

# **Apostasy and Revival in the Books of Kings**

*David Gooding*

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# Contents

1	<a href="#">Overview and Introduction</a>	3
2	<a href="#">Christ and the House of God</a>	13
3	<a href="#">Elijah at Carmel</a>	22
4	<a href="#">Elijah at Horeb</a>	32
5	<a href="#">The Ascensions of Elijah</a>	42
6	<a href="#">The Miracles of Elisha</a>	51
7	<a href="#">Preserving the House</a>	62
8	<a href="#">How to Keep Going in Frustrating Times</a>	71
9	<a href="#">Standing as Pillars</a>	79
10	<a href="#">The Secret of Godliness</a>	88
	Charts	97
1.	<a href="#">Major Themes in 1 and 2 Kings</a>	98
2.	<a href="#">A Record of Disobedience, Apostasy and Judgment</a>	99
3.	<a href="#">Major Revivals</a>	100
	<a href="#">About the Author</a>	101

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the English Revised Version (1885), the *King James Version*, or are Dr Gooding's own translations or paraphrases.

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w: [www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)

e: [info@myrtlefieldhouse.com](mailto:info@myrtlefieldhouse.com)

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## Overview and Introduction

We come to the first of ten studies on the books of 1 and 2 Kings that we hope to conduct here tonight and in the ensuing weeks, God willing. The books of 1 and 2 Kings are not necessarily every Christian's favourite books. Granted, they have some exciting chapters in them. They tell us about the colourful prophets Elijah and then Elisha, and a lot of people feel the books would be far better improved if all the stories were like those instead of what they are. We shall not be studying the whole of the detail in each of the two books. We only have ten talks, and there are nearly fifty chapters in these two books combined, so I shall be using my special privilege in selecting one of the major themes of 1 and 2 Kings. What that major theme is, is fairly well indicated in verse 1 of chapter 1.

It's a very dramatic opening, for it opens with the description of King David on his deathbed, shivering cold. Of course, his servants, loyal to him, did their best, hoping he would recover. You see, some of them couldn't imagine life without King David. The old boys and the venerable women remembered how they saw this teenager go out to meet Goliath when the whole army of Israel were thunderstruck by the giant's appearance, and they told and retold the story, how he brought the giant down and cut off his head, and of course rose to fame, particularly in the army of King Saul.

Then Saul became jealous, and David had to flee and became a kind of a Robin Hood character, all the more charming for that of course, as people talked to each other over their coffee, 'Have you heard where David is? Now and again he appears here, and then he appears there, and then when they go to look for him he isn't there. Do you know where he is?' Then King Saul, and David's great personal friend, Jonathan the prince, were defeated in battle by the Philistines, and Israel was left without a king. They tried to put in place one of Saul's sons, but he was a weak-kneed individual and scarcely was able for the job. David eventually came back as far as Hebron, his own city, and there they made him king, but David didn't push to have the ten tribes come under his command. He was king over the two tribes to start with, Judah and Benjamin, but he let the others be under their own king. They loved him for it of course. People don't like being coerced. Eventually the ten tribes and their leaders came voluntarily and made David king.

Then he extended the nation, to unheard of dimensions for Israel, and got himself very famous because of it. There were years of disappointment. There was the whole business of him committing adultery with the wife of one of his officers, and then murdering the officer to try and cover up his sin, but he sought forgiveness from God and eventually the nation forgave him.

There then came a civil war when one of the king's sons conspired against him, and David, rather than mix up Jerusalem the capital city in warfare, turned around and left with a

few faithful servants and went into exile. Eventually however, the rebel Absalom was defeated, and David came back.

It wasn't just that. As he got older he went into retirement; that is to say he handed over the actual practical government of the nation to his son Solomon and David gave himself to what he had longed to do. I don't know whether you have any plans for your retirement. Some of you look as if you're going to be a long while before you retire. What would you do if you had nothing else to do and didn't have to earn your living? I can tell you what David did. He organised the choirs of the Levites, so that when eventually a temple should be built the Levites could sing reasonably well. Then of course he wrote songs, and if Elvis Presley got himself to fame around the world by writing songs, you can imagine the fame that David got by writing those psalms; some of us sing them still.

Then David got old, and he went to bed, and he was very cold. As an older English version puts it, curiously enough, 'he gat no heat' (1 Kgs 1:1 KJV), so they covered him with blankets you see, poor old boy. That didn't work. So they got a rare kind of a super duper hot water bottle and tried to warm him up that way. That didn't work either really, and eventually David died. Some people couldn't imagine life without David.

### **Maintaining the nation after David**

The interesting thing to notice is the provision that God made for the maintenance of his people Israel and, if need be, for their recovery when they got into trouble. And it wasn't to raise up a succession of able kings like David. You'd have thought perhaps, if you gave yourself to thinking much, that if God could raise up one David, surely he could raise up a half a dozen Davids. Why didn't he? Well, some of the men that followed David on the throne had their gifts of course. Solomon was very wise and knew all about the science of his day but when he was old, perhaps long before that too, he got silly. I have to be careful what I say, but he married a lot of women that weren't advisable—pagan women. He went astray in the head, so much so that he built them their special pagan temples, did Solomon, and came unstuck. Some people that followed David were reasonable fellows. Some had a spark of genius. Some were pretty poor. Some were downright bad. Why did God arrange it that way? I repeat, if God could have raised up one David, why didn't he raise up a whole succession of Davids?

Of course you could ask the same thing of the Christian church, couldn't you? It started off magnificently well with great men like Paul the apostle and Peter the apostle, tremendous evangelists and pastors and teachers inspired of God to write the New Testament. What of the men that came afterwards? I have to be careful what I say (I shall have to meet a lot of them in heaven one day), but they weren't all Apostle Pauls, were they? Not the men that came afterwards they weren't! Old Origen got himself muddled up with Greek philosophy in a disastrous fashion. If God could raise up one Apostle Paul and one Apostle Peter, why didn't he raise up a succession of them? Do you get the point?

What was God's provision for maintaining Israel and, if need be, for recovering them when they went astray? It is in answer to that question that a good deal of the early chapters of 1 Kings is written. The answer was not to raise up a succession of King Davids; the answer

was the building of the house of God at Jerusalem. To convince you of that, and what it means, let me do some reading. This is 1 Kings 8, and Solomon is presiding at the celebrations when the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, was complete and the ark was brought up into the temple. So here is Solomon standing before a gigantic crowd of Israelites, and he says as follows:

But will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee this day: that thine eyes may be opened toward this house night and day, even toward the place whereof thou hast said, My name shall be there: to hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall pray toward this place. (1 Kgs 8:27–29)

First of all, Solomon shows himself aware of the stupendous glory and the significance of this house. Solomon was not a simple, unenlightened man. He had come to realise of course that the heaven of heavens cannot contain God—how do you get the infinite God into a restricted space? And yet, when Solomon brought in the ark, the cloud of the glory of the presence of God filled the temple. You will notice the phrase that Solomon uses, ‘the place where you have put your name’. I must divert myself a little bit, for fear of provoking jealousy in you. You say, ‘That’s alright for Solomon, but what about us?’ Oh, I’m glad you raised it, because in actual fact there is a house of God today, isn’t there? Let me read to you from 1 Timothy 3. Now we’ve jumped the centuries, and we’re reading from a letter that Paul wrote to Timothy, who was in charge of the great church at Ephesus. ‘These things write I unto you, hoping to come unto you shortly; but if I tarry long, that you may know how people ought to behave themselves in the house of God . . .’. What is that? What is the house of God? He goes on to explain it a bit more. It is in fact ‘the church of the living God.’ In addition, ‘it is the pillar and ground of the truth. For without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness . . .’ (vv. 14–15).

Now I have the permission of the elders of this church to set you assignments, ‘which I’m now going to do. I would eventually like to hear how you understand the words that we have just read, ‘that you may know how people ought to behave in the house of God.’ What do you understand by ‘the house of God’? Is it a building made of wood or plaster or stone, or what is it? It is, so Paul says, ‘The church of the living God, and it is the pillar and ground of the truth,’ whatever that means. That is my assignment. Who knows, you might be called upon to stand to your feet and say what these verses mean.

When we read of the temple that Solomon built and the problem that he had (how do you get God inside a limited building?) then of course our Christian mind turns toward our blessed Lord, surely. According to John 2, he cleansed the literal temple at Jerusalem and said, ‘Take these things away and don’t make my Father’s house a house of merchandise.’ When they asked him what sign he showed that he had authority to cleanse the temple, he said, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days’ (v. 19). They thought he was talking about a literal temple. He wasn’t; he was talking about his body.

I'm not asking you to solve that problem, but I ask you to ponder it. You believe that almighty God, at one stage in human history, was present in the person of Jesus Christ. 'Destroy this temple,' he said, referring to his body. Now he has risen from the dead and is seated at the right hand of God, so we are told, but we're told more. God has given him not *a* name, which is above every name, he has given him *the* name that is above every name. There is only one name like that in the whole universe, and the personal name is of course Jehovah, Yahweh. 'God has given him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Jehovah' (Phil 2:9–11). When the Jews came to translate Yahweh (Jehovah, if you like) into Greek, they used the Greek word for Lord: *kyrios*. So there are times when *kyrios* in the New Testament stands for Jehovah. This is one of them. What did Solomon say about God? God put his name on that building! Let me remind you of a greater wonder still. God has taken his own name and put it on Jesus Christ our Lord; given him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Jehovah. His body, so he said, was a temple; God dwelt in him.

You still have to do a certain assignment and expound to us, when we come up against it, what those verses in 1 Timothy 3 mean, that people might know how to behave in 'the house of God . . . church of the living God, pillar and ground of the truth.'

But let me now point out from this same chapter how Solomon saw this house that he had been allowed to build as a 'cure-all-ills.' For instance he says:

If a man sin against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and he come and swear before thine altar in this house: then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked to bring his way upon his own head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness. (1 Kgs 8:31–32)

This is Solomon talking before he went a little astray in the head and got foolish. It's not simply coming to a building; this building is a place where God has put his very name and his glory. If Israel believed it, then when strife arose, so serious that someone would be required to swear an oath and so forth, then Solomon appeals to God: 'Deal with it.'

Or, in verse 33,

When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; if they turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication unto thee in this house.

Why? Because God's presence was there. That's what you meant by a house of God. Not just a building that you had chosen to call sacred, but a place where God had put his name, where his presence was a reality. So Solomon goes down the list:

Then hear thou in heaven and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers; When heaven is shut up, and there' is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them: then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the

sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, when thou teachest them the good way wherein they should walk; and send rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance. (vv. 34–36)

So he mentions seven conditions. He talks about famine (or plague) and then he talks about the stranger. For he says, ‘People of other nations will hear about this house because God’s presence is a reality here. They will hear about it and come to seek it. ‘Grant, Lord, that Israel may so behave that people of other nations shall be attracted to this house, and come and meet thee there. So, similarly, if they go out to battle, or if they sin against thee . . .’. Surely these things are to be read quietly in the presence of God.

This is what Solomon asks God to do in that house where God has been pleased to put his name and to manifest himself. You can see why I’ve set you the assignment of 1 Timothy 3, can’t you? My excuse is that it uses the same words, ‘that people ought to know how to behave in the house of God.’ What does that mean? Is it that you have to behave when you go to the meeting, and do what you like at home, or what?

### ***What the house was like***

Let’s leave that for the moment and ask ourselves now, ‘What did the thing look like when Solomon had built it?’ The plans for this house are given in chapter 6, and I shall not tire you this evening by going through all the details. That’s for another occasion, but let’s get the general shape of the house as best we can reconstruct it.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The outside*

Consider the house itself. Those who suggested some reconstructions have steps going up to it. We come to the main door in, and we are told in the text it was a folding door. The two pillars on either side were not supporting anything except the capitals that were upon them; they didn’t support the building. We shall come back to them in a moment. Here then was the main house, but it had this peculiarity that, built round the sides, there were side chambers so that you went in a door into a side chamber. Each had one window; its roof rested on a rebatement in the wall of the house of God itself, for in the house the wall came down to the ground. There were ledges on the way down so that the roof of the side chamber rested on this wall, but also on a rebatement in the wall of the house, and formed, not only the ceiling of one set of rooms, but the floor of the ones above it. Don’t worry about that, we shall come down to details later.

There was a third story of side chambers. They were for the priests and the people—the temple officials—with all the jobs that they had to do: the treasury, the making of the incense and so forth, the storage of the robes and all those sacred tasks that had to be done. These side chambers went round the back and came round the side as well.

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<sup>1</sup> From this point and throughout this series of talks, Dr Gooding made use of a digital presentation composed of various artistic representations of Solomon’s temple. Some of the best of these images are to be found in the *ESV Study Bible* (Crossway). Readers are encouraged to consult these images as they read, while noting any differences noted in the course of the talks.

There are other interpretations of how the thing looked, and we might as well agree that we cannot be certain about the exact proportions. We're given dimensions, but exactly how things were finally done we cannot be absolutely certain, but we can get a good idea.

The house itself had a porch on it, which the tabernacle didn't have of course. You first went up into and through the porch and then into the house itself. Again, note the two pillars. They're not supporting anything, they're freestanding pillars. The point of the pillars is to hold up these beautiful capitals. They are described in some detail in the text, and they were meant to be very beautiful and very attractive. There were pomegranates and lilies and goodness knows what else, and chains and network and so forth on top of those pillars, and the pillars were there to hold up all of that to the view of the people who approached. The pillars were so important that they were given names. One was Jachin and the other is Boaz ('in it his strength' and 'he shall support' respectively).

### *Inside the house*

Then we come to the Holy Place. Like the tabernacle, there was the Holy Place, the *Hekhal*, and then the *debir*, the holy of holies behind the veil.<sup>2</sup> The difference is the *Ulam*, the porch, the side chambers, the two pillars. Had you gone inside that temple, you would have been amazed at the amount of gold. The walls had cherubim on them, carved in the wood, rosettes—formal representation of rose blossoms—and, if you please, cherubim carved on the walls: all overlaid with gold. The doors were overlaid with gold. What is more, the floor, both in the Most Holy Place and in the Holy Place, was overlaid with gold.

Now when some scholars read that, they thought this was fairy story stuff. How could you possibly have even the floor covered in gold? A learned professor, Alan Millard, previously of the University of Liverpool, has called our attention to the fact that it was the habit of people at that time to use gold very liberally.<sup>3</sup> He points out that if you go to see the remains of ancient pillars nowadays, only the stone is there. There's no gold round them now, but you'll find little holes going round a ring, and up higher again a few little holes. That is where the goldsmiths nailed the gold, the sheet gold, onto the pillars. This is not fairy story stuff; this was exceedingly wealthy, as befitted the house of the Lord.

The pillars were part of the furniture of the court outside the house; that's where they belonged. They're described as belonging to the court, and then there was an object full of water, a laver, but it was so big that it was called 'the sea' and it rested on the backs of a dozen oxen made of metal. Then, in addition to the major laver, there were subsidiary lavers. These were smaller basins filled with water, and these things were on wheels, so that you could wheel them round the court wherever you needed to use them. If you were sacrificing endless animals on the altar, you would need a great deal of water, of course, and the ancient literature that Jewish writers recorded for us, stressed this matter of how important water was in the temple. These subsidiary lavers had panels with various things marked on them

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout these talks, the terms 'the holiest of all' and 'the Most Holy Place' are used interchangeably when discussing the innermost room of the temple, here referenced as 'the holy of holies'.

<sup>3</sup> Alan R. Millard, 'Does the Bible Exaggerate King Solomon's Golden Wealth?', *Biblical Archaeology Review* 15.3 (1989): 21–34.

decoratively, and one of the kings is said to have broken them off and sold them, or given them away to his friends (2 Kgs 16:17).

### ***The five sets of plans for the house of the Lord***

That is somewhat how the place might have looked, and we are going to consider the house in more detail. So now let's pause. This was God's provision for the maintenance of his people, for their good behaviour, for their loyalty to God. Men might come and men might go, but the presence of God in that house, being observed by his faithful people, might preserve them, and if need be, restore them when they went astray. You say, 'Well then, that was marvellous. They probably prospered all their days, and lived happily ever after.' No they didn't. Not with guys like Jeroboam about the place, and Ahaz, and other such spiritual rogues. Let's just survey what happened. There are five sets of plans, as I shall try to demonstrate to you, in chapters 6–7.<sup>4</sup>

The first set deals with the structure of the house, and therefore the side chambers. There was only one house of course, but many side chambers. The structure comes first (6:1–10). Then there's an interesting verse or two which, so far from being an architect's plan, seems to be a special plea for obedience (6:11–13).<sup>5</sup> In a subsequent study we shall see why that's there and why it comes after the first set.

Then we go inside and consider a wealth of detail about the walls and the decorative motif on them, what was on the veil and what the doors were made of, and how it was all overlaid with gold. Then inside the holiest of all was the ark of the covenant. It had two special cherubim, in addition to the two cherubim on the mercy seat, overshadowing the mercy seat. It had two mighty big cherubim, likewise overlaid with gold. They stood with their wings outstretched, one wing touching the wall, the other wing coming to the middle of the house, touched by the wing of the other cherub, and that cherub's further wing extended to the other wall. Two mighty great cherubim in the Most Holy Place therefore, overlaid with gold, as well as the throne of God, the ark of the covenant (6:14–28).

Then there is a set of plans for the king's house, and this is a special feature to be got hold of in one's head. There was the house of God, but it was built by the king, and the king has his house, or his rooms of various sorts. He had apartments for his wife, and he had a place for receiving envoys from abroad. He had the house of the forest of Lebanon (it had so many pillars in it, you called it a forest). He had his own private rooms and apartments in the house, and so forth and so on. It was set down a bit lower than the house of God itself, but beside it, because it was meant to be a twin unit of government. There was the house of God with God's presence there and there was the king appointed by God—anoined by God to see to it that the execution of justice expressed the actual character of God, and that his people were brought to obey God and be loyal to God (7:1–12).

The fifth set of plans deals with the pillars and then the sea and the lavers. These were the furnishings of the court, including those two big pillars, and then the big sea and the lavers (7:13–51).

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<sup>4</sup> See the left hand column of [Chart 2. A Record of Disobedience, Apostasy and Judgment](#).

<sup>5</sup> This is noted as the 2nd Set on [Chart 2. A Record of Disobedience, Apostasy and Judgment](#).

### ***The sets of plans and the subsequent history***

Now look at the history and get ready to weep.<sup>6</sup>

#### *The 1st set of plans and the history of Jeroboam*

God, by definition, had just one house. Jeroboam set up other *houses*, if you please (12:25–33). It's a thing to be noticed when you do your assignment. In the New Testament you will read of the church, and the churches, plural. You'll read of the house of God, but never anywhere of the *houses* of God. But then you'll read of the body of Christ and nowhere will you ever read of the *bodies* of Christ. It would be a strange error to talk about the *bodies* of Christ. So there was only to be one house. Jeroboam built others; God had him executed for it. He was succeeded by Nadab and then by a king called Baasha who revolted against Jeroboam's family. You might have thought that Baasha, who revolted against Jeroboam, would have been careful not to fall into Jeroboam's mistake. He did worse and had to be removed.

#### *The 3rd set of plans and the history of Ahab*

If you come inside the building, to the Most Holy Place, there was the ark of the covenant, with its number one requirement, 'Thou shalt have no other God but me.' Look at Ahab of Israel, he shut down the temple of the Lord and built a house for Baal! Well his wife wanted it, you know: 'Jezzie likes it' (Jezzie was Queen Jezebel, Ahab's wife). The thing was preposterous. God dealt with him, of course.

#### *The 4th set of plans and the history of Jehu and Athaliah*

Then there was the fourth set of plans that had to do with the king's house, the royal apartments for the king himself, for the queen, for the princes and princesses and so forth. Look at the history. Jehu of Israel destroys the royal house of Ahab completely. Athaliah (who was an Israelite actually, but married Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, when Jehoshaphat didn't have a lot of sense) destroys the royal house of Judah, except for one little boy whose nurse managed to secret him out of the palace and took him to the high priest, who made a special room for him, hidden away in the temple until he grew up. Otherwise the whole line of Judah would have been broken and you would never have come to our Lord, who came from that line. That is how very serious this is.

#### *The 5th set of plans and the history of Ahaz and the exile*

Then there was the sea and the lavers and the pillars. Ahaz of Judah cut off the side panels of the subsidiary lavers, took down the sea off the oxen and put it on the pavement. Well that made a change, didn't it? You can't have the same thing all the years, can you? Unless it happens to be God's house of course, and you had better consult him before you make any changes. Ahaz of Judah put the sea off the oxen, down on to the ground, if you please. He cut off the side panels of the subsidiary lavers and gave them away. Eventually Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up. He smashed the bronze laver to pieces, and the pillars, and took the metal to Babylon. What do you say about that?—because we are interested parties. That's how they treated the house of God in their day. We're members of a house, aren't we? Have

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<sup>6</sup> Compare the two columns of [Chart 2. A Record of Disobedience, Apostasy and Judgment](#).

we the right to change it as we please? That's a question we shall have to face later on. This is dismal. It's true to history, of course, and true to human nature.

### **A history of major revivals**

But let's cheer ourselves up before we finish. 1 and 2 Kings is not just stories of human revolt against God and ruination of God's plans and purposes. It is the history of major revivals. There's the revival led by Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18), and the issue at stake will be, 'Who is the true God, Baal or Jehovah?' In the face of Ahab, who built a house to Baal, Elijah led his revival on Mount Carmel to establish whether Baal or Jehovah is the true God. The priests of Baal were there, and you will remember the story, won't you? Elijah suggested to the priests of Baal that they build an altar. Well, they built an altar and they put their animal on top, and they called upon Baal to send the fire to light the offering. 'The God that answered by fire,' said Elijah, 'would be the true God.' So they called on Baal, and they got very excited and cut themselves and all this kind of thing. Elijah mocked them. 'Cry a bit louder,' he said, 'because perhaps he's gone on a journey.' Then descending to small things, 'Perhaps he's gone to the toilet,' said he. There was no voice or anything that answered. Elijah built an altar, flooded it with water, put the sacrifice on, called upon the living God, and God answered by fire. We shall come to think of the significance of it.

Under the revival led by Jehoiada the high priest (2 Kings 11), the issue at stake is, 'Who is the true king?' For at this time Athaliah, who had murdered all the royal princes (but had missed Joash), now sat herself on the throne as a pseudo-queen in Judah. The issue at stake was therefore, who is the true king, Athaliah or Joash?

Then there's the revival led by King Hezekiah at the time of the siege of Jerusalem by the forces of the king of Assyria (2 Kings 18). The issue at stake: 'Is the Lord God just one more god among many gods of the Gentile nations, or is he the unique, transcendent Lord God?'

Finally, there's the revival led by King Josiah (2 Kings 22). He wanted to clean up the house of the Lord, and when the priests went in to clean it up, they found a book. So they took it out and brought it to the king.

So he said, 'Hmm, this book. Where did you get that?'

'In the temple.'

'Well, what book is it?'

'We don't know,' they said.

'Oh, well, you'd better ask the prophetess, she's good at reading these ancient things.'

So they asked her and it turned out to be a book of the Bible. They didn't even know it was a Bible. (If you want an example of that in modern times, listen to the BBC and some of the quizzes when they're asked about the Bible.) In the revival led by King Josiah on finding the book of the Lord, the question was, 'Will the nation repent and return to obeying the word of God and all its commandments?' They did repent, and that led to a massive clean up of the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.

So that is the framework that we shall be following in these studies. We start with the house of the Lord and the plans for it, what the house of the Lord means and how, if we give heed to it, it can preserve us; and what we must avoid and what we must come back to, if we

have strayed from it. For all of us want to see revival in our day, do we not? This is the book of revivals.

Let's just commend ourselves to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank thee for these two books in thy word, that thou has given us the experience of other men and women in centuries past, so that we might profit and be encouraged by their spiritual successes and warned by their spiritual failures. We thank thee Father for inspiring these works of history, so that all things written before time are written for our learning. Strengthen our minds, grant that our hearts might be loyal to thee, and give us good understanding of what we should learn from these two books.

So now we commit ourselves to thee, and pray thy blessing on our fellowship now together, as we eat and drink together, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

## Christ and the House of God

*1 Kings 6:1–10*

### ***So far in our studies***

This is now the second in a series of studies on the first and second books of Kings. In our first study we thought particularly about what this book has to say on the topic of God's provision for his people. The book opens with the death of David who had brought the nation not only to unity, but to a very long (by their standards) empire. Now he was going, and the question would be: what provision, if any, did God make for the maintenance of his people Israel, when David had gone? What provision did God make for the recovery of Israel, if ever they should go astray?

We found that the answer to those two questions was that God's provision did not depend simply on a succession of very brave and wise kings. Some of the kings that followed David were wise, some wise in their own conceits. Some of them were powerful, some of them were spiritually hopeless; they were a varied bunch. So the story of 1 and 2 Kings, from one point of view, is a melancholy succession of spiritual failures. On the other hand, we noticed that there were revivals in the course of Israel's history and we considered the plans for the house of the Lord. It was in our modern sense a temple, but it is referred to constantly by another name, 'the house of the Lord', or 'the house of God at Jerusalem'.

We considered what the building might have looked like. As you approached it, there were two pillars, probably free-standing pillars. They weren't upholding any part of the building, but they had on the top of them two beautiful capitals with fruit and flowers arranged, delightful things. Their job as pillars was to hold them up. They were so important that they got names, one was Jachin and the other Boaz, meaning, 'In it his strength', and 'he shall support'. Then there were doors at the front, they were folding doors, and they were carved with cherubim and open flowers.

For our purpose in this study, we ought to notice that the temple itself, the house of God itself, is formed of an oblong building. The side bits were, strictly speaking, not the house of God. They were rooms presumably for the use of the priests, who had their tasks to do in the house of the Lord to prepare the sacrifices, to prepare the incense, to look after the treasury, to bake the showbread, to process the oil for the light, and so forth and so on. They were rooms for the priests therefore, side rooms, and not strictly part of the house itself, though they were there for practical purposes for the running of the house.

## Many side chambers but only one house

As we read in 1 Kings 6 we find the technical terms that describe this house, and then the side chambers; and we may notice in advance the way the side chambers were built. The beams that formed the substance of their structure did not penetrate the actual wall of the house. That, for the Jewish rabbis, was exceedingly important and had great significance.

And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Ziv, which is the second month, that he, [that is Solomon] began to build the house of the LORD. And the house which king Solomon built for the LORD, the length thereof was threescore [that's sixty] cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits. And the porch before the temple of the house, twenty cubits was the length thereof, according to the breadth of the house; and ten cubits was the breadth thereof before the house. And for the house he made windows of fixed lattice-work. And against the wall of the house he built stories round about, against the walls of the house round about, both of the temple and of the oracle: and he made side-chambers round about. The nethermost story was five cubits broad, and the middle was six cubits broad, and the third was seven cubits broad: for on the outside he made rebatements in the wall of the house round about, that the beams should not have hold in the walls of the house. And the house, when it was being built, was built of stone made ready at the quarry: and there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was being built. The door for the middle side-chambers was in the right side of the house: and they went up by winding stairs into the middle chambers, and out of the middle into the third. So he built the house, and finished it; and he covered the house with beams and planks of cedar. And he built the stories against all the house, each five cubits high: and they rested on the house with timber of cedar. (vv. 1-10)

So let us recall the ground plan of the house which will help us comprehend what we have been considering. We first see the freestanding pillars with their capitals. There was the porch in front of the house called the *Ulam*. There was then, as in the tabernacle, the Holy Place, with the lampstands and the table of showbread and the incense altar, and then there was the holiest of all, the holy of holies, with the ark, called the *debir* in Hebrew. There were some significant differences between the furniture for the house of the Lord at Jerusalem and the tabernacle that had been. We shall come across that later.

Now consider the floor plan of the store chambers and how they might have been arranged. Along the wall of the house of God itself, running up the side are rebatements (or offsets), creating a kind of stair step structure along the temple wall for the beams of each level to rest on. The point of it was that the beams that formed the ceiling of the room on the ground floor, and the floor of the room above it, were set on a separate wall. The beams did not protrude into the actual wall of the temple itself. That was very deliberate because, in technical terms, had the beams protruded into the wall itself, the rooms would have partaken of the holiness of the temple itself whereas, by not protruding into the wall, they were in that sense a separate arrangement.

So then, as the text has told us, the bottom room was five cubits. The room above it was six cubits, because of the extra space created by the offset. Then the uppermost room, again because of the extra space created by the offset, was seven cubits. That is how the side chambers were constructed.

### ***Only one house***

Now we shall notice one of the most important points of our studies. There was only one house of God for the whole of Israel. Let that penetrate our thinking. Later on during the centuries the institution of the synagogue was made in Israel, and there were synagogues all over the place. You read for instance in the Christian Gospels of how our Lord went into the synagogue in Capernaum, or the synagogue in Nazareth. There were synagogues all over the country, and indeed because of the dispersion of the Jews throughout the world, there were synagogues in many foreign countries as well. There was a very big and important synagogue in Alexandria in Egypt, a very exceedingly important synagogue it was. One of the Cleopatras had two leaders of her army who were both Jews, such was the spread of their people at that time. There was a very big synagogue just outside Babylon over the years in a place called Pumbedita. There are synagogues to this very present day, at least one synagogue in Northern Ireland and there used to be two in Dublin. But it is important to see the difference between a synagogue and the house of the Lord, or the temple, at Jerusalem.

In the synagogue there were no priests and no sacrifices. Inside a synagogue to this very present day there is no showbread or lampstand or incense altar. There is no ark. I'd better correct that because, in a modern synagogue, they have what they call an ark. At the long end of the synagogue there is an arch with a curtain drawn across it. If you draw aside the curtain you will find inside that niche in the wall a scroll which is the scroll of the law—the Pentateuch—the first five books of Scripture in Hebrew. On a Sabbath it is taken out and ceremonially walked around the whole synagogue, and then the cantor will stand up on a big stage and he will recite, or read, a long, long passage from the law. This is done every Sabbath in a Jewish synagogue to this present day. When the scroll is then paraded round the congregation, the men take their prayer shawls and they touch the scroll of the law with their shawls and then each man puts his shawl to his mouth and kisses it to signify what is written in the psalms, 'Thy words are like honey to my mouth' (119:103).

There was no sacrifice in the synagogue. There was only one house of the Lord. It was at Jerusalem, and we are to think about that.

### ***Understanding the concept of God's 'house'***

What is the concept behind the house of God? Why did they not have more than one? Why did they only have one in the whole world? Of course it depends on their concept of what the house of God was. So I'm about to read one or two ideas about the house of God, as people down the ages have talked about it.

#### ***Jacob's vision***

The first one comes with Jacob's experience as described in the book of Genesis. What we're looking for now is Jacob's concept of what the house of God means. This is Jacob as he's

running away from home to escape being murdered by his brother, whom he cheated. When he couldn't keep awake any longer he lay down and 'He dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven' (Gen 28:12). I ask you to notice, if you will, that the ladder wasn't let down from heaven, and the bottom of it almost reached earth. The ladder was set up on earth and the top went towards heaven, 'And behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.' Did you notice the direction the angels are travelling? They're going up and down. Angels normally, so we are told in other parts of Scripture, stand in the presence of God waiting to be commanded. When they're commanded on some business or other, they leave the divine presence and go wherever it is necessary to go, and when the job is finished they return. These angels were not coming down and going back, they were ascending and descending. Where was God? Well, we shall be told: 'Jacob awoke out of his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place"' (v. 16). Notice he doesn't say, 'Surely the Lord is in heaven.' Jacob had believed for a long, long while that God was in heaven. It was sometimes convenient for Jacob to have God somewhat removed, way up in heaven, particularly when Jacob had some very questionable things to be done; but God was 'in this place', where Jacob was. 'And he was afraid and said, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven"' (v. 17).

He was afraid and said, 'How dreadful is this place.' We should notice then where God was, and behold verse 13 says 'the LORD stood'. Now I don't know what translation you have, but from the Hebrew it should not be 'stood above it'; it should be, 'by the side of it', or even perhaps, 'stood above Jacob'. Jacob says, 'The LORD is in this place'—where Jacob was and had been sleeping these last nine hours or so, with a rock for his pillow: 'God in this place, and I knew it not. This is the house of God. This is the gate of heaven.'

Again we shall have to ask what Jacob meant by that. Jacob was not saying to himself, as far as I can make out, 'Oh how marvellous. At last I have discovered the way into heaven. Look at that! The gate's open, I shall go in.' Oh no, no, no. He wasn't for going into heaven just as quick as all that. He hadn't been married, for instance. You want to be married first, find out what life is about, you don't want to go to heaven too quick—well, Jacob didn't. He says, 'This is the gate of heaven'.

He's thinking like an Easterner would, you see. You can see an ancient gate if you go to a place called Dan or Laish in the north of Israel. The ancient gate is there and it's like the vestibule at Queen's University in Belfast. When you go into the building, you find it's a big open place with doors going off it, and then you come out the other side into the green lawns of Queen's. So the gate of a city was like that. It had seats around the side of it because it was there that the elders met to administer the affairs of the city; they 'sat in the gate', to use the Hebrew phrase, to administer the affairs of the city.

Now it begins to make sense, doesn't it? This is, 'the house of God', this is 'the gate of heaven'. Look at those angels going up and down ceaselessly on the ladder, going out from the divine presence and coming back to the divine presence. These are God's—I nearly said civil servants—his executives, going out from the presence of God and coming back.

That was Jacob's concept, and of course he had a proposal to put to God, for Jacob wasn't slow to see the business implications of this. 'Well Lord, if in fact you're by my side and have plenty of angels, I mean, God, would it be too much to ask if you would give me a decent

living, a decent wage, food to eat and clothes to wear? I'm not fussy, but I like good clothes, and bring me back again in peace?' (see vv. 20–21). What else would you use angels for, if you were Jacob?

The concept of having God's executives; the gate where God administers his affairs, down by Jacob's elbow. Well let's leave it there for a moment. That was Jacob's impression of the house of God.

#### *Nathanael's revelation*

Now let me read you a New Testament passage. This is the Gospel of John, and Philip has gone after Nathanael and has preached the gospel to him:

Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!' Nathanael said to him, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' Nathanael answered him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered him, 'Because I said to you, "I saw you under the fig tree", do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' And he said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.' (John 1:46–51)

Notice the angels again, and this time, where they are ascending from and descending to. The angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. Of course it's no wonder perhaps that Christ should address Nathanael like this, because Christ had begun his comments by saying, 'This is an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.' Jacob, the first Israelite, was moderately full of guile, he knew how to get a good bargain. This Nathanael was an honest fellow.

Says Christ, 'This is an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile. He says openly what he thinks; he doubts my character, by implication, when he asks, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" If I come from Nazareth, he thinks I'm worth nothing.' Says he to Nathanael, 'You shall see greater things than these. Are you impressed because I said I saw you when you were under the fig tree before Philip called you? One of these days you will see the angels of God, ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

So let me ask you a question, do you hope to see that? When do you think the angels will start ascending and descending upon the Son of Man?

Did I hear some adventurous soul saying, 'I think they're already doing it'?

Or do you say, 'No, that won't be until the second coming.'

Oh really? What is Christ's relationship with the angels nowadays? We are reliably told, are we not, that he is ascended up far above principality and powers. He's seated in the heavenly places, far above the principalities and powers, and it is your claim as believers that you are seated with him, above the angels. Oh, you are 'somebody', aren't you—above angels? Without exaggeration I can quote to you from Colossians, 'For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and in him you are made full, who is the head of all principality and power' (Col 2:9–10). So you're seated in Christ in heavenly places, he's above the angels, and in him you are made full because he is the head of all principality and power.

Do you believe it? For if you believe it, you have a right to say with Jacob, 'This is none other than the house of God. This is the very gate of heaven. This is where heaven's business is done and executed!'

Yes, but if that be so let me try to prove to you from Scripture that Christ already holds this exalted position. Let's cite it again, that when Solomon dedicated the temple he was aware of the inadequacy of that building. Says he to God, 'You fill everything.' God is immeasurable; 'How will you get a God like that into a tiny little building like this that I have built?' asks Solomon. So he adopts a formula, 'This building, where you have put *your name*.' Therefore, what name would you put on the Lord Jesus? Was he God's Son when he walked on earth?

'Yes,' you say, 'of course he was.'

You mean, almighty God dwelt in him? But God is infinite!

You say, 'I can't care about that. I go by what Scripture says. He was God incarnate, even as he travelled in Peter's fishing boat, and now he's ascended, far above principalities, powers, might and dominions, and every name that is named, not only in this world but in that which is to come.'

Tell me, are the angels subject to him already, or are they not? You think they are? Well jolly good for you. The archangel as well? And all those serried ranks of angels? Well, by what you say to me, you seem to be claiming that the house of God exists. Can you give me an example of the house of God?

#### *The one house today*

We noticed earlier in our studies that, whereas the New Testament speaks of 'the church' in the singular, and then in the plural 'the churches', it never speaks of 'the bodies' of Christ. There's only one body. It doesn't speak of 'the houses' of God either, does it? There's only one house. It is the centre of God's executive power. But let me use a thought model. In South Sudan, where the folks are getting their independence, I ask you to imagine a prayer meeting of delightful believers. If you ask them what they're doing and how they expect it to be effective, they would tell you, 'Ah, you see, we're gathered together in his name.' You mean, God has put his name there? Move on from them for a moment. Here's you at your weekly prayer meeting, and is Christ among you? For the verse reads, 'where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst' (Matt 18:20). Do you hold that's true when you meet in your prayer meeting?

You say, 'We've met in Christ's name, and Christ, according to his promise, is with us.'

What about those in South Sudan? They've met in his name too. Is Christ among them?

You say, 'Yes, he is.'

Well, that's two Christs, then?

'No, no, no,' you say, 'No, no, of course not. There are not two Christs, there's only one.'

You mean he's simultaneously with them and with you?

If you say yes to that, now you're telling me something else about the house of God. There are not two houses, or three, there's only one house. He's the Son 'over his own house', as Hebrews has it, in command of the mighty angels of God (see Heb 3:6). Do you believe it? What an importance and an awesomeness that puts upon our meeting together *in his name*. I

repeat, there are not many houses of God; there is only one house of God. He is the Son over his own house, and we shall see one day, with literal eyes (perhaps we may see it by faith at the moment) the angels of God ascending and descending on the glorified man of Calvary; God's government.

Yes, but if that is what the house of God at Jerusalem (largely symbolic, of course) was about in its early days, it would account for this, that the believing Jews would never have any other house of God anywhere else in the world, just in Jerusalem. That was *the* place where God has put his name. Yes, they would read the Bible in their synagogues; they still do. They would sing praises to God in their synagogues, celebrate the annual festivals, such as are in Leviticus 24, but no sacrifices. The only house of God they would know was in Jerusalem. Now it doesn't exist and they have no place to offer their sacrifices. The only place they ever did recognise officially was that one house in Jerusalem. When our Lord was here on earth and the priests asked what authority he had to cleanse their temple, he replied, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days' (John 2:19). They thought he was mad, but he referred, says John, to his own body—Christ was conscious that he was the house of God, in charge of all the angels of God, Son of the Father, Son over his own house. And he died for you my brother, my sister. There was only one house therefore.

### ***Solomon's folly and Jeroboam's sin***

So now we have to face the sorry fact that when Solomon grew old he became foolish. There are those who think he became foolish a long while before he became old, because we are told that when he was established in his kingdom, he loved a number of ladies.

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites, of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, you shall not go among them, neither shall they come among you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Solomon clave unto these in love. (1 Kgs 11:1-2)

He was the wisest man that then existed in the world, but academic wisdom is one thing, isn't it? It would have been marvellous to have had dinner with Solomon. I've often wished I'd been there, because over the soup he'd be liable to ask you, 'Have you considered the ivy recently?'

You say, 'What do you mean, the ivy that comes over the wall?'

'Yes, have you considered that recently?'

'Oh no, why should I?'

'Oh, but my dear, it's marvellous you see.'

He would expound to you the ivy, and then the cedar tree of Lebanon, if you like. He was interested in these things. What a marvellous thing it is to find people that are interested in life. I don't know what he could have told you about the stars, but they are interesting, aren't they? Solomon knew all about those kinds of things and rejoiced in them. Why shouldn't he? The heart is another thing. Though wise in intellect, he went grievously astray in heart. He loved his foreign women, of whom God had explicitly said, 'You should not love them, or go

after them, or marry them.’ He took no notice, and of course he didn’t just marry commoners, you know. He had that kind of sense anyway. He married princesses and their fathers gave them great dowries. Pharaoh gave a great dowry to the daughter that he gave to Solomon, and Solomon had plenty of money anyway. At their request, he built the houses of their gods all around Jerusalem—totally idolatrous shrines—because he lost his heart to these women.

So he contradicted the very basic notion of the house of God; he built other houses for foreign deities and it led Israel astray. A lot of labour was invested as Solomon used his troops and his citizens to build these temples for these foreign ladies. Among the many officers that Solomon had, there was a particularly vigorous young man. His name was Jeroboam. He was no idle man! He rose in the ranks to be a foreman and a controller of some of the building works of Solomon, and made a good job of it. When Solomon went astray there came a prophet of the Lord, Ahijah, to Jeroboam and said, ‘Jeroboam, because of Solomon’s foolish sinfulness, I’m going to rend the kingdom from him, except for one tribe, and I’m going to give the kingdom to you’ (see 11:26–37). When Solomon heard about that, he persecuted the young man who then ran off to Egypt. But when Solomon died, and it came out on the BBC that weekend that Solomon was dead and his son, Rehoboam, reigned in his place, Jeroboam came back to Jerusalem and led some of the disaffected citizens.

So a lot of them came to Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, and they said to him, ‘Your majesty, your father made his yoke very heavy on our necks. We’re not going to put up with it any more. We’re now asking you formally to make our yoke lighter, and we will serve you; but if you don’t change it, we shall revolt and serve you no longer. We’ve had enough of it.’ Rehoboam thought about it and wondered what to do. So he had a word with the old men, the senators, and they said, ‘Tell the people to go away and think it over for three days.’ So that’s what he did. The old men said to him, ‘Now listen young man. If you treat them reasonably and make their yoke lighter, and if you *serve them . . .*’—I’m quoting Scripture there; this is literally what the old men said. ‘. . . if you serve them, Rehoboam . . . Your job as king is to serve them. If you ease their burden and serve them, they will obey you and serve you forever.’

That’s what the old men said. Then he consulted the young men, and the young men said, ‘Nonsense; what you want to say to them is this: “What do you mean, you want a lighter yoke than my father put upon you? My little finger is thicker than his loins. He chastised you with whips, did he? I shall chastise you with scorpions”’ (whips with iron nails inserted into them). When they saw that the king was following the advice of the young men, the ten tribes said, ‘Thank you very much, we have no longer any inheritance in David. Look to your own self, we’re going out independently of you.’ And eventually they anointed Jeroboam as king.

#### *The yoke that is heavy and the yoke that is light*

Isn’t it an interesting thing that it came down to this question of, ‘Should the yoke be heavier or should it be lighter?’ I think you’re prejudiced because you follow one who said, ‘Come unto me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I ‘am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light’ (Matt 11:28–30). That’s the king you

know, isn't it? It's also true of that king that he said, 'The kings of the earth exercise authority over them, and grind them down, but I am among you as one who serves' (see Luke 22:25, 27). Do you believe it? Come on now, really? Earlier you nodded your heads to say you agreed with me that he's in charge of all the angels and mighty angels and archangels. Now you're going to tell me that he serves you?

I don't know what kinds of tables they have in glory, whether they're conference tables, trestle things or whatever, but when you get home to glory and sit down for dinner, be careful about the waiters, won't you? Because, when perhaps you're least expecting it, one of the waiters will turn out to be Christ. 'I shall gird myself, I shall come forth and gird myself and serve you,' says Christ (Luke 12:37). That's our Lord. But then let us not forget that he's speaking about his yoke.

Now, as you listen to this story from 1 Kings, when the people came and said, 'Your father Solomon made his yoke heavy, now you, his son, please make it lighter,' they're talking about the king. What they mean by his 'yoke', is his kingly rule. When our Lord says, 'My yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Matt 11:30), he still uses the word 'yoke', doesn't he? For we remember, surely, that he is king and it's his kingly yoke.

Now there have been some folks, God bless them, and they have interpreted the yoke in this fashion. (I've heard them do it myself, so I'm not telling tales out of school.) They say, 'You know, a farmer who ploughs with horses will have, for instance, two horses. One is a youngster, full of pranks and prancing around about the place, and difficult to manoeuvre. So the farmer will put an older horse beside the younger one so that they're sharing the same yoke, and the older one will keep the younger one in check and somewhere near the line of the plough.' So they say, 'You know, God in his mercy has given us a Saviour. He is (excuse the term) the counterpart of the older horse. We're the youngsters who have to be trained and he joins us in the yoke; it's his yoke really, but he loves us and he helps us to plough a straight furrow in life.'

It's a very nice thought, and the Lord is certainly with us; but as far as I can see that is not what our Lord meant anyway. When he talks about his yoke he's using the term yoke in the sense they used it in 1 Kings, of a king's *rule*. 'Take my yoke upon you.' He's king and, as our Lord tells us in Matthew, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and upon earth' (Matt 28:18). He is the sovereign Lord; his yoke is easy, his burden is light, he's there to serve us, but he is king and will insist on ruling us. What should we say to him? He is the Son of David. Shall we say to him, like the crowd said, 'We have no portion in David' (1 Kgs 12:16), or shall we not bow our knees and hasten to say, 'Lord, forgive me that I haven't taken your yoke so fully as I should have done. Help me to bow my neck and my heart to receive your yoke and live according to your guidance.'

The house of God, then, and what it means. There's only one house throughout the whole universe and our Lord is the Son over that house.

Shall we pray.

Lord, thou hast read our minds and measured our hearts as we have thought about these ancient controversies and the problems that came up in Solomon's day. We recognise, Lord, that the human heart is the same, but by thy grace thou hast died for us.

Thou hast forgiven us and received us. We ask now thy grace, Lord, that we may accept thy yoke, not with simple emotion but with studied thought and deliberation; that thou may control our hearts and their loves and our brains and their thinking, so that we might be, in thy good hand, a blessing to those around us. So we thank thee for thy word. Work out its reality in our lives, as we pray for thy name's sake. Amen.

## Elijah at Carmel

It is not antiquarianism that takes us back to the first millennium BC to consider the famous building that Solomon built in Jerusalem at the time. It is because there is a decided connection between the function of the building that he built and our present situation in this modern advanced age as believers. What Solomon did, among the many things for which he is renowned, was to build the house of God at Jerusalem. Until this point there had been no permanent stone-built house of God in Jerusalem; the one that Solomon built was the first. But, as we have considered that house, we have at least been reminded of the similar terms that are used in the Christian epistle by Paul. He writes to Timothy at Ephesus:

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly, but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how people ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Tim 3:14–15)

There you will see the term, ‘the house of God’. And as we advance in our study of the ancient house of God that Solomon built, we shall find another immediate correspondence. That house was marked by the presence of two massive pillars, each of them carrying a most ornate capital on its top. As far as we know, they were freestanding pillars and hugely significant, such that each one of them was given a name in Hebrew. So then, Paul, talking to the Christian people in Ephesus (through Timothy), says that he writes that they might ‘know how people ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.’ We can see, at least in the vocabulary, a similarity between the New Testament situation and the one that we read of in 1 Kings.

### ***So far in our studies***

We have concentrated on the provision that God made for his people Israel after the death of David. David was the great conqueror who had brought the nation together as distinct from being just twelve tribes, and had conquered Jerusalem and set it up as the capital city. David was dying; his people tried to keep him alive, but it was no use and he passed away. A lot of people couldn’t imagine living without King David being there. We’ve asked ourselves, therefore, having raised up King David, what provision did God make after his death for the maintenance of his people in good, fit, spiritual condition? And if they strayed, what provision had God made for their recovery? We find the answer in this very house of God that Solomon built. This was the house of God where God deigned to presence himself and to place his name there.

In our last study we noticed an interesting but peculiar thing about this particular house of God; that there was only one of them. It contrasts vividly with the habit of other nations, like Greece for instance, where you might find in many a city a temple to Zeus the chief god, or a temple to Apollo or even to Aphrodite—many such in many cities—but with Israel there was only one house of God, and that was in Jerusalem. They had eventually, in the course of history, many synagogues in different villages and towns, and indeed in different countries such as Babylon, where there were a number, or in Egypt, for instance. And in different parts of Palestine there were synagogues, just like there are synagogues around about the place to this present day. In Judaism there was only one temple, one house of God. It was so in the time of our Lord; there was only one house that was in Jerusalem. Our Lord preached in the synagogue of Nazareth, but that wasn't a temple. To get to the temple you had to go up to Jerusalem. There was only one house.

We drew the parallel between that and our Lord's provision for Christian people to this present day. To use New Testament language, you can talk about the church, or you can put it in the plural and you can talk about churches all over the country, indeed all over the world. That is very proper, to use the plural of the term 'church' for these places. For other terms that are used, you cannot use the plural. For instance, the New Testament talks of 'the body of Christ', and all believers are members of 'his body', but we'd be bordering dangerously near heresy to talk about 'the bodies of Christ'. Similarly, with the house of God, you will never read in the New Testament of 'the houses of God', simply and solely of 'the house of God', for even today there is only one house of God.

### **After Solomon's Death: Rehoboam**

We're coming on now to a period of history when Israel went astray. Let's read what happened after Solomon's son, Rehoboam came to the throne. Ten of the tribes eventually revolted against Solomon's son. They chose themselves another leader as king, a man called Jeroboam, and he took ten of the tribes and established another country and royal rule. Notice what is said of him, 'And he made houses of high places, and made priests from among all the people, which were not of the sons of Levi' (1 Kgs 12:31). He not only built other houses instead of the one house, but look where he built them—he built them on 'high places'. Now it was a common thing for people in that country, as in many, to build temples on high places. They were thought to be specially inhabited by spirit beings. For instance, if you want to get some idea of the ancient world, it's a good thing to go to Japan and notice the habits of people that profess the religion of Shintoism, which is the worship of the spirit. And if, as a property developer, you came across a high place, a sizable or even a small hillock with nice trees on it, you would have to be very careful where you developed houses around there, because that would be a place where some feel that it would be the home of spirits, and must be respected.

There was reason behind God's prohibition of building another house of God, or even temples, on high places, because very easily it would lead to syncretism; to regard Jehovah, the one true God, as simply one more spirit being. The churches today in Myanmar find this a difficulty as it too is a land that is marked by Spiritism.

How did Rehoboam come to do this? Well, as we saw previously, the fault was really Solomon's. When Solomon got older he fell in love with foreign ladies from all over the place, and the Book of Kings lists some of them. To please them he built houses to their gods all around Jerusalem and elsewhere, in spite of the implied insult that that was to the God whom he professed to worship, namely the one true God, Jehovah. To build those several temples to these foreign deities, he had to load the people with onerous tasks, more than he should have done. So when Solomon died the people came to his son Rehoboam and said to him, 'Look, your father made our burden too heavy. Make our burden lighter and we will serve you.' So Rehoboam took counsel with the old men, and then with the younger men. Alas he followed the counsel of the younger men, and he replied to the complainants and said, 'Make my yoke lighter? I wouldn't dream of it. My father whipped you with whips, I will whip you with scorpions,' (leather straps embedded with iron). 'My little finger will be thicker than my father's loins!' He was a foolish man, of course. We contrasted, as Christians, what he said about making his yoke harder with the words of our blessed Lord,

Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest to your souls. (Matt 11:28-29)

Christ is the king of the easy yoke. It is a yoke, of course. When we become Christians we're no longer free to do as we like; we do take his kingly rule upon us, but his yoke is easy and his burden light.

When Solomon's son Rehoboam made that threatening response to the ten tribes they said, 'Goodbye Rehoboam, we have no longer any interest in David,' and they split off and chose themselves another king. Indeed, the context tells us that God himself deliberately removed ten of the tribes from Solomon's son and gave them to Jeroboam (11:31). He is not to be faulted for what he did in that respect, but he is to be faulted on what he did subsequently. He was given to rule over ten tribes, but this apparently was what he said to himself when he came to the throne,

If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah; and they shall kill me, and return to Rehoboam king of Judah. (1 Kgs 12:27)

Jeroboam was frightened lest he lose the loyalty of the people. Kings, you know, have that fear. How do you keep the loyalty of the people? Sometimes elders in Christian churches have the same fear: how do you keep the loyalty of the people?

I remember at one stage how a good man came to me, and he was quite a famous preacher. In our discussion he confessed that he had sort of run out of material.

So, he said outright, 'Now what would you suggest? What kind of a Bible book could I perhaps take up?'

I said, 'Have you ever done 1 Corinthians?'

'No,' he said, 'but I couldn't do that.'

I said, 'Why on earth not?'

He said, 'It would break my ministry.'

I thought I understood why he said it, because 1 Corinthians talks about the way we run the churches, doesn't it? There are so many different views on how Christian churches ought to be run that it is a bold man, and a bold woman, who would dare in some circles to preach from 1 Corinthians. Pity, isn't it? Because the fear is you'd lose the people that wouldn't put up with it.

So Jeroboam did various things,

The king took counsel, and made two calves of gold; and he said unto the people, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.' (12:28)

There are two things wrong with that at least. One is that it was second hand notions. Earlier on, far earlier on, when the people were camped below Mount Sinai and Moses had gone up to talk to God and was up there forty days and forty nights, the people got restive and they talked about making a captain and going back to Egypt. And Aaron, poor man, was a little bit weak kneed, high priest though he was. He got the tremors, and he said, 'Okay, bring your earrings to me.' So they brought their earrings. He put them in a furnace and melted them down, and made a golden calf, and said, 'These are your gods that brought you out of Egypt' (Exod 32:8). Oh dear, dear, dear me! It wasn't therefore very new or startlingly original for Jeroboam to follow the same trick; but, worse still, it was sheer idolatry to interpose faith in those idols instead of faith in the one true God. He did some other things as well as making houses on the high places:

And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he went up unto the altar; so did he in Beth-el, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made . . . And he went up unto the altar which he had made in Beth-el on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart. (12:32-33)

Bother Scripture! Never mind what God's word says, you've got to keep the loyalty of the people, and he proposed to do that by organising different feasts.

After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again from among all the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, that there might be priests of the high places. (13:33)

So he was making priests, for which he had no biblical authority or divine authority whatsoever. It's a sorry and sad thing, isn't it? And so soon after David and Solomon. Israel never recovered from Jeroboam's sin; they remained separate with their different houses. Eventually they went over to the worship of Baal, as we shall see, until the Assyrians came and took them all away to Assyria. They never recovered.

## A special plea for obedience

Now we shall recall God's plans for the house of the Lord—there are five sets of them.<sup>7</sup> The first set is the house itself. There was to be only one house, though many side rooms. Then in the middle of the sets of plans for the house of the Lord, you get a few verses that are nothing other than a special plea for obedience. Look at the actual history; so soon after Solomon, though there was meant to be only one house, Jeroboam sets up other houses. Well, it made a change, didn't it?

Jeroboam had a son called Nadab, but then a certain Baasha assassinated him and therefore destroyed the dynasty of Jeroboam. But in spite of the fact that God allowed him to destroy Jeroboam's dynasty, he carried on with Jeroboam's sin. There was no repentance or reform under Baasha (16:1–6).

Now we're going to look further into the history; we're coming down to the inside of the house of the Lord and we're going to notice in the third set that it's a very long list of instructions for the internal decorations and furniture. First of all, we'll take its chief installation.

In the Most Holy Place in the house of God which Solomon had built, there stood the ark of God. Inside were the tables of the law that ran, as we know, 'Thou shalt have no other gods but me.' So that was in the house of the Lord down in Jerusalem. Watch now what happens among the ten tribes—the house of God at Jerusalem was still meant to be for all the tribes. It didn't become the exclusive property of the two tribes; the house of the Lord was still open to all twelve tribes, as God originally intended. But there arose a king called Ahab, and he married a foreign girl called Jezebel. She was a follower of the god Baal. So, if you please, Ahab built a whole temple to Baal and they virtually closed down any worship of the one true God. Look at it, the chief installation in the midst of this set of plans, with its emphasis, 'Thou shalt have no other gods but me.' Really, Ahab?

But I have a wonderful story to tell you. God isn't hard up for ideas and every now and again, in spite of extremes of perversity, God instigates a revival. Let's have a look.

## Revival under Elijah

We're going to consider the very famous story of the first big revival led by Elijah on Mount Carmel (ch. 18). Most revivals, even present ones, have one particular issue at stake. This one was no exception. The basic issue at stake in the middle of this revival was the question, Who is the true god, Baal or Jehovah? How would you tell? If you met somebody down your street who was a worshiper of Baal, how would you show that your God is the true God and theirs isn't a true god? Should you bother about it anyway?

Well, this revival was led by Elijah, so let me tell you a thing or two about him. He was a northerner, as far as we are aware, and whether he ever went down to Jerusalem to the house of God in Jerusalem like he ought to have done as an Israelite, we're not told. We're not told that he ever visited the place. That doesn't mean that he didn't know about it. As I said, in our Lord's time there was only one house of God, and it was at Jerusalem. Even the Jews that

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<sup>7</sup> See [Chart 2. A Record of Disobedience, Apostasy and Judgment](#).

lived up in Galilee knew what the Jerusalem temple stood for and how it was laid out and so forth and so on. So too Elijah would have known about it and its chief features, which we call to mind now.

### ***The life represented inside the house***

If you were to come in the main door you would see that on all sides round, floor included, is gold. It's magnificent, of course, and in keeping with the gigantic wealth spent on temples in those far off days.<sup>8</sup> History remarks that in Solomon's day gold was so plentiful that if you saw a bit of silver on the ground you kicked it down the drain and didn't bother about picking it up. The floor and the walls were covered in gold. But first of all they were stone walls, and then they were lined with cedar wood, and the cedar wood was carved. You'll find all the details in chapter 6. Cherubim and palm trees and open flowers were carved on the cedar wood. Lovely, wasn't it? There's another name for cherubim in Scripture, in the Book of Ezekiel for instance. Cherubim are the *living creatures*, they are expressive of *life*. When John saw the throne of God in the book of the Revelation, he said the throne itself was upheld on the backs of cherubim—one was like a lion, another like an eagle, another like a man, and the other was like an ox (4:7). They were the living creatures.

You know, I've often thought it, but even more so nowadays. I wish I were a cherub. To have all these four different forms of life all at once! The times were when I was beautiful—at least my mother thought so; but that time has long since gone by. At least there were times when I was strong and played rugby against the New Zealanders and things—not now, ladies and gentleman. I once had lovely hair. But, to be frank, I never flew like an eagle can. That's the one thing. It would be marvellous to be an eagle, or a lion—wow! Talk about life!

God's house was carved with emblems of life—life's beauty, in the palm trees and the cherubs with their different forms of life. To add to it, in the Most Holy Place was the throne of God—the ark, and it had on it the slab of pure gold that people have called in English 'the mercy seat'. The mercy seat had two cherubs coming out of each end and their wings overshadowed the mercy seat. Not content with that, in the house that Solomon built by God's command, there were in addition two very large olive wood cherubs. They stood behind the ark, presumably, with their wings outstretched. One wing touched the wall on one side, the other wing touched the edge of the fellow cherub's wing and the other cherub did the same. Living creatures—but you see this is the house of the *living* God. Would that we remembered it in those verses I quoted from 1 Timothy; 'That if I tarry long, that people might know how to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God' (3:15). It's not just a theory, it's a theological fact; he's a person and alive, whereas idols are dead things.

Now whether Elijah had ever been down to the house of God at Jerusalem (he wasn't a priest so he wouldn't have been allowed inside anyway) he would surely have heard of this magnificent display in the house of the living God. So when he is introduced in the first book of Kings, look what he says, 'And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the sojourners of Gilead,

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<sup>8</sup> Alan R. Millard, 'Does the Bible Exaggerate King Solomon's Golden Wealth?', *Biblical Archaeology Review* 15.3 (1989): 21–34.

said unto Ahab, as the LORD, the God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word' (17:1). Elijah was prepared; he stood before the living God.

In addition, in the Holy Place there was a little altar. It was called the golden altar. It was at this that the priest at the hour of prayer should come and offer the praises and prayers of Israel. It was by such an altar that Zechariah the father of John the Baptist was ministering. When the people were outside praying, and Zechariah was inside as the priest allotted for that day to offer the incense and the prayers of Israel, an angel appeared to him, and said, 'Zechariah, your prayer has been heard. God grants you your prayer' (Luke 1:12–13). What a tremendous thing this is. The altar had to stand outside the veil, of course, but it addressed the priest. And as it stood there it addressed God, who presenced himself on the ark. And the marvellous grace of God is this, that he invited his people to make their suggestions to the government, to the divine government! What magnificent grace it is, isn't it? We are invited likewise, are we not, my brothers and sisters, to come and make our suggestions and our prayers before the government of the universe, to the living God.

### ***The contest at Mount Carmel***

There came eventually the big contest. In answer to Elijah's prayers, there was no rain for three years. The epistle by James reminds us Elijah was a man of like passions as we are, yet he prayed, and the heavens withheld their rain, and he prayed again, that is on Mount Carmel, and the deluge came (5:17). As an instrument in God's hand therefore, Elijah prayed and the rain was stayed.

Eventually God indicated to him that the time had come for the great contest, and Elijah met Ahab, and Ahab met Elijah. He was a brave man, was Elijah, to meet Ahab. Ahab could have had him executed there and then, humanly speaking. Elijah proposed a test. That was to gather the people to Mount Carmel, and the priests of Baal were to be there too. And the test was this: let them build their altar and call upon their god Baal, and the god that answered by fire, let him be God. They were to call on Baal to send down fire from heaven. Elijah then would build an altar and call on Jehovah, and the same test applied: the god that answers by fire, let him be God (1 Kgs 18:24).

So Elijah challenged the people, 'How long will you halt between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal be God, worship him (v. 21). So the priests of Baal built their altar and put the sacrifice on it and called upon Baal. I'll tell you something about Baal: he didn't exist. Baal means *lord*, and represented the powers of agriculture. And then he was also the storm god, as they thought.

'So go on, call on your god,' says Elijah.

They called on him from morning, but nothing happened.

Then they got excited, and they cut themselves with knives to show their zeal. Nothing happened.

Then Elijah got sarcastic. (I don't know whether you agree that sarcasm has times when it is perfectly okay, or perhaps you think it isn't Christian; but Elijah wasn't a Christian really, not yet!) He said, 'Call a bit louder, you priests of Baal. Call a bit louder. I mean to say,

perhaps your god has gone off hunting somewhere.’ Then he said a Hebrew word that means, perhaps he’s gone ‘to the toilet’ — that was really sarcastic, wasn’t it?

‘But there was . . .’.

Now listen to the pathos. They had called, ‘Oh Baal, hear us!’

‘. . . there was neither voice, nor any to answer’ (vv. 27–29).

Oh, it would break your heart to think of this world, wouldn’t it? They won’t have the true God. They want to think that *matter* is the only reality, but it’s impersonal and men and women in their need call on matter.

‘O, Evolution, hear us!’

Might as well save your breath. There’s no one to answer, no voice. If there is no God, we are alone in the universe, aren’t we? We are amidst incalculably strong forces, but we are utterly alone, and they’re going to destroy us anyway.

It would move your heart, wouldn’t it? Men and women that don’t know the living God, where can they call in their times of extremity? ‘. . . no voice, nor any to answer.’

### *The God who answers*

Elijah put up with it until about two or three o’clock in the afternoon, the time of the evening sacrifice. He first ordered drums of water to be deluged over his altar and the sacrifice, and then he called upon God, the living God, to hear and turn these people’s hearts back again. The fire descended, burned up the altar and the wood and everything else—self-evidently it was from God.

What does it say to us? Well, you will have your thoughts as I do mine. I shall tell you now where God has spoken to me, and that’s at the sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord. Tell me, has God accepted his sacrifice? Has God demonstrated the adequacy of that sacrifice?

You say, ‘Yes he has indeed. The third day, God raised him from the dead.’

This is where God speaks and what a message it is. For almighty God, it is not sentiment that has him saying, ‘Despite of all your sins, I love you with a creator’s heart. And my Son, see him dying for you, and giving his life for you. This is of me—I raised him the third day from the dead.’ There are other evidences for the truth of Christianity, aren’t there? There’s none more powerful than God’s gift, and God’s response to the sacrifice of Christ.

### *After the fire, the rain fell*

Elijah commanded that they go down and slaughter the priests of Baal (v. 40). Ahab went back to his palace in Samaria and Elijah sat on the mountain and put his head between his knees, for now it was a question of another prayer. He had prayed that there should not be rain for three years and now the sacrifice had been offered and the fire from heaven had come, would the rain come in answer to his prayer? He told his servant to go out and look, and there was nothing. ‘Go and look a second time,’ he said. Eventually there came a tiny little bit of mist, like a man’s hand, and eventually the whole sky was dark, and the rain pelted down (v. 45).

You say, ‘So soon after the sacrifice?’

And now I open myself to all sorts of charges of fancifulness, in particular in the realm of typology. But you’re nobody if you don’t have one or two vices, are you? If you hold that

God spoke at Calvary and raised our Lord from the dead, do you hear of any rain coming thereafter?

'Not rain,' you say, 'but there happened a something on the day of Pentecost that swept three thousand folks into the kingdom of God.'

The ancient revival under Elijah is a lovely story, isn't it? The issue at stake was, Who is the true God, Baal or Jehovah? We shall ponder long, shall we not, what the test was, and how that ancient test can still speak to us in our modern world.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank thee for these stirring accounts of thine ancient servant Elijah. We bless thee for thy heart that planned it and in thy mercy gave thy people opportunity to repent and be restored. Help us in our day, Lord, that we might know thee ourselves, as the living God, and prove thee in our labours for thee. So we thank thee for this occasion; we thank thee for the refreshments provided and ask thy blessing on our concourse, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Elijah at Horeb

### *So far in our studies*

We turn now to consider the final four chapters of 1 Kings, chapters 19–22. On our last occasion we enjoyed together the stirring story of the revival that Elijah led on Mount Carmel. We almost heard the fire crackling as he proposed the test that would distinguish the service of the living God from the service of the priests of Baal. Baal was a nature god, thought to be the force behind the growing of the crops. At the same time, he was the storm god. And Elijah suggested the test: the priests of Baal would build their altars, slay their animal sacrifices, lay them on the altar and call upon their god; if their god was a living god he would send the necessary fire down from heaven to consume their sacrifice. They called for many hours on end, but nothing happened. Elijah taunted them, ‘Perhaps your god has gone on a journey somewhere? He might have even gone to the toilet?’ (1 Kgs 18:27). There was no voice, nor any that answered.

That story carries a lesson for our modern world, where many have given up faith in a personal creator that could answer our prayers and has spoken into the world, and they profess to believe in materialism. That is, if you should ask them individually (and you would know them well enough to ask them without giving offence), ‘What was ultimately responsible for your existence?’, they would reply in terms of the physical elements in the universe; atoms and molecules, all of them impersonal, without any purpose, and not knowing what they have done. That is of course contrary to our instincts. We know ourselves to be persons and therefore much more significant than mere matter. The sun up in the sky is very large; my brain is very small. My brain is more significant than the sun up in the sky, for it is merely so much gas. The sun doesn’t know I’m here; I know the sun is there. The sun doesn’t know how I work; I know how the sun works, thanks to the scientists. The early Greeks saw it was a perversity to imagine that impersonal matter is the source of our human persons. So when the priests of Baal joined in the contest and called upon Baal to answer them, says the ancient text, ‘There was no voice, nor any that answered.’ You hear the pathos of it, and in our distress, or faced with life’s ultimate questions, if we’re calling out on simple evolution as a process to hear us and to help us and to encourage us, there will come no voice. It is an impersonal process.

By contrast we see the sacrifice that Elijah offered. When he called upon the living God, fire came down from heaven and consumed it. In those far gone centuries, the principle was already being enunciated and practiced: there is a living God. And the Christian gospel tells us that, particularly in the cross and death of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, God has spoken, and

God speaks still. There is no other message like it, to get beneath the human conscience and the human heart. It tells of a God who so loved us that he gave his Son for our redemption.

### ***What happened after Mount Carmel***

You'd have thought from the description that we had on our last occasion, of the great demonstration that Elijah gave on Mount Carmel, that multitudes would have been brought to a healthier state of mind, than to go after the drivelling puerilities of Baal worship. There's some evidence that the people got converted, and they fell on their faces and they said, 'The LORD, he is God' (18:39). There would even appear to have been evidence that King Ahab himself got converted, for we read that after the demonstration, when Ahab got into his chariot to be driven home to his palace in Jezreel, Elijah girded up his loins, which is what ancient gentlemen used to do (moderns have their equivalents) and ran in front of the chariot for, I don't know, thirty miles or so (v. 46). That makes a very interesting little visual picture that you can carry in your mind. Here comes Ahab; he's got his chariot and his fine horses, and doubtless the chariot is ornamented with ivory in the manner of the kings who had enough money to do it. A Bentley chariot, at least! Now here is Elijah the prophet; is he running in front to guide the way? If the Duke of Edinburgh came to Belfast and was returning to the royal residence in Hillsborough, and you saw Billy Graham in front of his Rolls Royce, running in front, what would you conclude? You would think the man had got religion or something. So when we come to the end of the story in chapter 19, we are full of hope that the next few chapters will be full of the glad tidings and activities of redemption. Alas, not so.

### *Elijah on the run*

You may well have to struggle against being sorely disappointed as we briefly refer to these next four chapters. There was no revival, for we are told that when Ahab got home, 'He told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword' (19:1).

'Oh, has he really?' said Jezebel.

'Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life' (vv. 2-3).

Now I don't know, without inquiring from you, how you interpret Elijah's behaviour in the chapter that follows. They who study it well are divided, and rather a lot of people say that Elijah, enflamed by his success (as he thought it) on Mount Carmel, began to feel that he was a very special 'archbishop' of a prophet; but when he heard what Jezebel said, then fear gripped him and he collapsed inside. His confidence in his own abilities and resources gave way to doubt and, as one commentator puts it, to manic depression. He says to God, 'I am no better than my fathers' (v. 4). Say the commentators, 'Well whoever thought he was anyway—better than his fathers?' It's a dangerous place when a man or woman gets it into their head they're better than the previous generation. And he asked for God to take away his life. And so scared was he that he ran, not from Jezreel down to Beersheba (Jezreel was one of the palaces of Ahab and Jezebel his wife, and Beersheba was right at the south of the next-door country of Judah). Elijah ran all those miles but, not content with that, he ran

another 200 miles down to the mountain range of Horeb. He was certainly getting away from Jezebel—obviously! You say, ‘He must have been panic stricken.’ According to these commentators, God had to rebuke him. Twice over God asked him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ (vv. 9, 13).

Well, it could be so, for ‘Elijah was a man of like passions as we are,’ says the apostle James (5:17). None of us is free of the mould of pride, are we? But I take a rather different view. I hold, yes, the man was profoundly disappointed and maybe broken, not because he had any pride, but by the sheer exhaustion that followed his spectacular efforts and by what had happened since. May I point out to you chapter 19 and verse 3, though I don’t know what translation you may have. You may have a version that reads, ‘Then he was afraid, and ran for his life’. But the majority of the Hebrew manuscripts read not, ‘he was afraid’ but, ‘when he saw’. Saw what? Well, saw what the situation was. If there was going to be any revival in Israel, then either the woman Jezebel had to get converted or else she’d have to get eliminated. For Ahab, king though he was and on occasion wore the crown, was a weak-kneed worm of a man when faced with Jezebel in all her colours. When he told Jezebel that the priests of Baal were slain, she was flaming mad. It was Jezebel that had prevailed upon Ahab to build a temple to Baal and he’d been weak enough to give in. She came from Tyre anyway; she was a pagan and was determined to continue on with the priests of Baal.

#### *The character of the queen*

The kind of woman she was we shall read in another chapter before we finish. We’ll see how her husband took to gardening. Well, some royals do, of course. Not having a lot of other things to do, they take to gardening. Well, it so happened that Ahab wanted to extend his garden beyond where it was at the moment, but alas the land on the other side of the wall belonged to a certain Naboth. So Ahab made what he thought was a reasonable offer.

He said, ‘Naboth, my good man, I’d like to develop my garden, you see, and I’d like to buy your property. Please sell it to me. I’ll give you a very good sum for it and somewhere else, wherever you choose.’

Naboth wouldn’t sell it. ‘I’ve inherited it from my grandfathers and their grandfathers down through the centuries; it’s always had our name on it. I don’t care what you offer me by way of money, I’m not interested in it. I wouldn’t sell what has belonged to my family for centuries.’

Ahab was very keen on gardening and he went back and sulked on his bed and didn’t feel well. And Jezebel came to inquire, ‘You don’t feel well my dear? What’s wrong with you today?’

He told her about this Naboth chap who wouldn’t sell him the ground for his extended gardens.

Said Jezebel, ‘Do you reign here or not? You leave it to me.’

She engaged in judicial murder. She organised false witnesses to come and witness that Naboth had cursed God and the king, both of which were criminal acts. She put him on trial, suborned the jury and got him executed.

‘There you are, you can have the land,’ says Jezebel.

I don't know what Ahab said. Perhaps something like, 'Oh, how clever you are, Jezebel my dear.'

Values? Cost of life? The arrogance of condemning somebody in the name of God when he is innocent; and doing it deliberately. She was some woman was Jezebel, and Ahab followed where she led.

### *Why Elijah ran*

If there were to come a revival and the priests of Baal be eliminated and the temple of Baal be destroyed, you will have to deal with Jezebel; and if Jezebel didn't get converted or eliminated, you might as well give up any notion of a revival led by her dear hubby, Ahab. When Elijah saw it, he ran. She wouldn't hesitate to execute him either.

Why did he run? He ran as hard as he could, and virtually collapsed. 'I'm no better than my fathers,' said he (19:4).

Have you ever tried to lead a revival? Have you ever prayed and worked for a revival? Do you know what it costs by way of emotional energy and rigorous hard work, and then to know it will come to nothing?

Elijah was broken hearted, of course. He was exhausted: physically exhausted, mentally exhausted, emotionally exhausted. What would God do? Well, he'd put Elijah to bed. That was nice of God, wasn't it? He has angels that do that kind of thing from time to time. When he woke up there was a meal. I don't know what the crockery was like, but there was a very tasty meal. Sometimes, you know, when we get exhausted or depressed or disappointed, it's not extra prayer we need, it can be extra sleep and a decent meal or two. So God read the situation and twice over he put Elijah to bed for a long sleep. Then the angel awoke him a second time and said, 'Now get up and eat Elijah, for the journey is too far for you' (19:7).

What journey? The aforesaid expositors who think Elijah was suffering from manic depression or something, think that he should have gone back there and then, and put his fist in Jezebel's face maybe. That's the way he ought to have gone—north. But apparently not; not from the text. It was the journey down to Mount Horeb, which was around 200 miles south of Beersheba. Why did God send him there? Because that was the famous mountain where Moses went up to receive the law. Sinai is part of that Horeb range, where God proposed a covenant with Israel.

### *Remembering Mount Sinai*

According to the covenant, God proposed that they make him a tabernacle, and he would come and dwell among them. And there, scarcely had God got the words out of his mouth when Israel had broken the covenant and persuaded Aaron to make them a golden calf, which they made from their earrings.

They said to themselves, 'You know, we can't sit here at the bottom of a mountain, twiddling our thumbs in the desert. You have to be aiming at something in life, surely.' They said to Aaron therefore, 'Aaron, make us gods to go before us and lead us.' You've got to make progress in life surely somewhere, in some direction.

So they broke off their earrings. Now in those far off days, there being no banks (mercifully), the people wore their excessive wealth on their persons. It wasn't simply that the ladies wanted to show off, with mighty great earrings stretched halfway down the face; it

was their excessive wealth that they wore as jewels. And you say, 'Where have they got them when they were in the wilderness?' Well, when they came out of Egypt they hadn't been paid their wages like they should have been for years and years and years and the Egyptians were so glad to get rid of them that they gave them all kinds of stuff. The gold from which they made the earrings was but a by-product of their redemption. Now they wanted gods to go before them. They lost faith in Moses, they'd lost faith in Moses' God and they weren't interested in hearing about his tabernacle. They were going after gods to go before them made of earrings, if you don't mind. Not just any earrings; gold earrings—the by-products of redemption.

I remember the days when in England people smoked (cigarettes, generally). When they got converted, very often they gave up smoking for various reasons and saved themselves a lot of money. You know what, some of them saved so much that they could afford a little car, an Austin Minor for instance, or a Morris Minor or something of the sort. Of course, if you have a car, you have to go out in it, don't you? What's the point of having it if you don't go out in it? Seeing they had to work all the week long, some of them went off on Sundays too. There's nothing wrong in Morris Minors that I know of. Nothing wrong in making money if it's properly made. But to make it the goal in life, as distinct from God, that's another thing, isn't it? 'Make us gods to go before us!' So they made the golden calf. Now God sends Elijah down to Horeb. If ever Israel is to have a revival it will have to be in getting back to the covenant with God. And Elijah, as he returns to Israel, will have fresh in his mind the lesson that is taught him on Mount Horeb. There he prayed against Israel.

#### *Elijah's concerns addressed in the New Testament*

Now it's a very interesting thing that the New Testament comments on Elijah's praying. It was his prayers that provoked the revival, so James tells us at the end of chapter 5 of his letter. Elijah prayed that there should not be rain for three years and there wasn't rain. Then he prayed again and rain came. Though he was 'a man of like passions as we', his prayers in that sense, provoked what revival there was. Then Paul, in Romans 11 quotes this prayer that Elijah now prayed at Horeb. He told God, 'They have broken down your altars, and slain your prophets, and I, even I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away' (Rom 11:3). God didn't dispute that, but he did add, 'Yet will I leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him' (v. 4 cf. 1 Kgs 19:18).

It's God's good medicine for depression—spiritual depression. 'Elijah, it's perfectly true what you say; Jezebel is against you, the Israelites will side with her and they'll persecute you. They could possibly eliminate you if they got the chance. Elijah, I'm telling you now, I'm not finished with Israel myself. I've got a remnant; I've got seven thousand men who haven't bowed their knee to Baal!'

And Paul gladly takes up that promise, doesn't he? For in Romans chapters 9, 10 and 11, he deals with the problem. Israel was the nation chosen of God to bring in the Messiah. You just imagine Paul in prison in Caesarea (if I may take time off just for a few minutes). Can you imagine that? Felix is the governor. He was open to all kinds of persuasion, particularly if it came in the form of bank notes or silver or gold or anything like that. So he was interested to

have a prisoner like Saul of Tarsus, a highly educated man, knowing his Greek and classics. So, Felix used to come and talk to him in the evening. (It was something to do when you haven't got television!) You can imagine Felix saying to Paul, 'Now Paul, how do you know that Jesus is the Messiah?'

'Well, sir, you see the Old Testament Scriptures tell us about the coming of a Messiah, and they say what family he is to be born of, where he is to be born and so forth, and what he's going to do.'

'That's very impressive,' says Felix; 'you have Scriptures or something—could you read me some of them? Oh, look at that, yes. But, Paul, are you sure that this is not your own interpretation of this thing? Do all the rabbis in Israel admit that this is the true interpretation, or is it just you? Paul, tell me, how many other rabbis agree with you that Jesus is the Messiah?'

'Well, there's Nicodemus, to start with, and he was of a very famous family, the ben Gurions (very famous family). There's Joseph of Arimathea and he was a member of the Sanhedrin.'

'Any more, Paul?'

What would you have said if you were Paul? Virtually the whole nation denied Jesus. Paul continued to witness of course, and pointed out what the issues were at stake and so forth, and so on.

Listen to God talking to Paul. 'Paul, it may be now that the majority in Israel reject Jesus Christ as their Messiah; but it won't always be so.'

Says Paul, 'God certainly hasn't finished with Israel.'

'How do you know, Paul?'

'Listen to what God said to Elijah when he was ready to give up: "I haven't finished with Israel yet. I have seven thousand men that haven't bowed their knees to Baal. That may be a small proportion, but it's a remnant. And the reason I leave a remnant is this:" "if I were going to destroy the nation, I'd destroy them root and branch at once. The very fact that I leave a remnant, says that I guarantee that one day I will restore the rest."' (See Rom 11.)

Good, isn't it? Well, I don't know if you agree, but if you do agree you could shout 'Hallelujah!' under your breath. God will yet restore that nation through whom his Son came.

#### *God's answer to Elijah*

Notice the promise and the consideration that God now forces on Elijah. 'It's worth working Elijah, worth carrying on. You're disappointed now because the revival didn't break out, but it's worth carrying on Elijah. Go back and anoint your successors' (19:15–18).

So Elijah came to the mouth of his cave, and there was a big windstorm, but God wasn't in the windstorm. There was a big fire, and God wasn't in the fire. Then there came a still, small voice. And here the commentators, as usual, see an opportunity.

'Yes,' they say, 'Elijah would enjoy seeing fire come down from heaven and destroy everybody, but he had to learn that there was another side to God—the still, small voice that talks to our consciences.'

Okay, but what did the still, small voice say? It would not be a bad idea to read what it said. These verses announce a withering judgment:

Thou shalt anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. (vv. 15–17)

God will, in his good time, bring in his judgment. When God judges he doesn't lose his temper, you know. It was a still, small voice. He would see that justice was done.

*God preaches the gospel to Ahab*

It will be evident now that Jezebel and Ahab have sinned a most obnoxious sin, putting their fist in the very face of God, defying God. What would you have God do to Ahab? What would you have done with him? Would you set him as a Sunday School teacher, hoping he'd improve his ways perhaps, or what? God preached the gospel to the man—the mercies of God are beyond measurement.

You see, the Syrians (what were called Syrians in those days; they were Aramaeans really) had long troubled Israel, and therefore they came against Israel once more. Israel was strengthened by God to defeat them, so the Syrians scratched their heads and tried to come up with a reason for their defeat. Their counsel was to, 'Muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot. Then we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they' (20:25). The first time they tried to defeat Israel up in the mountains and that didn't work, so the strategists said to themselves, 'Ah, their god is a god of the mountains, so let's this time attack them on the plain; we shall conquer them if we do that, because their god is a god of the hills and he won't be able to help them on the plain.' Perhaps it's nonsense, but that's how people thought in those days.

Here is God, using the enemy to preach a little gospel message to Ahab. 'Because your enemy have said that you defeated them because you fought them up the mountains and your God is a god of the mountains, now they're going to come back to you in the plain, for they think that your God isn't a god of the plain. They've got absolutely false ideas of God and I'm going to give you the victory, Ahab, to demonstrate that I'm not some geographical god like Baal. I'm God almighty and omnipresent; not a god of the hills or a god of the plain, but God of the universe. I'm going to give you the victory, Ahab—just to show you who I am' (v. 28). Nice gospel message, isn't it?

Do you know what? Many years ago when I left England there were a lot of people there that believed in God. I came all the way to Ulster and do you know what I found? Thousands of folks in Ulster believed in God! Do you suppose you could get anywhere on earth where God isn't? He's the living God, isn't he? The heaven of heavens cannot contain him.

Ahab, put your faith in the real God; let God preach you the gospel! The victory was given him that day again—this was God preaching the gospel to Ahab.

So then the king of Syria and his courtiers came to Ahab; they came very humbly with ropes round their necks and old clothes. Humble and repentant, they begged his majesty a pardon. What ought Ahab to have done? Well, he ought to have got hold of the rope and tightened it round their necks, because they were a plague constantly to Israel. Instead he joined up with them, bade them come and sit in his chariot with him. Funny that, isn't it? It happens that some people can get into all kinds of interminable muddles through sinful

practices, and then when God delivers them, instead of rooting out the sinful practice, they continue with it. Ahab did that. So the gospel was lost on Ahab.

We've already talked about the way that Jezebel urged Ahab, and together they indulged in judicial murder of Naboth to get a few square inches of land so that Ahab could add it to his garden. How would you deal with authorities that value human life like that? What would you have God do?

### ***Believing the lie***

Finally, we come to a very sad chapter, on the basis of which I can tell you what God did with Ahab. Ahab had had the gospel preached to him many times now, through Elijah the prophet, through the other prophets, and he had always rejected it and confused it. Now God is going to send him 'a strong delusion so that he believes the lie, that he might be damned.' If you think that is excessively strong language, then of course I'm quoting from the New Testament. 'God will send some people at the end of this age,' says Paul, 'a strong delusion that they believe the lie.' Why will God do it? 'Because they would not receive the love of the truth' '(see 2 Thess 2:11-12). If you won't have the truth, what is there left? Let's see how it worked out in Ahab's case in chapter 22.

Ahab came to Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat was, on the whole, a good king; he was the king of Judah. (He'd made an unfortunate marriage arrangement between his son and Ahab's daughter, but that's another story.) He was visiting Ahab up in Ahab's palace in Samaria when Ahab said to Jehoshaphat one day, 'Josh old boy, have you thought much about Ramoth-gilead these days?'

'No,' says Jehoshaphat, 'I hadn't thought about that.'

'Well it's ours you know. It belongs to us and these Syrians have got it, and that can't be right. So what about having a joint campaign? We'll join our armies together and go up and get Ramoth-gilead back into our possession.'

'Well, that's a thing,' said Jehoshaphat. (He was easily persuaded, unfortunately.) 'Yes, perhaps we should.'

### *Which way went the word of the Lord?*

So it was arranged and the two kings came out. Can you see them out there? There's a big place outside Samaria, outside the city wall, a big threshing floor actually, but it was a wide space for all sorts of ceremonies you could have. Ahab and Jehoshaphat had their thrones there, and they dressed up in their royal attire, with their crowns and things on. This was the beginnings of them going to march up to Ramoth-gilead in the north and seizing it back from the Syrians.

Ahab had a lot of religious men there; a lot of prophets of various sorts and of very doubtful origins. He said to them, 'Now gentlemen, as two monarchs here, we want your advice. Is it the will of God that we go up and take Ramoth-gilead?'

The prophets with one accord said, 'Yes, go up, and the Lord will give it to you Ahab.'

'There you are,' said Ahab, 'we've every encouragement from the Lord to go.'

'Yes, Ahab, yes I know, good fellow,' said Jehoshaphat, 'but shouldn't we also listen to a prophet of the Lord as well, perhaps?'

‘Well, Josh old boy,’ said Ahab, ‘there aren’t many of them around nowadays. They’re decidedly unpopular; I don’t know if you’ve noticed the trend. They’re unpopular and there’s only about one left, but he’s in prison because he never can say anything agreeable about me—he’s always against what I propose. If you insist we can hear what he has to say; but all the other prophets are saying, ‘Go up, and the Lord will deliver it into your hand’ (see 22:1–12)

So an officer was sent to get Micaiah out of prison. As they came along the road, being an ordinary soldier, a prison governor or something, this officer had a word in the prophet’s ear. He said, ‘Now sir, it’s not my business to tell you what to say; I wouldn’t dream of telling you what to say, but all the other prophets are encouraging the king to go up. If you can manage it—with a good conscience, of course—could you encourage the king to go up? He mightn’t like it if you didn’t, and you don’t want to go back to prison, do you? The bread and water here isn’t good stuff!’

So Micaiah said, ‘Thanks very much,’ and he went up (see vv. 13–14).

Ahab said to the prophet of the Lord, ‘Micaiah, shall we go up?’

‘Yes,’ said Micaiah, ‘you go up, and the LORD will deliver it into your hand.’

‘Here, stop that,’ Ahab said. ‘How long am I to tell you to tell me the truth.’

How did he know it wasn’t the truth? When all the other prophets said ‘go up,’ he believed them. When Micaiah said, ‘Yes, go up, you’ll be successful,’ how did he recognise that it wasn’t the truth? So Ahab at least could tell the difference between a lie and the truth, could he?

‘Well, if you really want the truth,’ said the prophet, ‘well, that’s unusual for you, Ahab, but if you want the truth now let me tell you. I saw the LORD in the heavenly council, surrounded by the hosts, and the LORD said, “Who will go up and entice Ahab to go to war?”’ (Notice the word. It doesn’t say ‘compel’ Ahab, but ‘entice’ him. Ahab wanted to go anyway.)

‘There came forth an evil spirit and said, “I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets” and the LORD said, “Go”’ (see vv. 15–22).

Micaiah was put back in prison and Ahab and Jehoshaphat went to the war. Jehoshaphat went in his robes and nearly got killed because the foreign troops pressed around him. When he cried to God they backed off. Ahab disguised himself, but there was a certain soldier who, without aiming at anything in particular, put his arrow on a bowstring and pulled it and let it go. It found an opening between the chainmail and the breastplate in Ahab’s armour and he received a mortal wound from which he died.

Think about it. How many times did God preach the gospel to Ahab, on Mount Carmel and thereafter? When Ahab would not have the truth, then God said in his judgment, ‘Ahab, believe the lie.’

If you won’t have the truth, then automatically you believe the lie, don’t you? The Bible is likewise very severe when talking to us about the end of this age. ‘God will send them strong delusion, so that they believe the lie—those who would not receive the love of the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness’ (2 Thess 2:10–12).

It’s serious stuff, isn’t it? But the question of what is truth and what is a lie stands in Scripture. Is there a God, or isn’t there? What is truth? It’s an open question now, but it won’t

always be an open question. There will come times when it will be a capital offence against the state to believe in God, and people will make it an excuse for believing the lie.

Let us commit ourselves to God in prayer.

Our Father, our hearts are solemnised by reading these ancient stories, as we perceive in them that men and women wrestled with the same kinds of questions that we wrestle with today. Help us, Oh Lord, we beseech thee, who know the Saviour by thy grace, to witness to him who said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except by me.' Grant that our hearts may be open and willing to receive the truth when we know it, lest that day comes upon us when, having to get to the truth, we believe the only alternative, which is the lie. So now dismiss us with thy blessing and grant us a peaceful night, we pray. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## [The Ascensions of Elijah](#)

This is now the fifth study that we are presently conducting on the first and second Books of Kings. We are not seeking to cover every comma, not necessarily every full stop, and so you will understand that we have been arbitrarily selecting various topics from these two books. Tonight we arrive at the Second Book of Kings, and to its early chapters. It is my intention, God willing, to speak about the ascension of Elijah. Perhaps I ought to rephrase that and say I intend to speak about the ascensions of Elijah, for there are two. In the first one, he ascends to a steep hill and sits on its top, much to the distress of the king. In the second one, he is taken up by chariot and horses into heaven. I shall suggest that, in both these passages, Elijah becomes for us a prototype of our blessed Lord. Please notice that I didn't say a *type* of our Lord, but a *prototype*, which is rather a different thing. So let us refresh our memories by reading a few verses here and there from these early chapters of 2 Kings, beginning at chapter 1 and verse 1:

And Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab. And Ahaziah fell down through the lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, 'Go inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this sickness.' But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, 'Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, "Is it because there is no God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not come down from the bed whither thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.'" And Elijah departed. And the messengers returned unto him, [unto the king that is], and he said unto them, 'Why is it that you are returned?' And they said unto him, 'There came up a man to meet us and said unto us, "Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, "Thus saith the LORD, Is it because there is no God in Israel, that thou sendest to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from the bed wither thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.'" And he said unto them, 'What manner of man was he which came up to meet you and told you these words?' And they answered him, 'He was a hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he [the king] said, It is Elijah the Tishbite.' Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of the hill. And he spake unto him, 'O man of God, the king hath said, "Come down.'" And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, 'If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty.' And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. (2 Kgs 1:1-10)

There were two other attempts similarly, and the second earned itself the same punishment as did the first. The third captain took a much more sensible view, pleaded with Elijah and was shown mercy, but there was no mercy for the king, Ahaziah.

In chapter 2 we have the famous ascension of Elijah. Let's read it, breaking in at verse 9.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.' And Elisha said, 'Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me.' And he said, 'You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so.' And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it and he cried, 'My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him. (2 Kgs 2:9–13)

God give us good understanding of his word.

### ***The severity of Elijah***

The first of these stories has been widely criticised in the technical and academic literature. Many have observed that the judgment inflicted by Elijah on the two captains and their two groups of fifty soldiers was exceedingly severe. Fire came down from heaven and destroyed them. It has been argued over this case, and others like it, that the Old Testament is a foreign book and does not accord with the character of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. In particular, did not our Lord explicitly forbid his apostles to behave like Elijah did on this occasion? Luke tells us that, as our Lord was slowly journeying down from Galilee to Jerusalem, the apostles, or some of them at least, had the task of going ahead and booking a lodging for the night. So they went to a particular village, knocked on the door and asked the dear lady for lodging for our Lord and some of his apostles. She happened to be a Samaritan, and when she discovered that this Jesus and his apostles were going down to Jerusalem to the temple she slammed the door in their faces. We who live in this favoured part of the geography of the world will know what religious animosity can do. The apostles, according to some manuscripts, were led to ask the Lord, 'What shall we do in reply to this? Is it your will that we call down fire from heaven, like Elijah did?' He strictly forbade it of course. 'You'll do no such thing' (9:54–55). That kind of animosity is sad, isn't it?

This was a Saviour who was out to save both Jews and Samaritans, and in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John we have a lengthy story of our Lord's personal conversation with a Samaritan woman, leading her to faith, and not only her but practically her whole city. In the light of what our Lord said on that occasion, how shall we understand these stories in chapter one of the two Books of Kings—of the severe judgment that was meted out to the king and to his two deputies?

Just let us remember what that king knew. He was the son of Ahab and his mother was Jezebel. Recently God himself had demonstrated in miraculous fashion that Baal was no god whatsoever, and that Jehovah was the one, true God. Elijah had staged a sacrifice to show it,

and called upon the God of heaven to demonstrate that he was the sole God by answering by fire; sending fire down from heaven to consume the sacrifice. Ahaziah, in spite of it, when he was now ill, sent, like his unfortunate mother would have done, to inquire of Baal-zebub. In the face of recent history, it was a deliberate insult to Jehovah. What would you have God to do?

As for this being contrary to the spirit of Jesus, let me remind you of what our Lord said, among other things, about the false attitudes of many of the rabbis in Jerusalem. He enunciated there some of their perverse deeds, and added, 'How shall you escape the torments of hell?' (Matt 23:33). Yes, he is the loving Saviour, he died to save mankind, but he is also the judge. Said he on one occasion, 'The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father and has given him the judgment because he is the Son of man' (John 5:22-23).

That is part of our Christian *gospel*, is it not? I use the word advisedly; it is part of our Christian *gospel* that there's going to be a final judgment. I hope you agree with me that it's part of the *gospel*. Would you prefer that the world went on endlessly in its perverse ways, with all the crime that exists in it and the deliberate atheism? Would you prefer it went on forever, or would you like inequity stopped? The good news is, part of the *gospel* is, according to Paul, 'He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed' (Acts 17:31). The judgment of God is not contrary to what our Lord Jesus stands for. It is precisely because there will be a judgment that he died for our sakes at Calvary, to save us from it; and now he's ascended. He was 'the meek and lowly Jesus' as we say; now he's ascended far above all principality, powers, might, and dominions. The favoured disciple who at the last supper leaned back on the couch and therefore leaned on the breast of the Lord Jesus, when he saw the Lord Jesus in all his glory on the Isle of Patmos, tells us that he fell at his feet as one dead. Such was the overpowering glory of the risen Lord.

Let me press home what I'm trying to say by referring to the thesis with which I began this series. That was simply this: that after the death of David, God made provision for the spiritual maintenance of his people, if they should wander, for bringing them back again and recovering them to their normal spiritual health. That provision was not the endless raising up of kings. God did raise up kings and some of them were very good. Some of them were good and some of them were the very opposite. The provision God made according to Solomon was the building of the house of the Lord at Jerusalem. We shall look inside that house of the Lord just briefly, to see one of its features.

### ***Cherubim everywhere***

When you came in through the door, you would find the walls covered with wood. The wood was carved with cherubim, palmettes and rosettes. Then it was overlaid with gold, so whichever way you looked around there were cherubim! In fact, coming in the door you saw the same. It was similarly constructed; it was a folding door, but it had cherubim on it. If you came into the Most Holy Place there was of course the ark, and on the golden slab that covered the ark (the mercy seat, as it is called in English) were two cherubim on each end, overarched with their wings outstretched, looking towards the mercy seat. In addition, there

were two olive wood cherubim. There was no such thing like it in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle, but here was the same ark. Solomon had it placed here in the Most Holy Place and on either side of it there were two olive wood cherubim. They were full models, and they stood there with their wings outstretched so that the wing of the one touched the wall and his other wing went to the middle. The other cherub stood with his wings outstretched, so their two wings met in the middle and his other wing went to the other wall. The whole thing was covered by these cherubim.

I don't know if you like cherubim and whether your bedroom is covered with wallpaper with cherubim on it or not, or when you wake up after a nightmare in the middle of the night you see cherubim, I don't know of course. What do they mean to you? Let's think of their history for a moment.

We first read of them in Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sinned and were expelled from the garden and they could no longer put out their hands whenever they liked and take the fruit of the tree of life. When they were in the garden, any time they wished they could stretch out their hand and take of the fruit of the tree of life, and they needed to do so, of course, to keep the trace elements necessary for the perpetuation of life. When they were shut out from the garden, and they could no longer stretch out their hand and take and eat of the fruit of the tree of life, they began to die. At the gateway there were cherubim with a flaming sword, keeping the way to the tree. It's a sorry story, and it has its application still. We are mortal creatures, aren't we? Until the Lord Jesus comes, we are physically mortal.

Then come forward with me some centuries to the time when Moses was instructed to build the tabernacle. Here is the tabernacle, therefore, and, if you can imagine it, here is a priest and this is the first time he ever came in. Of course he's all fingers and thumbs because of the splendour of the place, and not wanting to do anything wrong. He comes in and on the left here is a lampstand. The thing about the lampstand was, not merely that it had seven lamps on it, it was made to look like a tree. It had roots, it had six branches and the branches were adorned. Though it was made of gold, the goldsmith had so hammered it as to show emblems of various stages of the life of a tree and of its fruit. If the priest knew Genesis, he would surely have jumped to the conclusion what this was. This tree was symbolic of the tree of life—what an amazing thing.

As the priest came near it, he must have shuddered a little bit, for all round in the tabernacle were cherubim. Cherubim on the walls, cherubim on the veil, cherubim on the ceiling, cherubim galore, and yet not one of them raised a protest against the man coming to the tree of life—he could touch it if he wanted to. How can that be, how could a man be admitted to the tree of life? The answer, as you know, is to be found if you penetrate into the Holiest of All and to the very ark and throne of God. Inside that ark was God's holy law that would condemn the most holy of us as sinners deserving the penalty of sin. But on that golden slab that covered the ark was the blood of atonement spilt by the priest on the Day of Atonement. As Paul says, 'God has set forth our blessed Lord, to be a propitiation through his blood, so that we can be justified, not by the works of the law, but through faith in Christ' (see Rom 3:24–28). Hence, therefore, the way into the presence of God; and we all have enjoyed it, have we not? We find in its illustration a means of helping our imagination to grasp what God has done through the sacrifice of Christ.

Now we come to the house of God and there are cherubim everywhere. Enough to remind them of the holiness of God—cherubs on the door, cherubs on the walls and the two great cherubs standing in the Most Holy Place. What will they tell us of? They will eventually remind us that they are God’s executives. So, when we come to the Book of the Revelation, in chapter 4 we’re given a vision of the throne of God, which rests on the four *living* creatures, which is another name for cherubim. Cherubim and living creatures are one and the same thing. They uphold the throne of God and when God’s judgments are about to happen, on one occasion at least, it is one of the cherubs that takes the vial of the wrath of God and gives it to the angel to empty over the world. Cherubim are the executives of God, not only in his mercy but in his judgment. It was life itself under God protesting against the suicide of human sin.

Therefore, when God in his mercy caused Elijah to stage on Mount Carmel the practical demonstration that God was the only and true God, and his the only sacrifice; and then Ahaziah deliberately, in the face of God, ignores God, Jehovah, and when he’s ill sends to Baal-zebub to ask whether he will recover, then Ahaziah has gone beyond all mercy and must face the judgment. The New Testament agrees with it. We must not be misled into soft-peddling the judgment of God in the words of Jesus Christ, as though Christ was all love and no judgment. That is not true. The opposite is true. The very fact he died for us is because otherwise there would have been eternal judgment for each of us. The symbolism therefore of the house of God is that the cherubs are God’s executives to protect the holiness of that house.

### ***The succession***

With that let us pass to what I have called Elijah’s second ascension. You’ll forgive me I’m sure for describing the first one, when he went and sat on a hill, as ‘an ascension’. The second one is more notorious. As he and Elisha went together, and both of them knew that this day they must part, there appeared a chariot and horses, and Elijah was taken up into heaven by the chariot and the horses. Elisha was left to carry on Elijah’s work. It would be easy for Christians to see in this a prototype of what happened when our Lord left his disciples as he had forewarned them he would, went up into heaven and then left us here to carry on the witness. Let us notice therefore one or two features from chapter 2:

And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what shall I do for thee, before I be taken from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. (2 Kgs 2:9–10)

Interesting condition, wasn’t it? ‘If you see me as I am being taken from you.’ We think of the story of our Lord’s own ascension.

### ***Our Lord’s ascension***

What do you make of that story in Acts 1, that Christ was taken up into heaven? A lot of academics known to me tell me that it is simply a myth. You can’t get into heaven by going up from earth, rocket or no rocket. How far would you have to go before you come to a door called heaven? They say it’s a primitive story, by people who thought that heaven was just,

you know, a few miles above Jerusalem, or London or wherever. No, it's not a primitive story.

Let's describe it this way to start with. It was a physical event, and yet it was a symbolic event. Let me use an analogy, a modern analogy. Let me ask you, when did Queen Elizabeth II ascend the throne?

Incidentally, what do you mean by that funny phrase, 'she ascended the throne'?

You say, 'You don't mean it literally, do you? I mean, it's not a question of getting a big old chair and climbing up on it and sitting on it.'

Well no, when we say that Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne, we mean she began to reign as Queen, don't we?

'Just a minute, is there no chair? I thought there was a literal chair, and on the day of her coronation she went down to the Abbey in a nice gilded coach, climbed up on this big chair and sat on it.'

That's the funny way English has, I suppose. To ascend the throne can mean literally what she did in Westminster Abbey; she climbed up on a big chair and sat on it. Or it can be a metaphor for becoming Queen. So the ascension of our Lord was both a physical event and . . . I nearly said a magnificent metaphor. God has raised him; not only raised him from the dead, but seated him at his own right hand in glory, far above principalities, powers, might, and dominions. He has literally done so, and yet, as well as being literal, his ascension into heaven was a symbolic act. It brought to an end that succession of appearances that our Lord made to this apostle, to Mary Magdalene, to the two on the road to Emmaus and in the upper room at Jerusalem, where he used to come and go, and come and go, for forty days. The ascension stopped it all. Now he ascended into glory, you see.

It was a literal act therefore, and a symbolic one, and you will have noticed how the chapter that tells us of this, Acts 1, stresses the fact that the apostles saw him go into heaven. Let me read you the passage. He led them out to Mount Olives, and commissioned them.

And while they were looking stedfastly into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, You men of Galilee, why stand you looking into heaven? This same Jesus, which was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you beheld him going into heaven. (Acts 1:10-11)

Do you notice the emphasis on the actual seeing of it happening? We're told that as they were looking he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight, and while they were looking the angels asked, 'Why stand you looking? This same Jesus shall come in like manner as you beheld him going.' You couldn't stress it more, could you? The ascension of Christ was witnessed. People saw that it happened—they saw the real Christ ascending.

We notice how careful the record is; they don't say that they saw him enter heaven. They saw him going up thus far and then a cloud received him out of their sight. They didn't see him cross over. Whether it could be seen or not, I have no idea. How do you get into heaven if you start in London? Go up? Or should you start in Australia, go down? What should you do? How far do you have to go up to get to heaven? They are not profitable questions to ask. The apostles don't say they saw him entering heaven; they say they saw him going into heaven. He went up from them. They saw him go, and thank God for the words of the angels:

‘You shall see him, this same Jesus, you shall see coming in like manner.’ Oh what a marvellous thing it is! ‘Oh, I shall see him descend from the sky | Coming for me, for me.’<sup>9</sup> What it will be to see him!

But it’s not only his ascension. Says Hebrews 2, ‘we see him.’ ‘We see not yet all things put under him, but we see Jesus’ (vv. 8–9). Isn’t it true, my brothers, my sisters? Not with physical sight, but in those moments of quiet, as you think and pray, you see him, don’t you?—at the right hand of God, interceding for us, we see him. We are to look off unto Jesus; we’re here to gather our thoughts and think about those things that are above.

### *Elijah’s ascension*

Then as Elisha was watching Elijah go up, open-mouthed, his mantle fell down, and Elisha went and picked it up. Now, I have to confess to you that I can’t find a verse that says that Elisha thereafter wore Elijah’s mantle. If you should find such a verse, I would be glad to know of it. It was an article of his clothing that was used when they had together gone across Jordan and out to the other side. Elijah had used his mantle to smite the waters, the waters divided and they went over. When Elisha came back without Elijah, he got hold of the mantle and he smote the waters and they parted, and he came over.

Since it’s a part of Elijah’s clothing, it’s interesting to hear what our Lord said as he left his apostles, ‘But tarry in the city until you be endued with power from on high’ (Luke 24:49 KJV). But though you know what ‘endue’ means, you don’t use it these days so much, or at least I don’t. I don’t say of our dear brother, ‘He was endued in a navy blue suit,’ you know. No, I don’t say that, but *endue* means to be clothed. ‘Wait in the city until you be clothed with power from on high.’ ‘You see,’ said Christ before he left them, ‘the works that I have done, you shall do also, and greater works than these shall you do’ (John 14:12) ‘Endued with power from on high’; that’s a gospel message surely.

And then, as Elijah was leaving Elisha, they visited many places. Maybe Elijah was saying goodbye to some of the sons of the prophets he had known, who knows. He went to Bethel, and he went to Jericho, and he went to Jordan, smote the waters and crossed over to the other side—rehearsing the stages of Israel’s entry into the land. That’s a good thing to do, isn’t it? They came across under Joshua, through Jordan, to the other side. We’ve known the story, some of us, since we went to Sunday School. It’s one thing to know the story; it’s another thing to go through the experience for yourself. Under Elijah’s guidance, Elisha was taken back through Israel’s historical experience, presumably so that Elisha might himself enter into what it stood for.

### *Jericho*

Across Jordan there stood Jericho. How shall we apply Jericho? Well some people say Jericho is your besetting sin, you know. Have you got a besetting sin? You’ve tried and tried and tried again to get over it, and one day you hope that the walls will fall down. Well that may be true, but it isn’t what the Book of Joshua is telling us. Here comes Joshua to execute the wrath of God on Jericho, and they bring the ark and it circulates around Jericho. I can imagine all the Jerichoites looking over the walls, asking, ‘What is this thing?’ But this thing was the

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Jesus, my Saviour, to Bethlehem came’ (Anon.).

very throne of God, and it had come through Jordan and up the other side, and its processing around the walls of Jericho was saying very clearly to the Jerichoites, 'You will not keep God out of this city. He's going to come in.'

That is our witness still, isn't it? We won't keep Christ forever out of this world; he's coming again. He's coming to execute the judgments of God, like the Israelites came and executed the judgments of God on Jericho. Oh what a message we have to preach, haven't we?

### *Bethel*

Then of course there was Bethel. Bethel had many a long association. It was first famous for Jacob's experience, when he was running away from home. He was a nice boy, was Jacob, he knew all about cooking, whereas Esau was a hunting type. Esau was a manly fellow, and doubtless had hairy legs and all that kind of thing, you see. Jacob was a bit of a stay-at-home type, but he was very crafty and he stole the blessing from Esau. Then, when Esau threatened to murder him, he had to run away. Do you know, it's the first time he'd left home, and he was going out into the big, big world to find himself a job. What should he do? (There are others in that kind of situation from time to time.) What's he going to do? So he travelled as far as he could that night, and when he couldn't travel anymore he lay down and got a stone near his head, I suppose to protect his head. I hope he didn't have to lie on it, that would have been uncomfortable; but he lay down and he slept. As he slept, he dreamed. He saw a ladder, and it was set up on earth and the top reached to heaven. Notice it was that way round; it wasn't a ladder let down from heaven, the bottom of which almost reached the earth. It was the other way round; it was set up on earth and the top of it reached to heaven. If you please, there were the angels of God, 'ascending and descending' (Gen 28:12)—notice the order of the words. Angels stand in the presence of God until they get their orders; they fly to do the divine will and then they return. So here too; they were ascending and then descending.

Where was God? When Jacob woke up he tells us where God was. 'God is in *this place* and I didn't realise it,' he says. God in this place, by his pillow, with God's executives—the angels of God going to do God's will. And Jacob came to an agreement with God, that if God would guide him, that he would honour God with his life and his earnings.

It's a wonderful thing, isn't it? I remember when I finished studying and had to get a living, how difficult it was to know about the Lord's guidance. What would the Lord have me to do? It's a crucial time in life, isn't it? To have an experience of God by one's pillow, so to speak, is showing us that he has our career in hand and will guide us. That is what Bethel is.

I'll tell you a story. I was working in the University of Durham and was attached to St Cuthbert's College in that university. My tenure of the post was coming to an end. I had tried for all kinds of jobs and was turned down because, though I was a classicist, my research wasn't classics (far from it). There was a job that I thought would be almost certain, but one morning I got a letter saying that the job had been given to somebody else. I'd exhausted what I thought were the possibilities, and I went down to St Cuthbert's for lunch—down in the mouth I must tell you. When I got to St Cuthbert's, this was in vacation time, and the college servants were having a spring clean, so there was nobody else at the table but me, and

the crockery was most extraordinary—bits and pieces that the grandmothers had given them, I think, or something. Very odd it was indeed, I'd never seen the likes of it before. There was, I think it was the gravy boat, and on its side it had a motto in Latin: *Jehovah, tu mihi, deus es, quid deest*. You will notice it is a jumble of sounds. It means, 'Jehovah, you are a God for me. What do I lack?'—'*Tu mihi deus es, quid deest*'. I never saw the thing again, but for me that became the very voice of God to let me know that, in spite of many disappointments, God was guiding my career. Where do you think he brought me? Well, I leave you to work it out, but Bethel is a real experience in the lives of God's people. To know it as a historical fact about what happened to Jacob, that's one thing; to experience the actual guidance of God in these daily matters is another thing. And for all who have trusted Christ, God is a God to them. What do they need in addition?

Let's commend ourselves to the Lord.

We thank thee now, Lord, for thy mercies towards us, for bringing us to know thee and to know thy dear Son. In spite of our many ups and downs, we thank thee that he is able to keep what we have committed to him against that day. Guide us, Lord. We're not asking for miracles at every turn of the road, but just to know thy guidance in the sense that we may know that we are doing thy will, and that our career is in thy hand. So may we witness for thee in this sorry world, both to the love of Christ and the judgment that must follow without him. We commit ourselves to thee, and thank thee for the gift of food and fellowship that we enjoy. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## [The Miracles of Elisha](#)

This is now our sixth study of 1 and 2 Kings. We have not been attempting to study every detail in these two books. We have treated them rather shamefully, picking bits that are easier and leaving bits that are not so easy. That is a trick that many preachers have learned to use.

### *So far in our studies*

We are in particular concentrating on these books of Kings as they record the provision God made for the maintenance of his people, and for their recovery if ever they should go astray. In the long prayer that Solomon prayed at the dedication of the house, he mentioned at least a half a dozen or more situations that could arise for the people of God in the course of the decades; and prayed that, however far they got, whatever mistakes they made, if only they looked towards this house, God in his mercy would visit them, recover them and restore them to their true spirituality (1 Kings 8). We found the provision that God made was in fact the building of the house of God in Jerusalem.

Inside it was just like the tabernacle that Moses built. It was divided in two. There was first of all the Holy Place, then there was the Most Holy Place in which stood the ark of God. These protrusions by the side were side rooms. Then we noticed that there were a number of paragraphs to the plans.<sup>10</sup>

### *The five sets of plans*

The first set of plans are for the one house, to start with, and the many side chambers forming the one house. That is followed by a special plea for obedience from God to his people, which is the second set. Then at the third set there was the internal organisation and decoration inside the building, divided, as I have said, into two parts: the Holy Place and the Most Holy, and it is chiefly remarkable for the fact that in the Most Holy Place, not only was there the ark with the cherubim coming from the mercy seat, but there were two great olive wood cherubim, standing on four legs presumably, with their wings outstretched, just behind and over the ark. Of course the walls all the way round were covered with wood, and then covered with gold, and carved. And the motifs in the carving were cherubim, palm trees and rosettes.

For the fourth set of plans we have a description of the king's royal apartments. Whereas the house of God stood up high, down on that same hill, but a bit lower and at the side, was

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<sup>10</sup> See the left hand column of [Chart 2. A Record of Disobedience, Apostasy and Judgment](#).

the king's house, with its many apartments for the king himself, for his public receptions, for his throne room, for his private apartments, and similarly for his wife or wives as the case might be—their apartments as well.

Then we come out into the court, and we have the sea and the lavers in the fifth set of plans. The sea is the very large laver, so large that the water inside it looked like a sea, and so it was called 'the sea'. Then ten subsidiary lavers on wheels could take the water wherever the water was required. Then there were the two pillars that we have already noted, standing in the front, freestanding, but with the glorious capitals on top of them.

This was to be the house that Israel was to respect and, whenever they got into trouble, or on their high days and their holidays and their religious expressions, they would come and use, or look towards, or pray towards, that house.

### *The subsequent history*

Now if we look down the other side of our chart, we have recorded the history and how that, in the course of the history, Israel went foul across the provisions and the instructions that God had made.<sup>11</sup> His instructions were that there was to be just one house (many side rooms, but only one house).

Very soon there arose Jeroboam in Israel. He made other houses on top of high places, and they fell to superstition and idolatry. As a result God allowed that his son was assassinated, and there came on the throne of Israel a certain Baasha. Though he was allowed in place because of Jeroboam's sin, he made no attempt to repent of Jeroboam's sin, but persisted in it.

In the ark of the covenant, the first phase of the covenant was, 'Thou shalt have no other gods but me.' We notice opposite this that, in Israel, there rose a certain Ahab, who married a Phoenician, Jezebel. To please her, he built a special house for Baal and encouraged the people to go there and join in the worship of Baal, and to forsake Jehovah.

Next we notice the plan for the king's house. Of course, we're aware that the term the king's *house* refers not merely to the buildings of stone, but also to the royal members of that house. We notice next in the history that God allowed Jehu of Israel—in fact he commissioned Jehu—to destroy the royal house of Ahab completely, and he blotted it out. We notice also Athaliah, daughter of Ahab, who had married a certain Jehoshaphat's son and was therefore in Judah, she proceeded to destroy all the royal house of Judah and almost managed to do it completely, save for one little boy. When we think that our blessed Lord was destined to come of the house of David, the house of Judah, of the line that sprang from David, then the antics of Athaliah in destroying all the seed royal of the house of David would make one's hair stand up on end, if one had any. Thank God for the one little boy who was taken and hidden, allowed to grow up and then take the place of Athaliah.

When we come to the end chapters of 2 Kings we find a certain king Ahaz of Judah. He's much talked of and to by Isaiah the prophet. He cut off the side panels of the subsidiary lavers. He didn't like the shape or something, or the design—I don't know what it was. He just cut them off anyway. He took down the sea, the great sea that was on the backs of oxen. Very impressive it was surely, and he just took it down and put it on the pavement. Well that

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<sup>11</sup> See the right hand column of [Chart 2. A Record of Disobedience, Apostasy and Judgment.](#)

made a change, didn't it? It didn't matter that God Almighty designed it; Ahaz thought he knew better and it didn't please him. In the end of course, God allowed Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to come up, sack the city, smash the sea and the pillars, and take the copper of which they were made to Babylon.

From that point of view, this is a sorry story. Though we in Christendom, as we survey the history that has gone on, and through the middle ages unto the present, haven't a lot we could boast of, compared with ancient Israel. But there began revivals, some of them we've begun to study, and God willing we shall find others.<sup>12</sup>

### *The revivals*

There was at first a big revival by Elijah on Mount Carmel, bringing the people back from the worship of Baal to the worship of Jehovah. The issue at stake: *Who is the true God, Baal or Jehovah?* Of course under that you would also include his successor, Elisha.

The second revival was led by Jehoiada the high priest. The issue at stake: *Who is the true king: Athaliah or Joash?*

The third revival was led by King Hezekiah at the time of the siege of Jerusalem by the forces of the king of Assyria. The issue at stake: *Is the Lord God just one more god among the many gods of the Gentile nations, or is he the unique, transcendent Lord God?* With Isaiah's support and encouragement and constant exaltation, Hezekiah managed to stand against the mass might of the Assyrians.

The final revival was led by King Josiah. When he came to the throne he set about having the temple cleansed, and in the process they found a book. They didn't know what it was so they took it to the king and he got a good lady prophet to come and tell them what it was. It was part of the Bible actually. They didn't know it was there! (I would boast how superior Christians are, if I didn't have a sneaking suspicion that some Christians couldn't tell you all the books of the Bible.) When they opened it and read it, they found they were in plain disobedience to many of its commands, so that they confessed their sin and set about reviving. Here was a revival led by Scripture. God is the God of revival still, and these things are written for our encouragement.

Tonight we are to look at some of the ministry of Elisha the prophet, and for that purpose we shall start in 2 Kings 4. Now let me, if I may, just steal a minute or two to put Elisha in his context.

## **Elisha's context and the house of God**

We are told of how Ahab misbehaved himself as usual, and submitted to Jezebel's tactics to have Naboth judicially murdered. Elijah went down to meet Ahab to denounce him, but God said to Elijah, 'Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house' (1 Kgs 21:29). This is because of the outrageous sin of the house of Ahab, but now he is repentant. I would have questioned the sincerity of his repentance, but never mind. God is more merciful than I am, and God laid it down that he wouldn't destroy Ahab

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<sup>12</sup> See [Chart 3. The Major Revivals](#).

forthwith, but in his son's day the house of Ahab would be eliminated; and it was eliminated by Jehu. Elisha lived in that in-between period, and it was a period of what you might call grace, was it not? Elisha, of course, lived and worked up in Israel among the ten tribes. The house of Israel, in the person of its kings, had so seriously offended that God had already given his command—the house would be destroyed. That is, all the reigning princes and princesses in the house of Ahab would be destroyed, but not immediately, and not in Ahab's day. There was to be an interval between the giving of the sentence and its execution. It's a good thing to bear that in mind when we come to the ministry of Elisha, that it was an interval of grace; it wouldn't last forever. It would come to its end in the terrible judgments of God.

### *Life displayed in the temple*

Then there is a very nice thing. Let us think again of the inside of the house of God. Here's the way in—this is the Holy Place, there is the altar of incense, here is the Most Holy Place with the two, very large, cherubim standing there. Extra cherubim with their wings outstretched, in addition to the cherubim on the mercy seat. These, as we saw before, were God's executives—cherubim. As they stood looking out, so to speak (I know they were only images, but they were symbols of realities), lo and behold, what did they see all round the walls? Oh, cherubim galore! I don't know whether cherubim enjoy ruling over other cherubim. I've never met one so I haven't asked them, but I imagine they do. Ezekiel tells us in one of his chapters that he saw the cherubim carrying the very glory of God and the throne of God, and he said of those cherubim, 'I realised they were the living creatures' (Ezek 10:20). Cherubim and 'living creatures' are one and the same thing. This is the thing that appeals to me about cherubim.

You will be more familiar, of course, with Revelation 4 and the vision of the throne of God; you could recite it off in your dreams. The throne of God, in all its majesty, is the throne of the almighty creator and it rests upon the backs of four living creatures. The Authorized Version says four 'beasts', which is an unpleasant word to use; it should be four 'living creatures'.

One had the form of an ox; one had the form of a man; one had the form of a lion; and one had the form of an eagle. (I like it, you know—I've a childish enough mind to enjoy such things.) Forms of life, living things, what a magnificent thing life is! Even at my age I can hold on to it. What glorious expressions of life you find in this world. I think of those living creatures under the throne of God, and there's a lion—I've a postcard with a lion on it on my dresser. I look at it some mornings, just to find encouragement—what a noble beast it is. I used to be majestic like that, anyway my mother said so; but I got old and that's gone, but what majestic things they are, aren't they?

Then there was an ox. I wish I were an ox sometimes (I don't know about you) when I've got a lot of work to do, because oxen were the work animals. The Israelis didn't pull their plough by horses; they pulled them by oxen. They were the beasts of burden and work and they had a lot of work to do. There are moments when I wish I were an ox, you see, and had the energy of an ox, but I don't have.

Then one had the face of a man. That's meant to be intelligent. Well, I had intelligence once, but now I've got old and I don't know what to do with it. I notice that some young folks have a lot of energy and they don't seem to have the intelligence to use it sensibly. That's another thing, and a private opinion!

Then there was the eagle. What that must be, to be able to take off and leave Belfast for just a few minutes and go up into the atmosphere with their keen sight.

Life! This is the house of the *living* God! If you watch how God rules: take for instance apple trees—how does God get apple trees to bear apples?

You say, 'He sends down a message in the summertime to apple trees: 'All apple trees are to bear apples.'

No he doesn't.

'How does he do it then?'

Well he gives certain trees 'apple tree life.' That's how he governs; and it's no secret, at least they who read the New Testament are aware of it, that to be a believer and to lead a truly Christian life we first of all need to receive a new life from God, to be 'born again' as our Lord puts it, that we might know the reality of the divine life within us. Isn't that true?

## **The Miracles of Elisha**

### ***Story number 1—the miracle of the oil (4:1-7)***

So let's look at some of the miracles that Elisha did. We start in 2 Kings 4. I'm going to read the passage just to remind us all of the story.

Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, 'Thy servant my husband is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD, and the creditor has come to take unto him my two children, my two sons to be slaves'. And Elisha said unto her, 'What shall I do for you? Tell me, what have you in your house?' And she said, 'Your handmaid has not anything in the house, except a pot of oil'. Then he said, 'Go borrow vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels, borrow not a few. And thou shalt go in, and shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full'. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons. They brought the vessels to her, and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, 'Bring me yet another vessel'. And he said unto her, 'There is not any vessel more'. And the oil stayed. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, 'Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy sons of the rest.' (vv. 1-7)

This is inspired holy Scripture of course, but what lesson, if any, does it teach us? Now I tread on hot coals here, because I was brought up in a tradition that, when faced with a story like this, would have used this as a type, as a picture. People used to argue to me that she had oil in her house, being a believer, and so have you, but oil is a type of the Holy Spirit. If only we relied more upon the Holy Spirit, then we should find our work for the Lord successful. Modern commentators don't like that idea, do they? They say, 'That's very arbitrary.' And

they say, 'Just look at the end. If the oil represents the Holy Spirit, the dear woman is told to go out and sell the oil. You're not supposed to sell the Holy Spirit, are you?' So what shall we do? I shan't attempt to interpret it as a picture/type. Instead I'm going to use another device completely.

### *The right use of analogies*

I'm going to use what is called an analogy. You say, 'What on earth is an analogy on Thursday night at ten to nine?' Well, let me tell you a little story. A brother persuaded me one day to spend a week's holiday with him on the Norfolk Broads. So down we went to the Broads, and we chose a nice old motorboat that went puff, puff, puff, puff, puff, you see, and we got on it. You could sleep on the boat and wander round the Broads wherever you liked. The difficult thing, you know, was when you came into land, because you had to have enough power on the old boat to get to the jetty. But then, if you've got enough power to get to the jetty, how on earth did you get it to stop without smashing into the jetty? It was a bit of a job. Now, if only the thing had brakes; but as far as I could see it had no wheels on it, so it didn't have any brakes. You say, 'Has it got anything *analogous* to brakes?' Well, yes it had. In a car you have got brakes to slow down the speed—to stop it if need be. On a boat like that, you don't have brakes. What you do is to turn an old switch or something, and the propeller goes the other way round. That has the effect of making you go slower and slower and slower through the water. You'll come to a stop, and if you're not careful you'll go backwards. So if I were to say the old boat had brakes—not actual brakes like a car, but analogous brakes—there's an analogy between the car brakes and the method used in the boat, yes? I'm not saying that the boat is a picture/type of a car; they're two quite different things.

But there is a story from the Old Testament, and you will be already familiar with it, that uses analogy to get across its message, and that is the message given to us in the Epistle to the Romans chapter 4. We are told that 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness' (v. 3). Now please, Abraham wasn't a type, not a picture/type; he was an actual man with two legs and two arms and a head. That actual man was literally justified. How was he justified? He 'believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.' So Abraham becomes what we call nowadays in legal terms, *a case law*. How can you be justified? Well, the man Abraham was justified by faith. That means that everybody else can be justified by faith, if God is fair. Everybody must be justified by faith. God has set down this man as the prominent example of how anybody gets justified. Happy about that, yes? Good! Now comes the difficulty. When Abraham believed God, what did he believe God about? The answer of course is, as God said to Abraham, 'I'm going to give you a son.' Well there was still some hope; though he was already very old and his wife was very old, God said, 'I'm going to give you a son.'

Then he left Abraham until Abraham's body was as good as dead, and Sarah was long past having any hope of bearing a child. Abraham believed God, and Abraham argued this: 'Okay. God has promised I'm going to have a son. Sarah is now old and my body is old and decrepit, but God can't lie. If he said he's going to give me a son, he will give me a son.' So

Abraham carried on believing, even though it meant putting faith in a God who could bring life out of virtually dead bodies.

Now cast your mind back to the day or night you got justified. Can you remember it? Did God make you a promise that you were going to have a son in your old age?

You say, 'No, don't be silly, of course not.'

Well then, how is Abraham's case anything to do with you whatsoever?

You say, 'I believe God like Abraham did.'

Oh, yes, yes, Abraham believed God, that God would give him a son. You believe God and . . . how is your faith like Abraham's faith? Oh, here comes my big word, let me use it as best I can. It's by *analogy* that your faith corresponds to his, because he believed that God would give life; bring life out of those dead bodies. You are required to believe God who delivered Christ up for your justification. He died and was buried, and God raised him the third day. If Christ isn't raised, you're not justified, you know. That's the plain fact. But you believe in God, who actually raised the dead body of Jesus Christ—that is the basis of your justification.

I say again that Abraham isn't a picture or type; he was an actual man. If he walked in the door, you'd invite him to join this church (that would improve it a lot!) and you'd admit him to the Lord's Supper and so forth, wouldn't you? He was an actual man, but in him God sets out the principles of justification by faith. There's an analogy between our faith and Abraham's faith, in that Abraham believed that God could bring life out of dead bodies: you believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, the very one who died for your sins.

#### *The analogy of the miracle*

So, what's that got to do with our story? Well, I'm going to say the story has everything to do with us, because of the *analogy* with our situation. Said the dear lady to Elisha the prophet, 'You know my husband died. I'm a widow, and your servant, my husband, feared the Lord. Now he's dead and the creditor is come to take unto him my two children to be slaves.' In the ancient world that was a constant possibility. If you couldn't pay, your creditor could take you over as a slave for a certain time, until you had done the work that was equivalent to the amount of money that you had owed him. 'He's come to take my two sons as slaves,' and how long that would last, who knows?

As you hear that, are you in any danger of being a slave? You'll know the immediate answer to it of course, and you'll cite me Romans chapter 8, will you not? Romans chapter 8 runs like this, 'For you received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear, but you received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father"' (Rom 8:15). This is true at various levels, is it not? The letter to the Galatians was written because people were telling the believers that, in order to be justified in the initial sense, they had to be circumcised and keep the food laws. And Paul argues that this would be a kind of a slavery and was not to be accepted. We are justified by faith, and not by the works of the law (see Gal 4:1-6). So we're free, aren't we?

Ah, but then there's the whole business of life, isn't there? Preachers everlastingly tell us we ought to serve the Lord, and so we should. Did you ever get round to feeling it was a bit of a burden, and you didn't want to do it? And that having to do it made a slave of you?

There are some believers that would confess it to you straight, 'I know what it feels like.' Notice what the Scripture says, 'We have not received the spirit of slavery again to fear.' A slave of an unprincipled master would know that if he were set to a job, and he didn't do it, he'd be lashed across the back. It was fear that drove him to the work. We're not expected to live under that condition, are we? You're not living in fear of the lake of fire and eternal damnation if you don't work for the Lord, are you? No, indeed not; but in general, and the principle that makes us work for the Lord is this, 'We have not received the spirit of slavery again to fear, but the spirit of adoption set as a son of God.' 'If,' said our Lord, 'the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed' (John 8:36). Lovely, isn't it? At least I think it's lovely.

### ***Story number 2—the dead son raised (4:16–17)***

Then there was this other dear lady, and she and her husband made a special room in their house for the man of God, Elisha, if he ever came by that way, so he could sleep there for the night. And there was a bed and a table and so forth. He noticed that she had no child. I suspect she was like Hannah.' She wanted a child. Very natural, isn't it? But she had no child. Elisha challenged her and said, 'Ask of me something, what can I do for you.' She said, 'Oh, no, don't talk to the prince about me. I can stay with my own people' (see v. 13). Elisha says, 'You have no child, have you? This time next year you'll have a child.' Well it happened. How did it happen? Listen to what the woman says to Elisha. When he said, 'You're going to have a child, my dear, this time next year,' she said, 'Now look here you man of God, don't you tell me *lies*.' She wanted to make sure this was the serious word of God through his prophet. If it was that, she could rest on it.

That is how it is still; we have to take God's word. It's full of promises, is it not? But then God sometimes gives them to us personally, and if it's God's word we can rest on it. This was a marvellous woman of faith. The boy at length, as he grew up, went out with the reapers and got sun stroke or something, and they laid him on the bed and he appeared to die. She, not content with that said, 'Now if God meant to give me a son, he wouldn't disappoint me like this.' So she told the coachman to get the horses out and the carriage, and they were to drive. And when they met Elisha's servant, he said, 'Is everything well?' She said in her famous words, 'It is well. It is well.' The dear lady, her words lie behind the hymn that says,

When peace like a river attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.<sup>13</sup>

It is well. Oh the triumph of faith in God's word and God's promise! So Elisha said to his servant Gehazi, 'Take my sceptre'—his staff of office as a prophet—'and go and lay it on the face of the boy.' I can imagine Gehazi as he went up the road: 'You know what this is? I've got a prophet's insignia.' So he got to the house where the dead boy was on the bed, and he laid the rod of office on the boy's face. No response. 'Hey, look here,' he said, 'this is the

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<sup>13</sup> Horatio G. Spafford, 1873.

prophet's authority, my boy, take notice of this.' No response. There are times where officialdom doesn't work. So Elisha came and he lay on the lad, eyes to eyes, nose to nose, mouth to mouth, and the very warmth of his body warmed and got the lad's heart going as it should. Yes, being a prophet is not merely that you have the authority; it is sharing your very life. What's all that about the life, the living cherubim—the living ones? I'm grateful, when my car breaks down, if somebody knows about cars and can put it right. Well that's a mere mechanical thing; I need men who have come alongside me and warmed me with their own vital life in Christ.

### ***Story number 3—death in the pot (4:38-41)***

So there was another story according to our passage. There was a dinner party apparently, and one of the sons of the prophets (they were junior prophets in some kind of Bible school, I suppose) went out and, thinking to contribute to the common pot, he gathered a lot of gourds. They were poisonous, or if not poisonous, very severely laxative, and he put them in the pot. Then someone ate them and said, 'There's death in the pot!' (4:40). Elisha told them to add meal and counteracted the effect of the gourds.

You know, without being unduly critical, it happens sometimes. Young men and women with very good intention take Bible courses on this, that and the other. And sometimes they can get ideas into their head that would destroy the very gospel itself. You see examples in the New Testament, in the church at Corinth; people there had some superior knowledge, they knew a thing or two. They 'knew' that there was no such thing as the resurrection. If that had been true, it would have destroyed Christianity, root and branch. I was given a paper to read by a dear such student recently. 'Love wins,' it said. 'God doesn't judge anybody. He loves everybody, and if you die without being reconciled to God you have to suffer some, but in the end you will not perish because God loves everybody.' That is absolutely false and needs to be counteracted. Sometimes the best way to do it is not to enter into an argument about it, but to get handfuls of meal, carefully chosen to deal with this topic, and positively expound what holy Scripture says.

### ***Story number 4—not enough food (4:42-44)***

Then there came a man, one of the guests, and he brought some supplies, you see. Somebody said, 'What good are they? How can you put that little amount of stuff in front of such a big number of people as we have here?' Elisha said, 'Carry on, put it before them,' and in actual fact they all ate and were filled. Now I don't know whether I have now transgressed into typology or not, and it's too late at night for me to care. I have sometimes wondered how God can take the meagre stuff that I can put on a spiritual table and use it to bless one hundred people. How does God do that?

You will remember what happened at the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. Our Lord had told his disciples to sit the people down because they needed to be fed. Then he said to them, 'You give them to eat.' Well, they said, 'Lord, now let's see. Five thousand and for each, if it's a Marks & Spencer's lunch, it will cost this, and that, and so on. Impossible!' Somebody, as a joke I suppose, said, 'Well there's a lad here, and he's got five little loaves and

two fish.' Our Lord didn't say, 'Don't be so ridiculous,' he took it and, in his hand, one little boy's lunch satisfied five thousand. He could use you, couldn't he? You spoke the gospel; you preached the gospel and did the best you could. God could use it, couldn't he, to eternal effect. That is the wonder—life answering to life—it's a living word and a living God.

### ***Story number 5—Naaman (5:1-27)***

Then there was Naaman. He was a splendid type of man, wasn't he? He would have played rugby if it had been invented in those days. He was a general in command of the whole Syrian army, but he was a leper. He came with his chariot and his supplies and first of all he went to the king of Israel. The king got a bit ratty and thought the man was pulling his leg and seeking a cause of war, and then told him to go to the prophet. So he went to the prophet and, as he subsequently confessed, he thought the prophet would come out, put his holy hand on the spot of the leprosy and, in much ceremony and with all the TV lights there, the papers next day would say, 'The great Naaman gets religion.' So he knocked on the door, made his request, and the answer came back—Elisha didn't budge off his seat. He said, 'Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and you'll be cured.' Was Naaman angry? Wow! Never felt so insulted in all his life. Bad enough to come to this evangelical prophet, but to be insulted like that! He went home in a rage, or he started to go home in a rage. Mercifully he had some sensible servants and they said, 'You know, if the prophet had told you to do some very big thing, you'd have done it, wouldn't you? Why don't you do this little thing, Sir? You refused to be baptised in the Jordan and that hasn't cured your leprosy, has it? You are a leper still, and the end is death.'

Why do people fiddle with salvation? The fact is, as we saw when we began our studies, God's judgment was soon to descend on Israel. For Naaman, the leprosy was already there and there was only one end to that. He needed to be saved, dear man. If only he would humble himself, and baptise himself in Jordan seven times over, he would be cured. He saw sense, and was cured.

Now finally I must ask you to think about the temple again. Here is the golden altar of incense, and it's got a priest standing by it. Of course, at the time of incense, he's addressing himself to God who sat enthroned on the cherubim. Now, Scripture gives us directions. In the inner sanctuary the floor was overlaid with gold, if you please. That's marvellous, but suitable to the majesty of God. Out here in the outer sanctuary, where the priests stood offering their incense, what was the floor overlaid with? Actually, it was overlaid with gold, just like inside in the presence of God. Now I wouldn't have done it that way if I'd been God. I would have said, 'Well yes, my division must have floor overlaid with gold, but where that priest stands, linoleum would do good enough for him, or tiles or something. I wouldn't spend any money.' But God gets this man standing on the same glorious foundation as God himself stands on. Do you believe it? Bankrupt sinners who, if left to ourselves would go on to eternal perdition, are now justified through faith in Christ and raised and seated with Christ on the very throne of God. And, my brother, my sister, so are you!

And before Naaman went back to his country he asked one petition (v. 17). Please, could he have two or three basket loads of Israelite earth so that, when he got to his pagan country and stood to worship God, he could stand at least on Israelite soil. That's as hard as his faith

went; it was good for a Syrian general, wasn't it? He was aware of Israel's special position, and now he was raised to share that same position. But I have a greater story to tell you: that, in all our bankruptcy, God has not only given us life and made us sons and daughters and made us free, but has raised us to glory in Christ. We are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. It's a job to get over it, isn't it?

Let us bow ourselves in prayer.

Lord, thy grace is so extensive and so limitless that we are dumbfounded by it, and know not what to say, but we bow down and worship thee from our hearts for bringing us to Christ, and through Christ to reconcile us to thyself. Already in spirit, Lord, we sit with him in heavenly places, and we thank thee for thy grace in using us to feed one or two, or multitudes of our contemporaries. Help us in this topic we pray, that we may do it by thy gracious Spirit's influence and power, and not treat it as a slavery to which we must come for fear of punishment. Hear us now we pray, and bless the food that we partake of, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Preserving the House

### *So far in our studies*

This is now the seventh of ten studies on 1 and 2 Kings. We have not been attempting to cover the whole of these two books in detail, or even to cover every chapter. We have been interested in what we judge to be one of the major themes, and for that purpose we have taken notice of Solomon's prayer of dedication. Having built the temple, he summoned the whole nation to come and celebrate its dedication and, before them all, confessed to the wonder, surpassing understanding, how almighty God, who fills the universe and all beside, should possibly presence himself in the building that Solomon had built. That said, he shows himself aware of the various needs that will come across his people, and he thanks God for the provision that he has made for the spiritual maintenance of his people in the coming years and, if need be, their recovery if ever they have wandered off into sinful ways.

### *The house of the Lord*

So we have been following the history by looking at the plans for the house of the Lord and then comparing them with some of the major points that are recorded in the historical narrative. We have thought about possible reconstructions of what the house of God that Solomon built may have looked like. We cannot be absolutely sure, for there are technical terms and we don't really know exactly how they should be translated, and back then styles were different. But we have thought about what it must have looked like coming up to the main doors with the two freestanding pillars, with their delightful capitals. And then at this side and running round the back, and running back round this side, there were lean-to buildings that were there for practical purposes: for the priests and the Levites to work in them, whether for treasury or for preparing sacrifices or for the vestments or whatever. Solomon's prayer in making this building was that, whatever straits the nation got into, if they would only look towards, and pray towards the God who graciously presenced himself in that building, God would restore them.

So then we were emboldened to look at the various divisions of the building of the house with the predominance of gold everywhere inside the house of the Lord. Professor Millard has reminded us in some of his academic writings, that this story of gold everywhere, even to gold on the floor, is not fairy story stuff. Gold was plentiful in those days, and it was the habit, not only of Israelites but other nations too, thus to decorate their temples. The house of God had two divisions, like the tabernacle of Moses. There was the Holy Place, and beyond the veil was the Holiest of All. In that was the ark that Moses had built, now antique, but still preserved with the cherubim on the mercy seat.

In addition to that, there were two very large olive wood cherubim in the Holy Place, standing, their faces looking outwards and their wings outstretched so that the wings between the two of them, covered the width of the Most Holy Place. As they looked out, so to speak—if we may say that of symbols—they would have found the walls everywhere, covered with cherubim and palm trees and rosettes. We made the point in one or two of our past talks that this was meant to be for the time being, in those far off days, the temple, or the house of the *living* God. We also noticed that the way God governs is in part by imparting the right kind of life. As you are aware, God doesn't send down a government notice from above to apple trees, 'Remember this is the time to start budding and producing apples.' He gets it done simply by giving the tree apple tree life. And if we would live as children of God, the secret, the *sine qua non*, is of course that first of all we be born again and receive the life of God within. So then the inside of the house: it is a fact that it was only a small building, though generally twice the size of Moses's tabernacle. Small as it was, when you entered into the door, and even more so if you were allowed through the veil, you entered a world bigger than ours, because here the Shekinah glory of God deigned to dwell. And to find one's self in the presence of that infinitude makes life very big.

So we recently studied the life and ministry of Elijah and found one of his favourite phrases to be this, 'The living God, before whom I stand.' We found likewise in studying the ministry of Elisha that it was marked by life-giving, which doubtless he learned as he meditated upon the symbolism of the house of the living God. To show at least some relevance (and a preacher that doesn't do that is not worth his salt, is he?), as we observed the features of this place and the pillars with their delightful and attractive capitals, we observed what the New Testament has to say at the end of 1 Timothy 3, 'These things I write,' says Paul, 'hoping to come to you shortly, but if I delay, I write these things so that people might know how they ought to behave in the house of God, in the church of the living God, pillar and ground of the truth' (vv. 14–15).

### *The plans*

Hitherto in our studies we have noticed that in the paragraphing of the old Hebrew text there are five divisions of instructions for the construction of the various buildings.<sup>14</sup> So on the left of our chart, taken from 1 Kings 6, there was the one house, its structure and its side rooms. The side rooms were simply that; they were not separate houses. There's only one house of God in the whole of Judaism. Then, among the directions for building, there's a special plea for obedience. Then comes the third set, with the installation and organisation of the inside of the house of the Lord, with its chief piece of furniture (not the only one, but the chief one), the ark of the covenant, the symbolic throne of God, in the Most Holy Place.

The fourth set the Hebrew rabbis found very odd, because this is an account of the building of the king's house (we shall study that presently). The rabbis wondered how that could possibly be set here, before Solomon had concluded building these other things that belonged to the house of God. So in the ancient Greek translation these things are reversed and the fourth set stands last and the fifth set stands in the place of the fourth. Supposed godliness has moved the scribes to what they thought was favouring God's house, rather

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<sup>14</sup> See [Chart 2. A Record of Disobedience, Apostasy and Judgment](#).

than the king's house. The king's house was built a bit lower down the slope, surrounded by a court, like the Lord's house was. It may have had a stairway connection between the king's palace and the house of the Lord. But, as we notice the history, we perceive that the two houses were a twinned, though not equal, arrangement for the government of God's people. God set his laws; it was among the king's duties to see that the people obeyed those laws.

Then finally, in the fifth place you get the furniture of the court outside: the two big pillars that are so significant they are given names—Jachin and Boaz—beautiful with their capitals, and attractive. Then we have the sea and the lavers. The sea was a laver itself but so enormous that it got named 'the sea'. In addition, there were ten subsidiary lavers on wheels, so that you could wheel them around wherever water was needed for cleansing.

It is to be noticed that there is no mention of the altar with its blood. That I point out because the theologians might otherwise think I had overlooked something, and since I haven't overlooked it, then I can ask the theologians afterwards why the altar isn't mentioned, at least in the plans.

### *The subsequent history*

If we were right in thinking that the building of the house of the Lord was God's provision for the maintenance of his people, and when necessary for their recovery, then we naturally look to the history to see what happened. Notice the right side of our chart. What a sorry disappointing story it is at first sight. Solomon was scarce dead when the nation divided and Jeroboam was given by God rule over the ten tribes, and just two tribes were left to Solomon's son. Whereas the plans laid it down that there should only be one house, Jeroboam made houses all over the place. He built houses on high hills where people worshipped the greenery of trees and everything else like that, spiritism generally, and elsewhere. It was a sorry introduction of idolatry from which Israel as ten tribes never recovered.

We noticed that Jeroboam's son Nadab was eventually replaced by a certain Baasha of Israel and he destroyed Jeroboam's dynasty. He must have been aware of God's pronouncements through the prophets of God's rejection of the idolatry that Jeroboam had introduced. In spite of it and in spite of any plea for obedience, he continued in that idolatrous practice of Jeroboam.

We noticed opposite the third set of plans that the most sacred part of the temple was the Most Holy Place, in which was the ark of the covenant. The very first term of its covenant is, 'Thou shalt have no other god but me,' yet Ahab installs Baal as Israel's chief God. I think he did it to please his wife Jezebel. She took some pleasing; let that be sufficient. It was blatant, not merely introducing idolatrous things within the temple, like some kings allowed, but here they built Baal a special temple to worship him.

Then we were thinking about the king's house, and we shall have to think about that in a moment. Jehu of Israel—appointed by God to execute God's judgment and chastening upon the nation, but doing it far too willingly and thoroughly and excessively—destroys the royal house of Ahab, root and branch. Whereupon, Athaliah, who was Ahab's daughter, rose up and almost eliminated the whole royal house of Judah. That isn't bad going for one attempt,

is it? The whole house eliminated except one little boy. We shall have to think about its significance in a moment.

Ahaz of Judah was impressed by the Assyrians. And the Assyrians appeared, like Americans appeared to us in the remote parts of Suffolk, as though they were giants from another world. The Assyrians came and Ahaz was very much taken with them, and he went up there and he saw the altar. So he sent a postcard home to the high priest in Jerusalem: 'Please, these are the directions and dimensions for an altar. I've just seen a wonderful altar. Perhaps you'll be so kind as to make an altar just like that one, and put the other one round the side somewhere.' That made a change, didn't it? Then he took the big sea, which stood on the backs of oxen, and he cut it down and put it down on the pavement. That also made a change, regardless of the fact that this arrangement was God's command.

You're not surprised to read at the end of the book that Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up. He not only conquered Jerusalem, he smashed the sea and the pillars. That was an easy way for transporting the copper of which they were made, which was very valuable of course at that time, and took it all to Babylon.

The whole is a distressing story, and I should scarce have had the courage to rehearse it before you, were it not for the fact that these books contain a series of revivals.<sup>15</sup>

#### *A series of revivals*

There's the revival led by Elijah on Mount Carmel and sundry other revivals. Just like revivals do, these revivals, though similar and general, had a particular point to them. In the first one, the issue at stake: Who is the true God, Baal or Jehovah?

The second revival was led by Jehoiada the high priest against Athaliah, Ahab's daughter, and her attempt to eliminate the house of David. The issue at stake: Who is the true king? Not Athaliah by any chance. There was the little boy who had been saved, in spite of her determination to destroy the whole house, now preserved and set upon the throne.

The third revival was led by Hezekiah at the time of the siege of Jerusalem by the forces of the king of Assyria. The issue at stake: Is the Lord God just one more god among many gods, as the Assyrians argued he was? Says the great emperor, through his Rabshakeh, 'I've pillaged many a temple and got their gods, like boys stealing eggs out of bird's nests. Your god is no different.' Encouraged by Isaiah the prophet, Hezekiah managed to stand firm for the truth that the Lord God is the unique, transcendent Lord.

Then a final revival was led by King Josiah, who set about cleansing the house of the Lord. Those who undertook the cleansing found a book, and discovered it was a copy of part of a Bible, and they started reading it. That was a novel idea in those days (could be in ours too). They read it and found all sorts of things that they were supposed to do that they weren't even aware of. It started a reformation. The issue at stake: Will the nation repent and return to obeying the word of God and all its commandments? In spite of the gloom of the book therefore, and the many apostasies, it is a book of encouragement with a series of revivals.

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<sup>15</sup> See [Chart 3. The Major Revivals](#).

## **The plan for the king's house**

With that we come to this fourth set of plans. They are to be found in 1 Kings 7, which begins, 'And Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house' (v. 1). Then the text lists the various rooms that there were in the palace. He built the house of trees from the forest of Lebanon; the length is given and the number of pillars and the beams and the door posts. Then, 'He made the porch of pillars; the length thereof was fifty cubits . . . he made the porch of the throne where he might judge' (vv. 6–7). This was the king's bench division of the palace. And then there was his own private apartment, the house where he might dwell, and then a house similarly for Pharaoh's daughter, 'whom Solomon had taken to wife' (v. 8). It was a twin unit of government. So then God gave the commandment—it was one of the tasks of the king to encourage the people to keep those commandments, and certainly not to lead them off into idolatry like so many kings did. Now I want to get us to perceive a nice little distinction in terminology. We have read the directions for the construction of 'the king's house', properly so-called, meaning the house where he lived, which was in Jerusalem. Then other Scriptures talk about 'the house of David', and that's a rather different thing. So let me illustrate the difference if I may.

Around about some rather ordinary town in England there's a castle called Windsor Castle. I'm told that the Queen likes it very much and she likes living there. That's what it's for mainly, for the king or queen to live there. It does have functions and other things, but it's basically where they live. It's got a bedroom and a bathroom to start with, and running water, in this king's palace. It is called Windsor Castle, but if I talked about the House of Windsor you wouldn't think of the castle, would you? You would say, 'Oh, now the word *house* is being used a little bit differently.' Now it means the royal dynasty and the present set of kings and queens who are of the House of Windsor, as distinct from Jacobean and other such things that have been in the past. They are the House of Windsor. That is a legal notion, a succession within this family of the Windsors that provides kings and queens right when we need them.

We have to distinguish in our thinking therefore, between the literal house that Solomon built for his dwelling place (and for the execution of his many duties, with things like law courts and so forth, and receiving emissaries from foreign countries, and this, that and the other, but where he basically lived) and the other phrase, 'the house of David'. If you want an example you will find it in 1 Kings 12, where the ten tribes say to Rehoboam, 'Well, if you're not going to grant us our respect, goodbye Rehoboam. Look to your own house, David, we couldn't care less' (v. 16). So they rejected the ruling house of David and set up the house of Jeroboam, which didn't last very long.

### ***The house of David under threat***

We must try to hold both these ideas in our heads, because our major story now is of a queen who came to live in the king's house in Jerusalem, and for all I know may have sat upon the throne in the porch of the king's house. She did her level sinister best to destroy root and branch the whole house of David. Why ever did she do it? Well I'm no psychologist, and when it comes to dealing with queens I pay my income tax and hope thus otherwise to escape

notice, but she was Ahab's daughter and she married the son of Jehoshaphat; Jehoshaphat being the king of Judah.

Now let me remind you, Jehoshaphat was on the whole a dear, saintly man, who loved the Lord and tried to serve him, but if a lesser mortal may criticise him a little bit, he did appear to have a weak spine, or trembling legs or something, and was forever being inveigled by Ahab to join some hare-brained scheme that Ahab had for conquering Syrians or something, or for launching ships to go and get gold. You wonder how he managed to do it, with Ahab so sold out to the worship of Baal. How did the king of Judah, living in that king's house, within the shadow of the house of the Lord, come to compromise with a fellow like Ahab and his worship of Baal? One outcome was his son's marriage. You know you can't avoid these things happening, can you?

Of course Ahab put on parties, and the ladies were there in all their finery—marvellously attractive they were, no money spared. The young gentlemen were amazed. Jehoshaphat's son eventually married Ahab's daughter Athaliah. Now I have to tell you that Israel's sin under Ahab and Jezebel was so grievous and extreme that in the end God commissioned a man, his name was Jehu, to execute the wrath of God on the aforesaid Ahab and Jezebel and all the Baal worshippers. He was a bloodthirsty boy, was Jehu. If I weren't in Ulster I should say he was a little bit like some of the Reformers that would have cut your head off if you didn't agree. Through the prophet Hosea, God himself complains at him, for he exceeded his commission by miles. But in the course of his action he killed Athaliah's husband, and the next in order, and he killed many more.

I don't know. I must let Athaliah speak for herself, but she was certainly down on the house of David and determined to blot it out. You say, 'Well that was bad, but why shall we bother of a Thursday evening at nine o'clock to even think about these things?' Let me ask you: would it have made any difference to your faith if Athaliah had succeeded in destroying the whole house of David, root and branch, without exception? (Well here's one or two who think it would have made a difference. I won't take a vote then.) Yes, for the simple reason that the promises of God were given to David, before Athaliah was born, that he would have a son, and that his kingdom would eventually prosper and not fail. As Scripture went by, promise was added to promise of what the son of David would do, so that when our Lord came, the Gospels frequently point out, don't they, that the crowd appealed to him, 'Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on us.' To Mary the angel announced, 'You're going to have a child, Mary. He shall be called the Son of God, and God will give him the throne of his father David' (Luke 1:32). The Christian gospel is inextricably tied to the name David.

### *The historical gospel*

Let me try to demonstrate that to you if I may from Romans 1. Now I'm on safe ground, for not all Christians know what 1 and 2 Kings is about, but all Christians know their Romans inside out and upside down. Here Paul is about to expound the gospel and he says,

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, which he promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection. (Rom 1:1-4)

We notice that Christianity, if I may put it this way, is not a philosophy. Anybody with two pennyworth (well, you'll need a bit more than that, sixpence worth) of intelligence can concoct a philosophy. Some are better than others, of course. There's nothing wrong with philosophical thinking, but the Christian gospel did not come by philosophy. The Christian gospel is rooted in history; it is about a Saviour who was the seed of David.

Would you know who this Saviour is and was and what connections he had? Well he is of the seed of David according to the flesh. Moreover, David said things that imply the deity of his son. Let me read you the famous words of Matthew 22, 'Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What think ye of the Messiah? Whose son is he?"' Please notice that he's not saying, 'What do you think of me? I am the Messiah; what do you think of me?' No, he's asking a theological question, 'What do you think of the Messiah? When he comes, whose son will he turn out to be?' They say to him, 'The son of David.' He says to them, 'But if that's all he is, how then does David in the spirit call him Lord, saying the Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet? If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son?' (vv. 41-45).

I think you Irish gentlemen will see the point of our Lord's remark very quickly. You have a son maybe, and you are going with your dear wife on a Mediterranean cruise, and after that to South Africa and the penguins. You won't be back for six months. And you say to your eldest son, 'Now, my lord, would you please consider possibly cutting the lawn once or twice?' You don't say anything of the sort, do you? Call your son lord? It would be an unusual Irishman that did that. Of course not.

But David, talking in the spirit, inspired writer of the psalm says, 'The LORD said unto my lord, "Sit thou on my right hand, till I put thine enemies under thy feet"' (110:1). If David then calls him 'Lord', how is he simply his son? Since the Lord, that is Jehovah, says to 'my Lord' (David's Lord), how is this one merely David's son? We know, of course, and I don't need to emphasise it to you, that our blessed Lord, being of the seed of David, is not mere human but is God incarnate.

You know, I have been listening from time to time, and I've noticed you in worship reading worshipfully the great song sung by multitudes and recorded in Revelation 5, about him who has prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof, because he was slain, and has redeemed you to God by his blood, out of every tribe, kindred, tongue and nation. What is more, he not only redeemed you, but made something of you. Made us a kingdom, people that obey God, and priests that worship God. I've noticed how dear to your heart it is. Who is it you're talking about? Well it begins like this, doesn't it? The book was there in the right hand of him that sat on the throne and the challenge was issued, 'Who is worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof?' For as each seal is opened, some judgment or other falls on earth. Who is worthy to do it? It's not, 'Who had the power to do it—who is morally worthy to do it?' You have heard the answer, 'Weep not,' says the angel to John, 'for the lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered' (Rev 5:5). I don't know if you like being saved by a Jew—he's the lion of the tribe of *Judah*. Not only so, but when Paul was in Pisidian Antioch and preached in the synagogue, on the first Sabbath a lot of God fearers came, as they used to come, for in many a Greek city there were people called God fearers. They had abandoned their paganism as being nonsense, and they used to attend the synagogue because they felt

that the synagogue preached a certain kind of philosophy. So they came, mostly the women, because they could join; the men would have to be circumcised, which discouraged them. When Paul got up to preach and preached the gospel of the Lord Jesus—‘Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses’ (Acts 13:38–39 KJV)—when the Gentiles heard this, they got excited! Here is a Jewish book telling of a Messiah who is to be a light to the Gentiles. The synagogue authorities were very angry with Paul and Paul couldn’t make it out. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘look at the crowds coming. Didn’t the prophets say that one day, through the advent of a Messiah, the Gentiles would come? Look at them!’

Wonderful, isn’t it? Sometimes I get the privilege of talking to a Jewish friend, and it goes as usual on the very well-worn things—you Christians that told the Sunday School children that it was the wicked Jews that crucified Jesus, you are responsible for the concentration camps and the gas chambers. I would say, ‘My dear friend, do you know who killed Jesus?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well,’ I said, ‘I did.’

‘You did? What do you mean?’

‘Well, “Christians know what we believe, that when Christ died, he died for our sins according to the Scriptures. There was no other way of forgiveness, so he died for our sins. I’d no more accuse you, my good friend, of being the cause of Jesus’ death, than I would myself.’

‘But,’ I continued, ‘you tell me of another Jew who has led more Gentiles to believe in God.’ ‘You know I’m an old Gentile, but I believe in God. Not just any kind of God either; I believe as a Gentile in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Do you know who led me to that belief, and not only me but millions of Gentiles? His name is Jesus Christ. Find me another Jew that has led more Gentiles to believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and can offer forgiveness in God’s name.’

When Paul wrote 2 Timothy, the executioner’s axe was very near. ‘Tim,’ he says, ‘remember Jesus Christ of the seed of David according to my gospel, risen from the dead!’ (2:8). Hallelujah!

And he’s soon coming, isn’t he? At least I’m simple enough to take what his word says. This is the last book of the New Testament and the last chapter: ‘I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star’ (v. 16). He didn’t start like we do, he’s the root of David; he is also the offspring. He is the bright and the morning star. He shall come and speak peace to our world under his rule.

You say, ‘But you didn’t get round to telling us about Ahaz. He’s the juicy bit in this story, isn’t he? What about all this kind of stuff he did with the temple furniture?’ Alright, I’ve run out of time, but God willing, if you’re interested in hacking lavers to pieces, and pillars carted off to Babylon, well we should be delighted to welcome you once more.

God bless his word. Shall we pray.

Our Father we thank thee for thy holy word, written so long ago, but life breathing. We thank thee thou has discovered to us its very heartbeat in the person of thy dear Son. We thank thee Father for bringing us as thy children into a little of thy plans, that we might begin to understand them. Help us to live intelligently in our world, we pray, rightly to represent the interests of thy Son, as we look forward to his coming.

Oh thou bright morning star, shine into our hearts, we pray, the comfort of thy beam, that we might be ready for thy coming as the noon day sun. We thank thee also for the refreshments we shall enjoy together and our Christian fellowship, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## How to Keep Going in Frustrating Times

So, to begin with, a very warm welcome to all of you who have braved the shining sun in order to come now to a serious Bible study. We are currently studying 1 and 2 Kings from the Old Testament. This is now the eighth study and there are but ten, so we have not aimed to discuss every detail in these extensive histories.

### ***So far in our studies***

We have rather arbitrarily selected one particular theme and tried to follow it throughout both books. We were led to this theme by observing how 1 Kings begins. A great deal of notice is taken of David, that is King David, in his final days. We are told, the dear old boy, he lay in bed all a-shivering, and they tried various methods to warm him up, but all in vain. 'He gat no heat,' says the Authorised Version.

Eventually of course he passed away, and that left a very big gap in the minds and hearts and histories of a good many in Israel. It was like when Queen Victoria died, not that I was personally affected thereby, but I've heard people say she had reigned so long that they couldn't imagine the world carrying on when she died. So it was with David. They vividly remembered how he went out to face the giant and conquered against all odds and became the darling of the hearts of the people. He made his mistakes of course—serious moral errors. He suffered a rebellion by his own son, Absalom. Yet, taken as a whole, it was a magnificent life, wasn't it? And alongside the history we put the many psalms that he wrote, and remember how he trained the Levites to sing in their chants at the temple. He desired to build a temple for God but that task was not given to him; it was said that his son should build it.

So we posed ourselves the question: if God could have raised up one David, why didn't he raise up a whole succession of Davids in order to keep his people in their right condition? Of course you could ask the same thing of the Christian apostles. If God could, and did, raise up Peter, James, John and Paul, why didn't he proceed to raise up a whole succession of Peters, James', Johns and Pauls, but left it to the likes of us? So we have looked at 1 and 2 Kings to see if we could discern in its histories what God actually provided for his people, for their maintenance and, where necessary, their recovery.

From Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple we perceived that God's provision for his nation was the building of the house of the Lord at Jerusalem. Solomon was conscious of the ginormous condescension of God, that he should even visit the house that Solomon built with the cloud of his Shekinah glory. Which got Solomon wondering, 'Since God is beyond all dimension, and he fills and overfills heaven and earth, how could he possibly get in to this building that I have built?' And yet, smart Solomon, on the basis of God's fulfilled

promise, he prayed that whatever should happen to Israel down the centuries, whether they were allured by success or disconsolate through failure, if only they should look towards that house and pray towards that house, that God would hear in heaven, forgive and restore them where necessary and maintain them (see 1 Kgs 8:30).

So we have been following the provision that God made in the form of the house of God. Of course we confess to being Christians, and while we have been thinking outwardly of the house of God that Solomon built in Jerusalem, some of us have surreptitiously been thinking of another house of God, of which Paul the apostle writes in 1 Timothy 3, saying to his fellow Christians, 'These things I write to you, so that, if I am a long time coming and get hindered, you will know how to behave in the house of God, in the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth' (vv. 14–15). We have it, or at least I have it, tucked up away in my intentions and not publicly advertised too often, that before we have finished this series we shall have to turn to that passage in 1 Timothy 3 and inquire what exactly it means.

### *The house of God at Jerusalem*

We think again of the house of God that Solomon built. There was the building itself. At the front of it you saw a porch, so called, and then the building itself. It was like the tabernacle that Moses built in two parts. There was the first part, which is the Holy Place, and then, after the second veil, the Most Holy Place in which stood the symbolic throne of God, covered with the mercy seat and the cherubim. At the side of the building you would have seen built out protrusions. These were the side rooms built for the convenience of the priests and the Levites, that in them they might do the various tasks that were assigned to them. We should also notice that in front of the porch—freestanding, that is, not part of the building itself—were two large pillars. Their task was to support intricate and ornate capitals on the top of them. They were meant to be symbolic, for in Hebrew they were given names, one of which means 'in it is strength', and the other means 'God will strengthen it'.

We shall have to enquire, God willing next week, what those pillars can talk to us about. It is a New Testament metaphor, isn't it, when Paul says in the Epistle to the Galatians that he went up to Jerusalem, not to be told what the gospel was? He had received the gospel directly from Christ, but he went to consult with the other apostles, to squelch the rumour that was beginning to circulate that Paul preached a different gospel from the other apostles (2:1–9). That was nonsense of course, so he went up and they made a joint statement. In the course of examining he says that he accosted those who 'seemed to be pillars' (v. 9). I'm not sure about us here tonight. Have you in your church people that give the appearance at least of being pillars? I don't mean they're straight beyond all possibility. These pillars, as I say, stood there to carry the beauty of the capitals that combined the beauty of flowers and fruit and so forth; we have no ground of complaint that God should make his house attractive and beautiful. Anyway, that New Testament verse that I quoted earlier, informs us how we are to behave in the house of God—'the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.' That's what pillars are for actually, if only they knew it. The church is not the truth; the church is to uphold the truth for all to see, and to uphold it in such a fashion so that those that come to it can see its beauty and its potential for fruitfulness. Let me leave it there.

There was also in the court a laver. It was a basin with water in it, so big that they called it the sea and it stood on the backs of oxen. It was a great work of art in those days. Then there were ten subsidiary lavers in frames and with wheels so that they could be wheeled round all the various courts of the temple, as would be necessary when there were many, many sacrifices, with blood and innards scattered all over the place. It is a thing that theologians like to debate, why in 1 Kings 6 and 7 mention is made of those pillars, mention is made of the sea and the lavers, but no mention is made of the big altar with its sacrifice of animals and the outpouring of blood. I submit it to all theologians now present; it's a question we shall have to face before we come to the end of the series, God willing, in two weeks' time.

Now if we think of what it was like inside. The walls were covered with cedar, and then they were overlaid with gold. That is not a fairy story. Even the floor, we're told, was overlaid with gold. Professor Millard, late of Liverpool, has pointed out how this was true to life. In the ancient world gold was more plentiful than it is nowadays and people used it lavishly; not only on the walls and on the floor, but even the pillars could very often be overlaid with gold.<sup>16</sup> The picture language is of palmettes and rosettes, and the cherubim, of course, otherwise known as the living creatures; so that if you had walked inside there, the impression you would get from the décor was indeed that this was the house of the *living* God. God isn't just a collection of doctrines, he is personal and living—the living God. It was a favourite description that Elijah used when he spoke of 'the living God before whom I stand.'

#### *The plans and the history*

We think now again of the plans for the house of the Lord set against the subsequent history in 1 and 2 Kings.<sup>17</sup> The plans for the house of the Lord start with the question of the one house, its framework and the side rooms. Then there comes a special plea for obedience. Then the internal installation and decoration, with the chief installation the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place—the very throne of God with cherubim on the mercy seat, and two big olive wood cherubim standing with their wings outstretched in the Most Holy Place.

In the fourth place, we have plans for the king's house, and we still have to concentrate a little on that even tonight. The temple was the superior building; it stood at the top. Somewhat down the slope was the official king's house, where the king lived. It had its big reception room for foreign diplomats, the place for the king to sit in law courts, the throne room and so forth. It also had the women's quarters, for the queen and all her handmaids. So that was the king's house then.

There was a twin set of government—there was the Lord's house with his throne and his covenant, then there was the king's house, whose responsibility it was to see that the people behaved as they should and keep (seriously keep) the covenant of the Lord.

Finally, in the fifth set of plans there was the sea and the lavers and the two pillars. Our general thesis has been to study how Israel treated the plans of the Lord's house. You see

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<sup>16</sup> Alan R. Millard, 'Does the Bible Exaggerate King Solomon's Golden Wealth?', *Biblical Archaeology Review* 15.3 (1989): 21–34.

<sup>17</sup> See [Chart 2. Record of Disobedience, Apostasy and Judgment](#).

from the sets of plans that the architects allowed only for one house. Yet no sooner was the nation divided under Rehoboam's son and Jeroboam took over, that almost the first accusation that was made against him was that he set up 'other houses'. He was eventually destroyed; God allowed him to be supplanted by a certain Baasha, who was there to take the place of Jeroboam. But even though Baasha executed Jeroboam, he continued in the same disobedience.

If you look at the third set of plans, with the ark of the covenant, its first provision was, 'Thou shalt have no other god but me.' Set against that, we're told of Ahab of Israel that he not only built a separate house for Baal, the pagan god, but installed him as Israel's chief god! He came to a sticky end, did Ahab.

Then we were thinking last time about the king's house, and we noticed that, in English at least, we have two similar phrases and we were careful to distinguish them. You can talk about the king's house as being the palace. You can talk about the house of her gracious majesty, Queen Elizabeth; she has a house where she can live—well, she has two or three. The one she likes best of all, so I'm told, is Windsor Castle. It's the *house* where she lives. Then there's a *house* in another sense. So when we read of the house of David in Scripture, we're thinking not of the building in which he lived, we're thinking of the royal dynasty. So Windsor Castle is one thing, but if I talk of the House of Windsor, then I think of the royal dynasty of which the Queen is the present representative.

We saw last week that there came a time when, in the king's house, in the very throne room, there sat as queen a woman who devised and then executed the murder of almost the whole of the house of David. She was the daughter of Ahab, whom we've already met. Many of her family had been destroyed by Jehu. Her own very son had been killed by Jehu and now, for reasons best known to her, she set about eliminating the whole of the house of Judah.

Last week we thought about that to some extent. What would that matter to us? Let me put it to you. If some historian succeeded (from time to time they have a go) in proving to you that King David was not a real historical figure at all, but just a figure of legend, would you as a Christian protest? We went through a lot of verses in the New Testament that tell us that our Christianity, our Christian salvation, is based on someone who was the son of David. It rings through the whole of the New Testament. When Athaliah rose up and did her best to destroy the house of David, the royal dynasty of David, if she had succeeded in doing it, it would have been a spiritual as well as a moral disaster. The very first verse of the New Testament tells us, as also the early verses of the Epistle to the Romans tell us, that our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, according to the flesh, is of the seed of David and declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. It is an integral part of our Christian faith that Jesus Christ is the descendant of David.

When she did that, as we saw last week, she didn't quite succeed, because the young child Joash was a little boy, and his aunt got him smuggled out of the palace and took him to the high priest who hid him in one of the many chambers in the house of the Lord until the boy was grown up, or at least until he was about seven or eight years old. Meanwhile Athaliah lived as though she were the sole monarch. Then eventually the day came when the high priest showed the king, the young king, to the leaders of the army and to the leading

politicians. They were, of course, surprised and delighted. They made him king, and Athaliah was executed.

You see, I wish I could do the same for you. Not the execution bit, I don't mean that bit. But our Lord was done to death, wasn't he? There were many who thought that that was the end of him. He is now gone into heaven, hid from our eyes, if you like, but he's really there! I wish I had the eloquence and the inspiration of an Apostle Paul, at least, to write another letter to the Colossians and point out the reality of the living Christ seated on the throne of the Father. The creator, the one through whom the whole ages were created, who maintains all, is the firstborn of all creation, and we have been translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear and beloved son! Oh, I wish I could show you! Well, some Christian apostles had the privilege, didn't they? John saw him. He who leaned on the bosom of Christ at the last supper, seeing Christ in all his glory, fell to the ground as if dead. He's real, and he comes to reign.

You say, 'What happened therefore, when the little boy sat on the throne? How did he get on?' Well, we have the advantage that there happened to live round about that time a prophet by the name of Isaiah. He tells us in chapter 6 of his prophecy, '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 (v. 1). 'In the year,' says Isaiah, 'that King Uzziah died.' Let's think about that year.

### **The year that Uzziah died**

You may have a little difficulty in looking up Uzziah, because sometimes he's called Azariah, so his name varies. It's like William and Billy; his name differs in different places. But, 'It was the year that King Uzziah died,' says Isaiah, 'that I had this vision.'

#### ***The vision of Isaiah***

Do you know, in that year it was quite a while since any king of Judah had died in his bed. There was Joash, the little boy who was hidden in the temple and then he came to the throne. He did quite well at the beginning, but when the high priest Jehoiada died he started to go astray, did Joash. Jehoiada's son, who at this time was a prophet, came and stood in the temple and denounced their changes and called on them to repent, and Joash had him executed. He was executing the son of the very priest that had saved Joash's life by hiding him in the temple. He had him executed for telling Joash what had become unpopular doctrine to him. Oh dear. Then his servants eventually assassinated Joash. His son Amaziah, you know, was a good king really. Well, he did many good things, but then he got a little swellheaded and went to attack the much more powerful ten tribes of Israel, plus Syria if you please (or Aram). They got hold of Amaziah, took him back to Jerusalem, and they took him to the north side (what we should now call the Damascus gate) and the wall of Jerusalem that faced the northern kingdom; they bashed it down and there was nothing that Amaziah could do about it. It was just to remind him that he had some very powerful neighbours and had better not start attacking them. So (poor old boy) he was a lame duck kind of a thing for the rest of his life. He fled, but his servants got hold of him and assassinated him. Dear, oh dear. The house of David isn't doing very well, is it?

*The days of Uzziah*

Then there came this aforesaid Uzziah. He was a very capable man. He reigned for about fifty-nine years and developed agriculture and invented war machines and did very well on the whole. He did so very well that he got a little bit beyond his own stature and went into the temple to offer incense, and the priests came flocking round and said, 'No, no, no your majesty, you mustn't do that. It's not given to you!' But he brushed them aside. He was not only going to be king and inventor and agriculturist and everything else; he was going to be the offerer of incense in the house of the Lord. As he stood there beginning to do it, a spot arose in his skin. It's called in our ancient translations 'leprosy'. It probably wasn't leprosy, but it was a skin disease, a very rare skin disease. He was hustled out of the temple, and he himself also hastened to go out (2 Chr 26:16–20). He couldn't any longer exercise kingship. He had to live in a separate compartment; where exactly we don't know. And his son, Jotham, who was a very decent chap and a very capable man, had to carry on until his father died. Uzziah reigned fifty-nine years, however.

How would you have felt if you had lived in those days? Of course you don't live in a day anything like that, do you? There are some churches of which our Lord complains that they have a name that they live, but are dead, actually. But that's another point completely. How would you feel if all your efforts had gone into establishing and helping the nation to find solidity and prosperity, and the kings had behaved like this? I think I would have felt like saying, 'It's no use, you may spare your breath, Gooding. Well, you're part of the trouble anyway. What is the use of preaching, to start with, and trying reform?' Well, of course, you wouldn't do that; you would persevere. But you should know what other folks sometimes are tempted to feel.

*Motivation to carry on*

'In the year that King Uzziah died,' says Isaiah. And we look to see what inspired him to carry on. Are you not glad he carried on? Have you ever been helped by what Isaiah has written and felt it lift your soul, after all these centuries? He gives us here his secret:

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 . . . one cried unto another, and said Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory . . . Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. (6:1–5)

'Mine eyes have seen *the* King, the LORD of hosts.' It is the prayer of my heart, and I suspect of yours, that God will give me a vision amidst all the passing squalor of this world, and the mistakes—my own and those of the church—to look beyond it and to catch a vision of *the* King. You will notice that when that happened to Isaiah, he forthwith felt unqualified to speak.

Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. 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. (vv. 6–8)

(I don't know if prophets got excited.) Then said he, 'I will!' only to be told:

Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until cities be waste without inhabitant, and houses without man, and the land become utterly waste, and the LORD have removed men far away, and the forsaken places be many in the midst of the land. (vv. 9–12)

Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. You imagine being told to preach, and being told in advance, 'You will find the people coming to listen to your preaching less and less, and less and less until the place is empty.' Would you carry on? How did Isaiah find the grace and the puff to carry on? I'm glad he did, for he was the man who wrote Isaiah, the book. I know his congregations dwindled, but how many do you suppose are being converted through Isaiah 53? Thousands! Oh I am so glad Isaiah carried on, for I personally confess my gratitude to him. I have found him, in times of difficulty, more than human help. He saw *the* King amidst the decline of the kings of Judah, let alone the opposition of the kings of Israel.

#### *The motivation of the Lord Jesus*

In the Gospel of John chapter 12, John is moved to cite this passage from Isaiah 6 as to what happened when our blessed Lord was here on earth and he preached and great crowds came. Well, at the beginning they did; and then great crowds came to cry, 'Let him be crucified!' 'For all the miracles he'd done,' says John, 'they didn't believe on him.' Then John adds a serious note, 'Neither could they, for God had shut their eyes' (12:39–40). If we carry on rejecting truth and shutting our eyes to what we see is plain straightforward truth—God's truth—there will come a time when God will say, 'You don't like my truth? Righto, don't see it then.' There is a judgment of God that in the end gives men what they prefer.

Tell me, if that's John's comment on the ministry of Christ, why did Christ carry on? You're inclined to say, 'Because he loved me. Because he accepted the role that God had given him to do, to be the Saviour of the world, and he said, though it cost him sweat like blood in the garden, "Not my will, but thine be done"' (Luke 22:42).

Is it worth our carrying on in our modern day? Well, God give you to see ten thousand folks converted. May God do it, and do it fast. If you never saw anybody converted, would you carry on? This is the challenge that Isaiah brings us from this ancient story of the kings. God help us to see its relevance to our modern situation.

Shall we pray?

Lord, now we bring to thee thy word and we thank thee, Lord, that through thy servant Isaiah our eyes have been summoned to look not on the decrepit failure of the best of our

service, but on thy dear Son, and the triumph of his cross and resurrection, and the certainty of his coming again.

For every blessing we have received from his gracious hand, for the glory of the knowledge of salvation and forgiveness of sins, for the honour and privilege of being mouthpieces for God in our day and generation, help us Lord in our more difficult modern times, to stand firm, and with grace and tact and more than human wisdom, to maintain thy message in the world, as we patiently wait for the coming again of thy dear Son, for his glorification and his endless reign. Bless us therefore, and bless us as we partake of these refreshments, for which we thank thee gratefully, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Standing as Pillars

This is the second last of the studies of 1 and 2 Kings that we have been engaged upon in these past weeks. Let me say at once how delighted we are to see you all and we pray God's blessing on your attendance.

### *So far in our studies*

Hitherto we have been studying the descriptions, the regulations, for the building of the house of the Lord at Jerusalem. We took our cue from Solomon who, at the dedication of the house, poured out his heart towards God, for he saw that the presence of God in this house of the Lord at Jerusalem would be sufficient for the maintenance of the people or, if need be, for their repair, whatever should happen to them. We have discovered, of course, in reading the history, that the people of God in those days failed to take advantage of the tremendous blessing that God had given them in not only building a house of God in Jerusalem but coming himself, almighty though he is and omnipresent, to dwell in that confined house.

### **The fifth set of plans**

So tonight we have come to the fifth and final section of the plans for the house of the Lord, and perhaps we should begin by reading some verses from the appropriate chapter. This is the first book of Kings, chapter 7, beginning to read at verse 13:

And king Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. He was the son of a widow woman of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in copper; and he was filled with wisdom and understanding and cunning, to work all works in copper. And he came to king Solomon, and wrought all his work. For he fashioned the two pillars of copper, of eighteen cubits high apiece: and a line of twelve cubits compassed either of them about. And he made two capitals of molten copper, to set upon the tops of the pillars: the height of the one capital was five cubits, and the height of the other capital was five cubits. There were nets of checker work, and wreaths of chain-work, for the capitals which were upon the top of the pillars; seven for the one capital, and seven for the other capital. So he made the pillars; and there were two rows round about upon the one network, to cover the capitals that were upon the top of the pillars: and so did he for the other capital. And the capitals that were upon the top of the pillars in the porch were of lily work, four cubits. And there were capitals above also upon the two pillars, close by the belly which was beside the network: and the pomegranates were two hundred, in rows round about upon the other capital. And he set up the pillars at the

porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin: and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz. And upon the top of the pillars was lily work: so was the work of the pillars finished. And he made the molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and the height thereof was five cubits: and a line of thirty cubits compassed it round about. And under the brim of it round about there were knops which did compass it, for ten cubits, compassing the sea round about: the knops were in two rows, cast when it was cast. It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea was set upon them above, and all their hinder parts were inward.' (vv. 13–25)

God give us good understanding of his word.

We have arrived therefore at the final set of plans and descriptions of the house of the Lord that Solomon built in Jerusalem, and we have come at length to the court that was around the temple building itself, and we are to consider the furnishings of that court. The major furnishings were in two groups. There were two large pillars with their capitals above that were very imposing, very beautiful. Then there was another group, what is in our reading called 'the molten sea' and it was what in the tabernacle was referred to as the laver. It was so large that it was called a sea, and it was there filled with water for the cleansing of the priests. It was of an elaborate design; it stood on the backs of twelve oxen. And in addition to this great sea there were ten subsidiary lavers on wooden frames, on wheels, so that they could be taken to any part of the court. They were suitably decorated with panels, with cherubim on them and such like things.

People have been interested to note that in the furniture of the court, as here described, there is no mention of the altar, with its shedding of blood. The reason for its absence is not given, but in the subsequent chapters we read from time to time of the altar that Solomon made. There was therefore an altar, and later on in history, as we shall have to consider perhaps this evening, we read of an unhappy king who decided to remove the altar and substitute for it a style of altar that was recommended in Damascus of Aram. The chap was nothing if he wasn't favouring modernism.

### ***The symbolic beauty of the decoration***

Our first major question is to ask whether decoration of the pillars and the great sea and lavers was merely impressionistic or was it, as well as that, symbolic? Perhaps you say, 'What is the difference between being impressionistic and being symbolic?' Well, if one might take as an example our dear lady Queen Elizabeth II. Sometimes it runs in my mind (though it's not often I have to look at her photograph, I must confess) she wears a kind of velour or velvet or something. It looks a bit shiny, you see, but it's a beautiful royal blue. That's not typical of anything; it's not symbolic in that sense. It is impressionistic, wow, isn't it? I wouldn't wish to have a jacket like it, but it looks good on her. When, however, at her coronation she is handed a globe and a sceptre, they are not just impressionistic. It's not simply a matter of how nice they look, they are significant symbolically. The globe represents her empire; the sceptre stands for her rule. We ask this therefore of the decoration of the

pillars, and the pillars themselves, and the lavers and the great sea. They were impressionistic, of course, but were they also symbolic?

### ***The lavers in the courtyard***

The easy answer to it is to start backwards and consider the lavers. They were filled with water for the cleansing of the priests. At the laver the priests, at their induction, would have been bathed all over. Thereafter, whenever they approached their duties at the altar or inside, they were to rinse their hands and their feet.

We have the New Testament's authority for seeing in that water a symbolic meaning, for our Lord himself used the same symbol, didn't he? At the Last Supper he rose, divested himself of his outer garment, wrapped a towel round his middle, poured water into a basin and, kneeling at the feet of his apostles, he washed their feet and then explained what he'd done. 'He that has been bathed all over, needs not save to rinse his feet but is clean, every bit of him' (John 13:10). The famous verse in Hebrews 10 that bids us welcome into the holiest of all, says that we are to come boldly to enter into the holiest of all, 'our hearts sprinkled', and that will mean with blood, for it is always so. Never in Scripture is it 'washed in blood' but 'rinsed in blood' or 'sprinkled in blood', except it be garments, that are sometimes said to be 'washed in blood'—it is not said of persons. Our bodies are bathed all over 'in pure water' (10:22). For, 'Christ loved the church, and gave himself for her', so we are told. Not content to have a bride, he is a perfectionist and wants his bride to look the maximum beauty, to which he gives his devotion constantly in this present time—'that she might be purified by the washing of water with the word. That she might be a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing' (Eph. 5:25–27). I've said more than enough to show, I think, that the water in the great sea in Solomon's temple court was symbolic and not just impressionistic.

### ***The two pillars and standing for the truth***

If the laver and its water were symbolic, what about the two pillars? They were there of course to be impressionistic certainly. To arrive at your front door and see two great pillars, (you probably have them) at your front door. They're just to make the likes of me tremble at my knees a little bit when I enter in, because they must be important people that could have pillars like that at the front door. Yes, but were they also symbolic? A first clue is the fact that they were named. One was called Jachin, meaning 'God will uphold, strengthen', and the other Boaz, 'in it is strength'. Because of the verb that is used, Jachin has presumably as its subject God himself, 'God is our refuge and *strength*, a very present help in trouble' (Ps 46:1). Majestic therefore, and beautiful of course, with the very large capitals and all kinds of stonework; lilies and so forth, pomegranates and what have you, to be both beautiful and attractive. It was the purpose of the pillars to uphold the capitals, wasn't it? Surely it was.

So as they stood there, with these delightful capitals, they were very attractive, weren't they? They seemed to convey promises from the very God whose pillars they were, of fruitfulness and blessing. In a verse that, God willing, if the Lord leaves us long enough to come to it next Thursday, when we have to turn to the New Testament, to the end verses of

1 Timothy 3, we shall hear Paul saying, 'I write these things, that you might know how people ought to behave themselves in the house of God, in the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth' (1 Tim 3:14–15). The church isn't the truth; the church is there to uphold the truth. And what that has to do with us we shall have to consider next Thursday.

*The truth of the one creator God*

I'm going to take it therefore, that the pillars and then the lavers were symbolic. The pillars were there to make their witness to the truth that behind all the beauty of flowers and the fruitfulness of fruit trees there stood the one true God Creator, Lord of heaven and earth. This was his house. That would be a very important truth to uphold, would it not? Surely we have a similar duty in the present to stand, and having done all, to stand for the truth of the one true God Creator.

I'm aware of course of the great basic theory of the evolution of religion. If everything has evolved, why not religion? Otherwise it would get jealous, would it not? According to the theory, you started off with animism, such as the Japanese still have in their Shintoist shrines. These are thought to be inhabited by spirits, where a nice green shady nook with an elegant tree, and perhaps a raised up piece of grass, is thought to be a dwelling place of spirits. So you start off with animism, and then you develop polytheism—many gods, thought of in rather human terms. Then as men evolved further they left polytheism and came to henotheism. Henotheism means one god per people, or per nation. From that you went on to monotheism—only one god for the whole universe, and beyond that you evolved into atheism.

That isn't true actually of Israel's religion. As you'll see reading three or four of the books, they started off with monotheism, 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth' (Gen 1:1); but over the centuries, constantly seduced by other nations around them, they went off into the miseries of polytheism and deified the forces of nature. So they worshipped the sun god and the moon god and the storm god and the god of sex and so forth and so on. They were deifying the forces of nature and had constantly to be dragged back by the roots of their hair by their prophets, back to the original monotheism that is everywhere throughout the Old Testament the burden of the prophets. Not evolution. They taught how, at the root of truth and beauty, is the doctrine of the one true God Creator.

We used to tell the Russians this—perhaps they knew it already, but in the bad old days we pointed out, in very gentlemanly fashion, how that atheists deified the forces of nature. If you ask an atheist what was responsible for his existence and what will eventually bring him to his end, he will tell you, 'Some gene or other.' In other words, a chemical, and he will then tell you, if he's honest, that one day he'll find a gene in his body, or a bug of some kind, and he'll be able to see what it's going to do; it's going to ruin him, tear him to pieces, and eventually it will get hold of his rationality and tear it to pieces and make a nonsense of it. And when it's done it, it won't know it's done it. Man and man's intellect at the mercy of mindless, purposeless matter. I don't find it very attractive. Human dignity depends on man being a creature and a redeemed creature of the one true God Creator.

Don't be ashamed of it, will you? At the university outreach tonight, courageous and valiant men and women will stand like pillars to uphold before the gaze of their fellow students the glorious fact of the one true God, creator of heaven and earth and all the beauty and the power that's in it. We must stand, must we not, like pillars—and not just for the truth of the one true God Creator.

*The truth that the church is subject to Scripture*

In Galatians 2, Paul tells us that he went up to Jerusalem, 'by revelation' (v. 2). They didn't summon him there. He went up to confer with the other apostles so as to make sure they were not running at cross-purposes. In fact they all agreed on the gospel and he says that when he got there:

When they perceived the grace that was given unto me, James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision; only they would that we should remember the poor; which very thing I was also zealous to do. (Gal 2:9–10)

Now that could sound a bit obscure and irrelevant in the hustle and bustle of life, but it comes back to this: Who gave us the Scriptures? Who would you say?

I remember years and years ago (and since I'm an old man I can repeat my stories) there came a good gentleman to see me one Saturday afternoon. He said that he'd been advised by others on the staff, and he wanted to come and see what my opinion was.

About what?

Well, he was thinking of joining a very strict religious order, what did I think about it?

So I did some thinking, and I said, 'Well, I don't know really what to say, because the church to which that order belongs curses me.'

'No, no,' he said, 'surely they don't.'

I said, 'Yes they do.'

For in those days it was the Council of Trent that was the final authority, and it said if anybody professes to be absolutely sure of salvation, let him be anathema. That is not faith, it's what they call in Latin, *fiducia*—over winning confidence—not true faith. For faith would never say it's absolutely sure of salvation.

I said, 'You see, old chap, I do believe. I'm one of those; I believe, and I'm absolutely sure of salvation.'

'Oh yes?' he said. 'You shouldn't be like that.'

I said, 'Why not?'

'Well,' he said, 'it all depends on our works in the end, doesn't it?'

I said, 'I didn't know it did.'

'Oh yes,' he said, 'yes.'

I said, 'Well, just let me read you something. "To him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt"' (Rom 4:4). 'There you are,' he says, 'that's what it is.'

'Well,' I said, 'half a minute, let me complete the sentence; "And to him that works not . . ."—what about him?'

'Well, he's no good at all,' he says.'

'Half a minute,' I said. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness"" (v. 5). 'Oh,' he says, 'I don't know what that means; I didn't know it was in the Bible.'

Well, I showed him the page and he said, 'Oh, Paul, yes. Well, yes, yes, yes, but he wrote a lot of funny things, and you can't just sit there and read it and take it in and get saved like that, you know. Of course you can't. You have to take it to the church. It was the church that gave us the Bible, and it's logically absurd to take the Bible which the church gave us in order to criticize the church.'

That view is very widespread in my experience.

I said, 'You know, Paul tells us that when he went up to Jerusalem those that were apostles before him didn't add anything to him.'

'Oh, they did,' he said, 'they must have done.'

'No,' I said, 'there it is, old boy, read it. "They didn't add anything to me" (Gal 2:6).' I said, 'What are you telling me? Suppose I were living in the time of Paul, in the Arabian Desert, and I saw Paul and I said, "Oh, I think that's Paul," and I went up and said, "Are you, sir, the Christian Apostle Paul?"'

"Yes."

"Ah, well, would you mind telling me how I can be justified?" And Paul told me by word of mouth what he here writes—should I be able to believe it there and then and be justified and saved, or would I have to take it to the church and get the church to pronounce upon it, whether Paul got it right or not?'

'Oh,' he said, 'you'd have to take it to the church.'

I'm afraid after that we didn't get very far, because he insisted you have to take it to the church, and Paul says, 'they added nothing to me.'

Sheer A, B, C tells us what the facts are. The Epistle to the Corinthians is not written by the church to the Corinthians. It carries the author's name on it; it is written by Paul to the church. That is an exceedingly important piece of the truth, it stands for our true freedom in Christ.

*The truth that justification is by grace through faith apart from works*

We need to be pillars, aware of the situation, and when it comes to how a man is justified before God, Acts 15 gives us an example of some pillars at work.

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, saying, 'Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved.' And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and questioning with them, the brethren appointed that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. (vv. 1-2)

They went to get a statement from all the apostles that they all agreed, and when they got there, 'There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying, ""It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses." And when there had been much questioning, Peter got up amongst them and said quite plainly, ""Now, therefore, why tempt you God that we should put a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which

neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?’” (vv. 5, 7–10). Then, if I might put it into modern English, he said, ‘It is our belief and conviction that it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus that we shall be saved, we Jews as well as those Gentiles’ (v. 11).

How we need to stand for this truth; to be pillars, aware of the things that are seriously disputed that relate to our common salvation. And then, by God’s grace, to stand firm, like pillars, but always remembering that the true gospel brings forth flowers to be attractive and fruit to satisfy our thirst. It is wrong to take a true doctrine and to advocate it in such a cantankerous fashion as to make it very decidedly unattractive to those that hear us. We are to be pillars, therefore.

### ***Two kings under pressure to give in***

#### *King Ahaz*

I shall have to trouble you now by going back a little bit to Ahaz (2 Kgs 16). We are told by Isaiah the prophet that he did his best for king Ahaz of Jerusalem. To sum up the then current history, the king of Israel joined forces with the king of Damascus of Aram to attack Jerusalem (v. 5). Of course, Israel, being ten tribes, were a big, big bully to the lesser two tribes of Judea, so Ahaz was panic struck and Isaiah pleaded with the man to stand his ground and not to do anything silly. But Ahaz wouldn’t listen when faced with these enemies. The king of Aram from Damascus and the king of Israel would swamp little Jerusalem, so they thought. Ahaz got in touch with the Assyrian emperor.

It reminds me of the story of the two mice, you know. There was a big mouse and a small mouse, and the big mouse, like mice do, cut up rough with the small mouse. Not knowing what to do, the small mouse pleaded with the cat to come and deal with the enemy, which the cat did; but, having done so, it still felt hungry and swallowed the small mouse as well!

It was absurd to call on the Assyrians to help. Isaiah warned Ahaz of what would happen if he summoned the Assyrians. You see, when the news came through that the kings of Damascus and Samaria were going to attack Judah, and it was told to the house of David, says Isaiah, ‘His heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest are moved with the wind’ (Isa 7:2). Yes, it looked dark and difficult; but notice how Isaiah carefully words it—when the news came through, it was told to ‘the house of David’. Behind the throne of David stood almighty God. God had appointed him; if now the king in Jerusalem had to call on the utterly unconverted Gentiles to maintain him, that made a nonsense of his claim that the throne was appointed by almighty God, did it not?

Ahaz wouldn’t listen and went off to Damascus. He took the trouble to cut off the gold from the pillars and the walls, and goodness knows where else, around the temple of the Lord and gave it as a gift (not to say bribe) to the then king of Assyria, who promised to help him. Foolish man. ‘Why don’t you ask God for a sign,’ said Isaiah (v. 11). ‘If your faith is that small, why not ask him for a sign and deliberate guidance?’ Not Ahaz, no—he was a man of no faith whatsoever. Isaiah talked to him about the virgin birth (v. 14); but it meant nothing to him.

So off he went to Damascus. He had enough money left to get a decent hotel I suppose, and he went, and he saw an altar there that they had up in Damascus. Oh, it was beautiful! It

was modern, you know. To be honest, that thing they had from Solomon's day, that was old fashioned, you see, it really was. And so he drew out the thing on a postcard, the dimensions and things of this new altar he saw in Damascus, and sent it to the high priest, and said, 'Get me an altar made just like this one, before I come back.' Well, he must have stayed on holiday quite a while because, by the time he got back, the high priest had made him an altar exactly like it. 'So we'll have this one, the newly built altar for all the main sacrifices and everything else,' said Ahaz. 'I will keep the old altar as to inquire by' (2 Kgs 16:10–16).

You say, 'It's a pity that the Assyrians made him do it.' They didn't; the Assyrians weren't like that. You could worship who you liked, within reason. They wouldn't force you to do anything, except politically.

Why did he do it then? Now, forgive my strong language—it was the curse of always having to modernise the gospel. Yes, to make it attractive to modern day intellectuals, or non-intellectuals more generally, instead of seeing it as a God given trust, that this is the truth of God. No, let me put it into modern decent English, but let me keep the facts of the glorious gospel and not change them! I remember being shown a pulpit; it had a notice on it: 'Preachers are asked not to mention hell; the congregation doesn't like it.'

Isaiah warned the man what Assyria would do. What would it do? It would come sweeping in like a tide and destroy the kingdom of Israel, and take them all off to Assyria and fill their places with people collected from Assyria. That was the way Assyrians had of controlling populations—mass deportation. You can imagine Isaiah telling Ahaz, 'Don't tell me you weren't warned.'

### *King Hezekiah*

There would be worse in the days of Hezekiah. Sennacherib had been campaigning down the south from Jerusalem, and he had taken a city called Lachish. If you want to know what kind of gentlemen the Assyrians were, go to the British Museum in London to see the bas relief, a depiction hung originally upon the Assyrians' palace walls of the attack on Lachish and the unmentionable cruelties of the Assyrians.

From Lachish, and then the next place that the emperor went to, he sent a deputation. Army generals, and one governor of a province whose name was the Rabshakeh—that was his office, he was a governor of a province. He sent them to Jerusalem to demand that Hezekiah give up, come out to them and own defeat. 'Don't you let that Hezekiah chap deceive you,' said the Rabshakeh, 'saying, "Your God will deliver you." God? We've taken scores of gods, like boys stealing birds' eggs out of nests. Come on, we're not going to do you any harm. Come out. We'll give you horses' (2 Kgs 18:19–35).

That would be some temptation, wouldn't it, to be given Jaguars, or some such car like that. 'You'd never be so wealthy in all your life as you will be. Come out!'

And Hezekiah, who at first compromised, got strength, by God's grace, to resist him, and with the help of Isaiah stood like a pillar for the doctrine of the truth and the reality of the true God of Israel, the Lord of heaven and earth (19:15). We shall have to think more of it next time, but it is an important thing, isn't it—the Lord God of heaven and earth?

Listen to the shouts from the other side, 'Thus says the king of Assyria, the great king, "Give up your faith in God, and come out; you'll never be so happy as you will be then."' It

took a lot of faith in tiny Jerusalem to stand and witness to the true God of heaven. Just when the Assyrians thought they were going to win, God visited them with a disaster. They went off home. The Rabshakeh shouted over his shoulder, 'Don't you think you've won. I'm coming back!' He never came back, and the emperor himself was assassinated subsequently some years later by his two sons (vv. 35–37).

But it is a gripping story, isn't it? As we listen to the history and we listen to this great emperor: 'Thus says the king of Assyria, the great king, "Don't let that God deceive you,' we hear rumblings that this world will hear again at the end of this age, from the voice of someone who will sit in the temple of God, showing himself to be God and demand divine honours, and that people give up this childish notion that there's a god in heaven. I don't know what your prophetic views are, but we move towards that end. It's good to get a little practice in, isn't it? I'm having to practise standing on one leg these days to get my brain thinking right after a recent knee surgery (and it's okay even if it hurts), so that I shall cure myself of favouring the one leg. It's not bad to take a practice at standing on two legs as a pillar in the house of the Lord.

Shall we pray.

Our Father, we thank thee for these stirring histories. We feel for thy servant Hezekiah; the human blood running through his veins and knowing the fears that all of us know. But we thank thee for thy support of him and thy vindication of faith, and we ask thy grace that we in our day and generation may stand boldly for thee. Help us to value thy revealed doctrine and stand for it. Help us, Lord, to convey it in good modern English, but the old truth of the gospel that never changes. So bless us now as we thank thee for our session together, and for the refreshments we are about to enjoy, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## The Secret of Godliness

This is now the tenth and the last of our studies in 1 and 2 Kings. Thank you for the way you have attended, and those who have managed to attend all ten deserve a special congratulation for, not only their persistence of interest, but for their extraordinary powers of endurance. I hope at least I have convinced you that the stories in 1 and 2 Kings are not just things that various writers happened to mention and, remembering them, put them down somewhat haphazardly, leaving us to make the best we can of them. They are deliberately written, as it is apparent from one at least of the predominant themes in the book that we have tried to follow in these ten talks. That is the provision that God made for the maintenance of his people and, where necessary, for their recovery spiritually after the death of the great and famous King David. That provision, as Solomon enunciated, was the building of the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, and not only the building of the house, but the promised presence of God Almighty.

It wasn't that the ancients had a very childish view of God. At the inauguration, Solomon explicitly mentioned the fact that 'the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee', and he said to God, 'How much less this little house that I have built?' (1 Kgs 8:27). It is of course a problem (not a serious problem) that we have still to this very present day. How can almighty God, whom the heavens of heavens are not sufficient to contain, dwell in our individual hearts?

### ***So far in our studies***

So we have followed in these talks the use that Israel made of the house of God, that God himself provided for their maintenance. The general lesson has been this, that when they took advantage of the spiritual power that God provided in those far off days through that house, then they prospered. When, as so often happened, they not only neglected the house and the God who dwelt in it, but 'went a-whoring', as Hebrew would put it, after other gods and goddesses of the nations around them, they came into great and grievous trouble.

We are in fact tonight to see how it all ended up; not only with the house itself destroyed, but with its lovely furniture—those beautiful pillars with their attractive and delightful capitals, and the elaborate laver on the backs of oxen, and the ten subsidiary lavers, with their panels embossed with figures of cherubim—smashed under the hammer and taken down to Babylon as mere material to be used in other projects. It is in one sense a melancholy tale, but we noticed at the beginning of our studies that there is a little passage in the New Testament that talks to us in the same terms and terminology as it does about the house of the Lord that Solomon built.

The passage comes at the end of chapter 3 of Paul's first letter to Timothy. It says in this fashion, 'Great is the mystery of godliness'. So Paul writes, hoping to come to Timothy, 'But if I tarry long, that you may know how people ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth' (3:15). He uses in that last phrase the same symbol as we have found in the house of the Lord that Solomon built. For standing in front of the building were two pillars with their grounding and their capitals. And Paul proceeds, as we must consider later on this evening, 'Great,' says he, 'is the mystery of godliness; he who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory' (v. 16).

If Solomon's house was in fact glorious, how much more is the house that God is nowadays building, where the stones are not laid of elaborate concrete, or even from Irish marble, but the stones are living stones. I confess to a boy-like interest; I'm hoping when I get to heaven I shall get the chance to look around the great city. There's no temple in it because there will be the immediate presence of God himself in the city. But if Peter be true, and the city is built up of living stones, I hope to be able to walk down the golden street and nudge one or two stones in the ribs, and say, 'Tell me, how did you ever consider coming here?' Well, I've got all eternity to hear the answers, anyway—'Who polished you? Who prepared you?'

### ***The lavers and the washings***

With that we must come down to detail this evening, so let us read a few verses, first of all from 1 Kings 7.

And he made the molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and the height thereof was five cubits: and a line of thirty cubits compassed it round about. And under the brim of it round about there were knops which did compass it, for ten cubits, compassing the sea round about: the knops were in two rows, cast when it was cast. It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea was set upon them above, and all their hinder parts were inward. And it was a handbreadth thick; and the brim thereof was wrought like the brim of a cup, like the flower of a lily: it held two thousand baths. And he made the ten bases of brass; four cubits was the length of one base, and four cubits the breadth thereof, and three cubits the height of it. (vv. 23–27)

These 'bases' were the ten subsidiary lavers for use around the whole courts of the house of the Lord. Thus for the directions for making the big molten sea that stood there, with the oxen underneath, their hinder parts inward, and the whole thing being carried by oxen, twelve of them in all. Recall one more example; the imagery in the temple itself, all around the walls, was of cherubim—living creatures, with flowers and palmettes. This was the house of the *living* God, not just a collection of doctrines, though doctrine is important. It was the house of the living God. The throne of God the creator—as John was given to see it in his vision in the isle of Patmos and recorded in Revelation 4—was resting on cherubim. These, as Ezekiel tells us, were the living creatures, their faces representing four different types of life.

This is the living God; would God we knew more of it, so that a stranger coming into the church would sense that God is here of a truth.

Anyway, this was how it was to be built, and you notice the laver on the oxen. Let's look at 2 Kings 16:17: 'And King Ahaz [who at one stage was king of Judah] cut off the borders of the bases [that is, the ten subsidiary lavers], and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brasen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stone.' Ahaz took it down off the oxen and put it on a lump of concrete or something. You know, the copper was polished like glass and was very valuable; it could be used for all sorts of things that his majesty was interested in. Why would you waste all that stuff under a laver? He didn't design the laver, of course—God happened to do that. Ahaz took the liberty of changing the design. Let's read now finally, 2 Kings 25,

And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and encamped against it; and they built forts against it round about. So the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. (vv. 1–2)

Eventually the Babylonians took Jerusalem. Let's read from verse 13:

And the pillars of copper that were in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the copper sea that were in the house of the LORD, did the Chaldeans brake in pieces and carried the copper of them to Babylon. And the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons, and all the vessels of copper wherewith they ministered, took they away. And the firepans, and the basins; that which was of gold, in gold; and that which was of silver, in silver, the captain of the guard took away. The two pillars, the one sea, and the bases, which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD; the copper of all these vessels was without weight. (vv. 13–16)

And you see the writer, who is writing this thing, recording perhaps the emotion of someone standing and watching the Babylonian workmen smash these things to pieces. They had been so beautiful. 'The height of one pillar [it's now in fragments of course] was eighteen cubits, and a capital of copper was upon it: and the height of the capital was three cubits; with network and pomegranates upon the capital round about, all of copper: and like unto these had the second pillar with network' (v. 17). Gone now, smashed up—you feel the throb of the emotion coming through.

#### *What the lavers were for*

So tonight we must spend our first time in thinking about the significance of the laver, and then the ten subsidiary lavers. What was that saying? Now if for a moment we may be the antiquarians, and go back beyond this period to the tabernacle that Moses built, you would have found in that tabernacle, in the court, two vessels. There was an altar and then a laver; they both offered cleansing. At the altar there was cleansing by blood; at the laver there was cleansing by water.

It is an interesting thing that, in the New Testament, Christian salvation offers us likewise cleansing by blood and cleansing by water.

It is written in Hebrews 9, and elsewhere, to the effect that the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. Or, to quote Hebrews, 'How much more shall the blood of Christ . . . cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?' (9:14). What does blood cleanse? It cleanses the conscience. How? Well, not like some detergent. It cleanses the conscience because, when we human beings sin, we are so made that our conscience registers guilt. It doesn't matter if we forget it the next hour; it will be on our minds for the rest of life. How does the blood of Christ then cleanse that conscience? Because the blood of Christ is the symbol resulting from the fact that he died for us; 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures' (1 Cor 15:3). 'He bore our sins in his body on the tree' (1 Pet 2:24). He paid the penalty of sin. And when I perceive it, that, as the love gift of God to us, God has given his Son to the extent of dying for us, I know that the penalty of my sins has been paid fully. Shedding his blood ensures that God's forgiveness shall not appear to be some shallow thing that says, 'Don't bother about it; it doesn't really matter what you have done.' It matters what we humans do.

The view that takes the idea that it doesn't really matter what people do is, of course, a disgrace to human beings. It lowers them. Well, if I step on an ant or two in my back garden I don't get broken hearted. (Perhaps I should, I don't know.) But what do they matter? There are thousands of ants like that. Do we matter? Does what we have done matter? 'Yes,' says God, 'it matters and, what is more, it matters eternally.' We're made for eternity. God cannot forgive in the sense of just saying, 'Well, forget it. It doesn't really matter in the end.' That would be to diminish us, would it not? He says what we have done matters. But when it is a question of breaking his law and sinning against our neighbour, then God has an answer, 'That he might be just, [as well as] the justifier of him that believes in Jesus' (Rom 3:26), for Jesus, God's Son, paid the price, the ransom price, for our forgiveness, and offers it to us free and for nothing.

Cleansing by blood therefore, it deals with our conscience. It removes guilt.

### *Cleansing by water*

But, as in the later temple in Jerusalem, Moses' tabernacle had a laver with water. That also was for cleansing. And it is a fact (not always remembered as it should be) that the New Testament offers us cleansing by water. Not by being baptised, of course not. It is written that Christian men ought to love their wives, 'as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for her, that he might cleanse her by the washing of . . .'. Oh, please, not blood. People are never washed in blood in the New Testament—never. Clothes can be washed in blood, not people.

If you find a tomb in Britain of an ancient Britain, or some other, and it says on the tombstone 'washed in blood,' you'll be certain that that isn't a Christian. It's a follower of Mithras, where soldiers (they liked Mithras, for some reason) would dig a pit and get down into it, and have a bull knifed and sacrificed, and so the blood ran down and washed them, covered them all over. That's washed in blood.

The blood of Christ, as I say, cleanses our conscience and guilt, when we see he has paid the price. The water, what does that do? Well, to continue my parable, 'Men ought to love their wives as Christ loved the church. He gave himself for her, that he might sanctify her by

the washing of water through the word, that he might present the church to himself, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing' (Eph 5:25–27).

You say, 'What on earth are spots and wrinkles and other such things?'

Well, sir, if you don't know, you should. A whole industry is based on covering up those things, from the humble powder puff, to other such serious matters. Yes, but the spots and blemishes that Paul is talking about in Ephesians are not pimples on the face. They're pimples alright, and sometimes boils and carbuncles and other such things in the personality—selfishness, envy, quick temperedness. And it's not only the ladies that have them, is it?

Does it matter? Has God any provision for it? Yes of course he has, but don't be misled by an ancient hymn—it's a lovely hymn and I sing it with all my heart, to the extent my lungs will empower me—'Would you be free from your passion and pride? There's power in the blood.'<sup>18</sup> Pity the poet put it that way; it should be, 'There's power in the water,' not 'in the blood.' The blood deals with guilt. The pimples and carbuncles that spoil my character are dealt with by washing with water, so to speak.

There is a once and for all such washing with water, and then there is a constant rinsing in water, which our Lord demonstrated the night before his crucifixion to his apostles, as he filled a basin with water, girded himself with a towel and began to rinse their feet. Peter protested and said, 'Oh Lord, not only my feet, but my hands and my head and all over.' 'No, no, no,' our Lord said, 'He who has been bathed all over only needs thereafter to have his feet rinsed' (John 13:9–10).

There are two great cleansings by water, to use now the parable language. One is 'the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit' (Titus 3:5). 'Except a man be born of . . .'—what did our Lord say? Yes, of water, not of blood; 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God' (John 3:5). This is the work of the gracious Holy Spirit within, convicting us of uncleanness, coming in to expel it, and give us, as he trains us, increasing control of our personalities, to do away with the spots and the blemishes. That is regeneration therefore, and thereafter a constant rinsing by the use of holy Scripture. Thus our minds and our characters are gradually purified.

### ***What the pillars and the laver represent***

That was the Old Testament tabernacle that Moses built. Here in the directions for the furniture in the court there is no mention of the altar anywhere. They did have an altar; it is referred to in subsequent chapters of the book of Kings. The two things that are noticed are the two big pillars at the beginning, with their capitals, and then the enormous great laver for washing. And what do they represent?

#### *The pillars*

Well, for time's sake, I shall now be very arbitrary. I shall say the pillars, with their delightful capitals, represent objective truth. Where do I come up with that? Well, they stood outside the door. Whose house was it anyway? And all this symbolism, was it true—did it represent

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis Ellis Jones (1865–1936), 'Would you be free from your burden of sin?'

anything real? And the God who presented himself, according to the text, in the holiest of all—was he real, or is this a mere legend? The pillars stand there, Jachin and Boaz they are named, meaning ‘he will strengthen’ and ‘in it is strength,’ in front of the house with their delightful capitals. I’m going to suggest that they stand for the objective reality of God’s revelation of himself in this building.

I’m encouraged in that idea by the New Testament’s use of the same symbol, as Paul uses it. He got the gospel direct from the Lord, not from the other apostles in Jerusalem. But eventually he went up to Jerusalem and they compared notes. They found that they agreed on all the basic principles of the gospel, though there had been no consultation between them. He speaks of James and John, leading apostles of course, as those who were ‘reputed to be pillars’ (Gal 2:9). They were men who stood for the truth, men who not only stood for the truth but were used of God as inspired apostles to convey the truth of God to us.

It’s a question that faces everybody that opens the New Testament. Why should I listen to Peter? Why on earth should I listen to John, let alone Matthew? Why? Because, as Paul would put it, ‘I am an apostle of Jesus Christ, chosen as an instrument for the revelation of God’s word and his gospel of God’s truth.’ He stood for the objective truth.

#### *The laver*

The laver, I’m going to say, in that context represents subjective truth. You say, ‘What on earth do you mean by those terms, objective truth and subjective truth?’

Well, to take a lesson from nature, the fact is there is a sun up in the sky. I’m now about to assert it: ‘There is a sun up in the sky.’ Even though you can’t see it, there is such a sun up in the sky. That is true, whether I like it, or I don’t like it; whether I would change it, or I would leave it as it is. I haven’t decided to change it yet, but it isn’t to be changed—not until God consents thereto. It is the objective fact.

There’s a subjective truth that comes from that fact. So I’m advising you now, if you go out on a scorching summer day with the sun shining you’d better have some ointment to put on your noble forehead because, if you don’t, you’ll be sunburnt and it could lead to cancer. That’s subjective application of a truth. It requires both kinds of truth, first the objective and then the subjective.

#### *Pillars of objective truth*

Last week we followed the history, having studied a little of the fifth division of the instructions for the building of the house. We studied one of the kings by the name of Hezekiah. Hezekiah becomes famous, in spite of the various wobbles that he made from time to time like we all do, for his stand against the Rabshakeh from Sennacherib, the Assyrian emperor. The Assyrian emperor, to extend his empire, came and circled Jerusalem and went down south, southwest to Lachish and captured the place. The record of it is in the British Museum to this very present, in bas-relief showing the horrible tortures that the Assyrians engaged in.

From Lachish, Sennacherib sent up a Rabshakeh to call on Hezekiah to surrender. He was a provincial governor, and he said, ‘Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, come out. I’ll give you, every one of you horses, chariots galore, Rolls Royces and other things, Daimlers and Bentleys. Come out! Don’t let Hezekiah deceive you, saying, “Jehovah will look

after us.” That’s a lot of old wives’ tales. There’s no Jehovah, and if there is, I’ve dealt with gods galore in these many cities I’ve come to and not one of them was able to save the city. Your God is no different. Come out.’ And Hezekiah, strengthened by Isaiah the prophet, *stood* firm. And some disaster came and afflicted the forces around Jerusalem and they went home, what was left of them. They never did take Jerusalem, not the Assyrians (the Babylonians eventually did). They came right up to the neck, as Isaiah said they would, but they failed to take Jerusalem, because Hezekiah dared to *stand* for the reality of the one and only true God of heaven.

#### *Revival through the application of rediscovered truth*

That leaves the laver. It’s a very interesting thing. Hezekiah’s son Manasseh reigned for fifty five years or so, and was most of the time an absolute filthy rotter. Then he got converted, according to 2 Chronicles (33:13). None too soon.

There followed a king called Josiah, and when he came to the throne he ordered that the temple of the Lord be renewed and set the workman to repair what was broken down in it, and so forth and so on, and that it should be thoroughly cleansed. And that the workmen did. Well, all of a sudden one afternoon, (or was it a morning, I don’t know), they found a book. So the chaps who found it gave it to the priest. The priest eventually brought it to the king, and the king had to get an expert, Huldah the prophetess, to read the thing, because it was so ancient. It turned out to be what we call the book of Deuteronomy; they didn’t even know it was in the Bible anyway. (Do you have any religious friends that wouldn’t know whether Jeremiah is in the New Testament or the Old?)

So they read this book. The result for King Josiah was, he feared and quaked in his shoes. If this was the word of God, then they had offended God ten thousand times by ignoring his commands and very often doing the opposite. So they began to read the book and, as a result, re-established some of the ancient ceremonies. One is noticed in particular; they kept the Passover. Just you imagine! It was unheard of, in Judah at any rate, at that stage. ‘What, literally, keeping the Passover? I mean, like it says in the Bible?’ Well why not? So they did.

According to Chronicles, it was attended with much joy and singing. What a thing it is when, even in our modern world, churches rediscover the book of God and dare to carry out what it says should be carried out in Christian churches. There’s a day coming when we might be hard put to it to explain to Christ why, if we have done so, we have neglected to do what Christ’s apostles have told us.

#### ***The secret of godliness in the house of God***

Now we come to those final verses that we promised ourselves to consider at the beginning of this particular series of studies.

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly; but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Tim 3:14–15)

Let’s concentrate then on the six phrases in verse 16:

Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory.

These two verses, as you see, are introduced by the phrase, 'Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness.' Let's be clear in our mind at the term 'mystery' in the New Testament. It doesn't mean something mysterious; it is a secret that has now been declared, it is an open secret. The secret of godliness is as follows—and when we look at these things here, these are descriptions of our blessed Lord—the secret of godliness in the church is Christ!

You will notice that there are three pairs of couplets:

'manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the spirit'

'seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations'

'believed on in the world, taken up in glory'

Interesting, isn't it, there is no reference to the death of Christ. Why is that, isn't that the foundation of the gospel? Yes, of course it is, but it's not mentioned, is it? By implication we have the resurrection and ascension mentioned in this final phrase, 'taken up in glory,' but otherwise not. What are these things stating? Well, presumably they are what this says it is going to be—the secret of godliness.

### *The mystery of godliness*

What on earth is godliness, if ever you met it? How would you tell what it was? Godliness in Greek simply means *well respect*. And this is for God of course, well respect for God, so that in all life's major decisions and in behaviour in the church, we should always first start by what God thinks and what God says. Mercifully then, we have the example of Christ. How did Christ interpret God's attitude? In 1 Timothy 2, for instance, we read that 'God would have all men everywhere to repent and come to the knowledge of the truth' (v. 4). *All*—that is God's attitude, so what will Christ do about that then? Well, as the supreme example of godliness, if God would have all men to be saved, Christ will give himself a ransom for *all*. Of course, he is perfectly representing God and we are to take up the rear and 'pray for *all men*' (2:1). Yes, that is godliness. This is an example of Christ's godliness.

We can run through it very briefly, but I submit it to your further cogitation and reflection—where you perceive I'm wrong and missing, pray tell me eventually. The first principle of godliness is that it has to be manifest in actual living.

'*Manifested in the flesh*'. Oh praise God for it! It's not just theory, not even doctrine, however marvellous doctrine is. He came and showed us what God was like, by his incarnation—manifested in the flesh.

'*Vindicated in spirit*', not vindicated in flesh. In fact, by the time he'd lived to thirty-three and a half years, the verdict of the religious authorities was that his life was so corrupt, he'd better be crucified. Yes, so much for the world's opinion. 'Manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the spirit', by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and his ascension, and seated at the right hand of God.

'*Seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations*'. A godly life. What of the publicity? Now I don't know what you think this means. This is '*seen by angels*', not that he saw angels, though he did from time to time. He was *seen by angels*. We're told by the introduction to the book of

Job, are we not, that it came to pass one day when the angels of God came to present themselves, and Satan came among them, and God said to Satan, 'Have you, by any chance, considered my servant Job recently?'

'Ah!' said Satan, 'Well, it so happens I have, yes. You think, God, don't you, you've got the idea that Job is a very good pious man. Let me tell you what the facts are. You have feather bedded him. He doesn't mind singing a hymn or two in church on a Sunday for you. You've feather bedded him. Let him suffer disaster, bereavement, persecution or something; you'll see how it will change his tune.'

Seen of angels? I hope God doesn't call Satan's attention to me. I think God knows better than that perhaps. Dear me. To be called to the attention of the angelic hosts! Ah yes, but you see this life manifested in the flesh and justified in spirit, how God opened heaven more than once, he couldn't resist it, and said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased' (Matt 3:17). God has seen to it the maximum publicity. 'Seen by angels, preached . . .' not simply among the Jews, 'preached among the nations', throughout the whole world. As a result of which, some have actually believed on him. They include of course the notorious Saul of Tarsus, who thought he ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth and set about doing it with strong determination. He got converted. 'I now believe in him,' says Paul, 'I've committed my everything to him.'

*'Believed on in the world'*. And if you, sir, and you, madam, live a godly life as Christ did, then some people will come to *believe* in you.

*'Taken up into glory'*. Well, if the world doesn't want you, the angels and God himself will receive you. When Christ rose from the dead, they shouted their hallelujahs and received him up into glory. Such will be the end of truly godly lives, lived in the church and in the world for Christ's sake—received up in the end in glory.

Let's just commit our study to God in prayer.

Our Father, we feel like an ancient scribe who said, 'I have engaged in things too wonderful for me.' But we thank thee for thy word. We thank thee for revealing thyself to us, and for the humility of Christ, who comes alongside us each one, to lead us further and to teach us thy word. For this we thank thee. We bless thee for him. We thank thee he sits enthroned at thy right hand. We thank thee for the almost incredible promise that he's coming, and one day we shall be with him in glory.

So we thank thee for thy word, help us to obey it and carry it out in our lives and in our churches and in the world. Now we thank thee for the refreshments. Bless our fellowship together we pray, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## CHARTS

## CHART 1

**Major Themes in 1 and 2 Kings**

1. The Lord's provision for the maintenance, recovery and revival of his people: The House of God at Jerusalem (1 Kings 8)
2. The One House versus the danger of idolatrous organization (1 Kings 12–14)
3. The Living God versus the gods of nature (1 Kings 17–19)
4. Ahab and the strong delusion (1 Kings 20–22)
5. The Ascension of Elijah and the true prophetic succession (2 Kings 1–2)
6. An Age of Grace and the gospel of life out of death (2 Kings 4–7)
7. The House of David versus the Usurper Queen (2 Kings 9–11)
8. Isaiah and Hezekiah: pillars of objective truth (2 Kings 18–20)
9. Josiah and revival through the subjective application of re-discovered truth (2 Kings 22–23)
10. The destruction of the house of God and its furniture in the final disaster. Yet Evil-merodach's kindness to Jehoiachin presages hope for the future (2 Kings 24–25)

## CHART 2

**A Record of Disobedience, Apostasy and Judgment**

The Plans for the House of the Lord	The History
1st Set: <b>Structural: Only ONE House, though many side-rooms (6:1–10)</b>	<b>1. Jeroboam of Israel</b> sets up other houses 1 Kings 12:25–33
2nd Set: <b>The Special Plea for obedience (6:11–13)</b>	<b>2. Baasha of Israel</b> destroys the dynasty of Jeroboam, but persists in Jeroboam’s sin 1 Kings 15:25–16:7
3rd Set: <b>Chief installation:            THE ARK OF THE COVENANT:            ‘You shall have no other gods but me.’ (6:14–28)</b>	<b>3. Ahab of Israel</b> installs Baal as Israel’s chief god 1 Kings 16:29–34
4th Set: <b>The King’s House (7:1–12)</b>	4. <b>(a) Jehu of Israel</b> destroys the royal house of Ahab 2 Kings 9–10 <b>(b) Athaliah</b> destroys all the royal house of Judah, except one little boy 2 Kings 11
5th Set: <b>(a) The Sea and the lavers.            (b) The Pillars.            (7:13–51)</b>	5. <b>(a) Ahaz of Judah</b> cut off the side panels of the subsidiary lavers; took down the Sea off the oxen, and put it on the pavement 2 Kings 16:17 <b>(b) Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon</b> smashes the Sea and the pillars and takes the copper to Babylon 2 Kings 25:13

## CHART 3

### Major Revivals

#### **1st Revival: Led by Elijah on Mount Carmel** **1 Kings 18**

*Issue at stake:*

Who is the True God: Baal or Jehovah?

#### **2nd Revival: Led by Jehoiada, the high priest** **2 Kings 11**

*Issue at stake:*

Who is the true King: Athaliah or Joash?

#### **3rd Revival: Led by King Hezekiah at the time of the siege of Jerusalem by the forces of the King of Assyria** **2 Kings 18**

*Issue at stake:*

Is the Lord God just one more god among the many gods of the Gentile nations?

Or is he the unique, transcendent, Lord God?

#### **4th Revival: Led by King Josiah upon finding the Book of the Law in the House of the Lord** **2 Kings 22**

*Issue at stake:*

Will the nation repent and return to obeying the word of God and all its commandments?

### About the Author

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