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The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE TABERNACLE OF GOD

Part 2

“But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us... And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:11-12, 22-24)

Of all the typology in the Old Testament, the Tabernacle and its fittings are undoubtedly the most comprehensive and instructive. There is a great variety of truth and a fullness of spiritual teaching to be derived from it. The Tabernacle conveys three main lessons:

1. It is a visible illustration of the heavenly dwelling place of God.
2. It is a type of Christ, who is the ‘meeting place’ – in whom dwells all the fullness of God.
3. It is a symbol of Christ in the midst of His Church; the communion of the Head with all His members.

Before proceeding further, consider a few scripture references which substantiate these three points: *“It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these...”* (Hebrews 9:23). The Tabernacle was a **pattern of heaven**. However, being itself but an earthly thing, it was necessary that it should be purified

with ‘these’ – that is, the sprinkling of sacrificial blood described in the foregoing verses. By contrast, the way to heaven is sanctified with the blood of a far superior sacrifice, namely that wrought by Christ, who has now entered the holy place. Not a sanctuary ‘made with hands’ – that was only a figure of the true – but into heaven itself. These words in the Hebrew epistle give full proof that the Tabernacle served as a type and illustration of the place wherein God abides.

Secondly: “*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). The word here translated ‘dwelt’ has the meaning of ‘encamped’, or ‘tabernacled’ among us. The Eternal Son of God ‘pitched His tent’ upon earth by becoming man. So just as the Tabernacle was Jehovah’s dwelling place in the midst of Israel, so too: “*God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself*” (2 Corinthians 5:19); “*In Him [Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*” (Colossians 2:9).

The Tabernacle was not something which sprang from the minds of the children of Israel, or the invention of Moses – no – it was imparted directly from God, and He designed every detail. Similarly at the incarnation, no man was involved. The humanity of Christ, in which His deity was enshrined, was not begotten of man. The Holy Ghost, and overshadowing power of The Highest accomplished that work (cf Luke 1:35), such that Christ could say: “*a body Thou [God] hast prepared Me*” (Hebrews 10:5).

Thirdly, the Tabernacle was the centre of communion; the point where man was enabled to meet with God; which act was facilitated by means of manifold offerings and sacrifices. In like manner, Christ is the only point of contact with God, and it is by virtue of His own one great sacrifice for sin that this is possible. Mankind has access unto the Father through Christ alone. Whether in time or in eternity the Lord Jesus is

at the centre of all His people's communion and worship, hence the praise described in John's vision of glory: "*Behold, the **tabernacle** of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God*" (Revelation 21:3).

Having established these three primary interpretations of the Old Testament Tabernacle, the course which future articles will take should be apparent. **Christ** is the glorious and central theme. As a whole, and also in its many intrinsic parts, this building foreshadows the person and work of the Mediator. When the light of Scripture is brought to bear on this fundamental assertion, the credibility and veracity of it is more evidently seen.

By way of further example, consider again the statement of John 1, 'the Word was made flesh and 'tabernacled' among us'.

The Tabernacle was a temporary structure; simply a tent which could be moved from place to place. Likewise, the Lord's dwelling amongst men was not for long – just over thirty years – and His was a life of almost continual movement.

The Tabernacle was specifically for use during the Hebrews' wanderings in the wilderness, with all its harsh and inhospitable conditions. So too the Saviour in His human form endured such adversity: a manger for a cradle; the despised man of Nazareth with nowhere to lay His head (cf Matthew 8:20); with no money whereby to pay tribute (cf Matthew 17:27); with no more earthly goods than the clothes which He wore (cf John 19:23-24); with no burying-place in death than what a stranger provided (cf Matthew 27:60).

The Tabernacle was humble and unremarkable in its outward appearance. Externally it displayed nothing of great richness or value, and would have seemed nothing more than an assembly of boards and

skins to a passer-by. Similarly, the divine majesty of Christ was hidden behind a veil of human flesh. Of the unbelieving masses who observed Him in life it is said 'He had no form or comeliness'; and when they beheld Him with unenlightened eyes, there was 'no beauty that they should desire Him' (cf Isaiah 53:2).

The Tabernacle served as 'the tent of Meeting'. Within its confines was the Mercy Seat, placed upon the Ark of the Covenant, in which was held the Law and the Testimony, as God directed: "*thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat...*" (Exodus 25:21-22). This was the specific and single point of contact with the Almighty. In this, Christ is manifestly set forth: "*I am the way... no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me*" (John 14:6); "*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Timothy 2:5). Christ alone can span the gulf between fallen humanity and thrice-holy Deity, because He Himself is both God and man.

The Tabernacle was in the very centre of Israel's camp, and all were to pitch around it (cf Numbers 1:50). Herein is a perfect analogy. Christ is the central figure among His people. When they pray, it is 'for His sake'; when they assemble for worship it is in His name; and (says He) 'I will be in their midst' (cf Matthew 18:20).

The Tabernacle was the place where the Law was preserved. Moses records: "*At that time the Lord said unto me, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto Me into the mount, and make thee an ark of wood. And I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark. And I made an ark of shittim wood, and hewed two tables of stone like unto the first, and went up into the mount, having the two tables in mine hand. And He wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the Ten Commandments, which*

the Lord spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly: and the Lord gave them unto me. And I turned myself and came down from the mount, and put the tables in the ark which I had made; and there they be, as the Lord commanded me” (Deuteronomy 10:1-5).

The two tables of stone originally given were broken in pieces, Moses having cast them out of his hands in anger, upon discovery of the people’s idolatry and sin (cf Exodus 32:19). God re-wrote them as recorded here in Deuteronomy, and on this occasion, they were deposited in the ark, and thus into the Tabernacle. What vivid imagery to the enlightened mind! The Law of God as given at the first was entrusted to mortal man – Adam. He could not keep it, and cast it from him, ‘breaking’ it. The first man failed. Then came the ‘second man’, the Last Adam, the Lord from Heaven. Listen as He speaks: *“Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is **within My heart**”* (Psalm 40:7-8). That Law as deposited in the man Christ Jesus was honoured, obeyed, fulfilled and preserved in its every detail.

The Tabernacle was the centre of sacrifice. It was an object in the wilderness from which there never ceased to be the flowing of sacrificial blood. What symbolism is here! That body of flesh in which the Son of God ‘tabernacled’ was nailed to a cross of shame at Calvary. It was the altar upon which the Lamb of God was slain. There was shed the blood of a victim whose sacrifice would ‘perfect for ever those that are sanctified’ (cf Hebrews 10:14). There was opened up a fountain for sin and all uncleanness whose efficacy continues to the present.

“Grace is flowing like a river,
Millions there have been supplied;
Still it flows, the same for ever,
From the Saviour’s bleeding side.” Caskie

“Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power;
‘Til all the ransomed Church of God,
Be saved to sin no more.”

Cowper

The Tabernacle was the place where the priestly family fed, and the means of their sustenance (cf Leviticus 6, 7). Their food was provided there. In like manner, Christ is spiritual food unto His people, the Bread of Life unto their souls; those that feed upon Him live forever (cf John 6:51, 58).

The Tabernacle was the focal point of worship. When the pious Israelite desired to worship Jehovah, he turned to the Tabernacle, there being no other course to take. So it is with Christ, the anti-type. “*By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name*” (Hebrews 13:15). By Him; In His name; it is through Christ and Him alone that worship can be brought to the Father. It is through Him only that access may be had to the Throne of Grace.

The Tabernacle had only one entrance, which, taken in connection with the foregoing point, is a further reminder of Christ as the only way unto God, and into the kingdom. He Himself said: “*I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out...*” (John 10:9).

These numerous parallels should be sufficient to confirm in the mind of every reader the authenticity of the Tabernacle as being genuine biblical typology. The Saviour is pre-eminently foreshadowed by that tent which was reared up in the camp of Israel. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit prompted John to pen those words which so clearly link the Tabernacle of old to Christ, who ‘tabernacled’ amongst men.

There are two full accounts given of the construction of the Tabernacle in the book of Exodus. First, the very detailed instructions imparted by God to Moses in chapters 32 – 34. There follows the tragic parenthesis of the people’s idolatry in making and worshipping a golden calf. Then in chapter 35 to the end of the book is given the record of the construction of the Tabernacle, which is in full and complete accord with the previous directions. These two sections are vitally connected: *“According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it”* (Exodus 25:9).

Note the emphasis in these words. Moses not only received implicit instructions as to the materials, dimensions, furnishings, etc, but the Almighty set before him a complete pattern or visible plan, so he knew exactly what was to be done, and how the finished article must appear. This fact is stressed by its numerous occurrences in Holy Writ: *“And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount”* (Exodus 25:40); *“And thou shalt rear up the tabernacle according to the fashion thereof which was shewed thee in the mount”* (Exodus 26:30); *“Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen”* (Acts 7:44); *“Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount”* (Hebrews 8:5).

Nothing was left to man’s wisdom or choice. Everything was to be in exact accordance with the Divine Mandate, and the will of God. This simple truth – the agreement between the explanation and enactment – teach how that everything concerning Christ and His people has also been outworked according to the eternal purpose of Him who ‘worketh all things after the counsel of His own will’ (cf Ephesians 1:11). The Church was always seen as being complete in Christ, and

its every member chosen in Him, before the worlds were framed or time existed (cf Ephesians 1:4). The Saviour, the Lamb of God, was foreseen as slain, from before the foundation of the world (cf Revelation 13:8).

The whole scheme of Redemption is being fulfilled, to this present moment, in absolute accordance with a pattern laid down in past-eternity. The salvation of God's people rests in a sovereign plan which can never go awry, and which will never fail. The wisdom of God appointed it; the power of God accomplished it; it was, and is, and shall be gloriously completed.

Sad to say, the majority of professing Christians are probably inclined to pass over the latter half of Exodus, regarding it as repetitive or merely incidental, and have little appreciation of the wonders and deep spiritual instruction contained therein. Indeed, the widespread ignorance of true biblical typology, as afforded by the Tabernacle and many other Old Testament figures, is evidence of the shallowness of modern ministry, and a troubling sign of the times.

It was the design of Jehovah to express the glorious redemption of His people in a typical, or symbolic, manner in the first instance. As in natural things, children are able to grasp the meaning of pictures before they learn to spell or read, so in spiritual matters God has provided in Old Testament imagery truth which is later found in the New Testament in the form of doctrinal exposition. The Tabernacle is a prime example. Thus the vivid pictures of material and physical things in the Old Covenant era greatly aid our understanding of the mysteries of heaven and the deep things of God. May it prove to be so in this series of articles.

W. H. Molland
(*transcribed by R. J. Steward*)

THE PATTERN OF THE TABERNACLE

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying... let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.” (Exodus 25:1, 8-9)

In these verses, God tells Moses His intention in general that the children of Israel should build Him a sanctuary, for He designed to dwell among them. God had chosen the people of Israel to be a peculiar people to Himself (above all people), among whom divine revelation, and a religion according to it, should be lodged and established: He Himself would be their King... and therefore He orders a royal palace to be set up among them for Himself, here called a sanctuary or holy place, or habitation, of which it is said: *“A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary”* (Jeremiah 17:12). And, because in the wilderness they dwelt in tents, even this royal palace was ordered to be a tabernacle too, that it might move with them, and might be an instance of the condescension of [God’s] divine favour.

This sanctuary is to be considered as typical: the holy places made with hands were the figures of the true (cf Hebrews 9:24). The gospel church is the true tabernacle, which the Lord hath pitched, and not man (cf Hebrews 8:2). The body of Christ, in and by which He made atonement, was the greater and more perfect tabernacle (cf Hebrews 9:11). The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, as in a tabernacle (cf John 1:4).

When Moses was to erect this palace, it was requisite that he should first be instructed where he must have the materials, and where he must have the model; for he could neither contrive it by his own

ingenuity nor build it at his own charge; he is therefore directed here concerning both... God Himself would furnish him with the model: “*According to all that I show thee*”. God showed him an exact plan of it, in miniature, which he must conform to in all points. Note, whatsoever is done in God’s service must be done by His direction, and not otherwise. Yet God did not only show him the model, but gave him also particular directions how to frame the tabernacle according to that model, in all the parts of it, which he goes over distinctly in this and the following chapters.

When Moses, in the beginning of Genesis, was to describe the creation of the world, though it is such a stately and curious fabric and made up of such a variety and vast number of particulars, yet he gave a very short and general account of it, and nothing compared with what the wisdom of this world would have desired and expected from one that wrote by divine revelation. But, when he comes to describe the tabernacle, he does it with the greatest niceness and accuracy imaginable. He that gave us no account of the lines and circles of the globe, the diameter of the earth, or the height and magnitude of the stars, has told us particularly the measure of every board and curtain of the tabernacle. For God’s church and instituted religion are more precious to Him and more considerable than all the rest of the world. And the Scriptures were written, not to describe to us the works of nature, but to acquaint us with the methods of grace.

Matthew Henry (1662 – 1714)

“With the Tabernacle and its services, we are not left in doubt as to the true meaning. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are distinctly told that it was ‘a shadow of the heavenly things’. It was the outward sign of God’s presence in the midst of the camp of Israel – God’s tent in the midst of their tents – the meeting place between God and man. As

such it was a true picture of the incarnation. As a whole it was a type of Christ, and every part of it shows forth something of His glory: “*in His temple doth every one speak of His glory*” (Psalm 29:9). Every detail of its design was given to Moses by God in the mount; and over fifty times it is recorded, “*As the Lord commanded Moses, so did he*”.

What have we each seen in the Tabernacle? How did it appear, viewed from without? A long, black, unattractive tent of badgers’ skins. But when we come inside, we find ourselves surrounded by shining gold: looking up to the curtained roof, we see the wings of the cherubim woven in blue and purple and scarlet and fine twined linen. All the beauty within is revealed by the light of the candlestick. So it is with Christ Himself. The natural man, beholding Him, sees no beauty that he should desire Him. But to those who know the Lord Jesus Christ, His beauty satisfies their souls.”

A. M. Hodgkin, “*Christ in All the Scriptures*”

“The Holy Spirit makes allusion to... the tabernacle. But what rule has been given us to guide in and fix with certainty the interpretation of the mystical signification of these things? Certainly God has not left His people to the worthless devisings of their own imaginations. No, in [the Hebrew] epistle, He has graciously informed us that the tabernacle, and all contained in it, were typical of Christ... The tabernacle, its holy vessels and services, supplied a representation of the person, work, offices and glories of Christ as the Head of His people. That it did so is clear from Hebrews 8:2. The “*true tabernacle*” there mentioned (our Lord’s humanity) is opposed... to the tabernacle of Moses, which was but figurative and transitory. In the Lord Jesus, we have the substance of what Israel had only the shadow.”

A. W. Pink (1886 – 1952)

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

“And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first”... (Genesis 13:3-4)

In the previous edition, a remarkable incident in the life of Jacob was considered, which befell him at Bethel, where the Lord appeared in a dramatic and unexpected way, confirming the covenant upon the fleeing patriarch. Contained in those exceeding great and precious promises was the assurance that, *“the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed”* (Genesis 28:13). The earthly promised land of Canaan would ultimately be occupied by Jacob’s descendants; this was the place where blessing was to be especially known.

In light of such profound words, one might have expected Jacob to display a particular affection and regard for that country, and a great desire to abide there. Yet the very opposite seems to be the case, as he continues his journey eastward, away from the regions of which the Lord had spoken, and back toward Padan Aram, and the lands from which his grandfather Abraham had originally come out. His purpose was ostensibly to find a suitable bride from among his own people. However, a task which was accomplished in matter of hours by his father’s servant a generation previously (cf Genesis 24:54-60), and which his mother anticipated would occupy him for only *“a few days”* (Genesis 27:44), turned into an absence of over twenty years in Jacob’s case (cf Genesis 31:41).

Nor did the heir of the covenant distinguish himself by his behaviour during those two decades. It became one of the lowest points in his chequered history; a period of deceiving and being deceived by his uncle Laban; of contracting an unlawful and polygamous relationship

with four wives; of raising a family whose subsequent attitudes and conduct gave dire evidence to the godless environment in which they had been brought up. It was an older, sadder Jacob who ultimately returned to Bethel. The long intervening years had been a sorry catalogue of financial misdealing, domestic strife, flight, idolatry, immorality, violence and confrontation. Would that he had never left the land where God had placed him at the first! Or having left, to have returned more quickly.

It will be noticed that the biography of Jacob very closely resembles that of Abraham and Isaac before him. There is a striking similarity between the lives of all three; for having received the gracious promises and blessing of God in the land of Canaan, all were inclined at particular times to depart out of its confines, to their hurt and loss; but then to return, in the providence of God. *“The Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south. And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land”* (Genesis 12:7-10).

In a scenario so alike to this that the Word of God takes care to distinguish it, we read: *“And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar. And the Lord appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father... And Isaac dwelt in Gerar”* (Genesis 26:1-3, 6). Isaac was instructed to abide in Canaan, the realm

to which the promises of God pertained, and not to flee abroad as had his father. And yet in an unacceptable compromise, he went instead to the Philistines in hope of material sustenance.

In all three instances, the results of departure were disastrous, and might have been so much worse, but for the gracious intervention of God. The reader might well be inclined to ask, ‘why have such frank and unflattering accounts of these patriarchs been recorded in Scripture?’ In answer, “*whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*” (Romans 15:4). These Old Testament case-studies are provided that subsequent generations may learn by example, both positive and negative. And since a threefold cord is not quickly broken (cf Ecclesiastes 4:12), the triple repetition of the same pattern of behaviour should command our still closer attention.

These particular episodes in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (men subject to like passions as ourselves) are illustrative of departure, deterioration or backsliding. They had been in situations of blessing – closeness to God, conformity to His revealed will – but forsook that condition on the basis of carnal reasoning and human logic. These are circumstances painfully familiar to every believer who has been upon the Christian pathway for any length of time. Let us consider then the causes which prompted these characters to forsake the good and right way, and the factors which detained them in a state of distance from God and His truth, that we may learn thereby.

Surprisingly, in the case of Abraham, renowned for his great faith, the problem appears to have been one of a **lack of faith**. Faced with drought and famine in the land, he concluded that the purposes of God had gone amiss, and human ingenuity was needed to devise a solution. It seems ironic that one who, “*By faith... when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he*

went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8), and made an epic pilgrimage to a destination unknown, should, upon safe arrival there, doubt that his material needs could continue to be supplied. Having exercised faith in that which was greatest or hardest, surely faith in a lesser matter ought to be a simple affair? It is a sensible argument; alas that it does not always follow! Here is a salutary lesson for all God's people. They have trusted Him in respect of the mighty work of salvation, the cleansing of their souls from sin, their deliverance from wrath to come, the inheritance of glory and life eternal – how much more then should they be able to trust Him for their temporal preservation, and help in times of affliction and need? It is both necessary and God-honouring to be 'faith-full in that which is least'. This includes faithful obedience to all His commandments, even when sense might dictate to the contrary. Often it appears that doing what God requires will be difficult to the point of impossibility. It is then that our faith in His Word is tested, and its strength determined.

The situation with Isaac was somewhat different. Perhaps recalling to mind his father's experience and heeding the direct commandment of God, he did not 'go down into Egypt'. But neither was he content to 'dwell in the land of which he had been told', namely Canaan; seeking instead a **compromise**. Abimelech's country was not so far removed from the land of promise as that of Pharaoh, and to human thinking was a better, nobler alternative. That the outcome was precisely the same proves the folly of such reasoning. There is no such thing as a compromise with the holy Law of God. There can be no half-way house where the Divine standard is concerned. Partial obedience is disobedience; partial faith is doubt.

However, Isaac was nothing if not persistent, and having narrowly escaped scandal and acrimony in the royal household, he continued trying to make a living amongst the Philistines. It was a policy doomed to failure. As often as he relocated, he could find no suitable

habitation. As often as he dug wells in search of water, they were taken from him, and proved to be ‘labour in vain’. Not until “*he removed from hence*” could good pasture be found; not until “*he went up from thence to Beersheba*” could true peace and prosperity be restored (cf Genesis 26:22-23). There is no comfort in compromise. The Christian can never flourish or grow spiritually whilst trying to forge a deal with the ungodly: “*know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?*” (James 4:4).

The factors which brought Jacob into Padan Aram, and kept him there over twenty years, were different again. **Outright sin** had driven him from the bosom of his family; a cheated brother, deceived father and forsaken mother. Restoration required that his former sin be addressed, confessed and redressed. Yet this he was unwilling to do, and instead distracted himself with the legitimate affairs of life, home and business. So effective did this policy of procrastination prove that it kept him away from the land of promise for nearly a quarter-century. For all that he thought to gain by this course of action, the spiritual costs to Jacob were immense, as he was caused to feel the chastening hand of God upon him. The Lord’s next meeting with him after Bethel was in the form of one who fought against him; who struck the hollow of his thigh that he might limp upon it thereafter; from whom the least blessing must be sought with strong crying and tears (cf Genesis 32:24-32). Let us learn from Jacob the perils of long-harboured sin, allowed to rankle in the heart. Not all the distractions of the world can ameliorate it; nor can blessedness return until it is dealt with.

Having seen how these three men came into their respective states of decline, note how they were preserved in the midst of them. It is a matter of great encouragement that despite their sinfulness, God was still present with them, and His hand was upon them for restraint and protection. In the case of both Abraham and Isaac, the Lord intervened to prevent their sin from escalating, and delivered them from the

consequences of their folly. Jacob was caused to testify to Laban in retrospect: “*Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen my affliction...*” (Genesis 31:42). This was but a fulfilment of a promise which God had made before at Bethel: “*behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of*” (Genesis 28:15).

The grace conveyed in these words becomes apparent when the foreknowledge of God is recalled to mind, who knew all that Jacob would do in future days, and the nature of the places ‘whither he would go’. That man was to wander far from Canaan, leave the land of promise, and drift from the God who made the promises – but God would not leave him. On account of the Covenant which He had spoken, the Almighty was certain to keep and preserve His oft-sinful servant.

The same promises apply to every true child of God. They have been chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world. Their salvation is assured. They cannot be lost, or plucked out of His omnipotent hands. God has spoken definitively concerning them; it is impossible for Him to lie, and His word cannot be broken. Thus they may be “*confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 1:6), or as the Psalmist expressed it: “*Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me: Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and Thy right hand shall save me. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of Thine own hands*” (Psalm 138:7-8).

It might further be asked what prompted these individuals to turn from their sinful state and return unto God? In no instance was it a product

of their own determination, power, or exercise of will. Every time God can be seen, sovereignly working through circumstances, the words of heathen monarchs, the acts of unbelieving men, to bring His servants back to Himself: “*I... will bring thee again into this land...*” (Genesis 28:15). Repentance is a virtue which God Himself imparts and enables. As the prophet put it, speaking in allegorical terms from the Divine perspective: “*When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt... I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love...*” (Hosea 11:1, 3-4). It is God who calls, who heals, who draws, who teaches the backslider to go back into the way of righteousness – and all on account of His love.

This is not to exclude or negate the place of human responsibility. It is seen particularly in the case of Jacob that, having received the divine call that restored him, he took practical measures too, concordant with true repentance: “*And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.*” (Genesis 35:1-4). Impressed by the need for repentance of a complete and unequivocal nature, Jacob sought to eradicate every last vestige of sin. Even the cherished gods which his own wife had secreted away years before must now be rooted out. The jewellery so characteristic of false religion was also to be removed, and all put beyond reach or recovery, buried in the ground. He and his household would be sanctified in the sight of God, spiritually, mentally and practically. Genuine repentance will admit no impediment.

More ready to hearken than we are to pray, more ready to forgive than we are to confess, the grace of God is further magnified by the way in which He blesses the penitent returnee. *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will **abundantly pardon**”* (Isaiah 55:7). The abounding nature of God’s grace is practically demonstrated in the case of the three patriarchs. Each had been admitted into the good of the Covenant early in their pilgrimage. Each in turn experienced times of relapse and distance from God. Those seasons were marked by a distinct absence of covenant blessings, and no direct revelation from heaven. But note the transformation of their circumstances so soon as they returned. In the space of a single chapter, Genesis 13, Abraham comes back from Egypt, and worships again at the altar at Bethel: *“Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan... And the Lord said unto Abram... Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever”* (Genesis 13:12, 14-15).

Of Jacob it is recorded: *“And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan Aram, and blessed him”* (Genesis 35:9); while in Isaac’s case, the swift entrance of God’s grace is even more pronounced: *“And he went up from thence to Beersheba. And the Lord appeared unto him **the same night**, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham’s sake. And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there”* (Genesis 26:23-25). So was each one brought back to the point where they had begun, and knew a restoration of the joys of their salvation, and indeed, a latter state more blessed than the former. Sin may be the sad and constant experience of the saints – but thus they may also know the great blessings of repentance, and the changeless, matchless grace of God.

R. J. Steward

EDITORIAL

There is a tendency amongst many Christian periodicals to seek to be topical, up-to-date and relevant at all costs. In an effort to achieve this, they take for their lead the news stories and current affairs with which the world's media are preoccupied at any given time. The result of this is to render the shelves of many a church's book room almost indistinguishable from a local newsagents, as the headlines, subject matter and images are all much the same. It is becoming increasingly difficult to discern supposedly 'religious' journals and ecclesiastical publications from the tabloid press.

Believers are exhorted in the Word of God to be **seasonable**, or timely, in their ministry and witness (cf Isaiah 50:4, 2 Timothy 4:2). It is also evident that a right assessment and understanding of the days in which we live is of value (cf 1 Chronicles 12:32). However, to extend the remit of these simple injunctions to justify a slavish pursuit of contemporary issues is to 'wrest the Scriptures' – an injurious and destructive policy (cf 2 Peter 3:16).

The Holy Spirit has recorded to the shame of the Areopagites that they "*spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing*" (Acts 17:21). They were devoted followers of the **news**. Yet this perpetual desire for immediacy and novelty was to the detriment of their souls, for they remained in gross ignorance of spiritual truth, and God was entirely unknown to them. The knowledge of salvation is not imparted by the news headlines.

It is a tragedy to see allegedly Christian magazines substituting worldly 'soundbites' and journalistic hyperbole for the infallible Word of God; and having their content dictated, not by the **spiritual** needs of the hour, but by the whims of **worldly** news organisations and godless

media magnates. Their agenda is not being set by Biblical considerations, or that which is spiritually imperative, but by the small doings of celebrities, politicians, sports-personalities, and the latest degradations of godless society. Rather than trading in the gold and silver of Divine Truth, they have resorted to recycling the worthless dross which pours continually from the nations' broadcast media. Sadly, the pens of many a Christian author have been sidetracked away from that which is holy and Scriptural, and begun instead to 'mind earthly things'; becoming occupied with political opinion, humanistic philosophy, economic policy, and all manner of subjects upon which they are neither qualified nor authorised to write.

Only once in His three years of public ministry was the Lord heard to make direct comment upon current affairs (cf Luke 13:1-5), His object being to prevent their gossip and idle speculation. With the least reference to the details of the situation, the Saviour proceeded immediately to vital spiritual application, and the far weightier matters of repentance, and judgment to come. This must surely be the pattern to be emulated by His disciples in all subsequent generations.

The saints are in possession of a story far more newsworthy and significant than anything the world has to offer, because unto them are 'committed the oracles of God'. The Lord has given them His Word, and great indeed is the work, and reward, of publishing it (cf Psalm 68:11). No praise is afforded in Scripture to those who, in an attempt at popularity, relevancy, or wider circulation, peddle the gossip of the ungodly. But blessings are ascribed to those who "[publish] *peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith... Thy God reigneth!*" (Isaiah 52:7). "*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things*" (Philippians 4:8).