. After the rite had been performed it was said, "I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you." It was a play on the name "Gilgal" which thus obtained a double significance. Simultaneously with this event the supply of manna ceased.

Before the people advanced against Jericho Joshua saw a man beside him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua asked whether he were for them or for their enemies. His answer was startling, "Nay, but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come." Joshua recognised him as an angel, but nothing is recorded of what was said or done on the occasion.

### *The fall of Jericho*

The siege of Jericho is one of the most peculiar episodes in the history of war. The army of Israel, with a company of priests carrying the ark of the covenant and seven trumpets made of rams' horns, encompassed the city in silence once every day for six days. On the seventh day they

marched round the walls seven times; then at a given signal, the priests blew with the trumpets and the people gave a great shout, “and it came to pass that the wall fell down flat.” We know now that the wall fell outwards so that the invaders might more easily enter the city. One part of it escaped, the portion where the house of Rahab stood, and where her father and kinsfolk were gathered. All the rest of the inhabitants were destroyed, and the city was burned. Later on Rahab was married to Salmon of the tribe of Judah, and became an ancestress of Jesus of Nazareth.

Before the fall of Jericho, Joshua had proclaimed all the city to be devoted to the Lord; and that all the spoil was to be placed in the treasury. He also pronounced a curse on anyone who attempted to rebuild the city.

Jubilant at the outcome of the first siege the Israelites went into the hill country to Ai. Confident of success only a portion of the armed men were used. Their confidence was misplaced, for they were defeated and driven back with loss. Joshua was dismayed; a reverse at this stage was likely to undo the effect of the crossing of the Jordan and the capture of Jericho. He fell on his face before the Lord. Then he learned the reason for the reverse; he was told “Israel hath sinned, they have transgressed My covenant; yea, they have even taken of the devoted thing.”

The culprit was identified by lot, which finally fell on Achan of the tribe of Judah. Thus identified, Achan confessed that he had taken a wedge of gold, two hundred shekels of silver, and a Babylonish garment, and had hidden them in his tent. He had stolen that which belonged to God, and he, and all his, were stoned at a spot named the Valley of Achor (troubling). Seven hundred years later the prophet Hosea told of a time when the Valley of Achor should become a door of hope for the people of Israel.<sup>1</sup>

The sin of Achan having been punished Ai was again attacked. This time stratagem was employed and the city was taken; it was burned and the whole of its inhabitants were put to the sword.

The fall of Jericho and Ai gave Israel a position in the country, and Joshua moved to Mount Ebal, where he erected an altar to the Lord. He inscribed a copy of the law of Moses (probably the ten Commandments) on stones. Then in a great assembly of the people he read the law from the book that Moses had written, and the blessings and cursings which Moses had pronounced on the obedient and disobedient respectively. It was a solemn dedication of the nation to be the people of God in the land that had been promised to their fathers.

### *Victory*

The news of the fall of Jericho and Ai caused consternation in the country. The next cities on the direct route from Ai were Gibeon and certain cities that were confederate with it. They dared not challenge the might of Joshua, so they sought to beguile him. The elders of the cities came to Gilgal, whither he had returned, wearing old garments, and carrying old wineskins, and bread that was dry and mouldy. They said they had come from a far country and desired to enter into a covenant with Israel. Totally deceived, Joshua and the elders of Israel made a covenant with them.

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea 2:15.

Three days afterwards they found that they were near neighbours; their cities were north-west of Jerusalem. Joshua remonstrated with them, but the oath that had been taken had to be respected, and the Gibeonites and their allies were made to be hewers of wood and drawers of water for the people and for the service of the tabernacle.

Gibeon was a great city, and the covenant that had been made between it and Israel made a deep impression on the kings of Southern Canaan. The kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon, combined to make war against Gibeon and its sister cities, whose leaders sent an urgent appeal to Joshua for assistance. Joshua responded, adopting methods that were characteristic of him. He left Gilgal by night and marched eighteen miles from the depths of the valley to the mountains of Judea, and falling unexpectedly on the assembled armies, gained a decisive victory. As the armies of the kings fled down the roads that led westward a violent thunderstorm broke out, and “the Lord cast down great stones from heaven ... they were more which died with the hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew.” Anxious to lose none of the advantage of the victory Joshua said,

Sun, stand thou still (or, be silent) upon Gibeon,  
And thou moon in the Valley of Aijalon.

“And the sun stayed in the midst of heaven” until Israel had finished the slaughter of their enemies. The victory gave Israel the undisputed supremacy of the southern portion of the land. They held positions of strategical importance from which they could not be dislodged. Several other towns were taken and destroyed, and Joshua returned to the camp at Gilgal.

In the north a still greater coalition was arranged against Israel. There were the kings of Hazor, Madan, Shimron, Achsaph, “all the kings in the mountains and the plains,” as far as Mount Hermon. When their hosts were gathered together they were “as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude,” and they had great numbers of chariots and horses. Tidings of the new threat reaching Gilgal, Joshua went by forced marches and suddenly fell upon the assembled hosts. He gained another overwhelming victory, and the various sections of the enemy army fled in all directions. City after city was destroyed; the only ones that escaped were those that “stood on their mounds,” that is, the fortified cities on the heights above the plain of Esdraelon.

Thus by the capture of two cities, and the defeat of two confederations, Israel obtained practical possession of the Promised Land. There was much more to be done to secure the peaceable occupation of the country, but the land was, to all intents and purposes, won. The great fact which stands out is that the Lord fought for Israel, and that as a result they were invincible.

### *Dividing the land*

Joshua's work as a soldier was over, though there remained much land to be possessed. But there was another necessary task to be done, one for a statesman and an organiser. The conquest of the land brought many problems. The division of the land between the tribes was a difficult matter, which might have given rise to feelings of jealousy. The tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh had received the land they desired on the east side of the Jordan. Levi was to have no inheritance, they were to be sustained by the people in return for the religious services they

performed. There were nine and a half tribes to be considered. In the conflicts of the past the territory of Judah and that of the sons of Joseph had been fixed—Judah in the south, Ephraim and the other half tribe of Manasseh in the central portion of the land. The possession of Judah was influenced by a promise that had been made to Caleb under which he was given possession of Hebron, and, as he was of the tribe of Judah, it followed that their inheritance must be in the south. The Joseph tribes were very numerous, and complained that their inheritance was not sufficient for them. Joshua told them they must take the additional land they required, driving out the Canaanites who dwelt in it.

The leading tribes having been provided for, the question of the rest had to be determined. A great assembly was held at Shiloh, to which place the tabernacle had been removed from Gilgal. There Joshua addressed them. “How long are ye slack to go in to possess the land which the Lord the God of your fathers, hath given you?” He then directed them to choose out three men from each tribe who should go through the land not already appropriated, describing it by its cities in a book, and dividing it into seven parts. The results of their survey were to be brought to him at Shiloh, where he would cast lots before the Lord for their possessions. Such a course would prevent feelings of jealousy, or charges of favouritism. The work was carried through, and the tribes of Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulon, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan, were given their territories. Joshua received an inheritance for himself in Mount Ephraim, where he built a city.

There remained the question of the possessions of the Levites. As the teachers, and the religious workers, of the nation it was not desirable to give them a portion of the land like that of the other tribes. They were needed everywhere to teach the people in the ways of God. The necessity was met by assigning them forty-eight cities in the territories of the various tribes.

One thing more remained to be done. Moses had given instructions that cities of refuge were to be provided, so that any one who killed another unwittingly might flee thither and find “refuge” from the avenger of blood. It was a necessary provision in those days. One city was to be situate in each of the six geographical divisions of the land, three on each side of the Jordan. They appointed Kedesh in Galilee, Shechem in the centre of the land, and Hebron in the south, and on the east of the river, Bezer in the wilderness, Ramoth in Gilead, and Golon in Bashan. These were Levitical cities, for it was necessary for them to be in the hands of men who knew the Law, and were uninfluenced by tribal feeling.

### *Joshua's final address*

Joshua's work was nearly done. He summoned the men of the two and a half tribes whose possessions lay on the east of the Jordan. They had carried out the bargain they had made to help their brethren in the conquest of the land. Now they could return to their families and possessions. In a farewell address Joshua charged them to take heed to keep the law which Moses had commanded them, to love the Lord their God, to walk in all His ways, and to serve Him with all their heart and with all their soul.

The two and a half tribes crossed the Jordan to reach their homes. Before they crossed, they erected a great altar by the river. News of this reached the rest of the people, who regarded it as a departure from the Lord, whose altar was in the tabernacle enclosure. They pursued the two and a half tribes

purposing to fight against them, for their action seemed a rejection of the one thing that bound the twelve tribes together—the worship of Yahweh, the God of Israel. When they came to Jordan the eastern tribes gave an explanation of their action. The altar was not for sacrifice; it was a memorial. Instead of being an indication of the rejection of the worship of Yahweh it was a witness that the people were one in family and in worship. “Yahweh, El Elohim, Yahweh, El Elohim,” the eastern tribes said, “He knoweth, and Israel, he shall know, if it be in rebellion, or if in trespass against the Lord, that we have built up an altar.” The solemn repetition of three names of the Deity, and the assurance of the object for which the altar had been made, were grateful tidings to the rest of the tribes, who returned to their homes well content with the unity of the nation in the worship of the One True God.

Joshua was now an old man. Once more he called the people to him; this time at Shechem. He exhorted them to do all that was written in the Book of the law of Moses. He reminded them that in the past their ancestors had worshipped other gods, and that the One God had made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He recounted the history of the deliverance from Egypt and the conquest of the land, and finished with these words, which are characteristic of the man. “Choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River (i.e. the Euphrates), or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” When the people replied that they would serve the Lord he pointed out the seriousness of their undertaking. Yahweh was a jealous God; if they forsook Him after electing to serve Him, He would do them hurt. Again they replied, “Nay, but we will serve the Lord.” Then Joshua made a covenant with them, and established a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. Finally he wrote a record of the event in the book of the law of God.

Joshua died at the age of a hundred and ten years, leaving a great example to guide the people in the future.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE TIMES OF THE JUDGES

ALTHOUGH the objects of the invasion had generally been attained, due partly to the strategy of Joshua, but more to the help of God, the conquest was by no means complete. The next chapter in the Bible Story emphasises this fact and shows the results that followed. The results were not apparent during the times of Joshua and the elders who had been associated with him; they exercised a good influence to which the nation generally responded.

When Joshua died the need for further progress was realised, and efforts were made to consolidate the gains that had been achieved. Those efforts were far from complete. Thus Judah, while successful in various quarters “could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had chariots of iron.” Of Benjamin it is said, they “did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem.” Further north the same tendency was seen. Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean, Tanaach, Dor, Ibleam and Megiddo, neither did Ephraim drive out the inhabitants of Gezer. In the far north the story was just the same, for Zebulon, Asher, and Naphtali all failed to accomplish the clearance of the territories assigned to them. It was a calamity, for the failure had

disastrous effects, yet it was understandable. The places which these tribes failed to take were the strongly fortified cities that commanded the great roads and important districts of Canaan, whose inhabitants were well armed. Israel settled down to enjoy the land they had conquered.

### *Slipping back*

A rebuke from an angel made little impression. They came to more or less definite understandings with the earlier inhabitants and gradually fell into the ways of the peoples around, joined with them in marriage, and forsook the worship of Yahweh. The result was some centuries of confusion, during which the general condition of the people was that every man did that which was right in his own eyes. The book of Judges is a record of failures and reformatations as they successively took place. It is a series of episodes rather than a history.

The first of their oppressors was Cushan-rishathaim of Mesopotamia, under whom they were oppressed eight years. From this oppression they were delivered by Othniel, the son of a brother of Caleb, who introduced a peaceful period of forty years.

At the end of that time the conditions changed, and the king of Moab held them in subjection for eighteen years. They achieved deliverance from this oppression through Ehud, a Benjamite. He took a present, probably the stipulated tribute, to the king of Moab, and, under the pretext that he had a secret message, secured a private interview with the king and assassinated him. The death of the king ended the supremacy of Moab, and a rest of eighty years followed.

On the next occasion trouble arose in the north where Jabin ruled in Hazor. His title, “king of Canaan,” shows how precarious was the hold on the country exercised by the Israelites. Jabin was a powerful ruler with great military resources, including nine hundred chariots of iron; the most effective form of offence in those days. For twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel. On this occasion a woman came to the help of the people— Deborah, a prophetess. She could not act as a military commander, and she chose Barak, a man of Naphtali, to act on her behalf. At her instigation he went to Mount Tabor with ten thousand men. Deborah accompanied them, for Barak refused to go unless she did so.

### *Deborah and Barak*

When Jabin heard that the Israelites had gathered an army (actually there were only men from two tribes, Naphtali and Zebulun) he sent Sisera with nine hundred chariots and all his army to put down the insurrection, as he esteemed it. The position of Barak was well chosen; for chariots could not act on a mountain. Then it seemed as if Deborah and Barak made a mistake, they moved down from the mount into the plain. It was not a mistake, but a divinely directed movement. In a great song of victory that was sung afterwards Deborah said,

“They fought from heaven;  
The stars in their courses fought against Sisera,  
The River Kishon swept them away,  
That ancient river, the River Kishon.”

A terrific thunderstorm broke out, with a deluge of hail and rain. It turned the Kishon into a seething torrent, and the plain of Esdraelon into a quagmire. No chariots could manoeuvre on such ground, and Sisera left his and fled. It was not a defeat but a rout. Famished and weary, Sisera sought refuge in the tent of a woman of the Kenites. She gave him food and drink, and, as he lay asleep, drove a tent-peg through his temples, fastening him to the ground. Israel was delivered and the land had rest for forty years.

The old tendency set in again. Baal worship gained a place among the people, and their own God was forgotten. This time they were given into the hands of the Midianites. It was not so much a subjection to a foreign power; but the occurrence of a series of raids in which the produce of the fields was taken away by roving bands of Midianites. So regular did the practice become that the people had to find hiding places for their harvests in the dens and caves of the country.

### *Gideon*

Then the Lord sent a prophet with a call to repentance. It found at least one who was ready to listen—Gideon, the son of Joash, of the tribe of Manasseh. As he was threshing wheat in a winepress an angel appeared to him and said, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.” It was a strange greeting in the circumstances, and Gideon replied, “Oh my Lord, if the Lord is with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all His wondrous works which our fathers told us of?” His words showed that the great events of the past had not been forgotten, and that there was a longing for further manifestations of God’s care for His people.

The angel encouraged Gideon to undertake the deliverance of Israel. Speaking in the name of the Lord, he said, “Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites.” The position of Israel was so desperate that Gideon asked to be given a sign. He prepared a kid and unleavened cakes and placed them on a rock. The angel touched them with his staff and vanished, as a flame burst forth and consumed them. Gideon erected an altar to the Lord, and during the night he and his servants broke down the altar of Baal, and cut down the Asherah (a tree or a conventional representation of a tree) which he burnt on the altar he had made. Next morning, when the people saw what had been done consternation seized them; they regarded it as sacrilege, and called on Joash to bring out his son that he might be killed. There was fine irony in his reply, “Will ye plead for Baal? Will ye save him?” If Baal were a god he could look after himself. The logic of the reasoning was unanswerable, and when Gideon issued a call, all the men of the place responded. From farther away also they came, from Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. The Midianites gathered their forces and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.

They were a great company, and Gideon felt the need for a further sign. He put a fleece of wool on the floor and prayed that it might be wet with dew and the earth around be dry—and so it was. Then he reversed the request, and the fleece was dry while all the ground was wet.

Thirty-two thousand men had responded to Gideon’s call, but God told him they were too many. He issued a proclamation that all who were faint-hearted might return to their homes, and his force was reduced to ten thousand. Still they were too many, and Gideon was told to take them to the water and to notice the way they drank. Three hundred lapped, the rest went down on their knees to



drink. Then he was told, "By the three hundred that lapped will I deliver the Midianites unto thine hand."

That night Gideon and his servant went into the camp of the Midianites. As they crept through they heard a man of Midian telling of a dream. He saw a cake of barley bread roll against a Midianite tent and level it to the ground. His fellow said, "This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon; God hath delivered Midian and all the host into his hands." Greatly encouraged Gideon returned to his three hundred and prepared for the battle.

He divided the three hundred into three companies. To each man he gave a trumpet, a pitcher, and a torch, which was placed inside the pitcher. The three companies approached the Midianites from three sides. The watch had been newly set in the camp, and they must have been greatly puzzled when they saw in the darkness a hundred columns of light approaching from three separate directions. Suddenly three hundred pitchers crashed to the ground, three hundred trumpets were blown, and three hundred voices shouted "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." Roused up from sleep in the darkness, and seeing the flashing lights of torches in the hands of the three hundred, a panic seized the Midianites and they fled pell mell, killing each other in the confusion. The defeat was complete and again Israel was delivered. Gideon was not wholeheartedly received by some of the people, but a combination of severity and good humoured flattery gained their goodwill to such an extent that the people suggested that he should be made king and inaugurate an hereditary monarchy.

This incident was the first indication of a feeling that was growing up in Israel. Moses had exercised the powers of a king, but had never even suggested that he should occupy such a position. He had ruled for God, for Israel was the Kingdom of God. The Judges had been subordinate rulers, not kings. Gideon refused the proffered honour. As a true patriot, who recognised that God was the king of Israel, he answered, "The Lord shall rule over you." He made one mistake, he asked for the golden earrings they had taken from the Midianites, and of them he made an ephod. It became a sacred object, and proved a snare to him and to his house. So long as he lived, however, Israel prospered, then once more they turned after Baalim. (Baalim is the plural of Baal.)

### *More trouble*

The death of Gideon caused a complete change in the country. One of his sons, named Abimelech, the son of a concubine, a woman of Shechem, persuaded the men of that city to support his claim to rule over the country. With the money they provided he hired a number of followers and slew the other sons of his father, of whom only one escaped. Abimelech reigned for three years, the first king in the history of Israel. Then trouble broke out between him and the men of Shechem. They found a champion in one named Gael. The insurrection was put down, but in the course of the fighting Abimelech was killed. So ended the first attempt to turn Israel into a kingdom.

After the death of Abimelech a number of comparatively unknown individuals became judges, Israel all the while serving Baal and other heathen deities. Retribution overtook them at the hands of the Ammonites and the Bedouin people who lived in the east. They invaded the country as far as the territory of Benjamin, and Israel was in sore distress.

East of the Jordan was the land of Gilead, and among the people who lived there was Jephthah, who had been driven out by his brothers because he was illegitimate. He was “a mighty man of valour” and had become the head of a band of marauders. As the people looked for one to lead them against the Ammonites they thought of Jephthah and asked him to take up their cause. After some bargaining he agreed to do so, it being understood that if he defeated the Ammonites he should be made the judge. He did so, but two things marred his triumph, one in his family, and the other among the people. In his zeal Jephthah made a vow that if the Lord gave him the victory he would offer in sacrifice the first that came out of his house to meet him. As he returned, his daughter, an only child, came out. It put an end to his triumph; his joy was turned to sorrow “Alas, my daughter,” he said, “thou hast brought me very low. I have opened my mouth to the Lord and I cannot go back.” His daughter made no attempt to persuade him to break his vow. All she did was to beg two months’ grace to bewail her virginity, for to die without children was a thing greatly dreaded in those days. At the end of the two months he did with her according to his vow.

It is a dark story, and reflects the character of the times. Yet it has a lesson. Jephthah’s words are an illustration of a great principle. “I have opened my mouth unto the Lord and I cannot go back.” His daughter’s words, too, were noble. “My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do unto me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth.” Many years afterwards David asked, “Lord, who shall sojourn in Thy tabernacle?” and among those whom he said should do so was “he that sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not.”<sup>1</sup>

The second thing that marred the triumph was the action of the tribe of Ephraim. They despised the Gileadites and were jealous of the fame Jephthah had acquired, so they threatened to burn his house over his head. Jephthah noted the threat and gathered the people of Gilead together to fight against Ephraim. In this fratricidal war the Ephraimites were defeated. The Gileadites seized the fords of Jordan, and any Ephraimite who attempted to cross to his own side was told to say “Shibboleth.” The dialect of the Ephraimites caused them to say “Sibboleth,” and every one who did so was killed.

### *Samson*

A number of smaller men succeeded Jephthah, and the people once more fell into evil ways. A great oppression by the Philistines ensued, during which Samson was born. His birth was foretold by an angel who appeared to his mother and instructed her to bring him up as a Nazarite,<sup>1</sup> and told her that no razor should come on his head. When Samson grew to man’s estate he desired to take a woman of the Philistines as a wife. His parents tried to dissuade him, but he insisted. On the way to the Philistine town where she lived he met a lion. Catching it by its two jaws he rent it asunder as if it were a kid. Returning soon afterwards he found the carcass of the lion occupied by a swarm of bees.

When the time came for the marriage to take place he issued a challenge to the Philistines who had

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 15:1 to 4.

<sup>1</sup> See Num. 6:13-21.

come to be his companions. If they could answer his riddle he would provide each of them with a shirt and a change of raiment. They accepted the challenge, and he gave them the riddle.

Out of the eater came forth meat;  
And out of the strong came forth sweetness.

As the days passed and they could not answer the riddle they threatened to destroy his wife if she did not tell them the answer. By tears she obtained the answer from Samson and passed it on to them. They had won, though by unfair means. In great anger Samson went out and slew thirty Philistines and gave their garments to the young men in discharge of his wager. Then he returned to his father's house.

When he next went down to his wife he found she had been given to another. He showed his feelings by catching a number of foxes, tying them in pairs, tail to tail, with a lighted brand between them, and then driving them into the standing corn of the Philistines.

After a number of adventures he was betrayed to the Philistines by a woman with whom he had fallen in love. He lost his strength through her wiles, and the Philistines put out his eyes. On one of their religious festivals they brought him out to make sport of him. In the intensity of his feelings he determined to bring one final act of judgment on his enemies. He asked a lad to lead him to the pillars on which the house rested. Then he prayed, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." Bearing with all his might upon the pillars, he uttered a final prayer, "Let me die with the Philistines," and the whole building collapsed, "so the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

Samson was not like the other judges. He was no warrior who risked his life to deliver his people. Yet he was the hero of his times, and his exploits greatly heartened the people of Israel at a time when they most needed it.

### *Wicked times*

Two other incidents of the times of the Judges need to be mentioned. In the division of the land the Danites found the territory assigned to them too little for their requirements, so they set out to seek farther land in the north. On the way they found a Levite who had taken service with a man who had made a graven image with some money his mother had dedicated to the Lord. They had known him before, and induced him to become their priest in their new home. There they set up the graven image, and the Levite, "Jonathan, the grandson of Moses" (not Manasseh as in the Authorised Version) "became its priest." Nothing could show more clearly the degeneracy of the times than the fact that a grandson of the great law-giver should become a priest to a graven image.

The other is an unsavoury incident in relation to the tribe of Benjamin. A Levite and his concubine, travelling from Bethlehem, would not seek hospitality in the city of Jebus (Jerusalem) because it was not an Israelitish city. They went on to Gibeah of Benjamin, where the concubine was so foully treated that she died. The Levite adopted a terrible means to call the attention of the tribes to what had happened. He cut her body up into twelve pieces and sent them through the land. A wave

of indignation swept through the country, and the people called on Benjamin to punish the people of Gibeah. Benjamin refused, and gathered together in defence of the inhabitants of Gibeah. A terrible war ensued; twice the Benjaminites were victorious, but in the third battle the tribe was almost exterminated, only about six hundred escaping.

The people had taken an oath that they would not give any of their daughters to Benjamin. Yet a tribe could not be allowed to perish. Enquiries showed that the city of Jabesh-gilead had taken no part in the war, so Israel made war on it and, killing all the adult males, handed the women over to the tribe of Benjamin. Still there were not sufficient for all. There was every year a feast to the Lord at Shiloh at which the maidens of the place took part in a dance. The survivors of Benjamin were told to go and wait in the vineyards near by and then to seize the maidens and make them their wives. They were rough times with rough methods, and they are well expressed in the words that are found at the end of this chapter of the story, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

### *Ruth, the Moabites!*

A delightful contrast to the evils described in the book of Judges is furnished in that of Ruth. Owing to a famine in Canaan a man of Bethlehem emigrated to Moab with his wife and two sons. There the young men married women of Moab, Orpah and Ruth. In the course of time the man and his two sons died, leaving his wife, Naomi, and his two daughters-in-law. Some time afterwards Naomi determined to return to her own country. Her daughters-in-law accompanied her part of the way, then she told them to go back to their own people. Orpah went, but Ruth, with noble simplicity, replied "Intreat me not to leave thee; and to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." Hers was a definite choice of Israel's God, Israel's people, and Israel's land, the Land of Promise.

When they arrived in Bethlehem it was the time of the barley harvest, and Ruth found her way into the fields of Boaz, a kinsman of Naomi. Boaz saw the stranger from Moab and enquired who she was. When he knew he told her not to go into another field, saying, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord, the God of Israel, under Whose wings thou art come to take refuge." In the evening Ruth reported to Naomi all that had occurred.

Later on, acting on Naomi's instructions, Ruth went to the threshing floor where Boaz was winnowing his corn. After he had lain down to sleep she lay down at his feet, as Naomi had told her. At midnight Boaz realised that a woman was at his feet, and anxiously asked who she was. "I am Ruth, thy handmaid," was the reply, "spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid, for thou art a near kinsman."

With kindly tact Boaz told her that there was a nearer kinsman than he, but intimated that if he would not act a "kinsman's part," he (Boaz) would do so. Next day he saw the kinsman, who declined to act lest he should spoil his own inheritance. The only obstacle being thus removed Boaz took the elders of the city to witness that he purchased all that had pertained to the husband of Naomi and to her sons, and that at the same time he took Ruth to be his wife.

The marriage of Boaz and Ruth was a link in the chain that led from Adam, through Shem and Abraham to Jesus the Christ. Their child was named Obed who was the grandfather of David. Thus the blood of a Moabitess had a place in the line that finished in Jesus of Nazareth.

## CHAPTER XII

### SAMUEL THE PROPHET

THE list of judges drew to an end. The people were growing tired of a system under which men of various tribes came to power; there was no continuity in it, and it had led to one of the greatest oppressions in the history of Israel. The last but one of the Judges was Eli.

Though himself a good man, he had failed to control his sons, and their unseemly conduct caused men to “abhor the offering of the Lord.”

#### *The birth of Samuel*

During his judgeship Samuel was born. His mother, Hannah, had longed for a child for many years. Her husband, who was a Levite, went every year to Shiloh to sacrifice to the Lord. On one occasion when Hannah accompanied him, she went into the tabernacle enclosure and prayed earnestly for a son. Her lips moved, but no sounds came from them, and Eli accused her of being drunk. Hannah answered, “I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit ... count not thy handmaiden for a daughter of Belial, for out of the abundance of my complaint and my provocation have I spoken.” Eli realised her sincerity, “Go in peace,” he said, “and the God of Israel grant thy petition that thou hast asked of Him.”

In due time a child was born, and a few years afterwards Hannah went to Shiloh, taking the child Samuel with her. When she saw Eli she said, “Oh my Lord, I am the woman that stood by thee praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed. Therefore I also have granted him to the Lord.” Thus Samuel entered on a service which lasted until his death.

Hannah’s song of praise is a beautiful example of thanksgiving, and expresses deeply felt religious ideas.

My heart exulteth in the Lord;  
Mine horn is exalted in the Lord...  
There is none holy as the Lord;  
For there is none beside Thee,  
Neither is there any rock like our God...  
The Lord killeth and maketh alive,  
He bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up...  
The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth;  
And He shall give strength unto His king,  
And exalt the horn of His Anointed.

This is the first occasion in the Story that any allusion has been made to the Lord's Anointed. Other allusions will occur later until they finally focus attention on Jesus Christ, for Christ is the Greek form of the Hebrew word Messiah, the Anointed.

Some years passed by and then in the quietness of the night, while the tabernacle lamps were still burning, the call came that was to mean so much to Samuel and to Israel. As he lay down to sleep, Samuel heard a Voice calling him. He ran to Eli, thinking that he had called, but Eli told him he had not done so. This happened three times; then Eli realised that the Lord had called Samuel. He told him to lie down again, and if he heard the voice he was to say, "Speak Lord, for Thy servant heareth." When next the Voice called, he answered as Eli had told him. It was a hard message that came, it announced the doom of Eli's sons, with the terrible addition that the iniquity of Eli's house should never be purged. Next morning Eli asked what message had been given; when Samuel repeated it he only said, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good."

The news of the call of Samuel became known far beyond Shiloh, and all Israel knew that he was established to be a prophet of the Lord. The allusion here to "all Israel" is an indication of the fact that the consolidation of the people into one nation was going on; they were no longer a collection of tribes, but a nation.

### *Battles with the Philistines*

The prophecy that had been given was fulfilled by means of the Philistines. Israel endeavoured to regain their freedom, and in a battle they were defeated. In despair the leaders of the army sent for the ark of the covenant, so that, as they said, it might save them from their enemies. Eli let it go in the custody of his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. For a moment the Philistines wavered, then with a shout of encouragement they renewed their attack, and Israel fled. The defeat became a rout; the ark was captured and Eli's two sons were slain.

News of the disaster reached Shiloh where Eli was waiting to know what happened. When he heard of the death of his sons and the capture of the ark, he fell from his seat and was taken up dead. Soon the Philistines reached Shiloh, where they massacred the priests and destroyed the city, reducing it to a waste from which it did not recover for centuries. But before they reached Shiloh the tabernacle was hurriedly removed to Gilgal, probably under the direction of Samuel.

The Philistines carried the ark in triumph to Ashdod, where it was placed in the temple of their god Dagon. Next morning the image of Dagon was found on the ground. It was replaced, and on the following morning it was again on the ground broken. The people of Ashdod could not bear to see their god treated in that way and sent the ark to Gath. There a plague broke out, and the ark was sent to Ekron, where the same thing happened. The Philistines then took counsel what they should do. They determined to impose a severe test to see whether their troubles were from the God of Israel, or were merely chance occurrences. They placed the ark on a new cart to which they attached two milch kine. They shut up their calves and waited to see what the cows would do. Unhesitatingly they took the way towards the land of the Israelites, leaving their calves behind them. It was a sure sign to the Philistines, and they were glad to be rid of the ark that had caused them so much distress.

The ark was taken to Beth-shemesh, where the people were gathering in their harvest. When the cows came to a standstill, the Levites who were in the place sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering, using the wood of the cart to make the fire. The God of Israel had vindicated Himself. But a great calamity fell upon the people of Beth-shemesh. Curiosity caused some of them to look inside the ark and a plague broke out among them. Then they too sent the ark away, and it was taken to Kirjath-jearim.

All this time the condition of the people of Israel bad; they needed a deliverer. Samuel stood forth as the saviour of the country. He summoned the people to Mizpeh, where he told them to put away their idols and serve the Lord; saying that if they did so they would find deliverance.

News of this gathering reached the Philistines, who marched to Mizpeh. A panic seized the Israelites, but Samuel quieted them and offered sacrifice and prayer for the nation. Just as the Philistines were about to attack a violent thunderstorm broke out and in the confusion that ensued they fled. It was a turning point; Samuel was regarded as the leader of the people, and hope began to revive.

### *A king for Israel*

Yet the old trouble remained. Samuel's sons were not like him, and looking to the future the people could see no settled peace under the existing regime. All around them nations were ruled by kings; they were governed by a judge. A king's sons would be educated in the arts of war and government; the sons of a Levite, such as those of Samuel, were trained as Levites, not as soldiers. At last the murmurs of the people came to a head, and the elders came to Samuel and put forward their case. They said, "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways; now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." It was a great blow to Samuel. It affected him as a father, and as a prophet of the Lord, it must be remembered that Israel was the kingdom of God, a holy, or a separate, people. Now they wanted to be like the other nations. The request of the people struck at Samuel's deepest loyalty, his loyalty to God as Israel's king.

Samuel took his trouble to the Lord, and received the reply, "Hearken unto the voice of the people ... for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me that I should not be king over them." That was the grievous fact. God had been their king, and they wanted a king they could see. They preferred sight to faith, temporal things to those that were eternal. They were not alone in this, it has been the mistake of almost all men. In spite of Samuel's advice the people persisted in their request, "Nay, we will have a king over us," they said.

An anxious time followed. A king requires certain qualifications, and there was no one who had been trained for such a position. It was necessary for God to indicate the one who was to be the king, and His choice was indicated by a series of strange incidents.

Saul, the son of Kish, a man of Benjamin, accompanied by a servant, went to seek some asses that had strayed. He failed to find them, and as they were then near the home of Samuel, the servant suggested that they should enquire of him. They made their way towards his house and met Samuel. Meanwhile it had been revealed to Samuel that the one who was to be king would visit him about that time. When the two met, Saul asked Samuel to direct him to the seer's house.

Samuel replied, "I am the seer." He told him that his father's asses had been found, and then said, "And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house?" Saul accompanied him to his home where he was treated with marked deference. Early the following morning Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, and there anointed him to be prince over the Lord's inheritance. A number of signs that Samuel foretold gave Saul confidence in the career to which he had been called, and "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he prophesied among them."

Another gathering of the people was called at Mizpeh so that the king might be seen by all the people. God's choice was indicated by lot, which fell successively on the tribe of Benjamin, on the family, and on the person, of Saul. When the people sought for him he could not be found, he had hidden himself. When he was found he was seen to be a goodly young man, a head taller than the people generally. A great shout went up from the assembly, "Let the King live." A number of men attached themselves to him—the monarchy had commenced. Yet there were some who grumbled. "How shall this man save us?" they said, and despised him. Saul was very tolerant, he held his peace, or, in more expressive words, "he was as though he had been deaf."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE REIGN OF SAUL

AND Saul went up to his house." No kingly state marked the beginning of his reign. It needed a crisis to establish his royal position. Such an occasion came when the town of Jabesh-gilead was attacked by the Ammonites. The inhabitants offered to surrender on terms, but the terms laid down were such as no one could accept, so the people continued their resistance and sent to Saul. Saul called all Israel to meet him, and a great company assembled. He then attacked the Ammonites and inflicted a crushing defeat on them. Jabesh was relieved, and the victory united the people in loyalty to the new king. Samuel took advantage of this to call the tribes to Gilgal, and there an official ceremony took place; it may be regarded as the equivalent of a modern coronation.

Samuel addressed the assembly, reminding them that they had asked for a king when the Lord was their king. It was the time of the wheat harvest, and a thunderstorm passed over the land, an unusual thing at that time of the year. It moved the people considerably, and they requested the intercession of Samuel. He then exhorted them, "Serve the Lord with all your heart ... the Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake."

The new reign opened auspiciously, and Saul's son Jonathan gained a victory over a Philistine garrison in Geba. Then Saul commanded the people to come to him, an act which the Philistines regarded as a challenge, and they invaded the land. The Israelites had been so cowed by the Philistines that many of those who were with Saul fled across the Jordan. The remainder waited for Samuel to come and offer a sacrifice, but after waiting seven days Saul offered one himself. It was a fatal mistake; it ranged the Levites, who were the only official class, against him. When Samuel came, he was indignant at Saul's usurpation of priestly functions, and asked why he had done such a thing. Saul attempted to justify himself by saying he feared the danger that threatened the tabernacle at Gilgal. But Samuel was not persuaded, and told Saul that the kingdom should be



taken from him and given to another, leaving Saul a prey to forebodings.

### *Jonathan's courage*

The defection from the army had been so serious, that after Samuel's departure there were only six hundred men left with Saul. Parties of the enemy ranged through the land, and so great had been their tyranny that none of the Hebrews had been permitted to own any weapons, or to carry on the work of a smith. It was Jonathan, the son of Saul, who gave heart to the Israelites. Accompanied by his armour-bearer he attacked a Philistine garrison who were on a height at Michmash. The place was practically unapproachable, but by climbing, and taking advantage of the protection afforded by the herbage, they got near the place, and then disclosed themselves to the garrison. Just as they reached the top, and had commenced to kill the first of the garrison, there was an earthquake, "a very great quaking." Panic seized the Philistines, and they fled, beating down one another as they ran. The little army that was with Saul joined in the pursuit and those who had left the army returned.

In his eagerness to make the most of the opportunity Saul charged the people that none should eat anything until the evening. Knowing nothing of this; Jonathan ate some of the honey that was in the wood. When the day was over the people, famished for food, flew upon the spoil, and, regardless of the provisions of the Law, ate the flesh with the blood. Then Saul proposed to make a night attack on the Philistines. He enquired of the Lord, but God gave him no answer. Saul concluded that there must be some reason for God's silence, and proceeded to ascertain who was the cause by casting lots. The lot fell on Jonathan and Saul prepared to put him to death. The people took a saner view; Jonathan had gained a remarkable victory that day, and they intervened to save him.

The position of Israel was greatly improved, and the policy of having a king seemed to be justified. For a time victory followed Saul wherever he went. Commanded to go and fight the Amalekites, and to spare neither men, women, children, or animals, Saul spared the king and the best of the flocks and herds.

### *Saul's rejection*

Next morning Samuel sought Saul, who greeted him with the words, "Blessed be thou of the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord." Sternly Samuel asked, "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep?" Then Saul showed something of the weakness of his character. "The people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God." It was an unworthy excuse. He had had his opportunity and, having failed, tried to put the blame on the people. Samuel's answer is a keynote in the Bible story. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Then he repeated the intimation that the Lord would take the kingdom from Saul. Finally he did part of the work that Saul had left undone; he took Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and slew him.

The rejection of Saul made it necessary to choose another king. Samuel was sent to Bethlehem, to anoint one of the sons of Jesse. One after another, seven of his sons stood before him, only to be

rejected by the Lord, who told Samuel that He looked to the heart, not to the outward appearance of the men. “Are here all thy children?” asked Samuel of Jesse, at last. “There remaineth yet the youngest, and behold, he keepeth the sheep,” said Jesse. He was sent for and when he came Samuel saw a ruddy youth, of fair countenance. He was the Lord’s choice, and Samuel anointed him, “and the Spirit” of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.”

### *David the shepherd*

David’s life as a shepherd had done something to prepare him for the work he was to do. Out on the hills and in the fields around Bethlehem he had many experiences; but more important was the effect of those experiences on his feelings. There he learned to know God, and to trust in Him. Probably it was the remembrance of some night spent in the fields, under the open sky, that caused him after the Spirit of the Lord had come upon him, to write one of his psalms.

O Yahweh, our Adonai,  
How excellent is Thy name in all the earth!  
Who hath set Thy glory upon the heavens ...  
When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy fingers,  
The moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained,  
What is man that Thou art mindful of him?  
And the son of man that Thou visitest him?

Such lessons were not learned in royal courts, or in the camp. The Twenty-third, the Shepherd Psalm, is another illustration of the abiding influence of David’s early experiences.

By this time Saul’s character and personality were deteriorating. An evil spirit from the Lord troubled him, and his servants urged him to seek for a skilful musician, that the sweetness of music might pacify his troubled spirit. David was such a musician, and the young shepherd was taken into the royal service.

### *David and Goliath*

The Philistines invaded the country again. They had with them a mighty man, named Goliath, a giant who paraded between the two camps, challenging any Israelite to come forward and engage in single combat. Daily the challenge rang out, but none dared to meet the giant. Some of David’s brothers were with the army, and Jesse sent his youngest son with food for them. There he heard the insolent challenge of Goliath as he defied the armies of the God of Israel. To David, the challenge sounded like blasphemy. At last, unmoved by the jibes of his elder brother, he openly spoke what was in his mind. His words were carried to Saul, who sent for him. Comparing his youthful appearance with the bulk of the Philistine, Saul expressed his doubts as to the issue of such a combat. David told him how he had slain a lion and a bear whilst in charge of his father’s flocks, adding, “The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul fitted him out with a suit of armour, but David found that it hampered him. He put it off, and

went to meet the Philistine clad in his usual clothes, armed with a shepherd's staff, a sling, and five small pebbles from the valley. When the giant saw such a stripling coming towards him he said, "Am I a dog that thou comest to me with staves?" David's response was both brave and reverential, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a javelin; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, Whom thou hast defied." Then, without giving time for the Philistine to get near him, David ran toward him, put a stone in his sling, and slung it with all his might. It hit Goliath on his forehead and he crashed to the earth. The combat was over; David ran forward, drew Goliath's sword from its sheath, and used it to sever the giant's head from the body.

The fall of their champion caused the Philistines to flee, chased by the Israelites. It was a great deliverance, and the incident had a profound influence on the fortunes of David, Saul, and Jonathan. Jonathan was so affected by the bravery of David that "his soul was knit with the soul of David, and he loved him as his own soul." He saw in him a kindred spirit; the killing of Goliath was a feat fit to be placed beside his own when he attacked the Philistine garrison at Michmash. From that instant David and Jonathan were the closest of friends.

A little later all the promise of the incident was spoiled. The army returned in triumph, and were welcomed by the people with songs.

"Saul hath slain his thousands,  
And David his ten thousands,"

were the words they sang. To a man of Saul's temperament such an idea was fatal. He was already possessed of an "evil spirit," now a spirit of jealousy came upon him, and "Saul eyed David from that day and forward." He made several attempts on his life. In the royal court he twice hurled a spear at him, but without result. He caused it to be said that he would give his elder daughter in marriage to David if he would prove his worthiness in battle against the Philistines, but when the time for the marriage arrived, he gave her to another. Saul's younger daughter, Michal, fell in love with the young hero. When Saul heard of it he caused David to be told that the only dowry he required for her was a hundred foreskins of the Philistines. He thought David would be slain in attempting to get them, but the price was paid, twice told, and David became son-in-law to Saul.

### *Saul's Jealousy*

The gloomy king grew worse and worse. He tried to get Jonathan, or some of his servants, to kill David. For a time Jonathan succeeded in quieting the spirit of his father, but when David won another victory over the Philistines, the jealousy of the king grew worse. He sent to David's house to take him, but Michal let David down from a window, and he escaped. Saul pursued him as far as Ramah, but there the spirit of prophecy seized the king; he stripped off his clothes and lay down naked all that day and night. Madness was gradually mastering him.

Jonathan was loyal to David and they consulted together for David's safety. It was arranged that at the time of an approaching feast David should be absent from his place in the court. On the first day Saul took no notice, but on the second he said, "Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat?" Jonathan told him that David had asked for leave to attend a family sacrifice in Bethlehem.

Instantly Saul's fury blazed forth. He denounced Jonathan in bitter language, and sent men to arrest David. When Jonathan expostulated with the king he cast a spear at his own son. Jonathan saw there was no hope of a reconciliation, and went out to David to tell him what had occurred. They mingled their tears together, and then parted; Jonathan returned to the court, and David fled.

He first visited Nob, where Ahimelech the priest was in residence, and obtained food and a sword. The food was the shew-bread, and the sword that of Goliath. Unfortunately a servant of Saul was there, and he reported the incident to his master. Saul sent to Nob and slew Ahimelech and all the priests that were in the city. Then David went to Achish, king of Gath, but as the servants of the king were suspicious of him he pretended to be mad, and fled to Adullam.

### *David the fugitive*

At Adullam David was an outlaw. He was joined by all his family, including his father and mother, for they were all proscribed by Saul. Adullam became the refuge of all those who were in distress, in debt, or discontented. It was not a very promising company, but under David's leadership they were trained for their future indicated by his anointing. David recognised that a cave in the mountains was no place for aged people like his parents, so he sent them to the king of Moab, asking him to keep them so long as he remained an outlaw. It will be remembered that Ruth the Moabitess was an ancestress of David; Jesse was her grandson.

Saul's chief concern was to secure the death of David, and for some time David's life was one long effort to avoid capture. At the same time he carried out raids on the Philistines, and so increased his popularity with Israel. Some, however, were ready to betray him and gain the king's favour, and David had to take refuge in the Wilderness of Ziph. There he received a visit from Jonathan, who told him "thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee, and that also Saul my father knoweth."

The friendship of Jonathan could not protect David from Saul, or from the treachery of those who sought Saul's favour. He had to flee again, and it was only an invasion of the Philistines that caused Saul to give up the pursuit. In the course of David's flight an unexpected incident placed Saul at his mercy. Saul went into a cave, in the innermost recesses of which David and some of his men had taken refuge. David was urged to kill Saul, but he refused; he would wait for God's time to take the kingdom, but he cut off a portion of the king's robe, to show the king how he had spared his life. Saul was deeply touched, and said, "I know that thou shalt surely be king," and asked that David would not cut off his posterity in those days.

About this time David sent a message to a rich man named Nabal, who had many flocks of sheep and goats, which David's men had protected from any interference. Now the time of sheep-shearing had come, and David requested that in such a time of rejoicing, Nabal would spare something for his men. Nabal refused with disdain. The servants of Nabal told his wife, Abigail, what had happened. She recognised the dangers to which her husband's refusal exposed her and the household, and made her way to David with a present. She urged him not to spoil his future by taking revenge now. In the course of her interview with him she said, "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with Yahweh thy God." It is an interesting illustration of the recognition of a doctrine of a future life, a life that was bound up with God.

Nabal knew nothing of what Abigail had done for he was drunk. When she told him the next morning he had a seizure; ten days afterwards he died. When news of his death reached David he saw the hand of God in the event, a feature of life and history that was always present to his mind. He sent for Abigail and took her to be his wife for Saul had given Michal to another man.

After this Saul again took the field against David and again fell into his hand. During the night David and Abishai, one of his followers, came to the camp where Saul lay sleeping. Abishai urged him to kill the king, but David would not. Saul was the Lord's Anointed; however unworthy he might be, he would not act against him to his hurt. He took the king's spear and a cruse of water, and stealthily moved from the camp. Once outside he called to Abner, the captain of Saul's host, and taunted him with his failure to guard the king. Saul recognised David's voice, and realised that he had been in David's power. "Blessed be thou, my son David," he said, "thou shalt both do mightily, and shalt surely prevail." It was the last time David saw Saul.

David placed no reliance on the apparent change in the king's feelings, and determined to place himself beyond his reach. He went to Gath and offered his services as a free-lance to its king. He was given the city of Ziklag to dwell in; it was a border city between Philistia and Canaan. Thence he conducted raids against non-Israelitish cities and villages taking large quantities of spoil which he laid up for the opportunity which he saw was near at hand.

### *Saul's death*

Once again the Philistines invaded the land. In great fear Saul enquired of the Lord for guidance, but received no answer. In his extremity he sought for a witch; perhaps she could do what God refused to do. There was such a woman at Endor, and he decided to go to her. He went by night and in disguise. It was an adventurous journey, for he had to pass the camp of the Philistines. When he arrived at Endor he asked the woman to bring Samuel before him. Samuel was dead, and "the dead know not anything,"<sup>1</sup> but the woman professed to bring him up. In doing this she was in rapport with the king, and realised who he was. It was a case of clairvoyance, and the woman saw the picture that was in the mind of the king. Saul's attempt to get information was successful, but the information was of no use to him. The supposed Samuel told him of the certainty of defeat, and added, "to-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me."

David and his men had been assigned a place in the Philistine army, but the lords of the Philistines feared he might betray them to Saul, so Achish regretfully sent him away. David went to the south, Achish and his army marched northwards to Jezreel.

David's adventures can be briefly told. When his men arrived at Ziklag they found it had been raided by the Amalekites, probably as a reprisal for one of David's raids on their territory. The wives and children of David and his men had been driven away, and his men lost heart; they even spoke of stoning him. David faced the situation boldly; he led his men in pursuit of the Amalekites, and captured all the spoil they had gathered in their raid, not only from Ziklag but from many other places; David sent portions of his share of it to his friends, and to the rulers of the principal cities in

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<sup>1</sup> Ecc. 9:5.

Judah, thus preparing for the future.

In the north Saul fought his last battle. Harassed, unbalanced, and discouraged, the result was a foregone conclusion. In the battle of Mount Gilboa Saul was wounded, his sons were slain, and Israel fled. Fearing to fall into the hands of the Philistines, Saul told his armour-bearer to kill him, but the young man was afraid, and Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. So died the first appointed king of Israel—a suicide.

## CHAPTER XIV

### DAVID THE KING

AFTER the Battle of Gilboa a young man, an Amalekite, came to David, and, thinking to please him, told him that he had found Saul wounded, and, at the king's request, had slain him. The lie brought its retribution, David ordered one of his men to kill him. His own feelings found expression in an anguished lament over Saul and Jonathan.

Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places!  
How are the mighty fallen!  
Tell it not in Gath,  
Publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon . .  
Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew,  
Nor rain upon you, neither fields of offerings,  
For there the shield of the mighty was vilely cast away,  
The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil ...  
I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan,  
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me.  
Thy love to me was wonderful,  
Passing the love of women,  
How are the mighty fallen,  
And the weapons of war perished!

David made his way to Hebron, where the men of Judah anointed him king, and many from Israel joined him.

#### *Civil war*

Abner, Saul's captain, set up Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, as king. A civil war ensued, in the course of which an event happened which had a sinister sequel. As Asahel was pursuing Abner, the latter turned and killed him. Asahel was a brother of Joab, of whom more will be heard, and the event started a blood feud between the two families which ended tragically.

The civil war dragged on for some years, always to the advantage of David. Some time afterward Ish-bosheth reproached Abner for having taken Saul's concubine. Abner was wroth, and in his indignation determined to transfer his allegiance to David. He made approaches to the king who

agreed to receive him provided that his wife Michal was restored to him. This was arranged, and Abner was received into the royal favour. With him came the whole of the tribe of Benjamin.

Joab was absent when these matters were arranged. When he returned he expostulated with David, insinuating that Abner had only come to spy the resources of the south. Failing to obtain any satisfaction in this way he proceeded to deceit. He sent messengers after Abner, and when he returned, took him on one side and killed him in revenge for Asahel's death. It was a particularly hateful deed, and David never forgot it.

The defection of Abner seriously weakened the house of Saul. Ish-bosheth continued to exercise a poor kind of sovereignty until two of his servants slew him. They carried his head to David, expecting to receive a great reward. David treated them as they deserved: he had them killed. Ish-bosheth's death ended the division of the kingdom. There was no one to dispute the claims of David, and all the elders of Israel came to anoint him king over the whole land.

### *David's capital*

It was now David's policy to organise the kingdom. Hebron was not a satisfactory place for a capital, it was too far to the south. David recognised that the city of Jerusalem was a suitable site; its situation in the hills of Judea made it almost impregnable. It was off the main roads through the country, but that was an advantage, as it was not easily reached by an enemy. It was inhabited by the Jebusites, a branch of the Canaanites that Israel had failed to destroy.

David set out to capture the city. It was impossible to take it by assault; secure on its rocky height it could defy an army. So confident were its inhabitants that they taunted David, saying that the blind and lame of the city were sufficient to defend it. At some time David had learned of its one weakness. The only water supply of the city was in the valley, outside the walls. Such a source was useless in a time of war, and the Jebusites had cut a tunnel through the rock and brought the water to a cistern inside the limits of the city. The cistern and the city were connected by a shaft down which the women let their receptacles for the water. David saw in this a way into the city. If the water shaft could be climbed it was possible to get within the city walls. The danger and the difficulty of the attempt called for a corresponding reward, and David caused it to be proclaimed that whoever climbed the water shaft should be made commander in chief of the army. Joab undertook the task. With a few helpers he entered the tunnel by night climbed the shaft, and stood within the city. Taken completely by surprise the inhabitants were easily mastered; the army outside came to the assistance of Joab, and Jerusalem, otherwise known as Zion became the city of David.

Established in Jerusalem David proceeded to consolidate the kingdom, and though the Philistines twice tried to restrain his progress, he completely defeated them, driving them back to their own towns.

One of the first things David essayed to do was to bring the ark into the city of Jerusalem in order to make the city the centre of the religious life of the nation. The first time he tried he failed. The oxen drawing the cart bearing the ark stumbled and Uzzah, one of those who were accompanying it, put out his hand to steady it; instantly he fell dead. David was seriously troubled. The hopes he

had entertained as to the effect of the presence of the ark in his city were dashed to the ground, and he gave instructions for it to be placed in the house of Obed-edom. Nothing harmful occurred there, instead the Lord blessed the house. Then David recognised that he had been wrong in his methods. God had given instructions that none but the Levites were to carry the ark. This time he gathered the priests and the Levites, and with great religious ceremony brought the ark into the city, where he had prepared a tabernacle for it. In the rejoicings of the day David himself danced before the Lord with all his might.

One thing marred this day of rejoicing. Michal, David's wife, who had been restored to him, despised him in her heart. Like her father, she was not moved by religious fervour; she could not understand it, and regarded it as unseemly and undignified. When David returned to his house she spoke sarcastically to him, showing how different was her character from his. It caused a final break between them for any true marriage requires a community of interest to sustain it.

### *The Kingdom of God*

The kingdom was now well established, but though David was living in a palace the ark, the symbol of God's presence, was in a tent. David felt that this was not fitting, and spoke to the prophet Nathan about it. Nathan encouraged the king in his thoughts, saying, "Do all that is in thy heart."

That night Nathan received a message from God. He was to commend the king for his intentions, but to tell him that not he, but his son, should build a house for the ark of the Lord. Next morning Nathan delivered the message, to which, however, something of tremendous importance was added. "The Lord telleth thee that He will make thee a house. When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be My son ... and I will settle him in Mine house and in My kingdom for ever; and his throne shall be established for ever-thine house and thy kingdom shall be made sure for ever before thee."<sup>1</sup>

### *Great and precious promises*

It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of these words. They state that, (a) the thing was to happen after David was dead, (b) his seed, or son, was to sit on his throne for ever, (c) his seed was to be the Son of God; and (d) reign in the house and over the Kingdom of God. (e) When this takes place David will be there, for it was to be established for ever before him. It was the most wonderful and most far-reaching promise that had been made since the days of the patriarchs.

David recognised the supreme importance of the promise. He said, "Thou hast spoken of Thy servant's house for a great while to come ... Thou didst establish to Thyself Thy people Israel to be a people unto Thee for ever ... Let Thy name be magnified saying, The Lord of hosts is God over Israel; and the house of Thy servant David shall be established before Thee." Many years after-

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<sup>1</sup> This is a combination of the wording of the promise as given in 2 Sam. 7, and 1 Chron. 17.



wards, in his last words, he again alluded to the promise. He foresaw a time when One who would be just, should rule over men in the fear of God. It would be, he said, "as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, a morning without clouds." Then he added, "Verily my house is not so with God, yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for it is all my salvation and all my desire." Thus a third everlasting covenant was made. The first, that with Noah guaranteed the eternal existence of the earth; the second, with Abraham, gave the everlasting possession of the land of Canaan, and by inference, of the earth, to One who was to be the seed of Abraham. Now a third gave to One who was to be the seed of David, the everlasting possession of David's throne. More than that, the personal character of the second and third ensured the gift of eternal life after death, involving a resurrection, when mortality shall give place to immortality.

After reaching the height of these great promises the rest of the events of David's reign seem to be of small consequence. He carried on wars against enemies in various directions, and greatly extended his dominions. He sought out a son of the house of Saul that he might show him kindness for Jonathan's sake. He found a son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, who was a cripple, restored to him all the personal possessions of Saul, and caused him to dwell in the palace and partake of the king's meat.

### *David's sin*

In the course of his wars David's great fall took place. While the army was prosecuting the war against Ammon, he saw from the roof of his palace a woman washing herself. She was of great beauty, and the king desired her; being a king he sent for her and gave way to his desires. The woman was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of the principal men of the army. In due time the woman sent a message to David, saying, "I am with child." It was an awkward predicament for David, and he did what he could to hide his, and the woman's, shame. He sent for Uriah, ostensibly to enquire as to the progress of the fighting, really that he might go to his house and so cover the evidence of David's guilt. Uriah came, but did not go to his house. In vain did David ply him with drink; he would not go down to the ease and enjoyment of his house and his wife while the army abode in the field. David then resorted to other means. He made Uriah the bearer of his own death-warrant, a letter to Joab telling him to set Uriah in the hottest part of the battle there to perish. Everything went as David had planned. Uriah was killed and David took Bathsheba into the royal household, adding her to the number of his wives.

Not only was the action of the king wrong morally, it was also fatal to his peace. All the troubles of the later part of his reign are traceable, directly or indirectly, to this incident. The prophet Nathan brought the sin home to the king's conscience. By a parable about a man who, being visited by a friend, and requiring a lamb for his refreshment, took one belonging to a poor man, he aroused the king's indignation. "The man who hath done such a thing shall surely die," said David. "Thou art the man!" sternly replied the prophet. There are not, and have not been, many prophets or preachers who would venture into a king's court and reprimand him to his face, and Nathan must have been a brave, as well as a good, man. The king's conscience was aroused. "I have sinned against the Lord," he said. It was no outward profession; it was a real and genuine repentance, which wrung from the heart the pathetic words of a Psalm.

Have mercy upon me O God, according to Thy loving kindness;

According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin,  
For I acknowledge my transgressions,  
And my sin is ever before me.  
Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned  
And done that which is evil in Thy sight.

The whole Psalm (the 51st) is the expression of the deep contrition of a soul convinced of guilt. It explains why David was a man after God's own heart.

Repentance did not prevent retribution, the first act of which was the death of the child that was born of the king's lust. Sin often brings its punishment though the guilt may be forgiven. Later on Bathsheba bore the king another son, Solomon, of whom more will be heard in the Bible Story.

### *Family trouble*

From this time the history of David was one of trouble. His eldest son, Amnon, violated David's daughter Tamar, the sister of his favourite son Absalom. For two years Absalom meditated revenge. At a sheep-shearing festival a number of men were engaged by him to kill Amnon. Absalom fled and remained away for three years; then Joab brought about his recall, though David refused to receive him at court. Absalom took every means to ingratiate himself with the people; he also took steps that compelled Joab to bring about a complete reconciliation with the king.

Absalom was then free to mature his plans. He gathered a band of followers, and, by his free and easy manners, "stole the hearts of the men of Israel." When all was ready he went to Hebron, and sent men to proclaim, "Absalom reigns in Hebron." When David heard of it his old courage left him; and he fled. Yet there were many who remained loyal, the special guards, the Cherethites and the Pelethites (a force recruited from Philistine sources), Zadok and the Levites, Joab and many others. Amongst those who sided with Absalom was Ahithophel, the grandfather of Bathsheba, who was noted for his wisdom. Another wise man, Hushai, followed David, but David sent him back to thwart the counsel of Ahithophel. Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, overtook David, saying that Mephibosheth was hoping that the rebellion might enable him to secure the kingdom to the house of Saul, so David presented Ziba with all the possessions of Mephibosheth.

In Jerusalem Absalom took counsel as to the course he should pursue. Ahithophel recommended the immediate pursuit of the royal fugitive, and offered to lead an expedition with that object in view. Hushai counselled delay, and recommended that all Israel should be gathered so that they might overwhelm the forces that were with David by the sheer weight of numbers. Absalom was not a brave man, and Hushai's advice appealed to him. The delay was fatal to his cause; it gave David time to cross the Jordan and organise his forces. Ahithophel, seeing the fatal consequences of the delay went and hanged himself.

### *Absalom killed*

In due course the army of Absalom crossed the Jordan. It was an assembly of untrained men, and when the battle was joined the difference between the two armies was seen. Absalom's army broke and fled with a loss of twenty thousand. Absalom himself fled on a mule, and as it passed under an oak his neck caught in the fork of the branches, and he hung suspended in the air. When one of David's men saw him he went and told Joab. David had charged the people saying, "Deal gently with the young man Absalom," but Joab had no scruples on that account. He took a number of men with him and thrust three darts through Absalom's heart.

Messengers hurriedly carried the news of the victory to David. But the king's thoughts were with Absalom. "Is the young man Absalom safe?" he asked, and when he heard that he was dead he retired to a chamber by himself, crying, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son." All else was forgotten, and it needed the rough remonstrances of Joab to make the king go out to the people and sit in the gate.

David weakened very much during the closing years of his reign and he never forgave Joab for the death of his son. He made Amasa, the leader of Absalom's rebel army, chief captain, an affront which Joab revenged by murdering him. Mephibosheth met David and complained that he had been slandered by Ziba, but the king's only comment was, "Why speakest thou any more of thy matter? I say, Thou and Ziba divide the land."

### *Preparations for a temple*

The rest of the reign is soon told. Various wars took place, civil and foreign, always to David's advantage. One of the last incidents was the taking of a census of the fighting men. It was probably caused by growing pride in the success of the nation. Joab expostulated against it, but the king's command prevailed, though the numbering was never completed. The prophet Gad was sent with a message, "Shall three years of famine come unto thee in thy land, or wilt thou flee three months before thy foes ... or shall there be three days pestilence in thy land?" It was a hard choice, but David said, "I am in a great strait; let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great, and let me not fall into the hands of man."

For three days pestilence ravaged the land. On the third day David saw an angel with a drawn sword over the city of Jerusalem and confessing his guilt, prayed for deliverance. The prophet Gad came again with a message, "Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." David sent to Araunah, who offered the threshing floor and the requirements for the sacrifice freely. David's reply revealed the kind of man he was at heart. "Nay," he said, "but I will verily buy it of thee at a price; neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God which cost me nothing." So he bought the threshing floor, and the oxen, and offered up his sacrifice.

Long before, Moses had foretold that God would choose a place in the land where His name should dwell, and where sacrifices should be offered.<sup>1</sup> David saw in this incident an indication of that

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<sup>1</sup> See Deut. 12:5, 11, etc.

choice, and said, "This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel," and commenced preparations for the construction of a vast temple. Immense stores of stones, timber and brass were gathered together, and great quantities of silver and gold. Plans were prepared, "the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit," together with particulars of the furniture that was required, "which the Lord made him to understand in writing by His hand upon him."

The time had come for the reign to end. David commenced his reign at a time of disaster; he died with the people in undisputed possession of the land that had been promised to the fathers, with an Empire stretching far to the north. But the great exertions of his reign, following the privations of his life as a fugitive and an outlaw, had caused a heavy drain on the king's vitality. His vigour had gone, and though they brought a fair young virgin to nourish him with her warmth, it was in vain. The king was failing.

David's eldest surviving son, Adonijah, could not wait for the old king's death, and attempted to seize the kingdom for himself. In this he was abetted by Joab, whose life of faithfulness to David was clouded by this action of his old age. The prophets were on the watch, and Nathan took the matter in hand, working through Bathsheba. As a result David called for Solomon and caused him to be anointed king. This indication of the royal decision killed the revolt of Adonijah and Joab, and Solomon ascended the throne as the successor of David.

Before he died the king charged his son to build the temple that he had projected. It was to be "exceeding magnificent," a fit abode for the symbolic presence of the God of Israel. Having done what he could for the future of his house, David died, having reigned forty years.

There is an important point in the Story relating to the last days of David that cannot be too strongly emphasised. In the presence of the assembled princes, the heads of the tribes, the officers, the captains, and the stewards of the army and of the kingdom, David said, "Of all my sons (for the Lord hath given me many sons), he hath chosen Solomon my son, to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel." The Kingdom of the Lord! Although Israel had rejected God as their king, and though he had permitted human kings to reign, the nation was still the kingdom of the Lord, and David had sat on its throne as His vicegerent. Any reading of the Story that does not take note of this is sure to give a false idea of the facts of the case.



## CHAPTER XV

### SOLOMON THE GREAT

THE truth expressed in the end of the previous chapter is emphasised in the account of the accession of the new king. “Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king instead of David his father, and prospered.”<sup>1</sup> The fact that the throne was the Lord’s is inherent in the whole story.

One of Solomon’s first acts was to deal with the abortive attempt of Adonijah and Joab to interfere with the succession. It was hastened by Adonijah himself, who, working through Bathsheba, sought to marry Abishag the Shunamite, the young virgin who had ministered to David. When the request was made known to Solomon, he gave instructions for Adonijah and Joab to be put to death. Others who had been concerned with various risings of his father’s reign were also dealt with.

<sup>1</sup> In later times Jeremiah (3:17), speaking of a future time of rejoicing, spoke of Jerusalem as “the throne of the Lord.”

### *The wisdom of God*

Early in his reign Solomon went to Gibeon where the tabernacle was pitched, though the ark was still in its tent in Jerusalem. While there God appeared to him in a vision, saying, "Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon's request was a wise one. "Give me now wisdom and knowledge that I may go out and come in before this people." In reply, God said to Solomon, "Because this was in thine heart and thou hast not asked riches, wealth honour, nor the life of them that hate thee, neither yet hast asked long life ... wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee, and I will give thee riches and wealth and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like." This reply furnishes the key to Solomon's position in the Bible; he was the wise man who wrote wise things, though he did not always practise them.

Solomon organised the kingdom on sound lines. Officers were appointed to look after various matters. He built largely, including fortresses and strongholds in various parts of the country. His outstanding work was the construction of the temple which his father had designed. It was a wonderful building for the times, and seven years were occupied in its construction. It was built on the pattern of the tabernacle, but larger; the measurements being doubled. There was a court, a holy place, and a most holy place. There were the same kind of accessories, altars, lavers, lampstands, a mercy-seat and the ark, most of them on a larger scale, though the original ark was placed in the inmost sanctuary.

### *Dedication of the temple*

A great dedication service was held in which the king occupied the foremost place. In his prayer he referred to the Lord God of heaven as one Who keepeth covenant and mercy, and asked for the Divine compassion to be shown to all who prayed to God in or toward the house he had built. He finished with the words, "That all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord, he is God; there is none else. Let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord our God to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments as at this day."

In addition to the temple Solomon built a palace for himself much more splendid than his father's, store cities and fortified cities, and many fine buildings. He was a great king, but during his magnificent reign the seeds were sown that resulted in the division of the kingdom.

One of the events of his reign was a visit from the Queen of Sheba, who sent to Jerusalem to see if all that was said of Solomon was true. She gave the king rich presents and asked him many questions. Before she returned to her own land she said, "It was a true report that I heard in mine own land ... howbeit I believed not the words until I came, and behold, the half was not told me; thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard."

Solomon was not only a ruler, he was also a great trader. With the help of the Phoenicians he fitted out a fleet to carry on trade with Tarshish and Ophir. It brought back gold and other eastern produce, such as silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks. Other trading activities also brought him much gain. Civilization and luxury made immense strides in the kingdom, but they brought disadvantages as well as advantages.

### *Solomon's weakness*

Solomon's principal weakness was his desire for women. He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, women of all peoples, and in the end they "turned away his heart." He tried to mix the worship of the gods of his wives with that of the God of Israel. The two ideas would not mix, and the result was disastrous. Once more the Lord appeared to Solomon, not to bless but to threaten. Because he had not kept the covenant of his God, God said, "I will surely rend the kingdom from thee and will give it to thy servant." Yet for David's sake there was an exception, two tribes were to be made sure to the house of David.

Towards the end of Solomon's reign adversaries began to arise. There was Hadad of Edom who had fled to Egypt during the reign of David, where he gained the favour of the Egyptian king. Later Hadad returned to his home where the people were ready to stir up trouble with Israel when opportunity offered.

There were other sources of trouble, the principal one being Jeroboam. He was an energetic young man, and Solomon had noted him for preferment. One day he was met by a prophet, who seizing his mantle, tore it into twelve pieces, and said, "Take thee ten pieces, for thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to thee." Though the incident took place when Jeroboam and the prophet were alone, Solomon heard of it, and Jeroboam had to flee; he too went to Egypt to await the time for the fulfilment of the prophecy.

So the forty years of the reign of Solomon came to an end. The strength of the kingdom had been drained by the exactions of the king whose wisdom was mixed with much folly in his dealings with the people.

Solomon was a great writer. He wrote three thousand proverbs, and "his songs were a thousand and five. He spoke of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts and of fowls, of creeping things, and of fishes." Much of his writing is found in our Bible, though much of it has perished. The Book of Proverbs is the outstanding example of his literary work.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE DIVIDED KINGDOM THE WORK OF ELIJAH

THE death of Solomon brought a crisis in the kingdom. Rehoboam, his son, went to Shechem, not Jerusalem, where Israel had gone to make him king. The fact is significant; it implies that the position was already precarious; Israel were prepared to accept Rehoboam as king, but only on conditions. They required a relaxation of the burdens that had been placed upon them by Solomon. He took three days to consider, their request, which he placed before the men who had been associated with his father, and before the younger men who had been brought up with him. The former counselled concessions; the latter advised the rejection of the appeal. On the appointed day the people came again, led by Jeroboam. With haughty indifference to the sufferings of the people

Rehoboam replied, “My father did lade you with a heavy yoke; I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.” It was a foolish saying, but it was overruled of God. The division of the kingdom had been foretold by the prophet, and it had to take place.

Ten tribes threw off allegiance to the house of David, and established a separate kingdom under Jeroboam. Rehoboam refused to recognise the division, and sent his officers to collect the usual tribute, but their leader was stoned and Rehoboam hurried off to Jerusalem to gather the men of Judah to fight against the other tribes. A prophet commanded him to refrain as the thing was from the Lord.

### *Political ambition*

In the North Jeroboam did what he could to strengthen himself. He established his court at Shechem, a place hallowed by its association with Abraham, Jacob and Joshua. He saw that his greatest danger was a religious one. Israel had learned to look upon Jerusalem as the place which God had chosen to be the religious centre of the nation. If his subjects went there every year, the sight of the old familiar things might cause them to accept the rule of Rehoboam. To prevent such a thing happening, he set up two calves, one in Dan and the other in Bethel, and issued a proclamation saying that Jerusalem was too far away and adding “Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” A new priesthood was installed, and new feasts instituted; the cleavage between the North and South was complete.

It is not to be supposed that Jeroboam intended to repudiate the worship of Yahweh; his object was political, not religious, he desired to prevent his people coming into contact with those of the south. There were protests against the king’s policy. In the presence of Jeroboam a prophet from Judah predicted that the altar he had set up would be defiled by a member of the house of David whose name should be Josiah. He announced that the altar should be rent and its ashes scattered, and this actually happened. Jeroboam stretched out his hand to seize the bold prophet, but his hand dried up so that he could not take it back again. At the intercession of the prophet it was healed.

The miracle so impressed Jeroboam that he invited the prophet to stay, but he replied that he had been commanded to eat no bread and drink no water in Bethel. As he went on his way he was overtaken by an old prophet who invited him home to partake of food, saying that an angel had told him to invite the man of Judah to his house. It was a lie, but the prophet was persuaded to go with him. Suddenly in the midst of the meal the old prophet exclaimed, “Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast been disobedient unto the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, thy carcase shall not come into the sepulchre of thy fathers.” It must have been a dramatic moment. The man of Judah had listened to the voice of a false prophet and had to pay the penalty. On his way home a lion met him and slew him. It is a strange story but it has its moral—a command from God must be obeyed.

Jeroboam continued his evil course, but when his son fell sick he told his wife to go to Shiloh, where lived the prophet who had foretold that he should be king. She went disguised, but on the threshold of the prophet’s house she was greeted by the words, “Come in thou wife of Jeroboam, why feignest thyself to be another?” It was foolish to think she could deceive a prophet. If he could



foretell the future he could certainly be assured of the facts of the present. He gave her a heavy message. "Get thee to thine own house, and when thy feet enter into the city the child shall die."

### *Trouble in the south*

Rehoboam took steps to strengthen himself by building fortified cities on his northern border. All through his reign there was a desultory war between him and Israel, in which the advantage generally remained with Judah, though neither side gained any real success. The religious life of Judah was not much better than that of Israel though many of the Levites who had lived in the North sought a home in the south. The principal trouble of the reign was an invasion of Palestine by Shishak, king of Egypt. It affected both Judah and Israel, though Judah bore the brunt of it, for Shishak's chief spoil was taken from the temple in Jerusalem.

Rehoboam was succeeded by his son Abijam who only reigned three years. During his reign the warfare against Jeroboam continued. Before one of the battles Abijah of Judah addressed the army of Israel; "Now ye think to withstand the kingdom of the Lord in the hand of the sons of David." He recognised that Judah was still the Kingdom of God.

Abijam was succeeded by his son Asa, who inaugurated a period of reformation and success. The religious evils that had crept in were ended; he removed his own mother from her position in the court because she had set up an abominable image. He added to the treasures that were dedicated to the Lord, and increased the number of fortified cities in the kingdom.

In the north Jeroboam was succeeded by his son Nadab who, after a reign of two years was murdered by Baasha one of his captains, who killed the whole family of Jeroboam in fulfilment of a prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite. Baasha established himself in Tirzah instead of Shechem. He continued the warfare with Asa of Judah, who relied on alliances, and used the treasures of the temple to purchase the assistance of Benhadad, the king of Syria. This king had been in alliance with Baasha, but in response to Asa's application he broke the league and invaded Israel. Asa took advantage of the respite, and, conscripting the whole man power of Judah, destroyed the city of Ramah, which Baasha was converting into a fortified city, and used the materials to strengthen two of the cities of Judah. During the reign of Asa Judah was invaded by an immense army of Egyptians led by Zerah, an Ethiopian. Asa gained a notable victory over the invaders, a victory which deeply impressed the surrounding peoples with the power of Judah. The latter part of his reign was spoilt by his neglect of God and his reliance on others, yet his reign was one of marked progress which must be attributed to the principle expressed in the words of the record, "Asa did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, as did David his father." After a reign of forty-one years he died, greatly lamented by his subjects.

Baasha's reign of twenty-four years drew to a close, and the end of his house was announced by a prophet, a member of a class of men who were beginning to occupy an ever greater position in the land. Baasha was succeeded by his son Elah, but after two years his servant Zimri murdered him as he was "drinking himself drunk" in the house of his steward. Zimri destroyed the whole of the house of Baasha, but he had only reigned a week when a part of the army besieged him in Tirzah. The city fell, Zimri shut himself in the royal palace, set it on fire, and perished. Another aspirant

for power rose up in the person of Omri, but the people were divided, some following Omri and others following Tibni. The party of Omri prevailed, and in the words of the Story, "Tibni died and Omri reigned."

The Bible has little to say about Omri who was, however, a strong and capable king. The great feature of his reign was his decision to found a new capital. Shechem and Tirzah were not suitable sites for the capital of a country having numerous enemies. Omri chose the hill of Samaria. Lying at the head of two valleys, it was a strong site, easily defended, and near enough to the main roads of the country to make it a suitable centre for trade. The later history of Samaria furnished a full justification for Omri's choice.

Omri was succeeded by Ahab, the greatest of all the kings of the ten tribes. His religious life was unsatisfactory, but his political outlook was that of a far seeing statesman. He married Jezebel, the daughter of Eth-baal, king of the Zidonians and high priest of Baal. Ahab's principal idea seems to have been to reconcile the worship of Yahweh with that of Baal. Such an attempt was bound to fail, and the resulting condition of the country brought forth the man of the time.

### *Elijah the prophet*

With dramatic suddenness the interest of the Bible Story centres in one man, Elijah the Tishbite, whose personality dominates the whole of the reign of Ahab. Of his past nothing is known, his whole being is merged in his career as a prophet of Yahweh. As a retribution for the religious evils of the reign of Ahab a famine came upon Israel through the failure of the rains. The brooks dried up, the grass withered, and the harvests were scanty. Through the first part of the famine Elijah was sustained by ravens until the brook Cherith dried up. Then he was told to go to Zarephath, in Sidon, lodge there with a widow and her son. There also the famine was severe, and when he arrived the widow was gathering a few sticks to bake a small cake for herself and her child, with the last of her meal and her oil. It was a severe test for the woman, but when the prophet said to her, "Fear not, go and do as thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first ... For thus saith the Lord the God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth", she did as Elijah had said, and the meal and the oil lasted until rain once more fell on the parched land.

While Elijah was lodging with the woman her child fell sick and died. In her grief she went to Elijah, crying, "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? thou art come unto me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son!" Elijah took the child to his own room, and prayed; then stretching himself on the body of the child, said, "O Lord, my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again." His prayer was heard, and Elijah gave the child back to his mother, saying, "See, thy son liveth."

### *God or Baal?*

Over three years had passed since the famine began when Elijah was told to show himself to Ahab, for rain was coming. He showed himself to Obadiah, the governor of the house of Ahab, and told him to go and tell his master that he was there. When Ahab reached Elijah he asked, "Is it thou, the

troubler of Israel?” Elijah answered, “I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baalim.” Then he issued a challenge. Let Ahab bring the prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel for the purpose of an ordeal by fire. Ahab accepted the challenge and a great assembly of priests and people gathered together. Elijah addressed the people, “How long halt ye between two opinions?” or rather “How long hop ye from one idea to another?” It was a telling description of the condition of Israel at the time. All Ahab’s children whose names we know had names which incorporated that of Yahweh;<sup>1</sup> yet Baal worship was rampant in the land. The king and the people were trying to carry on two worships and loyalties. Elijah’s object was to stop the “hopping,” “If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.”

In the presence of the multitudes the prophets of Baal prepared their altar, and in accordance with the terms of the challenge put no fire under the sacrifice. Then they called on the name of their god from morning to noon, but there was no response. “O Baal hear us,” they cried. Elijah mocked them. “Cry aloud,” he said, “either he is musing, or he is gone aside, or peradventure he sleepeth.” Still they cried and cut themselves with lancets till the blood pushed forth. It was no use, Baal did not respond.

At last Elijah took his turn. It was the time of the evening sacrifice. He repaired the altar and placed on it a bullock with the necessary wood. He commanded the attendant to fill four buckets from a perennial spring near by, and to pour the water over the sacrifice. This was done three times, until both the altar and the sacrifice were drenched, and the water ran round the trench. Then, the voice of Elijah was heard. “O Lord, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant ... Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that the people may know that Thou Lord, art God.” Suddenly the fire descended; it consumed the stones of the altar as well as the sacrifice, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. The effect was instantaneous. “Yahweh is the God,” shouted the people, and, at the command of Elijah they proceeded to slay the prophets of Baal.

### *Elijah encouraged*

Ahab had looked on, now Elijah turned to him and said, “Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of abundance of rain.” The long drought was to end, and its end coincided with Israel’s recognition of Yahweh as their God. Elijah sent a lad to look over the sea. Six times he returned with the report that there was nothing to be seen. On the seventh occasion there was a little cloud about “as small as a man’s hand.” Then Elijah sent his servant to Ahab urging his instant departure, “Get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.” As the thick clouds blotted out the sky, and the howling winds told of the rain that was about to fall, Ahab drove to Jezreel and Elijah girded up his loins, and ran before his chariot to that place.

When Jezebel heard of the fate of the prophets of Baal she threatened to kill Elijah, who fled to Beersheba, some eighty miles to the south, into the wilderness, where he requested that he might die. As he lay asleep an angel touched him and said, “Arise and eat.” Again he slept and was awakened with the same words, to which the angel added “the journey is great.” In the strength of

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<sup>1</sup> They are Ahaziah, Yahweh owns; Jehoram, exalted by Yahweh, and Athaliah, constrained by Yahweh.

the food which had been provided he went for forty days to Mount Horeb, where he took refuge in a cave. There God spoke to him. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" He asked. Yes, what? The desert was no place for a prophet of the Lord. Such a man must speak for God, and there was no one to speak to in the desert. Elijah answered that he was the only one left of the prophets of the Lord, and that his life was threatened. He was told to go to the Mount. As he stood there a tremendous wind blew, dislodging rocks and breaking them in pieces. Then an earthquake shook the mountain and after that a fire broke out. In these phenomena Elijah saw no indication of the presence of God, but when he heard "a sound of gentle stillness," he recognised the evidence of the presence of God. The gentle stillness spoke of Him rather than the wind, the earthquake, and the fire. Again the question was put. "What doest thou here Elijah?" and the same answer was given. Then he was told to anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, Jehu to be king of Israel, and Elisha as a prophet to succeed himself. He was also assured that there were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Thus encouraged Elijah returned, AND anointed Elisha to be a prophet of the Lord. Elijah never anointed Jehu, that was done by his successor. There is no record of the anointing of Hazael.

The story now returns to Ahab. Ben-hadad, king of Syria, gathered an army together to besiege Samaria. He sent insulting messages to Ahab, who called his counsellors together and told them what had happened. They urged him to resist, and a prophet encouraged him with the assurance that the Syrians should be defeated. Ahab returned a reply to Ben-hadad, "Let not him that girdeth on his armour boast as he that putteth it off." It seemed a hopeless conflict. The armies of Syria were large and that of Samaria very small. Ben-hadad was confident of victory, and he and the subject kings who were with him were drinking themselves drunk in the pavilions. When he was told that a number of men had come out from Samaria, he gave instructions that they were to be taken alive. He had badly blundered, for the result was an overwhelming victory for Ahab.

Next year Ben-hadad tried again. He thought the gods of the Israelites must be gods of the hills, and determined to fight on the plains. But the result was exactly as before, and the Syrians fled. Ben-hadad was forced to submit, and sent messengers to Ahab to make peace. Ahab received them graciously and granted easy terms. In so doing he was acting as a statesman. Assyria was rising and Ahab foresaw that a united Syria was the only possible way by which an Assyrian advance could be stopped. The prophets looked at matters differently, and one of them, in an acted parable, rebuked the king for saving alive a man whom God had appointed for death. Ahab could not bear rebuke; he returned to Samaria heavy and sore displeased.

### *Naboth's vineyard*

Ahab had some estates in Jezreel. Adjoining them was a vineyard belonging to a man named Naboth. Ahab thought the acquisition of the vineyard would round off his estates, and offered to buy it. but Naboth declined to sell the inheritance of his fathers. Disappointed and sulky, Ahab went to his house, and refused to eat. When Jezebel heard the reason she said, "Dost thou govern Israel? Arise and eat, I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth." She wrote letters in the king's name and commanded the elders of the city to proclaim a fast, set up Naboth, and charge him with blaspheming God and the king, then stone him and transfer his estates to the king. The programme was carried through and Ahab went down to Jezreel to take possession of the vineyard.

There Elijah met him. The king sensed that the meeting boded no good to him, and asked, "Hast thou found me, O my enemy?" "I have found thee," replied Elijah, and pronounced the king's doom. His house should perish like those of Jeroboam and Baasha, and Jezebel should be eaten by dogs by the wall of Jezreel. Ahab was not utterly bad; he rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, and "went softly." So the evil was postponed until the days of his son.

Ben-hadad did not carry out the terms he had made with Ahab; he did not hand over the city of Ramoth-gilead, so Ahab took steps to secure the fulfilment of the treaty. He asked Jehoshaphat, who was then king of Judah, to accompany him. Before setting out he consulted his prophets, all of whom foretold success. Jehoshaphat was not satisfied. "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, besides?" he enquired. Ahab replied that there was one Micaiah, but said he hated him for he never prophesied good but only evil. However he sent for him, and Micaiah also foretold victory. There was something in his voice or manner that aroused Ahab's suspicions. "How many times," he asked, "shall I adjure thee that thou speak unto me nothing but the truth in the name of Yahweh?" Micaiah replied, "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep that have no shepherd." Then Micaiah told how he had seen a vision in which the Lord had asked how Ahab might be enticed so that he might fall at Ramoth-gilead, and a spirit had volunteered to do this by being a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets.

#### *Ahab's death*

Ahab refused to be warned, but he disguised himself, while Jehoshaphat wore his royal robes. The Syrians attacked Jehoshaphat thinking him to be the king of Israel, but he escaped. Yet the decrees of God could not be evaded. A man drew a bow at a venture, and the arrow, speeding on its way, struck Ahab between the joints of his armour, and he fell fatally wounded. He was carried to Jezreel, where he died. The defeat became a rout, and victory was with the Syrians.

Ahab had been a great king. He built much in Samaria, including an ivory palace (probably a house decorated with ivories), and his military achievements were considerable. His fatal mistake was his marriage to the idolatrous Jezebel, to which all the evils of his reign may be traced. Unequal yoking was his ruin, a fact of much importance even to-day, for Paul has said, "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers, for ... what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever?"<sup>1</sup>

In the south Asa had been succeeded by Jehoshaphat, of whom something has been told already. He was a good man and a good king, and organised a religious reformation. He placed a deputy on the throne of Edom, and received homage from the Philistines and the Arabians. He tried to imitate the trading activities of Solomon, but his ships were broken in the home port, and the idea came to nothing.

Ahab was succeeded by Ahaziah who only reigned two years, during which time Moab cast off their allegiance to Israel and refused to pay their annual tribute of lambs, rams, and wool, but his short reign gave no opportunity for him to deal with the rebellion. The king fell through a lattice and was severely injured. He sent messengers to Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to enquire what were the chances of recovery. His messengers were met by Elijah who told them to tell their master

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. 6:14-16.

that he should die. Ahaziah recognised from the description they gave that it was Elijah who had met them, and sent a captain with fifty men to arrest him. Fire from heaven fell on them and they were consumed. A similar fate overtook a second captain and his fifty. A third was sent, and he begged Elijah to spare his life and the lives of his men. Elijah then went with them to the king, giving him the same message he had given the messengers. As Elijah had foretold the king died and was succeeded by his brother Jehoram.



## CHAPTER XVII

### ELISHA THE PROPHET AND DECLINE AND FALL OF ISRAEL

THE time came when Elijah was to be succeeded by Elisha. The two journeyed from Gilgal to Bethel and thence to Jericho. There was something unusual in their movements. Twice they were met by a company of prophets who said to Elisha, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?" Three times Elijah said to Elisha, "Tarry ye here, I pray you," to which Elisha replied, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." When they reached the Jordan, Elijah took his mantle and smote the river with it, the waters receded so that they were able to cross on dry ground. As they stood on the eastern bank Elijah asked Elisha what should be done for him before he, Elijah, was taken away. Elisha responded, "I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." It was a great request, but Elijah told him that if he saw him as he was taken away it should be granted. Suddenly a chariot of fire with horses of fire appeared, and Elijah was taken away by a whirlwind to heaven. Elisha saw it and cried, "My

father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof.” He had seen, and double portion of spirit rested on him. He rent his clothes, took up the mantle that had fallen from Elijah, and went to the Jordan. He smote the river as Elijah had done and the waters parted so that he crossed on dry land. The prophets, who were waiting for him, asked permission to send a number of men to search for Elijah. At first he refused, but later consented. For three days they searched without result; Elijah was gone. The opening of Elisha’s ministry was marked by a number of miracles such as the healing of the waters of Jericho, and the death of a number of young lads who mocked him.

Jehoram, the new king of Israel continued the worship that had been introduced by Jeroboam though he was not a Baal worshipper. He decided to punish the king of Moab who had rebelled in the reign of his brother, and, assisted by Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom, invaded Moab. The route led the army through a wild and dreary country where there was no water, and they were in sore distress. Jehoshaphat asked if there were a prophet of whom guidance might be sought. Elisha was sent for but when he arrived he said that if it were not for the presence of Jehoshaphat he would not give any information. A minstrel was called for, and, as he played, the spirit of the Lord came upon him and he said, “Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches.” They did so, and when the morning broke the ditches were full of water, which in the glow of the rising sun looked like blood. The Moabites thought the three kings had fallen out and had been fighting between themselves. Crying, “Now Moab to the spoil,” they rushed forward, to be met by the combined forces of the three kings. The Moabites fled followed by the allies, who killed them in the rout, threw stones on the arable land, and stopped the wells of water. When the king of Moab saw what had happened, he took his eldest son, and offered him up as a burnt offering. “And there was great wrath against Israel; and they departed from him and returned to their own land.” From the Moabite Stone<sup>1</sup> it appears that the rebellion was ultimately successful, and the domination of Moab by Israel was ended.

### *Naaman the leper*

For a time Elisha is the principal figure in the Story. He performed many miracles. A woman of the sons of the prophets who was in financial distress had her oil multiplied. Another, who had provided him with a room in her house, had her son raised from the dead. In a time of dearth, when the prophets had gathered gourds to cook, and had included a poisonous one, Elisha healed the contents of the pot, whilst on another occasion he fed a hundred men with a few cakes of bread and a few ears of corn. He also caused an iron axe-head to float.

The principal miracle of Elisha was the healing of Naaman the Syrian. In one of the wars between Israel and Syria a little maid had been carried captive to Syria, where she served in the household of Naaman, who was a leper. One day she remarked, “Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria.” The words were repeated and reached the Syrian king, who wrote a letter to the king of Israel, requesting him to cause Naaman to be healed of his leprosy. The king of Israel regarded it as an attempt to seek a quarrel with him, but Elisha, who had heard of the letter, sent a message saying, “LET him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

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<sup>1</sup> A cast of this is in the British Museum.

Naaman went to the prophet's house, and Elisha sent him a message, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times." Naaman was angry, he thought the prophet should have come out to him. He was indignant at being told to wash in such a river as the Jordan. "Are not Abana and Pharpar better than all the waters of Israel?" he said. He turned his steps homeward, still a leper. There was evidently something good in him, for his servants reasoned with him. "My father," one of them said, "if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing wouldest thou not have done it?" Of course he would; and he saw the point. He went down to Jordan, dipped seven times, and his leprosy was cleansed. Simple obedience had effected his cure.

He returned to Elisha and pressed upon him great rewards, but Elisha declined them. Then Naaman preferred a strange request. He desired to be given two mules' burden of earth from the land of Israel, saying, "Thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offerings, nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto Yahweh." He realised the anomaly of his position; as a great man in Syria he had to accompany the king into the house of the Syrian god, Rimmon. What should he do? "The Lord pardon thy servant," he said, "when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon." Elisha's only response was, "Go in peace," and the two parted.

Elisha had a servant named Gehazi. He thought it absurd that his master should refuse the present which had been offered him. So he followed Naaman, and told him that two young men had just arrived, and requested that he might have a talent of silver and two changes of raiment for them. Naaman pressed him to accept two talents, and Gehazi returned home with his booty. When he went in to his master Elisha asked, "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?"

"Thy servant went no whither," he replied.

"Went not my heart with thee when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money and to receive garments, and olive yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men servants and maid servants? The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever." Gehazi went out from Elisha's presence a leper, white as snow.

### *Elisha and Israel*

In the various troubles between Israel and Syria Elisha gave valuable information to the king of Israel. The failure of his plans caused the king of Syria to suspect treachery on the part of his officers, until one of them told him that Elisha was able to tell the king of Israel the very words that he himself spoke in his bed chamber. He sent an officer with a band of men to take Elisha, and they encamped round the city where the prophet was. In the morning Elisha's servant saw them, and cried, "Alas my master, how shall we do?" "Fear not," said Elisha, and then, "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see." When his eyes were opened he saw the amazing sight of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. In response to the prophet's prayer the Syrians were stricken with blindness, or dazzlings, and Elisha offered to lead them to the man they required. He led them to the palace of the king of Israel. There the dazzlings ceased and they saw they were trapped. At Elisha's command they were supplied with food and drink and sent to their own land. The incident cured the king of Syria for a time of any desire to invade Israel.

When he did at last invade Israel again and besieged Samaria the people were reduced to such



straits that at least one woman ate her own child. When the king of Israel heard of this he exclaimed, "God do so, and more also, if the head of Elisha shall stand on him this day." He sent for the prophet as he was seated among the elders of the city. When the messenger appeared Elisha made the startling announcement that to-morrow a measure of fine flour should be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for the same amount. It sounded absurd, and one of the courtiers derided the idea. "Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof," said Elisha.

In the morning twilight the Lord caused a noise to startle the Syrians. It sounded like the rushing of an army. They were seized with panic and fled, thinking the king of Israel had hired help from the kings of the Hittites and of the Egyptians. A company of lepers discovered that the Syrians had gone, and reported it to the watch, who sent the news to the king. When he found it was as the lepers had reported he sent and gathered of the spoil the Syrians had left, placing the courtier who had derided the words of Elisha in charge of the gate. The people were too excited to be restrained by him, and he was trodden under foot and died. He saw the plenty but did not eat of it.

In Elisha's journeys he went to Damascus, where the king of Syria was sick. Hearing that Elisha was in the town he sent one of his officers, Hazael, to enquire whether he would recover. "Say unto him," said Elisha, "thou shalt certainly recover, howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die." Hazael was puzzled, and Elisha wept. In response to Hazael's question why he wept the prophet replied, "Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel," and added, "The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria." Hazael returned to his master and told him the first part of what the prophet had said. On the following day he took a thick cloth, dipped it in water, and spread it on Ben-hadad's face, and suffocated him.

The reigns of Omri and Ahab had completely altered the positions of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Before then the southern kingdom had been the stronger of the two, but by the end of Ahab's reign the position was reversed, and Jehoshaphat of Judah recognised Ahab as his suzerain.

### *False religion*

One of Jehoshaphat's principal tasks was the reorganisation of the country and the improvement of the defences of Jerusalem. Towards the end of his reign he associated his son Jehoram with him in the rule. The latter was a very different kind of man from his father; he had married a daughter of Ahab, and was influenced by the false religion of the northern kingdom. When he reigned alone he slew all his brethren and a number of the princes of the realm. The kingdom sank lower and lower and when Jehoram died he was succeeded by Ahaziah who only reigned one year. The two royal houses were now closely related, for Ahaziah was the son of Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab.

### *Jehu's work*

Elisha had sent a prophet to Ramoth-gilead to anoint Jehu, as king of Israel. Jehu was sitting with a number of officers, and the messenger said, "I have an errand to thee, O captain," and followed Jehu into the house, where he anointed him. He told Jehu that the house of Ahab should be destroyed like those of Jeroboam and Baasha, and that the dogs should eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel. Then opening the door the prophet fled. The whole incident looked strange to those who

waited without, and when Jehu came to them they wanted to know what “that madman” had said to him. When Jehu told them they placed their garments on the top of the stairs, and, with a flourish of trumpets, proclaimed Jehu king.

Jehoram the son of Ahab had gone to Jezreel to be healed of wounds he had received of the Syrians. With him was his nephew, Ahaziah of Judah. Jehu made for Jezreel with some of the conspirators. When the watchman at Jezreel saw men coming he reported the fact and Jehoram ordered a horseman to go and enquire their errand. Jehu received him but did not permit him to return. A second horseman was sent and was similarly treated. This time as the watchman reported the fact he said, “The driving is like that of Jehu, the son of Nimshi, for he driveth furiously.” Jehoram and Ahaziah then went out and met Jehu by the vineyard of Naboth. As they met Jehoram asked, “Is it peace, Jehu?” “What peace so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts are so many?” Jehu replied. Jehoram and Ahaziah turned to flee, but Jehu drew a bow at his full strength, and the arrow pierced the heart of Jehoram. It was a fitting place for such a tragedy, and Jehu recalled the words of Elijah, uttered some years before, “I will require the blood of Naboth in this plat.” Retribution may sometimes be slow but it is certain. Ahaziah fled, followed by Jehu, and was slain.

Jehu then made his way to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard what had happened she said to Jehu, “Is it peace, thou Zimri, thy master’s murderer?” Jehu did not parley with her. He called on the attendants to throw her down from the window where she was standing. They did so and her blood was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses. Then Jehu went in to eat and to drink. Later on he sent to have Jezebel’s remains buried, but there were none left but her skull, the feet, and the palms of her hands. The prophet’s words, “the dogs shall eat Jezebel” had been literally fulfilled.

Jehu proceeded to do the other things that were necessary to fulfil the command of Elijah. Seventy of Ahab’s sons were killed. As if in explanation, Jehu said, “Know now that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of the Lord which the Lord spake concerning the house of Ahab.” He proceeded to destroy all the members of Ahab’s house, all the great men, his kinsfolk and his priests. As he went to Samaria he met some of the brethren of Ahaziah, who, not knowing what had happened were on their way to Jezreel. They too were slain. When he reached Samaria a further massacre of the supporters of Ahab took place. Jehu was a brutal soldier and a man of blood. Later he announced his intention to hold a great feast to Baal. He said, “Ahab served Baal a little, Jehu shall serve him much.” It was a ruse, yet it was quite true that Ahab was not a whole-hearted worshipper of Baal, though Jezebel was. Like Israel he had “hopped” between two opinions, trying to harmonise Baal and Yahweh worship.

On the day of the sacrifice the house of Baal was crowded from one end to the other. When the sacrifice was over the doors were closed and a band of soldiers entered the temple. They had orders to kill every soul in the building. The image of Baal was destroyed, and the place was defiled. It was not that Jehu had a true conception of the God of Israel. Before his dynasty passed away the prophet Hosea denounced the bloodshed and cruelty of Jehu. “Yet a little while,” he said, “and I (the Lord) will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu.”<sup>1</sup> There was no excuse for the cold blooded cruelty of the new king, though, for a time, he cleared the kingdom of Baal-worship.

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea 1:4.

Ahab had raised Israel to a high position among the surrounding peoples. In the reign of Jehu the Lord “began to cut Israel short.”

### *Jehoiada and Joash*

The death of Ahaziah caused a change of ill omen to Judah. His mother was Athaliah, a daughter of Jezebel, who had all her mother’s zeal for the worship of Baal. When she saw that her son was dead she slew “all the seed of the kingdom,” and seized the throne for herself. Only one member of the royal family escaped, Joash the young son of the dead king. He was taken by Jehosheba, the sister of the late king, and wife of Jehoiada, the high priest, and hidden in a bedchamber, and, later, in the temple.

For six years Athaliah reigned as queen, then Jehoiada took steps to get rid of her and make Joash king. He took advantage of the fact that at the time of the changing of the guard, there were considerably more men than usual in the temple. A hasty coronation ceremony took place, and shouts rang through the temple court, “Let the king live!” Athaliah heard and came to see what had happened, but Jehoiada gave instructions for her to be taken outside the temple precincts and killed. Baal worship, which she had introduced into Jerusalem, was abolished, and its high priest slain.

The new king was only seven years of age, and the government was in the hands of Jehoiada. There was plenty of zeal in Judah, and arrangements were made for money to be collected for the repair of the temple. Twenty years afterwards nothing had been done, and the king, now of man’s estate, wanted to know why. A new beginning was made. Instead of the money being handled by the priests, the king’s scribe and the high priest took possession of it, and used it to pay builders and carpenters who were engaged in the work on the house of God. Yet the kingdom was not in a healthy state. Hazael of Syria invaded the land as far south as Gath, and Joash had to take the treasures from the house of the Lord to give to him as tribute. The king’s action was unpopular, and he was murdered by some of his servants, and was succeeded by his son Amaziah.

### *North of the border*

In the north things were going badly. Jehu was succeeded by his son Jehoahaz. He was a poor king, and when Hazael invaded the land much suffering was caused. In the following reign, that of Jehoash, Elisha, who was dying, sent for the king, who was sincerely troubled. The dying prophet told the king to open the window and shoot an arrow out of it. When he had done so, Elisha said, “The arrow of the Lord’s deliverance,” and told the king to smite on the ground. The wondering king did so three times and then stayed. He probably thought the whole thing was absurd. But it was real to the prophet. “Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times,” he said, “then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it.” Three victories were gained by Jehoash, and the cities which had been taken by Syria were recovered. Yet Hazael proved to be a great scourge to the country. Later the Lord sent Israel a saviour in the person of Jeroboam II, the son of Jehoash who succeeded him on the throne.

Under Amaziah the fortunes of Judah improved somewhat. He defeated the Edomites, and,

encouraged by his success, challenged Jehoash of Israel to battle. Jehoash tried to dissuade him, but without success. Judah was invaded and a portion of the wall of Jerusalem was broken down. The people blamed the king for their sufferings, and a conspiracy was formed against him, and he was slain.

When Jeroboam II ascended the throne of Israel the fortunes of the country were at their lowest ebb. He proved to be a wicked, but capable, king, and raised Israel once more to prosperity. His conquests reached as far north as Damascus and Hamath. In his days Hosea one of the earliest of the prophets, whose writings are included in the Bible, commenced his ministry. He was mainly a preacher of doom, but looking into the distant future he saw a brighter picture. The two ideas are included in his saying, "The children of Israel shall abide many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without pillar, and without ephod or teraphim; afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall come with fear unto the Lord and to His goodness in the latter days."<sup>1</sup>

### *The beginning of Isaiah's work*

In the south Azariah, or Uzziah, became king at the age of sixteen, and reigned for fifty-two years. He carried on wars against the Philistines, the Arabians, and others. He reorganised the fighting forces of the country, and provided engines of war for the protection of Jerusalem. He built extensively, and "was marvellously helped till he was strong." Then pride brought about his fall. He usurped the duties of the priesthood, and was stricken with leprosy. He could do nothing then, and the affairs of the kingdom passed into the hands of his son Jotham.

The most important event of Uzziah's reign was the call of Isaiah, who says, "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple ... And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send? and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me."<sup>1</sup> It was the beginning of a wonderful career, of which more will be heard as the Story is unfolded.

Another event is not recorded in the history at all; we only know of it from the statements of two prophets. "The words of Amos, which he saw concerning Israel, in the days of Uzziah king of Judah ... two years before the earthquake."<sup>2</sup> He draws a dreadful picture of a terrible calamity that was to overwhelm the land from Tyre in the north to Edom in the south. There had been a number of earthquakes on a small scale, but little notice had been taken. Now Israel was exhorted to prepare to meet her God, for sudden destruction would come; God would touch the land and it should melt; it should rise up wholly as a flood, and should tremble, and should be cast out and drowned as by the flood of Egypt. Earthquakes and tidal waves were to spread death and desolation through all the country. Two hundred and fifty years afterwards the memory of the dreadful visitation remained, and Zechariah, speaking of the time when the Lord shall stand upon the Mount of Olives, said, "ye shall flee like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of

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<sup>1</sup> Hosea 3:4-5.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. 6:1-8.

<sup>2</sup> Amos 1:1.

Uzziah.”<sup>3</sup>

Like Hosea, Amos was mainly a prophet of doom, yet he too could take the long view and see the distant future under the coming Messiah. It was in such a spirit that he said, “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the nations, which are called by My name, saith the Lord of hosts that doeth this. Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed ... They shall be no more plucked up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.”<sup>1</sup>

The last days of Israel present a sorry picture. Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam II, succeeded to the throne after an interval of internecine strife, during which the land was without a ruler. He had only reigned six months, when he was slain by Shallum, who retained the throne for just a month and was then slain by Menahem, who occupied it for ten years. In his reign a new enemy appeared upon the scene. The Assyrians under Pul, or Tiglath-pileser, invaded the land and Menahem had to exact money from all the men of wealth to satisfy their demands.

#### *Assassinations in Israel*

His son Pekahiah succeeded him and reigned for two years, when he was murdered by Pekah, one of his captains, who reigned over the distracted kingdom for twenty years. He too had to meet an invasion of Assyrians under Tiglath-pileser, who carried great numbers of the people into captivity. By this time the kingdom of Israel possessed very little territory outside the immediate surroundings of Samaria. Then another conspiracy took place; Hoshea murdered the king, and, after an interval, seized the throne.

#### *Judah warned about idolatry*

When Uzziah died Jotham took sole control of the land of Judah and ruled it for sixteen years'. He built considerably in Jerusalem and Judah, erecting fortresses and towers at suitable points. In his reign the voice of prophecy became more insistent. Isaiah was joined by Micah, and together they sustained the faith of the southern kingdom. Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah of Israel, formed a league against Judah, but it was not until the next reign that events came to a head.

Ahaz was the next king. He was only twenty when he succeeded to the throne, and the times required a man of experience. He re-introduced idolatrous practices and the worst ceremonies of Baal worship. Early in his reign the confederacy between Syria and Israel came to a head and Judah was invaded. Knowing what Tiglath-pileser had done to the northern kingdom, Ahaz sent to him for help, stripping the gold from the temple to pay for it, and acknowledging him as his overlord. The prophet Isaiah tried to dissuade him from such a course. He told him not to be afraid

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<sup>3</sup> Zech. 14:1-5.

<sup>1</sup> Amos 9:12-15.

of the allied kings, for their power should soon be broken. He offered to give the king a sign, but Ahaz refused to ask for any. When he refused, Isaiah, speaking to the “house of David,” said, “The Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” He told the king that the Assyrians, whose help he had invoked, would invade his land, which he spoke of as “Immanuel’s land.” Continuing his prophecy he said, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light ... For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” He did not finish there, but added, “Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with judgment and with righteousness from henceforth, even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this.”<sup>1</sup> Thus while the king refused to listen to the prophet’s words, the hopes of the faithful were sustained by the growing revelation of the coming of the Messiah. But Ahaz preferred the immediate prospect of Assyrian help. He died soon afterwards, and Hezekiah his son became king.

### *The end of the kingdom of Israel*

In the north things rapidly moved to a climax. Hoshea occupied the precarious throne for nine years. He was practically a nominee of the Assyrians, but he made a conspiracy with Egypt, and refused to pay the usual tribute. Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, marched to Samaria and for three years the city was besieged. During the siege Shalmaneser died and Sargon seized the throne of Assyria. He pressed on the siege and Samaria fell; the inhabitants, with the principal people of the surrounding country, were carried into captivity. The kingdom of Israel was at an end, and the land was occupied by men of Babylon and other parts, who were placed there to prevent the residue of the Israelites, who were but the poorest of the land, from rising against Assyria.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### FROM HEZEKIAH TO THE CAPTIVITY

THE reign of Hezekiah was one of the most thrilling periods in the history of Judah. He ascended the throne six years before the fall of Samaria, when the future of his country seemed very uncertain. He was a man of high character, with a religious outlook on life. He removed the tokens of idolatry from the land, and did all he could to guide Judah aright; he even sent messengers to the remnant in the North and endeavoured to bring them back to the worship of Yahweh. For a time he reigned quietly, then trouble broke out. Sennacherib, the son of Sargon, had succeeded to the throne of Assyria. Hezekiah refused to pay tribute, and the Assyrians invaded the land. Hezekiah felt that he could do nothing and submitted, using the treasures of the temple to satisfy the demands of Sennacherib. For a time there was a respite, then the threat was renewed. Feverish preparations were made for the defence of the capital. The waters which had been allowed to run down the valley were diverted through a tunnel which Hezekiah caused to be cut through the rocky hill of Ophel to a point within the city walls. Many houses in Jerusalem were pulled down to provide

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<sup>1</sup> See Isaiah, chaps. 7, 8 and 9, and page 224.

material for the repair of the walls of the city. Then the officers of Sennacherib came to Jerusalem. When they approached the city they tried to frighten the people who thronged the wall by boasting of the power of their master, before whom no king and no god had been able to stand what, therefore, could Hezekiah and Yahweh do?

### *Saved from the Assyrians*

News of what was happening came to the king. Hezekiah rent his clothes, went into the Temple and sent to the prophet Isaiah. The prophet gave him an assurance that the king of Assyria would depart from Jerusalem without doing any damage. So it was for when Sennacherib heard that the king of Egypt was advancing, he marched southward to meet him. He sent a letter to Hezekiah threatening what he would do to Jerusalem. Hezekiah laid the letter before the Lord in the Temple, and prayed, “O Lord our God, save Thou us, I beseech Thee, out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art the Lord God, even Thou only.” Isaiah brought the answer. “Thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor set a mount against it. ... for I will defend this city to save it, for Mine own sake, and for My servant David’s sake.” And so He did, for “the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and eighty-five thousand”—probably by some terrible plague. Sennacherib returned in shame to his own land where two of his sons murdered him.

In his prophecies Isaiah used the circumstances of the times to enforce a greater lesson. The Assyrians, he said, were the rod of God to chastise the nation for unfaithfulness. The work they had done had been God’s work. Yet when that work was finished Yahweh would punish the king of Assyria. He would lop the bow with terror and throw down the men of high stature.” Then he passed to the lone view. “And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall bear fruit; and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord ... and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears, but with righteousness shall he judge the poor ... for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea,” for the time should come when “the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion and before His ancients gloriously.”<sup>1</sup>

In the same reign Micah spoke words of doom and hope. “Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. But in the latter days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills, and peoples shall flow unto it. And many nations shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord ... and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem ... And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”<sup>1</sup> Thus Micah joined Isaiah in looking for the coming of Immanuel.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 11:1-9; 24:23.

<sup>1</sup> Micah 3:12 to 4:3.

### *Hezekiah's sickness*

Half way through his reign Hezekiah was taken with a grievous illness. It troubled him greatly for he had no son to succeed him. It looked as if the great promise that had been made to David must fail for lack of an heir. Hezekiah wept sore and prayed for a prolongation of his life. In response to his prayer Isaiah came with a message from God, promising him another fifteen years of life. As a sign that the promise would be fulfilled the shadow on the dial of Ahaz moved backward. Hezekiah recovered, and gave expression to his praise in a song, in the course of which he said,

The grave cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee;  
They that go down into the pit cannot hope for  
Thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day;  
The father to the children shall make known Thy truth.<sup>2</sup>

Three years afterwards an heir to the throne was born.

The wonder that had occurred caused a petty king of Babylon, Merodach-baladan, to send an embassy to Hezekiah. He was a deadly enemy of the Assyrians, and wanted to know the strength of Judah as a possible ally in his designs against them. Hezekiah welcomed the messengers and showed them all the riches and power of his country. It was a niece of natural pride, but it was a great mistake. Judah had no community with any Gentile kingdoms; it was the kingdom of God, Gentile kingdoms were parts of the kingdoms of men. The prophet Isaiah visited the king with the message, "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house ... shall be carried to Babylon, ... and of thy sons which shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."<sup>3</sup> Vainglory is never any good, and the people of God have nothing to do with diplomacy. These are the lessons to be derived from this incident in the life of Hezekiah.

Prophecy was coming more and more to the fore in the land. Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries of Hezekiah, and both were essentially prophets of the Messiah. The former in a telling prediction spoke of a time when God would "destroy in this mountain the face of the covering that is cast over all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations." Visualising this time he continued "He hath swallowed up death for ever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the reproach of His people shall He take away from off all the earth." Though death was a stern reality (Old Testament writers knew nothing of the theory of the immortality of the soul, they knew that death was a state of utter unconsciousness) Isaiah looked beyond the grave, and said, "Thy dead shall live; my dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust ... the earth shall cast forth the dead." In a later chapter he said, "Behold a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment," when, "Judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness shall abide in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence for ever."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 38:18 and 19.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 39:6 and 7.

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 25:7 and 8; 26:19; 32:1; 16 and 17.



Micah was encouraging the nation with similar hopes; he spoke of the Messiah who was to be born in Bethlehem, and who should “stand and feed, (or rule), in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.” He finished his prophecies with a reminder of the old promises, “Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which Thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.”<sup>2</sup>

When Hezekiah died, after a reign of twenty-nine years, he was succeeded by his son Manasseh, who was only twelve years old. His mother’s name was Hephzibah, a name which Isaiah applied to the land of Israel in the great future he foretold for it as Immanuel’s land. Hephzibah means “My delight is in her.”<sup>3</sup>

### *Wickedness in Judah*

Manasseh fell into the hands of evil counsellors, and the good influences of Hezekiah’s reign were forgotten. Idolatry was re-established, including the worship of Baal, and the inhuman practice of passing children through the fire of sacrifice. The worshippers of Yahweh were persecuted, and innocent blood was freely shed. In after years the reign of Manasseh was regarded as one of the principal causes for the down-fall of the state. The prophets protested in vain; their voices were silenced by death, and the kingdom came to the brink of ruin. Then the Assyrians invaded the land and carried Manasseh to Babylon. (Esarhaddon the Assyrian king was particularly partial to Babylon as a place of residence and built a palace there). Manasseh repented, and called upon the God of his father. Yahweh heard him, and reinstated him in his kingdom.

Restored to his own land Manasseh did what he could to counteract the evils of the past. He re-established the temple services, and repaired the walls of Jerusalem. But though he had changed, the people had not, they continued to worship in shrines of heathen origin. Things were going from bad to worse, when, after a reign of fifty-five years (the longest in the history of the people) Manasseh died leaving his son Amon to succeed him.

Amon only reigned two years during which he reintroduced the worse features of the earlier portion of his father’s reign. He died as the result of a palace conspiracy, and “the people of the land” put the conspirators to death and made his son Josiah king.

### *Josiah’s reform*

Josiah was then only eight years old, and he reigned for thirty-one years. From a moral and religious point of view his reign was one of the best in the history of Judah. At the age of sixteen he commenced a work of reformation. The pagan emblems were removed from Jerusalem, and pagan altars were defiled by burning bones upon them. In his reforming zeal he also sent to the remnant

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<sup>2</sup> Micah 5:4; 7:20.

<sup>3</sup> See Isaiah 62:4.

of the Israelites who still lived in the north. Ten years afterwards, he put in hand the great task of cleansing and restoring the temple in Jerusalem. In the course of this work the high priest found a copy of the book of the law which had been given through Moses. He told the king's scribe, and he in turn carried the news to the king. The king sent for this ancient relic of the past, and it was read before him. The reading caused a severe shock to Josiah. He recognised that for a long time Judah had not kept the law and that the curses of the law were hanging over them. In deep anxiety he sent his counsellors to Huldah, a prophetess, saying, "Go ye, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, concerning the words of the book that is found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book." The discovery, and the reformation, had come too late, and Huldah answered, "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent you unto me, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read ... My wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched." A personal message was sent to Josiah. He was not to see the evil that was to come upon the people and the land; but should be removed before the final evils came.

The knowledge that any reform was too late to prevent the evils foretold did not turn Josiah from inaugurating a reform in the religious and moral affairs of the nation. Princes, priests, prophets, and people were gathered together to hear the law read from the ancient book. Then they entered into a covenant with God, and broke down all the emblems of idolatry in the land. Everything that was combustible was burned; and the houses that had been used for idolatrous purposes were broken down. The Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) which had been the place of Baal worship was defiled and became the place where the refuse of the city was destroyed.<sup>1</sup> A similar process was carried out in the cities of Samaria; indeed, the whole land was cleared of everything connected with idol worship. Then a great passover was held in accordance with the instructions given in the book of the law. It is recorded of Josiah that "there was no king before him that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might."

### *Jeremiah prophesies*

In his reforming zeal Josiah must have been influenced by a young prophet of Anathoth, a village about three miles from Jerusalem. Jeremiah commenced his mission about five years before the great reformation. He was very young; for he speaks of himself as only a child. It was no easy task that was before him, but he was encouraged to endure.

Josiah met his death in warfare. War had broken out between Assyria, and the Babylonians and Medes. In the conflict that ensued strange alterations of policy took place, and Egypt, which had suffered severely from Assyrian invasions, marched to the help of Assyria. Josiah joined in the conflict challenging the march of Pharaoh Necho who tried to dissuade him from doing so, but in vain. Probably Josiah thought the king of Egypt desired to establish a new Empire in Syria. He met the Egyptians at Megiddo where he was killed. It was an evil day for Judah, it definitely marked the beginning of the end. Jeremiah especially lamented his death and wrote a lamentation over him; not the book in the Bible called The Lamentations, which was written about a quarter of a

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<sup>1</sup> Gehenna is the Greek name for the Valley of Hinnom; it is used in the New Testament in places where "hell fire" is referred to. In the light of its origin it obviously indicates the final destruction of all who are consigned to it.

century afterwards.

Another prophet beside Jeremiah ministered in the days of Josiah, for Zephaniah, a descendant of Hezekiah, also appeared in his reign. He announced an impending day of judgment, in which the whole land should be devoured by the fire of Jehovah's wrath. But like the other prophets he did not speak only of the immediate future; he saw beyond the troubles to a time of final restoration, when a changed and reformed Israel should inhabit the Promised Land, and should feed and lie down and none should make them afraid. Looking forward to that time he said, "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all thy heart, O daughter of Jerusalem ... The king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee, thou shalt not fear evil any more." At that time Israel will be made "a name and a praise among all the peoples of the earth." Zephaniah foretold something more of great import. He said, "Then will I (the Lord, Yahweh) turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent." The Messianic hope was ever deepening as the days grew darker, a universal religion was to take the place of the divided religious loyalties of the past and present.

On the death of Josiah the people of the land made Jehoahaz, a younger son of Josiah, king. probably Eliakim, his elder brother, had Egyptian sympathies, and was passed over on that account. Jehoahaz had only reigned three months, when Necho deposed him, and imposed a fine of a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold on the country; He set up Eliakim, the elder brother as king, changing his name to Jehoiakim. Jehoahaz was taken to Egypt where he died.

### *Captives taken to Babylon*

Jehoiakim had a troubled reign of eleven years. The country was impoverished, but he had no consideration for the troubles of the people. He built for himself a palace with spacious chambers, ceiled with cedar, and adorned with bright colours. It was all done by forced labour, and Jeremiah denounced the king for his injustice and oppression, and announced the coming of the king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was not likely to overlook the little kingdom of Judah, ruled over by a king who was a nominee of Egypt, and when Egypt had been defeated at the battle of Carchemish,<sup>1</sup> he threatened Judah. Jehoiakim was compelled to accept him as his suzerain and pay tribute. It was at this time that a number of the princes of the royal house including Daniel, were carried into captivity and became eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon as Isaiah had foretold. For three years Jehoiakim paid tribute; then he withheld it. A time of confusion ensued; Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites and others invaded the land, and signs of the impending dissolution became marked. In vain Jeremiah appealed to king, princes, and people, to reform; they turned a deaf ear. In the midst of the troubles' Jehoiakim died, and his young son, Jehoiachin, became king of the unhappy country. Nebuchadnezzar would not recognise a king who had been set up without his consent, and sent an army against Jerusalem. It was useless for the Jews to oppose the Babylonians and Jehoiachin, with his mother, servants, princes, and officers, went out to them. They and the treasures that remained in the Temple were carried to Babylon, together with considerable numbers of smiths, craftsmen, and soldiers. The country was denuded of its most capable inhabitants, and was nothing but an appanage of the King of Babylon.

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<sup>1</sup> Jer. 46:1-12.

Mattaniah, an uncle of Jehoiachin, was made king by Nebuchadnezzar, who changed his name to Zedekiah. He had a troubled reign. There were two parties in the country, one that looked to Egypt for help and another which counselled submission to Babylon. Among the latter was Jeremiah; who pointed forward to a long distant future for the restoration of the people of the land, though he also spoke of a more immediate restoration after a period of seventy years. But his words were not regarded; false prophets prevailed, and Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

### *The end of the Kingdom*

Away in Babylon, another prophet Ezekiel, realised the position and as Nebuchadnezzar's troops marched he raised his warning voice. Addressing Zedekiah he said "And thou, O deadly wounded wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day is come in the time of the iniquity of the end; Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the mitre and take off the crown, this shall be no more the same; exalt that which is low and abase that which is high. I will overturn, overturn it; this shall also be no more until he come whose right it is, and I will give it him."<sup>1</sup> Thus Ezekiel gave expression to the old hope of Shiloh whom Jacob had said should come, connecting it with the promise made to David that one should occupy his throne for ever, and Isaiah's prophecy of a rod out of the stem of Jesse, (the father of David) who should also be the son of a virgin, Immanuel, and should reign upon David's throne for evermore.

In Jerusalem, Jeremiah spoke of similar things. He too, took the long view, and said, "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute judgment and justice in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord is our Righteousness." So sure was the future, that Jeremiah said "Thus saith the Lord, If ye can break My covenant of the day, and My covenant of the night" (the everlasting covenant made with Noah) "that there should not be day and night in their season, then may My covenant be broken with David, My servant."<sup>1</sup> The promise of a son to David was shown to have a deep significance, not only was he to be the Son of God, but his name was to be Immanuel, God with us, and Yahweh is our Righteousness. As the darkness increased the light of the prophecy grew brighter.

Nothing could stay the progress of the Babylonians though Jerusalem held out for two years before Zedekiah attempted to escape. It was useless; he was caught and brought before the king of Babylon, who showed a fiendish cruelty towards a captive king who had put up a brave fight against overwhelming odds. The sons of Zedekiah were put to death in his presence, and then his eyes were put out, and he was taken to Babylon. It was a horrible and vindictive piece of cruelty which shows the littleness of mind that may characterise a great conqueror. The temple was despoiled of all its treasures and the land was bereft of all its inhabitants except the very poorest.

Over that feeble remnant Gedaliah was made governor. Jeremiah, who was given permission to stay or to go as he preferred, elected to stay. A few months afterwards a member of the royal family, Ishmael, came to the land and murdered Gedaliah. The treacherous action brought a complete end to the little state. No king could let such an action pass unpunished, but the remnant

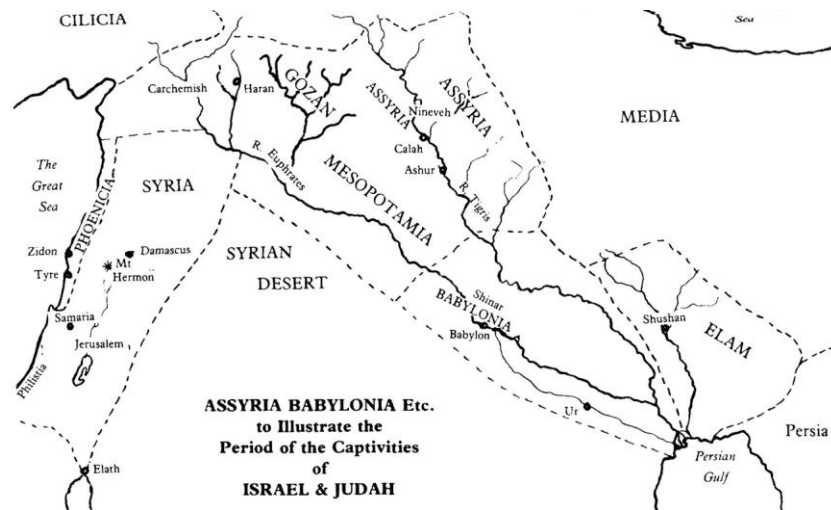
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<sup>1</sup> Ezek. 21:25-27.

<sup>1</sup> Jer. 23:5 and 6 and 33:20 and 21.

did not wait for anything further; they fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them. Thus the kingdom came to an end.

The dark days of the closing years of the kingdom were illuminated by the words of the prophets who spoke the words of Yahweh. Among them was Habakkuk who, looking to the distant future, added his words to those of the earlier prophets, and spoke of a time when “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” It was a long view; it has not yet been realised, but it will be remembered that Moses said something very like it, and said that it would come to pass as truly as the Lord (Yahweh) lived.



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE CAPTIVITY

OF the period of the Captivity little is recorded. At first it was a time of despondency, and is well illustrated by a Psalm of the period.

By the rivers of Babylon,  
There we sat down, yea, we wept  
When we remembered Zion.  
Upon the willows in the midst thereof  
We hanged up our harps.  
For there they that led us captive required of us songs,  
And they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying,  
Sing us one of the songs of Zion.  
How shall we sing the Lord's song In a strange land?  
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,  
Let my right hand forget her cunning.  
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,  
If I remember thee not;

If I prefer not Jerusalem  
Above my chief joy.<sup>1</sup>

One thing the captivity did, it showed that Jeremiah and Ezekiel were true prophets; the false prophets were confounded. Ezekiel now began to speak messages of hope. He told of a time when One Shepherd should be set up, who should feed the people rightly. Canaan should again become God's land and "a plant of renown" should grow up there. The mountains of Israel would shoot forth branches the cities would be inhabited. Such a future was to be "for Yahweh's holy name's sake." Speaking of a great future he declared, "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." "I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be builded, and the land that was desolate shall be tilled ... and they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden." Under the type of a valley full of dry bones the resurrection of the nation was foreshadowed, while another symbol represented the union of the two peoples, Israel and Judah. "I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king to them all, and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all ... And My servant David shall be king over them ... and they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob My servant ... Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them, and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set My Sanctuary in the midst of them for ever more."<sup>1</sup> Thus the old covenants of promise were called to mind for the comfort of the people in captivity.

#### *Nebuchadnezzar's dream*

Amongst those who had been carried to Babylon were Daniel, and three of his friends. They determined they would not defile themselves by partaking of the king's meat, which probably had been offered to the Babylonian gods. After a trial, the prince of the eunuchs permitted them to car pulse instead of meat.

Daniel rose to fame by his ability to recall, and to interpret, a dream that Nebuchadnezzar had seen and had forgotten. The dream was one of a great image composed of various metals, which was struck on the feet by a "little stone cut out of the mountain without hands." Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that it foretold that Babylon would be succeeded by three other dominions, which history has shown to be Persia, Greece, and Rome. Then a divided state of affairs should follow, represented by the mixed composition of the feet and toes of the image (iron and clay), and answering to the divided state of the Old World since the fall of Rome. Finally Daniel said, "The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed ... but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." The Davidic hope and promise were therefore extended until they embraced the whole of the earth, ruled by the Shepherd of whom Ezekiel had spoken, the Davidic king, Immanuel.

A great trial fell upon Daniel's three friends. Nebuchadnezzar set up an image, and issued a decree that at a given signal all the people were to fall down and worship it on pain of being cast into a

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 137.

<sup>1</sup> Ezek., chapters 34, 36 and 37.

fiery furnace. The three Jews refused to do this, and when brought before the king said, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God Whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods." In a rage Nebuchadnezzar ordered the heat of the furnace to be increased seven-fold and the three men were cast into it. So fierce was the heat that those who threw them in were destroyed by it. Suddenly the king looking toward the furnace saw four forms walking in it, one of them was like unto a "son of the gods." Approaching as near as he dared he called for the men to come forth. Not a hair of their heads had been singed; there was not even the smell of fire upon them.

### *God is in control*

Later Nebuchadnezzar had another dream. He saw a great tree which was cut down and bound with a band of iron and brass. Daniel told him that the tree represented him, i.e. Nebuchadnezzar, and that a time of madness should overtake him, during which he should dwell with the beasts of the earth. The purpose of the dream was to teach him, and all others, that the Most High rules in the kingdoms of men. The madness of the king followed as Daniel had foretold. When Nebuchadnezzar recovered, he issued a decree that all peoples should worship the God of heaven, who was able to raise up kings and put them down as He willed.

The years passed by. Nebuchadnezzar died and Nabonidus ascended the throne of Babylon. He was an antiquarian rather than a king, and left the affairs of the kingdom to his son Belshazzar. At the beginning of the latter's viceroyalty Daniel had a dream. He saw four beasts rise up out of the Great Sea. There was a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a great unnamed beast. There are obvious parallels between this vision and that which Nebuchadnezzar had seen, especially in the numbers four and ten (ten toes to the image and ten horns to the fourth beast). Ignoring details, the outcome of either dream is the same, for it was said to Daniel "The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him."

In the last year of Belshazzar's regency he gave a great feast to all the nobles of the kingdom. It was probably a religious festival, for outside the city the armies of Media and Persia were pressing on the siege. In the course of the feast Belshazzar sent for the vessels that had been brought from the temple at Jerusalem, and in them he pledged the gods of Babylon. As he did so a hand appeared against the white wall of the great throne room, and inscribed the words, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin." Sobered by the sight, Belshazzar sought to understand the meaning of the words, but his wise men either could not, or would not, interpret them. At the suggestion of the Queen Mother Daniel was sent for, and told that if he would interpret the words he would receive great honours and be made the third ruler in the kingdom. It was the highest dignity Belshazzar could offer, for he himself was the second in the kingdom. Daniel declined any honours, but he gave the interpretation of the words. Mene: God hath numbered thy kingdom and brought it to an end. Tekel: Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting. Peres: (Upharsin is a plural form of this word). Thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. The fulfilment followed, "In that night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain, and Darius the Mede received the kingdom."

### *Fame and persecution*

Before dealing with the events that affected the land of the Bible Story it will be well to review the things that happened to the Jews in Babylon and Persia. Under Darius Daniel was promoted to one of the highest positions in the State. He was then an old man, but that did not save him from the jealousy of the other officers of the kingdom, who took steps to bring about his fall. There was only one way to do this, and that was to get a decree issued to which Daniel would not, because he could not, conform. They placed before Darius a decree that any one who preferred a request to any king or god, other than Darius himself, during a period of thirty days, should be cast into the den of lions. The issue of the decree made no difference to the custom of Daniel. He had been in the habit of praying to his God, and he did not cease to do so. With his windows opened towards Jerusalem he kneeled down and prayed as usual. Exulting in the success of their stratagem, the lords denounced him to the king. Too late, Darius saw through their designs, and tried to save Daniel. But the decree could not be ignored and Daniel was cast into the den of lions.

Nothing is too hard for God, and He sent His angel to close the mouths of the lions and Daniel was unhurt. Early next morning the king went to the entrance of the den and called to Daniel. With intense relief he heard Daniel reply that God had sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths. Daniel was drawn up from the den, and Darius gave instructions for all his accusers and their families to be cast in. There was no restraint on the lions now; their native ferocity broke forth, and the men and their families perished.

### *Visions of the future*

Daniel was a student of the prophets, and read in the writings of Jeremiah that a fixed time had been appointed for the desolations of Jerusalem. Intensely interested in the fact that the period was about to expire, he prayed that the desolations of the city might cease. In answer to his prayer the angel Gabriel was sent with a revelation concerning the Messiah. He was told that from the issue of a decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, seventy weeks were appointed and that near the end of that time the Anointed One, the Prince, should be cut off and should have nothing. It was a strange prediction and Daniel could not understand it. It all seemed wrong. The Messiah should be the stone cut out of the mountains without hands, who was to receive dominion, glory, and a kingdom that should stand for ever; how then could he be cut off? Books such as the one he had been studying spoke of somewhat similar things. They told of One who should be despised and rejected, who should be bruised for our iniquities, and who yet would divide the spoil with the strong, and in whose hand the pleasure of the Lord should prosper.<sup>1</sup> More light was necessary, and that light came when the Light of the World appeared as the Messiah, who was cut off.

### *The story of Esther*

Daniel was not the only Jew who remained in Babylon or Persia and rose to a position of power there. There was one Mordecai, a descendant of Kish, the father of Saul. He dwelt in Shushan in the days of Ahasuerus, or Xerxes. In the third year of that king's reign a great assembly of notables

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 53.



was held. In the course of the festivities that took place, the king sent for Vashti, the Queen, that the princes might behold her beauty. Vashti refused to come, and was removed from her position as queen. Then a decree was issued commanding all the fair young virgins of the country to go to Shushan, that it might be seen which of them was worthy to occupy the position hitherto held by Vashti. Among those who went was Hadassah, a cousin of Mordecai. She was exceedingly beautiful, and was made Queen. About the same time Mordecai discovered a conspiracy to murder the king. He made it known to Esther (the new name given to Hadassah), who informed the king, and the conspirators were put to death.

At this point troubles began for Mordecai. The Grand Vizier of the country was Haman, and though all the people bowed before him, Mordecai would not do so. Haman was greatly annoyed and determined on a great revenge. He scorned to lay hands on Mordecai alone, he determined to get rid of all the Jews. He placed a garbled account of the position of the Jews before the king and obtained permission to issue a decree for their destruction.

It was a bitter prospect, and Mordecai sent to Esther and urged her to plead the cause of her people. "Who knoweth," he said, "whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this." Esther put on her royal robes and approached the king. It was a dangerous thing to do; it meant death unless the king held out his sceptre towards her. That happened, and Esther invited Ahasuerus and Haman to a banquet. At the banquet she sought another favourable sign, and invited the two to a banquet of wine on the following day. The intervening night was one of fate. The king could not sleep, and called for the chronicles of the kingdom to be read before him. The section read included an account of the conspiracy that Mordecai had discovered. "What has been done for him?" asked the king. "Nothing," was the reply. The king enquired who was in the court, and was told that Haman had just come in. He had come to request the king's permission to hang Mordecai on a great gallows which he had erected. When he came in he was met with the question, "What shall be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour?" Thinking the king must intend to honour him he said, "Let royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and on the head of which a crown royal is set; and let the apparel and the horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes ... and proclaim before the man, 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour'." "Go and do so," said the king, "to Mordecai the Jew." It was a bitter disappointment, but Haman had to obey.

At the banquet of wine Esther put forward her request. She besought the king to save her and her people from the man who would destroy them. "Who is he that durst do such a thing?" asked the king. "The enemy and adversary is that wicked Haman," replied Esther, pointing to the Vizier. The attendants, sensing the king's wrath, seized Haman, and told the king of the gallows that he had caused to be made for Mordecai. "Hang him thereon," said the king, and he was led off to execution.

But the decree had been issued for the extermination of the Jews and it could not be rescinded. Esther approached the king again, and a further decree was issued giving the Jews permission to stand for their lives and put to death any who lifted a sword against them. They were thus saved from destruction, for few were ready to attack those whom the king favoured, and those who did perished. Mordecai was raised to the position previously occupied by Haman. They were remarkable events, and are commemorated to this day by the Jews in the annual feast of Purim.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE RESTORATION

THE position held by Darius was the result of the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus. He was king of the whole of the realms subject to him; Darius reigned for him over Babylon. In the first year of his reign Cyrus issued a decree permitting the Jews living in the provinces of Persia to return to their country and rebuild the temple of the Lord. This action was in accord with the general policy of Cyrus. In response to the decree many of the exiles, led by Zerubbabel, a member of the royal house, returned to Jerusalem to undertake the rebuilding of the temple. There was plenty of enthusiasm at first; the altar was repaired and some of the old sacrifices were reinstituted. Then apathy overtook the workers and little more was done.

The cessation of the work was partly due to the opposition of “the people of the land,” the remnant of the Israelites mingled with the Gentile peoples who had been placed there by the Assyrians. They offered to assist the Jews, and when their offer was rejected they did all they could to hinder the work. The Jews were discouraged and their zeal waned; so they built houses for themselves and discontinued the building of the temple.

#### *Rebuilding encouraged*

They were aroused from their apathy by the words of two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. Haggai commenced to prophesy two months before Zechariah. His voice was a trumpet call to work. “Consider your ways,” he said. He told the people that their troubles were due to their neglect of the house of God. When they responded to his call the tone of his proclamation altered; promise took the place of rebuke. Some of his promises were very far-reaching. Though the temple looked very poor to those who remembered the glories of former days, he said, speaking in the name of the Lord of hosts, “Yet now be strong ... yet once, it is a little while, ... and I will shake all nations, and the desirable things of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory.” Like the earlier prophets he took the view that saw in the fulfilment of the promises something connected with the covenants made with Abraham and David.

Zechariah added his voice in encouragement. In a series of visions he described the earth as sitting still and at rest. He spoke of a time when the Lord should inherit Judah, his portion in the holy land, and choose Jerusalem again. Looking into the future he saw how one whose name should be the Branch should build the temple of the Lord, and reign as king and priest. “In that day saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour, under the vine and under the fig tree.” He foresaw Jerusalem a city of truth, a holy mountain. In a later prophecy he spoke of a king who should speak peace to the nations, and whose dominion should be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. In a final vision he declared that the Lord should be king over all the earth, when the governing principle in the city of Jerusalem should be holiness to the Lord.

Urged by the words of the prophets the work of rebuilding the temple was carried to a conclusion, notwithstanding the opposition of the peoples of the land, and a great dedication ceremony was

held, after which things again quietened down.

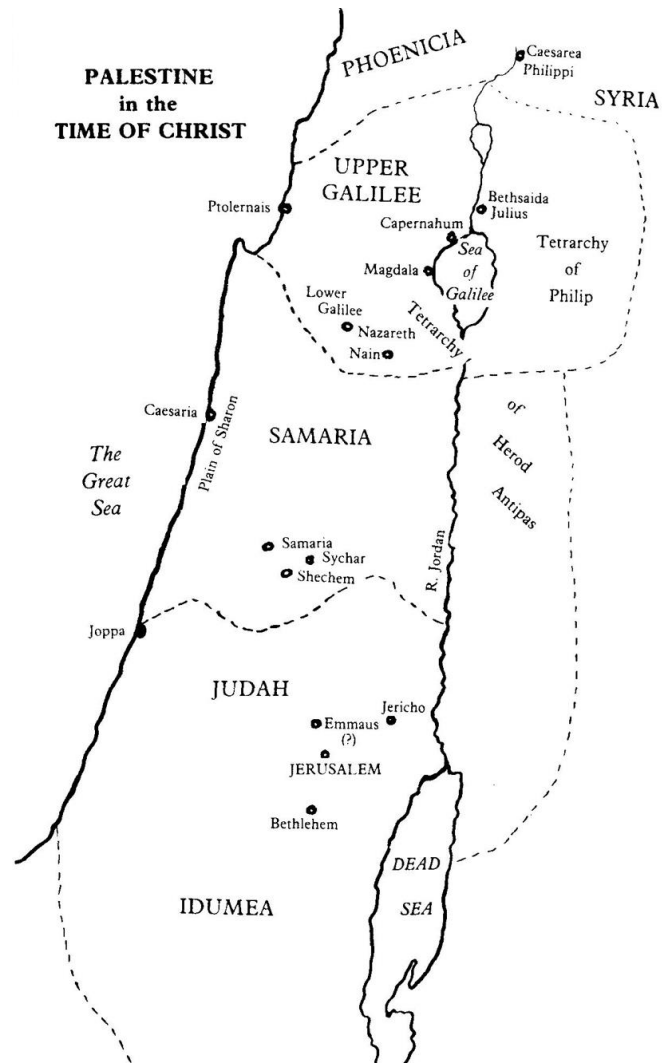
Many years afterwards a fresh company of Jews led by Ezra reached Palestine. Ezra was not a builder but a scribe, an enthusiast for the law of the Lord. His main object was to explain and expound the Law, and to see that it was carried out. The services of the temple were arranged on the lines provided in the Law. He found that marriages had taken place between the returned Jews and the mixed population of Canaan, a thing prohibited in the Law. Ezra moved the people to reform, and induced them to enter into a covenant under which they agreed to put away their alien wives.

Later, Nehemiah was appointed governor. He had been cupbearer in the court of the Persian king, and was troubled by the reports that had reached him concerning the condition of Jerusalem; he desired to do something for the city of his fathers. Armed with the necessary authority from the king he came to Jerusalem and took up the duties of governor.

### *Nehemiah, the governor*

He examined the walls of the city by night and found they were all broken down. He set to work to rebuild them. He was an organizer as well as an of action. He gathered around him people of all classes, including rulers, goldsmiths and women, and in fifty-two days the work was finished in spite of all manner of difficulties and opposition. The old animosity of the people of the land continued, but though they tried every possible expedient they could not stop the progress of the work. It was a great day when the new and repaired walls were dedicated.

Nehemiah then gave attention to the organization of the country and the court, and, in conjunction with Ezra, carried through a religious reformation. Then he returned to Persia, after having been governor for twelve years. In his absence the old evils revived, and he obtained leave to visit the country again. Foreign marriages had once more taken place; the priesthood had been defiled, and another religious reformation was needed; with characteristic vigour Nehemiah took charge of affairs and carried through a religious and a social reformation.



The improvement did not last long; the removal of Nehemiah resulted in all the old evils reviving, and things became as bad as ever. Against the prevailing tendency Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, raised his voice. Mercenary motives prevailed in connection with the temple services; every one required his price. The priesthood was degenerate and the people were corrupt. Marriage laws were flagrantly disregarded. Malachi protested against such things and warned the people of the consequences. He declared "the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in ... But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?" he asked.

In his teaching Malachi gave expression to a truth that runs through, and explains, the whole of the Story. "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Many years afterwards an Apostle expressed the same truth in other words when he said, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." Israel's part in the great plan that forms one of the main themes of the Story cannot be changed. They are beloved for the fathers' sake, and the purpose will be carried out for God's holy name's sake.

Like other prophets of the closing days of the old dispensation, Malachi foresaw the universal extension of the knowledge of God. After rebuking Israel he said, "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense is offered unto My name, and a pure offering; for My name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts." In the certainty of prophecy he spoke of the future as already present.

In this spirit the Old Testament section of the Story closes with a great promise and a warning. "Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings ... Remember ye the law of Moses ... Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord come."

## CHAPTER XXI

### JESUS OF NAZARETH

THE prophet Amos foretold a time when there should be a famine of hearing the words of the law of the Lord. That time came at the end of the ministry of Malachi. For over four hundred years no prophet arose in Israel like those who had been their teachers for so long. There were prophets of a kind, and there were patriots and priests who struggled hard to keep the nation right, but there were none who have a part in this Story, until once more the voice of a prophet was heard in the land.

Strange circumstances attended his birth. His parents were advanced in years and had had no child. His father was a priest, and was ministering in the temple when an angel appeared to him with the message that he should have a son who would appear before Israel in the spirit and power of Elijah, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. In this reference to Elijah the end of the Old Testament is linked with the beginning of the New.<sup>1</sup> The child who was born in accordance with this promise was John the Baptist.

#### *The Messenger*

Some months afterwards an angel appeared to a virgin of Nazareth named Mary with a still more surprising message. He said, "Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bear a son ... He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end." In explanation of how this wonder might be brought about, the angel also said "The holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee therefore also that which is to be born of thee shall be called holy, the Son of God." Not only therefore was the voice of prophecy to be revived, but the great promises of the past were being remembered; David's son who was to possess the throne over Israel was about to be born.

Mary was espoused to Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth. When he found that his affianced bride was

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<sup>1</sup> See Malachi 4:5.

about to have a child he was greatly troubled. He knew he was not the child's father, yet, being of a kindly disposition, he did not want any scandal to attach to Mary. As he thought of the matter he had a vision of an angel who said, "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." He was also told that the whole matter was a fulfilment of the prophecy that a virgin should bring forth a son who should be called Immanuel, which means, God with us. Both he and Mary were told to name the child "Jesus," for he was to save his people from their sins.

### *The birth of Jesus*

In due time the child was born, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, yet made of a woman and therefore a partaker of the nature of his mother.<sup>1</sup> Although known as Jesus of Nazareth he was born in Bethlehem, whither his mother, and his supposed father, had gone on account of a command of the Roman Emperor that a census should be taken. On the night of his birth as some shepherds of Bethlehem watched their flocks by night they were visited by an angel who brought the message, "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Suddenly the messenger was surrounded by a multitude of angels, singing,

"Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth peace among men  
In whom He is well pleased."

The child narrowly escaped destruction. Wise men from the East sought Herod, the king of the country, saying, "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" Herod ascertained that according to the old prophecies, the Messiah, the king of the Jews, was to be born in Bethlehem. He directed the Wise men there, asking them to return to him and let him know where the young child was. They found the babe, and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, but they did not return to Herod as they were warned by God to return another way. Foiled in his attempt to ascertain where the child was, Herod gave instructions for all the children under two years of age in the city of Bethlehem to be killed, but the child was saved through another vision in which Joseph was told to take him and his mother to Egypt. There they remained until Herod was dead.

Thirty years passed by during which the only thing recorded of Jesus is a visit he paid with his mother and father to Jerusalem and the temple. There at the age of twelve he was found listening to the doctors of the law and asking them questions. To his mother's anxious expostulations he replied, "Wist ye not that I must be in my father's house?"

### *Jesus' baptism*

At the end of the thirty years Israel heard again the voice of prophecy. It was John, who came with a message for the people, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." It was a great message and it portended great things. It created a stir among the people, for multitudes went out to hear what

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<sup>1</sup> See John 3:16; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:14.

John had to say. He introduced the initiatory rite of baptism, that is immersion in water, for anything short of that is not baptism at all. Great numbers of people flocked to him and were baptized. The main theme of his teaching was that a greater One than he was coming. Meanwhile he said the axe was laid at the root of the tree of Israel, and that unless the nation brought forth fruits meet for repentance the axe would be used to cut the tree down. Such a message insistently delivered, aroused the attention of the people, and the civil and religious leaders of the nation sent a deputation to know who he really was, Was he Elijah who was to come? or was he the prophet? or was he the Christ? His answer was instructive. "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah."

It may have seemed a strange application of Isaiah's prophecy, but it was very apt. Isaiah had foretold that such a proclamation should be made, and had associated it with the statement, "The voice of one saying, Cry. And one said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, ... but the word of our God shall stand for ever."<sup>1</sup> It was a reminder that there was something stable in a perishing world though few really grasped the fact, either then or now.

One day as John was preaching, Jesus of Nazareth came to him to be baptized. John would have dissuaded him, his baptism was for the remission of sins, and he knew enough of his kinsman to feel sure that he had no sins. But Jesus insisted, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." No greater emphasis could be given; it "became" Jesus to fulfil all righteousness by submitting to baptism, and no follower of his can refuse to do the same. Immediately afterwards the Holy Spirit, in the shape of a dove, descended and alighted on Jesus, and a Voice was heard saying, "This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." To this John added his testimony, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Under such auspices Jesus of Nazareth entered upon his public career.

### *His work*

John's testimony secured for Jesus his first two disciples, Andrew, and John the son of Zebedee who were immediately joined by their brothers Peter and James, and, shortly afterwards, by Philip of Bethsaida. As the days passed, and the influence of Jesus grew, the little band increased until a special choice was made of twelve who were to be apostles and witnesses of the things that he did and said. To write of these things would require a volume of itself; all that can be told here is the barest outline of the story.

Among his deeds reference must be made to the miracles he wrought. These were not mere prodigies, aimed at producing a feeling of wonderment; they were beneficent acts, performed for the good of those who were the subjects of them. The sick were healed, the blind received their sight, the dumb were given speech, the hungry were fed, lepers were cleansed, demoniacs restored to their right mind, and the dead were raised up. Such works coincided with the claims that Jesus made, and his works can only be properly appreciated when they are placed alongside the things he said. He was to take away the sin of the world; what better proof could there be than that he should

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 40:1-8.

remove the effects of sin?

*... And teaching*

As a teacher he was unique. The rabbis of his time were prolix, and depended on the sayings of their predecessors. Jesus was often terse and his teaching original. It went straight to the mark, and reached the heart, so that men and women became his ardent friends or his bitter enemies. He spoke "with authority." "Ye have heard it said by them of old time" thus and so, "but I say unto you" this or that. He preached a new morality. Men were to be judged not by what they did, but by what they thought or desired. A man who looked at a woman with lust in his heart had committed adultery already in intent. The "Thou shalt nots" of the Law gave place to such positive injunctions as "Love your enemies," "Pray for those that persecute you," "Resist not evil," "Ye therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."<sup>1</sup>

His word pictures are the most delightful examples of such teaching that can be found anywhere. They were based on the most common of everyday things, yet they took on a profound meaning. The familiar sight of a sower sowing his seed was made to teach great lessons. Tares growing in a wheatfield taught others. Such things as the fisherman's net, the merchant's trading, a woman leavening her meal or searching for a lost piece of silver, the shepherd on the mountains, the householder on a journey, virgins attending a wedding feast, all were made to point a moral. Nothing seemed to be too trivial to be made the basis of spiritual lessons, which to-day, after nineteen hundred years, are, in all lands, as fresh as when they were first uttered. Even the political events of the period were used to give point to him and his mission. Herod the Great and Archelaus had both journeyed to Rome to receive the kingdom over Israel. So Jesus spoke of a nobleman who went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and return. No one could miss the point. He preached the Kingdom of God, and he must go to God in the far country of heaven, to receive the credentials of his kingdom and then return.

In his teaching he laid the old Story under tribute. He referred to Adam and Eve and the first marriage, to the Flood, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to the destruction of Sodom, to Moses, David Isaiah and Daniel. He knew all about them, and his comments gave importance to many things that might otherwise have seemed quite unimportant. He seemed to gather up the spirit of the past, and to focus its meaning in himself. "Your father, Abraham, rejoiced to see my day, he saw it and was glad."

*Temptations*

So three strenuous years passed by, preaching, teaching, travelling, and healing, above all, showing men how to prepare for the future when they would have to give account of the actions of the present. There were many sad incidents in his life. A profligate Herod had been induced to murder John the Baptist, and Jesus withdrew himself to a desert place apart to mourn. As the last days approached he was deserted by his followers until he turned to the Twelve and said, "And will ye also go away?" It is one of the most pathetic questions in all the world's literature; it reveals a

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g. the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. chaps. 5, 6 and 7.



depth of meaning and of suffering that can scarcely be realised.

On the other hand there were sometimes periods of great exaltation. One of these occurred towards the end of his life when, probably on Mount Hermon, the incident generally referred to as the transfiguration took place. Accompanied by his three most intimate disciples, Peter, James, and John, Jesus had ascended the mountain to pray. As he was engaged in prayer his countenance seemed to alter; it became radiant, and his raiment was white and dazzling. Then Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with him. It was a strange conversation for such a brilliant scene, they talked of his coming death in Jerusalem! Suddenly they were engulfed in a great cloud, and the voice of God was heard saying, "This is My Son, My chosen one; hear him." Then they were alone again; the vision was over, but the experience must have been a tremendous source of strength in the dark days that soon followed.

It was in Jerusalem, the place of the throne that had been promised him, the centre of the worship of his Father, that he found his most bitter enemies. It seemed as if he could do nothing to please its inhabitants. They set traps to catch him in his speech, only to be staggered at his answers, and to marvel at the way in which he turned the tables on them. At last they could stand it no longer. The priests and rulers took counsel, and it only waited for a traitor in the inmost circle of his friends to betray him into their hands.

By that time all the hopes that had been entertained by his followers had been crushed. He had said, "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." He had even promised them that they should sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>1</sup> Now he was always talking of his approaching death. True, he said that he should rise again, but in their depressed state that saying made no impression upon them; the shadow of the cross was too dark.

### *The last supper*

His last meeting with the Twelve took place in an upper room in Jerusalem where they met to celebrate the Passover. There he spoke to them as he had never spoken before. "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. ... If I go I will come again." He promised them the gift of the Holy Spirit, and spoke one of the most beautiful of all parables, that of the True Vine. "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman." "I am the vine, ye are the branches." He depicted the ideal unity of their association together. Then he prayed for them that they might be one, "I in them, and Thou (Father) in me, that they may be perfected into one."<sup>1</sup>

While they were assembled in the upper room, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me." After that he took a cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, even that which is poured out for you." Throughout the ages the memory of that meal, and of the things represented by the bread and the wine, have been commemorated wherever true believers in Jesus have been

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<sup>1</sup> See Luke 12:32; Matt. 5:5; 19:28.

<sup>1</sup> John, chaps. 13 to 17

found. On the first day of each week such people meet to remember Jesus in his final act of self-sacrifice, though at the same time they remember that he is now “the Lord in Spirit,” who brought life and immortality to light in his own experiences. After the supper Jesus and the eleven left Jerusalem for the garden of Gethsemane.

Before they left, Judas, one of the twelve, had gone to the chief priests. Meanwhile Jesus had withdrawn himself even from his disciples to seek his Father in prayer. There in Gethsemane he prayed, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” So great was the agony of this last struggle that his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground. While he was praying his disciples slept, worn out by the emotions of the last few days. Suddenly the garden was invaded by a mob bearing lanterns, torches and weapons, led by Judas, who, by a pre-arranged signal, betrayed his Master by a kiss!

At first it looked as if the attempt would fail. The armed men fell backwards, awed by the presence of the one they sought to take. They soon recovered themselves and laid hold on Jesus, when one of the disciples, Peter, drew a sword and cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest. Jesus put forth his hand and healed him, saying to Peter, “Put up thy sword into the sheath, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword,” which expresses a truth of eternal application that all his followers must respect.

### *His trial*

Now everything was rushed. The Passover was approaching and the priests wanted to get rid of Jesus before the routine of the feast made it impossible for them to do anything further. So they rushed him from Annas to Caiaphas, and from Caiaphas to Pilate, where trials took place which were a mockery of all legal forms. Before the Jewish courts Jesus was asked, “Art thou the Christ?” “Art thou the son of God?” to which he replied “Ye say that I am.” It was sufficient to enable the judges to justify their condemnation. They termed it blasphemy and pronounced him to be worthy of death. While this was taking place the mental sufferings of the prisoner were deepened by a three-fold denial of one of his closest friends Peter.

Then a new trial was rushed through. The Jewish court had no power to inflict a death sentence; the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate, must declare him guilty and pass the sentence. A charge of blasphemy would have failed before Pilate, so a new one was preferred, a charge that Jesus claimed to be the king of the Jews. It was true, yet it was false. As the Messiah of Israel Jesus necessarily claimed to be the king of the Jews. Yet when, shortly before, the multitude had desired to take him by force and make him king, he refused to submit to such a thing. In reply to Pilate’s question, “Art thou a king then?” He replied, “My kingdom is not of this world (or order), if my kingdom were of this world then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now is my kingdom not from hence.” When Pilate pressed the question, “Art thou a king then?” he replied, “Thou sayest that I am a king (the Hebrew form of affirmation). To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.” Pilate could not understand it. He recognised that envy was at the bottom of the accusation, the prisoner before him was not one of whom Rome need be afraid, and he was ready to release Jesus. He tried to save him by suggesting that he should be released as an act of clemency, but the Jews cried out that he should rather release Barabbas, a robber. Then the priests played their final card.

“If thou let this man go thou art not Caesar’s friend; every one that maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.” It was their last argument and Pilate dared not face it; he was afraid, and against his convictions gave the order for Jesus to be crucified.

### *Crucifixion*

Matters were still rushed, the death must take place before the feast, so Jesus was hurried away to Calvary and there, between two thieves, was crucified. Pilate provided the wording for the cross. “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.” It was too pointed for the chief priests, and they urged Pilate to modify it. “What I have written I have written,” was his reply, and there the words remained which connected Jesus with the kingship of the Jews, David’s son, the Messiah despised and rejected of men, apparently forsaken by God, deserted by his friends, denied by one of his closest followers, yet the Lamb of God who was to take away the sin of the world. A great darkness fell on the land, and with a last cry, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” Jesus died—”died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”

Now the chief priests were very careful. They knew that Jesus had said that he would rise again on the third day, so they sought for permission to have the tomb sealed and watched. Pilate appears to have been very curt with them, “You have a watch,” he said, “make it as sure as ye can.” The tomb was sealed, and a watch set while the disciples of Jesus, helpless and dis-spirited, were scattered. It seemed as if all the promise connected with Jesus was over.

### *Resurrection*

On the morning of the third day, however, when some women who had been his followers, went with- spices for his body, they found the tomb open and empty. They saw a vision of angels who gave them the startling information that he was alive. They hurried to the disciples with the news, and Peter and John ran to the sepulchre, and also found it empty. Mary Magdalene, one of the women, spoke to one whom she thought to be the gardener, but a word from him, “Mary,” showed her that it was the Master, risen from the dead. Afterwards he appeared to all the disciples, as well as to individuals among them, and proved to them, “by many infallible proofs” that God had raised him from the dead. He was “raised again for our justification.”

For forty days he remained, meeting them from time to time, that they might be fully assured of his resurrection. Then he gave them their great charge, “Go ye into all the world, preach the gospel to the whole creation, he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that dis-believeth shall be condemned.” It was his last command, and it has never been rescinded; belief of the gospel and baptism are unchanging essentials for all who would be saved, to which must be added the idea expressed in another account of the commission, “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you.” No one who reads, and thinks over the Story, can avoid the conclusion that this last command of Jesus must be obeyed. Having given this commission Jesus ascended to heaven, there to be a merciful and faithful high priest, an advocate with the Father for his people.

As he ascended from them the disciples became aware that two angelic beings were standing by them. They brought a message, a message that has been the central feature of all Christian teaching

ever since. "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? This Jesus, which was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven." No words could be used which would more simply, or more explicitly, convey the idea that Jesus of Nazareth must come back to the earth to fulfil all the things predicted of him, to raise the dead, to act as a judge, because the Father has committed all judgment to the Son, to possess the Land of Promise as the Seed of Abraham, and to sit as a king upon the throne of David in accordance with the covenant concerning the sure mercies of David.

This is an exceedingly brief account of the most important chapter in the whole of the God-Spell, or Story. But from this chapter it will be seen that Jesus was 1, The Seed of the woman; 2, The Seed of Abraham; 3, The Prophet like unto Moses; 4, The Antitype of the lambs slain under the Mosaic Law; 5, David's greater Son; 6, Immanuel (God with us), for "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself"; 7, The Branch of the Lord; 8, The Lord our Righteousness. Thus all the Old Testament lines of promise and prophecy converge in him who was the Word made flesh.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE APOSTLES

WHEN the apostles returned to Jerusalem after the ascension of their Master, they remained there with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brethren, who had at last been convinced of the truth of their brother's claims to be the Messiah. Before his resurrection they had not believed in him. Altogether the believers in the city numbered a hundred and twenty. The first task that faced them was to appoint an apostle in the place of Judas, who had hanged himself. The choice was made by means of the lot, and Matthias was appointed.

#### *Pentecost*

They waited in the city until the day of Pentecost. On that day, as they were gathered together, a sudden rushing sound was heard, and tongues as of flame were seen resting on each of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak "with other tongues." News of what had occurred reached the people outside, and crowds came together to see the strange phenomenon. Some said the apostles were drunk, but Peter, acting as their spokesman, pointed out that this was a most improbable suggestion, and showed that it was only on the lines of what their prophets had foretold. Then he boldly preached Christ to them; and charged them with having crucified one who had been approved of God as evidenced by the wonders and signs that God did by him. God had raised him from the dead, he declared, an event which David had foretold because he had known that God would raise up the Christ to sit upon his (David's) throne. So effectually did Peter speak that his hearers cried out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter's reply was noteworthy. "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of sins." Three thousand obeyed. The Christian Church had commenced its public career.

For a time nothing could stay its progress. Miracles added to the impression made by the apostles' words. A lame man was healed at the gate of the temple, and again Peter spoke to the crowds that gathered. He charged them with denying the Holy and Righteous One, with killing the Prince of

Life, whom God had raised and glorified. He told them that God would send Jesus Christ, who was in heaven waiting for the times of restoration of which God had spoken through all the prophets. As a result two thousand more were added to the Church.

To stop this progress the rulers put the apostles in prison. When they brought them before the Council Peter referred to Jesus as the “Stone which the builders rejected,” and the “only Name under heaven wherein we must be saved.” The rulers could do nothing. The healed man stood before them, and near by was the empty tomb in which Jesus had been placed! So they let them go, “for all men glorified God for that which was done.”

The progress that had been made caused the high priest and the Sadducees to put the apostles in prison again, but in the night an angel opened the prison doors, and in the morning the apostles were in the Temple proclaiming “the words of this life.” They were re-arrested and brought before the council, only to tell them once more that God had raised Jesus from the dead. The council could do nothing but charge them not to speak in the name of Jesus. It was a useless charge, for, as they replied, “they could not but speak the things they had seen and heard.”

### *Stephen and Philip*

The growth of the Church made it necessary for arrangements to be made for the organisation of the business side of its affairs. Seven men were appointed for this purpose, one of whom was Stephen. He was a man of great ability, and engaged in dispute with various parties of the Jews. As they could not silence him by argument they brought false charges against him. He made his defence before the council, showing how they had only repeated the actions of their fathers who had rejected Joseph and Moses, both of whom had become the saviours of their people. So effective was his argument that they “gnashed upon him with their teeth,” cast him out of the city, and stoned him. It was a travesty of justice, just as the trial of Jesus had been. The first Christian martyr was a victim of hate. Stephen died with a prayer on his lips for the forgiveness of his murderers. Standing by, and minding the clothes of those who stoned Stephen, was a young man named Saul.

Gradually the area covered by the labours of the Christians extended. Persecution drove them throughout the country, and wherever they went they preached of Jesus. Samaria was the scene of activities, and there the two-fold aspect of the God-Spell is indicated by the expression “the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ,” on belief of which many of the Samaritans were baptised.

Philip, who had preached to the Samaritans also taught the truth to a eunuch, a man in the service of Candace, the Queen of Ethiopia. He was returning from Jerusalem and was reading from a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. The scroll was open at the fifty-third chapter. Philip joined him, and, taking the words of the scroll as his text, “preached unto him Jesus.” No more suitable chapter could be imagined for such a purpose. It speaks of One who was not desired, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, despised and rejected of men, but one on whom God had laid the iniquity of us all. It told of One who was smitten for the transgressions of his people, and who, though they made his grave with the wicked, was with the rich in his death. By his knowledge this one was to justify many, and bear their iniquities, though ultimately he should divide the spoil with the strong

and be an intercessor for the transgressors.

### *Light to the Gentiles*

A much greater extension of the area of gospel proclamation was opened up by a vision which Peter had in Joppa. He was hungry, and dreamed he saw a great sheet let down from heaven containing all kinds of unclean animals and creeping things. A voice told him to kill and eat, but he demurred, for he had “never eaten anything that was common and unclean.” Then the voice spoke again, “What God hath cleansed that make not thou common.” This occurred three times, and then some men who had come from Caesarea asked for him. They had been sent by Cornelius, a centurion of the Roman army, with a request that Peter would go to Caesarea because Cornelius also had had a vision. Realising that God must have a work for him to do, Peter went, and in the most Roman city of Palestine, he preached to a Roman soldier the things concerning Jesus Christ. It is worth while calling attention to one saying of Cornelius. He told Peter he had seen a vision and had been told to send for him “who shall speak unto thee words whereby thou shalt be saved.” It is clear from this that a belief of certain things is essential for salvation, the things which concern the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Peter declared these to Cornelius and his friends and then, to the astonishment of the Jews who were with Peter, the Holy Spirit fell upon these Gentiles and they were baptized. Thus the door of faith was opened to all peoples, and the way was prepared for the greatest development of all.

### *The conversion of Saul*

That development was connected with Saul, who had looked after the clothes of the men who stoned Stephen. He was an enthusiastic advocate of the traditions of the Jews, and a persecutor of the Christians. He obtained letters from the chief priests authorising him to go to Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished. On the way he was suddenly struck to the earth by a light brighter than that of the mid-day sun, and heard a voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”

“Who art thou, Lord?” he said.

“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest,” was the reply.

The brilliancy of the light had deprived Saul of sight, and he had to be led into the city of Damascus. Three days later he was visited by a Christian of the city who called him “Brother Saul,” laid his hands upon him so that he recovered his sight, and then said, “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins.”

The main interest of the Story now centres in Saul, or Paul as he was afterwards called. At a meeting of the Church at Antioch the Holy Spirit said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” Soon afterwards the two men set out accompanied by John Mark, to inaugurate the greatest movement in the Christian Church. These three Jews were going into new lands to make known the Story. Try to realise their task. They were going to proclaim that Jesus of Nazareth, who had been rejected by his own nation, and crucified as a common malefactor

by the Roman governor of Judea, had been raised from the dead, and was alive for evermore, not as a mere shade, but as a living, substantial person; that this Jesus was the one and only Saviour of Jews and Gentiles, and that in due time he would come back to earth, raise the dead, collect all the living who are amenable to his judgment, and sit as the judge of the quick and the dead. Equally surprising was the other aspect of their teaching. This Jesus would overthrow all the existing dominions of the earth, whether ruled by Caesar or by others, and occupy the throne of universal dominion, sharing that exalted position with those who identified themselves with him in the way he had appointed, i.e. belief of the Story, repentance, baptism in water, and a faithful obedience to his commands; commands which involve the crucifixion of the flesh and the rejection of the world. Could any proclamation seem more fantastic or more hopeless? Yet it succeeded, and wherever they went they found those who listened, believed and obeyed. Only two things can account for their success, the message was true, and they spoke “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”<sup>1</sup>

### *Paul’s missionary journeys*

On that first journey Barnabas and Paul went to Cyprus and Asia Minor proclaiming the truth to peoples of various cities. John Mark left them and returned home. An excellent illustration of Paul’s manner of teaching is found in an address he gave to the Jews in Antioch in Pisidia. It abounds with such expressions as “God chose our fathers and exalted the people,” “He led them forth,” He “destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan” and “gave Israel their land.” “He gave them judges,” “God gave them Saul” and “removed him.” He “raised up David to be their king.” It is typical of Bible history which is not a mere record of events, but the account of a Divine purpose working in the affairs of men, leading to a definite end which centres in Christ, for God, “brought unto Israel a Saviour Jesus” and “God raised him from the dead.” It was in this way that Paul proclaimed the gospel, or God’s Story.

Paul’s second journey, accompanied by Silas, took him through Syria and Cilicia to Asia Minor, where, at Lystra, he chose Timothy to be a younger member of the party, as John Mark had been on the first journey. Guided by the Holy Spirit they reached Troas, where Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia, saying, “Come over into Macedonia and help us.” So the gospel reached Europe, for Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth, received the word of God. Churches were established in various parts and another chapter in the Story was opened.

The third journey took him through Asia Minor “establishing all the disciples.” He went to Ephesos, where he stayed a long time, then to Corinth and the country of Greece, after which he returned to Jerusalem by way of Troas and Miletus, where he met the elders of the Ephesian church to whom he gave a remarkable address, ending with a significant commendation, “I commend you to God and the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified.”

When he reached Jerusalem and was in the Temple he was attacked by the Jews, and was only rescued by a company of Roman soldiers who were quartered in the Castle of Antonia, adjoining the Temple. He was brought before the High Priest, but a conspiracy being formed against him, he was sent to Caesarea to the Roman governor Felix. Before him Paul reasoned of righteousness,

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 2:4.

temperance and judgment to come, and so powerful were his arguments that the Roman trembled. Paul remained in Caesarea until Felix was removed and Festus was appointed governor. Then he placed himself beyond the power of the Jews by appealing to Caesar's judgment seat. Before he could be sent to Rome, Agrippa, the king of Judaea, visited Festus and Paul was brought before him. Finally he was sent to Rome. The record of his journey there is one of the most graphic pieces of descriptive writing in the whole of the Story; it must be read in full to be appreciated; no summary can do it justice.<sup>1</sup> Finally he reached Rome, and there the Story ends. "And Paul abode two whole years in his own hired dwelling, and received all that went in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding him."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE LETTERS OF THE APOSTLES

ALTHOUGH the God-Spell ends with Paul in Rome there are two appendices to which a brief allusion must be made—the epistles and the Apocalypse.

Paul and the other Apostles were not only preachers, some of them were also writers. There are thirteen epistles of Paul, two of Peter, three of John, and one each of James and Jude, together with an anonymous one addressed to the Hebrews. Most of these were written because of circumstances that prevailed in the churches or that affected the individuals to which they were addressed. They furnish interesting lights on the history of the early church, and are full of wise counsel.

#### *Early letters*

The earliest of the Epistles of Paul were the two to the Thessalonians. They are marked by the simplicity that characterised the early years of Christianity. One idea stands out in each of them; the believers were waiting for the return of Christ: they were to be the Apostle's "crown of glorying before our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming." He prayed for them that they might be unblamable "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Their hope for their friends who had died was that they should be raised from the dead when "the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout ... and the dead in Christ shall rise first." They knew of the times and seasons which were to indicate the time of the coming of the Lord. Their persecutions were to be recompensed when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven, though that event would not take place until there had been a falling away (an apostacy) from the truth."

Next in order, probably, was the Epistle to the Galatians. It was written to oppose the efforts of some who were trying to introduce Judaism into the Church. It emphasises the fact that there is only one gospel, anything else is not really a gospel. That gospel had been preached to Abraham when God promised him that in his seed, the Christ, all the families of the earth should be blessed. The importance of it in a personal sense is seen in the fact that the inheritance connected with the

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 1:27.



promise was not that of the law, but that “as many of you as have been baptized into Christ did put on Christ ... and if ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise.”

### *Questions and answers*

The two Epistles to the Corinthians were written in response to letters from them asking for guidance, and as a result of reports of evil practices among them, yet they contain much that is of universal application, not the least important being the necessity of unity in the Church. The command of a weekly memorial meeting is emphasised. Paul had “received of the Lord” particulars in relation to the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine. In the midst of these instructions there occurs one of the outstanding chapters in the New Testament, the Hymn of Love, the greatest thing in the world, for now “abideth faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.”

A remarkable chapter sets out the place of resurrection in the Christian faith. If there be no resurrection of the dead, that is, of the dead body, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished; only when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, shall the saying come to pass, “death is swallowed up in victory.” The second epistle sets forth the place of judgment in the scheme, “for we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things in the body, according to that he hath done, whether good or bad.”

### *Important teachings*

The Epistle to the Romans was written before Paul had been to Rome. It is more like a theological treatise than an ordinary letter and is an excellent exposition of the doctrines of the early Church. It sets forth the majesty of the God as evidenced in creation, the necessity of judgment “in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ.” An allusion to the Abrahamic promises leads to the subject of faith, evidenced by Abraham himself in his implicit belief in the promise of God, and then to an important section which deals with the problems of sin and evil and their removal. Sin and death came by one man, Adam, and as a result, death reigned. In like manner righteousness and life come through the obedience of Christ, that, “as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness, unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Such a result may accrue to those who have been baptized into the death of Christ, and who have realised the result in their later life—dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God in Jesus Christ.

There follows an elaborate argument on the whole subject. Sin is viewed not only as an act but as a principle, a law of sin in the members of the individual, causing Paul to say, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?” only to respond “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” It is noticeable that in the course of the whole argument Paul does not make the slightest allusion to the common idea of a devil, or a hell of consciousness and suffering. “The wages of sin is death, and the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

A later section of the epistle deals with Israel’s part in the plan. They were beloved for the fathers’ sake but had been cast off for their sins. Under the figure of an olive tree Paul shows that Israel

were as branches broken off because of unbelief so that Gentiles might, contrary to nature, be grafted into the olive tree and thus share in the promises made to Abraham. The final section of the epistle is taken up with rules for daily conduct and a doxology of great power.

Paul's stay in Rome is marked by a group of Epistles, those to the Ephesians, the Philippians, and the Colossians, and a personal one to Philemon. They contain evidence of a gradual falling away from the simplicity of the faith. Philosophy and vain deceit, the traditions of men, the "rudiments of the world," had corrupted the early simplicity of the Truth as it is in Jesus, and these epistles are directed against such tendencies. Yet the old simplicity is there. The covenants of promise are still referred to; believers are regarded as fellow citizens with the saints of the past, fellow heirs of the old promises. A seven-fold unity is enjoined, One body (the Church, the body of Christ), one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. The same salvation is proclaimed, the coming of "the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory." The way to this end is also the same, burial with Christ by baptism that they might be raised by him through faith. Their life was hid with Christ in God, only to be received when Christ "who is our life" is manifested at his second coming.

The last group consists of letters to Timothy and Titus. They are more intimate in character, but they lay down principles for the guidance of the church and those who serve the church. They speak of the great degeneracy that was to mark the last times, when men should be "lovers of self," "lovers of money" and "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." As the Apostle reached the end of his career and recognised that his death was at hand, he wrote, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me at that day," "according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus."

### *Old and New Covenants*

The anonymous Epistle to the Hebrews is a remarkable exposition of the "betterness" of the religion of Christ when compared with that of the Mosaic dispensation. Jesus is more excellent than either angels, Moses, Aaron, or Joshua. Yet the truth in him had its foundations in the past, and all that had gone before had been a preparation for him. "Better" is a keynote to the epistle: better promises, better sacrifices, a better hope, for Jesus had entered into the holy place having obtained eternal redemption, an end that exceeds all the promises of the law, and is only possible because Jesus had died as the sacrificial victim whereby the Abrahamic covenant had been confirmed. His death and resurrection indicated how the principle is to be understood that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. An outstanding chapter defines faith, "the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen," and proceeds to illustrate that faith by many examples recorded in the Story. In every case it was a faith that worked by love, and it rested on the old promises, confirmed by the death and resurrection of Jesus, showed that while "here we have no continuing city" we look for "the city which is to come," in contrast to the idea of one to go to. An important section of this epistle emphasises the fact that Jesus was of the same nature as all human beings, that "He might bring to naught him that had the power of death, that is the devil." As the "sting of death is sin," this saying identifies the devil with the sin nature, or sin power in us, which is to be brought to naught through Christ.

### *Keeping the faith*

The Epistle of James was evidently written by the person spoken of as “James, the Lord’s brother.” It is very practical, and is mainly concerned with the actions and the duties of the believer. It extols the virtue of patience and exhorts its readers to “be patient until the coming of the Lord.”

Two Epistles of Peter follow. They are wonderful indications of what a change can be wrought in any one by an association with Jesus; they are as unlike the sayings of the Peter of the early days as they could possibly be. He speaks of Jesus as “the chief corner stone, elect, precious,” and refers to the sufferings of the Christ and the glories that shall follow, adding to this the idea that in some way the Christian has to make up that which was lacking of those sufferings—a wonderful and suggestive thought. The old lessons of the past are reiterated. “All flesh is as grass,” but “the Word of the Lord abideth for ever.” The great hope of the new dispensation is emphasised, and attention fixed upon the time when the Chief Shepherd shall be manifested. Peter gives a word of warning. “Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” There were enemies around seeking for some way of stopping the progress of Christianity; the pagan authorities as the embodiment of the sin-power of the time. Peter had been put in prison by the Jewish authorities in Judaea, and the “sojourners of the Dispersion” were likely to have similar experiences in Asia Minor. There is no need to imagine the Devil of a past theology roaring like a lion in his search for the souls of believers.

A second letter used the great judgments of the past to illustrate judgments to come, and the dangers of false teachers or prophets. In it Peter spoke of a new heaven and a new earth wherein righteousness shall dwell, once more linking the New Testament with the Old in its hopes and expectations, for it is in the Old that the details of the new heavens and the new earth must be sought<sup>1</sup> Peter ends his second epistle with an exhortation to “grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” and the ascription to him of glory both now and for ever.

John’s three Epistles are marked by the things that characterised the man. The great Christian virtue is love, and its duties and obligations are spoken of and emphasised. The simple truths of the Christian religion are insisted on. The place of Christ as the propitiation for sins, the fact that he came in the flesh, i.e., the flesh of men and not in some other kind of flesh; his coming again to cause his followers to be as he is now; spirit and not mere flesh and blood. They need life, and eternal life is only to be found in him. He adds his testimony to that of Paul in relation to the simple things of the religion of Christ.

The list of the Epistles is completed by that of Jude, a short letter in which he shows the necessity of contending earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints, and building ourselves up on that most holy faith.

These are only a few thoughts on the letters of the New Testament. They would require volumes for their proper treatment yet they form a part of the great Story and must have at least a passing

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<sup>1</sup> See 65:17; 66:23; 51:16.

allusion in this review.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE APOCALYPSE

THE Story finishes with a book which is unique in character; it is almost wholly concerned with what was, at the time of writing, in the future. It is described as “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him to show unto his servants the things which must shortly come to pass.” These things were not indicated by plain predictions but by a series of signs which represented something different from themselves. All that can be done is to summarise the sections, and show how the past finds its consummation in this book—The Apocalypse.

#### *Seven churches*

It was addressed to seven typical churches in Asia. This was not the Asia of geography, but the Roman province of that name, situated in the west of Asia Minor. The book contains, first of all, seven letters addressed to these churches. All have certain expressions in common, and these expressions apply equally to the churches of to-day. They are, “I know thy works,” “He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches,” and “To him that overcometh will I give” thus and so. These expressions may be regarded as the key-notes of the letters which describe the spiritual state of the various churches, and may be considered as typical of the condition of the churches of all times.

The chief actor in the book is shown in a vision that John, the writer of the book, saw. There was a seven-sealed scroll in which was inscribed in a series of hieroglyphs the future history of the church and the world. John greatly desired to see the contents of the scroll, but so long as the seals remained unbroken he could not do so. So intense was his desire to see what was written that he wept much until one appeared who was able to open the seals. That one is described as “the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” and his appearance was as “a Lamb standing as it had been slain.” Thus in the last book of the Story the Old and New Testaments merge in the symbols that are used. Shiloh, of the blessing of Judah, who was both the root and the offspring of David, is seen to be the slain, but risen, Lamb, and the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is the operator throughout the whole of the book, in which, in symbol, he is seen controlling the affairs of the world and of the Church, to the great rejoicing of certain symbolic creatures who are described in the book.

As the Lamb proceeded to open the seals a series of incidents took place which show the history of the church and the world in the period that witnessed the conquests of the Cross and the fall of paganism. The sixth seal completes that process and shows the “wrath of the Lamb” on those who had persecuted the Church.

### *Seven seals*

The vision that follows shows, by anticipation, the final result. John saw a great multitude “out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues” standing before the throne of the Lamb, ascribing glory to God. They are spoken of as those who had come out of the great tribulation and who had washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. All these were to be led to fountains of waters of life and every tear was to be wiped away.

The opening of the seventh seal discloses seven angels, each with a trumpet in his hand. As these trumpets were successively blown various incidents took place which represent the events connected with the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, first in the West and then in the East. The fifth and sixth trumpets which are described as “woes,” were principally connected with the East, though the latter comprehends the great events in the West which ushered in what may be described as the Modern World. It resulted in the new condition of national affairs which arose out of the French Revolution, which brought about a new orientation of the peoples of the world. In direct association with these things there is a re-assertion of the great truth which is to be the outcome of the whole story. It is expressed in the words “the kingdoms of the world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever,” at a time of great crisis when the nations are angry and God’s wrath comes, and the time of the dead that they shall be judged, and the servants of God, the prophets and the saints, shall receive their reward. It will be seen therefore that the last book of all teaches the same things as all the rest of the Story.

### *The return of Jesus*

A kind of appendix follows which illustrates the religious history of the times already covered, and this leads again to the anticipation of the great future to which the whole programme leads. The Lamb is seen standing on Mount Zion (the site of David’s throne) with a symbolic host who have been inscribed in their foreheads with the name of God, the name revealed to Moses at the bush, and who then go forth to finish the work of subduing the world for Christ. Then the thread of history in prophecy is taken up again. Seven angels appear having seven golden bowls, the contents of which are to finish the wrath of God. The contents are poured out on various parts of what was the Roman World. They culminate in the seventh, but during the process of pouring the sixth a warning goes from the Lamb, “Behold I come as a thief,” while the message connected with the seventh is “It is done.”

At this point another appendix fills in the religious aspect of affairs of the trumpets and bowls period. It culminates in the destruction of a system spoken of as “Mystery, Babylon the Great” enthroned on seven hills. This system, known as the Papacy, comes to an end in the judgments of the last bowl.

Then the Apocalypse ends with visions of the last scenes of all. There are Hallelujah rejoicings, for “the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth.” The time comes for “the marriage of the Lamb” to take place. His Bride, the immortal and glorified saints, are seen clad in fine linen, bright and pure, which is described as being the righteous acts of the saints. The Lamb, as the Word of God, goes forth to smite the nations and to rule them with an iron rod. All the forces of evil symbolised by the dragon, called the Devil and Satan, are restrained, whilst Christ and his saints reign on the earth for

a thousand years. In this reign the old prophecies are fulfilled when David's son rules the world from his throne on Mount Zion.

Finally, at the end of the thousand years, the forces of evil break forth again, only to be crushed and destroyed. Then there is to be a "new heaven and a new earth," the "tabernacle of God will be with men," and "He shall dwell with them ... and be their God, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more."

So the Story comes to an end. It is indeed a gospel, or a God-Spell, worthy of the God who conceived it, and who has been over-ruling all things to bring it about. "And the Spirit and the Bride say Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come; he that will, let him take the water of life freely." Thus though early in the Story we read of the beginning of death, here it finishes with life, and that a life which is eternal. "He which testifieth these things saith, Yea, I come quickly. Amen, come Lord Jesus."

*There is no substitute for reading the Scriptures themselves and it is hoped that this book will have stimulated a greater desire for understanding the word of God in the Bible.*

*One good way to start is with the help of a daily Bible reading plan which, complete with notebook, will take the reader through a year's helpful study. This can be obtained free on application to the publishers.*

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AN EPITOME OF THE FIRST PRINCIPLES  
OF THE ORACLES OF GOD

AN EPITOME OF THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE ORACLES OF GOD

FROM a statement in the Epistle to the Hebrews it will be gathered that there are certain well denned beliefs which are described as The First Principles of the Oracles of God. They may be regarded as the fundamental truths of Christianity. In the Acts of the Apostles they are spoken of as the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ. Below will be found a summary of such principles as established in the Bible, and expressed or implied, in the foregoing pages. The method of setting them out involves certain repetitions, but it is thought that this way is desirable for the sake of clearness, and to make each subject as complete as possible. No references are given, either to the Bible or to the pages in this book; the statement is regarded merely as a summary.

GOD.—There is only one God, self-existent and supreme, Who is from everlasting to everlasting; eternal, almighty, omniscient, and everywhere present by His Spirit. He is the Creator and

Sustainer of all things, the source of all life, and He overrules the affairs of mankind so that they may ultimately lead to the fulfilment of His great purpose to fill the earth with His glory. He is holy, just, and merciful. He has made His purpose known by revelation, both directly and indirectly. That purpose is to be found in the Bible, which is His word, and in which He reveals Himself to those who believe and obey it.

**THE SPIRIT OF GOD.**—The Spirit of God is the power by means of which God has acted in the past in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the formation of man and all things. It is the means by which He sustains all creation, and controls all things for the accomplishment of His purposes. It is sometimes called the Holy Spirit. By it God has revealed His will in the past, revealing many things which could not otherwise have been known. By means of it Jesus was begotten in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and by it the apostles and prophets were enabled to make known God's will and purpose.

**JESUS CHRIST.**—Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, begotten of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. He was therefore the "Seed of the Woman," and, by reason of his descent, also the "Seed of Abraham" and the "Seed of David." Being born of Mary he partook of her nature, that is the nature of all men and women, yet he was Immanuel, or God with us, the Word made flesh. By reason of his nature he was, like all human beings, tempted from within, yet he never succumbed to temptation, but was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. He was born to be a sacrifice for sin, the "Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world." During his public ministry he preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God; and at the end of his life was rejected by his people, was crucified and buried. On the third day God raised him from the dead and constituted him The Lord the Spirit. Thus "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures," and was "raised again for our justification." He ascended to heaven, where he is acting as a high priest, or an advocate with the Father, on behalf of his people.

As the Anointed of God (Christ means anointed) he is heir to the great promises of God, and will return to the earth to fulfil the covenants made with Abraham and David, receiving the earth for his inheritance and ruling the world in righteousness on the throne of his father David. At his second appearing he will raise the responsible dead, and gather them with the responsible among the living, to his judgment seat, rewarding the righteous with eternal life, and consigning the wicked to the punishment due to them, a punishment which will end in the second death.

**MAN.**—Man is a mortal creature (or soul), formed out of the dust, living by means of the breath, or spirit, of life. He is subject to death, for the wages of sin is death, which has passed upon all men. In the death state man is absolutely unconscious, he "knows not anything." He will continue in that state until the resurrection, which will take place when Christ returns to the earth.

**SIN.**—Sin is the transgression of the Divine Law, but the word is also used in an extended sense to describe the principle of evil, or lust, which is inherent in human nature, and which leads to actual sin, or transgression. It is the cause of all the evils to which human beings are subject, including death which is its wages. The principle of evil within man is the "Devil" of the Bible, which Jesus Christ has already destroyed in relation to himself, and will destroy in all the faithful when he returns. At the end of his millennial reign sin will be entirely destroyed.

**RESURRECTION.**—Resurrection means the raising of the body from the dust of death. It will take place when Christ returns to the earth, and will affect all who are responsible to the judgment seat of Christ.

**JUDGEMENT.**—Christ is the appointed Judge. At his judgement seat that judgement will be exercised in relation to all those who (living or dead at the time of his coming) are amenable to it by reason of their knowledge of the Divine will and commands. Others, not so responsible, will remain in the congregation of the dead, or among the mortal living. The righteous will be changed from mortality to immortality, and be made kings and priests to reign with Christ on earth in the Kingdom of God. The wicked will be punished according to their deserts, and will finally suffer the second death, from which there will be no release.

**THE COVENANTS OF PROMISE.**—God has made various promises, some of which have been made the subject of covenants. The covenant with Noah guarantees the continuance of the regularity of the seasons, and implies the eternal existence of the earth. The covenant with Abraham ensures eternal life and the everlasting possession of the land of Canaan, and of the earth, by him and his seed. (His seed is Christ, and all who are “in Christ.”) The covenant with David involves the restoration of his throne over Israel, and its occupation by Christ, and, by implication, the extension of his kingdom over all the earth.

**THE EARTH.**—The earth is to endure for ever, and is to be the scene of God’s Kingdom in the future. It has been promised to the righteous who are to dwell therein for ever, when it is freed from all evil. It will then be filled with the glory of the Lord, and with the knowledge of the Lord.

**ISRAEL.**—The people of Israel, descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are a chosen race. They were driven from their land, the land of Canaan, because of their unfaithfulness and disobedience, especially in rejecting their Messiah when he appeared, and have been scattered throughout all the earth. They are to be regathered to their own land, where they will be reunited into one kingdom, and will form the first section of the Kingdom of God under the rulership of Christ, their king, ruling from the city of Jerusalem.

**THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**—In the past Israel was the Kingdom of God, and though they rejected God as their king, they continued to be regarded as “the Kingdom of the Lord.” When they are restored they will again constitute the Kingdom of God, which will be extended to include the whole of the earth—all the kingdoms of the world.

In this kingdom all the evils that now afflict mankind will be restrained. Christ will be the King, assisted by those who are approved by Him at His judgement seat. The mortal people of the earth will be blessed in every way. Profound peace will prevail universally, and prosperity will abound. A universal law will go forth from Zion, and one religion will be held by all mankind. This phase of the Kingdom will last for a thousand years, at the end of which mortality will be banished from the earth, which will then be entirely freed from sin and every evil, and God will be all in all. (A judgement at the end of the thousand years will adjudicate on those who have lived during that period.)



**SALVATION.**—Salvation, or a participation in eternal life, or the Divine nature, in the Kingdom of God, is offered to men and women upon certain conditions. It is based upon the shedding of blood, the “precious blood of Christ.” The conditions on which men and women may attain salvation include a belief of the gospel, or the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ; repentance, that is a change of mind and a new manner of life; baptism, a complete immersion in water, into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and thereafter an obedience to the commandments of God as given through Christ and the Apostles.

**THE DUTIES OF THOSE IN CHRIST.**—All who are “in Christ” by baptism into him must conform to his requirements as revealed in the Bible. Amongst other things they are commanded to partake in a memorial of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine), “This do in remembrance of me,” which after the Apostolic example, they do every first day of the week. They are expected to be separate from the world, in it but not of it, and they must conform to the commandments of Christ even though they conflict with the laws of men.

The purpose for which the gospel, or the God-Spell, is proclaimed is to “take out of the Gentiles a people for God’s name.” The implications of this purpose cannot be insisted upon too greatly. The plan which has gradually been unfolded is one that is worthy of the God who originated it and Who has, in Christ, carried it through so far. For every reader of these pages the great question to be faced is, what is the effect of the knowledge of this plan, which originated in the mind of God, upon him? It should be a call to holiness and to service, a service which, commencing now, will find its perfect expression when “this mortal shall have put on immortality” having been made a partaker of the Divine nature.

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