

Life-Study of Genesis

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LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE

GENESIS—THE GENERAL SKETCH AND CENTRAL THOUGHT

Praise the Lord for the Bible! Praise the Lord for the life, the divine life, the eternal life, which is contained in this Book! And praise the Lord that He has afforded us this opportunity to have a life-study of His divine Word with such a large congregation! The Lord willing, starting from today, April 6th, 1974, we shall continue this life-study through the Bible, book after book, consecutively every weekend. May the Lord grant us His dear presence with His rich anointing all the way through our study.

A WONDERFUL BOOK

The Bible is a wonderful book. It is "The Book" among all books! It took 1600 years to complete, starting with Moses, the greatest prophet of God, and ending with the Apostle John. It was confirmed 300 years later (397 A.D.) at a council held at Carthage in North

Africa. Not long after that, the Bible was locked away from the people by the Catholic Church. For nearly a thousand years, from the 6th century through the 15th century, the Bible was locked up. History calls this period the Dark Age. Human society became dark because the Bible, containing all the divine light, was locked away from humanity.

Then, in the Reformation, God used Martin Luther to unlock the Bible. At the same time, printing was invented, allowing the Bible to be printed. Although the Bible was unlocked, it was not so open. Yet, we thank the Lord that during the past five centuries He has opened up His Word again and again through many great teachers. We stand on their shoulders and we are grateful to them. Yet, how we thank the Lord that today the Bible is so open to us, allowing us to have a rich life-study of the living Word.

THE BREATH OF GOD

What is the Bible? We know that the word "Bible" means "the Book." But what is this book? The Bible itself says, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). The Bible is the breath of God. It is not merely the word or the thought of God, but the very breath of God. Whatever we breathe out is our breath, and this breath proceeds out of our being. So the Bible as the breath of God is something breathed out of the being of God. The Bible contains the very element of God. Whatever God is, is contained in this divine book. God is light, life, love, power, wisdom, and many other items. All these items of what God is have been breathed out into the Bible. Whenever we come to this book with an open heart and an open spirit, we can immediately touch something divine: not just thoughts, concepts, knowledge, words, or sentences, but something deeper than all these things. We touch God Himself.

THE SPIRIT AND LIFE

The Lord Jesus said that the words He speaks are spirit and life (John 6:63). Can we imagine that the Bible as the Word of God is the Spirit? It is not simply words in black and white; it is something higher, deeper, fuller, and richer—that is the Spirit and life. And the Bible tells us that the Spirit is God Himself (John 4:24), and that life is Christ (John 14:6). I do not say that the Bible is God Himself, but, according to the Lord Jesus, the word in the Bible is the Spirit, and the Spirit is God Himself, the Lord who is life to us. When we come to contact the Word, if we are right in our position and open in our heart and spirit, we will surely contact God Himself and receive life.

When we come to the divine Word, nearly our whole being is involved. We must come with a heart which seeks after God, with a clear, sober mind, and with an open spirit. If we open our spirit to God and to His Word, we can touch God Himself behind the printed page. It is not just a matter of reading with our eyes, understanding with our mind, or seeking with our heart; it is also a matter of touching God in our spirit. If we exercise our whole being in this way, we not only receive a revelation, but some divine element revealed and conveyed by His Word will be transmitted into our spirit. So, Ephesians 6:17-18 says that we have to "receive...the word of God, by means of all prayer and petition..." We should take the word of the Bible not only by reading and studying, but also "by means of all prayer." We should read and study the Bible prayerfully; that is, we must exercise our spirit to contact the Lord by prayer with the reading of the divine Word.

THE MAIN REVELATION IN THE BIBLE

In the Bible mainly life is revealed. Life is the focus of the whole Bible. But what is life, or who is life? The answer is in the word of the Lord Jesus. He says, "I am life," and "I am come that you may have life." The Bible is a revelation of Christ as life. Whenever we come to the Bible, we must realize that we are coming to contact Christ as our life.

The whole Bible is a book of life, and this life is nothing less than the divine and living Person of Christ Jesus Himself, Who is our portion. When we come to the Bible, we must come to contact Him. We should not repeat the pitiful history of the Jewish people who researched the Scriptures because they thought there was life in them, yet would not come to the Lord Jesus (John 5:39-40). We should not contact the Bible without contacting the Lord. Whenever we open the Bible we have to say, "Lord Jesus, You have to be here. This is not merely a book, this is Your revelation. I don't like to read this book without contacting You. I don't like to hear something from this book without hearing You. I don't like to read this book without seeing You. I like to see Your face. I like to see what You are from the printed page. O Lord Jesus, enlighten Your Word and anoint every line that I may touch You." We need such a spirit to contact this living Word.

After man was created, he was put in front of two trees in the garden of Eden: one was the tree of life and the other was the tree of knowledge. If man had eaten the tree of life he would have received the divine life of God that was indicated by the tree of life. But man was tempted and took the tree of knowledge that denoted the source other than God, that is Satan. The issue of that was death. The principle is the same in our contact with the Bible. We may take the Bible as a book of life by contacting it with our spirit, by praying to the Lord that we may receive Him as life through His Word, or we may make the Bible a book of knowledge by contacting it merely with our mind, seeking knowledge in letters. This brings us death, not life. Second Corinthians 3:6 warns us that "the letter [that is, the scripture in letters] kills, but the Spirit gives life." We shouldn't make the Bible merely a book of letters to kill us. We have to take the Bible by contacting the Lord Spirit that it may be the Spirit and life to us.

OTHER FUNCTIONS OF THE BIBLE

In addition, we have some verses which tell us that the Bible has many other functions. The Bible has the wisdom which can help us to be saved (2 Tim. 3:15). It has the producing function of a seed. Through the Word of the Bible we can be reborn, regenerated (1 Pet. 1:23). After the new birth, the Word of the Bible is milk and food to us that we may be nourished to grow in the Lord (1 Pet. 2:2; Matt. 4:4). So, we must eat the Word (Jer. 15:16), that is, take the Word into us by exercising our spirit over the Word.

Also, the Bible can give us the best teaching and perfect the man of God (Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). If we belong to the Lord and desire to be perfect, we can surely receive perfection through His divine Word.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Bible is composed of two Testaments, the Old and the New. The Old Testament is mainly a prediction of Christ, predicting the

coming Christ in plain words, shadows, types, and many figures.

The Lord Jesus in Luke 24 twice tells us that the Old Testament was written concerning Him (vv. 27, 44). The Old Testament can be subdivided into three main sections: Moses (which means the law), the prophets, and the psalms. The Lord said that in every section of the Old Testament there is something written concerning Him. In John 5:39 the Lord also says that the scriptures of the Old Testament are a testimony of Him. And in Hebrews 10:7 He said, "In the roll of the book [that is, the Old Testament] it is written concerning Me." Thus, the Old Testament is mainly a record prophesying of Christ as everything to the people of God.

GENESIS

Now we may begin a life-study of Genesis. The original title of this book was "In [the] Beginning." The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, adopted the title of Genesis which is a Latin word that means giving of birth, origin. Genesis brings birth to everything, gives the origin of everything. Genesis is a book containing all the seeds of the divine truths. All the divine truths in the whole Bible were sown in this book.

I. THE GENERAL SKETCH

With every book of the Bible, there is a general sketch. The general sketch of Genesis is:

God created, Satan corrupted, man fell, and
Jehovah promised to save.

Never forget these four items!

Although Genesis has 50 chapters, it is so simple; it is divided into three sections. Chapters 1 and 2 are the first section, chapters 3 through 11 the second section, and chapters 12 through 50 the third section. Each section begins with a name. The names in sections one and three are wonderful, but not the name in section two. In the first section we have "God," in the second section the "serpent," and in the third section "Jehovah." (In the King James Version "Jehovah" is translated as "the Lord.") God created, the serpent corrupted, and Jehovah called.

What did God create? God created the heavens and the earth. But this is not all. Ultimately God created man because the heavens are for the earth and the earth is for man, and man is for God. After God's creation, the subtle one, that is the serpent, crept in to corrupt. He really corrupted God's creation, starting with rebellion and ending with rebellion. Chapter 11 reveals the rebellion of the fallen race to the uttermost. There was no hope. Nevertheless, there was hope because Jehovah came in to call out Abraham for a new start. Hallelujah! God created, the serpent corrupted, but Jehovah called.

In which section are you? I can testify that fifty years ago I was in the second section, but today I am in the third section. Fifty years ago I was one corrupted by the serpent, but now I am one called by Jehovah.

The first two chapters are apparently a record of God's creation. Then, in the following 48 chapters we find biographies of eight great persons: Adam, Abel, Enoch, and Noah—a group of four; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph—another group of four. Each group belongs to a different race. The first four belong to the Adamic race, and the last four belong to the Abrahamic race. In the book of Genesis are two fathers: Adam, the father of the created race, and Abraham, the father of the called race.

Do you belong to the created race or to the called race? All the called ones are sons of Abraham. Galatians 3 tells us that whoever believes in Jesus Christ is a son of Abraham (vv. 7, 29). Hallelujah! Once we were created, but now we are called. First Corinthians 1:24 says that to the called ones Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. We are no longer the created race, but are forever the called race, called to partake of and enjoy Christ.

II. THE CENTRAL THOUGHT

With every book of the Bible, there is also a central thought. The central thought of Genesis is:

Christ is the hope and salvation of fallen man, and God will make fallen man to fulfill His purpose through Christ.

Once we have a real and thorough understanding of the book of Genesis, we can see that it presents Christ as the hope and salvation of fallen man. Through Christ God will enable fallen man to accomplish His purpose.

Genesis is a book with Christ as the center, and Christ is life to the people whom He restored from the fall. Why does this book give us such a record of creation in the first two chapters? Why does it give us the biographies of eight persons in the following forty-eight chapters? We need a deeper understanding. The first two chapters appear to be a record of creation, but this is superficial. The underlying thought is focused on life. These two chapters are a record of life. They are too simple and too brief to be an adequate account of creation. Genesis 1 and 2 were not intended by God to be a record of creation, but a revelation of life.

Look into these chapters. First, it mentions that God created the universe, and that the universe was ruined, becoming waste, empty, and full of darkness. Then, the Spirit of God came in to brood in order to produce life. Following the Spirit of life came the light, also for producing life. After this, the air was made to divide the waters of death. Then the land emerged out of the death waters. The land appeared for the purpose of generating life, and immediately every kind of plant life was produced. Then came the animal life in the water, the animal life in the air, and the animal life on the earth, and, eventually, the human life. Following the human life is the divine life, indicated by the tree of life. Thus, we can see that these two chapters, strictly speaking, are not a record of creation, but of life.

What about the biographies of the eight persons? If we read Genesis carefully once again, we may be surprised that these biographies say very little about the works of these men. What mostly has been recorded is their life, their living, and their way with God. The Bible tells us little of what Adam did, but it does say how long Adam lived—930 years. If we were to write Adam's biography, we

would need hundreds of pages to tell about his work and all that he did. But Genesis only tells us how Adam walked in the presence of God.

We come to Abel, and then to Enoch. Genesis doesn't say anything about Enoch except that he walked with God, and eventually was taken to God. This is wonderful. I do hope that I could be such a person, doing nothing and being nothing, just walking with the Lord until the day I am taken to be with Him.

You may ask, didn't Noah do something? Yes, he did some work, but not according to himself nor for himself. He did everything according to God's revelation and for God's purpose. We go on to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. It is hard for us to see that Abraham did a good work, neither Isaac nor Jacob. It seems that Jacob's son, Joseph, did something, but if we know the record we will understand that Joseph's work was the reigning part of Jacob's life. Joseph was reigning as a king.

Strictly speaking, Genesis is neither a book of creation nor a book of biographies. It is a book of life. God uses the record of creation to show the matter of life. God uses the biographies of eight persons to show how He needs a life to fulfill His purpose. In this book the last life was the life of Jacob, one who was eventually called Israel, the prince of God. This is God's intention—to have an Israel. We all need to be brought to the place where God can consider us to be His Israel. This is wholly a matter of life. So, Genesis is focused on life, and this life is Christ.

III. THE CONTENTS

Now we come to the contents of Genesis.

A. God's Desire and Purpose— 1:1—2:3

God's creation not only fulfills His desire and accomplishes His purpose, but also reveals His desire in the universe and manifests His purpose in eternity. Anything we make expresses our desire. Although we may not say much, the thing we make manifests our purpose. When God created the heavens, the earth with so many items, and eventually man in His own image and with authority over all created things, He surely had a purpose. By His creation we can see that God had a desire and a purpose.

1. God's Original Creation—1:1

a. Motive

According to Ephesians 1:5 and 9, the motive of God's original creation was His desire and pleasure. God carried out the original creation to fulfill His desire and to satisfy His pleasure. He desired and liked to create; so He did it to please Himself.

b. Purpose

There are two aspects of God's purpose in His creation. Firstly, God's purpose in His creation is to glorify the Son of God (Col. 1:15-19). Although we do not find the term the Son of God or the name Christ in Genesis 1 and 2, we learn from Romans 5:14 that Adam was a pre-figure of Christ. Adam, created in the image of God, was a type of Christ. In Adam we can see something of Christ. God's purpose in His creation is to glorify His Son, Jesus Christ.

Secondly, creation manifests God Himself. By the heavens and the earth we can realize something of God and by man we can see something of God. God is manifested in man, especially through His Son, Christ. Christ is the embodiment of God (Col. 2:9). When Christ is glorified in man in the midst of God's creation, God is also manifested.

Why did God create the heavens? What was His purpose? If we read the Bible well, we can see that the heavens are for the earth. Even the scientists can prove this. So many things from the heavens are for the earth: the sunshine, the water, and the expanse are all for the earth. Then what is the earth for? According to the Bible, the earth is for man. Zechariah 12:1 says that God stretched forth the heavens, laid the foundation of the earth, and formed the spirit of man. The heavens are for the earth, the earth is for man, and man is for God. God created man as a corporate entity to contain Him, express Him, and glorify Him.

c. Basis

The basis of creation is God's will and plan (Eph. 1:10). Revelation 4:11 tells us clearly that all things were created according to God's will. God has a will, and according to that will He conceived His plan. According to that will and plan He created all things.

d. Means

The means of God's creation were the Son of God (Col. 1:15-16; Heb. 1:2b) and the Word of God (Heb. 11:3; John 1:1-3). The Bible clearly tells us that God created the heavens and the earth by Christ as the Son of God and as the Word of God. The Son of God and the Word of God are one.

We all must realize that God's eternal and central purpose is altogether for His Son, Christ. The Bible says that when God created the heavens and the earth and all the other items He did it through Christ and by Christ. All things were made through Christ, by Christ, and, in a sense, in Christ. From the time of creation, all things subsist in Christ. Christ is the hub which holds together every part of the universe.

Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ holds all things by the word of His power, and Colossians 1:17 says that all things subsist in Christ. Apparently the earth is hanging on nothing, but, in reality, it is held by Christ. If only one of the planets were to move a little wrongly, there would be a big collision. But the Lord holds everything. Hallelujah!

Why does Christ hold everything? He holds all things for His glory, for His Body. If the heavens were to collapse and the earth to

drop, then where should we be, and where would the Body be? We do have such a good earth on which to live and walk, and we have the heavens to serve us. When we need the sunshine, the heavens send it. When we need the rain, the rain comes. When we need the air, the air is here. There is no air on the moon, but surrounding the earth there is the firmament, there is the air. The heavens serve the earth, and the earth is for us, and we are here for the Body and even we are the Body. Christ loves the Body. For His Body He holds the whole universe. Hallelujah!

e. Process

Job 38:4-7 reveals the process of God's creation. The heavens with all the hosts and angels therein were created first. The earth, probably with some living creatures, was created second. We say "probably" because there is not a clear word about this matter. Some portions of the Word give us inferences. Job 38:4-7 says that when God laid the foundation of the earth, the stars and the angels (the sons of God) were there already. This proves that the heavens with all the stars and angels were created first, and that the earth was created second.

1) In (the) Beginning

Now we come to the first verse of the first chapter: "In [the] beginning..." In the Bible this phrase, "in the beginning," is used in two ways, the first time in Genesis 1:1 and the second time in John 1:1. The beginning mentioned in John 1:1 was earlier than the beginning mentioned in Genesis. The beginning mentioned by John was the beginning in eternity, a beginning without any beginning. The beginning revealed in Genesis 1 was the beginning of time, which started with God's creation. John refers to eternity, while Genesis refers to time.

2) God Created

In this beginning God created. It is quite interesting to notice that in this sentence the subject "God" is plural and the predicate "created" is singular. Does this mean that there are several Gods? Surely this is a little seed of the Trinity. God is one, but He is triune. In the same chapter (v. 26) He calls Himself "us": God said, "Let us make man." God is one, but the pronoun for Him is "us." We cannot explain. God is one, yet triune. The Triune God came to create.

In Genesis 1 and 2, three different verbs are used concerning God's creation and re-creation: created, made, and formed. To create means to bring something into existence out of nothing. Only God can create. We cannot create. We can only make. To make means to take something which exists already and then use it to produce something else. On the first day, God did not create the light nor on the third day did He create the earth, because the light was there already and the earth was buried under the deep waters. On the first day God did not create but He commanded. God said, "Let there be light," and light was there. On the third day, God commanded the buried land to come out of the death waters. That was not an act of creating, but of making. Then, God made man a physical body. That was formation. God formed man with the dust.

God's creation is in verse 1 and God's re-creation begins with verse 3. It doesn't say that God made the heavens, nor that God formed the earth. It says that God created the heavens and the earth.

3) Creation Proves the Existence of God

Creation declares the glory of God, proving that there is a God. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament, the expanse, showeth His handiwork (Psa. 19:1-2). Although God's divine power and Godhead are invisible things, man can understand them by the things that were made. Man can understand and is without excuse (Rom. 1:20). Look at creation: how can we say there is no God!

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE TWO

SATAN'S REBELLION AND CORRUPTION

2. Satan's Rebellion and Corruption

We come to the matter of Satan's rebellion and corruption. That we should now study this subject may come as a surprise. We have been considering God's creation and suddenly we turn to Satan's rebellion. What does this mean? We must approach this matter with a sober mind in order that we may be crystal clear.

Many good Christians think that Genesis 1:1 is the subject of the first two chapters of Genesis. They were taught that these two chapters are a record of God's creation, and that chapter 1, verse 1 is the subject. But if verse 1 is the subject, how can verse 2 start with "and"? "And" means that something is going on already, and then something else happens to follow it. "And" is a conjunction which combines two things: the first thing goes and the second thing comes. Even the grammar shows that verse 1 is not the subject, but part of the description. It describes the first event in a series. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and..." This means that after God created, something happened.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth became waste and empty." The Concordant Version of Genesis translates the verse this way: "Yet the earth became a chaos and vacant." The Concordant Version does not say "and"; it says "yet." "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Yet the earth became a chaos and vacant." A chaos is a mess. The earth became a chaos—waste and vacant. If you build some apartments and no one dwells in them, they are vacant. We may render this phrase as either "a chaos and vacant" or "waste and empty." Something happened between verse 1 and verse 2 which caused the earth to become waste and empty.

a. The Origin of Satan

Satan was an angel created by God before He created the earth. The book of Job (38:4-7) tells us that when God laid the measure of the foundation of the earth, the sons of God (the angels) shouted for joy. This proves that God created the angels before He created

the earth. From Ezekiel 28 we see that Satan was not only one of the angels, but the highest archangel, the head of all the angels.

Ezekiel 28 describes Satan's position in the universe before his rebellion and corruption. This whole chapter seems to speak about the king of Tyre. But verse 13 says, "Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God." If we read the context, we can see that this was not the Eden in which Adam was put. This Eden was not on the earth, but in the heavens, on the holy mountain of God.

"Every precious stone was thy covering." He was covered with precious stones. G. H. Pember says that this indicates his dwelling place. His dwelling was of precious stones.

"The service of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared with thee in the day thou wast created" (Heb.). In the ancient times, musical instruments such as tambourines and pipes were for kings (Dan. 3:5; 6:18). This indicates that Satan was a king, holding the highest position in that universe. This was why even the Lord Jesus called him "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31). The Apostle also calls him "the ruler of the authority of the air" (Eph. 2:2). Luke 4:5-6 also confirms this. "And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the inhabited earth in a moment of time. And the Devil said to Him, To You I will give all this authority and their glory, because to me it has been delivered, and to whomever I want I give it." Was this a lie? If it was a lie the Lord Jesus surely would have rebuked Satan. Since the Lord did not rebuke him, it must be a fact. Satan, the Devil, told the Lord that all the kingdoms of the world and all their glory had been delivered to him. Satan also said, "to whomever I want I give it." When did God deliver all of this to Satan? This was definitely something pre-Adamic, before the world of Adam. By reading the full revelation of the Bible, we can realize that God did appoint Satan the head of that universe, and that God had delivered all created things in the heaven and on the earth into his hand. So he became "the ruler of this world." His position and rank were so high that even "Michael the archangel..did not dare to bring a reviling judgment against him" (Jude 9). Michael is one of the archangels (Dan. 10:13). His daring not to rebuke Satan proves that Satan's rank must be even higher than his. Thus, we can infer that Satan must be the highest archangel.

Verse 14: "Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth." Satan was "the anointed cherub that covereth." This probably means that he covered (cf. Exo. 25:20) the ark of God in the heavens (Rev. 11:19). "And I have set thee so." God did this. God anointed and appointed the archangel to cover His ark. Ezekiel tells us that the cherubim bear God's glory (9:3; 10:18) and that they are very close to God's throne (10:1; 1:26). This shows that Satan, before his rebellion, when he was the anointed cherub covering God's ark, must have been very close to God, bearing God's glory. Ezekiel also tells us that the cherubim are the four living creatures which are of special use to God (10:20). Also the four living creatures in Ezekiel are similar to the four in Revelation (Ezek. 1:10, cf. Rev. 4:7) which took the lead among the creatures in worshipping God. This reveals that today's Satan, God's adversary, originally the anointed cherub, must have been specially appointed by God to be the head among His creatures, bearing His glory and leading them to worship Him. This may indicate that the anointed archangel also had the priesthood. He might have been the high priest in the universal worship of God.

"Thou wast upon the holy mountain of God." This certainly must be in the heavens. "Thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire." In Exodus 24:10, 17, Moses, Aaron, and many others saw under God's throne some precious stones with the glory of God like burning fire. That must be the stones of fire. From this we may infer that the anointed cherub was also specially privileged to move in the realm where God's glory was.

Beside Ezekiel 28, Isaiah 14:12 also helps us to see Satan's origin. It tells us that Satan was the "Daystar [for Lucifer according to Hebrew], son of the morning." Just as the daystar is the leading one among the stars, so Satan must be the head of all the angels. The title "son of the morning" shows that he was there early, in the morning of the universe. Thus, Satan, from the earliest days of the universe, was the head of the angels, bright as the daystar.

Satan's origin was wonderful. He was God's anointed cherub, the one closest to God, holding the highest position in God's creation. He had not only the kingship, but also the priesthood, the very position that we, God's redeemed people, have forever (Rev. 5:9-10; 20:4-6). But he was deprived of his position and offices when he rebelled against God. Now God has chosen us to be His priests and kings, to take over Satan's position and offices, to put him to shame, and to glorify God.

b. The Rebellion of Satan

Ezekiel 28:15 says that Satan was perfect in his ways from the day he was created. Of course, God didn't create an evil Satan. God created a good and perfect archangel. But at a certain time, this archangel, the anointed cherub, rebelled against God.

1) The Cause

Satan rebelled against God because of pride in his heart. Ezekiel 28:17 says that his heart was lifted up because of his beauty, that he corrupted his wisdom by reason of his brightness. He was "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty"; he "sealed up the sum," (Ezek. 28:12) meaning that he had the full measure of completeness and was short of nothing. But he gazed on his beauty and was proud. He looked at his brightness and became corrupted. To look at what God has made us and forget God Himself always tempts us to be proud. Pride was the cause of Satan's rebellion. So, the Apostle would never allow "a novice" to be an elder in the church, "lest being blinded with pride he fall into the judgment of the Devil" (1 Tim. 3:6). All the natural virtues and attributes, and all the spiritual gifts can be utilized by the Devil to make us proud. Even the Apostle Paul could be "exceedingly lifted up by the transcendence of the revelations" (2 Cor. 12:7). The proud Devil is still prowling about on the earth, seeking the proud ones whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). The only way to "resist" him is to "humble" ourselves, to gird ourselves with humility because "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:9, 5-6). The Lord Jesus is a good example in this matter. Satan exalted himself, but the Lord Jesus "humbled Himself" (Phil. 2:8). Thus, the Lord overcame Satan, and Satan had nothing in Him (John 14:30).

2) The Purpose

The purpose of Satan's rebellion was to exalt himself to be equal with God. In Isaiah 14:13-14 we find that five times Satan said "I will," at the time of his rebellion. "I will ascend..I will exalt my throne..I will sit also upon the mount..I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High." Satan wanted to be equal with God. That was the purpose of his rebellion against God.

Ambition for position was the motivation of every rebellion recorded in the Bible. The rebellion at Babel (Gen. 11:4), the rebellion of Dathan, Abiram, and the two hundred and fifty princes of the Israelites (Num. 16:1-3), and the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sam. 15:10-12), were all because of the evil ambition for position. But the Lord Jesus "emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave...Wherefore also God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:7, 9).

3) The Process

Satan initiated the rebellion against God with the evil intention to overthrow God's authority (Ezek. 28:15-18; Isa. 14:13-14).

Not only he rebelled, but a great part of the angels who were under his hand also rebelled. In Revelation 12:4, 9 we see that one-third of the heavenly stars, that is one-third of the angels, followed him. (In Revelation stars represent angels.) In Matthew 25:41 the Lord Jesus said, "The Devil and his angels." Ephesians 2:2 describes Satan as "the ruler of the authority of the air," and Ephesians 6:12 tells us that the principalities and powers are in the air. These principalities and powers were the angels under Satan's hand, ruling over the pre-Adamic universe. So, they are the powers of the air. When Satan rebelled against God, most of his angels followed him in his rebellion, becoming the fallen angels, the evil spirits. Today, in the universe there are two categories of angels, good angels and bad angels. The good angels stand with God; the bad ones are allied with Satan against God.

The living creatures which were on the earth at that time, and later became the demons on the earth, also joined Satan in his rebellion.

If we read the four Gospels we will see that on the earth there is another kind of spirit—the demons. Who and what are demons? Most Christians think that demons are identical with the fallen angels, but, according to Ephesians, the fallen angels live in the air, not on the earth. The four Gospels reveal that, strictly speaking, demons never enter the air, but either move upon the earth or else go into the water which is their lodging place. Remember the incident of the men possessed with many demons (Matt. 8:28-32). When the Lord Jesus cast out the demons, they begged Him for permission to enter into a herd of swine. After the demons entered the swine, the swine rushed into the water, where the demons like to stay.

Matthew 12:22-27 and 43-45 are quite meaningful in this regard. In this portion of the Word, we can see that Satan has his devilish kingdom and that he is "the ruler of the demons." Verse 43 says, "When the unclean spirit [the demon] goes out from a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it." The demon that was cast out of the blind and dumb man was seeking rest which he could not find in the waterless places. This shows that the resting place, the lodging place of the demons, is in the water. Verse 44 tells us what happens if they can't find water. "Then it says, I will return into my house..." This "house" is the physical body of human beings. The lodging place of the demons is the water, and their temporary dwelling place is the human body.

Acts 23:8-9 proves that the demons are not fallen angels. In these two verses we see that angels and spirits are classified as two different kinds of beings. Even the ancient Jewish Pharisees put demons and angels into separate categories. If we read the four Gospels carefully, we will discover that the demons are also called evil spirits. Not only the angels are spirits; demons also are spirits.

Who are the demons? Why do demons like to get into water or into a human body? In his famous book, Earth's Earliest Ages, G. H. Pember has made a scholarly and thorough study of this matter. Geology and archaeology have discovered that the earth is not only six thousand years old, but much older. Because of the concept that the earth is just six thousand years old according to the age of Adam, some atheists and modernistic Christians said that there was an error in Genesis 1. Archaeologists have discovered fossil remains of bones which are thousands and thousands of years old. But Mr. Pember found the answer. Between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 there was a period of time which he called the interval. No one can say how long this interval was. At any rate, it must have been a very long period of time. After studying this matter thoroughly, Pember inferred that at a certain time after the original creation, Satan and his angels rebelled. Moreover, Pember inferred from the biblical record that in this pre-Adamic age there existed on the earth some living beings with spirits and that these beings also joined Satan in his rebellion against God. Thus, Satan, his fallen angels, and these living beings were all judged by God. After they were judged by God, these beings lost their bodies and became disembodied spirits. This is the reason that demons want to enter a physical body.

The water with which God judged them became the deep where the demons must live. Pember even proved that under this deep water there is the so-called abyss. The Greek translation of Genesis 1:2 uses the word "abyss" to translate the word "deep." The deep water is the demons' dwelling place.

One day, while Jesus was sailing across the sea, a strong wind blew and a great storm arose. The Lord Jesus didn't pray; He commanded the wind to stop and the storm to be silent (Matt. 8:23-27). Why did the air become windy and the water stormy? Because there were the fallen angels in the air and demons in the water. They knew that Jesus was going over to the other shore to cast out demons (Matt. 8:28-32). Today the air is still full of fallen angels and the earth full of demons.

As the children of God, we should know something of these points concerning the universe and, especially, the earth. The bad angels followed Satan in rebellion against God. The demons, another kind of being, are disembodied spirits who live in the water and work on the earth. Satan is the prince of this world which includes the earth and the air. In Satan's kingdom there are the fallen angels in the air, the demons in the water, and the fallen human beings on the earth.

4) The Result

a) Satan Was Judged by God

Satan's rebellion brought in God's judgment. God cannot tolerate any rebellion among His creatures. Immediately after Satan's rebellion, God declared His judgment on him. "Iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy slander [G. H. Pember says that according to the root of the Hebrew word, here 'merchandise' can be translated 'slander.'][...] thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up...thou hast corrupted thy wisdom...I will cast thee to the ground....Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities..." (Ezek. 28:15-18). "Thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit" (Isa. 14:15).

The heavens and the earth surely were defiled by Satan's rebellion. God rebuked Satan, "Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries" (Ezek. 28:18). So, the heavens and the earth were also judged by God. Job 9:5-7 says that God overturned the mountains in His anger, shook the earth out of its place, commanded the sun not to rise, and sealed the stars. When did God do this? We cannot find a record of such an event in human history. It must have happened before the Adamic world, at the time God judged the heavens and the earth due to the rebellion of Satan and his followers. Because of God's judgment, the heavens did not shine. The earth was covered by darkness. The fact that the earth, after being judged by God, was buried under the deep water proves that God must have judged the earth by flooding it with water. So, "the earth became waste and empty," buried under deep water, and covered with darkness (Gen. 1:2).

Isaiah 45:18 tells us, "God created the earth not a waste" (Heb.). Job 38:4-7 shows that God created the earth in good order. It says that when God "laid the foundations of the earth," "laid the measures thereof," and "stretched the line upon it," "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God [the angels] shouted for joy." When God laid the foundations of the earth, He laid the measure upon it and stretched the line upon it. This means that He created it in good order. So, when the morning stars saw it, they were excited and sang, and when all the angels saw it, they shouted for joy. When did this happen? It must have happened in Genesis 1:1, not in Genesis 1:2. How could the morning stars sing and the angels shout for joy when the earth became waste and empty?

Whenever these two words "waste" and "empty" are used together in the Old Testament, they always denote a result of judgment. We see this in Jeremiah 4:23 ("without form, and void" should be "waste and empty," Heb.), in Isaiah 24:1, and in Isaiah 34:11 ("confusion" should be "a waste," Heb.). Whatever has been judged by God becomes waste and empty. The earth became waste and empty because it was judged by God.

The darkness which was upon the surface of the deep was also a sign declaring that the universe of that age was judged, because darkness comes from God's judgment (cf. Exo. 10:21-22; Rev. 16:10).

Thus, the earth mentioned in Genesis 1:2 was not in the same condition as when created by God originally. It was created by God in a good order, but it "became" waste and empty. The word "became" is the same word as used in Genesis 19:26 which says that Lot's wife "became a pillar of salt." She was not a pillar of salt, but she became one. In the same principle, the earth originally was not waste and empty, but it became so.

c) The Rebellious Angels and the Demons Were Judged

When God judged Satan and the universe that was under him, God also must have judged the angels which followed him and the living beings on the earth during that age which joined him in his rebellion. After being judged, the rebellious angels became the "wicked spirits" in the air (Eph. 6:12, KJV margin), and the living beings became disembodied spirits, the demons lodging in the water with which they were judged.

Though Satan, the rebellious angels, and the demons were all judged by God, they are still moving and working today, because the judgment upon them has not yet been executed. One day it will be fully executed (Rev. 12:12; Matt. 8:29; Luke 8:31). Today, Satan can still go to God to accuse God's people (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Rev. 12:10). He is still walking about on the earth, "seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8), still working to blind people (2 Cor. 4:4), to deceive them (2 Cor. 11:14), to fill their heart (Acts 5:3), and to get an advantage of us (2 Cor. 2:11). He is still "the strong man," holding "his vessels" (Matt. 12:29). The rebellious angels are still "the world-rulers of this darkness" (Eph. 6:12; cf. Dan. 10:20), (some fallen angels are now imprisoned unto judgment—2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6) and the demons are still the unclean and wicked spirits working on the earth (Matt. 12:43-45). The judgment upon them all needs to be executed.

God has judged Satan and all his followers. But this does not mean that God executed His judgment at the time He pronounced it. To condemn is one thing; to carry out the condemnation is another thing. God judged Satan and his followers before Adam was created, but the execution of this judgment is still going on. The execution of God's judgment will not be carried out by God Himself. God will not do this. No judge carries out the execution himself. He needs some executioners.

Who will execute God's judgment upon Satan and his followers? The executors will be the Christians, the church, the overcoming believers. Why hasn't the judgment on Satan and his followers been executed? Because God is waiting for the church to rise up. The Judge has made His judgment, but He is waiting for some executioners to carry it out. In Revelation 12 we see that the overcomers will execute God's judgment upon Satan. Moreover, day by day in our homes, whenever we are victorious, our victory is an execution of this judgment. God has declared His judgment upon the rebellious one. However, this judgment will not be carried out until the church rises up to do it. Now is the time for us to execute God's judgment over Satan.

Today the church must pray to "bind the strong man" and "plunder his house" (Matt. 12:29), fight against the wicked spirits in the air (Eph. 6:12), and cast out the demons (Matt. 17:21) wherever we see them working to damage people. God has judged the demons and confined them to the water, but He needs the church to bring in the age when the sea will be terminated (Rev. 21:1) and the demons which are now confined therein will have the judgment executed upon them (Rev. 20:13: the dead in the sea cannot be human beings, but must be the demons).

The Lord Jesus, when in the flesh as a man, began to execute God's judgment. He "was manifested, that He might undo the works of the Devil" (1 John 3:8). The Lord gave His disciples "authority" (Luke 10:19) over all the power of the enemy. When the disciples cast out demons, Satan fell from heaven (Luke 10:17-20). Through His death on the cross, He destroyed the Devil (Heb. 2:14). He has bruised the head of the old serpent. Now we, as His Body, must continue this execution, destroying the tail of the serpent. Through the church's executing work, the Devil will be "cast to the earth," and his angels will be "cast out with him" (Rev. 12:9). He will later be bound and cast into the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:2-3). Eventually, he will be "cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:10). Then, the execution of God's judgment upon Satan and his followers will be completed.

MESSAGE THREE

GOD'S RESTORATION AND FURTHER CREATION (1) PROCESS

As we have seen already, God's creation is fully covered in chapter 1, verse 1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Also, Satan's rebellion is covered in the first half of verse 2. "And the earth became waste and empty; and darkness was upon the surface of the deep." In verse 2a, there are five main points: the fact that the earth became something different from what it was originally; the waste and the emptiness; the darkness and the deep. Keep these five items in mind. After the earth was judged due to Satan's rebellion, it became waste and empty.

Darkness is another indication of judgment. Exodus 10:21-22 and Revelation 16:10 show that darkness is a result of God's judgment. There was darkness when God exercised His judgment upon Pharaoh, and there will be darkness when He exercises His judgment over the antichrist. Thus, the darkness in Genesis 1:2a points to God's judgment.

In addition, we know that light accompanies life and that darkness always signifies death. Where life is, there is light; where death is, there is darkness. The reverse is also true: where there is death, there is darkness. Thus, the darkness in Genesis 1:2 also signifies that the earth was under a condition of death.

The word "deep" means the deep water. In the Bible, water has two meanings and symbolizes two different things, one positive and the other negative. In the positive sense, water always signifies something living. The flowing water brings life to people and quenches their thirst. In the negative sense, water signifies death. For instance, when we were baptized in water, that water represented death. Also, the waters of the Red Sea and the waters of the River Jordan both represent death. The water mentioned in Genesis 1:2 doesn't represent life, but indicates death. Therefore, we conclude that the earth was under death. The earth not only was waste, empty, and meaningless, but was filled with death and was under death. In the midst of this situation, God came in.

3. God's Restoration and Further Creation— 1:2b—2:3

Genesis 1:2b does not refer to God's original creation—that was completed with verse 1—but God's restoration. God was going to restore what had been damaged, and was going to have some further creation. For instance, this time God created man. Man was a being created by God, not a being restored by God. Genesis 1:2b—2:25 is a portion of the divine Word showing us God's restoration of the damaged universe, plus His further creation.

We need to read chapter 2, verse 4. "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens." Most people pay little attention to this verse; yet, it is very meaningful. It shows us both God's original creation and God's restoration. The first half of the verse says, "...the heavens and the earth when they were created..." Notice that the heavens are mentioned first and then the earth, and that the verb used here is "created." The second half of the verse says, "...in the day that the Lord God made..." Here, the verb has been changed from "created" to "made." As we have pointed out in the first message, to create means to produce something out of nothing, and to make means to work upon an existing substance in order to produce something else out of it. We need to see that originally the heavens and the earth were created. Then the second half of the verse says, "...in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens." Have you noticed the change in the sequence? First, God created the heavens and the earth; then, He made the earth and the heavens.

In Genesis 1:1 God created. "In the beginning God created [firstly] the heavens and [then] the earth." Then, from verse 3 to the end of chapter 1, the Lord made the earth and the heavens. "...the Lord made the earth and the heavens" (Gen. 2:4b). If we read chapter 1 again, we can see that on the third day the Lord recovered the earth. God did not create the earth, for it was there already, submerged beneath the waters. So the Lord recovered the earth on the third day. Also, on the fourth day, the Lord recovered the sky, that is the heavens. Thus, in the restoration, it was not the heavens and the earth; it was firstly the earth, and then the heavens. But in the creation, it was firstly the heavens and then the earth. We can see both of these things in Genesis 2:4.

As we have pointed out strongly in the first message, the first two chapters of Genesis appear to be a record of God's creation, but the underlying thought is completely a matter of life. This is why some people consider that chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis are too simple, too brief, to be a record of creation. We agree. As a record of God's creation, it is too simple. But we know that the Bible is not a record of creation, neither a record of history, nor a record of any stories. The Bible is completely a book of life. The whole Bible is focused on life. If we read the first chapter of Genesis carefully and have light from the Holy Spirit, we can realize that it is absolutely a chapter of life. It was written from the point of view of life.

You may say that the word "life" is not found in this chapter. This is true. Nevertheless, we can find many items pertaining to life. When God recovered the earth on the third day, all kinds of plant life were produced. Then came the animal life in the water, the animal life in the air, the animal life on the earth, the human life, and ultimately the divine life in chapter 2. Hallelujah! Life is the focus of these two chapters. From this perspective, we can surely understand the record of Genesis 1.

a. Process

1) The Spirit Came—1:2b

God's original creation was damaged by Satan's rebellion and then judged by God Himself. After God's judgment, there remained nothing except darkness upon the surface of the deep water. This signifies a death condition. In the midst of this death condition, the Bible suddenly says, "And the Spirit of God was brooding upon the surface of the waters." Isn't this wonderful? The Spirit was brooding. Hallelujah! "The Spirit was brooding" as a hen broods over her eggs in order to produce little chickens. When the Bible first says something about the Spirit, it doesn't say "the power of the Spirit," "the might of the Spirit," but it says that the "Spirit of God

was brooding over the surface of the waters." This means that He was preparing to generate life. We need to see that the record of Genesis 1 is something related to life, to God's gospel, and to spiritual things. For this we have a strong proof in 2 Corinthians 4:6. Paul says, "God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts for the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." This certainly was a reference to chapter one of Genesis. By this one verse, we can realize that everything recorded in Genesis 1 must be related to life, to God's shining, and to God's gospel. Based upon this verse, we need to interpret everything according to life.

We need to recall our condition before we were saved. We were just waste and empty, our lives were meaningless, and we were covered with darkness. Within us was an abyss, a bottomless pit. And in this abyss was a swarm of demons, driving us to lose our temper, to gamble, to go to the movies, and to do many other evil things. We were waste and empty, yet full of darkness and death.

But, hallelujah! One day, some living One began to hover over us, to work within our heart, to brood upon the death and the deep within us. This was not something psychological or ethical, but the living One working within us, working so gently, lovingly, like a big hen brooding over the eggs in her nest. This is the brooding and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus said (John 16:8-11) that when the Holy Spirit is come, He will reprove, He will convince the world (meaning humanity) of sin (related to Adam), of righteousness (related to Christ), and of judgment (related to Satan). He will rebuke in a brooding way, in a very kind way, not in a violent way. In the whole universe, there are only three persons—Adam, Christ, and Satan. The Holy Spirit works within us, convincing us that we were born in Adam and have nothing but sin, that we have no way to escape sin and Adam's influence without believing in Christ. The Holy Spirit will brood within us and speak to us, saying, "Look, Jesus died on the cross for you and He has accomplished everything that is required by God. Now the real righteousness is with Him. If you turn to Him and believe in Him, you will receive Him as your righteousness. He has passed through incarnation, He has passed through life on this earth, He has passed through crucifixion and resurrection. Now He is accepted by God at His right hand. He is there as the proof that if you believe on Him, you will be free of sin and obtain righteousness. If you don't do this, you will go with Satan into God's judgment." By this brooding of the Holy Spirit, you will be fully convinced and will say, "Lord Jesus, I have nothing to say, but I thank You." By this, you are regenerated, you are born again of the Spirit (John 3:6-7). Hallelujah!

The Spirit of God came. This coming of the Holy Spirit is the first requirement for generating life. The Spirit came to brood over the waters of death which submerged the earth, brooding that life might be generated.

2) The Word Came—1:3a

The Word of God came to bring in the light. This is the second requirement for generating life. Verse 3 reads, "And God said..." God spoke; that was the Word of God. To speak is not a small thing. Suppose I come to the platform and remain silent, while you look at me and I look at you. What is this? This is death. If I am a living person, I cannot just stand here and be silent for an hour. As long as I am living, I must speak. When I speak, it means that I am living, and that what I speak will be something living. God spoke and the Word of God came to bring in the light. "And God said, Let there be light." The divine Word always brings us light. Hallelujah!

Check with your own experience. First, the Spirit broods over you. Then comes the speaking. Through that speaking, you receive a living Word and that living Word enlightens you within. When God speaks, He commands the light to shine out of darkness. "God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts..." Hallelujah! God's speaking brings in light.

The Lord Jesus said that whoever hears His Word and believes has life (John 5:24). If we hear the Lord's Word and believe, we have life. James 1:18 tells us that God has brought us forth with His Word.

3) The Light Came—1:3

Now we come to the third requirement for generating life: the light came to dispel the darkness that covered the waters of death. Praise the Lord. This is really meaningful. I can testify that when I was saved, it was exactly like this: firstly, the Spirit came; secondly, the Word of God came; thirdly, the light came. I was enlightened within. Something was shining within me. I believe that this was also your experience.

In addition to 2 Corinthians 4:6, we have John 1:4, 5, and 9. "In the beginning was the Word...In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:1, 4-5). Darkness can never overcome light. Light always dispels darkness. When light comes, darkness must flee.

Who and what is light? Light is Christ, the living Word of God. When Christ came as the real Light to shine in the darkness, the darkness could not overcome Him. He is the real Light.

We should remember the three comings: the coming of the Spirit, the coming of the Word, and the coming of Light. Following these comings, are three separations, three divisions.

4) The Separation of Light from Darkness—1:4-5

The first separation was between light and darkness. This was the fourth requirement for generating life. This separation was for the purpose of discerning day from night, causing the light to be set apart. This is more difficult to understand, but an illustration will make it clear.

Immediately after you were saved, you didn't have any discernment and were unable to distinguish between light and darkness. After you were saved awhile and had gone on with the Lord, gradually there was a separation within you and you had the discernment to say, "This is light and that is darkness. I will keep the light, but not the darkness." Before we were saved, we had no day at all, only a night of twenty-four hours. We were constantly in the night, a dark and cloudy night with no stars. But, praise the Lord! From the day we were saved, something began to dawn like the morning. This is the day.

Perhaps your first day was only four hours long, and then evening came again. Regardless of how long it was, you had your first day.

Praise the Lord! After ten hours of night, you came to a meeting and in that meeting you saw the dawn. It was another day and you shouted, "Hallelujah!" Then you went to school or to work and evening came again. Don't be disappointed—evening is a sign that morning will come. Also, when you are in the morning, be prepared for the evening to come again. In Genesis 1:5, it doesn't say morning and evening; it says evening and morning because we came out of the night. "And evening and morning were the first day." Praise the Lord!

With the young people the night is always longer, but with the old folks the night is shorter. Because I am experienced, my spiritual day is longer than yours. My spiritual day is nineteen hours and my spiritual night only five hours. When we get into the New Jerusalem, there will be no night at all (Rev. 21:25). You need to grow. Perhaps your day is just ten hours and your night fourteen hours. You need to grow for your days to be longer and your nights to be shorter.

We need the separation of day and night, the discernment between light and darkness. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul asks, "What fellowship has light with darkness?" This word must also refer to Genesis 1. God has separated light from darkness; so don't try to mix them. Light has nothing to do with darkness. What kind of fellowship can light have with darkness? This means that we are children of light and that we shouldn't be yoked or mingled with the people living in darkness. We must maintain the separation. They are children of darkness and we are children of light. We all must say, "What communion can there be between light and darkness?" This is a real separation. If we keep this requirement, we will have more light.

*5) The Separation of Waters under the Expanse
from Waters above the Expanse—1:6-8*

We proceed to the fifth requirement for generating life: separating the waters of death by making an expanse. The waters which are above the expanse must be divided from the waters which are under the expanse. To divide light from darkness is rather objective; to divide the waters above the expanse from the waters under the expanse is more subjective. We need the second separation—dividing the heavenly things from the earthly things (Col. 3:1-3). The waters under the expanse represent the earthly things, while the waters above the expanse represent heavenly things. Some things may not be dark, but they are earthly, not heavenly.

Suppose, as I am speaking, I wear a cowboy hat, cowboy outfit, and boots. That is not something dark, but it is earthly. Suppose I wear a wide necktie, eight inches wide, colored with green, red, blue, purple, and bright yellow. If I were to wear this, it would prove that I am lacking the expanse.

What is this expanse? The expanse is simply the atmosphere, the air surrounding the earth. Without the atmosphere no life could ever be generated upon the earth. There is no life on the moon because there is no expanse around the moon. God created the expanse surrounding the earth so that the earth may produce life. After being saved, we not only have the light within us, but also the air, the expanse. Something has come into us to separate the heavenly things from the earthly things, the things above which are acceptable to God from the things below which are not acceptable to Him. What is this? This is the dividing work of the cross. After we have been saved and have gone on with the Lord, we will experience the cross. The cross divides. It divides the natural things from the spiritual things, it divides the holy things from the common things, and it divides the heavenly things from the earthly things. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the living Word can separate us to such an extent that our soul is divided from our spirit. I may say or do something good; yet that good word or deed does not have its source in the spirit, but in the soul. Morally speaking, ethically speaking, or humanly speaking, there is nothing wrong. But spiritually speaking, the source is not of God, not of the heavens. It is not of the spirit, but of the soul, of the earth. Thus, we need a further division: not only a separation between light and darkness, but also a discernment between the spirit (the things above) and the soul (the things beneath).

Have you ever noticed in Genesis 1 that on every day, except the second, after God had accomplished something He looked at it and it was good. But on the second day there is no such record. Genesis doesn't say that God saw the waters and the air and said that they were good. Why? Because the air is full of fallen angels and the waters full of demons. Remember that the demons have their dwelling place in the waters. On the second day, there was something which really was not good: in the air were the fallen angels and in the waters were the demons. We must realize that whatever is of us, even once the cross has divided it, is nevertheless not good. Whatever is of us is not good. God cannot say that it is good.

*6) The Separation of the Earth
from the Waters—1:9-10*

After the second day, we have the third day—the day of resurrection. On the third day, the day of resurrection, the dry land appeared under the expanse for generating life. This is the sixth requirement for generating life. In the whole Bible, the sea represents death and the earth represents Christ Himself. The Bible tells us that, eventually, after God has worked through many generations, the sea will be eliminated. After Satan's rebellion and God's judgment of the original creation, there was nearly nothing except waters. Then, God came in to restore by the brooding Spirit, the living Word, and the dividing light. On the second day, the expanse divided the waters, and on the third day God gathered the waters together under the expanse that the dry land might appear for producing life. This means that God had been working on the waters, seeking to confine and limit them. In Jeremiah 5:22 we are told that God drew a line to limit the sea. Today, God is still working to eliminate the sea because in it there are demons. The sea represents something demonic, something devilish. Eventually, when God's work is completed, there will be no more sea. In the new heavens and new earth there is only land, no sea (Rev. 21:1). The sea representing a main part of Satan's kingdom has been eliminated. Praise the Lord!

The dry land appeared in order to produce life, to generate life. On the third day, Christ came out of death. Christ came out of death in resurrection just to generate life. Hallelujah!

Although you may be saved, the darkness within has not been cleared up, the waters have not been divided and confined, and the things of death have not been limited. As you are going on with the Lord, the waters of death within you will gradually be confined, limited, and eliminated. Within you, the dry land will rise up. That is Christ. That is Christ in resurrection. First Peter 1:3 tells us that we have been regenerated by the resurrection of Christ. Without the resurrected Christ, there is no possibility for any life to be generated.

The land was separated from the waters. The land signifies life and the waters signify death. To divide the land from the waters means to separate life from death.

As we grow in the Lord, we learn how to discern light from darkness, separate heavenly things from earthly things, and divide life from death. In my speaking I may have nothing dark and nothing earthly; yet I speak without life. I am devoid of life. My speaking is genuine and proper, with nothing of darkness and nothing worldly, but nevertheless is full of death. So, I must pray, "Lord Jesus, drive away all the death waters within me that the dry land may appear to produce life." In my speaking there should be nothing of darkness, nothing of this earth, and nothing of death. Within my speaking there must be the dry land that produces life.

In your family life, there may be nothing of darkness, nothing worldly, but also nothing of life. When someone comes into your home, he cannot see anything dark or worldly; neither can he see anything living. All that he can see there is death. But I hope that when I come to see you, I will see that everything is full of life. Christ, the dry land, is appearing in your home. Christ is manifested, producing life in your home.

On the dry land there is no darkness and no waters of death. We just have the dry land filled with every kind of life. So, I say once again that what is revealed to us in Genesis is completely a matter of life.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FOUR

GOD'S RESTORATION AND FURTHER CREATION

(2)

PROCESS

In the last message we covered six points, including three comings and three separations. The Spirit came, the Word of God came, and the light came. As a result of this, there were three separations: light was separated from darkness; the waters above were separated from the waters below; and the dry land was separated from the death waters. By these three separations the dry land emerged out of the waters of death on the third day, the day of resurrection. The Lord Jesus is the dry land Who came out of the death water. He was resurrected that He might regenerate us.

In the Old Testament, the land typifies Christ as the generating source. This land was buried beneath the waters of death and appeared again on the third day. As the record of the Old Testament reveals, every kind of life was produced out of this land: the plant life, the animal life, and even the human life came out of the earth. Man was made from the dust of the earth. This typifies that every kind of life comes out of Christ.

After the fall of humanity and during the time of Noah, the land was once again covered by the waters of death (Gen. 7:17-24), signifying that man was severed from Christ. Humanity was severed from the enjoyment of the good land. After this, the land was recovered again (Gen. 8:13-17, 22). The land was recovered until the day of Babel when man fell even further and the whole human race rose up in rebellion against God (Gen. 11:1-9). Thus, God called out a race with Abraham as the father to enter into the high land, the good land of Canaan (Gen. 12:1, 5, 7). This good land also signifies Christ. Abraham was called out of Babel into the good land. We have been called out of rebellion into Christ, our good land (1 Cor. 1:9). Now this good land is ours, ready to produce life.

7) The Plant Life Was Generated

The plant life on the land was generated. The lowest life, a life without consciousness, came into existence (Gen. 1:11-13; cf. Mark 4:8; Hosea 14:5-7). This is the generating of life and happened on the third day, after the land emerged out of the death water. At that time, there was no growth of life, only the lowest form of life, a life without any consciousness. If we talk to the grass or to the trees, the grass cannot understand and the trees will not react because they have no feeling, no consciousness. They have no emotion, thought, or will because they are lives without any consciousness. This is the lowest life.

When we received Christ into us, Christ appeared out of the death water within us. Christ appeared and now we have life, the generating of life. We are saved and we have life. At the time we were saved, we received life, but the life within us was very low. This is signified in the record of Genesis by the life of the grass, the life of the herbs, and the life of the fruit trees.

Even with the plant life there are three levels: grass, the lowest plant life; the herbs which yield seeds, a higher level; and the fruit trees, an even higher level. If we read Genesis 1:29-30, we will see that God gave the herbs and the fruit trees to man for his food. Then, God gave the grass to the beasts and to the cattle for their food.

When you became a Christian, you received life, but that life within you was very low. Perhaps the life within you is similar to grass: it is life and it grows; yet it is the lowest life. Even when compared with the other plant life, grass is quite low. Although last week you might have been like the grass, today you have grown a little higher and you have become the herb yielding the seed. I hope after two months, you will be a tree bringing forth fruit. How would you liken yourself—to the grass, the herb, or the trees? Suppose the Lord Himself would ask you, "How about you? Are you like the grass or the herb or the tree?" Today you may be an herb, but after a certain period of time perhaps you will be likened to a fruit-bearing tree. But when you become a tree, don't become satisfied. This is not the last verse of chapter 1; it is something which happened on the third day.

8) The Light Bearers Appeared

On the fourth day, there was no growth of life, but the appearance of the stronger, more solid lights (Gen. 1:14-17). Although light came in on the first day, it was not that solid, not that strong. On the fourth day, not only the lights came, but also the light bearers—the sun, the moon, and the stars. These are lights which are stronger, more solid, and more available. This is the first requirement for the growth of life.

Suppose that you are not only the grass or the herb, but also the tree. By this time you will receive more light. Although you have the light of the first day, you need something to happen on the fourth day. You need to receive some higher lights, some fuller lights, some richer, stronger, and more available lights. First John 1:5-7 tells us that after we are saved we need more light, that we need to walk in the light.

Genesis 1:14-19 does not speak about lights in a loose way, but in a very definite way—the sun, the moon, and the stars. In typology, the sun typifies Christ. Christ is our sun. Malachi 4:2 tells us that Christ is the Sun of Righteousness and that there is healing in His wings. His shining forth is the wings, and with this shining forth there is healing. The second half of this verse tells us that we all will grow up under the shining of Christ. Also, Luke 1:78-79 tells us that Christ is our dayspring, the sunrise in the early morning. Hallelujah! Jesus the Lord is our sun. He is the "great light" which has sprung up over darkness and the shadow of death (Matt. 4:16).

The overcoming saints are also likened by the Lord Jesus to the sun (Matt. 13:43). They are so one with the Lord that one day they will shine as the sun, even as He does.

Who, then, is the moon? The moon is the church. Although it is difficult for us to find a verse in the Bible indicating that the moon is the church, there is, nevertheless, a basis for saying that the church is the moon. Remember Joseph's dream about the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars (Gen. 37:9-11). The sun was his father, the moon his mother, and the stars his brothers. Based upon this fact, we may say that the church as the wife, the bride of Christ, may be typified by the moon. The church today is the moon. What is the moon? The moon is an object that has no light in itself, but has the ability to reflect light. By itself, the church has no light. But hallelujah! the church was made in a way to reflect the light of Christ. Furthermore, the moon is able to reflect light only in the night time. Today, during the church age, it is the night time. Look at the world. How dark it is! Although the church is really in a dark night (the local churches are lampstands shining in this dark night, Rev. 1:20), she can reflect the light of Christ. However, frequently the church (like the moon) is not very stable, coming up and going down. The church may be the full moon, the half moon, or the new moon. And, when there is no moon, the stars shine. Hallelujah!

We not only have the sun, the moon, but also the stars: not only Christ, the church, but also all the overcoming saints. Daniel 12:3 says that those who turn many to righteousness shine like the stars. If we are going to help people to be saved, if we are going to turn people from darkness to light, if we are going to recover all the backsliders, we must be the shining stars. Revelation 1:20 tells us that the churches are the lampstands shining in the darkness and that the angels (the living ones in the churches) are the shining stars. The Lord said that the saints are "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14), and Paul said that the saints shine "as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

After we have grown in life from the grass to the tree, we should not be satisfied, for that was only the third day, not the end. We must go on to the fourth day to enjoy Christ as the sunrise, to enjoy the church as the bright moon, and to enjoy so many good saints as the shining stars, that we may grow in life.

If the moon doesn't shine, don't say that the moon is not there. The moon is still there. Likewise don't say that there is no church; the church is still there. The problem is that the church is somewhat covered, and is not so right with the sun. Thus, it doesn't reflect any light. Although there may be a problem with the church, the church is still there.

When there is a problem with the church, that is the time for the stars to shine. Many of us have to be the shining stars. We need to contact Christ, we need to contact the church, and we also need to contact the shining saints. We must contact so many good saints. When you come to a living brother or a living sister, don't you sense an amount of light, that when you enter their presence you are under a certain kind of shining? This is light. This light will help us to grow in life.

9) Some Rule Was Established

The lights God made on the fourth day were established "to rule over the day and over the night" by their shining (Gen. 1:18a). The light not only shines, but also rules by its shining. Where there is shining, there is ruling. Darkness brings in confusion, but light regulates. For the growth of life, we need the ruling and the regulating of the fourth-day lights.

The lights on the fourth day also "divide the light from the darkness" (Gen. 1:18b). The separation of the light from the darkness, as we have seen in message three, had happened already (Gen. 1:4). Now, the ruling of the fourth-day lights' shining strengthens this separation. For the growth of life, we need the ruling of the lights and also the strengthening of the separation. This is the second requirement for the growth of life.

10) The Living Creatures in the Water Were Generated

On the fifth day, the lower life with the lowest consciousness came into being (Gen. 1:20-22). Although every form of animal life has some level of consciousness, some lives are higher and others are lower. First, the fish are mentioned, the animal life with the lowest consciousness. We have all had some experience of this. Suppose there are some goldfish swimming in the water and we come near them. They will be frightened away. However, if we scatter some food into the water and keep away, all the fish will return. This life is higher than the tree life, higher than the plant life (Ezek. 47:7, 9). Although it is not very high, it is higher. This is the first step of the growth of life.

The fish in the sea live in salt water. As a rule, salt water doesn't grow anything; it kills, allowing nearly no plants to grow. Salt water kills life. Fish, however, can live in salt water. The water may be salty, but the fish will never be salty, unless they are dead. This is quite meaningful.

All of humanity, the entire human society, is like a great salt sea. Yet, we Christians are so living. We can be alive and live in such a society and not be salted by it. But once we are dead, we will become salty. The Chinese people used to eat a great deal of salted fish. First, they killed the living fish and then put them into salt until all the fish became salty. When the fish were living, salt could do nothing to them; they could live in the salt water. This is wonderful. We Christians who have the life of Christ can live in this dark, evil society. However, if we become dead, we will be salted. Today, if you are so living and one of your schoolmates tempts you to go

to a movie or to take some drugs, you will say, "No." Nothing can influence you. But, if you are dead, you will first be brought to the movie theater like a sheep to the slaughter. Once you have been slaughtered, you will be dead, take drugs, even heroin. You will be salted. But hallelujah! We can never be salted because we have life. Life repels every kind of salt from the dead sea. This life can survive in any death situation. In the midst of an environment of death, this life can still survive. This is good; yet there is more.

11) The Living Creatures in the Air Were Generated

After the fish, the birds, the fowl in the air, were created on the fifth day (Gen. 1:20-23). This is the higher life with the lower consciousness. The bird life is higher than the fish life. Fish can live in the death waters, but birds can transcend them. After you become a fish, you must grow until you are a bird. When your classmates come to you and say, "Let us go to the movies," you will soar. No one can touch you—you will be transcendent. You will not only repel the salt, but you will transcend it.

Every item mentioned in the first chapter of Genesis has a Bible verse signifying that it is a type. For instance, the Lord Jesus told Peter that he would be a fisher of men (Matt. 4:19). By this word, the Lord Jesus likened all people to fish in the sea. Also, we have Isaiah 40:31 which says that they who wait on the Lord shall be as the eagles, soaring and transcending. This is a higher life. Many can testify that often they were soaring. We can live in any kind of situation, but with a little more growth we not only survive in evil circumstances, we also transcend them. We fly away and nothing can touch us. Hallelujah! A number of times I thought to myself that I would like to be a bird. Then, one day I discovered that I really was a bird. I was an eagle with two big wings. Hallelujah! An eagle can mount up and transcend the frustrations of this earth. This is wonderful. I am not speaking something I don't know or something that is not found in the Bible. Read Isaiah 40:31. We can be the eagle. This is the second step of the growth of life. This is wonderful, but there is still more.

12) The Living Creatures on the Earth Were Generated

On the sixth day the higher life with the higher consciousness came into existence (Gen. 1:24-25). This higher life can accomplish something on the earth. Genesis 49:9 speaks about the lion, likening Judah to a lion which can do many things. First Samuel 6:7, 12a tells about two kine which were used to carry the cart with the ark. These verses show that both the beasts and the cattle can accomplish something on this earth. Their consciousness is higher than the fish, even higher than the bird, and they can do something on this earth. This is the third step of the growth of life.

We have Christ within us as our life. Starting from the level of the grass, this life will grow from the grass to the herb, from the herb to the tree. Then, we will be on another plane, the plane of the animal life. On this level, we will first be a fish, gradually grow to be a bird, and eventually grow even further to be one of the cattle with a life that is higher, stronger, and more meaningful.

We must recognize the need of light. On the first day, we had the light from the Spirit and from the Word. As we go on, we need the lights of the fourth day. On the fourth day, the lights come from Christ, from the church, and from the shining saints. Since we are under the enlightening of Christ, the church, and the shining saints, we no longer have only the generating of life but the growth of life. The light on the first day is for the generating of life; the lights on the fourth day are for the growth of life. The lights on the fourth day mainly come from Christ directly, also from the church and the shining saints. If we are to grow in life after we have received the eternal life, we must firstly contact Christ, secondly contact the church, and thirdly contact the living saints. While we are under such a shining, we are in the process of growth.

Regarding this process of growth, I am not speaking about something theoretical. I know what I am talking about because I myself have passed through all of these stages. Forty-nine years ago I was a little blade of grass. Then, I grew from the grass to the herb. Later, I became a tree. After a certain time, I was a fish, able to live in any of the evil situations. Then, I reached a stage in which it was so easy for me to soar in the heavens. When there was any trouble or persecution, any hardship or affliction from mother, from brothers in the flesh, from wife or children, even from brothers in the spirit, I simply transcended them all. This is real.

Many times your dear wife gives you a hard time. Before you become a bird, you will stay there to argue, to exchange words. Once you become an eagle and the dear wife gives you trouble, the eagle-husband will fly away. This eagle-husband will remain soaring in the air and watching, watching until the wife says, "Praise the Lord." Then, the eagle-husband will return. By your experience you can tell when you were the fish and when you were the eagle. If you haven't had this kind of experience, I can assure you that someday you will be an eagle. The eagle has no struggle. When any difficulty comes, he soars in the air. It is really hard to catch him. When there is affliction, hardship, or trouble, the eagle takes to the air. That is a real victory, a transcending victory. Don't you want to be such an eagle?

Sometimes, however, when I was an eagle, finding it easy to fly away, the Lord said to me, "Don't fly away. Stay to be one of the cattle. You need to be a cow. Either produce milk to feed others or bear them as a burden. When your wife gives you a hard time, don't fly away—give her some milk. Feed her and bear her as a burden."

Perhaps your husband or your wife is the death water to you, killing and salty. If you are a tree or an herb, you will certainly be killed, but if you have grown from a plant to a fish, you will live. In the past, I saw many young ones who were so good before they were married. Once they married, however, they were killed. The young husbands were killed by the young wives and the young wives were killed by the young husbands. But, I also saw some dear saints who had grown up to be a living fish. The wives didn't care how salty their husbands were and the husbands didn't care how salty their wives were. They continued to live. After a certain time, they grew from the fish stage to the eagle stage. Whenever they had some hardship, they simply transcended it. Gradually, after more growth in life, they realized that flying away was not the higher life. They realized that they needed to stay on earth to produce some milk for their folks and to bear their dear folks as a burden. When you reach this stage and your dear wife gives you a difficult time, you don't say anything. You simply put her upon your shoulders and bear her as a burden. While your wife is arguing with you, you put her upon your shoulders and tell her, "I am going to bear you to the heavens."

In 1 Samuel 6 there is a cart with the Lord's ark. You are needed to carry part of the weight of the ark. You need to do something, to have some activity upon this earth. Don't fly away. The so-called heavenly life is not the highest life. When you become so heavenly, you must return to the earth. Do not simply grow higher and higher, but grow in order to come down.

The Lord Jesus was God, but for the fulfillment of God's purpose He came to the earth to be a cow. He came to be sacrificed and He came to bear all of our burdens. Whenever someone persecuted Him, He put that persecutor on His shoulders and said, "I will carry you to the heavens." What kind of life is this? This is wonderful.

Now we can see that every point in the first chapter of Genesis is related to life. I ask you to bring all of these verses and all the points included in this message to the Lord in prayer. "Lord, I have the life. But Lord, You know that I need the lights of the fourth day. I have the light from the first day already, but I need the lights of the fourth day. Lord Jesus, I need You as the sun. I need to contact You directly. I want to be in Your presence day by day. I want to be under Your shining. I also need the church, the moon. And I need the stars. I need the overcoming saints, the ones who are shining, who turn many to righteousness. I need those who can turn people from darkness to light." If you will contact the Lord as the sun, the church as the moon, and some good saints as the shining stars, you will have the lights of the fourth day. It is by these lights that you will grow. The plane of life within you will change from the plant life to the animal life. You will grow day by day. Then you will be able to withstand any death situation and be able to transcend every opposition, distraction, or temptation. Eventually, you will return to earth purposely to do God's will. This is wonderful!

However, this is not the life with the highest consciousness, but the higher life with the higher consciousness. We need to go on to the last part of the sixth day. As we will see in a later message, at the last part of the sixth day comes the life with the highest consciousness, the human life, a life which expresses the image of God and has dominion over all things for God.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FIVE

THE FOURTH-DAY LIGHTS

(A PARENTHESIS)

Before we study the creation of man, we need to consider, as a parenthesis, the matter of the fourth-day lights. In Genesis 1, it is recorded that on the first day of restoration God summoned the light. The first day was a day of light and that light may be called the first-day light. On the fourth day, God did something further regarding light. He made the light bearers—the sun, the moon, and the stars. The Bible does not tell us what kind of light was present on the first day, and there is no need for us to guess. The light of the first day was not very solid, strong, or definite. It was not given a specific designation; it was simply called "light." However, the lights of the fourth day—the sun, the moon, and the stars—were definite and solid, strong and available.

If we pay attention to the record of Genesis 1, we can see that God's restoration with His further creation was accomplished in six days. These six days were not for God's original creation. God's original creation was accomplished in Genesis chapter 1, verse 1. After creation, there was a great change which occurred somewhere in chapter 1, verse 2, and God came in to judge the universe. After that judgment, there was a long period of time. Then, God came in to restore and to have some further creation. This restoration with its further creation was accomplished in six days which may be divided into two sections: the first three days considered as the first section; the last three days considered as the second section. Each section begins with a day of light. The light of the first day was the first-day light; the lights of the fourth day were the fourth-day lights. On the first day, God called for the light. On the fourth day He restored the sun, the moon, and the stars. This is very meaningful.

These days of light mark the beginning of God's creation of life. According to the revelation of the whole Bible, light is for life. Once again, we see that God's creation is completely focused on life. All that God created and made was focused on life and was for life. Thus, there is the need for light. Light and life always go together. On the contrary, darkness and death always go together. Before God's restoration, darkness covered the death waters, meaning that darkness and death were one. Death is abstract and no one can see it. Therefore, the Bible uses water to signify death. The deep water of the ocean is a picture of death. Before God's restoration, there were only two things—darkness and death.

God is life and light, the exact opposite of death and darkness. The very God of light can never tolerate darkness, so He came to dispel it. Also, the God of life can never tolerate death, so He came in to swallow it up. When you read the Bible, don't take a scientific view—take God's view. If we read the Bible from God's point of view, every line will be full of light and life because the Bible is a record of the Divine Being who is light and life. The God of light and life came in to eliminate darkness and death.

On the first day, God commanded the light to come and light came. Then, God divided light from darkness. That division was a limitation to the darkness. The God of light seemed to say to the darkness, "Darkness, listen to Me. You have been prevailing for a time and you have filled the whole universe. Now, My light comes in to limit you. You can only prevail during the night. There is no room for you in the day. I limit you. I divide light from you. Never again can you occupy the whole universe. For at least half the time the universe must belong to Me." Hallelujah!

This was good; however, it was only half good. A certain amount of darkness remains. God is still working to eliminate this dark part until we arrive at Revelation 21 and 22 where there is the declaration, "night shall not be there" (21:25b). Hallelujah! One day there will be no more night.

God limited the darkness on the first day and, in the same principle, He limited the death waters on the third day. In Jeremiah 5:22 we read that God limited the death waters with sand, the smallest particles of rocks. God told the death waters, "This is your limitation. You cannot go beyond it." Thus, the dry land appeared, making a separation between the land and the sea. After the first day of God's restoring creation, it was half light and half darkness; after the third day, it was half land and half water. God is still working to eliminate the second half of the night and the second half of the death waters. In the new heavens and the new earth, there will be no more sea (Rev. 21:1); in the New Jerusalem, there will be no more night (Rev. 21:25b; 22:5). This means that both darkness and death will be completely eliminated.

Check with yourself. How much darkness do you have? How much death do you have? You need to answer to the Lord. If in your Christian life, you are constantly growing in the Lord's presence, one day you will be able to tell Satan, "Satan, I have no night. My

day is twenty-four hours long. There is no death water with me. In my whole Christian life, everywhere, in every corner and on every avenue, there is dry land. There is no more sea." We all must be like this.

To be like this we need the fourth-day lights. The first-day light only eliminates half of our darkness and half of our death. The fourth-day lights will bring us to another world where there is no night and no sea.

All the truths in the Bible were sown as seeds in the book of Genesis, especially in the first chapter. Genesis 1:14-18 is a wonderful seed of the light revealed throughout the Bible. According to the principle of life, the fourth-day lights are not for generating life; they are for the growth of life. On the third day, perhaps at the last part of that day, after the Lord called out the dry land and the land emerged out of the death waters, life was generated. By that time there were light, air, and land—three elements necessary for generating life. After the dry land appeared, plant life was generated. Although God was not happy at the end of the second day—He did not say that it was good—He was surely happy at the end of the third day when He saw the light, the air, the dry land, and all the plant life. God saw the grass, the herbs, and the trees, and said that it was good. Before that time, there had been no created life on the earth.

Starting with the plant life, life was generated. But that was the lowest life, the life with the lowest consciousness, unable to walk, unable to talk, and unable to understand God. God may speak to a lily a thousand times, but the lily cannot respond to Him because the life of a lily is too low. Although life was present, it needed to grow. The fourth-day lights were needed for the growth of life. The first-day light was for generating life; the fourth-day lights were for the growth of life. On the fourth day the solid lights were prepared; no other work was done.

Many of you young people have received the first-day light, but I doubt very much whether you have entered into the fourth-day lights. The fourth-day lights are different from the first-day light. The first-day light was indefinite; the fourth-day lights are definite. Now we need to see what the sun, moon, and stars prefigure in typology.

I. THE SUN—CHRIST AND THE SAINTS

The sun indicates Christ and also the saints who will shine as the sun in the kingdom. Malachi 4:2 says that Christ is the sun of righteousness. In His wings (that is, His shining) there is the healing of death. Without His shining, there is death; when His shining appears, death is healed. Luke 1:78-79 says that the birth of Christ was the real sunrise for humanity. Matthew 4:16 tells us that when Christ came to the sea of Galilee, He appeared as the great light. The people who sat in darkness saw a great light. Light shone upon those who were sitting in the region and shadow of death. That light was Jesus. Matthew 13:43a tells us that the overcoming saints will shine as the sun in the future kingdom. Although we may be a star today, it is too early for us to shine as the sun. For that, we must wait until the day of restoration. In the kingdom, many saints will shine as the sun. Today Christ is the sun; tomorrow the overcoming saints also will be the sun.

II. THE MOON—THE CHURCH

The moon is the church. In Joseph's dream, his father was likened to the sun, his mother to the moon, and his brothers to the stars (Gen. 37:9). The church is the bride, the wife of Christ. Therefore, the moon is a figure of the church (cf. S.S. 6:10).

Revelation 1:20 tells us that the local churches are lampstands. Lamps are needed in the nighttime, not in the daytime. Revelation 1:20 proves strongly that the church age is not the daytime, but the nighttime. As a lampstand the church shines in the night. However, the lampstand itself does not shine; the lamp does. The seven lampstands are in Revelation chapter 1 and the seven lamps are in chapter 4. The seven lamps are the seven Spirits (Rev. 4:5). The church is the lampstand and the Spirit is the lamp held by the stand. If the church lacks the Spirit, the church is a lampstand without light. It is then a stumbling block. But, the lampstand with the shining lamp is wonderful. We may have the church as a lampstand, but what about the lamp? We need the lamp. Some may say, "I have the Holy Spirit as the lamp. I don't care about the lampstand." If you say this, you are wrong, for the lamp is on the lampstand. If today, during the church age, you are going to have the light of the seven Spirits, you must have the churches. The seven lamps are on the seven lampstands.

During the church age it is night, and during the night we cannot get the sunlight, the light of Christ, directly. We need reflection. We need the moon to reflect the sunlight; we need the church to reflect the light of Christ. Without the church it is hard for us to see the light of Christ. When we come to the church and the church is not waning, we will surely receive light.

According to history, there was a long period during which the church was on the wane. While the moon is on the wane, that is the best time for the stars to shine. During the Dark Ages the stars shone. Martin Luther was a star. Before and after Luther, many other great stars were shining because the moon was on the wane. Two centuries ago, Zinzendorf and the so-called Moravian brothers were practicing the church life. Although their moon was not full, it was at least a crescent moon, reminding people that the church was there. A century later, the Brethren were raised up in England and the crescent was increased to nearly a full moon. Philadelphia, the church, was there. However, it didn't last very long. There is a proverb which says that when the moon is full it begins to wane. Within a period of seventy years covering the last part of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth, we can see some other stars such as Andrew Murray, Mrs. Penn-Lewis, and A. B. Simpson. During that time, there were stars, but no moon—there was no church life. The moon was on the wane and the stars shone.

Praise the Lord! Today, if we don't have a full moon, we at least have a full crescent. In the churches, we should not expect to see spiritual giants. If there are giants, this means that the moon is waning. As long as the moon is waxing, is growing, the stars should not be so evident. I don't want to be a big star, just a small brother. When we have the moon, we have little need for the stars.

If we go to the sun and ask for light during the nighttime, we are foolish. The sun will tell you, "Don't come to me. Go to my reflection. Go to the church if you want the light which comes from me. The church reflects my light." We must remember this is the night; the day has not come. We need the church. The Spirit speaks to the churches. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 3:22). We must go to the churches and get the light of the sun indirectly.

Many dear Christians say, "I don't care for the churches—I only care for Christ." I can guarantee that whoever says this will not grow. Those who say such a thing may have the first-day light, but they lack the fourth-day lights. If you check with many saints, they will tell you that they did not grow until they came into the church. When we sincerely turn our heart to the church, we receive the proper light of Christ indirectly.

As many can testify, whenever we were bothered by the church and turned our backs to the church, we were in absolute darkness. When you turn your back on the moon during the nighttime, your face will be in darkness. However, when we turn to the church and are one with the church, the shining comes immediately.

Some may say that we stress the church too much and neglect Christ. But how can the moon shine without the light of the sun? Without Christ, the church has no light. The shining of the moon in the nighttime is simply a reflection of sunlight. The light of the church is altogether the reflection of Christ. People who talk so much about Christ without contacting the proper church will find it difficult to obtain the real and practical light for the growth in life. For the growth of life we all need the moonlight, which is a principal part of the fourth-day lights. The more church life we have, the more Christ we gain, the more light we receive, and the more growth in life we experience.

III. THE STARS—CHRIST AND THE SAINTS

The stars are Christ and the saints. Although Christ is the real sun, He does not appear as the sun during this age of night. He shines as a star, as the bright and morning star (Rev. 22:16b). Christ Himself is a star. All the overcoming saints are also stars. Second Peter 1:19 tells us to take heed to the sure Word until the morning star, which is Christ, arises within us. Revelation 1:20 not only tells us that the churches are the lampstands shining with the Spirit, but also that the angels, the leading ones or the messengers in the churches, are the shining stars. Daniel 12:3 says that those who turn many from the wrong way unto righteousness will shine as stars. Matthew 5:14 says that the believers today are the light of the world and Philippians 2:15 says, "among whom you shine as lights in the world." All these verses show that the saints who are in the proper way and have the proper standing are stars.

IV. TO RULE FOR DISCERNMENT

These fourth-day lights rule for discernment. Discernment comes from light. Without the fourth-day lights, it is difficult to discern anything. We all need this discernment for the growth in life. Young people need discernment regarding where to go and where not to go, what to say and what not to say, what to do and what not to do, what is of God and what is of Satan, what is in the spirit and what is in the soul. Even the junior high young people need discernment concerning their schoolmates, which classmates to contact and which ones they should never touch.

Discernment comes from light. When the light shines, the light rules. If I am in a room without light, I will stumble. Without light there is no direction, no ruling, and no discernment. However, if I am under the shining of the light, I can discern which way I should go.

You junior high students are different from all other students in school because you are children of the day. The others are still in darkness. When you speak with your teacher, you know what you should say. You have discernment. The best way for parents to take care of their children is to cast them into the hand of the Lord. Then, they will have the light, and the light will be their ruling. This ruling of the light will give the children the best discernment. They would never be tempted into drugs. Discernment is the biggest protection.

Again I say, this discernment comes from the shining, and the shining of the light is just the ruling. If you read and pray over Genesis 1:14, 16, 18 and Ephesians 5:8-11, 13-14 until these verses get into you and the light shines upon you, you will know what you must reprove and what you must accept, what you should receive and what you should reject. Also, 1 John 1:5-7 is a good portion telling us that God is light, that if we have fellowship with Him we are in the light, and that when we walk in the light we know the difference between darkness and light. We have the ruling with the discernment.

V. FOR SIGNS—MAINLY FOR MOVEMENT

The sun, moon, and stars are signs. These signs are mainly for movement. In the ancient time, sailors navigated according to the stars. Today, we drive our cars according to traffic signs. Thus, signs are for movement.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees came to the Lord Jesus, asking Him to show them a sign from heaven (Matt. 16:1-4). The Lord said, "Foolish people, you know the signs of the sky. When the sky is red in the evening, you say that the weather will be fine. When the morning sky is red and lowering, you say the weather will be stormy. You know the signs in the sky, but you don't know the signs of this time. I am the sign—I am just like Jonah. You don't see the sign because you don't have the light." The disciples also came to the Lord on the mount of Olives and asked Him about the sign of His coming, the sign of the end of this age (Matt. 24:3).

We not only have these verses, but also a great sign in the universe found in Revelation 12:1—the sign of a woman with the sun, the moon, and the stars. In order to move properly in this universe, we have this woman as a great sign. This woman is something related to the church. I do not say that the woman is the church, but that the church is a great part of this woman. If we are to move and behave and act in this universe, we must know this woman.

She originates in Genesis 3. The Bible is a book of women. Satan entered the human race through a woman, and the Lord Jesus also entered the human race through a woman. Eventually, the Bible consummates with the New Jerusalem, which is a female, the bride of Christ. Hallelujah! We will all be a part of that woman. So, we all must know the woman in Revelation 12. She is a biblical woman, a universal woman covering the whole Bible. Strictly speaking, she began in Genesis 2 with Eve, not in Genesis 3, and then proceeds from Genesis 2 to Revelation 22. If you know this woman, you know the signs. She is a very prominent sign. She is a sign for God's people to know whether they must go on or stop. Because many Christians lack this woman, they don't know what to do. They have no way to go on. We need a sign, a sign which comes from the fourth-day lights.

VI. FOR SEASONS—APPOINTED BY THE MOON, MAINLY FOR GROWING

The signs are for moving and the seasons are for growing. The words of the Lord Jesus regarding the harvest show that the seasons are for growth (John 4:35). Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 tells us that there is a time to sow and a time to pluck up the harvest. These are seasons. Seasons are for growing. If you are a farmer, you must know the seasons. Would you sow the seed in the winter time or rest in the summer time? The seasons tell us when to plow, when to sow, when to reap, and when to rest. Revelation 22:2 says that the tree of life bears fruit every month. The seasons are appointed by the months, and the months are decided by the moon.

We need to read several verses in Leviticus in this regard (Lev. 23:2, 5, 6, 24, 27, 34, 39, 41). These verses tell us that every year in the first month the people had a feast. A feast is also related to the seasons. The feast in the first month was the feast of Passover. Following that came the feast of unleavened bread, then the feast of the firstfruits and, following that, the feast of the seven weeks, called the feast of Pentecost. These four feasts came during the first half of the year. On the first day of the seventh month, there was the feast of the blowing of the trumpet, and on the tenth day of the seventh month was the feast of atonement. Also, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month was the feast of tabernacles. All of these seven feasts were held according to the months.

Without a time for growing, you could never have a feast. If there is no growth, what are you going to feast on? At the time of the feast, the people of Israel brought their riches—cows, lambs, grapes, all the produce which came from the growth. The feast of tabernacles, especially, was a feast for the enjoyment of the harvest. The Lord said that we must come together in His presence and enjoy the harvest—that is a feast. The feast is the result of growing, and this growing is very much related to the moon, the church. If we don't have the church, we lack the element of the feast. Very few Christians have the feast because they don't have the moon. They don't have the full enjoyment of Christ as a feast because they don't have the church. We need the church to appoint the seasons for growing and feasting.

Numbers 28:11 speaks regarding the new moon, and Numbers 29:6 says something about the month. These verses are for the months.

Jeremiah 8:7 tells of the stork which knows its appointed flying time. It also speaks of the turtledove, the crane, and the swallow which all know their time, their season. The Lord said of His people that they have no season. This is the situation today. Christians don't have summer time or spring time; they don't have the first moon, the last moon, or any moon. They have no seasons: no spring, no fall, no summer, and no winter. In a sense, every day is the same. Therefore, they have no way to grow and they don't have a feast—all because they are short of the fourth-day lights.

However, once we are in the proper church life, the church will appoint the months, the months will bring in the seasons, and the seasons will give us the feasts. We will have all the feasts.

VII. FOR DAYS-SET BY THE DAILY ROTATION OF THE EARTH FOR NEW STARTS

Both days and years are related to the sun. The earth makes two kinds of movements in relation to the sun—the daily revolving and the yearly revolving. The daily revolving is called rotation; the yearly revolving is called revolution. We all know that the earth's daily rotation makes a day and the earth's yearly revolution makes a year. The phrase "for days" (Gen. 1:14b) means that the earth is continually rotating to create new starts. Hallelujah! Every day is a new start, for every day we have a sunrise. Every day we have a dawn. As the sun, Christ gives us a new start day by day. Every morning, morning watch should be our dawn, a time when the daystar arises within us for a new beginning.

Numbers 28:3-4 says that every morning we must present some burnt offerings. Every day is a new start. Lamentations 3:22-23 says that the mercies and compassions of the Lord are new every morning. First Thessalonians 5:4-8 says that we are not children of the night, but children of the day.

VIII. FOR YEARS-SET BY THE YEARLY REVOLUTION OF THE EARTH FOR GREATER BEGINNINGS

The yearly revolutions around the sun bring in greater beginnings. This is really wonderful. We are in Christ and we are in the church. Therefore, we have the sun and moon to give us seasons, days, and years.

When the people of Israel came out of Egypt, the Lord told them it was the beginning of a new year (Exo. 12:2). When we were saved, that was also the beginning of a new year, the year of our rebirth, a real revolution in our life. My first revolution was in 1925, the year I was saved. The second was in 1931, the year I was revived. Less than a year later, in July, 1932, I had another revolution—I saw the church. That revolutionized my whole Christian life. In my Christian life, I have had many other new years besides these. Year after year, Christ as the real sun gives us a new beginning.

No crops can grow without the seasons, days, and years. All the crops grow by the lights of the fourth day. On the one hand, we are God's crop; on the other hand, we are God's farm. We need the moon to appoint the seasons for us and we need the sun to appoint the days and the years.

Genesis 8:13 tells us that Noah returned to the land on the first day of the first month. He had a new start on the first day of the first month, a new start on the new land. Exodus 40:2, 17 tells us that the tabernacle was erected on the first day of the first month, another new start. Why didn't God tell the people to raise up the tabernacle on the twenty-ninth day of the fourth month, but on the first day of the first month? It was for a new beginning. Second Chronicles 29:17 and Ezekiel 45:18 both tell us that the people cleansed and sanctified the temple on the first day of the first month. According to Ezra 7:9, the return from Babylon started on the first day of the first month. Every Christian needs these four new beginnings: coming to the new land, raising up God's tabernacle, cleansing God's temple, and returning from captivity. All of these are new beginnings in your Christian life for your growth in Christ and they must be on the first day of the first month.

IX. SHADOWS OF CHRIST

All of the days, signs, seasons, and years are shadows. Christ is the reality (Col. 2:16-17). Christ is the holy day, Christ is the new moon, Christ is the sabbath day, Christ is the beginning of the year, Christ is everything. Christ is your new beginning—a greater beginning as a year and a smaller beginning as a day. Christ is the new moon.

X. LIGHTS STRENGTHENED

During the time of the millennium, the age of the kingdom, the light of the moon will equal the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, like seven days (Isa. 30:26). The Spirit of God intensified becomes the seven Spirits; the sun intensified becomes the sevenfold sunlight. This will happen during the age of the kingdom, the time of restoration when God will heal His people. However, we can have a foretaste today. With some of the saints, the moon is as bright as the sun. To me, the church life is just like the sun, much stronger than the ordinary moon. I have a bright moon, as bright as the sunshine and the sun has sevenfold, intensified sunlight.

XI. ULTIMATELY THERE WILL BE NO MORE NIGHT

In the New Jerusalem, there will be no night (Rev. 21:23, 25b; 22:5). In that city there will be no need for the sun or the moon or any lamp because the Triune God will be the light. If we read Revelation carefully, we will see that outside the New Jerusalem, outside the city, there will still be day and night, but inside the city there will be no night. We will have our Triune God as the perfect and unique light shining over us. The days will be twenty-four hours long.

Today, however, we need the fourth-day lights. We especially need the moon and the stars to reflect the light of the sun. This is the way for us to grow. I hope that the Lord will speak to you concerning your growth, that your growth in life is with the fourth-day lights. The first-day light was good for generating life, good for your rebirth. But, for your growth in life you need the fourth-day lights.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SIX

GOD'S RESTORATION AND FURTHER CREATION

(3)

PURPOSE

In this message we will consider the creation of the human life, the higher life with the highest consciousness. Since the last message was a parenthesis, we now continue our study with the process of God's restoration and further creation.

13) The Conference of the Godhead

Genesis 1:26 reveals that there was a conference held by the Godhead and among the Godhead. We say "among" because God is triune. Using human terms, we may say that there are three Persons in the Godhead, one God with three Persons. I can't explain this. I can only say that God is triune, that we have one God with three Persons. There was a conference held by these three Persons of the Godhead, and a decision was made. This conference with its decision initiated the maturity of life. After God had created the cattle, the beasts, and the creeping things on the first part of the sixth day, He did not proceed immediately to create man. Rather, He had a conference to discuss this matter. Genesis 1:26 says, "And God said, Let us make man..." If we read this verse carefully, we can see that there was something like a conference. God said, "Let us..." God is one: yet, the pronoun is "us." This proves that God is triune. It does not say, "Let me make..." If the Bible had said "me" and not "us," there would have been no need to say "let." The phrase "Let us make" means let us have some fellowship. Although you may think that I infer too much, we nevertheless have this word in the Bible: "Let us..."

After God created all the foregoing items of life, God still needed to create man as the highest created life to express Himself in His image and after His likeness. To accomplish this work, there is the need of the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit to work on man. This is fully proven by the following books of the whole Bible.

Up to this point, we have seen eight items of life. Don't forget this. God created the grass, the herbs, and the trees at the end of the third day, before the fourth-day lights. After the fourth-day lights, He created the fish and the birds on the fifth day. In the early part of the sixth day, God created the cattle, represented by the ox, the beasts, represented by the lion, and the creeping things. Thus, there were three items of the plant life and five items of the animal life. It may seem to us that the whole earth was filled with life. However, there was not the maturity of life.

The maturity of life on this earth is the human life. Even today, after six thousand years, no life on this earth can surpass the human life. Don't look down on yourself. You are very high, higher than the grass, higher than the herbs and the trees, higher than the cattle, the beasts, and the creeping things. You are the highest created life. Without man, there would have been no maturity of life. Thus, the Triune God held a conference and initiated the maturity of life. The Triune God decided to create the highest created life.

14) Man as the Center Was Generated

Man as the center was generated, the higher life with the highest consciousness. This is the maturity of life that has the image of God and is able to exercise dominion for God. On this earth, man is the center. As we have pointed out before, the heavens are for the earth and the earth is for man. Everything in the sky—the sunshine, the rain, and the air—are for the growth of life on earth. Without sunshine, rain, and air there is no possibility to have life on earth. So, the heavens are for this earth, and this earth, with all kinds of life, is for man. We all know that the minerals are for the plants, the plants are for the animals, both the plants and the animals are for man, and man is for God. So man is the center.

The heavens were fixed and the earth was prepared. Everything was ready for man to come into being. Praise the Lord! God didn't create man and then ask man to wait until He fixed the heavens and prepared the earth for him. On the contrary, after God fixed the heavens, prepared the earth, and made everything ready, man came into being. At the last, God created man. Man ranks as the last, but he was and still is the center.

This is exactly like a marriage according to oriental custom. In such a marriage, the husband prepares everything and, at the last, the bride comes in. The bride does not appear and then wait for everything to be prepared. After everything has been prepared, the bride appears. Likewise, the whole earth is a place for God's wedding. God has prepared all things for His wedding. Who is the bride? The bride is man.

Man is the maturity of all created life. Without man, there is no maturity. Look at the grass. It is green and tender, but it is lacking in form, in appearance. It has no face. The herbs, including corn and wheat, are more developed in form. However, they also have no face. The trees are larger, bearing fruit as well as seeds; yet, none of them has a face with which to express itself. After these three levels of plant life, we have the fish, the first level of animal life. The fish does have a face with two small eyes, but its head is not clearly distinguished. And a fish has no neck. The birds, however, have a distinct face and neck. They have eyes, ears, and a small mouth, somewhat closer to the face of man. The cattle, horses, and oxen have faces similar to a human face. Following the cattle, we have the beasts, especially the lion. The face of a lion closely resembles a human face. Although Darwin foolishly said that man is a descendent of the monkey, it is nevertheless true that the faces of some beasts resemble the face of man. However, regardless of how much the faces of birds, cattle, beasts, eagles, oxen, and lambs resemble the face of man, they are not man. They are short and they are inferior. They are not the maturity of the created life.

Ezekiel 1:5, 10 speaks of the four living creatures. These four living creatures look like man. Each has four faces: the face of a man at the front, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle at the rear. The eagle is at the rear because an eagle's face is not much like a man's. The faces of the lion and the ox are much closer to man's face. However, man's face is supreme. Thus, the human life is the maturity of all created life, having the ability to express God and to exercise God's dominion.

The most striking and wonderful thing about the human life is its consciousness. We do have the highest consciousness. This consciousness of ours is higher than the fish, the eagle, the ox, and the lion. As far as consciousness goes, the human life is the highest. We need to shout, "Hallelujah!" In this universe and on this earth man has been generated. Man has been created, possessing a life with the highest consciousness, a life that is able to express God and represent God. This is wonderful! The creation of man was so crucial and important that the Triune God held a conference before He did it. The sky had been restored. The heavens had been fixed for the purpose of serving the earth. The dry land appeared for the purpose of generating plant life, the animal life, and the human life. Look at the sky: we have the sun, the moon, the stars, the rain, and the air. Look at the earth: we have the grass, the herbs, and the trees. We have the birds in the air, the fish in the water, and the cattle, the beasts, and the creeping things on the earth. As the center of all this, we have man, expressing God and representing God. After God created man, He rested. He was satisfied.

b. Central Points

We now come to the central points of God's restoration and further creation.

1) To Recover the Earth

God needed to recover the earth for generating life and for dominion (Gen. 1:9, 26, 28). As long as the earth was under the death waters, there was no possibility to generate life or to have dominion. In order to have these two things, there was the need for the earth to be recovered.

2) To Have Man

The second central point was to have man as the expression of God Himself and to deal with God's enemy (Gen. 1:26-28). Later we will see more of this.

3) To Generate Life

The third point was to generate life. This was necessary for the ability to express God and to have dominion for God. Remember these three central points: to recover the earth, to have man, and to generate life. Although the things created by God are numerous, in the record of Genesis 1 and 2 God only mentioned the matters of life and the items related to life, for His restoration and further creation were focused on life. All God's creation was focused on life. He recovered the earth, created man, and produced all kinds of life for the purpose of expressing Himself and dealing with His enemy.

c. Purpose

Now we come to the purpose of God's restoration and further creation. This is extremely important.

1) To Have Man to Express God

The main purpose of God's restoration and further creation was to have man, a corporate man, to express God (Gen. 1:26-27). The man God created was a corporate man. God did not create many men. God created mankind collectively in one person, Adam. God created Adam and Adam was a corporate man, a collective man. When Adam was created, we were all created. If you are thirty years of age today, don't say that you were created thirty years ago. You were born thirty years ago, but you were created six thousand years ago. Although I might have been born forty years earlier than you, we were created at the same time. When Adam was created, we were all created because we were all created collectively in Adam. We were included in Adam. God did not create an individual man, but a corporate man to express Himself. In verse 26 God said, "Let them"—one man, but the pronoun is "them." This proves that this man is a corporate man. In this verse, as the pronoun "us" signifies that God is triune, so the pronoun "them" signifies that man is

corporate. God created such a corporate man in His own image and after His likeness so that man might express God Himself.

a) *With the Image of God Inwardly*

Genesis 1:26 says, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." Here we find two things—the image and the likeness. All of the good Bible students agree that the image refers to something inward and the likeness refers to something outward. We all have something inward—the intellect, the will, and the emotion. Outwardly, we have the likeness, the body-form.

(1) The Image of God Is Christ

Second Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15 both say that the image of God is Christ. Christ is the image of the invisible God. God is invisible; yet He has an image. The invisible God has a visible image. No one has ever seen God, but Christ has declared Him (John 1:18). We all, more or less, have seen Christ. Peter saw Him. John saw Him. After His resurrection, five hundred brothers saw Him at the same time (1 Cor. 15:6). He is really the image of God. Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ is the express image of God's Person.

(2) Man Was Created in Christ's Image

Since man was created in the image of God and the image of God is Christ, man was created in the image of Christ. In Genesis 1:26 God said, "Let us make man in our image..." But verse 27 says, "God created man in his image." Surely here "his image" means the image of Christ. So, man was made in the image of Christ.

(3) Adam Was the Type of Christ

Romans 5:14 says that Adam, the first man, was a type, a figure of Christ. If we take a photograph of a person, that picture is the figure or type of the person. Adam was a photograph of Christ. Christ was the image of God and Adam was a picture of Christ. As a photograph is the expression of a certain image, so man was made to be the expression of the image of God which is Christ.

I may use the illustration of a glove. The glove was made in the image and according to the form of the hand. Both the hand and the glove have five fingers. The glove was made in the image of the hand that one day the hand might enter into the glove. The hand fills up the glove, and the glove expresses the hand. Why was man made in the image of Christ? Because God's intention was that someday Christ would enter into man and be expressed through man. Romans 9:21, 23 tells us clearly that man was made as a vessel, that is as a container. Man is not a knife, a hammer, or any instrument. Man is a vessel, a container. Romans 9:21, 23 further says that man was made a vessel of honor to contain God, to contain God's glory. Second Corinthians 4:7 says that we have this treasure in earthen vessels. This vessel is like the glove: one day the hand gets into it; the contents get into the container. We are simply a vessel to contain Christ.

(4) Christ Was Made in the Likeness of Man

One day, Christ came to be made in the likeness of man (Phil. 2:6-8). Man was made according to Christ's image, and Christ was made in the likeness of man. Isn't this wonderful? Who is according to whom? It is mutual. Man was made according to Christ, and Christ was made in the likeness of man that through His death and resurrection man may obtain God's life. It is a mystery; yet, it is a fact. Hallelujah! We have all obtained this life.

(5) Man Can Be Transformed into
and Conformed unto the Image of Christ

Because we have this divine life, we can be transformed into and conformed unto the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29m). Here we have two things—transformation and conformation. Transformation is inward and conformation is outward.

We have an intellect, emotion, and will, which were made according to Christ. Christ, no doubt, has the best intellect, the best will, and the best emotion. Our intellect, will, and emotion are not very real. Consider again the illustration of the hand and the glove. The human hand has a thumb and four fingers, and the glove also has a thumb and four fingers. We cannot deny that the thumb of a glove is a thumb, but compared with the real thumb we find a great difference. Compare our intellect with the intellect of Christ. Our intellect resembles the empty thumb of a glove. Christ's intellect resembles the real thumb of a human hand. We have wisdom, but again our wisdom is like the empty thumb and Christ's wisdom is like the real thumb. One day, however, the real thumb will get into the thumb of the glove and the two thumbs will become one! One is the appearance, the expression; the other is the reality, the content. Our wisdom is simply the container of the wisdom of Christ, the expression of the wisdom of Christ. Do you have love? Yes, we all have love, but our love is like an empty glove. Wives, don't expect love from your husbands. Even if your husband loves you, that love is empty. Praise the Lord that it is empty! It is empty that the love of Christ may come in.

But it is not always easy. It may take some dealing for the love of Christ to get into us. The fingers of a glove may be twisted or bent, giving resistance to the hand that wants to get in. Likewise, we need some dealing in order that the love of Christ may get into us. One day, Christ's love enters into the empty love of the husband. At that time, you will enjoy the real love, the love of Christ, through your husband's empty love. Praise the Lord!

Whatever we have, whatever we are, and whatever we can do is just an empty form, best used as a container to hold all that Christ is, all that Christ has, and all that Christ can do.

Christ is in us. Constantly, the life of Christ is doing a transforming work within us. Our love, our emotion, and our thinking are inadequate. Nothing we have by nature is adequate because it is empty and limited. The essence, the element of Christ must enter into all that we are. The wisdom of Christ must enter our empty wisdom, giving us the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). Our mind must be a container for the mind of Christ; the mind of Christ must fill up our mind. Then, our mind will be transformed into the image of Christ. Second Corinthians 3:18 says that we all with unveiled face behold and reflect like a mirror the glory of the Lord and are transformed into His image. This is inward transformation. This inward transformation will also become the outward conformation. We will be conformed to the image of the Son of God (Rom. 8:29m).

(6) Our Body Will Be Transfigured into the Likeness

We were made according to Christ. One day, Christ came in the likeness of this form of ours. We received Him and He came into us. This Christ is now within us doing the work of transformation, not only transforming us into His image, but also conforming us unto His very form. Eventually, He will come to transfigure our outward body into the likeness of His glorious body (Phil. 3:21). Then we will be fully, completely, and ultimately the same as He is (1 John 3:2b). When He looks at Himself, He will say, "All you people are like Me." When we look at ourselves, we will say to the Lord Jesus, "We are all like You, and You are like us." There will be no difference. We will all be like Christ, and Christ will be fully like us. Christ and we, we and Christ—we all will be in the same image and in the same likeness. This was God's purpose in creating man to express God Himself. In a sense, the creation of man has been completed, but the process of transformation continues. We are now under the process of transformation, waiting for His coming back.

b) With the Likeness of God Outwardly

Man was created not only in the image of God inwardly, but also after the likeness of God outwardly. All the other items in creation are after "their kind." Man, however, is not after man's kind, but after God's likeness. As image indicates the inward being of God, so likeness must indicate the outward form of God.

The relationship between God and man is a mystery. On the one hand, the Bible says that God is invisible. On the other hand, it says that even before the Lord Jesus was incarnated to be a man, He appeared to people several times in the Old Testament as a man. Several times Christ appeared in the form of a man's body. While Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent, he saw three men coming (Gen. 18:2a). The Lord and two angels appeared to him. Abraham invited the three men into his tent and served them a good meal. They all ate with him. God ate with Abraham and they had a thorough talk. That was why Abraham was called the friend of God (James 2:23). If we read Genesis 18, we will find that it is a record of a friend-fellowship. God was a friend to Abraham. After awhile, the two angels were sent away by the Lord, and the Lord remained with Abraham. Abraham stood before the Lord, just like a friend (Gen. 18:16a, 22). That was Christ before His incarnation.

The second time Christ appeared in the form of man was in the case of Jacob at Peniel. A man came to subdue this strong Jacob (Gen. 32:24). Yet, Jacob was wrestling with God! God in the form of man was wrestling with Jacob. Jacob was really strong and God could not subdue him until He touched his thigh and Jacob became lame. Jacob asked, "Please tell me—what is Your name?" God said, "Don't ask My name. Just let Me give you My blessing." Eventually, Jacob realized that he had met God face to face (Gen. 32:28-30). Peniel means the face of God. God appeared there as a man, a real man. If He had not been a real man, how could He have wrestled with Jacob?

Another occasion when God appeared in the form of a human body was in Joshua 5. At that time, Joshua bore the great burden of defeating Jericho. Perhaps it was the next day that the army of God was going out to fight against Jericho, and Joshua, as their leader, bore the burden for that battle. I believe that he was considering the situation in the evening time when suddenly he saw a man. Joshua asked him, "Art thou for us or for our adversaries?" That man said, "Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come" (Josh. 5:13-14). The man also told Joshua, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy" (Josh. 5:15). That was the place where God was.

By all of these instances, we can see that the Lord Jesus, before His incarnation, appeared several times in the bodyform of a man. This is really mysterious.

The grass has no face, neither do the herbs nor the trees. Starting from the animal life, we have seen that the fish has a face, but not very close to man's face. Next came the birds, the cattle, and the beasts. Then came man whose face is very much like God. This is a mystery. At any rate, we have been told clearly that we were made in God's image. This is why we have wisdom, will, and emotion, just as God does, but without the reality. What we have are simply the expressions. We need the content.

We also have a form, a form of the image, just like a photograph. However, the photograph doesn't have the reality. When man was created in the form, in the image of God, he didn't have the reality of God. After he was created, man still needed to take God in. Regardless of how much man had the form and the image of God, he did not have the reality of God or the life of God. Man failed. Then the Lord came in the form of man. He died in this form and was resurrected to uplift this form. By His death and resurrection, it is now so easy for us to take Him in. We have received and obtained this divine life, and by this divine life we all can have the reality of God. This divine life is now working in us to transform our empty life into the divine form in reality. This is transformation. Eventually, we will be conformed unto His image. The Bible is a revelation of such a mystery. It is so important, so central and crucial that we all see the image of God and the form of God in which and after which we were created. We must all see how Christ was this image and how Christ was made in the form of man that we may take Him in as our life and reality. Eventually, He and we will be mingled together and made as one. We will be His appearance and expression; He will be our reality and content. He and we will be one. He will be like us and we will be like Him. Then, we will express God to the whole universe.

Now we can see why God created the heavens and the earth and why God created the human life. This is the meaning and center of the universe. If we don't see this, we don't know what is the meaning of the universe and we don't know where we are going. Today, we do know the meaning of the universe and we know where we are and where we are going. We are here to express Him and we are going to meet Him, to be one with Him.

When we were saved, the divine life within us was like the grass. It grew into the herb and into the trees. Then, it grew into a higher plane of life—the fish, the bird, the cattle, and the beast. Not until we reach the top of the created life can we ever express God. We need the human life. According to Ezekiel 1:5, 10 and Revelation 4:6-7, of the nine items of life recorded in Genesis 1, only four are represented in the presence of God—the eagle, the ox, the lion, and the man. These four are in the presence of God, representing all the creatures before God. In Ezekiel and Revelation, there is no mention of the grass, the herb, the trees, the fish, or the creeping things. For eternity and in eternity there will be no sea. Therefore, there will be no fish. Certainly, there will be no creeping things. What will be represented in the presence of God will be the man with the cattle, the lion, and the eagle. We all must grow until we reach the higher plane of life, that is the plane of the cattle, the lion, and the eagle. We must go on until we reach the maturity of life

signified by the human life. Only this life can express God. Only this life can have dominion for God. This is our goal. We must grow and grow from the plant life to the animal life and from the animal life to the human life.

A FURTHER WORD

You have heard that all the truths in the Bible were sown in Genesis, especially in chapter 1. As we have seen, Genesis 1 says something about the light and this light has been developed through the whole Bible. We have seen the light on the first day, the lights on the fourth day, and the development of these lights to the end of the Bible where, in the last two chapters, it says, "night shall be no more." Eventually, God Himself is the light to His redeemed ones. As the redeemed ones in the New Jerusalem, we will not need the sun, the moon, or any other light. The light will be God Himself. So, the seed of light sown in Genesis 1 has been fully developed in Revelation 22.

In the same principle, we have the word image. "God made man in His own image." The image of God is for the expression of God. To express God is just to manifest God's glory. This little word image has been developed and developed until, at the end of the Bible, it has grown into the New Jerusalem. The whole city has the appearance of jasper (Rev. 21:11). If you read Revelation 4:3, you can see that the One sitting on the throne looks like jasper. God's appearance is like jasper. Eventually, the whole city of New Jerusalem is built with jasper. The wall of the city is also built with jasper (Rev. 21:18a). From every angle, from every direction, and from every side the New Jerusalem has the appearance of God. This is the expression of the image of God.

This morning, while we were pray-reading, Brother Al asked me about the four living creatures in Ezekiel 1:5, 10 and Revelation 4:6-7. In Ezekiel, each living creature has four faces: the front face is a man; the rear face is an eagle; the right face is a lion; and the left face is an ox. However, if you go on from Ezekiel to Revelation chapter 4, you see a little difference. There, each of the four living creatures has only one face. The first is not a man, but a lion. The second is not an ox, but a calf. You know the difference between an ox and a calf. An ox is older. This is strange. In my opinion, the ox in Ezekiel should be a calf, and the calf in Revelation should be an ox—first the younger, then the older. But the Bible first mentions the older and then the younger—first the ox, then the calf. I tell you, we Christians are not going to be older, but younger. The more we grow, the younger we are.

In Revelation, the lion is first, the calf second, the man third, and the eagle fourth. Brother Al asked me why there is this difference between Ezekiel and Revelation. The reason is that the order of the living creatures in Revelation is according to the order of the four Gospels. In Matthew we have the lion, the king. In Mark we have the servant, the slave, the calf. In Luke we have the man. In John we have God, the soaring eagle. What does this mean? The four living creatures in Ezekiel, strictly speaking, were the manifestation of God's glory. In the conference we had on Ezekiel, we covered Ezekiel 1 and saw how the four living creatures were the manifestation of God's glory. What is God's glory? That is Christ. When God's glory is expressed, that is Christ. But notice the difference. The four living creatures in Ezekiel were the manifestation of God's glory. The four living creatures in Revelation are the expression of Christ Himself. There has been an improvement from God's glory to Christ Himself. Thus, in Revelation, the appearance of the four living creatures is just like the four Gospels. This means that the four living creatures in Revelation are just the expression of Christ. I do not say they are Christ. They are not Christ, but they express Christ. They express what Christ is. Christ is in four aspects: the king, the slave, the man, and the very God. Christ bears these four aspects and this Christ needs an expression in His creation. So, in this universe there are four living creatures, representing all kinds of life on every plane, to express Christ.

Everything in Genesis 1, except the darkness, the death waters, and the creeping things, is Christ. The Spirit came to brood. That is Christ. Christ is the Spirit. Christ is also the Word. The light came in. The light is Christ. The air, no doubt, is Christ. The Spirit is Christ, and the Word is Christ; the light is Christ, and the air is Christ. The dry land is Christ. The grass is Christ because Christ is our green pasture. The herbs are Christ. Christ is the corn, the wheat, the henna flower, and all kinds of beautiful herbs. All the trees are Christ. Christ is the olive tree, the fig tree, the vine tree, the life tree. And the fish are Christ. Christ fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fishes. Most Christians only pay attention to the five loaves, forgetting the two fishes. However, Christ is not only the five loaves; He is also the two fishes, something from the death waters to nourish us. Christ is also the birds. He is the eagle. Exodus 19:4 says that Christ was the big eagle which bore the Israelites upon His two shoulders. As a great eagle, He delivered His people out of Egypt. One day Christ said that He was a big hen. At the end of Matthew 23 (v. 37), Christ said, "I am a hen. I want to gather you all under My wings, but you would not come to Me." Christ is the cattle, the ox, the calf, the cow, the sheep, and the lamb. Christ is also a lion (Rev. 5:5). Finally, Christ is the man, the real Adam. Christ is also the sun, the morning star, and the real source of the moon's light. In chapter 1 of Genesis, everything is Christ and Christ is everything.

If you only enjoy Christ as the grass, you are not qualified to express Him. If you enjoy Him as the herbs and as all the trees, you are still not qualified. Even if you enjoy Him as the fish, you are not qualified. Although you may enjoy Christ so much, you are not yet qualified to express Him. You must progress from all these levels of life to the level of the bird life. Then you begin to be qualified to express Christ.

The bird life is one of the four categories of life represented before the throne of God. As I mentioned last night, of the nine categories of life in Genesis 1, only four are represented before the throne of God. Let me give you the nine categories again: the grass, the herbs, the trees, the fish, the birds, the cattle, the beasts, the creeping things, and the man.

Out of nine categories, only four—the bird, the cattle, the beast, and the man—are qualified to express Christ. The grass is not qualified. It is good, but it is a kind of life on the lowest level. Neither the herbs, the trees, nor the fish are qualified. Of course, all the creeping things are forsaken for eternity. They go to the lake of fire.

Only the birds, the cattle, the beasts, and the man have a distinguished face. Your face is the outward appearance of your inward being. What you are inwardly is expressed outwardly by your face. As I have mentioned already, the grass, the herbs, and the trees have no face. The fish have a face, but their face is not distinguished. And the fish have no neck. We need a longer neck to make our face more distinct. Among all the nine categories, only four have a distinguished face, and among these four, the human face is the best, the highest, and the most distinct. Compare your face with the face of an eagle, calf, or lion. You will see that your face is much more distinguished. Why? Because, the human life within you is much more distinctive than the bird life, the cattle life, and the beast life.

According to God's economy, Christ has four aspects. He is a man, but He serves people like a calf. He is a man, but He fights the battle, exercises control, and has dominion like a lion. He is a man, but He can fly far away, soaring like an eagle. Although we need the human life to express Christ, we still need the calf life, the lion life, and the eagle life. When we have all four we can express Christ in full.

Now we can see that the little word image in Genesis 1 has undergone a great development. We not only have the four living creatures expressing Christ in four aspects. Eventually we have the New Jerusalem, a high city with the image of God expressing Christ. God looks like jasper, and the appearance of the New Jerusalem is also jasper, the same as God's appearance. This is the fulfillment of Genesis 1:26. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SEVEN

GOD'S RESTORATION AND FURTHER CREATION

(4)

PURPOSE

We have seen that man is the center of God's creation and that the human life is the highest created life. We should never forget the nine items of life mentioned in Genesis chapter one: the grass, the herbs, the trees, the fish, the birds, the cattle, the beasts, the creeping things, and man. Man is the highest created life. According to the record of Genesis 1, when God reached the point of creating man, He held a conference. This conference among the Godhead was very impressive. God said, "Let us..." This is quite meaningful. The three Persons of the Godhead were needed for the creation of man. The subsequent books of the whole Bible develop the subject of the work of the Triune God upon man. God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Then God said, "Let them." God did not say men; He said man. Man is a singular noun, but them is a plural pronoun. "Let us make man...let them..." Was there one God or many? Was there one man or many? Our God is One, but triune. Man is one, but corporate. Hallelujah! Never forget the two "lets" in Genesis 1:26. God said, "Let us" and God said, "let them." The word "us" reveals that the one God is triune; the word "them" reveals that the one man is corporate. The Triune God created a corporate man.

2) To Have Man to Exercise God's Dominion

God said, "Let us make man in our image..and let them have dominion..." God created a corporate man to exercise His dominion (Gen. 1:26-28). The word dominion includes more than just authority. Dominion means having authority to rule and to form a kingdom. Dominion means having a kingdom as a sphere in which to exercise authority. If I have authority, but no sphere over which to rule, I have no dominion. God said, "Let man have dominion." Man was given dominion over all things. Keep the words image and dominion in mind and underline them in your Bible.

Very few Christians pay attention to the word dominion when they read Genesis 1. We need to consider the words image and dominion a little more. An image is an expression. God created man in His image with the intention that man might express Him. The invisible God desires to be expressed. He needs an expression. Dominion means kingdom, authority. Man was made in God's image to express God and was given authority to represent God and to have dominion. We are God's expression and we are God's representative. The young people especially need to lay hold of these two words with these two basic revelations: image and dominion. The purpose of God's restoration and further creation was twofold: to have a corporate man to express God and to have a corporate man to exercise His dominion.

a) Sphere

This matter of dominion includes a sphere or a realm. There are three points related to this sphere:

(1) Over All Things in the Seas

Man must have dominion over the seas. The seas are the lodging place of the demons (Matt. 8:32; 12:43). Thus, the sphere of God's dominion must include the seas.

(2) Over All Things in the Air

Man must have dominion over all things in the air, which is the place where Satan and his angels are (Eph. 2:2; 6:12). There are evil powers in the air with Satan as their head. Ephesians 2:2 describes Satan as the prince of the power of the air.

(3) Over All Things on the Earth

Man must have dominion over all things on the earth, the field of Satan's activities. Satan is very active on the earth (Luke 4:5-6). So, here in Genesis 1:26 it especially says that man may have the dominion "over all the earth." The earth has been usurped by Satan. Thus, it needs to be ruled over by man, God's representative.

Remember that the sphere of God's dominion which He committed to man includes three sections: the seas, the dwelling place of the demons; the air, the place where Satan and his angels are; the earth, the field of Satan's activities.

When the Lord Jesus was on this earth, He had to deal with Satan, fallen angels, or demons wherever He went. That was why the Lord Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves during a storm. The wind came from the fallen angels in the air and the waves came from the demons in the water. The Lord told the wind, "Stop" and the waves, "Be calm." Immediately the wind ceased and the waves were calm. The fallen angels and the demons were subdued and overruled by the Lord Jesus. If we know how to read the Bible, we will see in the four Gospels that the Lord Jesus exercised God's authority over the seas, the air, and the earth. This is the sphere of God's dominion which He committed to man.

God's dominion not only has a sphere; it also has an intention. What was God's intention in giving man dominion?

(1) To Deal with God's Enemy

The first aspect of God's intention is to deal with His enemy, to deal with Satan typified by the creeping things (Gen. 1:26). In the Bible, the creeping things are demonic, devilish, and Satanic. In the last message, we pointed out that only four living creatures, representing all creation, are present before the throne of God—the eagle, the ox, the lion, and the man. No creeping things such as serpents or scorpions are represented before God. In the Bible, Satan is typified by the serpent (Gen. 3:1). In Revelation 12:9 Satan is called the "ancient serpent." He has become old since the time he first appeared in Genesis 3.

In God's original creation, He had only one purpose—to express Himself. Due to Satan's rebellion, God now has another purpose—to deal with His enemy. When God created man, He had both of these purposes. Therefore, He created man in His own image that man might express Him and He gave him dominion that man might deal with His enemy. Both of these things must be accomplished. We need the image of God in order to express God and we need the dominion of God in order to subdue the enemy.

We need to express God and to deal with Satan in our home life. Many times the husband comes home and immediately the wife does not express God. She expresses the serpent. The wife's face has the appearance of a subtle serpent. Many times the husband also expresses the serpent. I have learned this by experience. Sometimes, when I saw Satan expressed in the members of my family, I didn't say a word. I went to my bedroom, knelt down, and prayed, "Lord, bind the serpent." A number of times I realized that I myself was expressing the serpent. Again I ran away to pray, "O Lord, forgive me. Bind the serpent." On many occasions, the divine authority of God is not exercised. The evil power of Satan is expressed instead. Recently, I learned that many young brothers are living in the brothers' houses. However, I am fearful that even in the brothers' house there is still the possibility that Satan's image, not God's, will be expressed, that the evil power, not God's authority, will be exercised. We all must realize that today God has this double goal to accomplish—to express Himself and to deal with His enemy. It is not really your husband who loses his temper. It is the serpent. It is not really your wife who says something to provoke your temper. It is the serpent. Don't deal with the husband and don't deal with the wife. It is not their fault. We must deal with the serpent that is behind them. Exchanging words can never deal with Satan. The more we argue, the more Satan gains ground. The only way to deal with Satan is to go on our knees, pray, call on the name of Jesus, and ask Him to bind the serpent.

(2) To Recover the Earth

The second aspect of God's intention in giving man dominion is to recover the earth (Gen. 1:26-28). Man is to have dominion over the earth, to subdue it, and to conquer it. To conquer the earth means that the enemy is there already, that a war is raging. Therefore, we must fight and conquer.

The young people who are preparing to enter into marriage must realize that marriage is a battle. Many of us know this by experience. Even when we were on our honeymoon, we were on the battlefield, fighting with our husband or wife. If we did not fight outwardly, we fought inwardly. Every area of life—school life, work life, family life—is a battlefield. The enemy never sleeps. All day long he is on the alert, not only in the family life, but also in the church life. Even in the church life, Satan and all his messengers are busy. On the earth a warfare is raging. God's intention is to recover the earth.

The earth was and still is usurped by Satan. Look at today's society. Look how the enemy is still usurping the whole earth.

God wants to regain the earth. The earth has become a crucial place, a place that Satan wants to hold and a place that God wants to regain. The battle is over the earth. Whoever gains the earth is the winner. If Satan can keep the earth under his hand, he has the victory. If God can regain the earth, He will have the victory. The Lord Jesus has not returned because the earth is still so much under Satan's usurping. This is why God needs the church. The church must fight the battle to regain the earth, if not the whole earth, at least some stepping stones, some outpost for the Lord Jesus to put His feet upon. The earth is crucial.

This point has been fully proved by Psalm 8. Psalm 8 begins by saying, "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" It also ends the same way. There is no doubt that the Lord's name is excellent in the heavens, but, in a sense, the name of the Lord is not excellent on this earth. His name is not excellent among so many of the fallen people. We need to pray, "Your name be sanctified" (Matt. 6:9). Oh, the Lord's name must be sanctified on this earth. The problem is not in the heavens; the problem is here on earth.

God desires that His kingdom come to this earth and that His will be done on earth (Matt. 6:10). Now we can understand the prayer which the Lord Jesus established. He said, "Let Your name be sanctified; let Your kingdom come." Certainly this means to come from the heavens to the earth. The prayer continues, "Let Your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." God's will is now being done in heaven. But on the earth there are many frustrations, hindering God's will from being done. We must pray, "Let Your name be sanctified; let Your kingdom come; let Your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." We must fight to recover the earth.

At the time of the millennium, the earth will become the kingdom of God. This is revealed in Revelation 11:15. When the Lord Jesus comes to inaugurate the millennium, the whole earth will become the kingdom of God. Then the earth will be regained by God.

In eternity, God's habitation will come down from heaven to the new earth (Rev. 21:1-2). Many Christians dream of going to heaven. That is a good dream and, undoubtedly, all of us will be there. However, God desires to come down to earth. We like the heavens, but God likes the earth. We are going up, and He is coming down. Hallelujah! Let me tell you the truth: when we get to heaven, the Lord will say, "Children, let us go down. Let us go down to take over the earth." In eternity, the heavens will not be God's habitation. God's habitation will be the New Jerusalem, and the New Jerusalem will come down from the heavens to the new earth. This proves that God's desire is to possess the earth.

Satan, the usurping one, will not only be cast out of the air, but also cast out of the earth. According to Revelation 12:9, Satan will first be cast down from the air to the earth. Then Satan will be bound and cast out of the earth into the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:2-3). There will be no more spiritual smog. We will have fresh air, and the earth will be cleansed of all defilement. That will be during the

millennium. At the end of the millennium, Satan will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). After the millennium, we will have eternity in which God's eternal habitation will be on the new earth. God wants the earth.

(3) To Bring in God's Authority

The third aspect of God's intention in giving man dominion is to bring in God's authority, to exercise God's authority over the earth. Man must exercise God's authority in order that the kingdom of God may come to earth, that the will of God may be done on earth, and that the glory of God may be manifested on earth. All of this will be on the earth. God will never be satisfied to have His kingdom only in the heavens. Neither will He be happy to have His will done only in the heavens nor to see His glory expressed only in the heavens. He wants all these things to happen on the earth. This is the responsibility of the church today. In the church we have the kingdom of God. In the church the will of God is done. In the church the glory of God is expressed. Hallelujah! We have a foretaste. Now we can see why God gave man dominion over everything in the seas, in the air, and on the earth. God's intention is to eliminate the enemy, regain the earth, and manifest His glory.

(4) The Fulfillment

Has this been accomplished? Certainly not. Yet, God created man with this intention. Satan knows this much better than we do. The Bible tells us that immediately after the creation of man, Satan came in to damage the man whom God had created for His purpose. Man fell. However, God did not give man up. God Himself became a man. He came that He might get into man and make Himself one with man. He came to be the second man called Jesus (1 Cor. 15:47). The first man didn't fulfill God's purpose; the second man did. The first man was a corporate man, and the second man is also a corporate man. Adam was the head of the first corporate man, and Christ is the Head of the second man. God's purpose is fulfilled by the second man.

(a) With Christ

The fulfillment of God's purpose in giving man dominion started with Christ.

aa. When Christ Came, the Kingdom of God Came

The preaching in the New Testament begins in a peculiar way, in a way that is contrary to our concept. It says, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 4:17). The words "has drawn near" mean is come. When Christ came, the kingdom of God came. Christ brought in the kingdom. The little man Jesus was the kingdom of God. Many Christians think that the kingdom did not come when Jesus came. According to their concept, when the Jewish people rejected Jesus with the kingdom, the kingdom was suspended and the church age began. They think that the church is not the kingdom, that after the church age the kingdom will be established by the return of Jesus. In the Bible, there is some ground to say this and, in a sense, it is right, but just partially right. Romans 14:17 tells us that the church today is the kingdom. The church life is the kingdom. In a sense, the Jewish people rejected the kingdom. In another sense, the Lord established the kingdom by establishing the church. We can never separate the church from the kingdom. In Matthew 16:18, the Lord Jesus told Peter, "Peter, you are a stone and I will build the church upon Myself as the rock. The gates of Hades shall not prevail against this church." Immediately after this (v. 19), the Lord Jesus said, "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom." On the day of Pentecost and in the house of Cornelius Peter established the church by using the keys of the kingdom to open the door for both Jews and Gentiles to enter into the kingdom. Thus, when the church started, the kingdom was there. The church is the kingdom. No doubt there will be a full manifestation of the kingdom in the future. But the reality of the kingdom is here today. That is the church life.

bb. Christ Cast Out Demons
to Bring in the Kingdom of God

The four gospels tell us that Jesus encountered demons wherever He went. Jesus could never tolerate demons and He immediately cast them out. In Matthew 12:28 Jesus tells us that His casting out the demons was the coming of the kingdom. That was the dominion of God. Adam had failed to bring in the kingdom, but when Jesus came He brought in the kingdom by casting out demons. To cast out demons means to bring in the kingdom of God.

cc. Christ Gave His Disciples
Authority over the Power of the Enemy

Christ also gave His disciples authority over all the power of Satan. In Luke 10:19, the Lord Jesus said, "Behold I have given you the authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy." Both serpents and scorpions are in plural, indicating that they are many. In verse 18 of the same chapter we see Satan. In verse 20 we have the spirits, that is the demons. The "serpents" means the satanic power, and "scorpions" means the demonic power. Satan, the serpents, and the scorpions have power, but we have authority. Our authority exceeds their power. There are many powerful cars on the streets. However, the little policeman has authority. When he says, "Stop," you stop. The cars have power; the policeman has authority. Satan and his demons have power, but we are God's policemen. We must give Satan the commandment, "Stop!" When Jesus gave this authority to His disciples and they exercised it to cast out demons, they were excited. However, the Lord Jesus told them, "Don't rejoice in this. You must rejoice in something better—that your names are written in heaven." When Jesus came, the kingdom came. When Jesus cast out demons, He brought in the kingdom of God. Also, Jesus did this by and through His disciples. He gave them authority to cast out demons, and they did.

dd. Christ Received All Authority

After His resurrection, Christ received all the authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). As the Lord God He had authority before His resurrection. As a man named Jesus of Nazareth, He was commissioned with all authority in heaven and on earth after His resurrection. Jesus is the real Adam. He has been committed with God's dominion.

(b) With the Church, Including the Saints:

aa. The Gates of Hades Cannot Prevail against the Church

The fulfillment of God's intention in giving man dominion involves Christ as the Head and the church, including all the saints, as the

Body. The fulfillment of God's intention is not only with the Head, but also with the Body. The gates of Hades cannot prevail against the church (Matt. 16:18). The Bible does not say the gates of Hades (meaning the power of Satan) cannot prevail against the saints. They can prevail against the saints if the saints are separate or individualistic. You need to be built into the church. The Body which is built up with Christ can never be defeated by Satan. Satan can never prevail against the builded church.

bb. The Saints Have Been Given Authority
to Bind the Enemy

The saints have been given authority to bind the enemy (Matt. 16:19; 18:18). The word in Matthew 16:19 was spoken to Peter; the word in Matthew 18:18 was spoken to every believer. The Catholic Church claims that Peter had the authority to represent Christ. They base this on Matthew 16:19. However, we must tell them that we also have Matthew 18:18. Not only has Peter been given authority to bind and loose, but we also. Every believer has been given the authority to bind and to loose. Today, the church with all the saints has the authority to bind and loose. Many times, we should not simply pray; we should bind and loose.

cc. God Will Crush Satan under the Feet
of the Saints

Romans 16:20 says, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." Paul said, "soon." I don't know how Paul felt when he said this nineteen hundred years ago. It may seem to us that a long time has passed. But, we believe, it has not been too long. Shortly, Satan will be crushed. The word crush not only means to bruise or break, but also to subdue. Satan must be under our feet. In your home life Satan must be under your feet. In your married life Satan must be under your feet. In your church life Satan must be under your feet. You have to tell him, "Satan, your position is under my feet." Here and now Satan must be under our feet.

dd. The Saints Have to Fight against the Enemy

Second Corinthians 10:3-5 and Ephesians 6:11-13 tell us that we must fight against the enemy. We not only fight, we wrestle. Wrestling is more difficult than fighting. We must wrestle with the evil powers in the air.

ee. The Overcoming Saints Will Have Authority
over the Nations

The overcoming saints will have authority over the nations (Rev. 2:26-27) and in the millennium they will be kings reigning with Christ over the whole earth (Rev. 20:4, 6). By that time, God will fully have His dominion on this earth. That will be the fulfillment of what God desired to have in Genesis 1.

ff. All the Saints Will Reign for Eternity

Eventually, all the saints will reign as kings over the earth for eternity in the New Jerusalem. At that time, Satan, the evil angels in the air, and the sea with all the demons will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10, 13-14; Matt. 25:41). All the pollution will be cleared away. The air, the water, and the earth have been polluted. When eternity comes, all the pollution will disappear. Everything will be clear, and God's dominion will be there. God's authority will be exercised on the earth. In that realm and in that sphere God's image will be fully expressed and God's glory will be fully manifested. That will be the eternal kingdom, the dominion of God.

Genesis 1 is a nursery. All the seeds of the truth were sown there. We have seen that the word light was sown in Genesis 1 and developed through all the Bible until Revelation 22 where there is no need for the sun, the moon, or any lamp. God Himself is the light. Likewise, the word image first appears in Genesis 1 and is developed throughout the entire Bible until we see the New Jerusalem bearing the image of God, expressing God. In the same principle, the word dominion also needs the whole Bible to explain it. We go from the single word dominion in Genesis 1 to Revelation 22:5 where we see that all the saints will reign with God for eternity. That will be the ultimate fulfillment of God's dominion.

Man was made in God's image to express God and was given God's dominion to represent God and to deal with His enemy. Today, the church is the great part of the second man. The church's responsibility and duty is positively to express God and negatively to subdue God's enemy. This is our duty. We must bear this responsibility.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS
MESSAGE EIGHT
GOD'S RESTORATION AND FURTHER CREATION
(5)
ULTIMATE CONSUMMATION

d. Ultimate Consummation

In this message we come to the ultimate consummation, the climax of Genesis 1. We need to recall the various steps in the process of God's restoration and further creation. The Spirit was brooding over the darkness and death. Light came, and there was a division between light and darkness. God made the expanse to divide the things above from the things beneath. Next God called the dry land out of the death waters. Out of the dry land the plant life was generated. After the plant life, the fourth-day lights came in to shine upon the earth. Then came the fish life, the bird life, the cattle life, the beast life, and all the creeping things. Eventually, God created man. Man is the climax of God's creation because man bears God's image. This is not a small thing.

1) *God Was Expressed and Represented*

Man is the expression of God because he bears God's image. He also has the dominion of God. Man was committed with God's dominion over the seas, the air, the earth, and especially over all the creeping things. Man has power, authority, and dominion because man looks like God. Man bears the image of God; so, man has authority. The climax in God's creation is man bearing God's image and representing God with His authority over all things.

When man looks at God and God looks at man, they look alike. If I take a photograph of you, you will look like the photograph and the photograph will look like you. Likewise, God can say, "Man, you are very much like Me." Man will reply, "God, You are so much like me. We two are very much alike." Also, when man comes out of the presence of God, he is the ruler over all created things. He has authority to rule. This is dominion, the kingdom.

The two crucial words in chapter one of Genesis are image and dominion. You may forget the creeping things and the fish, but don't forget man with image and dominion. Man was not made in the image of a serpent or scorpion, but in the image of God. This is the climax: man bearing God's image, exercising God's authority to maintain dominion.

Image and dominion were sown as two seeds in Genesis 1. However, these seeds need the whole Bible to grow and develop. The harvest, the full maturity, is in Revelation 21 and 22. The whole New Jerusalem expresses God, bearing God's appearance. The New Jerusalem also exercises God's divine authority to maintain God's dominion for eternity. Today, these two seeds are growing in you and me. The image of God and the authority of God are constantly growing within us.

Consider the case of a young married couple. The husband loves the wife, and the wife loves the husband. Although she loves her husband, the wife says within herself, "Although I love you, you are just a naughty young man." It is doctrinally correct to tell the wife that her husband is her head. However, the wife will say within herself, "I know that my husband is my head, but actually he is a naughty young man. It is hard for me to respect him." One day the husband is saved, and the divine life enters into him. This is the seed, and the seed grows in this young man day after day, month after month. Perhaps after eighteen months, the wife will look at her husband and say, "Surely I must respect him. Once he was just a naughty young man. But look at him today! He has some weight. He is not so loose, so light. He is weighty." There is no need for the husband to exercise authority and say, "You must know that I am now a Christian husband. You must submit to me." The husband need not say this. Whenever the wife looks at him, she will realize that his words are weighty, that there is something precious and valuable about him. Spontaneously she respects him. Formerly she argued. Now she respects and honors him, considering seriously everything he says because he now bears the image of God, and out of this image comes the divine authority. This is dominion.

Many people have read Watchman Nee's book, Spiritual Authority. They simply utilize that book, saying, "We are the elders of the church. We are the leaders of a group of Christians. We are God's authority." If you say this, you are through with God's authority. You do not bear the image of God. When the Lord Jesus came, He never held any attitude toward people that He was the authority and that people had to submit to Him. He never did this. However, when He was on this earth, He bore the image of God. He also had the authority of God. Authority always comes from the image.

The ultimate consummation is that God is expressed and represented. Nothing can be higher than this. When God is expressed and represented, that is the climax.

Man was made in God's image that man might express Him. This is a matter of life. Life with the image is for the expression of God. God gave man dominion over all things that man might represent Him. This is a matter of authority. If you are going to represent God with authority, you need to express God in life. The whole story of the Bible is just one story, telling of the saints who expressed God and represented God. We need now to consider eighteen cases covering the Old and the New Testaments.

a) The Case of Abraham

We begin with Abraham. This does not mean that before Abraham there was no man who expressed God. There were at least three great men—Abel, Enoch, and Noah. However, if we read their history, we find no record that they conquered the enemy or subdued anything. Until Abraham, there is no record of anyone who subdued the enemy. Abraham built an altar that he might contact God (Gen. 12:7). The more you contact God, the more you will bear God's image. The more you look at God, the more you will look like God. To build an altar for the purpose of contacting God means to become more and more transformed into the image of God. Abraham didn't build a tower. The people at Babel didn't build an altar to contact God; they built a tower to make themselves a name (Gen. 11:4). That is self-pride. Abraham, however, was called out of that environment; he built a small altar and there he contacted God. The more he contacted God, the more he looked like God. The Bible tells us that eventually God became a friend to Abraham and that Abraham was called the friend of God (James 2:23). If you read Genesis 18, you will see that God did not come to Abraham as the Creator or the Almighty God. God came to him as a friend. God and Abraham had fellowship just like two friends talking together. By that time Abraham had become more and more like God. Therefore, we are told that Abraham conquered and defeated the enemies (Gen. 14:17).

b) The Case of Joseph

Joseph was the last person whose history was recorded in Genesis. He lived a holy and victorious life (Gen. 39:11-12). He lived a life that was very much like God. God was holy; Joseph was holy. God was victorious; Joseph was victorious. Joseph bore the image of God. He was a man who fulfilled God's intention. The story of Joseph is the story of a holy and victorious life, a life that eventually became the ruling authority. Joseph ruled over all of Egypt (Gen. 41:39-45). In Genesis chapter one we see a man made by God in His image and committed with God's dominion. In the last few chapters of Genesis, we also see a man who really expressed God, represented God, and ruled over the whole earth.

c) The Case of Moses

Moses was not a great politician. He was a man who contacted God. After contacting God, his face shone with the divine glory (Exo. 34:29-30). When Moses' face shone with the glory of God, he bore the image of God. Thus, Moses became a man with authority. He had authority to rule over the whole house of Israel (Heb. 3:2, 5). He also had authority to defeat the enemy (Exo. 14:30-31). He did not fight the battle with machine guns or atom bombs, but with a little rod. The little rod not only represented power; it represented authority. Moses used that rod and said to the Red Sea, "Open up the way." The waters were divided. That was authority. Moses was a man who bore God's image and represented God with divine authority.

d) The Case of Israel with the Tabernacle

Following Moses, we have the people of Israel. Israel was a people called to be a kingdom of priests (Exo. 19:6). Israel was not called to be a kingdom of kings, but a kingdom of priests. The priesthood is altogether related to God's image. The kingship is related to God's authority. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament we have these two posts, the priesthood and the kingship. The priesthood is for us to contact God and to have the image of God; the kingship is for us to represent God and to exercise God's authority. Later on we will see that Christians have been called to be priests and kings. The destiny of the people of Israel was to be a kingdom of priests. They were to contact God until, like Moses, their faces shone with the glory of God. Don't look at the negative side of the people of Israel. Look at the positive side. With the ark of the tabernacle they were the priests that defeated Jericho (Josh. 6:1-21). If you read Joshua 6 again, you will see that the whole nation of Israel did not fight the battle with swords or spears. Day by day, they bore the testimony and blew the rams' horns. Then they shouted, meaning that they praised God. Jericho fell. They did not fight the battle like soldiers or warriors. They fought the battle like priests. As long as you are a priest, you are qualified to defeat the enemy.

Wives, why do you lose the war in your family life? Because you don't have a priest's face. Perhaps you have the face of a scorpion or a turtle or a serpent. If you don't express the face of a priest, you have lost the war already. Husbands, we are the head, but what kind of head are we—the head of a scorpion? The husband who has a scorpion's head can never be a proper head. You must have a head that bears the face of a priest, shining with God's glory. If we have a priest's face, we will gain the victory in our family life. I would even check with you brothers in the brothers' house. What kind of face do you bear? Do you bear the face of a priest reflecting the glory of the Lord or the face of a mouse? We must be priests. Then we will subdue the whole environment. As long as you have the priest's face, you have authority. Jericho will be subdued.

e) The Case of Aaron with the Budding Rod

The case of Aaron is very interesting. Although God's intention was to make the whole nation of Israel a kingdom of priests, the nation failed God. So, out of the entire nation, God called out one tribe, the Levites, to be a tribe of priests. The head of that tribe was the house of Aaron. At a certain time, the people of Israel murmured and rebelled against Aaron, saying, "Is God only with you and not with us?" Then God asked each of the twelve tribes to bring a rod with the name of the tribe written upon it. A rod means authority. Aaron's rod was the only rod that budded (Num. 17:2-10). It budded almonds. In Palestine, the first thing that blossoms in the springtime is the almonds. In typology, the almond blossoms signify resurrection life. After the wintertime, the first thing that blossoms is almonds—that is resurrection life. Aaron's rod was a piece of dead wood. Overnight this piece of dead wood budded. It became a budding rod, not budding with apples or grapefruit, but with almonds. This means that it was surviving with the resurrection life. Where there is life, there is authority. Where there is divine life, there is divine authority. Where there is life, there is the image, and the image brings in dominion. Thus, Aaron had the resurrection life to express God. So, Aaron had authority to represent God.

Elders in the local churches, leaders in all the service groups, leading sisters—you all must be very clear that to be a leading one in the churches among God's people means that you must bud. You must bud with the resurrection life. We are all simply pieces of dead wood. Whether or not this dead wood can be a rod of authority depends on whether or not this dead wood buds with resurrection life. If you have the intention to be a leader in a certain service, we will wait to see whether or not the dead wood rots or buds. If it buds with resurrection life, that is a sign authority is there. It is no more a piece of dead wood; it is a ruling rod.

f) The Case of Joshua and Caleb

The principle is the same in the case of Joshua and Caleb. They fully followed the Lord (Num. 14:24). The Lord Himself testified that Caleb fully followed Him. Thus, they defeated the enemy (Num. 14:6-9). When they followed the Lord, they had the image. Then they were in the authority.

g) The Cases of the Judges

I like Judges 5:31. This verse says that during the time of the judges, there were some who loved the Lord. They who loved the Lord shone as the sunshine. So they defeated the enemy. Whenever a certain person shone as the sun, there was victory over the enemy and rest for the entire nation. The whole book of Judges is a book of repetition. Whenever there was one who loved the Lord and shone as the sun, there was victory through him. The whole nation enjoyed rest through him.

h) The Case of David

David was a man after God's heart. If you read 1 Samuel 13:14, you will see that originally Saul was the king. However, Saul did not have a heart after God. He lost the throne, and God found another man who was after His heart. This one, David, doubtless had the image of God. It was he who defeated the enemy (1 Chron. 22:8a).

i) The Cases of the Kings

We have seen the priesthood. Now we come to the kingship. Whenever the kings were one with the Lord, they defeated the enemy (2 Chron. 14:2-14). Whenever they were not one with the Lord, they were defeated. They lost the authority. In other words, whenever the kings were in the image of God and expressed God, they had authority to defeat the enemies. We have now both the priesthood and the kingship. Never forget that the priesthood is for the image and that the kingship is for the dominion. Now we are priests to be like God and, at the same time, we are kings to represent God, exercising His authority over the enemies.

j) The Case of Daniel

Daniel was a captive in Babylon, a waiter in the king's palace. Yet, he lived a holy life, a life that expressed God (Dan. 1:8). Thus, he came into power. He had authority over the world at that time (Dan. 6:28).

k) The Case of Jesus

When Jesus was on this earth, He expressed God. Wherever He was, He expressed God. He was a real man and a typical man, but He continually expressed God. So, He obtained authority over everything (Matt. 28:18). Zechariah 6:13 tells us that Jesus bears two

posts, the priesthood and the kingship. He was the priest and He was the king. Today, He is still the High Priest and is still the King of kings. He is the One who expresses God, the One who represents God. He bears God's image and He holds God's authority. This is Jesus.

l) The Case of Zebedee's Two Sons

One day, the mother of Zebedee's children came with her two sons to Jesus to pray (Matt. 20:20-23). She prayed a good prayer, asking that her two sons sit on the Lord's two sides in the kingdom. We all might have prayed such a prayer. The Lord Jesus answered her prayer, but not according to the way she prayed. The Lord Jesus said, "You have prayed about the two sides. Now you must know that whether or not your sons will have these two sides is not up to Me. It is up to the Father. But I tell you one thing—you must suffer. You must drink what I will drink and suffer what I will suffer." This means that if you are going to have authority, you need to have life. To suffer is to gain life. If there is no death, there is no life. If there is no suffering, there is no life. Life always comes through suffering. If we are going to obtain authority, we need to gain life through suffering.

m) The Cases of the Apostles

The entire book of Acts and all the Epistles show us that the apostles were persons who bore the image of God. Therefore, they constantly had God's authority. They had God's image and they exercised God's authority. We should not just consider them as good preachers or great teachers. That is too low. That is not the climax. We must look at them as persons who bore God's image and exercised divine authority.

n) The Negative Case of Sceva's Seven Sons

The seven sons of Sceva saw how Paul cast out demons by the name of Jesus (Acts 19:13-16). They imitated Paul, telling the demons, "I cast you out by the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches." The demons are not so easy to deal with. The demon said, "Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you to cast me out? I will jump all over you." Instead of defeating the demons, the demons defeated them. If you don't have the image, you can never have authority. The demons know and you yourself also know. If you don't have life, you don't have authority. If you don't bear the image, you can never exercise dominion.

o) The Case of the Believers in the Church Age

Revelation 5:10 and 1 Peter 2:9 both tell us that today Christians are royal priests. On the one hand we are priests; on the other hand we are kings. However, we need to contact God that we may have the real image to bear the glory of God in life. Then we have the authority to represent God. But most Christians miss this. They don't look like priests and, thus, they are not kings. If you don't bear the image, you will lose the authority. Praise God that through all the centuries there have been and there still are some saints who contact God, keeping themselves in the real priesthood. They have authority and they exercise kingship.

p) The Case of the Overcoming Saints in the Millennium

During the millennium, the coming kingdom age of a thousand years, the overcoming saints will be priests and kings (Rev. 20:4, 6). They will be priests expressing God and kings representing God.

*q) The Case of All the Saints
in the New Heaven and the New Earth*

In eternity, all the saints will serve God as priests (Rev. 22:3b-4). They will express God and bear God's image. The saints will also reign as kings, representing God with His authority (Rev. 22:5b).

r) The Case of the New Jerusalem

Finally, the New Jerusalem will bear God's appearance. Revelation 4:3a tells us that the appearance of God is like jasper. Eventually, the wall of the whole city of New Jerusalem will be built with jasper (Rev. 21:18a). The entire city will have the appearance of God (Rev. 21:11). Then the city will exercise God's authority (Rev. 21:24, 26). In eternity the whole body of the redeemed saints will bear God's image to express God and exercise God's authority to represent God. That will be the climax and the ultimate consummation.

We don't have to wait for that day. We can all have a foretaste today. We can enjoy the image of God and the dominion of God. Today we are priests and we are kings. We must keep our birthright. We are here expressing God with His image and we are here representing God with His dominion. Hallelujah! What a position this is and what a responsibility—yet what an enjoyment! Praise the Lord! We are God's priests and we are God's kings. We bear God's image and we have God's dominion. Now we are the people in the church who express God and represent God. Hallelujah! We do have the image and the dominion.

I hope that you all can see that the whole Bible is a record of the development of image and dominion. It is not a small thing that these two items are the climax of the record in Genesis 1. That chapter began with darkness, emptiness, waste, and death waters. Then the Spirit brooded, the light separated, and the expanse divided. The dry land appeared to generate life. Then came the lowest life, the lower life, the higher life, and the highest created life—man. Look at all of the life forms. With the grass, the herbs, and the trees there is no face. A fish does have a face, but it is not very distinct. The face of a bird is more distinguished. Then we have the cattle and the beasts. Eventually, we have man's face. We all must admit that the human face is the most distinctive. This face is the face that bears God's image. With this face, that is, with this expression, God's authority has been committed.

Everything is determined by what you look like. If you look like a scorpion, that is something related to demons. If you look like a serpent, that is something related to Satan. But if you look like a real man, that is related to God's image. A real man has authority.

What is a real man? A real man is a priest to God. If you are a priest, then you are a king. If you are in the priesthood, you surely have the kingship. This means that if you have the image of God in life, you certainly have the authority of God for His dominion.

The whole Bible is a record of the development of image and dominion. In Genesis 1 we have Adam in God's image and with God's

dominion, but that is only a little seed. We go on to Abraham. Abraham was the first person who matured and developed something of God's image and authority. He contacted God and defeated the enemy. Then we come to Joseph, a very matured person. As we read Joseph's story, we see a man bearing God's full image of holiness and victory. We see the man Joseph exercising authority. At that time, the authority was not Pharaoh of Egypt—it was Joseph. Joseph ruled over the whole earth. As we continue through the Old Testament, we see that God called out a people to be a nation of priests. The whole nation was to contact God and bear God's image as His priests. Therefore, they would be kings in every kind of situation. There would be no need for them to fight. The whole situation would be subdued under their feet. Then we come to the kings and the prophets. Finally, we come to Jesus. He is fully a priest as well as a king. With Him there is the priesthood to express God and the kingship to represent God. Christ is the Head. Following Him, is the Body, the composition of all the redeemed saints. As the Body, we are the same as the Head, bearing the image as priests and exercising the authority as kings. Today we are priests to God and kings over every situation. We express God in the church life and represent Him in every situation. Then will come the millennium, the fullness of time, during which all the overcoming saints will literally be the priests expressing God with God's image and the kings representing God with God's authority, having full dominion over this earth. Eventually, we will have eternity. In eternity we will see a wonderful consummation—the New Jerusalem. That will be the real climax. Nothing can be higher and fuller than that. The whole city of New Jerusalem will bear the image of God and the whole city will exercise God's dominion. Hallelujah! This is the record of the Bible. The Bible records the development of God's image with God's dominion. God will be eternally expressed and God will be eternally represented by His redeemed people.

A FURTHER WORD

Let us turn to the book of Matthew and read the last verse of chapter sixteen and the first two verses of chapter seventeen. The Lord Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, There are some of those standing here who shall by no means taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. And after six days Jesus takes with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brings them up into a high mountain apart. And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone as the sun, and His garments became white as the light." In these verses we see the coming of Jesus in His kingdom. When Jesus was shining in the transfiguration, that was the coming of the kingdom. Where there is the shining of Jesus, there is the kingdom. This shining is the bearing of God's image. The image is present, and immediately the dominion appears. When we shine with God's glory, there is no need for us to exercise dominion purposely. The authority of God is just there.

How can we shine with the glory of God? We need to read 2 Corinthians 3:18. "And we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit." I like the word face, unveiled face. In the transfiguration the face of the Lord Jesus shone as the bright sun. However, the face mentioned in 2 Corinthians 3:18 is not simply the outward face, but the inward face. We all have an outer face and an inner face. The outer face is simply the expression of the inner face. The outer face is our outward being; the inward face is our inward being. The face is the index of our whole being, the expression of our whole being. None of us here has a veil upon his outward face, but I am afraid that many of us still have some veils over our inner face. We need an unveiled face.

Religious things and holy things as well as sinful things and worldly things can be a veil to us. If you study the context of 2 Corinthians 3, you will see that the veil mentioned there is specifically the Old Testament in letters. Even the Bible can be a veil. Even the letters in the Bible can be a veil to cover us, keeping us from seeing the living Lord. If the letters of the Bible can be a veil to us, then everything can be a veil—your wife, your husband, your friends, your children, your self, your brothers and sisters, your good behavior, your bad behavior, your zealous activity, your work for God—everything. All things, provided they are not the Lord Himself, can be a veil. It doesn't matter how holy a thing is, how heavenly it is, how spiritual it is, or how religious it is, as long as it is not the Lord Himself, it can be a veil. You may still be under this kind of veiling. That is why you sit here, but you cannot see the Lord.

Second Corinthians 3:18 says that we all with an unveiled face behold as a mirror. We are a mirror. As a mirror, we behold. What a mirror beholds, it reflects. We need to have an unveiled face beholding and reflecting the glory of the Lord, just like Moses when he beheld the glory of God for forty days and God's glory radiated from the skin of his face. When he came down from the mountain, he was shining, glowing with God's glory. We all need to be like that. We all need to forget everything bad, good, holy, unholy, religious, unreligious, spiritual, unspiritual. Regardless of what a thing may be, if it is not the Lord Himself, we must put it aside. We need to recognize the subtlety of the enemy. Satan can utilize anything to turn you away from beholding the Lord. The only thing that Satan cannot utilize is the Lord Himself.

In the New Testament there are at least four books written specifically about the things that frustrate people from beholding the Lord, things that veil people from contacting and enjoying the Lord. The book of Galatians deals with the law, religion, and tradition. All of these are a veil of separation. The law was given by God and was holy. Even the New Testament says that the law is holy (Rom. 7:12). Yet, even something holy such as the law can sever you from Christ, cutting you off from the enjoyment of Christ (Gal. 5:4 ASV). It is possible to be severed from Christ, not just by immoral books, but by the God-given law. How? Because your face can be turned to the law instead of Christ. Thus, the law immediately becomes a veil. The law always forms a religion, and religion has long traditions. So we have the law, religion, and traditions, all forming layers of insulation, insulating you from the heavenly electricity which is the Lord Himself.

Colossians is another book. In Colossians the word philosophy is used. The word philosophy in Colossians really means Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a higher philosophy, a composition of Greek, Egyptian, and Babylonian philosophy, plus the philosophy of Christianity, which included the Jewish philosophy. That was quite a mixture. That philosophy, the highest product of human culture, came into the early church, causing considerable frustration. Although philosophy may be good and the best product of human culture, since it is not the Lord it becomes a veil. It must be dealt with.

We come to another book, the book of Hebrews. If you read the book of Hebrews, you will see that it itemizes all the good things of Judaism. Hebrews shows us that all the good things in Judaism should just be considered as types, figures, and shadows of Christ.

Suppose, before you come to visit me, you send me a picture of yourself. Since I love you, I will treasure your picture. This is right. I simply love your picture. Now you come to visit me in person. Instead of looking at you, I continue to look at your picture, loving the

picture. Even your picture becomes a veil to my eyes. You would say, "Stupid man, throw away the picture. Look at me."

Before Jesus came, God used the Old Testament to present to His people many pictures of Christ from different angles. But the Jewish people just held on to the pictures, not only pictures in four directions, but maybe in thirty-two directions. That enclosed them, keeping them from seeing Christ. Christ is outside of that enclosure. The Jewish people saw so many things about Christ, but they couldn't see Christ Himself. Thus, the book of Hebrews was written to tell all the Jewish believers that they must drop the pictures, the whole system of Judaism, and look at Christ. Consider the Apostle and High Priest, Jesus Christ (Heb. 3:1). Forget Moses, forget the angels, and forget Joshua. Just consider our Apostle, Jesus Christ. Consider our High Priest, Jesus Christ. Look at Him. Not only look at Him, but look away unto Him (Heb. 12:2). Look away from all the Jewish things. Look away from the Bible unto Jesus Himself.

We have still another book, 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians Paul warned us that even the spiritual gifts—speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, healings, miracles—can all be veils to the Christian. Do you see the subtlety of the enemy?

The law, philosophy, Judaism with its scriptural items and teachings, spiritual gifts—all these things are good, but have become veils over the faces of many real Christians. We all need to tell the Lord Jesus, "Lord Jesus, I love You. I love the Bible because it reveals You, but I will never let the Bible become a veil. I love You, Lord Jesus. I love You personally, I love You directly, I love You most intimately. I love You by kissing You. I don't like to see You far away. I like to see You face to face. Lord, I would even kiss You." Many of you, I believe, have entered into this experience already, but we all need to be preserved in this experience. We need to tell the Lord, "Lord Jesus, I love the gifts because the gifts help me to touch You, but if the gifts become a veil, I will throw them away. I just love You Lord. I love You personally, directly, intimately. I love You in the way that I can kiss You at any time. There is no distance between You and me, no distance, no separation, and no isolation. I am directly, intimately in Your presence." If you are like this, you will be on the mount of transfiguration. You will be transfigured and you will shine.

Many of us can testify about our folks. When they came out of their room after spending time in the presence of the Lord, their faces were shining, causing us to realize that they had been with the Lord. That shining subdues every rebellious creature. It subdues the husband, the wife, the children, and every kind of environment. This is the kingdom. This is dominion. Dominion comes from the shining. Jesus appeared in His kingdom when He was transfigured. He was shining as the sun. He had the image and He had dominion.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE NINE

GOD'S RESTORATION AND FURTHER CREATION

(6)

ULTIMATE CONSUMMATION

We continue with the subject of the ultimate consummation. As we have seen in the previous message, the first item of this consummation was God expressed and represented. That was the climax. Based upon this point, we will consider several other points.

2) God Blessed Man to Be Fruitful

God blessed man to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and conquer it (Gen. 1:28). This is not a small thing. Before the time that God had a man to express Him and represent Him, there was no way for God to pour out His full blessing. God is rich and God is rich in blessing, but before the creation of man there was no object to receive His blessing in full. There was no way and no opportunity for God to render His blessing to His creatures in a full way. According to the record of Genesis 1, God did not begin to bless until the time when the living creatures came into being (Gen. 1:22). Yet, only the human life is up to the standard to receive God's blessing in full. After God created man, He was able to see on earth a living creature bearing His image and having His dominion. Immediately God bestowed His full blessing upon man.

Blessing is a good word. Many talk about God's blessing. We have prayed many times, "O Lord, bless us." However, if we are to receive God's blessing, we need to meet the qualifications. The qualifications, once again, are image and dominion. If there is the image of God with God's dominion in your home, you can be assured that the blessing of God will be there. God's blessing always follows His image and His dominion. In other words, God's blessing always follows His expression and His representation.

God's blessing is always with the priesthood and the kingship. We see this with Melchizedek. He was the king of Salem and the priest of the Most High God who blessed Abraham (Gen. 14:17-19). Blessing always comes with the priesthood and the kingship. If the church is seeking God's blessing, the church must have the priesthood and the kingship. What do the priesthood and the kingship mean? They simply mean God's image and God's dominion. The priesthood is for God's image; the kingship is for God's dominion. As long as we exercise the priesthood to contact God, to behold God and to reflect the image of glory, we have the kingship. God's blessing follows immediately.

God blessed man that he might be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. The blessing is fruit bearing, increase, multiplication, and the filling of the earth. Suppose Adam, the corporate man, had been made in the image of a scorpion or serpent, and God blessed the scorpion and the serpent to multiply and fill the earth. The earth would have been filled with scorpions and serpents. What a dreadful earth that would have been! If this had been the case, I would prefer to have never been born. Suppose you had two hundred scorpions in your bedroom and two hundred serpents in your living room. That would not be a blessing, but a curse. God, however, created a man in His image, giving him authority to have dominion for the Almighty on earth. This man was ready for God's blessing. God's blessing was to enable this man to be fruitful. One would become ten, ten would become one hundred, one hundred would become a thousand, a thousand would become a hundred thousand, a hundred thousand would become a million, and a million would become a billion, until the whole earth was filled with beautiful faces expressing God and representing God.

Although human beings are fallen, something wonderful still remains. That wonderful thing is the image of God. People may love dogs, but the love for a dog is much different than the love for a human being. Regardless of how good a dog is, it is not nearly as lovable as a human being. Every human being is lovable because every human being bears the image of God. Regardless of how much human beings have fallen, the earth is filled with men bearing the image of God.

In the church life today we are the real man bearing God's image and exercising God's dominion. In the church life we are ready for God to come in and render His blessing to us. How much God is able to bless us depends on how much we express Him and represent Him. If we express Him and represent Him in an adequate way, we will surely have His full blessing in multiplication and fruit bearing.

At this point I would like to say a word about gospel preaching. Everything in the Christian field, including gospel preaching, has been damaged by the poor practice of the past centuries. The real gospel preaching is not only an outward work. Real gospel preaching is fruit bearing out of the overflow of the inner life. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Lord Jesus said to go, preach the gospel, and disciple the nations, but in John He said that we must bear fruit. Preaching is one thing; fruit bearing is another thing. Genuine gospel preaching is not to convince people doctrinally, to subdue their thinking, and change their concept. Genuine gospel preaching is to minister life to others. Fruit bearing is the outflow of the riches of the inner life. Look at the branch of a tree filled with the life juice. The branch has the overflow of life and this overflow produces fruit. Fruit is the issue of the inner riches of life. We must realize that gospel preaching should be fruit bearing and that fruit bearing comes from God's blessing. Although we need to pray for the gospel preaching, it is not simply a matter of our endeavoring. We must have God's blessing. If a church wants to increase, the gospel certainly must be preached. However, if the preaching of the gospel is not under God's blessing, nothing will be gained regardless of how much we endeavor. The fruit gained will not have human faces, but scorpion faces. You may bring in many people, but when God looks at them He will say, "This is a scorpion, that is a serpent, and that is a frog. Yes, you brought in many people, but not many with a proper face expressing God." What kind of person are you going to bring in? People with the faces of scorpions or people with beautiful faces expressing God Himself? The fruit you bear is an expression of what you are. If you are an apple tree, you can never bear oranges. If you are a peach tree, you can never bear bananas. If you are going to produce bananas, you must be a banana tree. If you are a tree of knowledge, don't expect to bear the fruit of life. Only the tree of life can produce the fruit of life. We all must endeavor to preach the gospel, but consider what we are. If we are in the image of God and if we have the dominion of God, we will surely bring others into the image of God and dominion of God. All the local churches need the increase, but never use gimmicks, which may produce "Moabites" instead of the proper fruit.

God promised Abraham a seed. God was testing Abraham until Abraham's natural energy was terminated. Then He would give him a seed. While Abraham was under God's testing, his wife came in with a good proposal (Gen. 16:1-2). It worked. But it did not bring forth Isaac whom God wanted, but Ishmael whom God rejected. In English letters, both Isaac and Ishmael start with "Is." They are very much alike. All the churches need the increase, but don't imitate Sarah. Don't produce Ishmaelites.

Another case was the two daughters of Lot (Gen. 19:30-38). Do you remember how they discussed fruit bearing? They said, "There is a possibility that our father will have no descendants. Let us do something to help him produce an heir." They did something, and it worked. They brought forth Moabites and Ammonites. Many Christians today bring forth Ishmaelites, Moabites, or Ammonites. It is better not to have any descendants like these.

We must be men who bear God's image and exercise God's authority. Then we will be under God's blessing to be fruitful and multiply. Human faces with God's image will fill the earth. This is one of the points of the ultimate consummation. Don't think that gospel preaching is something low. It must be high. Our gospel preaching must be the climax, not producing Ishmaelites, Moabites, or Ammonites, but Isaacs.

We Christians always have a vain dream. We quote the record in Acts where it says that 3,000 were saved on the day of Pentecost and 5,000 saved on another day. Although there is such a record, the multiplication of human beings cannot come too fast. It may take twenty years to produce a generation. You cannot have a generation in five years. After five years a person is still a small child. Even after fifteen years he is a teenager. It generally takes twenty years to produce a generation of human beings. It is easy to make artificial flowers. In one night we can fill this meeting room with flowers, but all will be artificial. However, to grow an orchard takes time. If you come to the orchard one morning, it will appear about the same as the day before. The same will occur the following day, and every day will appear as the preceding day. It may take several years to grow trees that bear fruit. But hallelujah! Once they grow up they will multiply. This is the church life. All the churches need the increase, but we don't want the mushrooming increase, the overnight increase. We need the increase that comes from the image and dominion under God's blessing. This takes time.

3) Man and All Other Living Creatures Were Satisfied

It is not a small thing to say that man was satisfied (Gen. 1:29). Suppose Adam had been created and there was nothing for him to eat. Suppose God had said to Adam, "I made you, but I didn't prepare anything for you to eat. Please wait one or two days." The situation was not like this. Everything had been prepared before Adam came into being. God had made trees that were good for food. When Adam came out of God's creating hand, he immediately had something to eat. He was satisfied. Not only Adam was satisfied; all the living creatures were satisfied (Gen. 1:30). Later on we will see that real rest comes out of satisfaction. Can we rest if we are hungry? As long as we are hungry, we can never rest. Rest depends upon satisfaction. Hallelujah! Man ate and was satisfied.

4) Everything Was Very Good

Genesis 1:31 says that God looked at everything that He had made and it was very good. Before the sixth day, God did not say, "very good"; He said, "good." Why did God say "very good" on the sixth day? Because Adam was in God's image and had been given God's dominion. No one murmured and no one was hungry. God could say, "Very good!" That was the climax. After God said this, came the seventh day, the day of rest.

5) God Rested—God Was Satisfied

God rested because He was satisfied (Gen. 2:1-3). This was the last item of the ultimate consummation—God rested and was satisfied.

a) The Reason for Rest

The reason for God's rest was that His glory was manifested because man had His image and His authority was about to be exercised. Satan, God's enemy, was going to be dealt with by God. As long as man expresses God's image and deals with God's enemy, God can rest. It was not simply that God had finished His work, but in His work was a man who could bear God's image and subdue God's enemy. Based upon these two facts, God rested.

b) The Miniature of Rest—the Rest of Creation

The rest of creation was a small rest, a miniature rest. In this rest, man had the image of God and could exercise God's dominion. These two factors caused rest, but only rest on a very small scale.

c) The Types of Rest

Whatever is mentioned in Genesis 1 and 2 is a seed. We have seen in previous messages that light, image, and dominion are all seeds. Rest also is a seed, needing the whole Bible to grow and develop. The seed of rest is sown in Genesis and the harvest of this seed is in Revelation. In Revelation we have the consummation of rest.

The Bible has some types of rest. The sabbath of the Old Testament is a type of rest (Exo. 20:8-11). Man was a testimony, an expression of God. Man also was subject to God's authority. God's authority was exercised over the people who kept the sabbath. Thus, it was a type of rest.

The Lord's Day of the New Testament is also a type of rest (Rev. 1:10; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). The Lord's Day is a type of the coming rest. The church with the saints releases the Lord's life, expressing God Himself. This is the rest we have today. As long as God can be expressed, there is rest. The church with the saints exercises the Lord's authority to deal with His enemy. If we release the Lord's life and exercise His authority, we have rest even now. On the contrary, if we argue and fight, we will have no rest because we are not releasing the life of the Lord. If we fail to exercise authority over the enemy, there will be no rest.

d) The Foretaste of Rest

The rest we experience now is a foretaste of rest because the full rest has not come.

(1) With the Saints

With the saints the life of God flows and God Himself is manifested. As long as the life of God is flowing and God Himself is manifested, there is rest. This is a foretaste of the coming rest. You may experience this rest even when you are on your job. When you allow the life of God to flow and you let God be expressed, you have the sense of rest. If, however, you are cut off from the flow of God's life, immediately you will be upset within. You have no rest. The more you argue with your wife, the more you will have stomach trouble. You may even develop an ulcer, indicating that there is no life and no rest. On the contrary, if you release the Lord's life whenever your wife troubles you, you will have a foretaste of rest.

With the saints the authority of God is exercised and the enemy of God is dealt with. When your wife gives you a difficult time, don't exercise your headship. Don't say to her, "Don't you know that I am the head?" If you do that you will lose the human face and express the face of a serpent. You will become a scorpion. When your wife gives you a hard time, go to the Lord as a priest. Let the life flow and be released. Authority and dominion will be there, the enemy will be subdued, and both you and your wife will have rest. We have all experienced this.

(2) With the Church as the Body

With the church as the Body, God is expressed and Satan is dealt with (Eph. 1:23; 3:19b; 6:11-13). Whenever and wherever God is expressed and His enemy dealt with, there is the foretaste of rest. This is also true in our home life, marriage life, and personal life. If you buy something that will not help you to express God and to deal with Satan, you will lose the foretaste of rest. If you express God and deal with His enemy in whatever you do and wherever you go, you will have a sweet foretaste of the coming rest.

In the church life don't argue and don't murmur. One night I received a phone call, telling me that a certain church was in poor condition. Two people were on the phone, the one confirming what the other said about the poor and sick condition of the church. They stopped their talking and wanted to hear what I would say. Immediately I said, "Don't talk this way. From now on forget about your talk. If you say that the church is bad, the church certainly will be bad because you are bad. If you say the church is wonderful, the church will certainly be wonderful because you are wonderful. What is the church? The church is you. When you say that the church is bad, you are condemning yourselves." I further told the brothers that they must be aware of the subtlety of the enemy. They said, "What shall we do? To whom shall we go?" I said, "Don't go to anyone. Don't talk! Just go to the church meetings and praise the Lord." They asked, "Shouldn't we pray?" I replied, "Yes, you should pray, but don't pray negatively. Pray positively. The church has no problems. The church is glorious. The church doesn't need you to pray, 'O Lord, there is a problem.' You are the problem. The more you pray about the problem, the more you become the problem. Don't cause a problem and there won't be any problem. Go to the church meeting, praise the Lord, and pray positively."

We all must see through the wiles of the enemy. From now on don't talk about the condition of the church. Just go to the church meeting and praise the Lord. The church is the church. So, we have rest. Whenever you talk about the condition of the church, you will lose your rest. You will never have the foretaste of rest. If you go to the church meeting and praise the Lord, you will immediately be in the foretaste of rest.

e) The Fulfillment of Rest—the Rest of the Millennium

The fulfillment of rest is the rest of the millennium, the thousand-year kingdom. According to Hebrews, there is a rest promised for God's people, and we all must labor to enter into that rest (Heb. 4:1, 3, 9, 11). If we do not endeavor to enter into that rest, we will miss it. The way to enter into that rest is to experience the foretaste today. If we have the foretaste, we will certainly enter into the full

taste. If we don't have the foretaste of that rest today, we will miss the full taste to come. During the rest of the millennium, the saints will be fully like Christ, expressing God's glory (1 John 3:2; Col. 3:4; 1 Thes. 2:12). The saints will reign with Christ (Rev. 20:6).

f) The Consummation of Rest

The consummation of rest is the rest in the new heaven and the new earth. All the redeemed ones as one Body will express the glory of God for eternity (Rev. 21:11, 23). Also, all the redeemed ones as one Body will reign for God for eternity (Rev. 22:5b). That will be the consummation of rest. Rest in Genesis 2 was simply a type; the consummation will be in the New Jerusalem. Everyone will be satisfied. Everyone will have rest because God Himself will be satisfied and God Himself will find His rest there. The church life today is a miniature of the New Jerusalem. The church life is a foretaste of that full taste. The consummate rest mainly includes two items: the expression of God's image and the exercise of God's authority.

g) Man Also Rested with God

If you read Genesis 1 carefully, you will see that after God created man He didn't tell him to do anything. God simply spoke about man's eating (Gen. 1:29).

(1) God's Seventh Day Was Man's First Day

According to the calendar of the Bible, a day does not start in the morning, but in the evening. I believe that man was made late on the sixth day. When man came out of God's creating hand, he immediately entered the seventh day. The seventh day was to God the day of rest (Gen. 2:2-3). God's seventh day was man's first day. This means that God had prepared everything for man's enjoyment. After man was created, he didn't join in God's work; he entered into God's rest. Hallelujah! Don't think that you must do something. God doesn't need you to do anything. God has plenty of riches and He wants you to come and enjoy them. Don't work! If you try to work, God will say, "Foolish child, I have no work for you to do, but I do have great riches for you to enjoy. Come, join Me in My rest. My sabbath day is your first day. I have worked for six days. Now, come and join Me in rest as your first day. Let us go together and rest." Man did.

I have spent a good deal of time to find out what man did after he was created. I found out that he did nothing but eat and rest. Isn't this wonderful! After people are saved, they always think that they must do something. Forget about doing. Come to eat Jesus. Come to be satisfied. Come to join God in His rest. God will say, "Little child, forget your doing. Forget your working. I have done everything. Now is My time to rest. Come to join Me in My rest."

In 1936, I was working in north China, very burdened for the Lord's work. The work was hard and testing and circumstances were difficult. I would ride by bicycle to the suburbs, throw it down, fall flat on the ground and cry, "Lord, help me!" I was bothered and tested. One day, before giving a message, the word came to me and said, "Do you know that man's first day is God's seventh day? God's seventh day was man's first day. Why do you labor so hard? Stupid child, give up. Throw away your work. Just come to Me and join Me in My rest." On that Sunday morning I gave a message that God's seventh day was man's first day. I told people, "Hallelujah! Today is my first day. For months I have been laboring very hard, but now I am throwing away my work. I will labor no longer. Today I have begun to rest with God. His seventh day is my first day." You may ask, "What about the day after the seventh day?" That was the first day of the week, the Lord's day, a new rest and a new sabbath. Praise the Lord!

(2) The Sabbath Was Made for Man

The Pharisees forced every man to be for the sabbath. The Lord condemned them, telling them that they were absolutely wrong. He said that the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath (Mark 2:27). Hallelujah! Man's destiny is not work—it is the sabbath.

(3) Man Rests Because God Rests

Whenever God is satisfied, you are satisfied. Whenever you are satisfied, that is a proof that God is at rest. He is satisfied.

(4) Man Rests When God's Work on Man Reaches His Goal

Don't work. Just take care of one thing: to let God reach His goal. What is God's goal? God's goal is to have His image expressed and to have His dominion exercised. As long as you have God's image expressed and God's dominion exercised to deal with His enemy, God has reached His goal. God will say, "I am satisfied." Then you will say, "God, I am satisfied too." Thus, you rest with God.

All the aforementioned rests are due to the fact that God has reached His goal and man enjoys the rest with God. Praise the Lord! This is wonderful.

I am so happy that the Lord has afforded us the opportunity to release these nine messages on Genesis. From these messages we can see that everything written in the divine record is fully focused on life. Genesis 1 and 2 are simply an outline. The biographies of the eight men—Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph—will present the full picture. Eventually we will see that Jacob and Joseph are coupled together. These two are actually one man: Jacob becomes Israel, the prince of God, bearing the image of God; Joseph becomes the one to rule over everything, exercising God's dominion. At the end of Genesis, we will see a dual man: one aspect—Jacob—expressing God's image and the other aspect—Joseph—exercising God's dominion. God's image is expressed, God's authority is exercised, and there is rest. Hallelujah!

The whole Bible, with all its stories, histories, biographies, and teachings, is focused on life. This life will produce the expression of God and the representation of God. God will be manifested and His enemy will be dealt with. Hallelujah! Then there will be ultimate rest in this universe. We thank God for the Old Testament and the New Testament. Without the New Testament, it would be difficult for us to understand the allegories, types, figures, and shadows of the Old Testament. However, without the Old Testament, we would have only the direct words of the New Testament. We would lack the pictures. Praise the Lord that we have both testaments. We have the pictures and we have the clear words that we may know where we are—in God's image and God's dominion. We shall be in God's

rest. We need to remember the five crucial words that we have covered thus far—image, dominion, blessing, satisfaction, and rest. When we bear the image of God expressing Him, we will have the dominion of God representing Him. Then His full blessing will be upon us and we will be satisfied. Eventually, God and we will all rest in full satisfaction under His blessing with His image and dominion.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE TEN

GOD'S PROCEDURES TO FULFILL HIS PURPOSE

(1)

In the previous messages we have covered the first main point of the book of Genesis—the desire and purpose of God. This was revealed in Genesis 1:1–2:3. God's desire and purpose are to have a corporate man to express Him in His image and to represent Him with His authority. Now we must ask a question: how can man express God in His image and represent Him with His authority? This brings us to the second main point of this book.

B. God's Procedures to Fulfill His Purpose—2:4–7

Genesis chapter 2 reveals the way God uses to accomplish His purpose. This is why we have the second record of creation in Genesis 2. When I was a young Christian, I was troubled by these two records of the creation of man. Genesis 1 provided us a record of creation. Why do we need another record in Genesis 2? It was not until the later days of my ministry that God showed me the answer. Although the record of creation in Genesis 1 reveals God's purpose in creating man, it does not show us the way to fulfill this purpose. Therefore, we need the second record to reveal the way, the procedure, God takes to fulfill His purpose. After seeing the purpose in chapter 1, we must come to see the procedure in chapter 2. This procedure is fully revealed in Genesis 2, starting with verse 5 and continuing through the end of the chapter. If we read this portion of the Word in the light of the whole Bible, we will see that this procedure is of three steps. We can only cover one step in this message, leaving the remaining two steps for subsequent messages. However, before we consider the first step, we want to point out that the means by which God fulfills His purpose is life.

1. By Life

God is going to accomplish His purpose by means of His own life. How can one person express another if he does not have that person's life? A dog cannot express a cat because a dog does not have a cat's life. A dog has a dog's life, and this life is only suitable for expressing a dog. According to the same principle, a cat can never express a dog. If we think otherwise, we are dreaming. How can we human beings express God? There is no way except by having the life of God. If a dog is to express a cat, there must be a way to inject the cat's life into the dog. Once a dog has received a cat's life, it will be easy for it spontaneously to become the expression of a cat. Man is destined to express God. Are we able to do this? It is impossible for us to do it by our life because it is simply a human life. God is transcendent. Our life is too low to express Him. If we are going to express God, we need the life of God. If we have the life of God, we will express Him spontaneously and unconsciously. Once we have His life, we will express His image. Life is the way to fulfill God's purpose. This life is not our natural life, but the divine and eternal life of God.

Authority is also related to life. Neither a table nor a chair has authority, for authority is always related to a certain life. Look at yourself. The more life you have, the more authority you have. Human beings have authority over the animals because we have more life than the animals. Even in the area of human relationships we find it true that the more life a person has the more authority he has. If I am more mature than you, I have authority over you. If a teenager comes to me, there is no need for me to threaten him. He spontaneously will come under my authority. This authority was not given to me by the President of the United States. It came from my age. If you are 110 years of age and I am 70, I will come under your authority. Your age assigns you the authority. In order to represent God with His authority, we need His life.

If you are to represent a certain person in society, you need to possess a life that is nearly the same as his. Suppose you are invited to represent the President of the United States. You need to have the same amount of life as he. If your life is rather low, you will be unable to represent him. The standard of your life must match the life of the President.

This is the basic and logical principle that we must care for: we can never express God or represent God by our own life. Consider your life. Your life is incapable of expressing God; it is only adequate to express yourself. To a certain extent, a woman is not even qualified in life to represent her husband, because her life is not as high as her husband's. I wonder if the sisters agree with this. At any rate, we all must admit that our natural life disqualifies us from expressing God and representing Him. Not only is our fallen life inadequate for this, but even the created life we had at the beginning was inadequate. As we shall see in the next message, this was the reason God, after creating man, placed him in front of the tree of life, indicating that man needed to possess a higher life than he already had.

Some people may ask, "Didn't God create us in His image?" Yes, God did create us in His image. Then these people may say, "Since we already have God's image, why can't we express Him?" We may say that the man created in the image of God resembles the photograph of a person. Suppose you take a photograph of Brother John and show it to others saying that this is Brother John. In a sense, you are correct, for that is Brother John. However, the photograph is not the real Brother John; it is Brother John in a picture. Although the picture reveals the features, style, and the person of Brother John, it does not have the life of Brother John. It can show something of Brother John, but it cannot express him. The only way for the photograph to express Brother John is for it to have his life. Man was created in the image of God, but he was like a photograph showing something of God without having the life of God. Although man was in the image of God, he did not have the life of God. God intended that man should partake of the life indicated by the tree of life. Man failed to do it. Today, by believing in Christ, we have been brought back to share in that life. We all have received eternal life. Thus, there is no other way for us to express God in His image and to represent God with His authority except by sharing His life. This is confirmed by many verses in the Bible.

*a. Life Conforms the Believers to the Image of God
and Brings Them into Glory*

The Bible says that it is life which conforms the believers to the image of the Son of God (Rom. 8:2, 6, 29). Only by the way of life can we be conformed to the image of the Son of God. Romans 8:2 speaks of "the Spirit of life," and verse 6 mentions that the mind set on the spirit is life. It is by this life of the Spirit that we can be conformed to the Son of God. This is very clear. Also, it is Christ as life who brings us into God's glory to express God. Colossians 3:4 tells us that Christ our life will bring us into God's glory that we may express God. This confirms the claim that it is by God's life that we express God.

b. Resurrection Life Gives Authority

The Bible also shows that it was the budding resurrection life which gave authority to Aaron's rod (Num. 17:8). Twelve rods representing the twelve tribes of Israel were placed in the presence of the Lord for one night. Each rod was a piece of dry, dead wood. During the night, Aaron's rod budded, signifying that resurrection life had authorized his rod to reign over the people. Thus, life gives authority. If you are going to be a leading one in the church, you need a great deal of life. Elders are assigned not only by the outward appointment but by the inward authorization in life. All elders should be matured in life and qualified to rule by this reigning life. This is also true for the deacons, the deaconesses, and the leading ones in the service groups. Only life can assign authority.

Revelation 20:4 says that it is the overcoming resurrection life which brings believers into the reign with Christ during the millennium. Resurrection life brings us into the kingship with Christ because it proceeds out of the throne of God. The throne of God signifies authority. We see a picture of this in Revelation 22:1 where the water of life issues out of the throne of God. Therefore, authority and life are mutually related. The river of life is related to the throne of God. If we have the throne of God as our source, we will be in the water of life. If we are in the water of life, it will bring us to the throne of God, giving us the authority that proceeds from His throne. Life brings authority. We all must see that representing God requires God's life.

*2. The First Step—Creating Man as a Vessel
to Contain God as Life*

The first step of God's procedure in fulfilling His purpose was to create man as a vessel to contain Himself as life. I like this word vessel. Do you realize that as a human being you are a vessel? A vessel is like a bottle or a cup. Today, while I was with the Lord, I was rejoicing because I am a vessel. I said to myself, "Man, you are exactly like a bottle. Your mouth resembles the mouth of a bottle. The purpose of a bottle is to contain something, not to contain yourself. You are a vessel designed to contain God."

This is not my concept. It was presented initially in Genesis and then stated emphatically by Paul in Romans 9 when he said, "Who are you, trying to argue with God? Don't you realize that you are clay? The potter has sovereign authority to mold the clay into vessels." Romans 9:21, 23 reveals that God created man as a vessel. We are vessels to contain God as life.

Therefore, after God created man, He put him in front of the tree of life. The tree of life was good for food. In John 6 the Lord Jesus said that He was edible, that He was the bread of life (John 6:35). Therefore, we all can eat Him. Furthermore, we contain whatever we eat because it comes into our being. Our being is simply a vessel to contain everything we eat. Whatever we eat is not only contained in us, but is assimilated into our very element. It even becomes us. Therefore, dietitians say, "You are what you eat." We are not only containing vessels; we are eating vessels, vessels that assimilate what we eat. God is desirous of being eaten by us. If we tell God that we want to eat Him, He will be very happy. We are His eating and assimilating vessels. Eventually, God will become us. Praise the Lord! We were made vessels to contain God as life.

Romans 9:21, 23 tells us that we are vessels unto honor, vessels of mercy prepared unto glory. This is our portion. Do not look down on me. I am a vessel unto honor, not dishonor. One day I will be filled with glory and I will be in glory to express the God of glory. We all are vessels of mercy prepared unto glory.

a. The Background

Firstly, we need to see the background of God's first step in fulfilling His purpose.

1) God Had Not Caused It to Rain upon the Earth

I love the Bible. I have been with the Bible exactly 50 years and I love it today more than ever. As we come to Genesis 2:4-7, I want to say a word to the young people. When I was a young Christian, I was troubled by Genesis 2, thinking that it did not sound very biblical. I felt that the Bible should be classical, but Genesis 2 did not seem very classical to me. For example, in Genesis 2:5 it says, "for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth." I wondered why this was included in the Bible. I did not think it was very important. Then verse 5 continues by saying, "there was not a man to till the ground." What is the meaning of this? It did not sound like a word of the Bible to me. Earlier in verse 5 it mentions "every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew." What is this? I thought it was like the vocabulary of a fourth-grader. Furthermore, we are told in verse 6 that "there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground." It did not sound like the words of the Bible to me. Many of you may say, "Romans 8 is good. It sounds the way a Bible is supposed to sound. But I don't like Genesis 2. There is no spirit there, no mind and no life. It just talks about herbs, plants, and mist." Nevertheless, Genesis 2:5-6 is part of the Bible, and without these verses the Bible is imperfect. The Bible needs these two verses of Genesis chapter 2 in order to perfect it. It is very significant for us to see what is revealed in this passage.

Do not despise any line in the Bible, for the Bible proceeded out of the mouth of God. Every word, phrase, clause, and sentence proceeded out of His mouth. It is a serious matter to read a phrase in the Bible. You may prove this by reading Genesis 2:5-6 again and again with a praying spirit. If you pray and read these verses in such a way, you will be nourished. However, if you do the same thing with some lines from the Los Angeles Times or the Santa Anna Register you will be killed. There is a great difference between secular writings and the Holy Bible. Every word in the Bible is holy; it is something of God.

God had not caused it to rain upon the earth. This signifies that God had not sent down His Spirit to mingle with man who was to be made with the dust of the ground. In Joel 2:23, 28-29 we see that God's Spirit is allegorized as the rain.

Some Christians criticize us for allegorizing the Bible too much. However, we must realize that allegorizing the Bible is proper because much of it, especially Genesis 1 and 2, is written in figurative language. Paul himself allegorized the Old Testament. In 2 Corinthians 4:6 he mentions the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness. This certainly refers to Genesis 1. That the very God who commanded light to shine out of darkness now shines in us means that God's work in Genesis 1 is an allegory of what He is doing within us today. In Galatians 4 Paul allegorized Sarah, Abraham's wife, and Hagar, Abraham's concubine. Paul allegorized these two women as two covenants. Therefore, the best way to understand the Old Testament is to allegorize it.

In the four Gospels the Lord Jesus allegorized almost everything. He allegorized all of the types, shadows, and figures found in the Old Testament. He said that He was Solomon, David, the sabbath, the light, the food, the air, the door, the Shepherd, and the pasture. He was everything. Therefore, we need to allegorize the Bible. I encourage you to do this.

Now we are going to allegorize Genesis 2:5-6 where we are told that God did not cause rain to come on the earth. This signifies that God had not yet sent His heavenly rain, His Spirit, down to earth. When the rain descends to the earth, it soaks into the ground and mingles with it for the purpose of producing life. Now we can see the point: that there was no rain before God created man signifies that the Spirit from heaven had not yet mingled with something of dust to produce life.

2) There Was No Man to Till the Ground

"And there was not a man to till the ground." This signifies that there was no man to work with God in coordination by human labor with the divine (cf. 1 Cor. 3:9). Many Christians are too super-spiritual. When they are too "super," they become superficial. They are superficially spiritual, saying, "We should not do anything. The Spirit does everything." This is wrong. If you do nothing, God cannot do anything, for He needs human labor to cooperate with His divine labor. What is the use of the rain coming down if there is no man to till the ground? If, as a man, you have tilled the ground, you have the right to pray, "Lord, I am here. Send the rain." Then God will send rain. However, suppose there is no man upon the earth claiming the rain and some angel says, "O God Jehovah, why don't You send the rain?" God will reply, "If I send My rain, it will be wasted. I am waiting for a man to till the ground. Once the man on the earth has tilled the ground, I will send rain."

In these days the church is concerned about gospel preaching. Suppose, however, there is not one Christian in Anaheim working with God and some angels in the air pray, "O God Almighty, save the people in Anaheim. Send out Your voice and everyone will repent." God would reply, "This is foolish. When there is no one in Anaheim working with Me, how can I save people?" Do you remember the story of Cornelius? Although an angel came to him with a message, the angel could not preach the gospel (Acts 10:1-8). The angel told Cornelius, "You need to send for Peter and ask him to come. I cannot till the ground because I am an angel. I am not qualified. The human beings have been ordained to preach the gospel. They are qualified. Ask Peter to come."

While there was no man on the earth to till the ground, God did not send the rain. There was no man to work with God in coordination by human labor with the divine. We must labor in coordination with God's divine labor. Day and night we must pray for our relatives and our friends. We must work on them. Then the rain will come. If we do not cooperate with God by tilling the ground, the rain will never come. God does not waste His rain. When it comes, it comes to produce life.

3) No Life Had Grown Out of the Earth

"And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew." This signifies that there was not yet any life, for life had not grown out of the earth. Since there was no one to till the ground and no rain had fallen, it was impossible to have life.

4) A Mist Went Up from the Earth

"But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground" (v. 6). This signifies that there was only something out of the earth to work on the earth; there was nothing from heaven coming down to cause the earth to grow out life.

These four items compose the background of the creation of man. If we approach these verses in an allegorical way, we will find them worthy to be in the Bible. I love Genesis 2:5-6. Now we may understand that we need the rain and that God needs us. God needs our co-labor. Then the rain from heaven will descend to mingle with the dust of the earth to produce life.

b. The Way—Genesis 2:7

Now we proceed to consider the way in which God created man. God created man exactly like a bottle with a neck and a mouth. Praise the Lord that I have a mouth! How could I live without one? God made me this way.

1) To Form Man's Body with the Dust of the Ground

God formed man's body with the dust of the ground that man may have a body as his outward expression and as an organ to contact material things. God made man with dust, not with gold. Gold cannot produce life. If you sow seed into gold, you will waste the seed. Dust, however, can grow life. If you sow seed into the dust, the seed will grow. We are not a man of gold, but a man of dust. I am happy to be a man of dust. I am an earthen vessel. Hallelujah!

Our body was formed out of dust to be our outward expression. When I have the time, I like to look at myself in the mirror, especially examining my face. The more I look at myself, the more I am convinced that I was made by God. No other person in the whole universe can fashion such a wonderful creature. The style of American cars may be improved and changed every year, but no one can improve the design of a human being. Our ears have been perfectly designed for listening. How awkward it would be if the members of our body were relocated! What would happen if our nose were placed upon our forehead and turned upward? The rain and the

dust would come in. God purposely designed the nose to be turned downward that only air may enter in. Although my nose is not very attractive, I am still fond of it. God designed it for me.

There are many things to consider about the human body. In Ecclesiastes 12:3 Solomon mentions the grinders, saying that when a man is old the grinders will cease because they are few. The grinding here refers to the grinding activity of our molars. The front teeth, the incisors, are the cutting teeth and the molars are the grinding teeth. When we eat a piece of meat, our front teeth cut it, and the tongue sends it to the molars where it is ground into a digestible substance. According to Ecclesiastes, the grinders cease because an older person usually has fewer teeth. Who designed us this way? Who designed our incisors, our molars, and the saliva that is secreted to liquefy the food? Surely God did this.

Man was created by God. He was designed by the best artist. Do not pay attention to the theory of evolution. Even medical science can confirm that the human body contains all the elements found in dust such as salt, sulfur, copper, and iron. God formed a wonderful human body out of this dust. I have no words to describe it. Look at yourself. Look at your shoulders, arms, and the five fingers on each hand. With the four fingers and a thumb man can do anything. What could we do if we had five thumbs on each hand? We could not even pick up our eating utensils. If you examine your human body, you will find that it is a living bottle. We were truly made by God.

*2) To Breathe into Man's Nostrils
the Breath of Life*

God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life that man may have a spirit as the recipient for him to receive God and as an organ to contact God and the spiritual things (John 4:24; Rom. 1:9). Within a transistor radio, there is a receiver. When this receiver is damaged, the radio waves cannot get through. Likewise, our body is an outward container and within us is a spirit made by God as a receiver to receive God as the heavenly radio waves. By means of this organ we may contact spiritual things. I contact a blackboard with my hand. I contact odors with my nose, colors with my eyes. I substantiate sounds with my ears. All these material things can be substantiated by the senses in our physical body. In the universe there are also spiritual things. There is God in this universe, and God is Spirit. We cannot substantiate Him through our physical senses. It is foolish to deny the existence of God because we cannot substantiate Him in a physical way. To say that something does not exist because we cannot sense it is foolhardy. Although there are many radio waves in the atmosphere, we cannot substantiate them without a receiver. Likewise, we cannot substantiate God without the proper receiver, our human spirit. If our spirit does not function well, we will be unable to sense God. We need to tune our spirit. We need to exercise our spirit to contact God. Within us there is such an organ called by the Bible the spirit of man.

a) The Breath of Life and the Spirit of Man

In Hebrew the word breath in Genesis 2:7 is neshamah, which is translated "spirit" in Proverbs 20:27. This means that the breath in Genesis 2:7 is the human spirit, and this spirit is the lamp of the Lord. In ancient times people used oil lamps. The lamp contained oil which was burned to give light. Within us we have a lamp to contain the Spirit of God as the oil. Although we have such a lamp within us, we need the divine oil to come into it, enabling the lamp to burn and shine. Proverbs 20:27 says that the spirit of man searches all the inward parts of our being. When God as oil comes in to ignite our lamp, we will be enlightened and searched. The Bible tells us clearly that the breath of God has become our human spirit and that our spirit is God's lamp to contain God as the oil and to give us light.

*b) The Spirit of Man
Was Specifically Formed by God*

The spirit of man was specifically formed by God (Zech. 12:1; Job 32:8). Zechariah 12:1 says that God stretched forth the heavens, laid the foundation of the earth, and formed the spirit of man within him. In this universe are three equally important things: the heavens, the earth, and the spirit of man. The heavens are for the earth, the earth is for man, and man has a spirit for God. God created the heavens for the earth. Without the heavens the earth cannot grow anything. The earth is for man, and man has a spirit within him to contain God. Thus, man is the center of the entire universe, and the center of man is his spirit. This is very important. As far as God is concerned, if there were no spirit within man, man would be an empty shell. If there were no man on this earth, the earth would be a void and the heavens useless. We praise the Lord that the heavens serve the earth, the earth serves man, and man has a spirit to receive God. Praise the Lord that "there is a spirit in man"!

*c) The Spirit of Man Is Where the Spirit of God Works
and the Lord Stays*

The spirit of man is where the Spirit of God works. Romans 8:16 says that the Spirit of God witnesses with our spirit. Therefore, the Holy Spirit works with the human spirit. Second Timothy 4:22 says, "The Lord be with your spirit." The Lord Jesus is now with our spirit. This is where He dwells.

3) To Make Man a Living Soul

God made man a living soul that man may have a soul as his person with his personality and as an organ to contact the psychological realm. In between our outward body and our inward spirit is our soul, our person. By means of the soul we contact psychological things. I have previously mentioned some physical things and some spiritual things; now I want to speak about psychological things. Take the example of joy. Joy is neither material nor spiritual—it is psychological. If you come to me and find that I am unhappy with you, how will you know that I am unhappy? You will know by means of your soul, your psychological part. It is very clear that God has made us in three parts with a spirit, a soul, and a body.

*4) To Make Man a Tripartite Being—
Spirit, Soul, and Body*

God made man as a tripartite being. First Thessalonians 5:23 says clearly that we have a spirit and soul and body. Hebrews 4:12 says that our spirit can be divided from our soul. Why did God create us in this way? Simply that we may be a wonderful person. We are wonderful because we are tripartite. Human beings are not simple. Do not consider yourself as simple. Related to the soul we have

the mind, the emotions, and the will. Related to the body we have many members. Medical science takes years to study the human body and still cannot do it very well. Within our spirit we have the conscience, the intuition, and the fellowship. God created us in such a wonderful way because He wanted us to be His container. We were not made for any other purpose. Our body exists that we may be a living vessel to contain God. If we are to be such a vessel, we not only need the inward spirit, but also the outward body to enable us to live on this earth, exercising our spirit to contact God, take Him in, contain Him, and even assimilate Him. Praise the Lord that we have been made in a wonderful, tripartite way!

For the sake of the young people I want to use an illustration. Suppose you are a poor man. You endeavor to earn money, primarily to satisfy your physical needs. Eventually you acquire a good house, fine food, excellent clothing, and the best transportation. Once your physical needs have been met, you begin to desire music, sports, and amusements. These gratify the psychological needs of your soul. Although you can afford every amusement, as you sit alone in your home at night you have the sense that deep within you are empty. You still need something. You tell yourself, "You have everything. What more do you want? You have a car, a fine home, a good wife and children, every amusement and entertainment." Nevertheless, deep within you something says, "I still have a need." Deep within you something is demanding, requiring, and even begging. What is this? It is your spirit. This part of your being, your spirit, needs God.

We have three kinds of needs—material needs, psychological needs, and spiritual needs—because we have three parts to our being. In human society, people take care of the first two needs and neglect the third. This is why the church is here, for only the church can help people to satisfy the third need. Although you may have the finest material enjoyment and the best psychological satisfaction, you are still short. You need spiritual enjoyment, you need God. You need to be satisfied deep within. Since I have been satisfied within, I do not care very much about a car or a house. My spirit is satisfied with God, for my spirit was made to contain Him.

For the fulfillment of His purpose God firstly made man as vessels to contain Himself as life. Man was made in such a specific way, not only with a body to exist physically and with a soul to express himself, but also purposely with a spirit as an organ to contact God and as a recipient to receive and retain God. Man's soul is his person with his personality. It is a complete person. However, God's intention in creating man was not that man should express himself with himself. God's intention was that man, as a complete, created being, might take God as life and express Him in all his personality. Therefore, in addition to his soul, man needs a specific organ to contact God—the human spirit.

As we have pointed out formerly, everything in Genesis is a seed that will be developed in the following books of the Bible. The same is true regarding the matters we have been considering in this message—man as vessels to contain God, the human spirit as the organ to contact God, etc. All of these points are sown in Genesis as seeds and will be fully developed in the New Testament as a harvest. We need many verses from the New Testament to give a comprehensive definition of these matters, but for the time being we must stop here.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ELEVEN

GOD'S PROCEDURES TO FULFILL HIS PURPOSE

(2)

In the past ten messages we have seen clearly from the holy Word that God's eternal purpose is to express Himself through man and to commit His authority to man that man may exercise His dominion on the earth. We have also seen that God's way to fulfill His purpose is by life. As the first step in the accomplishment of His purpose, God created mankind in a very specific way, forming them as vessels to contain Himself, not as instruments to work for Him. Romans 9 declares definitely that God made man out of clay as vessels of mercy unto honor and glory to contain God Himself. Thus, God created man with a special organ—the human spirit. We should never forget Zechariah 12:1 which says that God stretched forth the heavens, laid the foundation of the earth, and formed the spirit of man within him. In this universe three things are necessary for the fulfillment of God's purpose: the heavens, the earth, and the spirit of man. Our spirit is extremely important; it is just as vital for the accomplishment of God's purpose as are the heavens and the earth. Although the spirit of man is not spacious as the heavens or large as the earth, it is nevertheless the most crucial aspect of our being.

Job 32:8 says, "There is a spirit in man." Everyone knows that man has a heart, mind, will, and conscience, but few people realize that man has a spirit. By this we do not mean the Holy Spirit of God; we refer to the human spirit of man. We have such an organ created by God.

Consider the organs of our physical body: we have hearing organs, seeing organs, smelling, tasting, and touching organs. With my eyes I can see many different colors. If I were blind, I would be unable to substantiate the existence of these colors. Although colors would continue to exist, I would have no way to substantiate them, for a certain object can only be substantiated by the organ specifically designed for that purpose. As I am speaking, your ears substantiate the sound of my voice. If you had no ears, it would seem as if my voice did not exist. The same is true for our sense of smell. Although there may be a fragrant aroma in this room, we need the sense of smell to substantiate it.

God has not only created our physical organs, but also our psychological organs. How can we verify the existence of thought? We substantiate thought by the function of our mind. Likewise, by the emotional organ of joy in our soul, we can sense happiness. We substantiate the existence of thought and joy by the appropriate psychological organs in our soul.

In addition to our physical and psychological organs, God has created a spiritual organ—the human spirit. Although it is difficult to understand our spirit, we can know something about it through the function of our conscience. Although few people understand the human spirit, everybody knows the meaning of conscience. According to the Bible, the conscience is the main organ of our human spirit. Where is our conscience located? It is not easy to determine. In fact, it is also difficult to locate our emotion, mind, and heart. Actually, we have two hearts, a physical heart and a psychological heart. It is easy to locate our physical heart, but difficult to find our

psychological heart. We cannot deny that we have such a heart, but we are unable to locate it. The same is true for our conscience. Although we are unable to locate it, we know it exists because it constantly accuses or excuses us. Our conscience continually protests against our reasoning and our emotions. For example, some young people in school are tempted to steal when they think of others as being rich and having everything and of themselves as poor. Thus, they decide to steal from others, making some flimsy excuse to justify their action. The mind agrees, the emotions approve, and the will decides. However, as the young person is about to steal something, his conscience protests, "Don't do this; it is not right." Even if he should ignore the feeling of his conscience and steal something, the voice of his conscience will condemn him for many days. This inner voice is not from the mind, emotion, or heart; it is from the conscience, and the conscience is the main part of our spirit.

Now we must relate this to a very important matter about God. What is God? God is a spiritual substance. In John 4:24 Jesus says that God is Spirit. This table next to me is made of wood; wood is its substance. Likewise, God is Spirit; the substance of the divine being of God is Spirit. The organ by which we can substantiate such a divine being is our human spirit. If we try to experience God without exercising our spirit, it will be like attempting to substantiate colors without exercising our sight. If we use the wrong organ, it is impossible to substantiate God. We praise God that in His creation He formed a spirit within us. Since we were made as vessels to contain God, we do need our spirit as the proper receiver.

The receiver in our physical body is our stomach. If we had a mouth without a stomach, it would be impossible to receive food for the supply of the whole body. The stomach is not only a receiver but also a digestive organ which assimilates food and dispenses it into the blood cells. Eventually, the substance of the digested and assimilated food becomes our very organic tissues. God has the intention of dispensing Himself into us. How can He do this? He does it by being food to us. The Lord Jesus Himself told us that He came as the bread of life (John 6:35). He also said, "He who eats Me shall also live because of Me" (John 6:57). This means that Jesus is not only our Savior, Redeemer, and life, but also our life supply. He is the bread of life. God desires to dispense Himself into us by being food for us to receive. What organ do we use to take God into us? Our human spirit.

We need to pray. Praying is not simply asking God to do things for us. This understanding of prayer is too shallow. Prayer is breathing. Whenever we pray, "O Father in heaven," or call, "O Lord Jesus," that is breathing. As we breathe, we take breath into us. Likewise, whenever we pray to God by exercising our spirit, we receive His divine being into our spirit. Within our spirit we contain Him and, in a sense, we assimilate Him and dispense His divine elements into our whole being. In this way God comes into us as life. As human beings, we were made by God in a very specific manner: we were made as vessels with a receiver, our human spirit. This was the first step God took to accomplish His purpose.

3. The Second Step— to Have Man to Receive God as Life—2:8-17

Now we come to the second step. Most people cannot accomplish anything in a single step. Thus, after God created man as vessels with a human spirit to receive Him and to contain Him, He took another step by placing man in front of the tree of life.

a. Placing Man in Front of the Tree of Life

As I mentioned in the last message, when I was a young Christian I was troubled by Genesis 2 because it did not seem to be a classical piece of writing as I felt the Bible ought to be. It reminded me of the play of some little boys who made images out of clay and put them before certain objects. Nevertheless, according to Genesis 2, God placed man in front of the tree of life. What is life? Life is mysterious. Not even medical doctors or biologists are able to define life. Although life is mysterious, it is presented in Genesis 2 in a solid and substantial way as the tree of life. We may be eager to know the meaning of the tree of life, but we cannot afford to be hasty. We should not approach something as mysterious as life in a quick and superficial way. It is easy to talk about this blackboard, but very difficult to speak about life. For the time being we simply need to see that God put man in front of this tree of life.

When I was young and read the first two chapters of Genesis, I wondered why God did not command Adam to worship Him as the Creator. I thought God should have told Adam, "I am your Creator. You must worship Me every morning, noon, and evening. You must worship Me at least seven times a day. You must bow down, kneel down, and prostrate yourself before Me. I will write some praises for you so you may practice how to worship Me." That was my concept. As far as I was concerned, it was foolish of God to place man in front of the tree of life with nothing to do. Furthermore, I felt that after God had created Eve, He should have given both Adam and Eve a wedding sermon, saying, "Adam, you must thank Me for giving you such a dear wife. You must promise Me that you will love her forever. Eve, I command you, as his wife, to submit to him." It seemed to me entirely logical for God to make such demands. Under the influence of Christianity, especially the conduct of wedding ceremonies, I assumed that God would have delivered a wedding sermon to the first couple. However, God gave them no such word. He only seemed to tell them, "Be careful about your eating. You must eat correctly. I don't care whether or not you love your wife or submit yourself to your husband. I don't care very much about worship. I care about your eating. If you eat wrongly, you will be wrong. If you eat the wrong tree, you will die. Adam, you must realize that it is not a matter of what you do; it is a matter of what you are. You will be what you eat. If you eat death, you will become death. If you eat life, you will become life. It is not a question of doing, but of being. Take care of your eating." In my early days as a Christian, I was bothered by this. To tell you the truth, during that period I did not like Genesis 2. I liked chapter 1 which described God's work of creation, but I felt that chapter 2 resembled a children's cartoon.

After God created man, He put him in front of a tree. God did not charge him to obey ten laws and requirements. There were no commandments, but there was a placement. God placed man in front of the tree of life; He wanted man to eat this tree. Later in this message we will see the meaning of the tree of life.

1) "Eastward"—
a Place of the Shining Glory

According to Genesis 2:8, this placement was "eastward." As we read Genesis 2, we must realize that this record is written in figurative language and that these figures need to be allegorized. In message ten I said that it is not wrong to allegorize the Bible, for even the apostle Paul allegorized Sarah and Hagar (Gal. 4:22-26). Thus, we need to allegorize Genesis 2. In the Bible "eastward"

signifies the direction of shining glory because the rising of the glorious sunshine occurs in the east (Ezek. 43:2). This is very meaningful. Whenever we come together and have the presence of the Lord, we immediately sense deep within that this meeting is glorious. After such a meeting, you will go home and tell your wife about the glory you experienced.

2) "In Eden"—a Place of Pleasure

God put man in Eden. The word Eden in Hebrew means pleasure. Thus, Eden is a place of pleasure, enjoyment, and amusement. Do not think that having amusements is wrong. Today's sinful, worldly entertainments are certainly wrong, but amusement in God is undoubtedly right.

3) In "a Garden"—
a Lovely and Pleasant Place

God set man in a garden, not in a factory, school, or cathedral. He put him in a garden, a place that is not only lovely and pleasant, but also a place for growing things. A garden is not a playground where people play, a factory where they work, a school where they study, a hospital where they are cured, or a cathedral where they worship: a garden is a place for growing things, a place to produce life. Life is the central thought of Genesis 1 and 2. God does not care very much for learning or even for worship. He cares for growth. Therefore, He put man in a garden. The church life should not be like a school or a cathedral; the church life must be a garden. In 1 Corinthians 3:9 Paul says, "You are God's farm." Paul's thought in 1 Corinthians 3 is the same as God's thought in Genesis 2, for a farm is a place for growth. Because it produces life, a garden displays many beautiful things. On the contrary, it is difficult to find beauty in a factory. The most lovely, pleasant, and beautiful place is a garden with colorful plants growing there. Praise the Lord that man was put into a garden!

4) With Every "Tree"

The most important item in the garden is the trees. In the Scriptures the concept concerning the tree is crucial. When the Scripture mentions man, both in the beginning and at the end, it also mentions the tree. Whether man shall have life or shall die, shall live everlasting or shall perish, all depends on how man deals with the tree (cf. Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-3, 22, 24; Ezek. 47:12; Rev. 22:2, 14, 19). The concept of the tree is absolutely vital to man's destiny.

a) "Pleasant to the Sight"—
to Please Man

The fact that the Lord God made every tree which is pleasant to the sight (Gen. 2:9) means that God wanted to please man and to make him happy. God's intention was not that man should work, but that man should be completely pleased and satisfied. This is contrary to our religious concept, which is to worship God. When I was a young Christian, I saw many long-faced worshipers of God. However, God does not care for that kind of worship. He cares about our happiness. This is why the Psalms tell us in several places, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord" (Psa. 95:1; 100:1). God enjoys our smiling faces. He likes to see that we are pleased with Him and satisfied with Him. Do not think about what you have done for God or about what you should do for Him. You need to consider whether or not you are joyful in the Lord. Romans 14:17 says that the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. You should be joyful in the presence of God. If you are not joyful in His presence and if you are not happy, it means that you are wrong with God. Everything you do for God will become a heavy burden to you if you have no joy. You do not need such a burden; you need joy. You need to be joyful, pleasant, and fully satisfied by God and with God.

b) "Good for Food"—to Satisfy Man

Genesis 2:9 says that the trees were good for food. Notice that the Bible does not say that the trees were good for producing materials, for the concept of Genesis is not that of human labor or achievement. Thus, no manufacturing materials are mentioned. The concept of Genesis 2 is fully focused on life. Thus, it says that the trees were good for food because food is related to life. Without food, we cannot live. Food maintains our life and satisfies us.

c) With the "Tree of Life" as the Center

The tree of life was in the midst of the garden. If we study the record of Genesis 2, we will realize that, apart from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, no tree is mentioned by name except the tree of life. We do not know the names of the other trees, but we do know that there was a tree called the tree of life. This shows that the tree of life was the center.

(1) The Center of the Universe

The tree of life is the center of the universe. According to the purpose of God, the earth is the center of the universe, the garden of Eden is the center of the earth, and the tree of life is the center of the garden of Eden. We must realize that the whole universe is centered on this tree of life: nothing is more central and crucial to both God and man than this tree. It is very meaningful to see man in the garden standing before the tree of life.

(2) Enabling Man to Receive God as Life

This tree enables man to receive God as life. How can we prove this? The following books of the Bible reveal that God is life. Therefore, the tree of life in the garden was the indicator that God intends to be our life in the form of food. One day, according to the Gospel of John, God came in the flesh (John 1:1, 14). In Him was life (John 1:4). The life displayed by the tree of life in Genesis 2 was the life incarnated in Jesus, God in the flesh. Jesus told us that He Himself is life (John 14:6). Furthermore, John 15 tells us that Christ is a tree, the vine tree. On the one hand, He is a tree; on the other hand, He is life. When we put together all these portions from John, we see that Jesus is the tree of life. Jesus said that He is the bread of life, meaning that He has come to us as the tree of life in the form of food.

It is not easy to understand the Bible. Let me ask you a question: how tall was the tree of life? If you turn the question to me, I will answer that it was not taller than I. I answer this way because Adam, who had been placed before the tree of life, probably was not much taller than I. If the tree of life had been of a great height, its fruit would have been out of reach. Adam and Eve had no ladder or

other instrument to use in plucking the fruit of this tree. Therefore, I believe the tree of life was not very tall.

As the Almighty God, Jesus is high, but when He came to us as food He was lowly. He was a loaf of bread. He was even the crumbs under the table (Matt. 15:21-27). The very Jesus who came to us as life in the form of food was not tall and great; He was small and lowly. Anything we eat must be smaller than we are; if it is not, we cannot take it into us. Even if our food is larger than we are, it must be cut into pieces small enough to eat. Thus, Jesus came to us as life in the form of food. He said, "I am the bread of life," and, "He who eats Me shall also live because of Me." God in the Son is the tree of life that is good for food. Day after day we can feed on Him. We can eat Him.

(3) Typifying Christ

The tree of life typifies Christ who imparts life to man and who pleases and satisfies man (cf. John 15:1; Exo. 15:25). Christ imparts divine life into us, pleases us, and satisfies us. Many of us can testify of this. We can say, "Hallelujah! Jesus has imparted life to me. He satisfies me all the time." This is the tree of life.

5) With a "River"

Along with the tree there is a river (Gen. 2:10). Since the tree is a tree of life, the river must also be related to life. At the end of the Bible we also see a river of life flowing and a tree of life growing (Rev. 22:1-2). At the beginning and the end of the Bible we find the tree of life and a river flowing with living water. In the Scriptures the concept of the river is also crucial. When the Scripture mentions man, both in the beginning and at the end, it also mentions the river. For man to receive God as life, to enjoy the fatness of God, to quench thirst, to be watered, to grow, and to rejoice, all depends on the river (cf. Psa. 36:8-9; 46:4; 65:9; Exo. 17:1-7; Joel 3:18; Zech. 14:8; John 4:14; 7:37-38; Rev. 22:1-2).

If you take in the Lord Jesus, you immediately have the deep sensation of something watering you from within. Something is flowing within you. Have you not had such an experience? Whenever you say, "Lord Jesus, I love You," or whenever you pray to the Lord—this means that you receive Him into you once again—you sense something flowing within you. Every morning you should take Christ as your breakfast, every noon you should take Him as your lunch, and every evening you should eat Him as your dinner. You need to feed on Christ at least three times a day. If you do this, the water of life will water you inwardly. You will never be dry. Perhaps you work at an office all day and arrive home from work tired and worn, feeling quite dry. If you take Jesus as your dinner, living water will flow within you. "A river went out of Eden to water the garden." This flow will discharge many old things out of your being. Both our experience and the divine record in the Bible tell us that this river is necessary.

Although Genesis 2 appears to be a record of creation, it was actually written according to the experience of life. The tree of life and the flowing river indicate this: whenever we take Jesus into us as food, that food will impart divine life, a life that is a watering and flowing life. In Revelation 22:1-2 we see that the river of life with the tree of life growing in it proceeds out of the throne of God. This picture is a further proof that the tree of life and the river of life represent the genuine experience of life. Whenever we take God in Christ as our life, we will have this river flowing within us to water us and work many things within us.

a) To Water, Quench Thirst, and Flow Life

This river was made to water the garden that the garden might grow things of life. Surely it also quenched man's thirst that he might survive. All this means that this river caused life to flow. In our physical life we must drink enough water to maintain the circulation of our blood. The flow of our physical life depends on water. Likewise, day by day we must take the water of life to maintain the flow of the divine life within us. This gives us the spiritual circulation of the divine life.

b) Flowing out of Eden

The river flows out of Eden, meaning that it flows out of God. In Revelation 22, the river of the water of life proceeds out of the throne of God. It is also a flow out of God Himself. God as the very life is the source of the living water, flowing into us for our enjoyment.

c) One River Becoming Four Heads

This river is one river. Do you have two rivers? Although the believers here may number a thousand, we still have one river because we all are of the same source—God the Creator. Since the source is one, the course also must be one.

This one river was parted and became four heads (Gen. 2:10-14). What does this mean? This means that the river flows out of God as the source and the center to reach men in every direction. In the Bible the number one is the number of God, the Creator, for He is unique. The number four signifies man, the creature. Because men live in each of the four directions, the one river flows out of God in every direction to reach them.

(1) The First Head

The name of the first head is Pison, which means "flowing free" (cf. Isa. 55:1; Rev. 22:17). This river flows without price; it is free. It flows to the land of Havilah which means "to cause to grow." This branch of the river flows freely to cause everything of life to grow (cf. Ezek. 47:9, 12).

This flowing also brings in gold, which typifies the divine nature (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4). If you have had no experience, you will not understand what this means; if you have had some experience you will say, "Amen." Whenever the life of God flows within us, it brings in gold, the divine nature. In the previous message I said that I do not like to be a man of gold but a man of dust because gold does not grow life. In the sense of growing life, it is very good to be a man of dust. However, we need the element of gold to be added to us. Eventually, we will be men of gold. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul warns us to be careful about our building work, telling us to use the proper materials, the first of which is gold. Furthermore, in Revelation 1 we are told that the churches are golden lampstands. The lampstands are not built with clay, but with gold. In Romans 9 we are dust; in Revelation 1 we are gold. How can dust be replaced by gold? The divine life must flow within us to bring gold into us. This is even true of physical gold which frequently is found at or in a river. Before we experienced Christ as the flowing life, we had no divine nature, no gold. Now through the flowing of the divine life we

have some gold within us. Something precious and weighty, the very divine nature, has been brought into us.

The flowing of the river also produces pearl. At present, we do not have time to cover the definition of pearl except to say that it is a transformed substance. It typifies the regenerated new man (cf. Matt. 13:45) because pearl is not a created element but a transformed substance.

Furthermore, the flowing of the river brings forth onyx stone, which typifies the transformed man expressing God's glorious image (cf. Rev. 4:3; 2 Cor. 3:18). We will see more of this in the following message.

The first head, Pison, means that the river of life flows freely, making everything grow and bringing in three kinds of precious material—gold, pearl, and precious stone. If we read through the entire Bible, we will see that these materials are all found in the building of the New Jerusalem. The materials brought in through the flow of the river of life are for the building of God's habitation. They can only be brought in by the flow of the divine life. In other words, the divine life flowing within us makes us the materials for God's building. This is the meaning and significance of the first head of the river.

(2) The Second Head

The name of the second head is Gihon, which means turbulence of waters. Turbulence implies fullness (cf. John 4:14; 7:38). This river rushes like a mighty tide. Suppose we have a few drops of water. That amount of water cannot generate turbulence. In order to have a turbulence like Niagara Falls we need a great quantity of water. The turbulence of the river indicates its fullness.

This river flows to Cush. Cush, the ancient Hebrew name for Ethiopia, means black face, typifying the unchangeable evil nature of sinners (cf. Jer. 13:23; Rom. 7:18). I was a Cushite before I was saved: I was black, sinful, and evil. In fact, we were all Cushites; we were more than black, and our nature was evil. Humanly speaking, such a nature can never change. Praise the Lord that the turbulence of the divine waters will regenerate us and transform us into another person. The flowing of the divine river is so rich and strong that it can change our evil nature and even glorify us. Although the Cushite cannot change his skin, we have the way by which our black skin, our evil nature, can be fully transformed: it is by the rushing turbulence of the flow of the divine life.

(3) The Third Head

The third head is Hiddekel (the Hebrew name of Tigris) which means rapid, implying power (cf. Phil 3:10; Eph. 1:19-20). Water that flows rapidly has power. Hiddekel flows toward Assyria, which means plain, the inhabited place. This tells us that the flow of living water reaches the place where people dwell (cf. John 10:10b; 7:37).

(4) The Fourth Head

The fourth head is called Perath (the Hebrew name of Euphrates) which means sweet, making fertile, or fruitful (cf. 2 Cor. 2:14; 2 Pet. 1:3-8, 11; Gal. 5:22-23). Praise the Lord! The last head of the flow of living water makes us sweet, fertile, and fruitful. Recently, we have been talking about fruit bearing. How can we bear fruit? We can bear fruit only by the flow of the river of life within us. As long as the life flows within, it will make us sweet, fertile, and fruitful. This is wonderful!

If we put all four heads of the one river together, we have a full picture of the New Testament. We need the whole New Testament to define the four heads of the one river of the divine life.

Once again I say that everything found in the book of Genesis is a seed, the growth of the seed is in the New Testament, and the harvest is in the book of Revelation. The seed of the flowing river is sown in Genesis 2, the growth occurs in the following books of the Bible, and the harvest is in the book of Revelation. We need the whole Bible to give us the true meaning of the picture in Genesis 2. God in His Son Jesus Christ is life to us in the form of food. If we take Him in, we not only have satisfaction, but this life will become a watering river within us. This water will be a torrent flowing within us to regenerate us, transform us, and to make us sweet and fruitful. By this flow we will become gold, pearl, and precious stones for the building of God's habitation, the New Jerusalem. Praise the Lord! This is God's way to fulfill His eternal purpose. However, this is just the second step. We will cover the third step in the next message.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE TWELVE

TRANSFORMATION FOR BUILDING IN THE FLOW OF LIFE

In this message I want to consider, as a parenthesis, the precious materials revealed in various portions of the Bible. Genesis 2:10-12 mentions three categories of these materials—gold, pearl, and onyx stone. Revelation 21 speaks of gold, pearl, and several varieties of precious stones (vv. 11-14, 18-21). If we read Exodus 28:6-21, we learn that onyx stones mounted in plaited settings of gold were placed upon the shoulders of the ephod and that twelve precious stones were set in gold on the breastplate worn by the high priest. Precious materials are also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3:12. Paul says that we must take heed how we build the church, that we should build with gold, silver, and precious stones. Although Paul replaces pearl with silver, the other two substances remain the same. The Lord Jesus spoke of stones when He told Peter that he was a stone for the building of the church (Matt. 16:18). Then Peter, in his first Epistle, said that we all are living stones for the building of a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5).

We also need to pay attention to a very crucial word in the New Testament—transformation. This word is correctly translated from the Greek language in Romans 12:2, which says that we should be transformed by the renewing of our mind. However, the same Greek word is found in 2 Corinthians 3:18 where it is rendered by the King James Version "changed." According to the proper translation, it should read, "transformed into the same image." Thus, the Greek word for transformation is found at least twice in the New Testament. An English equivalent to the Greek is the term metabolic change. Transformation is not a mere outward change; it is an organic change, a metabolic change. Transformation means to change a substance from one form and element into another form and element. Precious stones are produced by such a process of transformation. This is the meaning of transformation.

Many Christians do not know that the Bible covers the matter of transformation. Therefore, this entire message will be devoted to it. In the previous messages we have seen the eternal purpose of God, which is to express Himself and to exercise His dominion through man. For the fulfillment of this purpose, God created man in a specific way as a vessel to contain God Himself as life. Thus, God created man with a human spirit that he might contact God, receive God, retain God, and assimilate God into his whole being. After creating man in this way, God placed him in a garden with the tree of life as the center. Near the tree of life was a river flowing with living water, and at the flow of this river were gold, pearl, and onyx stones. Genesis 2 presents such a vivid picture.

What does this picture signify? We know that the Bible is very economical: not one paragraph, sentence, or word is wasted. Every word is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). Therefore, we must learn why God used nearly a whole chapter to portray a garden, a tree, a man, a river, and three precious materials. What does it all mean?

The Bible as a whole is God's revelation, and most of the seeds of this revelation were sown in Genesis 1 and 2. For example, God, man, and life are some seeds sown in Genesis 1 and developed throughout the whole Bible. The seeds sown in Genesis grow in the following books of the Bible, especially in the New Testament, producing a crop in the Epistles and a harvest in Revelation. Nearly everything sown in Genesis 1 and 2 is reaped as a great harvest in the book of Revelation.

Based upon this principle, let us attend to some of the items found in both Genesis and Revelation. In Genesis 2 we have the tree of life in the midst of the garden. Then we have a river which flows by the side of the tree and brings forth gold, pearl, and onyx stone. The setting for all of this is a garden, and a garden signifies the natural things created by God. In a garden we can see the growth of created things.

When we come to Revelation 21 and 22, we do not find a garden, but a city. A city is not created; it is built. In Genesis 2 we have creation; in Revelation 21 and 22 we have the building. In the city we also have the tree of life. Thus, the Bible begins and ends with life. Moreover, in the city we find a river of living water proceeding out of the throne of God. This corresponds to the river in the garden. Furthermore, in Revelation we find the three categories of precious materials, not in a natural state, but built into a city made with gold, pearl, and precious stones. Therefore, what was sown in Genesis as a seed is reaped in Revelation as the harvest. The growth of the seed and the development of the crop are found between Genesis and Revelation. This is not our human concept; it is the revelation of the divine Word found in the first and last chapters of the Bible.

In the beginning of the Bible we can see a garden. At the end of the Bible we see a city. Between the garden and the city a long process must transpire, and a great deal of work must be accomplished. Nevertheless, the seed sown in the garden becomes the harvest in the city. This seed includes the tree of life, a river of water, and the three precious materials. At the time of harvest in Revelation, the materials are no longer in a natural state, but become a building fitly joined together. The New Jerusalem is a building of gold, pearl, and precious stones.

If we read Revelation 21 and 22 carefully, we will see the entire city of New Jerusalem is a mountain of gold. It is not an edifice of clay. This golden mountain is also a golden city. Thus, the gold is the site, the ground for the building of the city. The precious stones are built into the wall of the New Jerusalem, and every gate in this wall is a large pearl. The site of the New Jerusalem is gold, the wall is composed of precious stones, and each of the twelve gates is a pearl. Therefore, this city is a composition of the precious materials found in a natural state in the garden. In Genesis the precious substances are lying in the garden; in Revelation they are built into a city.

This is not my interpretation. Between Genesis and Revelation we have 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul says that as a masterbuilder he laid the unique foundation, Jesus Christ, and that we all must take heed how we build upon it. What materials are we using in building up the church? Paul tells us to build with gold, silver, and precious stones. (Later we will see why he substituted silver for pearl.) By this we can see that not only the New Jerusalem is built with gold, pearl, and precious stones, but even the church in this age must be built with gold, silver, and precious stones, not with wood, grass, and straw. As we shall see, gold contrasts with wood, silver opposes grass, and precious stones are versus straw.

When I saw this as a young Christian, I was excited. I saw a garden in Genesis 2 with precious materials. I saw a city in Revelation built with these same materials. Between Genesis and Revelation I saw a church built with gold, silver, and precious stones. I saw that the church is a composition of all the redeemed people, and that this composition is a building. Who are the gold, silver, and stones? You and I. We, God's redeemed people, are the materials for His spiritual building.

In Old Testament times God also had a people, the children of Israel. The most prominent person among them was the high priest who represented them in the presence of God. Whenever he went into the presence of God on behalf of the people, he had to wear two shoulder plates and a breastplate. On the shoulder plates were two large pieces of onyx stone on which were engraved the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. On the breastplate was a beautiful setting of fine, inlaid gold, and within this setting were set twelve precious stones in four rows of three stones each. The twelve stones in the breastplate correspond to the number twelve in the New Jerusalem. The number twelve both in the city and on the breastplate is composed of four times three. For instance, the breastplate has four rows with three stones in a row, and the city has four sides with three gates on each side, giving a total number of twelve in both the breastplate and the city. Thus, the number of the stones on the breastplate of the high priest was the number of the New Jerusalem. Furthermore, on these twelve stones were engraved the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. In Revelation 21 we find the names of these twelve tribes on the twelve gates of the city. This is very significant.

Let us consider the meaning of this. In the New Testament we have a church built with gold, silver, and precious stones. In the Old Testament we have God's people composed with gold and precious stones to become a complete entity. In the eyes of God, the breastplate of the high priest was a part of the miniature of the coming New Jerusalem. Likewise, the church built with gold, silver, and precious stones is also a part of the miniature of the New Jerusalem. In the Old Testament we have Israel with twelve tribes. In the New Testament we have the church with twelve apostles. Hence, Israel plus the church equals the New Jerusalem. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel are on the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem, and the names of the twelve apostles of the church are on the twelve foundation stones of the city. This building covers the entire Bible from the beginning with a garden in Genesis to the conclusion with a city in Revelation. Between the garden and the city are two peoples, Israel and the church. Both Israel and the

church have twelve names. Eventually, all of these have been transformed into gold, silver or pearl, and precious stones. Hence, the garden, the city, and the two peoples are all related to the three categories of precious materials.

In the Bible, between the garden and the city, there are not only the two peoples, Israel and the church, represented by gold and precious stones, built together as God's dwelling place, but there are also the life and the river enjoyed by these two peoples. Psalm 36:8-9 tells us that the children of Israel enjoyed the fountain of life and the river of pleasures in God. John 6 and 7 point out that the people in the church enjoy the bread of life and the rivers of living water. Hence, in the Bible there is the continued mention not only of the precious materials but also of the life and river mentioned at the beginning and at the end.

Why is pearl found in Genesis 2 and Revelation 21 and silver in 1 Corinthians 3? In 1 Corinthians 3 we have silver because in typology silver represents redemption. The meaning of redemption is to deal with sin. If there had been no sin, there would have been no need of redemption. In the garden of Genesis 2 there was no sin, and for eternity in the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 sin will be banished. Sin came in from Genesis 3 and will be fully eliminated in Revelation 20. Thus, in neither Genesis 2 nor Revelation 21 do we find sin. Therefore, in these situations there is no need for redemption, for silver. The need there is not silver for redemption, but pearl for regeneration. Redemption is to take away sin; regeneration is to bring in the divine life. Silver stands for redemption between Genesis 2 and Revelation 21 because of the great problem of sin that necessitates redemption. In the present age we need silver.

With all of this as a background, we come to the subject of transformation. We have seen that God has a purpose, and for the fulfillment of His purpose He created man as a vessel to contain Him, making him with a human spirit. The Lord Jesus told the Samaritan woman that God is Spirit and they that worship Him must worship in spirit (John 4:24). If we are going to worship God, we must use the proper organ. For example, we cannot drink water with our ears, but with our mouth. God is living water. If we want to drink Him as our living water, we must exercise our spirit to contact Him. When we exercise our spirit to contact God the Spirit, we are actually drinking of God as the living water (John 4:24, 14). Thus, God made man with a spirit to contact and worship Him.

God is life. God Himself is the tree of life. When He came in the flesh, He revealed Himself as life and as the life supply. Christ is the bread of life (John 6:35). Whatever we take into us as food will be assimilated into our being. This is very meaningful and significant. God is life to us in the form of food. We need to receive Him by eating Him. Once God enters into us, He becomes the flow of life within us. For proper eating we need food and drink. John 6 covers the bread of life for our eating, and John 7 covers the living water for our drinking. If we have food without water, it will be difficult for us to eat. How can we digest and assimilate our food without water? We need the flow of life. In Genesis 2 we have the tree of life for our food and the flowing river for our drink. Food comes first and drink follows. When we take in the Lord as our food, we will also have Him as the water flowing within us.

I. CAUSING MAN TO HAVE THE DIVINE NATURE—GOLD

In message eleven we saw that this flow of living water brings forth three kinds of materials. The first of these is gold, which typifies God's divine nature. All Bible scholars agree that in typology gold signifies the divine nature. Gold itself is not a transformed substance; it is an element. Unlike gold, pearl, and precious stones are transformed materials, for they have been changed from one form into another. Gold is a created element and can never be transformed or changed. This is meaningful. Iron or steel can change through the years, but gold remains the same. It is the strongest and the most unchangeable element. Therefore, gold is precious, expensive, and valuable. Thus, in typology God used gold to signify His divine nature. This divine nature has been brought into our being. The element of gold has been added to us (2 Pet. 1:4; 1 Cor. 3:12; Rev. 21:18, 21).

Whenever you worship God or pray to Him for a period of time, you will have the sensation that you are golden. You will sense that you are shining, precious, and weighty. Gold is weighty. Before you prayed in such a way, you were light and loose. However, after praying for two hours, you have an element in you that is precious, shining, and weighty. Have you not had this experience? When you pray to God the Father or call on the name of the Lord Jesus, the divine life flows within you to bring forth gold.

At this point, I would like to talk to the sisters about shopping. Suppose you sisters pray for two hours. After your prayer, you have the sensation that you are precious and weighty. Then you go to the department store and do your shopping carelessly, unconcerned about the inner gold. If you shop in this loose manner, you will sense that your gold has gone. It disappeared. Although it remains within you, it has disappeared as far as your sensation is concerned. On the contrary, suppose you intend to go shopping after a two-hour period of prayer, and the inner sense of the divine gold does not agree. If you say, "Amen, Lord. I will not go," you will have the sense that the gold within you has increased in weight. If we walk in the spirit continually, we will sense that the inner gold is increasing constantly. The divine nature will increase within us.

How much "gold" do you have within you? Perhaps some will have to admit that they have just a little. If we pray and walk in the spirit, the inner gold will increase daily. The flow of the divine life will add more of the divine nature to us. Although we were made of clay, God's intention is to impart His gold into us by the flow of His life. In this way the process of transformation begins.

Transformation requires a new element to be added to the original element. Suppose I am a person with a pale complexion. If you color my face with make-up, that is outward beautification, not inward transformation. If I am to have a real change, a new element must be added to me. How can it be added? By my eating. If I eat healthy meals day after day, I will undergo an inward transformation, an inward metabolic change in life. When a metabolic change occurs, new elements are added and old elements are discharged. This is transformation.

II. CAUSING MAN TO BE REGENERATED—PEARL

What does the pearl signify? Although pearl is replaced with silver in 1 Corinthians because of the need for redemption, pearl was God's original concept. When I was young, I did not know what the Bible meant by pearl. However, after passing through many experiences with the Lord, we now understand the meaning of pearl.

Consider how a pearl is formed. An oyster living in the sea is wounded by a piece of sand. The oyster secretes life juice around the

grain of sand until the sand becomes a pearl. Christ is the oyster who lived in the ocean of this world. We are the grains of sand that wound Him and, after injuring Him, stay at His wound. His life secretes His life essence, enveloping us with it layer upon layer. Eventually, after becoming fully enclosed by this life-secretion, we become a pearl (Matt. 13:46). This is the experience of regeneration. Originally, we were small pieces of sand, but we became pearls as the life juice of Christ enveloped our being. Every gate of the New Jerusalem is a pearl, signifying the entrance into the kingdom of God (Rev. 21:21). The Lord Jesus said that unless we are born anew we cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5; cf. Titus 3:5). We all have been born again and can enter into the kingdom. Furthermore, by becoming pearls, we even become the entrance itself.

After entering the New Jerusalem through the gate of pearl, we find ourselves on the street of gold (Rev. 21:21). This means that we walk according to the divine nature and that the divine nature becomes our way. Regeneration is our gate; the divine nature is our way. Do not go to others to ask them what you should do. The Lord Jesus is your way (John 14:6). You simply need to walk according to the golden street, the divine nature within you. Brothers, do you get your haircut according to the divine nature? Sisters, do you shop according to the divine nature? I am quite sure that the golden way never leads to a movie theater. When you are going in the direction of the movies, you will find yourself on the way of clay. We all need to walk the golden way. To be on the street of gold is to touch the divine nature of God.

III. CAUSING MAN TO BE TRANSFORMED INTO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST—PRECIOUS STONE

Although we may have the gate of pearl and the street of gold, we do not yet have a wall built up to express the image of God. The wall of the New Jerusalem is not only an erected boundary that separates the holy from the common, but also a building that expresses the image of God. In Revelation 4:2-3, God sitting on the throne has the appearance of jasper. The wall of the New Jerusalem and the first foundation stone of the wall are also built with jasper (Rev. 21:18-19), bearing the same appearance as God. Although we have passed through the gate of pearl and are walking the golden way, I still expect to see around us a wall built up to include all godly things, to exclude all worldly things, and to express the image of God. This wall is built up by the way of transformation (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2a; 1 Cor. 3:12a). The materials of the wall are all transformed precious stones (Rev. 21:11, 18a, 19-20). Only transformed people can be built together.

Where do precious stones come from? A precious stone is a transformed item. All precious stones originally were of other materials. Some of them were formed into igneous rocks by pressure and heat. Others were formed into sedimentary rocks by pressure and by the flowing of water. All became precious stones. Diamond (Exo. 28:18) is formed out of carbon by heat and pressure. Under extreme pressure and intense heat the carbon becomes a diamond. These are the principles of the transformation of precious stones. Oh, we need the burning, we need the flowing of the living water, and we need the pressure!

After entering the gate of pearl and walking the street of gold, you may think you are right with the Lord in every respect. As far as the gate and the street are concerned, you are right with Him. As you walk the golden way, you may have no problem with the Lord, but other difficulties will arise. For example, as a young brother you may expect to have a very good sister as your wife. Also, the sisters expect to have a fine young brother as their husband. However, married people can testify that while marriage is an enjoyment, it also causes suffering. Each husband is a source of suffering to the wife, and each wife is a source of suffering to the husband. Although you may provide enjoyment for your spouse, you also provide some suffering. We try our best to make our spouses happy, yet we cannot avoid making them suffer. Although marriage is a cause of suffering, we cannot do without marriage. Our marriage is not in our own hands; it is overruled by the sovereign Lord Himself according to His economy. Besides the suffering caused by marriage, there are many other sufferings. Along the golden way are many pains and piercing thorns.

In your kitchen you have many appliances. Among them is a stove with an oven. It is difficult to cook properly without a stove and oven. In one sense, the church is a garden. In another sense, the church is a dining room and a kitchen. Without the kitchen, the dining room is empty. The church kitchen has a big stove with many compartments. There is a place in that stove for every one of us. I can testify from my own experience that in the church we are truly burned for the sake of our transformation. The leading brothers burn one another constantly. The husbands burn the wives, and the wives burn the husbands. This is God's burning for our transformation.

We were made earthen vessels. Although these vessels are useful, their material, which is clay, does not match the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem there are no bricks, only transformed stones. We need a great amount of pressure and burning and flowing of life before we can be transformed into precious stones. The more pressure, burning, and flowing we experience, the more precious we become.

IV. FOR THE BUILDING OF GOD'S REDEEMED PEOPLE

Paul warned us to build the church in a proper way. Most of the work among Christians is not with gold, silver or pearl, and precious stone, but with wood, grass, and straw. As gold in typology signifies the divine nature, wood represents our human nature. Thus, wood is versus gold. We are fond of saying that we are all human, especially when we make a mistake. However, we should not make our humanity an excuse. Our humanity must be a resurrected humanity, for the natural humanity is inadequate for the building of God's church. The building of the church requires a transformed humanity, not a humanity of wood.

Grass is versus silver. The Bible tells us that all flesh is grass (Isa. 40:6; 1 Pet. 1:24). Grass typifies the people having become flesh. Grass is not solid like wood; it is weak and fragile. Thus, grass represents the fallen nature of man.

The last item that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 3:12 is straw. Straw is the stock or stem of a crop which remains after the grain has been threshed. Straw, which comes out of the ground, is versus the precious stone, which is a transformed substance. First Corinthians 3:12 presents a vivid contrast. Wood is a tree without fruit, and straw is a crop without grain. We should not be wood or straw, materials that will be burned away and that are useless for the building of God's church.

For the Lord's building, we need the divine gold, the regenerated pearl, and the transformed precious stones. The more we have of

these items, the easier it will be for us to be built together spontaneously. If we experience the gold, pearl, and precious stones, we will not only be the precious materials, but also a building fitly joined together to form a habitation of God in our spirit (Eph. 2:22). Thus, transformation is for God's building. We need to pray about these matters and fellowship concerning them that the Lord may bring us all into the reality of transformation for His building.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

THE TWO TREES

(1)

In the foregoing messages, we have covered God's eternal purpose and some of the points regarding God's way of fulfilling His purpose. God's way of accomplishing His purpose was firstly to create man as a vessel to contain Himself as life and then to place him in a garden before the tree of life, indicating that God's intention was for man to partake of the fruit of this tree. However, along with the tree of life, Genesis 2:9, 17 mention the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Therefore, we need to consider very carefully the significance of these two trees.

b. Allowing Man to Have Free Choice—2:16-17

Although God wanted man to eat of the tree of life, He did not force him to do it. Neither did God put the tree of life into him. Instead, God gave man free will. He gave him freedom of choice. When mothers feed their infant children, they seem to force the children to take the food. Nevertheless, the baby still has free will, for often he refuses the food that has been put in his mouth. The mother wants her child to eat, but she must recognize that he has a free will.

God created man with freedom of choice. Why did God do this? God is great. He is not small. Only a small man forces people to accept his opinion. If you compel others to take your way, it proves that you are a small person. If you are a great man, you will never force people to accept you. You will always give them a choice, saying, "If you love me, you may take me. If you do not care for me, you are free to forget about me." No man who is great or honorable will coerce people. Likewise, God is great. He is so attractive as the God of glory. God did not place man in front of Him exclusively, thus compelling man to choose Him. He placed man before two trees, confronting him with a choice.

When I was a young Christian, I was bothered by this. I said, "Why did God put man into such a dangerous situation? If I had been God, I would have removed the tree of knowledge of good and evil. I would have left the tree of life, placed man in front of it, and built a high protective wall to keep him safe. Why didn't God do this? Why did God put the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden as a temptation? Every problem comes from this source. Why didn't God take it away? If He had removed this tree, it would have saved us a great deal of trouble." I was not the only one who had these questions. Many young people asked me the same thing. However, if God had not given man a choice, He would have forced him to take the tree of life. God is too great to do such a thing. God is honorable and attractive. In order to display His greatness and prove His attractiveness, He needs the second tree.

According to the book of Job, Satan, the adversary of God, accused Job to God. He seemed to say, "Why does Job worship You? He worships You only because You bless him. If You take away all these blessings, Job will forsake You and renounce You to Your face" (Job 1:9-11). In other words, Satan told the Lord that He was bribing Job to worship Him and that if He did not bribe him, Job would forsake Him. Thus, Satan was slandering God as well as Job. God seemed to answer Satan, "Do as much as you can. I only command you to spare his life. I will prove to you that Job has not been bribed, but that he has been attracted by Me. Job worships Me out of his own free will."

God is the same today. He never forces anyone to accept Him. When the Lord Jesus came, He did not coerce people into following Him. He presented Himself to people, but always respected their freedom of choice. The Lord seemed to say, "If you like Me, you may take Me. If you don't like Me, you may forget about Me." Some of us may feel that we have been compelled by the Lord's mercy to believe in Him. To a certain extent, I feel the same way. His mercy has conquered us, persuading us to receive Him. Nevertheless, I can testify strongly that if you force me to reject Him, I will still take Him. I will never give Him up. Why have there been so many martyrs throughout the centuries? The Lord God stayed away, allowing His people to make a choice, that the actual situation might be proved to His enemy. God seemed to say, "Do your best, Satan. My people still choose Me." Our brother Watchman Nee was imprisoned for twenty years, from 1952 until his death in 1972, where he was tested and tempted. He never changed his choice because his Lord was too lovely and too attractive. We have received the Lord Jesus, not because we have been forced or pressed, but because we have been called by His glory and attracted by His virtue (2 Pet. 1:3). We all can confess that regardless of what people might offer us, we would never renounce the Lord Jesus. Our Lord is too dear, too precious, and too attractive. We have made Him our unique choice.

The same principle operated in the garden of Eden when God placed Adam before the two trees, which denoted two sources. God wanted man to choose Him as the tree of life.

1) The Tree of Life

a) Signifying God

The tree of life was a symbol, signifying God as the proper source (cf. Psa. 36:9; John 1:4; 10:10b; 11:25; 14:6; 1 John 5:12; Col. 3:4). If we only read Genesis 2, we will be unable to understand the meaning of the tree of life. However, the Gospel of John reveals the life denoted by the tree of life in a concrete way. John 1:4 says, "In Him was life," and John 15:5 tells us that the Lord Jesus is a vine tree. If we put these two verses together, we will realize that Christ is the tree of life. Jesus, the embodiment of God, is the tree of life. Therefore, the tree of life in Genesis 2 is a symbol of God as the source of life.

Besides this source, there is another tree, another source in the universe—death. However, this tree is not called the tree of death; it is

called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There is such a tree in this universe. These two trees oppose one another, the tree of life denoting God as the source of life, and the tree of knowledge signifying Satan as the source of death. As God is the source of life, Satan is the source of death. Therefore, in Genesis 2 we find two sources signified by two trees.

Throughout the course of this life-study, we have pointed out several times that nearly everything in Genesis 1 and 2 is a seed of the divine revelation. The two trees are such seeds. Along with all the other seeds sown in Genesis 1 and 2, these seeds grow in the following books of the Bible and are reaped as a harvest in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 20:10, 14 we see that death is cast into the lake of fire. In Revelation 22:2 we see that life abides in the New Jerusalem. At the beginning of the Bible we find death and life, and at the end of the Bible we again see death and life. Between the two ends of the Bible two lines are set forth—the line of death and the line of life. Both lines begin in the book of Genesis and end in the book of Revelation. Death begins with the tree of knowledge of good and evil and ends with the lake of fire. Life begins with the tree of life and ends at the New Jerusalem. Before we were saved, we were on the line of death. After we were saved, we were put on the line of life.

b) Its Contents, Nature, and Result

The first of these two choices was the tree of life, which denoted God Himself as life. The content of the tree of life is life. It is life, simply, purely, and absolutely. The nature of this tree and the result of this tree are also life. Life is the content, nature, and result. Everything is life.

c) Its Principle—to Be Dependent

The principle of the tree of life is dependence. Perhaps many of you are not clear about this principle of dependence. Allow me to use the illustration of graduation. Nearly everyone reading this message has graduated from some kind of school, either elementary school, high school, college, or university. Although we may graduate from such schools, we can never graduate from a restaurant. We may graduate from studying, but we should never graduate from eating. Furthermore, we cannot graduate from drinking water or from breathing air. I encourage you to study well and to graduate from school as soon as possible. However, I would never encourage you to graduate from breathing, for if you do that you will die. What is the meaning of this? It means that knowledge creates independence and that life demands dependence. Obtaining a certain body of knowledge permits us to graduate and to act independently. For example, I may not know how to cook. After studying the art of cooking under an expert chef, I will eventually become knowledgeable, independent, and able to cook without the aid of my instructor. However, in the things pertaining to life we can never be independent. We are dependent upon life constantly. I have been breathing since the day I was born, and I continue to breathe twenty-four hours a day. I have never graduated from breathing. I can never be independent of breathing and stay alive. I should not say, "I have practiced enough breathing. Now I am an expert. I can teach you to breathe, but I don't need to breathe myself." Regardless how old we are, we remain dependent upon breathing because breathing is a matter of life.

When God called Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees, He did not give him a map. God did not say, "Abraham, here is a map for your journey. I want to bring you out of Ur of the Chaldees and into the good land. This map is very clear. If you follow every turn accurately, you will arrive at your destination." God simply told Abraham to leave his country, kinsmen, and father's house. God did not tell Abraham where he should go. Why did God deal with Abraham in this way? God led him in this manner because, prior to the call of Abraham, the human race had fallen far away from God. Man had forsaken the presence of God and was living absolutely according to knowledge, not according to God as life. God intervened to call Abraham out of that situation and bring him back to Himself. God did not give Abraham a map or directions, because His intention was that Abraham had to live and move continually in His presence. God's presence was the map. God's presence was the direction, the leading, and the guidance. If Abraham had asked God, "Lord, tell me where I should go tomorrow," He would have replied, "My child, sleep well and be at peace. Do not be troubled. Tomorrow I will be your guidance. I will be your living map."

No automobile driver likes a back-seat driver. However, if you are the driver of a heavenly automobile, you need a co-driver. If you have the living God as your co-driver, you will not need a map. He will be your living map and your living guide. Actually, you will even cease being the driver and let Him drive. You may sit near Him and enjoy His driving saying, "Why must I labor and take care of all the turns? Lord Jesus, You do it. Lord, You drive in my place. Let me simply enjoy Your driving." This is what it means to be dependent on life.

Suppose, on the contrary, that I learn every doctrine, every book of the Bible, and compose hundreds of messages to supply me for a whole lifetime of ministry. If I were such a person, I could only give you the tree of knowledge. Knowledge does not require our dependence. Once you have acquired knowledge, recording it in your memory or in your notebooks, you may stay far away from the Lord's presence and still work for Him. When you have knowledge, you do not need to depend on the Lord Jesus. The Lord could be in the third heavens and you in a remote region of the earth and you could still conduct your ministry.

The way of life is absolutely different from this. Many times I have been burdened about what I should speak in a forthcoming meeting. For example, once I prayed the entire afternoon and evening saying, "Lord, give me a word. O Lord, what is Your burden?" Although I had a burden, I had no clear guidance relating to the content of the burden. I had to speak that night. As I entered the meeting hall, I had no word. As the congregation was singing and praying, I was burdened, but still had no word. I continued to pray, "Lord, what is Your burden? What is Your message? O Lord, what do You want me to say?" Although it was time for me to deliver the message, I still did not know what to speak. I stepped up to the platform and said, "Let us open the Bible..." Even at that very moment I did not know what book. Then I said, "...and read the book of Genesis," although I did not know what chapter. Then I said, "Chapter three," yet I did not know which verse. Only then was I clear to begin a message on Genesis 3:15, which says that the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent. A living message came forth. From the beginning to the end I was dependent. I had no knowledge. All I could do was depend upon the living Lord. This is the principle of the tree of life.

We may apply this principle to the teaching about marriage in Ephesians 5. All Christian wives know the verse in Ephesians 5 which tells them to submit to their own husbands. All Christian husbands know the verse which tells them to love their wives. Nevertheless, wives and husbands fail to fulfill the requirements of these verses because they take Ephesians 5 as the tree of knowledge, not as the tree of life. Husbands and wives, you should not live according to the tree of knowledge. You must live by the tree of life. As a wife you should say, "Lord, I don't know how to submit to my husband. Lord, even if I do know, I cannot do it. I will forget about it, Lord. I

won't use my effort or energy to fulfill this requirement. Lord Jesus, I simply stay in Your presence. I want to abide in You and enjoy You twenty-four hours a day." If you do this, submission spontaneously will flow out of your inner being. It will be the overflow of your enjoyment of Christ as your inner life. This is dependence on the tree of life.

What is the principle of the tree of life? Its principle is dependence. We all must be dependent. Do not take the way of knowledge, for the result of that way is death.

*2) The Tree of the Knowledge
of Good and Evil*

The second choice was the tree of knowledge (Gen. 2:17), which was the opposite of the tree of life. Note that this tree was called the tree of knowledge of good and evil, not simply the knowledge of evil. Both the knowledge of good and the knowledge of evil come from the same tree. It does not matter whether knowledge is the knowledge of good or of evil. As long as it is knowledge, it does not belong to the tree of life. It belongs to the tree of knowledge.

*a) Signifying Satan
and All Things apart from God*

Although the tree of the knowledge of good and evil signifies Satan, it does not signify him directly. It firstly signifies everything apart from God and then it signifies Satan indirectly, because Satan is hidden at the back of the things that are apart from God. Satan likes to conceal himself. Thus, the tree of knowledge represents him indirectly.

Satan is not as frank as God. God is very frank and always comes to the front. Satan, however, is subtle, always staying at the rear. If Satan wants to trouble you, he will not do it openly and frankly. He will do it subtly, acting through your wife or through a part of the world, such as a department store. Sometimes, Satan even utilizes the Bible, operating through the letters of the Scripture to harass you. Remember how the Jewish religionists, the Pharisees and the scribes, used the Bible to condemn the Lord Jesus to death (John 19:7). Because Satan is subtle, the tree of knowledge does not signify him directly. It signifies everything apart from God, including good things, scriptural things, and religious things. Regardless of whether a thing is good or evil, as long as it is not God Himself it can be utilized by Satan.

The things apart from God fall into three categories: knowledge, good, and evil. Suppose you have the intention of doing a certain good thing. Deep in your spirit, however, you have the sense not to touch it and not to do it. You are not convinced by this inner sense which forbids you to do it and you go to one of the elders saying, "Brother, look at this good thing I have in mind to do. It is very good. Why don't I have the peace to do it?" The elder may say, "It does not matter whether or not you have the peace. You should do it because it is good." If the elder gives such a reply, he will certainly be an elder of knowledge, not knowing the principle of life. Every proper elder should say, "Brother, we should never go along with the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Our principle is not good and bad, right and wrong. Our principle is life." Do not employ the principle of good and bad, but cooperate with the principle of life. If you do not have peace within, it means that the Spirit of life does not agree with what you intend to do. You need to cooperate with Him. If you do, you will receive life. Have you not had this kind of experience repeatedly in the past? Whenever you acted according to the good, you were killed. You experienced death. However, when you acted according to the inner life, you received more life.

The tree of knowledge firstly signifies everything utilized by Satan, regardless of whether it is good or evil. It does not signify Satan directly, because he likes to hide. When Satan first entered into man, he did not do it in a frank way. He came in the form of a serpent. At the beginning of the Bible, the serpent was very cunning and apparently was quite attractive (Gen. 3:1), unlike the ugly serpents under God's curse. As Eve conversed with the serpent, she did not realize that Satan was in it. Herein lies the principle of Satan's appearing: he never appears frankly, but subtly.

We find another example of Satan's subtle appearing in the case of Peter in the Gospels. Peter was an honest, faithful disciple, and he loved the Lord Jesus very much. When the Lord spoke of His coming crucifixion, Peter said, "God be merciful to You, Lord; this shall by no means happen to You!" (Matt. 16:21-23). The Lord Jesus turned to Peter and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan!" Apparently, Peter was the speaker; actually it was Satan in Peter. Satan was also in Judas when he betrayed the Lord Jesus. Judas was filled with Satan and called "a devil" (John 13:2, 27; 6:70).

By all these examples we can see that Satan never acts frankly. He is always subtle, using others as a covering. You may say, "That is not Satan. That is my wife. That is my dear husband." Nevertheless, the wife and the husband have been used by Satan. Therefore, we must be careful.

b) Its Contents

The contents of the tree of knowledge are all things apart from God. Even the Bible inspired by God and the law given by God may be utilized in letters by Satan as the tree of knowledge. Even the experience of Christ that you had today can become the tree of knowledge tomorrow. I have already illustrated the experience of giving a message on Genesis 3:15 in complete dependence upon the Lord. That message was very living. Suppose, however, I am invited to speak in another city, and I think to myself, "I gave such a good message on Genesis 3:15. I think I'll repeat the same message." If I do this, that message will become the tree of knowledge. Two months ago that message was the tree of life; now, once it is repeated in the way of knowledge, it becomes the tree of knowledge. You may have a similar experience after offering up a living prayer to the Lord. One night you may be offering up a living prayer in dependence upon the Lord. Because that prayer was excellent and living, you decide to repeat the same prayer, word for word, in the next prayer meeting. To your surprise, the prayer that once was the tree of life becomes the tree of knowledge. Thus, even a living prayer can become the tree of knowledge.

Let us take an example from our family life. Parents often instruct their children by saying, "Don't you see that John is such a good boy? Why don't you act the way he does?" If John's behavior comes from a dependence upon the Lord, it is the tree of life. If another child imitates John, his imitation is the tree of knowledge. We need to apply this to ourselves. If we act in a certain way according to life and then repeat that action according to the knowledge derived from our first experience, that repetition becomes the tree of knowledge.

Even the one Bible can be two trees to us. If you depend on the Lord and exercise your spirit as you touch the Word, the Bible is the tree of life. However, if you exercise your mind and investigate the Bible as a book of letters, it will be the tree of knowledge. We can make the Bible in letters the tree of knowledge. The Lord Jesus told the Jews, "You search the Scriptures..you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). To merely search the Scriptures is to come to the tree of knowledge; to contact the Lord through the Word is to come to the tree of life. Never make the Bible the tree of knowledge. Always keep it as the tree of life. The determining factor is whether or not you are dependent upon the Lord as you come to the Bible. If you are independent of Him, whatever you may get is the tree of knowledge. If you are dependent upon Him, everything you receive is the tree of life. We should never think that the two trees mentioned in Genesis 2 are ancient history. Genesis 2 is not an antiquated record; it is a living, up-to-date, divine revelation of two principles.

c) Its Nature and Result

The nature and result of the tree of life are both life because it is a tree of life. But the nature and result of the tree of knowledge of good and evil are both death because knowledge, good, and evil are all of death and bring in death. Anything that is not life is of death and results in death. Actually, the tree of knowledge of good and evil is the tree of death; yet it is not called the tree of death, but the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Death is not only behind evil; it is also behind knowledge and good. The title of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is subtle because Satan always likes to conceal himself. Satan has the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Since the tree of knowledge of good and evil is actually the tree of death, it signifies Satan.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FOURTEEN

THE TWO TREES

(2)

In the previous message we have seen that the tree of knowledge of good and evil signifies Satan, who has the power of death, the contents of which are all things apart from God and the nature and result of which are both death. Now we have to see what is the principle of this tree.

d) Its Principle—to Be Independent

If we know the principle of the tree of life, we will also know the principle of the tree of knowledge, for it is opposite the principle of the tree of life. The principle of the tree of life is dependence; the principle of the tree of knowledge is independence. Anything we do in dependence upon the Lord is in the principle of the tree of life. Anything we do independently of the Lord is in the principle of the tree of knowledge.

Everyone wants to be independent. However, we should never be independent of the Lord. Spiritual independence means death. If we are independent, we kill ourselves.

To be independent of the Lord means to have an insulation separating us from the Lord, an insulation which cuts off the flow of divine electricity. Although we may have an electrical power plant with tremendous resources and all the necessary equipment properly installed, all is useless if there is insulation at the switch. That insulation severs the flow of electricity. Only a slight amount of insulation, perhaps a paper-thin layer, will cut off the flow. Independence is a spiritual insulation, disconnecting us from the life of God. Do not think of yourself as an expert in spiritual matters. Regardless of how long electricity has been applied, it still needs application without insulation. It is the same in the spiritual realm. Never say, "I have much experience in Christ. I have been exercising my spirit for years and I don't need to do it any more." We should never adopt this attitude. We need to depend on the Lord continually. Never be independent of the living Lord. One second of independence means death.

3) The Realization of the Two Principles

The principle of the tree of life and the principle of the tree of knowledge of good and evil are realized throughout the whole Bible. All the negative things in the Bible are on the line of the tree of knowledge, and all the positive things are on the line of the tree of life. I call the first line the line of knowledge and the second line, the line of life. If we follow these two lines, they carry us through the entire Scripture.

Firstly, man was induced to eat of the tree of knowledge. As a result, man fell. The descendants of fallen man did not depend upon God at all. They relied upon their knowledge. According to Genesis 4, the first human culture was invented, and this culture developed until it became the corrupted world of Noah. During the time of Noah, God judged the earth by the flood. Noah's descendants became another race, but this race still did not depend upon God. Eventually, the second human culture came forth, the culture which erected the tower and city of Babel. Then God called Abraham out of that fallen race. By this we can see the development of the two lines. Strictly speaking, the line of life began with Adam, who was fallen and redeemed, and continued through Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and so many Israelites. On this line of life we have the tent of Noah, the tent of Abraham, the tabernacle, and the temple. The line of knowledge began with Cain and continued through all the ungodly people. On the line of knowledge we have the city of Enoch, Babel, Sodom, the treasure cities of Pharaoh, and Babylon, which captured the things on the line of life.

We find the same two lines in the New Testament. Although the Old Testament and the law were originally on the line of life, the Jewish religionists treated them as mere knowledge and put them on the line of knowledge. The Pharisees used the Old Testament in the way of knowledge. When the Lord Jesus came, the religious leaders were altogether on the line of knowledge. Only the Lord Jesus Himself was on the line of life. Then He brought His disciples to the line of life. On the day of Pentecost, His disciples put many other people on the line of life. Thus, at that time, there was the Jewish religion on the line of knowledge and the church on the line of life. However, not long afterward, the church was degraded, falling from the living Christ to dead scriptural knowledge, and became Christianity. The church was on the line of life, but Christianity was on the line of knowledge. Revelation 17 tells us that eventually

Christianity will become the great, religious Babylon, and Revelation 18 says that the world system will result in the great political Babylon. The great Babylon will have two aspects—the religious aspect and the political aspect. Regardless of the aspect, the great Babylon is the culmination of the line of knowledge. The overcomers among the Christians through all the centuries never have shifted from the line of life to the line of knowledge. They will remain on the line of life until the end when it ultimately issues in the New Jerusalem. The great Babylon and all things apart from God will be swept away by the stream of fire (Dan. 7:10) into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10, 14-15; 21:8). All the positive things in the Bible throughout the ages will be carried on by the river of the water of life (Rev. 22:1) into the New Jerusalem. In opposition to the lake of fire will be a city of water, the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10—22:4). At the end of the Bible we see a lake and a city: the lake is the lake of the thirst-creating fire as the ultimate consummation of the line of knowledge; the city is the city of the thirst-quenching water as the ultimate consummation of the line of life. Thus, at the end of the book of Revelation we find the harvest of the seed of the tree of knowledge and of the tree of life.

Which line are you on—the line of life or the line of death? Remember that God is frank. Because life is God, life also is frank. Death, on the contrary, is subtle. Death does not appear manifestly as death; it appears as knowledge. Life is simply life: its contents, nature, and results are life. Death is knowledge. Everyone likes knowledge. Even the little children hunger for it. They weary us with question upon question. If you answer one question, they respond with several more because there is a craving for knowledge within man. Man covets knowledge. Even many Christians are greedy for it. Although the word "knowledge" itself may be a good term, at the back of knowledge and underneath knowledge is death. The letter kills because the letter is knowledge (2 Cor. 3:6). The letter of the Bible kills whenever the Bible is separated from the living God. Religion has separated the Bible from the living Christ. Thus the Bible can kill and spread death.

Death is concealed under so many good things, even lurking under our best intentions. Many dear Christians have been killed by the good intentions of other people. Although your intention may be excellent, Satan lurks beneath it, and Satan is death. Everyone knows that death hides behind evil things. For example, the gambling casinos in Las Vegas are manifestly evil and deadly. However, attending a cathedral seems to be good, much better than visiting a casino. Nevertheless, death is found in both places. The difference is in the appearance, not in the actuality, for death is present and prevailing in both good and evil things. Death is subtle.

Now we know on which line we should be. We must take the line of life.

4) A Further Word

I still have the burden to share further on the two trees from the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is a book of life. In this Gospel, many human cases are brought to the Lord, and almost every case is an issue of religion, teaching, or questions of right and wrong. As we shall see, the Lord Jesus did not give a yes or no answer to any of the cases.

The Samaritan woman asked the Lord concerning the proper place of worship, whether it was in the mountain of Samaria or in Jerusalem (John 4:20). The Lord answered that it was not a question of the right or wrong place, but a matter of the spirit. To be concerned about a yes or no answer is to be involved with the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The Lord said that God is Spirit and that we must worship Him, not in a certain correct place, but in our spirit. As God the Spirit is life and we contact and receive Him as the living water in our spirit, so this worship is in the principle of the tree of life.

One day the Lord saw a man who was blind from birth (John 9:1). The disciples, under the influence of a natural, religious concept, asked Him, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?" (v. 2). Listen to the Lord's answer. "Neither has this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God might be manifested in him" (John 9:3). Here is the significance of the Lord's reply: people always appraise situations according to yes or no, right or wrong, which are the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but the Lord Jesus always brings people back to the tree of life, which is God Himself.

When Nicodemus approached the Lord in the way of religious teachings, the Lord answered that he needed a rebirth with the divine life. It was not a matter of teaching, of knowledge added to the mind, but of regeneration, of divine life entering the spirit.

If we read the whole book of John, we will see that the Lord Jesus never gave yes or no answers. When people proposed that He act, He refused. When the supply of wine was depleted at the wedding feast in Cana, and when the mother of Jesus wanted Him to deal with the situation, He declined. However, when she ceased asking, He changed water into wine (John 2:3-9). At the time of the feast of tabernacles, the Lord's brothers challenged Him to go into Judea. The Lord told them to go, saying that He Himself was not going. However, after His brothers went to the feast, He also went (John 7:1-10). Likewise, when the Lord was informed that His friend Lazarus was ill, He did not go to see him (John 11:1-6). He stayed where He was for two more days. Afterward, the Lord decided to go into Judea again, and His disciples were opposed to this (John 11:7-8). Why does the Gospel of John present the Lord Jesus as acting in such a way? Because the Gospel of John is a book of life. The Lord wanted to train His disciples to free themselves from right and wrong, yes and no—that is, to forsake the tree of knowledge of good and evil—and to come fully into life. Life is God Himself.

Another case is found in chapter eight where a sinful woman was brought to the Lord (John 8:1-11). This woman had been caught in the act of adultery. The Pharisees said to the Lord that Moses commanded that such a one should be stoned. Then they asked the Lord, "What then do you say?" Although they charged the Lord to give a yes or no answer, He did not reply in this way. He said, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." What does this mean? It means that the Lord was pointing them to God, for in the whole universe God is the only One who is not sinful. The Pharisees were silenced by the Lord's answer. Then the Lord told the woman, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." This case reveals that it is not a matter of law or of knowledge; it is absolutely a matter of touching the living God.

As I have pointed out previously, when God called Abraham, He did not tell him where to go. If God had done so, Abraham would have had knowledge. However, God purposely refrained from giving Abraham any information in order to keep Abraham constantly in direct contact with Himself. The living presence of God was his map, his direction.

In many of the Christian books we are given ways and methods of doing things. By reading the books, we can learn the proper way. For example, regarding the matter of being crucified with Christ we are told by the books to reckon ourselves dead. If we make this merely a way or a method, it belongs to the tree of knowledge. What is knowledge? What is religion? Knowledge or religion means to

be good and to do good, to worship God or to work for God without having the living presence of God. Anything good done for God without His presence is religion. A certain thing may be both life and knowledge to us. If we experience the presence of the living God while doing it, it is life. However, if we do it without God's presence, it is simply dead knowledge. No way or method can help us. We need the living God.

What is life? Life is God Himself. What is the principle of life? The principle of life is to be dependent on God for everything. If you depend on God, everything is life.

5) The Triangular Situation

When Adam stood in front of the two trees, he was standing before God and Satan. This formed a triangular situation between man, God, and Satan in the universe. The struggle between God and Satan was upon man. Whether man will choose God or follow Satan depends completely upon man's choice. This triangular situation is now within us. Once Satan was in the garden outside of Adam; now he is in our flesh. Once God also was in the garden outside of man; now He is in our spirit.

In message ten we pointed out that man is tripartite: he has a spirit, soul, and body. The spirit is our innermost part, the body is our outermost part, and the soul, the main part of our being, stands between them. As a result of the fall, Satan as the tree of knowledge came into man's flesh. As a result of our believing in Christ, God as the tree of life came into our spirit. Therefore, the two trees that were once in the garden outside of man are now within us, one in our flesh and the other in our spirit. If we read Romans 7 carefully, we will see that Paul said in his flesh nothing good dwells, only sin. Sin is actually the evil nature of Satan. To say that sin dwells in our flesh means that Satan, the evil one, is in our flesh. Romans 8:16, a verse which proves that God is in us, says that the Spirit of God witnesses with our spirit. Thus, every genuine Christian is a miniature garden of Eden. The mind of your soul represents your self, sin in your flesh represents Satan, and the Spirit in your spirit represents God. As in the garden of Eden, the three parties form a triangular situation within us.

The seed of this triangular situation was sown in Genesis 2, and the growth of the seed is found in Romans 8, where we see the outcrop of the two trees. Romans 8:6 says that the mind set on the flesh is death and that the mind set on the spirit is life and peace. In Genesis 2 the two trees were objective; in Romans 8 they are subjective. We should never say that these two trees are no longer with us. Even as you read this message, they are within you. In the past I expected to uproot the tree of knowledge in my flesh, but the more I dealt with it, the more it remained within me. Eventually I discovered Romans 8. I saw that there is another tree abiding in my spirit. Thus, in Romans 8 we find a present-day garden of Eden. Romans 8:2 mentions the law of the Spirit of life, which sets us free from the law of sin and death. Therefore, in Romans 8 we have two laws—the law of life and the law of death. These two laws are the two principles of the two trees in our subjective experience.

I want to say a word especially to the young people reading this message. I hope that you will learn early in your Christian life to enjoy the Lord as your tree of life. After hearing the testimony of a more experienced brother in the Lord, do not try to imitate him. If you do this, you will be turning to the tree of knowledge. You simply need to contact the Lord continually, and the Lord will be your tree of life. As a result, you will spontaneously love the Lord and His Word. Your love will be the outflow of touching the Lord as your living source, as your tree of life. When I was loving the Lord and seeking after Him as a young person, I had no one who could render such help to me. In the church life today you are surrounded by brothers and sisters who encourage you to enjoy the Lord as your tree of life.

c. Charging Man to Bear Responsibility— to Cooperate with God—2:15

God charged man to till the garden that life may grow for the fulfillment of the first aspect of God's purpose, that is, to express God in His image. Tilling the ground was for the growth of the tree of life. What does it mean to till the ground? This matter of tilling the ground was sown as a seed in Genesis 2 and developed in Matthew 13. In Matthew 13 the Lord Jesus says that the ground is the human heart. Furthermore, in Matthew 13 the tree of life is the Lord Jesus Himself as the seed which He sows into our heart. To till the ground means to loosen and break our hard heart, to open our heart to the heavens that rain may descend for the growth of life within us. When God charged man to till the ground, it meant that man had to be open, broken, and prepared for the tree of life to come into him.

Along with this charge, God gave man an order: man must not only till the ground, but also guard it. God warned man to protect the garden from the enemy that the second aspect of His purpose might be fulfilled, that is, to deal with Satan by His authority. The tree of life requires the tilling of the ground, and the tree of knowledge necessitates the guarding of the ground. We need to till the ground that God might be able to enter into us. However, since Satan also wants to invade us, we need to guard the ground, leaving no opening for the tree of knowledge. To till the ground is to open ourselves to the tree of life; to guard the ground is to close ourselves to the tree of knowledge.

d. Warning Man— Giving Him the Prohibition—2:17

Genesis 2:17 tells us that God issued man a warning and gave him a prohibition. God wanted man only to touch Him to receive life, but not to touch the things apart from God to receive death. God seemed to tell Adam and Eve, "Don't touch the tree of knowledge—only touch the tree of life. If you eat the tree of life, you will receive Me and have My life. If you eat the tree of knowledge, you will take in Satan and have his death." This was not merely a commandment; it was a warning. We must realize that in the whole universe there are two sources: one is the source of life, and the other is the source of death. Be careful which source you touch. If you touch God, you have the source of life and receive life. If you touch Satan, you have the source of death and receive death.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FIFTEEN

THE LINE OF LIFE THROUGHOUT THE SCRIPTURES

In this message I have the burden to cover, as a parenthesis, the principle of the tree of life throughout the Scriptures. We have pointed out many times that almost everything in the first two chapters of Genesis has been sown there as a seed and that this seed grows gradually in the following books of the Bible, appearing as a crop in the New Testament and ripening as a harvest in the book of Revelation. This is a basic principle of the divine Word. God was very economical in writing the Bible, not wasting a single word. He used every word in a most economical way. Furthermore, God's revelation is consistent throughout the Scriptures. Therefore, whatever we find in the beginning of the Bible we also find throughout the Bible and at the end.

The record of the two trees in Genesis 2, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, is not merely ancient history, for these two trees are still with us today. If we read the Bible carefully we will discover that throughout the Bible we have two lines—the line of the tree of life and the line of the tree of knowledge. We may refer to them in brief as the line of life and the line of knowledge. These two lines began at the book of Genesis and continue through the subsequent books of the Bible until they reach their destination. As we pointed out in message thirteen, the destination of the line of life will be the New Jerusalem, where the tree of life appears once again. The river of the water of life is also found in the New Jerusalem, for it flows throughout the entire city. Thus, the New Jerusalem, a city of living water, is the ultimate consummation of the line of the tree of life. The line of knowledge will conclude with the lake of fire, a vivid contrast to the city of New Jerusalem. The city is a city of living water; the lake is a lake of burning fire.

According to the revelation in the Bible, we see two streams proceeding out of the throne of God. One is the stream of living water, and the other is a stream of fire. The stream of living water is revealed in Ezekiel 47 and Revelation 22. In Ezekiel living water issues out of the house of God; in Revelation 22 living water flows out of the throne of God. In Daniel 7:9-10 we see another stream, a stream of fire, flowing out of the throne of God. The living water is for reviving and watering, but the stream of fire is for judging. It courses in judgment throughout the universe. The river of water proceeds out of the throne of God and will flow all positive things into the New Jerusalem. The stream of fire issues out of the throne of God and will sweep all negative things into the lake of fire. In the beginning of the Bible we have the start of two lines, the line of life and the line of knowledge. At the end of the Bible we have two results, two consummations—the city of living water and the lake of burning fire.

Where are you and where are you going? Which line are you on? The line of life is certainly the right line, but the line of knowledge is the wrong line. As redeemed people we are surely on the right line, the line of life. However, it is possible that our walk and our work—that is, the way we live and work for God—might be on the wrong line. Although as persons we may be on the line of life, our walk and work may be on the line of knowledge. The Bible firstly warns people to stay away from the line of knowledge and remain on or return to the line of life. Once we are saved, we are eternally saved, and our salvation is eternally secure. Nevertheless, the Bible warns us concerning our daily walk and our work for the Lord. In Galatians Paul warns us to walk in the Spirit (5:16) and to sow to the Spirit (6:7-8). Otherwise, everything we do will be consumed by fire. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul cautions us, the builders of the churches, to be careful to build with the proper materials. If we build the church with gold, silver, and precious stones, this work will continue unto the New Jerusalem, because the New Jerusalem is a city built with gold, pearl, and precious stones. On the other hand, Paul warns us that the wood, grass, and straw are only useful for burning (1 Cor. 3:12-15). Everything that is built with those materials will be swept by the stream of fire into the lake of fire. Thus, we must be careful about ourselves, our walk, and our work. We ourselves must stay on the right line, and our daily walk and work must also be on the right line. Then we and our work will enter the New Jerusalem. We need to be very clear about these two lines. In this message, I shall cover the line of life and in the following message the line of knowledge.

Many times I have been bothered by the fact that the tree of life appeared for a short while in Genesis 2 and that it was closed off from man at the end of Genesis 3. Apparently the tree of life has been closed to man; actually through the promised redemption it has been available throughout the ages for God's people to touch, enjoy, and experience. Now in a very simple way I want to give you many of the positive persons on this line of life. We do not begin with Adam, who was fallen and redeemed. We begin with Abel.

I. ABEL—CONTACTING GOD IN GOD'S WAY

The characteristic of Abel's life was that he contacted God in God's way (Gen. 4:4). Do not say that as long as you contact God everything is all right. In whose way do you contact God—in your way or God's? There are three peoples who claim to contact God: the Jews, the Moslems, and the Christians. The Jews contact God in their own way. According to Romans 10:2-3, the Jews seek to establish their own righteousness and do not submit to the righteousness of God. This means that they contact God in their own way. The Moslems are even more devoted to their own way of worshipping God. If you visit a Moslem mosque, you will find that the Moslems appear pious and godly, worshipping God by bowing themselves. Many so-called Christians, including Catholics, do their service to God according to their own way, not through the redemption of Christ, nor in the Spirit.

What is the origin of man's own way of contacting God? The source is man's troublesome mind, which can produce nothing except knowledge. Hence, men contact God in the way of knowledge, not in the way of life. Abel, however, contacted God in His way. As we shall see in the following message, his elder brother, Cain, contacted God in his own way. God's way is life; Cain's way is knowledge. We all need to be careful. Although you may say that you are for God, perhaps you are for God in your own way. You approach God in your self-invented way, and that way is entirely a matter of knowledge. Do not follow that way. We should observe the example of Abel and contact God by laying aside our thought, opinion, and concept. "Lord, I contact You in Your way. I don't contact You by my thought, concept, or knowledge. Lord, You are my way." If we do this, we will enjoy God as the tree of life. Abel did partake of God as the tree of life. He truly ate of the fruit of this tree.

II. SETH AND ENOSH— CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD

Perhaps the names of Seth and Enosh are unfamiliar to you. Seth and Enosh were the third and fourth generations of mankind, although the Bible considers them as one. After Abel was slain, the line of life seemed to be terminated. Nevertheless, Seth and Enosh were raised up to continue it. These two generations had one outstanding characteristic—they began to call upon the name of the

Lord (Gen. 4:26). They not only prayed, but called on the name of the Lord. If you read the original text of the Hebrew and Greek, you will see that the word call means to cry out, not only to pray. Although all Christians pray, few pray in a calling way. Most pray very quietly, even in silence. However, the third and fourth generations of mankind learned that in order to contact God they needed to cry out to Him and call on Him. Do not argue that God is not deaf, that He is able to hear us. Even the Lord Jesus Himself prayed with a strong cry in the garden (Heb. 5:7). During the time of Seth and Enoch, men learned how to pray to God in the way of calling on Him. If you try it, you will discover that it makes a difference. The Apostle Paul said that the Lord is rich unto all who call upon Him (Rom. 10:12). If you want to enjoy the riches of the Lord, you need to call upon His name.

Suppose you are helping a new convert touch the Lord in prayer. He prays, "Jesus, You are the Son of God. You died for me. I take You as my Savior. Thank You." Although this is a good prayer, it is better for him to call on the Lord in a strong way. If he says, "O Lord Jesus, thank You for dying for me," his spirit will be stirred up and he will touch the Lord in a living way.

Although the third and fourth generations of mankind discovered the way of calling on the name of the Lord, this way of calling on Him was gradually lost. Many Christians today neglect it and even despise it. However, no Christian can escape calling on the Lord's name. During peaceful and untroubled times you may retain your composure, unwilling to lose your face by calling on the name of the Lord. However, during a time of difficulty, perhaps after an automobile accident or in a time of sudden illness, you will call on Him spontaneously, saying, "O Lord." It is unnecessary for us to teach people to call on the Lord. One day they will call on Him. When troubles come, they will have the need to call on His name. To call on the name of the Lord is simply to enjoy Him and to eat Him as the tree of life.

III. ENOCH—WALKING WITH GOD

The characteristic of Enoch's life was that he walked with God (Gen. 5:22, 24). We are not told that he worked for God or that he did great things for God, but that he walked with God. This is very meaningful. In order to walk with a person, you must like him. If I do not like you, I will never walk with you. Firstly, I like you, then I love you, and then I will walk with you continually. The fact that Enoch walked with God proves that he loved God. He simply loved to be in the presence of God. The Lord Jesus rebuked the church at Ephesus because they did many works for God but had lost their first love (Rev. 2:2-4). The Lord does not want to see so many good works; He wants to see our love toward God. Suppose a wife performs many good works for her husband, yet would never be in his presence. Surely the husband will say, "I don't want you to be busy and yet be away from me. I want a wife who is with me all the time."

Enoch walked with God. If we read Genesis 5:21-24 carefully, we will see that Enoch began his walk with God at the age of sixty-five and continued walking with Him for three hundred years. He walked with God day after day for a period of three hundred years. Finally, God seemed to say, "Enoch, you have walked with Me long enough. Let Me take you to Myself." Many Christians are fond of talking about the rapture and the coming of the Lord. Do you realize that rapture requires that you love the Lord and live in His presence? We need to love the Lord. "Lord Jesus, I love You. I want to live in Your presence. I want to walk with You because I love You." This loving attitude is the preparation, condition, and basis of being raptured. On what ground was Enoch raptured? He was raptured on the basis of his walk with God for a period of three hundred years. Enoch offered us an excellent example.

IV. NOAH—WALKING WITH GOD

Noah followed Enoch's footsteps and also walked with God (Gen. 6:9). Actually, he walked with God for a period even longer than three hundred years. As Noah walked with God, God showed him a vision of what He wanted to do in that age. Noah received the vision of the ark used to save eight members of the fallen race. Like Noah, we should not act according to our concept. Whatever we do and work should be according to the vision we received in walking with the Lord. In our daily walk with the Lord we will come to see His desire, His mind, and His will. Then we will work and serve according to God's desire, not according to our own thoughts. Noah enjoyed God by walking with Him.

V. ABRAHAM—LIVING IN THE APPEARING OF GOD AND CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD

Abraham was more outstanding than Noah. As we pointed out in the Life-study of Romans, Abraham was transfused with the appearing of the God of glory. While Abraham was in Ur of the Chaldees, the God of glory appeared to him and attracted him (Acts 7:2). According to the record in Genesis, God appeared to Abraham several other times as well (Gen. 12:7; 17:1; 18:1). Abraham was not a giant of faith by himself; he was as weak as we are. The God of glory appeared to Abraham again and again, each time transfusing and infusing His divine elements into him, enabling him to live by the faith of God. Abraham's experience reminds us of a battery which operates well after it is charged, but which needs recharging after a period of time. It is very interesting to study Abraham's history according to God's appearances to him. God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and led him on by appearing to him again and again. As I have mentioned previously, when God called Abraham to leave Ur, He did not give him a map or any directions. Abraham walked according to the appearing of God. If God's appearing was in a certain direction, Abraham simply moved in that direction. In this way Abraham enjoyed the riches of God.

In addition to experiencing the appearances of God, Abraham called upon the name of the Lord (Gen. 12:7-8). Abraham's son, Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob, also called upon the name of the Lord. Since these three generations were all the same, God was called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This means that God is the God of His people who live in His appearing and who call upon His name. As Abraham lived in the appearing of God and called upon the name of the Lord, he enjoyed Him as the tree of life. According to Genesis 18, God appeared to Abraham as he sat at the entrance of his tent, and He stayed with him for about half a day, even enjoying a meal with him. Thus, the Bible even says that Abraham was called the friend of God (James 2:23). In Genesis 18 God and Abraham conversed together and ate together as friends.

Certainly we all would like to have such an enjoyment of the Lord. Nevertheless, our portion today is much better than Abraham's experience in Genesis 18. According to Revelation 3:20, the Lord Jesus is knocking at the door. If anyone will hear His voice and open the door, the Lord will come into him and sup with him. Day by day we may have a feast with the Lord. Abraham dined with the

Lord for approximately half a day, but we may feast with Him continually. We may meet with the Lord at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Our portion is higher and richer than was Abraham's.

Abraham enjoyed God as the tree of life. What is the tree of life? The tree of life is the supply of life that maintains our living in the presence of God. Abraham enjoyed God in such a way.

VI. ISAAC—LIVING IN THE APPEARING OF GOD AND CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD

Isaac, as the son of Abraham, was in the same way of contacting God as was his father. He also lived in the appearing of God and called upon the name of the Lord (Gen. 26:2, 24-25). He did not only inherit all the blessings of his father, but also his way to enjoy God.

VII. JACOB—LIVING IN THE APPEARING OF GOD AND CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD

Jacob, as the third generation of the called race, was eventually led by God not to live by his supplanting way, but by the same way of contacting God as his grandfather and his father did. After being dealt with by the Lord for a considerable time, he learned to live in the appearing of God and to call upon the name of the Lord (Gen. 35:1, 9; 48:3). To him, this was not only the inherited way, but also the way to which he was led by God's discipline.

VIII. MOSES—LIVING IN THE APPEARING AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Moses was a most interesting person. He was born at a time when the Israelites were under the persecution of the Egyptians. God sovereignly placed him in the palace of Pharaoh, and he was brought up as a member of the royal family, as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Moses learned of the sufferings of his people under the hand of the Egyptians, probably hearing of them from his nursing mother, who was actually his natural mother. Such reports undoubtedly stirred Moses' heart. Perhaps Moses said, "The Egyptians have been persecuting my people. I will do something to help them." Although Moses had a good heart, that heart was a heart of knowledge, a heart of death. This is the situation among many Christians today. Many have a good heart. They are stirred up and want to do something for God. But Moses acted in his own way and in his own strength. The result was failure, and he was deeply disappointed. Eventually, Moses realized that he could not do anything; he was disappointed to such an extent that he gave up. It seems that he said, "I had such a good heart for my people, but God didn't help me. God did not appreciate my efforts. Since God is not with me, I will forget about the situation and go to the wilderness." Although he was concerned about the welfare of the children of Israel, he was disheartened by his failure and he fled to the wilderness, where, lonely and despondent, he became a keeper of the flock. Moses, the man who was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and who was mighty in words and deeds (Acts 7:22), was now a little shepherd in the wilderness, a defeated and dejected man.

One day, in the midst of his disappointment, God came. God appeared to Moses in a vision of a burning bush, a bush that burned without being consumed (Exo. 3:2, 16). Moses was surprised and turned aside to see this bush. It was as if God was saying to Moses, "Moses, you must be like this burning bush. Do not burn by yourself or act by yourself. You had a good heart, but you acted in the wrong way." We may use the example of a modern automobile. If we want to move the automobile, it is foolish for us either to pull it or push it. That will only wear us out. We should use gasoline as our source of power. When the gasoline burns, the automobile moves. We must operate the vehicle in this way. Likewise, Moses learned to cease from his own knowledge, his own way, his own energy, and his own activities. Moses began to live, as his grandfathers had done, in the presence and the appearing of the Lord. No longer did he act out of himself. From that time onward, he was one with God. For the leading of the Israelites on their journey, the Lord told him, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." And he said to the Lord, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Exo. 33:13-15). This shows that Moses knew the necessity of the Lord's presence for his work for the Lord. He was acting in the presence of God.

After Moses had brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, God called him to the mountaintop, where he remained for forty days. While he was on the mountaintop, he was thoroughly infused with the shekinah glory of God. As he descended along the side of the mountain, the glory of God radiated from his face (Exo. 34:29). On this mountaintop Moses experienced the full enjoyment of God as the tree of life. Although the tree of life had disappeared from unbelieving men, it nevertheless appeared to a person like Moses. Moses enjoyed God as the tree of life on the mount of glory.

Moses, like Noah, received a vision of God's building. While he was in the glory on the mountain, God gave him a detailed pattern of His dwelling place on the earth (Exo. 25:9). If we are one with God as we minister and work for Him, our work will not be a labor, but an enjoyment. When I speak for the Lord, I enjoy Him immensely. Once I have completed a message, I feel satisfied. Every ministry that is of God and according to God is actually a kind of food to the minister. Moses served God and enjoyed God in this way.

IX. THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL— JOURNEYING IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

When we speak about the children of Israel, it is easy to have a poor impression of them. If we recall how they worshipped the golden calf in the wilderness, we will think of them as pitiful indeed. However, everything in the universe has two sides. For instance, we have both day and night. Furthermore, in every home there is a living room and a place to keep the refuse, the trash. In the Bible we can find both positive and negative things, depending on where we look. For example, Abraham, who was so good, had a concubine and was not as wonderful as we think he was. But we should not look upon the negative things so much as on the positive things. This is especially true as we come to the history of the children of Israel.

For a period of forty years the children of Israel journeyed in the presence of the Lord (Exo. 13:21-22; Num. 14:14). They had the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The Israelites did not journey according to their opinion, but simply followed the movement of the pillar. Actually, there were not two pillars, but just one. In the day the pillar was like a cloud and in the night it was

like a fire. During the day God shaded the people, protecting them from the bright sunlight. During the night he gave them light to illuminate their way. This pillar was God Himself. Therefore, during the forty years in the wilderness the children of Israel enjoyed the presence of God. They also ate manna, the heavenly food, day after day, meaning they enjoyed God as the tree of life. Thus, even in the wilderness we see the line of the tree of life. Although we may have a negative concept about the children of Israel in the wilderness, they nevertheless experienced the tree of life, enjoying God day by day.

Would it not be wonderful to experience such a pillar of cloud and pillar of fire and heavenly manna in Orange County today? However, our portion is much better. We have the Holy Spirit as the pillar of cloud and the Bible as the pillar of fire. We also have the Lord Jesus as our heavenly manna. As we journey through the wilderness of Orange County, the Lord is present with us, and we enjoy Him as the tree of life.

X. JOSHUA—LIVING AND WORKING IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

When God called Joshua, He encouraged him, assuring him that He would be with him as He was with Moses (Josh. 1:5-9). The Lord told Joshua to be strong and courageous, for the Lord would be with him wherever he went. Joshua was a person who enjoyed God. As long as we enjoy God's presence, we can be a Joshua today. God is not far from us; He is with us all the time. Thus, we, like Joshua, can live, walk, and work in the presence of the Lord.

XI. GIDEON—FIGHTING IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

Gideon's outstanding characteristic was that he fought the battle in the presence of God (Judg. 6:12, 16). He not only lived, walked, and worked in the presence of the Lord, but fought with the presence of the Lord. We all must be like this. In one sense our daily walk is a walk, in another sense it is a work, and in still another sense it is a warfare. Whether we walk, work, or fight, we must be in the presence of the Lord. To be in the presence of the Lord simply means to have the enjoyment of the Lord as the tree of life. Gideon enjoyed God as the tree of life.

XII. SAMUEL—PRAYING AND CALLING UPON THE LORD

Samuel was another wonderful person in the Old Testament, a man who prayed for the children of God continually. The Bible says that Samuel told the people that he would not sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for them (1 Sam. 12:23). When Samuel learned that King Saul offended God, he was grieved and cried to the Lord the entire night (1 Sam. 15:11). Therefore, the Bible refers to Samuel as a man who called upon the name of the Lord (Psa. 99:6) and as a man who stood in the presence of God (Jer. 15:1). All of this reveals to us that Samuel was a person who prayed continually, who called on the name of the Lord, and who stood in the presence of God. By standing in the presence of the Lord and by calling on the name of the Lord, he enjoyed the Lord, partaking of Him as the tree of life. This motivation and enjoyment made him such a wonderful person in human history.

XIII. DAVID—TRUSTING IN GOD, LOOKING TO HIM, AND ENJOYING GOD'S LIFE

David was a man who trusted in God and looked to Him (1 Sam. 17:37, 45; 30:6). The secret of David's life was that he desired to dwell continually in the house of God and to behold His beauty (Psa. 27:4, 8, 14). This means that he enjoyed the presence of God. Moreover, he enjoyed God as the fatness and as the river of joy (Psa. 36:8-9). David said, "With thee is the fountain of life." This proves that even in ancient times David enjoyed God's life as the tree of life and as the river flowing within him. This enjoyment of God made him such a great king among the children of Israel.

XIV. DANIEL—PRAYING TO GOD

We are all familiar with the story of Daniel. However, most Christians are just curious about Daniel's prophecies. They want to know about the great image in Daniel 2, the image with the golden head, silver shoulders, brass abdomen, iron legs, and clay toes. They also want to know about the beasts that emerge from the sea in Daniel 7. All of the young people are interested in these matters. Although many years ago I spent a great deal of time studying these things, I eventually came to appreciate other aspects of the book of Daniel even more. Now I like the book of Daniel because in it I see a man who prayed constantly and contacted the Lord continually (Dan. 6:10-11; 9:3-4; 10:2-3, 12). According to Daniel 6, Daniel was preeminent among the governors and princes in the kingdom of Darius. The other governors and princes were jealous and plotted against him, seeking to destroy him. When Daniel learned of this, he went to the Lord and prayed. The aim of the conspiracy of the one hundred twenty governors was to shake Daniel's relationship with God. Nevertheless, Daniel opened his windows toward Jerusalem and prayed three times a day. When Daniel learned from reading the prophecy of Jeremiah that the seventy-year period of exile and captivity was soon to expire, he began to pray (Dan. 9:2-3). Then he received another vision and he prayed continually for three weeks until the answer came (Dan. 10:1-3, 12). Daniel's prayer life issued out of a holy life. He lived a holy life in the heathen land of Babylon. For example, Daniel refused to eat the king's food, the food which was first offered to idols and then used to feed the king and his people (Dan. 1:8). Daniel refused that food, and he enjoyed God very much. He enjoyed God as the tree of life.

XV. JESUS—AS THE SON OF GOD LIVING BY GOD

As we come to the New Testament, we see that the first person on the line of life in the New Testament was the Lord Jesus. Jesus not only enjoyed the tree of life; He was the tree of life. He Himself said that He came from the Father and that He lived by the Father (John 6:57). He did not live according to knowledge and learning. He lived, walked, and worked according to the Father who was working within Him (John 14:10).

XVI. THE NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS— LIVING BY THE LORD

Our destiny as New Testament believers is simply to abide in the Lord and to allow the Lord to abide in us (John 15:5). This means that we enjoy the Lord. The Lord Jesus told us that we must eat Him, for he who eats Him shall live because of Him (John 6:57; 14:19). We must eat the Lord Jesus because He is our bread of life, our tree of life. The tree of life is life presented in the form of food. In John 6 the Lord presented Himself as the life supply also in the form of food, telling us that He is the bread of life (v. 35) and that His flesh is eatable (v. 55). If we eat Him, we will have Him as our life and as the life supply by which we live. This is the genuine enjoyment of the tree of life.

XVII. PAUL—LIVING OUT THE LORD

Among all the New Testament believers, Paul was an example of a man who lived out the Lord. In Galatians 2:20 Paul said that Christ lived in him and that the life which he lived he lived by the faith of the Lord Jesus. Paul was saying that he himself had been crucified and buried, and that it was Christ who lived in him. Eventually Paul could say, "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). Christ was his life and his life supply, for Paul enjoyed Christ as the tree of life.

XVIII. THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST— LIVING BY CHRIST AS LIFE

The church is the Body of Christ. It is impossible for the body not to enjoy the head. The body cannot be separated from the head, for such separation means death. The entire church is the Body of Christ, depending on Christ and living by Christ as life (Eph. 1:23; Col. 3:4). By this we can see that the church may enjoy Christ as the tree of life.

XIX. THE NEW JERUSALEM—SUSTAINED BY THE RIVER OF LIFE WITH THE TREE OF LIFE

At the end of the Bible we see the consummation of the tree of life—the New Jerusalem. In the center of this city we see the river of life, which proceeds out of the throne of God and the Lamb, and in which grows the tree of life that bears fruit every month (Rev. 22:1-2). Our destiny and our portion for eternity will be the enjoyment of the tree of life and the water of life. The Bible concludes with a promise and a call. The promise is found in Revelation 22:14 which says, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life." The call is found in Revelation 22:17 which says, "He who wills, let him take the water of life freely." Thus, the whole Bible ends with eating and drinking, with enjoying God as the tree of life and with drinking Him as the water of life. This is the consummation of the line of life.

What should we do today? We should not do anything. We should simply stay on the line of the tree of life, enjoying God as our life and as our life supply. God will take care of everything. Out of the enjoyment of the Lord as our life supply, we will have our daily life, walk, work, and the building up of the churches. Then everything we have will be according to God's divine element, not according to our own concepts. Now we see the way we must take. May the Lord have mercy on us that we all may continue on the line of life.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SIXTEEN

THE LINE OF KNOWLEDGE THROUGHOUT THE SCRIPTURES

We have seen that the Bible opens with two trees, the tree of life, which brings in life, and the tree of knowledge, which brings in knowledge. However, knowledge is a pretense, for the tree of knowledge actually is the tree of death and brings in death. Thus, from the very beginning of the Bible we see two lines which continue throughout the entire Bible. The first line is the line of life, beginning with the tree of life and continuing throughout the Scriptures until it ends at the city of New Jerusalem, where we also see the tree of life (Rev. 22:1-2, 14). The second line is the line of knowledge, beginning with the tree of knowledge and continuing throughout the Scriptures until it ends at the lake of fire. In this message we shall consider the line of knowledge throughout the Scriptures. In every book of the Bible we can see the knowledge that troubles, damages, kills, and destroys. Now we shall examine many cases of people who lived, worked, moved, and acted by knowledge, not by life.

I. CAIN

Cain, the first son of Adam and the second generation of mankind, was the first person to live according to knowledge. Cain brought the fruit of the ground as an offering to the Lord (Gen. 4:3). Although this appears to be very good, it was wrong because Cain presented an offering to God in his own way, not in God's way. God's way required that fallen man offer a redeeming sacrifice in order to contact Him. However, Cain only offered the fruit of the ground without the redeeming blood. Cain's offering was presented according to his own consideration in his mind. It was offered in his own way. Every such way originates with the human mind. We must be careful. As we have pointed out, the principle of the tree of knowledge is to be independent of God. It means that we make our decisions independently. Although Cain performed a good deed, it was independent of God. Everything that is good yet independent of God results in death. This is similar to insulation which severs the flow of electricity. Regardless of the substance that is used as insulation—it may even be diamond—electricity is cut off nonetheless. As long as it causes insulation, it does not matter whether the material is good or bad. Likewise, if a thing keeps us away from God, it brings death, regardless of how good it is.

As a consequence of acting independently Cain went out from the presence of the Lord (Gen. 4:16). That was dreadful. It does not matter how good we are, for if we are away from the presence of God it is awful. We may be either good or bad, but the issue is the same as long as we are out of the presence of the Lord.

Once people have acted in their own way and have left the presence of God, they desire to erect a building for themselves. Cain built a city and called it Enoch, after the name of his son (Gen. 4:17). Cain did not name the city after the name of God; he made a name for mankind. This was a declaration that man was independent of God.

II. NIMROD

Nimrod was a mighty hunter before the Lord (Gen. 10:8-11). He was a mighty one in the earth, a person who was absolutely independent of God. He built a kingdom for himself, and the beginning of his kingdom was Babel. Although many Christians know that mankind constructed the tower and city of Babel, few realize that the kingdom of Babel was formed by Nimrod. The first kingdom in human history was probably the kingdom of Babel formed by Nimrod, who also built the great city of Nineveh in Assyria. His building was a sign that mankind was completely independent of God. Abraham, on the contrary, did not build anything but a little altar. He dwelt in a tent. Noah likewise did not build anything except the ark and an altar. The people who put their trust in God do not engage in much building activity. The more we place our confidence in God, the less independent building we will have. Only the giant workers—those who are independent of God—will construct their high towers.

III. THE PEOPLE AT BABEL

The people at Babel held a council (Gen. 11:3). They did not pray nor ask the Lord what they should do or where they should go. Human history is a history of councils. After World War I the League of Nations was formed, and this league was actually a council. After the end of World War II the League of Nations was changed into the United Nations, which has a huge building in New York where council is held nearly every day. Such human councils are utterly independent of God. The result of the council at Babel was the construction of a high tower for man's name and the formation of a city for his possession (Gen. 11:4).

IV. LOT

Although Lot was a saved person, he drifted away from the line of life by making a choice according to his own sight (Gen. 13:10-11; cf. vv. 14-15). When Lot separated himself from Abraham, he lifted up his eyes, looked at the plain of the Jordan, and made a decision according to his own sight. He did not pray, "Lord, I do not know what I should do. What should I do? Lord have mercy on me. Take Your choice. I want to take Your choice." Lot did not pray in this way, but made a choice according to the sight of his eyes. As a result, he moved toward the evil city of Sodom (Gen. 13:12-13; cf. v. 18). Whenever you take a course in independence of God, be assured that your way will be downward. Your way will be in the direction of the sinful city of Sodom.

V. ESAU

If we read the history of Esau, we find that, ethically speaking, he did nothing wrong. Jacob seemed to have been much worse. Esau, however, was a hunter, hunting for his own satisfaction (Gen. 25:27, 29). Esau hunted independently of God. Eventually, for the purpose of satisfying his appetite, he sold his birthright (Gen. 25:30-34). All the people who are independent of God have sold their human birthright, the enjoyment of God. Since God created man in His own image to be His expression, it means that, by birth, man has the right to express God. Thus, every human being has a birthright, the right by birth to express God. However, nearly everyone has sold his birthright because of his independence. What does it mean to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus? Repentance means to have a change in our thinking, in our mentality. Formerly, I was moving in a certain direction with my back turned toward God. After I heard the gospel I turned around. This is the meaning of repentance. To believe in the Lord Jesus means to come back to our human birthright, to come back to the enjoyment of God and to the expression of God. This is the meaning of repentance and belief in the Lord Jesus. Esau did not do this, but moved in the opposite direction.

VI. PHARAOH

In Exodus 1–12 we see how independent Pharaoh was. He was not only independent; he was rebellious against God, even asking on one occasion, "Who is God?" (Exo. 5:2). Pharaoh did not care for God and he was unwilling to know God. Thus, Pharaoh's heart was hardened. He hardened his heart and even God hardened his heart (Exo. 7:13, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:34-35). Again and again and again the heart of Pharaoh was hardened. The people throughout the world today are hardened in their heart because they do not care for God. They care about their councils, plans and plots, but they do not care for God. Thus, God lets go of them and their hearts become hardened.

VII. AARON

The name of Aaron is a good name. Although he was the high priest and was on the line of life, Aaron acted according to the line of knowledge. While Moses was on the mount enjoying God as the tree of life, Aaron and the people were at the foot of the mountain. They neither prayed nor looked to the Lord. When the people proposed to Aaron that he make them gods out of gold, he hearkened to them (Exo. 32:1, 4, 24). There are times when we should not listen to the people, for the congregation may present a proposal that is against God. Aaron heeded their advice, acting independently to make an idol of gold. The idol was very attractive; it was not made of clay but of gold. When Moses had descended from the mountaintop, he asked Aaron what happened. Aaron replied that he put the gold into the fire and a golden calf came out (Exo. 32:24). Aaron seemed to be defending himself, asking Moses not to condemn him and apparently thinking that he had not done very much. Nevertheless, as long as we are independent of God it does not matter how much we do or fail to do. As long as we are independent of God the golden calf will appear. There is no need for us to do very much: simply be independent of God and the result will be a golden calf.

VIII. NADAB AND ABIHU

Nadab and Abihu offered to God "strange fire" with their incense (Lev. 10:1-2). Although the incense was good, the fire was "strange." It was not the fire from the altar where the atonement was made. The fire they used was acceptable to their concept, but it was "strange" to God. This "strange fire," applied in their own way, not according to God's revelation, caused their death.

IX. MIRIAM AND AARON

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because he had married a heathen woman (Num. 12:1-2). Undoubtedly Moses was wrong in this. However, Miriam and Aaron were opposed to Moses, not as a result of their contacting God, but because of their own motive. Their opposition to Moses did not have its source in God, but in themselves, in their knowledge. This brought God's wrath upon

them, causing Miriam to suffer leprosy and to be shut out of the camp seven days (Num. 12:9-15).

The record of the Bible shows us that only one leadership has ever been faultless—the leadership of the Lord Jesus. Every other leadership has some shortcoming. Thus, with any leadership, other than the leadership of the Lord Jesus, there are always mistakes. Nevertheless, we must be very careful about our attack, even if the leadership is wrong.

X. THE TEN SPIES

The failure of the ten spies was looking at the situation in the land by their own sight (Num. 13:28, 32-33). As they were spying out the land, they saw the giants and the walled cities and were frightened. Unlike Joshua and Caleb, they did not turn their eyes to God. They failed because they relied on their knowledge and refused to trust in the Lord (cf. Num. 13:30; 14:6-9). Whenever you are in a difficult situation, do not survey it according to your own eyes. If you do this, you will turn away from God. In a difficult situation you need to close your eyes, turn yourself in your spirit to God, and pray to Him. Then you will be rescued. Because the ten spies looked at the situation by their own sight, they did not trust in the Lord as did Caleb and Joshua. Joshua and Caleb told the people, "Forget the situation and trust in the Lord. The Lord is higher than the walls of the city and He is greater than all the giants." The difference between the ten spies and Joshua and Caleb was that the two trusted in the Lord and the ten surveyed the situation by their own understanding, that is, according to their own knowledge.

XI. KORAH AND HIS COMPANY

Korah and his company attacked God's deputy authority (Num. 16:1-3). Any attack against God's authority, whether it is reasonable or unreasonable, has its origin in the mind. The principle is the same in the church today. You may attack the leaders because you feel they have "taken too much upon themselves," but your attack, which has its source in the mind, brings you spiritual death. Korah and his company suffered the destruction of death due to their attack upon God's authority. You may consider that you are right in attacking the leaders in the church, but you must examine the result—death or life? If you are truly right, the result of your attack must be life. I can testify to you, however, that in the past I saw several attacks against the leadership in the church and that every one of those attacks brought in the destruction of death to the attackers. This is serious! You must ask yourself, "Does my attack proceed out of the spirit, out of the throne of God, or does it come from my mind?" Attack against God's deputy authority, regardless of the reason, is on the line of knowledge that brings in death.

The attack of Korah and his company was due to the fact that they neglected the presence of God (Num. 16:19). If they had taken care of the presence of God, they would have been rescued from their attack against Moses and Aaron. They would have been turned from the line of knowledge to the line of life.

XII. SAUL

Saul did not act immorally as did David. Nevertheless, he dealt with the enemy according to his likes (1 Sam. 15:8). God had told him to smite and kill all of his enemies, but Saul spared some of them because they were good in his sight. Thus, Saul acted independently and did not follow the Lord (1 Sam. 15:11, 22-23). As a result of this independence Saul was dethroned and lost his kingdom.

XIII. ABSALOM

Absalom rebelled against his father, King David (2 Sam. 15:10-13). According to the record of 2 Samuel 13—18, he was a person who acted altogether on his own and by his knowledge. He had no trust in God, and the result was nothing except death.

XIV. AHAB

Ahab was an evil king. He married Jezebel, a devilish and idolatrous woman, and built a temple for Baal, the most famous idol of the time (1 Kings 16:30-32). Although Ahab was born in a nation of God, he was more than independent of God. He did not have one thought toward God. He was utterly independent of Him.

XV. THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE SCRIBES

Now we come to the New Testament. The chief priests and the scribes knew the Bible. When King Herod inquired where Christ was to be born, they gave him the answer immediately (Matt. 2:4-6). Although there is nothing inherently wrong with Bible knowledge, it is dangerous merely to hold the knowledge as did the chief priests and scribes. Although they knew that Christ was to be born at Bethlehem, none of them went to see for themselves. This proves that they were on the line of knowledge, not on the line of life. The wise men from the east, who had no knowledge of the Bible, were on the line of life. Following the heavenly star, they came to the place where Christ was and worshipped Him. Undoubtedly, the wise men from a heathen land had life, while the chief priests and the scribes had death. Although the chief priests and scribes had the knowledge of the Bible, the result of their knowledge was death. Knowledge cannot give life.

XVI. NICODEMUS

Nicodemus was a good man. However, when he first came to the Lord he was on the line of knowledge (John 3:1-2). He said to the Lord Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God." In His reply the Lord turned Nicodemus from teaching and knowledge to the line of life (John 3:3). The Lord was telling Nicodemus, "You do not need teaching. You need a new birth and a new life. Nicodemus, you don't need any more knowledge. As a teacher of the law of Moses you have enough knowledge already. What you need is a new life."

XVII. THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

Although the Samaritan woman was an immoral person, she was still religious. She had the traditional knowledge of religion, yet lived in sin without satisfaction (John 4:15-20). This proves that religion cannot help us. The Samaritan woman was on the line of

knowledge. The Lord Jesus directed her to God, the Spirit, as the living water for her satisfaction (John 4:21-24, 14). Although she was on the line of knowledge, the Lord turned her to the line of life.

XVIII. THE JEWISH RELIGIONISTS

Now we come to the Jewish religionists. According to John 5, the Lord Jesus quickened a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. This happened on the Sabbath day, and the Jewish religionists were offended (John 5:1-16). They only cared for the Sabbath, not for man's genuine rest. The palsied man had no rest, even on the Sabbath day, for a period of thirty-eight years. When the Lord Jesus quickened him he experienced true rest. The Jewish religionists condemned the Lord Jesus, and He said to them, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life...and you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." In other words, the Lord was telling them that they searched the Bible thinking that in it they had eternal life, yet they would not come to the Lord for that very life.

The same thing in principle is happening to people today. Many Christians search the Scriptures with the consideration that in them they have eternal life, yet they do not come to contact the living Lord Himself. It is possible for us to read many verses and chapters of the Bible without contacting the Lord. We should never separate our reading of the Bible from our contacting of the Lord. These two things must be one. Whenever we read a line of the Bible, we must say, "Lord Jesus, let me contact You in the divine Word. Lord, You are the living Word. Without You as the living Word I can receive nothing as life from the written Word. Lord, I must contact You. Although You are so mysterious, I praise You that You have given me such a tangible Word. This Word is solid, concrete, and substantial. I thank You for the Word that I can read and pray with. Yet, Lord, what I need is not the letter in black and white, but You, the living Spirit." This is the correct way to use the Scriptures. Never touch the Bible independently of the Lord. There is no need for you to read an immoral novel in order to experience death. If you read the Bible without being in the spirit, you will also experience death. Thus, even the reading of the Bible can be on the line of knowledge that leads to death.

XIX. THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

The Scribes and Pharisees held the knowledge of the law, but were still under the slavery of sin (John 8:5, 9, 34). They brought a sinful woman to the Lord and, according to their knowledge, demanded a yes or no answer regarding the way in which the woman should be treated. They said that Moses commanded that such a person be stoned. Although the book of John reveals that the Lord Jesus several times was challenged to give yes or no answers, He always refused to do so. He did not refrain from giving such answers because He was wise, but because He was concerned with life. The Gospel of John is the book of life. Life is simply life, not knowledge of yes or no, good or evil. Both yes and no and good and evil belong to the tree of knowledge. Thus, the Lord did not answer them in that way. He stooped to write on the ground. Then He answered, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone." When the Lord spoke this to them, His word touched their conscience and, beginning with the most experienced ones, they turned away. Not one of them was without sin. The only person without sin was the Lord Jesus. Therefore, the Lord's answer pointed to Himself as the tree of life.

XX. THE DISCIPLES

Do not think that because we are disciples we have a guarantee that we are on the line of life. The disciples who were with the Lord still held the traditional knowledge of religion when they saw a man blind from birth (John 9:1-3). Based upon their religious knowledge, they asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?" The Lord answered, "Neither has this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God might be manifested in him." The Lord did not give them a yes or no answer, but directed them to God. Yes and no belong to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but God is the tree of life. Thus, the Lord directed the disciples from the line of knowledge to the line of life.

XXI. MARTHA

Martha was a disciple of the Lord. However, she was occupied with the line of knowledge, holding the knowledge of the sound teachings regarding the resurrection on the last day (John 11:24). Martha had complained to the Lord that if He had been present, Lazarus would not have died. When the Lord said that her brother would rise again, Martha immediately expounded His word, saying she knew that Lazarus would rise again in the resurrection at the last day (John 11:23-24). She postponed the present resurrection life to a time two thousand years in the future. In His answer the Lord was referring to the present resurrection life, but Martha, by her religious knowledge and expounding of the Lord's word, postponed the resurrection to the distant future. This was dreadful. Martha offered a good, fundamental exposition of the Bible. Nevertheless, the Lord directed her to the present resurrection by saying, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). The Lord seemed to be telling Martha, "There is no need to wait for two thousand years. You need not wait for the last day. I am the resurrection life right now. Don't change My word by your religious, fundamental expounding of it. I am the resurrection now."

XXII. PETER

Immediately after receiving the revelation from the heavenly Father (Matt. 16:17), Peter turned to his mind and was utilized by Satan to frustrate the Lord from going to suffer crucifixion (Matt. 16:21-23). The Lord rebuked him, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan..for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men." Thinking is a matter in the mind and of knowledge. It is easy to be usurped and utilized by Satan when we exercise our mind in the line of knowledge to think independently of the Lord. Although Peter was on the line of life, beyond his consciousness he was shifted to the line of knowledge. We all must be careful about our thinking! Otherwise we may be taken over by Satan, the source of death.

XXIII. JUDAS

Judas was one of the twelve apostles, but he was always in his mind counting money (John 12:4-6). He was absolutely on the line of the killing knowledge and not at all on the line of life, even though he was with the Lord Jesus, who was then the tree of life. Since his mind was occupied with thoughts of money he opened himself to the Devil, who put into his heart the thought of betraying the Lord (John 13:2). Eventually, Satan entered into him (John 13:27), and he betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15).

However, the result was that he gained no profit from the money, but that he lost himself in death by hanging (Matt. 27:5).

XXIV. THE JEWS

The Jews kept their law and sentenced the Lord Jesus to death according to it (John 19:7). They said, "We have a law, and according to our law he ought to die, because he made himself Son of God." According to their law, the Lord had blasphemed God in saying that He was His Son. Thus, they sentenced Him to death according to their law. We must be careful in using and in quoting the Bible. A great deal depends on whether we employ the Scriptures in the way of life or in the way of knowledge. The Scriptures should be the tree of life, which brings us life, but they can be the tree of knowledge, which brings us death. Even in using the Scriptures we have to be careful.

XXV. SAUL OF TARSUS

Saul of Tarsus was a foremost religionist. He was exceedingly zealous of the tradition of his fathers and surpassed many of his equals in the Jewish religion. As a result, he persecuted the church (Gal. 1:13-14). Religion, with its traditional knowledge, is always a persecutor of the living church. How did God turn Saul of Tarsus to the line of life? As Saul was persecuting the churches, God revealed the Son of God into him, and he came to live by Him (Gal. 1:16; 2:20). Saul was extremely religious. Although no one thinks that religion is wrong, it is altogether on the line of knowledge. Only as you turn to the living Christ will you be shifted from the line of knowledge to the line of life.

XXVI. THE CORINTHIANS

The Corinthian believers were enriched in all knowledge, but were puffed up and were still babes in Christ (1 Cor. 1:5; 8:1; 3:1). Knowledge will not help you grow a fraction of an inch; it will only keep you in your spiritual infancy. The more you cling to knowledge, the longer you will remain a babe in Christ. In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul turned them from knowledge to the growth in life that they might thereby experience transformation for God's building (1 Cor. 3:6-12). Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God made to grow." He seemed to tell the Corinthians, "You don't need any more knowledge. What you need is the growth in life. This growth in life is for the transformation which produces the precious materials for God's building. You need the growth in life to transform you from being fleshly into being genuinely spiritual that you may become the precious stones for God's building."

XXVII. THE GNOSTICS

During the time of the apostles there was a philosophy called gnosticism. Gnosticism was a composite of Egyptian, Babylonian, Jewish, and Greek thought. This eclectic philosophy crept into the church life and it is described in Colossians 2:8 as philosophy, vain deceit, the tradition of men, and the rudiments of the world. This philosophy distracted and spoiled many believers from Christ as their life. At that time the Roman politics did not damage the believers as much as did the Hebrew religion and the Greek philosophy. Therefore, Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians instructing them to turn back to the Christ whom they had received. Since they had received Christ, they should also walk in Him (Col. 2:6), not according to philosophy, human concepts, or worldly rudiments.

XXVIII. THE DISSENTERS IN THE CHURCH

The New Testament refers to the dissenters in the church. In Romans 16:17 Paul warns us to keep a watchful eye over the dissenting ones. They hold dissenting teachings and make divisions and causes of falling. They speak with flattering, enticing words and pretend to be helpful. If they did not speak with smooth words, no one would listen to them. Paul charged us to be watchful over the dissenting ones because they like to teach differently and contend for contrary doctrines. However, the test we must apply to any dissenting talk is not the standard of good or bad, right or wrong. Instead, we must ask, "Does this build up or tear down? Does it maintain unity and oneness or cause division? Does it help you to go on or does it cause you to fall?" Before you listened to the dissenting talk you were alive, but after listening for an hour you were deadened, thus proving that such dissension spreads death. Do not examine the dissenters according to the knowledge of right or wrong, for if you do this you will be tasting the tree of knowledge of good and evil. You must test all dissenting opinions according to death or life. After you listen to the dissenting talk, are you alive or dead? If you are truly alive, then listen as much as possible. However, if you experience death, you must go to the Lord and ask Him to cleanse you and to rescue you from that death. During the past decades we have seen many dissenting ones. We need to realize that in no church is the situation always right. However, the issue is not a matter of right or wrong; it is a matter of death or life. Never test dissenting talk by the standard of right or wrong. Always measure it by death or life. Anything that enlivens you and gives you life you may receive. Anything that deadens and kills you you must renounce.

Paul charged Timothy to remain at Ephesus to do one thing-to charge the dissenters not to teach differently, but to take care of God's dispensation, the dispensing of God as life (1 Tim. 1:3-4). Once again we see that the test is life. If a man's talk dispenses God into you as life, that is fine. If it does not give you life but kills you instead, it is certainly on the line of knowledge.

XXIX. BALAAM, THE NICOLAITANS, AND JEZEBEL

Revelation 2 mentions the doctrine of Balaam, the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, the teachings of Jezebel, and the depths of Satan (Rev. 2:14, 15, 20, 24). The early churches were deceived by such teachings and turned away from the eating of the Lord and the feasting with the Lord. Therefore, to turn the churches back to the enjoyment of Himself, the Lord made a promise to the churches that if they stay away from this kind of doctrine He will give them to eat of Himself. In Revelation 2:7 the Lord promises to give them to eat of the tree of life. In Revelation 2:17 He promises to give them the hidden manna. In these two verses we see the tree that was in the garden of Eden and the manna that was in the wilderness, both of which are Christ Himself. The Lord did not say that He would give them teachings or that He would offer them a superior doctrine. While Balaam and the Nicolaitans have their doctrines, Jezebel her teaching, and Satan his depths, the Lord Jesus has the tree of life and the hidden manna. According to Revelation 3:20, the Lord promises a feast to everyone who will open to Him as He knocks on the door. What does it mean to eat of the tree of life, to partake of the hidden manna, and to feast with the Lord Jesus? It means that we stay continually on the line of life to enjoy the Lord. If, in the midst of the confusions and divisions of the day, we go along with the teachings, we will be killed. However, if we take care of the

enjoyment of the Lord, that is, to be on the line of life, we will receive life and live.

XXX. THE ANTICHRIST

The Antichrist will be a man completely in the mind with a strong, independent will. Thus, he will be totally possessed by Satan and will even become the incarnation of Satan (Rev. 13:5-8). He is called "the man of lawlessness," "the son of destruction," because he will exalt himself as God (2Thes. 2:3-4). He will be the giant on the line of knowledge in the Bible, knowing and caring for nothing on the line of life. His destiny will be to suffer eternal death with Satan, the source of death (Rev. 19:20; 20:10).

XXXI. IN GENERAL

As a conclusion I want to refer to 2 Corinthians 3:6, which says, "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." The "letter" here refers to the Old Testament, and the same Greek word is rendered "writings" in 2 Timothy 3:15, where Paul mentions that Timothy knew the sacred writings since childhood. But the Bible in dead letters, which belongs to the tree of knowledge, kills, while the Spirit, who belongs to the tree of life, gives life. Therefore, we do have a choice. Praise the Lord for this choice! The choice of life! Besides the line of knowledge there is the line of life. We must make a choice between life and knowledge. We must choose between death and life.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SEVENTEEN

TO WORK GOD INTO MAN AS LIFE

In this message we come to the last part of Genesis 2. Although Genesis 1 and 2 are quite brief, they contain many basic items. We have previously pointed out that nearly every item in these two chapters is a seed of divine truth, and that these seeds require the entire Bible to expound and develop them. The divine revelation in the Bible unveils spiritual things, and these spiritual things are mysterious, abstract, and, humanly speaking, unsubstantial. Due to our limited ability to understand them, God was forced to disclose His divine revelation in the way of picture and allegory. Genesis 2 was written in a figurative way, and all the items found therein are figures. We should not understand them merely according to the outward letters, but probe into the inner sense of the figures. Both the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil are figures. What is the tree of life? It is difficult for people to understand. Nevertheless, it is the tree of life. In Genesis 2 we also find a river, and at the flow of this river we have gold, pearl, and onyx stone. What do all of these things signify? What do they mean? As we have seen in earlier messages, all of them are figures and compose an allegory.

Humanly speaking, the end of Genesis 2 is easy to understand because it relates the story of a marriage. Adam was created, but he had no wife. Thus, God provided a wife for him. This does not sound allegorical. If we only read Genesis 2 we will not recognize it as an allegory. However, if we read through the whole Bible, we will realize that the marriage found in Genesis 2 is indeed an allegory. Why do we say this? Because later in the Old Testament God told His people, "For thy Maker is thine husband" (Isa. 54:5). Man's creator is his husband, meaning that in the universe the unique man is God Himself. The man created by God actually is not a man, but a woman. I have a question to address to all the men reading this message: are you male or female? I am a female. I am a female because I am part of the wife. Firstly, God was my creator. Secondly, He became my redeemer. Now He is my husband.

This concept is thoroughly developed and expounded in the New Testament. Although many people think of Jesus Christ as a great teacher and others regard Him as their Savior, the four Gospels also reveal Him as the bridegroom. Undoubtedly He is a teacher and the Savior. However, He is also the bridegroom come to receive the bride (John 3:29). One day the disciples of John came to the Lord Jesus, asking Him why His disciples did not fast (Matt. 9:14-15). In His answer the Lord Jesus revealed Himself as the bridegroom. The Lord asked them, "Can the sons of the bridechamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" Furthermore, Paul, the greatest apostle, told us clearly that the church is the wife and that Christ is the husband. In 2 Corinthians 11:2 he said, "I betrothed you to one Husband, to present a pure virgin to Christ." Thus, we are a wife to Christ. Moreover, in Ephesians 5 Paul speaks of marriage, saying that when a man is joined to his wife the two become one flesh. In Ephesians 5:32 Paul says that marriage signifies the great mystery concerning Christ and the church.

Adam in Genesis 2 was a type, a prefigure of Christ. Speaking figuratively, we may say that Adam was Christ. When we see Adam in Genesis 2, we see Christ. What then does Eve signify? Apparently she was only a woman, Adam's wife. However, if we have the spiritual vision from Ephesians 5, we will see that Eve in the garden was a prefigure of the church. If we have this perspective, we will realize that whatever happened to Adam in Genesis 2 was an experience of Christ and that whatever happened to Eve was related to the church. We must understand Genesis 2 in this way. In figure, Adam was Christ and Eve was the church.

This is similar to the photograph of a person. Suppose I have a photograph of Brother John. If I show you the photograph and ask you who it is, you will be correct if you say that it is Brother John. However, we must be careful, for although it is a picture of Brother John, it is not the real person of Brother John. It is simply a photograph of Brother John, depicting his appearance and giving you some idea of what he is like. Likewise, in Genesis 2 we see a figure or picture of Christ and the church in the types of Adam and Eve. When we examine the picture of Adam and Eve, we understand how the church comes into existence. It will be difficult to understand this if we simply talk about Christ and the church; however, if we look at the picture, we will be very clear. The picture saves a great many words. If I describe Brother John to you, using many words, it would still be difficult for you to picture what he is like. However, if I show you his photograph, you will immediately be clear about him. Although the photograph is not the real person, it does afford you some understanding of the person, relieving you of the need to guess. God uses the picture of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 to give us a definite revelation of Christ and the church. Without this chapter we could never understand the relationship between Christ and the church so exactly. This picture shows how the church came into being.

Please remember that Genesis 1 and 2 unveil two main things. Genesis 1 reveals God's eternal purpose, which is to express Himself through man and to exercise His dominion with man. Man was created to express God and to represent God. Genesis 2 continues by showing the way to fulfill God's purpose. Although God has a purpose, He must have a means of fulfilling it. What is God's divine way of accomplishing His purpose? As we have seen, His way is life. God desires to come into us as life. In order to accomplish His

purpose, God wants to come into man to be man's life and life supply. Furthermore, Genesis 2 reveals that God's procedure involves three steps. The first step was for God to create man as a vessel to contain Him as life. Since man was made as a vessel to contain God, man can live by Him, express Him, and represent Him. As the second step, God placed man in front of the tree of life. We have seen that the tree of life represents God Himself. In placing man before the tree of life, God was indicating that He wanted man to take Him into his being that he might be transformed into the precious materials for the building up of the church.

4. The Third Step—To Work God into Man as Life—2:18-25

Now we come to the third step. The first step was to make the vessel, the second was to put this vessel in front of the tree of life, and the third is to work God into man as life. How can God work Himself into man as life? Praise the Lord that we have an allegory to help us understand. We need to have a clear view of this allegory. Although you are familiar with the story of Adam's marriage, perhaps you have never been impressed with its significance.

a. The Background—2:18-20

God created the heavens, which are for the earth, and the earth, which is for man. Then God created man, who is for God, with a spirit to receive Him. Man typifies God as the real, universal husband who is seeking a wife for Himself.

1) Not Good for God to Be Alone

After man was created, God said of him, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his complement" (Gen. 2:18, Heb.). Although man was perfect, he was not complete. For example, a human head is perfect, but without the body it is incomplete. Every person resembles a half of a watermelon. Since he is just a half a watermelon, he is incomplete. Although he is perfect, he needs a counterpart to complete him. It takes the two halves of a watermelon to make a whole melon. Likewise, a man and wife, resembling the two halves of a watermelon, together make a complete unit. This is why I frequently tell the young people to get married. If you are unmarried, though you may be a perfect person you are incomplete. Thus, as God looked at Adam, He seemed to say, "Adam, you are perfect, but you are only a half a unit. You are too lonely. I will make a complement for you. I will make you a counterpart."

Man is a type of God, the real, universal husband. Before God had secured the proper man, He was alone. It was not good for God to be alone. Although God is absolutely and eternally perfect, He is not complete. To say that God is imperfect is to speak blasphemy. Our God is eternally perfect. Nevertheless, without the church He is incomplete. Without the church He is like a husband without a wife or like a head without a body. Therefore, when God said that it was not good for Adam to be alone, it meant that God Himself was incomplete and that it was not good for Him to be alone. Adam's need for a wife typifies and portrays God's need to have a complement. If we see this, every aspect of Genesis 2 will be clear.

2) No One Like God to Be His Complement

Out of the ground God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air and brought them to Adam (Gen. 2:19). When God brought a horse to Adam, perhaps Adam said, "This is a horse. This animal can never match me because it has four feet and I have two." When God brought a cow before Adam, perhaps Adam said, "This is a cow. It has two horns. It does not resemble me and it cannot be a complement to me." God brought item after item to Adam, and Adam gave names to all the cattle, to all the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field, but he did not find among them a complement for himself (Gen. 2:20), one that could match him. Although Adam, having wisdom, named all the creatures, he seemed to say, "All of them are far removed from me. They don't look like me. How can I have any of them as my counterpart?" After fulfilling the task of naming all the creatures, Adam, in a sense, was disappointed. Among the entire creation he could not find one to match him, to complement him. However God knew exactly what He was doing.

Then out of a rib taken from Adam's side the Lord God builded a woman and brought her to the man (Gen. 2:22). When Adam awoke from his sleep and looked at Eve he said, "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23, Heb.). Adam seemed to say, "This is not like the former times. Before it was a lion, a horse, a dove, a turtle...This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. Certainly this is my other part, my second part. This is my counterpart that fully matches me." When he and Eve, the two parts, are joined, they become one flesh, one complete unit. By this we can see that the wife, Eve, was the complement to the husband, Adam. Without Eve, Adam was incomplete. Eve was taken out of Adam and returned to Adam that the two of them might become one flesh. If we see this, we have the basic understanding of the significance of the allegory in Genesis 2.

In the same way that Eve was the complement of Adam the church is the complement of Christ. Figuratively speaking, so many things in Christianity are just "horses, cattle, turtles, doves" because they are not out of Christ and cannot match Christ. Only those who are regenerated of Christ and who live by Christ as the church can match Christ and complement Him. When Christ sees this He surely says, "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Eph. 5:30).

b. The Process—2:21-24

Now we need to consider the process. What did God do in order to produce a complement for Himself?

1) To Become a Man—Adam Created

One day God became a man (John 1:14). This man was born of a virgin in the town of Bethlehem and was named Jesus. God becoming man was typified by the creation of man. Before creation there was no man. By God's sovereign creation a man suddenly came into being. Likewise, before the birth of Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem, God was only God. However, through the incarnation God became a man. This man was the real Adam. The Adam in Genesis 2 was a photograph (Rom. 5:14); with the birth of Christ in the flesh, the real Adam came. According to the Bible, Adam in the garden is called the first Adam, and the Lord Jesus as the real Adam is called the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). As the last One He is the real One.

One day the real Adam was put to sleep on the cross where He slept for six hours, from nine o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon (Mark 15:25, 33). This was signified by the phrase in Genesis 2 which said that "God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam" and that "He took one of his ribs" to build him a wife (Gen. 2:21). That sleep of Adam's was a type of Christ's death on the cross for producing the church. This is the life-releasing, life-imparting, life-propagating, life-multiplying, and life-reproducing death of Christ, which is signified by a grain of wheat falling into the ground to die and to grow up in order to produce many grains (John 12:24) for the making of the loaf which is the Body, the church (1 Cor. 10:17). By producing the church in this way God in Christ has been wrought into man as life. Firstly, God became a man. Then this man with the divine life and nature, was multiplied through death and resurrection into many believers who become the many members to compose the real Eve to match Him and to complement Him. It is through this process that God in Christ has been wrought into man with His life and nature that man in life and nature can be the same as He is in order to match Him as His complement.

3) To Flow Out His Life—Adam's Rib Taken Out

At the end of Christ's crucifixion, the Jews, who did not want the bodies of the crucified criminals to remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, asked Pilate to have their legs broken (John 19:31). When the soldiers came to Jesus to break His legs, they found that He had died already and that there was no need for them to break His bones. This fulfilled the scripture which said, "A bone of Him shall not be broken" (John 19:32-33, 36; Exo. 12:46; Num. 9:12; Psa. 34:20). Nevertheless, the soldiers pierced His side and blood and water came out (John 19:34). The blood was for redemption (Heb. 9:22; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). What does the water signify? In Exodus 17:6 we find the type of the smitten rock (1 Cor. 10:4). After the rock was smitten, it was cleft, and living water came forth. Jesus on the cross was smitten with the rod of Moses, that is, by the law of God. He was cleft. His side was pierced, and water came forth. This water was the flow of His divine life signifying the life which produces the church.

This life was typified by the rib, a piece of bone taken out of Adam's opened side, of which Eve was produced and built. Hence, the bone typifies the divine life that is signified by the water flowing out of Christ's side. None of His bones was broken. This signifies that His divine life cannot be broken. His physical life was killed, but nothing could break His divine life which flows out to produce the church.

4) To Be Resurrected—Adam Wakened

After God finished the work of producing Eve during Adam's sleep, Adam awoke from his sleep. As Adam's sleep typifies the death of Christ, so his waking signifies the resurrection of Christ. After waking, Adam became another person with Eve produced out of him. After His resurrection Christ also became another person with the church brought forth out of Him. As Adam eventually awoke from his sleep to take Eve as his counterpart, so Christ was also resurrected from the dead to take the church as His complement.

5) To Bring Forth the Church—Eve Built

When Adam awoke from his sleep, he immediately discovered that Eve, who was builded with His rib, was present. Likewise, when Christ was resurrected from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20), the church was brought forth with His divine life. Through His death the divine life within Him was released and through His resurrection this released, divine life was imparted into us who believe in Him. So, the Bible says that through His resurrection we were regenerated (1 Pet. 1:3). He was the grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died and produced many grains (John 12:24). We are the many grains who have been regenerated with His resurrection life. As regenerated ones who have Him as life and who live by Him, we compose His church, the real Eve in resurrection.

When Adam saw Eve he said, "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23, Heb.). When Christ saw the church He might have said, "I have seen the cattle, lions, turtles, fishes, and birds, but none of them could match Me. This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, for the church is produced by My death and resurrection. The church comes out of Me. The church and I can be one."

Many Christians are talking about the church. Some say that the church is a material building and speak of going to church. After seeing the significance of the type of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2, we can never again refer to a physical building as the church. A material building is not a church; it is a house built with wood and brick. Other people, somewhat improved, say that the church is a group of genuine Christians. However, a group of genuine Christians may not constitute the church. They may still be the natural man, so many Americans, Chinese, Japanese, and Mexicans. Such a gathering of the natural man is not the church.

What is the church? The church is a part of Christ; it is nothing less than Christ Himself. The church is the element of Christ in the believers. When this element in so many believers is added together, it equals the church. The church is not a composition of Americans, Mexicans, Japanese, and Chinese. The church is the totality of the Christ in all His believers. Although we are regenerated people, if we live and act according to our natural disposition, we are not in reality members of the Body of Christ. Only in a shallow sense can we say that we are members of His Body. When we behave according to our natural disposition we may be typical Americans, Jews, or Chinese, but we are not actually the members of Christ. What actually is a member of Christ? It is a person produced with the element of Christ who is the life-giving Spirit in our spirit. Christ as the life-giving Spirit indwells His believers. When this Christ in His believers is added together, the sum equals the church. Therefore, we all must put off our old man. We need to put off all the natural life until the living Christ can be expressed from within our spirit. Then we will be the church in reality. In the church, the new man, there is no Jew, Greek, or barbarian, but Christ is all and in all (Col. 3:11). To live out anything other than Christ is not the church. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). This is the church! "This time it is" bone of His bones! All things that come out of man's natural life, such as all man's organizations and all kinds of human activities in Christianity, are not the church and cannot be the complement of Christ to match Him. Figuratively speaking, these things should not be considered as Eve, but as all the other things named by Adam.

Consider the picture depicted in the four Gospels. When the Lord Jesus came as the last Adam and looked at the Jewish religionists, He seemed to say of them, "This is a horse and that is a turtle." In Matthew 16 He turned to Peter and said, "Satan." The Lord seemed to be saying, "These are not My counterpart. They do not match Me. They can never be My complement." Thus, the Lord Jesus had to

die. He had to sleep on the cross that He might release His life to produce His real complement to match Him. After He awoke from death in resurrection, He saw the church. At that time, especially on the day of Pentecost, He could say, "This time it is bone of My bones and flesh of My flesh."

Only that which comes out of Christ can be recognized by Christ. Only that which comes out of Christ can return to Christ and match Him. Only that which comes out of the resurrection life of Christ can be His complement and counterpart, the Body of Christ. Only that which comes out of Christ and which is Christ Himself can be one with Christ.

The Epistles reveal that after the day of Pentecost many negative things crept in. The animals, such as the horse and the turtle, appeared once again. Thus, the Lord Jesus had to say again, "This is not and that is not." Now He is waiting for the coming wedding. At that wedding day He will look at the overcomers and say, "This time it is bone of My bones and flesh of My flesh."

As we are on our way toward that wedding feast we must cast off all the natural things, the things of the natural man, the things other than Christ. I have passed through many things. I was born in Christianity and raised in Christianity. As I passed through and considered many things, the resurrection life within me said of them, "This is not and that is not." One day I touched the right thing and the resurrection life within me said, "This time it is!" Many times, even among us, the life within says, "This is not," but even more times the resurrection life says, "This is it." We need to hear the voice of Christ, the resurrection life within us, and to go along with it all the time.

*6) To Be One with Man—
Adam and Eve Becoming One Flesh*

In typology, Adam and Eve became one flesh (Gen. 2:23-24). In actuality, Christ and the church are one spirit, because he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). Figuratively speaking, all the believers of Christ are "members of His Body." The marriage union between husband and wife is a great mystery "with regard to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:29-32).

If we have such a vision as we read the Bible, we will understand the Song of Songs: Christ is our love and we are His beloved. Also, we will understand the whole New Testament in the way of life, not in a natural way or in the way of knowledge. We will realize that we have all been reborn and recreated with Christ, that we are now one spirit with Him and with one another, and that on earth today we are living a marriage life with our husband, Christ. We are not just waiting for the future; we are living a corporate marriage life today. In one sense we have the marriage life already and we are living with our husband. In another, fuller sense we have only the foretaste today and are awaiting the full taste of the marriage to come. This marriage will be carried out in Revelation 19. Following that, the church will be consummated as the New Jerusalem, which will be the completed bride of Christ for eternity. Christ and the completed wife will enjoy a marriage life for eternity. This wife, of course, will not be an individual person, but will be a corporate, builded expression, the New Jerusalem.

In Genesis 2 we see the creation of man and the tree of life which denotes God as man's life and life supply. As God works Himself into man, man begins to experience the flow of life, and at the flow of life there are the precious materials—gold, pearl, and onyx stone. At the end of Genesis 2 we see the building of a woman. All the precious materials mentioned earlier in this chapter are for the building of this woman. If we only have Genesis 2, we cannot understand this matter adequately and clearly. However, at the end of the Bible we also find a woman, the New Jerusalem. This woman is a city built with gold, pearl, and precious stones. In Genesis 2, these materials were found at the flow of life, but were not yet builded. At the end of the Bible all of these materials have been built up into a city, which is the ultimate and eternal woman. In Genesis 2 we can see the New Jerusalem foreshadowed by Eve and in Revelation 21 we can see Eve consummated in the New Jerusalem, the corporate bride of the Lamb built with the three precious materials. Thus, we see once again that nearly everything found in Genesis 1 and 2 is a seed that grows throughout the Bible and ripens into a harvest in the book of Revelation.

Today we are neither at the beginning nor at the consummation—we are on the way. I am not even satisfied to be in Ephesians 5. I want to be in Revelation 19:7-9, at the marriage supper of Christ. In order to get there we must put off all the natural things—the cattle, the turtles, the horses, etc. Perhaps your natural disposition is like a strong horse. We must put off this natural life. Praise the Lord that within us we have another life, another element—Christ as the life-giving Spirit. We must live by this life, day and night putting off the old man and putting on the new man. In this way we will be transformed and conformed to His image, prepared for the wedding feast at the time of His return. Eventually, we will be the New Jerusalem, and God's eternal purpose will be completely fulfilled.

c. The Result

1) A Bride Gained—Eve Gained by Adam

The result of Adam's sleep in which his side was opened to release a rib was that he gained Eve as his complement to match him. This signifies that the result of Christ's death with His side pierced to release His divine life was that He obtained the church as His complement. Henceforth, God is no longer alone. Christ has gained a bride to match Him. Revelation 21—22 unfolds that in eternity the New Jerusalem as the consummation of the church will be the bride of Christ for God's full complement to match Him eternally.

2) One with Man—Adam and Eve Becoming One Flesh

Adam and Eve eventually became one flesh, one complete unit. This was a figure of God and man being joined as one. God's desire is to be one with man. He has reached this goal through Christ's death and resurrection which produced the church, representing the proper humanity to match Him as the husband. In this union humanity is one with divinity; this union will last for eternity. The coming New Jerusalem will be just the unity of God and man, a living, complete unit composed with divinity and humanity.

3) Living with Man—Adam Living with Eve

Adam and Eve, being one, lived together. This portrayed that God, the universal husband, will live with regenerated humanity forever. The universal marriage life of God and man is fully revealed in Revelation 21. In eternity, God in Christ will be the center,

reality, and life of man's living, and man will live by God in Christ as life. Man will express God's glory and will exercise God's authority over the new earth. God and man, man and God will live together in a marriage life forever.

So, Genesis 1:1–2:3 is a picture of God's purpose, and 2:4–25 is a portrait of the way to fulfill God's purpose. These two sections may be considered as a blueprint of an architectural plan. Genesis 3 through Revelation 20 may be considered as the building process, and Revelation 21 and 22 as a photograph of the finished building.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE EIGHTEEN

THE FIRST FALL OF MAN

I love the books of Genesis and Revelation because in them we can see God's purpose and its fulfillment. These two books also reveal how the enemy, the subtle one, came in and how he will be cast out. The so-called modern critics, who do not believe in the Bible, mainly direct their attacks at the books of Genesis and Revelation. When we were young this higher criticism was quite prevailing, and we fought against it. The higher critics attacked the books of Genesis and Revelation because the subtle serpent within them knew that no other books exposed him as much. If you want to know how the serpent came in and what his destiny will be, you need to read the first chapters of Genesis and the last chapters of Revelation. Revelation 12:9 mentions "the ancient serpent, he who is called the Devil and Satan." The word "ancient" that describes the serpent refers to the time of Genesis 3. Therefore, if we did not have the books of Genesis and Revelation, the subtle serpent would not be fully exposed. Thus, the serpent invented the so-called modern criticism in an attempt to discredit these two books.

In Genesis 1 and 2 we see a garden and in Revelation 21 and 22 we see a city. By transformation and building the garden becomes a city. Between Genesis 2 and Revelation 21 are many ages or dispensations. The serpent first appeared in Genesis 3 and he has been active ever since; he never sleeps. Throughout all the generations since Genesis 3 the serpent has been working constantly. If you read through the entire Bible carefully, you will see that the serpent came in in Genesis 3 and that in Revelation 20:10 he will be cast into the lake of fire. Regardless of the age or dispensation Satan has always been active. In the first dispensation, meaning the first way in which God dealt with man, Satan was there. Satan not only corrupted the first human couple, but has corrupted man in every succeeding dispensation. When God initiated another age or dispensation, Satan was there to damage people. Throughout age after age and dispensation after dispensation Satan has been present, making it appear as if God has been unable to handle the situation. But this is not so. God is great. We only need to give Him a little time. As far as God is concerned, a thousand years are equal to a day. The period of time from Adam's creation until now is actually less than six days to God. We need to be patient with Him.

As we come to the church dispensation, we see the strongest conflict between Satan and man. What a battle is raging! The book of Revelation shows us that in the churches God has gained a group of overcomers who will defeat Satan. At the end of this dispensation the Lord Jesus will return in victory. The Lord Jesus has been unable to return because as yet there has been no victorious ground on which He can set His feet. He is waiting for this. The overcomers will establish a beachhead for the glorious Christ to return in a victorious way. According to Revelation 12, Satan firstly will be defeated by the overcomers. Then, at the time of the Lord's return, Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1-3). Eventually and ultimately he will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

In Genesis 3 Satan came in and in Revelation 20 he will be cast out. Immediately after the first two chapters of Genesis Satan came in, and immediately before the last two chapters of Revelation he will be cast out. Thus, in the entire Bible there are just four chapters in which we see no footprints of the contaminating enemy. Apart from these four chapters he has polluted every age and space. Only Genesis 1 and 2 and Revelation 21 and 22 are free from Satan's contamination. Between Genesis 2 and Revelation 21 we see all the activities of the subtle serpent. Have you ever noticed that Satan appeared immediately after the first two chapters of Genesis and that he will be cast into the lake of fire prior to the last two chapters of Revelation? In this message we want to consider how this crafty one first came in.

As we have seen, Genesis 1 reveals God's eternal purpose and heart's desire, and Genesis 2 reveals God's way of fulfilling His purpose. However, before God could accomplish His purpose, Satan came in. In everything Satan tries to be first. Anything that is real can afford to be somewhat slow, but that which is false always moves hastily. Therefore, in regard to many things it is better for us to do nothing at the first instance. Suppose a little boy comes to his father and says, "Daddy, I want to buy a new toy." The father should answer, "Son, wait for two days. Let us see what the Lord will say." Perhaps it is even better to wait an additional two days. Since Satan is always in a rush we should never accept the first proposal. If a brother comes to you seeking an answer regarding a certain matter, do not reply immediately. Perhaps that question is an instance of the rushing activity of Satan. You need to wait awhile. After a few days that brother might change his mind. I have seen this happen many times. The disposition of young men and young ladies is very quick; they have a hasty temperament. They like to act swiftly and get answers immediately. This haste has its origin in the subtle serpent. If you will wait, God will come in. In most things God is not present at the first instance. The serpent will always act ahead of God in an attempt to defeat Him.

According to Genesis 3, Satan came in first. In the Bible we have the principle of the first mention. Whatever is first mentioned in a particular field establishes the principle for all the subsequent items in that field. Thus, Genesis 3, the first mention of Satan's activity, reveals the principle that Satan comes in before God.

IV. MAN'S FALL—3:1—11:9

According to Genesis 3 through 11 mankind had four falls. In this message we shall consider the first of them.

A. The First Fall

Most people have at least some knowledge of the Bible. Even some non-Christians know about Adam and Eve's eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. However, not many people, including Christians, know the significance of man's first fall. Hence, we must

approach this subject from three directions. First, we must determine the cause of the fall. What was the cause, the basic factor, of man's first fall? Second, we must learn the process, the way in which the first fall transpired. Third, we need to discover the result of man's first fall. This is my burden in this message. I realize that it is a difficult message to give because of the battle that is raging. The enemy is within us. Even the knowledge that we already have of Genesis 3 may frustrate us from penetrating into the depths of this chapter. We must probe into the depths of the significance of man's first fall and not look at it superficially.

1. The Cause

a. The Serpent's Temptation

If I were to ask you the cause of man's first fall, you would undoubtedly reply that the cause was Satan. This is correct. However, we should not place the entire blame upon Satan. As we shall see, the cause of man's first fall was not primarily on Satan's side, but on man's side. We may use the illustration of catching a cold. In order to catch a cold you must have cold air. However, cold air itself is insufficient to cause a cold. You need to have the cold germs. A chair cannot catch a cold even if it is exposed to a chilly draft because it is unaffected by cold germs. It is easy for people to catch a cold because we have cold germs. We should not put all the blame on the cold air, for most of the blame belongs to the cold germs. Likewise, we should not blame Satan for the fall, since much of the responsibility rests with man. Nevertheless, I have put Satan as the first cause of man's fall. Satan was the initial factor in this fall. Satan is simply Satan. We should never expect him to be better or different.

1) "The Tempter"

Satan has a specific name, "the tempter" (Matt. 4:3). Wherever he goes he acts like a tempter, for he is such by disposition and make-up. The Lord Jesus spoke of him as a liar saying, "When he speaks a lie, he speaks out of his own self; for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). Whatever comes out of Satan is a lie. We should never expect him to be improved. We must stay away from him.

a) "The Devil" Himself

In the Bible Satan is called "the Devil" (Rev. 12:9; 20:2) which means "the slanderer." He slanders God to man and also slanders man to God. His talk with Eve implies some slandering of God (v. 5). His slander is always a lie. It is by slanderous lies that he tempts man, and in this way he tempted Eve.

b) "The Serpent," the Incarnation of the Devil

When Satan approached Eve he was very crafty, pretending to be what he was not and appearing in an incarnational way. When the Lord Jesus was incarnated He was God become man. Although everyone could see the man, few realized that this man was God. Before God Himself was incarnated Satan acted first to incarnate himself. God was incarnated in John 1; Satan was incarnated in Genesis 3. With regard to many of the things which God intended to do, Satan acted first and in a similar manner. Thus, before God was incarnated Satan was incarnated as a serpent which was crafty ("subtle," KJV).

The serpent was crafty. That means he was clever, cunning, and subtle. He was pretending to be what he was not in order to deceive Eve. We need to beware of anything that is crafty. We should be cautious of anyone who is clever, for it is easy for clever people to be taken over by the serpent. Satan did not assume the form of a turtle, because a turtle is stupid. We must remember to be careful of anything that is clever and crafty, because Satan may be hidden in such a thing.

Therefore, outwardly speaking, the cause of man's first fall was Satan. As we shall see later, the inward cause of the fall was man himself.

2) The Way to Tempt

I hope that especially the young people will take these points seriously. These points are basic principles.

The way Satan tempts is firstly to make a proposal to man (vv. 1, 4), a proposal which invariably questions God's Word. Satan will always try to tempt you, induce you, and trap you by making a proposal which raises questions about God's Word. Any time you doubt the Word of God you must realize that that doubt does not originate with you; it comes from the serpent. Years ago I read an article by a Baptist minister in the United States in which he said, "The question mark is shaped like a serpent standing up and asking, 'Has God said?'" We should not question any of the words in the Bible, but should say "Amen" to every word. It is safe to say, "Amen"; it is dangerous to raise questions. A question mark on the Word of God is a suggestion that originates from the tempter.

Satan's proposal always causes man to doubt God's Word and God's heart. The subtle one is like a scorpion, and his questions are like the poison in the scorpion's sting. The serpent told Eve, "You shall not surely die." The serpent actually said to Eve, "Why has God prohibited you from eating the tree of knowledge? Because God knows that once you eat it you will be like Him. You will be as wise as God." These words were poison, the poison from the scorpion's sting. Eve was stung, and poison was injected into her. Thus, she looked at the tree of knowledge and found it good and pleasant (v. 6). That was Satan's way of tempting her.

b. The Woman's Assuming the Headship

Now we must see the inward cause of man's first fall. I am strong on this point. The inward cause of man's fall was the woman's assuming the headship (vv. 2-3, 6). Eve was ensnared by the serpent because she forgot her husband. The Devil was crafty, knowing that the woman was weaker than the man (1 Pet. 3:7), and he chose her as his target. Regardless of what the woman said to the serpent, as long as she stood there and spoke to him, she was wrong, for it indicated that she had assumed the headship. The safest way for her would have been not to talk to the evil one, but to turn to her husband and hide behind him. If Eve had done this, the subtle one would have been frustrated. Therefore, the basic cause of man's first fall was the assuming of the headship by the wife. Although she had a husband, she nonetheless stood on her own.

1) The Significance of the Woman

The significance of the woman is that she represents man before God. In the life-study message on Romans 7 we pointed out that Isaiah 54:5 says, "For thy Maker is thine husband." God is the unique, universal man. Whether we are males or females we are all a part of His wife. Man's position is not the position of the husband; it is the position of a wife. God is our husband. The headship is with God, not with us, not even with the men. Before God, the position of the brothers is the same as that of the sisters. Both sisters and brothers are females in the eyes of God.

2) The Position of the Woman

God is our Husband and our Head, and we must always keep ourselves under His covering. The woman must cover her head and never assume the headship (1 Cor. 11:3, 5, 14-15). Since God is our Head we should always turn to Him. By the Lord's mercy, I have learned of Him. If I had been Eve in the garden and the Devil had come to me, I would not even have looked at him. I would have turned to my husband and hidden myself behind him. I would have let Adam be the head and let him exercise his headship. Then there would have been no problem.

3) The Failure of the Woman

The failure of the woman consisted in being over the man and assuming the headship (cf. 1 Tim. 2:14). This failure on Eve's part typifies man's assuming the headship and signifies his being over God and putting God aside. This same principle operates today. Whenever we act on our own, putting the Lord aside, we are defeated. If we try on our own to be victorious, that very effort is a defeat because it keeps us away from our husband, our Head. Never do anything by yourself. To try to do anything by yourself means that you are assuming the headship and forgetting your position as a wife. We should be wise and never take the position of the husband.

Eve in the garden was our representative. Nearly all of us on occasion have acted in the way she did. We have become Eve. Whatever situation occurred we faced it by ourselves. Although we might have prayed a great deal, when the problem presented itself we forgot our husband and acted as if we had none. Why do you not turn to your husband? Why do you always meet the temptations alone? As long as you confront situations by yourself you stay away from your husband. That was the basic cause of man's first fall. As a minister of the Word, I must learn the lesson of not speaking by myself. While I am speaking I must rely upon my husband. I must hide myself in Him and be one with Him. If I fail to do this, I will become another Eve and will be defeated.

Now we can see that we should not blame Satan too much. We all must blame ourselves because we have assumed the headship and have not respected our husband. We assumed the headship, forgetting that we are the wife. When mothers deal with their little children they may deal with them independently. They may say, "I know how to take care of children. I have been a mother for years. I know what to do and I know how to do it." If you adopt this attitude, you immediately become Eve. Although you may do a good job, in fact you are defeated. We must remember the principle of man's first fall: man renounced the wife's position and assumed the husband's position, making himself the head and the husband. Whether our efforts succeed or fail makes no difference. As long as we stay away from God and presume that we can act apart from Him, we have been defeated already. We must see this.

We may experience this even as we deal with our temper. To be defeated by our temper is a small thing. However, if we try by ourselves to overcome our temper, we commit a sin. The attempt itself is a great sin. Your trying to defeat your temper means that you are assuming the headship. You must learn to say, "Lord, I do not care whether or not I can defeat my temper. Lord, I rely upon You for this. It is not my responsibility to deal with my temper. Lord, I am not the husband. You are my husband. I simply rely upon You. I don't assume that I have the headship. Lord, You are my Head. Lord, You take care of my temper." If we all learn this lesson and maintain this stand before the Lord, our temper will disappear. The Devil will be defeated. We must learn this one, basic principle.

2. The Process

a. Not Using the Spirit

Adam and Eve failed because they did not use their spirit. If Eve had turned to the spirit, there would have been no problem. Our husband is with our spirit. However, if we remain in our mind it means that we are assuming the headship, setting our mind to behave independently. This is awful and sinful. We must realize that our husband is with our spirit and exercise our spirit accordingly. Even when your temper is stirred within you, you need to turn to the spirit. Although you may say that it is difficult to turn in such a circumstance, I would reply that in such difficult times it is all the more necessary for us to turn to our spirit. Do not deal with your temper; turn yourself to the spirit. Learn to use your spirit. All Christians know how to pray and ask God to help them, but few of them know that they have a spirit to which they can turn. We do have such an organ, and it has a wonderful function. Since God is with our spirit, we need to turn to it. If we will learn to turn to our spirit and to exercise our spirit in every situation, the results will be marvelous.

How do you know when you are using your spirit? It is very easy. Whenever you do a certain thing or contact a person without being with God it proves that you are not using your spirit. Regardless of what you do, if you are independent of God and not contacting Him while you are doing it, it proves that you are not in the spirit. Be assured that in such a case you will suffer loss. We all must learn to contact God in everything. As long as we contact Him, we are in our spirit. As long as I walk, I am using my feet; as long as I see, I am using my eyes; and as long as I contact God, I am using my spirit, since my spirit is the organ by which I contact Him (John 4:24). If I see, it means that I am exercising my eyes. Likewise, if I am contacting God, I must be exercising my spirit. This is very precious in our daily walk, and we all must learn to practice it.

Thus, the first step in the process of man's fall was failing to use his spirit. Adam and Eve did not contact God in eating of the tree of knowledge, but instead paid attention to things other than God, not taking Him as the Head.

b. The Soul Being Exercised

Although man did not use his spirit, he did exercise his soul, signifying that man, represented by the soul, assumed the headship. Many times people refuse to pray or exercise their spirit. Instead they think, consider, and study. They find it difficult to pray because

their mind is too active, filled with many thoughts. They are unable to quiet their mind. All of us are familiar with this situation. Many Christian wives find it easy to talk. They talk to their husbands, friends, and relatives. However, if you ask them to pray, they find it difficult to do because their soul has been exercised so much. The best lesson for us all to learn is to be quiet in our thinking. If we are able to stop our thinking and turn to prayer, it proves that we are a person walking with the Lord and living in His presence. However, if you are a talkative person, so active and strong in your mind, it will be difficult for you to calm yourself for a few minutes of prayer. Such a person exercises his soul continually.

During the process of the fall Eve exercised her soul. As she spoke with the serpent her mind was reasoning (vv. 2-3). Then her emotion was pleased with the fruit of the tree of knowledge (v. 6). Eventually, her will made a decision, deciding to take the fruit and eat it (v. 6). Our experience is the same. As we are tempted by a particular matter, our mind reasons and considers, our emotion is aroused and comes to like the thing, and our will makes the decision. Our mind, emotion, and will are the parts of our soul. We should not trust any of these items. Do not trust your mind, emotion, or will, but turn your whole being to the spirit. As you are reasoning about matters, you must turn to your spirit.

We may use the example of shopping. As many brothers and sisters are shopping and see a particular item they want, they reason with themselves, saying, "I need this. It is on sale now and the price is quite low. This is my only opportunity to buy it at this price." The more they reason about the item, the more precious it becomes. We have all experienced this. Nevertheless, after we buy it and bring it home the thing soon loses its attraction and we repent. While you were reasoning, the little serpent was present, stirring up your emotion, strengthening your will, and saying, "Go and buy it." Whenever you are in this situation you must realize that you are repeating Eve's history. We should not laugh at Eve, for our own home is the garden of Eden and we ourselves at times are Eve. Many sisters are not Martha, Mary, or Ruth—they are Eve. Although some sisters may select the name Mary, it seems that no one chooses the name Eve. What was Mary's characteristic? It was that she was calm and quiet in the presence of the Lord, not reasoning excessively in her mind. We all must learn this basic lesson.

c. The Body Acting

The third step in the process of the fall was the action of the body. When the spirit is neglected and the soul is exercised, the body becomes a slave serving our purpose. The eye sees, the hand takes, and the mouth eats. If in the matter of shopping we forsake our spirit and use our soul, our body will take us to the department store.

3. The Result

It is very important that we understand the result of man's first fall. If we know the result, we will understand where we are and what we are today.

a. The Soul Corrupted

The first result of the fall was that the soul of man was corrupted, contaminated, and ruined. It was contaminated because the soul accepted and received the Devil's thought and word (v. 7). Eve should not have spoken to the evil one, for while she was talking with him his wicked thought entered into her mind. Thus, even before Eve partook of the tree of knowledge her mind had been polluted by the enemy's concept already. Do not think that it was not until Eve ate of the tree of knowledge that she was contaminated. While she was talking to the serpent, the serpent's concept penetrated her mind and defiled it. Hence, her mind was ruined. Eventually, her mind was fully corrupted after she ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

b. The Body Changed in Nature

The body was then changed in nature, having the element of the tree of knowledge, the element of Satan, added to it, making it the flesh (v. 7). As originally created by God, the human body was a pure vessel containing one essence, the element created by God. As a result of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, a foreign element was injected into man's body, transmuting it into the flesh. The body which once was pure and sinless now contains the evil element of Satan. According to Romans 7, this element is the indwelling sin which makes its home in man's flesh. In Romans 7:17 Paul says, "So now it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me." This evil substance, the nature of sin that has contaminated our body, still dwells in our flesh. Therefore, we should have no confidence in our flesh because it has been fully occupied and saturated with the sin of Satan.

We may use a parable as an illustration. A little boy has been charged by his mother not to touch a certain bottle because it contains poison. One day, while the mother is away, the child takes the bottle and drinks some of the poisonous liquid. He transgresses his mother's prohibition, but that is actually a small matter. The truly serious thing which happens is that poison has entered into his being. Likewise, in the day that man partook of the tree of knowledge an evil substance entered into his body. Thus, it is not merely a matter of transgression, but a matter of a poisonous element, sin, the nature of the evil one, having entered into the human body. No one can deny or argue the fact that, although we might have been saved for years, we still have this evil element in our flesh. Even as you are reading this message the evil substance of sin dwells in your body.

c. The Spirit Deadened

As a consequence of the fall man's spirit was deadened, becoming insulated from God and losing its function toward God (vv. 8, 10). Although the spirit was deadened, neither sin nor Satan himself entered the spirit of man. We thank God for this. Nevertheless, man's spirit within him was deadened. Ephesians 2 tells us that before we were saved we were dead (vv. 1, 5). In what part of our being were we dead? We were not dead in our body or in our soul, but in our spirit. What does it mean to be dead? To be dead simply means to be without function or sensation. If my hand is without function, it is a dead hand. By God's creation we all have a human spirit (Zech. 12:1) by which we may sense God and contact Him. However, as a result of the fall man's spirit was deadened; it became functionless and senseless, no longer possessing the ability to contact God. The God-contacting function of the human spirit was deadened. When we repented and applied the redeeming blood to cleanse our conscience, our deadened spirit was quickened. Then our spirit began to sense God and contact Him. Now the more we say, "O Lord, I love You," the more alive our spirit becomes. The more we say, "Lord, cleanse me, wash me, and cover me with Your prevailing blood," and the more we confess our sins and praise the

Lord, the more living our spirit will be.

Due to the fall man's soul was corrupted, his body changed in nature, and his spirit was deadened, losing its function toward God. We must realize that this was not merely a matter of outward transgression; it was an inward damage to man's being. Each of the three parts of man—the body, soul, and spirit—was affected by the fall. The body was changed in nature, the soul was contaminated, and the spirit was deadened. We all were such persons. If you are not saved, you are still like this. Your body is indwelt by sin, your mind is corrupted, your soul is contaminated, and your spirit is deadened. How we thank God that we have been redeemed by and washed in the blood of Christ, that our spirit has been made alive, that our soul is under the process of renewing and transformation, and that our body will be brought under the direction of our spirit.

d. Being Constituted a Sinner

The fallen man was constituted a sinner (Rom. 5:19). There is a certain constitution within the being of fallen man, and the main element of this constitution is the satanic nature. The very satanic nature has entered into man's being, becoming the element to constitute him into a sinner. Do not think that you are a sinner simply because you are wrong or sinful in your outward doings, in your behavior. Before we do anything sinful we are sinners already. If a tree is not a corrupt tree, it cannot bring forth evil fruit (Matt. 7:17-18). Likewise, if you are not a sinner, you cannot sin. A tree is not corrupt because it brings forth evil fruit; it brings forth evil fruit because it is corrupt. In like manner, we are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners, because we have been constituted sinners. Because we are sinners we have the sinning function.

As constituted sinners we have the evil life of Satan inwardly. This is what Paul describes as the "sin that dwells in me" and "the evil present with me" (Rom. 7:17, 20, 21). Paul discovered that there was an evil element within him and he termed it the "sin that dwells in me." Paul learned that whenever he tried to do good the evil was present with him. The Greek word translated "the evil" in Romans 7:21 is *kakos*, a word denoting that which is evil in character. This must refer to the evil character of Satan himself. Whenever we try to do good, "the evil" is present with us. We have a life of sin within us and, as a result, we have been constituted sinners.

e. Being Condemned

Since we have transgressed God's prohibition we not only have a sinful element inwardly, but also a court case outwardly (Rom. 5:18). We have a case in the heavenly court, a case that was built up by Adam, not by us. We were all in Adam; therefore, this case not only concerns Adam, but us all.

f. Bringing in the Curse

The first fall of man brought in the curse (vv. 17-19). We may count the items of the curse: the curse itself, sorrow, thorns, thistles, and sweat. These are the items of the curse. Although we are Christians, we often confront harsh circumstances in our attempt to earn a living. In farming, the crop does not grow quickly, but the weeds do. What encourages the weeds to flourish? We pluck them up one day and they reappear soon afterward. This is a sign that the ground was cursed thousands of years ago. Furthermore, in nearly all that we do we must sweat. Without sweating it seems that we cannot accomplish anything. Sweat is the sign that man is under the curse.

g. Being Cast Out of Paradise

As a result of the fall man was also cast out of paradise, out of the realm of life (vv. 23-24). Paradise was the realm of life which included the tree of life and the sphere in which man may receive life. Thus, to be cast out of paradise means to be driven away from the sphere of life.

According to Genesis 3:23-24, we see that when man was expelled from the garden God guarded the tree of life with cherubim and a flaming sword. The cherubim signified God's glory, the sword God's righteousness, and the flame of fire God's holiness. This means that God's glory, righteousness, and holiness guarded the sphere of life from sinful man until the time that the Lord Jesus came. The Lord Jesus died on the cross to fulfill all the requirements of God's glory, righteousness, and holiness, opening the way for us to enter into the realm of life once again. Now we have a new and living way to enter into the holy of holies to contact the living tree of life (Heb. 10:19-20).

h. Bringing in Death

The ultimate result of man's first fall was death (Gen. 3:19; 5:5; Rom. 5:12). Firstly, man's spirit was deadened and eventually his body will die. Through Adam's transgression sin entered into the world and death through sin. Death reigns over all men (Rom. 5:14, 17). Thus, "in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22).

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE NINETEEN

GOD'S DEALING WITH MAN'S FIRST FALL

(1)

In the previous message we studied the first fall of man, considering its cause, process, and result. We have seen how dreadful was the cause, how awful was the process, and how terrible was the result. Thank God that Genesis 3 does not stop here! Genesis 3 not only unveils the cause, process, and result of man's first fall, but also reveals the way God used to deal with this fall. His way is the way of salvation, and the message or the word regarding His way is the gospel. We are preaching the gospel to all who read this message. The first occurrence of gospel preaching in the entire universe is recorded in chapter three of Genesis. Do not think that Genesis 3 is a negative chapter; it is very positive. Although this chapter begins with the evil one, the subtle, crafty serpent, this serpent opened the way for the seed of the woman to come in. This is wonderful!

Who is the seed of the woman? Jesus. Jesus was born of a woman, not of a man. The so-called higher critics, who attacked the book of Genesis and Revelation, also claimed that Jesus was not born of a virgin, alleging that He was born of Joseph, the carpenter. Such an assertion is the greatest blasphemy against the Lord Jesus. The Lord was not the son of that carpenter who later became the husband of the virgin Mary, of which virgin Jesus was born. Thus, Jesus was not the seed of any man; He was the seed of a woman, a virgin, as prophesied in Isaiah (7:14), fulfilled in Matthew (1:23), and confirmed by Paul (Gal. 4:4). In Galatians 4:4 Paul says that Christ was born of a woman. Therefore, Jesus was not the seed of man. He was the seed of a woman, born to fulfill the promise given by God as the gospel in Genesis 3:15. The first fall of man opened the way for the seed of woman to come in. This is the gospel.

4. God's Way of Dealing with the First Fall of Man

Now we need to consider God's way of dealing with the first fall of man. God did not judge man. Immediately after the fall both Adam and Eve realized that they were not very good. They condemned themselves, hid themselves, and used fig leaves to cover themselves (Gen. 3:7-8). Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of God. They knew that they had violated God's prohibition against eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and that the result of their transgression was to be death. Therefore, they hid themselves from the Lord's presence, awaiting the sentence of death. However, God came in, not to declare the sentence of death, but to preach the gospel. God did not pronounce the sentence of death; He sounded the voice of the gospel.

a. Seeking Man

Do you know what was the first word of this gospel preaching? It was the question found in Genesis 3:9: "Where art thou?" In the earlier years of my ministry when I preached the gospel I used this question as my topic several times. I asked people, "Where are you? Gentlemen, where are you? Ladies, where are you? Young people, doctors, professors—where are you? You must know where you are." This question is not the pronouncement of a judgment; it is the opening proclamation of the glad tidings. God was seeking man, asking, "Where art thou?"

After the fall, man was no longer sincere and honest. If Adam had been honest when God asked him where he was, he would have confessed his transgression immediately, but he did not do this. However, in his answer he acknowledged that he was naked (v. 10). Then God asked him, "Who told thee that thou was naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" Adam should have made an honest confession, saying, "Yes, God, I did eat of it. Please forgive me." However, instead of forthrightly confessing his own transgression, he discharged himself of the responsibility by placing it upon the woman. Adam said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (v. 12). His answer implied that he blamed God for giving him the woman who gave him to eat of the fruit of the tree. Only then did he admit that he ate it. Adam seemed to be saying, "It's not my fault, God. You must bear the responsibility for the trouble caused by the woman You gave me. If You hadn't given me the woman, I would never have eaten of that tree. You gave me the woman, she gave me to eat, and I ate." Nevertheless, God did not rebuke him, because God had not come to judge but to save. God came to man in the garden in the same way that His Son was to come many centuries later: He came to save, not to judge (John 3:17).

Then God turned to the woman asking, "What is this that thou hast done?" (v. 13). Like Adam, Eve did not forthrightly confess her fault. She said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." Ever since the time of man's first fall, human beings have acted in this way. Whenever little children misbehave, they never confess, but always blame someone or something else. A child may even place the responsibility on the pet cat, saying, "Mommy, if you did not have a cat, I would never have done that thing. It's not my fault. It's yours for having a cat."

It is very clear that as God dealt with the first fall of man He was seeking the lost man as His Son was to do many years later in seeking to save man (Luke 19:10). God did not seek him to condemn man, but to preach the gospel to him.

b. Judging the Serpent

When God came to Adam and Eve He asked them questions, but when He turned to the serpent He asked no questions at all. He immediately condemned the serpent. God did not ask the serpent, "Serpent, have you done this?" When God came to Adam He asked him, "Where art thou?" (v. 9). He also asked him, "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" and "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" (v. 11). God also asked the woman, "What is this that thou hast done?" (v. 13). God did not ask Adam and Eve all these questions because He had the intention of condemning them. God asked these questions to lead them to confession. However, when God turned to the serpent He did not ask him anything. Instead, God said to the serpent, "Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life" (v. 14). This was God's judgment upon the serpent.

1) Creeping on the Belly— Limited to Moving on the Earth

It was certainly a curse for the serpent to creep on his belly and to eat dust all the days of his life. In this curse pronounced upon the serpent something is hidden and implied. As God judged the serpent, He limited Satan's activity and move to the earth. A bird is free and can soar in the air whenever it wishes. The serpent, on the contrary, has no such freedom, but is restricted to the earth. As long as we are above the earth, the serpent, the Devil, Satan, cannot touch us. When we are transcendent, we are over him. However, if we also creep on the earth, we will be where he is. We will become his companion and creep together with him and all the other creeping things. But we are not creeping on this earth—we are transcendent.

2) Eating the Dust—Limited to Eating the Earthy Things

A second aspect of the curse pronounced upon the serpent was that the serpent was limited to eating only dust. Dust is the serpent's food. We were made from dust. If we are earthly, living in an earthly manner, we become the serpent's food and he will devour us (1 Pet. 5:8). If you are an earthly person, dealing with your wife or living with your husband in an earthly way, you will immediately

become food for the Devil. Many families are completely swallowed up by the Devil because they are so earthly. Why does it seem that your marriage life is being devoured by the Devil? Because your marriage life is earthly and full of dust.

In God's condemnation upon the serpent He gave Satan a limitation: the serpent cannot move above the earth and he cannot eat anything except dust. God created man with a spirit, a soul, and a body. Although the body and the soul are earthly, the spirit is not. Since our spirit is not earthly, it is not supposed to be Satan's food. The serpent is only allowed to eat the dust. Our fallen body and soul are the food of Satan, but our spirit is different. The human spirit is not earthly; so it should not be Satan's food. Whenever we walk in our flesh we become a delectable dish for Satan, and whenever we are soulish we become a meal for the Devil. However, whenever we turn to the spirit, forgetting the body and the soul, Satan has nothing to eat. When we turn to the spirit, Satan is limited. Praise the Lord for the limitation that God in His judgment has pronounced over the serpent.

We do not need to creep on the earth and we do not have to be earthly. Sisters, when your husband or children give you a difficult time, you do not need to remain on the earth. You can exercise your spirit and immediately soar to the heavens, and the Devil will be unable to touch you. The "serpent" is limited to the earth and is only permitted to eat the earthly things. If you soar to the third heavens you will say, "Satan, what are you doing there? You are just playing with my husband and with my naughty children. Satan, I am here in the third heaven, and you cannot touch me. You cannot devour me. I can crush you under my feet." "Now the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom. 16:20). In order to crush Satan we must be above him. If we are under him, how can God crush him under our feet? Since "the serpent" has been limited to this earth, it is so easy for us to tread upon him. Praise the Lord that in judging "the serpent" God preached the gospel. God has limited Satan's move and diet. After pronouncing this judgment on the serpent, God proclaimed the glad tidings found in Genesis 3:15.

c. The Promise to Man

In Genesis 3:15 we see the wonderful promise that God made to man after the fall. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." This promise certainly is good news.

1) The Background

The background of God's promise was that man had been tempted by the serpent and had fallen into sin (v. 13). At that time man was under the fear of God, waiting for the sentence of death (vv. 8, 10). However, God did not condemn him. He judged the serpent (v. 14).

2) The Contents

a) Causing Enmity between the Serpent and the Woman

In Genesis 3:15 God said to the serpent, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman..." We do not like the word enmity because we do not want to be involved in fighting or warfare, but God said that He would put enmity between the serpent and the woman. God did not relinquish control of the situation and He did not allow the woman and the serpent to fend for themselves. God seemed to be saying, "I will manage this situation. I will maintain control over everything. I will put enmity between you and the woman." Shortly we shall see who the woman is. In Genesis 3:15 God continued to say that He would put enmity between the serpent's seed and the woman's seed, that the woman's seed would bruise the serpent's head, and that the serpent would bruise the heel of the woman's seed. This reveals that the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman will be enemies, that the woman's seed will bruise the serpent's head, and that the serpent will bruise the heel of the woman's seed. To bruise the head of the serpent means to destroy and kill him. According to Genesis 3:15, the seed of the woman would destroy the serpent, but the serpent could only injure the heel of the woman's seed.

Like most of the items mentioned in Genesis 1 through 3, Genesis 3:15 is a seed, a tremendously significant seed of the gospel. It was in Genesis 3:15 that God first proclaimed His full gospel. Therefore, we need to spend considerable time on this verse to see who is the woman, who is the seed of the serpent, and who is the seed of the woman. We must become familiar with three classes of people—the woman, the seed of the serpent, and the seed of the woman. Firstly, let us see who the woman is.

As I have previously mentioned, nearly everything in Genesis 1 through 3 is a seed as well as a sign or symbol. Thus, we need to allegorize this portion of the holy Word. After reading the foregoing message we should realize that the proper position of human beings is that of a woman. Whether we are male or female we all have the position of a woman before God. If we claim that we are men before Him, we will immediately be devoured by Satan. Undoubtedly, the woman mentioned in Genesis 3:15 is Eve, and Eve signifies all the people of God, the people who take the position of a woman trusting in God. As long as we trust in God, we are His people, His wife. Hence, the woman of Genesis 3:15 is firstly Eve and secondly all the people who rely upon God and who put their trust in God. In brief, all the people of God are the woman. Therefore, the enmity between the serpent and the woman is the enmity between Satan and Eve, between Satan and all of God's people. Eve signifies all the people of God.

In Revelation 12:1 we see the sign of a universal woman. This woman, a great sign, is clothed with the sun, has the moon under her feet, and has a crown of twelve stars upon her head. Therefore, this woman is not a single, local, individual woman; she is a universal woman, a sign that symbolizes all of God's people from Adam to Abraham, from Isaac to Moses, from Moses to the apostles, and from the apostles to the present time. All the people of God compose this woman and are included in her. The twelve stars represent the patriarchs such as Adam, Abel, Enoch, Abraham, and Jacob. Those patriarchs were stars, not yet formed as a unit. Following them we have the people of Israel. Since they lived during the dark night they are represented by the moon. However, when the Lord Jesus came, day dawned and the sun shone brightly. Thus, the church people are represented by the sun. Hence, all of God's people—the patriarchs, Israel of the Old Testament, and the church of the New Testament, including all the believers—compose this universal woman. The universal woman of Revelation 12 was symbolized by the individual woman, Eve, of Genesis 3:15. Eve in Genesis 3 was a symbol of this universal woman.

In the glad tidings which God announced in Genesis 3:15 God said that He would put enmity between the serpent and the woman.

This means that throughout the centuries Satan, the Devil, has been fighting against all the people of God. The serpent not only fought against Eve, but has also fought against the people of God in every generation. An illustration of this is the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. According to 1 John 3:12, this act of murder was not merely a crime perpetrated by Cain, but a deed performed by the wicked one, by the serpent. The serpent used Cain to kill Abel. If we do not put our trust in God, we are not the people of God. If we are not the people of God, we are in the same category as Satan, and he will not fight against us. However, once you turn to God and become a person who trusts in God, the serpent will immediately attack you. This is the enmity between the serpent and the woman.

*b) Causing Enmity between the Seed of the Serpent
and the Seed of the Woman*

Adam and Eve were waiting for death, thinking themselves to be under the sentence of death. Hence, the mention of a seed came as glad tidings to them. They thought it was impossible for them to have a seed because they were doomed to die immediately. When Adam heard that the woman was going to have a seed, he called his wife's name Eve, which in Hebrew means "living." As Adam and Eve were awaiting the sentence of death in fear and trembling, there suddenly came the glad tidings that this woman would have a seed, and Adam spontaneously said, "Living. You are not dying, you are living. Your name is Eve. You are living." As we have seen in message seventeen, when Adam first saw Eve in Genesis 2:23 he was excited, saying, "This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." However, in Genesis 3 Adam was also excited. Instead of receiving the sentence of condemnation, he heard the gospel. So, Adam called his wife, "Living." We have all heard these glad tidings and we all should call ourselves "Living." If you ask me my name, I will tell you that my name is "Living."

God preached the gospel in verse 15, and Adam reacted to the gospel in verse 20. If Adam had not reacted to the gospel, he would have called his wife "Dying," saying, "Poor woman, don't you know that you are the cause of death? Your name should be Dying." On the contrary, after Adam heard God's preaching of the gospel he was happy and called his wife's name Eve—"Living." The whole world today is under the sentence of death, and we must go to them proclaiming Genesis 3:15. When the people hear the glad tidings of Genesis 3:15, receiving the gospel and responding to it, they will shout, "Now we are living. Praise the Lord!"

*(1) Enmity between the Seed of the Serpent
and the Seed of the Woman*

The seed of the serpent are the people who follow Satan. The Bible uses various terms to describe them. In Matthew 3:7 they are called the "brood of vipers." In Matthew 13:38 they are designated "the sons of the evil one." In John 8:44 the Lord Jesus referred to them as being of their father, the Devil. In 1 John 3 the Apostle John said that everyone who practices sin is of the Devil (v. 8); he also used the term "the children of the Devil" (v. 10). All of these titles indicate that the people who follow Satan are the seed of the serpent. Whether they are called brood of vipers, sons of the evil one, or children of the Devil, the meaning is the same: they are the seed of the serpent and they persecute and fight against the Lord Jesus and the overcomers.

The seed of the woman is the Lord Jesus. He was born of the virgin Mary (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23; Gal. 4:4). Thus, He is truly the seed of the woman. He is the very seed prophesied in the glad tidings proclaimed by God Himself in Genesis 3:15. He is the One who bruised the serpent. There is great enmity between the people who follow Satan and the Lord Jesus.

*(2) The Seed of the Woman
Bruising the Head of the Serpent*

The Lord Jesus, the seed of the woman, has bruised the head of the serpent. The Lord has destroyed Satan, the one who holds the power of death. This is fully revealed in Hebrews 2:14 and 1 John 3:8.

*(3) The Serpent Bruising the Heel
of the Seed of the Woman*

While the Lord Jesus was destroying the serpent on the cross, the serpent bruised His heel. This means that Satan wounded the Lord Jesus by nailing His feet to the cross (Psa. 22:16).

(4) Enmity between the Serpent and the Overcomers

Who are the overcomers? As we have seen already, the woman in Genesis 3:15 firstly is Eve and secondly is all the people of God, including the virgin Mary, as signified by Eve. Hence, the seed of the woman is mainly the Lord Jesus who was born of Mary. However, more regarding the seed of the woman can be seen in Revelation 12. The woman depicted in Revelation 12 and signified in Genesis 3:15 is a universal woman, and within her is a part called the manchild (Rev. 12:1, 2, 5). In a biblical sense, woman represents weakness, for the woman is the weaker vessel (1 Pet. 3:7). The man, especially the manchild, represents strength. The universal woman of Revelation 12 has two parts: the outer part, which is the woman herself, and the inner part, which is the manchild. The outer part, the woman, is the weaker part; the inner part, the manchild, is the stronger part. All the people of God are the woman, who is somewhat weak, but among all the people of God is a stronger part, which is the manchild, the overcomers. In the churches some of the saints may be comparatively weak, being a portion of the woman, but other saints may be quite strong, being a portion of the manchild. This manchild may also be considered as a part of the seed of the woman. The manchild is the stronger part among the people of God. The entire people of God are the woman, and the stronger part of the people of God is the manchild. Therefore the manchild is also a part of the seed of the woman.

I like to compare Revelation 12 with Genesis 3. In Genesis 3:15 we have three main items: the serpent, the woman, and the seed of the woman. We find the same three items in Revelation 12, where we see the old serpent, the universal woman, and the manchild. Have you seen how these two chapters correspond to one another? The "ancient serpent" of Revelation 12:9 is the serpent of Genesis 3, the universal woman of Revelation 12:1 is the woman of Genesis 3:15, and the manchild of Revelation 12:5 is a part of the seed of the woman that is also mentioned in Genesis 3:15. If you do not understand Revelation 12, you will not be clear in full about Genesis 3:15. In this small verse three major items were unfolded—the serpent, the woman, and the seed of the woman. It is difficult for us to understand these three items without reading through the entire Bible until we come to the book of Revelation. As we come to Revelation 12 we discover that the serpent of Genesis 3:15 is the Devil, for Revelation 12:9 speaks of "the ancient serpent, he who is

called the Devil and Satan." The woman is not only Eve, but all the people who put their trust in God, including the virgin Mary, for God's people occupy a feminine position before Him. Furthermore, we see that within the woman is a stronger part called the manchild. Therefore, the manchild of Revelation 12 is a part of the seed of the woman mentioned in Genesis 3:15.

Some may ask who the manchild is. There are different schools of teaching in Christianity regarding this. Some say that the manchild is the Lord Jesus. I agree with this in a sense because the Lord Jesus is the Head, the center, the reality, the life, and the nature of the manchild. However, this manchild is not individual; he is corporate. Since the woman herself is not individual, but universal and corporate, her child must also be universal and corporate. This corporate manchild includes the Lord Jesus as the Head, center, reality, life, and nature of the manchild. This can be proved from the Scriptures. Psalm 2:8-9 prophesies that the Lord Jesus, God's Anointed One, will rule the nations with a rod of iron. Revelation 2:26-27 says that the overcomers in the churches will rule over the nations with a rod of iron. Now in Revelation 12:5 we are told that the manchild will rule all nations with a rod of iron. Therefore, according to the record of the Bible, both the Lord Jesus Himself and His overcomers will rule over the nations with a rod of iron. Thus, the manchild in Revelation 12:5 includes both the Lord Jesus and the overcomers in the churches. Furthermore, Revelation 20:4 says that Christ and the resurrected overcomers will reign as kings for a thousand years. Hence, the manchild in Revelation 12 is neither the Lord Jesus individually nor the overcomers separate from Him, but the Lord Jesus with the overcomers. Christ Himself is the foremost overcomer (Rev. 3:21). As the leading overcomer He is the Head, center, reality, life, and nature of the overcomers. Among the people of God on earth there is a stronger part which includes the Lord Jesus and the overcomers. Thus, the Lord Jesus and His overcomers compose the manchild.

The enmity between the serpent and the woman's seed mentioned in Genesis 3:15 is fully manifested in Revelation 12. In Revelation 12 we see that the old serpent tries his best to damage the manchild and the woman (vv. 4, 13-17). The enmity of Genesis 3:15 is thus fulfilled to the uttermost.

Although the Lord Jesus was a manchild, He was born of a woman. What does this mean? The spiritual significance of this is that the Lord Jesus was born of a source that trusted in God. The woman is the source of the seed, and the seed, part of which is the manchild that defeats the enemy, is stronger than the woman. The source of the manchild is a woman, not a man. His source is the one who trusts in God, not the one who declares independence from God. The manchild is the seed of a woman who trusts in God and depends on God. The Lord Jesus was the seed from such a source.

Likewise, we all need to be the seed of the woman, the seed from a source that depends on God. If we claim to be a man before God, we are finished with God and are no longer of God. Anyone who is of God must be a female before Him. If the leaders in the churches should say, "We know how to do things," they are no longer the woman before God, but have assumed the position of a man. The leading brothers should say, "O Lord, You know how weak we are. We depend upon You. Apart from You, Lord, we can do nothing. We trust in You for everything." If the leading brothers have this attitude, they are truly the woman before God. Genesis 3:15 does not mention the seed of man, for only the seed of woman, not the seed of man, has the position before God.

On the one hand, we are the woman; on the other hand, we are the seed of the woman. We are the ones who trust in God: this is our source. We also are the seed of this source that trusts in God. Therefore, we can become strong. Only the seed of the source trusting in God can be strong, not strong in themselves, but strong in God. The Lord Jesus Himself took the lead to be such a person. He is the Head of the manchild. Now He is also the center, reality, life, and nature of the manchild. How the enemy, Satan, fights against this manchild!

3) The Center

The focus, the central point, of Genesis 3:15 is that the seed of woman, the Lord Jesus, would come to destroy Satan on the cross. This is the strongest proclamation in the preaching of the glad tidings. Once again I say that Adam and Eve were trembling under the imminent sentence of death, but God, instead of condemning them, surprised them by preaching the gospel to them. Adam and Eve had fear toward God and hate toward the serpent. Therefore, God declared in His glad tidings that One entitled "the seed of woman" would come to destroy the serpent. That was the gospel. The promise regarding the seed of the woman and the coming destruction of the serpent was the glad tidings proclaimed to the first generation of sinners.

4) The Fulfillment

a) In the People of God

The promise of Genesis 3:15 has been fulfilled throughout the generations. Firstly, it has been fulfilled in all the people of God. From the time that this promise was first given Satan has been the enemy of God's people. He will continue to be their enemy until he is cast into the abyss (Rev. 20:1-3) and ultimately hurled into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:7-10). Until Satan is cast into the lake of fire he remains the enemy of the people of God.

b) In All the Overcomers

Furthermore, this promise is fulfilled in all the overcomers until the time of rapture. This is revealed in Revelation 12.

c) In the Lord Jesus

This promise has been completely fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. Firstly, it was fulfilled at the time of His birth (Matt. 2:13-22). When the Lord Jesus was born, the serpent stirred up a great deal of enmity, causing many young lives to be lost. Secondly, the promise was fulfilled throughout the Lord's earthly life. If we read the four Gospels, we will see that Satan was continually troubling the Lord Jesus, pursuing Him and opposing Him. Eventually, Satan bruised the Lord's heel on the cross, as was prophesied in Psalm 22:16.

The promise in Genesis 3:15 reveals that Satan is the enemy of the people of God. Eventually, the Lord Jesus came as the seed of woman to destroy the enemy. Today we are enjoying the fulfillment of this promise.

MESSAGE TWENTY

THE SERPENT, THE WOMAN, AND THE SEED OF THE WOMAN

In this message I am burdened to present, as a parenthesis, a further word on Genesis 3:15. As we saw in the last message, Genesis 3:15 is the gospel. Genesis 3:15 is the first occurrence of the proclamation of the gospel in the entire Bible. In this verse God Himself preached the glad tidings to fallen man in judging the serpent. Therefore, we need to spend more time on this verse.

I have mentioned several times in previous messages that nearly everything found in Genesis 1 through 3 is a seed that grows throughout the following books of the Bible, appearing as a crop in the Epistles of the New Testament and ripening into a harvest in the book of Revelation. We have seen this principle applied to many items. In this message I want to point out this principle once again as we consider the three main items found in Genesis 3:15: the serpent, the woman, and the seed of the woman.

I. THE SERPENT

As we read through the Scriptures, we find the serpent is not only mentioned in Genesis, but also in other books of the Bible. Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 both refer to the serpent. In Revelation 12 and 20 we find that Satan has various names—the dragon, the ancient serpent, the Devil, and Satan. Among these names we find the title "the ancient serpent." John uses this term because at the time he wrote the book of Revelation the serpent had become very old, in fact, at least four thousand years old. Who is this "ancient serpent"? The only way to answer this question is to consult the third chapter of Genesis where the serpent is first mentioned.

In John 3:14 we find another reference to the serpent. When Nicodemus, a high-class gentleman of superior attainment, came to the Lord Jesus in a positive way, the Lord told him that he needed a new birth with a new life (John 3:3, 5). The Lord told him that his human spirit needed to be reborn of the Holy Spirit, for "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). However, not many Christians have observed that in His conversation with Nicodemus the Lord pointed that gentleman to the serpent (John 3:14). Although Nicodemus was a gentleman, a teacher, and a "master of Israel," the Lord indicated that he was a serpent.

At a certain point in His conversation with Nicodemus the Lord Jesus said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." What does this mean? It was the Lord's answer to Nicodemus's question. Nicodemus had asked, "How can a man be born when he is old?" and, "How can these things be?" Nicodemus was asking how he could be born again. The Lord replied, "You are the teacher of Israel, and you don't know these things?" Although Nicodemus taught the Old Testament to the people, he did not know the meaning of being born again. Therefore, the Lord referred to the type of the brass serpent lifted up on a pole by Moses (Num. 21:9). The Lord seemed to be saying to him, "Your fathers were all bitten by poisonous serpents, and the poison of the serpents entered into them. Your fathers became serpents in the eyes of God. Because they were dying, Moses prayed to God on their behalf, and God told Moses to lift up a brass serpent on a pole to bear His judgment upon the poisoned Israelites. Everyone who had been poisoned by the serpents and who looked to the brass serpent lifted up on the pole lived." Many of the Israelites did this, and their lives were preserved. This is a type of regeneration. The Lord seemed to be telling Nicodemus, "Don't consider yourself as a gentleman. You must realize that you are one of the people who has been poisoned by the serpent and that you have the serpentine nature within you. Apparently you are a man; actually you are a serpent. In the eyes of God you are one of the serpents. Although you are a serpent, I have come to die for you. I shall die on the cross in the form of the serpent. When I am on the cross, in the eyes of God I shall not only be a substitute for sinners; I shall be judged there by God in the form of the serpent. The only difference is that the real serpent has poison, but I shall only be in the form of the serpent. I do not have the nature and the poison of the serpent. I have come in the likeness of the flesh of sin, in the form of the serpent, to die for all of you who have been poisoned by the serpent."

The first mention of the serpent in Genesis 3 is a seed that is developed in subsequent books of the Bible. We see the serpent in Genesis 3 and also in John 3:14. Nearly all Christians have seen the eternal life in John 3:16, but not many have seen the serpent in John 3:14. However, if we are to understand what is eternal life, we must also understand what is the serpent. We must see the serpent. The serpent is not only in Genesis and John but is fully exposed in the book of Revelation. In Genesis 3:15 the serpent is a little seed, in the Gospel of John this seed grows, and in the book of Revelation this seed becomes a harvest. By reading throughout the Bible we can see that in every generation God's divine work has had a goal: to build up the Body to express His Son, Christ, and also to eliminate the serpent. God intends to expel the serpent. Therefore, we all must realize where the serpent is today.

A. Having Injected Himself into Mankind

Through the fall of man the serpent injected himself into mankind. Where is this serpent now? He is in our flesh. In the garden, before the fall of man, the serpent was outside of man. However, since the fall, the subtle, crafty serpent is in man, in his flesh.

One day the Lord Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter immediately responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15-16). A short time after this the Lord rebuked Peter, calling him "Satan" (Matt. 16:23). Can you believe that one minute he was a holy Peter and that soon afterward he had become Satan? If I had been Andrew, Peter's brother, I would have asked the Lord Jesus, "Where is Satan? I am Andrew, and Peter is my brother, but where is Satan?" The Lord Jesus might have answered, "Satan is here within him. Satan is inside of Peter." When you speak in an evil way, who are you? You are Satan. When you act in a mean way with your wife or husband, who are you? Satan. At such a time the Lord Jesus could say of you, "Satan!" Where is Satan? He is within fallen mankind. Satan today is in man's flesh. We all must be on the alert because Satan, the one who tempted and damaged the first generation of mankind, is now within us.

B. Men Having Become "Serpents"

Because Satan has injected himself into man, all men have become serpents in the eyes of God. Although you may consider yourself a man, in the eyes of God you are a serpent. According to Matthew 3:7, John the Baptist called the religious, Jewish people a "brood of vipers." They were serpents. John seemed to be saying to them, "You think of yourselves as religionists. You are so religious, yet you don't realize that you are a generation of vipers." In His explanation of the parable of the sower the Lord Jesus used the term "the

sons of the evil one" (Matt. 13:38). Who is the evil one? The serpent, Satan—he is the evil one and all his followers are his sons. The followers of Satan are not his adopted sons; they are his sons by birth. Thus, in John 8:44 the Lord Jesus said, "You are of your father the Devil." The Lord appeared to be saying, "Your father is the Devil because you have the Devil's life. The Devil's life and nature are in you. You were born of your father and now you have his life and nature." The Apostle John mentions "the children of the Devil" and says, "He who practices sin is of the Devil" (1 John 3:10, 8). Therefore, Paul called Elymas the sorcerer the "son of the Devil" (Acts 13:10). Even a gentleman such as Nicodemus, who appeared to be such an upper-class person, was a serpent in the eyes of God, possessing the serpentine nature. This is the reason that all the serpentine people need the Lord Jesus to be their substitute in the form of a serpent.

C. Men Having the Serpentine Nature and Life

As children of the Devil, people who have been born of the serpent, we all have the serpentine nature and life (1 John 3:12). No one can deny or dispute this since we see Satan's nature and life in our own children. Apparently little children are sweet; however, the more they grow, the more the serpentine nature within them is exposed. Although they are not trained to display the serpentine nature and life, they manifest it spontaneously. I have observed this in many children including my own. We must remember that we all are like that. Not only are we like that—we are that! We have a serpentine nature and life within us.

D. As the Evil Spirit Working in Fallen Man

Satan, the serpent, is the evil spirit that works in fallen man (Eph. 2:2). This evil spirit does not lie dormant, but actively works in the children of disobedience. Consider, as an example, how Satan worked in Judas, the man who betrayed the Lord Jesus (John 13:2, 27; 6:70). How Satan worked in that pitiful man! We have already seen that Peter was referred to as Satan (Matt. 16:23). If we did not have such a record as Matthew 16, no one would believe that Peter, a leading apostle, could have become Satan. Furthermore, even after the day of Pentecost Ananias and Sapphira were filled with Satan and lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). Ananias and Sapphira were not in a gambling casino; they were in the church after the day of Pentecost. Nevertheless, they were filled with Satan.

Now we know Satan's whereabouts. He is not far from us; he is within us. Some Christians think to themselves, "After we are saved and are in the Body of Christ, Satan has nothing to do with us." This thought is not the voice of the Holy Spirit; it is the voice of the subtle serpent, and the preaching of this concept is the lie of the serpent. We all must be on the alert because even now the subtle one is still present with us. As long as we are in the old creation, the serpent remains within us.

II. THE WOMAN

A. Signifying All the People of God

Now we need to see who the woman is. Undoubtedly, the woman in Genesis 3:15 firstly is Eve. Secondly, as all the fundamental teachers agree, this woman also refers to Mary, the mother of Jesus, because the seed of the woman was the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus was not born of a man, but of a woman, a virgin. Hence, His title is "the seed of the woman." However, the woman has a threefold significance, not only signifying Eve and the virgin Mary, but also the woman revealed in Revelation 12.

The woman of Revelation 12:1 is a universal woman who includes all the people of God. Therefore, she is a corporate woman. However, some people interpret the woman of Revelation 12 as Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus. But Mary was an individual, local virgin. If we read Revelation 12, we can see that the woman unveiled there is universal, not local. She has twelve stars upon her head, the moon under her feet, and is clothed with the sun. All of this certainly indicates that she is universal and corporate. The best way to interpret the Bible is to consult other portions of the holy Word. We see a similar vision in Joseph's dream (Gen. 37:9). In that dream Joseph saw the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars. The sun signified Jacob, Joseph's father; the moon signified Joseph's mother; and the eleven stars signified Joseph's brothers. Therefore, in principle, the sun, moon, and stars together represent the entire body of God's people. Thus, the woman in Revelation 12 is not an individual, local virgin. She is universal and corporate, including all the people of God.

According to the Bible, the people of God can be classified into three categories: the patriarchs, Israel, and the church. The patriarchs, who came before the nation of Israel, are signified in Revelation 12 by the stars. Israel, which lived during the dark time, is signified by the moon under the woman's feet. When the Lord Jesus came, the sun shone (Luke 1:78-79), and the church came into existence. In a sense, during the present age the church is in the sun, in the day. So, the church is represented by the sun. Now we can see that this woman is composed of the patriarchs, Israel, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and all the church people. She includes all the people of God beginning with Adam and continuing throughout the Old Testament period and the New Testament age until the time that the Lord Jesus returns. We are all included in this woman.

I have stated many times that our position before God is that of a woman. Our status is not that of a man, but of a wife, for we are all a woman before God. Do not consider that you are a wise, strong, capable man. If you assume this kind of position, you are immediately fallen. Whether we are brothers or sisters, we all have the same position before God—that of a wife. We must say, "Lord, I stand on the position of a wife. I know nothing and I can do nothing. Lord, I put my trust in You. You are my husband." Whenever we take such a position, leaning upon the Lord Jesus, we all are a part of the woman. All of the patriarchs were people like this. The genuine Israelites and all the people in the church throughout the generations have been people like this. We also must be people like this. We need to say, "O Lord, apart from You we are helpless and can do nothing. We put our trust in You." We must realize that according to the Bible the woman signifies the weaker vessel (1 Pet. 3:7).

B. Attacked by the Serpent

Throughout the generations the woman, the people of God, has been attacked by the serpent. The serpent attacked Job (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7). He also attacked Israel, David (1 Chron. 21:1), and Joshua the high priest (Zech. 3:1-2). Hence, in Revelation 12 we see that the serpent opposes, persecutes, and fights against the woman (Rev. 12:4, 13-17).

Although the woman is the weaker vessel, within her is a stronger part, the manchild. Now we need to consider this manchild, the

seed of the woman.

III. THE SEED OF THE WOMAN

Who is the manchild? As we pointed out in message nineteen, some fundamental Christians say that the manchild is the Lord Jesus Christ. Although I agree with this in a sense, I do not agree with it in every sense. There are two main reasons why I do not believe that, in every respect, the manchild of Revelation 12 refers to Christ. Firstly, I have already mentioned that the mother of the manchild is not a local, individual woman, but a universal, corporate woman. Since the mother is corporate, her child must also be corporate. Secondly, if we read Revelation 12 carefully, we will see that the manchild is raptured in verse 5. He is not raptured to the air, but to the throne of God. Some people say that this describes the ascension of the Lord Jesus into the heavens. However, in the following verse it says that after the rapture of the manchild there will be a period of "a thousand two hundred and sixty days." This denotes a period of forty-two months, for forty-two months multiplied by thirty equals one thousand two hundred sixty days. This one thousand two hundred sixty days or forty-two months is the equivalent of "a time, and times, and half a time" (Rev. 12:14). "Time" means one year, "times" two years, and "half a time" a half year, giving a total of three and a half years, which equals forty-two months or one thousand two hundred sixty days. This period of three and a half years is the second half of the last seven years, the last week of the seventy weeks mentioned in Daniel 9:25-27. The "one week" of Daniel 9:27 specifies an era of seven years considered by all Bible teachers as the period of the great tribulation. The great tribulation will be intensified during the last half of the seven years, referring to the forty-two months or to the one thousand two hundred sixty days. Here is my point in mentioning all of this: if you say that the manchild is only the Lord Jesus, who ascended to the heavens over nineteen hundred years ago, how could it be that after He ascended to the heavens there will only be three and a half years? This is impossible. Nevertheless, after the rapture of the manchild to the throne of God, there will only be the last half of the last seven years. By this we can realize that the manchild must be other than Christ Himself.

The manchild in Revelation 12 certainly is the complete fulfillment of the prophecy regarding the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15. In message nineteen I pointed out how Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12 are two portions of the Divine Word which correspond to one another. In Genesis 3:15 we see three main figures—the serpent, the woman, and the seed of the woman. In Revelation 12 we see the same three crucial figures—the serpent, the woman, and the manchild. As we saw in the last message, the seed of the woman mentioned in Genesis 3:15 undoubtedly is Christ. However, once this seed reaches the development of the manchild unveiled in Revelation 12, it is no longer only the Lord Jesus Himself, but the Lord and the overcoming part of His Body. What was once an individual seed has become corporate by the time of Revelation 12. When the Lord Jesus was born in the manger, He was the individual seed of the woman, and when He was crucified on the cross to be our Redeemer, He was still this individual seed. However, after His resurrection He was reproduced and multiplied. The one grain of wheat became many grains (John 12:24). Once He was the unique One, the only begotten Son (John 1:14), but through death and resurrection He became the firstborn among many brothers, the first Son among many sons (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:10). The firstborn Son is the Head of the Body, and all the brothers, the many sons, are the members of the Body. Now the seed of the woman is no longer an individual person, but a corporate person with the individual Christ as the Head and with all His members as the Body. Therefore, Christ is the Head of this manchild. He is also the center, reality, life, and nature of the manchild. The Head has gone to the heavens, but His Body remains on the earth. As far as the Head is concerned, He ascended to the heavens more than nineteen hundred years ago. But as far as His Body is concerned, we are still here awaiting the coming rapture. After the rapture of the manchild will be a time of three and one-half years.

The manchild, like the mother, is universal and corporate. The virgin Mary was a part of this universal mother. Therefore, firstly we have an individual mother with an individual seed, but eventually we have a corporate mother with a corporate manchild. We are the same as He. He is the leading overcomer, and we are the following overcomers. He is the Head of the manchild, and we are the Body. He is the center of the manchild, and we are the circumference. He is the reality of the manchild, and we are the expression of the manchild. He is the manchild's life and nature, and we are the manchild.

A. Christ

We have seen that firstly the seed of the woman is Christ. This Christ was born of a woman, even of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23; Gal. 4:4). When this seed of the woman was on earth, He bound the serpent as the strong man (Matt. 12:29). When the Lord Jesus was on earth, Satan, the serpent, was the strong man, and the Lord exercised His authority to bind him. Jesus, as the seed of the woman, bound the serpent and plundered all his wealth. In John 14:30 He told His disciples that the serpent, as the prince of the world, had nothing in Him. Although the serpent tried his best, he could find nothing for himself in the seed of the woman. When the Lord Jesus went to the cross, He bruised the head of the serpent, destroying him entirely. Thus, Hebrews 2:14 says that through death Christ destroyed the Devil who holds the power of death. Christ has destroyed the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8). In the future Christ will rule over the nations with a rod of iron (Psa. 2:8-9; Rev. 12:5).

All of this concerning Christ as the seed of the woman is wonderful, but it is still outside of us. He has not yet come into us. Nevertheless, after Jesus was born, had bound the strong man, had given no ground to the prince of the world, and had destroyed the enemy on the cross, He was resurrected and in resurrection became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Whenever and wherever a person will say, "Lord Jesus," this life-giving Spirit will immediately come into him. This is a mystery, yet it is a fact. By coming into His believers as the life-giving Spirit Christ works Himself into them as the conquering seed.

Christ has been sown into us as the seed. The parable of the sower in Matthew 13 shows that this Christ has sown Himself as the seed into our hearts. As a result, we have been regenerated. Peter says that we were regenerated, not by a corrupted or a corrupting seed, but by an incorruptible seed, the living and abiding Word of God (1 Pet. 1:23). This living Word is Christ, and Christ is the seed. Furthermore, the Apostle John says, "Everyone who has been begotten of God does not practice sin, because His seed abides in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been begotten of God" (1 John 3:9). The seed here is Christ, the seed of the woman. The seed of the conqueror, the seed of the overcomer, is this very seed. The foremost overcomer is the seed. We have a conquering seed within us. If we let this seed grow, it will be victorious. We all must shout, "Hallelujah, we have the conquering seed within us!"

One day I was surprised to see the last stanza of "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing," a hymn written by Charles Wesley over two hundred years ago. In this stanza we see a clear reference to the conquering seed of the woman:

Come, Desire of nations, come!
 Fix in us Thy humble home:
 Rise, the woman's conqu'ring seed,
 Bruise in us the serpent's head;
 Adam's likeness now efface,
 Stamp Thine image in its place:
 Final Adam from above,
 Reinstate us in Thy love.

This stanza opens with an appeal for the "Desire of nations" to come, an allusion to Haggai 2:7. Christ is the desire of all nations. The writer does not ask Christ, the Desire of nations, to come to die on the cross for us, but to "Fix in us Thy humble home." The next line does not say, "Rise Emmanuel, rise Jesus Christ, the Son of God." It says, "Rise, the woman's conqu'ring seed." I like this line. The writer then beseeches this "conqu'ring seed" to "bruise in us the serpent's head." Although He bruised the serpent on the cross, He must now bruise the serpent's head within us. Furthermore, Adam's likeness must be effaced because it has been filled with the serpentine nature. Then Wesley says, "Stamp Thine image in its place," which means to transform us into the image of the Lord. The hymn ends with a prayer that the "Final Adam" would reinstate us in His love. We all must praise the Lord that He has fixed His humble home in us and that He is now bruising the head of the serpent within us. He is "the woman's conqu'ring seed."

B. The Overcomers

This conquering seed also makes us overcomers. We are the co-overcomers with Christ because we have the over-coming seed within us. In Romans 16:20 we have the promise that God will soon crush Satan under our feet. Nevertheless, as co-overcomers with Christ, we are attacked and accused by the serpent (2 Cor. 12:7; Rev. 12:10). The serpent will also try to devour us (Rev. 12:4), but we can overcome him. We do not overcome by our merit; we overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony (Rev. 12:11). We must declare the word of our testimony, telling the serpent, "You have been bruised." We should not only preach the gospel to human beings, but must also declare to the serpent the facts regarding the conquering seed of the woman. If you are tempted to lose your temper, do not try to overcome it. Simply speak to Satan, "Satan, don't tempt me. Don't you know that you have been bruised?" Say this the next time Satan entices you to lose your temper. Do not pray, but remind the serpent that he has been bruised. Say to him, "Satan, read your Bible. Read Hebrews 2:14. I want to remind you that you have been destroyed." We overcome him by the word of our testimony, by declaring what Jesus has done. This is our victory. Moreover, the overcomers do not love their soulish life even to the death.

Eventually, we will be co-rulers with Christ, ruling over the nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 2:26-27). Revelation 2:26-27 is a quotation from Psalm 2, a prophecy concerning Christ that predicts His rule over the nations. However, the fulfillment of this prophecy concerns the overcomers. By this we can see that the Bible actually combines Christ and all His overcomers as one body. This gives us further ground to say that the manchild in Revelation 12 is not only Christ Himself, but Christ as the Head and all the overcomers as His Body. In the prophecy of Psalm 2 Christ is prophesied as the One who will rule over the nations with a rod of iron. In the fulfillment in Revelation 2:26-27 the overcomers are revealed as the ones who will rule over the nations with a rod of iron. The prophecy and its fulfillment bring together Christ and His overcomers as one manchild. Therefore, Revelation 12:5 says that this manchild will rule all nations with a rod of iron. Hallelujah! We are co-rulers with Christ. According to Revelation 20:1-6, we will also be co-kings with Christ to rule with Him in the millennial kingdom.

IV. THE RESULT

Now we come to the result. The seed is in Genesis 3:15, and the result, the harvest, is in Revelation 20 through 22. Each of the three items has grown from a seed into a highly developed form. The serpent has grown into a dragon (Rev. 12:9; 20:2), the individual woman has grown into a corporate woman, and the individual seed of the woman has grown into a corporate manchild.

A. The Serpent to Be Cast into the Lake of Fire

Revelation 20:10 declares that the serpent ultimately will be cast into the lake of fire. This is the harvest of Satan. Satan's destiny and destination is the lake of fire.

B. The Woman to Issue in the New Jerusalem

The woman herself will issue in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2, 9-10). This is the harvest of the woman. The destiny and destination of the woman is the New Jerusalem.

C. The Seed of the Woman to Be the Center of the New Jerusalem

What about the seed of the woman? The seed of the woman will be the center of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22-23; 22:1). This is the harvest of the seed of the woman. The destiny and destination of the seed of the woman is to be the center of the New Jerusalem.

I believe that the Lord has shown us clearly the serpent, the woman, and the seed of the woman. The seed of these three items is in Genesis 3:15, and the harvest of them all is in Revelation 20 through 22.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE

GOD'S DEALING WITH MAN'S FIRST FALL

In this message we need to consider some further points on the way God deals with man's first fall.

d. The Discipline of Man by Suffering

As we have seen, after man fell God did not come to condemn him, but to seek him and to judge the serpent. In His condemnation on the serpent God proclaimed the promise regarding the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15). However, that was not the end. Although God had proclaimed the promise of His salvation, man still remained in a troubled situation. Not only was man in a difficult situation, but a sinful element had been injected into his nature. Therefore, man is both sinful outwardly and also corrupted inwardly. God had no intention of condemning man. All that God had in His heart toward man was love, and man was fully under God's loving care. Thus, God ordained some suffering for man's benefit. Although we do not like suffering, God has ordained it nonetheless.

1) The Purpose

What is the purpose of the sufferings ordained by God? The primary purpose is to restrict man. The sufferings appointed by God are actually our security and protection. Never forget that as a result of the fall man has a corrupted and corrupting element in his nature. God loves man and exercises a loving concern over him, but man still has a satanic element in his nature. Immediately after the fall man probably did not realize his true condition; however, God understood the problem and thus He ordained sufferings for the purpose of restricting fallen man. Young people throughout the world want freedom; they desire to have their liberty. Nevertheless, we must realize that too much freedom removes the restrictions that God, in His love, has placed upon us. As fallen men with a corrupted nature, we definitely need restrictions as a protection and safeguard. Suppose a mother has a naughty boy. If she does not exercise any restrictions over him, that child would not live for three days. He would kill himself as a result of having too much freedom. No mother is so foolish as to give complete liberty to a naughty child. All children need restrictions. Restrictions are good for us.

As an older person I need to be and I love to be restricted by my dear brothers in the Lord. I am restricted even more by the sisters. Actually I have very little freedom. If you were to offer me freedom, I would say, "No thank you. You take your freedom home with you. I need restriction." How I thank the Lord that in all the past years I have been protected by restrictions. I have not suffered under the restriction of the saints, but have rather enjoyed it. All the limitations rendered to me by my brothers and sisters in the Lord have been my protection. Although, at present, you may not think that restrictions are pleasant, after the passing of years I believe that you will worship the Lord and say, "Thank the Lord for restrictions!"

Let me say a word about husbands and wives. No woman likes to be restricted. The dear sisters may be holy and seek after spirituality, but I do not believe that they are fond of being restricted. A wife does not like to accept any restraint from her husband or mother-in-law. I have learned from history and from experience that not many daughters-in-law like their mothers-in-law. It seems that this comes from God's ordination. God ordained that the mother-in-law be a restriction to the daughter-in-law and that the daughter-in-law be a problem to the mother-in-law. Humanly speaking, this does not sound pleasant, but actually it is good. Any sister who is willing to accept restrictions from her husband, children, and mother-in-law will be protected.

Now I turn to the husbands. We brothers certainly need the restrictions that come from our wives. I thank the Lord for my dear wife. I can testify that the best help which she has given me has been her restrictions. She even restricts my eating. Although my stomach belongs to me, she determines how much I eat. Day after day I tell her, "I'm still hungry," but she answers, "It is sufficient. There is no more." Eventually, however, as a result of accepting her limitations, my stomach trouble was cured. I have learned that if you have stomach trouble or a stomach ulcer the best way to deal with it is to be restricted in your eating. Thus, any restriction is truly a great help. We all need restrictions. Therefore, God ordained suffering to man to restrict him, to rescue him by discipline, and to guard him.

2) Concerning the Woman

a) Suffering in Childbearing

Concerning the woman, God has ordained suffering or pain in childbearing (Gen. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:15). The suffering in childbearing includes both pregnancy and delivery. The entire matter of childbearing, including pregnancy and delivery, is a matter of pain. It was not originally destined this way by God before the fall; however, due to the fall God ordained a portion of suffering for the woman, the leader in the fall. You may ask why God ordained suffering firstly to the woman and secondly to the man. God did this because the woman took the lead in transgressing God's prohibition. Thus, God came to her first. That was fair. If God had gone to Adam, Adam would have said, "Lord, don't come to me. I was not the leader in the fall. You must go to the leader." Thus, God came to Eve first.

Why do some women limit their childbearing? Because they want to enjoy a free life. That is against God's way. We all know that childbearing is troublesome, but it was ordained by God as a restriction. The best protection to an unrestricted young woman is to have a number of children. Although neither the woman's parents, husband, nor in-laws can restrict her, as long as she has some children these children will limit her undue freedom. Children are a restriction and a protection to their mothers. Thus, Paul wanted the young women to marry and bear children that they might not be idle or busybodies (1 Tim. 5:13-14).

b) The Ruling of the Husband

The Lord also told Eve that her husband shall rule over her. According to this word, every sister should be under the rule of her husband. Why did Eve fall? Because she did not care for her husband and assumed his headship. Therefore, God seemed to say to her, "Eve, from now on I appoint Adam to rule over you." Although this is a difficult word to accept, the Bible tells us that a woman must be ruled by her husband. We all must take this word as a security and protection. The ruling of the husband is a genuine safeguard to the wife. Hence, in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 Paul says, "Let a woman learn in quietness in all subjection; but I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man." Paul's teaching on this matter is based upon God's ordination in Genesis 3:16. I hope that the sisters will take heed to this divine word of the Bible.

3) Concerning the Man

a) The Ground Growing Thorns and Thistles

Concerning the man, the ground grows thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:17-18). Many of you are not farmers and may think that you can escape from the ground. However, regardless of the kind of job or profession you may have, your job or profession is the ground. In the whole earth there is not one job or profession that is without hardship. In every occupation the ground grows thorns and thistles. Some may say then, "I will never be hired by others. I will go into business for myself." If you say this, after a few years you will not want to be in business any longer. You will feel like giving up your business because, instead of producing dollars, it grows thorns and thistles. In every kind of employment—in the schools, factories, markets, and offices—it seems easy for the ground to grow thorns and thistles. Several years ago I met a brother who is a fruit farmer. I thought that it would be wonderful to be a farmer, but the brother told me many stories about the difficulties with his farm. Such difficulties are ordained by God. Young people, you must realize that this is God's ordination. God told Adam that the ground would grow thorns and thistles and that he had to suffer pain and toil.

b) Sorrow, Sweat, and Labor during His Whole Life

God has said that man must endure sorrow (pain), sweat, and labor during his entire life (Gen. 3:19). Thus, man must labor, sweat, and suffer. Yet, labor and suffering are a protection to fallen man. If a man is not occupied with certain labor, it is easy for him to fall into sin. All men need to be occupied with some form of labor that they may be kept from doing sinful things. For many men labor itself is not a sufficient safeguard; they need some sufferings. Hence, labor along with sufferings often prevents people from doing evil.

(c) Returning to the Ground

After the fall God also ordained that man should not live forever, but that he should die, returning to the ground. However, this does not mean that man must perish, because God, in His dealing with man, has afforded man the way of salvation. In God's dealing with both the man and the woman there are sufferings, but no necessary perdition. Nevertheless, if man will not take God's way of salvation, he surely will perish after death. Death is also a restriction that God has placed over fallen man.

Several years ago I gave a message which covered three subjects: suffering, sleeping, and dying. None of these items seems to be good, and I do not care for any of them. I would like to be a person who never suffers, who does not need to sleep, and who lives forever. But we must understand that suffering, sleeping, and dying are restrictions upon sinful people. If Hitler were still living and were to continue living another five hundred years, he would be the greatest devil that the earth has ever seen. While I was in Manila more than twenty years ago people spoke to me about a certain evil person. I told them, "Don't be bothered. Let him be as bad as he can be. I assure you that he cannot continue for another ten years. I do not expect him to change for the good, but I am quite certain that after ten years he will die." Soon afterward I read in the newspaper that this person had died. Suffering restricts people, sleeping stops people, and dying terminates people. If you go to Hong Kong, you will hear the Mah-Jongg playing. None of the Mah-Jongg players like to sleep; they prefer to play Mah-Jongg day and night for seventy-two hours without resting. However, after seventy-two hours there is no need for their wives to stop them; sleep conquers them. Thus, regardless how bad a person may be, he will first be stopped by sleep and then he will be terminated by death. Sleeping is a small dying, and dying is a greater sleeping. On this earth today there is not one evil person who is one hundred and fifty years of age. All the evil ones of the past one hundred and fifty years are dead and buried. God has used death to clear up the earth. In a sense, death is a suffering for man; yet, man does not realize that it is truly God's way of protecting him.

e. The Anticipated Redemption

Along with the sufferings ordained by God Adam experienced the anticipated redemption. Why do we say that it was an anticipated redemption? Because at the time of Genesis 3 the actual redemption had not been accomplished. In Genesis 3:21 we see an anticipation of the redemption that was to be accomplished four thousand years later. Both the man and the woman were in a situation that needed redemption. Although God had not condemned them, although God had sought them out and had ordained suffering as a restriction and protection for them, and although God had proclaimed to them the promise of the coming seed, when Adam and Eve looked at themselves they were still mostly naked. I say that they were mostly naked because they were poorly covered by the aprons (skirts) which they had made for themselves out of fig leaves (Gen. 3:7). The fig-leaf skirts represented man's own work in covering his sinfulness.

Adam and Eve were sinful, and their eyes were opened to know good and evil. One servant of the Lord has said that there is no need to do evil, for simply knowing evil is itself evil. Once Adam and Eve were innocent, not evil. However, when they realized that they were naked, they became evil because knowing evil is evil. No one can avoid evil if he knows evil. As long as you know evil you will become involved with evil. The best way to stay away from evil is not to know it. Adam and Eve were sinful and knew that they were sinful. Thus they tried to help themselves by making skirts of fig leaves to cover their nakedness. That was the work of their own hands with the leaves of a fig tree. After the fall, any use that man makes of the vegetable life signifies his doing without blood for redemption. Before the fall man did not need blood to redeem him, but after the fall he did. Thus, the attempt to cover his nakedness with the vegetable life can never work. Sinful man needs the blood of an animal; he needs the bleeding sacrifice for redemption (Heb. 9:22). Therefore, the skirts that Adam and Eve made from fig leaves did not cover their nakedness in the eyes of God.

However, we should not forget Genesis 3:20. After Adam heard the glad tidings, he immediately called his wife's name, "Eve," which means "Living." Adam and Eve were trembling in fear of the condemnation of death, but suddenly Adam heard the glad tidings, responded in a believing way, and said to Eve, "Eve, you are living. You are not going to die; you are going to be living." Verse 20 means that Adam believed in the glad tidings. The first time that the Bible indicates the matter of believing is in Genesis 3:20, and the first believer in the good news was Adam. When Adam heard the glad tidings, he believed that he and Eve were going to live and not die.

Following verse 20 in which we see Adam's believing, we come to verse 21 where we see God's justification. After Adam believed in God's glad tidings, God made coats of skins for him and his wife and clothed them. The coats fully covered them. Think a little about the skirts made of fig leaves. After a few days the leaves would have been dried and broken. Eventually, they would have dropped away, and the man and the woman would have been completely naked. Thus, you should never try to cover yourself by your own work. You are sinful in the eyes of God and naked in His sight. Anything that you do to cover yourself is just a skirt made from the withered fig leaves of the vegetable life. You need the skins from the animal life to cover you. The coats of skins which God made for

Adam and Eve covered them day after day.

Please remember that nearly every item mentioned in the first three chapters of Genesis is a seed. Here in Genesis 3:20-21 we have the seed of believing in the gospel and the seed of justification by God. The seed of believing in God's gospel is found in Genesis 3:20 where Adam declared that Eve's name was "Living." When God proclaimed the gospel and Adam responded by saying, "Living," that was the seed of believing in the gospel. Following this, God came to justify. Adam and Eve were naked and they made themselves skirts as a covering. These skirts did not cover their bodies adequately. After God had come in to preach the gospel and Adam had responded by believing, God placed coats over the man and the woman. This means that God justified them. To be justified means to be covered with the righteousness of God, which is Christ Himself, not with anything man-made. Adam and Eve's being under the coats signified that they were in Christ. Galatians 3:27 says, "As many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." The coat is the clearest type of Christ as God's righteousness, the righteousness that covers us. Thus, figuratively speaking, Adam and Eve were in Christ. Hence, both man's believing and God's justifying the believers were sown as seeds in Genesis 3:20-21. These seeds are developed in the Epistles of the New Testament.

Although the Bible does not say explicitly that the skins were taken from a lamb, I, along with others, believe that they were lamb skins, because the skins were made into coats. Some versions say "robes" and others "garments." At any rate, the skins were made into clothing. To be sure, the skins did not come from cows; they must have been the skins of tender lambs, skins so suitable for clothing.

After the coats of skins had been placed on them, Adam and Eve had the appearance of a lamb. Was Adam a man or a lamb? All that was visible was the wool, for Adam was completely covered by the lamb. Although he was a man, he had become a lamb in the eyes of God. People always become the very thing which covers them. Since we all are covered by Christ, we will express Christ and resemble Christ. When Adam and Eve were covered by their self-made skirts of fig leaves, they must have looked like ugly, naked, sinful persons. However, after putting on the coats made with the lamb skins, they must have looked like lambs. God has put us in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30), and we have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27). Thus, we can express Christ. Paul could even say, "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). Paul became the expression of Christ through being one with Him. This thought of expressing Christ was sown in the type of the coats of skins which covered Adam and Eve and which became their expression.

*1) The Bleeding Sacrifice—
Substitution*

Before the skins were taken from the animals, the lambs were undoubtedly sacrificed. They were killed and their blood was shed. I believe that God probably killed the lambs in the presence of Adam and Eve and that they witnessed the sacrifice. It must have given them a deep impression. Perhaps Adam said to Eve, "Eve, don't you know that that should be our destiny? We should be killed. Our blood should be shed because we fell, committed sin, and transgressed God's prohibition. According to God's prohibition, we should be killed. But God didn't kill us, Eve. God is killing these lambs in our place. How thankful and grateful we should be to these lambs. They are our substitute."

One day the Lord Jesus came, and John the Baptist said of Him, "Behold, the Lamb of God" (John 1:29). John 1:29 is a development of Genesis 3:21. In type, when the lambs were slain, Christ had already been slain in the eyes of God, for He was slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). Hebrews 9:22 says, "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Thus, this matter of shedding of blood was also sown as a seed in Genesis 3:21 and is developed in John 1:29 and Hebrews 9:22. If you read the Epistles in the New Testament, you will notice how many times the blood is mentioned. We have been redeemed by the precious blood of God's Lamb ordained by God for us before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:18-20). Christ was ordained before Adam's fall. We can see a picture of the shedding of Christ's blood there in the garden. Without the shedding of blood, how can a righteous God justify sinful man? Without the shedding of blood, it would not have been legal, lawful, righteous, or fair for God to put a covering upon fallen man. However, before God covered sinful man with the coats of skins, God judged and killed him in the sacrifice. God will never kill us, because He has already killed us in Christ. On the cross Christ was killed by the righteous God. Thus, whenever we respond to the gospel and say, "Living," God immediately comes and covers us with Christ as our righteousness. This means that God's justification is based upon redemption. The putting on of the coats of skins was based upon the shedding of the blood of the sacrifice, for the sacrificial lamb was actually a substitute for sinful man.

2) The Covering Skins—Union

Although many Christians talk about substitution, about Christ's having died in our place, not many realize the matter of union. However, genuine substitution is based upon union. Adam and Eve were sinful, and the lambs were killed and their blood shed for their sins. How could the killing of the lambs have been their killing? If the lambs and Adam and Eve had been separate from one another, the lambs could not have substituted for them. Once Adam believed in the glad tidings God covered him with a coat of the lamb skins, and he became one with the lamb. The sinner had become one with the substitute. This is union. Union brings about the effectiveness of substitution, for without union substitution stands alone. Substitution has nothing to do with us until we enter into that union. Once we participate in that union, whatever the substitute has accomplished is ours. Christ has done everything for us on the cross, but without union all that He has accomplished on the cross is unrelated to us. But if we say, "Amen, Lord," Christ will be put upon us, and we will be put into Christ. Since we are one with Christ, whatever Christ has accomplished on the cross becomes ours; it is our portion. Union brings in the effectiveness of substitution, and substitution is based upon union.

When we preach the gospel, some people always ask us, "As long as Christ has died for us on the cross, why do we need to believe? You have just told us that He has accomplished full redemption for us. Why then do we have to believe?" You need union. If you do not believe in Christ, you do not have this union. If you do not have union with Him, whatever He has done on the cross cannot be appropriated by you or applied to you. We need to believe in Christ. Whenever the Bible speaks about believing for salvation it uses the preposition "in." We must believe in Him. This little word "in" denotes union. To believe in Jesus Christ is to be one with Him, to have union with Him. If I am a poor man and you are a billionaire, you might be afraid to be united with me, but I would be glad to be joined with you, because once I am united with you everything you have is mine. This is why so many women want to marry rich men. According to California law, because of the union between husband and wife, whatever the husband has in his name also belongs to his wife. We have the best marriage. We, the poor beggars, have been married to Christ, the greatest billionaire. Whatever

He has, whatever He is, whatever He has done and is going to do, whatever He has attained and obtained—everything is ours. We are now in Christ. This matter of union was also sown as a seed in Genesis, has been fully developed in the Epistles of the New Testament, and will ripen into a harvest in Revelation 21.

f. The Closing of the Way to the Tree of Life

1) The Reason

Although we have seen the ordination of sufferings to restrict, rescue, and guard us and although we have seen the anticipated redemption, there is still a practical problem: What about the tree of life? Can the way to the tree of life be left open to fallen and sinful people?

Although Adam and Eve had the anticipated redemption, they did not then have the actual redemption. They were still sinful in nature. If they, being corrupted in nature, had eaten of the tree of life while in that condition, they would have lived forever with their sinful nature. God did not allow that. The tree of life signifying God must not be touched by sinful man. Thus, before the actual redemption was accomplished, God had to close the way to the tree of life. Once the actual redemption had been completed, access to the tree of life would again be possible. Thus, Genesis tells us that after God had prepared the anticipated redemption for man, He closed the way to the tree of life.

2) The Means

It is very meaningful to consider the manner in which God barred the way to the tree of life. In figure, God closed the way by means of cherubim and a flaming sword. Here we see three items: the cherubim, the flame, and the sword. As we have said previously regarding other items in these chapters of Genesis, we must allegorize all of the figures in Genesis 3. It is absolutely correct to allegorize the Old Testament, for both the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul did this.

a) The Cherubim—the Glory of God

If we read Ezekiel 9 and 10 and Hebrews 9, we will see that the cherubim are symbols of God's glory. Ezekiel 9:3 reveals that glory of God was with the cherub, and Hebrews 9:5 even speaks of "the cherubim of glory," because they were used by God to signify, express, and indicate His glory. Therefore, the way to the tree of life was closed by the cherubim, meaning that it was closed by God's glory. God's glory did not allow sinful man to touch Him before the actual redemption had been accomplished. In Romans 3:23 Paul says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. So it was God's glory which closed the way to the tree of life. God's glory would not allow any sinful person who was short of His glory to contact Him.

b) The Flame—the Holiness of God

The flame means fire, and fire in typology signifies the holiness of God. God is a consuming fire (Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Heb. 12:29). Anything common, unclean, or sinful is consumed by Him. This consuming fire signifies God's holiness, and without holiness no man shall see Him (Heb. 12:14). Thus, the second item which closed the way to the tree of life was God's holiness.

c) The Sword—the Righteousness of God

The sword signifies killing. In Genesis 3 the killing of the sword indicates God's righteousness (cf. Lam. 3:42-43; Rom. 2:5). If God would kill someone without sin being involved, He could be condemned for acting unjustly. However, since sin was involved, there is, according to the righteous God, the need for killing. Hence, the sword for killing signifies the requirements of God's righteousness. Therefore, God's glory, holiness, and righteousness closed the way to the tree of life, indicating that man, as long as he was sinful, was not permitted to contact God as the tree of life.

3) The Examples

a) God on Mount Sinai

Now we need to consider two illustrations of God's closing the way to the tree of life. On Mount Sinai God came to visit His people (Exo. 19:10—20:21). However, He seemed to say to Moses, "Moses, tell the people that I must have a boundary around the mountain and that none of them should cross over the boundary. I am holy, righteous, and full of glory. None of you sinful persons are qualified to step over that boundary. If you do, you will die." Mount Sinai was covered with a cloud in which was the glory of God (Exo. 24:16-17). That glory was very demanding. It separated all sinful people from the presence of God and it closed the way to the tree of life. Also, on the mount was the consuming fire (Exo. 19:18). The Israelites were so terrified that they said to Moses, "Oh, don't ask us to go to God. You approach Him for us. Look what is on the mountain—the devouring fire. We dare not go one step further." That was the requirement of God's holiness. Furthermore, during His meeting with Moses on Mount Sinai God gave the law, the ten righteous commandments (Exo. 20:1-17). Those commandments also were very demanding. Thus, on Mount Sinai we see a picture of three items: the glory of God, the holiness of God, and the righteousness of God. These divine attributes placed demands and requirements upon sinful man. Hence, man was kept away from God as the tree of life by God's glory, holiness, and righteousness.

b) God in the Holiest Place of the Tabernacle

A second illustration is the tabernacle in the center of which was the Holiest of all (Lev. 16:1-2). God was in the holiest place, and His shekinah glory continually filled it. However, no man could enter the holiest place at any time, because the cherubim which were over the ark (Exo. 25:18-20) were watching whether or not sinful man could fulfill the righteous requirements of God. This meant that the glory of God was there observing. Also, cherubim were embroidered on the separating veil (Exo. 26:31-34). Furthermore, when the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, went into the holy place with strange fire, they were burned to death (Lev. 10:1-3). Fire, indicating God's holiness, came out of the holiest place to devour them. Moreover, in the ark in the Holiest of all was the law of God (Exo. 40:20-21; Heb. 9:3-4). The law signified God's righteousness. Therefore, once again we see that the glory, the holiness, and the righteousness of God made demands upon sinful man and prevented him from contacting God.

4) The Time Limit

*a) Until the Accomplishment of Redemption
on the Cross by the Lord Jesus*

The way to the tree of life was closed during the period of time preceding the accomplishment of redemption by the Lord Jesus. By His all-inclusive death on the cross Christ fulfilled all the requirements of God's glory, holiness, and righteousness.

(1) The Requirement of God's Glory

His redeeming death satisfied the requirements of God's glory. When He died the veil, in which were embroidered the cherubim of glory, was rent from top to bottom (Matt. 27:50-51). The fact that it was rent from top to bottom proves that it was a work accomplished by God and that the barrier between God and man had been removed. Man was short of God's glory, but now through the redemption that is in Christ man can be justified by God (Rom. 3:23-24).

(2) The Requirement of God's Holiness

In the death of Christ on the cross God's holiness was satisfied. We are sanctified, made holy, through the offering of Christ once for all (Heb. 10:10). By His one offering Christ has perfected us in sanctification, in holiness (Heb. 10:14). He has sanctified us with His blood (Heb. 13:12). Through the death of Christ God's holiness is ours, and the requirement of His holiness is a problem to us no longer.

(3) The Requirement of God's Righteousness

The death of Christ has also honored God's righteousness. God made Christ sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). As the just One, He suffered for sins on behalf of the unjust (1 Pet. 3:18). Through the death of Christ the righteousness of God has become ours and it cannot keep us from the righteous God who is the tree of life. Thus, the way to the tree of life has been completely opened to us once again through the accomplishment of Christ's redemption.

b) A New and Living Way Opened

Since Christ has fulfilled the requirements of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory, His blood has opened for us a new and living way (Heb. 10:19-20, 22). The word "new" in Hebrews 10:20 means "fresh," "recently made." We have such a fresh way, a way just recently made. By this new, fresh, and living way we have boldness to enter into the secret place where the tree of life is.

Do not be afraid of your sinful nature. It has been crucified on the cross. The sinful nature, the old man, the soul, the self, the ugly "I"—all have been crucified on the cross. Therefore, God has the confidence to permit us to have eternal life. He is not afraid that we will live forever with our fallen nature because it has been terminated by the all-inclusive death of Christ.

*c) Man Permitted to Approach God
and Enjoy Him as Life*

Now we can draw nigh to God (James 4:8; Heb. 4:16; 10:19, 22). Through Christ's redemption God has come into our spirit. We need to turn to our spirit and through the blood of Jesus enter into the Holiest of all where we can touch the tree of life. This is wonderful. Today we are no longer under the anticipated redemption; we are enjoying the accomplished redemption. This redemption has opened a new and living way for us to enter into the Holiest of all. This way was not present in the garden, but it is now in our spirit. Therefore, we now have boldness to contact the living God who is the very tree of life. Because our robes have been washed we have the right to come to the tree of life and to enjoy its riches (Rev. 22:14).

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO

THE SECOND FALL OF MAN

(1)

After seeing man's first fall and God's proclamation of the glad tidings as recorded in Genesis 3, we now come to Genesis 4. Apparently we are studying the fall; actually we are considering the glad tidings. If there had been no fall, there would have been no glad tidings. Praise the Lord for the fall! Man's fall has brought in God's gospel. In this message we come to a further step of man's fall and also to a further step in the proclamation of God's glad tidings.

B. The Second Fall

1. The Background

At the time of Genesis 4 man had already fallen (Gen. 3:6-8, 22-24). Nevertheless, man had received God's promise of salvation (3:15) and had obtained God's way of salvation (3:21). When God promised Adam that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent, Adam believed and responded by calling his wife "Living." Adam and Eve had been awaiting the sentence of death. Thus, when they heard the glad tidings, Adam did not call his wife "Dying," but "Living." As we pointed out in message nineteen, the whole human race is dying; no one is living. Nevertheless, after hearing and receiving the gospel of God, man becomes living. Hallelujah, we are living!

Although Adam's response in Genesis 3:20 proves that he believed the gospel, we find no indication in that chapter that Eve also believed. However, Genesis 4:1 tells us that Eve believed the glad tidings. "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bear Cain, and said, I have acquired a man, Jehovah" (Heb.). Eve brought forth a son and called him Cain, which means "acquired." Although Cain, the person, was evil, his name was very meaningful. When Eve brought him forth, she declared, "I have acquired." She had not acquired a house or some land; she had acquired a man. According to her concept, Cain was the seed of woman promised in Genesis 3:15. God had promised Eve that her seed would bruise the head of the serpent, the evil one. Eve's words in Genesis 4:1 prove that she had believed that promise and that she was expecting to have that seed. When her first boy was born, she declared, "I

have acquired a man, Jehovah." If you think that this translation is too bold, I ask you to consult the Hebrew text. In the Hebrew text of Genesis 4:1 there is no preposition between the words "man" and "Jehovah." Although some translators may add prepositions such as "from" or "with," there is no such preposition in this part of the Word according to the Hebrew text. The Hebrew text simply reads, "I have acquired a man, Jehovah." The Concordant Version of Genesis renders it this way in the text, and the New American Standard Version places this translation in the margin. Thus, according to Eve's understanding, the child she bore in 4:1 was the fulfillment of the promise regarding the seed of the woman in 3:15. Therefore, she called her child Jehovah, the Lord.

Such a statement, however, was premature. Eve actually did not bear the man, Jehovah. Four thousand years later the virgin Mary gave birth to a child, and His name was called the mighty God (Isa. 9:6). The child born in the manger at Bethlehem was Jehovah. His name was called Jesus, which means, "Jehovah, the Savior" (Matt. 1:21). Although Eve herself did not give birth to the man, Jehovah, she symbolized the virgin Mary who gave birth to Him. Eventually, the real seed of the woman came through the virgin Mary. Therefore, Jesus, Jehovah, the Savior, is truly the man, Jehovah to whom Eve supposed that she had given birth as mentioned in Genesis 4:1. By giving her child the name Cain, Eve proved that she believed the gospel proclaimed by God in Genesis 3:15. Although four thousand years had to pass, the man, Jehovah eventually came through the virgin Mary.

Both Adam and Eve believed the gospel. Adam believed and called his wife's name "Living"; Eve believed and called her son "acquired," thinking that she had acquired what God had promised. Adam and Eve certainly must have preached the gospel to their children, telling Cain and Abel how they had been created by God, how they had been charged by God not to eat of the tree of knowledge, how they had disobeyed God and had eaten of that tree, how they were in fear and trembling as they awaited the sentence of death, and how God came in to preach the gospel by promising them that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. Furthermore, Adam and Eve must also have told them how they had stood naked in the presence of God and how God had slain some lambs as sacrifices, using the skins to make robes to cover their nakedness that they could stand before God and have fellowship with Him. I am convinced that Adam and Eve preached this gospel to their children. Evidence of this is found in Hebrews 11:4 which says, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." According to the Bible, faith comes from hearing the word that is preached (Rom. 10:17, 14). Since Abel had such faith, exercised this faith, and offered a sacrifice to God in accordance with this faith, he must have heard the preaching of the glad tidings from his parents. Out of that word he received faith. He did not present his sacrifice according to his own opinion or learning, and his offering was not his own invention. He presented his offering by faith according to the words preached by his parents.

The father, Adam, the mother, Eve, and the second child, Abel, believed the gospel. We, the saved ones, are not the firstborn. The firstborn perished (Exo. 12:29), and the second born were saved by believing. We who believe are the second child. Praise the Lord that we are the second boys, the second children. Adam was a good father, taking the lead in believing the gospel. I hope that all the fathers reading this message will be leaders in believing the gospel. Eve, a good wife and mother, was also a believer, following her believing husband and opening the way for her child to believe. Therefore, in Genesis 4 we have a believing father, a believing mother, and a believing child. Look at this family—they all believed in the same gospel. When people have asked me if Adam and Eve were saved, I have said, "Why not? If you are saved, then certainly they were saved as well. In fact, they were saved much earlier than you were." Adam and Eve were pioneers in believing the gospel. Adam cut the way, Eve paved the way, and Abel walked on the way. Now we are followers of Abel. I wish that every father would be an Adam, every mother an Eve, and all the children Abels. The first family on the earth was a gospel family, a family of believers.

Abel himself was an extraordinary believer. Although you have read the Bible for years, perhaps you have never noticed Abel's occupation. He was a "feeder of sheep" (Gen. 4:2, Heb.). During Abel's time sheep were of no use for man's eating, since, before the flood, man was only permitted to eat vegetables (Gen. 1:29). Only after the flood did God ordain that man eat meat as well as herbs (Gen. 9:3). Therefore, as Abel was feeding the sheep he was not working for food to live on. It seems that Cain was more clever; he was more practical than Abel and "was a server of the ground" (Gen. 4:2, Heb.). Cain might have said to his brother, "Abel, what you are doing is impractical. What is the use of raising sheep? Look at what I'm doing. I am serving the land because the land will produce food for my living. How can you earn a living simply by feeding sheep? All you can get is the skin to cover you, but you have nothing to live on." If we enter into the thought of Genesis 4:2, we shall see that Abel was not working for his living, but for God's satisfaction. Abel did not care about his own satisfaction; he cared for God's. Cain, on the contrary, did not care for God's satisfaction; he only cared for earning a living for himself.

Genesis 4:2 tells us of two flesh brothers: the first served the ground, and the second fed the sheep. The earth produced food for man, while the sheep were used primarily as offerings for God. Thus, we see that Cain served the earth and Abel served God. I have a question to address to all who are reading this message: Are you feeding the sheep or are you serving the earth, the world? If we are living for the Lord, everything we do is feeding the sheep. However, if we do not serve the Lord, everything we do is serving the earth. There are only two categories of people—the servers of the world and the feeders of sheep for God. What are you? All the worldly people serve the earth diligently and earnestly, not caring at all for God. All fallen human beings are servers of the ground and are slaves to the earth. Are you such a server, such a slave? The people who serve the earth think that we, the feeders of sheep for God, are crazy. When they learn that we meet continually, when they see us reading the Bible and fellowshipping with one another, when they hear us singing and praising the Lord all the time they wonder what kind of people we are. We are sheep feeders. Day and night we are feeding the sheep. Do not say that you teach school or work at your business. You are feeding sheep for God. We are Abels, people who are more concerned with feeding the sheep for God than with merely earning a living. Do not say that the leading brothers in the church are the only ones who feed the sheep and that the other brothers and sisters must care for their employment, profession, and business. Apparently, you are working at your job or studying in school; actually you are feeding the sheep for God. Your employment or education is secondary; feeding the sheep is primary. The main aspect of our living is caring for God's satisfaction. We are not servers of the earth; we are feeders of the sheep for God.

Abel fed the sheep with the sole purpose of providing offerings for God. Thus, Abel served God absolutely. Everything you do should be for the purpose of serving God. You should not do anything for any other reason. We are serving God, feeding the sheep that we may have offerings to present to Him. Everything must be for this purpose. Since Abel was such a person, he was an extraordinary believer. He not only believed in the gospel, but practiced the gospel and lived for it.

When Eve gave birth to Cain she was excited and declared, "I have acquired a man, Jehovah." Probably after not too long a time she

was disappointed and said, "That was not Jehovah. That was just a naughty boy." Furthermore, Cain did not hearken to her word. Therefore, when Eve gave birth to a second boy, she named him Abel, which means "vanity," like the vanishing of a breath. At the birth of the first child she was enthusiastic and shouted, "I have acquired"; at the birth of the second she was disappointed and said, "vanity." When Abel was born Eve merely said, "It is vanity." The thought here is very significant. We are vanity; yet we are feeders of the sheep. We are nothing and nobodies, but we are feeders of the sheep for God. I find it difficult to answer people when they ask me about my profession. A number of times I have replied, "It is hard for me to say. In a sense I am nobody. In another sense I am wonderful." On the one hand I am nobody, vanity; on the other hand I am a wonderful person doing the wonderful job of feeding the sheep for God. Nothing is more wonderful than the work of feeding the sheep for God. This is Abel. By birth we are people of vanity. If we do not feed the sheep for God, all that we are and do is "vanity of vanities" (Eccl. 1:2). Praise the Lord that in the midst of vanities we are feeding sheep for God's satisfaction. Hence, we are no longer vanity; we are doing a wonderful work for satisfying God.

2. *The Cause*

In Genesis 4 we see two kinds of examples. Abel was an excellent example of believing the gospel, practicing the gospel, and living for the gospel. Cain, the firstborn of the second human generation, was an example of continuing the fall and of turning from God's way of salvation. With Adam and Eve there were two main matters: the fall which they caused and the gospel which they received and preached. Adam and Eve were saved, and they passed on the word of salvation to the following generation. We also must share these things with our own children, telling them the sad story of man's fall and proclaiming to them the good news of God's salvation. Cain did not follow the way of God's salvation, but continued the fall. His life was a continuance and a furtherance of man's fall. Therefore, we may say that with Cain mankind experienced a second fall. His parents caused the first fall; he continued it and brought about the second.

Here I would speak a word of warning: Never continue the fall. We must separate ourselves from the fall and say to it, "Fall, I refuse to cooperate with you. Stay away from me. I will not allow you to continue. I will run to God's salvation." Cain perpetuated man's fall, but Abel pursued God's way of salvation. The same choice confronts us today. Do you want to remain in the fall and continue it or will you go to God for salvation? We should not be so unwise as to continue the fall. We must accept God's provision for our salvation. Nevertheless, Cain was foolish, remaining in the fall and actually abetting its development.

a. *The Devil's Gain*

We need to understand the cause of man's second fall. One reason for Cain's continuing the fall was that the Devil had gained him inwardly. Apparently it was Cain that rejected God's glad tidings; actually it was Satan that kept him from God's way of salvation. Satan knew that if Cain had received the glad tidings he would have had no way to gain him. Hence, he subtly caused Cain to take his own way of worshipping God. By this means he kept Cain in his hand and even caused him to fall further. Thus, the second fall of man was instigated by the subtle one who had gained Cain and worked within him.

b. *Man's Presumption in Forsaking God's Way of Salvation*

At the time of Genesis 4 the Devil had already injected himself into man, and God had shown man His way of salvation. However, Cain was presumptuous in that he forsook God's way of salvation. This means that he followed the Devil and put aside God's will. This was a further cause of the second fall. Cain did not care for God's Word, for God's gospel, and he did not hearken to the preaching of his parents. Once again I say that I strongly believe that his parents preached the gospel to him and his brother, telling them of their need for coverings made from the skins of the sacrificial lambs. I believe that this accounts for Abel's desire to be a feeder of the sheep. However, Cain had no regard for this, presumptuously forsaking God's way and inventing his own.

3. *The Process*

a. *Man's Presumption in Offering "the Fruit of the Ground" to God*

Cain was presumptuous and served God according to his own concept. "Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord" (Gen. 4:3). Cain served God according to his opinion. He invented a religion of man's concept. There is not a word in Genesis 3 about offering the fruit of the ground to God. God cares for a sacrifice in which the blood is shed to meet the requirement of God's righteousness and He cares for the skins of the sacrificial lambs that can cover fallen, naked persons. When Adam and Eve discovered that they were naked, they covered themselves with skirts made of fig leaves, but God had no regard for that kind of covering. God slew some lambs for sin offerings and from the skins of those lambs He made robes to cover the man and the woman. We have seen that Adam and Eve must have told Cain and Abel about this and that Abel received their word and acted on it. However, Cain considered himself more clever and disregarded God's concern, refusing to take His way. He did not obey God's gospel, but invented his own way, a religion according to his own concept. Who told him to offer of the fruit of the ground? He told himself, being motivated by the subtle one. This practice originated with his own mind.

Throughout the centuries and the generations there have been countless followers of Cain, people in every place and time who have invented their own religion. They did not teach people to sin, but to serve God and worship Him. In their presumption these people think that they are serving God. They say, "What is wrong with serving God in this way? We are not gambling, stealing, or killing. We are serving God." Nevertheless, I would say to them, "You serve God according to your concept. Ultimately, you do not serve God, you serve yourself. You serve your own concept and you do not care for God's satisfaction. God is not your God; your concept, your mentality, is your God."

If you read Genesis 4 hastily, you may have the same problem that I had when I read this portion of the Word as a young man. I said, "God is not fair. Both brothers presented an offering to God. What was wrong with Cain's offering? He wasn't gambling or stealing. He was religious. If he had not been religious, he wouldn't have presented an offering. He labored on the ground until it produced fruit and then he preserved some of that fruit as an offering to God. Wasn't that good? How could God condemn him for doing that?"

However, the Bible says, "But upon Cain and on his offering He did not look" (Gen. 4:5, Heb.). God seemed to say to Cain, "Cain, you did something religious, but I will not even look at it. This is not a service to Me. You are serving your own concept. I don't care at all for your offering." When I was young I could not understand why God reacted in this way, respecting Abel's offering and rejecting Cain's. I thought that God was unfair.

As the years went by I came to realize that although Cain presented an offering to God, he did not present it according to God's way, but according to his own idea. Out of his own concept and desire he invented a new way of worshipping God. In today's Christianity there are many new inventions for worshipping God. All such inventions are presumptuous.

According to his natural being, Cain was no longer pure. Although Adam was pure when created by God, as a result of the fall Satan, the evil one, injected himself into man. Therefore, whenever man acts by himself he is in union with the Devil. Thus, man should not act on his own, but should reject himself and depend on God. I must continually realize that I am a fallen person and that Satan is within me, in my nature, in my thought, desire, and will. Satan is altogether one with me. I dare not exercise myself in acting on my own. I must say, "Lord, I cast myself aside and I put my trust in You. Lord, You take the lead. You take the initiative. Lord, I want to follow You and take Your way." We are not merely sinful, but our very self has become devilish because Satan is in us. Everything we devise according to our nature is actually an invention of the Devil. Cain, along with numerous people today, did not realize this. He thought that as long as he did something for God, serving Him and worshipping Him, everything was fine. Do not think this way. You must realize where you stand and what you are. As fallen people, we are one with the Devil. He is not only around us and over us, but also within us, in our nature, in our mind, emotion, and will. Whenever you lose your temper Satan is present. Whenever you exercise your emotions by yourself, Satan is active in you. Do not say that it is only you who behave in such a way, for Satan is with you and in you. This is not only true in evil things, but even in good things. When Cain presented the fruit of the ground as an offering to God, Satan was involved in his activity. In Cain Satan presented an offering to God. That was the reason that God refused to look at it. God seemed to say, "Cain, your offering is evil. It is an insult to Me. It is an abomination in My eyes. I refuse to accept it."

b. Man's Anger

When he learned that God did not look upon his offering, "Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell" (Gen. 4:5). It is the same among religious people today. If you fail to appreciate their works, they will be angry with you and say, "Are we not serving God? Why don't you agree with me?" When religious people see others serving God in His way and thus gaining His respect, they will be even more furious. Cain was the leader in this. If you serve God, following the way of Abel, meaning that you follow God's way, the so-called religious people will be angry with you and say, "Don't you think that we also are serving God? Why should God accept you and not us?" We have heard these words quite often. I ask you to be careful. Although you are serving God, in whose way are you serving Him—in yours or in His? Do you serve God according to His revelation or according to your concept and invention? Simply to say that you are serving God is inadequate. You must determine the way in which you are serving Him. Is your service according to God's Word or according to your own ideas?

God, however, was merciful toward Cain and still talked to him. Cain did not pray to God nor ask Him, "God, what is wrong with me?" Although he did not pray, God, who is rich in mercy, came to him and spoke with him. "And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?" (Gen. 4:6). God was asking Cain why he was so angry and why his countenance had fallen. The people who follow God's way all have an uplifted countenance. They lift up their countenance and say, "Praise the Lord! Amen, hallelujah. Jesus is Lord!" According to the King James Version, God said to Cain, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" The Hebrew may also be rendered, "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?" If we are in God's way, our countenance will be lifted up. Although many religious people serve God and worship Him, God does not look at them. They become angry as a result, saying, "Am I not serving God? Am I not doing many things for Him?" Such angry words are indicators of a fallen countenance. When Cain was angry God seemed to say to him, "Cain, you don't need to be angry. You are a sinner. Haven't you heard the glad tidings from your parents? I have My way. Why have you become a person with a fallen countenance? You are like this because you have forsaken My way, because you have not listened to the preaching of your parents, and because you have not believed the gospel. If you take My way and believe the gospel, your face will be lifted up. Cain, it is still not too late. But be careful. If you go on this way, sin is crouching at the door seeking to devour you."

In Genesis 4:7 God gave Cain a warning. "And if thou doest not well, sin is crouching at the door" (Heb.). The latter part of this verse is difficult to translate. The King James Version says, "And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him." Other versions render the pronouns "his" and "him" as "its" and "it," meaning that sin's desire is for you and that you must overcome it. The King James Version is correct, using the pronouns "his" and "him." Who is the "him" mentioned in this verse? The answer is found in John 8:44 and 1 John 3:12. With the help of these verses we can realize that the "him" in Genesis 4:7 is the Devil. Hence, God was telling Cain that sin was crouching at the door and that his desire, meaning Satan's desire, was for him, and that Cain had to overcome him. Sin and Satan are one. Be careful! If you reject God's way of salvation, sin is crouching at the door to get you. Sin's desire, that is, Satan's desire, is for you, and you must overcome him. The best way to overcome Satan is to flee from your own concept and hide in God's salvation. God's salvation is Jesus as the sacrifice. Jesus shed His blood for our sins and has given Himself to us as righteousness to cover our nakedness. This is the way for us to flee from Satan and to escape the sin which is crouching at our door. If any one of you reading this message will not take Jesus as your Savior, I must tell you that sin is crouching at your door like a ravenous beast, waiting for the opportunity to seize and devour you. This sin is Satan, the subtle one, the liar, the one who was a murderer from the beginning.

c. Man's Murder of His Brother

"And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him" (Gen. 4:8). When we compare this verse with John 8:44, we learn that Cain was not the only murderer; Satan was the murderer as well. In that passage the Lord Jesus spoke of the Devil, saying, "He was a murderer from the beginning." Although Abel was slain by Cain, Satan committed murder in Cain's act of murder. Because Cain had rejected God's way and God's warning, he was caught by Satan, the murderer, and became a murderer with Satan. Hence, two murderers committed the same crime. By murdering his brother Cain became completely possessed by the Devil, for the Devil murdered Abel by Cain's hand and with his cooperation. Cain disdained his parents' preaching and he discarded God's warning. Thus, he, motivated by Satan, served God according to his

own invention and eventually was totally possessed by Satan and became a murderer. That was the second fall of man.

The second fall of man began with man's invention of religion. It did not begin with stealing; it began with worshipping God according to the human concept. Worshipping God according to a manmade religion was not a rescue from the first fall, but a continuation of it. The second fall, which began with a self-made religion, was completed by an act of murder. Do you believe that it is possible for religious people to commit murder? If you read history you will discover that the Roman Catholic Church has killed more genuine Christians than the Roman Empire. Thousands of Christians were killed by the Roman Empire, and the Roman Catholic Church continued this persecution, killing even more genuine believers. If you attempt to be a pure and genuine Christian in Portugal or Spain, you will need to be careful, for the religious people there might attempt to take your life. Human religion is always like this: it begins by serving God and it ends by killing people. This exactly corresponds to the word of the Lord Jesus in John 16:2: "An hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think that he is offering service to God."

What was the first fall of man? The first fall of man was man's taking into himself something other than God. Man did not do anything evil; he simply absorbed into himself an element other than God. What was man's second fall? The second fall of man was the invention of religion which resulted in an act of murder. The second fall occurred because of man's presumption. Presumption means that man does not care for God's economy, for God's way, but that he only cares for his own desires and concepts. When man refused to follow God's way, inventing instead his own religion, he eventually became a murderer of God's people. That was the second fall of man.

It is very helpful to be clear about the fall, for, as a result, we can see more of God's salvation. I hope that no one reading this message will become a Cain. We all should be righteous Abels. Let us all be like Abel, believing the gospel, practicing the gospel, and living for the gospel.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE TWENTY-THREE

CAIN AND ABEL

In this message, a parenthesis in our study of Genesis 4, we need to see more about Cain and Abel. During this life-study of Genesis we have pointed out several times that nearly every item found in the first three chapters of Genesis is a seed that is developed in the following books of the Bible, especially in the New Testament. This is also true in the case of Cain and Abel. According to the revelation of the divine Word, these two brothers should be considered as two important seeds sown in Genesis 4. This is proved by the fact that the New Testament speaks of both Cain and Abel (Jude 11; 1 John 3:12; Matt. 23:35; Heb. 11:4; 12:24). The Lord Jesus was alluding to Cain in John 8:44 when He said that the Devil "was a murderer from the beginning." As we saw in the previous message, Cain became one with the Devil and, thus, both Cain and the Devil were the murderer of Abel. In John 8:44 the Lord Jesus also said that the Devil was a liar: "When he speaks a lie, he speaks out of his own self; for he is a liar and the father of it." I believe that this also was an allusion to Cain, referring to the lie that he told God when He asked him about his brother (Gen. 4:9). Cain lied to God in His presence. Thus, Cain was not only a murderer, but also a liar. Therefore, the Lord's word in John 8:44 is evidence that the story of Cain in Genesis 4 is a seed.

We have seen that in the beginning man was placed in front of two trees, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge (Gen. 2:8-9). These two trees represent two sources out of which two lines continue throughout the whole Bible: the line of the tree of life and the line of the tree of knowledge. Undoubtedly, Cain was on the line of the tree of knowledge, and Abel was on the line of the tree of life.

Adam and Eve certainly must have produced more children than the two mentioned here. However, the Bible here only mentions Cain and Abel. Why does the Bible only mention these two here? Because the intention of the Holy Word is to show us the two categories of people which existed from the beginning of the second human generation: Cain, who represents the line of the tree of knowledge, and Abel, who represents the line of the tree of life.

The Bible ends as it begins. It begins with two trees denoting two sources and it concludes with two cities—the great Babylon and the New Jerusalem—denoting two consummations. One of these cities is great and the other is holy. The great Babylon will be the ultimate consummation both of the line of the tree of knowledge and of the seed of Cain. The seed of Cain is sown in Genesis 4, developed throughout the Old and New Testament, and will be consummated in the great Babylon revealed in Revelation 17 and 18. Likewise, the New Jerusalem will not only be the ultimate consummation of the line of the tree of life, but also of the seed of Abel. Everyone who will be a part of the New Jerusalem will be an Abel. Every piece of precious stone in that city will be an Abel for eternity. On the contrary, the majority of those in the great Babylon will be Cains. Hence, the great Babylon is the ultimate consummation of so many Cains, and the New Jerusalem is the totality of all the Abels. What are you—an Abel or a Cain? I hope that no one reading this message is a Cain.

Let us now consider these two brothers more thoroughly, examining them in the light of the subsequent books of the Bible. We begin with Cain.

I. CAIN

A. Working and Living for Himself— "a Server of the Ground"

In the last message we pointed out that Cain was one who served the ground to make a living. He is called here "a server of the ground" (v. 2, Heb.). This means that he was working and living for himself. He not only worked and lived for himself, but also by himself. Please remember that after the fall of man, man's self became the incarnation of Satan. Thus, to live by man's self actually means to live by Satan. Cain lived as such a person.

B. Worshipping God

according to His Own Concept Which Originated with Satan

What was wrong with Cain? Humanly speaking, he was not wrong originally. When I was a young Christian, I acted as Cain's attorney, arguing on his behalf in the heavenly law court. I felt that there was nothing wrong with Cain. He was the first to present an offering to God. Abel was second. He might have learned this from Cain. It seemed to me that it was not wrong for Cain to present an offering to God; it was not like gambling, lying, or murdering. Thus, I argued with God, saying, "God, You were not fair with Cain. Your unfairness provoked him to kill his brother. If You had been fair, Cain probably would have loved his brother very much." I spoke as an unlearned attorney, as a country boy in a law court. However, God was kind toward Cain, not executing his judgment upon him. God was also merciful to me, not putting me to death. Eventually, through the passing of years I came to understand the reason that God refused to accept or to look upon Cain and his offering.

Let me tell you the reason. Cain and Abel were born of fallen parents. Adam and Eve were not merely wrong with God, but had been injected with the evil nature of Satan. Satan's nature had penetrated their nature, mind, and concept. Adam and Eve realized their condition, recognizing that they were wrong in the presence of God. In fact, they were also filled with the evil element of Satan. They realized that God was merciful and gracious to them, promising them salvation and providing them robes made of skins to cover their nakedness, which typified Christ as the genuine righteousness to come. As we pointed out in the last message, Adam and Eve told their children about this, declaring God's way of salvation. Thus, Cain and Abel were not born of pure parents; they were the descendants of polluted, corrupted, contaminated, and ruined parents.

Suppose we have one glass of pure water and another glass of polluted water. If you offer me the pure water, I would appreciate it very much, drinking it to assuage my thirst. However, if you offer me the glass of polluted water, I would be insulted. Although I may be thirsty, I would refuse the offer of a glass of polluted water. If you understand this example, you will not say that God was unfair in rejecting Cain's offering. God simply cannot accept polluted water, that is, a polluted offering. Cain was born of polluted parents and, by birth, was unclean and contaminated. God, on the contrary, is holy, righteous, and pure. Not only were Cain and Abel corrupted and sinful, but within them was the enemy of God. Since Satan, God's enemy, lived and acted in them, and motivated them to do things, everything they did out of themselves would have been an action of God's enemy. If you were God and realized that within Cain was the Devil, your enemy, would you accept his act of worship? Such worship is an insult to God.

Apparently we do not see the Devil in Genesis 4; we see Cain murdering and lying. However, in John 8:44 the Lord Jesus said that that was the Devil murdering and lying. In the eyes of God, it was not merely Cain, but the Devil. Moreover, in 1 John 3:12 we are told that Cain was "of the evil one." The Greek word translated "of" actually means "out of." Hence, Cain was out of the evil one, the Devil. Cain's source was Satan. These two verses show us clearly and thoroughly that Cain and the Devil, the Devil and Cain, were one.

Perhaps you will argue, wondering how the devil can motivate people to worship God. Consider the illustration of Peter in Matthew 16:21-23. After Peter had received the heavenly vision regarding Christ, he was motivated by Satan to tell the Lord Jesus, who had just spoken of His coming suffering and death, to pity Himself. The Lord turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan." Notice that the Lord did not say, "Get behind Me, Peter." Thus, the one who had just received a revelation from the Father became Satan. He did not become Satan with respect to something evil, but in the matter of caring for the Lord.

When we are told to worship God, or when we are close to the Lord, trying to care for Him, Satan, the subtle one, often will not tell us not to do it, but will propose a way different from God's revelation in his attempt to keep us from God's economy. As long as he can keep us from God's way and frustrate us in fulfilling God's purpose, Satan will even motivate us to do things for God. This was how he worked in Cain.

We should be careful. The same thing may happen to us. We must realize that it is not a matter of what we do, but of what we are. The real issue is not whether or not we worship God; it is whether or not we are one with the Devil in whatever we do. Even if you love others by being one with the Devil, that kind of love is an insult to God, because Satan, God's enemy, is active in it. Thus, Cain was the one who presented the offering, but the Devil was the motivator, the one who initiated Cain's act of worship. Suppose you have an enemy who refuses to be reconciled with you, yet he sends someone to worship you. Would you not consider that worship as an insult? Now we can see what was wrong with Cain.

Cain offered the fruit of his own labor to God (Gen. 4:3). He brought the fruit of the ground with no blood for shedding. This means that he had rejected God's way of redemption which he had heard from his parents. God's way of redemption as revealed to Cain's parents was that of a sacrifice in which the blood was shed, for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Heb. 9:22). Man was fallen, ruined, sinful, and polluted in the eyes of God. He needed the shedding of blood for the remission of sins. Although Cain's parents surely spoke to him of God's way of redemption, he rejected it, casting it aside. Cain did not care for God's way; he invented his own way according to his concept.

What is a concept? The human concept is of the tree of knowledge. By taking the way of the tree of knowledge Cain opened his being to the Devil. By doing this he was completely caught by the evil one. Cain was the first to invent religion. You may argue, "Cain invented religion to worship God. He did not invent gambling casinos." However, God does not care for what you invent; He cares for the origin. Anything invented by man is not originated by God and is not by man's spirit, but by his mind. If your invention originates with yourself in your mind, that invention, regardless of how good it is, has its source in Satan, for Satan, the subtle one, is in your mind. When Cain devised his own way of worshipping God, he was absolutely one with Satan. He was filled, saturated, and permeated with the devil. Therefore, the Lord Jesus in John 8:44 alluded to him as Satan. How dare such a person present an offering to God without the shedding of blood!

Now we can understand the reason that God did not accept Cain's offering. Although Cain should have realized that what God wanted was a sacrifice with the shedding of blood, he did not offer it accordingly. He worshipped God according to his own concept, without the shedding of blood, and without the covering skins of the sacrifice. This means that he rejected God's way of taking Christ as God's righteousness to cover him as revealed in Philippians 3:9 and 1 Corinthians 1:30. He, like the religious Jews, sought to establish his own righteousness, ignoring God's righteousness and not submitting to it as revealed in Romans 10:3. Thus, his offering was an insult

to God; it was an abomination in His eyes, and He rejected it.

C. Going His Own Way

Jude 11 speaks of those who "have gone in the way of Cain." What is the way of Cain? It is to do good to please God and to worship God presumptuously by man's own effort and according to man's own invention under the Devil's motivation. The way of Cain is to worship God religiously without Christ. In a human sense the way of Cain is not bad, for religion is the best invention of human culture. In fact, according to the Bible, religion was the first and foremost invention of human culture. However, we must ask the question: Who invented religion? It was not Cain himself, but Satan the motivator within him. Satan usurped the first human generation by tempting them to take the tree of knowledge. Nevertheless, God intervened to rescue them and to recover them by His way of redemption. Although, in a sense, both Adam and Eve were lost, God came in to bring them back to Himself, opening His redeeming way, the blood-shedding way. That was God's way of rescue, of salvation. We have seen that Adam and Eve passed on this way to their children and that Cain, their firstborn, rejected it and took his own, becoming one with the Devil. That rejection, that following of his own way, was the rejecting of God and the following of Satan. This is the evil way of Cain.

God has given us a full revelation of His way. Regardless of how much Adam and Eve preached to their children, they did not have the Bible as we do. We have a Bible of sixty-six books telling us in full of the way of salvation, the way of life, the way of shedding blood, and the way of Christ. We have the way. However, many people have heard of this way, that is, have heard the preaching of the gospel, but have turned aside and have taken their own way, attempting to worship God according to their own concept and trying to do good to please God according to their own desire. A great many people are taking the way of Cain. The way of Cain is not to gamble in the casinos; it is to devise a human religion, a way of worshipping God, that is not according to God's revelation, but according to man's invention. Apparently this is good; actually it is dreadful, for by inventing religion the second human generation was completely captured by Satan. Satan gained the first generation by tempting man to eat of the tree of knowledge and he captured the second by turning man from God's way to the way of human invention.

God's way is in contrast to both good and bad. Many people think that as long as they do not do something bad they are all right. However, whether you are on the bad side or on the good side, you are still outside of God's way. God does not care whether or not you are on the good side or on the bad; He only cares whether or not you are on His way of redemption. You may think that you are high and that your way is higher than God's. Many religious people, people who have invented their own religion, think of themselves as higher than those who follow God's way of salvation. Perhaps they are higher than we are, but we are in God's way. Cain's way is not the way of apparent evil; it is the way of good. Nevertheless, it distracts man from God. Satan is on the side of both good and evil. Remember that the tree of life is of one factor—life. However, the tree of knowledge has two factors—good and evil. Hence, as long as you are not in God's way you are following Satan's way, regardless of whether you are doing good or evil.

I have a word to say to any readers of this message who may not be saved. You need God's redeeming way. Regardless of the good you have done or can do, you must realize that you were born sinful, that the devilish nature is in your flesh, and that the satanic element is in your mind. You need the shedding of Jesus' blood, for without it there is no remission of sins.

Thank God for the shedding of the blood of Jesus! By it we have the remission of our sins. My wife can testify that almost every time we pray together the first word I say is, "Lord, we come to You by Your blood. Lord, cleanse us with Your blood. How we need the covering of Your blood!" While we are in the old creation, we still have a dirty, defiled element within us. Therefore, we need the cleansing of the blood of Jesus. Many times I have said to the Lord in my prayers, "Lord, we must pass through the altar. We need You to be our offerings. Lord, we take You as our sin offering and we offer You the fat." Cain missed the mark. He rejected the way of shedding of blood and took the way of Satan.

When the Apostle Paul was in the Jewish religion, he surpassed many of his equals (Gal. 1:14). However, he did not at that time obtain God's righteousness. In Philippians 3:9 he spoke a deep and excellent word: "And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God based on faith." Paul did not want to be found in himself, having his own righteousness; he wanted to be found in Christ, having the righteousness which is of God. We, like Paul, need to be found in Christ. That He is our righteousness is expressed by the words of a well-known hymn: "God's Christ, who is my righteousness, My beauty is, my glorious dress." Christ, as God's righteousness, is our covering under whom we stand. God has put us into Christ and made Him our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). We stand under His covering. We are one with Him. He, Himself, His very person, not one of His attributes, is our righteousness.

In Romans 10:3 Paul spoke of the unbelieving Jews, saying, "For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, did not submit to the righteousness of God." Those Jews were the true followers of Cain. Cain was their forerunner, setting an example of attempting to establish his own righteousness and of not submitting himself to God's way of taking Christ as his righteousness. I say again that this is the way of Cain. Whenever we, outside of Christ, try to do good to please God, in the eyes of God we are following the footsteps of Cain. Never do that. According to God's revelation, we must recognize that worshipping God in our own way is an insult to Him.

D. Gained by the Devil

Although God was merciful to Cain, he did not repent. God had the legal ground to sentence Cain to death, but He did not do it. Instead, He warned him that sin was crouching at the door, waiting for the opportunity to seize and devour him (Gen. 4:7). In that word of warning God indicated that sin was a person, Satan, that his desire was for Cain, and that Cain had to overcome him. Cain neglected God's warning, only caring for his own way. He did not repent, return, or change. He insisted on his own way unto the end, even unto death. So, he was absolutely gained by Satan and became one with the Devil (John 8:44). Hence, 1 John 3:12 says that he was out "of the evil one."

E. Persecuting God's True Worshippers

When Cain saw how pleased God was with Abel, His true worshipper, he was jealous. Why did Cain slay his brother? For years I tried to find the answer to this question. I believe that Cain murdered Abel because Abel's countenance was uplifted while Cain's was fallen. The King James Version renders Genesis 4:7 as, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" However, the Hebrew here may be rendered. "If you do well, will you not be lifted up?" Cain fought against Abel because Abel's face was smiling and shining. Abel's uplifted countenance provoked Cain to jealousy. The same is true today. If you are happy and are enjoying the Lord, you will provoke the religious jealousy in others. People will say, "Why are you so joyful? Is God only with you? Is not He also with us?" The result is that they will persecute you. This, I believe, was the reason that Cain attacked Abel. He was offended by Abel's shining face, uplifted countenance, and joyful voice. In some places people warned us, "Don't do this anymore. If you continue, we will cast you out." Religious jealousy is terrible. No jealousy is as awful as the jealousy in religion. This accounts for the fact that the Roman Catholic Church has killed more genuine Christians than the Roman Empire.

Listen to what the Lord Jesus said to the Pharisees: "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar" (Matt. 23:35). Where did the religious people kill Zechariah? It was not in a theater; it was between the temple and the altar, in the place where the religious people worshipped God. The religious people murdered those who worshipped God in His way and not in theirs, killing them in the very place where they rendered, in their own way, their worship to God. On the one hand they worshipped; on the other hand they committed murder. This is the jealousy of religion. How terrible it is!

II. ABEL

A. Working and Living for God— "a Feeder of Sheep"

Now we come to Abel, the seed that consummates in the New Jerusalem. Abel worked and lived for God. He also lived by God. Day by day Abel lived for God and by God; he was "a feeder of sheep" for God. As we pointed out in the last message, during Abel's time sheep were primarily for God. He did not work and live for himself as Cain did, but for God's satisfaction as God desired. It seems that the purpose and interest of his life was to satisfy God in God's way.

B. Worshipping God according to God's Revelation

Abel did not present his sacrifice according to his concept, thought, or way, but according to God's way of salvation. He worshipped God according to His revelation (Heb. 11:4). Unlike Cain, Abel presented the firstlings of his flock, which probably were lambs. The Bible says that he "brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof" (Gen. 4:4). When he offered the fat, the sacrifice was killed and the blood was shed, for without killing it would have been impossible to have the fat to present to God. Abel realized that he needed an offering with the shedding of blood. He knew that he had been born of fallen parents and that he was evil, sinful, and polluted in the eyes of God. Thus, he offered some firstlings of his flock, shedding the blood for his redemption and burning the fat for God's satisfaction. Who told him to offer the firstlings of the sheep? He undoubtedly did this according to the instruction of his parents. What Abel did corresponded exactly to the requirements of the Mosaic law which was given later. This proves that his way of worshipping God was according to God's divine revelation, and not according to his concept.

As fallen persons, everything we think is sinful. Even if we think the best thoughts, our thinking is still sinful. Furthermore, whatever we see and say is sinful. St. Augustine said that even our tears of repentance need the cleansing of the blood. We are so sinful that we even need to repent of our repentance. We are the embodiment of sin. Therefore, whatever originates with us, with our thinking, speaking, hearing, and feeling, is sinful. We must put ourselves aside. To put ourselves aside actually means to put the Devil aside, because the Devil is in our self. If we cast ourselves aside, we simultaneously reject Satan in an absolute way. Do not say, "My way is good. My thoughts are excellent." Regardless of the excellence of your thoughts, Satan is in them, and you must reject them and take God's way according to His revelation.

Abel's offering was a type of Christ. According to Numbers 18:17, the firstling of a cow or sheep, a type Christ, could not be eaten by the Israelites; it had to be offered to God. Hence, in typology, Abel offered Christ to God. The offering of the firstling of a cow or sheep had two factors: the blood, which was sprinkled on the altar for redemption, and the fat, which was burned on the altar as an offering, as a sweet savor unto the Lord, for His satisfaction. The Lord Jesus Christ had these two factors. He had the blood which was shed for us and the fat which satisfied God's desire. Abel, following the word of his parents regarding God's way of salvation, presented such an offering to God. Thus, Abel took Christ as his covering and was justified by God (Heb. 11:4; Matt. 23:35). We need the blood of Christ to cleanse us and we need Christ Himself to cover us that we may be accepted by God and that we may satisfy Him.

Let me share with you some of my own experience. When I was an active young man, I thought that I could and should do many things for God. I believed that I was quite intelligent, that I had considerable initiative, and that I was very capable. So, I dreamed of the many things I would do for God and for the church. Not long afterward, the heavenly light began to shine upon me. Although I did not see very much at first, the light continued to shine day and night, even while I slept. Eventually I was enlightened to such an extent that I bowed before the Lord and said, "Lord, I dare not see myself or think about myself. All that I am is a shame. Every part of my being is ugly." I truly saw myself in such a way. That was the time I began to realize the preciousness of the Lord's blood. I prayed, "Lord, I have nothing to say. Cleanse me. Cleanse me with Your blood. Cleanse my eyes, cleanse my thoughts, cleanse every part of my being. Lord, cleanse everything." One day I made a confession to the Lord that lasted for half a day. Although I confessed continuously without letup, I felt, at the end of that time, that my confession had not been thorough. Within me came the deep conviction that I did not dare to do anything. I could only say, "Lord, I should not initiate anything. My whole being needs Your cleansing, not my doing. Lord, I just apply Your blood. Lord, You take the initiative. If You do not do anything, neither will I." I had been caught by the heavenly vision. I had seen that my entire being was altogether sinful, that I should not invent anything or initiate anything, that everything that proceeded out of me was defiled in the eyes of God, that even my tears of repentance needed to be washed with the blood, and that in my repentance was an element of the self that made my repentance impure. Thus, I had to repent of that repentance. This is what it means to apply the blood of Jesus and to put on Christ as your righteousness, as your covering. I had come to know my need for the blood of Christ. I had come to realize that everything I do should simply be the living of Christ as

my covering. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." This is what it means to offer the firstlings and the fat to the Lord. I can testify that never have I been as joyful as at that time. I was filled with the sweetness of the Lord. I was in the heavens. This is the experience of Abel. I know that many of you reading this message have had this kind of experience.

What Abel did corresponds exactly to the gospel in the New Testament, which tells us to receive the cleansing of the blood, to deny ourselves, to put ourselves aside, and to take Christ as our covering. We need to confess our sins and deny ourselves. We need to offer Christ as the firstling of God's sheep and to present His fat as the sweetness which satisfies God, forgetting ourselves, rejecting ourselves, renouncing ourselves, putting ourselves aside, and taking Him as our covering. If we do this, we shall not only live for Him, but by Him. Christ is not only the sacrifice to God, but also the way of God, the way of redemption and of life. Hebrews 11:4 says that by the sacrifice which he offered in faith as a type of Christ Abel obtained the witness that he was righteous. By this kind of faith he still speaks today.

C. The First Priest of God

Abel was the first priest. He did not hire a priest to offer his sacrifice for him; he did it himself. Every Abel is a priest. Do not ask others to offer your sacrifice. Do not go to a father in the Catholic Church, to a priest in the Anglican Church, or to a minister or pastor. You must be the priest, presenting the sacrificial offering. Everyone in the church life is a priest. We offer Christ to God continually.

D. Persecuted by the Worshippers in the Flesh

Abel was persecuted and killed by Cain because he worshipped God in God's way, not like Cain who worshipped God in his own way. Cain was in the flesh, trusting in the fruit of his labor, but Abel had no trust in himself. He put his trust in his offering. Typically speaking, Abel trusted and boasted in Christ, having no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3). The worshippers in the flesh always oppose and persecute those who worship by the Spirit (Gal. 4:29).

E. A Type of Christ

Abel was a type of Christ (Heb. 12:24). What is a type? A type is a shadow or a picture. Although Abel was not Christ, he was a picture of Christ showing some of the aspects of Christ. For instance, Abel was a feeder of sheep. The Lord Jesus was the real feeder, the true shepherd of God's people (John 10:11, 14; Heb. 13:20). Although not many people in the Bible are called righteous, both the Lord Jesus and Abel are called righteous. In Matthew 23:35 Abel was called "righteous Abel"; in Acts 7:52 and 22:14 the Lord Jesus is called the Righteous One. Abel was killed by his brother in the flesh. Jesus also was killed by His Jewish brothers. Furthermore, both the blood of Abel and the blood of Jesus are speaking bloods. Genesis 4:10 says that the voice of Abel's blood cries unto God from the ground. The speaking of Abel's blood, however, was only a type of the speaking of the blood of Christ. In Hebrews 12:24, the fulfillment of the type in Genesis 4:10, we are told that the blood of Jesus is the "blood of sprinkling, which speaks better than that of Abel." Thank the Lord. We have the speaking blood. We not only have the redeeming blood, the cleansing blood, and the covering blood, but also the speaking blood. Abel's blood spoke from the earth; Jesus' blood speaks from heaven. It speaks better things than the blood of Abel. Praise the Lord!

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE TWENTY-FOUR

THE SECOND FALL OF MAN

(2)

In this message we continue our study of the second fall of man. As we have seen in previous messages, in the first fall man ate something wrong. According to our human concept, this was not very serious. When I was a young Christian, I tried to argue with God, asking what was wrong with eating a piece of fruit. I met other Christians who held the same concept. However, if we proceed from Genesis 3 to Genesis 4, we shall see the evil things that issued out of that small seed.

The seed that entered into man in Genesis 3 is called sin by Paul in Romans 7. In Romans 7:19-20 Paul says, "For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil I do not will, this I practice. But if what I do not will, this I do, it is no longer I that do it but sin that dwells in me." Although most Christians know that Galatians 2:20 says that it is no longer I but Christ who lives in me, not very many pay attention to Romans 7:20 which says that it is no longer I but sin that dwells in me. By Galatians 2:20 we can see that the Christ dwelling in us is a person. Christ, the very embodiment of God, dwells in us as a person. In the same principle, we can say that the sin which dwells in us must also be a living person. I have no doubt that sin is the embodiment of Satan. Christ is the embodiment of God dwelling in our spirit, and sin is the embodiment of Satan dwelling in our flesh. Satan, the evil one, has injected himself into our nature. This occurred in Genesis 3, but the issue of this injection appears in fallen man in Genesis 4.

This evil seed first expressed itself in a religious way, in the way of worshipping God. Can you imagine that the seed of Satan indwelling fallen man would cause him to worship God? Yet, as we have seen, this seed in Cain did cause him to worship God, not according to God's way or according to God's revelation, but according to his concept which was the concept of a fallen man. What is the concept of a fallen man? It is the expression of Satan in man. Never forget the incident recorded in Matthew 16:20-23 in which Peter expressed his concern for the Lord. Peter did not realize that Satan was present in his concept, but the Lord recognized it and called Peter "Satan." Thus, the concept of a fallen man is simply the expression of the indwelling Satan.

d. Man's Lie and Arrogance

In Genesis 4 we see that the evil seed which had been injected into man in Genesis 3 firstly manifested itself in what was apparently a good thing—worshipping God. Never-the-less, this chapter shows a further development of the seed: firstly into jealousy, then into anger, hatred, murder, and lies. Cain not only murdered his brother, but also lied to God Himself. Imagine that such a person dared to lie to God! After Cain slew Abel, God came to him in a kind and merciful way. In a sense, God did not come to judge or to execute

the sentence of death upon Cain. God inquired of Cain as to where his brother was. This question indicated that the door of repentance was still open. If I had been Cain, I would have said, "Lord, forgive me for killing my brother. I committed such a sinful deed." Under the enlightenment of the gospel, I would have confessed and asked for forgiveness. But listen to Cain's answer: "I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9). This answer was a big lie, the first lie in the history of the human race. John 8:44 makes it evident that Cain was not the only one telling the lie, but that the Devil also lied from the beginning. Cain was one with the liar, the Devil. Satan, the Devil, was the liar, and Cain cooperated with him to speak a great lie. The first lie on earth was not spoken to man, but to God. Notice now the development of the seed in Genesis 4: it began with worshipping God and developed into lying to God. Moreover, Cain was arrogant. His words, "Am I my brother's keeper?" show his arrogance. Now we can see to what extent man had fallen. Every evil thing found in Genesis 4 came from the little seed that was injected into man in Genesis 3.

This evil seed remains in our nature. Apparently, you may be gentle, nice, kind, and good; actually, the evil seed of Satan abides in your nature. Thus, we must take the way of salvation revealed by God. The seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent, the evil one, who is the source of all evil (Gen. 3:15). The seed of the woman, our Lord Jesus Christ, has bruised the head of the serpent objectively on the cross, and day by day He continues to bruise the serpent's head subjectively within us. Under the covering of the Lord's prevailing blood, I can testify that the indwelling seed of the woman has bruised the serpent's head within me several times today. As long as we do not care for the seed of the woman within us, Satan will still manipulate us. We have no way of escape other than believing that Jesus is the seed of woman who is daily and hourly bruising the head of the evil one within us.

There is no need for us to commit sinful acts in order to be sinful persons. As long as we are human beings, we are sinful. We are sinful by birth. In fact, we were sinful before we were born. Hence, we are a piece of sin. If you ask what I am naturally, I would reply that I am nothing but a piece of sin. I am defiled, polluted, and contaminated. I need the blood of God's Lamb to cleanse me. I need Christ as the seed of the woman to crush the serpent within me. However, if I worship God according to my own concept instead of taking God's way of salvation, I will immediately be under the control of the evil one. Although he may motivate me to worship God, he would, in so doing, take absolute hold of me. After causing me to worship God, he may develop in me to such an extent that I would become a liar and be arrogant in the presence of God. We all must see that the seed of every evil lies within us.

When I was a young Christian, I said, "Since Satan was in Cain and Cain was so evil, why didn't God just get rid of him? If I had been God, I would have sentenced him to death." But God was kind and merciful, leaving open the door of repentance to Cain and to all fallen people.

4. The Result

a. The Greater Curse

As a result of man's second fall, God pronounced a greater curse. "And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength" (4:11-12). These words were a warning to Cain. God seemed to be saying, "Since you have done such evil things, the ground will be under a greater curse than it was before. It was cursed because of the fall of your parents and so it brought forth thorns and thistles (3:17-18). Now, because of your further fall, the ground will receive a further curse. It will be cursed to the extent that regardless how much you labor upon it, it will not yield to you its strength."

b. The Vagabondism

Moreover, God told Cain that "a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (4:12). What is a vagabond? A vagabond, or a wanderer, is a person who has no goal, no home, no satisfaction, and no rest. A vagabond has no dwelling place and no comfort; he continually wanders on the earth, floating from place to place. God told Cain that he would become such a vagabond.

This sentence, however, was a merciful sentence. If, at any time, Cain would have repented and sought God's forgiveness, the Lord would have been happy to forgive him. Suppose Cain had said, "Lord, I was wrong. I didn't take the way that You showed to my parents, the way that my parents told me. Now I repent and take that way. Lord, forgive me." If Cain had prayed in this way, God surely would have forgiven him. But listen to Cain's response to God's merciful sentence. "Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that everyone that findeth me shall slay me" (4:14). There is not the slightest hint of repentance. Cain was only bargaining with God, saying that he would be driven out from the face of the earth.

What does it mean to be driven out from the face of the earth? It is difficult for any reader of the Bible to understand this word. What do you think it means? Apparently, Cain was not driven out from the face of the earth. How could he be away from the face of the earth and continue to live? Remember that this word was not spoken by God, for He had only said that Cain would be a fugitive and a vagabond, not that he would be driven away from the face of the earth. Nevertheless, Cain understood God's words in this way, realizing that he was about to be driven out from the face of the earth. What does this mean? I shall answer this question later on in the message.

Cain did not repent. He argued in a fearful way. He was not afraid of God, but of being killed by others. Why did he have this fear? Because he had killed his brother. A number of times Brother Watchman Nee said to me, "If someone thinks that you might steal from him, that person must be a robber. Only a robber is afraid that others will steal from him. If you never steal from others, you will not think that others would steal from you." If you know nothing about robbery, you will never entertain the thought that someone might rob you. However, if you rob others, you will be aware of the danger of being robbed. Cain was afraid of being murdered because he had murdered his brother. Thus, he did not repent, but argued with God, saying, "It shall come to pass, that everyone that findeth me shall slay me." Cain knew that he had no safeguard. However, God was kind. God is always kind according to what we are able to receive. "And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him" (4:15). We see that God put a mark upon Cain. Do not ask me what this mark was, for I do not know. I only know that God marked Cain as a safeguard to him.

c. Being Cast Out of the Presence of God

Cain, unrepentant, went his own way. His own way was to depart from the presence of God. "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden" (4:16). Adam was driven out of paradise, out of the garden of Eden, but Cain went away from the presence of God. Although he worshipped God, he eventually left the presence of God. What kind of worship was that? I hate any kind of worship that keeps people from God's presence. Do not say, "What is wrong with the way we are worshipping God?" It is wrong if it keeps you from God's presence. How terrible it is to be a person on this earth without the presence of God.

Now we return to the question we asked about the meaning of being driven out from the face of the earth. If you are a person who does not live in the presence of God, you have no place to live on this earth. The earth was made for the people who live in God's presence. In Genesis 4:14 the face of the earth is equivalent to the face of God. Although the words "face" and "presence" in verses 14 and 16 are translations of the same Hebrew word, the King James Version purposely used the English word "face" in verse 14 in order to match "the face of the earth" with "thy face," meaning the face of God. Cain said, "Thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid." Thus, if you do not live in the face of God, you are not rightly living on this earth. If you do not live in the presence of God, you are robbing the earth. The earth was not made for those who are against God; it was created for the people who live for God. Therefore, if you have no standing in the face of God, you have no place on the earth. Hence, to be driven out from the face of God is equivalent to being driven out from the face of the earth. Logically speaking, this may not sound correct, but, spiritually speaking, it is accurate. If you are not in the presence of God, you will have the conviction that you have nowhere to go. You will have the sense deep within that you are a wanderer. You would even say, "There is no place on earth for me." However, when you are in the presence of God, every place is heaven. Every place is so pleasant. No one who lives in the presence of God would ever commit suicide. Only those who have lost God's presence to the uttermost and who have become vagabonds on the earth, people without a dwelling place, contemplate suicide. Our real dwelling place is the presence of God.

During World War II, because of my work for the church, I was put into prison by the Japanese army which had invaded China. Everything in that prison was dirty. That imprisonment was a real suffering to me. But the Lord was there, and I was in His presence. Never have I enjoyed the Lord's presence as much as during that period of imprisonment. One night I had a thorough dealing with the Lord. According to my sensation, it seemed as if the Lord were in front of me. My tears came down, and I said, "Lord, it is too good." That was my experience in prison. That prison became the heavens to me, and I dwelt with the Lord in the heavens.

d. To Produce a Culture without God

Cain left the presence of God and went his own way. The first thing he did was to build a city. He produced a culture without God (4:16-24). In the Bible the concept of a city is very significant, and it is possible to trace a line of cities throughout the Scriptures, beginning with Enoch, a city built by Cain, and ending with the New Jerusalem, a city built by God. The city constructed by Cain will consummate in the Great Babylon. The city of Enoch was a counterfeit of God's building. It was not of God, but was initiated by Satan within Cain.

1) The Reason

We must realize the source of human culture and the reason for its development. Human culture developed because humanity had lost God. Originally, God, the Creator of man, was everything to man. God was man's protection, maintenance, supply, joy, amusement, and defense. God was everything. In the garden, man had no need to do anything except to till the ground to cooperate with God. God was everything to man in the garden. However, when man lost God, he lost everything. He lost protection, safeguard, maintenance, supply, and amusement. This loss of God forced him to invent human culture. Because man had lost everything, he had to invent something.

2) The Process

a) Building a City for Self-existence

Satan, working from within Cain, suggested to him that he build a city. Perhaps Satan said, "Cain, you are afraid that people will kill you. For your existence you need a city to protect you." Because he lost God, Cain was afraid. He had lost God as his supply, joy, and defense. The main purpose for cities in ancient times was for protection. Hence, Cain constructed such a city for his self-protection. In a godless culture people are forced to fend for themselves. Cain did not name the city Jehovah, but Enoch, after the name of his son. He gave the same name to his son and to his city, for, in a sense, his city was his child and he loved it as he loved his own son. It is very meaningful to note that the name Enoch means "initiated," referring to something initiated by Cain. Cain was the first city builder, the first city planner, and the first architect. Cain was an inventor, an initiator. However, the first item of his invention was not the city; it was religion. Firstly, he invented religion; secondly, he invented city building.

One of Cain's descendants was Lamech. The name Lamech in Hebrew means "strong," "powerful." Lamech, the seventh human generation, was a powerful person. Having two wives, he practiced polygamy (4:19). Thus, polygamy began in the city of Enoch in the land of Nod, which means "wandering." Lamech practiced polygamy in order to fulfill his lusts. Polygamy is a violation of the natural law ordained by God for man's existence. Marriage is necessary for human existence. However, marriage must be limited according to the principle of one wife for one husband. This principle was ordained by God to maintain human existence. Lamech was the first to break the divine principle in marriage. The first of his two wives was named Adah, which means "adornment." She was one who adorned and beautified herself. Adah was a wife of adornment. By having these two wives, Lamech's lust was exposed. One day Lamech boasted to his wives. "And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold" (4:23-24). Lamech was even more arrogant than his forefather Cain, boasting that he had slain a man for wounding him and had killed a young man for hurting him. Thus, Lamech was not only a polygamist, but was a murderer and an arrogant boaster. By reading this short portion of the Word we can see how dreadful was the first human culture, a culture without God. All these evil things must have occurred in the city of Enoch built by Cain. This may be called the city life, which was as evil as the life in the big cities today.

b) Inventing Cattle-raising for Making a Living

Adah, Lamech's first wife, bore Jabal and Jubal. Jabal was the father of cattle-raising (4:20). He invented cattle-raising for the purpose of making a living. He became a nomad, wandering from place to place, because he had no land that would yield to him its strength. No one in the United States is willing to be a nomad, because the land in this country is very fertile. Thus, there is no need for anyone here to be a nomad. However, Jabal found that the land would not yield its strength to him. This forced him to be a wanderer and to keep cattle that he might make a living. The matter of making a living for one's self is a main aspect of man's culture. The city was invented for man's existence, and cattle-raising was invented for man's living.

c) Inventing Music for Amusement

Jubal invented music (4:21). He invented harps and pipes. In fact, the very name Jubal means "jubilee" or "a joyful sound" or "music." What is music? Music is a type of amusement which makes people joyful. Why does man need such amusement? Because he has lost God as his joy. God is man's true enjoyment. A number of times in the past when my friends invited me to attend the movies with them, I said to them, "I don't need that. I have something much better than your movie." I don't even need to watch television, for I have a heavenly television. Everything in the New Jerusalem has been televised to me. I can never forget an experience I had when visiting the city of Houston. A friend was taking me on a tour of the city. However, I told him, "As long as I have seen the New Jerusalem, I don't need to see any earthly city." I am not speaking nonsense. I really mean it.

One day, in the year 1937, I was preaching the gospel in the capital city of Nanking. It was a good time of preaching, and the gospel was prevailing. After one of the meetings, a smart young lady, dressed in a very worldly and fashionable way, came to me and said, "Mr. Lee, I have been convinced by your preaching. I would even decide to believe in your Jesus. But this decision depends upon one thing. I am a lover of the theater. Tell me, after becoming a Christian, will I still be allowed to attend the theater?" That question bothered me a great deal. I realized that she was convinced and that she was willing to believe in the Lord Jesus. However, if I answered her question in a negative way, she would not decide for the Lord. Nevertheless, as a gospel preacher, how could I answer her in the affirmative? As I was considering the way to answer her, I looked to the Lord for a wise reply, and He gave me one. I said to this young lady, "You have your young son with you. Suppose that one day he plays with a sharp knife, and you feel that it is dangerous for him to do this. How would you deal with him? Would you force him to drop the knife, or would you grab the knife out of his hand?" She said, "No, I would simply throw some candies or apples on the floor. I'm sure that he would drop the knife and pick up the candies and apples. The knife would be gone because his hands would be filled with better things." Then I said, "It is exactly the same with you in attending the theater. If you will take Jesus, He will fill you up, and you will have no capacity for anything else." She said, "Marvelous, I will believe." Then I told her, "You must do it now." She replied, "Yes, I will do it now. I believe in the Lord Jesus." She was saved.

Why do people attend the movies and go dancing? Because they are empty. They do not have God as their joy. The reason I do not attend the movies is not because the church has a regulation against it. The church does not have a list of commandments against such things. However, although there is no such prohibition, I would not attend a movie even if you paid me thousands of dollars to do it. I have something better. I am filled with Christ and I have no capacity for anything else.

Jubal invented music because, at that time, man was empty. He was in vanity, and nothing could satisfy him. Since nothing could amuse him, he had to devise some amusement for himself. The principle is the same with every kind of entertainment today. People need entertainment because they do not have God.

Some of you are familiar with the story of the Welsh Revival which occurred approximately seventy years ago. During that time, in the whole island of Wales, all the theaters and amusement places were closed because all the people were saved. They had something better than worldly entertainment. They had Christ.

Lamech fulfilled his lusts, and Adah adorned and beautified herself with ornaments. Of these two parents Jubal, the inventor of music, was born. Here we see a family composed of lust, adornment, and amusement. What a family it was! Many families today are the same: the fathers fulfill their lusts, the mothers care for their dress and adornment, and the children pursue amusement. Is not this the modern family?

In Genesis 4 we can see two families in opposition to one another. Adam's family was a gospel-believing family. The father cut the way of believing in the gospel, the mother paved the way, and the son, Abel, walked on this way. But Lamech's family was a world-pursuing family. The father fulfilled the lusts, the mother cared for adornment, and the son, Jubal, pursued amusement. What a contrast! I do not like to be a member of Lamech's family. Praise the Lord, we are members of the gospel-believing family!

The seed sown in Genesis 4 will continue to develop until it becomes a harvest in the Great Babylon. Revelation 18 enumerates many items of merchandise, all of which are for three things—to fulfill lusts, to adorn people, and to amuse people. If you remove these things from human society, all of the department stores will be closed. What do department stores sell? They sell things for the gratification of man's lust, for the adornment of women, and for the amusement of young people. This is the reason that whenever I enter a department store I have the deep conviction that I am going into hell. My wife can testify that for over three years I have not gone into one department store. Thus, modern society is an enlargement of the record in Genesis 4. The principle of each item remains exactly the same.

d) Inventing Weapons for Defense

Zillah, Lamech's other wife, brought forth Tubal-cain, who was "an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron" (4:22), meaning that he was the inventor of weaponry. The weapons he produced were for the purpose of killing others. The modern arsenal is the full harvest of the weapons found in Genesis 4. All these weapons are, of course, for man's defense.

The name Zillah means "a shade," a "covering." What kind of covering does this refer to? The covering by weapons. One of Lamech's wives was for adornment, and the other was for a covering, a shadowing. She was used as a shade to cover him.

Thus, we see four items invented by the first human culture, a culture without God: a city for existence, cattle-raising for making a living, music for amusement, and weapons for defense. These four items are also the main aspects of modern human culture. They all

came into being because man lost God.

If you analyze the present world situation in the light of history, you will discover that it is simply a further development of the human culture devised in Genesis 4. The present world situation, like the culture invented in Genesis 4, is composed of four elements: cities for man's existence, various means of earning a living, amusements, and defense.

A godless culture began to develop in Genesis 4 and will continue to develop until it climaxes in the Great Babylon. We thank the Lord that we are not in that culture.

3) The Issue

We have seen that man has produced a culture without God. The issue of this culture is the fulfilling of lust, the committing of adultery, and the fighting against and slaying of one another. We have found both of these exemplified in the person of Lamech. Thus, we see from the holy Word that the small seed injected into human nature in Genesis 3 has developed to such a degree. To all the evils of Cain were added the fulfilling of lust and the fighting amongst the human race. How many evils have developed from the one small seed sown into human nature!

Zillah not only gave birth to Tubal-cain, but also to a daughter named Naamah (4:22). The name Naamah means "making herself lovely and pleasant." For what purpose did she make herself attractive? For the sake of man's lust. This also is an aspect of modern society. The young ladies are fond of making themselves pleasant and lovely. Hence, every item of contemporary culture, in seed form, was present in Genesis 4. Now we know the source of human culture. It came into being because man lost God.

If you read Genesis 5, you will discover that it lists the ages of all the people that it names. It tells us, for example, that Adam lived nine hundred thirty years. However, the genealogy in Genesis 4 does not list the years of any person. Why? Because this genealogy is the genealogy of the lost. All the persons in Genesis 5 were saved. Hence, that genealogy is the genealogy of the saved. The saved persons walk in the way of God and, as a result, their days and years are reckoned in His eyes. The lost people, on the contrary, are finished in His sight, and their days and years are not counted before Him. How long did Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-cain live? No one knows. But we are told clearly how long Adam and Methuselah lived—nine hundred thirty years and nine hundred sixty-nine years respectively. Genesis 5 also speaks of Enoch—a different Enoch from that found in Genesis 4—telling us that he lived three hundred sixty-five years. His days and years were reckoned in the eyes of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE TWENTY-FIVE

THE SECOND FALL OF MAN

(3)

In this message we come to the last two verses of Genesis 4. We have seen that nearly every item found in the first chapters of Genesis is a seed that is developed in the following books of the Bible. Although Genesis 4:25-26 is such a brief portion of the Word, it contains a very significant seed. However, before we consider this seed, we need to cover some other matters.

5. The Way to Escape

The first fall of man occurred in Genesis 3, and the second fall in Genesis 4. We have seen that the way to escape from the first fall is to believe in the seed of the woman, that is, the Lord Jesus, and to take God's way of salvation. Nevertheless, as a result of this fall, Satan is within our nature. This was the main cause of the second fall. What is the way of escape from this second fall?

a. Not Presumptuous according to One's Own Concept

In order to escape from the second fall of man we must be careful of being presumptuous. What does it mean to be presumptuous? It means to do good, to worship God, and to serve God according to our human concept and not according to God's revelation. We have seen this illustrated in the case of Cain (4:3). Doing anything of ourselves, regardless of how good it is according to our own concept, is presumptuous and is one with the Devil. As fallen man with Satan in our nature, we must reject anything that originates with ourselves. We must do everything according to the way revealed by God that we may be kept from the Devil and from the furtherance of the fall.

b. Living for God and Worshipping Him according to His Way

Furthermore, if we want to escape the second fall of man, we must live for God and worship God according to His way, as Abel did (4:2, 4; cf. 3:21; Heb. 11:4). On the negative side, we should not be presumptuous; on the positive side, we should live for God and worship Him according to His revelation and in His way. It is not only to live for God and to worship God, but to do so according to the way of God's revelation. We must remain in God's way that we may be kept from any further fall.

c. Realizing the Vanity of Human Life

In Genesis 4 we find two names which are especially meaningful. The first one is Abel, which means "vanity." As a result of the fall, the human life became a vanity. Look at people today. Although they are very busy, within them there is a gap, a void. Deep within them is a sense of emptiness. Regardless of your social status, regardless how wealthy or how successful you are, when you sit alone in the quiet of the night or early morning, you know there is a gap within you. That emptiness is the vanity that I am talking about. This is exactly what the wise King Solomon meant when he said, "Vanity of vanities, all under the sun are vanity" (Eccl. 1:2-3). In order to escape the second fall of man we must realize that as fallen men without God everything we are, have, and do is empty. We

are nothing but vanity.

d. Realizing the Fragility of Man

The second name which is especially meaningful is Enosh, which means "frail, mortal man." After the fall, not only did human life become a vanity, but man also became frail and mortal. We must admit that we are frail, weak, and easily broken. How easily we fail! Man is mortal. No one can boast that he will live another week. No man knows his tomorrow. To escape the second fall of man we need to realize both the vanity of human life and the fragility of man. If we have this realization, we will have no trust in ourselves and, thus, we will not be presumptuous in departing from the way of God.

e. Calling On the Name of Jehovah— the "I Am"

When we see that we should not be presumptuous, but should live for God and worship Him according to His way and realize the vanity of human life and the fragility of man, we will say, "O Lord, I shouldn't be presumptuous. I must live for You and worship You in Your way. Lord, my life is vanity. I am frail and mortal." When we see that our life is vanity and that we ourselves are frail, spontaneously we will call upon the name of the Lord. This is the reason that Genesis 4:26 says, "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord." From the time of Enosh, the third generation of mankind, men began to call upon the name of the Lord, realizing their weakness, fragility, and mortality.

In Hebrew, the word for "the Lord" is Jehovah (4:26; cf. Exo. 3:14). The title "God" is primarily used for God's relation to His creation in Genesis 1. The name Jehovah is primarily used for God in relation to man starting from Genesis 2. Jehovah is the name for God coming into an intimate relationship with man. Hence, Genesis 4:26 does not say that men began to call on the name of God, but on the name of Jehovah. Men did not call on the One who created all things, but on the One who was so near to them, on the One who was closely related to them. The name Jehovah means "I am that I am," that is, He is the One existing from eternity to eternity. He is the One who was in the past, who is in the present, and who will be in the future forever. He is the everlasting One. When men realized that they were fragile and mortal, they began to call on Jehovah, the everlasting One. This is the calling on the name of the Lord. This calling began even with the third human generation.

When we are careless about God, we do not call on His name. However, when we realize that we must live for Him and worship Him in His way, and when we realize that we are frail and mortal and that our life is nothing but vanity, spontaneously, from deep within us, we not only pray, but call upon the name of the Lord. Therefore, we must consider this most important seed of calling on the name of the Lord. It is a most significant matter in both the Old and New Testaments.

1) The Definition of Calling On the Lord

Firstly, we need to learn the meaning of calling on the name of the Lord. Some Christians think that calling on the Lord is the same as praying to Him. Formerly, I held the same concept. One day, however, the Lord showed me that calling on His name is different from merely praying. Yes, calling is a type of prayer, for it is a part of our prayer, but calling is not merely praying. The Hebrew word for call means to "call out to," "to cry unto," that is, to cry out. The Greek word for call means "to invoke a person," "to call a person by name." In other words, it is to call a person by naming him audibly. Although prayer may be silent, calling must be audible.

To call on the Lord also means to cry to Him and to experience spiritual breathing. "I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry" (Lam. 3:55-56). These verses indicate that calling is also crying and breathing. Crying is the best breathing. I have been told that crying is the best exercise for little babies. Whenever you cry out, you breathe spontaneously and deeply. By crying and breathing we both exhale and inhale. Inhaling always follows exhaling. By exhaling we breathe out all the negative things. Whenever you breathe out the negative things, the positive things of the Lord will fill you up. Let me take the example of losing your temper. When you are about to lose your temper, do not try to suppress it, but call, "O Lord Jesus." Then add a short prayer, "Lord Jesus, I am going to lose my temper." Do this and see whether you still lose your temper. By calling on the name of the Lord you will breathe out your temper and you will breathe in the Lord Jesus. You will exhale your temper and inhale the Lord. Do you want to be holy? The way to be holy is to call on the name of the Lord Jesus. By calling on His name all the sinful, evil, and unclean things will be breathed out, and all the positive things—the riches of the Lord—will be breathed into you.

A. B. Simpson wrote a hymn on breathing the Lord. Let us read some of the stanzas:

O Lord, breathe Thy Spirit on me,
Teach me how to breathe Thee in;
Help me pour into Thy bosom
All my life of self and sin.
I am breathing out my sorrow,
Breathing out my sin;
I am breathing, breathing, breathing,
All Thy fulness in.
Breathing out my sinful nature,
Thou hast borne it all for me;
Breathing in Thy cleansing fulness,
Finding all my life in Thee.

In 1963 I introduced this hymn to some of the saints in the United States. One day, after we had sung this hymn, a dear saint came to me and said, "I can't understand this hymn. Breathing, breathing, breathing—breathing what?" He was somewhat bothered. A few years later, after we had published our hymnal, this same saint said to me, "Brother, my favorite hymn in the hymnal is that hymn on breathing the Lord."

How do we breathe the Lord? We breathe the Lord by opening ourselves to the Lord and calling upon His name. We need to call out to Him and even cry to Him, for, as Jeremiah has told us, calling on the Lord is to cry out to Him. He did this out of the low dungeon. Whenever we are low, that is, down in a "dungeon," we have to call on the Lord by crying out to Him that we may be released from confinement and receive more of the Lord into us.

Isaiah also tells us that our calling on the Lord is our crying to Him. "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the Lord, call upon his name...Sing unto the Lord...Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee" (Isa. 12:2-6). In these verses Isaiah tells us to praise, sing, cry out, and shout. All of these match the calling mentioned in verse 4. In verse 2 he says that God is our salvation and our strength. God is everything to us. We simply need to draw water out of the wells of God's salvation. How can we with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation? The way is to call on His name, to praise the Lord, to sing a hymn, and to cry out and shout. In verse 4 we find that praising and calling are put together, and in verse 6 we find that crying and shouting are put together. This proves that to call on the Lord is to cry and shout to Him. Many Christians have never shouted. If you have never shouted before the Lord, I doubt that you could have enjoyed the Lord in a rich way. Try shouting before Him. If you have never shouted about what the Lord is to you, I encourage you to try it. The more you shout, "O Lord Jesus, You are so good to me," the more you will be released from your self and be filled with the Lord. You will be in the third heaven. Thus, Isaiah, even in Old Testament times, told people to praise the Lord, call upon His name, cry out and shout.

Let me share with you something of my own testimony regarding calling on the Lord. I was raised in the Southern Baptist Church. After I was saved, due to my seeking after the Word, I stayed for several years with a very strict Brethren assembly. Their practice was always to be silent. It is no exaggeration to say that even if a needle fell on the floor in their meetings, it would have been heard. We were trained in that way. I sat under the feet of these Brethren teachers, listening to their teachings. I thank the Lord for that. Although I loved the Lord and the Word, I did not receive the proper help of life. The only help I received was in understanding the black and white letters of the Scriptures.

One day, in August, 1931, while I was walking on the street, the Spirit spoke within me, "Look at yourself. You have so much knowledge. You know the prophecies and the types, but look at how dead you are." Immediately deep within I was conscious of a thirst and a hunger. Something within wanted to burst out. However, because of my religious background, I would not do that on the street. I restrained myself, suffering for the remainder of that afternoon, evening, and night, waiting for morning to come, when I would be able to release myself before the Lord. My home was at the foot of a small mountain. When morning came, I ran to the top of that mountain and released what was on my heart. I had no intention to shout, but something burst forth from within, saying, "O Lord Jesus." I spontaneously called on the Lord. No one taught me to call on the Lord, and I had not seen anything in the Bible regarding it. I simply did it spontaneously. Although I did not have the terms "enjoying the Lord" and "the release of the spirit," I had the reality of them both. I did exercise and release my spirit and I certainly enjoyed the Lord. Nearly every morning thereafter I went to the top of the mountain, calling on the Lord each time. By calling on the Lord I was filled with the Lord. Each morning as I descended from the top of that mountain, I was filled with joy. I was in the heavens, and the whole earth with everything in it was under my feet.

However, due to my background, I never brought this matter into the teaching. I did not teach others to practice it. Twelve years later, in 1943, I was put into prison by the Japanese army which had invaded China. One day they were persecuting me and beating me. I could do nothing. Spontaneously I called, "O Lord Jesus," and they stopped beating me. Nevertheless, due to my religious background, I still did not bring it into the daily practice. I did not realize that we could do it in our daily life.

Twenty-four years later, in 1967, the matter of calling on the Lord came forth in Los Angeles. At that time I felt the need to verify this matter by studying the Word. As a result of spending much time in the Word regarding calling on the Lord, I discovered that it was a practice of the saints in ancient times. It started thousands of years ago. Using a concordance, I found a great many references to calling on the Lord and I noted the various aspects of calling. At that time I was confirmed and strengthened not only to practice calling on the Lord, but also to teach others and to help others to call on Him. Since 1967, calling on the Lord has been one of the items in the Lord's recovery. It was discovered that it was the best way to touch the Lord. In that same year I visited the Far East and brought this to the saints. I can testify that thousands of saints were released and enriched through calling on the name of the Lord.

2) The History of Calling On the Lord

Do not think that calling on the Lord was invented by us. It is not a new invention. At most, it may be called a new discovery or a part of the Lord's recovery. Calling on the Lord began, as we have seen, with the third generation of the human race. Enosh, the son of Seth, was the third generation. Eve named her second son Abel, which means vanity. Then Seth, Abel's brother, called his son Enosh, which indicates that Seth realized that human life was weak, frail, and mortal. By calling his son Enosh, Seth might have told his son that he was weak and fragile. Since Enosh realized the fragility of human life, he began to call on the name of the everlasting Lord. Therefore, when we realize that we are nothing, that we are weak and frail, what should we do? We should simply call, "O Lord Jesus."

The history of calling on the Lord's name continues throughout the Bible, and we may list the names of many of those who called on His name: Abraham (Gen. 12:8), Isaac (Gen. 26:25), Moses (Deut. 4:7), Job (Job 12:4), Jabez (1 Chron. 4:10), Samson (Judg. 16:28), Samuel (1 Sam. 12:10), David (2 Sam. 22:4), Jonah (Jonah 1:6), Elijah (1 Kings 18:24), Elisha (2 Kings 5:11), Jeremiah (Lam. 3:55). Not only did the Old Testament saints call on the Lord; they even prophesied that people would call on His name (Joel 2:32; Zeph. 3:9; Zech. 13:9). Although many are familiar with Joel's prophecy regarding the Holy Spirit, not many have paid attention to the fact that receiving the outpoured Holy Spirit requires our calling on the name of the Lord. On the one hand, Joel prophesied that God would pour out His Spirit; on the other hand, he prophesied that people would call on the name of the Lord. God's outpouring needs the cooperation of our calling on Him. Joel's prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

Calling on the name of the Lord was also practiced by the New Testament saints. It began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:21). On the day of Pentecost God poured out His Spirit, and the early saints received the Spirit by calling on the name of the Lord. Their calling

was a response to God's pouring out of His Spirit. Stephen also called on the Lord's name. While he was being stoned to death, he was calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 7:59). He died calling on the Lord's name. If the Lord delays His coming and we die, I hope that we die calling on His name.

All the New Testament believers practiced the matter of calling on the Lord (Acts 9:14; 22:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Tim. 2:22). When Paul was Saul of Tarsus he received authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on the name of the Lord (Acts 9:14). This indicates that all the early saints were Jesus callers. Their calling on the name of the Lord was a sign, a mark, that they were Christians. Thus, Saul of Tarsus felt that it would be easy to identify the Christians in Damascus by the fact that they called on the Lord's name. They not only prayed to the Lord, but called on Him. There are many true Christians who pray to the Lord daily, yet their neighbors, friends, and classmates do not know that they are Christians. We may describe them as silent Christians. However, if they become Christians who call on the name of the Lord, their calling will mark them out as Christians. It was this way with the early Christians.

Do you know what happened to Saul when he was on the way to Damascus with the intention of binding all that call on the Lord's name? He was captured by the Lord and was blinded. The Lord sent a little disciple named Ananias to visit Saul and to speak a word from the Lord to him. Listen to what Ananias said: "And now, why do you delay? Rise up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). According to the grammar of the English language, the word "calling" modifies the verb "wash." What sin did Saul need to wash away? The sin of binding those who called on the name of Jesus. He did this at Jerusalem and intended to do it at Damascus. All the Christians knew that he was such an evil one. In their eyes, Saul sinned by persecuting the saints and by binding the callers of Jesus. Thus, the best way for him to wash away his sins was to call on the name of Jesus. By doing this it would be made clear to all the believers that he was truly converted. He who once bound those who called on the name now called on the Lord's name.

Some Christians misinterpret Acts 22:16, thinking that "wash away your sins" modifies "be baptized." According to grammar, that cannot be the meaning. There are two things mentioned in this verse—"be baptized" and "wash away your sins"—and the Greek word kai, translated "and" in English, connects them. Thus, to be baptized is one thing and to wash away your sins is another. Saul was baptized and washed away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord. Saul of Tarsus, who had persecuted so many who called on the name of the Lord, was captured by the Lord. Then Ananias, who had been sent by the Lord, told Saul to be baptized and to wash away his sins by calling on the name of the Lord. If Saul had only been baptized, many of the believers would have doubted that he had actually been converted. They might have said, "Ananias, you should not have baptized such a silent believer." However, when Ananias was about to baptize Saul, he seemed to tell him, "Brother, wash away your sins by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. Brother Saul, you have bound many Christians. You are evil in the eyes of the saints. You have tried to bind all the Jesus callers. Now the best way in their eyes for you to wash away your sins is to call, 'O Lord Jesus.'" Once Saul called on the name of the Lord, all the Christians could see that the persecutor had become one of their brothers. His calling on the Lord was the proof that he had been converted.

Paul himself stressed the matter of calling when he wrote the book of Romans. He said, "For there is no difference between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord of all is rich to all who call upon Him. For, Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:12-13). In Romans 10:12 Paul said that the Lord is rich unto all who call on Him, and in verse 13 he quoted the prophecy of Joel which says that whoever calls on the Lord's name will be saved. Paul also spoke of calling on the Lord in 1 Corinthians when he wrote the words, "with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, theirs and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2). Furthermore, in 2 Timothy he told Timothy to pursue spiritual things with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22). By all of these verses we can see that in the first century the Christians practiced the matter of calling on the name of the Lord very much. Therefore, throughout the Old Testament as well as in the early days of the Christian age, the saints called on the Lord's name. How regrettable that it has been neglected by most Christians for a long time. I believe that today the Lord wants to recover this matter and to have us practice it that we also may enjoy the riches of His life.

3) *The Purpose of Calling On the Lord*

a) *To Be Saved*

Why do we need to call on the name of the Lord? Men need to call on the name of the Lord in order to be saved (Rom. 10:13). Suppose a particular person hears the gospel and begins to believe in the Lord. You can help him to be saved by having him pray to the Lord in a very quiet way, and I have seen many persons saved in this manner. However, if you would not only help him to pray, but also to call upon the name of the Lord, his experience of salvation would be much stronger. The first way, the way of praying quietly, does help people to be saved, but not so richly. The second way, the way of calling loudly, helps people to be saved in a richer and more thorough way. Thus, we need to encourage people to open themselves and to call on the name of the Lord Jesus.

b) *To Be Rescued from Distress, Trouble, Sorrow, and Pain*

Another reason for calling on the Lord is to be rescued from distress (Psa. 18:6; 118:5), from trouble (Psa. 50:15; 86:7; 81:7), and from sorrow and pain (Psa. 116:3-4). People who have argued about calling on the Lord found themselves calling on Him when they were subject to a certain trouble or illness. When our lives are free from trouble, we will argue about calling on the Lord. However, when trouble comes, there will be no need for anyone to tell you to call on Him. You will call spontaneously. Calling on the Lord rescues us and delivers us. We need to call on the Lord when in distress and trouble. Furthermore, Psalm 116:3-4 tells us that calling on the name of the Lord rescues us from many negative things such as pain, sorrow, death, and hell. If you want to be delivered from such things, you need to call on the Lord.

c) *To Participate in the Lord's Mercy*

Psalm 86:5 says that the Lord is good, ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon Him. The way for us to participate in the Lord's plenteous mercy is to call upon Him. The more we call upon Him, the more we enjoy His mercy.

d) *To Partake of the Lord's Salvation*

Psalm 116 also tells us that we may partake of the Lord's salvation by calling on Him. "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord" (v. 13). In this one psalm calling on the Lord is mentioned four times (vv. 2, 4, 13, 17). The calling here is for the purpose of partaking of the Lord's salvation. As we have seen earlier, the way to draw water out of the wells of salvation is to call upon the name of the Lord (Isa. 12:2-4).

e) To Receive the Spirit

Another reason for calling on the Lord is to receive the Spirit (Acts 2:17, 21). The best and easiest way to be filled with the Holy Spirit is to call on the name of the Lord Jesus. The Spirit has already been poured out. We simply need to receive Him by calling on the Lord. We can do it anytime. If you call on the name of the Lord several times, you will be filled with the Spirit.

*f) To Drink the Spiritual Water
and to Eat the Spiritual Food for Satisfaction*

Isaiah 55:1 says, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." What is the way to eat and drink the Lord? Isaiah gives us the way in verse 6 of the same chapter: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." Thus, the way to drink the spiritual water and to eat the spiritual food for our satisfaction is to seek the Lord and to call upon His name.

g) To Enjoy the Riches of the Lord

Romans 10:12 says that the Lord of all is rich to all who call upon Him. The Lord is rich and rich to all who call upon Him. The way to enjoy the riches of the Lord is to call upon Him. The Lord is not only rich, but also nigh and available as mentioned in verse 8 of the same chapter because He is the life-giving Spirit. As the Spirit, He is omnipresent. At any time and in any place we may call on His name. When we call on Him, He comes to us as the Spirit, and we enjoy His riches. When you call on Jesus, the Spirit comes.

First Corinthians is a book on the enjoyment of Christ. In chapter twelve Paul tells us how to enjoy Him. The way to enjoy the Lord is to call on His name (12:3; 1:2). Whenever we say, "Lord Jesus," we drink of Him, the life-giving Spirit (v. 13). In 15:45 we are told that the Lord is now the life-giving Spirit. Whenever we call, "Lord Jesus," He comes as the Spirit. If I call a person's name, and if he is real, living, and present, then that person will come to me. The Lord Jesus is real, living, and present. He is always available. Whenever we call on Him, He comes. Even during the Old Testament times Moses said of the Lord, "For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is whenever we call upon him" (Deut. 4:7, Heb.). Whenever we call upon His name, He is nigh (Psa. 145:18). Do you want to enjoy the Lord's presence with all His riches? The best way to experience His presence with all His riches is to call on His name. Call on Him while you are driving on the freeway or while you are at work. Anywhere and anytime you call, the Lord is nigh and rich to you.

h) To Stir Up Ourselves

By calling on the name of the Lord we can stir up ourselves. Isaiah 64:7 says, "And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." When we feel that we are down or low, we can lift and stir ourselves up by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus.

4) How to Call On the Lord

Now we need to consider how we should call on the Lord. Firstly, we must call on Him out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22). Our heart, which is the source, must be pure, seeking nothing but the Lord Himself. Secondly, we must call with a pure lip (Zeph. 3:9, Heb.). We need to watch our speech, for nothing contaminates our lips more than loose talk. If our lips are impure due to loose talk, it will be difficult for us to call on the Lord. Along with a pure heart and pure lips, we need to have an open mouth (Psa. 81:10; cf. v. 7). We need to open our mouth wide to call on the Lord. Furthermore, we need to call on the Lord corporately. Second Timothy 2:22 says, "Flee youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." We need to come together for the purpose of calling on the name of the Lord. Psalm 88:9 says, "Lord, I have called daily upon thee." Hence, we should call daily upon His name. This matter of calling on the name of the Lord is not a doctrine. It is very practical. We need to practice it daily and hourly. We should never stop breathing. We all know what happens when breathing ceases. Furthermore, Psalm 116:2 says, "Therefore will I call upon him as long as I live." As long as we live we should call on the name of the Lord. I hope that many more of the Lord's people, especially the new ones, will begin this practice of calling on the Lord. If you do it, you will see that it is the best way to enjoy the Lord's riches.

Ever since the matter of calling on the name of the Lord has become an item in the Lord's recovery, some people have checked with me, "Is not the Lord within us? Why do you need to say that the Lord is near you when you call?" I have a question to address to those who think that we do not need to call on the Lord since He is already within us. Do you not have breath within you? Since the breath is already within you, why do you still need to breathe? The logic of this question is the same as that pertaining to calling on the Lord when He is already within us. Although it may sound logical to say that we need not call on Him since He already indwells us, it is not practical. No one would practice this with respect to breathing. No one would say that since the breath is in us we no longer need to breathe. We must keep breathing in order to exist. Likewise, the Lord is in us, but we still need to call on Him and breathe Him in the more.

Others have asked, "Why do you call so loudly? Is our God deaf? Can't He hear our silent prayer?" They argue that since the Lord is not deaf, we need not to pray loudly by calling on Him. However, look at how the Lord prayed as described in Hebrews 5:7. "Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up petitions and supplications with strong crying and tears to Him who was able to save Him out of death, and having been heard because of His piety." The "strong crying" in this verse surely is not a silent prayer. If you complain about those who call on the Lord loudly, you need to ask the Lord Jesus why He prayed with strong crying. Since God the Father is not deaf, why did the Lord pray in that way? Moreover, at least twice in the Gospel of John the Lord Jesus said that He was not alone, that the Father was always with Him (16:32; 8:29). Since the Father was continually with Him, why did He need to cry out strongly in prayer to the Father?

Furthermore, several times in the Psalms we are told to make a joyful noise to the Lord (66:1; 81:1; 95:1, 2; 98:4, 6; 100:1). Notice that it does not say a joyful voice, but a joyful noise. We all know the difference between a voice and a noise. We need to make a joyful noise to the Lord, for the Lord likes to hear such a noise.

Nevertheless, the real issue is not whether or not God hears us. The point is that we need to exercise our spirit, releasing what is in our spirit and on our heart, that the Lord as the life-giving Spirit may get into us. It is not a matter of being heard, but of enjoying the Lord and participating in all His riches. My burden and intention in this message are simply to give an account of the Bible regarding the matter of calling on the Lord. If you consider what the Bible says about calling on the Lord, you will be convinced that calling on His name is not a recent invention. It is a recovery of one of the holy things in the Bible. As we have seen from Genesis 4:26, calling on the name of the Lord began thousands of years ago, even from the third generation of mankind.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE TWENTY-SIX

THE WAY TO ESCAPE THE ULTIMATE ISSUE OF MAN'S FALL

In this message we come to Genesis 5. Many readers of the Bible have found this chapter to be so dry that they have passed over it in their reading, perhaps, at most, paying attention only to the last twelve verses. Nevertheless, we must recognize that Genesis 5 is a most important portion of the Holy Word. Although many names and years are mentioned in this chapter, it is not an account of history. The whole Bible is a book of life, and this chapter, with all of its names and years, shows us the way of life.

As we saw in the last message, at the end of Genesis 4 we have the wonderful matter of calling on the name of the Lord (4:26). Genesis 5 speaks of walking with God (v. 22). To call on the Lord is one thing, and to walk with God is another. We all must call on the Lord and, following this, walk with God. We should not walk according to the age, but with God. Walking with God must follow our calling on the Lord. Thus, we must progress from Genesis 4 to Genesis 5. Let us now consider the contents of this chapter.

C. The Ultimate Issue of Man's Fall and the Way to Escape It

1. *The Genealogy of the Saved*

Firstly, Genesis 5 tells us the origin of man. What was man's origin? The answer is found in the first two verses of this chapter, which are very important and wonderful. "This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created." According to these verses, man's origin was not only God, but also the likeness, the image, of God. God's image was the practical origin of Adam, for Adam was made in the image of God. Thus, our origin is not a certain race or nationality; it is God with His image. All of us have been created by God in His image. It does not matter whether we are male or female because both male and female, both husband and wife, were called Adam. God has ordained this as a divine principle, and this principle still operates today. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Taylor both have the name Taylor. Mr. Taylor is husband Taylor, and Mrs. Taylor is wife Taylor. Thus, both the husband and the wife are Taylor. In like manner, both Adam and Eve were called Adam. Once God has established a principle, it remains. No one can alter it.

Genesis 5 is a wonderful chapter. I have never read a record like it in any other book. I have not read elsewhere that a man lived for a certain number of years and begat a son, that after this begetting he lived another period of time, begat children, and then died, and that his son lived for certain years and begat a child and continued to live and to beget children and then died. This is the record of Genesis 5, a record which seems very repetitious. Genesis 5 is filled with names that are difficult to pronounce, with the number of years that the people lived, and with the words "lived," "begat," and "died." These three words are repeated again and again throughout the chapter. Furthermore, have you ever noticed that the word "lived" is used twice for each person? For instance, we are told that Adam lived a hundred thirty years and begat Seth (5:3) and that all the days Adam lived were nine hundred thirty years (5:5). Following Adam, Seth lived a hundred five years and begat Enosh and then lived another eight hundred seven years (5:6-7). This cycle of lived, begat, lived, begat, and died is repeated eight times in this chapter. Although ten generations are mentioned in Genesis 5, we must deduct Enoch who was an exceptional case and Noah whose death is not recorded in this chapter. Thus, we have eight generations that lived, begat, lived, begat, and died.

There is a great difference between the records of Genesis 4 and 5. Genesis 4 tells us that certain people lived, but it does not tell us how many years they lived. In a sense, the people named in Genesis 4 had no living in the eyes of God. Their lives were vanity. However, Genesis 4 tells us of many of the things that they invented—religion, city planning, city building, farming, music, and weapons. That chapter also speaks of the evil things that the people did. How strange that Genesis 5 tells us nothing of the deeds and activities of the people. Those men lived for such a long time, in most cases for more than nine hundred years. What did they do? Although I have spent considerable time studying this chapter, all I could learn was that the people lived, begat, lived, begat, and died. Other than this, there is not the slightest hint revealed as to what they did. All they did was live and beget.

Man was not only created by God in the image of God, but also for God. Thus, God ordained that man should multiply. God's eternal purpose can never be fulfilled without man's multiplication. If you had asked Adam what he was doing, he probably would have answered, "Brother, I am living for God's purpose. I am begetting for the fulfillment of God's purpose. God doesn't need my work, He needs my begetting." What is begetting? Using a New Testament term, we may call it fruit-bearing. Begetting is fruit-bearing. Therefore, Adam was bearing fruit for God's purpose. He was being very fruitful. I have already mentioned that the word "lived" is used twice for each person. Now I wish to point out that the word "begat" is used three times for each. For example, Adam lived a hundred thirty years and begat Seth; after he begat Seth, he lived another eight hundred years and begat sons and daughters. This indicates that the people in Genesis 5 were simply living and begetting.

We are doing the same thing today. Do not say that you are teaching or working as a carpenter. You must say, "I am living in the

presence of God and I am begetting, bearing fruit to fulfill God's purpose." As we have seen, the fulfillment of God's purpose depends upon our begetting. The more sons we beget, the more useful we are in God's hands. This was a physical matter with Adam, but it is a spiritual matter with us. We are living and begetting. Fifty years ago I was a single person. Now I have a large family composed of many children and grandchildren. Nevertheless, I am not as happy with my physical family as I am with my family in the churches. Under this little ministry I have been living and begetting a large family composed of thousands of persons. If you were to ask me what I have been doing for the past forty-three years, I would answer that I have been doing nothing except living and begetting.

Our profession is unique—it is living and begetting. When we say this, the worldly people simply cannot understand what we are talking about. However, it is very real. The things mentioned in Genesis 4 are vanity, but there is no vanity found in Genesis 5. If you read Genesis 5 along with Luke 3, you will see that the genealogy in Genesis 5 eventually brought forth the Lord Jesus. This genealogy began with God and issued in Christ. The living and begetting brought forth Jesus. When Genesis 5 and Luke 3 are put together, we see that all the dear ones in Genesis 5 were not living in vanity. They were living and begetting in a most meaningful way to bring forth Christ.

The record of the genealogy in Genesis 5 is wonderful as far as the people's living and begetting are concerned. However, it contains a black spot, that is, after the people lived and begat, they died. For them to live and beget was wonderful, but for them to die was not a pleasant thing. If you compare this genealogy with the genealogy in Matthew 1, you will see that in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1 there is no death. Death remained in Adam's genealogy because Christ had not yet come. Since Christ has come, in the genealogy of Christ death has gone. Christ "nullified death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).

2. The Ultimate Issue of Man's Fall—Death

Genesis 5 is a record of the saved people who lived with the expectation that Christ would come. But, in their time, Christ did not come. So they were still subject to death, and in their genealogy there was the mention of death, a negative matter. To live and to beget are good; to die is not. I do not want to die. Eight of the ten generations mentioned in Genesis 5 died. Death is the ultimate issue of man's fall. Although Genesis 5 is a wonderful record of the living and fruit-bearing ones, this chapter still shows that they were under the ultimate issue of man's fall, death. Is there a way to escape this death? What is the way? While this chapter reveals the living and begetting of the saints in the earliest days, it also unveils the way to escape the ultimate issue of man's fall. Among the records of the ten generations, we find that one generation escaped death. Enoch lived, begat, walked with God, begat, and did not die. God took Enoch away (Gen. 5:24). The reason that God took Enoch away was that he should not see death (Heb. 11:5). His being kept away from death was God's ultimate salvation. This is salvation in full. The other eight generations might have enjoyed ninety percent of God's salvation. They lived and begat for God's purpose, but they were not kept from the ultimate issue of man's fall. Only Enoch enjoyed and partook of God's salvation to the fullest.

Today we are living and begetting, but how about death? Death has a double application. Death is working and killing continually, and daily we are under its threatening. Physically, mentally, and spiritually we are under the killing of death. This is the first application. If the Lord delays His coming back, we shall all die physically. That is the second application of death. There will be no third application of death for us, because we shall not share in the so-called second death (Rev. 21:8). However, in two senses, we are presently under death: in the sense that death is continuously damaging us and doing a killing work within and upon us, and in the sense that this death power can bring our mortal body into actual death.

3. The Way to Escape Death

Do you know that there is a way to escape from death? Do you believe there is a way? The way was discovered by the seventh generation of mankind. Calling on the name of the Lord was discovered by the third generation, and, four generations later, the way to escape the ultimate issue of man's fall was discovered by the seventh generation, Enoch. Enoch lived in such a way that he was kept from death both literally and totally. Before Enoch was taken up by the Lord and while he was living and walking on earth, death had ceased to kill him. Enoch overcame the killing of death.

Enoch was the first person to be raptured. Today many Christians are fond of discussing prophecy and the rapture. Many say that the Lord Jesus will soon return and that we all shall be taken to the air. In a sense, this is according to the prophecy of the Scripture (1 Thes. 4:16-17). But, in another sense, I am afraid that most Christians apply this prophecy according to their human understanding. If you read the Bible carefully, with the divine light, you will see that the rapture revealed in the Bible is not in the way that so many Christians imagine. Since the first mention of a thing in the Bible establishes the principle for that thing, the case of Enoch, the first mention of the rapture, establishes the principle of the rapture. What is the principle of the rapture? It is to be matured in life by walking with God. Enoch walked with God for three hundred years, and God took him away (Gen. 5:22-24).

a. To Walk with God

Do you expect to be raptured? If you do, you need to walk with God. We should not only call upon the name of the Lord, but should also walk with God. The calling must be followed by the walking. To walk with God is not to override God, not to be presumptuous, not to do things according to our own concept and desire, nor to do anything without God. To walk with God is to take Him as our center and everything, to do things according to His revelation and leading, and to do everything with Him. It is not only to live for God and to do things for God, but to live and to do things according to God and with God. Enoch walked with God in such a way, living and doing things according to God and with God, not according to his own desire or concept, nor according to the current of the age in which he lived.

It is not easy to walk with another person. When I have walked with the brothers or with the members of my family, they all have said that I walk too fast and that they cannot keep up with me. They have asked me to walk slower. However, I have a question to address to the brothers and to my family: Are you going to walk with me or am I going to walk with you? Let us firstly determine who is going to walk with whom. If you are going to walk with me, you must keep up with me. Do not blame me for walking too fast. If you complain that I walk too fast, forget about me and walk with someone who is as slow as you are. But, if your intention is to walk with me, you must come up to my standard. If my intention is to walk with you, I should slow down to your pace and be as slow as you are.

Please tell me, is God walking with you, or are you walking with God? Was God walking with Enoch or was Enoch walking with God? The Bible does not say that God walked with Enoch; it says that Enoch walked with God. It is difficult to find a place in the Bible that tells us that God walked with people. We do find an instance of this in Luke 24. On the day of resurrection the Lord Jesus walked with the two disciples who were going from Jerusalem to Emmaus. The disciples did not walk with the Lord Jesus; the Lord Jesus walked with them. Whenever the Lord walks with you, it means that you are going downward. You are descending from Jerusalem to Emmaus. However, whenever you walk with the Lord, you are going upward, coming back to Jerusalem from Emmaus. Are you walking with the Lord or is He walking with you? In other words, are you going downward or upward? If you are going downward to the movies, for example, the Lord Jesus will walk there with you. Many times the Lord has walked downward with the saints in such a way. A number of saints have told the Lord, "Lord, I cannot stay with You. I want to go to a movie." Then the Lord has said, "Are you going to a movie? I will go there with you; I will walk downward with you. Why will I walk with you there? Because I am going to bring you back. You shouldn't go downward to Emmaus. My intention is that you all remain in Jerusalem. Since you are going down, I have to go with you. I must walk with you in order to bring you back."

Enoch walked upward with God. Do not think that Enoch's being taken away by God happened suddenly. Do not think that one moment he was on earth and that the next he was in heaven. Enoch did not walk up and down with God; neither did he walk in a zigzag pattern. He continually walked upward until he touched heaven. At the age of three hundred sixty-five, as he was nearly touching heaven, God said to him, "Dear child, I am here. Come with Me." And Enoch was taken away.

Do you believe that Enoch's walk with God was up and down? Do you believe that Enoch walked with God inconsistently and that God said to him, "Poor child, come up quickly"? I do not believe that that was God's way of taking Enoch up. Enoch walked with God day and night for three centuries, for more than a hundred thousand days. Enoch walked with God day by day, a little closer to God each day than the day before. Enoch looked at the situation, the environment, the people and their deeds, and saw that everything was ungodly. Yet he kept on walking with God in a godly and holy way, walking with Him in this way for three hundred years.

In order to walk with God we must be with Him. We must be one with Him in our thinking, loving, and choosing. As I have already pointed out, it is not easy for one person to walk with another. Suppose, while I am walking with you, I have a different concept from you and say, "Brother, I love you and I want to walk with you, but don't go that way. Turn this way. I don't want to go that way." If I say this, I am not walking with you, I am arguing with you. However, this is exactly what so many lovers of Jesus do. They say, "Lord, I love You and I like to follow You. I want to go with You." However, when the actual time comes, many do not walk with Him, but argue with Him. For you to walk with the Lord implies a great deal: the denial of yourself, the denial of your thinking and your loving, the denial of everything that is of you. It implies that you have given yourself to Him, that you will give in to Him and let Him take the lead. To walk with the Lord is not a small thing. Walking with Him will kill you. My wife suffers whenever she walks with me. Nevertheless, if you are going to walk with me, you have to deny yourself. On the other hand, if I am going to walk with you, I must forget myself, condemn myself, and renounce myself that I may be one with you. If I am unwilling to do this, I cannot walk with you or with anyone else.

It is not simply a matter of calling on the name of the Lord. It is wonderful and enjoyable to call, "O Lord Jesus," but what follows the calling? When the Lord says, "Follow Me," will you follow Him? Will you walk with Him? Never forget that calling is found in Genesis 4 and that walking is revealed in Genesis 5. If walking does not follow our calling, our calling will not be very genuine. In a future message we shall see that after the walking we have the building. Enosh called, Enoch walked, and Noah walked and built. We must go on from Genesis 4, progressing from calling to walking. Calling may supply you, but it will not kill you. Calling makes you living. However, walking always kills you. But it will also resurrect you. Walking firstly kills you, then it resurrects you to make you so living in enjoying the presence of God. You will be living to the uttermost, not in a natural way, but in a resurrected way. Oh, how we all must walk with God!

b. To Believe in God

Although the Bible says little about Enoch, what is revealed in Genesis, Hebrews, and Jude is sufficient for us to appreciate his life. Hebrews 11:5-6 shows us that before Enoch was taken by God, he believed in God. This indicates that Enoch not only walked with God, but that he also believed God. "By faith Enoch was translated so that he should not see death" (Heb. 11:5). What does faith mean? According to the context of Hebrews 11, faith means that we believe that God is (Heb. 11:6). This means that we believe that there is a God. God exists, God is real, God is living, God is present, and God is God. We all must believe this. We hope that no one reading this message has any difficulty with this matter. We do believe that God exists and that He is living today.

Hebrews 11:6 says that if you believe in God, you will also believe that He is a rewarder. He not only exists, He is a rewarder. Why does God reward people? Because He is anxious to have man living for and fulfilling His purpose. We should not only believe that God exists, but also that He rewards all those who seek Him out. Although the King James Version says "diligently seek Him," the Greek text actually means "seek Him out." God is in this universe, and no man can see Him, but we must seek Him out. Do you believe that there is a God, that God exists? Then what should you do? You must seek Him out. Enoch did this. He believed that there was a God and he sought God out by believing that God was a rewarder. It must have been his believing in God and his seeking God that motivated him to walk with God. Enoch was God's seeker, and God was his rewarder. He sought God and walked with God, and God rewarded him.

What reward did God give Enoch? God gave him the highest degree of life—escape from death. "Enoch was translated that he should not see death." What a reward that was! For quite a number of years I have told the Lord, "Lord, I don't want to see death. Lord, come quickly. Keep me until the time of Your coming. I do not want to see death, I want to see You." This desire has caused me and still causes me to seek the Lord out. I am not boasting, but speaking the truth I must say that I am a seeker of the Lord. Are you not one of His seekers? By His mercy and grace we are all seekers of the Lord.

When I first began, in this country, to use the term "seeking saints" in my fellowship and prayer, many who heard this term were surprised by it. Later I shortened this term to "seekers," the Lord's seekers. Although some of the saints hesitated in adopting this term, today it is used in all the churches. Many would pray to the Lord, saying, "Lord, You have so many seekers in Orange County. O Lord, capture all Your dear seekers." The Lord is a rewarder, and we need to be His seekers. Enoch believed this and practiced it. He

believed that God was and that He would be a rewarder to him if he sought Him out. Enoch did seek the Lord and obtained the reward.

Jude speaks about the environment in which Enoch lived, using the word "ungodly" four times in describing the people and the deeds of Enoch's generation (Jude 15). Nevertheless, Jude records one of Enoch's prophecies in which Enoch used a wonderful word—saints. "And Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied also of these, saying: Behold, the Lord came with myriads of His saints" (Jude 14). Enoch did not say that the Lord is coming with myriads of sinners or ungodly ones or even believers or saved ones. Enoch said that the Lord was coming with myriads of His saints. As the record of Jude reveals, Enoch prophesied what was within him. He realized that his whole generation was ungodly. The neighborhood, the people, and everything else were ungodly. However, he was godly and holy, leading a holy life. Otherwise, he could not have prophesied of the Lord's coming with myriads of His saints to execute His judgment upon the ungodly. The saints mentioned in Jude 14 are versus the ungodly in verse 15. Although the generation, age, society, environment, people, and everything were ungodly, Enoch still lived a godly and holy life. Among ungodly people in an ungodly situation, he lived a godly life. He did this in faith, believing that God was and that He was a rewarder. Enoch walked with God in faith.

c. To Believe in God's Word

When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he begat a son giving him the name Methuselah (5:22). The name Methuselah has a prophetic significance. It means "when he is dead it shall be sent." That was a prophecy of the deluge. By naming his son Methuselah, Enoch prophesied of the coming judgment of the deluge. Undoubtedly he did this by the Spirit of God. He received God's revelation and did not set His will aside. He was inspired with the divine will and learned of the coming judgment upon the entire ungodly generation. I believe that the prophecy recorded by Jude has a double fulfillment. Enoch might have believed that the judgment of the deluge was the Lord's coming with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgment upon the ungodly. However, this prophecy of his, like others in the Old Testament, has a double fulfillment. The first fulfillment by the coming of the deluge was a prefigure of the second fulfillment by the Lord's second coming as referred to in Jude. If Enoch had not prophesied of the Lord's second coming, Jude would not have mentioned it. By Enoch's prophecy we can realize that he learned that God was going to execute His judgment upon the ungodly generation. Thus, he named his son Methuselah, indicating thereby that when his son died, God's judgment would be sent.

Enoch begat Methuselah at the age of sixty-five. Therefore, Enoch's prophecy regarding the flood was uttered when he was sixty-five years of age. Thereafter, day and night, Enoch was expecting the fulfillment of that prophecy, and that expectation caused him to walk with God. Although the whole generation and everything in it was ungodly, he himself did not dare to be ungodly. He was holy and walked with God, hoping to be saved from God's judgment. Enoch held on to this expectation for three hundred years. Nevertheless, the judgment did not come during that period of time. It was not to come until nine hundred sixty-nine years after Methuselah was born.

The flood came in the year that Methuselah died. Methuselah begat Lamech at the age of one hundred eighty-seven (5:25), and Lamech begat Noah when he was one hundred eighty-two (5:28). When Noah was six hundred years old, the deluge was sent (7:11). If we add these three figures together, we arrive at a total of nine hundred sixty-nine years, the age at which Methuselah died. The deluge came nine hundred sixty-nine years after Enoch prophesied regarding it. It occurred, as was prophesied, in the year Methuselah died. If Enoch had remained on the earth until the actual time of the deluge, he would have waited nine hundred sixty-nine years. But, he only had to wait three hundred years, for God seemed to say, "Enoch, it is good enough. I will not leave you on earth to exhaust your patience. Come with Me and stay with Me." And Enoch was taken up. Hebrews 11:5 indicates that after he was taken, people looked for him, but could not find him.

In a sense, I love Methuselah. In another sense, I do not love him, because he lived too long. He had the longest life of anyone recorded in the Bible. To live such a long time would surely exhaust our patience. So we pray, "Lord, come quickly." Although the Lord told us that He is coming quickly (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20), over nineteen hundred years have passed, and He still has not come. There is a principle here and it is this: our natural patience must be exhausted. If you are awaiting the Lord's coming in your natural patience, you will be disappointed and exhausted. Forget about the matter of time and simply walk with God. With Him, a thousand years are as one day. If you say, "Lord Jesus, it is too long," He will say, "It has not been two days yet. To Me, a thousand years are as one day. Why are you so impatient? You are impatient because you don't walk with Me. If you walk with Me, if you have Me with you, you won't care for the time. The earth will be the same as heaven because when you have Me, you are in heaven."

The most crucial matter that is revealed in Genesis 5 concerning our living is that we need to walk with God. In order to walk with God we must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder. We also must believe in His Word. Then we need to seek Him out, live according to His Word, follow Him, and walk with Him by faith. Eventually, we shall be taken up. We shall be raptured to escape death—the ultimate issue of man's fall. Hallelujah!

4. The End of This Genealogy

The genealogy of the saved ones recorded in Genesis 5 ends in a very promising way. It concludes with the name of Noah, which means "comfort" or "rest" (5:28-32). With the birth of Noah, the family of salvation finds comfort and rest. The family of the saved people is not a family without hope; it is a family full of comfort. This means that the family of Noah is full of expectation, comfort, and rest.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE TWENTY-SEVEN

THE THIRD FALL OF MAN

D. The Third Fall

In this message we come to the third fall of man, which is recorded in chapter six of Genesis. If we study Genesis carefully, we shall

realize that the intention of the Holy Spirit is to show man's continuous degradation. Man fell step after step and level after level. The record in Genesis reveals that there were at least four steps to man's fall. We may call these steps the four falls of man. In each fall man descended a step lower than the previous fall, falling lower and lower until he reached a point from which he could not fall any further. The third fall was not man's lowest fall; it was a further step of man's decline. As we shall see, after the third fall, there was a fourth. Man has fallen to a greater degree than we can imagine.

1. The Cause

Firstly, again we need to consider the cause of man's third fall. We can find a reason or cause for every fall. The cause of the third fall of man was not simple. Even in the first fall the cause was not simple, because that fall was not only brought about by man, but by a source other than man—the serpent, that is, the Devil, Satan, the enemy of God. We have seen that the enemy of God, who had entered into fallen man, became a subjective cause of the second fall. So, in every fall there was a cause other than man himself. Each fall, of course, was the fall of man, but the cause in each case was not merely man himself, but also the enemy of God. In the first fall, the enemy of God was outside of man. In the second fall, this enemy was inside of man. Now, in the case of the third fall, the enemy took another step, causing man to fall even further. We need to discover what was this other step. It is much worse than we can imagine. Although you might have studied the book of Genesis several times, you probably have never noticed the secret mystery of Satan's device. As we consider this satanic device, we need to look to the Lord for the covering of His prevailing blood, for this message touches the evil power and exposes the subtle device of God's enemy.

a. The Evil Spirits Mingled with Man— the Fallen Angels Joined with Man through Illegal Marriage

In the first fall, Satan seduced man to partake of something other than God. In the second fall, Satan, who was in man's nature, distracted man from God's way of salvation. In the third fall, Satan caused the evil spirits, that is, the fallen angels, to mingle with man and to join with man through illegal marriage. At the time of his fall, before the creation of this present world, Satan captured a large number of angels (see Life-study of Genesis, Message Two). According to Revelation 12:4, it should be that one-third of the angels followed Satan in his rebellion. This is the reason that Ephesians 6:12 speaks of the principalities and powers in the air. The Lord Jesus even told us that Satan has a kingdom (Matt. 12:26). In this universe there is an evil kingdom of the subtle enemy of God, that is, the kingdom of Satan. Satan has a kingdom, meaning that he has under his rule a good number of principalities, dominions, and powers.

According to the whole revelation of the holy Word, at the time of man's third fall, these fallen angels under Satan's control did something which polluted the human race. They caused the human race to be extraordinarily sinful and to be a mixture. No longer was the human race merely the human race; it became a race that was mixed with the fallen angels. Perhaps this word sounds very strange to you. Very few Christians know that the human race was once polluted by being mixed with fallen angels, the fallen spirits. Nevertheless, there is such a fact recorded in the Bible. At the time of the third fall of man, a number of the fallen angels in Satan's principality came down to the earth, took human bodies, and used these bodies to form illegal marriages with the daughters of men. In this way, the human race was mixed with the fallen spirits.

1) The Sons of God Being the Fallen Angels

This interpretation of Genesis 6 is neither my invention nor my discovery. When I first studied Genesis 6:2 fifty years ago, I was quite troubled. I had no difficulty with 6:1, but verse 2 presented a problem. Who are the sons of God mentioned there? Then I learned that some of the Brethren teachers said that there were two lines in Genesis 4—the line of the descendants of Seth, that is, the line of the godly people, and the line of the descendants of Cain. They said that the sons of God were the descendants of Seth. Since the descendants of Seth belonged to God, they were the sons of God. They also said that the daughters of men were the daughters of the descendants of Cain. I was not satisfied with that interpretation. It was not logical. How can you say that the sons of God were the descendants of Seth and that the daughters of men were the descendants of Cain? Were not the descendants of Seth also men? I could not accept their interpretation. Eventually I found the proper interpretation in Brother Watchman Nee's writing. In his writings Brother Nee said that the sons of God in 6:2 were angels. He pointed out that in the Old Testament we are told clearly that the angels are called the sons of God (Job 1:6; 2:1). Although this was very logical, I found it difficult to believe. I wondered how angels could have married human beings. Brother Nee went on to say that the Syriac Version of the Old Testament renders "the sons of God" as "the angels" and that a few ancient manuscripts also use "angels" instead of "sons of God" in Genesis 6:2. Brother Nee then argued that we cannot say that only the daughters of Cain and not also the sons of Seth were the descendants of men. I was already in agreement with that point. Brother Nee went on to say that in Jude 6 and 7 there is a strong proof that the sons of God mentioned in Genesis 6 were fallen angels. Brother Nee undoubtedly had studied Earth's Earliest Ages, by G. H. Pember. In that book Mr. Pember strongly proved that the sons of God in Genesis 6 were fallen angels. Thus, after much study, I was fully convinced that the sons of God in Genesis 6 were fallen angels.

2) The Fallen Angels Committing Fornication with the Strange Persons

The fallen angels committed fornication with strange persons, setting up an example which was followed by Sodom and Gomorrah. At this point we need to read carefully Jude 6 and 7. "And angels who did not keep their own principality, but abandoned their own dwelling place, He has kept in eternal bonds under gloom for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, who in like manner with these gave themselves over to fornication and went after other flesh, are set forth as an example, undergoing the penalty of eternal fire." When Peter and Jude wrote about the degradation, they wrote with the facts recorded in Genesis as a background. In verse 6, Jude says that the angels did not keep their principality. Principality here means the angels' domain or rule, referring to the sphere of their rule. What is the principality or sphere of the angels? According to Ephesians 2:2 and 6:12, their principality is the air. God's dwelling place is the third heaven, man's dwelling place is the earth, and Satan's and his angels' dwelling place is the air. When Jude 6 says that the angels did not keep their principality, but left their own habitation, it means that they left the air, came down to the earth, and entered into illegal marriages with human beings. God has reserved these

fallen angels under darkness in everlasting chains unto the judgment of the great day.

When did these angels leave their principality? When did the fallen angels leave the air of their principality and descend to the earth and do something which caused God to reserve them in chains unto the judgment of the great day? They must have done something very serious in order for God to take such an action. When did this happen? It must have been during the time mentioned in Genesis 6.

The word "as" in Jude 7 indicates that verse 7 is a continuation of verse 6. Because the subject of this sentence is not only Sodom and Gomorrah, but also "the cities around them," we need a comma after the word "them." Thus, Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities round about them are the subject of the sentence. The predicate is "are set forth." Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them are set forth for an example. Between the subject and the predicate we have the modifier "in like manner with these gave themselves over to fornication and went after other flesh." To whom does "these" refer? It refers to the fallen angels mentioned in the previous verse. What does "in like manner" mean? It means in the manner of going "after other flesh." The fallen angels went after human flesh. Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities about them also went "after other flesh." This means that these cities followed the example of the fallen angels. They did not invent that kind of fornication, but followed the fallen angels who invented it. Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other cities were followers; the angels were inventors.

At this point I must say a word especially to the young people. Marriage is a holy thing. God instituted marriage in order to maintain the human race which He created for His purpose. No one should consider the matter of marriage in a loose way. We all must approach it as a most holy thing. Hebrews 13:4 advises us to respect marriage as being holy. There is a strict principle regarding marriage—the principle of one husband for one wife. God has ordained this holy principle in order to keep the human race in a proper condition for the fulfillment of His purpose. However, at the time of man's third fall, the subtle enemy came in to break the holy principle of human marriage by his fallen angels taking human bodies to marry human females. This violated the principle of marriage that protected the purity of the human race. This illegal marriage of fallen angels with the human race not only broke the principle of marriage, but polluted the human race. What was the devil's intention in doing this? His intention was not only to corrupt the human race, but also to pollute it to such an extent that it became a mixture of humanity and fallen spirits. The angels, the fallen ones, set up such an example of breaking the principle of marriage. Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities about them followed this example, breaking the governing principle ordained by God.

Now we can understand why God determined to flood the human race and condemn them all to death. God decided to do this because the human race had become a mixture. Now we can also understand why God burned Sodom, Gomorrah, and the surrounding cities. When, as a young man, I read about the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the slaughter of the Canaanites, I did not agree with God. I said, "Isn't God a God of love? How could a God of love do such a thing? How could a God of love flood people, burn their cities, and slaughter the Canaanites at the hand of the Israelites?" I said to God, "God, You were not fair. Don't You think that the Israelites were sinful too? Why did You destroy all the Canaanites? How can You say that You are a God of love?" Eventually, God said to me, "Child, haven't you seen that before the flood the human race had become a mixture? I couldn't keep such a mixed race on this earth. I had to eliminate it. Don't you see that among the Canaanites there were the Nephilim, proving that the Canaanites were no longer a pure human race, but had become mixed with the fallen angels? I had to exterminate them." At that time I bowed myself and said, "Lord, You are God. I worship You. You did rightly."

If you read Jude 6 and 7, you will see that the fallen angels invented illegal marriage, breaking the governing principle of marriage ordained by God, and going "after other flesh", after human beings. That invention set an example which was followed by Sodom, Gomorrah, and the surrounding cities. In like manner to those angels, those cities committed fornication and pursued "other flesh." At a certain time there were some angels that had fallen to such an extent that God intervened to judge them. When did this happen? We must apply it to Genesis 6.

3) Causing a Mixture of the Human Race with the Fallen Spirits and Producing Nephilim

This illegal marriage between fallen angels and the human race produced Nephilim. The "mighty men which were of old, men of renown" in 6:4 were a product of the fallen spirits mingled with the human race (cf. Num. 13:33). Although the King James Version uses the word "giants" in Genesis 6:4 and Numbers 13:33, the Hebrew should be rendered "Nephilim." It is translated this way in the American Standard Version. The word Nephilim means "the fallen ones." G. H. Pember in his book Earth's Earliest Ages says that it probably refers to the fallen angels. However, the Nephilim were not purely angels, but were the product of the mixture of the fallen angels with the daughters of men. They were the product of the mingling of the human race, that is, human blood, with angelic spirits.

According to the Bible, the Nephilim were "men of a great stature" (Num. 13:32). If you were to look at them, they would threaten you, and you would be frightened. That is exactly what happened to ten of the twelve spies sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan. They saw the Nephilim and were terrified (Num. 13:33). They told the Israelites, "We should not go into the land, for we saw the Nephilim there." The Nephilim which they saw should be again the descendants of the fallen angels that had mingled with the daughters of men. The Nephilim were giants, capable men, men of renown.

God sent the flood to exterminate Noah's generation because the blood of that generation had become impure. Likewise, God slaughtered all the Canaanites because the Nephilim again were among them, and the blood of that race again was no longer pure. God could not tolerate that situation. For the sake of the fulfillment of His purpose, He could not allow such a human race to exist.

We all must learn one lesson from this: fornication is a serious thing. In the entire Bible, especially in the teaching of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 19:9), fornication is regarded as a serious matter. When you read the Epistles in the New Testament, you can see that the apostles were very strict, not tolerating fornication in the church life (1 Cor. 6:9-10, 18; Eph. 5:5). Why were they so strict? If you read the Bible, you will discover that fornication is related to idolatry (Rev. 2:14, 20). Idol worship encourages fornication. In Buddhism, all the people who worship idols are careless about fornication. Their idol worship ushers them into fornication. In China, in front of the idol temples where people worshipped idols, the opera was performed quite often with the stories of fornication. If you read the book of Numbers, you will see that when the Israelites worshipped idols, they committed fornication (25:1-2). The worship of idols

brings in fornication, and fornication ushers in idolatry. But this is not true in the genuine worship of God. The true worship of God keeps us pure with respect to marriage, maintaining the governing principle ordained by God. Several years ago a group of young people living together in San Francisco became involved in fornication. That fornication eventually brought them into witchcraft. Fornication brings people into contact with demons. Why? Because demons, fallen spirits, are searching for human bodies. If you are a person who exercises a proper intellect and reason, you will not allow an evil spirit to come into you. However, when people become addicted to fornication, they do not care about their intellect. They lose their reason, and the door is opened for demons to enter in and take full possession of them. None of the people who commit fornication care for their intellect or reason. They are not sound or normal. If you are a sound, normal person, you will care for your intellect and reason. You will not do anything which breaks God's governing principle. It is a dreadful thing to fall into fornication.

According to the record of the Bible, at the time of the third fall, men became flesh. They were full of lusts. Because men were in such a condition, the door was opened for the angels, the fallen ones, to enter in. At this point, man not only had the Devil in his evil nature, but some men had become possessed by the fallen angels who used their bodies to form illegal marriages and produce a mixture. That was the most evil thing in the eyes of God, and He could not tolerate it.

b. Man Became Flesh—the Fallen Man

We have seen that the first cause of man's third fall was the mingling of evil spirits with humanity. Let us now consider the second cause. The second cause of this fall was that man had become flesh. Genesis 6:3 says, "And the Lord said, My spirit shall not strive with man forever, for that he indeed is flesh" (Heb.). In the first fall, man did not exercise his spirit. In the second fall, he overexercised his soul. Cain knew nothing about his spirit, but overexercised his soul, inventing a new religion. In the third fall, man abused the fallen body and became flesh. Man not only failed to care for the spirit, but did not even care about his soul. Man neglected the intellect and reason in his soul.

Many people are in the same situation today. They do not care for the spirit, for the presence of God. Neither do they care for their soul, for their intellect or reason. They only fear the police. If you were to remove the National Guard or the police department, the flesh would come to the surface, caring nothing for the spirit, for human intellect or for man's reason. People would simply abuse their flesh and act nearly the same as animals. When man is in this condition, he has almost fallen to the uttermost. The first fall exposes man's not using the spirit, and the second fall exposes his overuse of the soul. Because of the overexercise of the soul, man fell further and began to abuse his body. Thus, man wholly became flesh.

The Bible reveals that the strongest and most evil enemy of God is our flesh. We see this unveiled in the book of Romans, especially in chapters seven and eight. The flesh is thoroughly and absolutely hated by God. God will not tolerate it. In a sense, God may tolerate our mistakes and transgressions, but He will never tolerate the flesh. Anything that issues out of our flesh is an insult to Him. At the time of the third fall, the entire human race became flesh. Thus, God stepped in and told His servant Noah that He was going to destroy that whole generation.

2. The Process

The process is not difficult to understand. The first step in the process was the fulfilling of the lusts of the flesh. When a person becomes flesh, he has no choice but to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. The result of fulfilling the lusts of the flesh is that man becomes evil and corrupt to the uttermost (6:5, 11-13). Although the Bible is very economical, not wasting any words, Genesis 6 a number of times says that the earth was corrupt and filled with violence (vv. 11-13). In the eyes of God, the earth was corrupt. It was not only evil, but corrupt to such a degree that God could not tolerate it any longer.

3. The Issue

a. The Withdrawing of the Holy Spirit— Signifying God's Forsaking

The first issue of man's third fall was the withdrawing of the Holy Spirit, signifying God's forsaking of man. The Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever" (v. 3, Heb.). This word indicates the gracious work of God's Holy Spirit. It is a word which proves that before that time God's Spirit was continually working and striving with man. This is the second mention of the Spirit in the book of Genesis. The first mention is in 1:3, which says that God's Spirit was hovering over the dead situation in order to bring life into being. When the Spirit is mentioned the second time, we are told that God the Spirit would not strive with man any longer, proving that prior to this the Spirit had been striving and working. God was gracious. Do not think that Abel was good by himself. That was impossible. All the dear saints mentioned in Genesis 5 were helped by the Spirit of God. Do you think that Enoch could have walked with God by himself? I do not believe this. Enoch was helped, strengthened, and moved by the Spirit of God. God's Spirit was striving against man's rebellion. Nevertheless, in Genesis 6 a point was reached when the Spirit of God would strive with man no longer. How dreadful this is. If the Spirit of God were to withdraw from us, how terrible it would be!

b. The Coming of the Deluge

The second issue of man's third fall was the coming of the deluge, which brought in the judgment of destruction (6:17; 7:10-12). The issue of man's third fall was that something so good, the Holy Spirit, was to be withdrawn and that something so terrible, the judgment of the deluge, was to come to execute the sentence of death upon fallen man.

4. A Prefigure of the Present Age

The third fall of man was a prefigure of the present age. The Lord Jesus likened the present age to the time of the third fall (Matt. 24:37-39). The Lord said that before the flood came, they were eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark and the flood came and took them all away. People knew nothing except eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage. At the time of the third fall, fallen man was abusing marriage. The situation is exactly the same today—eating, drinking, and abusing of marriage. It is not wrong to be married; it is holy. But do not abuse it. Your marriage must be according to

God's principle. This will bring God's grace and blessing upon you and your family. But the abuse of marriage will cause judgment to come upon man. Look at the present situation. It is the same as in the age before the flood. People know about eating, drinking, and marrying, but they do not know the coming judgment. It seems that, as far as they are concerned, there is no God in this universe. They do not care about the coming judgment. However, the Bible assures us that God is still on the throne and that the earth belongs to Him. One day He will intervene and exercise His judgment upon this ungodly age. What then should we do? We must go to Noah and see what he did. We shall consider Noah in the next message.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE TWENTY-EIGHT

THE WAY OF SALVATION FROM MAN'S THIRD FALL

(1)

In this message we continue our study of the third fall of man. Although no one likes to hear the word "fall," we need to realize that the falls portrayed in the book of Genesis are the background of a very positive picture which shows what God has done with the fallen human race. The main purpose of the record of Genesis is not to show the fall, but to show how much God's grace can do for fallen people. The fall is a black background which helps us see a white picture. Without the black background, the white picture would not be so impressive. In Genesis 3 we saw man's first fall and what God did for fallen mankind. In Genesis 4 we saw man's second fall and something further which God did for the fallen people. In this message we shall see what God did as a result of man's third fall.

5. *The Way of Salvation from the Third Fall*

As we consider the third fall of man, we shall see more of what God has done for fallen people. After the first fall, Adam and Eve were saved. It is not a small thing to be saved. Although Adam and Eve were fallen, they nevertheless were saved. Adam said, "Living," and Eve said, "I have acquired." Adam and Eve were not saved by themselves, but by Christ who is the Lamb of God and the seed of woman. After seeing how God dealt with Adam and Eve, we saw that Abel offered sacrifice and gifts to God (Heb. 11:4). Sacrifice was offered for his sins, and gifts were presented for God's pleasure. Can a fallen man please God? Abel was a fallen man, but he pleased God. He was not only saved, he also satisfied God. Abel did not please God by and with himself; he pleased God by and with Christ. We go from Adam to Abel and from Abel to Enosh. Enosh initiated the matter of calling on the name of the Lord to enjoy all His riches. With the case of Enosh, it was not just a matter of salvation or of pleasing God, but of calling on the Lord that man might enjoy all that He is. As we proceed from Genesis 4 to Genesis 5, we find even more riches. In chapter five we learn that the saved ones lived, begat, and walked with God. After all of this, there is still more in chapter six. In Genesis 6 we see that Noah certainly was saved, pleased God, called on the name of the Lord, and enjoyed all that He is. Noah also lived and begat, for he begat three sons. In addition to all of these positive aspects of the life of the saved ones, Genesis 6 shows us even more items.

a. Walking with God

Genesis 6:9 tells us that Noah walked with God. Undoubtedly, Noah inherited all the spiritual blessings from his forefathers, such as Adam, Abel, Enosh, Enoch, etc. and he followed his great grandfather, Enoch, to walk with God in a crooked, perverse, and adulterous generation. I do believe that he was much influenced by hearing of his great grandfather Enoch's godly walk. Noah stood for a strong continuation of the line of life and, with much development, he carried it on further.

1) Finding Grace in the Eyes of the Lord

Genesis 6:8 says, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." Finding grace in the eyes of the Lord is not a small thing. What does "finding grace" mean? Notice that this verse does not say that God was gracious to Noah, or that the Lord granted grace to Noah. No, it says that Noah found grace. Remember that Genesis is a book filled with spiritual seeds. Here, in 6:8, we have the first mention of grace in the Bible. Noah was able to be what he was because he found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

Hebrews 4:16 tells us to come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace in time of need. When I was young, nearly every day in my prayers I would say, "Lord, I am coming to the throne of grace. At Your throne of grace I find grace for my timely need. Lord, I need Your grace every minute. I not only need Your grace every year, every week, every day, and every hour, but every minute. Without Your grace, I simply cannot bear anything." Today I still need the Lord's grace every minute. Perhaps in a few minutes my folks will give me a difficult time, or else one of the brothers will come to bother me. Perhaps I will receive a phone call from a sister. So, I keep on telling the Lord, "Lord, I need Your grace every minute. I know that You are gracious and that You have grace ready for me. Lord, since grace needs my cooperation, I kneel before the throne of grace to find grace to meet my need." Many times we simply cannot stand our situation and we cannot face what is happening to us. However, there is a place called the throne of grace. Come boldly to the throne of grace that you may find mercy and grace for your time of need.

Do you believe that, by himself, Noah was able to find grace in the eyes of the Lord? I do not believe that he did this by himself. The flood came 1,656 years after Adam was made. Adam lived for nine hundred thirty years. This leaves seven hundred twenty-six years from the year Adam died to the year the deluge came. When Adam was six hundred twenty-two years of age, Enoch was born and he lived as a contemporary of Adam for three hundred and eight years. After Adam died, Enoch still lived another fifty-seven years before he was taken by God. Sixty-nine years later Noah was born. So, Noah was born only one hundred twenty-six years after Adam's death. When Enoch was sixty-five, he begat Methuselah and then lived for another three hundred years before he was taken away. Methuselah lived for nine hundred sixty-nine years, dying in Noah's six hundredth year, the year the deluge came. Undoubtedly, Enoch learned the things of God from his forefathers, perhaps even learning directly from Adam. The fact that Enoch named his son "Methuselah," which means "when he is dead, it shall be sent," proves that he taught his son concerning God. Methuselah must have taught his son, Lamech, and Lamech his son, Noah. Noah came from a godly family and learned from his

forefathers all the godly things. Thus, he came to realize his need for grace. His generation was corrupt and filled with violence. The human race had become flesh. Noah lived in a crooked, perverse, and evil generation. Nevertheless, his parents and grandparents taught him the things of God, and he realized that he needed God's grace.

Now we can see why Noah found grace. Verse 3 of the same chapter indicates that God was prepared to give grace to fallen man, because His Spirit was striving with man, ready to give grace to the needy ones. However, this grace needed human cooperation. Noah gave the necessary cooperation and he found grace.

What is grace? Most Christians think that grace is merely something given by God. If I give you a Bible as a present, that is grace. Although this understanding is correct, in the Bible grace means much more than that. Grace is not only something given by God, but it is God Himself doing things for us. Grace is not merely something objective that is given to us by God. Grace is God Himself coming to us and doing things for us. Are you weak? God will come to be your strength, and that coming of God is grace. Are you unable to face your situation? That need not be a problem, because God will come to stand with you and face that situation for and in you. This is grace. If you read Genesis 6 carefully, you will see that grace here does not mean that God gave Noah many things. It means that God came to Noah and was with Noah. God's presence was Noah's strength and power. Noah not only enjoyed something given to him by God objectively, but he enjoyed God Himself. In the midst of a crooked, perverse, and adulterous generation, a generation whose temptations no one could withstand, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. God came to strengthen Noah that He might stand with him and uphold him. That was the grace that Noah found, and that is the grace that we need today.

Consider the situation in modern society. I do not even dare to look at a newspaper. It contains too many temptations. While I am walking along the street, I do not dare to look into the show windows. This is the reason that I do not like to go into the department store. Department stores are more than devilish, and all the exhibitions and displays in them come from hell. The talk you hear on the radio, at work, and at school is evil, corrupt, and devilish. It is hard for anyone as a fallen person to stand in such a situation. This age is truly crooked, perverse, and adulterous; it is full of fornication and immorality. People talk about immorality without one bit of shame. Who can stand in such a generation? Not one of us is able to stand. We all have a fallen nature within us, the same evil nature that all men have. We need grace. We must come to the throne of grace boldly and say, "Lord, I am here. I need Your grace. I am not coming to ask You to give me good things. I am coming to find grace to meet my need. Lord, I cannot go to work or to school without Your presence. Lord, I cannot go to a department store without Your presence. Lord, I need You to stand with me. Come to be my strength. Lord, uphold me and sustain me."

The matter of divorce is a great temptation to the young people today. The temptations are without and the lusts are within. Who can stand in such an age? There is such great temptation! Because none of us is able to stand, we need the grace to be today's Noah. Only grace can enable you to be one with your wife or husband. Only grace can help us to love our husbands or wives without change. None of us can do it without grace, for there is too much temptation. The tide, current, and trend of the age are too strong. People seem to think that if you are not divorced, you are not modern. They say that in order to be up-to-date you must be divorced. How we need grace! We need God to come to us to be our strength and everything we need. This is grace. This is what Noah needed and what we also need today. Noah found it, and we also must find it. Because Noah found grace, it was easy for him to walk with God.

Parents are concerned about their children in school. The biggest temptation that the children face in the schools today is the matter of drugs. Even in the elementary schools there are heroin addicts. This is pitiful! The young children cannot stand against this kind of temptation. They need grace. There is no addiction that you can overcome by yourself. You need to come to the throne of grace and find grace. Noah found grace and he walked with God. Grace helped him to walk with God.

2) By Faith

Noah walked with God by faith (Heb. 11:7). As we pointed out in the Life-Study messages on Romans, faith is not something produced out from ourselves. Faith is something of God that is transfused into our being. The more we touch the throne of God and the more we look to the Lord, the more we are transfused and infused with all that He is. When He is transfused and infused into our being, His very divine element infused within us becomes our faith. When you touch the throne of grace and are transfused with God, you will believe in God spontaneously. There is no need for you to strive to believe in Him. Once God's element has been infused into you, something within you springs up to believe in Him. That is God Himself who has been transfused into you believing for you. We do not know how to believe and we cannot believe. However, if you simply come to the throne of grace, looking unto Him, touching Him, and finding grace, you will be infused with the believing God. He will believe in and for you. He will be your faith. Faith comes from this source.

3) Justified by God

Noah believed in God and, as a result, became a righteous person. He was right with God, with others, and with himself. None of the worldly people are right with God, with others, or with themselves. However, Noah was a righteous man (Ezek. 14:14), and Hebrews 11:7 says that he "became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."

Firstly, Noah found grace. Secondly, because God had been transfused into him, he believed in God. Because God's believing element was transfused into him, Noah had the believing faculty. He believed in God, and immediately his believing was reckoned unto him by God as righteousness as God did with Abraham (Rom. 4:3, 9). Moreover, because he found grace in the eyes of the Lord, this grace strengthened him and helped him to live a righteous life. In his daily walk, righteousness was lived out of him. This kind of righteousness was not merely objective, but also subjective. Firstly, he received objective righteousness; eventually, he lived out subjective righteousness. Thus, in the eyes of God, Noah inherited righteousness.

In the sixth chapter of Genesis, we see three important seeds: flesh, grace, and righteousness. This matter of the flesh is fully developed in the New Testament, particularly in the Epistles, and especially in Romans 7 and 8. Since we have covered this in the Life-study of Romans, we need not to repeat it now.

Do you realize that God's grace came because of the flesh? "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us..full of grace.." (John 1:14). In a good sense, where there is flesh, there is grace. What is flesh? The flesh is Satan's masterpiece. Do you know where Satan is

today? He is in our flesh. The flesh is the meeting hall of Satan, sin, and death. These three great enemies continually meet together in the hall of our flesh, and their meeting is never dismissed. I cannot tell you how many thousands of years this meeting has been going on. The flesh is such an ugly thing.

What then is grace? Grace is God Himself enjoyed by us and helping us to face the situation of the flesh. In a sense, if there were no flesh, grace would not be so much needed. If it were not for the flesh, probably God would not have to give us so much grace. We have seen that, according to Hebrews 4:16, we may find grace to meet our timely need. What element causes us to need grace? It is mainly the flesh. I sympathize with the young people, for I was once a young man myself. As I passed through all the human experiences, I came to realize how much we are in the flesh. Although I do not like to be in the flesh, the flesh is here. Once I got mad at the Lord and said to Him, "Lord, why don't You take away my flesh?" Eventually He showed me that, in a sense, I needed the flesh, for the flesh is the very factor that compels me to come to the throne of grace. I cannot do anything with this flesh. All I can do is go to the throne of grace. Although there is nothing that we can do, yet there is somewhere that we can go—the throne of grace.

If you read the New Testament carefully, you will see that where the flesh is, there also is grace. This is especially true in the book of Galatians. Galatians 5:4 says that if we attempt to be justified by the law, we are fallen from grace. We are in the flesh. Galatians deals with this matter of the flesh, and it also speaks much about the matter of grace. Do not say that you do not have the flesh. You have a great deal of flesh. Even as you read this message, you have the flesh to contend with. What shall we do? Let us come to the throne of grace for the sake of dealing with the flesh. Because the flesh is here with us, we need grace.

The flesh is the very presence of the Devil, and grace is the very presence of God. In order for us to face the presence of Satan, we need the presence of God. Where is Satan? Do not think that Satan is far away from you. He is within you. Every minute, even while you are praying, Satan is in your flesh. A good number of times my prayers have been frustrated by the flesh. Even in the holiest time, the time of prayer, the flesh is a frustration. This frustration of the flesh forces us to come to the throne of grace. Although the flesh is the presence of Satan, over and against it we have grace, which is the presence of God. How strong are you? Are you strong enough to overcome Satan? Do you think that you can deal with him? Forget such thoughts. Satan is much greater than we are. Although Satan is greater than we are, God is greater than Satan. God is the greatest. Since Satan is here with us, we need God to be present. We have to say, "Lord, You know Your enemy is right here. You have to come and stand with me against him." When God comes to us and stands with us, that is grace.

God is sovereign and wise. He knows that if He were to take away the flesh, probably very few of us would be desperate to seek His grace. In His sovereignty and wisdom, He leaves the flesh here, knowing that, in a sense, it is useful to us. Day and night the flesh helps us turn to the throne of grace. When we are matured, that is, when we are raptured, we will be able to turn to the flesh and say, "Little flesh, your time is over. You may leave now." Before the maturity of life, in a sense we need the flesh, not to damage us, but to force us to come to the throne of grace.

Where the flesh is, there is grace, and where grace is, there is the issue of grace—righteousness. Romans 5:17 puts grace and righteousness together. This verse says that "those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." Righteousness always accompanies grace. There is not one husband who can be right with his wife without grace, and there is not one wife who can be right with her husband without grace. There is only one kind of wife or husband who is right—the wife or husband who finds grace. Once we have found grace, grace will make us right with our husband or wife. Consider the case of a particular husband who for years has been told by others that he should treat his wife better than he does. Nevertheless, he is not convinced. One night he finds grace, and grace issues in righteousness. Immediately he changes his attitude.

It is by the power of grace, the strength of grace, and the life of grace that we can be right with God, with one another, and even with ourselves. Grace produces righteousness. Righteousness is the highest product of grace. Therefore, Romans 5:21 says that "grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life." Thus, righteousness and grace always go together. Where the flesh is, there is grace, and where grace is, righteousness is produced.

We who have found grace are righteous. We are more righteous than others because of grace. We are not righteous because of ourselves, but because of grace. It is even possible to boast that the church members are more righteous than other people. They are righteous because they have found grace. Righteousness not only became a boast to Noah; it was also a boast to God. God was able to boast to His enemy. God could boast of Noah's righteousness to that crooked and perverse generation. Noah's righteousness strengthened God's standing to execute His judgment upon that ungodly generation.

b. Building the Ark

Since Noah had found grace, walked with God by faith, and inherited righteousness, God was very happy with him. God was continually smiling at Noah. Whenever Noah was with God, God was smiling at him. How about you? Is God smiling at you? Is He happy with you? If He is, you should be able to say, "Amen," secretly to God. Because God was happy with Noah, He opened Himself to him. So, Noah was not only one who walked with God, but also the one who built the ark. The ark was for salvation. At that time, the ark of salvation was built up by Noah. Abel offered gifts to God, Enosh called on the name of the Lord, Enoch walked with God but Noah, in addition to doing all of these things did something more—he built the ark.

1) Receiving the Revelation

Firstly, Noah built the ark by receiving the revelation (6:14-16). While Noah was walking with God and God was happy with him, God opened His heart to Noah and revealed His secrets to him. None of the other people knew the real situation. The worldly people of the time were befuddled, blinded, covered, veiled, and "doped." They did not know where they were or what was coming. They were blinded and drugged by their lusts. Look at the situation today. It is exactly the same. People are lovers of money, lovers of self, and lovers of pleasure, just as the people described by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-3. Although the worldly people love money, pleasure, and themselves, they are not lovers of God. They have all been "doped" by their lusts, their pleasures, their riches, and other worldly things. They do not know where they are, where they are going, or what will happen to them. It was exactly the same in the ancient days. But Noah was with God. He saw the true situation because God revealed all His secrets to him. God told Noah that the earth

was filled with violence, that the end of all flesh was come and that He would destroy them with the earth (6:13). Moreover, God told Noah what to do: to build an ark. Noah built the ark according to God's revelation.

In a sense, we also are under the same kind of revelation. Do you not know the real situation today? Do you not know what is coming and where you are going? I can boast to you that I know all these things. I know where I am. I know the situation of the world. I know what will come. I know where I will go, and I know where the church will be. We are not the people that are veiled and blinded by modern pleasures. The worldly people are covered with layer upon layer of veils. They go to the movies, to the night clubs, to the dance halls, to all kinds of amusements, pleasures, and sports. They only know those things. But all of those things are "dope." The worldly people have been "doped" and blinded. Are you that kind of person? Praise the Lord that we have been unveiled. We know where we are, we know the world situation, and we know what will come. We know what the Lord will do with this ungodly generation, and we know where we shall be. We are clear about all these things. We are building the ark, not only for our own salvation, but also for the salvation of others. Brothers and sisters, what are we doing here? We are building the ark of salvation for the accomplishment of God's purpose. Even as we meet together, we are building. We are not only offering a gift to God, not only calling on the name of the Lord to enjoy all His riches, not only living, begetting, and walking with God, but also finding grace, receiving the revelation, and building the ark. Praise the Lord that we are building.

2) Believing in God's Word

After Noah received the revelation, he immediately believed in the Word of God (Heb. 11:7). According to the Bible, to believe always means to believe through the Word. In Romans 10:14 Paul asked, "And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" Without the preaching of the Word, it is difficult for people to believe. Believing comes about by listening to the Word. Thus Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes out of hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." Undoubtedly, Noah heard the Word of God and believed in the Word that he heard. Do not say that you have no faith. Do not say that you cannot believe. As far as we are concerned, we do not have the faith, but faith is God Himself believing in us. We need to come to Him and have Him infused into our being. We need to be infused with what God is. God is believing. God is our faith. When you come to Him, are infused with Him, and listen to His Word, spontaneously the very God who has been infused into you will believe in and for you. This is what it means to believe in His Word.

3) Preaching Righteousness

Noah preached what he believed in and practiced. He was a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5). Why did Noah preach righteousness? Because nothing was righteous in his generation. The earth was filled with violence, and that violence included robbery, murder, fornication, and lawlessness. Noah preached righteousness, telling the people to get right with God, with others, and with themselves or else God's righteous judgment would come upon them. Noah preached this kind of righteousness probably over a period of one hundred twenty years (6:3). Perhaps the people accused him of being a mental case, saying to him, "Noah, what are you talking about? What do you mean that a flood is going to come? Look at the sky. It is the same as usual." I believe that Noah suffered a great deal of mockery during that one hundred twenty years.

4) Preparing the Ark

While Noah was preaching righteousness, he was building and preparing the ark (1 Pet. 3:20). Perhaps the people said to him, "Noah, are you building a house for your grandson? You're crazy to think that a flood will come. Why are you building such an ark—three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, thirty cubits high, with three stories, a side door, and one skylight opened towards the heavens? This is ridiculous!" If you had been Noah, would you have built such an ark? Perhaps even your dear wife would oppose you. It might not have been easy for Noah during those years.

5) Entering the Ark with His Family and All Other Living Creatures

After Noah had prepared the ark, one day, perhaps while the sky was still clear, God told Noah to enter the ark and to bring with him his wife, his sons, and his daughters-in-law (7:13-16). Noah's wife, children, and daughters-in-law were all so submissive. They entered into the ark with all the living creatures. If I had been Noah's wife, I probably would have hesitated. But they all entered in.

6) Being Shut in the Ark by the Lord

After Noah entered into the ark, God shut him in (Gen. 7:16). His entering into the ark was a type of our entering into Christ. Although we are free to enter in, once we are in, we have no way to get out. Once you believe in the Lord Jesus, you can never get out of Him. It is up to you to come in, but it is not up to you to go out. I can strongly testify that during the past fifty years I have tried several times to get out of Christ. I tried, but I discovered that I had been locked in. Once you get into Christ, you are locked in Him.

When Noah, his family, and the living creatures entered into the ark, people probably said, "Look at those crazy persons. What are they doing? They don't care for their homes or for anything. They have forsaken everything just to go into the ark." The Lord Jesus has said that in the day of the Son of man it will be the same as it was in the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37-39). People will eat, drink, marry, and give in marriage. Suddenly He will come, just as the flood came in Noah's time. When the flood came, Noah and his family were in the ark, protected, preserved, and saved.

We all must be today's Noah. Let us follow Noah's steps to find grace, walk with God by faith, receive the revelation, believe in God's Word, testify to people what we believe in, work on what we believe in, and step into what we believe in. Finally, God will lock us in the ark, and we shall be preserved and saved.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE TWENTY-NINE

THE LIFE AND WORK THAT CHANGED THE AGE

In this message, a parenthesis in our Life-study of Genesis, I am burdened that we see a crucial point regarding Noah's life—that Noah's life and work changed the age. Although I had seen this previously in my study of Genesis, I never saw it so impressively as in these days. It is not a small thing to change the age.

There is a great contrast between Genesis 1 and 6. If you read the latter part of Genesis 1, you will see that God created man in His own image for the purpose of expressing Himself (1:26). God intended that man be His expression. Man was made in the image of God to express nothing less than God Himself. Man was like a photograph, made in the image of God to express God. Furthermore, man was also committed with God's authority that he might exercise this authority for God's dominion on earth. We must see how great a commission this is. Man was created in God's image that he might express God, and he was entrusted with God's authority that he might represent God and set up a dominion on earth over all God's creatures. God did not charge man to work or to establish a mission. No, God's intention was that man should express Him with His image and represent Him with His authority.

After God created man and had a thorough look at him, He said, "Very good" (1:31). After His work on some of the six days, God simply said, "Good." On the second day, God did not say anything, because on that day there were fallen angels in the air and demons in the water. It was impossible for God to say, "Good," on that day. God did not say anything about the second day. On the sixth day, the day in which God created man, God looked at His work, especially on man, and said, "Very good!" In God's eyes, man was very good.

Five chapters later on, in Genesis 6, God took another look at mankind. When God had His first look at mankind in Genesis 1, He was happy and pleased with man. When God had another look at man in Genesis 6, He saw that man had become wicked and corrupt to the uttermost, and it grieved Him that He had made man. What a change from Genesis 1! Originally, man was on such a high level, but, beginning at chapter three, he descended lower and lower. What would you have done if you had been God? Perhaps you would have said, "Forget about it." But what about God's eternal purpose? Is not God the eternal God? Can the eternal God change? God is not a temporary God, but an eternal God. In Him there is no shadow of change (James 1:17). Once He makes a decision, it stands for eternity. If God had forgotten His eternal purpose, His enemy would have laughed at Him, saying, "You intended to create man to defeat me, but instead of You defeating me, I have defeated You." Will God be defeated? Never! Then what should God do? The answer, the same in principle throughout the centuries, is found in Genesis 6:8: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord."

Let us read verses 5 through 8. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." In Hebrew, the words "every imagination" signify not only the imagination, but also the purposes and desires. "And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them." If that had been all, there would have been no hope. But hallelujah for verse 8! This verse begins with a big "But." "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." This is one of the greatest verses in the book of Genesis. Satan was glad to hear that God was going to destroy man from the face of the earth, but Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. That turned the situation and changed the age. Hallelujah, God was not defeated! In the midst of apparent defeat, there was victory through a man who found grace in the eyes of the Lord. That was the turning point. If you read history along with the Bible, you will see that in every generation, when Satan has done his best to damage the situation to the uttermost, there has always been one man or a few people who found grace in the eyes of God and who became the ones who turned the age. Remember the history of Israel. Although they degraded lower and lower until they reached the bottom, there was, much to the surprise of the enemy, a young man named Daniel. Daniel 1:8 says, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank." There in the book of Daniel it says, "But Daniel"; here in Genesis 6:8 it says, "But Noah." At the bottom of man's fall, there is always a "but."

If we look at Noah's life, we shall see that it was not simply a matter of walking with God or of building the ark. The basic and crucial point is that God used Noah to change the age. The enemy had driven the situation to the bottom, and even God repented that He had made man. There seemed to be no hope. But Noah found grace. Noah's life was a life that changed the age.

Look at the situation today. If you read the Gospels and if you see God's purpose for the church, you will realize that the church has such a high commission. The church was produced with God's life to express Him in this New Testament age. The church has been entrusted with such a glorious commission. There is no need for us to look into the past. The present situation is sufficient to show us how much the church has fallen and deviated from God's proper goal. But do not be disappointed. Though Satan has done his best, God still has a way to carry out His original purpose. Among all the defeats, God today has raised up local churches to change the age.

I. THE LIFE

Let us now look into the life that changed the age. What kind of life was it? I have such a heavy burden about this. I fear and tremble that I may fail God in His revelation. I am not trying to give you a good sermon. I want to discharge my burden upon you, passing on the burden that the Lord has given me. How we need to see the kind of life that God can use to change the age!

A. Inheriting the Godly Ways of the Fathers

This life always inherits the godly ways of the forefathers. Thank God that Noah, the tenth generation from Adam, had many good forefathers. Enoch was the seventh generation, Methuselah the eighth, Lamech the ninth, and Noah the tenth. All of Noah's nine forefathers from Adam to Lamech were godly men. Although Genesis gives us a record of man's fall, that is only a background showing us the true picture of the godly ways.

1. Adam's Way of Salvation

Noah inherited Adam's way of salvation (3:20-21). In Adam, we see the way of salvation. Although Adam had fallen, he was given the way of God's salvation. If you had never fallen, you would never be able to taste the sweetness of God's salvation. Since we have been fallen and saved, we can testify of the sweet taste of God's salvation. Let us come with joy to draw water out of the wells of God's salvation (Isa. 12:3). Adam was the pioneer in drawing water out of the wells of God's salvation. He was so joyful that he called his

wife's name "Living" (3:20—"Eve" means "living"). Do you not think that he was joyful when he called her "Living"? I am quite sure that he joyfully drew water out of the wells of salvation. I have no doubt that Noah inherited this way of salvation.

2. Abel's Way of Offering

Noah also inherited Abel's way of offering (4:4). Adam's way was the way to get himself saved, but Abel's was the way to please God by offering gifts to Him (Heb. 11:4). Can you imagine that a fallen man could please God? Abel was a fallen man who pleased Him. His way of pleasing God was that of offering the type of Christ to God. I can please God in the same way. Although I am a fallen man with a fallen nature, I can please God by offering Christ to Him as a gift. I am not boasting, but I can declare to you that I have pleased God very much in these recent days. I know that God has been pleased with me. Even this morning and this afternoon I was happy because my God was pleased. My God was happy, and I was happy too. What is the way to please God? It is the way of Abel, which is to offer Christ to God, not only as the sacrifice for our sins, but also as a gift for pleasing God. Whenever you give a person a gift, he will be happy. Likewise, whenever we bring Christ to God, He is very happy with our gift. God is pleased with Christ. Noah surely adopted Abel's way.

3. Enosh's Way of Calling

The third godly way that Noah inherited was Enosh's way of calling on the name of the Lord to enjoy all that He is (4:26). This was an addition to the first two godly ways. It was not only a matter of being saved or of pleasing God, but of participating in and enjoying what God is by calling on His name. We may partake of the riches of God by calling on the name of the Lord. Noah must have practiced this.

4. All the Fathers' Way of Living and Begetting

Noah also inherited the way of living and begetting (5:3-28). Noah, like his forefathers, was not idle, but was living with a purpose for God and begetting children for man's proper multiplication that God's purpose might be fulfilled on this earth through mankind.

5. Enoch's Way of Walking with God

Noah also inherited the fifth way, the way of walking with God (5:22, 24). How good it is that a fallen man can walk with God! Although it is marvelous to see that a fallen man can be saved, we must further realize that such a person can walk with God. In the seventh human generation, Enoch discovered the way of walking with God.

We can be saved, please God, call on His name, live and beget, and walk with God. What else do we want? It seems that we have been fully satisfied. We are saved; we can please God; we can call on His name to enjoy all that He is to us; we can live with a purpose and beget, that is, bear fruit, for God's multiplication; and we can walk with God. What do we lack? Nothing. We are pleased and satisfied. However, God has not been satisfied. This is the burden that the Lord has shown me. It is inadequate simply to see that Noah inherited all the godly ways of his forefathers. If this ministry only helps you to see this much, it has failed God. We must see something more.

B. Receiving More Revelation

God gave Noah what was nearly an all-inclusive revelation, a further revelation which none of Noah's forefathers saw. Although Enoch prophesied that when his son Methuselah died the deluge would come (the meaning of the name "Methuselah"), and that God's judgment would be executed upon the corrupted earth, and although he even prophesied about the Lord's coming (Jude 14), Enoch never received the vision of the way that God would terminate the corrupted generation and bring in a new age. None of Noah's forefathers saw this revelation. One day, God came to Noah and revealed it to him. As a result of this, Noah's view of godly things was greatly broadened, and he saw much more than all his forefathers did. He saw the vision and received a definite revelation from God. We all need such a revelation.

In principle, our situation is exactly the same as Noah's. Today's generation is corrupt, and the earth is filled with evil and violence. It seems that, according to man's concept, God has been defeated and driven out of the earth. However, do you not realize that today there is a big "but"? Some dear ones have inherited all the godly ways of the saints from the first century of the Christian era until the present. We have inherited all the godly ways that were exercised in the past centuries. But should we stop here? Should we say, "Look at what we have"? No. Although we have inherited so many godly things and are satisfied and contented, how about God? How about God's purpose? God needs to terminate this age. He needs a change of generation. He needs an ark that can bring His people out of this generation and start a new age. God needs an ark. I have seen this and I cry out for this.

Have you been saved? Praise the Lord! Do you have a way to please God? Thank the Lord for this. Can you call on His name to partake of His riches? Since 1967, we have practiced this matter of calling on the name of the Lord. Are you living and begetting? Yes, day by day we are living for the Lord and are begetting for the Lord's multiplication. Are you satisfied? Hallelujah, we are satisfied. But what about God and His purpose? Do you realize that God intends to terminate this generation and bring in another age? In order to do this, He must have an ark. We cannot build the ark by our imagination. Like Noah, we must receive a revelation concerning God's need of the ark.

1. Concerning the Generation

God not only revealed to Noah His need of an ark, but He also showed him the true situation of his generation. That generation was thoroughly exposed in the eyes of God. It was also exposed to Noah through God's revelation. Do you realize that most people, including many Christians, are not clear about the generation in which we live? Mankind has been veiled, "doped," and befuddled by all their lusts and evil pleasures. Even the so-called Christian churches are "doped" with the tide of this age. We need a revelation. We need God to come to us and reveal the genuine situation of this evil generation. We need to see this. I received this revelation nearly fifty years ago. God has shown me this evil generation.

2. Concerning God's Intention

God not only showed Noah the evil generation, but also revealed to him His intention. God was and still is a God of purpose, and He can never be defeated in His purpose. Years and years ago, God showed us His purpose. Many of you have read Brother Nee's own testimony in which he says that once he had a dream, meaning a revelation, in which he saw local churches raised up throughout China. He saw churches raised up by God. What he called a dream was actually a revelation. Through him, many years ago, God showed us His need of the churches. Before the Lord comes back, He needs the churches to be raised up. Otherwise, He will have no way to return. What is today's ark? What is God's way of terminating this evil generation and bringing in a new age? It is the churches. God revealed the ark to Noah, and I must testify that God has revealed to us the need for the proper church life. The proper church life is the ark God needs today. The church life is needed to terminate this generation and to bring in a new age.

Ever since the day we received this revelation and stood up to declare it, we have been opposed, rejected, and condemned. While Noah told people what God had shown him and while he was building the ark, one hundred twenty years went by. During that time, Noah must have experienced a great deal of mocking. People probably said to him, "Noah, what are you doing? Are we all wrong? Are you the only one who is right? Will everything that we do be judged and only the poor ark that you are building remain?" Perhaps Noah said, "Time will tell. Just wait. If the flood does not come after ten years, then perhaps it will come after fifty years. If it does not come after fifty years, perhaps it will come after eighty years, or a hundred years, or a hundred nineteen years. Wait for another period of time, and the flood will come. Then you will realize that you need the ark, but it will be too late."

I strongly feel that we are in the same situation today. Because of our firm testimony of the church according to God's revelation, a great deal of criticism and opposition have come out against us. Some even say that we are a "cult." How could we be a cult? Honestly speaking, we believe the Holy Word in a pure way more than others do in this age. We are not boasting, but simply speaking the truth. At least we are the same as others in believing the Holy Word, but not in a leavened way. Do our dear critics have the assurance in their conscience that we are heretical? Every Christian has a conscience. They should listen to their conscience before the Lord. Listen to your conscience, please, and to what the Lord tells you in your conscience.

I have asked the brothers here in the United States to tell me how a little man from China coming to the leading nation on earth can receive so much attention. Why do they pay attention to me? They should simply forget about this little man. Now from the west coast to the east there are rumors that Witness Lee is heretical. Even in 1964 when I went to Texas, some Christians tailed me like spies, following me from one place to another. They took down what I said in my messages and, after twisting it, put it into print. So for ten years this small man has received much undeserved attention. Why do so many people pay attention to such a small man? Because this small man has brought something to this country that disturbs the enemy and threatens the kingdom of darkness. This testimony touches the territory of darkness.

I am a small man. However, from the depths of my being and from my pure conscience, I have the full assurance that this ministry is telling God's people what is today's revelation. America is a country of Christianity. There is no need for a man from the Orient to come here and speak to people about Christianity. But there is the need for the dear saints in this country to see today's revelation of God. What does the Lord want to do today? He does not simply want to save people, cause them to please God, teach them to call on the name of the Lord, enable them to live, beget, and walk with God. What He wants to do today is more than all this. He needs the churches to be raised up. His intention is to attract His lovers and seekers and gather them together to practice the proper church life as a testimony against the enemy's kingdom of darkness and as a preparation for His return. This is His intention today. We all need to see this and build this "ark" to be today's Noah that we may terminate this generation and usher in the new age of the kingdom.

3. Concerning God's Desire

God not only has an intention, but also a desire. God does intend to do something and He is also hungry and thirsty for this. God desires to have the church life. In 1933 a good pastor came to me. He did not call me Brother Lee; he addressed me as Mr. Lee. He said, "Mr. Lee, if you would not have the church and just minister the Word, we all would invite you to speak in our churches. We would make the arrangements for you to rotate the year round from church to church. If you would close the door of your meeting place, disband the people who meet with you, and simply preach the Word, we would all open our doors to you." I said, "Thank you. I have my burden and I have enough to do."

When I went to Taiwan, a missionary came to see me. Firstly, he praised me very much, saying, "Brother Lee, how we thank God that He has used you and how we thank Him that He has raised up such a wonderful work on the island of Taiwan." While he was praising me, I knew what he was going to say next. He continued by saying something about the church in a dissenting way. Some of the missionaries in the Far East considered our church practice as "the dead fly in the ointment." Some said to me, "If you don't talk anymore about the church, you will be welcomed by all Christians." I said, "Sorry, it does not depend on me. The Lord has burdened me so." I used to say to them, "We are grateful to you brothers who came from countries afar off for the gospel, especially to those pioneers a century ago who came to China after a six-month voyage. We appreciate the fact that you have given up your country, your family, your home, and everything to come here to preach the gospel. But our burden is not only for the gospel, but also for the church. God needs the church. Gospel preaching should be for the church. We also preach the gospel, as you know, but our goal in doing so is the building up of the church. Sorry to say, it seems to us that you do not care for this goal that God has shown us."

I was invited to visit London and Denmark in 1958. I cannot tell you how warm a welcome they extended to me in both places. Eventually, most of the leading ones were displeased with me over the matter of the church. I am for the church. Some friendships in the Lord which had been deep were severed just because of this.

Because of my standing for the church life according to what the Lord has shown us, a number of the saints whom I know have deserted me. I have not the slightest doubt that time will tell that the church life is what God desires to have today. I came to Los Angeles in 1962 to stay with the brothers for the Lord's recovery. At that time, I told that small group of brothers to wait for five or ten years and they would see something. Today I say the same thing. I hope that the Lord will come back soon. In case that He delays, I ask you to wait for another ten years and see what will happen. The Lord is going to take this country and the other leading countries for His recovery.

We all need to see the vision. We all must have today's revelation to see what is God's heart's desire. Are you going to be today's Noah? If you are, you must see what Noah did. God's desire is not only that thousands of people be saved, but to have the wonderful church life.

How we thank God for all the saints who have been used by God in the past. We have been greatly helped by their life and work. But we believe that in this age the Lord has shown us something more. We do follow the godly ways of all of our forefathers in the Lord, but the Lord's revelation has brought us further in His goings on this earth. This revelation of the Lord surely has made us different from the dear ones who remain in the traditions. May the Lord have mercy upon us that we would be faithful to His revelation, not caring about being different from others.

C. Believing and Practicing the Revelation Seen

After Noah received the revelation, he believed it and practiced it (6:22). He practiced it in a way of not caring about being different from his forefathers and from his generation. Perhaps people said to him, "Noah, what are you doing? Adam never talked this way. Neither did Abel or Enosh. All the fathers lived, begat, and died, but none of them talked the way you do. Who are you? Are you greater than Adam or Enoch? We admire Enoch, for he walked with God. What are you talking about, telling us that a flood will come? What do you mean by building an ark?"

The principle is the same today. We are following God's revelation that is according to the Bible in order to practice the church life; however, most Christians lack this revelation. God's revelation will always make you different. Daniel and his three companions were different, for they refused to eat the royal food. Paul was different, and so was Martin Luther. Everyone who has seen God's revelation is different. The revelation makes him different. We must be different from our folks, our schoolmates, our neighbors, and even from our fellow Christians. Only those who are void of God's revelation are so common. Whenever we see something, it makes us different. It is good to be different.

II. THE WORK

A. Preaching Righteousness

Now we must consider Noah's work. Firstly, Noah worked in preaching righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5). If you read the whole context of the Bible, you will see that in Noah's day preaching righteousness was to protest against the evil generation. His generation was evil and filled with violence, but Noah was a man who preached righteousness and protested against all the unrighteousness, evil, and violence. He testified of the righteous way of God.

B. Building the Ark

1. According to God's Revelation by Faith

While Noah was preaching righteousness, he was building the ark. In principle, we are doing the same thing. We are preaching righteousness and we are protesting against the evil age. While we are preaching, we are building a corporate ark. Noah built the ark by faith according to God's revelation (Heb. 11:7). He did not construct it according to tradition or his own concept and invention, but absolutely according to God's revelation. This is the reason that in everything we must return to God's revelation in His holy Word. We must come back to the pure Word of God.

2. Against the Tide of the Age

The building of the ark was absolutely against the tide of Noah's generation. He was against the trend of that age and "he condemned the world" (Heb. 11:7). No one besides Noah's family appreciated that work. The work of Noah and his family was unique, peculiar, and strange. In human eyes it was impractical. It was according to God's revelation and, thus, it was against the trend and tide of that generation. Do you not think that the principle is the same today? What we are preaching and doing is altogether against the tide of this generation. But we praise the Lord that we are in His flow. We are not in the tide of this generation; we are in the flow from the throne according to His revelation. Praise Him!

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE THIRTY

THE WAY OF SALVATION FROM MAN'S THIRD FALL

(2)

C. The Ark

In this message we come to the ark (Gen. 6:14-16). We have seen that Genesis is a book containing many spiritual seeds. The ark is truly a great seed. The Lord has shown us something about the depth of this great type.

1. The Size

Firstly, I would like to speak about the dimensions and size of the ark. The length of the ark was three hundred cubits, the breadth fifty cubits, and the height thirty cubits (6:15). The ark had three stories (6:16). Since the height of the ark was thirty cubits, each story must have been ten cubits high. These dimensions are very meaningful. Why was the ark not eight hundred cubits long, seventy cubits wide, and twenty or forty cubits high? Why was it three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high? The answer is that the basic numbers in God's building are three and five.

Exodus 25:10 tells of another ark, the ark of God's testimony. Thus, in the Bible there are two arks—Noah's ark and the ark of God's

testimony. The first ark bore two numbers, three and five. But the dimensions of the ark of the testimony are two and a half cubits in length, one and a half cubits in width, and one and a half cubits in height. As we compare these two arks, we see that two and a half is half of five and one and a half is half of three. The first ark has the numbers in full, and the second ark has the numbers in halves. The Bible is the divine Word, and every point in it has a specific significance. Why are the measurements of the ark of the testimony in halves? When you see the half, you realize that there is another half, and that the two put together form a testimony. The two halves form a complete unit. That is God's testimony. The second ark was God's testimony. How could the testimony be signified by means of a figure? Although it is difficult for people to see a figure and realize the testimony, when people looked at the measurements of the ark of testimony and saw that they were halves, they would immediately realize the need of the other half. They would know that this was a testimony, for two is the number of testimony. What are the measurements of the ark a testimony of? They are a testimony of a complete unit in the basic numbers of three and five.

What is the meaning of the numbers three and five? In the Bible the number three firstly signifies the Triune God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Why must God be in three Persons? Do we have one God or three? We must say emphatically that we have one God. However, some Christians, understanding the Trinity according to their mental apprehension, have come to believe in three gods. A man once told me that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three gods. When I heard this, I said, "Please do not say this. That is really heresy. The Bible never tells us that there are three gods. The Bible always says that there is one God." Our God is one (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:5; 1 Cor. 8:4). Why or how can this one God have three Persons? The term "Person" is not found in the Bible; it comes from man's interpretation. Griffith Thomas, the writer of the best exposition on Romans, said in his book, *Principles of Theology*, "The term Person is also sometimes objected to. It certainly must not be pressed too far, or it will lead to Tritheism..While we are compelled to use terms like 'substance' and 'Person,' we are not to think of them as identical with what we understand as human substance and personality..The truth of the experience of the Trinity is not dependent upon theological terminology." Griffith Thomas also said that our human language is inadequate to explain this divine mystery. We lack the language, the utterance, and the terms. We are short of the proper understanding of this divine mystery. What terms should we use? We do not know. No adequate terms are available. The Trinity is a mystery, and we have no vehicle, no means, to express it. When Philip asked the Lord Jesus to show him and the other disciples the Father, the Lord said, "Am I so long a time with you, and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. How is it that you say, Show us the Father?" (John 14:9).

I have been condemned for saying that the Lord Jesus is the Spirit. Although I do not like to argue or to answer, I would like to ask those dear brothers who condemn me how they interpret 2 Corinthians 3:17 which says, "And the Lord is the Spirit." Do not ask, "Then are the Lord and the Spirit one?" We do not have the skill nor the means to explain this adequately. Although we cannot explain it adequately, we do have a verse in the Bible which says, "And the Lord is the Spirit." Where do you put this verse? Will you cut it out of your Bible? I would also present to those brothers Isaiah 9:6 which says, "Unto us a son is given..and his name shall be called..the everlasting Father..." Is He the Son or the Father? Again, although we cannot explain this adequately, we do have this verse that says that the Son shall be called the Father. Second Corinthians 3:17 says that the Lord is now the Spirit, and Isaiah 9:6 says that the Son is called the Father. This is the mystery of the Trinity. We do have the Father, the Son, and the Spirit; yet the Son is called the Father, and the Son is the Spirit. They three are still one God.

We all know John 1:1. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." It is quite clear that the Word and God are distinct. However, the following clause of John 1:1 says, "and the Word was God." This clause creates a problem. In the beginning was the Word of God, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Are they one or two? This is a mystery, the mystery of the Triune God.

Ephesians 4:6 says that the Father is in us, Colossians 1:27 says that Christ, the Son, is in us, and John 14:17 says that the Holy Spirit is in us. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all in us. Once I presented these verses to a certain person, asking him if he was clear about them and if he believed what they said. I asked him, "Do you believe all these facts—that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are in you?" When he said that he did, I asked him, "Tell me, how many are in you now?" He said, "One." Then I said, "Haven't you admitted that the Bible tells us that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all are in you? How can you say that only one is in you?" He could not answer. The Bible does say that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, all three are in us. But, according to our experience, we have only one in us, whom we call either the Spirit or the Lord. This is the mystery of the Trinity of our God. He is the only one God, yet He is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

The Trinity of God is for Him to be dispensed into us. No food can get into us without being cooked or processed. If a food is not cooked, at least it must pass through the process of being masticated, swallowed, digested, and assimilated. Without this process, nothing can get into us. The Triune God is the very God who is dispensing Himself into our being. Matthew 28:19 says, "Baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." For what purpose do we baptize people into the Father, Son, and Spirit? For the purpose of processing them into God and for processing God into them. The Triune God, the Trinity, is not a theory or a theological teaching. It is God's dispensation.

The number three signifies God in His dispensation. The number three denotes the dispensing God, the very God who is dispensing Himself into people. Whenever the Bible speaks of God mingling with man, of God entering into man, or of God being dispensed into man, it always uses the matter of the Trinity. Consider, for example, 2 Corinthians 13:14. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." This is not a doctrine of three gods; it is the Triune God in the process of dispensing, of getting Himself into us, and of bringing us into all His riches. This is the significance of the number three.

What does the number five signify? This is quite easy to understand. The ten commandments were divided into two tablets each containing five commandments. In Matthew 25, we have ten virgins divided into two groups of five. If you look at yourself, you will see that you have ten fingers and ten toes, all arranged in groups of five. The five fingers on each of your hands are composed of four plus one. If you had two thumbs and three fingers, it would be awkward for you to do anything. But with one thumb and four fingers we can easily do anything. The thumb is number one, representing the one God as the Creator. Four is the number of God's creature, like the four living creatures (Rev. 4:6). Thus, four plus one means man, God's creature, plus God. The thought here, as signified by the numbers three and five, is that of the mingling of the Triune God with man. What is God's building? God's building is simply to build Himself into us, and us into Him, making Him one with us and making us one with Him. So, in the ark, the basic numbers of three and five signify that this building is the mingling of God and man.

Why was the length of the ark three hundred cubits, the breadth fifty cubits, and the height thirty cubits? It is clear that the number three hundred is a hundred times of three, that the number fifty is ten times of five, and that the number thirty is ten times of three. The basic numbers are three and five, and the numbers three hundred, fifty, and thirty are the multiples of these basic numbers. The number one hundred denotes fullness. The Lord Jesus said that the best way to bear fruit is to bear it a hundredfold (Matt. 13:23). Thus, the number one hundred in the Bible is the number of fullness. The number ten means completeness (Dan. 1:12, 20). If you are lacking a thumb, you are incomplete. Since ten signifies completeness and a hundred indicates fullness, the ark is the mingling of the Triune God with man in completeness and in fullness.

If you read Exodus 27, you will find that the numbers three and five are also the basic numbers of the tabernacle. The court of the tabernacle was a hundred cubits long on both the south side and the north side (Exo. 27:9, 11). The breadth of the court on both the west side and the east side was fifty cubits (Exo. 27:12-13). The fence or curtains of the court were five cubits high (Exo. 27:18). The hangings on either side of the gate were fifteen cubits in length (Exo. 27:14-15). These hangings were supported by three pillars on each side, giving three sections of five cubits each. Nothing in the Bible is vain. The measurements of the entire court of the tabernacle are composed of the basic numbers of three and five. Furthermore, the whole tabernacle itself was of three sections: the outer court, the holy place, and the holiest of all. In the holy place there were three items: the showbread table, the lampstand, and the incense altar. This is all very meaningful. The numbers three and five are the basic numbers of God's building.

I hope that you take this word into your being and realize that whatever you share in building the church must be of three and five; it must be the Triune God mingled with man. Whatever you do for the building of the church must be in the mingling of the Triune God with you and others. This thought is deep.

2. Three Stories

The ark was of three stories, the lower, the second, and the third (6:16). The first, second, and third stories signify the height of the ark. The three sections of the tabernacle signify the depths into which we all must enter. The three stories of the ark signify the height which we all must attain. In one sense we are getting deeper, and in another sense we are getting higher. Undoubtedly, the three stories of the ark signify the Triune God. In the Trinity of the Godhead, we always say, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Which Person of the Trinity is the first story? It is easy to say who is the second, for we all know that the Son is in the middle. But is God the Father or God the Spirit the first story? In Luke 15 we find three parables: the shepherd recovering the lost sheep, the woman seeking and finding the lost coin, and the father receiving the returned prodigal. The first parable concerns the Son, the second concerns the Spirit, and the third concerns the Father. According to our experience, the Spirit firstly came to us, found us, brought us to the Son, and inspired us to believe in the Son. After we believed in the Son, we called, "O Father." The Spirit brings us to the Son, and the Son brings us to the Father. When we come to the Father, we are in the third story.

The Gospel of John is a book of the Son, and the First Epistle of John is a book of the Father. In the book of the Son, we have grace, but in the book of the Father, we have love. Love is higher than grace. In the Gospel of John we have the truth, but in the First Epistle of John we have the light. Light is higher than truth. The Gospel of John is good, for it brings us to the Son. The First Epistle of John, however, brings us to the Father. We all must go on from the Son to the Father.

The first story of the ark is of the Spirit. Many Christians like to talk about the so-called baptism in the Holy Spirit and about the charismatic things, but this is all in the first story. We all must go to the Spirit in order to know the Son, Christ. To know Christ is different; it is higher. Someday we shall all reach the story of the Father. This is the highest, greatest, and most mysterious.

Suppose I have a residence of three stories. If you are not my special friend, I would only admit you into the first story. I would not allow you into the second. If you are my good friend, I would admit you into the second story. However, unless you are so intimately related to me, I would never bring you into the third story to show you some of my mysteries, secrets, and hidden treasures. I would not dare to reveal to you my secrets and my riches. Who would be allowed into the third story? Certainly my wife would be there. The outsiders could never get into the third story.

Suppose that you are now in the ark. Would you prefer to stay in the first, second, or third story? I have no doubt that Noah, his sons, and daughters-in-law were in the third story. The lower beasts and creeping things might have been in the first story and the higher animals in the second. I can testify to you that I have passed the first story. I want to go higher and higher.

3. One Window toward the Heaven for Light

Following this, we come to the matter of light. In the ark there was one window towards the heavens (6:16). That was the skylight. The Hebrew word for window has the same root as the word for noon. This means that when you are under the window, you are in the noontime. You are in the sunshine and are full of light. Whether you are in the first, second, or third story is proved by the degree of light that you have. I have seen a good number of fervent Christians. In a sense they were on fire, but they were not so much in the light. I have also met some other dear saints whose presence made everything clear. I had many good times with Brother Nee. Whenever a person sat down with him, all of his darkness vanished, and everything became clear. In his presence it was noontime. What story are you in? The story you are in is indicated by the amount of light you have. The more light you have, the higher you are, and the less light you have, the lower you are.

There was only one window in the ark. Today people argue a great deal about different ministries. I do not care for the number of ministries. There is only one window and only one light. The Apostle Paul said that we must reject the doctrines different from what he preached and taught (Gal. 1:6-9; Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 1:3). In God's economy and in God's church there should be only one window. The light should not come from the north, south, east, or west, but from the sky. In the building of God, there is only one window, one revelation, and one vision. The light comes from above.

4. One Door on the Side

The ark had one door on the side (6:16). No one has ever dropped into the ark from the heavens. We all came in through the side. There is only one door, one way, to get in. Some may argue that there are twelve gates in the New Jerusalem, three gates on each of

the four sides of the city. But do you not know that the three are in one? What is three? It is the dispensing of the Godhead. In the ark there is one opening for the light and one entrance for all to get in. We all, including the Apostle Paul, came through the same door. The door is Christ.

5. Material—Gopher Wood

The ark was made of gopher wood (6:14). What is gopher wood? It is a cypress, full of resin; it is a kind of resinous wood. It can stand the attack of water. A wood without resin cannot withstand the attack of water. Gopher wood was able to withstand the attack of the flood water. Song of Songs 1:17 speaks of cedar and fir. Fir is very similar to cypress. Nearly all of the best versions translate the Hebrew word for fir as cypress. In typology, especially in the Song of Songs, cedar wood typifies the resurrected Christ. The resurrected Christ is the cedar wood that grows on the top of Mount Lebanon. Cypress is a figure of the crucified Christ. The crucified Christ can withstand the waters of death. He tasted death, and death could do nothing to Him. The ark made of gopher wood passed through the flood, and the flood attacked it again and again, but no damage was incurred. This signifies the solidness of Christ as the crucified One. Christ is the real gopher wood. He is the true cypress, full of resin and strong to withstand any flood. The flood waters of death cannot damage Him.

6. Covered within and without with Pitch

Christ is not only the crucified One, but also the One who shed His blood to cover us from the penalty of our sins. So, the ark was pitched within and without with pitch (6:14). The Hebrew word for pitch has the same root as the Hebrew word for atonement. The main meaning of this Hebrew root is "to cover." The word for the cover of the ark of the testimony, the mercy seat, also comes from this same root. This means that in Christ we have the full covering. We all are covered with His redemption. Death cannot damage Him, and so no condemnation or judgment can reach us, because we are under the covering of Christ's redemption. The pitch signifies the redeeming of Christ, which covers God's building within and without. The covering within is for our sight, and the covering without is for God's. Perhaps when the flood was attacking the ark, the people within were frightened. But whenever they looked at the pitch within, they could be at peace. The pitch inside the ark was for their peace. The pitch outside the ark was for God's satisfaction. The covering of the pitch without was also for Satan and the angels. This is a picture of the blood. Whenever we look at the blood, we have peace. Whenever God looks at the blood, He is satisfied. Whenever Satan looks at the blood, he is unable to attack. Whenever the angels look at the blood, they rejoice.

7. A Type of Christ

The whole ark is a type of Christ (1 Pet. 3:20-21). Christ is not a canoe, but an ark. A canoe is a curved piece of wood; an ark is composed of many pieces rightly framed together. An ark is a building. A canoe is individual, but an ark is a corporate entity. My Christ is an ark. We can never be safe in a canoe. However, when I am in the ark, I can sleep well regardless of how terrible the storm may be. We are in the ark. Some Christians may have Christ as a canoe, but our Christ is an ark.

Since the ark is a type of Christ, how could Noah have built it? Nevertheless the ark was built by Noah. Many Christians simply preach the gospel, expecting that one day God will send the ark down from heaven. If you say that we must work to build the ark, the salvation, people will condemn you, saying, "We are saved by grace, not by work." Noah was saved by the ark which was built by his work. Philippians 2:12-16 says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure..that you may become blameless and guileless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life." What does it mean to "work out your own salvation"? It means to hold out the Word of life, to illuminate, to enlighten, to live out Christ. This is through God's working within us both to will and to do. As God is working within us, so we have to work out our salvation. Although we have been saved, God is still working in us that we may work out our salvation. Thousands of people have been saved, but how many have the life described in Philippians 2:15? Many are not working out their salvation.

Are we now working out our salvation? Noah built the ark that eventually saved him not only from God's judgment, but also from that crooked and perverse generation. We must work out this kind of salvation. There is no doubt that we have been saved from eternal perdition. But Noah was not only saved from perdition; he was also saved out of that evil age into a new age. The ark which he built terminated the old generation and ushered in a new one. That was the kind of salvation that Noah was building. It was not simply a salvation from eternal perdition, but a salvation from that crooked and perverse generation. That kind of salvation was not only prepared by God; it was built through the corporate cooperation of the saved ones.

No one who has been saved will ever perish. Nevertheless, you need a further and higher salvation that will save you from this crooked and perverse generation. Have you been saved? What about the coming age? Will you have a share in it? Will you be there when Christ returns to take possession of the whole earth and to exercise His reigning power over it? Will you share in His reign? Although we all have been saved from eternal perdition, many of us are not working on something which will bring us out of this evil age. The ark which Noah built was a salvation that not only saved him from God's judgment, but that also separated him from that crooked and perverse generation and brought him into a new age. As far as God's judgment is concerned, we all have been saved, but as far as God's economy is concerned, we are lacking. God has condemned the world, but you still love it. God has warned you to escape from this age, but you still keep yourself firmly planted in it. You are short of the further and higher salvation. The salvation mentioned in Philippians 2 is not salvation from perdition, but from the crooked and perverse generation.

While the apostles were preaching the gospel, they were also building the ark in which they would enjoy full salvation. What was that ark? It was the corporate Christ. While the apostles were preaching the individual Christ, they were building up the corporate Christ. Through that corporate Christ, thousands of people were not only saved from God's judgment, but also from that crooked and perverse generation.

Today, if we are faithful to God, we must do the same thing. On the one hand, we preach the gospel; on the other hand, we build the ark. What we preach is what we build. What we preach is not a theory or a doctrine. We preach what we are building up. By our life and work, we build up the very thing that we are preaching to others. Eventually, we shall enter into that which we are building.

Others may also enter in. The builded ark will save us from this condemned generation. Do you not believe that we are building the ark? I am so happy that we are building the ark. My friends and relatives always ask me, "What are you doing?" I reply, "I am doing something which is difficult for you to understand. The only way for you to understand it is to get in it yourself." We are not just preaching, but also building what we preach. Do we preach Christ? We are building Christ as well as preaching Christ. This means that we are living by Christ and with Christ. We are living out Christ. We hold on to Christ and live Him out. This is our building work.

At the same time, we are building the church. The church is the corporate Christ (1 Cor. 12:12) which, in a sense, is today's ark. Thousands of people have been saved by entering into the church life. Many can testify how they have been saved by coming into the church. Although you might have been saved for many years, you were not separated from this crooked world until you came into the church. That corporate ark separated you. Once we came into the church, no one had to tell us to come out of the world. We simply began a life of "churching," coming to the meetings again and again. Eventually, the long hair and so many other things of this age disappeared. By churching, everything of this crooked age will disappear. What is able to save us from this perverse age? Churching can save us. We are building the ark that can save us as well as others from the age condemned by God.

*8. Not Only for Mankind
but Also for All Living Things*

The ark was not only for the salvation of man, but for the salvation of all living creatures. What does this signify? Hebrews 2:9 says that Christ tasted death not only for every man, but, as the Greek indicates, for everything. So, Colossians 1:20 says that God has reconciled all things to Himself through Christ. The creatures as well as the human beings were in the ark. Christ has accomplished an all-inclusive death for every creature, for all things. Thus, the ark was not only for the salvation of man, but for the salvation of all living creatures.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE THIRTY-ONE

SAVED THROUGH WATER

D. Saved through Water

God's salvation to Noah was not only to save him from God's judgment, but also from his crooked, perverse, and evil generation. In order to be saved from that evil age, he needed to be saved through water. First Peter 3:20 says clearly that Noah was saved through water. What does it mean to be saved through water? In order to understand this, we must know the background of Noah's generation.

Noah lived in a crooked and perverse age. As a result of man's first fall, the evil nature of Satan had been injected into man. In the second fall, man deviated from the presence of God into human culture. The evil nature of Satan which had been injected into man in the first fall developed into a godless human culture in the second fall. In the third fall of man, this culture ushered in an evil generation, producing a crooked, corrupted, and perverse generation. That generation was condemned in the eyes of God. It was into such a generation that Noah was born. Not only did God's condemnation rest upon that age, but there was on earth the evil power of darkness. At the time of man's third fall, that evil power of darkness had corrupted the earth and filled it with violence. As a result, God intervened to judge that generation and to terminate that age. Whoever lived on earth during that age was under two things: God's judgment and the evil power of darkness.

We live in the same kind of age. In Matthew 24 and in Luke 17 the Lord Jesus likened our age to that of Noah. Noah's background was exactly the same as ours; it was a prefigure of our background. Look at the world situation today. Undoubtedly, it is under God's condemnation. It is also under an evil power, a wicked influence. No young person or adult can withstand the evil power or influence of modern society. Christian parents pray for their children even before the children are born. They consecrate the children to the Lord, trying with fear and trembling to help them to know God and to stay away from the influence of this dark world. However, at the age of six, the children must attend school, and once they are in school, they are subject to the evil influence of the darkness of this age. Nearly all of the children are influenced at least to some extent. No one is immune. We can see that there is such an evil power, a wicked influence of darkness, on this earth. Everyone is under God's judgment and under the power and darkness of the evil one. So, God's full salvation not only saves us from His condemnation, but also from the evil power and influence of this dark age. On the day of Pentecost, Peter exhorted people, "Be saved from this crooked generation!" (Acts 2:40).

I say once again that nearly everything in the book of Genesis is a seed that requires further development. To be saved through water is a matter of baptism. First Peter 3:20-21 reveals that the water through which Noah passed was a figure of baptism. It may be considered as the first mention of baptism in the Bible. Thus, it was the seed of baptism. This seed of baptism was firstly developed in the case of the children of Israel passing through the Red Sea. First Corinthians 10:1-2 tells us that their passing through the Red Sea was a baptism. The passing through the waters of the Red Sea was a clear type of the baptism with water. Later, when the New Testament age came, the first thing that transpired to open up this age was baptism with water. God sent John the Baptist to carry this out. He came with the purpose of baptizing people with water.

Let us now consider the case of the Israelites. Although they were God's chosen people, they fell and drifted into Egypt. The whole Egyptian nation was under God's judgment. Since the Israelites also were there, undoubtedly they were under His judgment as well. They were at the same time under the power of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Their exodus from Egypt was not an escape from God's judgment; it was an escape from Egypt, a deliverance from the Egyptian slavery.

Let us see the salvation the children of Israel enjoyed. Firstly, they enjoyed the redemption of the blood of the lamb. They slew lambs and struck the blood upon the doorposts. In this way the Israelites were covered by the redeeming blood and saved from God's judgment. When God executed His judgment over the land of Egypt, those who were under the blood were saved. The children of Israel were saved by the blood from God's judgment. Following this, they all ate the flesh of the lamb. The purpose of doing this was

not to save them from judgment, but to strengthen them to walk out of Egypt. When they ate the lamb, they put on their sandals, held their staffs, and were ready to go out. While they were eating, they were preparing to get out of Egypt.

What delivered the Israelites out of Egypt and out from under the power of Pharaoh? Although God saved them from His judgment, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, would not let them go. Pharaoh was a type of Satan. Pharaoh, that is, Satan, seemed to say, "You children of Israel have been saved from God's judgment and you have eaten the flesh of the lamb. You are ready to leave. Do you think that it's easy for you to get out? This is my territory. This is my power, my kingdom, and my empire. I have the power here and I will not let you go." Thus, Pharaoh sent his army to hold the Israelites back. But God came in to deliver them, not by sending angels or fire to burn Pharaoh and his forces, but by opening the Red Sea that they might walk through it. After His people had passed through the sea, the Egyptian army followed. While they were pursuing God's people and when they came to the heart of the sea, God told Moses to stretch out his hand over the sea that the waters might come upon the Egyptians (Exo. 14:26). Moses did this, and the sea obeyed him. Pharaoh's army and all the power of the Egyptians were buried. The children of Israel were delivered. What were they delivered from? Not from God's judgment, but from the power of Egypt and Pharaoh, that is, from the power of the world and Satan.

The children of Israel enjoyed a double salvation. The first aspect of their salvation was the redeeming blood, and the second aspect was the judging water. Hallelujah for the redeeming blood and the judging water! We know what the redeeming blood is, but I doubt that very many know what the judging water is. For us, the judging water is the cross of Christ. The death of the Lord Jesus on the cross is the judging water. A line in Hymn 438 in our hymnal says, "I've crossed the Red Sea of His death." The Lord's death was the judging water. Satan and the world were judged on the cross. When the Lord Jesus was about to go to the cross, He declared, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). Both Satan and the world were judged on the cross.

The Lord saved His people from the world by His judgment upon it. God executed His judgment upon the Egyptians, and that judgment was a salvation to the Israelites. To Satan and to his world, the cross was a judgment, but to us, this judgment on the cross is a salvation. It is not a salvation from God's condemnation, but from the power of Satan and from the evil influence of this dark age. Since this matter is clear, we may return to Noah's case.

*1. Noah Saved by the Pitched Ark
from God's Judgment*

Undoubtedly Noah was under God's condemnation. He was also under the evil power of the age in which he lived. Noah built an ark which was pitched within and without with pitch. The pitch was a type of the redeeming blood. Thus, Noah was saved from God's judgment by the pitch upon the ark.

*2. Noah Saved through the Judging Water
from the Condemned World*

What saved Noah from that evil age? The flood sent by God as a judgment upon the evil world. That judging flood separated Noah from that age. The water of the Red Sea buried the Egyptians and separated the children of Israel from the Egyptian world, and the waters of the flood did the same thing for Noah. On the one hand, the flood judged that evil age; on the other hand, it separated Noah from that age. The water that judged the world saved Noah from that evil generation. As a result of the two aspects of God's full salvation, Noah was saved from God's condemnation as well as from that evil generation.

Hardly any Christians know about the second aspect of God's salvation. Every real Christian knows that the blood saves us from God's condemnation, from eternal perdition. We thank God for this. But how many Christians praise the Lord for the salvation through water? I do this a great deal. More than forty years ago, I began to praise the Lord for salvation through the blood and for salvation through water. "Thank You, Lord, that I have been saved from God's judgment and also from the evil power of Satan. Hallelujah, I am out of Egypt!" Since very few Christians know that they have been delivered out of the evil age of this world, my burden is that we all must see the second aspect of God's full salvation. God's great salvation not only saves us from His judgment, but also from Satan's power.

a. The World with All Its Ages Condemned by God

The world with all of its ages has been condemned by God. There is one world with many ages. There is the age of the old fashion and the age of the modern fashion. There is the short-hair age, and there is the long-hair age. All the ages are condemned by God. The world of Noah's age was condemned (Gen. 6:11-13), and the world of the Egyptian age also was condemned (Exo. 14:26-28).

The whole world is a satanic system which has systematized all of mankind. The world has different departments as well as different ages. In the same age you have the department of education, economics, religion, etc. Each of these is a department of the satanic system for the systematizing of man. The whole world with all of its ages and departments is under God's condemnation (John 12:31; 16:11). However, my intention is not simply that we see God's condemnation. We should just have a look at it and then go on to God's salvation.

*b. God's People Saved from the World
by God's Judgment on the World*

God's people are saved from the world by His judgment on it. With what does God save us from the condemned world? With the same thing by which He judged the world. The flood that God used to execute His judgment upon the ancient world saved Noah from that world. The Red Sea that God used to judge the Egyptians saved the children of Israel from the evil power of the Egyptians. The cross by which God judged Satan and his world also saves us from this condemned world.

We Christians are saved by the judging cross of Christ. The cross executed God's judgment upon Satan and the world. We have been saved from God's judgment by the redeeming blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9). We were saved from the condemned world by the judging death of Christ. Galatians 1:4 says, "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might rescue us out of the present evil age." Although

Christ died for our sins, the goal was to deliver us from this present evil age. I have heard many messages concerning Christ's death as a salvation from sin, but I have hardly heard a message telling me that the goal of Christ's death was to save me from the present evil age.

Galatians 6:14 says, "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world." To Paul, the world was on the cross, and to the world, Paul was on the cross. Is the world on the cross to you? Are you on the cross to the world? In our eyes, the world should be on the cross. It has been crucified. Do you love something that has been crucified? To the world, we are on the cross. Many times I have heard the parents of a saint say, "My son is dead." Some husbands may say that their wives are dead, and some wives may say that their husbands are dead. That is correct. All the Christian husbands, wives, sons, and daughters are dead. We are dead to the world, and the world is dead to us through the judging death of Christ.

*3. Baptism with Water
Signifying the Judging Death of Christ
Which Saves Us from the World
Condemned by God*

When you are baptized, you are buried. Nothing can remove people out of the world so effectively as a burial. Likewise, what can get you out of the world more effectively than baptism? Suppose a certain man loves the world very much. He has many attachments in the world. His wife, children, and all his relatives love him. He has money in the bank and several businesses under his control. How can such a man get out of the world? The easiest way is for him to be buried. Once his relatives have given him a good funeral, he will be through with the world. Thus, nothing separates a person from the world more than his burial.

What is baptism? I am sorry to say that many people think of it as a ritual which makes a person a nominal member of a so-called church. Before I experienced genuine baptism, I underwent such a ritual. We should never baptize people in a ritualistic way. Whenever we are going to baptize people, we must pray and exercise our spirit with authority and with the powerful name of the Lord Jesus. Then we baptize people, putting them into a "tomb" and burying them. This burial separates them from the world.

We have been baptized into Christ's death (Rom. 6:3). We have been buried with Christ in baptism (Col. 2:12). We are dead and buried from the rudiments of this world (Col. 2:20). We have passed through the flood waters and the Red Sea. The flood waters that judged Noah's generation rescued him, and the Red Sea that judged the Egyptians rescued the Israelites. This is the salvation that we need today. Every Christian needs the second aspect of God's full salvation. Have you enjoyed this aspect of His salvation? I can shout and declare, "I have been separated from Egypt! I have been separated from this evil, crooked, and perverse generation!"

a. Typified by the Flood of the Deluge

The baptism with water was typified by the flood that saved Noah from his evil age (1 Pet. 3:20-21). Noah was baptized in a large baptistery and experienced a very lengthy baptism. It lasted at least forty days. The number forty signifies testing. No one could have built such a large baptistery or collected so much water. The first mention of baptism in the Bible was a worldwide baptism. Our baptism must also be like that. Once you get into that kind of baptistery, there is no way out. Although it is easy for us to get out of the baptistery in the meeting hall, there was no way for Noah to get out of the baptistery used in his baptism. Noah was buried in a worldwide tomb. That was the seed of baptism. Christ's death is all-inclusive. The baptism based upon His death is worldwide, even universally wide, full of judging and burying water.

b. Typified by the Waters of the Red Sea

This baptism with water signifying the judging death of Christ was also typified by the waters of the Red Sea that saved the Israelites from the Egyptian age (Exo. 14:26-28). We have two types of the baptism with water: the flood and the Red Sea. First Peter 3:20-21 says that the flood through which Noah passed was a figure of the baptism that saves us, and 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 tells us that the Red Sea through which the Israelites passed was also a baptism that saved God's people from the evil power, from the enemy's slavery. All the worldly occupations, all the worldly pleasures, amusements, sports, are buried in the Red Sea of our baptism. This kind of effectual baptism in the power of the Spirit saves us from the world, from the evil age condemned and judged by God.

*c. Signified by the Laver, the Brass Sea,
and the Sea of Glass*

In addition to the types which typify baptism, we have the signs in the Bible which signify the meaning of baptism. Baptism was signified by the laver of the tabernacle (Exo. 30:18-21). In front of the tabernacle was the laver. The area outside the separating line of the tabernacle represented the world. Suppose a person was coming out of the world and wanted to be a priest and get into the presence of God within the tabernacle. Firstly, he had to pass through the altar, signifying the cross of Christ. On the altar, the offerings for sins were presented. After passing through the altar, his sins were dealt with and he was saved. Many Christians think that after passing through the altar he could have immediately entered into the holy place within the tabernacle. However, he could not move that fast, for after passing through the altar he needed the washing of the laver. The laver did not eliminate his sins. His sins were dealt with at the altar already. The laver dealt with his dirt from the earth. Since the dirt of the earth was still upon him, he needed to be washed. The washing of the laver removed this dirt. The blood was at the altar, not at the laver. After his sins had been dealt with at the altar and after the earthly dirt had been washed away at the laver, then he could enter into the holy place and come into the presence of God.

Many Christians do not have the way to come into God's presence. True, they have been saved at the cross, but to their realization there is still a separation, a barrier, that frustrates them from entering into God's presence. What is this? It is the dirt of the world. They lack the washing of the laver to remove their dirt of the world. In other words, their sins have been dealt with on the cross, but their world has not been buried beneath the Red Sea. The laver is a sign of baptism, the flood, and the Red Sea.

The principle is the same with the one brass sea and the ten lavers associated with the temple. Once the children of Israel were

established in the land of Canaan, they built a temple. Along with the temple they built a brass sea and ten lavers (1 Kings 7:23, 38). Brass signifies judgment. The brass sea and the ten lavers indicate the fullness of the realization of baptism. You cannot enter into the presence of God until you pass through the true meaning of baptism, that is, to bury the world.

For example, we must bury our worldly shopping. As you read this message, your spirit may tell you that you have a problem with shopping. You do not go shopping under the leading of the Lord. Of course, there is no difficulty if you shop under the Lord's leading. However, if you do not go shopping under the leading of the Lord, you will be killed for a few days. You will not be able to pray well or get into the Lord's presence for that length of time. You may reason that there is nothing wrong with a particular article of clothing. Although there is nothing wrong morally speaking, your spirit tells you that as long as you wear that piece of clothing you cannot pray with the Lord's presence. Although you might be able to pray without His presence, you cannot pray into the presence of God until you have eliminated that article of clothing. If you do that, you will be liberated. What then should we do? We should jump into the brass sea.

Baptism is also signified by the sea of glass (Rev. 4:6). In Revelation chapter four John was in the spirit and saw the throne of God. In front of the throne was a sea of glass. What does this mean? Brass denotes judgment, and glass means exposure. Whatever was washed in the laver or in the sea of brass could not be seen from the side, but since the sea of glass is crystal clear, everything washed in it is visible. In Revelation 15:2 the sea of glass is seen mingled with fire. This also is a sign of the universal baptism. The sea is mingled with fire. A sea, of course, is filled with water, but this sea is mingled with fire. What does this mean? Due to the fall of Satan and the fall of man, the old creation has been judged by God. God has judged again and again ever since the beginning. God judged the pre-Adamic age with water. He also judged the Adamic age with water at the time of Noah. However, after the flood, God said that never again would He judge the world with water (Gen. 9:11). He will judge with fire. Hence, in Revelation 15:2, the sea is mingled with fire; fire is burning in the sea. The two kinds of judgment exercised by God over the fallen creation are judgment by water and by fire. The sea of glass mingled with fire will consummate in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10, 14-15). Everything that was buried at the time of your baptism will go to the lake of fire.

Revelation 15:2-3 reveals that the saved ones are standing upon the sea of glass rejoicing and singing. They sing two kinds of songs—the song of Moses, which was first sung at the shore of the Red Sea, and the song of the Lamb. They sing the song of Moses because Moses brought them through the Red Sea, and they sing the song of the Lamb of God because He has brought them through the sea of baptism. Thus, all the saved ones are on the sea of glass. This is the universal baptistery. Eventually, all created things will be burned (2 Pet. 3:6-7, 10, 12). The entire creation will pass through baptism, and the oldness will be burned and washed by the burning fire into the lake of fire. That is the universal baptistery.

*d. No More World and No More Judging Water
in the New Heaven and the New Earth*

Eventually, the new heaven and the new earth, the new creation, will be brought to the presence of God, and the New Jerusalem will descend. The presence of God will be there. There will be no more sea (Rev. 21:1). The lake of fire will be the consummation of all the baptisms throughout the ages. Everything else will be in the presence of the very God who will take the New Jerusalem as His eternal habitation. Thus, to be saved through water means that whatever is not of God and for God must be washed away by the flood. Ultimately, this flood will be mingled with fire and consummate in the lake of fire. We who have been washed from all things other than God shall be in the consummation of the New Jerusalem.

The principle is the same in the church life today. The church is a miniature of the New Jerusalem and the baptistery is a figure of the lake of fire. Every baptism is a picture showing us how all the negative things buried in the baptistery will flow into the lake of fire. Let me ask you, where is your worldly shopping? Where are your new fashions? Where are your long hair and short skirts? They are all in the baptistery. The baptistery will transfer them to the lake of fire. This is what it means to be saved through water. This salvation will terminate the old age and usher in the new age. This salvation will bring us out of the old, crooked, and perverse generation and will usher us into the kingdom of Christ. Therefore, the next message will be on the kingdom life in resurrection.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE THIRTY-TWO

LIFE IN RESURRECTION

(1)

In the last message we saw that Noah and the people with him in the ark passed through the flood waters. As we have seen, passing through the water was a type of the baptism in the New Testament. After the flood, the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat (Gen. 8:4). That also was a sign, a type, a shadow of the resurrection of Christ. According to the Bible, the ark was a type of Christ. The ark passing through water signifies Christ passing through the death waters under God's judgment. When the ark rested upon the mountains, it signified that Christ was resurrected out of the death waters.

E. Life in Resurrection

The Bible is marvelous. Genesis 8:4 says that the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat on the seventeenth day of the seventh month. If you read the Bible carefully along with history and the best lexicons, you will find that, at the time of the Passover in Egypt, the seventh month was changed to the first (Exo. 12:2). The Jews have two kinds of calendars, the civil calendar and the sacred calendar. The civil calendar was the old one, and the sacred calendar was the new one, which began from the first Passover. When God told the Israelites to have the Passover, He told them that that month had to be counted as the first month of the year. In Hebrew the name of that month was Abib (Exo. 13:4), which means sprouting, budding, fresh ears of corn. This signifies that, in the eyes of God, the Passover was counted as a new beginning of life. Why do I point this out? Because the Lord Jesus was crucified on the day of the Passover, on the fourteenth day of the month (Exo. 12:6; John 18:28). According to the sacred calendar, He was crucified in the first month, and according to the civil calendar, He was crucified in the seventh month, the same month as when the ark rested upon

the mount. The Lord was crucified on the fourteenth day of that month and was resurrected three days later. Thus, according to the sacred calendar, Christ was resurrected on the seventeenth day of the first month. According to the civil calendar, it was on the seventeenth day of the seventh month, the very day that the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. So, in that early type of the ark resting upon the mountain, we were told the exact date of the resurrection of Christ. This is wonderful.

In 1 Peter 3:20-21, Peter connected the resurrection of Christ to the ark. He said that "eight souls, were brought safely through by water: which figure also now saves you, baptism..through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The figure of baptism also saves us through resurrection. I say once again that the ark resting upon the mountaintop signified Christ's resurrection out from the death waters. The month and day of both were exactly the same.

1. A Shadow of the Church

a. Resurrected with Christ

What do we find after the resurrection? We see a new living. Noah and the seven other people had a new living. I would also like to call your attention to the fact that the number of people in the ark was eight. The number eight means resurrection. A week has seven days, and the beginning of a new week is the eighth day. Christ was resurrected on the first day of the week, that is, on the eighth day (John 20:1). So, the number eight signifies resurrection. In this new living, the people were in resurrection. Whatever they did was in resurrection.

Not many Christians realize the true significance of the type in this portion of the Word. We should understand this portion of the Word in the way of typology. All Christians agree that the ark was a type of Christ, and 1 Peter 3:20-21 tells us clearly that the passing through the flood was a prefigure of baptism. Based upon these two facts, we must realize that everything related to Noah and to the seven people that were with him after the flood must also be a part of the complete type, forming a full picture of the type. We should not stop with saying that the passing through the flood was a type of baptism and that the ark resting on the mountain was a type of Christ's resurrection. What about the life of the eight persons after the flood? In other words, what about the living of the people after the resurrection? What does the living of those eight people after the flood signify? It signifies the church life. The living of the resurrected people after the resurrection was the church life. This is absolutely logical. The eight persons in the ark signify us, the New Testament believers.

I would like to say a word to the young people. When I was a young Christian, I exercised my mentality very much about the statements in the Bible that say that we are in Christ. I tried to figure out how we could be in Christ. I could neither see the reality of this nor understand its significance. One day, as I was considering what Noah's ark passed through, the Lord showed me that the eight persons in the ark were a picture showing us how it is that we are in Christ. Those eight persons were in the ark when the ark passed through the flood. Thus, they also passed through the flood in the ark, but they themselves did not touch the flood. It was the ark that withstood the flood waters. This answers the questions of how Christ's crucifixion can be ours and how we were crucified in Christ. When the ark came out of the flood, the eight people in it also came out. When the ark rested upon the mountaintop, the eight persons also were resurrected and rested on the mountaintop in the ark. Ephesians 2:6 says that we were raised up together with Christ. Before we were born, we were resurrected. When Christ was resurrected out from the death waters, we were in Him. Therefore, in the church we are resurrected people.

If we look at the picture of the type, we shall see that the church is another community; it is not the old society. The old community and society have been buried. When we were baptized, we buried the old community and society. The flood came and buried Noah's old society, and only eight persons were resurrected. Now the living of those eight persons on the new line must be a type of the church life. We are the church people, and the church people are a resurrected people. We are another community, another society. The church life is a new community.

After the flood, the eight persons saved through the ark began to have a new living. Before the flood, they saw many evil and ungodly things. But they were saved, separated, resurrected, and ushered into a new living. That new living was a type of the church life. In addition to all the other seeds sown in the book of Genesis, the seed of the church life is also sown there. Every part of the living of the eight people was a prefigure of a part of the church life.

b. The Fleshly Ones, Signified by the Raven, Going Back to the World Judged by God

Before the eight people began their new living on the new earth, Noah conducted some tests. He sent forth a raven and a dove (8:7-12). The raven represents the fleshly people. If you read Leviticus 11 carefully, you will find that the raven is an unclean bird. All of the unclean birds are unclean because they eat the dead things, the carcasses. In other words, they eat death. They are unclean because they feed on death. Death is filthy in the eyes of God. According to the Old Testament, once a person contacted death, he immediately became unclean. While the unclean birds ate death, the clean birds ate grain, cereal. In every grain there is life. The clean birds are clean because they feed on life. In the eyes of God, nothing is as clean as life, and nothing is as unclean as death. Do you eat death or life? Do you eat the carcass or the seed? Whoever eats carcasses is a raven, and whoever eats seeds is a dove.

Noah was wise and firstly sent out a raven. When the raven left the ark, it was as if he had come out of a cage. He saw the carcasses floating on the water of judgment and began to feed on them. When he was confined in the ark, he had no opportunity to eat carcasses, because there was no death in the ark. However, as he left the ark, he saw that the surface of the water was filled with carcasses, filled with death. What does this mean? It means that within the church there is no death and that all the ravens are being starved. In the church, the people who are accustomed to feeding on death are starving. One day, when there is the opportunity to get out, the ravens will fly away and begin to feed on the carcasses. Throughout the years, I have seen a good number of such "ravens." They were in the church life for awhile, but went out to contact the world that was judged by God and began to feed on the carcasses. Anyone that loves the condemned world resembles a raven feeding on the things of death. Even Demas, who was once with the Apostle Paul, loved the world and forsook Paul (2 Tim. 4:10). To love the world is to feed on the dead things condemned and judged by God.

*c. The Spiritual Ones, Signified by the Dove,
Staying with the Church
and Caring for Life in the Spirit*

After sending out a raven, Noah sent a dove. The dove could not find a resting place, because the earth was still filled with death waters. So, since there was no place for her, the dove returned to the ark (8:9). After seven days, Noah sent the dove out again, and this time she returned with a fresh olive leaf (8:11, ASV). In typology, olive signifies the Spirit, and the new, fresh, olive leaf signifies the new life in the Spirit. The dove saw the fresh olive leaf and plucked it. It was a sign of life.

In order to open a new opportunity for the church, a fresh olive leaf is needed. If we are going to have a church in a certain city, we should send one or two "doves" to see whether or not there is some fresh olive leaf. If there is, then it is possible to have the church life in that city. Otherwise, the "doves" should return to the ark. When Noah sent the dove the third time, she did not return, because the land of life was exposed. This also is a sign that we may have the church life. Suppose certain saints intend to start the church life in a particular city. They must determine whether the death waters are rising up or whether they have abated. If the water has abated and some olive trees have come up with fresh leaves, that may be a sign that the church should be there. They need to wait until the death waters have abated and the land of life has arisen. That will be the time for them to start the church life. Before we begin to have the church life in any place, we must act according to the same principle, testing the situation to see whether or not it is good for the church life.

*d. Offering Christ to God Signified by the Offerings
and through the Cross Signified by the Altar*

What did the resurrected people do after they came out of the ark and started their new living? The first thing they did upon coming out of the ark was to build an altar and offer sacrifices to God (8:20-22). The first thing in the church life should not be work; it must be the offering of Christ to God through the cross. Noah built an altar and offered sacrifices to God (8:20). Both the altar and the sacrifices are types. The altar is a type of the cross of Christ, and the sacrifices are types of the different aspects of Christ. We must offer Christ in different aspects to God. We must offer to God the Christ we have experienced. If we experience Christ as the burnt offering, then we should bring Him as such to God and offer Him to God. God wants us to bring Christ to Him. When we experience Christ and bring the Christ whom we have experienced to God, this is what pleases God. We must offer Christ to God for His satisfaction. In the church life, we must pay attention to this. We need to learn how to experience Christ, bring Him to God, and share Him with God. This is what God will accept.

We offer Christ to God through the cross. Do not work—go to the cross. Do not try to do anything or to behave—go to the cross. What will the cross do with you? It will only do one thing: it will cross you out. Before you do anything for God, you should go to the cross and let it cross you out. If a young man wants to obey the commandment to honor his parents, he should first let the cross cross him out. If a husband wants to love his wife, he also must be crossed out. The same is true for a wife who intends to submit herself to her husband. Are you going to work for God? Before working for Him, you must come to the cross and be crossed out. Eventually, there will be no natural work, service, or behavior. After you pass through the cross, only Christ will remain. Such a Christ will be a sweet savor to God.

1) Satisfying God

When we, through the cross, offer to God the Christ whom we have experienced, God will be satisfied. We all must be crossed out at the altar that we may offer the Christ whom we have experienced in our daily life. How I thank the Lord that throughout the years the churches in this country have been practicing these two points. We are being crossed out and also are experiencing Christ, bringing Him to God, and sharing Him with one another in the presence of God. Whenever we come together in this way, we have the assurance that God is satisfied. How do we know that He is satisfied? Because we are satisfied. When you are hungry, be sure that God also is hungry. When you are unhappy, God is unhappy. But when you are satisfied, the very God to whom you offer Christ is satisfied also. The more you work by yourself, the more unsatisfied you will be. The more you try to behave yourself, the more you will sense that you are hungry and thirsty. However, once you have been crossed out on the cross and have experienced Christ in a full way, you will be filled, happy, and satisfied. You will say, "Hallelujah, I'm filled and satisfied. I'm at peace. I have food and water. I have everything." This is the indication that God is satisfied.

2) Keeping the Curse Away

Offering Christ to God through the cross keeps the curse away. As a result of man's first fall, man was put under the curse (3:17). What is the curse? Ultimately, the curse is death. Death, including all other sufferings, is the consummation of the curse. Our offering of Christ to God through the cross keeps the curse away. This means that it keeps death away. All murmurings, gossipings, criticisms, complainings, etc. are signs of the curse of death. All these are done away by the experience of Christ through the cross. Without the experience of Christ through the cross, we would be under the curse of death, murmuring, gossiping, criticizing, and complaining. Then, if we come to the church meeting, we shall be under the curse of death. Whenever we come to a meeting and have the sensation that the meeting is under death, it means that the meeting is more or less under some curse. But when we come to a meeting and it is filled with life and we have the sensation that something is living, glowing, and shining, there is no curse there. The curse is kept away. Instead of the curse of death, we have the blessing of life. In the Bible, the consummate curse is death, and the greatest blessing is life. Life is the commanded blessing of God (Psa. 133:3). In a good meeting of the church, death is swallowed up and the curse is kept away.

3) Bringing Blessing to the Earth

Offering Christ to God through the cross brings blessing to the earth (8:22). Eight items are mentioned in Genesis 8:22. The first is the seedtime, the time of sowing the seed. In the church life, we must sow Christ into others. We must preach the gospel and minister Christ as the seed of life to others. When we sow Him, then we have the seedtime. After this, we have the harvest. The seedtime is the beginning, and the harvest is the consummation, the time of reaping. Not only do we minister Christ to others, but we also bring in the harvest. Bringing in a new convert with Christ in him is our harvest.

The third and fourth items are the cold and the heat. If you are going to be healthy, the best place to be is where it is cold in the winter and hot in the summer. We should not be lukewarm. On the one hand, the church must be cold—cold to Satan, sin, and the world. To Satan, sin, and the world, we are like a huge mountain of ice. We must also be cold to the self, the flesh, the soul-life, and to all other negative things. We can say, "Satan, come here. We will freeze you to death." On the other hand, we need to be so warm, heating others. Genesis 8:22 also speaks of summer and winter, day and night. This is the blessing of life.

In the proper church life, there must be cold and winter for Satan and nighttime for our sleep. We also need to have the heat, the summer, and the day for our God. This is the blessing. Look at today's society. There is no cold, heat, summer, winter, day, or night. The people who attend the night clubs make the night day and the day night. Because they do not have the proper life, they are under the curse. In the church, we must have the proper life under God's blessing. Unlike us, people are not used to the church life. We who are used to the church life are truly under God's blessing, not only spiritually and mentally, but even physically. All of the church people are so healthy because they are under God's blessing through the church life. Many of the church people can testify that before they came into the church life they were weak and sickly. Many were sick mentally, but after being in the church life they became sober and healthy. This is the blessing. This blessing comes as a result of offering Christ to God through the cross. Sisters, if you want to be healthy, you need to experience Christ and to offer Him to God through the cross. If you live this way for awhile, you will see how strong you will be and how mentally sober you will become. Every young sister who lives this way will be healthy both mentally and emotionally. Most young women are sick either emotionally or mentally. No psychiatrist can help them. However, if you live the church life, the very Christ whom you offer to God will heal you. He is better than any psychiatrist. Do not go to a psychiatrist—come to Christ and offer Him to God. Then you will be healthy, sober, and emotionally balanced. Since the church life is the proper life, it brings in God's blessing. Peace, joy, love, sympathy, kindness, normal living—all are signs of such a blessing of life which comes by the experience of Christ through the cross.

e. Fulfilling God's Purpose

The church life goes back to the beginning for the fulfillment of God's purpose (9:1-2, 6-7). In the beginning was the expression of God and the representation of God (1:26). God created man in His own image that he might express Him, and He committed man with His dominion that he might represent Him. Man failed God in both of these. So, God saved eight people through water and brought them in resurrection into a new age. Then God restated His goal to resurrected mankind. This is the church life. In the church life, we have been brought back to God's original goal, which is that man express and represent Him. Now, in the church life, we express God and represent Him.

The church even can and must exercise its heavenly authority to overrule the present world situation. We must tell the Lord, "Lord, we don't agree with the situation in today's world. It must be for Your interests." We must exercise our spirit and make such declarations to the whole universe. The church has the right to do this. Sorry to say, most Christians have lost sight of this. They do not realize that the church has such a right.

We are a resurrected people, a people who have been brought back from the fall to the beginning. We were fallen in Adam, but we have been recovered in Christ. In Christ, we have been brought back to the beginning for the expression and representation of God. In the church life, we have the life to express God. We may tell people, "Do you want to see God? Do you want to know God? Come to the church and you will see Him. In the church you will see God's expression." Furthermore, the church has been authorized to represent God in this age on earth. We are ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). Do not pray to the Lord, who has the authority and the sovereignty over the whole universe, in a pitiful, begging way. Since we have authority, we should pray to exercise and declare this authority. By prayer, we should express our attitude, saying, "We do not agree with the evil things that are happening in this country." The Lord will honor this kind of prayer because we in the church life are representatives of God.

Genesis 1:26 says that man was made in God's image. Colossians 3:10 tells us that the church is the new man created according to the image of God. This means that the church life replaces the fallen Adam. Adam lost his post, and the church has been put into it. Now the church is Adam's replacement to exercise divine authority over all things. After the flood, God told Noah that all living things were under him (9:2). Not only at the time of creation, but also at the time of resurrection, all living things were destined to be under man's authority. They were not destined to be under the authority of the fallen man, but under the authority of the resurrected man. In the church life, we are such a resurrected man. Are you a fallen man or a resurrected man in the church life? We all must rise up and tell the enemy that we disagree with his evil deeds and that he must stay away from us. Many times it is necessary that we pray in such a way. We should pray in this way in the church prayer meetings. Sometime the "ravens" not only eat the carcasses, but return to disturb the church life. Thus, we must exercise authority and tell the enemy that we do not agree with such disturbances and will not allow them to happen. We have the right to say this because we have been positioned to represent God. We have been placed into man's original post. This is the church life. We not only live, but we also rule. A church in a particular locality should rule over that locality. If the church is proper and in its rightful position, it has the authority to rule over every situation.

f. Living under God's Covenant

1) No More Judgment of Death

Then God made a covenant with Noah, his seed, and with every living creature (9:8-11). This covenant was mainly of one aspect—that never again would death come through the judgment of the death waters. The covenant here mainly typifies that in the church life there is no longer death, but life. The eight persons lived under that covenant. Since we do not share their background, it is difficult for us to understand their feelings upon leaving the ark. Suppose you were one of Noah's daughters-in-law. After coming out of the ark, you would still have been fearful, thinking that after awhile the flood might come again. Perhaps you would have said to yourself, "Before the flood, I had assurance. I looked at the sky, and it was clear. I was filled with assurance because the sky was clear. I had no fear. Now, through the experience of the flood, I have no assurance at all. The sky is clear, but perhaps the flood will come again." The people had no assurance; they were threatened and fearful. This signifies that even after we have been saved and brought into the church life, we are still under the threatening of death. Many are threatened by the besetting sins and the possibility of losing their temper. They hate their temper. Two weeks ago their sky was clear, but suddenly there was thunder and a great downpour—that was the loss of the temper. Whenever this happens, they are frightened. Many saints have told me, "Brother, it is so good in the church

life. But we don't have the faith or assurance that every day will be the same. I am kind toward my wife today, but perhaps after two days I will lose my temper and be bankrupt. I have no assurance and no peace. I am full of fear." Some sisters have no peace with their husbands or with themselves. They are under the fear that the flood will come again, that the death waters will come once more.

Because of this sense of threatening that Noah and the others were under, God made a covenant with them. God seemed to say, "Be at peace and be assured. No flood will come. There will be no more waters of death." This signifies that we may be assured and at peace in the church life, for there is no more death. Now in Christ there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1), no death water. We are in Romans 8 where there is no condemnation, no flood, no death, and no judgment. The more we say, "No more," the more we realize that we have no death. Do not believe your feelings and do not listen to your convictions. Your convictions are not dependable; they are lies. You must live under God's covenant. Do not live under your feelings, your convictions, or any environment. God's covenant declares that whenever the sky is cloudy, God will send a rainbow. When you see the rainbow, you know that the flood will not come. If your wife or husband has been so pleasant for two weeks and suddenly the sky becomes cloudy, do not believe it. You must say, "Lord, send the rainbow." Do not believe that your husband is going to lose his temper, but say, "Lord, You are faithful. You can take away the cloud and send the rainbow." If you say this, the sky will be clear.

Do not believe that you are weak. That is the lie of Satan. Do not believe that you will lose your temper, that you will fall. If you believe something negative and speak that thing, it will come to pass. Such prophecies are certainly fulfilled. If you are afraid of something and prophesy regarding that thing, it will happen. Do not believe your weaknesses. Do you believe them? Are you now living under your weaknesses or are you under God's covenant? The whole New Testament is called a new testament. A testament is even better than a covenant. We have a twenty-seven-book testament, a twenty-seven-book covenant. This covenant says, "There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). This covenant also says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Do you believe this? If we believe it, we should say a strong, "Amen." The covenant also says, "Christ..nullified death" (2 Tim. 1:10). Do you believe this? Do not look at yourself—look at Christ. Whenever you look at yourself, you will be trembling. We should not live under ourselves, but under God's covenant. We have a covenant! The covenant that God made with Noah was very short, at the most only half a chapter in length. But our covenant has twenty-seven books. Are you weak? You must say, "No, I am no longer weak, because the covenant tells me that I can 'be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim. 2:1), and I can 'boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ might tabernacle over me'" (2 Cor. 12:9). Spiritually speaking, I like the song that I learned as a child: "Jesus loves me—this I know, for the Bible tells me so." We may also say, "I am strong in the grace—this I know, for the Bible tells me so." We can declare, "I will be kept from stumbling—this I know, for the Bible tells me so" (Jude 24). Some of you may not have the faith to say this. You may think that this is too much and ask, "How can you say, 'I will be kept from stumbling—this I know'? I dare not say this. If I were to say it tonight, surely I would fall tomorrow." Yes, you would fall, simply because you prophesied that you would. You would fall because you are living under your feelings, not under God's covenant.

In His covenant, God says, "No more flood, no more judgment by water." If you had been there at the time, would you have said, "Amen"? I would have said, "Amen," over and over again. When Noah saw the clouds, he had no need to be afraid, because he knew that the rainbow would come. So, when the cloud of temper arises, you can say, "Lord, I will not lose my temper. Send the rainbow. I don't care about the cloud—I care about the rainbow. The sky is dark and the cloud is great, but a colorful rainbow is coming. Look at the rainbow." When you say this, you call things not being as being through faith. This faith is not according to your imagination; it is according to the twenty-seven books of God's written covenant.

After the flood, the eight persons became people of the covenant. They were a covenant people. In the church life, in Christ's resurrection, we are the covenant people. We have a covenant. We are not living under any of our convictions, considerations, or lies; we are living under God's covenant. We are now living under the New Testament. Are you weak? Are you going to lose your temper, hit your wife, or love the world? You can say, "No, for the Bible tells me so." We are secured, guaranteed, and protected by the promises in God's covenant. These promises are great and precious, by which we may be partakers of God's divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet. 1:4).

2) With the Rainbow as the Sign of God's Faithfulness in Keeping His Covenant

What is the significance of the rainbow that God set in the cloud as a token of the covenant (9:12-17)? It signifies God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness is the rainbow. In the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, the Apostle John saw God sitting upon a throne, and round about the throne there was a rainbow (Rev. 4:3). As the closing book of the Bible, Revelation always brings us back to the beginning of the Bible. In the first book of the Bible was a rainbow, and in the last book of the Bible we still find a rainbow. God's faithfulness remains forever. He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). Once He has spoken, He keeps His Word. He Himself is faithfulness. First Corinthians 1:9 says, "God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord," and 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous that He may forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God is faithful.

To what is God faithful? He is faithful to what He says. He is faithful to His Word, and His Word is the testament, the covenant. The covenant is simply God's Word. God is faithful in whatever He says. This is the rainbow. Whenever a cloud comes, you must call God's faithfulness to come. That means that you call out the rainbow. Whenever you feel that you are weak, you must call for God's faithfulness, saying, "O God, You are faithful. I am weak, but You must make me strong according to Your Word." We are all living under the covenant with God's faithfulness as the sure sign that the flood will not come. This is the church life.

Our Christian life and church life are absolutely a covenant life. We are under the covenant. In verse after verse of the New Testament, we find God's promises. I want to give you one of them, which I have experienced very much. "No temptation has taken you except that which is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able, but will with the temptation make also the way out, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13). There is a verse for every circumstance that you face. If you hold on to God's covenant, I can promise you that, regardless of what happens to you, there is a verse as a living promise for you to rely upon and live by. We all need to learn how to live under God's covenant. We should not be threatened or frightened by the clouds of our convictions, feelings, and environments. We are under God's covenant, fully under His blessing. There

is no more condemnation, no more judgment, no more curse. Death has been abolished. In the church, we continually enjoy life. Everything is life. Do not be frightened about losing your job or your health. Do not be threatened by any dark or negative thing. We are the covenanted people, and we have a verse of promise to meet every situation. We must stand under the covenant and not believe in any failure, weakness, darkness, or negative thing. Our destiny is under the blood-sprinkled covenant. Hallelujah, we are the covenant people! There is no cloud and no flood—only life. There is no curse—only blessing. The church life is such a life, and the church people are a people under the covenant. We can actually be called the church of the covenant.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE THIRTY-THREE

LIFE IN RESURRECTION

(2)

In this message we shall see more of the shadow of the church life as typified in Genesis 8 and 9, this time seeing something on the negative side.

g. The Failure of the Leader and the Deputy Authority

In the midst of all the positive aspects of the church life, something negative occurs—the failure of Noah who was the leader and God's deputy authority on the new earth (9:20-27).

1) Because of the Success of His Work

Why did Noah have a failure? Because he had been very successful. According to the record of Genesis, Noah had become the leader on the new land and the father of all mankind on the earth. At that time, he, as the father and leader of all mankind, undoubtedly was under God's blessing. Noah began to be a farmer and planted a vineyard (9:20). We know he was successful in this because the vineyards produced grapes from which wine was made (9:21). Then Noah became somewhat loose. The grape wine was nourishing, and Noah drank it in excess. He was wrong in this looseness. He should have exercised self-control, but he did not, and became drunken. Being drunken, he was not only loose, but was careless, becoming naked without realizing it. He was unconsciously naked, and his son, Ham, saw this. This shows us that we all must be careful whenever we experience success under God's blessing, for that success can easily cause us to be loose and careless. We should not be overly joyful with our success. Instead, we should be joyful in our suffering. When we suffer, we must rejoice (Rom. 5:3). But when we are successful, we must be careful. Any kind of success can cause you to be loose in the presence of God. After being loose, you may become careless. Then you may lose your consciousness and even become naked. What does it mean to be naked? It means to lose your covering in the eyes of God.

Here I must speak a strong word. As fallen human beings, we need a covering. We need a covering not only spiritually, but also physically. Spiritually and physically we must be covered in the presence of God. Before the fall of man, man was naked before God. There was nothing wrong with that nakedness because there was no sin. After the fall, because sin has come in, it is sinful to be naked. We are sinful in our nature and need a proper covering in the presence of God.

Physically speaking, the proper covering is our clothing. Immediately after the fall, Adam and Eve discovered that they were naked and tried their best to cover themselves (3:7), but they did not do it very well. Then God came in and covered them with the skins of the sacrifice (3:21). That covering was also a type of Christ as the covering for fallen people. Physically speaking, fallen man needs a covering, especially before God. The priests were not allowed to be naked; they had to be fully covered when they came into the presence of God (Exo. 20:25-26; 28:40-43).

People today like to be naked, exposing their bodies as much as possible. There is no need to ask what the Bible says about this—just ask yourself. Do you not feel that it is shameful to be naked? Your nature tells you that it is. The situation today is pitiful. People not only go against the Bible, but also against their own nature and consciousness. Both males and females must cover their bodies. Due to this deep conviction, I try to cover myself as much as possible. I do not like to have my body exposed. The more we are covered, the more we hide ourselves under a covering, the more peace we have. When I was young, I saw some people who wore short pants in the summer. If I were to wear short pants when I stand up to minister, I would not be able to speak. Even if I were to stand on the platform with bare feet or wear a short-sleeved shirt, I would find it difficult to speak. The more we expose our physical body, the less peace we have. If you read the Bible, you will find that this conviction regarding nakedness comes from the fall. Regardless of how holy we are, we still need a covering. Our physical body must be covered. If I could have my whole body covered, including my head and my hands, I could speak much better, because I would have the assurance that no one would see me. I could speak in a covered way. We all must cover ourselves as much as possible.

We need a spiritual covering even more than a physical covering. What is our spiritual covering? It is Christ. In typology, all garments and clothing are types of Christ as our covering (Luke 15:22; Psa. 45:13). To be naked spiritually speaking means to lose your covering in the presence of God, that is, to lose Christ as your covering. In fellowship, many times the brothers become overly excited about some success that they have had. When, in that excited talking, they become loose and careless, they lose Christ as their covering. They talk in the presence of God without any covering. I have seen this among the sisters. Some dear sisters prayed very spiritually with a full covering in the church meeting, but when the time came for them to fellowship with one another about certain exciting things, they became loose and careless. They lost Christ as their covering. In a sense, they were drunken and naked. Whenever I saw this situation among the sisters, I did not dare to enter in. From my learning in the past, I have come to realize that it is not good to see the nakedness of any saint. When the sisters engage in that kind of excited, naked fellowship, it is not good for me to see what is there. I like to see a wonderful prayer meeting, a meeting that is so high, with the prayers strong, and all the brothers and sisters fully under the covering of Christ. It is a blessing to see such a meeting. But, when I see a negative situation, I run away, for I do not like to see what is exposed there. We all must be careful not to be excited to the degree that we become loose, careless, drunken, naked, and lose the proper covering. Many times we were like this even while talking about spiritual things or about the church life. Perhaps we

were even talking about a high church meeting, but we talked about it in a naked way without the covering of Christ. As fallen human beings, we must keep ourselves covered by Christ in every kind of activity, in everything that we do or say. I would not do anything without Christ covering me. I would not talk to my wife, my children, or to my brothers or sisters without being covered by Christ. If I do anything without the covering of Christ, it means that I am loose, careless, drunken, and naked. It means that I have lost my self-control. That was exactly what happened to Noah.

Young people must learn how to be fully covered in their attitude, talk, and even in their fellowship. This is a real lesson. Whatever you lack now will be fully exposed when you are older. We older ones must realize that our present lack exposes the lack of learning when we were young. It is just the same as in education. If you do not learn sufficiently when you are young, you will feel that you lack certain knowledge when you become old. It is good to be saved as early as possible. The young people must be encouraged to learn the lessons now. Otherwise, when they are older, their shortage then will expose the lack of learning today. Now is the time to learn some of the lessons of the fine details concerning the spiritual life.

*2) Ham, the Father of Canaan,
Received the Curse by Exposing the Failure*

Noah made a mistake and had a failure. When Noah woke up, he did not make a confession. He immediately cursed the one that exposed his nakedness (9:22, 24-25). When I was young, I was somewhat unhappy with Noah about this. I said, "Noah, don't you realize that you were wrong? You should have confessed to God and then confessed to Ham, the son who saw your nakedness exposed. Instead of confessing, you cursed." I was really bothered. Noah cursed the exposing one and blessed the covering ones. He cursed whomever was not for him and blessed whomever was for him. Probably some of you have also had a problem with this portion of the Word. Maybe you do not understand why this happened.

Spiritually speaking, it was easy for a person like Noah to be humble and to confess. Do you not think that this is easy? But it would be very difficult for one who has failed and has been exposed to curse and to bless. Noah was the father of the family and the leader of mankind. Everyone looked to him. He failed and was exposed. He could have been humble, confessed, and admitted that he had failed. However, since God had established him as the leader, he had to speak, not according to his convictions, but according to God's government. Which is easier to do—to be humble and confess, or to speak according to God's government? It is easy for anyone to be humble, admit the failure, and confess it. But if Noah had been like that, what would have become of God's government on this earth? What about his descendants? What about God's economy, God's administration? It would have been all right for Noah to make such a confession, but it would have meant the ruin of God's government on earth. Besides Noah, who could have represented God to speak in a governmental way? No one but Noah could have done that work. It was difficult for Noah, as one who had failed, to represent God by speaking governmentally. While he was speaking in such a way, his conscience might have troubled him and the Devil might have accused his conscience, saying, "How can you speak this way, since you have had such a failure?" Sometimes when the leaders in the church fell into this kind of situation, they gave up and did not say anything. So, there was no divine government.

Do not judge Noah according to the human concept. In God's government, Noah was a good example. Though he failed, he was still so strong to represent God in speaking governmentally. It was difficult for Noah to do that. Do not look at Noah from his side, from the side of his failure. You must look at the situation from the side of the government of God. Undoubtedly Noah was wrong. He was loose, careless, drunken, and naked. Nevertheless, we must look at Noah from the perspective of God's government.

What should we do when the leader is wrong? This matter affects God's government. There are two things here: the divine government and the human failure. If we are going to understand this portion of the divine Word, we must see what is the divine government. It is not merely a matter of human failure. Whether the leader is right or wrong, God's government has to be taken care of. Ham, who exposed Noah's nakedness, neglected God's government. To expose a leader's failure is to be involved with the divine government. We all must see this. Suppose Noah was not the leader and not God's deputy authority on earth. Then what people did when he failed would not have been so serious. Whatever they did would not have affected God's government or involved them with God's governmental dealing. But Noah was the leader, and God's deputy authority on earth. What should be our attitude towards such a leader's failure? This involves us in God's governmental dealings. Moses was wrong in marrying an Ethiopian woman (Num. 12:1). Miriam spoke against him and suffered the curse of leprosy (Num. 12:10). She was cursed because she neglected God's government and touched God's deputy authority in a negative way.

Why does the Bible say strongly that whoever despises or dishonors his parents shall be cursed? (Deut. 27:16, Heb.). Because this involves God's government. God is a God of order, a God with His government. If you look at God's creation, you will see that everything is in good order. This order is related to God's government. In God's universal government, the parents are God's authority over the children. When children dishonor their parents, they are rebellious against God's government. They dishonor the deputy authority of God on earth. When they do this, they receive a curse. David was seriously wrong in killing Uriah and taking his wife. His son, Absalom, rebelled against him and suffered the curse of death (2 Sam. 15:10; 18:14-15). Today, so many young people despise and dishonor their parents and miss God's blessing as a result. Look at the way they live and act—it is just like the lower animals. They have missed the blessing that God destined for mankind. Why have they missed God's blessing? Because they have been cursed for dishonoring their parents. The Bible says clearly that the one who honors his parents will receive the blessing of long life (Eph. 6:2-3). Young people, if you honor your parents, you will be blessed with a long life, living normally. You will know how to be wise and how to behave. You will know what is the right way to have a normal life. You will not be under the curse, living like the lower animals. To have a wrong way of living is a sign of the curse.

Why was Ham cursed? Because he touched God's authority and became involved with God's government. Noah was wrong. But, as far as Ham was concerned, he should have considered his position and God's government. The failure of the leader always becomes a test to us. Are we truly under God's government? If we are, we shall be blessed. If not, we shall lose the blessing. Noah's failure was a test to his sons. From the same test, one received a curse and two received a blessing. Whether you receive a curse or a blessing from such a test depends on how you involve yourself with God's government. Although Noah's failure was bad, it was a good opportunity for Shem and Japheth to receive the blessing.

When I was young, I felt sorry for the record of the Bible. It seemed that whenever God did something Satan would come in to

damage it. At that time I only saw the black side, not the white side. Later the Lord showed me that the white side is greater than the black side. Noah failed—that was the black side. Noah's looseness, carelessness, drunkenness, and nakedness were all due to the work of the Devil through the flesh. But this failure caused by the Devil brought in a great blessing. Without this failure the blessing of God could never have been as practical as it is now. However, do not say, "Let us do evil that good may come." Never say this. The blessing of God always exceeds the damage caused by Satan. Satan is damaging, but God is continually blessing. God seems to say, "Satan, do your damage to what I have done. Once you have done your damage, I shall come in to bless. My blessing will surpass your damage." Who will receive this blessing? Only those who are under God's government. Do not be bothered by the damage that Satan does to God's work. Keep yourself under God's government, and, out of the damage caused by Satan, you will receive a blessing.

Ham missed the golden opportunity to receive the blessing. He missed it by neglecting the divine government. His talk to his brothers was based on fact. He did not spread a rumor or tell a lie. But Shem and Japheth, his two brothers, knew and respected God's government. Have you ever noticed what they did? "And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness" (9:23). They refused even a glimpse at their father's nakedness. What they did was not only right and moral—it was very much under God's government. Never forget that the situation there was not only related to a man's behavior, but also to God's government. Be careful. Whether or not your father is right or wrong is a personal matter. Do not forget that he is in the position of God's deputy authority on earth. If you expose his failure, you will involve yourself with God's government. We all must see this. I speak what I have fully experienced. Shem and Japheth knew God's government. They went in, not to look upon the failure, but to cover it.

It is not a blessing to see the failure of others. When you visit a brother's home, do not travel around his home and learn every detail. That will not be a blessing, but a curse. It would not be a gain to you, but a loss. Whenever you visit a brother's or sister's home, you should go there blindly. This is why I have a good answer when people ask me about others. I say, "I don't know." I tell the truth when I say this, because truly I do not know. I have been invited to a certain brother's home a number of times, but I know nothing about it except for the living room and the dining room. I do not know where the kitchen is. I do not like to know such things. I like to be blind. I like to be ignorant. I only like to know what the Lord burdens me with. Brothers and sisters, learn not to know. Learn not to see. Learn to be blind and deaf. Do you know where gossip comes from? Gossip comes from seeing and hearing. If you were deaf and blind, you would have nothing to gossip about. We all must learn not to see the situations of other people. Do not try to see such things, for that will involve you with God's government. It is not a small thing to be involved with God's government.

Throughout the years, close to fifty years, I saw and heard many dear saints criticizing Watchman Nee. I can strongly testify to you that none of the opposers of Brother Nee, none of those who criticized Brother Nee, saying that he was wrong and that they were right, received the blessing. Many of them suffered a loss spiritually. Some lost their health and others lost their business. There was scarcely one exception. In the early years I did not know the reason for this. Gradually I learned that it was because all the opposers and critics had touched God's government.

It is not a matter of whether the leader is right or wrong; it is a matter of whether or not you are under God's government. If the leader is always one hundred percent right, you will never be put to the test. The leader's failure or mistake becomes your test to prove where you are. If you are in the right position under God's government, the leader's failure will become your blessing.

Let me tell you a story concerning my own experience. For a period of six years, from 1942 to 1948, Brother Watchman Nee was out of his ministry. Because of the work of the Devil in China, there was a spiritual storm that kept Watchman from ministering. He and I were separated during the war. After the war, in 1946, I was invited to come from the north to the capital city in the south. When some of the co-workers who were involved in that storm against Brother Nee and who also knew me very well came from afar to meet with me, they said, "Brother Lee, can you say that Brother Nee has ever been wrong?" I replied, "Brothers, whether he is wrong or right is not my business. You must admit one thing—that we all owe very much to Brother Nee. We all must admit that he was just like a father to us all. If he was not a father to you, I must testify strongly that, in the Lord's economy, he certainly was a father to me. Before I met with Brother Nee, I knew nothing of the Lord's economy. He is my spiritual father, and my spiritual being came out of him." Then I told the brothers the story of Noah. I said, "Brothers, look at Noah's case. Was Noah wrong? Certainly he was wrong. But, it is not a matter of whether Noah was right or wrong; it is all a matter of from where we have received our being. Was Noah not our father? If he was your neighbor and not your father, it would be another story. But remember that you derived your being from him. He is your father. Whatever you are and whatever you obtained has come out of him. This involves you with the divine government. Brothers, I didn't see the thing for which people condemn Brother Nee. Even if I did see that he was wrong, I have no position to say anything about his wrongdoing, because he is my spiritual father and my spiritual being came out of him. I could never say anything against him. I am under God's government. Brothers, you must consider that it is not a small thing to be against our spiritual father. When you were not against Brother Nee, what was your inner feeling?" They all admitted that they felt so much life. When I asked, "How about now?" they responded, "We have to admit that we are just dead. We have no anointing or watering within. We are dried up." Then I said, "Brothers, you should listen to this real sensation. Don't care for your mental analysis. According to your mental analysis, Brother Nee is condemned, but as long as you condemn him, you are dead. The more you condemn him, the more dead you are." Immediately, the brothers turned and were saved from their dead situation.

We must all take care of God's government. I believe that among us there is God's government. If this is the Lord's recovery, then the divine government is among us.

Noah's curse and blessing were inspired by God in His governmental dealings. They were not according to Noah's personal feelings, but according to God's government. They were not of Noah himself, but of the very God who exercises His government over mankind. One of Noah's sons was cursed and the other two were blessed. The curse came first and the blessings followed. According to history and geography, Shem, Noah's first son, was the forefather of the Hebrews, the Jews. Ham, his second son, was the forefather of the black people. Ham's son was Cush, the forefather of Ethiopia. Japheth, Noah's third son, was the forefather of the Europeans.

In the prophecy spoken through Noah, it was stated clearly that Japheth would be enlarged by God (9:27). This one word needs centuries to fulfill it. History tells us that the Europeans have been enlarged. Consider the history of the last five centuries. What an enlargement, an expansion, has occurred with the Europeans since the time of Columbus. This expansion is continuing. This expansion is mainly due to three factors among the Europeans: governmental power, science, and art, including the skills and the trades. Due to these three things, the Europeans have been constantly expanding. The Americans are the expansion of the Europeans. Eventually the European culture spread throughout the world through America. This was a fulfillment of the blessing spoken prophetically to Japheth. The one word of prophecy, "enlarged," spoken to Japheth has needed centuries to be fulfilled. Many nations follow the European way of government because the Europeans were strong in this matter, learning it from the Romans. Furthermore, the sciences, skills, and arts came out of the Europeans. All of this is the fulfillment of God's prophecy that Japheth would be enlarged.

Now let us come to Shem. "And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem." The expansion is of Japheth, but God is of Shem. Jehovah, the very God, is of Shem. All of the Jews have to boast, saying, "God is ours." Even the Lord Jesus told the Samaritan woman that salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22). Whatever is related to God has come out of the Jews. Who wrote the Old Testament? The Jews. Who wrote the New Testament? Except for one Gentile, Luke, the physician, the New Testament was written by Jews. Even Luke wrote with the knowledge he received from the Jewish believers. All the things concerning God, concerning God's gospel, concerning Christ, and concerning salvation have come out of the Jews. Jehovah Elohim was prophesied to be Shem's. Shem does not have government or science; Shem has God. The prophecy declares that the enlarged Japheth must dwell in the tents of Shem (9:27). The Europeans, including the Americans, are strong, but they need the tents of the Hebrews. If you do not believe what the Jews preach, you have no tent, no rest.

The descendants of Shem did not build Babylon; they built tents like Abraham did and they built the tabernacle for God. The Lord Jesus, one of Shem's descendants, was likened to a tabernacle (a tent, John 1:14). Eventually, the New Jerusalem also will be God's eternal tent (tabernacle, Rev. 21:2-3), which bears the names of the twelve Jewish tribes and the names of the twelve Jewish apostles. The descendants of Japheth, the Europeans, including the Americans, truly have dwelt in Shem's tents of salvation. This prophecy has been and is still being fulfilled.

Japheth has been enlarged and needs to dwell in the tents of Shem. Ham has been cursed because he was involved in God's government. He lost the blessing. Under the curse, he became a slave of slaves. Has this been proved by history or not? It has. But turn to Acts 13:1. "Now there were in Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." In this verse we see that different peoples had become one church. Here we see certain prophets and teachers listed among the prominent, functioning members of the church. Barnabas and Saul were Jews. Simeon was called Niger (which means black). From this designation, he might have been a Negro. Lucius of Cyrene was from Africa. Cyrene was a city in northern Africa, where Libya is today. Manaen was brought up with Herod. Herod, though a descendant of an Idumaean (an Edomite) was governmentally related to the Romans (Europeans). So, though Manaen's origin is unknown, he, as a foster brother of Herod, must have been Europeanized. Thus, we see that the five great functioning members of the church in Antioch were composed of two Jews, descendants of Shem, one from Africa and one who might have been a black person, both of whom might have been descendants of Ham, and one who was at least culturally related to the descendants of Japheth. They all became one church. Regardless of whose descendant you are, do not feel disappointed. Since we have been regenerated, we are all the church people. We were born of different origins, but now we are all in the same church. We all were born in the fulfillment of God's prophecy concerning mankind spoken through Noah. But our natural status has been changed by the salvation of God in Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE THIRTY-FOUR

LIFE IN RESURRECTION

(3)

In the past several messages we have mainly covered the history of Noah. In those messages we saw how the ark made by Noah passed through the water and ushered Noah and his family into a new age. According to typology, at that time Noah and his family were living in resurrection, and that kind of living was a shadow of the church life. This shadow of the church life in resurrection reveals how the church people are resurrected with Christ, how they worship God with Christ, and how they resume God's original purpose of expressing God and representing Him. Furthermore, this shadow shows how the church people live under God's covenant. We may call them the covenanted people. Whatever they do is under God's covenant and is full of blessing. We have also seen that, unfortunately, in that shadow of the church life there was a failure, for, in a sense, Noah, God's deputy authority, failed God. Due to that failure certain things were exposed. Some received a blessing and others received a curse.

h. Issuing in the Denominations Signified by the Nations

In this message we must consider an aspect of the church life that is not pleasant. There is a glorious side to church history and there is also a shameful side, an unpleasant side. We need to look at this unpleasant side.

After the flood, Noah and his family had a new beginning. There was a real unity among them. They were one in everything. Firstly, they were one with God. As people in resurrection (in typology the number eight denotes resurrection) these eight people were one with God. They worshipped one God. Secondly, they had only one goal: to express God and represent Him. Their goal was to return to the purpose that God had at the beginning. At the beginning, God purposed that man would express Him with His image and represent Him with His dominion. After the flood, the new race returned to God's original purpose, expressing God and representing Him. Thirdly, these eight people were one in their opinion, language, concept, and understanding. They all spoke the same thing. They were all truly one.

As the days went by, more and more people were produced. The population increased tremendously. The result was division. They were not only divided into families and generations, but also into nations. A nation is a kingdom, an empire in which someone exercises authority as the so-called head. Whenever someone exercises authority over others, that is an empire, a nation. At the beginning of the new age of life in resurrection, there was only one deputy head, Noah, who represented God, the true Head. There was one family with one head. That was a complete unity. Eventually, however, the descendants of Noah were not only divided into families, but also into nations. That was terrible.

As we have pointed out several times in previous messages, Genesis, an all-inclusive book, is a book of seeds. Nearly everything that is revealed in the entire Bible is sown in this book as a seed. The seeds sown in the book of Genesis develop in the remaining books of the Bible, becoming a harvest in the book of Revelation. This is also true of the seed of division. The seed of division is sown in Genesis 10, grows in the New Testament Epistles, and becomes a harvest in the book of Revelation. Now we must take some time to consider this seed of division among God's people.

1) One Originally

Originally God's people were one. Why were they one? Although they were one because the family element held them together, the main factor of their oneness was their one God. Noah and his family worshipped one God. This one God is the main factor that keeps God's people in unity. Noah's family was one because they worshipped the one, unique God. The worship of God is crucial. When the worship of God is changed, the whole situation among God's people is also changed. When there are different worships among God's people, there are divisions among them. Thus, the main factor that preserved the oneness of the new race was that they had no God other than the one, true God. Likewise, we have only one God. We worship the unique God. Our God is uniquely one. Therefore, we also are one. Ephesians 4:6 speaks of one God and Father. Because we have only one God and Father, we are one.

Furthermore, as I have already mentioned, Noah and his family were one because they shared one, unique goal. Neither Noah nor his sons were for their own interests. They were all for God's goal. What was God's goal? God's goal was that man should express Him and represent Him. Noah and his family had no other God and no other goal. Their goal was not farming, education, or industry. Their goal was not their own self-interests. Their unique goal was to express God and represent Him. We must be deeply impressed with this. Although we have one God, we may have different goals. If we have different goals, we shall be divided. What is your goal? Is it to make a name for yourself or to be famous? Is it to build up something other than God's purpose? We are here in Anaheim to express God and represent Him. We have a strong standing to declare to the whole universe, even to Satan and to all the rebellious angels, principalities, powers, and demons, that we, the local churches, are standing one with God for His purpose. Our unique goal is to express our God. We are here to express Him.

I would like to say a simple word to some of the new ones who have been visiting our meetings. Do you realize what we are expressing here? Our people are not that intelligent or well-dressed. The leading ones have no beauty, form, or attraction. We have no grand piano or pipe organ. We do not even have a sign. What are we? We are nothing. We are just a voice in the wilderness (John 1:23). When you come to our meetings, you can see nothing outwardly. But in all probability you do see something—God Himself expressed. Perhaps after attending a meeting you wonder within yourself, "My, it was very good there with them, but I can't pin down exactly in what way they are good. Their singing is not that musical. No one is dressed in an attractive way. There is no outward beauty or form. But, there is something there among them." This "something" is the expression of God. God is our expression. He is our form, beauty, and attraction. As the church, we have returned to God's original purpose, to the purpose He had in the beginning—that man express Him and represent Him. This is the Lord's recovery.

As the church, we do represent God. This is why many times we pray, "Lord, we give You the command. You must do something. We are here representing You, not ourselves. Since we are Your representation, You must do something for Yourself." Can you pray such a prayer? Do you dare to pray in this way? Unless you stand in the position of representing God, your conscience will not allow you to utter such a prayer. But once you stand in the position of representing God, your conscience will confirm and strengthen you to say, "Lord, we give You the command. You must vindicate Your way. This is Your recovery, Your purpose. You must intervene. Since we are not here representing anything else but You, Lord, You must come in." This is the proper church life. As long as we are such, we have the unique unity. We are uniquely one. There is no need for us to say, "Brother, let us be one." If we need to say this, it is already too late to be one. As long as we go back to the beginning, to God's original purpose that man express Him and represent Him, we are spontaneously one. We are one because we have one goal.

2) Divided Eventually

Why, then, were the people divided? They were divided because they began to have different worships and because they had different goals, interests, and purposes. Genesis 10:31 reveals four ways in which the people were divided: according to their families; according to their languages, that is, according to their different words, concepts, understandings, and utterances; according to their different lands; and according to their different nations. Let me say a little about each of these four items.

What does a family signify? It signifies a relationship in the flesh. Many people do not care for God, for His purpose, or for His interests. They only care for their family. Why are they one with their family? Simply because their family is composed of their relatives. The principle is the same among the Lord's people today. Many divisions have been caused by relationships in the flesh. Every fleshly relationship is the start of a division. Although we may not be in the same family according to the flesh, we may have a fleshly relationship nonetheless. Perhaps you love a certain brother because he is the kind of person that you love, yet you may not love other kinds of people. If you love certain people because they are the kind of people that you love, you are a fleshly family, forming relationships according to your fleshly taste. Thus, in order to maintain genuine unity, we must overcome the fleshly relationships.

Another cause of division is language. Language not only means speech; it means the utterance of your understanding. Language is the expression of your concept. Divisions may be caused by our differing understandings and concepts. You hold one concept, I hold another, and a third person holds still another. Eventually, the three of us will speak different languages. Although we all may speak English, we each speak in our own way, talking in our own language. This will result in fighting and division. We have families because of our fleshly interests and we have languages because of different concepts and utterances. These different utterances cause

fighting, and fighting brings in division. Look at Christian history. At the beginning, many dear saints were absolutely one. However, at a certain time some of those saints took in different concepts and began to speak differently; they began to talk a different language. That caused trouble. This is the history of the division in Christianity throughout the centuries. Language truly is a factor of division.

What do the lands signify? They signify territories. When I was young, I learned that the missionaries who went to my province preaching the same Lord and the same gospel held a conference in which they divided a part of that province among themselves. They said that a certain territory belonged to the Southern Baptists and that other territories belonged to the Presbyterians, Open Brethren, etc. They divided that part of the country into four or five territories. They were strict about this, saying to those who encroached upon their territory, "Why do you come to our territory to preach? Don't you know that we have agreed to divide this part of the country into territories?"

The Lord has led us to release the matter of the church ground of locality in the United States. Ten years ago the church ground of locality was strongly opposed. Now it has become a hot item on the market. People are talking about the local church, and many are proclaiming that they are the local church in their locality. However, so many groups have not become local churches but local sects. Some have said to us, "We are the local church here. Don't come to bother us." Others say, "We are the local church here and we have the autonomy." What is this autonomy? It is the dividing of the land for the sake of the self. When people say, "Don't bother us—we are the local church in this locality," in God's sight they are a local sect, not a local church. Today the divisive people will use any excuse to be divisive. Yes, all the local churches are locally independent, yet universally they are one Body. We may say that there are many local churches, but we can never say that there are many bodies. Although there may be a thousand local churches, the Body of Christ universally is still one. Christ does not have more than one Body. If the brothers here in Anaheim would proclaim that they are the church in Anaheim and that others should not bother them, they immediately become a local sect. They have divided the land.

Let us take the example of the United States, a nation composed of fifty states. These fifty states are not divided lands. We can travel from one state to another. You may be a citizen in California today and a citizen in Oregon tomorrow. A short while later you may move to Arizona and become a citizen there. Although the United States is composed of fifty states, it is not divided into fifty lands.

Once you have become a fleshly family, you will have an opinionated language and a divisive way of dividing the land. Eventually, you will become a nation. It is meaningful that in English the word denomination includes the word nation. In typology, it is a nation; in Christianity, it is a denomination. A denomination means that which is denominated. In typology there are the nations, such as Ethiopia, Egypt, Sheba, etc.; in Christianity there are the denominations, such as Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, etc. All of these are nations or denominations. All are divided.

When I was saved, all the pastors and ministers were happy to use the word denomination. Then the Lord raised us up to condemn the denominations, and the pastors and ministers stopped using this term. Although they no longer used the term denomination, they still held on to the different names. Do you realize that every name is a division? Every denomination, every naming, is a division. Do not say that our name is "the local church." We do not have a name. The moon, for example, has no name; it is just the moon. We should simply call the moon "moon." Some people have said that the American moon is brighter than the Chinese moon. But there is no such thing as an American moon or a Chinese moon. The most you can say is the moon in America or the moon in China. It is one moon. There is only the one moon. Likewise, the church is simply the church. The term "local church" is not our name; it is the designation of our nature. We are not the divisive and divided so-called churches; we are the church in a locality. Thus the term "local church" denotes our nature; it is not our name. Do not consider "the local church" as a name. The most we can say is the church in a certain locality, such as the church in Los Angeles, the church in Anaheim, etc.

There is no king in a family. The head of the family is not a king. When you differ in your opinion or expression, you still do not have a king. When you divide the land, there probably is still no king. However, once you become denominated and become a nation, you acquire a king and you are divided immediately. Originally, unity was based upon one God and one goal and division was caused by many different worships, even worships of different objects with different interests and purposes. Eventually families were formed, language was expressed, the land was divided into territories, and the nations, or we may say the denominations, were formed. The result was division. If you look into the history of Christianity, you will see that it was divided in precisely this way.

During the 1930's I spoke a great deal on this matter of denominations. One day, upon returning to my hometown after a period of absence, some friends invited me to feast with a number of older Christian leaders who knew me quite well. When I went there, I discovered that I, a man of a little over thirty years of age, was surrounded by a group of old men, each one being more than sixty years of age. One of them, taking the lead to speak to me, said, "Mr. Lee, in the past years in your preaching you have condemned the denominations. We wish to ask you why, since you have been preaching against the denominations, you yourself have formed another denomination?" They thought that they had already defeated me. I replied, "I am glad to be here with you all, for this is the best time for me to clear up this whole matter. The Apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthians for saying, 'I am of Apollos,' 'I am of Paul,' and 'I am of Cephas.' Some even said, 'I am of Christ.' The Apostle Paul rebuked all of those divisive persons at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11-13). You all say that you are either Baptist, Presbyterian, or the Chinese Independent. Tell me from your sincere heart, if the Apostle Paul were here, would you be approved by the Apostle Paul?" They said, "No. Of course, Paul would never approve us." They were honest. They had to be honest because I had pinned them down already. Then I continued, "Since you agree that it is not right to say, 'I am Baptist' or 'I am Presbyterian,' then where do you put me? Will you put me in your Presbyterian denomination, or in your Baptist or Chinese Independent?" They said, "We don't put you anywhere." Then I said, "But you have to put me somewhere. Shouldn't I stay somewhere?" They were shocked. Then I proceeded, "By the Lord's mercy and grace, I surely love Him. Since I love Him, I must preach the gospel to the unbelievers. Many have been saved through my preaching. Where shall I put them? To which denomination shall I send them—to the Baptist, Presbyterian, the Chinese Independent?" They had nothing to say. Then I said, "Do you see the situation? Now do you see why on the one hand I preach against divisions and why on the other hand, it seems to you that I form another division? We need to come together. We are not one with you because you force us into not being one with you. Now if you promise me that from tomorrow you will take down all of your signs and forget about all your different names, then I promise you that I will have fellowship with all the brothers tonight and that we will close our meeting hall immediately. Then we can come together as one church in this city. How about this?" At this point, they said, "No, we can't do this." I concluded, "Since you will not do this, then who is responsible for the divisions?" After that night until the day I left mainland China, none of them bothered me

again. They had lost the case in the heavenly court. They wanted to keep their divisive, denominational names. Some wanted to say, "We are the Chinese Independent. Nothing is better than this." Others would say, "We are third generation Presbyterians. How can we renounce this name?" Still others wanted to say, "We are Baptists. The Baptists are much better than Presbyterians. They only have sprinkling, which is not right, but we have immersion." We are all familiar with this kind of fighting.

When we came over to the island of Taiwan, the Lord blessed the work. We increased in number from less than five hundred to more than twenty thousand. During a ten-day conference in Taipei in 1957, I gave at least thirty messages on the ground of unity. After those ten days, all the elders felt that we should contact some of the leading free groups in the city of Taipei. There were at least two or three groups claiming to be nonsectarian or nondenominational, simply meeting in the name of the Lord. At first, we sent two or three elders to visit these groups to have a thorough talk with them regarding the unity among the saints. Then we invited each of the groups to send some of their leaders to meet with us. When we all came together, we said to them, "Brothers, perhaps you are thinking that since we are so great in number compared with you, we will maneuver the situation. Be at peace. We have a sincere heart in talking with you. We mean business for the Lord's recovery and for the genuine unity of the Body. We are willing to resign from the eldership and allow you brothers to be the elders. We are willing to put all the properties of all the meeting halls into your hands. Furthermore, we are willing to hold a conference to tell all the saints to be one with you and to be submissive to you all. We promise you this and we are even willing to put it in writing and sign it." They were pinned down immediately. Then they said, "Brothers, we appreciate your sincerity, but we still want to be by ourselves." The leaders of each group said the same thing. We learned from this that they did not want to be one. Why were they unwilling to be one? Because they enjoyed having their own little empires, their own little nations.

After World War I, Mr. Wilson of the United States and the leaders of Great Britain and France formed the League of Nations in an attempt to unite all the nations of the world. It ended in failure. Then, after World War II, Mr. Roosevelt and other world leaders worked to form the United Nations. Are the nations really united? They are only united in their fightings. The same thing in principle happened in my hometown about fifty years ago. Soon after I was saved, I went to see my pastor and asked him why the Christians were so divided. He said, "Oh, you must be encouraged. I have some good news for you. All the denominations in our town are going to be united." After not long a time the same pastor told me that the more they tried to be united, the more they divided. In their conference held for the purpose of unity they were fighting against one another. If you do not believe me, gather together all the leaders of the denominations and see what will happen. All of them will utter something different. They may all speak in English, but they will all be talking with different concepts. You will see the divisions among them.

It is a curse to be dissenting and to speak differently. If you are dissenting, you will be the first to suffer a curse. If you speak differently, you will deaden your spirit first. Undoubtedly you will damage the church life, but you yourself will suffer the greatest loss. It is never a blessing to be dissenting or to speak differently; it is always a curse. During the past forty-five years of watching and observing, I have never seen one dissenter who did not suffer a loss. Brothers, there is no need for us to be dissenting. Do we not have one God? Do we not have one Bible? Do we not believe in the one Lord? Since we have one God, one Bible, and one Lord, let us forget about all the dissenting concepts, and speak the same thing for the Lord's interests. This was the reason that the Apostle Paul admonished us all to "speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion" (1 Cor. 1:10), and "to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one accord and one mouth glorify" God (Rom. 15:5-6).

During the first year of my work in the Lord's recovery in this country, I was invited to Tyler, Texas. Because I knew that Christians always hold different opinions, I was quite careful and cautious. I did not shout or say, "Amen, Praise the Lord," in a loud way. While some were praying, I sat there and quietly said, "Amen, Lord," thinking that no one could hear me. Eventually, someone said, "Brother Lee, you probably don't know the custom here. The people are not accustomed to hearing amen." I stopped my audible amens. Later some came to me and said, "The people in this country do not agree with saying amen in the service." Years ago, in some of the so-called Wesleyan churches they had an "amen corner," and anyone who wanted to say amen had to sit there. We should not be bothered by such things as saying amen. Whether or not people say amen or whether they say it loudly or quietly, it should be all right with us.

There is much argument regarding baptism. Some say that sprinkling is the right way. Some say that only immersion is scriptural. Some insist on immersing people forwards, some backwards. Some insist on immersing once, some three times. Others argue about the type of water used, whether it should be hot or cold, salt or fresh, in a man-made pool, or in a natural lake, river, or sea. There are many different opinions. We should not be divided by all this. As long as we all worship one God and believe in the one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was incarnated to be our Savior, who died on the cross for our sins by shedding His blood for our redemption, who was resurrected on the third day, and who is now the Lord in the heavens as well as life within us, we should all be one and not be divided by anything.

After the Lord led us to practice the pray-reading of God's Word and to call on the name of the Lord, some Christians began to oppose us in these matters. Some criticized us and others even condemned us evilly for these two things. If pray-reading or calling on the name of the Lord will change one's life, then I am in favor of it. It is ten thousand times better than going to the movies or attending sporting events. And it is much better than rock music.

Regarding the matter of the Trinity, according to the Bible we believe in the one God, the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. We believe exactly in what the Bible says. But some say, in their definition of the Trinity according to their concept, that the "Father, Son, and Spirit are three distinct persons in the nature of one God." Then what about this one God? Is He not a person? As the Father is a person, the Son is a person, and the Spirit is a person, so God Himself must also be a person. If so, then there must be four persons in the one God. To talk about the Trinity with this kind of terminology causes trouble and entangles those who use it. We should not get involved in it. Griffith Thomas, famous for his exposition on Romans, says in The Principles of Theology, "The term 'Person'... must not be pressed too far or it will lead to Tritheism..The truth and experience of the Trinity is not dependent on theological terminology." The Trinity is an unfathomable mystery. No one can explain it adequately. We can only say that according to the Bible there is one, unique God; that He is triune, the Father, Son, and Spirit; and that Isaiah 9:6 says that the Son is the Father, and 2 Corinthians 3:17 tells us that the Lord is the Spirit. We simply believe all that the Bible says. We can say nothing more. Those who hold the concept of three distinct persons "in the nature of one God" may be Christian brothers, but they are divisive because of

their opinion and terminology. Even if they hold that kind of concept, as long as they believe in the one, Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and in the Lord Jesus who is the Son of God incarnated to be our Savior, who died on the cross for our sins by shedding His blood for our redemption, who was resurrected on the third day, and who is now the Lord in the heavens as well as life within us, we would recognize them as brothers in Christ. We believe in the Trinity according to the pure Word of the Bible. We should not be opinionated by holding divisive theological concepts or terminology. We are here for the unity of the Body in the Lord's recovery. Dissenting brings in the curse, but unity brings in the blessing. "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Psa. 133:1, 3).

i. Consummating in Babylon Signified by Babel

Out of the nations, Babel came up. This signifies that out of the denominations, Babylon came out. All the divisions and denominations will consummate in the great Babylon. Babylon is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Babel. If you read the New Testament, you can see that from among the divisions of Christianity, that is, from among all the denominations, Babylon comes out. All the nations in ancient times issued in Babel, and all the denominations in Christianity eventually will consummate in the great Babylon. Once again we see that Genesis is a book of seeds, for here in Genesis 10 we have the seed of Babylon and in Revelation 17 and 18 we have the harvest of Babylon the great.

1) From the Line of the Curse

Babel came out of the nations that were along the line of the curse (10:6, 8). The cursed line was with Ham. Cush, the builder of Babel, was Ham's son, and Nimrod, the son of Cush, became the first king over the kingdom of Babel.

This is a type of Christianity. Christianity is altogether typified by the nations. Out of the nations Babel came out of the cursed line. What was the cause of the curse? Rebellion. Ham was cursed because of his rebellion against God's government. The descendants of Ham, under God's curse because of Ham's rebellion against the divine government, were utilized by Satan to set up his satanic system, Babel. The same is true today. Babylon has been built by Christians who do not care for God's government but for their own kingdom.

In every denomination, including the Roman Catholic Church, there are real, saved Christians. They are God's people belonging to the Lord. But the organization of the denominations in which they are is not of God. The denominational organizations have been utilized by Satan to set up his satanic system to destroy God's economy of the proper church life. All real believers, regardless of where they are, in the denominations or even in the Roman Catholic Church, are saved, but the system, the evil organization, is under God's judgment.

2) Nimrod Being the First King of Babel and Bringing in Idolatry

Nimrod was the first king of Babel who, according to history, brought in many idolatrous things (10:10). That idolatrous worship invented a most demonic emblem, the Madonna with her child. According to the book, *The Two Babylons*, the Madonna was the mother of Nimrod and also his wife. This emblem, invented by the Babylonian worship, spread throughout the earth—to Egypt, India, Greece, pagan Rome, Tibet, China, and Japan. It even has pervaded Roman Catholicism. When the Roman Catholic Church sent missionaries to China a few hundred years ago, those missionaries found the same emblem in the Buddhist idol temples and sent a report about this back to the Vatican. This is documented in *The Two Babylons*. Before I was saved, I went, as a child, to a Catholic cathedral in China and saw this emblem. In the same period of time, I visited a Chinese Buddhist temple and saw the same picture there. After I was saved, I told people in my preaching that, in some things, Catholicism and Buddhism are of the same source. The same emblem of a mother embracing her child is found in the Catholic cathedrals and in the Buddhist idol temples. This exposes the source of some of the things in today's Catholicism.

As the nations issued in Babel, the denominations eventually will issue in the great Babylon. These are not pleasant words to hear. But do not be troubled. When the nations became Babel, God intervened to call out Abraham. He did something better than what He had done before. The history of Abraham is much better than that of Noah. Who are today's Abraham? The church people. In a sense, we are today's Noah; in another sense, we are today's Abraham. Concerning this evil generation, we are today's Noah and concerning denominational Christianity, we are today's Abraham who has been called out of Babel. We shall see more of Abraham's life in the following messages.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE THIRTY-FIVE

LIFE IN RESURRECTION

(4)

2. A Shadow of the Kingdom

In previous messages we have seen many of the riches that are found in the book of Genesis. In this message we shall see another item of these riches—the kingdom. The kingdom is one of the many truths that is sown as a seed in the book of Genesis, developed throughout the Bible, and reaped as a harvest in Revelation. We have already seen that, after the flood, Noah and his family lived a life in resurrection and that such a life was a shadow of the church. Now we shall see that this life in resurrection was also a shadow of the kingdom. The kingdom is a very great subject in the Bible. It is a most significant matter.

a. The Beginning of Human Government

1) Man Being Given Authority over Others

The kingdom is implied in Genesis 9:1-7. Verse 6 says, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." This is a

crucial verse in the book of Genesis. All Bible teachers agree that in this verse, a verse which indicates that God has given man authority over other men, we can see here the beginning of human government. Before that time, God had never given man authority over others. All men were directly under God. But, due to the fall, there is a rebellious nature in mankind. For this reason, God established a certain authority on earth to be His deputy to rule over man. From the beginning of the book of Genesis until the time of 9:6, there was no indication that, apart from the husband being the head over his wife (3:16), God had given man authority over others. However, after the flood, when in resurrection man lived on the earth in a new way, God established a deputy authority on earth.

2) Noah Being the Deputy Authority

Noah was God's deputy authority after the flood. As the head of a new race, he was the deputy authority under God. Adam was not God's deputy authority over man. He was appointed to have authority over the creatures, not over man. If you read Genesis 1 carefully, you will see that Adam had authority over the fish, the fowl, the cattle, the creeping things, and "over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (vv. 26, 28). But there is not one word to indicate that Adam was given authority over other men. But after Noah became the head of a new race, God gave him authority not only over creatures other than man, but also over man.

3) God's Kingdom on Earth among Men

If you read Genesis 9 carefully, you will see a shadow of the kingdom. What is a kingdom? A kingdom is a rule, a reign. There, in Genesis 9, we see the shadow of the kingdom of God on earth among men. The ruling with God-given authority among men on the new earth signifies the reigning of God's kingdom in resurrection life.

b. Before that Kingdom

1) The Earth Being Filled with Violence

What was the situation on earth before the time of that kingdom? Firstly, the earth was filled with violence (6:11, 13). Why was the earth filled with violence? Because there was no deputy authority, no one who was authorized to rule over others. There was no deputy authority over man before the flood. Suppose that today there were no local, state, or federal government. Would we still be able to live peacefully? No, the land would be filled with violence. No one could sleep well at night, for all would fear that their possessions would be stolen. Because there was no government before the flood, the earth was filled with violence. As we shall see in the next message, the government during that time was man's conscience. In the garden, before the fall, man was directly under the rule of God, the divine government. After the fall, man was under the rule of his own conscience. However, the government of the conscience, or we may say self-government, did not work well. The result of this self-government was that the whole earth was filled with violence. Thus, after the flood, God authorized man to rule over other men and human government began.

2) Man Not Caring for God's Interest

Secondly, before that kingdom, man did not care for God's interest. According to Luke 17:26-27, before the flood, men were eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage. No one cared for God's interest. Eventually God's judgment came upon them.

c. In that Kingdom

Things were different after the flood. Under the ruling of God's deputy authority, which was a shadow of the kingdom of God, the situation was different.

1) The Earth Being Filled with Peace

After the flood the earth was filled with peace. We know this because 9:20 says that Noah planted a vineyard. Micah 4:3-4 indicates that when the people of God have a vineyard, it means that there is peace on earth. These verses in Micah, which refer to the coming kingdom, tell us that men shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks because there will no longer be war, and that every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree. This means that there is peace. That Noah planted a vineyard proves that he was enjoying peace in the kingdom. At that time there was no violence. The proper church life today is a real vineyard where there is no fighting but rest.

2) Man Being Recovered Back to the Beginning

In that kingdom, man was recovered back to the purpose that God had for man at the beginning: to express and represent God (9:1-7). It is very interesting to see that some of the words spoken in 1:26-28 are repeated here in Genesis 9. This means that after the flood man was brought back to the beginning to fulfill God's purpose, to have the one goal of expressing God and representing Him.

d. Resulting in the Rebellion of Babel

When we come to the end of the Bible, we see that the kingdom will result in a very unpleasant situation—in a great rebellion. It is the same with the type in the book of Genesis. How good it was that Noah enjoyed peace in the kingdom and that mankind was recovered back to the beginning to fulfill God's purpose. However, the issue of it all was the rebellion at Babel. The rebellion of mankind at Babel was altogether due to the work of Satan.

1) Satan Usurping Man to Misuse the God-given Authority to Form Nations

Satan usurped man to misuse the God-given authority over others to form nations. God gave man authority to rule over others that there might be peace, but Satan usurped man and caused him to misuse this authority to form nations. Although God did have the intention that man rule over others, He did not intend for man to form nations. The forming of nations was the work of Satan. Satan caused man to misuse his authority, using it to form nations and to establish little empires for man himself.

Satan instigated man to rebel against God by building the city and tower of Babel. The building of the city and tower of Babel was a declaration of independence from God. Mankind was declaring that it had become independent of God.

3) Judged by God

That rebellion was judged directly by God Himself. When God judged the earth at the time of the flood, He did not do it directly. He sent a flood to judge that age. However, at Babel God came down personally and judged that rebellion directly. He did not send anyone else to deal with that rebellion; He dealt with it Himself.

e. The Church Being the Kingdom in Reality

Now we come to the New Testament where we see the real kingdom, the kingdom in reality. The New Testament is a book of the kingdom. The whole New Testament is on the kingdom. What is the first item of the preaching in the New Testament? It is the kingdom. The kingdom is preached in the opening chapters of the Gospels. The New Testament preaches the gospel in the way of the kingdom, not in the way of going to heaven. The New Testament does not say, "Repent, for heaven is ready for you." It says, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). Today people hear thousands of gospel messages. Have you ever heard a gospel message telling people to repent because the kingdom is coming? In my whole life I have not heard one such message. When Christians preach the gospel nowadays, most of them always talk about sin, heaven, and hell. Hardly anyone speaks about the gospel as related to the kingdom. But in its first preaching of the gospel, the New Testament tells us to repent for the kingdom.

The gospel is for the kingdom. The purpose of the preaching of the gospel is that men might enter into the kingdom. The gospel is proclaimed that people might be saved, qualified, and equipped to enter into the kingdom. Regeneration is for the kingdom (John 3:3, 5). If you have not been regenerated, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Have you been saved, washed in the blood, and regenerated? For what purpose? Before I came into the church life, I was told that we had to be saved, washed, and regenerated that we might go to heaven. In the church, we have seen something higher—that we have been saved, washed, and regenerated for the church (Eph. 5:25, 23; Acts 20:28). The gospel of the kingdom brings the rebellious sinners into the church. But now we need to see what is the reality of the church. The reality of the church is the kingdom. If you have been saved, washed, and regenerated for the church, it means that you have experienced these things for the reality of the kingdom.

My burden in this message is to share with you what is the real church life. The real church life is the kingdom. The gospel is for the kingdom. Being saved, washed, and regenerated is altogether a matter of the kingdom.

The church is the kingdom in reality. Some Christians insist that this age is the church age and that the kingdom has not yet come. According to their concept, after the church age is over, the kingdom age will begin. Although this understanding is in a sense correct, it is not correct in every sense. As we shall see, the church today is the kingdom. The proper, real, and living church is the kingdom, and the kingdom is the reality of the church. If there is no kingdom, then there is no church. Our salvation and regeneration are for the church, and the church is the kingdom.

1) The Church Built, the Kingdom Established

When the church was built, the kingdom was established. The building up of the church was the establishment of the kingdom. This is proved by Matthew 16:18-19. In verse 18 the Lord said, "On this rock I will build My church," and in verse 19 He said to Peter, "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens." He spoke about the church in verse 18. In verse 19 He replaced the word "church" with the word "kingdom." This proves that the church and the kingdom are interchangeable terms; they refer to the same thing.

These two verses indicate that for the building of the church the keys of the kingdom would be given to Peter. I believe that Peter had just two keys. What were they and when did he use them? Every door, every entrance, has a special lock requiring a special key. Peter used the first key on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This key opened the door for the Jews to come into the kingdom. Later, in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10), he used the second key, the key that opened the door for the Gentiles to come into the kingdom. The Lord gave these keys to Peter, and Peter used them to open the two entrances into the kingdom, one entrance for the Jews and the other entrance for the Gentiles, that the church might be built. The kingdom into which the Jews and Gentiles entered was the church.

Who can say that the church today is not the kingdom? For example, your apartment house is your home. You cannot say, "I have an apartment, but I don't have a home." As long as you have an apartment, you have a home, for that apartment is your home. Likewise, as long as there is a church on earth, God has a kingdom. Do not say that the church is not the kingdom, for the church is the kingdom.

2) The Church Life Being the Kingdom

Romans 14:17 indicates that the church life is the kingdom. Romans is a book on the Christian life and on the church life. Before chapter twelve this book deals with the Christian life. In chapter twelve it begins to speak about the Body life. As you read from chapter twelve to chapter fourteen, you will see that chapter fourteen is a part of the practical Body life and that this practical Body life is the kingdom. In Romans 14:17 Paul mentions the kingdom of God. In this verse he does not speak of the church or the Body life; he says, "The kingdom of God is..righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." This is not a matter for the future; it is present right now. The Body life, the church life, is the kingdom.

3) The Church People Being in the Kingdom Today

Revelation 1:9 reveals that the church people are in the kingdom today. Today in the church we are under the heavenly ruling of God. We all need to be ruled by God. When we are ruled by God, then we can rule for God with heavenly authority. The first time the kingdom is related to the church (Matt. 16) there is mention of binding and loosing. This is our ruling by God's authority. When we

are under God's ruling, we can exercise His authority to rule over our situation.

Do we Christians in the church life still need the outward ruling of the government or the police? It is a shame to us if we do need such an outward ruling, for we have the heavenly ruling within. Suppose you purchase some food at a fast-food store and the cashier gives you too much change. Would you be able to eat your food peacefully? No. You would have to return the extra change, for the heavenly ruling over you and within you would not allow you to take advantage of others. You would not need a policeman to order you to return the money. We, the church people, are under the heavenly ruling of God. There is the reality of the kingdom among us.

However, because we are still in our fallen nature, sometimes we need to be ruled over by others. Because our yielding to the heavenly ruling is not yet adequate, some sisters need to be ruled over by their husbands. They may be over-emotional and need their husbands to rule over them. This is the husband's ruling, not the heavenly ruling. Because many sisters are still so natural, not really living by Christ or walking in the spirit, they need to be ruled by their husbands. If they lived by Christ and walked in the spirit, the husband's ruling would not be needed. When the wives are under the heavenly ruling, they do not need the ruling from their husbands.

The young brothers and sisters who are students may need their teachers to rule over them. They may also need their parents to exercise authority over them at home. Strictly speaking, however, if all the young brothers and sisters are absolutely under the heavenly ruling of God, they will not need any other ruling. In the schools, in the stores, in the homes, and in every other place, the heavenly ruling of God will be more than adequate. This is the kingdom. We are in the kingdom, and the kingdom is in the church. The church is the kingdom, and the kingdom is the reality of the church.

The reality of the church being the kingdom is completely dependent upon the life in the spirit. What is this life in the spirit? It is a life under the heavenly ruling of God. As long as we live and walk in our spirit, we are under the heavenly ruling of God. Such a living under the rule of God is the reality of the church life. This is the reality of the kingdom today. The kingdom truly is present in the living church.

f. The Church Bringing In the Kingdom in Manifestation

The church with the kingdom as its reality brings in the manifestation of the kingdom. There are different aspects of the kingdom. The kingdom in reality is one aspect and the kingdom in manifestation is another. In the church we have the kingdom in reality, but not the kingdom in manifestation. The kingdom is realized by our church life, but it is not manifested. It is realized inwardly, but it is not manifested outwardly. While the realization, the inward reality, of the kingdom is in the church today, the outward manifestation will come in the future.

If you are in the reality of the kingdom, you will return extra change when it is given to you by a cashier in a store or restaurant. Other people cannot understand us when we do this. They are surprised by the fact that we do not take advantage of the situation. People simply do not understand that this returning of extra change and refusing to take advantage of others is an example of the inward reality of the kingdom in our Christian life. The worldly people cannot see that this is the kingdom. But when the Lord Jesus returns, the manifestation of the kingdom will be brought in. Then all the people will say, "This is the kingdom in manifestation."

In a sense, the kingdom is here; in another sense, the kingdom is coming. This is just like the Lord Jesus Himself. In a sense, the Lord Jesus Himself is here with us. Wherever we are, the Lord is with us. But, in another sense, the Lord is coming. While the Lord is with us in an inward way, He is still coming in an outward way. Today it is necessary for us to tell people that we believe in the Lord Jesus and that we have Him in us. We need to explain to them what it means to believe in the Lord and to have Him in us. But when the Lord comes in the outward way and brings in the manifestation of the kingdom, there will be no need for any further explanation. Everyone will see the kingdom in manifestation. This manifestation of the kingdom, the kingdom in manifestation, will be brought in by the church which is the reality of the kingdom. The manifestation of the kingdom will not come suddenly; it will come through the church life. Why? Because there is the need for the overcomers to conquer the evil one, to overcome the world, to prepare the way, and to establish the beachhead to enable the Lord Jesus to return. Then the manifestation of the kingdom will be brought in.

1) The Church Producing the Overcomers

The church produces the overcomers. This is fully revealed in Revelation 12. In this chapter we see the woman who signifies the entire body of God's people (v. 1), including both the Old Testament saints and the New Testament believers, who (the New Testament believers) are the church. Do not think that the whole church with everyone in it will be the overcomers. No, some in the church will be overcomers and others will not. This is very similar to a family in which there are old ones, young ones, and strong ones. Who are the overcomers in a family? The strong ones. According to the book of Numbers, those who were over the age of twenty and under the age of fifty were the fighters (Num. 1:20; 4:3). All those under the age of twenty and over the age of fifty were the enjoyers. The fighters were the strong ones, those who were over twenty and under fifty. In the church life today we have some who are spiritually over fifty; they are enjoyers. Thank the Lord that we also have some younger ones, the ones who are spiritually under twenty; they are the young enjoyers. But we thank the Lord even the more that we have some who are spiritually over twenty and under fifty. These are the strong ones who fight the battle. These are the fighters. The battle is in their hands. All the rest are the enjoyers. The church is producing the strong ones, the overcomers, who will fight the battle against Satan, God's enemy, and against his world.

2) The Overcomers Ushering In the Kingdom

According to Revelation 12, when the overcomers are caught up into heaven, Satan will be cast down to the earth (vv. 5, 9). Then there will be the declaration that the kingdom of God has come (v. 10). The kingdom of God comes through the overcomers. The church produces the overcomers, and the overcomers defeat the enemy and usher in the manifestation of the kingdom. We shall say more about this when we have our life-study on the book of Revelation.

g. Reigning in Resurrection

The church is the reigning of the kingdom. But this reigning is not in our flesh or in our natural life. It must be a reigning in resurrection. This kind of reigning is not only for the future; it must be in our spirit today. Suppose the elders among us assume their position, exercising authority to rule over others in the church life. This will never work. If the elders try to do this, deep in our spirit we will realize that the elders are not reigning in resurrection; they are reigning in their position. We all must learn that in the church, where the reality of the kingdom is, we must behave ourselves in our spirit. We must live and walk in resurrection. As long as we walk in resurrection, we will have authority. It is true to say that the brothers are the head and that the sisters should be under their headship. However, if the brothers do not live and act in the spirit, but the sisters do, we will have the deep sensation that the brothers have no headship, but that the sisters do have a kind of authority. In such a case the sisters have authority because their life is in resurrection. When we speak from our natural man, we lose ground immediately. But when we speak and act in the spirit, we maintain the position of authority. The ruling in the church is not human or natural; it is in resurrection.

Let me say a word to the husbands and wives. If a husband exercises authority in a natural way, he immediately ceases to be the head and becomes the tail. However, if he lives in the spirit, the Spirit of God will tell everyone that this is the head and that they must submit to him. Even the little children in the homes can realize this. Many times, when the mother and father are quarreling, the children will say, "Mother, you are wrong. Daddy is right. You must listen to him." At other times the children will say, "Daddy, you are in the flesh. Since you are in the flesh, how can you be the head?" Such things have happened many times in Christian homes. Not only the Holy Spirit within us but even the little ones in our homes know whether we are in the flesh or in the spirit. Even your little daughter who is two or three years of age knows where you are. Husbands, do not exercise your headship only in a positional way. You have to live and walk in the spirit and be a person absolutely in resurrection. If you do this, you will be the head.

Reigning in the kingdom of God is a matter in resurrection. To be in resurrection is to be in the spirit. Oh, how we need to be in the spirit! Although the wives at times may not be fair, the Holy Spirit within them is fair. They also have a fair spirit within telling them, "Your husband is right." However, if we are not in the spirit, we lose the ground. We lose the heavenly ruling. In order to be in resurrection we must be in the spirit. When we are in the spirit, we are under the heavenly ruling, and spontaneously this ruling is exercised over the entire situation.

1) With Christ in a New Age

One day the overcomers will rise up and reign with Christ (Rev. 20:4, 6). As long as we are dead, we can never reign with Christ. The resurrected ones will reign with Christ in a new age during the thousand years.

2) Over the Nations

The resurrected ones will reign with Christ over the nations (Rev. 2:26-27; 12:5). When as a young man, I read about this, I could not believe it. I said to myself, "Certainly you are not qualified to rule over the nations." Do you really believe that in resurrection you will be Christ's co-kings reigning with Him over all the nations? If you believe this, I would ask you to look at yourself. Do you look like a king? In the church life, in the reality of the kingdom, we are being disciplined for kingship. We need to live in the spirit, walk in the spirit, be dealt with in our natural life, and always stay in resurrection. If you are in resurrection, you will be the most dignified person. You will be a king.

Suppose I am an elderly man in my family and an elderly man among the brothers. If I behave myself with natural dignity, I will say to my family, "Don't you children know that I am the head of the family? Don't you realize that I am the grandfather and that all you grandchildren are under me?" If I behave in this way, I will become like a turtle. Although I may try to act dignified, I will actually lose all my dignity. If I say to the brothers, "Don't you realize that I am the oldest one, that I am the most qualified one? I need to enjoy the dignity among the brothers." If I adopt this attitude, I will become like a scorpion and have no dignity whatsoever. However, the more I live in spirit, walk in spirit, and have my being in resurrection, the more I will have true dignity. This is kingship. Our kingship is in the proper walk in the spirit, in the life in resurrection. There is no need to strive for power or authority. The best way to gain authority is to keep yourself in resurrection. It was the budding, which signifies resurrection, of Aaron's rod that gave him authority in his ministry (Num. 17:3-10).

h. Resulting in Rebellion

According to the type of the kingdom found in Genesis, the kingdom issued in the rebellion at Babel. Now, in the fulfillment of the kingdom in Revelation 20, we see the real rebellion. Can you believe that after a thousand years of heavenly ruling under the kingship of Christ in restoration (Acts 3:21) there could be such a rebellion? But the fulfillment in both the type and the reality is the same. The result is rebellion.

Many Christian teachers say that as long as the Lord returns everything will be all right. I strongly say that this is not so. Even after the Lord returns, the rebellious nature is still in man. Even after the restoration during the thousand years, the rebellious human nature will still be in man.

1) Satan Loosed to Expose Man's Rebellious Nature

At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be loosed out of his prison (Rev. 20:7). Why will God allow Satan to be loosed? Satan will be set free to expose the hidden rebellious nature in mankind. Revelation 20:8 speaks of Gog and Magog. If you look at a biblical map, you can realize that Gog and Magog are in the north of the earth. The tendency of the human race today indicates this rebellion. Even after a thousand years of heavenly ruling, the rebellious nature will still be in man. Therefore, God will loose Satan from his prison to expose the rebellion in man.

2) Both Man and Satan Judged by God

After that rebellion, God will come and exercise His judgment over both man and Satan. That judgment will clear away the rebellious nature of mankind.

We should not learn about the kingdom as a doctrine. We all must see where we are today. We are in the church life under the

heavenly ruling. Now we need to be in resurrection and to live and walk according to the spirit that we may have the reality of the kingdom among us.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE THIRTY-SIX

THE FOURTH FALL OF MAN

F. The Fourth Fall

In this message we come to chapter eleven of Genesis. According to the divine record in the book of Genesis, mankind has had four falls. The first fall was that of Adam in chapter three, the second was that of Cain in chapter four, and the third was that of the crooked and perverse generation before the deluge recorded in chapter six. Now, in chapter eleven, we see man's fourth fall (vv. 1-9). These four falls continued one after another. Here in the fourth fall the subtlety of the enemy is exposed. This fall occurred after the flood. It transpired on the new earth after the restoration of human life under the headship of Noah. As we have seen, that life was a type of the life in resurrection. Man's fourth fall had such a background.

1. The Cause

Behind each of the four falls there was one common unique source—Satan, the enemy of God. You may ask, "Is not God the Almighty One? Since He is the Almighty One, why did He not destroy this enemy? It would have been so easy for Him to do it." But even God's enemy is at least somewhat useful in God's economy. Although God's economy has so many positive things in white, it needs some negative things in black to show the whiteness of the white. One of the black, negative things is Satan.

Many philosophers have written books about the condition of man on earth. All of their writings are nonsense; not one of them has hit the mark. However, when we come to the Bible, we find that it is filled with facts and with the divine revelation. Not one word is wasted. For example, the first two chapters of Genesis reveal God's purpose and the relationship between God and man. In the next eight and a half chapters, from Genesis 3 to the middle of Genesis 11, we find the record of man's four falls. In the fourth fall man fell to the uttermost. No fall can go beyond this. This means that in the fourth fall of man, the enemy of God, Satan, has done his worst. He can do nothing more. He did everything within his limit that he could possibly do, using every available means to bring about man's fourth fall.

a. The Instigation of Satan

Satan instigated a rebellion against God in the heart of man. Thus, the fourth fall was altogether a rebellion. Although there was a small element of rebellion in the first fall, that fall was not a rebellion; it was mostly a fall. But man's last fall was truly a rebellion instigated by Satan. The fourth fall, along with the three preceding falls, had the two factors of Satan and man. In this fall Satan was the real cause because he instigated a rebellion within man against God. In a sense, he created a rebellion in the heart of man. In all the falls of man, man fell from at least three levels, and now we need to consider each of them.

1) Man's Fall from God's Presence to Man's Conscience

The first level was that man fell from God's presence to man's conscience. This means that man fell from the divine government to self-government. According to Genesis 2, after God created man, He put him in front of Himself. Man was in God's presence, and there was nothing between God and man. There was no separation, hindrance, or frustration. Man was directly in the presence of God. In a very good and positive sense, man was directly governed by God's presence.

As we saw in message ten, God created man in three parts, with a spirit, a soul, and a body. The spirit was directly related to God's presence, the soul was under the direction of the human spirit, and the body was under the control of the soul. Originally, man's spirit was under God's presence, his soul was under his spirit, and his body was under his soul. That was the situation at the beginning. At the beginning, God's presence was the controlling essence. We may call this the divine government. Before the fall, the created, unfallen man was directly under this divine government. At that time man was not even controlled by something out of God. He was controlled directly by the presence of God. How wonderful that was! I like to be controlled by someone's presence. If the brothers simply leave me a word telling me to do certain things, I would feel quite bad. I do not like to be controlled by their word; I want to be under the direction of their presence. In married life, for example, the wives are often controlled by their husbands' presence. This is very sweet. I have observed this quite often when I have been invited to have dinner with a family. The husband did not have to say anything to the wife. As the wife looked into her husband's eyes, she knew exactly what to do next. Just a glance at the husband's face was sufficient to tell her that it was time to serve tea. How good it is to be governed and directed by the presence of our dear ones.

At the beginning, man was under God's presence from which man fell firstly to man's own conscience. This matter of the conscience has been a problem to most students of the Bible, because no one has been able to determine whether or not God created a conscience for man at the time of man's creation. There is no record concerning this. As a result, many Bible students have thought that man had no conscience before man's first fall. But we have to believe that, from the very beginning, there was within man an element created by God which eventually turned out to be man's conscience. The element of the conscience was within man from the time of his creation, but the function of the conscience was not developed until the time of the fall, until the time when Adam and Eve partook of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and their eyes were opened. Immediately, when their eyes were opened, the element of their conscience began to function. God is sovereign. He has foresight. In His creation of man, God made provision for the conscience. The element of the conscience was present in man, but its function was not in use until man had been seduced by Satan and had fallen. At the time of that fall, the conscience began to function.

Consider the example of a burglar alarm. Although an alarm has been installed in a building, it does not function unless there is a burglary. If there is no burglary, the alarm does not function. But when there is a burglary, the alarm goes off immediately. This

illustrates the element of conscience in man. It was installed in man at the time of his creation. It was built into the human building when God created man. But the conscience, which had been installed in man, had to wait for the time to function. That time was the time of man's first fall. When that fall transpired, the conscience began to function immediately, and Adam and Eve realized that they were naked (3:7). They felt ashamed. That was the beginning of the function of man's conscience.

It is a good thing that human beings are able to feel shameful. If I stole a certain thing and then was able to boast about it, that would be terrible. If I steal something, I should feel ashamed of it. But so many young people today have no feeling of shame. They are not ashamed of their evil doings. But shamefulness is a protection for fallen man; it is a part of the function of our conscience. If we have a genuine, good, clean conscience, it will always cause us to be ashamed whenever we do something unclean or immoral. This is an excellent protection.

The function of the conscience has preserved the human race throughout history. Simply trusting in the law, the courts, and the police force would not work adequately. There is the need of a fine, inner, and deeper work—the function of the conscience. The function of the conscience not only condemns us, but also causes us to have feelings of shame. But how the human situation has deteriorated in the past fifty years! Today there is open immorality. Some people even boast of their immorality without any sense of shame. It seems as if they do not have a conscience. They are like animals. What is the difference between man and the animals? Man has a conscience that causes him to have a sense of shame. Animals do not have such a conscience. This is part of God's sovereignty in His administration over man. In the first fall, man fell from God's presence to man's conscience. To fall from God's presence was really a sad thing. However, to fall to man's conscience was still a preservation.

2) Man's Fall from Man's Conscience to Others' Control

Man did not remain very long under the government of his conscience. The first person to violate the rule of the conscience was Cain. Genesis 4 reveals that Cain was not shameful for lying and for murdering his brother, Abel. His lying to God about Abel's death was an open manifestation of his breaking of his conscience. He was arrogant and not at all ashamed about his sin. Since man violated his conscience, violence filled the earth before the time of the flood (6:11). As we saw in the previous message, before the flood there was no human government. It was only after the flood that God established a deputy authority. Man began to exercise God's authority to rule over others. That was the beginning of human government. Thus, secondly, man fell from self-government to human government.

In the first nine chapters of Genesis we see three kinds of government: the divine government, the government of the conscience, or self-government, and human government. All Bible students agree that these governments constitute three of God's dispensations, three of the ways in which God deals with the human race. The first dispensation was that of God's divine government, and the second was that of the government of man's own conscience. When man fell from the rule of his conscience, he came under the third dispensation, that of the human government.

I would like to say a word to the young people. We thank God that we are His creatures. As human beings, we are under Him and He is the real government above us. We also have a conscience that He has provided for us. This is a good thing. Moreover, we have many deputy authorities: the parents at home, the principals and teachers in the schools, and the government. All of these are the deputy authorities of God. By these three kinds of government the human race has been preserved. Although mankind has not been saved, it has been preserved by these three kinds of government. Humanly speaking, we all must have a fear of God, we all must listen to our conscience, and we all must respect God's deputy authority. We must respect our parents, the school administrators, and the government. God uses all the deputy authorities to maintain the human race so that He might fulfill His purpose. Never rebel against God, against the human conscience, or against human government.

God's salvation moves in a direction opposite to that of man's fall. Man fell firstly from God's presence to man's conscience; secondly, from man's conscience to human government; and eventually from human government to rebellion under Satan's instigation. In God's salvation we are firstly saved from rebellion to human government and from human government to the conscience. Eventually we are saved from conscience to God's presence in our spirit.

3) Man's Fall from Human Government to Satan's Instigation

The fall from self-government to human government, however, was not the final fall. Man fell even further than this, falling from human government to Satan's instigation. Human government was of God's authorization. But Satan utilized the authority which God gave man to form nations and to instigate a rebellion against God with the nations. Hence, man fell into an open rebellion against God. What is rebellion? Rebellion is the denial of right and authority. At the rebellion at Babel, man declared that he denied God's right and that he was absolutely free from God's authority. We see this in the world today. Some people say, "Who is God? What is God?" They cast off the feeling of their conscience and deny God's right and authority over them. This is exactly what happened at Babel. In that rebellion the human race cast away God's right and authority over man. Although there is a tendency along this line today, a part of the human race still is not for this. This is the reason that God is able to allow the human race to remain on earth. If the human race suddenly all became like man at Babel, God would have to say, "This is the time when I must come down to intervene." We have already seen that at the fall at Babel God personally intervened and judged that rebellion directly.

The fourth fall at Babel was more than a fall; it was a rebellion. That rebellion was a satanic instigation. The fourth fall was not a matter of immorality, murder, or violence. If you read the record concerning man's fourth fall in Genesis 11, you will find that it says nothing about immorality and violence being involved there. When I read this portion of the Bible as a young man, I did not think that it was so bad. I said to myself, "What was wrong for people to build a city and a high tower? It seems wonderful to me. Why did God have to come down to judge? There was no theft, murder, or immorality." At that time I did not see what was behind that rebellion. At the back of that rebellion was the satanic instigation. Thus, man's fourth fall must be called a rebellion. The question in that fall was not morality or immorality. It was a question as to who would have the right and the authority in the universe. Do the right and the authority belong to God or to man? They belong to God. He is the Creator, the owner of all. All right and authority must be His. At Babel, the creatures of God rebelled against Him, saying that they did not care for Him. They claimed that they were the

owners, that authority was theirs, and that they would do whatever they wanted to do. Thus, that was not merely a fall, but a rebellion instigated by the rebellious Satan.

Firstly, man was under God; secondly, man was under man's conscience; and thirdly, man was under human government. Where was man at the time of Babel? He was under Satan's instigation. At that time man was altogether under Satan. Man collaborated with Satan. This brings us to the second factor of the cause of the fourth fall.

b. The Rebellion of the Human Race

The second factor of the cause of the fourth fall was the rebellion of the human race. The whole human race rebelled collectively against God's right and authority. As we have seen, the issue was a matter of who would have the right in this universe, of who would have authority on earth. The entire human race was stirred up, having been instigated into rebellion, to declare that they did not care for God's right or for God's authority.

1) Man Not Using the Spirit

In the first fall man did not use his spirit. If you read Genesis 3, you will see that Adam and Eve had probably forgotten about their spirit. They did not use it.

2) Man Acting by the Soul

In the second fall man acted by his soul. If you read the story of Cain in Genesis 4, you will see that he was a man who was one hundred percent in the soul. He was absolutely outside of his spirit.

3) Man Walking according to the Flesh

In the third fall man walked according to the flesh. Can you see these three steps? Firstly, man neglected the spirit; secondly, he acted by the soul; and thirdly, he lived and walked absolutely according to the flesh. So by the time of Genesis 6 man had become flesh (6:3). God could no longer tolerate this fallen flesh and He sent the flood as His judgment upon it.

4) The Whole Human Being Rising Up Collectively to Rebel against God

In the fourth fall man rose up collectively to rebel against God. His whole being was stirred up by Satan to rebel against God. If you consider your experience, you will find these four things within yourself. Sometimes we do not use our spirit and sometimes we go by the soul. At other times we are much worse, behaving ourselves according to the flesh. At other times the situation is even worse, for deep within us we may say, "I don't care for God." I believe that we have all said this. If we have not said it many times, at least we have said it a few times. I do not believe that there is anyone who has never said this. Although we might not have spoken these words outwardly, deep within we have said, "I don't care for God. He is too troublesome. I am a free person. I don't want to be bothered by God." Even after coming into the church life, there is still within you this sort of satanic instigation. This is the work of Satan to build up Babel in your being once again. Whenever you say that you do not care for God, it means that you intend to build a city and a tower. That is rebellion, the rebellion that comes from Satan's instigation.

5) Man's Fall to the Uttermost

In the fourth fall man fell to the uttermost. He simply could not fall any further. He had reached the bottom. This ultimate fall eventually caused God to forsake the Adamic race. God decided to give up the created race. It had become hopeless. It had reached the point where not even God could do anything with it. Although God forsook the created race, He did not give up His purpose for man. On the one hand, He gave up the Adamic race, but on the other hand, He called a man out of that fallen race to have a new beginning. The name of that called one was Abraham. According to the Bible, Abraham became the head of a new race. Adam was the head of the created race, and Abraham was the head of the called race. In the following messages we shall have much to say about the calling of Abraham.

The Lord has a way to fulfill His purpose. Regardless of the instigation of Satan and the rebellion of man, God is still God. He is sovereign. God seemed to say, "All right, I will let go of the Adamic race." But, under His sovereignty, He selected one to be the head of a new race. This selection, this choice, was made before the foundation of the world. God planned it this way and worked it according to schedule. God has a schedule. In His schedule, He dropped the Adamic race and called out Abraham to be the head of a new race.

2. The Process

a. Conspiring to Rebel against God

Let us now consider the process, the procedure, of this rebellion. In this rebellion there was a conspiracy (11:3). Under the instigation of Satan, man came together to conspire to rebel against God. The rebellion against God instigated by Satan always begins with a conspiracy. Throughout the generations, many times such a conspiracy against God has happened among the human race. The first one was at Babel. That was the beginning of mankind's rebellion against God. Under Satan's instigation, man decided collectively to give up God and to rebel against Him.

b. Making Bricks with the Earth by Human Labor

What did the people do in their conspiracy to rebel against God? They made bricks and burned them thoroughly (v. 3). Apparently, this is a simple story, and even little children are familiar with it. However, the deeper significance of this matter is profound.

According to the whole revelation of the Bible, God's building has never been with any kind of bricks. God's building is with stones.

Eventually, the New Jerusalem will be built with precious stones (Rev. 21:18-20). Stones are different from bricks. Stones are God-made; bricks are man-made. Precious stones are not only God-made but also God-transformed. Bricks are made by man with the earth. At Babel, man burned the earth, the mud, into bricks to build a city and a tower. Pharaoh also built his treasure cities out of bricks (Exo. 1:11, 14a). Now we need to allegorize this portion of the holy Word in order to see what this story signifies.

According to the biblical record, the earth is for growing life (1:11). Growing life requires certain elements. The earth has all the elements necessary for producing life. Even we grow physically with the elements found in the earth. The meat, vegetables, and cereal we eat all come from the earth. All of the nourishing and growing elements in these foodstuffs come out of the earth. Thus, the earth contains the elements needed to grow life. What does it mean to make bricks? It is, for the sake of man's building, to kill, to burn, every bit of the element in the earth that grows life. If you have the insight, you will realize that today every society, every human culture, is burning the earth into bricks. The schools, for instance, kill the element that grows life, burning it in order to make bricks.

In figure, the earth signifies humanity. The rebellion instigated by Satan kills the element within man that grows life by burning it out and it misuses man to build something against God. This happened at Babel and, in the same principle, it has happened throughout human history.

To make bricks requires human labor, even a great deal of labor. Since man has denied God, man has to labor so that he might build up something. All of human history is a record of man's building by human labor with the misused earth (mankind). This was the way that Babel was built—with the misused earth plus human labor.

*c. Building a City
to Have a Manmade, Godless Life*

The building by human labor with the misused earth is simply to build up a manmade, godless life. The city built at Babel could grow nothing. It was godless and lifeless. Look at human culture, at society, and at the situation throughout the world. What are the people doing? They are burning the earth into bricks in order to build up a city that is without God and without life. This is today's society. Every society is a Babel. Today's society is built up with bricks made by men who burn the element that grows life out of the earth created by God. Every organization in today's society is burning the earth into bricks and building up a Babel that is godless and lifeless.

Have you ever seen a society that is not doing this? If you have seen such a thing, it must be the church. The church does not burn the earth; the church plows the earth and sows seed into it. The church is not building up a lifeless and godless city; it is building up a city that is godly and full of life. The building in the church is with precious stones, not with bricks that come out of burning the earth. Not only in secular society but even to some degree in so-called Christian society, in Christianity, people are burning the earth into bricks. They are burning to death the element that grows life in order to build up a city that is godless and lifeless. I hope that everyone in the church will see the difference between the church and any type of society. The church is unique in that it does not burn the earth. The church plows the earth, sows seed into it, and waters it. That life seed, which is Christ, will grow and produce materials for the building up of God's holy city. This is what the church is doing here. However, every other society, including many of the so-called Christian groups, are burning the element that grows life for the purpose of building up a city that is godless and lifeless. But here in the church life we are not burning the earth; we are watering it. We are doing the work of planting and growing. We are plowing, sowing, watering, and growing; we are not burning or killing. We do have a building, the building of God, but it is not built with man-made bricks or by human labor; it is built with God-created and transformed stones and by the divine work.

*d. Building a Tower
to Declare the Renouncing of God*

When I was young I did not understand why those people at Babel built a tower as well as a city. What was the purpose of the tower? If you read this portion of the holy Word, you will find that the tower was a declaration made to the whole universe, especially to God, that man had become independent of God and everyone else.

The principle of a city with a tower is the same in human society today. A tower signifies advertisement. Even in Christian work there may be the building of a tower for advertisement. A certain Dr. So-and-So may be advertised as a world-famous preacher. That advertisement is a tower. In such a case, Jesus Christ would not have as great a name as Dr. So-and-So, the world-famous preacher. People go to hear him, not Christ. Big signs, extensive advertisements—these are the building of a tower.

Babel is the source of Babylon, for Babylon is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Babel. Eventually, we not only have Babel in Genesis 11 but Babylon in Revelation 17. The Babylon found in Revelation 17 is today's Christendom. Many leaders in today's Christianity know that Babylon in Revelation 17 is Christendom. Nevertheless, they continue building their own Babylon. Not only do they remain in Babylon, they are building it. They want to build their towers as high as possible.

One day as I was considering this kind of situation, the Lord showed me that the city of Babel is like a tomb and that the tower is like a tombstone. If a tomb does not have a tombstone, it will be incomplete. When people erect a sign for advertisement, they should realize that it is a tombstone, a mark of the dead.

*e. Making a Name to Deny
God's Name*

The tower was also built for the purpose of making themselves a name. In seeking to make themselves a name, they denied God's name, that is, they denied God Himself. What offended God the most was that the purpose of building the tower of Babel was to make a name for man. To make a name for man is actually to deny God's name. If you read the next chapter, Genesis 12, carefully, you will see that when Abraham went into the good land, he did not build a tower to make himself a name; he built an altar that he might call on the name of the Lord (12:7-8). Here, at Babel, rebellious man built a city with a tower for making a name for man, but Abraham, in the good land, erected a tent for his dwelling and built an altar for calling on the name of the Lord. That manmade tower at Babel was surely an offense to God. To set up a tower for making ourselves a name is equal to denying God's name. It is better that we conceal

our name. If you intend to get a name, it is better that you get a bad name.

3. The Result

a. Scattered in Living

The first result of man's fourth fall was that mankind was scattered in living, no longer able to live together in one place (vv. 8-9). According to the Bible, the church in the first century was not scattered. The church was spreading. Likewise, in all of our migrations, we have been spreading. Scattering means division. But we are not divided. We are one and we are spreading. We expect more churches to be raised up in the years to come. But that will not be a scattering; it will be a marvelous spreading. The church is not going to be scattered; it is going to spread.

b. Confounded in Language

Secondly, as a result of the fourth fall, mankind was confounded in language, no longer able to have the same language (vv. 7, 9). At Babel the language was confounded and confused. As I pointed out in Message Thirty-four, language is the utterance, the expression, of our concepts. In the church we should not have different kinds of speaking, because in the church we should have only one mind. In Romans 15:5-6, 1 Corinthians 1:10, and Philippians 2:2, the Apostle Paul charged the believers to be of one mind. We have only one mind. Some people criticize us severely, saying that all the local churches are the same, speak the same thing, and have the same concept. Although they claim that this is terrible, I say that it is marvelous. This is the reverse of Babel.

The curse always results in confusion. If in the church in Anaheim we have different thoughts and opinions, that is a sign that the curse has come upon us. In all the years that I have been in the work, I have never spoken a dissenting word. This does not mean that in every respect I was the same as the other co-workers, but I did realize that I should not be one who is under the curse. Everyone who is dissenting will be under a curse. Be careful. Do not be dissenting. If you are dissenting, you will be the first to be under the curse. God's commanded blessing of life evermore is upon the unity (Psa. 133:3). I thank the Lord that throughout the years I have not received a curse but a blessing because I have never been dissenting with the co-workers. In the church life we must be on the alert not to say things differently. Do not try to display your smartness or your sharpness. Do not try to show that you are better, higher, than others. The sharpest one is the person who receives the blessing, and receiving the blessing depends upon our speaking the same thing. Romans 15:5-6 even speaks of having one mind and one mouth. The church should have one mouth because the church is one body. Look at yourself. How many minds and mouths do you have? Of course, you only have one mind and one mouth. If you had two minds, you would be in a great deal of difficulty. The reason that today's Christianity has so much trouble is that there are thousands of minds. Today's Christianity has hardly any hands or feet; it only has minds and mouths. Every part is a mouth. When I was in that situation, I could not hear anything except, "I don't agree with that," or, "I don't think so," or, "I don't like it." Not even the wives would agree with the husbands nor the children with the parents. That is the poor situation in so-called Christianity. That is why Christianity is full of the curse.

What do we have in the church life? We have the blessing because we have one mind and one mouth. If you visit the church in Hong Kong today and the church in Tokyo tomorrow, you will be surprised to hear them speaking the same thing. Recently I stayed in Taipei for a month and then spent a few days in Korea and Japan. The believers in Korea and Japan spoke the same thing as those in Taipei. Although I could not understand the Korean or Japanese languages, I could understand their lips. Their lips were not confounded. This is not Babel—this is Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost, all the different peoples with different languages understood one another (Acts 2:7-11). The church life today is the real Pentecost. We do not have scattering; we have unity. We do not have confusion; we have one speaking. We are truly Pentecostal.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE THIRTY-SEVEN

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD'S CALLING

V. GOD'S CALLING

Introduction

In this message we come to the most wonderful section of the book of Genesis, the section on God's calling (11:10–50:26). Genesis, a book of fifty chapters, is divided into three sections. The first section (1:1–2:25) covers God's creation, the second (3:1–11:9) covers the serpent's corruption of mankind, and the third covers Jehovah's calling. Each of these sections begins with a special phrase. The first section begins with the words, "In the beginning God." The second section begins with the phrase, "Now the serpent." The third section begins with the words, "Now Jehovah" (12:1, Heb.). In these three sections we see three titles—God, the serpent, and Jehovah. These titles mean a great deal to us. After God created, the serpent crept in to corrupt, and then Jehovah came in to call. So the book of Genesis mainly relates these three major things.

According to the revelation of the Bible, Elohim, the Hebrew word for God in 1:1, is a title that mainly relates to God's creation. The title of Jehovah, however, is especially concerned with God's relationship to man in the matter of life. Jehovah is part, a main element, of the wonderful name of Jesus, for Jesus means "Jehovah the Saviour." Since the name Jesus includes Jehovah, we may say that Jesus is the New Testament Jehovah and that Jehovah was the Old Testament Jesus.

In these three sections of Genesis we see that God created, the serpent, Satan, corrupted, and Jehovah called. Thus, in these sections we have creation, corruption, and calling. Which of these do you love the most? I love God's calling. We are not only the created ones but also the called ones.

1. God's Creation, Revealing God's Purpose and Procedure

God's creation unveils His eternal purpose. God's eternal purpose is that man express Him with His image and represent Him with His dominion. We, the human race, are destined to express and represent God. This is clearly revealed in the first chapter of Genesis. In the second chapter we see God's procedure to fulfill this divine purpose. His procedure is by the divine life. God must work Himself into us as our life that we might be able to fulfill His eternal purpose. Thus, in chapter one we see God's purpose and in chapter two God's procedure for the fulfillment of this purpose.

2. The Serpent's Corruption, Causing Man's Fall

In the second section (3:1—11:9) we see that the serpent, Satan, crept in to cause man's fall. The serpent corrupted man and caused him to fall to the uttermost. Man fell lower and lower until it was impossible for him to fall any further. At that time Satan was happy and could celebrate his success. The whole human race was in rebellion against God. In a sense, God had been driven out from the earth.

3. The Lord's (Jehovah's) Calling, Fulfilling God's Purpose by God's Procedure

Although Satan, working through fallen man, had apparently driven God out from the earth, God is sovereign and cannot be defeated or frustrated by any kind of attack. All of Satan's work simply affords Him an excellent opportunity to display His wisdom. Although sometimes I was sorry that I was a fallen person, most of the time I rejoiced, because I had been redeemed, regenerated, and regained. Because of the fall, our relationship with God the Father is sweeter and more meaningful than it would have been without the fall. If you will spend some time to review your life, I believe you will weep, not in sorrow, but in sweet remembrance of God's wise and gracious work. When we enter into eternity, we shall exercise our spirit and recall our time on earth, and the memory of that time will be sweet, tasteful, and meaningful. God is wise. He allowed the serpent to come in. God watched the serpent and seemed to say, "Little serpent, what are you doing? Go ahead and do more. The more you do, the more opportunity I have to manifest My wisdom. Little serpent, do your best. Go on until you are satisfied and can do nothing more." Eventually, Satan had to say, "I have done all that I can do. I have exhausted myself in causing mankind to fall lower and lower. I cannot make him fall any further. This is all I can do. I am finished." When this point was reached, God came in, not as Elohim, but as Jehovah, the seed that was promised in 3:15. Nothing can frustrate God, defeat Him, or force Him to forsake His eternal purpose. He will complete what He has determined to perform. Nothing can change Him. Any interruption simply affords Him the opportunity to express more of His wise counsel.

If God had not been so wise, the book of Genesis would have been very short. But for God to display His wisdom, it has fifty chapters. The last thirty-nine and a half chapters are an abstract of the whole New Testament. Do you know how the New Testament begins? It begins with the words, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ Son of David, Son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). According to the genealogy in Matthew, the gospel begins with Abraham. The New Testament begins with the genealogy of Abraham. This corresponds with Genesis 12. Nearly everything found in the New Testament is sown as a seed in Genesis. So the thirty-nine and a half chapters that compose the third section of Genesis are a brief of the entire New Testament.

As we have pointed out on other occasions, the New Testament begins with the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom. When Jehovah came in to call Abraham in Genesis 12, He gave him a promise, and that promise was the preaching of the gospel. Galatians 3:8 proves this: "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham: In you all the nations shall be blessed." The first preaching of the gospel is not in Matthew but in Genesis 12. In the preaching of the gospel to Abraham, the main item is the nation. The nation is the kingdom. In the next message we shall see that God promised to make Abraham a great nation and that this nation is the kingdom of God including Israel as God's kingdom in the Old Testament, the church as God's kingdom in the New Testament, the millennial kingdom in the coming age, and also the new heaven and the new earth. This is the kingdom and this is the gospel of the kingdom.

Galatians 3:14 speaks of the blessing of Abraham: "That the blessing of Abraham might come to the nations in Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." What is the blessing? It is the Spirit. Who is the Spirit? The Spirit is Jesus (2 Cor. 3:17). The Spirit is Jesus, Jesus is Jehovah, and Jehovah is God. Therefore, this blessing is just God Himself. In God's preaching of His gospel to Abraham, He promised the called ones that He would give Himself to them as a blessing. This blessing is Jehovah Himself. Jehovah is Jesus, and Jesus is the Spirit whom we have received through faith in Christ. This is the gospel. Remember, Genesis is a book giving us an abstract of the whole New Testament. How we must worship God for His sovereign wisdom!

This long section of Genesis covers the lives of only three persons—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When God revealed Himself to Moses, He said, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exo. 3:6). As we shall see later on, this is clearly related to the Triune God. The New Testament is simply an autobiography of the Triune God—of the Father in Abraham, the Son in Isaac, and the Spirit in Jacob. Perhaps some will wonder about Joseph. As we shall see, Joseph does not stand alone; he is a part of Jacob. The entire story of the called ones in the book of Genesis is a story of these three persons, and the whole New Testament is a record of the divine Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, experienced by all the New Testament believers.

A. The Significance of God's Calling

1. The New Beginning of God

Now we need to consider the significance, the meaning, of God's calling. Firstly, God's calling was a new beginning. When God created man, there was a beginning. But that man was corrupted and spoiled. The man whom God created for Himself fell and forsook Him. So God came in to call man that He might have a new beginning with the fallen man. Even with us, God's calling was a new beginning. We all have had a new beginning. I thank God that after living over nineteen years in the old creation, I received a new beginning before I was twenty. God's calling is a new beginning made by God Himself. God would not give up man. Rather, He came in to call man that He might have a new beginning.

The man whom God called was Abraham. When God created Adam, He did not create a single man but a corporate man. When God called Abraham, in a sense He called a corporate man, but, in another sense, He called a single person. Although all of the

descendants of Adam were created in Adam, we cannot say that all the descendants of Abraham were called in Abraham. Although it appears so outwardly, actually this is not the case, for Romans 9:7-8 says that not all the seed of Abraham are the children of God. Simply because a person is a Jew by birth does not mean that he has had a new beginning with God. Even those who are Jews by birth need a new beginning. Whether we are Jews or Gentiles, as long as we have had a new beginning by faith in Christ, we are Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:7). Most of us are not Jewish, but we are all the seed of Abraham through faith in Christ. We are the seed of Abraham because we have had a new beginning. At the time of His calling of Abraham, God began to have a new beginning, and now we all have entered into this new beginning through faith. Whenever you speak about God's calling, you must realize that His calling means a new beginning. I can never forget that afternoon in 1925 when I was called by God. Immediately I had a new beginning and my whole life, being, and concepts were changed. This is God's calling.

2. The Transfer of Race

In His calling, God's new beginning with man is a transfer of race. God's calling of Abraham meant that He had given up the race of Adam and had chosen Abraham with his descendants as the new race to be His people for the fulfilling of His eternal purpose. This was a transfer of race, a transfer from the created Adamic race to the called Abrahamic race (12:2-3; Gal. 3:7-9, 14; Rom. 4:16-17). When we say that God's calling is a new beginning, we must understand that this new beginning is a transfer of race. We all have been transferred from the old created race to the new called race. Although we were born in a particular race, at the time of our calling we were transferred into another race, the new race of the called ones.

3. The Transfer of Life

The transfer of race in God's calling is actually the transfer of life. Although you can boldly declare that you have undergone the transfer of race, can you say that you have experienced the transfer of life? Although we have had the transfer of race, we are still in the process of the transfer of life. I dare not say that I have had a full transfer of life. Neither can I say that I have had no transfer of life. I have had some transfer of life, but this process has not yet been completed. We all are in the process of the transfer of life.

We need an inner transfer of life. Even though we have had the transfer of race, the life within us must be transferred. If we do not have this inner transfer of life, we shall remain the same as the fallen race. If we are simply removed from one position to another, we actually remain the same in life. The mere transfer of position cannot fulfill God's purpose in His calling of us. There must also be a transfer of life.

Since the transfer of life is from the life of Adam to the life of Christ, it is a transfer from the life of the old creation to the life of the new creation. Due to the fall of man, all of God's original creation became old and is no longer able to fulfill God's purpose. So God needs a new creation, a creation with a life stronger and much better than the created life of Adam. This stronger life is the uncreated life of God, the life of Christ. The transfer of life in God's calling is from the fallen life of the old creation to this stronger and better life of the new creation.

4. As Seen in the Called Ones

The significance of God's calling is clearly seen in God's called ones. In Abraham, in Isaac, in Jacob, and in the New Testament believers we can see the new beginning of God, the transfer of race, and the transfer of life. Their lives can be considered as clear pictures of the significance of God's calling.

a. In Abraham

The picture that is portrayed in Abraham is very clear. He had the new beginning, the transfer of race, and the transfer of life, which was a great problem to both him and God. Although the new beginning and the transfer of race in him transpired immediately at the time that he was called, the transfer of life in him took many years. It took several decades for him to have the transfer of life, and even then it was not fully completed.

1) Firstly Relying upon Eliezer

When God called Abraham out of the corrupted land, Abraham had no sons, no successors. God was sovereign. Before Abraham had undergone the transfer of race, God did not allow him to have a son. Because Abraham was childless, he relied upon Eliezer, his household servant, to be the possessor of his house, saying to the Lord, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the son of possession of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, a son of my house is mine heir" (15:2-3, Heb.). Abraham called Eliezer the son of possession of his house and thought that he would be his heir. Abraham was very natural, just as we are today. Although he received the promise, he interpreted it in a natural way. God rejected Eliezer, saying to Abraham, "This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir" (15:4). God was telling Abraham that Eliezer would not be the one to inherit the promise that He had given to him. A seed out of Abraham himself, born of Sarah, would be Abraham's heir.

2) Then Begetting Ishmael by the Strength of His Flesh

After God had rejected Eliezer as the heir, Abraham, at the suggestion of Sarah that he have a son by Hagar, exercised the strength of his flesh to fulfill God's promise. He brought forth Ishmael. The wife was the one who made the proposal and eventually she was the one who was troubled by the result of her proposal. It was sovereign that Sarah was troubled in this way. On the one hand, Sarah's proposal that Abraham have a son by Hagar was of the flesh. On the other hand, her command that Ishmael be driven out was according to God's sovereignty. She told Abraham that he had to drive out Ishmael, the one who was born of the bondwoman (21:9-10). This command was very grievous to Abraham; he was deeply troubled by it. Then God intervened and said to Abraham, "Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah has said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (21:12). This meant that God told Abraham to let Ishmael go, for he was not the one who was to inherit the promise that God had given Abraham. Isaac was to be his heir. We all must realize that in God's calling nothing of

our natural life can be prevailing. To only have the transfer of race is not adequate. We need a complete transfer of life.

*3) His Name Being Changed
and His Flesh Being Circumcised*

Firstly, God promised Abraham that he would have seed to inherit the promised land (12:7; 13:15-16). Later, when God told Abraham that Eliezer would not be his heir and that only the one born of himself would be his heir, God strongly confirmed His promise that Abraham would have seed of himself (15:2-5). After this, Abraham attempted to fulfill God's promise by using his fleshly strength to produce Ishmael. As a result, God came in, saying, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (17:1). God seemed to be saying to Abraham, "What you have done in begetting Ishmael is not perfect before Me. Now I must transform you. Your name shall be changed from Abram, which means an exalted father, to Abraham, which means the father of a great multitude (17:5). For this, you must be circumcised (17:10-14) that your fleshly strength may be cut off, that I may come to fulfill My promise, and that you may be exceeding fruitful." Here God promised Abraham to make him a great father, the father of a great multitude. This indicated that Abraham would be the father not only of his descendants according to the flesh, but also of the New Testament believers according to faith (Rom. 4:16-17). We Christians have all become Abraham's seed by faith in Christ. Although we were born of the Adamic race, we have been reborn into the Abrahamic race.

*4) Eventually Bringing Forth Isaac
by the Strength of God's Grace*

At the time when God changed Abraham's name and commanded him to be circumcised, God said to him in 17:21 "...Isaac, which Sarah shall bare unto thee at this set time in the next year." Here we see that God made an appointment, setting up a time when Isaac would be born. This is referred to in 18:14 when the Lord said, "At the time appointed I will return unto thee, at the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son" (Heb.). The appointed time, the time set for the birth of Isaac was "the time of life." This term, "the time of life," is very meaningful. The word life in this phrase is the same Hebrew word that is used for the tree of life in 2:9. The time when Isaac would be born was "the time of life." This happened after Abraham was circumcised. This indicates that "the time of life" when Christ will be life to us will come after our natural strength has been dealt with.

a) After the Death of the Strength of His Flesh

Before Isaac was born, Abraham and Sarah were completely deadened. Sarah's womb was deadened, and Abraham's body was considered dead (Rom. 4:18-19). What he had—Eliezer—and what he intended to keep—Ishmael—were all rejected, and his natural ability was terminated. Then what could he do? Perhaps Abraham and Sarah had some unhappy fellowship. Abraham might have said to his wife, "Dear, look at yourself. Your function has been deadened." Sarah might have said to Abraham, "Dear, look at yourself. How old!" Both of them were in a deadened condition. Sarah might have said, "Eliezer is good, but God has rejected him." Abraham might have replied, "Ishmael is better, but God would not accept him either. Since Eliezer has been eliminated and Ishmael has been rejected, that leaves you and me in such a poor situation. What shall we do?" But when "the time of life" came, Isaac was born of these two dead ones, as if it was by the power of resurrection. The time of that birth was "the time of life." Spiritually speaking, the birth of Isaac was a birth of life.

b) By Jehovah's Visitation

The birth of Isaac was by Jehovah's visitation, by the Lord's coming (18:14). Isaac's birth was not merely a human birth. In that birth there was the coming of Jehovah, for the Lord had said that at the appointed time, He would return and Isaac would be born and that that time would be "the time of life." When Abraham's natural strength was ended, Jehovah came to bring in Isaac's birth at "the time of life." That was the transfer of life. Everything of the natural life must go. Even the ability to beget a son must be terminated. Nothing of our natural life or of our self has any share in God's economy. Everything natural must be terminated until we are finished, dead, and have become nothing. Then, when we have come to the end, Jehovah will come in. This coming in of Jehovah means life. This is "Isaac." Hence, the birth of Isaac is the coming of Jehovah. This is life, this is the new beginning, and this is the transfer of life. This is the significance of God's calling.

It is very good to realize that we all have been called and have had a new beginning and the transfer of race. But we should all agree that we are still in the process of the transfer of life. Probably, some of us still cling to Eliezer, some want to hold on to Ishmael, and some have been fully disappointed. However, others among us have come to "the time of life." In their case, "Isaac" has been born. Jehovah's coming, Jehovah's visit, has transpired with some of us. This is the transfer of life. We all need such a transfer.

We need to forget the superficial and natural teachings, such as improving and behaving ourselves. It is not a matter of behavior but of a life transfer. We all must be transferred not only in race but also in life.

When Abraham was called out of the corrupted land, he had no son. He became old and still did not have a son. Therefore, he put his trust in Eliezer, the son of possession. God rejected Eliezer. Then Abraham exercised the strength of his flesh to produce Ishmael. Abraham loved Ishmael and wanted to keep him, but God would not accept him. The promised son had to be born of Jehovah's coming in, of the strength of God's grace at the appointed time. When the appointed time arrived, Jehovah came to Sarah and Isaac came forth. In a sense, Jehovah came into Sarah and Isaac came out of her. That was "the time of life." It was altogether a transfer of life.

b. In Isaac

In a sense, in Isaac the transfer of life was accomplished but it was not fully completed. We know this by the fact that Isaac still begat Esau whom God hated (Rom. 9:13). This means that within Isaac the natural life still remained. Thus, we may say that in Isaac the transfer of life was not completed thoroughly. It was completed in Jacob.

c. In Jacob

1) Firstly Being the Supplanter Jacob

At first, Jacob was a supplanter. His name means a supplanter. To supplant means to take the place of another, or to get something, through subtle means. Jacob was one who stole in a secret way. For instance, he stole from his uncle, Laban. Laban thought that Jacob was helping him with his flocks, but while Jacob was helping Laban, he made a flock for himself. This is an example of Jacob's supplanting. At the first, Jacob certainly did not have the transfer of life.

*2) Eventually Transformed into Israel,
the Prince of God*

God had a way to deal with Jacob. He transformed Jacob, the supplanter, into a prince of God. Although it took God a long time to accomplish this, at a certain time He told Jacob that his name was being changed from Jacob to Israel (32:27-28). Thereafter, he was called Israel. God did the same thing to Jacob that He had done to Abraham: He changed his name and his strength. When God came in to deal with Jacob, Jacob was truly a supplanter. He even wrestled with God. He was so strong in a natural way that even God found it difficult to subdue him. We should not laugh at Jacob. We are the same as he was. We are so strong that even God finds it difficult to subdue us. When God comes to deal with us, we wrestle with Him. Although it is difficult for God to subdue us, eventually we shall be subdued by Him. Jacob's wrestling forced God to touch his thigh, to touch the strongest part of his being. After that happened, he was lame. From that day onward, his supplanting was over. The supplanter had become a prince of God. Throughout the remainder of his days he did not steal again. His supplanting hands became blessing hands. He no longer supplanted; he only blessed. He stretched out his hands to bless whomever came to him. He even blessed Pharaoh, the greatest king on earth at that time (47:7, 10). The supplanter became a blesser. This is the prince of God. Here we have the full transfer of race with the complete transfer of life. This is God's calling. God's calling began at Genesis 12:1 and will continue until the coming of the New Jerusalem. All the supplacers will be terminated and become the princes of God. The New Jerusalem will come in, not only as a transfer of race, but also as a transfer of life.

d. In the Believers

1) Beginning with Regeneration

In principle, the experience is the same with the believers today. With the believers, this transfer of life begins with regeneration (John 3:3, 5). After being regenerated, we are in the process of the transfer of life.

*2) Accomplished by the Experience
of Spiritual Circumcision*

With the believers, the transfer of life is accomplished by the experience of circumcision, by the putting off of the flesh (Col. 2:11; Gal. 5:24). Today God is circumcising us, and this circumcision lasts quite a long time. I believe that many among us are still under God's circumcision hand. You may still cling to your fleshly strength or to your natural man. This requires God to come in and cut, or circumcise, that part of you. Hence, we all are in the process of being circumcised. In other words, we are in the process of transformation.

*3) Completed at the Redemption and
Transfiguration of Our Body*

The transfer of life will be fully completed at the time of the Lord's coming back. At that time our body will be fully redeemed and transfigured (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:21). Then we shall be the called ones, not only in the transfer of race, but also in the complete transfer of life. At that time we shall enjoy all of the blessings that God promised to our father Abraham. This is God's calling. God's calling is not for Abraham's natural descendants. God's calling is for the people who follow Abraham to exercise the obtained faith, to live by and in God, and to experience the transfer of life by the working of God. As a result of this process, we shall be altogether another people, a people of God's calling. Then we shall enjoy all the blessings of God's promise. All that God promised to Abraham will be the blessings of the New Testament gospel in which we all shall participate through faith in Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE THIRTY-EIGHT

**THE BACKGROUND AND ORIGIN OF GOD'S CALLING
AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CALLED**

Although Genesis is a long book, it has only three sections: God's creation (1:1—2:25), the serpent's corruption (3:1—11:9), and Jehovah's calling (11:10—50:26). In the last message we saw the significance of God's calling. God's calling means the new beginning of God, the transfer of race, and the transfer of life. On our side, God's calling is a transfer of race and life, but on God's side it is a new beginning. God had a new beginning in His creation of man, but that man became corrupted. So God came in to have another beginning when He called Abraham. This new beginning is actually the transfer from the race of Adam to the race of Abraham, a transfer from the created race to the called race. God's calling means that we are called out of the original, created race into the present, called race. This transfer of race is not merely positional but also dispositional, for it is actually a transfer of life.

Abraham experienced both a positional and dispositional transfer. He was transferred from the old land of Chaldea to the good land of Canaan. That was a positional transfer. However, God worked upon him inwardly as well as outwardly. At a certain time, God came in and told him that his name had to be changed (17:5). According to the Bible, the changing of name always indicates the changing in life. When Abraham's name was changed, it meant that his disposition, his life, was being changed. It seems that God was telling Abraham, "You are still in your old man. You are too much in your natural life. Although you have been called out of the old race, the nature and life of the old race still remain in you, and you still live by that life. It is necessary for Me to deal with you. I must cut off that life." This cutting off of the old life was signified by circumcision. Abraham's circumcision transpired at the same time that God changed his name. Outwardly, his name was changed, and inwardly, his disposition, his nature, and his life were dealt with. After the strength of Abraham's natural life had been cut off, Isaac was born at "the time of life." In a very real sense, Isaac was not born of Abraham's natural strength; he was born of God's coming, for God had said, "At the time appointed I will return unto thee, at the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son" (18:14, Heb.). The coming of the Lord was the birth of Isaac. This means that

Isaac was not produced out of Abraham's natural strength but out of a life dealt with by God. We see by this that Abraham was not only transferred positionally but also dispositionally.

Apparently Isaac did not need a transfer of life. Nevertheless, Esau, the first of the twins born to Isaac and Rebekah, was very natural. God will never accept anything that is natural. Since the first of Isaac's sons was so natural, God chose the second. The firstborn signifies the natural life. For this reason, God destroyed the lives of all the firstborn in Egypt during the night of the Passover. The second, on the contrary, signifies the transferred life. Because Jacob was the second, he was chosen.

Although Jacob had been chosen, his nature was not transferred. So, at a certain time, God came in and touched Jacob's natural strength. At that time his name was changed from Jacob, a supplanter, to Israel, a prince of God. From then on, Jacob was lame. His lameness was a sign that he had been touched by God, that his natural strength had been dealt with, and that he had become a prince of God. This is the true meaning of God's calling.

Have you been called? If you say that you have been called, then you must come out of Chaldea, Babel, the old race, and your natural life. You must get out of your natural life and get your natural life out of you. In God's calling there is the need of the new beginning, the transfer of race, and the transfer of life. We all need to be transferred. In all the years that I have been here with the saints, I have been watching the process of this transfer. I have been happy to see so many saints undergoing the transfer of life. Although at times the process of this transfer is not pleasant, after awhile you can see in the saints the real transfer of life. This is the meaning of God's calling.

B. The Background of God's Calling—Babel

1. Forsaking God

Now in this message we need to see the experience of the called ones. But before we come to this, we need to consider the background and origin of God's calling.

When God appeared to Abraham, he was in the darkest background. His background was exceedingly strong. The first aspect of this background was that man had forsaken God. Man's forsaking of God was signified by his building a city. We saw this in the case of Cain in chapter four. Man built a city because he had lost God as his protection. Since man no longer had God as his safeguard, he built a city to protect himself. So the building of the city was the sign that man had forsaken God. Man seemed to be saying, "Let God go. I will build a city to protect myself." The building of the city was the declaration that man had forsaken God.

2. Exalting Man

Not only did man forsake God, but he built a tower to exalt himself. The tower was a sign of man's self-exaltation. When man forsakes God, automatically he exalts himself. Whenever man builds a city he will also build a tower to make a name for himself.

3. Denying the Right of God

Furthermore, at Babel man also denied God's right over His creation. Both man and the earth were God's creation. Nevertheless, man would not recognize God's right but instead established the nations. The establishing of nations signified that man had denied God's right and authority. As we have seen, after the flood God gave man the authority to rule others, but Satan caused man to abuse this God-given authority to form nations that man may have his own dominion, denying God's right and authority over man.

4. Serving Idols

Finally, Joshua 24:2 shows us that at Babel man turned from God to idols, to other gods. Behind all the idols are demons. Whenever a man worships an idol, he worships demons. Apparently he is worshipping idols; actually he is worshipping demons.

As the background of God's calling we have the city, the tower, the nations, and the demons. Man had forsaken God, had exalted himself, had denied God's right and authority, and had turned from God to serve idols. Do you believe that the situation is any better today? I do not believe it. It is as bad today as it was then. The situation is exactly the same.

C. The Origin of God's Calling—God

Who originated this calling? Abraham did not originate it. Although he was the father of the called race, the calling was not initiated by him. I believe that Abraham was the same as we are today. He never dreamed of being called by God. Suddenly, while he and his relatives were there in Chaldea worshipping other gods (Josh. 24:2), God appeared to him. God was the originator of this calling.

1. The Appearing of God

Although God's calling is carried out in time, something prior to that—God's selection—took place in eternity past. God selected Abraham in eternity past. After that, also in eternity past, God predestinated, premarked, Abraham. Before Abraham was born, even before the foundation of the world when nothing but God Himself was in existence, God chose Abraham and predestinated him. One day, in time, while Abraham was worshipping other gods, having no forethought that he was to be called by God, God visited him. God just came in as the very God of glory. Abraham was surprised. The God of glory not only came to Abraham, but He appeared to him.

Because Abraham's background was so dark, God had to appear to him in a strong way. Many of us have also experienced such a strong calling of God. I can testify that one day, when I was an ambitious young man, God came to me in a strong way. That was God's visitation to me. I cannot deny it. Many of us have experienced the same thing. We were deeply fallen, and light and loose preaching would never have worked in our case. We needed the living God, the God of glory, to pay us a visit. I have heard many testimonies regarding this.

God appeared to Abraham twice. The first time was in Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:2; Gen. 11:31). If we study the Bible carefully, we shall see that, in Ur of the Chaldees, God did not appear to Abraham's father but to Abraham. Abraham, however, did not accept that calling immediately, and God sovereignly caused his father, Terah, to bring the family from Ur to Haran. They stayed there until Terah died. Abraham's staggering in answering God's calling brought about his father's death. God took his father away. Then, at Haran, God appeared to Abraham the second time (12:1). We can see by this that God has a specific purpose in dealing with people. I do not believe that any of you reading this message would respond immediately if God were to visit you. We all are the children of Abraham, and children are always like their fathers. Because Abraham hesitated in following God, God had to appear to him the second time.

2. The Calling of God

God not only appeared to Abraham twice, but He called him twice. The first calling of God was when Abraham was at Ur (Acts 7:2-4). According to Acts 7, God called Abraham out of his country and out of his kindred. But, in the second calling at Haran, God called Abraham out of his country, his kindred, and also out of his father's house (12:1). So God appeared to Abraham twice and called him twice. The first time God called him out of his country and kindred, mentioning nothing of the father's house. So the father's family also came out of Ur. At the time of God's second calling, however, He told him not only to leave his country and kindred but also his father's house. Abraham had two appearances of God and two callings of God. These appearances and callings of God show that God was the origin of God's calling.

D. The Experience of the Called

1. Three Being One

As you read the book of Genesis, you will notice that the records of Adam, Abel, Enoch, and Noah are quite distinct one from another. The records of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, however, overlap. Genesis, speaking of them, considers them as one corporate man. Isaac's life story began in chapter twenty-one, and Abraham's life story ended in chapter twenty-five. Jacob's life story began in chapter twenty-five, and Isaac's life story ended in chapter thirty-five. Jacob's life story, supplemented by that of Joseph, ended in chapter fifty. The significance of this overlapping is that, according to the experience of life, these three persons are one man, a corporate man. When God created mankind, He created man in a corporate way, for Adam was a corporate man (5:2). It is not a small thing to see this. Do not think that, as a called one, you are complete as an individual. None of us is a complete individual unit. We all need one another. You need me and I need you. In like manner, Abraham needed Isaac and Jacob, Isaac needed Abraham and Jacob, and Jacob needed Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph. All of them needed the others in order to have the completion of God's calling.

When some read this, they may ask, "Don't you believe that Abraham was an individual person?" Of course I believe it, just as I believe that you are an individual person. But the Bible tells us that we are members (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27). A member can never be a separate and complete individual unit. When a member becomes individually complete, that means death. My thumb, for example, is a member of my body. It is not separately complete or individual, for, if it were, that would mean death.

a. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob Being One God

The God who came to call this corporate person and who dealt with this corporate man was the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. When God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, He said, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exo. 3:6). In Exodus 3 we see that Moses was called by the angel of the Lord, that the angel of the Lord was the Lord Himself, and that the Lord Himself was the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (vv. 2, 4, 6). God did not say, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses." No, He said that He was the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. This God, who is the Lord, is also the angel of the Lord. Can you figure this out? If you read Exodus 3, you will find that verse 2 speaks of the angel of the Lord and verse 4 of the Lord. Then in verse 6, this angel of the Lord, who is the Lord Himself, told Moses, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Do you believe that these are three gods? Here there are three plus two others, the angel of the Lord and the Lord. Are these five individuals, five gods? The angel of the Lord and the Lord surely are two. Can we say that the angel of the Lord is just the Lord Himself? We can, because the Bible tells us so. No one can exhaust the study of Exodus 3. Eventually, in Exodus 3:14, God said to Moses, "I am that I am." God seemed to be saying, "I am the angel of the Lord. I am the Lord. I am the God of Abraham. I am the God of Isaac. I am the God of Jacob. I am that I am. I don't care whether you understand this or not—I am that I am. I don't care whether you agree with this or not—I am that I am." This is our God, the God who worked upon the corporate man. This God was the angel of the Lord, the Lord Himself, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the great I Am.

1) The God of Abraham—the Father

God's calling to Abraham was the work of God the Father. Abraham's original name was Abram which means "an exalted father," and the name Abraham, that replaced this name, means "the father of a great multitude." Both of these names have the basic thought of the father. The first in the Triune God is the Father, and Abraham was the first of the called ones. Abraham was the father of the called ones, and the first of the Triune God is also the Father. The Father is the source of life. He is also the source of plan and purpose. God the Father had a plan, a purpose. Because He had a purpose, He selected and predestinated in eternity past. Eventually, in time, the Father came in to call, justify, accept, and care for the called ones. God the Father's work is to select, predestinate, call, justify, accept, and take care of the called ones. Both selection and pre-destination precede the matter of calling. If you read Romans 9:11, you will see that these two items are found with Jacob. Nevertheless, in Abraham we see nearly all of the experiences that are related to God the Father. This is very meaningful.

2) The God of Isaac—the Son

Isaac was the son. It is very interesting to see that the second of the Triune God is also the Son. What is a son? A son is one who comes out of the father, who inherits all that the father is and has, and who accomplishes all that the father desires. If you look at Isaac's history, you will find that he was just like this. He was out of the father, he inherited everything of the father, and he worked to

accomplish his father's purpose. This is the experience of Isaac, the experience which fits the second of the Triune God, God the Son. The Lord Jesus, as the Son of God, came out of the Father (John 16:28), inherited all that the Father is and has (John 16:15), and accomplished all the Father's will (John 6:38). Isaac's life corresponds to His.

3) The God of Jacob—the Spirit

Now we come to Jacob. Jacob, a subtle supplanter, needed more than just the experience of the calling and the inheritance. He mainly needed the dealings to transform him from a man in the flesh to a man in the Spirit. So, it is very meaningful that the third of the Triune God is the Spirit who worked upon the subtle, supplanting Jacob to discipline and transform him into a prince of God. Here, in Jacob, we see regeneration, discipline, transformation, and the growth and maturity in life. All of this is the work of the Spirit. So the God of Jacob should be God the Spirit.

b. The Respective Experiences of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob Being Three Aspects of a Complete One

As the transfer of race began with Abraham, passed through Isaac, and was completed with Jacob, so their experiences should be considered as one complete experience. It is implied that the three were one. The Triune God considered them as members of a corporate man for His dealings and for Him to be their God in this way. The last thirty-nine and a half chapters of Genesis are a biography of a corporate person composed of three plus one. If we add together all the different aspects of the experiences of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob including Joseph, we see a clear picture of the complete experience of the called ones.

1) Abraham's Experience

Abraham had a good beginning with being called, but there is no record of his being chosen or of his reaching an ultimate and matured end. For his completion, Abraham had the need of Jacob's being chosen and of Jacob's matured end. Do you believe that, according to the record of Genesis, Abraham attained to the highest and consummate maturity of life? We cannot find such a record. Abraham's offering Isaac on the altar was the climax of his spiritual life (ch. 22). However, he did not reach maturity. In chapter twenty-four we see that he did something marvelous in obtaining a wife for his son, Isaac. But, after that, he took another wife (25:1). This shows us that Abraham was not matured. Where, then, is Abraham's maturity? His maturity is in Jacob's maturity.

Let us use as an illustration of this the visits that Abraham and Jacob made to Egypt. Abraham's trip to Egypt was shameful, for he told a lie about his wife (12:10-20). But Jacob had a glorious visit (47:7). He did not go to Egypt in order to take advantage of others. He went there with a blessing hand, even blessing Pharaoh, the greatest king on earth at the time (47:10). This reveals that the maturity of life is with Jacob and not with Abraham. According to the Bible, the greater always blesses the lesser (Heb. 7:7). No young one can bless an older one. In order to bless people you need the maturity of life. Does the Bible ever say that Abraham blessed someone? No. Jacob, on the contrary, was so mature in life that he could bestow blessings on others. When he blessed his grandchildren, he did it clearly, not blindly as did Isaac. When Joseph tried to change the position of his hands, Jacob refused and said, "I know it, my son, I know it" (48:19). Jacob was fully matured. Although Abraham was high in the life of faith, we do not see in him the maturity of life that we see in Jacob. For the maturity of life, Abraham had to rely upon Jacob. Although Abraham was the grandfather, he still needed his grandson for his completion. By this we can see that, according to experience, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not individuals but three members of the whole Body. Likewise, we are members one of another (Rom. 12:5) and, in certain aspects of life, we need to depend on each other.

2) Isaac's Experience

Isaac is another illustration of this. Isaac's experience was without beginning or end. He was never called and he never matured. Although he blessed his sons, he did it blindly (27:18-29), not so clearly as Jacob did with his grandsons. Isaac needed the beginning of both Abraham's and Jacob's experiences and the end of Jacob's experience for his completion. Isaac was in the middle. He was never dealt with. Although his father and son were dealt with, he did not need any dealings. He was fully covered by the two ends in the matter of God's dealings. Many times it is good for us to stay in the midst of other members of the Body, for those ahead of us and those behind us become our completion. This is the coordination among the members of the Body.

3) Jacob's Experience

In his experience, Jacob had the best, highest, and most matured end. Although he began as a subtle supplanter, after being dealt with by God, he matured to the uttermost. Although there are so many good ones, such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, in the book of Genesis, no one is as mature as Jacob. After he matured, his supplanting hands became blessing hands. Whenever someone came under his hands, there was no condemnation, only blessing. He not only blessed the descendants of faith but even the worldly people. He was so high and so mature.

Although Jacob was matured in life, he had neither the experience of being called nor of the life of faith. Neither did he have the experience of the inheriting of grace. For his completion, Jacob needed to have Abraham's being called and Abraham's experience in the life of faith as well as Isaac's experience in the inheriting of grace. Jacob was poor in faith. He did not know how to believe; he only knew how to supplant. After Abraham had been blessed by Melchisedec following the slaughter of kings, he met the king of Sodom. The king of Sodom encouraged Abraham, who had gained the victory for him, to take the spoil for himself. But Abraham refused to take even one thread, believing in the sufficiency of the Almighty God (14:19-23). Abraham had received the blessing from Melchisedec and did not need help from the king of Sodom. That was Abraham's experience of faith. But Jacob's experience was very different. Wherever he went, he was the first to supplant. In the midst of his supplanting life, Jacob even made a deal with God. When God appeared to him in a dream at Bethel, Jacob said upon waking, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on..then shall the Lord be my God..and of all that thou shall give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee" (28:20-22). Jacob made a deal with God. If God would take care of his needs, Jacob would give Him ten percent in return. Jacob seemed to be saying, "O God, if You will take care of my food, clothing, and all my needs, then I will give You a ten percent commission." According to that arrangement, Jacob received ninety percent and God only ten percent. We see by this that Jacob did not have Abraham's faith.

Eventually, however, Jacob was fully matured. He reached such a high level of maturity that Joseph, a part of Jacob, was reigning over the whole world. At that time, the world was under the hand of Pharaoh, and Pharaoh's authority was altogether with Joseph. In a very real sense, Joseph did not reign for Pharaoh but for Jacob. Here we see the kingdom. The New Testament ends with the kingdom. After the called ones have completed their experiences with the Triune God, the period of reigning will come. That will be the millennium. Joseph only reigned for a period of years, but in the kingdom we shall reign for a thousand years.

If we add together the experiences of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we have a clear portrait of the complete experience of the called one. As a help in doing this, let us consider the chart that is printed on page 525. As God's called ones, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were chosen in eternity past. Then, in time, after their birth, they were called. Many years after Abraham was called, he was circumcised and his name was changed. This is indicated by the curve. This is one line, or one aspect, of the experience of the called ones. We see from this chart that Isaac's experience is a straight line. It resembles a tasteless glass of plain water. We see another curve when we come to Jacob's experience. After this supplanting one was touched and dealt with, he became a prince of God. Eventually, all three of the called ones became a straight line. They will all be there in eternity future. We see from this chart that Jacob, or Israel, includes Joseph. The reason for this is, as we have seen, that Joseph was the reigning part of Jacob. While Jacob was a prince of God, Joseph was the one who reigned over the world, reigning over all the earth for Jacob. Joseph was the reigning son and Jacob was the reigning father.

The experiences of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the complete experience of the corporate called one. If we see this, we shall bow down and say, "O God the Father, we need You. We need Your plan, purpose, selection, predestination, calling, justification, acceptance, and care. O God the Son, we need You. We need You to redeem us that we might have the inheritance. We need You to accomplish all that the Father planned, all that the Father intended to do. O God the Spirit, we need You. We need You to regenerate us, to discipline us, to transform us, and to make us grow that we might mature in life. We need You to make us the real Israels. We need You to make all that the Father has planned and all that the Son has accomplished real to us. Our Triune God, how we bow to You, worship You, praise You, and thank You for all that You have done to us and in us!"

After seeing such a thing, we shall be humbled and realize that the whole experience of the corporate called one is too much for us to have individually. I cannot be Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with Joseph. Since I can only be one of these three, I must learn to rely upon my brothers for the remainder. Even if I were as mature as Israel, I would still need someone to be my Abraham and my Isaac. We all must realize that, at the most, we are only a member of the Body. We need all the other members. According to our traditional background, everyone ranks Abraham at the top, thinking that he exceeds everybody else. But he did not exceed everyone. Although he exceeded others in the matter of faith, he did not surpass them in maturity. As we have seen, Jacob was the most mature.

At present we are all in the process of this experience of God's called ones. Some of us are Abrahams, some are Isaacs, and others are Jacobs. Now we are enjoying the Triune God in our experience, not in theology. We do not have Him as a doctrinal concept but as an experiential enjoyment. We are enjoying God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. How good it is to enjoy the Father's calling, justifying, accepting, and caring for us. How wonderful it is to realize the Son's redeeming, saving, bringing us into the inheritance, and accomplishing of God's eternal purpose. How excellent it is to experience the Spirit's regenerating, disciplining, transforming, and causing us to grow and mature. We are not merely discussing the Triune God. We are experiencing Him; we are participating in the Father, Son, and Spirit. The Triune God is with us experientially. In the church life, we are Abrahams, Isaacs, and Jacobs including Josephs experiencing the Triune God. We are enjoying the selection, predestination, calling, justification, acceptance, care, redemption, inheritance, accomplishment of God's purpose, regeneration, discipline, transformation, growth, maturity, and eventually the reigning. Praise the Lord! This is the Triune God with the corporate called one.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE THIRTY-NINE

THE MOTIVE AND STRENGTH OF BEING CALLED

In the last message we saw that the Triune God dealt with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as one complete corporate man. If we are going to get into the last section of the book of Genesis, the section on God's calling, we need to remember that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not three separate and complete units but, under God's dispensation, are one complete corporate man. God dealt with each of them as a part of a complete unit. Their experiences are not three separate individual experiences but the aspects of one complete experience.

2. The First Aspect—The Experience of Abraham

In this message we need to see the first aspect of the complete experience of God's called ones. This aspect is fully shown in Abraham's life (11:10–25:18). This is quite basic. Abraham's life is an illustration of the first aspect of the complete experience of God's called ones. His experience goes from being called, through the living by faith in fellowship, to the knowing of grace.

a. Called

In his experience Abraham firstly was called by God. As we have seen, God's calling was not originated or initiated by the called one. It was initiated by the God who called. God was the originator of His calling.

1) The Motive and Strength

As God's calling did not originate with the called one but with the God who calls, so the motive and strength to receive God's calling did not originate from the side of the called one but from the side of the calling One. The motive and the strength whereby Abraham could answer God's calling came from God Himself. What was this motive and strength? If we look into the situation in a detailed way, we can see three things that motivated Abraham to accept God's calling: God's appearing, God's calling, and God's promise. Now we need to consider each of these items.

a) God's Appearing

The first aspect of the motive and strength to accept God's calling was God's appearing. If I were to come to you, it would mean nothing because I am nothing. If the president of the United States were to pay you a personal visit, you would be very excited. Probably you would be unable to sleep for a whole night. But who came to visit Abraham? The God of glory (Acts 7:2). Outside of Stephen's word in Acts 7:2, where Stephen told his persecutors that the God of glory appeared to their father Abraham, there is no other verse in the Bible that says that the God of glory appeared to Abraham. While Stephen was speaking, the Jesus of glory appeared to him (Acts 7:55-56). The heavens were opened and he saw Jesus in glory standing on the right hand of God. Stephen was bold to die for Jesus because, while they were opposing him, he saw the Lord Jesus. The people stoned him, but Jesus smiled at him. Because the Lord appeared to him, it was easy, even a great joy, for him to undergo persecution. There was no comparison between that persecution and the appearing of Jesus in glory. Because Stephen was in such a situation, the Jesus in glory appeared to him. Without such an appearing, his environment would have been too difficult for a human being to take.

In the same principle, the God of glory appeared to Abraham, paying him a visit with His personal appearance, because, at that time, Abraham was under the influence of a strong background in Chaldea. As we shall see in the next message, Chaldea in Hebrew means demonic. Chaldea was a demonic place, a place full of demons. Joshua 24:2 says that Abraham and his family served other gods. They worshipped idols, and behind the idols were demons.

Chaldea was in a land called Mesopotamia. The word Mesopotamia means "between rivers." According to geography, the region of Mesopotamia was bound by two great rivers, the Euphrates (Perath in Hebrew) and the Tigris (Hiddekel in Hebrew). Between these two rivers was a great plain, the land of Mesopotamia. Chaldea was a part of Mesopotamia. This means that Abraham's dwelling place was not only in a place full of demons but also in a place that was enclosed by two great rivers. It was very difficult for him or any other person to leave such a place, for the demons held him and the great rivers enclosed him. Since there was no modern transportation, the people had to walk. How was Abraham able to get out of Chaldea? Since his background was so strong, God appeared to him in order that he might come out of it.

This is a picture, an illustration, of our situation before we were saved. We all were in a Chaldea. All the young people need to realize that every junior high school is a Chaldea, a place filled with demons. So many of the students are little demons selling drugs and trying to hold you back, saying, "How can you be different from us? If you want to be different from us, where shall you go? There are two great rivers that keep you here. You must stay with us!" Sometimes the husbands are demons to the wives and the wives are demons to the husbands. As far as the worldly people are concerned, whenever a young man gets married he enters into a demonic region. The same is true for every young woman who marries. Consider the example of a young man who falls in love with a certain young lady. This young woman has a tremendous background composed of a great many relatives and friends, all of whom are demonic. If this young man were to marry her, he would fall into a demonic region. If he came to me, I would say, "Don't think that this young lady is so pretty, nice, and kind. You must look into her background. You are not only marrying her—you are marrying her with her whole background. After you marry a girl with such a demonic background, you will find yourself in Chaldea. The demons there will hold you." But God has chosen this young man. Do not think that it will be easy for him to believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved. It is not a matter of being saved and waiting to go to heaven. No, in the Bible, to be saved is to be called out of your background, region, and environment. You need to get yourself out.

As we have seen, God's promise to Abraham was a preaching of the gospel (Gal. 3:8). As part of this preaching, God told Abraham to get out of his country. What would you have done if you had been Abraham? Behind Sarah there might have been many demons, and these demons would not agree with Abraham's getting out of Chaldea. This was the reason that the God of glory appeared to Abraham. It was neither an angel nor a dignified person who appeared to Abraham but the God of glory Himself who appeared to him. That appearing was a great attraction, inciting Abraham to take God's calling.

In Matthew we are told that as Jesus walked by the sea of Galilee He called Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Matt. 4:18-22). The Lord Jesus simply said to them, "Follow Me," and they followed Him. For many years I was unable to understand this. The little Jesus of Nazareth spoke the words, "Follow Me," and they followed Him. I did not understand this until one day I noticed that the Jesus who walked by the sea of Galilee was a great light (Matt. 4:16). Peter, Andrew, James, and John were all attracted by that great light. When Jesus looked at them and called them, they were attracted to Him. Apparently, the One who called them was a poor Nazarene; actually, He was the God of glory. Likewise, the God of glory appeared to Abraham in the land of demons, a land enclosed by great waters. I believe that, in principle, we all have experienced such an appearing. To be saved is not merely a matter of hearing the preaching of the gospel, nodding your head, and then confessing that you are a sinner and that you believe in the Lord Jesus. Although this is correct, I must say that a true saved one is one who has had the appearing of Jesus.

In our conversion many seemed to see "the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). This became a great stimulation to so many of us.

We, the saved ones, have all had the appearing of Jesus. This did not occur in an outward way, but in our spirit deep within. Although we might forget the day or even the year when we were saved, we can never forget the time that, deep within, we saw Jesus. Jesus appeared to us and we met with Him. This is the real experience of being saved. To be saved is simply to be called. Before the Lord Jesus appeared to you, you found it difficult to be a genuine Christian. Your background and surroundings did not allow you to be different from others. One day, however, He appeared to you. Oh, the living Jesus in glory appeared to you. That was your calling. It was also His separating and His saving. By appearing to you in this way, He called you, saved you, and separated you. Abraham had the same kind of experience. That appearing of God strongly attracted Abraham. This appearing was Abraham's motive and strength to accept God's calling. If you consider Abraham's background and situation you will realize that without such an attraction and stimulation, it would have been impossible for him to accept God's calling.

b) God's Calling

The second factor of the motive and strength was God's calling (Acts 7:3-4; Gen. 12:1). God did not appear to Abraham without speaking to him. When He came to Abraham, He called him. God spoke to Abraham. Calling means speaking. It is not a small thing to hear God's speaking. At the time we were saved, we all experienced the appearing of Jesus. At the same time that He appeared to us, He spoke to us. There was a divine speaking, a kind of speaking in the spirit.

Many of us can testify that at the time we were saved, deep within us we had the consciousness that Jesus was speaking to us. Perhaps the Lord Jesus came to you when you were a student and said, "What are you doing here?" You answered, "I am studying to get my degree." Then the Lord asked, "For what?" You replied, "To make a good living in the future." After this, the Lord asked, "Then what? What about your future?" With others, the Lord Jesus has spoken in a different way, saying, "Look at how sinful you are, at how bad and poor you are!" In response to this, some have said to the Lord, "Don't bother me." Then the Lord said, "I love you. I want to save you. Don't you know that I'm Jesus. I want to rescue you from your poor situation. Aren't you willing to take Me?" To others of us the Lord Jesus said, "Don't you know that I am the living One. I am the only One who can give you eternal life." Many of us have heard words such as these, not out of the mouth of a preacher but out of the mouth of the living Jesus. Do you recall the kind of speaking you heard from the living Jesus when He appeared to you at the time you were called and saved? The non-Christians, including the professing Christians, have not had this kind of experience and they consider it as superstition. But it is not superstition! The God of glory has come to us and spoken to us. Abraham could say, "Don't tell me that this is a superstition. I heard Him speak. He said, 'Get thee out of thy country!' This word did not come from my father or from my wife. It was spoken by the God of glory." Tell me honestly, have you not heard the speaking of Jesus? I do not believe that any saved person will ever be lost again. Although a saved one may backslide, he can never forget the appearing and the speaking of Jesus. He might even say, "I don't believe in Jesus anymore," but deep within the Lord says, "How can you say that you don't believe in Me anymore?" You can never forget His appearing and His speaking to you.

A good number of young people have asked me what is the difference between a true Christian and a false Christian. All of them profess to believe in Jesus. The best answer that I can give is this: a true Christian has had the speaking of Jesus, but the professing Christian only has the preaching of a doctrine. A genuine Christian has, at least once, heard the speaking of Jesus by the living Spirit directly in the depths of his being. That speaking was the strength that enabled all of us to accept God's calling.

c) God's Promise

The third aspect of the motive and strength to accept God's calling is God's promise (12:2-3). Most of God's speaking to us is His promise. If God says, "I don't want to bother you; I want to save you," that is a promise. If He says, "I love you," that also is a promise. Most of what He speaks to us is a promise.

What did the God of glory say to Abraham? Firstly, the God of glory said, "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred" (12:1). You may think that this was not a promise. But it implied a promise. When God told Abraham to get out of his country, it implied that God was promising Abraham a place. Otherwise, Abraham would have said, "If I get out of my country, where should I go?" God had a place for Abraham. Even the command to get out of the country implied a promise, the promise of the good land. Abraham could say, "Since God commands me to get out of my country, this must surely mean that He has a place for me." God told Abraham to get out of his country, from his kindred, and from his father's house, unto a land that He would show him. That certainly was a promise. God's promise was an incentive for him to leave his country.

(1) To Make the Called "A Great Nation"

In 12:2 God said to Abraham, "I will make of thee a great nation." This word was a contrast to Abraham's background. At Babel, there were many nations formed with families. Abraham lived in such an atmosphere. When God came to Abraham, telling him to get out of his country, Abraham might have said within himself, "What about the matter of being a nation?" Then God promised that He would make of him a great nation. God also said, "I will bless thee, and make thy name great." This also was in contrast with Babel. When the people built a tower at Babel, they were trying to make a name for themselves. But God, in His promise, seemed to be telling Abraham, "You don't need to make a name for yourself. I will make your name great. You don't need to form a nation. I will make a nation out of you."

God promised Abraham that He would make of him "a great nation." This "great nation" is the kingdom of God, composed of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, the church in the New Testament, the millennial kingdom in the coming age, and the new heaven and the new earth in eternity. (In the millennial kingdom there will be two parts—the heavenly part and the earthly part. The heavenly part will be the kingdom of heaven. The overcomers of the past and present ages will be in the heavenly part of the millennium as co-kings with Christ. The earthly part is the Messianic kingdom, the kingdom of the Messiah, composed of the future Jewish nation.) The nation of Israel in the Old Testament age, the church in the New Testament age, the coming kingdom in the millennium, and the new heaven and the new earth in eternity—all are included in this "great nation" which God promised to make of Abraham. In this way Abraham's name became great. Other than the name of the Lord Jesus, no name on earth is greater than that of Abraham. He is the father of "a great nation." He is the father of the nation of Israel, the father of the church, and he will be the father of the millennial kingdom and of all the redeemed ones in eternity. What a "great nation" with a great name this is!

(2) To Bless the Called

God promised to bless Abraham (12:2). What is this blessing? It is the blessings of God's creation and redemption, including all that God wants to give man—God Himself and all that He has in this age and in the age to come. Galatians 3:14 shows us that this blessing eventually is the promise of the Spirit: "That the blessing of Abraham might come to the nations in Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Since the Spirit is God Himself, this means that God promised that He would give Himself to Abraham as the blessing.

(3) To Make the Called a Blessing to All Families of the Earth

God not only promised that He Himself would be a blessing to Abraham, but that Abraham would be a blessing to all the families, all the nations, of the earth (12:3). In His calling, God turned from Adam to Abraham. This meant that He had given up the Adamic race. But, in His promise, God made another turn from Abraham back to all the families of the Adamic race through Christ, the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:14). This is very meaningful. Firstly, God turned from Adam to Abraham and, eventually, He turned from Abraham through Christ back to the created race. By this new turn we all were captured. It appeared that God had left us and had turned to Abraham. Then God seemed to say to Abraham, "I will not only give Myself to you as a blessing, but I will make you a blessing to all those pitiful people of the Adamic race. Abraham, let us go back." We may say that God made a U-turn. By this U-turn all of the called

ones from the nations have been gathered in.

Let me say a word about our attitude toward the Jews. Never mistreat the Jewish people. God said, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." (In this word, "them" and "him" indicates people in both plural and singular number.) If you read history, you will find that during the past twenty-five centuries, from the time that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city of Jerusalem until now, every country, people, race, or individual that has cursed the Jewish people has received a curse. However, whoever blesses the Jewish people receives a blessing. No leader in history died in such a pitiful way as Hitler did. Hitler died in that way because he was cursed for his cursing of the Jewish people. Since the United States is helping the nation of Israel today, surely the United States is under God's blessing. This is not my opinion. This is according to God's promise in Genesis 12:3.

(4) God's Promise Being the Gospel Preached to Abraham

When I read 12:2-3 as a young man, I was not inspired by it. These verses seemed to be dry bones. I did not understand what God was talking about when He told Abraham that He would make of him a great nation, and that He would bless him, and make him a blessing. Eventually, after many years, I came back to these verses with the help of Galatians 3. I came to realize that God's promise to Abraham in 12:2-3 was the preaching of the gospel. The three items of God's promise—to make of Abraham a great nation, to bless him, and to make him a blessing to all the families of the earth—were the gospel preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8). The contents of God's promise are exactly the same as the contents of the gospel. Firstly, the preaching of the gospel opens with the words, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 3:2). As we have seen, the "great nation" refers to the kingdom. Secondly, the blessing that God promised Abraham was the Spirit, that is, God Himself. In the gospel, after we repent for the kingdom, we need to believe that we may have eternal life, which is in the Spirit. The blessing promised to Abraham, which, according to Galatians 3:14, is the promise of the Spirit, is the very blessing of the gospel. This blessing, as the third item, is for all the nations, for it is said, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

(5) Implying God's Eternal Purpose

God's promise to Abraham implied His eternal purpose. God's eternal purpose is that man express and represent Him. God said that He would make of Abraham "a great nation" and that He would bless him. A nation is a matter of dominion to represent God, and blessing is a matter of image in the Spirit to express God. We all shall be transformed into His image by the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). This requires that we have a regenerated spirit. Some may ask why 1:26, 28 mention expressing God with His image first and representing Him with His dominion second. The reason for this is that there we see God's original purpose. But because man has fallen, in the gospel man has to repent in order to come back to the beginning. Therefore, in the gospel, dominion is first and image follows. In God's original purpose, it was image and dominion, but, due to the fall, in the gospel the order is reversed.

(6) The Contents in God's Eternal Purpose, Promise, Gospel, and Fulfillment Being the Same

In God's eternal purpose, promise, gospel, and fulfillment, the contents are the same. It is very interesting to see this.

(a) In God's Eternal Purpose—with Adam

In God's eternal purpose we have two items: image to express God and dominion to represent God.

(b) In God's Promise—to Abraham

As we have seen, in God's promise to Abraham, the nation, which is for dominion to represent God, is mentioned first and the blessing, which is for the image to express God, is mentioned second.

(c) In the Gospel—with the Believers

In the gospel (salvation) with the believers we firstly have repentance for the kingdom (Matt. 3:2). This repentance is for the dominion to represent God. Secondly, we have the matter of receiving eternal life (John 3:16). This receiving of eternal life is for the image to express God.

(d) In the Fulfillment—in the New Jerusalem

We also see the same contents in the fulfillment, in the New Jerusalem. The entire New Jerusalem will bear God's appearance. God's appearance resembles jasper. Revelation 4:3 says that God, the One sitting on the throne, has the appearance of jasper. In Revelation 21:11, 18b, we see that the whole New Jerusalem shines like jasper. The appearance of the wall and of the entire city of New Jerusalem will be the same as God's appearance—jasper. This means that in eternity the whole New Jerusalem will express God. Furthermore, in eternity all the saved ones in the New Jerusalem will reign as kings with God (Rev. 22:5). This will be the dominion to represent God.

Although we did not care about God's dominion and image at the time we were called and saved, deep within, in God's calling and speaking, we realized that these matters were implied. After being saved, we had the realization that we needed to be under God's ruling. This is the kingdom, the dominion. Also, deep within us, we had the sensation that, after being saved, we had to glorify God. This is the matter of image to express God. However, after we were saved, most of us met some mistaken preachers who told us many wrong things that distracted us from God's purpose. Praise the Lord that in God's recovery He has recovered us to His original purpose and He has brought us back to the beginning. We the real called ones, the sons of Abraham receiving God's calling with His speaking and promise, are now in His kingdom to represent Him and have His image to express Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FORTY

THE PROGRESS IN ANSWERING GOD'S CALLING

As we have pointed out many times, nearly every item in the book of Genesis is a seed. In this message we come to the seed of river

crossing, to the experience of the first river crosser. What is river crossing? It is the real and actual following of the Lord. Following the Lord is a matter of crossing the river. Although it is easy to talk about river crossing, it is not easy to have the real river crossing according to the experience of Abraham. In this message we need to see how Abraham crossed the river. His experience, an example for us all, is another of the seeds sown in Genesis. This seed is now growing in so many of us. How we need the growth of this seed!

2) *The Progress*

a) *Called the First Time at Ur of Chaldea in Mesopotamia*

The best way to study the Word is to compare one portion of it with another. We may do this with respect to the calling of Abraham, for his calling is mentioned in both Genesis 12 and Acts 7. By the help of the Lord, it is easy for us to see the comparison in these two passages. We can see from these two portions of the Word that the God of glory appeared to Abraham twice. God did not come to him once for all. This is not our guess; it is proved by Acts 7:2 which says that the God of glory appeared to Abraham before he dwelt in Haran, while he was still in Mesopotamia. Then Genesis 12:1 indicates that after Abraham had dwelt in Haran for a time, God appeared to him again. By these two verses we see that God appeared to Abraham in two different places: at Ur of Chaldea and at Haran. It is certain that these two callings did not occur at the same time. The first call came while Abraham's father was still alive, and the second came after his father had died. This is a strong proof that God appeared to Abraham twice.

There is a very crucial difference between these two callings of God. In the first calling God told Abraham to get out of his country and his kindred (Acts 7:3). In the second calling God told him to get out of his country, his kindred, and his father's house (Gen. 12:1). When God called Abraham the second time, He not only mentioned Abraham's kindred in a general way but his father's house in a particular way. It was not sufficient for him to leave his kindred; he had to come out of his father's house. Later on we shall see the reason for this. But now we can see that Abraham experienced two different callings at two different places. In the first calling God told him to get out of his country and his kindred, and in the second calling He told him to get out of his country, his kindred, and his father's house.

Once we see this matter of the two callings, everything is clear. When I was young, I was told by certain teachers that Acts 7 was a quotation of Genesis 12. These teachers never pointed out clearly that God called Abraham twice. Perhaps some of you reading this message still hold on to the concept that Acts 7 is a quotation of Genesis 12. But the call in Acts 7 occurred before Abraham was brought to Haran, and the call in Genesis 12 happened after he had lived there for a time. The call in Acts 7 preceded the call in Genesis 12.

b) *Not Obeying God's Calling Right Away*

Why did God need to appear to Abraham twice and call him twice? Why did God need to repeat His calling? As far as God was concerned, there was no need for Him to repeat His calling. It was Abraham who needed the repetition. There is hardly one who has experienced God's calling just once and then immediately crossed the river. No one among us has ever answered God's calling without dragging his feet through mud and water. Hardly anyone has ever given a clean-cut answer to God's calling. You may say, "What about Peter and John when they were called by the Lord by the Sea of Galilee? The Lord called them, and they followed Him immediately." If you read other portions of the Word, you will see that even these disciples were dragging their feet. It is difficult to have a clean-cut answer to God's calling. We always drag our feet through mud and water. Our relatives might be the mud and we ourselves might be the water. Although you might have received the calling from God, you allow your relatives to be the mud through which you drag your feet. And you yourself are the water, the dirty and black water. You drag your feet through this mud and water.

While Abraham was living at Ur, the God of glory suddenly appeared to him. This appearing brought in light. (The name Ur means light.) In a demonic land, a land full of demons (Chaldea means demonic), the God of glory appeared and brought in light. This is very meaningful. Whenever God comes to call a man, there is always light. While Saul of Tarsus was on the way to Damascus to persecute the Christians there, a light from heaven shone upon him (Acts 9:1-3). At that moment, Saul was at Ur. He was under the light. When you were called, you also were under the light. You saw that your place, your environment and surroundings, was not the right place for you to stay any longer. You were called at Ur, the place of light.

c) *Taken to Haran by His Father after His Brother's Death*

I believe that Abraham received God's calling when he was young. He might have told his father, Terah, and his relatives how God had appeared to him and had told him to get out of his country and his kindred. Abraham probably did not have the boldness to do this himself. In 11:28 we are told that "Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees." Haran might have been Abraham's older brother and he might have opposed God's calling to Abraham. It might have been that God waited a certain period of time. When Abraham still did not take any action, God took away Haran, the opposing one. Haran might have been Terah's eldest son. The eldest son's death might have been a warning to the father not to tarry any longer. The name Terah means to tarry, to delay, or to be laggard. Terah took the whole family, went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, and dwelt in Haran (11:31; Acts 7:4a). It was not Abraham who took the initiative to leave Ur; it was his father.

Terah and his family might have traveled northward along the side of the river Euphrates. Eventually, after a journey of at least five hundred miles, they came to Haran. According to the ancient method of travel, it must have taken over half a month to travel from Ur to Haran. But although they made such a long journey, they never crossed the river as God wanted them to. How many years have you been dragging along the side of the river without crossing it? You may say, "Praise the Lord that I am no longer in Ur." Right, you are not in Ur, but you are still on the other side of the river. Even in the church life you have been journeying along the riverside without crossing the river. Many of you have journeyed northward but are still on the other side. But even this journey northward was caused by God's doing.

At Ur there was a person named Haran, and now we see a city with the same name. This means that they left one Haran and came into another. In the eyes of God, both are the same. Whether Haran is a person or a place, it is still Haran. The name Haran means dry. When the elder brother was opposing God's calling, he must have been dry. Any relative who tries to prevent you from accepting the Lord's calling is a dry one, and any place that hinders you from answering God's calling is a dry place. You can never be watered there. In such a place you have the sensation of dryness. Many of us have experienced this.

Christians are used to exalting Abraham. He is considered as being very high. But Abraham was not that high; he was as low as we are. When God came to Abraham, he lacked the boldness to take action. His father finally acted, taking the family to Haran where they dwelt until the father died (11:32). Then God appeared to Abraham and called him again (11:32–12:3; Acts 7:4b). Abraham's delay in answering God's calling caused two deaths, the death of his brother at Ur and the death of his father at Haran. Abraham took two steps, and each step was caused by the death of a close relative.

In His second calling God added another item, telling Abraham not only to come out of his country and his kindred but also out of his father's house (12:1). This means that he was only allowed to bring his wife with him, not any member of his father's house. God's calling was more severe the second time than it was the first time. If you look into the meaning of all the names, you will see that, apart from the name Abram, which means an exalted father, the only other name with a positive meaning is Sarai, which means my princess. The exalted father was the husband, and the princess was the wife. At Haran God called only these two. But again Abraham dragged his feet through the mud, for he took his nephew Lot with him.

In the second calling God was not only more severe, but He also gave Abraham the promise of the gospel as an incentive to encourage him to answer His calling (12:2-3). He received a more severe calling but with a great incentive.

e) Obeying God's Calling in a Dragging Way

This time Abraham obeyed God's calling, but he did not do so in a clean-cut way. He was still dragging along. We know this because he did not only take his wife Sarai with him but also his nephew Lot (12:4). Lot was a member of his father's family. Did not Abraham hear when God told him to get out of his father's house? Why then did he bring with him a member of his father's house? I believe that I can tell you the reason. At that time Abraham was quite old. He was seventy-five years of age. Although he was seventy-five years old, he still did not have a son of his own. For such a long journey he surely needed a young man to help him. That was his excuse. Abraham might have said, "God called me, but should I leave my nephew? Should I not love him?" Humanly speaking, everyone would say that Abraham was right in bringing Lot.

What is the meaning of the name Lot? It means a veil, a wrapping. Your dear relatives, whom you love so much and whom you would take with you in answering God's calling, are always veils to you. Look at your situation. Many of us have answered God's calling in a way of taking a veil along with us. Lot did not help Abraham at all. Rather, he caused trouble. When we come to Genesis 13, we shall see that Lot caused a great deal of trouble to Abraham and that eventually he had to leave Abraham. If you examine your own situation you will see that probably it was exactly the same as Abraham's.

In the gospel preaching today people are mostly told that if they believe in the Lord Jesus, they will be saved from hell and will go to heaven one day. This is true, but it is shallow. From God's point of view, to be saved is to be called. God is not concerned about hell but about your country, your kindred, and your father's house. God is concerned about your environment, surroundings, and background. To be saved means to be called out of your background, to be called out of your present surroundings, environment, and situation. To be saved is not merely a matter of having your sins forgiven, of being rescued from hell, and of being qualified to go to heaven. To be saved means to be called out of your background and environment.

To be saved is also to take a journey, to walk along the way, and to run the race. Pilgrim's Progress, a very famous book written by John Bunyan, stresses the one point that salvation is a journey. To be saved is to be called and to be on a journey. People talk much about justification by faith, using Abraham as the example. But before Abraham was justified, he took a journey. His justification transpired in Genesis 15:6. Before Genesis 15, however, we have at least three chapters telling us that this justified one was on a journey.

I hope that all the young people will see this. The place where the young people are today is worse than Chaldea. But praise the Lord, your Ur is brighter and has more light. Today God's calling to the young people is clearer and stronger than it was to Abraham. Young people, you must get out of the land, out of the people, and away from your relatives. To be saved is to be on a journey to reach God's purpose. God came in to call Abraham with a purpose. If you are called by God according to His purpose, your salvation is guaranteed by that calling. You do not need to be concerned about your salvation. If you take care of God's purpose, He will certainly take care of your salvation.

To be saved is to be called to fulfill God's purpose. When God came in to call Abraham, it was not for the purpose that Abraham be saved from hell or filled with joy; it was for the purpose of fulfilling God's plan. God called Abraham for the fulfillment of His purpose. We all must hear this calling.

God has a plan and a purpose. He has a good land that we may enter into. Abraham went into the good land of Canaan (12:4-5). Our good land today is Christ, the church, and the kingdom. Consider the case of Saul of Tarsus who boldly persecuted the church. In the eyes of God, while Saul was persecuting the church, he was living in "Chaldea." On the road to Damascus, the Lord appeared to him, shined upon him, and called him, and Saul's Chaldea became "Ur," the place of light. The Lord did not call him in order to save him from hell to heaven, or even to justify him. Although these are included in the Lord's calling, the Lord called him out of a Judaistic Chaldea. The Lord called Saul out of that religion in order that he might enter into Christ, God's new covenant economy, the church, and the kingdom. And Paul did get into Christ, into the New Testament economy, into the church, and into God's kingdom.

If we answer God's calling, taking care of His purpose that we enter into Christ, the New Testament economy, the church, and the kingdom, He will not allow us to go to hell. Do not be concerned about hell, and do not consider that much about heaven. We have something better than heaven. Is not Christ better than heaven? Is not God's economy, the dispensation of the Triune God into man, much better than heaven? Is not the church better than heaven? Heaven is going to be shaken. Hebrews 12:26 says that God is going to shake not only the earth but also heaven. Only God Himself is unshakable. We have received an unshakable kingdom, which is Christ with the church. Do not appreciate heaven so much. In the last two chapters of the Bible we see that the New Jerusalem will descend out of heaven. God is going to leave heaven and dwell in the New Jerusalem, which is the consummation of the church, for

eternity.

We all must see that to be saved means to be called to fulfill God's purpose. To be saved is to be delivered out of many negative situations so that we may come into God's goal. Many Christians have been saved, but they have never come into God's goal. God's goal firstly is Christ. We are in Christ. We are in the enjoyment of Christ. This is God's good land. Secondly, God's goal is the church. Years ago I did not realize that, in a sense, the church is also the good land of Canaan. Furthermore, God's New Testament economy, the kingdom, and the Sabbath rest, are all the good land to us today. Are you in the good land of Canaan? If you are, it means that you are in Christ, in the riches and the enjoyment of Christ. It also means that you are in God's new covenant dispensation and in the church life. Many of us were saved for many years before we crossed the river. We were neither in God's economy nor in the church. Moreover, we were not in God's kingdom. Some of us had the concept that the kingdom had been suspended and that the millennial kingdom would come in the future, but we never entered into the reality of the kingdom life today.

Although according to what is portrayed in Genesis 12 Abraham was dragging along, Hebrews 11:8 tells us that he obeyed God's calling by faith and went out without knowing where he was going. In His calling, God told him definitely what he had to leave, but God did not tell him clearly where he had to go. Abraham obeyed God's calling and went out by faith. This was great. On the one hand, he was dragging along; on the other hand, he took a great step by faith. His not knowing where to go caused him to trust in God and to look unto the Lord all the time. We may say that the living God was a road map to him for his traveling.

f) Removed by God into the Land of Canaan

Regardless of how long Abraham delayed in answering God's calling, he could not delay God very long. According to God's feeling, a thousand years are the same as a day. Can you delay God a thousand years? No one can do this. At the most, we might delay him for fifty years, which in God's eyes are a little more than an hour. God is sovereign and patient. God could say to Haran and Terah, "All that you are doing is in vain. After you die, I will bring My called one to My land." God is God. No one can frustrate Him. Once He has chosen and called you, He will not be stopped by anything. Sooner or later He will get through. He will come to you again and again. If one death is not sufficient to accomplish His aim, there will be another one. He has a way. He is much greater than you are. According to Acts 7:4, it was not Abraham who entered into the good land but God who removed him into the land. Although Hebrews 11:8 says that Abraham went out by faith, Acts 7:4 says that God removed him from Haran into Canaan. At most, we can delay the Lord for just a short time. Eventually we shall be gained by Him. If we delay, we shall only waste our time. God told Abraham to get out of his country. Since he did not do it in a rapid and clean-cut way, God removed him into His land.

*g) Passing through the Land
to the Place Which God Confirms*

At Haran, Abraham crossed the river. After crossing the river, he sojourned through the land, traveling southward until he reached a place called Shechem (12:6). The word Shechem means a shoulder which affords strength. At Shechem was Moreh where there was an oak. The name Moreh means a teacher who affords knowledge. Abraham journeyed to a place where he could get both strength and knowledge. Was that the place where God intended for Abraham to be? Yes. We know this because God did not reappear to Abraham until he had arrived at the oak of Moreh. There God reappeared to him (12:7).

God's reappearing to you confirms that you have arrived at the right place. Perhaps you experienced an appearing of God many years ago. After that time you wandered, journeyed, and traveled from place to place without having another appearing of God. One day, after arriving at the oak of Moreh, the church, the Lord appeared to you again. This appearing confirmed that you had arrived at the right place. Many of us can testify that after we were saved we traveled through Christianity without having God's reappearing. It was not until we came to today's Shechem with the oak of Moreh, that is, the church life, that the inner appearing rose up once again. Many of us can testify that after we came to the church, we had the feeling that God had appeared to us again, telling us, "This is the place."

The oak, a strong, hardy tree, signifies strength. An oak tree also affords shade from the heat of the sun. This is very meaningful. I believe that in symbol this signifies the church life which affords us the strength and shade. The church life strengthens us and shades us from the heat of the sun.

When God appeared to Abraham at Moreh, He said to him, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (12:7). This was the first time that the promise of the land was clearly given. In 12:1 God only said to Abraham, "unto a land that I will shew thee"; God did not tell him where the land was or that He would give the land to him. But here God told him definitely where the land was and He promised to give this land to his seed. When we get to the place which God confirms by His reappearing, we also shall receive the promise of today's good land—Christ, the church, and the kingdom.

At the place where the Lord reappeared to him, Abraham built an altar. This altar was an anti-testimony to the building of the tower of Babel. At Babel, men built a tower to make a name for themselves. At Shechem, Abraham did not build anything to make himself a name; he built an altar for calling on the name of the Lord (12:8). This signifies that when we arrive at the place that God has chosen, God appears to us, and we have a deeper, fuller, richer, and more intimate fellowship with Him by calling on His name. We all can testify that we never called on the name of the Lord as much as we have since coming into the church life. Calling on the name of the Lord follows the building up of an altar to the very God who has appeared to us. In the church life, under the oak of Moreh, we have the intimate appearing of the Lord. What shall we do in response to this? We should build an altar to Him and put everything we are and have on the altar. We need to tell the Lord that everything we are and have is for Him, and then we need to call on the name of the Lord to maintain a deeper, richer, and more intimate fellowship with Him.

Now we have seen the experience of the first Hebrew, the first river crosser. Abraham was the first one to cross the river and to reach the place where God could reappear to him and where he could build an altar and call on the name of the Lord. This place is the right place. It is not at Ur, Haran, or any place other than at the oak of Moreh. Here we have God's appearing and God's presence. Here we receive the promise of the good land. Here we can build an altar to the Lord, call on His name, and have intimate fellowship with Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FORTY-ONE

LIVING BY FAITH

In all of human history there has never been a book as wonderful as the Bible. As the first book in the Bible, Genesis is not a book of doctrine; it is a book of history. It is not a history in a human way but in a very divine way. Genesis uses the biographies of some ancient saints to tell us something that is so divine. The divine revelation is contained in the human lives, in the human stories, of the people in Genesis. In this message we need to see the divine revelation found in Abraham's experience of living by faith.

b. Living by Faith

In some of the preceding messages we have seen that the experience of the called ones has three aspects, the aspects of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The first stage of the first aspect, the aspect of Abraham, was Abraham's being called by God. We have covered this point adequately in the last two messages. Now we come to the second stage of the experience of Abraham—living by faith, or we may say a life by faith. When we speak of a life by faith, we do not mean the life within but the life without, that is, the daily living, the daily walk, of the called ones. This daily walk is not by sight but by faith (2 Cor. 5:7).

Abraham's history is a seed. The entire biography of Abraham is a seed. It is not a seed of doctrine but a seed of our history. Abraham's history is the seed of our history because our history grows out of his history. In a sense, we and Abraham are one in the experience of life. We, the believers, are the true descendants of Abraham, and he is the true father of everyone who has been called by God. When we read his biography, we are also reading our own. His story is about us. As we read all of the chapters in Genesis about Abraham, we must read them in the way of realizing that his story is our story.

We need to see the steps that we must take in following the Lord. The first step is being called, and the second is living by faith. Have you been called? You must strongly say, "Amen, I have been called." Abraham was the first to be called, and, as we have seen, he did not answer God's calling in a clean-cut way but in the way of dragging his feet through mud and water. Our story is the same. Our answer to the Lord's calling was exactly the same as his. In principle, the seed is on a small scale, the growth is on a greater scale, and the harvest is on the greatest scale. We have seen that when Abraham left Haran, he took Lot with him. Did you not bring a Lot with you? If Abraham, the seed, brought one Lot, then it is probable that each one of us has brought many Lots. I am afraid that some of those reading this message have brought more than ten Lots with them. By this we see that our history is found in Abraham's biography.

Regardless of how much Abraham dragged his feet through the mud and water, God was still sovereign. God is God. Abraham was not only called; he was caught. He came out of his country, his kindred, and his father's house, and was brought to Moreh, the place where God wanted him to be and where He reappeared to him (12:6-7). God's reappearing was a seal to Abraham's answer to His calling. God's calling was clean-cut, but Abraham's answer to God's calling was not. Nevertheless, eventually God received a full answer to His calling. I do not care how much the young brothers and sisters drag their feet. Sooner or later, they will be fully caught. The Christian workers and the leading brothers must have the faith never to be disappointed with the brothers and sisters. Never feel that a particular brother is beyond hope. Rather, we must say that there is much hope with that brother. Simply wait awhile and you will see that everyone will come to Moreh.

1) Strength—the Appearance of God

At Moreh God reappeared to Abraham and he met God again (12:6). If you say that you have been called, I would ask you this question: What is the seal of your calling? The seal of our calling is God's reappearance. God's reappearance, His coming again to us, is the seal of our answer to His calling. The reappearing of God to Abraham was the strength that enabled him to live by faith.

If you read the record in Genesis, you will see that during Abraham's time mankind lived in the way of building a strong city for their protection and erecting a high tower for making themselves a name. That was the living of the humankind at Babel. But Abraham lived in an absolutely different way. His living was an anti-testimony to the way of the humankind, to the way that had been fully developed at Babel. As we saw in message thirty-six, at Babel there was a great city built by man. This city was not built with God-created stones but with man-made bricks. Those bricks were made by killing the element in the soil that grows life. But Abraham, the called one, did not live in that way. With Abraham, there was no city and no tower. After God's reappearing as the seal to Abraham's answer to God's calling, Abraham immediately built an altar, not to make a name for himself but to call upon the name of the Lord. Why did Abraham do this? Because he had the reappearing of God. How was he able to do this? Also because he had the reappearing of God. Remember that the record in Genesis concerning Abraham is a biography, not a doctrine, religion, or tradition. Abraham did not build an altar because of teaching or religious tradition. He built it because God had reappeared to him. God's reappearing meant everything to him. It not only sealed Abraham's answer to God's calling; it also strengthened him to live in a way that was absolutely different from the way of all of the humankind. It caused him to live as an anti-testimony to his generation. The altar that Abraham built was an anti-testimony to the tower of Babel.

a) After Arriving at Canaan

Now we need to find out at what time Abraham experienced God's reappearing. Our God never does anything without a purpose and He never acts in a meaningless way. Everything He does is purposeful and meaningful. After Abraham answered God's calling, believing in Him and obeying Him, he came to the oak of Moreh (12:6-7). When he came to that place, God reappeared to him because he had believed in God's calling and had obeyed it. As one who believed and obeyed God's calling, Abraham had no choice of the place where he should stay. God called Abraham a second time at Haran, and he crossed the river there, beginning a long journey. While he was on this long journey, he did not have his own choice. Hebrews 11:8 tells us that Abraham did not know where he was going. He had no road map in his hand. His road map was a living Person, the living God. While he was journeying, he had to look to God continually; he could not stop at any place he chose. As he was traveling, God's presence was his direction, his road map. He followed God in this way until he arrived at Moreh. At Moreh, God appeared to him. That appearing of God at Moreh indicated that

Abraham had come to the place where God wanted him to be. There God told Abraham that He would give that land to his descendants.

God's first appearing to us does not depend upon us at all. It is God who initiates that calling. However, after the initial appearing, every other appearing depends upon our condition. Although God's first appearing is initiated by Him and does not depend upon us, the subsequent appearances depend upon our condition. If Abraham had not arrived at Moreh, he would not have had God's reappearing, the reappearing that strengthened him to go on with God. This going on with God was Abraham's living by faith in God.

b) After the Separation of Lot

A second reappearing of God to Abraham is recorded in Genesis 13:14-17. In this chapter we see that Abraham had difficulty with Lot. In the flesh, Lot was Abraham's nephew, but before God he was Abraham's brother. Although Lot gave Abraham a difficult time, Abraham did not strive with him. Rather, he allowed Lot to have the choice. After Lot had separated from Abraham, leaving him alone, God reappeared to Abraham again. This reappearing was due to the fact that Abraham did not strive or fight for himself but left all the choices with his brother Lot. This second reappearing of God also strengthened Abraham's life by faith.

After we have been called by God, we need to live by faith. This is our need today. If you have been called by God, you have to live by faith. In the Bible, faith is in contrast to sight. If you have been called by God, you must live by faith, not by sight. Look at today's world: it is undoubtedly a harvest of the human living sown at Babel. A seed was sown at Babel, and the world today is a great harvest of that seed. People are building great cities for their living and are erecting high towers for their name. This is the situation everywhere on earth. But we have been called. What shall we do? We must live by faith. What does it mean to live by faith? It means to live by trusting in God for everything. Abraham did not declare that he lived by faith. Neither did he preach living by faith. He simply lived by faith. Now we need to see in what way Abraham lived by faith.

2) Significance—the Altar

a) The First Altar

After Abraham had arrived at Moreh and after God had reappeared to him, he built an altar (12:7). This was the first altar that Abraham built. In order to live by faith, we must first of all build an altar. In the Bible an altar means that we have all for God and serve God. Building an altar means that we offer everything we are and have to God. We need to place all that we are and all that we have on the altar. Before we do anything for God, God would say to us, "Child, don't do anything for Me. I want you. I want you to put all that you are and all that you have on the altar for Me." This is real fellowship, real worship. The real worship of the called ones is to put all that we are and have on the altar.

According to the human viewpoint, people will say that we are foolish for doing this. They will accuse us of wasting our time, of wasting our lives. If they had been with Abraham, they would have said, "Abraham, what are you doing? Are you crazy? Why do you build such a low thing as an altar, and put everything on it and burn it? Isn't that foolish?" As called ones, whatever we do will be foolish in the eyes of the worldly people. Many of our relatives will say that it is foolish for us to attend meetings so often, wondering why we do not stay at home and watch television with our family. The worldly people cannot understand why we attend meetings several times a week. They think that we are crazy. They would say, "What are you doing there in that little building? Why do you go there on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, twice on Sunday, and even sometimes on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday? Are you people crazy?" Yes, according to the worldly people, we are crazy. God's appearing makes us crazy.

An altar means that we do not keep anything for ourselves. An altar means that we realize that we are here on earth for God. An altar means that our life is for God, that God is our life, and that the meaning of our life is God. So we put everything on the altar. We are not here making a name for ourselves; we are putting everything on the altar for the sake of His name.

If you check with your experience, you will see that immediately after you were called, God appeared to you again, and you said, "Lord, from now on everything is Yours. All that I am, all that I have, all that I can do and am going to do is for You." I can still recall what happened on the afternoon that I was saved. As I went out of that church building and walked along the street, I lifted up my eyes to heaven and said, "God, from today on everything is for You." That was a real consecration. In a spiritual sense, it was the building of an altar. I believe that many of you reading this message have had such an experience. When we received God's calling, we were crazy, not caring about what would happen. Although we did not realize what it meant at the time, we promised the Lord that everything we had was for Him. When I said this to the Lord that day on the street, I did not realize what it involved. When after a few years I found myself in some difficulties, the Lord within me said, "Don't you remember what you said that afternoon as you walked along the street? Didn't you say, 'O God, from today on everything is for You'?" When I signed the contract, I did not know what was involved. But it was too late to repent; the contract had already been signed. To tell the Lord that everything is for Him is the real building of an altar. We all can testify how sweet is the sensation and how intimate is the fellowship whenever we tell the Lord that everything is for Him. At that time, we come deeply into the Lord Himself.

Although we may tell the Lord that everything we are and have is for Him, we may forget it a few days later. But the One who called us will never forget. He has an excellent memory. Often He will come to us and remind us of what we have said to Him. He may say, "Don't you remember what you said to Me that day?" This is not a doctrine; it is a real experience. Unless you have not been called, you are not an exception. As long as you are a called one, I have the complete assurance that you have had this kind of experience. The Lord did reappear to you, and at that reappearing you were crazy, promising to give the Lord everything, without considering the meaning of the involvement. You simply consecrated yourself to Him. You did not realize the meaning of what you promised. I thank God that we were not clear about this when we did it. We did not realize how much we became involved with God as a result of speaking one short sentence. We were bound by it. He is God. He is the calling One, and we are the called ones. It is all of Him. Even if we want to be crazy for Him, in ourselves we do not have the incentive to do it. But once He appears to us, we are crazy and say, "O Lord, everything is Yours. Take it. Lord, do what You want. I offer everything to You." Such a time of offering ourselves to the Lord is like a dream. Later we wake up and begin to realize what it involves.

In the early days of my ministry I was burdened to help people to consecrate themselves. Although I gave a lot of teaching about

consecration, I did not see much result. My teaching did not work very well. Eventually, I learned that you cannot help people to consecrate themselves by teaching them. It is not teaching that causes people to consecrate themselves to the Lord; it is the Lord's appearing that motivates them to do this. If we can help people to meet the Lord and come into His presence, that will be sufficient. We do not need to tell them to consecrate themselves to God or to offer everything to the Lord on the altar. Once God appears to people, nothing can stop them from consecrating themselves. Spontaneously and automatically, they will say, "Lord, everything is Yours. From now on everything is for You." Have you not had this kind of experience? Have you not laid everything you are and have upon the altar for God and His purpose?

b) The Second Altar

After Abraham built an altar to the Lord at Moreh, he traveled through the land. God did not give him just one little spot; He gave him a spacious land. In his travels, Abraham came to a place that was between Bethel and Ai. Bethel was on the west and Ai was on the east. Here, between Bethel and Ai, Abraham built another altar (12:8; 13:3-4). Bethel means the house of God, and Ai means the heap of ruins. Bethel and Ai stand in contrast one to another. What does this contrast mean? It means that in the eyes of the called ones only God's house is worthwhile. Everything else is just a heap of ruins. The principle is the same with us today. On the one hand, we have Bethel, God's house, the church life. Opposite to this is a heap of ruins. Everything that is contrary to the church life is a heap of ruins. In the eyes of God's called ones, everything other than the church life is a heap of ruins because the called ones look at the world situation from God's point of view. This point of view is absolutely different from the world's point of view. According to the worldly viewpoint, everything in the world is high, good, and wonderful, but, from the point of view of God's called ones, everything opposite to the house of God is a heap of ruins.

Firstly, we consecrate ourselves at Moreh. Then we consecrate ourselves at the place that is between the church life and the heap of ruins. As far as we are concerned, only the house of God is worthwhile. Everything other than this is a heap of ruins. Between the house of God and the heap of ruins we build an altar that we might fellowship with God, worship Him, and serve Him.

c) The Third Altar

Abraham built the third altar at Mamre of Hebron (13:18). Mamre means strength, and Hebron means fellowship, communion, or friendship. According to Genesis 18:1, it was at Mamre that God came to visit Abraham. In that visit God not only appeared to him but stayed with him for quite a long time, even feasting with him. We shall see more about this when we come to that chapter. Although both Moreh and the place between Bethel and Ai were good, neither one was the place where Abraham stayed for constant fellowship with the Lord. The place where Abraham stayed for such constant fellowship with the Lord was Mamre of Hebron.

We all need to maintain a constant fellowship with the Lord. This does not happen by accident; neither should it occur occasionally. It must be constant. Perhaps some years ago you built an altar to the Lord. This is good, but what has happened since then? You may say that you built an altar two years ago, but how about today? Many of us have had the experience at Moreh but have not had the experience at Mamre. I believe that Abraham's life was mostly spent at Hebron, the place where he could have constant fellowship with the Lord. There, at Hebron, he built the third altar. We all need to build at least three altars: the first at Moreh, the second between Bethel and Ai, and the third at Mamre in Hebron. We need to build an altar at Mamre in Hebron so that we may worship God, serve Him, and have constant fellowship with Him. This is the experience of the third altar, the altar in Hebron.

3) Expression—the Tent

*a) Because All the Things He Had Were for God
and He Trusted in God*

After Abraham built an altar, he pitched a tent (12:7-8). At Babel, the people firstly built a city and then erected a tower. But Abraham firstly built an altar and then erected a tent. This means that Abraham was for God. The first thing he did was to take care of the worship of God, of his fellowship with God. Secondly, he took care of his living. The tent was for Abraham's living. Abraham did not take care of his living first. That was secondary. With Abraham, the primary matter was to consecrate everything to God, to worship and serve God, and to have fellowship with God. Only then did Abraham pitch a tent for his living. Abraham's dwelling in a tent indicated that he did not belong to the world but was a testimony to the people (Heb. 11:9).

b) At the Place of Testimony

Abraham firstly pitched his tent at the place between Bethel and Ai (12:8; 13:3). That was the place where God's house was and where he began his testimony in expressing God by fellowshipping with Him. His altar was the beginning of his testimony for God to the world, whereas his tent was the completion of his testimony to the world for God. His tent was a miniature of the tabernacle built by his descendants in the wilderness, which was called the "tabernacle of testimony" (Exo. 38:21). Since his tent was pitched by Bethel, in a sense it may be considered as the house of God for God's testimony on earth.

c) At the Place of Fellowship

Later, Abraham removed his tent to Hebron, which means fellowship (13:18). His tent firstly was a testimony for God to the world and then it became the center where he had fellowship with God. This is strongly proved by what occurred in chapter eighteen when God came to stay with him in the tent at Mamre in Hebron. By Abraham's pitching a tent God had a place on earth where He could communicate and fellowship with man. His tent brought God from heaven to earth. All of us, God's called ones, should pitch a tent. On the one hand, such a tent is a testimony of God to the world; on the other hand, it is a place of fellowship with God to bring God from heaven to earth.

Do not think that this matter of a tent is a small thing. Later, when Abraham's descendants were called out of Egypt and entered into the wilderness, God commanded them to build a tent and in front of the tent He commanded them to build an altar (Exo. 26:1; 27:1). There, in Exodus, we see an altar with a tent, a tabernacle. That tabernacle was God's house on earth. Abraham's tent was also God's house on earth. In Genesis 18 we can see that God came and stayed with Abraham in his tent. At that time, Abraham was a priest offering sacrifices to God. His building an altar and offering sacrifices to God proved that he functioned as a priest. God's intention is

that all of His called ones should be priests. We are priests. We do not need others to offer sacrifices for us. We must do it ourselves. When Abraham was feasting with God in his tent, he was the high priest, and the inner part of his tent was the Holy of Holies. God was there. By this we can see that Abraham's tent was a prefigure of the tabernacle built by Abraham's descendants in the wilderness as the dwelling place for God and for the priests. Here in Genesis we see a priest named Abraham who lived with God in his tent. At the side of this tent there was an altar.

d) Sojourning by Faith as in a Strange Country

Do not forget that Abraham's history is yours. Do you not have a tent where you always have the Lord's presence? The worldly people do not have such a tent. They only have a great city. The only thing that the worldly people can see is their great city. They say, "Look at my corporation. Look at my education, my attainment. Look at how many things I have." But we can say to the worldly people, "You have everything, but there is one thing that you don't have—God's presence. You do not have the tent—you have the city of Babel. All that you have is a part of the great Babylon." Whether we are high-class people or low-class people does not mean very much. All that matters is that wherever we are we have a tent with God's presence. When we have a tent with God's presence, we have the deep sensation within that nothing here on earth is lasting. Everything is temporary. We are looking to eternity. The banks, the corporations, the attainments—all are temporal and mean nothing. We have nothing constant on this earth. I just like to have a tent with God's presence. I like to live in such a situation. We may say to the worldly people, "Dr. So-and-so, I don't have as much as you have, but I have the one thing that you don't have—God's presence. I don't have to wait for eternity to have God's presence. I have His presence right now in my tent. My surroundings are a tent, a miniature of the New Jerusalem. This may not be worthwhile in your eyes, but in God's eyes it means a great deal." This is what it means to pitch a tent.

Whenever we answer God's calling and God reappears to us and we build an altar for God, telling Him that everything we are and have is for Him, we shall immediately erect a tent. Spontaneously, people will see that this is an expression, a declaration, that we do not belong to this world. By pitching a tent we declare that we belong to another country. We do not belong to this country; we are looking for a better one. We do not like this country, this earth, this world. We expect to come into another country. We are sojourning by faith as in a strange country (Heb. 11:9).

e) Waiting with Expectation for a City with Foundations

Hebrews 11:10 says that Abraham "waited for the city which has the foundations, whose Architect and Maker is God." This city which has foundations is undoubtedly the New Jerusalem, which has solid foundations laid and built by God (Rev. 21:14, 19-20). While Abraham was living in a tent without any foundations, he was looking and waiting for a city with foundations. But I do not believe that Abraham knew that he was waiting for the New Jerusalem. Even many Christians do not know that what they are waiting for is the New Jerusalem. But we have to be clear that we are living in the tent of the church life today, waiting for its ultimate consummation, which will be the New Jerusalem—the city of God with foundations.

f) Living in a Shadow of the New Jerusalem

Abraham's tent was a miniature of the New Jerusalem, which will be the ultimate tabernacle of God in the universe (Rev. 21:2-3). As he lived in that tent, he was living in a shadow of the New Jerusalem. While he was living there with God, he was waiting for a city, a city that eventually will be the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem, the eternal tabernacle, will replace that temporary tent in which Abraham lived. Abraham's tent was a seed of God's eternal dwelling place. This seed grew in the tabernacle erected by his descendants in the wilderness (Exo. 40), and its harvest will be the New Jerusalem, the tabernacle of God with man. God still needs to have such a seed in all of us. We all need to be those who live in a tent and who look forward to a better country, a country in which there will be the eternal tabernacle where God and we, we and God, will live together for eternity. Abraham's interest was altogether in a better country. Although God had told him that He would give the land to Abraham and his descendants, Abraham did not care for that. He was looking for another country and for a city with foundations. Eventually, the Bible tells us that this better country is the new heaven and the new earth and that the city with foundations is the New Jerusalem, the eternal dwelling place for God and for all His called ones.

Today we are repeating the life and history of Abraham. Once there was only one Abraham; now there are many. The church life today is the harvest of the life and history of Abraham. Abraham's life by faith is presently being repeated among us. We all are here building an altar and pitching a tent. Look at the church life: we have an altar and a real tabernacle. This is a picture of the coming New Jerusalem where we shall spend eternity with God.

The Bible ends with a tent. The New Jerusalem is the ultimate tent, the ultimate tabernacle, in the universe. Maybe one day Abraham will meet with God in the New Jerusalem, and God will say, "Abraham, don't you remember that day when we feasted together in your tent? Your tent was a miniature of this eternal tabernacle." Abraham's tent was a seed. The growth of that seed is in Exodus and its harvest is in Revelation 21. In principle, there is no difference between Abraham's tent, and the New Jerusalem, the ultimate tent. If I were Abraham meeting with God in the New Jerusalem, I would say, "Lord, I remember the day You came to my tent. Now I come to Your tent."

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FORTY-TWO

THE TRIAL OF THE CALLED

In this message we come to Abraham's experience of trials. We have seen how Abraham was called by God and how, by God's appearing, he was strengthened to answer that call. We have also seen that, by God's appearing, Abraham was brought to the very place where God intended him to be. Firstly he was brought to Shechem (12:6) and then to the place between Bethel and Ai, the place between the house of God and the heap of ruins (12:8). That place between the house of God and the heap of ruins was the high point, and Abraham should have remained there.

However, suddenly, after such a high attainment in his experience of God, Abraham continued his journey, going toward the south

(12:9). In studying this chapter, I have spent much time to find out the reason why Abraham continued his journey. Why did he journey on and not remain there between the house of God and the heap of ruins? Abraham had attained the high point, the place where God intended for him to be. By God's mercy, he should have remained there. But Abraham journeyed southward. This means that he went downward. After such a high attainment in the experience of God, any journey would be downward. This continuing of his journey was the cause of Abraham's failure.

We have seen that, at the beginning, Abraham dragged his feet through mud and water. Eventually, he was victorious, going all the way to Shechem and afterward to the place near Bethel. That was wonderful. In both of those places he built an altar and at the place between Bethel and Ai he also called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent as a declaration to the whole world that he was an anti-testimony to the situation at Babel. Do you not think that in doing so Abraham had arrived, attained the high point of his experience of God?

Perhaps you are thinking that if you had been Abraham, you surely would have remained there. But we should not think this way, for we are today's Abraham. The ancient Abraham was just like us. As we have pointed out elsewhere, Abraham's experience was a seed of our own experience. The record of Abraham in Genesis is his biography, but it is our autobiography. You may say, "No, it is Abraham's autobiography and my biography." But this record is your autobiography not your biography, because the biography of Abraham was written by Moses and your biography is written by yourself. Abraham's experience corresponds with ours. We and he are one. Have you not had a wonderful time with the Lord in which you reached the high point and shouted, "Hallelujah! How good it is here! No place is better than this place. This is the best place for me to be." Have you not said this? But what happened the very next day? You began to journey downward. The night before you said, "Hallelujah, this is the place for me," and the next morning you began to journey downward to the border of Egypt. This means that you journeyed to a place that was so close to the world, close to the movie theaters. One night you were on the high point in Canaan and the next morning you were moving downward to the border of the world. Has this not happened to you? I am so happy and surprised to hear the junior high young people offer such wonderful prayers in the meetings. But I need to say an honest word to them; I do not trust you. After praying such a wonderful prayer one night in the meeting, the next morning you may journey downward to the border of worldly entertainments. Today you may say, "Hallelujah, this is the best place for me," and next weekend you may move downward to the movie theater. Remember that we are today's Abraham. It is easy to reach the high point, but it is not easy to remain there. There is not much room on the high point. If you move just slightly, you will fall downhill. It is very difficult to keep the God-appointed position. The high point is surrounded by pits, and it is easy to fall into one of them. The called ones will not usually go backward, but it is easy for them to go downward into Egypt. Abraham never went back to Chaldea, but he did go down into Egypt.

4) Trial

In 12:9—13:18 we see Abraham's trial. The word trial is not a pleasant word. No one likes to experience trials. Do you like to have trials in your life? Although no one likes trials, they are good experiences. Not too long after Abraham was called and began to live by faith, a trial came to him. Do not pray, "Lord, You are so good to me. Don't let any trials come to me." This kind of prayer will only hasten the coming of the trials. The Lord will answer your prayer in just the opposite way. If you say, "Lord, don't send any trials," the Lord will say, "I will send a trial very quickly." I am assured that no one can say that since he was called by the Lord he has always enjoyed good times. No one can say that.

Our God is not only the God of love but also the God of sovereignty. Our God is sovereign. Our God is not only the God of love, the God of light, and the God of life, but also the God of sovereignty. Everything is under His dispensation. He manages the whole world just for us. We must all believe that God manages the entire universe for every one of us. You may say, "How small I am! How could the sovereign God manage the universe just for me?" But He does manage it just for you. You must believe this. You are not so small that God does not sovereignly arrange your environment for you. You are big enough to have God's sovereign arrangement. I have learned this from my own experience. Fifty years ago I did not like this story of Abraham going down to Egypt. I simply could not be happy with that experience. When, at that time, I read some messages on Abraham's downward experience, I did not understand it and did not feel good about it. I even questioned God. But now, after many years of experience, I am very happy. How we need to hear this message on Abraham's trial!

It is easy to reach the high point in our experience with God, but it is not easy to remain there. Look at the environment that surrounds you on every side. It was sovereignly arranged before you were born. God is sovereign. Although you may consider yourself a small creature, as far as God is concerned, you are a very important person. Before the foundation of the world, God arranged everything for you. He even arranged that you would be reading this message right now. We are under God's arrangement. Do not try to escape. If you escape to a certain place, you will find that place to be the exact place that God arranged for you. When you reach old age, you will bow down and say, "Lord, I am fully convinced that You arranged everything for me before the foundation of the world."

Abraham's trial was for him to learn a lesson. We all need to learn some lessons. We cannot learn these lessons from our parents or from the experienced brothers and sisters. We all must learn some lessons of God's sovereignty.

a) Famine

As we have seen, the second aspect of Abraham's experience was living by faith. He had to live by trusting in God for his daily needs. In 12:10 we read that there was a grievous famine in the land. This famine was a test to see whether or not Abraham would trust in God in the matter of making a living, in the matter of his daily living.

If you examine 12:10-20, you will see that in this situation Abraham was weak and low. He failed to keep the God-appointed position and went down to Egypt. Behind Canaan was Babel, beside Canaan was Egypt, and close to Canaan was Sodom. Abraham moved gradually southward until he went down to Egypt. As we shall see, in Egypt he sinned by lying. Probably none of us would believe that Abraham could be so weak and low. God had appeared to him at Ur, at Haran, and at Shechem. At Shechem, God said to Abraham, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (12:7). God told Abraham definitely that He was going to give that place to his descendants. Who was the God that spoke to Abraham? He was the Creator, the Possessor of heaven and earth. This was the very God that appeared to Abraham. When the famine came, Abraham should not have had any doubts but should have said, "I don't care about the famine because I have the living God. I am not concerned about the lack of food because the One who called me, brought me here, and

reappeared as a confirmation to my journey is the Almighty God. I have put my trust in Him and now I am living by trusting in Him for my daily need. I don't care whether there is food or not." Abraham should have prayed in this way.

However, what did Abraham do when the famine came? Did he pray? Did he say to his wife, "Dear, let us pray"? No, it seemed that Abraham forgot to pray. When such a period of testing came to him, he did not pray. Do not laugh at Abraham. When everything is going well, you find it easy to pray. But when the famine comes, you forget that you are a Christian and only remember that you are a human being. You forget the living God who appeared to you, only remembering that you have a stomach. Abraham was concerned about his stomach. He looked at the situation: in the land there was famine, and in Egypt there was plenty of food. Abraham and his wife did not talk very much. Immediately they both agreed to go to Egypt. I believe that even before they made this decision, they were already going downward. Both the husband and the wife forgot God. They did not consider where God wanted them to go. It was as if they had no God.

(1) Sinning by Lying

When Abraham and Sarah came to the border of Egypt, he said to her, "It shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive" (12:12). Fearing that the Egyptians would kill him and take his wife, Abraham prayed to Sarah, not to God saying, "Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee" (12:13). Abraham and Sarah agreed that she should lie about being his wife. Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his wife in order to save his life. It seemed that he had no standard of morality. Among Christians, Abraham has been uplifted too highly. He was not that high. Many of us would not have done what Abraham did. But Abraham was so low that he was willing to sacrifice his wife, allowing her to be taken to be the wife of another man, in order to save his own life. How shameful that was! Do you believe that God's called one, the father of faith, could do such a thing? We see by this that Abraham was not higher than we are. At the most, he was the same as we are. For the sake of his stomach he was prepared to sell his wife, and Sarah submitted to this. She was certainly the best wife, the standard of all wives. She was submissive, took Abraham's counsel, and did not blame him.

In this matter Abraham was a good prophet, for things happened in Egypt exactly as he had predicted. The Egyptians took his wife away to Pharaoh's palace (12:14-15). In a sense, Abraham did sell his wife. Because of Sarah, Pharaoh gave Abraham many things—sheep, oxen, camels, menservants, and maidservants (12:16). Abraham became rich. I have been unable to understand how Abraham, seeing that his wife had been taken, could have had the peace to receive all of these things from Pharaoh. But he did receive them. He did not fast. He did not say, "Oh, I can't accept this. I want Sarah!" No, he let Sarah go. I believe that Abraham was certain that his wife was lost, that she was gone. According to his figuration, Sarah was gone. More or less, he received as the price of letting her go the cattle, oxen, and servants.

(2) Being Kept by God

But God would not let Abraham go. God came in, not to deal with Abraham but to deal with Pharaoh. Verse 17 says, "And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife." The Bible says that great plagues came upon Pharaoh and his house. Although it is not confirmed by the word in the Bible, I believe that from the time Pharaoh took Sarah he became seriously ill, becoming sick to such an extent that he was about to die. We are told that great plagues were upon him and his house. What were these plagues? Did a fire burn the palace? I do not believe that. After much consideration, I strongly believe that the plagues were certain diseases that came over Pharaoh and over everyone in the house with the exception of Sarah. The whole palace might have talked about what was happening, wondering why everyone had become sick, why Pharaoh was dying, and why only Sarah had been spared. Perhaps they said, "Who is that woman? Why is she not sick?" They might have asked Sarah the reason. Sarah, seeing the whole situation, began to understand. Then she told Pharaoh that she was Abraham's wife. I believe that this is the way it might have happened. God's hand was on Pharaoh for Sarah. He came in to preserve Abraham and his wife.

When we, the believers, have faith in God, all of the surrounding people receive the benefits, but when we fail to have faith in God, we may bring harm to the people in our surroundings. God was sovereign and Pharaoh suffered. Although I do not say that God took things out of Pharaoh's hand and passed them on to Abraham, the real situation was somewhat like that. Eventually, Abraham did not lose his wife but instead gained great riches.

While he was in Egypt, Abraham experienced God's keeping grace. Without the keeping grace, none of us can remain on the high point of our experience. We all need the keeping grace. Do not trust in your experience—trust in His keeping grace. As far as God's keeping grace was concerned, Abraham was still on the high point even when he was selling his wife in Egypt. Whether he was on the top or on the bottom, he was always in God's keeping grace. In a very good sense Abraham never touched Egypt, for the keeping grace was under him all the time. Although he went down to Egypt, he was still in the keeping grace. Even if you have fallen, you are still in the keeping grace, and the keeping grace will bring you back to the high point. The keeping grace could say to Abraham, "Abraham, don't be naughty anymore. You gave me an opportunity to show you my sovereignty, but it is better for you to trust in me."

(3) Having Learned the Lesson
that God Takes Care of Him in Everything
and that Everything Is in God's Hand

By this one experience in Egypt Abraham learned that the God who called him also took care of him and that everything was in His hand. As we shall see, the next chapter proves that Abraham had learned this lesson. Through this experience Abraham was disciplined not only to trust in God but to know that God is real and faithful.

As long as you are one of God's called ones, He will take care of you whether or not you believe in Him or trust in Him. If you stay on the high point, He feeds you. If you fall to the bottom, He feeds you the more. Whether we stay on the high point or fall to the bottom is up to us. It does not make any difference to Him, for whether we are on the top or on the bottom, He takes care of us. This is our story as well as the story of Abraham. I can testify to you from my experience that God is real and faithful. Our Father is real and faithful. The One who has called us is real and faithful. Regardless of whether the economy of the world is good or bad, God takes care of us.

We, the called ones, can enjoy God. While we may be selling our wives, our God is taking care of us. While we may be planning to sell our wives to save our lives, God is planning how to preserve our wives, to gain many things for us, and to send us back to His place with all of the riches that we have acquired. When I read this story at first, I did not agree with it. Eventually, I was laughing because our calling God is so good. When Abraham was planning to sell his wife, God was preparing to bless him, preserve his life, and give him many riches. If I had been Abraham at that time, I would have said, "God, what can I say? I have no face to say anything to You." If I had been Abraham and had looked at my wife, cattle, and servants, I would not even have had the face to say, "Father, thank You." I would have said to Sarah, "Dear, let us go back. It doesn't matter whether the servants want to come with us or not. I don't deserve any of these riches that God has given us and I feel ashamed to enjoy them. I am not worthy, but God gives so freely. Sarah, while I was selling you, God gave all of these things to us. You may say that it is good, but I feel ashamed. Sarah, you pray and thank God for me. I just don't have the face to pray for myself." I do believe that this happened to Abraham.

In 13:1 we see that Abraham "went up out of Egypt." He went back to the very place where the high point was, "unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai; unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord" (13:3-4). Abraham returned to the place where he had built an altar and pitched his tent. When Abraham was planning to sell his wife in Egypt, there was no altar, tent, or calling on the name of the Lord. There was no declaration of his anti-testimony to Babel. When he was in Egypt, he lost all of this. But Abraham came back to the beginning, to the place of the altar, and there he recovered his calling on the name of the Lord.

b) *The Striving of the Brother*

After passing through the experience in chapter twelve, it might be easy for Abraham or for us to say, "Praise the Lord, I have learned the lesson!" But some tests are needed to prove whether or not we have truly learned the lesson. One test is the striving of the brother (13:5-13). Abraham had become rich by trying to sell his wife, and these riches caused him some trouble. He became too rich. Lot also acquired riches, and the land was too small to bear them both. In 13:6 we are told that "the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together." So there was "strife between the herdmen of Abraham's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle" (13:7). This became another trial for Abraham. Many times the second trial comes out of the blessing of the first trial. You may say, "Praise the Lord! When I was walking out of Egypt, I didn't have the face to thank the Lord, but now after three months I can praise Him for His goodness to me. He preserved my wife and has given me all of these riches." If you say this, you may soon find yourself in trouble, for the second trial will come from the blessing of the first trial. This is our experience.

Chapter thirteen indicates that Abraham had learned a lesson. This time he did not fail; he was prevailing because he had learned the lesson in the first trial. If you read carefully, you will see that in this case the fault was not with Abraham but with Lot. Abraham learned the lesson of not striving for himself and of having no choice for himself but of trusting in God's care. He knew that he was in the hand of God and under the care of God. There is no hint in chapter thirteen of any kind of failure on the part of Abraham. He was completely successful. "And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou will take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left" (13:8-9). Abraham seemed to be telling Lot, "Lot, we are Hebrew brothers, the only Hebrews in the land. All of the others are Gentiles. They are looking at us. There should be no strife between us, for that would be a shame to the God in whom we trust. Lot, look over the land and choose the place where you would like to be. I will not strive or have any choice." Deep within, Abraham must have said, "My choice is with God. I have learned the lesson by going down to Egypt. Now I know that I am under the care of my God and that under Him everything is mine. I don't need to choose. I will let Lot make his choice." Lot made his choice, departed from Abraham, and "pitched his tent toward Sodom," not caring about the wickedness of Sodom (13:12-13).

It was not a small thing for Abraham to be left without Lot. Abraham did not have a son. His nephew, Lot, a very close relative, was just like a son to him. I believe that Abraham treated Lot as his own son. So when Lot left him, he was alone. But at this point God appeared to Abraham again. In Egypt, God dealt with Pharaoh in the plagues, but He did not appear to Abraham because he was in the wrong position. In Egypt, Abraham was in God's keeping grace, but he did not have God's appearing. Now in chapter thirteen Abraham was not only in God's keeping grace but, having come back to the original place, was also in the right position. Furthermore, he did not strive for himself or choose for himself. As a result of the discipline he underwent in Egypt, he learned that his future and everything were in the hand of God and that he was under God's care. So God appeared to him and said, "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 forever" (13:14-15). Abraham told Lot to take his choice of the land. Then God came in and seemed to tell Abraham, "I do not allow you to choose. I am giving all the choices to you. Look northward, southward, eastward, and westward—all is yours. You gave the choice to Lot. Now I am giving everything to you." We must learn from this never to strive for ourselves in the church life. Let your brother have all the choices. If you give the choice to your brother, God will come in and give all the choices to you.

This time in His appearing God confirmed the promise concerning the good land in 12:7 and the promise concerning the increase of his seed in 12:2. Our prevailing over any trial always confirms God's promises to us. This happened to Abraham. Moreover, Abraham's prevailing over this trial ushered him to the peak of his experience of God. He removed his tent and came to dwell in Hebron (13:18) where he dwelt for most of the remainder of his time in the fellowship with God (18:1).

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FORTY-THREE

THE VICTORY OF THE CALLED

5) Victory

In this message we come to the victory in Abraham's experience (14:11-24). If we read the book of Genesis carefully, we shall see that apart from chapter fourteen it does not relate much concerning the international affairs among the Gentiles. But chapter fourteen

gives us a record concerning the international fighting among the Gentiles. Why is there such a record? The wording in the Bible is very economical. Not one word is wasted. Nevertheless, chapter fourteen is almost entirely concerned with the international fighting among the Gentile kingdoms. The events in chapter fourteen, however, are not just related to international affairs but are sovereignly related to God's people. Why does this chapter dedicate such a lengthy word to the international fighting among the Gentiles? Although this fighting apparently was international, actually it was sovereignly arranged by the Lord. God is sovereign over the environment and over all the events concerning His people. In the land of Canaan at that time, there were only two families of the Hebrew race—the family of Abraham and the family of Lot. All of the rest were Gentiles. In this chapter we see that God was sovereign, causing something to happen for the good of His people.

Chapter fourteen of Genesis relates the fighting between a group of four kings and a group of five kings. Eventually, the five kings were defeated by the four kings. If you read carefully, you will see this fighting was absolutely for Lot and for Abraham. In other words, both Lot and Abraham, the two Hebrews, were put to the test under God's sovereignty. Was this fighting good or not? Humanly speaking, no fighting is good. However, in this chapter the fighting was good for Lot and especially for Abraham. In this message we need to see the profitable aspects related to God's people in this fighting.

a) The Captivity of the Brother

The fighting occurred mainly at Sodom. It mainly happened at Sodom because one of God's people, Lot, was living there. Before the time of that fighting, Lot had separated himself from Abraham (13:11). Do you think that it was good for Lot to have separated himself from Abraham? No, it was not good. All of the young people today like to be separated from the older generation. In God's economy, however, it is not good for the young ones to be separated from the older generation. If you do this, you will miss the mark and the protection. At the time of Genesis 13, God's goal and eternal mark were with Abraham. If you had been there and had separated yourself from him, it would have been equal to separating yourself from God's mark. God's goal is with the called ones. If you separate yourself from the called ones, you separate yourself from God's goal. Lot should never have separated himself from Abraham, because God's goal was with Abraham. To leave Abraham was to leave God's mark. Moreover, to leave Abraham was to leave the protection.

Lot was not firstly defeated by the four kings. That defeat was the issue of at least two foregoing defeats. Before Lot was captured by Chedorlaomer, he already had had two defeats. The first defeat occurred when Lot's herdmen were striving against Abraham's herdmen and Abraham offered Lot the choice of the land (13:7-11). When Abraham offered the choice to Lot, Lot should have said, "Uncle, my choice is you. My choice is your choice. I don't like to make any choice of my own. If my herdmen will not listen to me, I will fire them, but I will never go away from you. I have no choice but you and your choice." But, on the contrary, when Abraham gave him his choice, immediately, without much consideration, Lot made his choice and went his way. That was his first defeat.

After separating from Abraham, "Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom" (13:12). Lot was going downhill. After taking the first step downward, it was easy for him to take the second and the third. The first step was leaving Abraham, who stood afar off from Sodom. Lot took the way that was toward Sodom. He walked in the direction of Sodom. In the eyes of God, Sodom was a wicked and sinful city (13:13). Lot, as one of the people of God, surely knew this. He should have stayed away from Sodom and not have walked towards it. Nevertheless, because the land around Sodom was rich, Lot journeyed toward Sodom. Eventually, he moved into the city, lived there, and settled there. That was his second defeat.

Do you think that God will allow His people to dwell in such a wicked city? Certainly not. Thus, under God's sovereignty, Chedorlaomer led the attack against Sodom. God allowed that war to take place. Four kings fought against five kings. Humanly speaking, the five kings should have been victorious since their number was greater. But the four kings defeated the five kings, and the city of Sodom was taken. The Bible stresses the taking of Sodom because Lot dwelt there. This fighting was not merely a matter of four kings against five kings; it was a fighting for one of God's people. Lot might have been peaceful as he dwelt in Sodom, but God was not peaceful. God would never allow Lot to stay there in peace. God might have said, "Lot, you may have peace within, but I will stir up some disturbance from without. I will send the four kings to defeat the five kings and capture your city. They will capture you, your family, and all that you have." This is in fact what happened to Lot. Lot suffered defeat after defeat. Eventually, as the last step of his defeat, he fell into the hands of the enemy. He was captured, and the king of Sodom could not help him.

b) Fighting for the Brother

In the matter of the capture of Lot, God was sovereign. Genesis 14:13 says, "And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew." The four kings had captured Sodom and all of its food supply, but one person who escaped told Abraham that Lot had been captured. Do you believe that this happened by accident? While so many others were captured, this one escaped. That person was preserved by God's sovereignty. As we shall see, it must have happened because of the intercession behind the scene. The one who escaped did not run away but came purposely to Abraham and told him that Lot had been captured.

Unlike us, Abraham did not count the weak point of his brother and did not take pleasure in Lot's suffering and calamity. Abraham did not say, "Lot should never have separated himself from me. I knew this was going to happen. He got what he deserved. I believe that God is sovereign and that Lot's suffering comes from God. Be at peace and go home. God will preserve Lot." I believe that many of us would have responded in this way. But Abraham was different. When he received this information, he made a strong decision to fight for Lot (14:14). As we shall see, Abraham prayed. In verse 22 he told the king of Sodom that before he went out to war he lifted up his hand to God. How could Abraham have prayed and made such a decision? It must have been due to the fact that someone behind the scene was interceding for him. I believe that the intercessor knew of the fighting that was going on and of the capture of Lot. As a result of this intercession, Abraham made a brief and bold decision.

Abraham decided to take his three hundred eighteen men and fight against the four kings and their armies. The four kings must have had several armies, the number of men in which must have been much greater than the number of Abraham's men. How could Abraham have fought against them with such a small number? Moreover, they were kings and generals who had fought many battles, and Abraham was a layman. How could he fight against those who were experts in war? How could he defeat them with such a small number? Nevertheless, Abraham was bold, having confidence in God.

As far as Abraham was concerned, it was a shame for him to see that his brother had been captured. It is the same in the church today. It is a shame for us to see that any brother or sister has been captured. If a brother in the brothers' house is captured and you see it, that is a shame. You should not tolerate it but should say, "I cannot bear with this. I must rise up and do something about it!" This is what Abraham did.

Abraham's bold decision must have been due to the fact that behind the scene someone was interceding for him. Perhaps you are thinking that there is no record of this in the Bible. Neither is there a record of Melchizedec's parents or genealogy. But do you believe that he had no parents or genealogy? Certainly he did, yet the Bible does not mention them. Many things behind the scene in this chapter are not recorded. I do believe that behind the scene there was some intercession. Someone concerned for God's interest on earth was interceding for Lot, Abraham, and Abraham's fighting.

We have seen that Lot's defeat did not begin at Sodom. In the same principle, Abraham's victory did not start with the slaughter of the kings. Abraham's victory began when Lot departed from him. Abraham had been called by God, and he answered that calling by coming forward to the very land that God intended to give him. At that time, however, Abraham had nearly no experience. All he had was a little experience in answering God's calling and coming forward to the place where God intended him to be. As we saw in the last message, a famine arose as a test to Abraham, and he was not able to withstand that test. Abraham failed God, trying by himself to make a living at the sacrifice of his wife. Under God's sovereign teaching, Abraham learned a great deal by that failure. Abraham learned that God is sovereign over everything and that He knows everything concerning His people. Everything related to God's called ones is in His hand. Abraham saw that, experienced it, and came fully into it.

Afterward, when the problem arose between Abraham and Lot, Abraham was victorious. His victory began at that time because he had learned the basic lesson in his going down to Egypt. We all must learn such a basic lesson. After you have been called and have answered God's calling by coming to the place where He intends you to be, the first basic lesson that God will teach you is that, as a called one of God, everything concerning you is under God's hand. God is sovereign over you. This was the basic lesson that Abraham learned by going down to Egypt. After learning that lesson, he gained the victory with Lot. When the problem arose with Lot, Abraham didn't take his own choice; he knew that his choice was in the hands of God. That was the beginning of Abraham's victory.

Then the time came when Abraham could show the whole universe that he was on God's side. When Melchizedec appeared, two special titles of God are revealed: the Most High God and the Possessor of heaven and earth (v. 19). Both Melchizedec and Abraham spoke of God in this way. Abraham said, "I have lifted up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth" (14:22). Abraham could say, "By going down to Egypt I have learned the lesson that my God, the One who called me, is the Possessor of both heaven and earth. I don't need to have any choice. My choice is just He. I cannot bear seeing that my brother has been captured. This is a shame to me. I must take him back. I don't care for the number of soldiers and I don't care for the kings and armies. I don't care that I have less than they do. My burden is to get my brother back. If I don't do this, it is a shame to me."

In fighting for his brother, Abraham risked his life. It was not a small thing for him to risk his life in order to rescue his captured brother. But he did it. The fight went smoothly, and Abraham pursued the enemy from the south all the way to Dan in the north. His victory must have been the result of the intercession behind the scene.

Abraham gained the victory by trusting in God. He had confidence in God because he had learned to know Him. Likewise, we all must learn to know God. We must learn that, even today, the earth is God's. God is the landlord. He is not only the landlord but also the heavenlord. Both the heaven and the earth belong to our Father, the One who has called us. We need to have such confidence in Him. If we lack this confidence, we are already defeated and shall become a Lot.

Why was Lot defeated? Because, unlike Abraham, he did not learn the lesson that God is the Possessor of heaven and earth. Even after he had been rescued, there is no record that he thanked Abraham or said a word to the Lord. Lot was absolutely out of function. According to the following chapters, he went back to Sodom. Although his capture was a warning to him not to return to Sodom, he still went back, even after his capture and rescue. We see from this that once you have been defeated it is very difficult to keep yourself away from that defeat.

Although Lot had been defeated, Abraham was victorious. This victory was the peak of his outward experience. Later on, God came in to give him some inward experiences.

c) *The Ministry of Melchizedec*

How was it possible for one who escaped to have come to Abraham, and how could Abraham have made such a brief and bold decision? What happened so that, after a short time, the enemy ran away? Melchizedec came in. Who is Melchizedec? He is a type of Christ. He is very much like Christ. When he came in, it signified that Christ came in. He was a type of Christ as God's High Priest. This is not revealed in Genesis 14, but it is found in Psalm 110. In Psalm 110 we are told that God's anointed One, the very Christ, is the Priest according to the order of Melchizedec, an order which is prior to that of Aaron. Before Aaron came into the priesthood, Melchizedec was God's Priest already.

The Aaronic priesthood dealt with sin, taking care of things on the negative side. The ministry of Melchizedec, on the contrary, is positive. Melchizedec did not come in to take away sin. He did not appear because Abraham had sinned but because Abraham had gained the victory. Melchizedec did not appear with an offering to take away sin but with bread and wine to nourish the victor. Nearly all Christians consider Christ as the High Priest who takes care of sin, but hardly anyone pays attention to Christ as the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedec. As such a High Priest, Christ does not take care of sin but ministers to us the processed God, signified by the bread and wine, as our nourishment.

Do you not believe that before Melchizedec came to minister bread and wine, as the priest of God he was interceding for Lot and Abraham? I believe that he was. I do not believe that Melchizedec was sleeping during all the fighting and that when he heard the news of Abraham's victory he hurriedly appeared to Abraham to minister bread and wine. I believe that Abraham's brief and bold decision to fight for the rescue of Lot was stirred up by the intercession of Melchizedec. I also believe that the one who came to tell Abraham of Lot's capture escaped because Melchizedec was interceding for Lot. As a priest, Melchizedec must have been taking care

of God's people. In answer to his intercession, one escaped from Sodom, told Abraham the news, and Abraham made the bold decision to fight for the rescue of Lot.

While we walk on this earth, many things happen to us. Apparently, these things just happen. Actually, behind the earthly scene, an intercession is going on. Our Melchisedec, our High Priest Christ, is still interceding for us in heaven (Heb. 7:25). His intercession overshadows us and cares for us.

Melchisedec's coming to Abraham was somewhat of an indication of Christ's second coming. What are we, today's Abraham, doing here? We are slaughtering the enemies. Some of God's people, like Lot, have suffered defeat after defeat. By God's mercy, some others need to be today's Abraham who experience victory after victory. We need to learn the basic lesson that our God, the One who called us, is the Possessor of heaven and earth. We are living for Him on the earth and we are His testimony. We do not tolerate any damage to God's interest on earth. When we hear of such damage, we make a quick decision to defeat the enemy and to slaughter the kings.

We need to slaughter some kings daily. We need to slaughter the kings in our mind, emotion, and will. We need to slaughter the kings in our environment, families, and schools. After we have finished our slaughter of the kings, our Melchisedec will come to us, meet with us, and celebrate our victory. The Lord will not come back until we have slaughtered all the kings. Then He will return and drink the fruit of the vine with us, as indicated by His word in Matthew 26:29: "I will by no means drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of My Father." Melchisedec interceded for Lot and Abraham. Today Christ, our High Priest, is interceding for all the overcoming ones. While He is interceding now for us in heaven, we are slaughtering the kings on earth. After the overcoming ones slaughter all the kings, our Intercessor, the High Priest of the Most High God, will appear with the full taste of the processed God.

Melchisedec's coming signified that Christ had come. Our victory always makes Christ manifested. The people in our environment may find it difficult to see where Christ is. However, if we gain a victory, that victory will declare Christ to them. Our victory will bring in Christ in a new aspect. How interesting it is to see that suddenly, in chapter fourteen of Genesis, Melchisedec, whose name means the king of righteousness and who was the king of Salem, which means the king of peace, appeared. What does this signify? It signifies that Christ will be declared to people and brought to them by the overcoming ones. One day the whole earth will be surprised by Christ's appearing. The people in the world do not even believe that there is a Christ, calling such belief nonsense. But after we have slaughtered all of the kings, Christ will suddenly appear. Christ will be made manifest by our slaughter of the kings, and the whole world will be surprised at His coming. To us, the overcomers, Christ's second appearing will not be a surprise, but to the worldly people it will be a great surprise. They may say, "Who is this one? What is his name and where does he come from?" We may answer, "His name is Christ, the real Melchisedec, and He comes from the heavens where He has been interceding for centuries."

We all need to echo the Lord's intercession. If we turn to our spirit and contact Him, there will always be some echoing. If we go according to that echoing, forgetting our environment, enemies, and even ourselves, we shall gain the victory and slaughter the kings. At the end of our slaughter of all the kings, our Melchisedec will appear to us. That will be the second coming of Christ. When Christ comes in, the whole earth will know the Most High God. Then all the earth will realize that God is the Possessor of heaven and earth. The earth is not possessed by any king, president, statesman, or politician, it is possessed by the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth. How can this fact be declared to the earth? Only by our slaughter of the kings.

Abraham's victory in chapter fourteen is not a small thing. In the Bible, God is revealed in a progressive way. In Genesis 1 we do not have the title, "the Most High God." Even up to chapter thirteen we have neither this title nor the special title, "Possessor of heaven and earth." Although you may have been a Christian for years, perhaps you have never realized that God has such titles. God is the Most High God and the Possessor of heaven and earth. He is the heavenlord and the landlord. By our experience of Christ, God's titles are progressively revealed to us. In our experience of Christ, we shall realize that our God is the Most High God and the Possessor of heaven and earth. This must be our attraction and incentive to go on to slaughter the kings.

Do not be today's Lot, for that is to be timid and cowardly. We all must be brief and bold because we have the Most High God and the Possessor of heaven and earth. Abraham told the king of Sodom that, before he went to war, he lifted up his hand to the Most High God, to the Possessor of heaven and earth. He went to war in such a spirit. Since Abraham had full confidence in the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth, he had to be victorious.

When Melchisedec came to Abraham, he blessed Abraham with the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth (v. 19). This proves that he was greater than Abraham (Heb. 7:6-7). He also blessed God for Abraham's victory (v. 20). Our victory always causes our Melchisedec to grant us blessing and to give blessing to God. Our victory brings in more blessings in Christ, both to us and to God.

At Melchisedec's blessing, Abraham gave him tithes of all, the tithes of his choice spoils (v. 20; Heb. 7:2, 4). This also proves Melchisedec's greatness. Our victory gains the spoils, and the offering of our spoils to Christ always declares the greatness of Christ. Without victory, we have nothing to offer to Christ and His greatness will not be declared.

d) Overcoming the Temptation of Earthly Substance

Abraham's victory regulated and restituted the whole situation and rearranged the entire environment. The four kings had defeated the five kings and had captured everything. The whole situation had been turned upside down. Abraham's victory changed this situation altogether, turning it right side up. He turned the unjust environment into a just one and made the whole situation peaceful. As a result, there was the king of righteousness and the king of peace. Abraham's victory stopped all the fighting and strife and brought in genuine peace.

The king of Sodom could humbly, honestly, and truthfully say to Abraham, "You have gained the victory. Everything that you brought back must be yours. You take it. All I want is my people." If you and I had been Abraham, we probably would have said, "That is right and fair. I rescued your people and recovered everything that you lost. It is good that you have the people and that everything else be mine." But the environment that was rearranged by Abraham's victory was not at all like this. It was pure. Abraham said to the king of Sodom, "I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet," and "I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I

have made Abram rich" (14:23). Abraham seemed to be saying, "If I take a thread from you, you will be able to say that you have made me rich. But I want to give a full testimony to the whole universe that my riches do not come from you. My riches come from the Possessor of heaven and earth, from my Most High God." How pure this was! There in that situation we see righteousness and peace.

Consider the scene in Genesis 14 after Abraham had slaughtered the kings. Abraham had brought back everything, and the kings came out to meet him. Melchisedec, the priest of the Most High God, was there, granting Abraham the blessing and receiving tithes from him. All of the people were watching, wondering to whom the things would go. Even the people who had been captured and brought back by Abraham wondered whose people they would be from then on. Then Abraham said, "I have lifted up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth." Abraham said that he would not take anything. All the people received a full settlement. In that situation there was righteousness and peace. In a sense, it was like the millennial kingdom, full of righteousness and peace (Isa. 32:1, 16-18; Psa. 72:2-3, 7).

Abraham was fair, saying to the king of Sodom that he would take nothing "save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eschol, and Mamre; let them take their portion" (14:24). Abraham said that his fighters and confederates should have their portion but that he would give his portion to the king of Sodom. What a man he was! He had slaughtered four kings and now he was dealing with another one, the king of Sodom. He was over all of them. We Christians need to be this kind of person today. We must be higher than the earthly kings and presidents. There is only one who is above us—our Melchisedec.

In Genesis 14 we see that Abraham was very high. Can you believe that one who was so high could have been so low as to plan to sacrifice his wife for his living? Can you believe that the one who would sell his wife in Egypt could be so high as to be above all the kings? When Abraham was willing to sell his wife, he was in the lowest hell, but when he dealt with the kings, he was in the highest heaven. We all may be like Abraham in both respects. We may be mean, planning to sell our wives, or, by the Lord's grace, we may be higher than the kings.

Abraham's victory and his being higher than the kings were absolutely due to the intercession behind the scene. Behind the earthly scene, something was going on in heaven that determined the entire situation. We all need to see this.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FORTY-FOUR

KNOWING GRACE FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PURPOSE THE SEED AND THE LAND

In this message we come to a great turn in Abraham's experience of God. Everything that we have seen of Abraham's experience of God thus far has been outward. Abraham was called by God and he answered God's calling by going to the place where God intended him to be. That was absolutely outward. Following that, Abraham's second experience was living by faith and trusting in God for his living.

The first trial that he faced in living by faith was a grievous famine through which he learned to trust God in the matter of eating. Whether in ancient or in modern times, whether in the Orient or in the West, all people, regardless of their attainment, education, or position, are concerned about the matter of making a living. Making a living is completely dependent on eating, on bread and butter. In the Bible and in human history, many times God exercised His control over the human race through this matter of eating. Do not be proud, for once God removes your food supply, you will bow down and say, "O God, help me!"

We have seen in previous messages that after Abraham came to the place where God wanted him to be, the first lesson he had to learn was to trust God in the matter of eating. He failed this test and went down to Egypt. There, in Egypt, he learned the lesson of trusting in God. After learning that lesson, he returned to the place between Bethel and Ai. Immediately after that, there followed another lesson in the same realm, in the realm of eating, when there was strife between the herdsmen of Lot and the herdsmen of Abraham. These herdsmen were fighting for their bread and butter, striving with one another for the sake of a better living. They did not want others to take away their bread and butter. Abraham was victorious in the second trial, having learned in the first trial that God was sovereign in his daily life. Abraham came to know that the God who had called him was the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth. He did not need to take care of his own bread and butter, for he had learned that the One who had called him would take care of this for him.

The fighting between the four kings and the five kings was also related to bread and butter. According to history, all of the warfare among the human race is over this matter. All international warfare is for one purpose—bread and butter. Genesis 14:11 indicates that the fighting between the four kings and the five kings was for this purpose.

Abraham was not afraid of those four kings but went out boldly and fought against them, slaughtering them and recovering the food supply. After Abraham had gained the victory over the four kings, Melchisedec came to meet him with bread and wine (14:18). This bread was mysterious. There was no need for Abraham to do anything in order to get it and he did not have to fight for it. Abraham just fought the battle and recovered the food supply, and then Melchisedec came to him with bread.

All of Abraham's experiences up to the end of chapter fourteen were outward, being concerned with outward blessing, care, and supply. When Abraham went down to Egypt, God took care of him outwardly, giving him cattle and servants. The victory that he won against the four kings was also outward. Even what Melchisedec brought to Abraham was outward. Everything that Abraham had experienced to that point was outward. Before hearing this, you might have thought that at the end of chapter fourteen Abraham must have been on the peak of his experience of God. Yes, in a sense he was on the peak, but it was the peak of the elementary stage of his experience. All that Abraham had experienced prior to chapter fifteen was elementary. At the beginning of chapter fifteen, God came in to turn him to an advanced stage in experiencing God.

Genesis 15:1 says, "After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." When God came in to speak these words, Abraham was still in an elementary stage. After his slaughter of the kings, a strong enmity had been created between him and the people who belonged to those kings. When Abraham was fighting the battle against the enemy, he was bold and brave. But after gaining the victory and going home he might have said to himself, "What have I done? Those people might come back. What should I do then? I only have three hundred and eighteen men, and they have many more than that." Abraham began to be afraid. Many times we are the same as Abraham. When we are in faith, we are bold, saying, "Hallelujah to the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth. I have lifted up my hand to Him." After gaining the victory and shouting hallelujahs in the meetings, you go home and begin to consider, saying to yourself, "What have I done? What shall I do if the enemy returns?"

When God appeared to Abraham in 15:1, He said, "Fear not." God's saying this to Abraham indicates that Abraham was fearing his enemies. God seemed to be telling him, "Abraham, you don't need to fear. I am your shield. Be at peace. I am also your exceeding great reward." Abraham, still being in an elementary stage at the time, was concerned about two things: that his enemies might return to fight against him and that he still had no child of his own. Abraham might have said, "Look at me—I am old. Look at my wife—she is nearly out of function. We still don't have a child. Lord, don't You know we are getting old in years? When will You give us a child?" When God appeared to him, Abraham was concerned about these two things.

In the presence of God we cannot hide our intention. If we are given the opportunity, we shall sooner or later utter whatever is in our heart. Therefore, in 15:2 Abraham said, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the son of possession of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" (Heb.). The next word that Abraham spoke to the Lord was not very polite. He said, "Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, a son of my house is mine heir" (15:3, Heb.). Abraham seemed to be saying, "Lord, I go childless because You have never given me a child. You must bear the blame for this. Why do I go childless? Because You have never given me a child! Now You come to tell me that You are my great reward. What's the use of Your giving me a reward if I have no child?"

Abraham told the Lord that a son of his house, who was Eliezer of Damascus, would be his heir. In Darby's New Translation the footnote says that "a son of my house" means "one of his domestics." This indicates that Eliezer must have come from Damascus. It might have been that when Abraham was passing through Damascus he obtained him there. None of us has ever answered God's call in a clean-cut way; we all dragged our feet through mud and water. Abraham even suffered two deaths, the death of his elder brother, Haran, and his father, Terah. Eventually, Abraham answered God's calling, being unable to avoid it any longer. He left Haran, where he had been called the second time, taking Lot along with him, and passed through Damascus where he picked up Eliezer. When the Lord appeared to Abraham, saying that He was Abraham's shield and great reward, Abraham seemed to say in reply, "Lord God, I go childless because You have not given me a child. The one whom I intend to have as the heir and possessor of my house must be my domestic servant, Eliezer."

The Lord said to Abraham, "This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir" (15:4). The Lord seemed to be saying to Abraham, "I didn't care for Lot. Neither do I care for this one. There must be a seed born out of yourself, not one of your domestics." Then the Lord said to him, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be" (15:5). It was at this juncture that Abraham believed in the Lord. Verse 6 says that "he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." Abraham's believing was counted to him by the Lord as righteousness, and at that time Abraham was justified. This is justification by faith.

Abraham's having a seed was absolutely not an outward matter but altogether an inward one. Abraham tried to make this an outward matter, for Eliezer was something outside of him, not something out of him. We need to see the difference here. Today, not many Christians care for the inward experience. Most Christians care for the outward experiences. The things that are taught among Christians today mostly go as far as the end of Genesis 14. Some may argue with this, saying, "Don't they have justification by faith, and is this not in chapter fifteen?" Yes, they do have justification by faith, but even this has been made by them an outward thing.

Abraham was not justified by faith in chapter fourteen when he believed that God was the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth. God did not count that kind of faith to him as righteousness. What kind of faith was it that was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness? It was the faith that believed that God was able to work something into him to bring forth the seed. Believing that God will supply our daily needs, our daily food, is good, but it is not the kind of faith that is precious in the eyes of God. What kind of faith is precious in God's sight? The faith that believes that He is able to work Himself into us to bring forth Christ. Most Christians today only care for the faith that believes that God can do outward things for them. That kind of faith believes that God is able to give them health, healing, a good job, or a promotion. Many Christians only have that kind of faith. Although that kind of faith is good, it is not the faith that is so dear and precious in the eyes of God. He did not count that kind of faith as righteousness to Abraham. The kind of faith that was counted as righteousness to Abraham was the faith that God was able to work something into him to bring forth a seed. In Genesis 15 Abraham did not believe that God would give him bread and butter, cattle, or more servants. He believed that God was able to work something into him and bring forth a seed.

What kind of faith do you have? Most Christians appreciate the faith that believes that God will provide all they need for their daily living. That is the faith that believes in God as the Most High God, as the Possessor of heaven and earth. Perhaps you are thinking that you would be satisfied to have such a faith as that. After reading the last message, you might have tried to believe in the Most High God, believing that our God is the Possessor of heaven and earth. But that faith is not the faith that is so dear and precious in the eyes of God. We need to have the faith that believes that God is working Himself into us, the faith that believes that a heavenly seed will be brought forth by something that has been wrought into us. May this matter be inscribed into our being!

1) Two Categories of God's Doings
for the Called

a) For Him to Exist

Prior to chapter fifteen, Abraham had experienced God as the One who protected him and provided many material things (12:16). Abraham had given all the choices to Lot and had gained the victory over the four kings. None of these things, however, had anything to do with the fulfillment of God's purpose but were only related to Abraham's existence (12:10; 14:24). He experienced all these outwardly in his environment, not inwardly in his life.

b) For Him to Fulfill God's Purpose

Do you know what God's purpose is? God's purpose is to have a people to express Him with His image, represent Him with His dominion, and take the earth for His kingdom. Beginning with Genesis 1:26, we see that God's eternal purpose is to have a people expressing Him in His image, representing Him with His dominion, and taking over the earth for His kingdom. When God came in to call Abraham He promised Abraham that he would have the blessing to express God and become a great nation so that through him God might have His kingdom on earth. This is God's eternal purpose today. But everything that had happened to Abraham prior to Genesis 15 had nothing to do with the fulfillment of God's purpose. It is from chapter fifteen through chapter twenty-four that we have a record showing us how God had worked something into Abraham so that he was able to fulfill God's purpose. It was no longer merely outward experiences in environment but inward experiences in life.

Most Christians today only care for their existence, not for God's eternal purpose. Even many among us still have not been deeply impressed with God's eternal purpose. Many are still hoping that the Lord will give them a better job, a good husband or wife, a good education, or an excellent promotion. While all of these things may enable you to exist, they have nothing to do directly with the fulfillment of God's purpose. Everything prior to chapter fifteen was good, helpful, and profitable for Abraham's existence, enabling him to live as a human being, but none of those things had anything to do directly with the fulfillment of God's purpose. Look into Abraham's situation. Could the cattle that Abraham gained in Egypt express God? Could the maidservants represent God? Although God had given Abraham a great deal, nothing that he had was useful for the fulfillment of God's purpose. To exist is one thing, and to fulfill God's purpose is another. The principle is the same with us today. Our education, jobs, and houses are all good for our existence, but none of them are good for the fulfilling of God's purpose.

2) Two Things Needed for the Fulfillment of God's Purpose

a) The Seed

Now we need to see the two things that were necessary for the fulfillment of God's purpose in Abraham's day. The first item was the seed (15:1-6; see 13:16; 22:17-18; 12:2). God called Abraham with the intention of fulfilling His purpose. As we have seen, His purpose is to have a people in His image to express Himself and with His dominion to represent Himself. But Abraham did not have a seed. How could Abraham fulfill God's purpose without having a seed? God needs the seed. He needs to have a people through the seed.

(1) Not What Abraham Had

Abraham was the same as we are, and we are the same as he was. When Abraham understood that he needed a seed, he counted on Eliezer (15:2-4). Abraham seemed to say, "Now I realize that I must have a seed for God to have a people. Since I am old and my wife is nearly out of function, the seed must be what I already have." But God will never use for the fulfillment of His purpose the things that we already have. Whatever we have is altogether no good for this. Do not think that what you have is good for the fulfillment of God's purpose. What you have is just an Eliezer. Nothing that you have is counted. Nothing that we have is useful for the fulfilling of God's purpose. At best, whatever we have is not of God but is something of Damascus.

(2) But What God Promised to Work Out

The seed that was needed for the fulfillment of God's purpose had to be what God promised to work out through Abraham. It had to be something that God worked into him so that he might bring it forth (15:4-5). What then is the seed? If you pray and read Genesis 15 and Galatians 3, you will see that the seed is Christ Himself. Nothing that we have could ever bring forth Christ. Our education, attainments, skills, etc. mean nothing. All of these things are just Eliezers, things which are not what the Lord has wrought into us to bring forth Christ, the seed. None of them are subjective but altogether objective in our environment. Your Eliezer might be your college education. Perhaps even in the church life you might still be trusting in this Eliezer, meaning that you still trust in your college education. All of us have passed through some Damascus, picking up at least one Eliezer. That could never be the seed that God wants. The seed must be something that God works into us, not something that we have picked up. Whatever we picked up from our Damascus can never bring forth Christ. Only that which God works into our being can bring forth Christ as the seed.

In order to fulfill God's purpose we must have Christ wrought into us. This is why Paul told us that Christ was revealed into him (Gal. 1:15-16), that Christ lived in him (Gal. 2:20), that Christ was formed in him (Gal. 4:19), and that for him to live was Christ (Phil. 1:21). Paul lived Christ. When he was Saul of Tarsus, he passed through a Jewish Damascus, gaining many things. All that he acquired during that time was just an Eliezer. The Lord told Paul that he had to forget all of those things—they were dung, garbage, dog food—and to cast them aside. None of the things that Paul had could bring forth Christ. Only that which God worked into his being could bring forth Christ. The Lord seemed to tell Paul, "The things that you had from your religious background can never bring forth Christ. Only what I am working into you will bring forth Christ. What I am working into you is My grace." Eventually, Paul could say, "By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me" (1 Cor. 15:10).

At this point, I need to say a word about the difference between grace and blessing. What most Christians consider to be grace is actually blessing. What is blessing? Blessing is prosperity, benefit, and bounty. Many Christians, using the adjective form of the word grace, are fond of saying, "Oh, how gracious God is to us." But this is far short of the meaning of the real grace. The Hebrew word for gracious in Numbers 6:25 means to bend or to stoop oneself in order to be kind to an inferior person. For example, in kindness, a king may stoop to give something to a beggar. That is what it means to be gracious. However, in the Bible, grace is nothing less than God Himself. In the Bible grace is simply God Himself coming into us to be our enjoyment. John 1:17 says, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ." John 1:14 says that "the Word became flesh..full of grace and reality," and John 1:16 tells us that "of His fullness we all received, and grace upon grace."

Blessings are for our existence, but grace is for the fulfillment of God's purpose. We do need God's blessing for our existence. If God did not bless us, we would lose our jobs, health, and perhaps even our physical lives. I have no doubt that, for my existence, I am fully under God's blessing.

Merely to exist, however, is vanity of vanities. What are we doing here in this country? Are we just here to make a living for our existence? If this is the case, it is vanity of vanities. All the cars, houses, degrees, and jobs are vanities. Some people may say, "Praise the Lord, we have three sons and two daughters. The sons are medical doctors and the daughters are professors. What a blessing this is!" This is a blessing for you and your family to exist in the vanity of vanities, if your existence is not for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Others may say, "Five years ago I was only making \$5,000 a year, but this last year I made \$25,000. What a blessing this is!" This also is a blessing for people to exist in the vanity of vanities, if they are not for God's eternal purpose.

Recently, the Lord awoke me early one morning and pointed out to me that not one of the New Testament books ends with the words, "Blessing be with you" or "Blessing be with your spirit." However, nearly all the Epistles end with the words, "Grace be with you" (Gal. 6:18; Eph. 6:24; Phil. 4:23; Col. 4:18). To say, "Blessing be with you," means that you will be prospered with material things. But our Bible never says anything like that. The Gospel of John does not say that the Word became flesh full of blessing, or that blessing came with Christ. No book ends by saying, "Blessing be with you."

In the Old Testament we mainly have blessings, but in the New Testament the physical blessings immediately are replaced by spiritual blessings. Ephesians 1:3 says that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ, and the last verse of the same book says, "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ." The last verse of the whole Bible also speaks of grace. Revelation 22:21 does not say, "The blessing of the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth, be with you all." No, it says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints." Do you remember the blessing that the priests used to give the children of Israel in Numbers 6:24-26? It went like this: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Paul's blessing in 2 Corinthians 13:14, on the contrary, is in another category: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." I repeat, blessings are for our existence, and grace is for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

(3) God's Promise and Abraham's Faith
Counted for Righteousness

After rejecting Abraham's proposal, God promised him that He would do something for him so that he might have seed born of himself, even as many as the stars in heaven (15:5). Abraham believed in the Lord according to His word, and the Lord counted his believing to him for righteousness (15:6). It is the kind of faith that believes that God will work in us to bring forth Christ, the seed, that is precious to God and is our righteousness in the eyes of God. This is the faith for receiving God's grace, not for receiving His blessing.

Today, most Christians care for blessing, not much for grace. Although this is the New Testament age, many Christians still live in the Old Testament dispensation, caring only for blessings, not for grace. In the Lord's recovery we do need the blessings. It is a great blessing to meet together all of the time. But, more than this, we need grace. We need God to come in and say, "What you have does not count. What you can do and will do does not count either. I will work something into you, and this will bring forth the seed. Do you believe in this?" If we believe this, this kind of faith is precious to God. This is not the faith that believes that God will give us all that we need for our existence; it is the faith that believes that God is working Himself into us in order to bring forth Christ as the unique seed, the seed that is needed for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

b) The Land

The second thing needed for the fulfillment of God's purpose was the land (15:17-21; see 12:7; 13:14-15, 17; 17:8).

(1) The Definition of the Land

What is the land? Many Christians think that the land is heaven, considering physical death as the Jordan River. This concept is altogether not according to the proper understanding of the Holy Word. During Abraham's time, the land was a place in which he could live. Abraham needed a place to live in and to live on. Hence, the land is a place for God's people to live in and to live on. Furthermore, during Abraham's time, the land was a place in which Abraham could defeat all of his enemies in order that God might have a kingdom on earth. Moreover, the land was the place where God could have a habitation as the expression of Himself. Thus, we see five points concerning the land: that it was a place for God's people to live in, a place for them to live on, a place where God's enemies could be defeated, a place where God could have His kingdom, and a place where God could have a habitation for His expression. Eventually, in the land, the kingdom of God was established, the temple was built for God's habitation, and the glory of God was manifested. All of that was a miniature of the fulfillment of God's purpose. This was altogether a different matter from Abraham's existence. It was one thing for Abraham to exist; it was another thing for him to have the seed and the land for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

What is the land for us today? Undoubtedly, the land is Christ who is living in us and in whom we are living. Today, we must live in Christ and on Christ. But many Christians do not practice this. They care neither for Christ's being wrought into them as the seed nor for their living in Christ as their land for the fulfillment of God's purpose. To them, Christ is not the land for them to live in and to live on; neither is He the land for them to slaughter all their enemies. Where can we slaughter our enemies? In Christ our land. Christ is the very place in which we slaughter our Chedorlaomer and all of the other kings. Christ is also the land for the kingdom of God where God's habitation can be built.

If we see this, then we know how greatly most Christians have missed the mark in seeking only for God's blessings. We do not need to pay that much attention to our existence or to be so concerned about God's blessings, because our Father knows what we need. We should let Him take care of us. He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

In this matter of God's purpose we should not count on what we have or on what we can do. What we have is Eliezer and what we can do is Ishmael. Eliezer was what Abraham had and Ishmael was what Abraham could do, and neither of them counted for the

fulfillment of God's purpose. What we have and what we can do does not count. It has to be God Himself. After a certain time, when we truly have become nothing, God will work Himself into us, and that which He has worked into us will bring forth Christ as the seed and will also bring us into Christ as our land. Christ should be the seed within us. Christ should also be the land in which we live. Do we not have Christ in us? Yes, but He must be the seed. Are we not in Christ today? Yes, but we must live in Him as our land.

Today the land is also the church, for the church is the enlargement of Christ. The Body of Christ, the church, is the expansion of Christ. In the church we live in Christ and on Christ; in the church we slaughter the enemies; and in the church we have the kingdom of God with the habitation of God. For this reason, when we came into the church, we immediately had the sensation that we had come home. Now we are no longer wandering but have a place in which and on which to live, a place in which to slaughter all our enemies, a place in which we may have the kingdom of God with the habitation of God. Before we came into the church, we did not have the proper Christian living, but after coming into the church, what a positive change has happened to our living!

Before coming into the church, it was difficult for us to defeat any of our enemies, but after coming into the church, it was so easy. Chedorlaomer is afraid of the church. Where can we slaughter all of our enemies? In Canaan. What is today's Canaan? It is the church, the enlarged Christ. Where is the kingdom of God with God's habitation today? Also in the church. The church, the enlarged Christ, is our good land today.

Both the seed and the land are Christ. The seed is Christ in us and the land is the Christ in whom we live. Christ lives in us as the seed, and we live in Him as the land. He is both the seed and the land for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

(2) God's Promise and Abraham's Lacking of Faith

In this chapter God not only repeated His promise to Abraham concerning the seed but also the promise to him concerning the land. The promise concerning the seed is fully covered in the first six verses. Abraham believed in the Lord for that promise concerning the seed. The promise concerning the land is affirmatively made by God in verse 7, but Abraham lacked faith to believe in God for this promise concerning the land. By this we can see that believing in God for the seed is easier than believing in God for the land. It is easier for us to let Christ live in us as the seed than it is to live in Christ as the land. To take Christ as the seed living in us is easier than to take Christ as the land for us to have the church life for God's kingdom with God's habitation. Because Abraham was like us, lacking faith in God in this respect, God was forced to make a covenant with him to confirm His promise concerning the land. In the next message we shall see the details concerning the covenant that God made with Abraham.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FORTY-FIVE

**KNOWING GRACE FOR THE FULFILLMENT
OF GOD'S PURPOSE
GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM**

In the last message we saw that whatever Abraham experienced prior to Genesis 15 was a matter of God's blessing for his existence. But God's calling of Abraham was not merely that Abraham should exist; it was that God's eternal purpose might be fulfilled through him. Beginning with chapter fifteen, God came in to show Abraham that he needed grace for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. Abraham not only needed outward blessings in his environment but also grace in his life. If we read Genesis 15 through 22 carefully, we shall see that in these chapters God was dealing with Abraham in order to bring him to the realization that he needed His grace in order to fulfill His eternal purpose. So God came in not simply to bless Abraham outwardly but to work Himself into him as grace in order that Abraham might have something substantial for the carrying out of God's eternal purpose.

As we saw in the previous message, two things were needed for Abraham to fulfill God's purpose—the seed and the land. If you read Genesis 15 again, you will see that these two things, the seed and the land, are mentioned repeatedly. We have seen that both the seed and the land are Christ. Firstly, the seed is the individual, personal Christ, and eventually it is the corporate Christ. Galatians 3:16 reveals that Christ is the seed of Abraham. Initially the seed was the individual Christ, but ultimately it has become the corporate Christ—the Christ who is the Head with all of us as His Body. This is the seed that is needed for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

Christ is also the land. The concept that Christ is the land may seem rather new or strange because in the past many of us were told that the good land of Canaan was a type, a symbol, of heaven. This concept is held by many Christians, but if we return to the pure Word, we can see that the land actually symbolizes Christ. In type, the land is the place where God's people have rest and where God can defeat all of His enemies and establish His kingdom with His habitation for His expression and representation. Please remember the following points regarding the land: that it is the place where God's people may have rest; that it is the place where all of God's enemies can be slaughtered; and that it is the place where God establishes His kingdom and builds up His habitation that He may be expressed and represented on this rebellious earth. What is qualified to be such a land? Nothing other than Christ. In Christ, we have rest and we slaughter the enemies. In Christ, God establishes His kingdom and builds His habitation, the church, for His expression and representation. Have you seen that both the seed and the land are Christ? The seed that God promised Abraham is today the corporate Christ, and the land that God promised him is the wonderful resurrected and elevated Christ in whom we rest and slaughter our enemies and in whom God establishes His kingdom and builds up His habitation that He might be expressed and represented.

When God promised Abraham that he would have a seed, Abraham believed God for this immediately (15:6). When Abraham believed in God for the promise concerning the seed, his faith, which was so precious to God, was counted as righteousness to him by God. At that time, Abraham was justified by faith, by the faith that believed that God would give him the seed to accomplish God's eternal purpose. When Abraham believed in God for that, God was happy with him. After this, however, when God also promised Abraham that He would give him the land, Abraham fell short, saying to the Lord, "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" (v. 8). Although he was able to believe in God for the promise concerning the seed, he could not believe in Him for the promise concerning the land.

The principle is the same today. To believe that Christ is the seed is easy, but to believe that Christ is the land is difficult. It is easier to believe that Christ is our life than it is to believe that Christ can be our church life. Many Christians believe in God for Christ's being their life, but when they come to the matter of the church life, the good land where we can rest, slaughter the enemies, and afford God the ground to establish His kingdom and build up His habitation, they say that it is impossible for us to have this today. Many Christians seem to be saying, "It is possible for us to live by Christ, but it is impossible to have the church life." It is easier for them to believe that Christ can be their life than that the church can be their living. They cannot believe that it is possible to have the church life today. Once again we see that we are the same as Abraham, finding it easy to believe in God for the seed but finding it difficult to believe in Him for the land. Do you have Christ as the seed? Do you also have Him as the land? It is not such a simple matter to have Christ as the land for us to live in so that we may have the church life and that God may have His kingdom with His habitation for His expression and representation.

Years ago, before we came into the church life, we ministered on the matter of living by Christ, but we ourselves were not in the rest. We wandered restlessly until one day, by His grace, we came into the church. When we came into the church, we began to have the sensation that we were in the rest. Before we came into the church life, it was very difficult for us to slaughter the enemies, but after coming into the church life, we found that it was easy to slaughter them all. In the church life God's kingdom is set up, His habitation is built up, and God is expressed and represented. This is the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose today.

(3) God Confirming His Promise by Making a Covenant
with Abraham through Christ

Because Abraham found it difficult to believe in God regarding the promise of the land, God was forced to make a covenant with him. In 15:9-21 we see that God confirmed His promise by making a covenant with Abraham through Christ. The way in which God made this covenant with Abraham was very peculiar. This portion of the Word is difficult for people to understand. We need to see that God was forced to make this covenant with Abraham. As far as God was concerned, there was no need for Him to do this. If Abraham had immediately believed in God for the promise of the land, Genesis 15 would have been much shorter than it is now. There would have been no need for many things that are mentioned there: the dividing of the heifer, the she-goat, and the ram; the offering of the turtledove and the young pigeon; the deep sleep that fell upon Abraham; the horror of great darkness that came upon him; God's passing through the pieces as a smoking furnace and as a torch of fire; and the mention of the four hundred years. It seems that nothing was pleasant. It was not the time of sunrise but of sunset, and God did not come in a lovely way but as a smoking furnace and a flaming torch. If we had witnessed such a scene, we probably would have been frightened to death, being unable to withstand it and finding it altogether a terrifying thing. This scene, however, has a very sweet flavor because in it God made a covenant with His dear called one; He had no intention of terrifying him.

I have spent much time in trying to understand this portion of the Word. In the early days I could not understand it because I lacked experience. I looked into some books, but none of them said anything helpful about this matter. But eventually by experiences through the years the Lord has shown me the real significance of this portion of the Word. This incident in Genesis 15 is the consummation of a covenant, the record of God's enacting of a covenant. The first covenant that God made was with Noah (9:8-17), a covenant that had a rainbow as its sign. Here, in Genesis 15, is the second covenant made by God with man. We need to keep this fact firmly in mind.

(a) Three Cattle Signifying the Crucified Christ

In making His covenant with Abraham, God told him to take a heifer, a she-goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon (v. 9). The three cattle, all of which were three years of age, were divided in half, but the two birds were not; they were kept alive. It was through these that God made His covenant with Abraham, implying that it was in this way that Abraham could fulfill God's eternal purpose.

We need to see the significance of the three cattle and the two birds. In typology, all things offered to God by man are a type of Christ. Based upon this principle, each of these five things undoubtedly is a type of Christ. Christ is firstly the crucified Christ, the cut Christ, and secondly He is the resurrected, living Christ. If we see this, then we can immediately understand that the three cattle, which were cut and killed, are types of the crucified Christ. The crucified Christ was the One who became flesh, living on earth in His humanity. John chapter one says that the Word who was God became flesh (v. 14). Then it speaks of this One as the Lamb of God (v. 29). The Lamb of God was the One who was the Word of God becoming flesh. Thus, the three cattle in Genesis 15 should signify Christ in His humanity being crucified for us.

If we read Genesis 15 along with the book of Leviticus, we can see that the female heifer was for a peace offering (Lev. 3:1). Why does the peace offering come first? Because when God was making a covenant with His called one, there was the need of peace. In making a covenant or any agreement between two parties there is the need of peace. In order for God to make a covenant with His called one, there was firstly the need of a peace offering. And Christ was that peace offering. The she-goat was a type of Christ as our sin offering (Lev. 4:28; 5:6). Regardless of how good we may be as God's called ones, we are still sinful. Thus, following the peace offering we need the sin offering. Hallelujah, the problem of sin has been settled! It has been taken away by Christ as our she-goat, as our sin offering. Following this there was the need of the burnt offering, the offering which signifies that everything must be for God (Lev. 1:10). After the peace offering, there was the sin offering, and after the sin offering, there was the burnt offering. Christ was all of the offerings that God passed through in making a covenant with His called one.

Why were the three cattle all three years old? Because Christ was not killed in death but in resurrection. He was not offered in death but in resurrection. Referring to His crucifixion, the Lord told the Jews, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The Lord was killed when He was "three years old," meaning that He was killed in resurrection. Even before He was killed He was already in resurrection because He was always in resurrection (John 11:25). Therefore, when He was killed, He was killed in resurrection, and this was why He could be resurrected. Christ offered Himself to God in resurrection. He was nailed to the cross in resurrection. Regardless of how strong you may be, if you were to be killed, you would be killed in death, not in resurrection. But the Lord Jesus was killed in resurrection.

(b) Two Birds Signifying the Resurrected Christ

The two birds, neither of which was killed, signify the resurrected, living Christ (Lev. 14:6-7). This resurrected Christ is mainly in His

divinity because, according to the Bible, a dove in typology signifies the Holy Spirit (John 1:32). Therefore, while the cattle typify Christ in His humanity, the birds typify Him in His divinity. So the birds in Genesis 15 signify the heavenly Christ, the Christ who came from and who still is in heaven (John 3:13), the Christ who was and who still is living. Christ has been crucified, yet He lives. He was killed in His humanity, but He lives in His divinity. He was killed as a man who walked on this earth, but now He is living as the heavenly One soaring in the heavens. While His humanity was good for Him to be all the sacrifices, His divinity is good for Him to be the living One. He was sacrificed for us in His humanity, and He is living for us in His divinity.

In typology, the turtledove signifies a suffering life and the young pigeon signifies a believing life, a life of faith. While He was living on earth, the Lord Jesus was always suffering and believing. In His suffering life He was the turtledove and in His believing life He was the young pigeon.

There were two birds, and the number two means testimony, bearing witness (Acts 5:32). The two living birds bear testimony of Christ as the resurrected One living in us and for us (John 14:19-20; Gal. 2:20). The living Jesus is the testimony, the One who constantly bears witness. In Revelation 1 the Lord Jesus said, "I am..the living One, and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever" (v. 18). His living forever is His testimony, for the testimony of Jesus is always related to the matter of being living. If a local church is not living, it does not have the testimony of Jesus. The more living we are, the more we are the testimony of the living Jesus.

There were three cattle and two birds, making a total of five items. The number five is the number of responsibility, indicating here that Christ as the crucified and living One is now bearing all the responsibility for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

(c) As Fowl from the Air, Satan and His Angels Coming
to Make Christ of None Effect

When the sacrifices were made ready, the fowl from the air came down trying to eat them (v. 11). This signifies that Satan and his angels come to make Christ of none effect for the church life (Gal. 5:2, 4). Today Satan and his angels (2 Cor. 11:13-15) are doing their best to rob Christians of the enjoyment of Christ for the church life (Col. 2:8). As Abraham drove the fowl away, so we must drive Satan and his angels away from what Christ is to us for the church life.

(d) The Covenanting God Passing between
the Pieces of the Sacrifices

It was through the sacrifices as types of Christ that God passed to make a covenant with Abraham (vv. 17-18; cf. Jer. 34:18-19). After Abraham divided the cattle and arranged all the sacrifices, "when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him" (vv. 11-12). When Abraham was in this kind of situation, God came in. Verse 17 says, "And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a torch of fire that passed between those pieces" (v. 18, Heb.). God did not come in a very lovely way but as a smoking furnace and as a flaming torch. A furnace is for refining, and a torch is for enlightening. In the midst of a dark situation God came in to refine and to enlighten. This happens quite often in the church life. Suddenly the sunrise becomes the sunset, a dark night descends upon us, many saints are sleepy and out of function, and there is suffering on every side. During such a time of affliction, we may begin to doubt, saying, "What is this? Is something wrong with us?" At such a time God will always come in as a furnace to refine us, to burn us out, and also as a torch to enlighten us. People often say of those in the church life, "How can you people have so much light? What light there is among you! How the torch is flaming!" The light mainly comes from the sufferings. Look at Abraham's situation: the sun went down, night came, Abraham was sleeping, and God came in, not as a comforter but as a furnace to burn and as a torch to enlighten. On the one hand God is burning us and we are suffering; on the other hand He is enlightening us and we are under the light. At such a time, even if we are in a dark night, we shall be so clear.

It was in this kind of a situation that God passed between the pieces of the sacrifices, and that was the enacting of God's covenant. God made a covenant with Abraham in the way of passing through all of the sacrifices as a smoking furnace and a torch of fire. It was in this way that God confirmed His promise to Abraham by making a covenant with him for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose.

e) The Called One Identified with Christ
by Offering Him to God

Whenever people offered something to God in the Old Testament, they laid their hand upon the sacrifice, signifying their union or identification with it. God's asking Abraham to offer the cattle and birds to Him implied that Abraham had to be one with all of the things that he offered to God. God seemed to be saying to him, "Abraham, you must be in union with all of the things that you offer to Me. You must be identified with the cattle and the birds." This indicates that we also have to be cut in Christ's being cut and crucified in His crucifixion. Our natural man, our flesh, and our self must be cut and crucified. As we are identified with Him in His crucifixion, we are also identified with Him in His resurrection. We are dead in His death (Rom. 6:5a, 8a) and we are living in His resurrection (Rom. 6:5b, 8b) to fulfill God's purpose. We were terminated in His crucifixion and we were germinated in His resurrection. It is in this way that we are enabled to fulfill God's eternal purpose.

It is impossible for the natural man to have the church life. Among us we have many different kinds of brothers and sisters. Humanly speaking, it is impossible for us to be one. Nevertheless, in the church we are truly one by the crucified and resurrected Christ. We are so one in Him that even the Devil has to admit that we are one. Our old man was terminated in Christ's crucifixion. Whenever my terminated old man comes out of the grave, I immediately rebuke him, saying, "What are you doing here? You have been terminated already. It is wrong for you to come here." We all have been terminated in Christ's crucifixion and germinated in His resurrection. In His resurrection we all are living, not living by ourselves but by the resurrected Christ who lives within us and who enables us to have the church life.

Now we see how God can have such a wonderful seed and land as the people and the sphere in and with which He can establish His kingdom and build up His habitation for His expression and representation. How can God do this? Only by Christ's being crucified as our peace offering, sin offering, and burnt offering and being resurrected to be our life. Now we, the called ones, those who offer Christ to God and are identified with Him, are one with Christ. When Christ was crucified and resurrected, we also were crucified and

resurrected with Him. We were crucified in His crucifixion and resurrected in His resurrection. Now we can all declare, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). It is by this fact that we can be living today in order to have the church life. In the church life we have Christ within as the seed and Christ without as the land. How can we get into such a land, into such a church life? Only through the crucified and resurrected Christ, through the heifer, she-goat, ram, turtledove, and pigeon. On the one hand, we all have been crucified; on the other hand, we all are living. So here God can have the seed and the land for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. Hallelujah for such a Christ as the seed for us to live by and as the land for us to live in!

(4) The Affliction of the Promised Seed
(a) Signified by the Great Darkness

Verses 12 through 16 speak of the affliction of the promised seed. This affliction was signified by the great darkness that fell upon Abraham. As the sun was going down, Abraham fell into a deep sleep, and a horror of a great darkness came upon him. In that darkness God prophesied concerning Abraham's seed, saying, "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years..but in the fourth generation they shall come hither again" (vv. 13, 16). God seemed to be telling Abraham, "Abraham, you should not doubt that I will give you the land. Your seed will inherit the land. But your descendants are going to suffer affliction for four hundred years." The Lord's prophecy here is very meaningful. In the church life today, at a certain point the sun will go down, the dark night will come, and most of the people will be sleeping, that is, they will be out of function and no longer useful. Such a time is a time of affliction. Here with Abraham we see three things: that the sun was going down, that a deep sleep fell upon Abraham, and that a horror of a great darkness fell upon him. It is during such a time that God's called people are under suffering. God told Abraham that his seed would be suffering like that for four hundred years. Those four hundred years were to be one long night, a dark age when all the children of Israel would be sleeping, out of function, and suffering affliction. Abraham's sleep signified that the four hundred years were to the children of Israel a dark night through which they passed.

(b) From Ishmael's Persecution of Isaac
to the Exodus Out of Egypt

History proves that Abraham's seed did suffer affliction for a period of four hundred years beginning with Ishmael's persecution of Isaac (21:9; Gal. 4:29) about 1891 B.C. until the exodus out of Egypt about 1491 B.C. (Exo. 3:7-8; Acts 7:6). Ishmael's mocking of Isaac was the start of the affliction of Abraham's seed that was to continue for four hundred years. What is the significance of the number four hundred? This number is composed of ten times forty. In the Bible, the number forty is the number of trials, sufferings, and tests. Thus, four hundred indicates ten times of trials. Before the children of Israel were tested in the wilderness for forty years, they had been tested for ten times forty years already. From Ishmael's persecution of Isaac, the promised seed, until the exodus out of Egypt was four hundred years. Why then does Exodus 12:40-41 (cf. Gal. 3:17) speak of four hundred thirty years? This four hundred thirty years began with Genesis 12:1-6, from about the year 1921 B.C. From the day that Abraham was called in Genesis 12 to the persecution of Isaac by Ishmael was exactly thirty years, the period in which God's called ones lived in a strange land. While Abraham was in Canaan, it was a strange land to him, and it remained a strange land to God's called ones until the day they entered into it as the good land. The persecution of the seed began thirty years after Abraham was called in Genesis 12 and continued for four hundred years.

This is not merely a doctrinal matter, for the principle is the same in the church life today. While we are enjoying Christ as the seed within and as the land without, a dark night may fall upon us and some trials and testings may come. What is the purpose of this? For the purpose that, in the midst of the dark night, the lack of function of the called ones, and the affliction, God might come in as a smoking furnace to refine us and as a flaming torch to enlighten us that we may fulfill His purpose by the seed and by the land.

(c) As a Sign for the Fulfillment of God's Covenant

In making the covenant with Abraham, God sovereignly made an environment of darkness in which He told Abraham that his descendants would suffer affliction for four hundred years. This prophecy, which was fulfilled accordingly, was a sign for the fulfillment of God's covenant made here. The affliction of the promised seed was a sign that God would fulfill His covenant. By suffering the affliction as God prophesied, God's people should be assured that God would fulfill His covenant. It is the same with us today. The suffering of the church in dark times is a strong sign that God will fulfill His covenant for the church life with Christ as the seed and the land.

In verse 18 the Lord made a covenant with Abraham and said, "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." Abraham's seed was given a spacious land, from the river of Egypt to the great river of Euphrates. The nation of Israel today has only a narrow strip of land, but the promised land is more spacious than this. In typology, this means that after all of the experiences of affliction, the church life will be expanded and become spacious. Then we shall have a richer seed and a wider, broader church life. The seed within us will be richer, and the land without us will be broader. It is here that we fulfill God's eternal purpose.

I believe that now, by the Lord's mercy, Genesis 15, a chapter which has been so difficult to understand, has been made clear to us. In this chapter we have the seed and the land. Here we have Christ as the crucified One and as the resurrected and living One. Here we also have our identification with Him. In this chapter there are the four hundred years of affliction and God's coming in as a furnace and a torch. It is here that God enacted His covenant that we might fulfill His eternal purpose. How did God enact His covenant? In the way of Christ's being crucified as the peace offering, sin offering, and burnt offering and being resurrected as the living One; in the way of our offering Christ and being fully identified with Him in His crucifixion and resurrection; and in the way of our realizing that we shall have the dark night, the affliction, and God's coming in as the furnace and the torch to refine and enlighten us. It is here in Genesis 15 that we are in the covenant made through Christ that enables us to fulfill God's eternal purpose. It is here that in the church life we enjoy Christ as the seed and as the good land. It is here that we enjoy Him as the all-sufficient grace for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

**KNOWING GRACE FOR THE FULFILLMENT
OF GOD'S PURPOSE
THE ALLEGORY OF THE TWO WOMEN**

Genesis is a book of the riches of God's divine revelation. The more I stay with this book, the more I enjoy its sweet riches. When we read the book of Genesis, we need the divine enlightenment, for by our human mentality we cannot get anything out of this book except historical records and some interesting stories. When I was young, I was happy to hear the stories in this book, but if we only understand Genesis as a story book, we shall miss a great deal.

3) *The Allegory of the Two Women*

Sarah and Hagar, the wife and the concubine of Abraham, God's called one, are an allegory of two covenants (Gal. 4:24). If the Apostle Paul had not written the book of Galatians in which he tells us that these two women are an allegory of two covenants, none of us would ever have dreamed of such a thing. Although some Christians criticize the allegorization of the Bible, Paul took the lead to allegorize the Old Testament. If we are going to appreciate the treasures in the book of Genesis, we must realize that Genesis is a book of allegories. Abraham's biography is an allegory. His wife and his concubine especially are a very meaningful allegory. In this message we shall do our best to probe into the meaning of this allegory.

Before we come to this allegory, however, we need to see something about the book of Genesis. Why is Genesis so sweet and precious? Because it is a book containing many seeds of the divine revelation that were sown by God Himself. This book contains all of the main aspects of God's divine revelation. In the very first chapter we see that God has an intention to express Himself through man and that for this purpose He created man in His own image (1:26). Man was made according to God's image with the intention that he might become God's exact expression and that through this expression God might have a dominion, a kingdom, in which He could exercise His authority. This is God's ultimate intention, His eternal purpose. If you read the Bible with this heavenly light, you will see that the whole Bible covers this divine intention. In order for God to fulfill His intention of having Himself expressed and of obtaining a dominion on earth, He needs to have the seed and the land, both of which are related to Christ. This Christ must be wrought into God's people. God wanted to do this with Adam, but Adam failed. Eventually, God had a new start with a new race, the race of the called ones, the first one of which was Abraham. If you read Abraham's biography, you will see that again and again God came to him with a promise concerning two things—the seed and the land (12:7; 13:15-16; 15:5, 7, 18). Abraham was not young when he was first called by God; he was seventy-five years of age when he answered God's calling in a full way.

Although Abraham was seventy-five years of age, he still did not have a child. As far as God was concerned, that was very good. If when God calls you you have nothing, that is very good, for if you have too much, that will frustrate God's calling. When Abraham was called by God, he did not have a child and he lived in a condemned, demonic land, a land out of which God called him. After he was called, Abraham had no child and no land. Suppose a man and his wife today would have no child and no land. Would they not think of themselves as the most pitiful people on earth? Perhaps Abraham said to his wife, "What are we here for? I am seventy-five and you are sixty-five, and we don't have even one child. We have also been called out of our land. Where are we? What are we doing here? Where are we going?" It seems that they were in a pitiful situation. But the more pitiful we are in this way, the better it is for God's purpose. I hope that none of us has a child within nor a land without. If both within and without we have nothing, that would be wonderful. Why? Because God does not want us to have anything for the fulfillment of His purpose. What God wants is to work Christ into us as the seed and then to work Christ out of us as the land. Firstly, the seed must be wrought into us; secondly, it must be worked out of us to become the land. Both the seed and the land are Christ.

We have seen that Abraham answered God's calling in the way of dragging his feet through mud and water. Since God did not give Abraham a child, Abraham took Lot, his nephew, along with him. Abraham could not say that he had nothing, because he had taken Lot with him. Furthermore, it might have been that as he was traveling through Damascus, he found Eliezer and took him along with him. Following that, it might have been that after Abraham fell into Egypt, drifting downstream like a piece of driftwood, he acquired Hagar. Although he planned to sacrifice his wife in Egypt, under God's sovereignty his wife was preserved, and, according to God's good plan, Abraham acquired many riches, including an Egyptian maid named Hagar. In Haran Abraham picked up Lot, in Damascus he found Eliezer, and in Egypt he secured Hagar. But in the good land he did not gain anything. All he obtained in the good land was God's promise in plain words regarding the seed and the land.

Although Abraham was not free to argue with God, within himself he probably said to God, "God, You don't need to promise me over and over again that You will give me a boy. You already told me that my descendants will become a great nation. You have told me three times that I would have a seed, but why don't You do anything? God, don't You realize that one action is better than a thousand words? You've not only made a promise to me but also a covenant. You tell me that the rain is going to come, but I have not yet seen even one drop of water. Also, You told me that You would give me this land. Why don't You give it to me right now? You always say, 'I will give it to you,' but don't You know that I need it now?" This was a real testing to Abraham. Firstly, Abraham relied upon Lot. Eventually Lot became a problem to him and separated from him. After that, Abraham put his trust in Eliezer, telling God that Eliezer would be his heir. When God said that Eliezer would not be the heir, Abraham might have said, "God, what are You doing? You have just robbed me. You say no to this and no to that. You don't give me even one yes." In order to strengthen Abraham's faith, God made a covenant with him in a very extraordinary way, using three cattle and two living birds. That covenant made by God was much stronger than just His promise.

After this, Abraham and Sarah might have had a lot of sad fellowship. Abraham might have said to his wife, "Sarah, many years ago God promised that we would have a seed. Where is it? God also promised to give us the land. In order to strengthen our faith, He made a covenant with us. We cannot say that the covenant is not believable or trustworthy, because I offered the cattle and the birds as the Lord told me to. But we still don't have anything." In times like this, the wives are often like Sarah. Often the wives are finer and look at things in more detail. It might have been that while Abraham was talking in such a sad way that Sarah presented him with a good proposal saying, "Abraham, we cannot say that God's word is not trustworthy, but look at how old we are. Didn't God tell you that someone born out of you would be your seed? Now I have a good proposal. It must have been sovereign that we acquired Hagar in Egypt. Why don't you go to her and have a child by her? Then we shall have the seed to fulfill God's purpose." If we had been Abraham we probably would have said, "This is a wonderful idea. I never thought of it, but thank God that you had the wisdom to

propose such a plan." Abraham took Sarah's counsel and Ishmael was produced. Perhaps after Ishmael was born Abraham said, "Who can deny this one? He was certainly born of me. Don't you believe that God was sovereign in giving us Hagar in Egypt and in the fact that she gave birth to a boy, not to a girl? God has been sovereign in three respects—in giving us Hagar, in causing her to conceive, and in giving us a boy through her. Praise the Lord! This is surely the sovereignty of God." But after the birth of Ishmael, God stayed away from Abraham for thirteen years (16:16; 17:1).

On the one hand, during that period of time Abraham might have been happy because he had a child, but on the other hand, he was suffering because he did not have God's appearing. He might have said to his wife, "Why don't we have God's appearing? What has happened? We didn't go down to Egypt again or do anything wrong. We acted on your proposal to have a seed to fulfill God's purpose. What is wrong with us? We have a child, but we don't have God's presence." As we shall see in the next message, after thirteen years, God finally came in, saying to Abraham, "I am the all-sufficient God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (17:1, Heb.). God seemed to be telling Abraham, "Abraham, you must be perfect. Although you have done no wrong, it is certain that you are not perfect." Then God told him that a seed would be born not only out of him but also out of his wife, saying that He would give Abraham a son by her (17:16). Ishmael had been born out of Abraham but not out of Sarah. Abraham, being very reluctant to give up Ishmael, said to God, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" (17:18). God answered Abraham, saying, "Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac" (17:19). God seemed to be telling Abraham, "Abraham, you have misunderstood Me. The seed must not only be out of you but also out of Sarah. And his name shall be Isaac, not Ishmael." God had rejected Ishmael.

In Galatians Paul tells us that Sarah and Hagar, the two women, are an allegory symbolizing two covenants. Paul could only have seen this through God's revelation. Without Paul's telling us about this, would you ever have dreamed that Sarah was a symbol of the covenant of grace and that Hagar was a symbol of the covenant of law? We should not be content with just knowing the stories in Genesis but should press on to understand the meaning of the allegory.

In Galatians 3:17 Paul said, "And I say this a covenant ratified beforehand by God, the law having come four hundred and thirty years after does not annul, so as to make the promise of none effect." This four hundred thirty years covers the span of time from Genesis 12:1 to the giving of the law in Exodus 20. Before the law was given, there was an allegory. In other words, before the law was given, God took a photograph of what would happen with the law four hundred thirty years later. We all must see this.

*a) The Freewoman, Sarah, Signifying
the Covenant of Promise (Grace)*

Sarah, the freewoman, signifies the covenant of promise (Gal. 4:23). God's covenant of promise with Abraham was a covenant of grace. In that covenant God promised that He would give Abraham the seed, without having any intention that Abraham needed to do anything in order to have it. God would work something into him that he might bring forth a seed to fulfill His purpose. It would be God's doing, not Abraham's. This is grace. Sarah, as the freewoman, the proper wife of Abraham, was a symbol of this covenant of grace. She brought forth Isaac not by man's strength but by God's grace.

*b) The Bondwoman, Hagar, Signifying
the Covenant of Law*

Hagar, the bondwoman, signifies the covenant of law (Gal. 4:25). It was when the children of Israel ignored God's work of grace upon them and attempted to please God by themselves that the law was brought in. When man is ignorant of God's grace, he will always endeavor to do something to please God, and this brings in the law, of which Hagar, the bondwoman, the improper wife of Abraham, was the symbol. Since she was the improper wife, she should not have come in. What she brought forth could not remain in God's economy. This signifies that the law should not have come in and that the produce of the law has no position in fulfilling God's purpose. Hagar brought forth Ishmael, who was rejected by God, by man's effort, not by God's grace. The produce of man's effort through the law has no share in the fulfillment of God's purpose.

According to God's economy, a man should only have one wife. Thus, Sarah's proposal that Abraham have a seed by Hagar was absolutely against God's economy. Hagar was not a proper wife but a concubine. Hagar, Abraham's concubine, was a symbol of the law. By this we can see that the position of the law is the position of the concubine. While grace is the proper wife, the mother of the proper heirs (Gal. 4:26, 28, 31), the law is the concubine, the mother of those who are rejected as heirs. According to the ancient custom, men mainly took concubines because their wives could not bear children. This is quite meaningful. When grace has not yet worked and you are in a hurry, you will join yourself to a concubine, to the law. Sarah was a symbol of grace, of the covenant of promise, and Hagar was a symbol of the law. Grace is the proper wife and the law is the concubine.

c) The Covenant of Promise (Grace) Being Made First

The promise was given in 12:2, 7; 13:15-17; 15:4-5, and the covenant was made in 15:7-21. According to God's intention, the covenant of promise came first. God had no intention of bringing in the law and of having man endeavor to keep it for the fulfillment of His purpose. What He originally intended to do was to work Himself into man to fulfill His purpose through man.

*d) The Covenant of Law
Being Brought in Later*

The covenant of law was brought in later by the effort of the flesh in Genesis 16. What we have in Genesis 16 is the effort of the flesh that brought in Hagar, the symbol of law. The promise was given when Abraham was called in Genesis 12, about 1921 B.C., and the law was given in Exodus 20, four hundred thirty years later, after the exodus out of Egypt about 1491 B.C. (Gal. 3:17). Grace always comes first, but the law follows to frustrate. Not very many Christians see that the position of the law is that of a concubine, that it is against God's economy, and that its produce is under God's rejection. Nevertheless they appreciate the law and try their best to keep it, making themselves Ishmaels, the children of the bondwoman.

*e) The Produce (Ishmael) by the Effort of the Flesh
with the Law*

Without exception, every Christian is like Abraham. After we were saved, we came to realize that God wants us to live a Christ-like

life, a heavenly life, a victorious life, a life that constantly pleases God and glorifies Him. Yes, God does want us to live such a life, but He will work Christ into us to live for us a heavenly life to please Him and glorify Him. However, all of us focus on the intention and neglect the grace. The intention is that we live a heavenly life for the glory of God, and the grace is that God will work Christ into us for the fulfillment of His purpose. So firstly we rely upon our Lot, that which we brought with us from our natural background, trying to use him to fulfill God's purpose in living a heavenly life for the glory of God. When God does not allow us to rely upon Lot, then we turn to Eliezer, expecting that he will enable us to live a heavenly life for God's glory. Eventually God tells us, "I don't want that. I don't want anything objective but something subjective from within your own being." Once we realize that God wants this, then we begin to exercise our own energy, our natural strength, to fulfill God's purpose. We all have a Hagar, a maid who is always willing to cooperate with us. We may not have the law given by Moses, but we do have many self-made laws. We all are lawgivers and make laws for ourselves.

Let us consider some examples of these self-made laws. Perhaps you say that never again will you lose your temper with your husband or have a negative attitude towards him. This is your first commandment. The second commandment is that, as a Christian lady and a Christian wife, you need to be nice, sweet, and humble. Your third commandment is never to criticize others, and the fourth is to always love people and never to hate them. These self-made laws are our Hagars. Whether we succeed or not in keeping our laws makes no difference in the eyes of God because in His eyes even our successes do not count. In the past years some sisters nearly succeeded in fulfilling their self-made laws. They had a strong character, a strong will, and a strong intention, and all day long they tried their best to control their temper and to be nice, sweet, and humble. Although such sisters might have been successful at this, what they produced was just an Ishmael. These sisters were happy with their Ishmael and, in a sense, they were proud of him. The principle is exactly the same with the brothers.

Although we may gain an Ishmael who is good in our eyes, we have the deep sensation that we are missing something. We have lost God's presence. Moreover, this Ishmael will always mock the spiritual things (21:9). On the one hand, we do not like this mocking element, but, on the other hand, we still feel that since Ishmael was produced by us, he is not that bad. But, having lost God's presence, we find ourselves in trouble. Just as the descendants of Ishmael are a problem to Israel today, so the Ishmael that we have produced remains a problem to us. Once we are clear about this, we would pray, "Lord, keep me in Your grace. Keep me in the promise. Whether Your promise will be fulfilled today or many years from now does not matter. I only want to care for Your promise." Although it is easy to say this, it is not easy to live it.

What is true in our Christian life is also true in our Christian work. The New Testament tells us that after we are saved we need to preach the gospel and bear fruit. But how much natural effort and strength are exercised in the matter of so-called soul winning! Many kinds of Hagars, all of whom were acquired in Egypt, are used to win souls. Every worldly means of soul-winning is a Hagar. Yes, you may use Hagar to win souls, but what kind of souls will you win? They will not be Isaac but Ishmael. According to the New Testament, the proper fruit-bearing and gospel preaching are by the overflow of the inner life, by God working Christ into, through, and out of us. This means that the proper gospel preaching is by Christ as grace to us.

There are a great many Hagars in the Christian world today. Do you want to live a Christian life by yourself? It is better for you to stop. Do you want to preach the gospel with worldly means? It is better that you stop this as well. Stop living the Christian life by yourself and stop working for the Lord with worldly means. Then you may say, "If I stop, I'll be finished." That is right. That is exactly what God expects. Although Abraham fully answered God's call when he was seventy-five, God did not do anything with him until he was ninety-nine because until then he still had his natural strength. He had Lot and Eliezer to rely upon and Hagar to match his natural strength. Eventually God was forced to stay away from him. Likewise, as long as we have a Lot and an Eliezer to rely upon, or a Hagar to endeavor with, God cannot do anything. As long as we still have the strength to produce an Ishmael, God cannot do anything. After the producing of that Ishmael, He will stay away for a period of time. When Abraham was ninety-nine years of age, according to his figuration, he was a dead person. Romans 4:19 says that "he considered his own body already become dead, being about a hundred years old." Romans 4 also indicates that Sarah was out of function. Both Abraham and Sarah were fully convinced that they were finished and could do nothing themselves. At that point God came in.

All of the revival preachers stir up people, telling them to live for Christ and to work for Him. But in our ministry we are saying that you have to stop living a Christian life by yourselves and doing a Christian work with worldly means. Do not be bothered at our saying this, for regardless how much we tell people to stop, hardly anyone will stop. If anyone will stop trying to live a Christian life by himself or to work for the Lord by worldly means, blessed is he. It is not easy to stop your self-effort in the Christian life and your natural zeal in Christian work. Although it is easy to be called by God, it is most difficult to stop your natural zeal. If the Lord would come in to stop you, you might say, "No, Lord. Look at today's situation. Hardly anyone works for You in what I am burdened to do. I'm nearly the only one. How could I stop my work for You?" But blessed is the one who will stop, for when you stop, God comes in. The end of humanity is the beginning of divinity. When our human life ends, the divine life begins.

When Abraham was eighty-six years of age, he still had too much of his own strength, causing God to wait for another thirteen years. Perhaps God, sitting in the heavens and looking at Abraham, said, "Abraham, you are now eighty-six, but I still have to wait for another thirteen years." While you are praying that God will do something, God is praying that you will stop. While you are saying, "O Lord, help me to do something," God is saying, "It would really be good for you to stop." While Abraham was so busy on earth, God might have looked at him and said, "Poor Abraham, you don't need to be that busy. Won't you stop and let Me come in? Please stop and let Me do it. Since you won't stop, I have to wait until you are ninety-nine years old." God waited until Abraham was a dying person out of function. Then He came in and could say, "Now is My start. Now is My time to begin something."

The produce of the effort of the flesh was Ishmael, but Ishmael was rejected by God (17:18-19; 21:10-12a; Gal. 4:30). Not only was Ishmael rejected by God, but he also frustrated God's appearing. Our experience today tells us the same thing, for our Ishmael breaks our fellowship with God and keeps us from God's appearing. We see by this that it is not a matter of what we do or of what we are; it is altogether a matter of whether or not we have God's presence. Do you have God's appearance all the time? We must forget our doing and our working and take care of God's appearing. When God's appearing is with us, we are in the grace, in the covenant of grace. But most Christians today only care for their doing and work, not for God's appearing and presence. Although they may produce many Ishmaels, they do not have God's presence. What we need is God's presence. What we need is not the outward fruit of our outward work but the inward appearing of our God. Do you have the presence of God within you? This is a most crucial test.

The produce of the promise of grace, which is Isaac, is the seed for the fulfillment of God's purpose (17:19; 21:12b). The seed for the fulfillment of God's purpose is nothing less than Christ Himself wrought by God into, through, and out of us. What God has wrought into us brings in Christ as the seed (Gal. 3:16). This seed will eventually become our land. Now we have the seed as our life and the land as our living. Within we have Christ as the seed by whom we live, and without we have Christ as the land in whom we live. This is the church life with Christ as our life. This is the only way for us to fulfill God's purpose.

No longer should we consider this story in Genesis merely as a kind of prediction but as an allegory of today's situation. Grace, law, and our natural strength are all here, and we are always being tempted to exercise our natural strength to coordinate Hagar to produce an Ishmael to fulfill God's purpose. But we have a safeguard—to check whether or not we have God's presence in our daily life and in our Christian work. The safeguard is not how much fruit we have; it is God's presence. Do you have the assurance, the confidence, that day after day Christ is being wrought into your being to be the inner life by whom you live? Do you have the assurance that this Christ is even becoming the realm in which you live? This realm is the church life. We need to have the seed and the land, the proper Christian life plus the church life. We need to live by Christ within and we need to live in Christ without. This is the proper way for us to fulfill God's purpose. We need to see this not for others but for ourselves. Abraham's biography is our autobiography, and the allegory of the two women is a portrait of our life. As we live today, we need Christ as the seed and as the land.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FORTY-SEVEN

KNOWING GRACE FOR THE FULFILLMENT

OF GOD'S PURPOSE

GOD'S COVENANT CONFIRMED WITH CIRCUMCISION

4) God's Covenant Confirmed

In this message we come to Genesis 17, a record of God's crucial dealing with Abraham in confirming His covenant. We have seen that Abraham was called and that he received God's call, promise, and covenant. After God called Abraham, He gave him the promise and then He confirmed the promise by making a covenant with him. After Abraham received the covenant, he accepted his wife's proposal to exercise his flesh along with the expediency of Hagar to produce a seed. The result was Ishmael. Here we see three things: Sarah's proposal, Hagar's expediency, and Abraham's exercise of the flesh to produce Ishmael.

a) God's Disappearing for Thirteen Years Because of Abraham's Exercise of the Flesh

Abraham might have thought that it was not serious for him to exercise his flesh to produce Ishmael, but according to God's economy for His eternal purpose, it was very serious. If we compare the first verse of chapter seventeen with the last verse of chapter sixteen, we can see that between these two chapters there was a period of thirteen years and that there was no record of Abraham's life during those thirteen years. When Abraham brought forth Ishmael, he was eighty-six years of age, and thirteen years later, when he was ninety-nine, God appeared to him again. During that long period of thirteen years, Abraham, a man called by God, a man who was living by faith and who was learning to know grace for the fulfillment of God's purpose, missed God's presence. How serious it is not to have God's presence!

After Abraham had answered God's calling and had begun to live a life by faith in God for his existence, he had a failure. Being short of faith, he went down to Egypt where he was even planning to sacrifice his wife. According to the human concept, that was much worse than using Hagar to produce Ishmael. But if we read these chapters attentively, we shall see that God was not as displeased with Abraham's going down to Egypt as He was with his using Hagar to produce Ishmael. Of course, it was not good for Abraham to go down to Egypt, but that did not offend God as much as his exercise of the flesh to bring forth Ishmael. Going down to Egypt was a failure without, but taking Hagar to produce Ishmael was failure within. It was deeper, for it was not merely related to circumstances but to life. Taking Hagar to produce Ishmael was not simply a matter of right or wrong or of committing a sin; it was a matter of life. Nothing that we do by ourselves is life. Whatever we work by ourselves is not life. Life is God Himself. It is God being something to us in our very being. We should not do anything by ourselves but by God's being wrought into us. Whatever we do by ourselves is not life but death, for it is the issue of our natural self.

In the eyes of God, our natural self is more dirty and more defiling than sin. Although sin is unclean in the presence of God, it is not as offensive to God as our natural self is. While we all recognize the seriousness of sin, not many people realize the seriousness of our natural self. If we commit a sin, we would immediately confess it to God, but if we do certain good things by our natural self, we do not have the sense that we are offending God. If I hate a particular brother, it is easy for me to recognize that this hatred is a sin and confess it as such to God. But if I love this brother by my natural self, it would be difficult to realize that this is against God. Sin only offends God's righteousness, but our natural self offends God Himself. God wants to come into us to be our life and our everything that we may live, work, and do everything by Him. But when we do things by our self, our natural self, we put Him aside. By this we can see that the natural self is against God Himself. It is not only against God's righteousness or holiness but against God Himself.

God's intention with Abraham was that He would work Himself into Abraham so that Abraham might bring forth a child to fulfill God's purpose. God did not intend that Abraham do this by his natural strength. Nevertheless, Abraham used his natural strength to bring forth a child to fulfill God's purpose. Nothing offends God more than this kind of natural doing. Working by our natural self is the most offensive thing to God. To Abraham, it was not so serious for him to take Hagar. His wife, Sarah, even proposed this, thinking that it would help Abraham to produce the seed since Abraham was old and she was out of function. But God had promised that they would have a son. Since they did not know how this could come about, they took the expediency of using Hagar, the Egyptian maid, to produce a child, not realizing how offensive that was to God. It was an insult to Him. Therefore, God disappeared from His dear called one for thirteen years. It was as if God had turned His face away from Abraham and had refused to speak to him for that length of time. There is no record in the Bible of what happened during that period of time. We only know from the last verse

of chapter sixteen and the first verse of chapter seventeen that God reappeared to Abraham thirteen years later. According to the Bible record, thirteen years of Abraham's life were wasted. In the heavenly record those years were lost because Abraham exercised his natural self to do something for the fulfilling of God's purpose.

b) Perfection Required by God's All-sufficiency

Genesis 17:1 says, "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the all-sufficient God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Heb.). Here we see that God charged Abraham with two things—that Abraham had to walk before the all-sufficient God and that he had to be perfect. In chapter sixteen, Abraham did not walk before God; he walked before Sarah, Hagar, and Ishmael. Since he had not walked before God, God came and told him to walk before Him and to be perfect. God's telling Abraham to be perfect indicates that before that time he was not perfect. In chapter sixteen, Abraham was imperfect; he lacked something.

Before we consider further what it means to walk before God and to be perfect, we need to learn the meaning of the title of God in 17:1, the all-sufficient God. In Hebrew this title is El-Shaddai. El means the Strong One, the Mighty One, and Shaddai, implying the meaning of breast, udder, means all-sufficient. El-Shaddai is the Mighty One with an udder, the Mighty One who has the all-sufficient supply. An udder produces milk, and milk is the all-sufficient supply, having water, minerals, and many vitamins in it and containing all that we need for our daily living. So El-Shaddai means the all-sufficient Mighty One.

When Abraham did things by his natural self, he forgot the source of his supply. In other words, he forgot God as his all-sufficient source of supply. Therefore, God came to Abraham and seemed to say, "I am the Mighty One with an udder. Are you lacking something? Why don't you come to this udder? Are you hungry or thirsty? Come to this udder. The source of your supply is not your natural self, but I, the Mighty One with an udder. I am the all-sufficient One who can supply everything you need for your living and everything you need for the fulfillment of My eternal purpose. I am the source. You are not the source. You should not live on your own or by yourself. You have to live by Me as the source of your supply."

In chapter seventeen it is not a matter of the Most High God or of the Possessor of heaven and earth as in chapter fourteen; it is absolutely a matter of the Mighty One with an udder. When Abraham was afraid of his enemies, God came in and said, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (15:1). At that time God seemed to say to Abraham, "You don't need to be afraid of your enemies. I am your shield and protection." But after Abraham had done something of his own natural self to fulfill God's purpose, doing something that was against God Himself, God came in and seemed to say, "I am El-Shaddai, the Mighty One with an udder. You should not do anything on your own or by yourself. You must realize that I am your supply." An udder does not give us weapons with which to kill people but milk that comes into us as our supply. God's supply must come into us as milk. God does not want you to energize your strength to produce a seed for the fulfillment of His purpose; He wants you to drink of His milk, to take something of Himself into you so that you might produce a seed. If we did not have the New Testament, we could never understand adequately this title of God, but now we can understand this title adequately. Today we may constantly live by taking the supply of the Mighty One with an udder. Are you receiving the supply from the divine udder day by day? This is not the protection of the shield against the enemy; it is the supply of the udder for producing the seed. This is not a matter of receiving a good job in place of a poor one but of rendering us the supply which, when taken into us, will become the very constituent to produce a child for the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose. What supply are you receiving day after day? We are receiving the supply from the Mighty One with His divine udder. Day by day we are under His udder and have the all-sufficient supply. God is such an all-sufficient Mighty One to us.

In 17:1 God told Abraham to walk before Him. What does this mean? It means to enjoy the Lord. Walking before the Lord means that we constantly enjoy Him and the supply of His udder. Will you walk before Him, enjoying the all-sufficient supply of His divine udder? To walk before God does not mean that we walk before Him fearfully as before the Holy One. No, the Mighty One with the all-sufficient udder supplies all of our daily need. As we are enjoying His supply, we are walking in His presence.

God also told Abraham to be perfect. What does it mean to be perfect? For Abraham to be imperfect did not mean that he was not good; it meant that he was short of God. None of us can be perfected without God. Without God, there is no perfection. Without Him we are always lacking something. Regardless of how perfect we may be in ourselves, we are still short of God and need to be perfected by and with God. If your home life is without God, your home life is not perfect. If God is not in your married life, your married life is imperfect. There is no perfection without God. Suppose your hand had only four fingers. Although it might be a good hand, since it did not have the thumb, it would not be perfect. Your hand would need to be perfected by the addition of the thumb. If one day the thumb would come to be added to your hand, your hand would be perfect. Hence, to be perfect means that we need God to be added to us. To walk before God means to enjoy Him, and to be perfected means to have God added to us. Have you ever realized that your perfection is God Himself? Have you ever realized that regardless of how good you are or how perfect you are in human eyes, without God you are short of something? We do not have the perfecting factor in ourselves, for the perfecting factor is God Himself. God must be added into our lives. If He is not added into our lives, our lives will remain imperfect.

Why did God require Abraham to be perfect? Because God was and still is the all-sufficient Mighty One. Since He is the all-sufficient Mighty One, there is no reason or excuse for us to be imperfect. Whatever we lack, God is. Do you lack strength? God is strength. Do you need energy? God is energy. God is whatever we need. Thus, God's all-sufficiency requires us to be perfect. There is no reason for us to be poor; we have a large deposit in the heavenly bank.

Practically speaking, to be perfect means that we do not rely upon the strength of the flesh but trust in the all-sufficient Mighty One for our life and work. We should not rely upon the exercise of our natural self or upon the energy of our flesh. We must always trust in God's all-sufficiency for everything. Many of us, for example, are troubled by our temper. Why do we lose our temper at certain times? Because at those times we do not trust in God. The losing of our temper should force us to learn one lesson—never to stay away from God but to trust in Him every moment. Do not try to overcome your temper. If you forget your temper and trust in God every moment, your temper will be overcome. Every imperfection is due to one thing: that we keep ourselves away from the all-sufficient Mighty One. When we keep ourselves away from Him, we are like an electrical appliance that will not work because it is cut off from the supply of electricity. We all must learn to keep ourselves constantly in God. This is the way to be perfect.

When as a young Christian I read 17:1, I realized that I was not perfect. I lacked kindness, humility, patience, love, and many other virtues and attributes. Therefore, in my prayer I made the decision that with the help of the Lord I would have love, patience, humility, kindness, and the other virtues that I lacked. But I must tell you that I never succeeded. Whenever I read 17:1 I could not understand what it meant to be perfect. Eventually I saw that the perfecting factor in our life is God Himself and that I needed to have God added into me. The most that we have is four fingers; we do not have the thumb. Regardless of how much we might train our four fingers to do things, they will still be imperfect because they are without the thumb. We need the thumb to be added to our hand to make it perfect.

c) The Changing of Name

Now we come to the changing of name. In 17:5 God said to Abraham, "Neither shall thy name anymore be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee." Abram means an exalted father, and Abraham means the father of a great multitude. Although Abraham was a high father, he was not the father of a multitude, the father of many nations. But in 17:5 his name was changed from exalted father to the father of a multitude. In Hebrew the name Abram is composed of just four letters represented by the English letters A-b-r-m. The name Abraham is composed with one additional letter—h. This indicates four plus one. Four is the number of the creature, and one is the number of the Creator. Hence, as four fingers plus one thumb makes a complete hand, so man plus God equals perfection. Four plus one equals five, the number of responsibility. Regardless of how good we may be as the number four, we are still short of the number one. In order to be the number five, bearing the responsibility to fulfill God's eternal purpose, God must be added to us. What was the significance of the changing of Abraham's name? It was that God was added into him. Before Genesis 17, Abraham was just Abram, a man who did not have God added to him. But in Genesis 17 the man, and not only his name, was changed by having God added into him. One unique letter was added to the four letters, and God was added into man. God is the perfecting factor. Without Him we are imperfect. We all need God to be added into us. This is perfection.

As the person is the reality of one's name, so the changing of Abraham's name signifies the changing of his person. His original name indicated that he was an exalted father. Now God changed his name to indicate that he would be the father of a great multitude. What is needed to fulfill God's eternal purpose is not an exalted father but a father of a great multitude, not an exalted individual but a multiplied person, a person with a great multitude as his multiplication. God needed a great multitude of people to fulfill His purpose, and for this He needed a producing father. Most Christians desire to be a person with exalted spirituality. The more they seek this kind of spirituality, the more they become barren and individualistic, producing no seed. But God needs us to be multiplied in producing seed, not exalted in seeking spirituality. For this we need the changing of name, the changing of our person. The exalted father has to be changed to the father of a great multitude. The exalted-spirituality-seeking person has to be changed to the multitude-producing person. This requires the termination of the spirituality-seeking self. Even this kind of self has to be terminated so that we may be a multiplied person, not an exalted one, for the fulfilling of God's purpose.

In 17:15 we see that Sarah's name was also changed. "And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be." Sarai means my princess and Sarah means princess. The word "my" before princess indicates narrowness, but princess by itself indicates broadness. Sarai's name was changed to Sarah because in a broad way, not in a narrow way, she was to be a mother of many nations. In 17:16 God said, "And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her." When God is added into us, we become wider and broader. Without God's being added into us, we are not only imperfect but also narrow. Although you may be a brother or sister, if you do not have God added into you, you are a narrow brother or sister. If you are a husband who does not have God added into you, you are a narrow husband. If you are a wife who does not have God added into you, you are a narrow wife. What can widen us? Only God Himself. If you are going to be a broadened person with a broadened view and with a broadened mind, heart, and spirit, you need God to enlarge you. Regardless of who we are, as long as we do not have God added into us, we always say things such as, "my interest," "my profit," "my future," "my growth in life," "my seeking of the Lord," "my function in the church meetings." Unless God enlarges us, we shall not care for others. Our name, which is "my princess," must be changed to "princess." We say, "This is my day, my house, my time, my this, and my that," because we are short of God, but once we have God added to us, we immediately become broadened. When we have God added into us, we shall not only become a father of a great multitude but also a princess of many nations for the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose. We all need such a change, a change which comes from God being added into us to broaden our narrow person.

We all need to be changed from "my princess" to "princess," transformed from our narrow concept of spirituality to a broadened and general spirituality that we may be no longer "my" princess but a "mother of nations," caring for others and having the seed for the fulfillment of God's purpose. This also requires the termination of our old and natural man so that we may be transformed into a new person, producing the seed, caring for many others, and enabling God's purpose to be fulfilled with a great multitude. For God's eternal purpose we need to be the "father of a great multitude" and the "mother of nations." We need to be transformed into a multiplied and multiplying person and into a broadened and general person.

d) The Covenant Confirmed with Circumcision

In order for us to have God added into us and to be broadened we need to be circumcised. The covenant that God made with Abraham in Genesis 15 was confirmed in Genesis 17 with circumcision. There was no need for God to confirm it again, for He had confirmed it once already, but it had to be confirmed from Abraham's side. While God was faithful to His covenant, Abraham was not because he had used his natural strength to produce Ishmael. Since Abraham's use of his natural energy with Hagar to produce Ishmael was the cause of the trouble, God confirmed His covenant by having Abraham circumcised (17:9-11, 13).

In the New Testament we can find out the significance of circumcision. The spiritual meaning of circumcision is to put off the flesh, to put off the self and the old man. Colossians 2:11-12 says, "In whom also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, buried together with Him in baptism, in whom also you were raised together through the faith of the operation of God, who raised Him from among the dead." Circumcision is a matter of putting off the flesh, the old man; it is not a matter of dealing with sin. In a strict sense, circumcision has nothing to do with the dealing with sin; it is a matter of being crucified and buried with Christ. Circumcision means to terminate your self, to terminate your flesh. Abraham exercised his flesh in Genesis 16, but here, in Genesis 17, God wanted his flesh to be cut off. In Genesis 16 he had

energized his natural strength, but in Genesis 17 his strength had to be terminated. This is circumcision.

The problem is the same today. As long as our natural strength remains, it is difficult for God to come in to be our everything for the fulfillment of His purpose. God wants to come into us to be everything to us, but our flesh, our natural being and strength, our old man and our old self, are a frustration to God's being everything to us. This self, this old man, must be terminated. It must be circumcised, that is, crucified. I want to tell you the good news that our old man has been crucified already (Rom. 6:6). With Abraham, it was to be crucified, but with us, it has been crucified already. We all must see this, reckon on it, and take it by faith. By faith we can declare that our flesh, our natural man with its strength, has been crucified. "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). We all need to live with the realization that the old man, the self, has been crucified. If we declare this and live according to it, then the God of resurrection immediately has the way to come into us and to be everything to us for the carrying out of His economy.

Circumcision is a sign, a seal, of justification by faith (Rom. 4:11). However, many Christians neglect this sign. Although they may realize and declare that they have been justified by faith, after having been justified by faith they do not have the sign of the termination of the self. How can you show people that you have been justified by God? You must live a life of the termination of the self. You must show that you are no longer living by yourself but that you are living by Christ. Then your living becomes a sign of your having been justified. To live a crucified life in the resurrection of Christ is a sign of our being justified. Suppose I, a saved person who has been justified by God, still live, act, and work by myself, doing everything by myself. If such is the case, it will be difficult for anyone to recognize that I am a justified person. People may even doubt that I am saved. But if I live a crucified life, putting myself aside and taking Christ as my life, no one could doubt that I have been justified by faith. Everyone would have to say, "Praise the Lord! There is no doubt that here is a brother who has been justified by God." The life of the termination of the self is a sign and a seal of our justification.

The confirmation of the covenant by circumcision concerned the seed and the land for the fulfillment of God's purpose (17:2-8). In order to fulfill God's eternal purpose that man express and represent Him, we need to have Christ as our seed and as our land. In order to have Christ as the seed and the land for the fulfillment of God's purpose, we need to be circumcised and to live a crucified life. Circumcision is for the fulfillment of God's purpose. When the flesh, the self, and the old man have been terminated, the door is open for God to come in and bring forth Isaac.

Among the Jews, circumcision was always practiced on the eighth day (17:12). The eighth day was the first day of a new week and denoted a new start, a new beginning in resurrection. Whenever we live a crucified life, we have a new beginning in resurrection. When we reject and deny our self and live a crucified life, we immediately have a new beginning in resurrection. Although you might have been married for many years, if today you begin to live a crucified life, you will have a new beginning in resurrection in your marriage, and your marriage will be renewed. Whenever there is circumcision there is the eighth day. In other words, whenever we live a crucified life, we are in resurrection.

All of the uncircumcised people were cut off from this covenant. In 17:14 God said to Abraham, "And the uncircumcised man-child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant." This is true today. If we do not live a crucified life, we are cut off from Christ, from the church life, and from the supply of the divine udder. Whenever we are unwilling to be circumcised, we are finished with the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose. Today our enjoying God, our living by Christ, and our practicing the church life all depend upon one thing—upon circumcision, upon living a crucified life.

e) The Birth of Isaac Promised

In 17:15-21 we see the birth of Isaac promised more definitely than ever before. We know that it is more definite because the name Isaac was mentioned and his mother was designated. In the foregoing chapters, God said that He would give Abraham a seed and that Abraham would bring forth the seed, but God did not mention that the seed would be out of Sarah. Neither did He say that the seed would be named Isaac. But in these verses we see that God promised in a definite way that the seed would be Isaac and that Isaac would be born of Sarah.

(1) After Abraham Had Become as Old as Dead
and Sarah Had Become out of Function

The promise of the birth of the seed was confirmed definitely at the time when Abraham was as old as dead and Sarah was out of function. Perhaps Abraham said to Sarah, "Sarah, I am a hundred years old and you are ninety. I am dying and you are out of function. We both have become nothing and we can do nothing." It is wonderful to become nothing, for then the Mighty One with an udder can come in to do everything for us. I would like to be a hundred years of age and become nothing. Becoming nothing would afford the Almighty One, the all-sufficient One, the best opportunity to feed me and to supply me with whatever He likes. Even today there are times when God would like to give me a new portion of milk, and I say, "No, I still have some way, some energy, some strength." We all need to become a hundred years of age. But do not try to act as if you are already a hundred years of age. After reading this message telling you that you need to be a hundred years of age and become nothing, you may pretend to be a hundred years of age. But you cannot become nothing overnight. The Lord knows how much we still are. Nevertheless, the principle is that we all need to become nothing so that the all-sufficient Mighty One may come in to be our everything with His all-sufficient udder to render us the supply that we need.

(2) Not by Abraham's Natural Strength
but by God's Visitation

After Abraham and Sarah had become nothing, God promised that Isaac would be born of Sarah (17:16, 19, 21). This means that the birth of Isaac was not the result of Abraham and Sarah's energy but that it was absolutely the result of God's gracious visitation. In 18:10, 14 we see clearly that the birth of Isaac was due to God's return to Abraham at the time of life. His gracious visitation to Abraham included His feeding and supplying him with all that He was. God had to be the udder supplying the milk that Abraham needed to bring forth Isaac. Isaac was not produced by any element in Abraham's natural being; he was brought forth by God's all-sufficient supply out of the divine udder.

Ishmael, the seed produced by the flesh, was rejected by God (17:18; 21:10). Whatever we do by our ability or by our natural self will always be rejected by God. Although you may do good by keeping the law, that will be rejected by God. Whatever we live, do, and work by the natural self and the old man will be altogether rejected. Not many Christians realize that even their natural goodness is rejected by God. Whatever we do by our natural self, natural strength, natural ability, or natural man, regardless of whether it is good or bad, will be rejected by God.

Only Isaac, the seed brought forth by God's grace, by the supply out of the divine udder, was established for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose (17:19, 21; 21:12; Rom. 9:7-9). God will only honor what is out of Him because only the seed that is produced out of Him by the supply of His grace can fulfill His purpose. This means God will only honor Christ, not anything out of our self, our natural man. Only the Christ whom we experience of the divine udder as our supply of grace can accomplish God's purpose. Only this Christ will be established as the real seed for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Our Ishmael was rejected, but our Isaac, Christ, has been and will be established in God's economy.

Now we can see what grace is. Grace means that God transmits some element out of His being into us to be our supply and that this supply becomes the very element by which we bring forth Isaac for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. After Abraham was called, he learned to live by faith in God for his existence. Then, beginning with Genesis 15, God began to train him in the matter of knowing grace for the fulfillment of God's purpose. We have seen this clearly in chapters fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen. Our self, flesh, natural strength, natural man, and old man must be terminated so that we might take God as our supply and that some of God's divine being might be wrought into us to be the element to produce Isaac for the fulfillment of God's promise. This is grace.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FORTY-EIGHT

KNOWING GRACE FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PURPOSE THE UNVEILING OF THE DIVINE TITLE AND THE CHANGING OF HUMAN NAMES FOR THE FULFILLING OF GOD'S PURPOSE

If we are to understand Genesis 17, we must know what God's purpose is. God's purpose, which He made in eternity past, is to express Himself through a body of people on earth. In order to have a collective people as His expression, God created the universe and within the universe, as its center, He created man in His image with the intention that man would express Him and represent Him so that He may have a dominion on earth as His kingdom. This was God's purpose with Adam and with the children of Israel in the past, it is His purpose with the church today, and it shall be His purpose in the millennium and throughout eternity. Throughout all the ages, God's purpose has remained the same: to have Himself expressed and represented by man on earth.

For the fulfillment of His purpose, God needs a people. If God can gain a people, He will be able to accomplish His purpose, but if He cannot gain a people, He will be defeated. But our God cannot be defeated! God created Adam, and Adam became a failure. Then God called Abraham to be the head of a new race. Although God called only one person, Abraham, this person had to become a race so that God could be expressed and represented on earth. God called Abraham for this purpose. It is impossible for an individual to fulfill God's purpose, for what God needs is not just an individual but a people. One Abraham must be multiplied into a great many Abrahams. But this cannot be accomplished according to man's natural understanding or by his natural ability, strength, or being.

*5) The Unveiling of the Divine Title
and the Changing of Human Names
for the Fulfilling of God's Purpose*

a) God's Desire to Work Himself into Man

The Bible reveals that God's way to express Himself is to work Himself into man. God's way is extraordinary. Although God wants us to do things for Him, His desire is not that we do anything but that He come into us to do everything through us for Himself. His desire is to work Himself into us, making Him one with us and us one with Him. But no one is willing for God to do this. Everyone seems to say, "O Lord, if You ask me to do something, I'll do it for You, but I cannot bear to have You come into me to annul me and dethrone me. When I do something for You, I like to do it by myself." Nevertheless, God would say, "Before you do anything for Me, I must work Myself into you. By coming into you, I will have you crucified and then I will make you alive by, with, and for Me. Are you willing for this?" Abraham did not wait for God to do this, but, as Genesis 16 reveals, he acted on his own to bring forth a seed.

b) The Unveiling of the Divine Title

In 17:1 God came in to unveil His divine title, unveiling what He, the very God, is. To unveil a name is to unveil a person, for a name always represents a person. Since God's divine title denotes His divine Person, the unveiling of the divine title is actually the revelation of the divine Person. In 1:1 God was unveiled as Elohim, which primarily means the Mighty One, the Strong One, and which is mainly related to God's creation. In Genesis 2 God was revealed as Jehovah, the great I Am. The name Jehovah means "I Am that I Am," implying that God is the self-existent and ever-existing One. This title of Jehovah refers to God's relationship with man. Furthermore, God revealed to Abraham that He was the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth (14:22). This is mainly related to God's care for His people's existence. But now in chapter seventeen, God comes in to unveil Himself further, revealing Himself to Abraham as El-Shaddai, the all-sufficient Mighty One with an udder.

God's all-sufficiency is in His divine udder. Perhaps some readers are unhappy with the use of the word udder and prefer that we use the word breast. However, if we were to use the word breast, most people would associate it with the matter of love. But the divine

title in 17:1 denotes that God is the rich source of supply as grace to His people for them to fulfill His purpose. Although He wants us to fulfill His purpose, He does not need anything from us. He wants to be our supply. Our God has an all-sufficient source of supply, and this source is likened to an udder. This is the meaning implied in the title El-Shaddai. Everything that is supplied to us from the udder of a cow comes into us and even becomes our constituent. All of the elements and ingredients of the riches of the milk we drink become our constituent, our organic tissue. It seemed that God was saying to Abraham, "You have known Me as the Most High God. Although that is wonderful, it is no longer adequate. I am not only the Most High God to you objectively, but I want to be the divine milk to you subjectively. I must be the One that you drink into your being."

Our mind may be bothered at the thought of such a divine drinking. The first time that I gave a message on the eating of Jesus was in 1958. After that message, a very highly educated brother said to me, "Brother Lee, that message was very good, but the term 'eating Jesus' is too wild." I replied, "Brother, I am not the first one to use this term. In John 6:35 and 57 the Lord Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life' and 'He who eats Me shall also live because of Me.'" Are you troubled by the likening of God's rich breast to the udder of a cow? Although I would prefer to liken God to a nice, tender, gentle mother with a loving breast, it is more meaningful to liken God to a cow with a rich udder, as the Scripture implies. We all have been positioned under this divine udder.

Many verses in the Bible give us the ground to speak of God in this way. Exodus 3:8 says, "I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey." The good land is a type of the all-inclusive Christ. With this Christ there is the flowing of milk. Before the children of Israel came into the good land to drink of the milk, they drank of the water that flowed from the riven rock which also was Christ (Exo. 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4). In Revelation 22 we see that in the New Jerusalem there will be a river flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. If we put all of these verses together, we can see that our God today is One out of whom something is flowing to quench, supply, and satisfy us. Regardless of whether we call it milk or living water, it flows out of God's being to supply us. Hence, 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that we have all been made to drink of one Spirit, who is God Himself (John 4:24). When we are drinking of the Spirit, we are drinking of God. Our God is so rich that one type or symbol cannot give us a complete understanding of Him, so the Bible uses different types and symbols to reveal the various aspects of His riches. The milk and the living water both reveal how rich God is to us. The principle in each case is the same: that the riches of His divine being are flowing out to be our supply as grace to us for us to fulfill His purpose. We all must drink of the rich supply that flows out from our God that we may be able to fulfill the divine purpose.

None of us is qualified to fulfill God's purpose. Although religion tells us that we must do certain things for God, what God wants us to do is to take Him in as our supply so that He may become our constituent and that we may become one with Him. The Bible reveals that God's intention is to get into us and that we must eat and drink of Him, taking something of Himself into our being. As we take into our being some element of His divine being, partaking of His divine nature, this divine element will work in and through us to fulfill His purpose.

At the time of Genesis 17, God needed to reveal this divine title of His to Abraham. In Genesis 16 Abraham did something not for his own purpose but for the fulfillment of God's purpose. However, what Abraham did for the fulfilling of God's purpose was accomplished by his natural being and natural strength. Since he did something for God by his natural strength, God was displeased and disappeared from him for thirteen years. After that long absence, God came in and seemed to say, "Abraham, you must know that I am the all-sufficient One with an udder. You must drink of the supply of this udder and not do anything for Me by your natural strength or natural ability. Doing something for Me by your natural strength is an insult to Me. I don't want anything from you. I want you and I need you, but I do not want you to use your natural strength and natural ability to bring forth the promised seed. You must bring forth a seed by My supply. Stop using your strength, deny your natural being, and put aside your natural ability. Since I am the all-sufficient Mighty One, you should not do anything by yourself or apart from Me. Apart from Me, it is impossible for you to fulfill My purpose because apart from Me you can do nothing for My economy. Abraham, in order to fulfill My purpose, you must drink of the supply out of My udder and take Me in. I am not here now as the Most High God or as the Possessor of heaven and earth. You have learned that already. I am now here before you as El-Shaddai, the all-sufficient Mighty One with an udder out of which is flowing a rich supply for you. Abraham, you must walk before Me. This means that you must drink of My udder and live by Me." The Divine Word is deep, and we cannot understand it superficially. We must dive into it before we can see what is revealed there. How good it is that God revealed Himself to Abraham as the Mighty One with an udder full of the all-sufficient supply for His people to fulfill His purpose.

c) The Changing of Human Names

Immediately after the divine title was revealed to Abraham, God told him that his name was to be changed (17:5). This is very meaningful. Not only must God's title be unveiled to us, but our names need to be changed, meaning that we need to be changed. The name Abram has to be changed to Abraham. As we pointed out in the previous message, Abram means exalted father and Abraham means the father of a great multitude, that is, a multiplied father, "a father of many nations." If you had a choice between being highly exalted and being multiplied, which would you choose? Instead of being highly exalted to the heavens, would you choose to be flattened out and multiplied? According to our natural concept, we would all desire to be exalted rather than multiplied. It is troublesome to be multiplied, for the more children we have, the more problems we have. Everyone likes to be exalted; however, God does not want to exalt us but to multiply us, making us a father of a great multitude. Are you willing to be multiplied?

It is impossible for an exalted father, who is only good for exhibition, to fulfill God's purpose. For the fulfillment of God's purpose, there must be a multitude. So we need to be multiplied, not exalted. Today most Christians want to be spiritual giants, and religion encourages them in this way. When I was young, I was taught and encouraged to be a spiritual giant, but I was never told that I needed to be multiplied. While our natural tendency is to be exalted, God wants to change our name from the father of exaltation to the father of multiplication. How our concept needs to be changed! What is the multitude that God wants? It is the church, a corporate people. God needs the church, the multitude. If you remain by yourself, God has no way of fulfilling His purpose through you. For the sake of the fulfillment of His purpose, we need to forget our old name and be changed from being exalted to being multiplied. To be multiplied is for the fulfilling of God's purpose, not for anything else. It is not merely for the increase or for the expansion of our work; it is for God to be expressed and represented on the earth.

To change the name is to change the person. It is not that originally I am a frog and that now you change my name to fish. Although

you may call me a fish, I am still a frog. The title has been changed, but the person has not. The proper changing of the name is the changing of the person. When our person has been changed, the change of title follows.

In the church life today we do not need any exalted fathers; we need many multiplied fathers. This is why the Lord has led us to have the communal life in so many homes. It is not easy for a family to live together with several young people because we all like to have our privacy and stay by ourselves. If the husbands are honest, sometimes even living with their wives is too much for them, and they would prefer to be left alone. But if we all stayed in private, how could we take care of the young ones? The changing of names helps the communal life. Why does the increase take place so slowly in the proper church life? Simply because we lack the fatherhood and because there are not enough homes to take care of the new ones. We need the multiplied fathers' homes to take care of the multitude.

One of the qualifications of an elder is hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2). If you are not hospitable, meaning that you are unwilling to take care of others but only care to be individually holy, you are not qualified to be an elder. If we are going to be hospitable, our name must be changed from the father of exaltation to the father of multiplication. Only a multiplied father is hospitable. The more we take care of others, the better it is for the church life. This is the real changing of names and the real changing of our person.

Not only Abraham's name was to be changed but also Sarah's. The name Sarai, which means my princess, has to be changed to Sarah, which means princess. "My princess" has to be changed to "princess," to "a mother of nations." Your particular character has to be changed into a general one so that you can be a mother of nations and take care of many people.

While every brother likes to be an exalted father, every sister wants to be a "my princess." When our name is Sarai we say, "My husband, my home, my day, my children, my position, my function in the meetings, my everything." Although the sisters may say "my princess," God wants them simply to become "princess" without any "my," to be general, not particular. We should not be exalted but multiplied, not particular but general. Particularity always goes with exaltation; they make a good couple. In the church life, none of us should be for exaltation or in particularity. We all have to be multiplied and general, to be a "father of nations" or a "mother of nations" (17:5, 16).

The church life depends a great deal upon the changing of names. If the brothers still insist on being exalted and if the sisters still prefer to be particular, how could we have the church life? We could only have a religion with a Sunday morning service and come together once a week, greet one another, and then go our separate ways until the next Sunday. In order to have the church life, there must be a great multitude of people that has been built up and compacted together, a people who truly know and practice the communal life. When the brothers no longer want to be exalted but multiplied and the sisters no longer want to be particular but general, then we shall be able to live together and have the proper church life and the multitude for the fulfilling of God's purpose. Then we shall live together day by day and be a churching people all the time. Nearly every time will be a meeting time. We shall be meeting together constantly because no one will want to be exalted but multiplied and because no one will want to be particular but general. This is not merely a doctrine. The changing of names is not only a change of term but a change of our being, of our person. Thus, we may change the title of this message to "the unveiling of the divine Being and the changing of the human person for the fulfilling of God's purpose." Although God's divine being has been unveiled, if we remain the same, His being unveiled will not profit us. His unveiling depends upon our changing. We need to be changed not only in name but also in person. Then we can enjoy the unveiled God and drink at His rich udder.

The changing of names in the sense of changing the person is also seen in the case of Jacob and Peter. For the fulfilling of God's purpose, Jacob's name was changed to Israel (Gen. 32:27-28); a heel-holder, a supplanter (Jacob), was changed into a prince of God (Israel). If Jacob had remained a supplanter, he could never have been used by God in the fulfillment of the divine purpose. Jacob had to be changed into a prince of God. For the building of the church, Peter's name, Simon, was changed to Cephas, which means a stone (John 1:42). Peter's natural being was muddy, and he had to be transformed into a stone, even a precious stone, for God's building (1 Pet. 2:5) to fulfill the divine purpose.

*d) The Sufficient Grace
for Fulfilling God's Purpose*

By the Lord's mercy, we have no confidence in ourselves or in anyone else. We do not have confidence in people because we have learned that no one is qualified to fulfill God's purpose. Whatever we can produce is just an Ishmael. The proper church life is not concerned with anything human or natural. The proper church life is that which carries out God's eternal purpose through being supplied with the riches of God Himself. Whatever we are able to do means nothing in the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose. All that is needed for the fulfillment of God's purpose is the supply of the divine udder. So we must drop ourselves, depreciate our natural strength and ability, and walk before God, drinking of the riches of His udder. If we do this, spontaneously some element of His divine being will be wrought into us to produce the seed for the fulfillment of His purpose. This is the proper church life.

We have seen that both the seed and the land are Christ. Now we need to see that the seed and the land are not only Christ but also we. After drinking of God's rich supply, we all shall become the seed and the land. Eventually, the seed becomes the land. For the fulfilling of His purpose, God needs a people to possess the land. In that land, God will have a kingdom to be built up with His habitation for His name. This is God's purpose. Since we are the seed, the people to fulfill God's purpose, we, the seed, shall also become the land. Among and within us God has His dominion, and in this dominion God has a kingdom in which He may build up His habitation.

We become the seed and the land by enjoying the riches of God and by having God wrought into us. God and we, we and God, are one in producing the seed and possessing the land. This is something heavenly on earth. It is Bethel, the gate of heaven, with the heavenly ladder joining earth to heaven and bringing heaven down to earth. Here we have God and man, man and God, joined together to be a mutual habitation. How is this fulfilled? By the unveiling of the divine Being and the changing of the human person. Once we have been changed, then we are qualified to enjoy the unveiled God as our grace. God has been unveiled, but this unveiled God needs the changed person. Regardless of who or what we are, we all need to be changed from having natural character to having spiritual character, changed from our source to the divine udder for the supply we need to fulfill the divine purpose. We need to forget ourselves, cease from our natural source of supply, walk before God, and drink of His udder all day long. Then the riches of the

unveiled divine Being will be wrought into our human being as the all-sufficient grace for us to fulfill the divine purpose. The Apostle Paul labored more abundantly than all the apostles; yet it was not he but the grace of God that was with him. By the grace of God he was what he was (1 Cor. 15:10). He fulfilled God's purpose in his ministry by enjoying the Lord's sufficient grace (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul surely was drinking of the divine udder to receive the sufficient supply of grace. He did not exercise his natural strength to produce Ishmaels but enjoyed the rich supply of the sufficient grace to bring forth many Isaacs. He lived and worked in the way of "no longer I who live, but Christ" (Gal. 2:20). The real changing of a name is the change from I to Christ—El-Shaddai, the all-sufficient grace Supplier. Only Christ, not I, can fulfill God's purpose.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FORTY-NINE

KNOWING GRACE FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PURPOSE CIRCUMCISION FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PURPOSE

In the book of Genesis, nearly all the divine truths are sown as seeds. In this message we come to a great and basic truth in the holy Word that is sown as a seed in Genesis 17—circumcision.

In order to understand circumcision, we need to see two main points of the divine revelation unfolded in the Bible. The first is that God's eternal purpose is to have Himself expressed and represented by man on earth. This matter is revealed throughout the whole Bible, from the first chapter of Genesis through the last chapter of Revelation. The second point concerns God's way of accomplishing His purpose. God's way to fulfill His purpose is to work Himself into man as man's life and everything so that man may become His expression and representation. The accomplishment of God's purpose does not depend upon what we can do but upon God's working Himself into us. If we see these two points, then we can understand the basic truths in the Bible.

For the fulfillment of His divine purpose, God called Abraham out of Chaldea, a land of demons and idolatry. As we have seen, Abraham did not give a clear-cut answer to God's call but dragged his feet through mud and water. His father brought him to Haran, the half-way place. By God's mercy, Abraham answered God's call nearly in a full way at Haran, crossed the great river, and came to the very place where God wanted him to be. That place was close to the sinful city of Sodom. It was not easy for Abraham to remain in the place where God wanted him to be and not long afterward he drifted down to Egypt. But by God's sovereignty, Abraham, who had left demonic Chaldea, had forsaken halfway Haran, and had overcome sinful Sodom, was delivered out of worldly Egypt and was brought back to the place of God's choosing.

We need to recall the names of three very important persons related to Abraham—Lot, Eliezer, and Hagar. Abraham took Lot with him when he left Haran, and he probably acquired Eliezer at Damascus and Hagar in Egypt. None of these three was a help to Abraham; each one was a problem. God rejected all three of these persons. Abraham used his natural strength to coordinate with Hagar to produce his masterpiece—Ishmael. But Ishmael was absolutely rejected by God.

6) Circumcision for the Fulfillment of God's Purpose

With this as the background, we come now to the matter of circumcision (17:9-14). At the time of Genesis 17, Abraham had been robbed of all the places where he had been and of all the important persons he had acquired. Chaldea and Haran were past, and he had nothing to do with Egypt. Although he was in the land that God had promised to give him, it had not yet been given to him. Thus, Abraham did not have Chaldea, Haran, Egypt, Sodom, or a portion of the promised land. Furthermore, Lot had separated from him, and both Eliezer and Ishmael had been rejected by God. Abraham was left alone with Sarah. They were two old people who had gained nothing and who were able to do nothing. Perhaps Abraham looked at Sarah and said, "What shall we do? We don't have anything and we can't do anything." At that juncture God came in, revealing Himself to Abraham as El-Shaddai, the all-sufficient Mighty One. It was then that God told Abraham that his name had to be changed from Abram to Abraham and that his wife's name had to be changed from Sarai to Sarah. After that, God told Abraham that he had to be circumcised. Abraham had been robbed of every place and every person. The only thing that still remained with him was himself. God came in to deal with Abraham's self, with his flesh, natural strength, and natural ability. This self, the flesh and natural strength, had to be cut off, circumcised. If we had been Abraham, we probably would have said, "God, don't You know that You have robbed me of so much? There is no one like me on the whole earth. Everyone else has a place of his own, but I have nothing. What will You do now—get rid of me?" God might have answered, "Abraham, you are right. I have robbed you of Chaldea, Haran, Egypt, Lot, Eliezer, Hagar, and Ishmael. I will not rob you anymore, but I will cut you. What you have acquired has been taken from you, and what you are must now be cut." This is circumcision.

Why is there the need of circumcision? On the one hand, God needs man for the fulfillment of His purpose. On the other hand, God does not want anything of man. However, none of the called ones would say, "God, I want to be for You, but I don't want anything of me to be for You. I am willing for You to take all that I have and terminate all that I am." On the contrary, everyone says, "Praise the Lord that He has called me. From now on, whatever I have and whatever I am will be for Him." Consider the example of Peter. For three and a half years the Lord told His disciples that they had to love Him and follow Him. But none of the disciples understood that the Lord did not want anything of them. When the Lord told the disciples that they all would be offended because of Him, Peter said, "If all shall be stumbled in You, I will never be stumbled," and "Even if I must die with You, I will by no means deny You" (Matt. 26:33, 35). But the Lord told Peter, "Truly I say to you, that this night, before a cock crows, you will deny Me three times" (Matt. 26:34). The Lord seemed to be saying to Peter, "Peter, don't boast. You have nothing to boast in. Tonight you will deny Me three times." Peter did deny the Lord three times, and those denials were his actual and practical circumcision. The proud, self-confident Peter was cut into pieces by the circumcising knife of his denial of the Lord.

We all must see that although God does need us for His recovery, He does not want anything of us. It is difficult for us to realize this. We either stay away from the Lord or we come to Him with everything that we have. A Japanese brother may say, "We Japanese are

the most patient people on earth. I shall serve the Lord with my Japanese patience." But the Lord does not need this kind of patience. Some sisters may say, "The Lord certainly needs us sisters, and we are willing to be for Him. As sisters, we are not rough like the brothers; we are quite fine. In the church life, our fineness will be for the Lord." Sisters, it is absolutely right for you to be for the Lord, but it is absolutely wrong that anything of yourselves be for Him. Since God does not want anything of us, we all need to be circumcised.

The seed of circumcision was not sown in Genesis 12 or 15 but in Genesis 17, after Abraham had been robbed of so much. Then God appeared to Abraham again, unveiled Himself as the all-sufficient Mighty One with an udder, and told Abraham to change his name. Abraham had to have a radical change. God seemed to say, "Abraham, you must now be circumcised. If you are not circumcised, there is no way for Me to fulfill My purpose through you. In order to have a people for My purpose, there must be the seed. Out of that seed will come the people who will possess the land wherein I shall have dominion, build My temple for My expression, and find rest. This is My purpose. But for the fulfillment of My purpose, I don't need anything of you. I will do everything for you and be everything to you. This is why I have taken every place and everyone away from you. Now I am asking you to agree with Me and cooperate with Me to get rid of yourself. I want your flesh to be cut off, but I don't want to do it directly. I want you to do it for Me. I want you to cut off your flesh. Are you willing to cooperate with Me?" We must not take this as a doctrinal teaching or as an exposition of the stories in the Bible. We all must realize that our need today is to have ourselves circumcised.

How grateful I am to the Lord that so many among us have left Chaldea and Haran and do not care for Sodom or Egypt, but remain in the very place where the Lord's recovery is. But how can the Lord have the seed? How can He take possession of the land so that He may have the proper church life for His dwelling place, dominion, satisfaction, and rest? It is not by our doing anything for Him. It is only by the way of His robbing us of so many things. Our intelligence, wisdom, natural ability, natural strength, and all that we are in our natural being must be taken away by the Lord. Do you agree with this? If you do, then you must pick up the circumcising knife and cut your flesh, your natural being. This is not a matter of overcoming sin or the world; it is a matter of terminating yourself so that the all-sufficient One may have a way to come in to be your life, your everything, and even your very self. This is circumcision. May the Spirit speak this word into us all.

The greatest frustration to the Lord's move in His recovery of the church life is our natural ability. What frustrates the Lord's move is not what we cannot do; it is what we can do. Abraham's exercise of his natural strength kept God away from him for thirteen years. What a frustration that was! Although Abraham had been robbed of so much, he still had his flesh, natural ability, and natural strength. It was by and with his flesh that he produced Ishmael with Hagar. By the time of Genesis 17 the time was ripe for God to touch the frustrating element of Abraham's flesh. God seemed to say, "Abraham, I have taken so much away from you. Only one thing is left to frustrate My gracious work in you—your flesh. I want to take this away from you, but since it is such a subjective matter in your being, I will not force you. I want you to cooperate with Me to cut yourself, to circumcise yourself for Me. Abraham, nothing that you can do by yourself will ever please Me. It can only offend and insult Me. As long as your natural strength remains, I have no way to come into you and bring forth Isaac. Abraham, your natural strength, your flesh, must be cut off." This matter of circumcision in Genesis 17 is most crucial.

What is the meaning of circumcision? It is to get rid of yourself. God has a purpose and He has the called ones, but there is a frustration to His coming in to bring forth the seed—our flesh. Many among us have come to the crucial point of dealing with the flesh. Throughout the years, we have been robbed of so many things, but our flesh, our natural strength, our natural ability may still remain. If we keep using our flesh, Isaac cannot be brought forth from us or even be conceived in us. Our need, then, is to be circumcised and to terminate the self, the flesh. This is what the Bible calls circumcision.

a) The Significance of Circumcision

(1) To Put off Our Flesh

What is the significance of circumcision? Firstly, it is to put off our flesh (Col. 2:11, 13a; Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4a; Acts 7:51). Many Christians today talk about the overcoming of sin, but that is not the basic dealing. The basic dealing is to put off the flesh. The flesh does include the sinful flesh. However, in the Bible, the flesh includes much more than this, for it also includes our natural strength, ability, power, and talents. Moreover, the flesh includes our natural man, the ego, the "I." Hence, to put off the flesh means to put off the very "I"; it means to terminate the self.

Many years ago I was seeking for the overcoming of sin, but I was only partially successful until I saw that my need was not to overcome sin but to terminate myself. I began to see that once I was terminated everything would be all right. This is why Paul said that he who has died is free from sin (Rom. 6:7). The more we try to overcome sin, the more we are involved with and troubled by it. The best way to overcome sin is to be dead and buried. Then sin will have nothing to do with us. Thus, the basic dealing in the Bible is not to overcome sin but to terminate ourselves.

Although the book of Genesis contains nearly all the seeds of the biblical truths, it does not contain the seed of the overcoming of sin. The real dealing with sin is not to overcome it but to get rid of ourselves, to circumcise ourselves. Once we have been circumcised and have ourselves terminated, we shall have no problem with sin. If you are still trying to overcome sin, it means that you are still living. If you terminate yourself, you will be through with sin. Therefore, it is not a matter of dealing with sin or of trying to overcome it; it is a matter of terminating ourselves. This is the negative significance of circumcision.

(2) To Bring Us into Resurrection

The positive significance of circumcision is to bring us into resurrection (Col. 2:12). Circumcision was always performed on the eighth day (17:12). In figure, the number eight signifies resurrection. This means that we cannot have circumcision without resurrection. Circumcision must be in resurrection, and it will always usher us into resurrection, just as death ushers people into resurrection. On the one hand, we have been crucified with Christ and have been buried with Him. On the other hand, this crucifixion and burial will usher us into His resurrection. When we have been terminated and ushered into resurrection, we become a new person. We are still we, but we are now another person because we have another life, nature, and constitution. We are people in resurrection. Only by being in resurrection are we able to fulfill God's eternal purpose. In our natural strength, we can do nothing to please God or to fulfill

His purpose. Our self and our natural strength must be cut off in circumcision. Then in resurrection we shall become another person.

(3) Equal to Baptism

Circumcision in the Old Testament is the equivalent of baptism in the New Testament (Col. 2:11-12). Both baptism and circumcision have the same purpose—to terminate our natural being and bring us into resurrection. Why are we baptized after believing in the Lord Jesus? Because we realize that our old man has been crucified with Him and that we must be buried so that we may be one with Him in His resurrection. Hence, Abraham's circumcision has the same significance as our baptism. In both circumcision and baptism the principle is the same. Although Abraham was justified in Genesis 15, he was circumcised in Genesis 17. As circumcision was the sign of Abraham's being justified, so baptism is the mark of our being saved. How can we prove that we have been saved? By living a life of baptism, a life of one who has been crucified, buried, and resurrected. If we live such a life, everyone will be able to see upon us the mark of our salvation.

(4) Corresponding to the Changing of Human Names

Circumcision corresponds to the changing of human names (17:5-6, 15-16). As we have seen, to change the name is to change the person. When Abraham's name was changed, his person was changed also. This was especially true of Jacob. When Jacob's name was changed to Israel, his person was changed (32:27-28). This change of name can only be accomplished through circumcision, through having ourselves terminated and ushered into resurrection. Then we are no longer a natural person but a resurrected person. Being terminated and ushered into resurrection is the real changing of a person. Hence, circumcision corresponds to the changing of names. Now we can understand why the changing of names and circumcision are both revealed in the same chapter. These two things are actually one. The changing of names and circumcision both mean to terminate our old being and to bring us into resurrection so that we may be another person.

b) *Not Outwardly in the Flesh, in the Letter,
but Inwardly of the Heart, in the Spirit*

Romans 2:28-29 says that circumcision is not "outward in the flesh," but "of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter." Circumcision is not an outward matter; it is an inward one (Phil. 3:3). The same is true of baptism. Baptism should not just be a form; it must be an inward reality. Let me tell you a story that I heard more than forty years ago. In Central America, the Catholic Church accepted and baptized as members many people who were not saved. One day, a certain priest sprinkled a few drops of water on a boy's head and changed his name to John. At that time, the Catholic Church insisted that on Fridays its people eat only fish, not meat. One Friday, this John had only meat to eat. Since the priest had sprinkled water on his head and had changed his name to John, he thought that he could do the same to the meat. Therefore, he sprinkled water on it and called the meat fish. He then proceeded to cook the meat by boiling it. As he was boiling the meat, the priest came by. Smelling the aroma of boiling meat, he was angry with John and asked him what he was doing. John replied, "I am doing nothing wrong. This is not meat; it is fish. Don't you remember sprinkling water on me and changing my name to John? I followed your way and sprinkled water on the meat and called it fish." This is not real baptism nor the genuine changing of names. Baptism must be an inward reality in the spirit, not an outward form of sprinkling a few drops of water on a person's head.

c) *The Circumcision of Christ*

Colossians 2:11 speaks of "the circumcision of Christ." Real circumcision is in Christ. The circumcision of Christ, like baptism, means to terminate our old being and to make us a new creation, a new person. Galatians 6:15 says, "For neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." The book of Colossians reveals that Christ is our eternal portion (1:12), our life (3:4), and our hope of glory (1:27), and that we must live by Him as the seed and walk in Him as the land (2:6). If we are to walk in Christ, we must not be distracted by other things. The way to live by Christ and walk in Christ is to be buried with Him. We who have been buried with Christ have been brought into His resurrection, not by our effort but by the operation of God, which is carried out by the Spirit of God. When we realize that we have been terminated with Christ, buried with Him, and ushered into His resurrection, the indwelling Spirit will honor our realization with an operation, minister the riches of Christ into us, and make us a person in resurrection. This is not a matter of mere teaching; it is the operation of God, the exercise of the living Spirit within us. This is the circumcision of Christ.

Colossians 3:9-10 tells us that we have put off the old man and have put on the new man. This is the real changing of names, the true significance of circumcision, and the genuine experience of baptism. To circumcise the flesh is to put off the old man and to put on the new man. Then as the new man, we shall have the seed for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Moreover, when we are in the new man, we are in the land, the church. This is altogether a matter of the experience of Christ. When we see that we have already been terminated with Christ and ushered into His resurrection, the indwelling Spirit will honor this by operating within us so that we can put off the old man and put on the new man. In this way, God has the seed and the land for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose.

d) *Not I, but Christ*

Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." The real changing of names is the change from I to Christ. This is the significance of circumcision and the meaning of baptism. The circumcision of Christ works out one thing—the change from I to Christ. Then it is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me.

e) *Not I, but the Grace of God*

Eventually, the "not I, but Christ" becomes "not I, but the grace of God" (1 Cor. 15:10). The Apostle Paul said that he labored more than the other apostles; yet it was not he, but the grace of God. What is grace? As we have seen, grace is God coming to us to be everything for us.

In Genesis 18:10 and 14 we find a very strange saying: "At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." What does this mean? There was no need for God to come in order for Sarah to have a son. If we had been Abraham, we probably would have said, "Lord, You don't need to do that much. You can simply stay in heaven and say a word, and

Sarah will have a son." But the Lord said that the birth of Isaac would be His coming, His arrival. It seems that the coming of God was very nearly the birth of Isaac. God seemed to be saying, "The delivery of Isaac will be My arrival. Isaac will not be out of you, but out of My coming. When I return to you, Sarah will have a son. My coming will be the birth of Isaac." I am not saying that Isaac is God or that God is Isaac, but I do say that it appears that the return of God nearly was the birth of Isaac. Isaac was an unusual person. Although he was a human being, his birth was the result of a divine visitation. What was that divine visitation? It was grace. Hence, both Abraham and Sarah could say, "It is not I, but the grace of God."

God called the time of Isaac's birth the appointed time. The appointment was made in 17:21, when God said, "My covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year." God called that appointed time the time of life, saying that according to the time of life He would return and Sarah would have a son. This is very meaningful. Everything we do must be according to the time of life and by God's visitation. The seed that we bring forth must be the coming of the Lord in His visitation of grace. This visitation of grace is the birth of Isaac. This proves that only the very Christ whom God has wrought into our being can be the seed to possess the land for the fulfillment of God's purpose. This is absolutely a matter of grace. It is not I, but Christ. It is not I, but the grace of God. Praise the Lord that we do have Christ and the grace of God worked into us so that we can have the seed and possess the land. We have Christ as our seed and the church life as our land. This is altogether the result of circumcision.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FIFTY

LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD COMMUNION WITH GOD ON THE HUMAN LEVEL

In this message we come to Genesis 18, which contains an intimate record of Abraham's experience with God. If we take an overall view of Abraham's experience with God as found in chapter eleven through chapter twenty-four, we shall see that his experience is in four major sections. Firstly, while he was living in the demonic land of Chaldea, he was called by God. Suddenly, much to his surprise, the God of glory appeared to him (Acts 7:2). That was the beginning of his experience with God.

Secondly, in chapters twelve through fourteen, Abraham experienced living by faith in God for his existence. He had been called by God for the fulfillment of God's divine purpose, but, as a human being, he still had to have food, protection, and all that was necessary to maintain his existence. He was a stranger in a new land, having no property of his own. Thus, God trained him to exercise the very faith which God had infused into him to trust in God for his existence.

Following that, in chapters fifteen through seventeen, the third section, God trained him to know grace for the fulfillment of His purpose. Here Abraham learned not to do anything by himself or on his own but to do everything by and with God. Although God needed him, God did not need anything of him. All that Abraham had, was, and could do was absolutely repudiated by God. God spent at least fifteen years to train Abraham in this matter. For thirteen years, God disappeared from him because he did not behave himself properly. Abraham was trained, disciplined, and very much in God's favor, but he did not walk in the presence of God. Rather, he walked in the presence of his wife, the one who proposed that he exercise his flesh to produce a seed for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Abraham expected that Ishmael, his seed, could fulfill God's purpose. Nevertheless, God seemed to say, "No, I don't approve of Ishmael. He is the issue of your effort, the produce of your doing. I reject him and you must not keep him. Abram, you must learn that nothing that you can do means anything to Me. I only need you, not your ability and strength. I don't need your Lot, Eliezer, Hagar, or anything of you. You must walk before Me, not doing anything by yourself or on your own. You must be nourished and supplied by the sufficiency of My divine udder. Then you will be able to produce something not only for Me but also of Me. I only accept and approve what is out of Myself. I shall not produce an Isaac without you. I shall produce an Isaac through you, but not out of you. You are My channel, not the source. Whenever you consider yourself to be the source, you insult Me. I am the unique, all-sufficient source. You have known Me as the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth. Now you must know Me as El-Shaddai, as the all-sufficient Mighty One with an udder. Stay under My udder and be supplied and nourished constantly by My all-sufficiency. This is the way to walk before Me." As Abraham learned to know grace for the fulfillment of God's purpose, God changed him in both name and in nature. God changed Abraham's constitution by having him circumcised. Abram was terminated and Abraham came into being. This is the third major section of Abraham's experience of God.

d. Living in Fellowship with God

1) Communion with God on the Human Level

Immediately after this, he was ushered into a glorious section—living in fellowship with God (18:1–24:67). Abraham had been called, had learned to live by faith in God for his existence, and had come to know grace for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Now he has been brought into constant fellowship with God. The fourth section of his experience is found in chapters eighteen through twenty-four. Everything revealed in these seven chapters is an aspect of Abraham's intimate fellowship with God.

In the first section of his experience, God appeared to Abraham as the God of glory. In the second section He revealed Himself as the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth. In the third section He came to Abraham as El-Shaddai, as the all-sufficient Mighty One with an udder. In the fourth section God came in a very different way—as a mortal man. As Abraham sat in the door of his tent during the heat of the day, he saw three mortal men approaching (vv. 1-2). In Hebrew, the word translated "men" in verse 2 means mortal men, human beings. God appeared to Abraham in such a form. At first, Abraham did not realize that one of these men was the Lord, Jehovah, and that the other two were angels.

Of these forms of God's appearing—as the God of glory, as the Most High God, as El-Shaddai, and as a mortal man—which do you prefer? Do you prefer that God appear to you as the God of glory? If He did, you would be terrified. Would you like Him to come as the Most High God? If the president of the United States were to come to me and say, "I am the most high president of the United States coming to visit a little man," I would feel uneasy. But if he were to come as a man the same as me, I would say, "Sir, how are you? Please come in and rest and be refreshed." If he were to come in this way, revealing later that he was the president of the United

States, I could have a very good time with him. Of these four ways of God's appearing, I prefer that He come to me in the form of a mortal man, not in His divine glory, in His most high position, nor in His all-sufficiency.

We all need to experience our God to such an extent. At the beginning of our experience, we sense Him as the God of glory. But the more we experience Him, the more we realize that He comes in a human form, the same as we are. If God had not come to Abraham in such a human form, how could Abraham have been called His friend? Genesis 18 reveals that Abraham and God spoke with one another like friends. Abraham said to Him, "My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree" (vv. 3-4). Abraham prepared water for God to wash His feet, and God rested under a tree in front of Abraham's tent.

Very few Christians think that God would ever come in the form of a mortal man, rest under the shade of a tree, and wash His feet with the water that was prepared by a man. Which do you think is more pleasant—for God to sit on His throne demanding that we bow down to Him and worship Him, or for God to sit under a tree and wash His feet? Before the feet of the Lord Jesus were washed with the woman's tears in the house of Simon (Luke 7:38, 44), God's feet were washed in front of Abraham's tent. While Jesus was in the house of Simon having His feet washed and anointed, the priests of Judaism were worshipping God in the temple. Where was God at that time—in the temple in Jerusalem or in the house of Simon? Surely He was in the house of Simon. Likewise, where was God in Genesis 18—sitting on His throne waiting for Abraham to worship Him, or washing His feet beneath the tree in front of Abraham's tent? How marvelous it was that He was in the form of a mortal man washing His feet in front of Abraham's tent! Where is your God in your experience? Is He sitting on a throne in heaven or washing His feet at your tent? Do you prefer to have your God sitting on the throne, waiting for you to say, "Holy, Holy, Holy" to Him, or do you prefer to have Him sitting at your tent door? God came to Abraham on his level and in a human form. Since He came in this way, He and Abraham could be friends. In this chapter there is no religious worship or fear, just sweet intimacy. How wonderful! Who is your God today? Is He only the God of glory, the Most High God, and the El-Shaddai, or One in the form of a mortal man, the same as you are?

I do not say that God was a mortal man in Genesis 18; for He was just in the form of a mortal man. One of the three men who appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18 was Jehovah God. Verse 13 mentions "the Lord." In Hebrew, the Lord here is Jehovah. It was Jehovah who came to Abraham in the form of a man!

When I read Genesis 18 years ago, I was troubled by it. In this chapter Abraham certainly saw the Lord, but the New Testament says that no man has ever seen God (John 1:18). Abraham did not see God in His divine form, but God in a human form. God appeared to him as a man. It was the same when the Lord Jesus was on earth. People did not see God in His divine form; they saw God in the man Jesus. Firstly, God appeared to Abraham in His divine glory. Then He came in His most high position and as the El-Shaddai, the all-sufficient Mighty One with an udder. Lastly, He came in the form of a man. Abraham did not see the form of God but the form of man. He saw three mortal men, not realizing at first that one of them was Jehovah.

God likes to appear to us in this way. He does not come in the form of God but in the form of man, without making any declaration that He is Jehovah God. God talked with Abraham as one man talks with another. Suddenly He asked Abraham, "Where is Sarah thy wife?" This might have shocked Abraham, and he might have thought, "This man knows my wife! How could He know her? Isn't he a stranger?" Then the Lord said, "I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life" (v. 10). Abraham might have said, "Who are you? You must be the very El-Shaddai who gave me the promise of Isaac's birth" (17:19, 21). Probably Abraham was still uncertain about this until God said, "Sarah thy wife shall have a son." Sarah laughed when she heard this. No human being could have known at that time that Sarah was laughing within, but the Lord said, "Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?" (v. 13). At this juncture, the Lord clearly unveiled to Abraham that He was Jehovah God by saying, "Is anything too marvelous for the Lord [Jehovah]?" When Sarah denied laughing He said, "Nay; but thou didst laugh" (v. 15), indicating that He was the omniscient God, the One who knows everything, even what is in man's heart. At this time Abraham was clear that this man was the Almighty Jehovah, the very El-Shaddai. In like manner, the disciples of Jesus gradually came to know that the man Jesus was God.

We all need to experience God in this way. We should not practice a religious form of meeting with God, saying, "Now is the time to worship God. I must dress up, comb my hair, and reverently walk into the cathedral where I shall be with God." If we take this way, God may not appear to us. Many times God comes to us while we are sitting at our tent door. Although we may be unprepared to worship God, we may see someone approaching and ask him to stay with us for a while. Eventually we learn that this One is God. Have you not had this kind of experience? According to religion, God visits people in a cathedral or chapel. But God often visits us in a very normal way, in a way which is extraordinary as far as religion is concerned. I like the God who appeared to Abraham in the form of a mortal man at his tent door. Many sisters have the experience that while they are cooking in their kitchens or doing the laundry, the Lord comes to them in a very intimate, human way, and they have a pleasant time of sweet fellowship with the Lord, conversing with Him as with a friend. Many brothers have the same kind of experience. While they are working on their jobs or resting at home, the Lord comes to them as a dear friend, and they have an intimate conversation with the Lord. This is the experience of the Lord coming to visit us on our human level so that we can commune with Him as with an intimate friend.

In which of the four sections of Abraham's experience are you? Are you experiencing God as the God of glory, as the Most High God, as the El-Shaddai, or as the One in the form of a mortal man? Are you living in intimate fellowship with God on a human level? How sweet it is when God comes to us not with His divine glory or in His high position but in the form of a mortal man!

a) After Abraham's Circumcision

Abraham's fellowship with God began after he was circumcised and had been terminated (17:24-27). He had not only been called and learned to live by faith in God for his existence, but he had learned to reject and deny his natural strength and to trust in God for everything for the fulfillment of His purpose. After becoming such a person, he began to live in fellowship with God. In his circumcised state, God came to visit him, and as a circumcised person Abraham had an intimate communion with the visiting God. He did not need to go to God; God came to visit him. Religion always charges people to go to God, but Genesis 18 reveals that God came to visit His circumcised one. The circumcised one did not need to go to a temple or cathedral; his tent became God's tabernacle, the place where God enjoyed His circumcised one's ministry of water and food. It is after our flesh has been circumcised and our

natural man has been terminated that God comes to visit us and we minister water and food to Him for His refreshment and satisfaction in our intimate fellowship with Him.

b) As a Friend of God

As Abraham lived in fellowship with God, God considered him to be his friend (James 2:23; Isa. 41:8; 2 Chron. 20:7). The conversation between Abraham and God in this chapter resembles that between two friends. This happened by the oaks of Mamre in Hebron, where Abraham lived according to God's pleasure (13:18). The name Hebron in Hebrew means fellowship, communion, and friendship. It was at this place of fellowship and friendship that God came to visit Abraham as a friend, and Abraham welcomed God as a friend, preparing water for God to wash His feet for His refreshment and feeding God with a rich meal for His satisfaction. Abraham did all this in the intimate fellowship with his Friend at his tent door under the shadow of the oak trees, not in the religious worship of "God" in a cathedral or sanctuary under the service of a "priest" or "minister."

When Abraham was sitting in the tent door to cool himself in the heat of the day, God appeared to him with the two angels. When he saw them approaching, he ran to welcome them and asked them to stay with him. He prepared water for them to wash their feet and served them a rich meal of three cakes of fine wheat flour baked on embers, a tender and good calf, and butter and milk (vv. 4-8). In ancient times, three measures, or three seahs, were the equivalent of an ephah. According to 1 Samuel 1:24 and Judges 6:19, the normal portion for a meal was an ephah of fine flour. Why then does 18:6, like Matthew 13:33, mention three measures, not one ephah? Because in both Genesis 18 and Matthew 13 three measures of fine flour signify the resurrected Christ in His humanity. Such a Christ is the fine flour baked into cakes to be food for both God and man. Abraham also prepared a tender calf. This calf, like the fatted calf used to feed the prodigal son in Luke 15:23, was also a figure of Christ. Abraham also served God and the angels butter and milk. God drank the milk of the good land much earlier than the children of Israel did. The cakes, the calf, and the butter and milk all signify the riches of the all-inclusive Christ for the satisfaction of both God and man.

Although the Bible does not say that Abraham presented this meal to God as an offering, in actuality he did so. Years later, when the children of Israel went to their yearly feasts, they offered God the produce of the good land, offering Him the produce of either the vegetable or animal life. In principle, Abraham did the same thing in Genesis 18. Whenever we enjoy a good time with God, having intimate fellowship with Him, at that time Christ not only is supplied to us, but we offer Christ to God, offering Him the riches of Christ for His enjoyment. In other words, we offer Christ to God as three measures of fine flour, as a tender and good calf, and as butter and milk. Thank the Lord that we have had at least some experience of this. While we were enjoying intimate fellowship with God, we not only received Christ from God but also offered Christ to God as God's food. We offered Christ in His resurrected humanity as three measures of fine flour, we offered Christ as the tender and good calf, and we presented all the riches of Christ to God for His enjoyment. A good number of times at the Lord's table I have not enjoyed the Lord as much as when I have offered Christ to God for God's enjoyment. When guests come to visit you in your house, you do not expect them to feed you. Rather, you enjoy feeding them. The sisters especially enjoy serving a meal and watching the guests eat it. The more the guests eat, the happier the sisters are. We all need to be in such an intimate fellowship with God that we not only enjoy Christ but also offer Christ to God for His enjoyment. The highest fellowship is not when we enjoy Christ so much before God but when God enjoys Him in us more than we do. The highest and richest meeting in the church is the meeting in which we offer Christ to God for His satisfaction.

c) Receiving Revelation from God

As Abraham was enjoying such sweet fellowship with God, he received revelation from Him regarding the birth of Isaac and the destruction of Sodom. These are the two basic things concerning which God will always deal with us. The birth of Isaac is related to Christ, and the destruction of Sodom is related to God's judgment upon sin. Isaac must come and Sodom must go. This means that Christ must come in and sin must go out. Today God is not only accomplishing His plan to fulfill His purpose, but as the Lord over all men He is also judging sin. The principle is the same in every aspect of our lives: in our married life, home life, personal life, Christian life, and church life. God's concern is to bring Christ forth through us and to eliminate all the sinful things. He intends to produce Christ and to destroy the "Sodom" in our home life, work life, and even in our Christian and church life. All the revelation that we have received and shall receive from God mostly concerns these two items. If you consider your own experience, you will find that this is so. Whenever you have received revelation from God during the course of your fellowship with Him, it has always concerned Christ on the positive side and sin on the negative side. Positively we see more of Christ and say, "I have seen something new of Christ. How I hate that I have not lived more by Him." This is the revelation regarding the birth of Isaac, the revelation that Christ will be brought forth in your life. But negatively we see our sins and say, "O Lord, forgive me. There is still so much selfishness, hatred, and jealousy in me. I have so many failures, shortcomings, and even sinful things. Lord, I judge these things and want them destroyed." This, in principle, is God's judgment upon and destruction of sin. In our Christian life, Christ must be brought in and "Sodom" must be destroyed. Likewise, in the church life, Christ must increase and sin must be abolished.

(1) Concerning the Birth of Isaac through Sarah
(a) The Promise Confirmed

How can Christ be brought forth? Firstly, there is the promise. The promise made to Abraham regarding the birth of Isaac in 17:19 and 21 was confirmed in 18:10. Not only did God promise Abraham that he would give birth to Isaac through Sarah, but in the whole Bible, especially in the New Testament, there is the rich promise concerning Christ. We have the promise that Christ will be our life, our supply, and our everything. How much the New Testament promises concerning Christ! All these promises can be fulfilled by the gracious visitation of God.

(b) At the Time of Life, the Appointed Time

The birth of Isaac was at the time of life, at the appointed time (17:21; 18:10, 14). Christ always has been and always will be increased in us and brought forth through us at the time of life. We need to have many such times of life. I would like to have one every day. The time of life is always the appointed time, the time appointed by God. God made the appointment, not Abraham. It is the same with us today, for it is God who makes the appointments, not you and I. Our past experiences will help us to understand this. Whenever God comes to visit us to bring forth Christ, that time is the appointed time, the time of life.

(c) Abraham Becoming Old as Dead and

The time of life for Abraham and Sarah was the time when they had become nothing. Isaac was born when Abraham had become as old as dead and Sarah had become out of function (vv. 11-13). Likewise, whenever we become nothing, that is a good time, a divinely appointed time, for us to participate in more life.

(d) A Wonderful and Marvelous Doing of the Lord

In verse 14 the Lord said, "Is anything too marvelous [or wonderful] for the Lord?" (Heb.). Every experience of Christ is marvelous in our eyes; it is a wonderful doing of the Lord. How could Sarah have brought forth Isaac? It was humanly impossible. If that had happened to us, it would have been a wonderful and marvelous thing in our eyes. Christian experiences are always like this because the Christian life is a life of impossibilities. How marvelous it is that all the impossibilities become possibilities with Christ! We can do what other people cannot do and we can be what others cannot be because Christ is marvelous and wonderful in our experience of Him.

(2) Concerning the Destruction of Sodom
 (a) Abraham Walking with God
 to Bring Him on the Way

The second revelation that Abraham received concerned the destruction of Sodom (vv. 16-21). After enjoying such intimate fellowship with Abraham, God and the two angels were satisfied, strengthened, and refreshed. Verse 16 says that then "the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way." Abraham walked with them for a certain distance to conduct them, to send them away. Often when guests come to visit us, we walk them out to their car after their visit, seeing them on their way. Abraham's walking with his visitors was like one sending his friend away.

(b) God Not Hiding His Intention from Abraham

As Abraham was bringing God on His way, "The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (v. 17). God could not hide His intention from Abraham, but told him of His intention to judge Sodom saying, "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know" (vv. 20-21). God's heart was concerned about Lot, but He could do nothing for him without an intercessor. As we shall see in the next message, God here was seeking for an intercessor. Although God did not mention Lot's name, He knew within His heart that Abraham understood what He was doing. God and Abraham spoke to one another in a mysterious way, neither of them mentioning Lot's name. The outsiders did not understand what they meant, but they each understood.

d) Remaining in the Presence of God

Verse 22 says, "And the men turned their faces from thence and went towards Sodom: but Abraham remained still standing before the Lord" (Heb.). When the two angels left, Abraham did not tell the Lord good-bye. No, he remained standing before the Lord. As we shall see, the purpose of his standing before the Lord was for intercession.

In Genesis 18 we see that Abraham, a circumcised man, had peace with God. Although Abraham did not expect such a visitation, God appeared to him in the form of a mortal man, conversing with him as with a friend. There was nothing religious about such intimate fellowship. In that fellowship Abraham received revelation from God positively concerning the birth of Isaac and negatively concerning the destruction of Sodom. Then, after the angels had left for Sodom, Abraham remained in the presence of God. God had found a man to whom He could commit what was on His heart, a man to respond to His heart's intention and echo His heart's desire. In this chapter we see that the sweetest and most intimate experience of God is like what we have with our most intimate friend.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS**MESSAGE FIFTY-ONE****LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD
A GLORIOUS INTERCESSION**

2) A Glorious Intercession

In this message we come to another seed of the divine revelation sown in the book of Genesis—the seed of intercession. In the first seventeen chapters of Genesis, there is no record of any intercession. Although we may suppose that Melchisedec was interceding behind the scene for Abraham, there is no record of this. The first clear mention of intercession in the Bible is in Genesis 18, where we see that Abraham was the first intercessor. This record of intercession is not simply a seed, for it contains a certain amount of development. In Genesis 18 we not only have a story of intercession but a clear revelation of the basic principles of intercession. Intercession is a great thing in the Bible. Without it God's economy cannot be accomplished. The excellent ministry of Christ today as our kingly and divine High Priest is a ministry of intercession. Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25 both tell us that Christ is interceding for us. Since this matter of intercession is so important, we must devote an entire message to it, mainly considering the basic principles of intercession.

a) According to God's Revelation

The first basic principle of intercession is that it must be according to God's revelation (18:17, 20-21). The only intercession that counts in the eyes of God is that which is according to His revelation. This means that proper intercession is not initiated by us but by God in His revelation. This is clearly portrayed in Genesis 18. Abraham did not wake up one morning concerned for Lot and then kneel down to pray to the One on the throne in heaven regarding him. No, while Abraham was sitting at his tent door to cool himself in the heat of the day, God came to him in the form of a mortal man. Since God did not come to Abraham in His glory with His majesty, Abraham did not recognize at first that it was Jehovah God who was visiting him. Eventually, Abraham realized that this One was the very God. Nevertheless, Abraham was not terrified; he was very restful, conversing with God as with an intimate friend.

This conversation must have lasted for several hours, for it took time to prepare the meal and to eat it. When God and the two angels were about to leave, Abraham did not bid them good-bye but conducted them on their way, probably walking with them for a good distance. Here we see that our God is not only a loving God but also a testing God. Although He loves us and knows everything, He often tests us. He knows our heart, the innermost part of our being, but He often says nothing. By testing He draws out what is within us.

What was God's purpose in coming to Abraham in Genesis 18? He surely did not come for a meal; neither did He come to confirm His promise regarding Sarah's giving birth to a son. God came to Abraham because He was seeking an intercessor. On His throne in heaven, God had decided to execute His judgment on the wicked city of Sodom. But God would never forget that one of His people, Lot, was in that city. Lot did not even realize that he had to be rescued from Sodom. What could God do? He had to find someone to intercede for Lot. God knew that there was no one on earth who was as concerned for Lot and who was so much with God as Abraham was. Hence, God came to Abraham for the purpose of finding an intercessor. Without an intercessor to intercede for His people, God cannot do anything. God has His divine principles. One of them is that without intercession He cannot save anyone. The salvation of every Christian has been accomplished through intercession. God did not stay on His throne in heaven waiting for such intercession to occur. Rather, He came down to visit Abraham in the form of a mortal man so that Abraham might easily talk with Him and intercede for Lot. In Genesis 18 Abraham did not pray to God or call on the name of God; he talked to God as with an intimate friend. Thus, the purpose of God's visit to Abraham in this chapter was that Abraham might take up the burden to intercede for Lot according to God's desire.

Although God remained at Abraham's tent door for several hours, talking a great deal to him, God did not say a word about His purpose in coming to secure an intercessor. We often act in the same way. Perhaps you want a brother to do a certain thing for you. If you are wise, you will not come to him and immediately ask him to do what you desire. You will first determine his mood by having a talk with him about various matters. At the very end of your visit, as the brother is seeing you to the door or conducting you on your way, you may open yourself to him and tell him of your desire. However, if he does not linger with you but says, "See you in the meeting tonight," you will realize that his heart is too cold and that he would not be interested in doing what you want him to do. But if he says, "I would like to stay with you for a while longer," then you will know that you can open yourself to him.

When God came to Abraham, Abraham welcomed Him, providing Him water and serving Him a good meal. Although God spoke to Abraham during the preparation and eating of the meal, He did not disclose the purpose for which He came. Only when God rose up and walked away from the tent and Abraham accompanied and conducted Him and the two angels on their way, did God tell Abraham of His intention. While Abraham walked with them, the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (18:17). God could not hide His intention from Abraham, His dear friend and called one.

As Abraham lingered in God's presence, even after the two angels had left for Sodom, remaining standing before Him (18:22), God opened up to him. God did not open to Abraham directly but in the way of implication. God did not say, "Abraham, I shall soon destroy Sodom. Lot is there, and I am very concerned about him. I have come to ask you to intercede for him." God was not that simple. Instead, He said, "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know" (18:20-21). Although God did not say a word about Lot, His intention in speaking about Sodom was for Lot. These two friends talked about Lot, but neither of them mentioned his name. They spoke about him in a mysterious way, in a way of implication. Abraham knew that God's concern was for Lot, and he interceded for Lot without mentioning him by name. Nevertheless, God knew Abraham's intention as Abraham knew God's intention.

Do not think that God's revelation regarding intercession comes in a sudden, miraculous, "Pentecostal" way. In order to receive such a revelation from the heart of God, we must pass through a long process. We must come all the way from Ur of Chaldea through many places to the tent door at the oaks of Mamre in Hebron. Firstly God called Abraham by appearing to him as the God of glory. At that time Abraham was neither prepared nor qualified to receive a revelation from God's heart. He was not in intimate fellowship with God. Even after he had slaughtered Chedorlaomer and the other kings, Abraham was not ready to converse with God in an intimate way. In chapters fifteen and sixteen we see that although Abraham was a man who sought God and loved Him, he was still so much in his flesh. In chapter seventeen he was circumcised and terminated, his name was changed from Abram to Abraham, and he became another person. Then, in chapter eighteen God came to him at the oaks of Mamre in Hebron not as the God of glory nor as the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth, nor as the El-Shaddai, but as a mortal man to enjoy a meal with His intimate friend. At that time God had found a man who was after His heart. The glorious intercession which Abraham made before God in Genesis 18 was not a prayer from man on earth to God in heaven; it was a human conversation between two friends. God came down from heaven, lowering Himself, putting on the form of a mortal man, and conversing with Abraham. Eventually, He indicated to Abraham that He was the Almighty God; yet they continued to talk as two friends. When Abraham was in this condition, he was prepared and qualified to receive a revelation from God's heart concerning His desire. Intercession is an intimate talk with God according to the unveiling of His heart's desire. This is the first principle of intercession.

In order for God to reveal His heart's desire to a man, that man must be prepared. Although millions of people belong to the name of God, very few have been prepared, disciplined, trained, circumcised, and terminated. Although we are not very much like Abraham, occasionally we have had similar experiences. We were willing to abandon ourselves and reject our flesh. Then, much to our surprise, God came to us as a human friend. We did not pray to Him or call on His name; we talked to Him as to an intimate friend.

In order to fulfill the first basic principle of intercession—that it should be according to an intimate revelation of God's heart's desire—we need to pass through a long process. We need to be dealt with, circumcised, and terminated. Then we shall be ready for intimate fellowship with God. God will come to us on a human level, not on a divine level, just as He came to Abraham. Suppose God would come to you in this way today and you would serve Him a meal and talk with Him, speaking with Him face to face. How good it is to talk with God in this way! When we have fellowship with God like this, we do not have the sense that we are talking to the almighty, majestic God, but to another human being. This is the meaning of intercession being according to the revelation of God. This intercession is always intimate, mysterious, and in the way of implication.

When God revealed to Abraham what was on His heart, Abraham immediately understood what God meant. Apparently Abraham interceded for Sodom; actually he interceded for Lot. "Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (18:23). Lot is implied here. Abraham seemed to be saying, "Lord, don't You know that in Sodom, the wicked city which You are about to destroy, there is a righteous person? There might also be other righteous ones with him. Do You intend to destroy the righteous with the wicked?" God did not mention the name of Lot to Abraham, but Abraham understood. Likewise, Abraham did not mention Lot to God, but God knew. They spoke to one another in a mysterious way. None of the outsiders knew what they were talking about, but they understood each other because they were intimate friends. How can we prove that Abraham was actually interceding for Lot? The proof is in 19:29: "And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt." We are not told that God remembered Lot but that He remembered Abraham. This verse tells us clearly that God answered Abraham's intercession by rescuing Lot from Sodom. Thus, Abraham's intercession in chapter eighteen actually was not for the city of Sodom but for Lot.

In principle, Abraham's intercession for Lot was like the intercession in the church in the New Testament. In Abraham's time, God's people on earth were composed of two families, the families of Abraham and Lot. A part of God's people, Lot's family, had drifted into the wicked city of Sodom. In like manner, some of the church people have drifted into the world. Just as Abraham interceded for that part of God's people who had drifted into Sodom, so we must intercede for the brothers and sisters who have drifted into the world. Abraham's intercession was the first that resembles the intercession in the church life.

c) According to God's Heart

Since all proper intercession is according to the revelation which is out of God's heart, it must also be according to God's heart. Intercession is not according to God's word. As I have already pointed out, although God did not mention Lot by name, Abraham realized what was on God's heart. Abraham did not intercede according to the outward word of God but according to the inward intention of God's heart. Proper intercession must always touch the heart of God. While Abraham was interceding, God was happy and could say within Himself, "How good it is that I have found a man on earth who knows My heart!"

I say once again that proper intercession must always be initiated by God's visitation on the human level. Whenever we have the deep sense that God has come to us on a human level, we shall realize that this is the time when God will initiate an intercession for us to carry out. For this we must learn to linger in the presence of God. If He would begin to walk away, we must stay in His presence and tell Him, "Lord, I don't want to lose Your presence. I want to linger here with You." Your lingering in His presence will open up His heart and draw out His desire. We have seen that Abraham did not abruptly say good-bye to the Lord but walked with Him for a certain distance. This reveals that, in a certain sense, God is very human. If we would linger in His presence, He would be so human as not to leave us. He would remain with us because of our lingering with Him. I have experienced this many times. I did not leave God's presence and He did not leave mine. As a result of that lingering, God opened His heart to me and the proper intercession came forth.

Intercession is not merely prayer; it is an intimate conversation. In this chapter Abraham was not praying; he was talking to his intimate Friend on a human level, saying, "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Abraham seemed to be saying to God, "Is this Your way? Let me remind You that You should not do it this way. There might be fifty righteous people in the city. Will You not spare it for the fifty righteous people who might be there?" This was a conversation. Then Abraham continued, "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (18:25). This was a strong challenge to the Lord. Have you ever had such a challenging talk with God? Very few have ever done this. But when you have come into intimate fellowship with God on the human level and know His heart's desire, you can challenge Him, saying, "Lord, is this Your way?" This is neither praying nor begging; it is challenging God in a very friendly conversation. The Lord answered Abraham, saying, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes" (18:26). A basic principle of intercession is that intercession is a challenging talk, not a praying or a begging. God wants us to challenge Him. When Abraham challenged God, God might have said, "I have found a man on earth who knows My heart so well that he does not pray, ask, or beg; He challenges Me. I must do what he says because I have been challenged by My dear friend. Now I am not as concerned for Lot as I am for Myself." Have you ever experienced this kind of intercession, talking with God in a challenging way, saying, "Lord, is this Your way of doing things? Will not the Judge of all the earth do right? Is it Your way to slay the righteous with the wicked? Surely it isn't!" This is real intercession.

In verses 27 through 32 we see that Abraham continued to talk to God about the number of righteous people it would take to spare the city. After the Lord had said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the city for their sakes," Abraham asked if He would destroy the city if the number was five less than that. To this the Lord replied, "If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it." The number forty-five was spoken by the Lord, not by Abraham. The Lord seemed to be saying, "The number forty-five is all right, but I can't find that many there." Then Abraham asked about forty, and the Lord said, "I will not do it for forty's sake." When Abraham proposed that thirty be the number, the Lord said that He would spare Sodom if thirty were found there. Then, on Abraham's side, the number was reduced to twenty. Once again, the Lord said that He would not destroy the city for the sake of twenty. Finally, reaching the bottom number, Abraham made his sixth proposal, asking the Lord to spare the city if ten righteous people were found there. God said that even for the ten He would not destroy the city. Abraham made six proposals to the Lord, reducing the number from fifty to ten. After that, he did not have the burden to make a seventh proposal. He might have been led by God's presence not to do so. When God told Abraham that He would not destroy the city for the sake of ten righteous persons (18:32), Abraham was disappointed. Lot had his wife, two unmarried daughters, and some married daughters with their husbands. According to Abraham's figuring, there must have been at least ten people in Lot's family, if all his sons-in-law were included. Abraham was surprised and disappointed to learn that there were not even ten righteous people in Sodom.

d) According to God's Righteous Way

Abraham's challenge to God was according to God's righteous way (18:23-25). Abraham said to the Lord, "You are the Judge of all the earth. Shall You do this? This is not Your righteous way." Proper intercession is neither according to God's love nor according to His grace, but according to His righteousness. The strongest challenge to God is not to say to Him, "God, are You not a loving God?" If we say this, God might say, "Yes, I am a loving God, but to love is up to Me. When I feel happy, I love. But if I don't feel happy, I don't

love. What's wrong with My doing this?" We have nothing to say to this. We should say to God, "God, are You not the righteous One?" If we challenge God according to His righteousness, God would reply, "I certainly am righteous." He would never say, "If I am happy, I shall be righteous, but if I am unhappy, I won't be righteous." What kind of a righteous God would this be? We must challenge God according to His righteousness because His righteousness binds Him more than His love and His grace do. God has no obligation to be loving or to show grace, but He is held responsible to be righteous. Nothing binds God as firmly as His righteousness. Every good intercessor knows that the way to bind God effectively is to challenge Him according to His righteousness. We should say, "Will the Judge of all the earth do such a thing?" And God will reply, "No, as the just One I would never do that. But you must show Me the proper number that will justify the city. If you show Me the justifying number, I'll be justified and I'll be righteous. I would never destroy that city." Proper intercession never begs God according to His love but challenges Him according to His righteous way.

I believe that many in the Lord's recovery will be brought into this kind of intercession. When God came down to visit Abraham on a human level, He was seeking one intercessor. Today God has come down to the human level once again, not to seek an individual but a corporate people. I believe that in not too long a time there will be a people on earth absolutely like Abraham, knowing the heart of God and making a challenging intercession in His presence. We may say to God, "Lord, don't You know that You have promised us definitely in the New Testament to finish the good work that You have begun?" Abraham did not cry and plead with God to spare Sodom for Lot's sake; he challenged Him. Likewise, we should not weep and beg but should challenge God. He does not want to hear our crying; He wants to hear our challenging intercession.

e) Expressing God's Desire

Abraham's intercession echoed the desire of God's heart concerning Lot. As he was interceding according to God's heart, his intercession spontaneously expressed God's desire. Proper intercession always expresses God's desire. This is another principle of intercession. If our intercession is initiated by our seeing of God's revelation in our intimate fellowship with Him, whatever we say to Him in our intercession will be the expression of His desire, the echo of His intention. True intercession is not to express our desire but God's desire. It is not to seek anything according to our intention but to seek the fulfillment of God's intention.

f) Carrying Out God's Will

Intercession must also carry out God's will. Although God had a will to rescue Lot, without Abraham's intercession God had no way to carry out His will. Proper intercession always paves the way for the accomplishing of God's will. It lays the tracks for the heavenly locomotive. God desired to rescue Lot from Sodom, but He had to find a way to do this. Thus, He visited Abraham for the purpose that he might intercede on Lot's behalf. Abraham was intimately close to God's heart, and God was able to open His heart to him. Immediately Abraham echoed back to God His heart's desire in a challenging intercession. This intercession was the expression of God's desire and the carrying out of His will.

There is the urgent need of this kind of challenging intercession in the church life today. All the messages that the Lord has been giving us are for the carrying out of His will. In this life-study we do not care for mere Bible teaching. We are concerned for the release of the present word of the Lord for His recovery. After reading this message, a strong echo will resound throughout the Lord's recovery as many of the dear saints respond to His word and are brought into a full realization of genuine intercession. From now on, many of us will exercise our spirit to intercede for the church by challenging God according to His heart's desire. We know that His heart's desire is to save His people out of the wicked city, to rescue today's Lot from the condition of condemnation. If we are so close to God, fellowshipping with Him in an intimate way, we shall be able to read His heart and echo His heart's desire back to Him in a glorious intercession. In the next message we shall see that Abraham's intercession was very effective. In 19:27-29 we see that Abraham was still with God's heart. Abraham woke up early in the morning and looked at the city, being very concerned for Lot. In 19:29 we are told clearly that God remembered Abraham and "sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt." This effective intercession will more and more be realized and practiced among us in the church life.

g) Until the Lord Has Finished His Speaking

This chapter does not end with Abraham's speaking; it ends with God's speaking. Verse 33 says, "And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had finished speaking to Abraham" (Heb.). The record here is the record of Abraham's intercession. But it does not say that Abraham had finished his speaking; it says that the Lord had finished His speaking. Proper intercession is always God's speaking. Apparently we are speaking; actually God is speaking in our speaking.

I like the verse which says that the Lord went His way as soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham. Many times in our prayers we say, "Amen," after we have finished speaking. Our "Amen" means the same as good-bye. I can testify that hundreds of times I have said good-bye to the Lord in this way before He has finished speaking to me. I prayed for a certain length of time and then said, "Amen," meaning good-bye. But deep in my spirit I sensed that God was saying, "What are you doing? I haven't finished talking to you. Why don't you stay for another few minutes?" Many of us have had this kind of experience. Our "Amen," our good-bye, was too fast. We need to stay in the presence of God until He has finished His speaking to us. Our intercession must utter what God is speaking.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FIFTY-TWO

LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD A DEFEATED RIGHTEOUS MAN

The Bible is a marvelous book. Alongside of the record of Abraham, it gives us the negative history of Lot. For quite a long time, I did not understand why the Bible included such a negative record. There are certain verses in Genesis 19 that, humanly speaking, I do not like to talk about. But the Lord's divine revelation is economical; not one word is wasted. Hence, every word in the Holy Bible is very important. What then is the purpose of chapter nineteen of Genesis? It is to give us a warning example. I have the strong burden that in this message so many of us, especially the young people, need to see this warning example. We need such an example because today's situation is no better than that of Sodom.

We thank the Lord that His Word gives us both a positive history of Abraham and a negative one of Lot. There is no record in the entire Bible that is as complete as the account of Abraham's life. This record shows how Abraham was called by God, how he answered God's calling, how he lived by faith in God for his existence, how he was trained to know grace for the fulfillment of God's purpose, how he was dealt with by being circumcised, and how he was brought into intimate fellowship with God, cooperating with Him on the human level. I appreciate this record of a fallen man who was saved, transformed, and brought into wonderful fellowship on the human level with the glorious and holy God. Yet alongside of this record, we have a black, negative record of Lot. In this message we must consider this record in detail, taking it as a warning for ourselves and for our children and relatives.

3) A Defeated Righteous Man

If we read 2 Peter 2:6-9, we see that Peter was much in favor of Lot. In verse 8 Peter referred to him as a "righteous man" whose "righteous soul" was vexed with the unlawful deeds of the people in Sodom. In verse 9 he describes Lot as godly. Thus, according to Peter's concept, Lot was both righteous and godly. Although we may find it difficult to believe this because Lot's record in Genesis is so negative, we must believe it because the Bible tells us so. If you still say that Lot was not righteous and godly, then I would ask you about yourself. Are you more righteous and godly than he? In a sense, Lot was more righteous and godly than many of us. But although he was saved, righteous, and godly, he was a defeated righteous man.

a) Passively Brought into God's Way by Others

As we consider Lot's history, we see that he was passively brought into God's way by others (11:31; 12:5), having been brought into God's way by his grandfather and his uncle. His grandfather brought him from Ur of Chaldea to Haran, stopping halfway because the grandfather would not go on. When God took the grandfather away, Abraham, Lot's uncle, took him from Haran to Canaan. Although it is good in the eyes of God that there are grandfathers and uncles who can bring their grandchildren and nephews into God's way, it is not the best to be passively brought on by others. Lot had a very weak start. He did not have an active, positive beginning in spiritual things. Young people, it is not the best to be passive concerning holy things or your following of the Lord. Lot was righteous and godly, but he was defeated because he had a very weak, passive start. His passive beginning was the cause of his eventual defeat.

b) Never Having God's Appearing

Lot never had God's appearing. As I read through the verses about Lot again and again, I could not find a hint that God ever appeared to him. Although God and the two angels visited Abraham, only the two angels came to Lot. Does this mean that God is unfair or a respecter of persons? Of course not. God is fair and is no respecter of persons. God did not appear to Lot or reveal Himself to Lot, because Lot was passive, not actively seeking God, and was living in a wicked city. He did not follow God in a direct way but in an indirect way and did not walk in the way of God. Unlike Abraham, Lot had no direct relationship with God. God does not respect persons, but He does respect behavior, respecting whether or not we are active or passive in seeking Him. If you seek Him, He will appear to you. But if you do not seek Him, He will not waste His time. That God did not appear to Lot was not God's fault; it was Lot's. God wants to appear to you, but are you seeking Him and walking in His way? Do you have a heart to seek God positively and actively and walk in the way of God? If you do, God will not fail you. He will certainly appear to you.

c) Never Taking the Initiative in Taking God's Way

Lot never took the initiative in taking God's way. I have been unable to find a verse which indicates that Lot ever took the initiative in this matter. The Bible says that Lot's grandfather took him to Haran; it does not say that Lot followed him. There is a great difference between the two. I am somewhat concerned for the young people among us. Many of them are in the church life because someone brought them here. They did not take the initiative to come into the church life. As I look back upon the past fifty years, I can testify that those who showed initiative in taking the way of the church are still strong today. However, those who took no initiative but who were passively brought into the way of the church have gradually fallen away. I can give you a hundred names of those who were intimate with me and who were helped by my ministry who gradually fell away because they did not have a strong start by actively taking the initiative to follow the Lord. Lot should have said to Abraham, "Uncle Abraham, whether or not you take God's way, I will take it. Even though I am younger than you, I would be the leader in following God and would ask you to follow me." To say this is not to be proud; it is to be active.

d) His Relationship with God Being under the Influence of Others

Lot's relationship with God was under the influence of others (13:1). When others were up, he was up. When they were down, he was down. Lot was like a piece of driftwood. When his spiritual leader drifted into Egypt, he drifted there after him. He was altogether under the influence of others. When Abraham was drifting southward toward Egypt and the world, Lot should have withheld him and said, "Abraham, if you go downward, I'll go upward." But we see no such tendency in Lot's life. I am concerned that in the church life today there is this kind of driftwood. Is your relationship with God under His direct appearing or under others' influence? Do not think that Lot suddenly drifted into Sodom. No, it was a gradual development starting from a very weak beginning. If as you read this message you feel that you have not had a strong beginning, be encouraged for it is still not too late to lay a solid foundation.

e) Leaving Others' Spiritual Influence Because of Material Substance

Lot left others' spiritual influence because of material substance (13:5-13). When there was only the spiritual influence, Lot kept himself under it. But when Lot was faced with the choice between spiritual influence and material substance, he chose material substance. The principle is the same today. Material substance, that is, worldliness, is a test to those who follow the spirituality of others. Like Lot, they may be righteous but still choose material substance.

The Bible does not indicate that in the strife between Lot and Abraham in chapter thirteen Abraham was wrong. However, I believe that in a very deep sense Lot's feelings were hurt. Here I would say a word to the leading brothers. It is a very difficult matter to deal with the brothers. Abraham did nothing wrong in dealing with Lot, but simply because he dealt with him, Lot would never return to

him. Abraham never forgot Lot. When he heard that Lot had been captured by Chedorlaomer, he led the fight against the kings and rescued Lot. When Abraham learned that God was about to destroy Sodom, he interceded for Lot. In 19:27 and 28, Abraham rose up early in the morning and looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah because he was so concerned for Lot. Nevertheless, because of his hurt feelings, Lot would not return to Abraham, but could say, "I have nothing to do with you. Even though you brought me back from captivity, I will never return to you." When Lot was delivered from the city of Sodom, he did not consider returning to Abraham. If he had returned, his life would not have had such a pitiful ending.

I am burdened that the young brothers and sisters will see that it is dangerous to dissent with and to leave the older generation in the Lord. When as a child I was rebuked by my mother, I would turn my face away from her for several days. I was wrong and I knew that she had rebuked me in love, but simply because she rebuked me, I refused to see her face. The principle is the same in the church life. Although others may love us, we do not like to be rebuked by them. I have learned that rebuking others builds up enmity. I spoke a frank word in love to certain brothers, and my frankness offended them. This might have been the reason why Lot would not return to Abraham. There is no indication in the Word that Lot thanked Abraham for delivering him from captivity. It might have been that he would not give up his hurt feelings and humble himself. We should not insist upon holding on to such human feelings. We, unlike Lot, should humble ourselves, lose our face, and return to Abraham and remain with him. The sooner we do this and the more we do it, the better.

*f) Drifting into a Situation
Which Was Wicked and Sinful before God*

Lot drifted into a situation which was wicked and sinful before God (13:11-12). Once you leave the source of spiritual influence, you will automatically go downhill. You will never go upward. Never forsake the proper spiritual influence, for it is your protection. If you give it up, you will lose your protection, and, like Lot, will drift downward into Sodom. In spite of the fact that Lot knew Sodom was wicked in the eyes of God, he eventually entered into that evil place and lived there.

Ur of Chaldea was a place of idols, Egypt was a place of worldly riches and pleasures, and Sodom was a city of sin. These three places form a triangular boundary around the land of Canaan. We, God's called ones, live within this triangle and must be careful lest we fall back to the city of idols, go down to the place of worldly pleasures, or drift into the city of sin. Although Lot stayed away from the land of idols and the place of worldly pleasures, he drifted, like a piece of driftwood, into the city of sin.

g) Sovereignly Warned by Being Captured

Lot was sovereignly warned by being captured (14:11-12). God was merciful to him, not allowing him to live in Sodom peacefully. As a warning and a discipline, God caused Lot to be captured.

*h) Rescued from Captivity by the Lord's Overcomer,
but Not Helped to Come Back to the Way of God*

Although Lot was rescued from captivity by the Lord's overcomer, he was not helped to come back to the way of God (14:12-16). For a long time I was troubled by Lot's not returning to the way of God. He might have been stubborn. Do not think that passive people are submissive. Nearly all the passive ones are rebellious. Lot did not learn the lesson and he did not return to God's way.

*i) Going Back to Live in the Wicked City
Which Was Condemned by God
and Was to Be Destroyed by the Judgment of God*

Lot went back to live in the wicked city which was condemned by God and which was to be destroyed by the judgment of God (19:1-13). Lot did not go there to visit; he went there to live. When the two angels came to execute God's judgment over Sodom, Lot was sitting in the gate of the city, in contrast to Abraham who was sitting at his tent door. According to ancient custom, whoever sat at the gate of the city was one of the elders, for only they had the privilege of sitting there. Lot became a leader in Sodom! Suppose the Lord or His angels were to visit you. Where would they find you --sitting at your tent door, or at the gate of the wicked world? Where you are sitting determines whether or not the Lord will come to you.

The angels refused to enter Lot's house (19:2). Compare this with the visit the Lord and the angels paid Abraham in the previous chapter. When Abraham invited them to stay, they immediately agreed. But the two angels did not want to enter into Lot's house and stay there, because it was in such a wicked city. After Lot pressed upon them greatly, they went in and stayed with him (19:3).

While the angels were staying in Lot's house, the Sodomites came to indulge in their sodomitical lust, coming from every corner of the city (19:4-11). A Sodomite is a homosexual. Paul speaks of them in Romans 1:24 and 27. There are many Sodomites today and much sodomitical lust is expressed. Sodomites seem to have no spirit; they are like brutal animals.

Lot was even willing to sacrifice his two daughters to satisfy the Sodomites' lust (19:7-9). Whether he was forced to do this or not, he never should have done it. This shows that Lot's sense of morality had been drugged. We may use the smell of garlic as an illustration of this. If we were to eat garlic all day long, our sense of smell would eventually be drugged. If someone having a fresh sense of smell would come into the midst of the garlic eaters, he would immediately notice the scent of garlic. Lot and his children remained in the garlic room of Sodom for years, and their sense of morality was drugged. Lot would consider sacrificing his virgin daughters to save his two guests. How could he consider such a thing! Although he was a righteous man, he had lost his sense of morality and shame.

In order to meet such a wicked situation, the angels smote the Sodomites with blindness (19:11), indicating that all the men in Sodom were blind and in darkness. All Sodomites are blind. If a man were not blind, how could he be a Sodomite? This shows that sinfulness blinds people.

j) His Children Being Corrupted

Lot's children were corrupted by living in the wicked city. The word of the angels in 19:12 indicates that Lot might have had sons as well as daughters. In chapter eighteen Abraham might have considered that there were at least ten people in Lot's family. The angels

said to Lot, "Hast thou here any besides? son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord has sent us to destroy it" (19:12-13). Lot had to tell his sons-in-law and his children that God was about to judge that city. But when Lot preached the gospel to them, some would not believe the word from the Lord, thinking that he was joking. Verse 14 says, "Lot went out, and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that jested unto his sons-in-law" (Heb.).

Others of Lot's children had no sense of morality (19:30-35). Look at what his daughters did after they escaped from the city! After escaping from Sodom, Lot and his daughters still had wine with them (19:32). If they had not brought the wine with them, how else could they have had it in the cave where they were dwelling? How drugged they were by the sinful situation in Sodom! When I was visiting some saints in Las Vegas in 1963, they vindicated their living in that city, saying, "It is not wrong for us to stay in this gambling city, because we are here as a testimony for the Lord." I did not argue with them, but deep within myself I said, "If you stay here for some years, your children will have no sense about the wickedness of gambling." Many of the young people today have been drugged. Look at the way they dress: there is no sense of morality or feeling of shame. Many times when I am on the street I have to shut my eyes. For young ladies to be without a sense of shame is to be without protection. Throughout the whole world the sense of shame and morality has been drugged. Because most of the young people were raised in a sinful atmosphere, their senses have been drugged. But if they would come in to the church life and remain in its pure atmosphere for a few months, they would never return to the sinful world. They would be unable to stand its smell.

We live in an evil age and need protection from it. Our family and our children must be protected. We all must escape Sodom and shut our doors to its evil atmosphere. If we do not, our descendants will be drugged. How could Lot and his children have conducted themselves in the way they did after Sodom was destroyed? Because their sense of morality had fallen so low. If we remain in the fresh air, we shall immediately sense the bad smell of immorality. But if we do not discern any bad smell, it means that our sense of morality has been drugged.

*k) He Himself Barely Saved
through the Overcomer's Intercession*

Lot himself was barely saved through the overcomer's intercession (19:15-25, 29). Even after the angels told Lot that Sodom was to be destroyed, he still lingered there. He had no willingness to escape from the city, but the angels held his hand and pulled him out. Verse 16 says, "And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city." Lot was not faithful, but the Lord was merciful, pulling him out of Sodom as wood plucked out of a fire.

*l) His Wife Being Saved from Destruction
but Becoming a Pillar of Salt*

Lot's wife was saved from destruction, but she became a pillar of salt (19:15-17, 26; Luke 17:32). In the form of powder, salt is useful. But when salt becomes a block, it is useless. That Lot's wife became a pillar of salt meant that she had lost her usefulness in the hand of God and had become a sign of shame. Today Christianity helps people only to take care of the matter of salvation or perdition. But the Bible reveals that besides the matter of salvation or perdition, there is the matter of glory or shame. Lot's wife was not lost; she was saved from destruction. Eventually, however, she became a shame. Hence, the Lord said in Luke 17:32, "Remember Lot's wife," warning us that, though we are saved, at the Lord's coming back we might possibly suffer shame like Lot's wife. Although we are saved, we may become ashamed at the Lord's coming back (1 John 2:28).

In Luke 17:28-33 the Lord warns us not to look back. Why did Lot's wife look back? Because some of her children, especially her daughters, were still in Sodom and because her house and her clothing also were there. If you read Genesis 19 carefully, you will see that she was behind Lot. As a couple, they should have gone together; she should not have been behind her husband. But, being behind him, she looked back and became a pillar of salt. She looked back to the place where she loved to live and became a sign of shame for our warning. This is not merely a story or doctrine. We see from it that in addition to the matter of salvation, there is the matter of shame. When the day of judgment arrives, will you share in the glory or in the shame? We shall not suffer perdition, for our salvation is assured. However, as this warning example indicates, we may be put to shame.

*m) His Life Issuing in Bringing Forth
Moabites and Ammonites*

Lot's life issued in bringing forth Moabites and Ammonites (children of Ben-ammi), who were rejected by God even to their tenth generation (19:36-38; Deut. 23:3). What a pitiful ending to Lot's life! He did not bring forth an Isaac but Moabites and Ammonites who were rejected by God. Here in the story of Lot we see the record of a defeated righteous man. Alongside of the white record of the victorious Abraham, we have the black record of the defeated Lot. The record of Lot's life should be a strong warning to us all.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS
MESSAGE FIFTY-THREE
LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD
A PILLAR OF SALT

The previous message was on Lot, who was a defeated righteous man. In this message we come to Lot's wife, who became a pillar of salt (19:26). Genesis 19 might be the only record in human history regarding a pillar of salt, and we need to consider it very carefully. This pillar of salt was not created by God. Lot's wife became a pillar of salt. It is very meaningful that in His heavy word recorded in Luke 17, spoken at a time when people were inquiring about the coming of the kingdom, the Lord Jesus said, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). In a sense, the Lord seemed to be saying to His disciples, "Don't talk about the kingdom. Rather, you must recognize what the age will be like when the kingdom comes. It will be like the days of Noah and the days of Lot. Both are prefigures of the days of My coming." Thus, in the Lord's heavy, solemn, and sobering word, three ages are mentioned: the age of Noah, the age of Lot, and

the age at the time of the Lord's coming back.

When we covered Noah in some of the foregoing messages in this life-study, we pointed out that he lived in a befuddled age, and that the people of his age were befuddled, drugged, and doped by their lusts and evil pleasures. However, in Luke 17:27, when the Lord spoke of the days of Noah, marriage was mentioned. But when He spoke of the days of Lot, there was no mention of marriage, because in Sodom marriage had been completely degraded, and the people indulged in their sodomitical lust. In Luke 17:28 and 30 the Lord said, "Likewise, even as it happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building...It will be in the same way on the day in which the Son of Man is revealed." After saying this and immediately before telling us to remember Lot's wife, the Lord said, "In that day, he who shall be on the housetop and his goods in the house, let him not come down to take them away; and he who is in the field, likewise, let him not turn back to the things behind" (Luke 17:31). In Palestine the houses had flat roofs. The Lord was saying, "If you are on your housetop at the time of My coming, do not come down into your house to take away your stuff. If you do, you will be left. If you are working in the field, do not return home. You must forget everything except Me." Immediately after this word, the Lord said, "Remember Lot's wife."

Today, like the people in the days of Noah and in the days of Lot, many Christians are doped and befuddled, having lost the proper sense of the things of God. Some even teach that believers may be raptured while they are playing football. But according to the revelation of the Holy Word, when the Lord comes back, He would not take any of His saints who are still participating in worldly entertainments. We Christians are the crop of God growing with Christ as the life seed (Matt. 13:3-8, 18-23). No Christian who is mature in the growth of life still participates in any worldly entertainments. Since the Christians who continue to participate in worldly entertainments are not ripe, but are green and raw, the Lord would not reap them from the field. The befuddled Christians of today need to hear such a sobering word.

4) A Pillar of Salt

The record of Lot's wife becoming a pillar of salt is found in the section on living in fellowship with God. Although this section in Genesis covering chapters eighteen through twenty-four is the record of a life that was in fellowship with God, it includes the black record of a defeated saved man, his wife, and his two daughters. Lot had more than these two daughters, but when the angels came to Sodom, they could not find the others. Genesis 19:15 says, "When the morning arose, the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are found; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city" (Heb.). The angels seemed to be saying, "Lot, we can only find two of your children. We were sent here by God to rescue you and all your family, but only these have been found. Our commission is to destroy the city. Now you, your wife, and your daughters must escape." The next verse says that Lot lingered. According to the original, Lot not only lingered; he hesitated, being unwilling to leave the city. Since he was hesitating, the angels "laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city." When the angels had brought the four of them outside the city, they said, "Escape for thy soul; look not behind thee" (v. 17, Heb.). But verse 26 says that Lot's wife "looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." Lot's wife was saved, for she was pulled out of the city and saved from its destruction. But although she was saved, she nevertheless became a pillar of salt. It is certain that becoming a pillar of salt is not a good thing; it is a shame.

As I have said many times, the book of Genesis contains the seeds of nearly all the divine truths. The pillar of salt in 19:26 may also be considered as a seed. The growth of this seed is in Luke 17:32, where the Lord tells us to remember Lot's wife, and in 1 John 2:28, where we are told that we might be put to shame at the Lord's appearing. The harvest is in Revelation 16:15, where the Lord says, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, that he may not walk naked and they see his shame." The Lord will come as a thief, not giving any prior notification. If at that time our nakedness is exposed, we shall be put to shame. Thus, the seed of being put to shame was sown in Genesis 19, grows in Luke 17 and 1 John 2, and is reaped in Revelation 16. My burden in this message is to impress you that the book of Genesis not only has the seed of Abraham, but also the seed of Lot and of his wife, who became a pillar of salt, a sign of shame.

The basic concept of this message is that a genuine saved person faces the definite possibility of being put to shame. Do not listen to the befuddling teachings of this age. Many teachings in Christianity today drug people, and those who absorb such teachings are neither sober in their mind nor living in their spirit. In this message we need to hear a sobering word from the Lord, a word that will sober our mind and quicken our spirit.

a) Lot's Wife

As we have already pointed out, there is no doubt that Lot's wife was saved from destruction. This is so definitely and clearly revealed that no one can argue with it. But, as we have seen, she looked back from behind her husband and became a pillar of salt. That she walked behind her husband indicates that she was even less willing than her husband to leave Sodom and that she was not happy to follow him out of the city. If she had been happy to flee Sodom, she would have walked side by side with her husband. Even before she looked back and became a pillar of salt, she was already behind her husband. At this point, let me say a word to the wives. In committing sin, it is good for a wife to be reluctant to follow her husband, but concerning the things of God, it is not good for her to be slow in following him. Concerning the things of God, the best thing for a wife to do is to go along with and walk together with her husband. Wives, in the things with God, do not go behind your husbands. If you do, you, like Lot's wife, may suffer and become a pillar of salt. This is a warning to us all.

That Lot's wife became a pillar of salt signifies that she had lost her function and had become a sign of shame. When salt is in the form of powder, it is very useful. The more that salt is ground into fine powder, the better it functions. But no one uses salt in the form of a pillar. The Lord Jesus said that we, the saved and regenerated ones, are the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13). Our function is to kill the germs of this corrupted world. However, if we become tasteless (Luke 14:34), it means that we, like Lot's wife, have lost our function. As one of the people of God, Lot's wife should have been filled with the salty taste and been able to kill the germs of corruption around her, but she lost her taste and became functionless. She was a sign of shame.

In writing the book of Genesis, the Spirit of God was unwilling to give the name of Lot's wife. Although the name of Abraham's wife, Sarah, is mentioned many times, there is no mention of the name of Lot's wife. It is unworthy of mention. That poor saint walked behind her husband and looked back toward the city of Sodom. She might have looked back for her children, her house, and her other

belongings. All her goods were left there in Sodom. Her interests, heart, desire, and soul were still there, though her body had been pulled out of that city. Hence, at her looking back to that place, the Lord caused her to become a pillar of salt as a warning example to us all.

In Luke 17, the Lord used Lot's wife as a warning example for His disciples. However, not many Christians today live under this warning. Nevertheless, we must heed the warning that a truly saved person faces the possibility of being put to shame at the Lord's appearing. I certainly do not want to become a pillar of salt. Do you? To become a pillar of salt is not a glory; it is a shame. What a shame for a believer to become a lifeless pillar of salt standing in the open air for nothing but suffering!

*b) People Who Are Not Absolute
in Following the Lord*

Luke 14:25-33 speaks of absoluteness in following the Lord. We must follow the Lord in an absolute way. Although the Bible teaches us to love others, here Luke 14:26, a holy word out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus, says, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and moreover, his own soul life also, he cannot be My disciple." It is impossible for anyone to follow the Lord in a proper way without being absolute. Our parents, wives, children, brothers, sisters, and our own soul life should all be secondary. Only the Lord Himself must be the first, and we must follow Him in an absolute way. When the Lord speaks of hating our relatives for His sake, He does not mean a real hatred but a loving hatred.

In this portion of the word out of the mouth of the Lord, we see that we must follow Him in the way of absoluteness. It is not a matter of worshipping God on Sundays nor of having a home Bible study according to our pleasure. Such a home Bible study may be another type of hobby or entertainment. In the eyes of God, your home Bible study may be no different from a basketball game. You play your Bible ball in your Bible study, using your living room as your playground. You are not absolute in following the Lord. I am not joking; I am speaking the truth. I am not only saying this to others but also to myself. The Lord can testify for me that as I was preparing for this message, the Lord asked me, "How about you? I have charged you to give this message, but are you absolute in following Me?" May the Lord have mercy on me that I would not preach to others and myself become a castaway. May He also have mercy on all His dear saints. How we need a sobering word that we would no longer be befuddled! If we believe John 3:16, we must also believe Luke 14:26-35. Many messages have been given and booklets published on John 3:16, but where are the messages and booklets on Luke 14:26-35? In the Lord's recovery we should not hide any truth from His people.

Those who are not absolute in following the Lord become useless. Tell me, how many Christians today are truly useful in the Lord's hand for God's economy? Most Christians have become useless as far as God's economy is concerned. They are like salt that is tasteless (Luke 14:34).

Such Christians are not only tasteless, but according to Luke 14:35, they are "fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile," but to be cast out. The land here is the field which grows things for God that He might accomplish His purpose. The dunghill in the universe is the lake of fire, where every dirty thing will be piled up. Luke 14:35 mainly refers to the coming age of the kingdom. In the kingdom age there will be the earth, the land for the fulfillment of God's purpose, and there will also be the lake of fire, the dunghill. Christianity always tells people that there are only two places—heaven or hell. But in this verse the Lord Jesus speaks of the third place, saying that tasteless salt, being fit for neither the land nor for the dunghill, is cast out. Where was the pillar of salt which Lot's wife became? Was it in heaven or in Sodom? It was in neither place, but in the third place. Although you have read through the Gospel of Luke, have you ever seen that in this chapter there are three places? Where will you be—in the land, in the dunghill, or cast out to the third place?

In Matthew 25:30 the Lord said that the unprofitable servant would be cast into outer darkness. The outer darkness must also be the third place. What this will be and where it will be, the Bible does not say. Nevertheless, the Bible does say that if you are a slothful servant, at the Lord's coming back you will be fit neither for the land because you were unprofitable, nor for the dunghill because you have been saved. Where then will you be? In the third place, a place outside both the glorious kingdom and the lake of fire. Few Christians have ever seen that in the Bible there is a third place prepared for the defeated saved ones. This is a sobering word.

We need to be deeply impressed that in the full revelation regarding man in the divine Word there are three places—a place for salvation, a place for perdition, and a place for shame. Where was Lot's wife? Although she was saved, she was in the third place, the place of shame. This is the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Do not try to argue with it.

*c) Believers Who Live in the World
as the Worldly People
and Seek to Save Their Soul*

Believers who live in the world as the worldly people and seek to save their soul, their soul-life, will suffer shame as did Lot's wife, and will lose their soul at the Lord's coming back (Luke 17:28-33). Most Christians are like this. Although they are believers, yet they live like worldly people, shopping and dressing in the same way as the worldly people do. Since they live and walk the same as the worldlings, there is no difference between them and the worldly people.

To save the soul means to refuse to suffer for the Lord's sake. Christians who save their soul like to have their pleasure. They say, "What's wrong with going to sporting events? It's not sinful." Although it may not be sinful, it is worldly. I am not saying that Christians should have no physical exercise for their health. We certainly need that. But once any form of exercise becomes a sport or entertainment, it is worldly. If you enjoy it and find it pleasurable, it means that you are saving your soul. To have any psychological and worldly enjoyment is to save the soul.

Today is not the time for us Christians to have psychological and worldly pleasure or enjoyment; it is the time for us to suffer in our soul, in our psychology. As long as we can maintain our existence, it is sufficient. We should not seek psychological and worldly pleasure. Since World War II, who has given such a sobering word? During the past thirty-one years, I have been watching and observing, but I have not heard a sober word or warning telling Christians that we are not on this earth for our psychological and worldly enjoyment, and that we must suffer the loss of every kind of amusement and entertainment. Your enjoyment of certain music

at home may be a saving of your soul. Many Christians cannot overcome their television sets. Their watching television may be a saving of their soul. I am neither religious nor legal, but I do say that today is not the time for us to have psychological and worldly amusement; it is the time for us to suffer in our soul. This suffering in the soul is for the saving of the soul. If you are not willing to suffer in order to save your soul, you will suffer shame as Lot's wife did and lose your soul at the Lord's coming back.

It is wrong to teach that all Christians will be raptured at one time at the Lord's coming back. That teaching befuddles the spiritual sense of the Lord's people. In Luke 17:34 and 35 the Lord said, "I tell you, in that night there will be two on one couch; the one will be taken, and the other will be left. There will be two grinding at the same place; the one will be taken, but the other will be left." You may argue, saying, "The one taken is a believer, and the one left is an unbeliever." But that is your interpretation. While both are the same, doing the same thing in the same place, only the Lord knows who is genuinely for Him. If you read the context of Luke 17:22-37, you will see that this word is not given to unbelievers but to the Lord's disciples. It was a word given to them concerning the time of His coming. The "two" in verses 34 and 35 refer to two of the Lord's disciples, one of whom will be taken and the other of whom will be left. The one who will be taken will surely not be like Lot's wife. The disciple who will be left will be like Lot's wife. This is a sober word.

*d) Children of God Who Do Not Abide
in the Lord as the Anointing Teaches*

The children of God who do not abide in the Lord as the anointing teaches will be put to shame at the Lord's coming back (1 John 2:27-28). We who are in the Lord's recovery know what is the inner teaching of the inward anointing. But do we abide in the Lord according to the teaching of the living anointing within us? First John 2:27 and 28 charges us to abide in the Lord according to the anointing. For example, if you are about to go shopping and the anointing says no, will you say, "Amen, Lord"? If you do, that is good. However, if you say, "Lord, I won't buy anything bad," the Lord may say, "I don't care whether you buy something good or bad. Don't go." We should simply say, "Amen, Lord, I'm just abiding in You according to Your teaching of the inward anointing." We all need to abide in the Lord in this way.

If we do not abide in the Lord according to the anointing, we shall "be put to shame from Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28). To feel shameful is one thing; to be put to shame is another. This verse is not saying that we shall feel shameful, but that we shall "be put to shame." Notice that, according to the Greek, it does not say, like the King James Version, "before Him" but "from Him." The Greek preposition here is apo, which means "away from." If we abide in the Lord according to the anointing, when He appears, we shall have confidence, assurance, boldness, and peace and not be put away from Him. Literally, the Greek words translated "at His coming" mean "in His presence." The Greek word for presence is parousia, which includes the meaning of coming. We may have His coming and yet not be in His presence. For example, the President of the United States may come to Anaheim tonight, but only a few people will enter into his presence, that is, into his parousia. The Lord Jesus will come, but will you be worthy to be in His presence? If you live in a worldly way, loving the world and making the Lord the last in your life, how could you be brought into His presence when He comes? We must abide in the Lord according to the inward anointing so that we may have confidence, boldness, and assurance before Him in His presence at His appearing and not be put to shame away from Him.

At His appearing, the Lord will deal with His believers. If His believers follow Him today in the way of abiding in Him according to the inward anointing, they will then have peace, boldness, assurance, and confidence and will be brought into His parousia, into His presence. If they do not abide in Him today, at His appearing, they will be put to shame away from Him. To be put to shame away from Him must mean to be put to the third place, the place which is neither the field for the fulfilling of God's purpose, nor the dunghill in the lake of fire. It is the place of shame outside His presence. A believer who is put to shame away from Him is not lost. He is still a saved person, but he must suffer being put to shame. That being put to shame will be for him a dealing and a discipline; it will be the chastisement exercised by the sovereign Lord over His defeated believers. This matter is quite clear and is very serious.

*e) Believers Who Do Not Watch
for the Lord's Coming Back
and Live a Proper Life*

The believers who do not watch for the Lord's coming back and live a proper life will suffer shame (Rev. 16:15). In Revelation 16:15 the Lord tells us to keep our garments. In the Bible, a garment always signifies what we are in our walk and living. We must have a clean walk, and our spiritual garment must be pure, white, and approved by God. We must watch for the Lord's coming and keep our garments pure. If we live such a clean life, we shall have no nakedness when He comes and men will not see our shame. This verse also says that the Lord is coming as a thief. He will not come as a visitor announcing His arrival ahead of time. When we do not think that the thief will come, he comes. I have been told that thieves often come about three or four o'clock in the morning, at the time when people are deeply asleep. We need to be sober and watching. Otherwise, the Lord will come as a thief and our nakedness will be exposed. Once again, this tells us that there is the possibility that a saved person may be put to shame at the Lord's coming back.

*f) God's People Who Do Not Live
and Walk according to His Economy*

God's people who do not live and walk according to His way, that is, according to His economy, will come short of the fulfillment of His purpose and be put to shame. As we have seen, this is the significance of the pillar of salt. Do not take this merely as a Bible study, but as a warning for us all. Even we who are in the Lord's recovery cannot afford to be loose or indifferent. We must be sober and consider the situation to be quite serious. We need to have a life and walk that fulfills God's purpose. Then at the Lord's appearing we shall be in His parousia and not be cast out to the third place, the place of shame.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FIFTY-FOUR

**LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD
THE SEED BY INCEST**

As I have pointed out many times, nearly all the seeds of the divine revelation are found in the book of Genesis. A seed is a primitive form of something. Although its size is small and its form is simple, once a seed has been sown into a field, it will grow. As it grows it takes on another form. First it is a sprout and later it is fully developed. Although the final form of its development is different from that of the seed, all the principles and major aspects of it are found within the seed. If we would understand Genesis 19, we must consider it as a seed which has its growth, development, and harvest in the following books of the Bible. Although the record concerning Lot and his daughters in Genesis 19:30-38 is a negative seed, concerning such an ugly thing as incest, it serves the positive purpose of giving us a strong, sobering warning.

5) *The Seed by Incest*

In this message we must see the portrait of a most ugly thing—incest. Genesis 19:30-38, probably the first recorded case of incest in human history, is part of the section on living in fellowship with God. As we consider this matter, we must cover six points: the family, the father, the mother, the daughters, the seed, and the far-reaching and unsearchable mercy of God.

Firstly, we have the family, the group, and secondly, we have the father, the leader of this group. Thirdly, we have the mother who was the leader's helper. The leader of any group needs help. The proper helper in a family is the wife, and in the Bible a wife is called a helpmeet. In figure, the wife in a family signifies a helper in life. This concept is according to the principles of the Bible. Consider the example of Sarah. Abraham had a family for God's purpose, for Abraham alone could do nothing for the fulfillment of God's purpose. He needed a helper in life. Although he turned to Hagar for help, she was not a helper in life but a helper in the flesh. Sarah was the unique helper, the one who had the function in life. Without her, Abraham could never have brought forth Isaac for the fulfillment of God's purpose. The church today is a spiritual family in which there also is the need of the proper function in life to bring forth "Isaac" for the fulfillment of God's purpose. As we shall see, at a certain point, Lot's family group lost its function in life because the wife became a pillar of salt. She should have been salty and maintained a good flavor, but due to her worldliness she lost the function in life. In figure, becoming a pillar of salt indicates the loss of the function in life. Although there was a group with a leader, there was no wife with the function in life, only a pillar of shame. This is true of many Christian groups today. Although these groups have leaders, they do not have the proper wife with the genuine function in life.

Because Lot's family had lost its function in life, it had improper members—the daughters. I am not happy to call the members of Lot's group daughters, for the word daughters is a good term. What kind of people were they? Were they daughters or wives or mothers? I simply do not know what to call them. If you call them daughters, you must say that they were incestuous daughters. Although they might have been mothers, they were incestuous mothers. I feel ashamed to even speak of what they did. After lying with their father, the first daughter encouraged the second to do the same thing. How shameful! These were the members of Lot's group. Many Christian groups today also have such improper members. They, like Lot's daughters, desire to have the seed but do not care for the proper means. They may say, "Let us go to win souls," but they win souls through the way of spiritual incest.

In 19:30-38 we have the group, the leader, the helper in life, the members, and the seed by incest. But praise the Lord that eventually the far-reaching and unsearchable mercy of God is seen in one of the descendants who came out of this incest. Ruth, a Moabitess, a descendant of Lot through his daughter, became the great grandmother of David and an ancestress of Christ. Is this not the far-reaching and unsearchable mercy of God? However, when we hear of this, we should not say, "Let us do evil that good may come."

a) *The Family—the Group*

Let us now consider these six points in more detail. Based upon the principle that everything in the book of Genesis is a seed, we may say that Abraham's tent, in which he had intimate fellowship with God on the human level, was a miniature of the tabernacle which God commanded Abraham's descendants to build as His dwelling place on earth. Abraham's tent was the seed, and the tabernacle erected in the wilderness by the children of Israel was the growth. The temple built in the good land of Canaan was a further development of this seed. Today's church, as the real dwelling of God on earth, is the fulfillment of what has been portrayed in the Old Testament by Abraham's tent, the tabernacle, and the temple. Eventually, the New Jerusalem will be the ultimate harvest of this seed. Revelation 21:3 says that "the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall tabernacle with them." Thus, in Genesis 18 we have the seed, and in Revelation 21 we have the harvest.

In the same principle, during the time of Abraham and Lot, God had a people on earth. His people were composed of two families, the families of Abraham and of Lot. This was a seed, a miniature, of God's people in the following ages. Firstly, the children of Israel were the development of the seed of God's people, and now the church today is the continuation of this development. Eventually, in the New Jerusalem we shall see that all the redeemed ones throughout the generations will be the full harvest of God's people on earth. Once again we have the seed, the development, and the harvest. By this we see that what is present with the seed should also be found with the development.

At the beginning, Abraham's family and Lot's family, being God's people, were one. At a certain time, however, division came in and they were divided. When they were one, they were not a group; they were the people of God, God's one people. When division came in, it produced a free group. That ancient free group was the seed and the miniature of today's free groups. The free groups among God's people today are actually a further development of this seed. The division which was sown by Lot was developed after the time of Solomon when the children of Israel were divided and a free group was produced. That free group, the nation of Israel, was never recognized by God. God only recognized Judah because Judah was on the proper ground. The principle is the same in the church age. The whole church should be God's one people. In the early days, the church was uniquely one. But division after division came in, producing many free groups. We praise the Lord that this division will not continue into the new heaven and new earth. It will be terminated by the Lord's coming back.

(1) Apart from God's Witness and Testimony

We have seen that Lot's separation from Abraham was the seed both of division and of today's free groups. Who was the cause of that division? The fault was not on Abraham's side; it was on Lot's side. The members of Lot's family might have argued, "Aren't we also God's people? Why do you, the members of Abraham's family, always say that you are the people of God?" Yes, Lot's family was a part of the people of God, but they had left God's witness and testimony, which were Abraham and what he was testifying. God's witness

and testimony were at the tent of Abraham by the oaks of Mamre in Hebron, not with Lot in the city of Sodom. In chapters eighteen and nineteen we see that God and the two angels were happy to stay with Abraham, enjoying dinner and intimate fellowship with him. But when the angels went to the wicked city of Sodom, God did not go with them; He remained with Abraham. While both groups were God's people, where was God's presence? Only with Abraham's family. God's presence was with Abraham's family because his family was the typical people of God and had the proper standing of God's testimony. Although Lot was one of God's people, he was not on the proper ground by the oaks of Mamre in Hebron; he was in Sodom, on the ground of division and free groups. All God's people, being His family, should dwell by the oaks of Mamre in Hebron, where God can pay them a friendly and intimate visit. Here we can see the difference between the church and the free groups: all the free groups are God's people, but the church is by the "oaks of Mamre" in "Hebron," continually enjoying God's intimate presence. What then about the free groups? As it was with the case of Lot's family, God does not meet with them. They are His people, and He cares for them and does not forget them, but His presence is not with them. After the angels left for Sodom to rescue Lot and his family, God's presence was with Abraham, His dear friend. Where are you—with Abraham's family in Hebron or with Lot's free group in Sodom?

Does not the Bible say that Lot was a righteous man? Yes, we are clearly told in 2 Peter 2:7 and 8 that Lot was righteous. Are not the people in the free groups saved? Certainly they are. But look at the situation: the people in the free groups are in a place which is under God's condemnation. This is clear in the enlightenment of the divine revelation. Suppose you were alive during the days of Abraham and Lot. With which group would you have been? Perhaps you would have said, "You say that Lot's group is a division. Isn't Abraham's group also a division? Neither Abraham's group nor Lot's group is the whole body. They both are the same. Why do you make so much of the difference between Abraham's family and Lot's family when both of them are God's people? Since both are God's people, today I will be with Lot and tomorrow I will visit Abraham." Although you might stay with Lot, God would not. This makes a great difference.

Besides the family which was on the ground where they could have intimate fellowship with God, there was a free group. Today's situation is a further development of this seed. Be honest and fair about the free groups. Is there the testimony of God among them? No, God is not expressed in the free groups. They do whatever they like, and there is no witness or testimony with them. Lot's family became such a free group because it was apart from Abraham and what he was testifying. If I had been Lot, having the light which we have today, I would have said, "Uncle Abraham, even if you force me to leave you, I would refuse to go. If you don't like me, I would still embrace and kiss you. I would stay with you because you are God's witness and because the testimony of God is with you. I will never forsake this testimony." We should have this attitude today. Although we may not be happy with the brothers in the church, we should say, "Brothers, although I don't feel happy with you and although you may mistreat me, I will never leave God's testimony." The source, the root, of the problem of the ancient free group was its departing from God's witness and testimony.

As many of us can testify, when we departed from the denominations, we were happy and felt as though we were in the heavens. But it is quite a different matter to leave the church. If you forsake the church, your joy will disappear and will not return until you return to God's testimony. I do not say this lightly. Without exception, those who have left the church have lost their joy. Once a person leaves the church, it is very difficult for him to come back. Look at Lot: although he was rescued after the slaughter of the kings, he refused to return to Abraham. Even after he had been delivered from the destruction of Sodom, he still did not go back to him. Later on, we shall see that Lot still had his self-choice. That we are joyful after leaving the denominations but joyless after leaving the church proves what is the church, which has God's presence, and what is a denomination, which does not have God's presence. Although we may not be able to discern the difference between them by our thought, we can discern it by the sense of life deep in our spirit.

(2) Drifted into the Wicked City

After Lot's group had left God's witness and testimony, they drifted into the wicked city of Sodom (13:12-13; 19:1). If you leave the church life, you will be defeated. Like a piece of driftwood that cannot control its direction but is carried along by the current, you will drift with the tide of this age and float downward until you find yourself in a wicked city.

(3) Rescued Yet Still Having Self-preference

After Lot was rescued from the destruction of Sodom, he still had his self-preference (19:20-23). He begged the rescuing angels to allow him to go to a little city named Zoar. God was merciful, and the angels granted Lot his request. If you trace the history of many dissenting groups, you will see that it is the same. At first, they were in a big city, and God gave them no blessing. Then, after God intervened, they moved to a Zoar, a little city far away from God's testimony. They firstly left God's testimony and drifted into a God-condemned situation, and then, still having their own choice, went to a little place.

(4) Isolated Farther Off from God's Witness and Testimony

Eventually Lot went to dwell in a cave (19:30). Like Lot, some free groups, after leaving a large city and going to a small one, have gone to live in a cave. They have isolated themselves from the rest of God's people, refusing to have fellowship with them. They may say, "Why do you say that you are the church and that we are not?" If they are the church, they should not dwell in a cave but come out to fellowship with God's people. But they only care for their little group in that cave. What they have is the cave life, not the church life.

b) *The Father—the Leader*

(1) Being Drunk with Worldly Wine
by the Desire of Securing Seed

Now we come to the father, the leader. In the cave, Lot became drunk with wine (19:32-35). As I have pointed out previously, it was very strange that these escapees had wine with them in the cave. They were so addicted to wine that they must have brought it with them when they fled Sodom. Wine was the drug that befuddled them. When they were in the cave, Lot's daughters did not have proper fellowship with him, saying, "Father, our mother has become a pillar of salt, and we don't have husbands. How can we have seed? We must do something about it. May we all pray together?" If they had done this, there would have been no incest. But they did not fellowship in the spirit, nor pray to the Lord. The older daughter, the one who was more experienced with the drugs of Sodom

and who had been more befuddled by them, proposed to the other that they make their father drunk with wine and lie with him that they might have seed by him. If you examine today's situation, you will find that the leader of nearly every free group has been drugged and befuddled with some wine. A proper leader must be sober. Lot should have said to the daughter who came to him with wine, "What are you doing? Throw that away." But Lot was not a sober person; he drank, and he even drank without self-control. He became drunk to such an extent that his daughters laid with him and he had no awareness of it. Most of the leaders of the free groups, being drunk with some wine, say, do, and decide things in a befuddled way. Because of the befuddled condition of so many leaders, most of the members of their groups have been drugged.

(2) Slumbering and Sleeping

After Lot became drunk, he slumbered and slept. The same condition prevails among the free groups today. Concerning the testimony of God, the leaders are slumbering and sleeping. They may be very active in the things which they are pursuing, but they are asleep as far as God's testimony is concerned.

(3) Being Befuddled

Furthermore, Lot was befuddled, having lost the sense of life (19:33b, 35b). When the first daughter came in to lie with him, "he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose." The same occurred with the second daughter the next night. What sin can surpass this? He even had no sense about his daughters' lying with him! The leaders of many free groups today have also lost the sense of life. They are not aware of the violation of some of the governing principles ordained by God.

c) *The Mother—the Helper in Life*

We have seen that the mother, who, as the wife, should have been the helper in life, became a pillar of salt because of her worldliness (19:26). When Lot's family came into the cave, there was no function of life, for there was no function of the proper wife. As a result, they turned to incest, using such a sinful thing to replace the lost function of life. This is also the situation among many so-called Christian groups. They have lost the function of the Body of Christ, the proper function of life, and use worldly methods to fill the gap. Like Lot's group, they cannot produce the proper "Isaac" for the fulfilling of God's purpose. Because they use incest to secure seed, they produce "Moabites" and "Ammonites."

d) *The Daughters—the Members*

We have seen that the leader was drugged and befuddled and that the function of life was lost. But the daughters, the members of this free group, still wanted to bear fruit and have the increase. Although they had neither the proper leadership nor the function of life, they had an evil way of acquiring the seed. The same is true among many free groups today. In order to bear fruit, we should live by Christ, live out Christ, pray, and help people to receive the living word of God so that they might be reborn. This is the way to bring forth the proper fruit to be the "Isaac" for the fulfilling of God's purpose. But look at today's situation: some groups use rock music, dancing, drama, movies, and games to satisfy their desire of securing the increase. In the eyes of God, this is spiritual incest. The free groups adopt these methods because the wife, being worldly, has lost her function. In the churches we need the function of life to produce seed. Once people have lost the proper wife with the function in life, they use ugly and worldly means for securing the increase. This is the way of "incest" which brings forth "Moabites" and "Ammonites."

(1) Having Lost the Sense of Morality

Lot's daughters had lost their sense of morality, having been drugged with the wicked current of the evil world. If they had had any sense of morality, they never would have considered lying with their father. The first daughter laid with her father without any sense of shame and encouraged her sister to do the same. They talked peacefully with one another about this without any feeling of guilt. When they were all in Sodom, Lot even proposed sacrificing his daughters to satisfy the Sodomites who were indulging in their sodomitical lust. How could a man with a proper sense of spiritual morality have proposed such a thing? He should have said, "Let them kill me and my guests, but I will never do this to my virgin daughters." Where was Lot's sense of morality? Lot had been drugged. The result was that his daughters had no sense of morality and that their humanity was degraded to the lowest level. Some free groups today have also been drugged with the wicked current of the evil world and only care for success, not for the means. They need the de-drugging of God's sobering word.

(2) Desiring to Have the Seed Regardless of the Means

Lot's drugged daughters were desirous of having seed regardless of the means (19:31-35). They cared only for the goal, not for the way. Many Christian groups are like this. They say, "What is wrong with preaching the gospel in this way as long as we bring people to Christ? We have won a great many people. How many souls have you won?" They care for soul-winning, but they do not care for the proper way of doing it.

(3) Having Committed Incest

Lot's daughters committed incest, breaking the governing principle ordained by God (19:36). Here we need to refer to Matthew 7:21-23. The Lord said that when He comes back, some so-called Christian workers will say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many works of power?" (Matt. 7:22). If they had not done these things, they would be unable to talk like this. The Lord will not deny that they did such works. But in Matthew 7:23 the Lord said that He will "declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, workers of lawlessness." For the Lord to say, "I never knew you" means "I never approved of you because you are a worker of lawlessness." The runners in a race must stay in their lane. However fast they run, they are not permitted to run lawlessly outside the boundaries of their lane. Likewise, we need a governing principle for our spiritual activity. It is not a matter of prophesying, casting out demons, or working miracles. It is a matter of the Father's will (Matt. 7:21). Our spiritual activities must be the doing of the Father's will. Our preaching, loving one another, and all we do must be the Father's will. If we lack the assurance deep in our spirit that what we are doing is the Father's will, we should not do it. If we do things without this assurance, we shall break the governing principle and commit spiritual incest. This is lawlessness in the eyes of God. The Lord will never approve of such lawless workers.

The daughters of Lot produced seed by incest. The names of their two sons are very meaningful. The first, Moab, means "from father" (19:37). When the first sister named her boy "from father," she was saying, "I have a child from my father." She even gave her child a name to remind her of this. The second daughter gave birth to a boy named Ben-ammi, which means "son of my kin" (19:38). As far as these daughters were concerned, as long as they had seed for their race, everything was all right. If they had had no seed, their free group would have been terminated. Today's situation is absolutely the same. Many free groups only care for the continuation of their kin, that is, of their group. They do not care for God's will nor for the proper way, but bring forth seed by incestuous activities.

The seed produced by incest became a great damage to the people of God through fornication (Num. 25:1-5). As God's people were wandering in the wilderness, the Moabites came in. Firstly, they hired the Gentile prophet Balaam to curse God's people (Num. 22:2-7), but God turned that curse into blessing (Num. 23:11; 24:10). Secondly, Balaam counseled the Moabites to seduce the children of Israel to worship idols and commit fornication (Num. 31:16). Idolatry always brings in fornication, for these two evil "sisters" go together. In Christianity today there are the teachings of Balaam mentioned in Revelation 2:14. The Lord told the church in Pergamos, a degraded, worldly church, that some among them held the teachings of Balaam, the teachings which damaged God's people through idolatry and fornication.

God severely judged the Israelites for their idolatry and fornication with the Moabites, telling Moses to "take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel" (Num. 25:4). Furthermore, God rejected the Moabites and the Ammonites with a holy and divine hatred, commanding the Israelites not to "seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days forever" and declaring that no "Ammonite or Moabite shall enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever" (Deut. 23:3-6). Everything relating to the Moabites and Ammonites was under God's condemnation, and the children of Israel were forbidden to seek their peace or prosperity.

In Genesis 16 through 21, there are three kinds of births: the birth of Ishmael, the birth of Moab and Ben-ammi, and the birth of Isaac. The birth of Ishmael was by fleshly effort, and the birth of Moab and Ben-ammi was by incest. But the birth of Isaac was by the grace of God. Ishmael, brought forth by fleshly effort, was rejected by God. Moab and Ben-ammi, brought forth by incest, were a shame in history. Only Isaac, brought forth by God's grace, was used to fulfill the purpose of God. We all must test ourselves to see what kind of seed we are bringing forth—Ishmael, Moab, or Isaac. We may have some increase, some fruit, but are they Ishmaelites, Moabites, or Isaacs?

f) The Far-reaching and Unsearchable Mercy of God

Although the Moabites were rejected to the tenth generation, in the case of Ruth we see the far-reaching and unsearchable mercy of God (Ruth 1:2, 4-5, 8, 15-19, 22; 4:13, 17). Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, brought his family from Judah to seek the peace and prosperity of the Moabites. After Elimelech died, his two sons "took them wives of the women of Moab" (Ruth 1:4). When the two sons died, Naomi was left in Moab with her two daughters-in-law. As Naomi was returning to Judah, Ruth, refusing to depart from her, said, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). Through seeking God absolutely, Ruth, a widow Moabitess, entered into the holy congregation of God's people, married Boaz, and became the great grandmother of King David. Eventually, she not only entered into the holy congregation of God's people, but also entered into the genealogy of Christ, becoming an ancestress of Christ and having a part in His incarnation (Matt. 1:1, 5). This is the far-reaching and unsearchable mercy of God. God's mercy is waiting for us to seek Him and His people. Do not stay in Moab—come to Judah. God's congregation and Christ's incarnation are with His people in Judah. The right standing means a great deal. You must change your standing and your ground. If you would be in the holy congregation and have a part in the incarnation of Christ, you must come out of Moab and be with the people of God in Judah.

Lot, who was one of God's people, and his family left God's witness and testimony. The issue of his life was the bringing forth of Moabites and Ammonites. Ruth, a widow Moabitess who was seeking after God, came to God's people and God's testimony. The issue of her life was the bringing forth of Christ. What a wonderful mercy of God is available to His seekers! Even a descendant of Moab, a man born through incest, could participate, through redemption, in the incarnation of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FIFTY-FIVE

LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD THE HIDDEN WEAKNESS AND A SHAMEFUL INTERCESSION

The Bible is an honest book. After Genesis 18 and 19, in which we see Abraham's high attainment in his experience of God, there is a record of his weakness in Genesis 20. Can you believe that after having such intimate fellowship with God and after making such a glorious intercession, Abraham could have the experience recorded in chapter twenty? It is difficult to believe and understand how Abraham could have shown such weakness. Once again we see that the Bible is not man-made. If it were of human manufacture, the writer would not have included this record of Abraham's weakness and shortcomings. But the Bible is honest and it has Genesis 20 as part of the divine record.

6) The Hidden Weakness and a Shameful Intercession

When I was young, I appreciated chapters eighteen, twenty-one, twenty-two, and twenty-four, but I had no interest in chapter twenty. In this chapter two main things are recorded: the hidden weakness and a shameful intercession. Abraham, a man of God, had a weakness hidden deep within him. While in chapter eighteen he made a glorious intercession, in chapter twenty we find the record of a shameful one.

Let us first consider Abraham's hidden weakness (20:1-16). In verse 1 we are told that "Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country." Abraham's journeying toward the south meant that he had left the standing of fellowship at the oaks of Mamre in Hebron. He should have remained in Hebron because there he had intimate fellowship with God. Nothing is better than this. It was not too long after he had intimate fellowship with God that he left Hebron and journeyed southward. Between the time the Lord spoke to Abraham regarding the birth of Isaac in 17:21 and 18:14 and the time of Isaac's birth in chapter twenty-one, there could not have been more than a year. Why did Abraham suddenly leave Hebron and journey toward the south during that year? In figure, south signifies easiness and north hardships. The south is warm and the north is cold, but God dwells in the north (Psa. 48:2; 75:6-7; Ezek. 1:4). In the north we have hardships with God's presence. In the south we have easiness, but without God's presence. There is no hint in Genesis 20 that God told Abraham to journey southward. In making this journey, Abraham acted on his own.

Abraham might have wanted to have a change and take a vacation. Although you may be enjoying the church life in Anaheim, one day you may feel that you need a change and desire to journey southward to Mexico City. The church life is marvelous and we all enjoy it very much. But some may become a little bored and want to take a trip to Las Vegas. If you go to Las Vegas and meet someone there who asks about what you do at home, you will find it difficult to give him an honest answer. On two occasions, when Abraham was in such a situation, he was not truthful (cf. 12:9-12). In chapter twelve Abraham journeyed southward because there was a famine in the land. That famine gave him an excuse for going southward to Egypt. But in this chapter Abraham had no excuse. He and his wife might have been bored and wanted a vacation. If they had remained by the oaks of Mamre in Hebron, Abraham would have had no need to lie. His lying was due to his wrong position. We see by this that the proper standing means a great deal. I do not believe that any brother can pray-read or give a living testimony in a casino in Las Vegas. He would not have the standing there to do such a thing. In order to do anything for God, we must have the proper standing. When Abraham left the standing of intimate fellowship with God and journeyed southward, he lost God's presence. The Bible does not say that in the south country God appeared to Abraham, nor that Abraham erected an altar and called on the name of the Lord. He had altogether lost the proper standing on which he could have fellowship with God. Young people, you must see that you need to stay in the right position. If you stay in the church, you will be kept and preserved. But if you journey southward, you will forsake the proper standing and lose God's presence. Spontaneously, your old man will return.

Before chapter twenty Abraham was circumcised. In chapter twenty, he should have been a circumcised person, not a natural person, for he had truly been dealt with by God. Some Christians claim that once they have experienced a certain blessing, they can no longer be in the flesh. But look at the example of Abraham. Although he had been circumcised both physically and spiritually, when he left the proper standing of fellowship with God, he was in the flesh again. After having such a high attainment in his experience with God, Abraham, the father of faith, acted the same as he did in Genesis 12, more than twenty years before. By this we see that as long as we are still in the old creation we are capable of doing anything in the flesh. If we do not remain in fellowship with God, we can do the same things that the worldly people do. Do not say that because you have been regenerated, have experienced the baptism of the Spirit, or have had a second blessing, you can no longer be in the flesh. However many are the blessings that you have received from God, if you do not remain in fellowship with Him, you will be in the flesh. Your experience proves that this is true.

We should never have any confidence in our self. The self is absolutely untrustworthy. We must put our trust in the presence of the Lord, telling Him, "Lord, if You take Your presence away from me, I am just a dog. But I praise You that in Your presence I'm a saint, one of the people of God." How much God's presence means to us! When Abraham was bringing God on His way in chapter eighteen, he was a wonderful saint, a man who could stand before God and talk face to face with Him as with an intimate friend. But in chapter twenty this wonderful person became very mean. After he had left the standing of fellowship with God, he could lie at the sacrifice of his wife. It seems unbelievable, but he did it. If we consider our past experience, we shall find that at least a few times we have done the same kind of thing. This shows us the importance of remaining in the presence of God. Our protection is not our self; it is His presence.

After Abraham had left God's presence and had journeyed toward the south, he repeated an old failure—lying by sacrificing his wife (20:2; cf. 12:11-13). To lie is one thing, and to sacrifice our wife is another. Although many brothers may lie, perhaps none of them would sacrifice his wife. But Abraham did it. I admire Sarah for being such a good wife. She did not complain but was agreeable with her husband's lie.

In 20:8-13 we see Abraham's hidden weakness exposed. Abraham did not lie accidentally; it was planned from the day he first began to follow the way of God. Abraham told Abimelech, "It came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother" (v. 13). This hidden weakness was kept within Abraham even after he had been circumcised. In principle, most of us are the same today. On the one hand, we are following the Lord in the church; on the other hand, we have a reserve. In case a certain thing happens, we have a reserve plan to deal with it. Do you mean to be absolute with the Lord? If you do, ask Him whether you still hold on to some hidden reserve. Although you may not believe that you have a reserve, when you take a vacation from the church life, it will be exposed. Many young sisters who are following the Lord in the church have a reserve deep within them. They say to themselves, "Maybe some day a certain thing will happen. If it does, I know just what I will do about it." This is the reserve planned from the time they first began to follow the Lord. Yes, we are living by faith in the church life. But what do we do when our faith fails? We use our reserve. Perhaps after a short while your weakness will be exposed. This will prove that in spite of your claim to be absolute, you are still not one hundred percent absolute.

I believe that the purpose of this record in chapter twenty is to show us that sooner or later our hidden reserve will be exposed. The Bible is different from any worldly book, for it is a genuine and honest record of a God-seeking people. However much we seek after God, we still have a reserve. I fear and tremble that perhaps there is still deep within me a hidden reserve that one day will be exposed.

In the Bible, Abraham, in figure, stands for faith and Sarah stands for grace. In other words, in the presence of God, a man always stands for faith and the wife always stands for God's grace. Abraham was the father of faith, and his life was a life of faith. Since Sarah is the figure of God's grace, for Isaac to be born of her meant that he was born of grace. Ishmael, on the contrary, was born of Hagar, of the law, of bondage. In figure, whenever faith becomes a failure, grace is damaged. This means that when faith fails on our side, grace suffers on the Lord's side. Each time Abraham failed, Sarah suffered, and when Sarah suffered, grace suffered.

Furthermore, grace and testimony go together. Whenever we have grace, we have the testimony. When Abraham lied, he did not have the enjoyment of grace. Therefore, he lost his testimony. Whenever faith fails, grace suffers, and the testimony of grace is lost.

God came in to rescue Sarah and to restore her. In figure, this means that God came in to take care of His grace and His testimony. God knows how to sovereignly protect His grace and preserve His testimony. We do not know how many times we have been in danger of damaging grace and losing the testimony because we have left the proper standing. But at a certain juncture, God came in to deal with the circumstances so that the testimony of His grace might be preserved. If this had been clear to Abraham, he would not have lied; he would have believed that God would care for His grace and His testimony.

Although Abraham's faith failed, God still preserved him by His sovereign care (vv. 3-7, 14-16). Because Abraham's experience had become abnormal, God did not appear to him. In chapters eighteen and nineteen, God appeared to Abraham but not to Lot. Here in chapter twenty, He did not appear to Abraham; He appeared to Abimelech in a dream (v. 3). In a sense, Abraham's standing in chapter twenty was nearly the same as Lot's in chapter nineteen. Therefore, God appeared to Abimelech, a Gentile king, telling him that the one who had lied to him was His prophet. Abimelech was surprised to hear that one of God's prophets had lied to him at the sacrifice of his wife. In this chapter, we see God's wisdom, sovereignty, fairness, and care. Leaving Abraham, the one who had lied, God spoke to Abimelech, the one who had been cheated, saying, "Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife" (v. 3). Abimelech was shocked. Then God told him that he must restore Abraham's wife and that Abraham would pray for him (v. 7). God did not inspire Abraham to pray for Abimelech; rather, He indicated to Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet and had the position to pray for the king and his family. In doing this, God did not rebuke Abraham.

Although Abraham was outside God's presence, God still preserved His testimony and gave Abraham many riches (vv. 14-16). When Abraham defeated Chedorlaomer and the other kings and rescued Lot, he refused to accept anything from the king of Sodom because he had the Most High God (14:21-24). However, when Abimelech gave Abraham sheep, oxen, servants, and silver, Abraham did not dare to say, "I don't need your help. I have the Most High God." He did not have the position to say this, and his mouth was shut. I do not believe that Abraham thanked Abimelech for his gifts or was happy to receive them. When he received all those gifts from Abimelech in front of Sarah, he must have been ashamed. God wisely and sovereignly restored Sarah, taking care of His grace and His testimony, and at the same time He disciplined Abraham.

b) A Shameful Intercession

After receiving the gifts from Abimelech, Abraham prayed for him (vv. 17-18). Abimelech needed Abraham's intercession because the Lord had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech. Do you think that you would be able to pray in such a shameful situation? Abimelech might have said to Abraham, "Why did you, a prophet of God, lie to me? Look at what has happened! Now that everything has been settled and I have returned your wife, I want you to pray for me." Many times, after we have failed the Lord, we are unable to pray for days, even though no one knows about our failure. How much more difficult it was for Abraham to pray in the presence of Abimelech! Nevertheless, Abraham prayed, and "God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maid-servants; and they bare children" (v. 17).

In order to intercede for Abimelech, Abraham had to overcome two things: his memory of his failure before Abimelech and his consideration of his wife's barrenness. He had to forget his failure before Abimelech and not consider his wife's barrenness. If I had been Abraham, I would have said, "I'm sorry, Abimelech, but I have failed the Lord and now I don't have the faith to pray for you." We all must learn that interceding for others does not depend upon our success; it depends upon the need. Once a need has been designated by God, we must intercede for it. Abraham might have said to the Lord, "I have failed. I lied to Abimelech and he has rebuked me. How can I intercede for him?" When we intercede for others, we must forget about ourselves, our surroundings, and our circumstances and intercede as if there were no one on earth except us and God. In spite of our failures, we must exercise our spirit and pray with boldness.

Although God was forced to leave Abraham and go to Abimelech, Abraham was higher than Abimelech. Although he had failed, Abimelech was far below him. The Bible says that the greater always blesses the lesser (Heb. 7:7). Because Abraham was higher than Abimelech, he could intercede for him.

Furthermore, we should not think that because God has not answered our prayers for our own needs we cannot pray for others. If I had been Abraham, I might have said, "Abimelech, you ask me to pray for you. I have been praying for my wife for years without receiving an answer. Because of this, I'm not sure that God will answer my prayer for you and I don't have the boldness to pray." We need to forget about our unanswered prayers and pray for others. If we would not pray for others, God will probably not answer our prayers for our own needs. Do not say that since your own need has not been met, you cannot pray for others. When Abraham forgot his need and interceded for Abimelech and his house, not only were their needs met but also his. If you forget your need and pray for the needs of others, God will not only answer your prayer for them but also your prayer for yourself. He will take care of your needs.

Abraham's intercession for Abimelech was a shameful one. In such a shameful situation it is difficult for anyone to intercede. The Bible does not give us a full record of Abraham's intercession for Abimelech like it does of his intercession for Lot. Perhaps Abraham was not bold or strong in spirit. Nevertheless, he interceded for Abimelech and his prayer was answered. By this we see that although we may not be bold in our spirit, as long as we intercede for others according to God's designation, our intercession will be answered. I can testify to this from my experience. A number of times I was in difficulty and prayed about it. But I received no answer. Suddenly people came to me who had the same difficulty and asked me to pray for them. After I prayed for them, God not only answered my prayer for their need but also my prayer for my own situation.

We all must learn not to pray according to our victory. It is easy to pray after we have been victorious, but not after we have failed. Although I do not encourage anyone to fail, I do say that we should not be bothered by our failures. God does not count on our failures; He counts on what we are. In the presence of God, we are the new man. This is what we are, and we must pray according to it. Because we are still in this old creation, we may fall back and fail. But we can forget that failure in the old creation and stand upon our position in the new creation. When Abraham stood on his position of being God's prophet, he could pray for Abimelech.

Genesis 20 is a very dear chapter, and we need to spend time to consider all its main points: the hidden weakness of God's seeking one; the way he was rebuked by Abimelech and was temporarily set aside by God; his intercession for Abimelech and his family; and the way God answered his prayer. If you dwell on this chapter for a few hours, your spirit will be richly nourished. As I consider this chapter today, I find it more needful than chapter eighteen. Although chapter eighteen is sweet, chapter twenty is precious, teaching us some precious lessons.

It teaches us that interceding for others does not depend upon our condition. It depends upon our standing. It depends upon who we are. We are the prophet of God, the new creation, the members of the Body of Christ. Being in the church life as a member of the Body of Christ gives us the standing to intercede for others. Forget about your environment and your failures. If you hold on to your feelings, your mouth will be shut, Satan will be victorious over you, and you will be deadened for days. This is very serious. We must forget our failures and our needs and take the proper standing to intercede for others according to God's designation and believe in God for others.

We also must learn to know ourselves. Do not think that if you have attainments as high as those recorded in Genesis 18 and 19, you will have no problems. We cannot afford to take a vacation from our fellowship with God. Do not have any confidence in your old self. Although your old self has been dealt with by God, it is still untrustworthy, even if it has been fully circumcised. Whether we are aware of it or not, deep within us there is a certain reservation in following the Lord. One day this reservation, this reserve of our natural weakness, will be exposed. Do not be surprised when it happens. Be prepared to take grace, forget your failures and your needs, and intercede for others. Stand on your position as a member of the Body of Christ, as a part of the new man, and as a saint in the Lord's recovery and pray, even if you pray with a sense of shame. Your intercession may be shameful and there may be no glory in it, but God will still answer it. Along with His answer to your shameful intercession, He will also answer your previously unanswered prayers for your own needs. How wonderful this is!

When, as God's prophet, Abraham lied to others, they became deadened. But when he forgot his failure before them and interceded for them, they received life and he himself was revived. Likewise, if we forget our failures and intercede for the needs of those before whom we have failed, we shall not only minister life to them but also to ourselves. May we all learn the lessons contained in this chapter.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FIFTY-SIX

LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF ISAAC

In the foregoing messages we have covered nearly ten chapters in Genesis regarding Abraham's experience with God. In those chapters we saw that Abraham, God's called one, had come to many stations and had passed through many stages. Now in Genesis 21 Abraham comes to a wonderful and marvelous station. Here Isaac is born.

7) The Birth and Growth of Isaac

The goal of God's calling of Abraham was to bring forth a seed. This matter of the seed was first mentioned in 12:7 and is referred to many times in the following chapters. In nearly every chapter God touched Abraham concerning the seed. Why was it so difficult for Abraham to have a seed? He was called, at the latest, at the age of seventy-five, but twenty-five years later he still did not have the seed, although God had called him for that very purpose. Because he had difficulty producing the seed, Abraham first relied upon Eliezer, whom God rejected. Then, hearkening to his wife's proposal, Abraham produced Ishmael by Hagar. However, God also rejected Ishmael, saying that He did not want a seed out of an Egyptian maid but out of Sarah. God seemed to say to Abraham, "Yes, you have produced a seed, but it is out of the wrong source. I will never approve that source. I have nothing to do with it. You may love Ishmael and care for him, but I do not." After the birth of Ishmael, God came in to tell Abraham that he had to be circumcised. At that time, God also strengthened and confirmed His promise to Abraham. After his circumcision, Abraham had intimate fellowship with God, enjoying the highest experience with God of anyone in history up to that time.

When, at the time of chapter twenty, the seed still had not come, even such a giant of faith as Abraham could not stand the test. As we saw in the last message, he was apparently bored in his experience of God and took a vacation. Abraham might have said to God, "God, You have promised again and again to give me a seed. You have dealt with me about this and that until I have nothing left. You have said no to everything I have done. Now I am bored and would like a change. I want to take a vacation." Abraham journeyed southward, that is, downward. Like everyone who takes a vacation after working hard, Abraham was seeking easiness. Because of this, he repeated an old failure. But God preserved him, creating a situation in which, in spite of his failure, circumstances, and environment, he had to intercede for Abimelech and his house. Not one thing was an encouragement to Abraham in this matter. Yet, being the giant of faith, he interceded, not with boldness or the release of the spirit, but in a shameful way. Nevertheless, his shameful intercession was answered. Not only did Abimelech's wife and maidservants bear children, but Sarah also gave birth to Isaac. One prayer of intercession received two answers. When we come to Genesis 21 we see that Abraham has returned from his vacation and is back in business again. In chapter twenty he tried to take a vacation and stay away from his divine job, but he did not succeed and God forced him to make an intercession. That intercession brought him back from vacation to his divine employment. Now, in chapter twenty-one, Abraham is back in his "office."

Genesis 21 has two sections. The first section, verses 1 through 13, is thoroughly covered by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 4:22-31,

where he allegorizes this portion of Genesis. By means of Paul's allegorization, seeking Christians throughout the centuries have been able to learn the true significance of the first part of Genesis 21. I wish that Paul had allegorized the remainder of that chapter, but he kept silent about it. Most Christians only consider 21:14-34 as a story of Ishmael's dwelling in the wilderness and becoming an archer and of Abraham's dealing with Abimelech over the well at Beer-sheba, not thinking that this portion of the Word has much spiritual significance. But if the first section of Genesis 21 has a spiritual significance, then the second section must also have a spiritual significance. In this message we need to cover the significance of both sections.

a) Isaac Born—Christ Brought Forth through Us

In the first section we see the birth of Isaac (vv. 1-7). Isaac, whose name means "laughter" or "he will laugh" (vv. 3, 6), was born according to God's promise (v. 1) at the appointed time, the time of life (v. 2; 17:21; 18:10, 14). As far as Abraham and Sarah were concerned, the birth of Isaac was a great matter. What is the spiritual significance of Isaac's birth? This is easy to see from Paul's allegory in Galatians 4. As Abraham was called by God, so we are God's called ones today. In God's calling us there is a goal, the same goal as there was with His calling Abraham—to bring forth the seed. God has called us to bring forth Christ. If you consider the experience of Abraham as recorded in chapters eleven through twenty and compare it with your own, you may be surprised to see that his experience is the same as yours and that his life is your biography. Our biography was written long before we were born. Whatever our age or generation may be, we all have the same biography. As Abraham was called to bring forth Isaac, so we have been called to bring forth Christ. We have not been called to produce good behavior. God's goal is that we bring forth Christ.

All the difficulties Abraham encountered in bringing forth Isaac were on his side, not on Isaac's. In like manner, it is easy for Christ to come through and out of us, but we have many problems. In fact, we ourselves are the problem. We simply are not the right persons to bring forth Christ. Although we can produce many things and have done so ever since we were saved, it is very difficult for us to bring forth Christ. I was a Christian for many years and still did not know how to bring forth Christ. I did not even know what it meant to bring Him forth. I am concerned that so many of us do not have the thought of bringing forth Christ. Some might even ask, "Hasn't Christ been brought forth already? Why must we bring Him forth again?" Yes, Christ has been brought forth, but every saved person must still bring Him forth.

In order to bring Christ forth, we must be circumcised. Our natural life and strength and our self must be terminated. This termination opens the way for the very El-Shaddai, the all-sufficient One, to come into our being as the all-sufficient grace to bring forth Christ. Abraham experienced this. In Genesis 21, Abraham reached his goal and Isaac was born, having been brought forth through Abraham. Today Christ, the real Isaac, needs us to bring Him forth. Both the Christian life and the church life are simply the bringing forth of Christ. We must bring Christ forth in our meetings, daily life, home life, and on our jobs.

Isaac's birth was not by Abraham's natural strength nor according to Abraham's time. It was by God's work of grace and it was according to God's time, the time of life appointed by God. Abraham was tested by this. His natural strength went ahead of God, trying to bring forth the seed God had promised. According to his natural strength, he had a time of expectation. But all that his natural strength produced was rejected by God. Before Abraham's natural strength was dealt with and terminated, God would not and could not do anything to bring forth through him the very seed He desired to have for the fulfillment of His purpose. Hence, God had to wait. While God was waiting, Abraham was tested. It is the same with us in the matter of bringing forth Christ. Our natural strength always causes God to wait. God's way and His timing are always a hard test to our natural life. God's grace will never do anything to help our natural life to bring forth Christ. He must wait until our natural life has been dealt with and terminated. Then, according to His timing, He will come in as the strength of grace to bring forth through us what He desires to have. If we would fulfill the divine purpose of God's calling, we all must learn this basic lesson. Never try to fulfill God's purpose by your natural strength and according to the time of your expectation. God has His way and His time. Only by His way and at His time can we bring forth Christ for the fulfilling of His purpose.

b) Isaac Grown Up—Christ Formed in Us

After the birth, there is the need of growth. Verse 8 says that "the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned." It is not sufficient simply to bring Christ forth. The very Christ whom we have brought forth must grow. In the past few years, many of us have brought forth Christ, but I wonder whether this Christ has grown up. Has there been the time of weaning? Isaac grew up and was weaned away from his mother's nourishment, meaning that he was no longer a young child but had become a young boy. On the day of his weaning, Abraham made a great feast. We can understand the significance of this according to our experience. When in the church life we see that Christ has grown up in certain brothers and sisters, we all will be happy and have a great feast, a great enjoyment.

It is not easy to have either the birth of Isaac or his growth. Likewise, it is not easy to have Christ brought forth, nor to have Him grown up. In the church life we need to have both the bringing forth and the growth of Christ. I thank God that Christ has been brought forth among us, but I hesitate to say that we have had much of the growth of Christ. It is wonderful to see that Christ has been brought forth in a particular young brother, but we are still waiting to see in him the growth of Christ. We want to see that the Christ in him has been weaned and is no longer a baby. Although the Christ in that brother may not yet be a full-grown man, we want to see Him as a strong boy. Christ must be formed not only in us but also among us (Gal. 4:19). In both our daily life and the church life we need the expression of a formed Christ. Then we may have a great feast for the enjoyment of God's grace.

c) Ishmael's Mocking of Isaac

According to Genesis 21, it was not the birth of Isaac that stirred up trouble; it was his growth. When Isaac was born, Hagar and her son Ishmael were not bothered very much. But after Isaac had grown up, Ishmael began to mock him (v. 9). In the biblical sense, this means that Ishmael was persecuting Isaac. God even counted Ishmael's persecution of Isaac as the beginning of the four-hundred-year persecution of His people (15:13; Acts 7:6). Ishmael's mocking was a serious thing because Isaac was God's ordained seed and Ishmael was the counterfeit. The counterfeit always hates the ordained. We, the ordained seed, are hated by the counterfeit. As Paul says in Galatians 4:29, "But as then he that was born according to flesh persecuted him that was born according to Spirit, so also it is now." The growth of Isaac stirred up that persecution.

Sarah, the one who represented grace, would not tolerate Ishmael's mocking of Isaac and said, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac" (v. 10). When I read this verse as a youth, I did not agree with Sarah, thinking that she was jealous and unfair. It was she who proposed to Abraham that he have a son by Hagar and now she tells him to cast Hagar and Ishmael out. According to my youthful understanding, I would have cast Sarah out. But one day, as I was thinking in this way, God rebuked me. That day I was arguing in favor of Hagar and Ishmael and sympathizing with Abraham, for "the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son" (v. 11). Although I thought that Abraham should have answered Sarah, telling her that she was cruel, he said nothing to her. Rather, God came in and told Abraham, "Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (v. 12). The heavenly Judge made the final decision, telling him to do what Sarah requested. Only Isaac, not Ishmael, was to be counted as the seed. Although Abraham had failed God in chapter twenty, he was quick to obey Him in chapter twenty-one. Verse 14 says that Abraham rose up early in the morning and sent Hagar and Ishmael on their way.

We need to see the spiritual significance of the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael. Like all Christians, you have been trying to do good since the day you were saved. But God has dealt with you, and many times you have been disciplined and cut. If you are a married brother, God has undoubtedly used your wife as the knife to cut your natural life. Every wife is such a sharp knife in the divine hand. Many Christian husbands can only be thoroughly dealt with and disciplined by the cutting of the wife-knife. No husband can escape it. I am happy to see that in the local churches God has used the wife-knives to deal with the natural life of the brothers. In this way, we brothers learn the lesson of hating our natural life and all the good things we can produce out of ourselves.

Although we may hate our natural life and all that it produces, we do not hate it absolutely. Deep within, we still appreciate it and say, "This Ishmael whom I have produced is quite good. He was born of me." Such a concept always delays Isaac's birth. It was only after Abraham had undergone dealing after dealing and failure after failure that Isaac finally came forth.

Christ has been born in our Christian life, but we still keep our Ishmael, hesitating to give up our good behavior. Many of us still boast in our natural goodness, saying, "I am not as proud as some of the brothers and sisters are. I thank God that I was born humble." The sisters might criticize others, saying, "I would never gossip the way Sister So-and-so does. I was not born that way." Even some elders and so-called ministers of the Word cannot keep from boasting of their natural attributes. Perhaps they say to themselves, "Brother So-and-so is so quick to lose his temper. But I thank God that my natural birth is much better than his." Although you may not utter this, it is nevertheless hidden deep within you.

When the Christ who has been born in our Christian life has begun to grow up, our natural goodness will mock Him. Then the grace within us will say, "Cast out the law! Cast out the bondwoman and what you have produced with her by your fleshly effort." Will you do this? You may do it apparently, but secretly you still hold on to Hagar and Ishmael, to the law and to your natural attributes and goodness. Not many Christians today have the boldness to say as Sarah did, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son." Not many would say, "Cast out the law, the effort of the flesh, and all the success of my effort." Rather, we cling to our success and hold on to our natural goodness. But sooner or later God will force us to abandon the law, our self-effort, and all we have produced. The brothers and sisters will then begin to rise up and say, "From now on there will be no more Hagar and Ishmael. They must go." Like Abraham, they will send them away with only bread and water (v. 14). Sooner or later we all must do this. We must rise up one morning, give the law a skin of water, and say, "Law, go your way, and take with you the one you helped me to produce. Don't leave him with me, because I don't want him anymore. I loved Ishmael in the past, but now I give him up." The law and the result of the effort of the flesh must be fully abandoned.

e) Two Wells—Two Sources of Living

In the first section of this chapter, we have two seeds, two kinds of persons, and two lives. Without the second section, however, we can see neither the source nor the result of their living. In the second section we have two wells, one for Ishmael (vv. 14-21) and one for Isaac (vv. 22-34). Since the Bible does not waste any words, this record of two wells for two kinds of lives must be very meaningful and full of spiritual significance.

(1) The Well for Ishmael
(a) In the Wilderness Close to Egypt

Ishmael's well, the source of his living, was in the wilderness close to Egypt (vv. 19-21; 25:12, 18). In the Bible, the wilderness always represents a place rejected by God. God never accepts the wilderness. As long as we are in the wilderness, we are rejected by Him. The best illustration of this is the wandering in the wilderness by the children of Israel. In figure, the wilderness also signifies our soul. If we live in our soul, we are straying in the wilderness that is rejected by God. The wilderness where Ishmael's well was located was close to Egypt. He could easily drift from there into Egypt. This means that when we are in our soul, in our natural being, we are wandering in the wilderness and can easily drift into the world.

(b) Making Ishmael an Archer

Ishmael's source of living made him an archer (v. 20). The difference between an archer and a planter is that a planter grows life and an archer kills it. An archer is a wild hunter like Nimrod in 10:8-12, a killer in the wilderness. This section of the Word even uses the word "bowshot" to describe the distance between the place where Hagar was sitting and the place where she had cast her child (vv. 15-16). Thus, in this portion of the Word, it is revealed that if we stay in the wilderness of our soul and drink water out of the well for Ishmael, the source of his living, we shall be made an archer using the bow to kill life for building up our own kingdom, not a planter growing life for the building up of God's kingdom.

(c) Leading to the Joining to Egypt

Ishmael's source of living eventually joined him to Egypt, that is, to the world (v. 21). When Hagar took a wife for Ishmael, she took a wife from Egypt, from her own source. Being an Egyptian, she desired to have an Egyptian woman as her daughter-in-law. By taking a wife out of the land of Egypt for Ishmael, Hagar sealed him with the things of Egypt. We see from all this that there is a well, a

source of living, which can make us a wild hunter who kills life and can join us to the world.

(2) The Well for Isaac

Praise the Lord that there is another well—the well for Isaac (vv. 22-34). Many verses in the Bible speak of this positive well. Psalm 36:8 says, "Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures." The Lord likes to make us drink of His river of pleasures. In John 4:14 the Lord Jesus said, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a spring of water welling up into eternal life." This means that God Himself will be our life. In John 7:37 and 38 the Lord Jesus also spoke of drinking: "If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." Moreover, in 1 Corinthians 12:13, the Apostle Paul says that we have all been made to drink of one Spirit, that is, of one well of water. Even the last chapter of the Bible contains a word about drinking: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come!..Let him who is thirsty also come; he who wills, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). This divine well must be the source of our living.

Although Christ has been brought forth and has grown up, in the church life we still must learn that there are two sources or two kinds of living. What kind of living do you have—the living of Ishmael or the living of Isaac? It is insufficient merely to say that you have the living of Isaac. You must examine the kind of water you are drinking day by day. Are you drinking of the well for Ishmael? If you are, that well will make you an Ishmael and will cause you to drift into the world. Are you drinking of the well for Isaac, the well which signifies the divine well, the well of Christ, the well of the Spirit? If you are drinking of this well, the divine water which flows out of it will accomplish a great deal.

(a) In Beer-sheba Close to the Land of the Philistines

The well for Isaac was in Beer-sheba, close to the land of the Philistines (vv. 25-32). This well, unlike the well for Ishmael, is not near Egypt but at the border of the land of the Philistines and the good land of Canaan. Beer-sheba was in the land of the Philistines and later became the southernmost part of the Holy Land. When describing the geography of the Holy Land, the Bible even uses the phrase "from Dan to Beer-sheba" (1 Sam. 3:20), because the distance from Dan in the north to Beer-sheba in the south includes the whole land of Canaan. In the Bible the land of the Philistines has a peculiar significance. It is not a place which rejects God absolutely; it is a place which accepts God but handles the things of God according to human cleverness, not according to God's economy. Consider as an illustration the way in which the Philistines handled the ark (1 Sam. 6:1-9). They did not reject it; they received it, but they handled it in a natural way according to their cleverness. Likewise, in Genesis 20 and 21 we see that Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, did not reject God but accepted Him in his own clever way. Abraham took God according to His economy; Abimelech took Him according to the way of human cleverness. This is the significance of the land of the Philistines.

(b) At the Cost of Seven Ewe Lambs—
Christ's Complete Redemption

The well for Isaac was a redeemed well (vv. 28-30). This well, which Abraham had dug, was lost, having been violently taken away by Abimelech's servants (v. 25). Then Abraham redeemed it at the cost of seven ewe lambs. In typology, these lambs signify the full redemption of Christ, indicating that the divine living water has been redeemed, bought back, by Christ's full redemption. Today, while the whole human race is living by a source which is without redemption, we are living by a redeemed source. The living water which we are drinking today is not natural; it has been redeemed at the cost of Christ's complete redemption.

(c) By a Covenant—the New Covenant

The well for Isaac also needed a covenant (vv. 31-32). The covenant here is a seed of the new covenant. Our living water today is not only redeemed water but also covenanted water. Ishmael drank of wild water, water that was without redemption and covenant. But all the water which Isaac drank was redeemed water, the water of the covenant. Since we have begun to know Christ, the source of our living has also been the redeemed and covenanted water.

(d) For Planting

In Beer-sheba Abraham planted a tamarisk tree (v. 33, Heb.). A tamarisk, a type of willow tree, has very fine leaves, often grows near water, and gives the impression of the flowing of the riches of life. That Abraham planted a tamarisk after making the covenant for the well at Beer-sheba indicates that the water of which he drank was flowing in a rich way. The Lord Jesus said that whoever believes in Him will have rivers of living water flowing out of his innermost being.

The church life today is by the well in Beer-sheba. When you drink of this well and live by it, you will be like a tamarisk flowing with the riches of life. Whenever people come to you, they will never sense dryness but will be refreshed by the water of life. Beer-sheba, which means "the well of an oath," is the place where the church should be. The church should be at the well of an oath with a covenant, and should also be full of tamarisk trees. We all need to be a flowing tamarisk. If you look at the branches of a tamarisk tree, they will remind you of the flowing of the riches of life. Praise the Lord that there are some real tamarisks in the local churches!

Here, at Beer-sheba, there is the planting, but with Ishmael in the wilderness there is wildness. Many Christian groups today are like a wilderness. They only make people wild. But the proper church life causes people to be planted. Have you been planted? Once you have been planted, you can no longer be wild.

In this section of the Word it is clearly revealed that there are two sources of living. One is the natural source in the wilderness of our soul, whereas the other is the redeemed source in the garden of our spirit. At Beer-sheba, Abraham was contending for the well which had been so violently taken away. Today we also need to fight for the divine well that we may have it for both the Christian life and the proper church life.

(e) With the Calling on the Name of Jehovah,
the Eternal Mighty One

Verse 33, which tells us that Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, also says that he "called there on the name of the Lord, the Eternal God" (Heb.). Here we see another special title of God—Jehovah, El Olam. In chapter seventeen we saw El-Shaddai, the

all-sufficient Mighty One. Here we see El Olam. The Hebrew word olam means eternity or eternal. However, the root of this Hebrew word means to conceal, hide, or veil from sight. Anything which is veiled spontaneously becomes secret. Abraham eventually experienced God as the Eternal One, as the secret and mysterious One. We cannot see or touch Him, yet He is so real. His existence is eternal, for He has neither beginning nor ending. He is the Eternal God (Psa. 90:2; Isa. 40:28).

Here we find another seed which is developed in the New Testament. The God whom Abraham experienced in chapter twenty-one is the same as the One revealed in John 1:1, 4: "In the beginning was the Word..and the Word was God..in Him was life." This life is the very El Olam. The mysterious God in eternity is our eternal life. Eternal life is a divine Person who is so concealed, veiled, hidden, mysterious, secret, and yet so real, ever-existing, and ever-living, without beginning or ending. The title El Olam implies eternal life. Here God was not revealed to Abraham but was experienced by him as the ever-living, secret, mysterious One who is the eternal life. In other words, in Genesis 21 Abraham experienced God as the eternal life. By the tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, Abraham could testify to the whole universe that he was experiencing the hidden, ever-living One as his mysterious life. There, at Beer-sheba, he called on the name of Jehovah, El Olam. In chapter twelve he only called upon the name of Jehovah, not yet experiencing Him as the God who is the mysterious, ever-living One. But here in chapter twenty-one, after having so much experience, with Isaac at Beer-sheba under the tamarisk tree he experienced the ever-living, mysterious One as his inner life and called, "O Jehovah, El Olam!" Although no one could see this mysterious One, He was real to Abraham in his experience. The One we have within us today is the very El Olam, the hidden, secret, concealed, mysterious, ever-living One. He is our life. We may have the same enjoyment Abraham had simply by calling, "O Lord Jesus."

While Abraham was sojourning in Beer-sheba, he must have done many things. But here the Scripture only tells us of one thing—that Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beer-sheba and called on the name of Jehovah, El Olam. By this brief record we can see two things. One is that the planting of the tamarisk tree must have been very significant; the other is that this planting of the tamarisk tree is connected with calling on the name of Jehovah, El Olam. As we have pointed out, Genesis 1 and 2 are not merely a record of God's creation but a record of life, with the tree of life as its center. Likewise this section of the Word is not merely a record of Abraham's history; it also is a record of life, showing by what source Abraham was living. He lived by calling on Jehovah, El Olam, by experiencing the eternal, hidden God as his life. In New Testament terms, he was experiencing the eternal life flowing with all its riches like a tamarisk tree which expresses the riches of the well by which it lives. As the tree of life is the center of the record in chapters one and two, the tamarisk tree is the center of the record here. We may say that the tamarisk tree is the tree of life experienced by us. It is the expression of the tree of life. Our Christian life and the proper church life are both a tamarisk tree, expressing the tree of life by which we live. This goes together with the calling on the Lord who is our eternal life, our Jehovah, El Olam.

(f) Making Isaac a Burnt Offering

This source of living water makes Isaac a burnt offering (22:2, 9). The source from which Ishmael drank made him an archer, one who lived wildly for himself. But Isaac's source of living made him a burnt offering, one who was offered to God for His satisfaction.

(g) Leading to the Offering to God
on the Mountain in Moriah

This source of living led Isaac up to Moriah, not down to Egypt (22:2). Ishmael's source of living leads people downward, but Isaac's source leads people upward to the mountain in Moriah where Jerusalem was later built. This going up to Moriah kept God's people from the Philistines. We also need to go up from Beer-sheba to Jerusalem, not only having the church life at Beer-sheba but also in Jerusalem. Ultimately, this proper source of life will make all of us Isaacs and will lead us to the New Jerusalem.

Here we have another seed of the divine revelation. Ishmael lived in the wilderness and was joined to Egypt, but Isaac lived in a planted place and was led to Moriah. The mountain in Moriah eventually became Mount Zion upon which God's temple was built (2 Chron. 3:1), thus becoming the center of the good land which God gave to Abraham and his descendants. After his descendants followed the way of Ishmael and went down to Egypt, God brought them out of that land with the intention of bringing them into the good land of Canaan. But their unbelief kept them wandering in the wilderness where Ishmael lived. Eventually, God brought their children into the good land and chose Jerusalem, which was built on Mount Moriah, as the unique center for them to worship Him. As a result of this, all the children of Israel were brought, three times every year, to the very mountain in Moriah to which Isaac was brought. Thus, Isaac's being brought to Mount Moriah was a seed which was developed in the going up to Mount Zion of all the children of Israel.

Out of Abraham two kinds of people came into existence. One is represented by Ishmael who lived in the wilderness and who was joined to Egypt; the other is represented by Isaac who lived at Beer-sheba and who was brought to Mount Moriah. Today there are also two kinds of Christians. One kind is like Ishmael, living for themselves in the wilderness of their soul and being joined to the world. The other kind is like Isaac, living for God in their spirit and in the church and being brought to Zion. Even we, the real Christians, may be like Ishmael, living in and for ourselves and being joined to the world, unless, as typified by Isaac, we live in our spirit and in the church that we might reach God's goal.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FIFTY-SEVEN

LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD THE OFFERING OF ISAAC

(1)

In this message we come to Genesis 22, where we see the climax of Abraham's experience with God. This chapter is the continuation of chapter twenty-one. These two chapters, giving the record of the birth and offering of Isaac, cover a period of at least twenty years. Some scholars believe that when Isaac was offered he was at least twenty years old. Thus, he was a full-grown man by then.

Everything recorded in these two chapters is very meaningful. As we pointed out in the last message, in 21:33, "Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the Eternal God" (Heb.). This planting of the tamarisk tree was not an insignificant thing. Although Abraham must have done many things while he was living in Beer-sheba, the Bible only records that he contended for the well, bought it back at a cost, planted a tamarisk tree, and called on the name of the Lord, the Eternal God. If these were insignificant things, the biblical record, which is very economical, would not have included them as part of the divine revelation. The fact that the divine revelation excludes many other things but includes the record of the planting of a tamarisk tree shows its importance.

The center of the revelation in Genesis 2 is the tree of life. Likewise, the center of the revelation in the second part of Genesis 21 is the tamarisk tree. If we have the spiritual realization with the divine light, we shall see that the tamarisk tree here is the tree of life experienced and expressed. When the tree of life is not experienced or expressed by us, it is simply the tree of life. But once we experience and express it, it becomes a tamarisk tree. A tamarisk tree has slender branches and very fine leaves showing the flow of the riches of life. Thus, the tamarisk tree planted by the well of an oath in Beer-sheba pictures the flow of the riches of life, the issue of the experience of the tree of life. Is the tree of life a tamarisk tree in your experience? Whenever we come to the meetings, the tree of life must become a tamarisk tree.

With Ishmael there was not a tree flowing with the riches of life; there was a bow. While the sign of Ishmael's life was a life-killing bow, the sign of Isaac's life was a life-flowing tree. As a Christian, a child of God and a descendant of Abraham, what is your sign—a bow or a tamarisk tree? Are you killing life, or is life with all its riches flowing in you?

If the tree of life in Genesis 2 is important, then the tamarisk tree in Genesis 21 must also be important. Very few Christians, if any, have seen the importance of the tamarisk tree at Beer-sheba. Although some have paid a little attention to the tree of life, they have not paid attention to the tamarisk tree. In the past we did see the tree of life, but we did not see the tamarisk tree. Thank the Lord that in these days He has given us the vision of the tamarisk tree. One day, the inward stirring told me that I had to know the significance of the tamarisk tree in chapter twenty-one. Although this chapter does not waste a word, ignoring the other things that Abraham must have done, it specifically says that he planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba. According to our opinion, the planting of a tamarisk tree may be insignificant, perhaps being only an ancient type of landscaping. But the Bible connects the planting of the tamarisk tree with calling on a new title of the Lord, the Eternal God. Notice how the conjunction "and" is used to connect these two items in 21:33. Abraham planted a tamarisk tree and there called on the name of Jehovah, El Olam. According to our human thought, planting a tree is unrelated to calling on the name of the Lord, especially to such a new and recently revealed title. But in the Bible here it gives us the ground for the proper calling on the Lord. If we would call on the name of the Lord, we need a tamarisk tree. If we do not have this tamarisk tree experience, we can only call on the old title of God, Jehovah, not on His newly unveiled title, El Olam.

In chapter twenty-one, Abraham called on a new title of God—El Olam, the mysterious, hidden, secret, yet so real, living, and ever-existing God. This title of God implies the term eternal life, for the eternal God means the eternal life. Abraham experienced the eternal life, but he did not have this term. The people in ancient times ate vitamins, but they had no scientific knowledge of them nor scientific terms to describe them. Because we were born after the writing of the New Testament, we have the term eternal life. But Abraham, who lived in ancient times, did not have such a divine term. Nevertheless, when he called on the name of Jehovah, El Olam, it is implied that he experienced God as the ever-existing and ever-living life, as the One who is real and living, yet so mysterious and secret.

We need to consider our own experience. Whenever we have had the flow of the riches of the divine life, that was the time when we called on the name of the Lord Jesus with a new realization. We called on the same Lord, but in our calling we had a fresh sense. Do you think that if you held the life-killing bow in your hand you would be able to call on the Lord's name? No, rather you would go to find an Egyptian wife.

8) The Offering of Isaac

a) Abraham Tested by God

In the original text of the Bible, there are no chapters, verses, or paragraphs. Chapter twenty-two is the immediate continuation of chapter twenty-one. After the mention of Abraham's planting a tamarisk tree and calling on the name of the Lord, God came in to test him (v. 1, Heb.). God, unlike Satan, never tempts anyone. But He does test us like He tested Abraham. I say again that after Abraham redeemed the well in Beer-sheba, he undoubtedly did many things, but, except for the planting of the tamarisk and calling on the name of the Lord, the Bible does not mention them. Rather, it immediately speaks of God's testing Abraham.

(1) To Offer to God
What God Has Given Him in Grace

Often after we have had the best enjoyment of the Lord, He will not ask us to do something for Him; rather, He will tell us to offer back to Him what He has given us. At such a time the Lord may say, "You have received a gift from and of Me. Now I ask you to return it." We always expect that after having a good time with the Lord He will command us to do something for Him. We never imagine that He may ask us to give back to Him that which He has given us. As Abraham was enjoying intimate fellowship with God, he was not commanded to work for Him. He received the highest demand from God—to give back to God what God had given him. From the very beginning, God never accepted anything that Abraham had. He did not care for Lot, rejected Eliezer, and told him to cast out Ishmael. Now, after Eliezer, Lot, and Ishmael had all been rejected, Abraham had acquired Isaac, the seed promised by God, and was at peace. Everything concerning Isaac was of God and by God. Never again would God say no to what Abraham had. But suddenly God came in and seemed to say, "I would never refuse Isaac. He was born of and from Me. But, Abraham, now you must give him back to Me."

Abraham was marvelous. If I had been he, I would have said, "Lord, what are You doing? You did not care for Lot, and You have refused Eliezer and Ishmael. Now You want Isaac, the one who was of You, to be given back to You. Will You rob me to such an extent?" If I had been Abraham, I would not have offered Isaac. I would have shook my head and said, "No, this certainly is not of the Lord. It would have been logical for Him to want Eliezer, and reasonable to demand Ishmael. But how could God want me to give Isaac back to Him? God is not purposeless. He promised to give me a seed, and His promise has been confirmed and fulfilled. Why

would He now waste all that He has been doing with me?" Yes, God is a God of purpose, and He certainly had a purpose in asking Abraham to give Isaac back to Him.

Many Christians, including some Christian workers, have never learned the lesson of offering back to God what He has given them. Have you received a gift? Do not hold on to it. Sooner or later God will come in and say, "Offer back to Me the gift which I have given you." Has God given you a successful work? At a certain time, God may say, "This work is the Isaac which I have given to you. Now I want you to offer it back to Me." However, many Christian workers will not take their hands off the work which God has given them. Nevertheless, all that God has given us, even what He has wrought in and through us, must be offered back to Him.

(2) To Offer to God His Only Son
Whom He Loves

In verse 2 God said to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." God told Abraham to offer Isaac, his only son whom he loved. How hard it must have been for Abraham to do this! If we had been he, we would have said, "Lord, I am more than a hundred twenty years of age, and Sarah is about to die. How can You ask me to offer back to You what You have given me?" If you have not had this experience, you will have it some day. We can testify that quite a number of times in the past God asked us to give back to Him what He had given us. The gifts, power, work, and success which He gives us must be offered back to Him. This is a real test. It would have been easy for Abraham to give up Lot or Eliezer. Even casting out Ishmael was not that difficult. But for him to offer his only son whom he loved was a very difficult thing. One day, after our having a good enjoyment of the Lord, He will ask us to give back to Him the gift, work, or success He has given us. He may say, "Now is the time for Me to ask you for something. I don't ask you to work for Me or to go to the mission field. I ask you to offer back what I have given you." This is the way we all must take today.

(a) A Life Grown Up by the Well of the Oath
with the Calling on the Name of the Eternal God

God did not tell Abraham to offer up a baby or even a little boy, but a full-grown man. Isaac's life was a life grown up by the well of the oath with the calling on the name of the Eternal God (21:33-34). Genesis 21:34, the last verse of chapter twenty-one, says, "Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days." This means that Abraham remained there for a good number of years. During that time, Isaac grew up by the well of Beer-sheba, growing up by a life of planting and calling on the name of the Lord, the Eternal God. The one whom Abraham was told to offer up was a grown-up son, one who had lived with him in a life of planting and calling. The life in Beer-sheba built Isaac up to be a burnt offering, not an archer.

(b) Offered to God on Mount Moriah
Where God's Temple Was Built

When God told Abraham to offer Isaac, He told him to go to the land of Moriah and to offer him upon one of the mountains there (v. 2). The land of Moriah was a two-day journey from Beer-sheba. The mountain on which Isaac was offered was later called Mount Moriah, eventually becoming Mount Zion, the place where the temple was built (2 Chron. 3:1).

When I read 22:2 as a youth, I was bothered. I wondered why God was so troublesome, saying, "Lord, You gave Abraham a son and asked him to offer his son back to You. That was all right, but it was not reasonable for him to go to such a far-off place. Aren't You omnipresent? Were You not there in Beer-sheba? Why did You ask Abraham to journey to a mountain so far away?" At first, God did not even tell Abraham on which mountain he was to offer Isaac, saying only that it would be "one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." In asking Abraham to journey far away for the offering of Isaac, God was not being troublesome. He is never troublesome; He is always meaningful. Eventually Mount Moriah became the center of the good land, and Abraham's descendants had to go to that mountain three times a year to offer the burnt offering to God (Deut. 16:16; Psa. 132:13). Thus, we see that chapter twenty-two of Genesis is a seed.

We cannot and should not offer to God the burnt offering which He desires in the place of our choosing. We must leave our place and go to the place of God's choice. Ishmael, the archer, the Bowman, went southward toward Egypt and married an Egyptian woman. But Isaac, the burnt offering, was a different kind of person. He did not go downward to Egypt; he went upward to Moriah. If you consult a map, you will see that Moriah is north from Beer-sheba. Here we have a picture of two types of persons—an archer and a burnt offering. Which will you be?

(c) For a Burnt Offering for God's Satisfaction

The picture in Genesis 22 is very vivid. In his hand Abraham held the fire and the knife. Isaac, who was carrying the wood for the burnt offering, said, "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" He did not know that he himself was to be the offering.

Do you know that your destiny is to be a burnt offering? To be a burnt offering is to be killed and burned. The growing, living, and calling on the name of El Olam at Beer-sheba are all for the building up of a burnt offering that we might be burned on the altar on Mount Moriah. The water at Beer-sheba is for the fire on Mount Moriah. The more we drink the water from the well of Beer-sheba, the more we shall grow, and the more we grow, the more we shall be prepared for the fire on Mount Moriah. Because of this, the Lord's recovery will never be a mass movement; it is a narrow way. At the time of Genesis 22, Isaac was the only person living and walking in this narrow way. Do not expect that many will take the way of the church. Many are happy to be a Bowman, for that is a sport. But living at Beer-sheba and calling on the name of the Lord may seem, in a sense, to be boring. Eventually, after we enjoy a good time with the Lord, He will ask us to offer our Isaac to Him. He will not allow us to offer Isaac at Beer-sheba. We shall have to travel a long distance and climb Mount Moriah. The proper church life does not produce bowmen; it produces burnt offerings. We all must become a burnt offering. Although this is a narrow way, it is prevailing.

Although it is a long journey from Beer-sheba to Mount Moriah and it is a journey which causes some suffering, it results in blessing. In the following message we shall see the blessing which comes from the life that grows up by the well of Beer-sheba and is offered to God on Mount Moriah. I know of a good number of very brilliant young brothers who came into the church life with an honest heart. Although their heart was honest, they expected that one day, after having all the necessary experiences and receiving all the visions,

they would become something in the Lord's recovery. In other words, they expected to be spiritual giants. Gradually, as the years went by, I learned what was on their heart, for they came to me and told me their story. One brother said, "When I came into the church life, I came in honestly, but I expected that one day, after I had been perfected, equipped, qualified, experienced, and had seen all the visions, I would be so useful in the Lord's hand. But now the Lord has told me that He intends to burn me up." Do you expect that someday you will become a strong Bowman? If you do, one day the Lord will say to you, "I don't want an Ishmael, a Bowman. I want an Isaac, a burnt offering. Don't try to do anything for Me. I can do anything I want. I just want you to be a burnt offering." The life at Beer-sheba only produces a burnt offering. The more we stay in the church life, the more it will bring us from Beer-sheba to Moriah, from the growing water to the burning fire. Are you growing? Thank God for this. But your growth is a preparation for your being burned. One day we all must pass through the process of being burned as a burnt offering.

In Hebrew the burnt offering means the ascending offering. After the burnt offering has been burned, its sweet odor ascends to God for His satisfaction. It is ascending and not spreading. As a burnt offering, we must not be spreading but ascending to God by being burned.

The experience of Genesis 22 cannot come immediately after that of Genesis 12. There must be a long journey from Genesis 12 through Genesis 21. When many of us came into the church life, that was our chapter twelve, not our chapter twenty-two. Abraham had to pass through the separation of Lot, the rejection of Eliezer, the casting out of Ishmael, and the birth of Isaac. Although God had promised Abraham a seed, He did not give it to him until Abraham had made a thorough clearance of Lot, Eliezer, and Ishmael. Only then was Isaac born. But not even Isaac's birth was the end. Isaac needed to grow and be offered.

As we have seen, Isaac did not grow up in the wilderness but in Beer-sheba, properly growing by the life of calling on the Lord. At a certain point, God came in and asked Abraham to offer Isaac. It seemed that God was being somewhat troublesome. However, God would never have troubled Abraham in that way if Abraham had not been qualified. When God comes to trouble you like this, it is an honor, because it testifies that you are qualified. God did not ask Abraham to offer Lot as a burnt offering. Neither did He request that Abraham offer Eliezer or Ishmael. Rather, God told Abraham to cast Ishmael out. Only the seed who was promised, confirmed, and brought into being by God was the right person. He was the one who grew up by the well of Beer-sheba and who called on the name of the Lord. God seemed to say to Abraham, "You love Isaac, and I love him too. Now you must give him to Me." Eventually, Isaac became the forefather of the entire chosen race. He also became a forefather of Christ. God's eternal purpose can never be fulfilled by anyone other than Isaac, the one who was brought up under the care of Abraham and offered to God.

(d) Returned in Resurrection
for the Fulfillment of God's Eternal Purpose

After Isaac was offered, he was returned in resurrection for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose (vv. 4, 12-13, 16, 18). After being returned in resurrection, Isaac was another person. He was no longer the natural Isaac, but the resurrected Isaac. This is very encouraging. After we have offered to God what we have received of Him, He will then return it to us in resurrection. Every gift, spiritual blessing, work, and success we have received of God must undergo the test of death. Eventually, it will come back to us in resurrection. The Lord Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Suppose God gives you a certain natural gift. That is one grain of wheat. If you keep this natural gift, never offering it to God, it will remain as one grain. But if you offer it back to God, after it has passed through death, it will be returned to you in resurrection and become a blessing. It does not depend on what we can do or intend to do for God. It all depends on our growing up to be offered to God as a burnt offering and then being raised up from the dead to be a resurrected gift. It is not a matter of being useful to God but of being under His blessing. God's blessing always comes in resurrection. For one grain to be multiplied into a hundred grains is God's blessing. If you offer your one grain to God and allow Him to put it into death, it will be returned to you in resurrection. Then you will see multiplication and great blessing. This is God's way.

b) Abraham's Obedience
by Faith

In Genesis 22 we see Abraham's obedience by faith. When I read this chapter as a young man, I could not understand how Abraham as a human being and a father could have been so bold. When God asked him to offer to Him his beloved son Isaac, he did it immediately. In this chapter there is no mention of Abraham's wife. According to the record here, we are not told that Abraham talked with his wife about offering Isaac. We are only shown that he responded quickly and boldly to God's command, rising up early in the morning and going to the place of which God had spoken.

(1) Believing in the Resurrecting God

In the Old Testament we cannot see why Abraham obeyed God so quickly and boldly. But in the New Testament we see that Abraham believed in the resurrecting God (Heb. 11:17-19; James 2:21-22). He had the faith which counted on God to raise up the very Isaac whom he was about to slay. He had received the firm and even confirmed promise that God's covenant would be established with Isaac and that he would become a great nation (17:19-21). If Abraham had offered Isaac on the altar, slaying him and burning him as an offering to God, and God did not raise him from the dead, then God's word would have been in vain. Abraham's faith was based upon God's confirmed promise. Abraham could have said, "If God wants Isaac, I will just slay him. God will raise him up for the fulfillment of His promise."

Romans 4:17, speaking of Abraham, says that the God in whom he believed is the One who "gives life to the dead and calls the things not being as being." Here we see that Abraham believed in God for two things: for giving life to the dead and for calling things not being as being. The birth of Isaac was related to God's calling things not being as being, and his being returned was related to God's giving life to the dead. Because Abraham had such faith, he obeyed God's commandment immediately. Hebrews 11:17-19 says that when Abraham was tried, he offered up Isaac by faith, "counting that God was able to raise him even from among the dead, from whence he also received him back in a figure."

(2) Acting according to God's Revelation

In obeying God by faith, Abraham acted according to God's revelation (vv. 3-4, 9-10). Everything Abraham did in this chapter was

absolutely of God. Abraham did not initiate anything nor do anything according to his concept. Nothing was done by his desire or understanding. God told Abraham what to do, how to do it, and where to do it. In every aspect of his action in offering Isaac, Abraham acted according to God's revelation and instructions.

(a) Going to Mount Moriah,
the Place of God's Choice

Abraham went to Mount Moriah, the place of God's choice. In verse 2 God told Abraham to go into the land of Moriah and offer Isaac on one of the mountains of which He would tell him. In the next verse we are told that Abraham "rose up and went to the place of which God had told him." Before Abraham began his journey, God must have told him which mountain He had chosen. In verse 4 we are told that "on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off." Abraham did nothing according to his concept or choice; he did everything according to God's revelation.

What Abraham did in Genesis 22 is an important seed in the Bible. As I have already pointed out, Abraham's descendants, the children of Israel, were commanded by God to go three times a year to Mount Moriah to worship God and there to offer to Him their burnt offerings. We have seen that Mount Moriah became Mount Zion, the very center of the good land. Abraham was the first to worship God with the burnt offering on Mount Zion. Eventually, we all shall be on Mount Zion worshipping God. On the one hand, in the church life today, as true descendants of Abraham, we are on Mount Zion; on the other hand, we are on our way there. What Abraham did in chapter twenty-two was the seed. His descendants, the Israelites, were the development of this seed, and we today are the further development of the seed. We all, including Abraham, shall be in the harvest of the seed. Perhaps one day we shall shake hands with Abraham on the eternal Mount Zion and say to him, "You were on the ancient Mount Zion, we were on the new testament Mount Zion, and now we are all together here on the eternal Mount Zion."

(b) Traveling for Three Days

Verse 4 indicates that Abraham traveled for three days, for we are told that on the third day he saw the appointed place afar off. In the eyes of God and according to Abraham's feeling, Isaac had been killed for three days. On the third day Abraham not only offered Isaac; he also received him back. Hence, the third day is surely a sign of resurrection. It is very meaningful that the Bible does not call it the second or fourth day. If you look at a map, you will see that the distance between Beer-sheba and Moriah is approximately fifty-five miles. According to the ancient method of travel, it would have taken two days to journey from Beer-sheba to Moriah. On the third day Abraham put Isaac on the altar, and then what he offered to God was given back to him in resurrection. This is marvelous. We all must see the seed here. Praise the Lord that today we are Isaacs, not Ishmaels. We are not journeying southward toward Egypt; we are traveling northward to Mount Zion.

In order to see this, we must have the life at Beer-sheba, because only this life builds us up and qualifies us to be the burnt offering for God's satisfaction and to receive the vision. The name Moriah means "the vision of Jah," that is, the vision of Jehovah, the vision of the Lord. This has two meanings—that we see the Lord and that the Lord sees us. On Mount Moriah Abraham undoubtedly saw God and God saw him. Likewise, on today's Mount Zion we have a vision. There is no cloud here. We are not in darkness; we are in the vision. The church life is a vision in which we see God and God sees us.

The translators are troubled about how to render verse 14, uncertain whether it should be "in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" or "it shall be provided." According to the King James Version, verse 14 says, "And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen." Other versions say, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." Some versions even say, "On the mount of the Lord he will see." Although this verse is difficult to translate, it is easy to understand according to our experience. God's provision is always His vision. Whenever we participate in and enjoy God's provision, we have a vision. We see God and He sees us. Because we are in His provision and have the vision, everything is clear, nothing is opaque, and there is no separation between us and Him.

Where is God's provision today? It is in the church life on Mount Zion. We all can testify what a provision there is in the church life. As we are enjoying the provision, what a vision we have! We see God. We see eternity. Here in the church life everything is crystal clear and transparent in God's eyes and in ours, and nothing is opaque. We did not have this experience in Christianity. When we were there, we were in a low dungeon that was opaque on every side. But today in the church life on Mount Zion we have the full provision with the full vision. We see God and are seen by Him; God sees us and is seen by us. In God's provision, everything is transparent.

(c) Building an Altar and Offering Isaac

Abraham went to a primitive region, built an altar on a mountain, and there offered his only son Isaac (vv. 9-10). To build an altar there was not easy, and to offer his only son by killing him was even more difficult. But he did this. He truly meant business with the Lord. We also must build an altar and offer what God demands. This surely will cost us something.

We have seen the record of Abraham's obedience by faith. The faith with which he was thoroughly infused by God gave him this obedience. It was this infused faith that brought him to Mount Moriah where he enjoyed God's provision and had a thoroughly transparent vision from God. At that time there was no one on earth nor in the whole universe who was as clear about divine things as Abraham was. There, on Mount Moriah, Abraham experienced God's provision and received a clear vision. Everything was clear in his eyes. We must not read Genesis 22 merely as a story. We must receive divine light from it and see that Abraham's experience is being repeated in us today. Praise the Lord that we have today's Beer-sheba and Moriah. We are not going downward to Egypt; we are traveling upward to Mount Moriah, where we shall enjoy God's provision and have a transparent vision.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FIFTY-EIGHT

LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD THE OFFERING OF ISAAC

In the last message we saw how Abraham offered his son Isaac according to God's demand. That story, recorded in Genesis 22, is not only a meaningful history but also has an implied significance, for it is a vivid picture of Christ in several aspects. Although we cannot find the title of Christ nor the name of Jesus in this chapter, many aspects of Christ are signified in the way of implication. In this message we need to see the aspects of Christ depicted in this chapter.

c) Isaac Typifying Christ

Isaac typified Christ. We have seen that Abraham answered God's call to go to Mount Moriah to offer Isaac. This is history. However, if we view this matter from the perspective of God's revelation, we shall see that what Abraham did to Isaac is a vivid picture of what the Father did to His beloved Son. When Abraham journeyed to Mount Moriah with Isaac, two young servants accompanied him. On the third day, Abraham put the two servants aside, saying, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (v. 5). From that point on, the story was different. It was no longer a story of four people—the father, the son, and the two servants; it was now a story of Abraham and his son Isaac. Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it upon Isaac, who bore it to the top of Mount Moriah. Compare this with John 19:17, which says, "And bearing the cross Himself, He went out to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha." Isaac walked the same path on the way to Mount Moriah that the Lord Jesus later walked on the way to Golgotha. Before Christ bore the cross and walked to Calvary, Golgotha, Isaac bore the wood for the burnt offering and walked along the same way. And Jesus was crucified on the same mount where Isaac was laid on the altar. Thus, we see that Abraham was a type of the Father, and Isaac, with the wood upon him, was a type of the Only Begotten Son of God. Isaac was brought as a lamb to the altar. Jesus was also "brought as a lamb to the slaughter" (Isa. 53:7).

As Abraham and Isaac were climbing Mount Moriah, Isaac said, "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (v. 7). Abraham replied, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (v. 8). Here we see that the son fellowshipped with the father. Do you not believe that while Jesus was bearing the cross on the way to Calvary He fellowshipped with the Father? And do you not believe that the Father talked with His Son? I do. If you say that the Bible does not tell us of this, I would say that Genesis 22 tells us so. We need to have the sight and the listening ear to hear the heavenly conversation on the way to Mount Moriah. Abraham and Isaac typified the Father and the Son, and their fellowship on the way to Mount Moriah was a vivid picture depicting how Jesus the Son fellowshipped with the Father as He was bearing the cross to Calvary. Although we do not have a clear explanation of this in plain words in the New Testament, we do have the picture in the Old Testament, and a picture is better than a thousand words. The picture in Genesis 22 portrays something which words cannot explain. Although the writers of the New Testament did not describe the loving fellowship between the Father and the Son on the way to Calvary, it is clearly portrayed in the picture in Genesis 22. How we all need to see this picture. As we shall see, nearly every point regarding the type in Genesis 22 is covered in John 1.

Let us consider now some details of Isaac as a type of Christ. Isaac was Abraham's only son (vv. 2, 12, 16). This typifies Christ as God's only Son (John 3:16). Isaac was Abraham's beloved son (v. 2), and Christ was the Father's beloved Son in whom He delighted (Matt. 3:17). In 22:5 we see that Isaac took his father's will, and in Matthew 26:39 we see that Christ chose the Father's will. In the picture in Genesis 22, we see that Isaac, a full-grown man, was obedient unto death (vv. 9-10). According to the record of this chapter, in the matter of offering Isaac, Abraham consulted neither with his wife Sarah nor with his son Isaac. Abraham took his son, put the wood upon him, led him up the mountain, bound him, and laid him on the altar. He did not give Isaac the opportunity to say anything. But Isaac took his father's will and was obedient to death. Likewise, when the Lord Jesus was about to die, He said, "Not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39). In Philippians 2:8 we are told that Christ was obedient unto death. Look again at the picture: Isaac was obedient unto the altar. He not only followed the father to the foot of the mount; he also obeyed him in taking up the wood and in being bound. He did not resist. Even when the father laid him on the altar, took the knife, and stretched out his hand to slay him, he did not rebel. He was obedient unto death. If we consider all these aspects of Isaac as a type of Christ as portrayed in the Old Testament, we shall see that they were sovereignly arranged, matching the clear word of the New Testament revelation.

In God's eyes, Isaac was killed. Just as Abraham was about to slay his son, the angel of the Lord intervened from heaven, saying, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him." The angel of the Lord here is actually God Himself. This is proved by verse 12 in which the angel of the Lord said to Abraham, "I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." The "me" here is God Himself. Notice that the angel of the Lord did not say "from him," but "from me." Abraham, the father, put his son to death, but the angel of the Lord raised him up from the dead. In like manner, Acts 2:24 says that God has raised up Christ from the dead.

d) Isaac Replaced by a Ram

Isaac was replaced by a ram, that is, by a lamb. Verse 13 says, "Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son." Here we see that the son was not killed, but the ram, the lamb, was. Who was killed on the cross—the Son of God or the Lamb of God? It was the Lamb of God who was killed. Christ is the Son of God, but when He was killed on the cross, He was replaced by the Lamb of God. John 1:14, speaking of the Son of God, says, "We beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten from a father." But John 1:29 says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Here we see that the Son of God was replaced by the Lamb of God. The Lamb of God, not the Son of God, was crucified. In crucifixion, the Son was replaced by a ram.

In 22:8 Abraham prophesied that God would provide a lamb for a burnt offering. The eternal Lamb was ordained by God from eternity (1 Pet. 1:19-20). In 22:13 we see "a ram caught in a thicket by his horns." In the Bible horns signify fighting power. Christ has the fighting power, but it was caught by a thicket. The thicket signifies humanity. We are the thicket, and Christ, the Lamb of God, has been caught in us and cannot escape. He has been caught by His human nature that He might be offered as our substitute. Christ as the Lamb of God was willing to have His horns caught by humanity. When we see this clear picture, we all must say, "Lord, thank You. You were willing to be caught by us."

The Son of God was replaced on the cross by the Lamb of God. In a positive, divine sense, the Son of God was never crucified. The Lamb of God was crucified. No one could crucify the Son of God. Praise Him that He was willing to be a little lamb putting His horns

among human beings and being caught by us. Thus, we see that not only did this Son of God become the Lamb of God, but that He was replaced by the Lamb of God. Although we do not have such a picture in the New Testament, we see it in the Old Testament. Along with the clear words in the four Gospels, we need the pictures in the Old Testament.

(1) Provided by Jehovah-jireh

The ram who replaced the son on the altar was provided by Jehovah-jireh (v. 14). The title Jehovah-jireh has two meanings: Jehovah will provide and Jehovah will see. There is not only a provision but also a vision. Within the provision, we have the vision. Look at the cross: what provision and vision we have there. I can testify that at the cross I have received both the provision and the vision. Before the cross, I was lacking, but at the cross I obtained the divine provision. Before the cross, I was blind, having no vision, but at the cross, through the provision, I can see. Now my sight is so clear. I have not only been provided for but also enlightened. Even many of the young people can testify that before they came to the cross, they were poor and blind. But one day they came to the cross and found the provision and the vision. May the Spirit of wisdom help us to realize the depth of the significance that is in the fact that the Son of God was replaced by the Lamb of God whose horns were caught by humanity.

(2) Typifying Christ
as Our Substitute

The Lamb of God who replaced the Son of God was our substitute (1 Pet. 3:18). As the ram was killed instead of Isaac, so the Lamb of God suffered crucifixion for us. When as a boy I heard the preaching of the gospel in which we were told that Christ suffered death on our behalf, I could not understand it fully. Only when I saw the clear picture in Genesis 22 was I able to understand how Christ was our substitute. The ram was killed for Isaac. This is a picture showing that Christ, the Lamb of God, was crucified on the cross for us. We all should have gone to the cross, but God replaced us with the Lamb of God. To this we all must say, "Praise the Lord! The Lamb of God, who is the Son of God, was our substitute."

Because the Lamb of God became our substitute, He became great and significant. In Revelation the unique title of Christ is the Lamb. When in Revelation 5 the Apostle John saw the scroll which no one in heaven or on earth was worthy to open, he wept. Then one of the elders said to him, "Do not weep; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome to open the scroll and its seven seals." Immediately after this, John saw the Lamb: "I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing." In Genesis 22 we have the seed of that Lamb. This seed grew up in John 1:29 and is harvested in the book of Revelation. Eventually, the throne of God becomes the throne of God and of the Lamb out of which proceeds the river of water of life with the tree of life growing in it (Rev. 22:1-2). All this proves that the Bible is not a manmade book. It certainly is the divine revelation. What a picture of Christ is revealed in Genesis 22!

e) Abraham Blessed by God

(1) With the Seed Multiplied

Abraham was blessed by God. The blessing here is not that of material things. Many of us have had the wrong impression in the past, saying that receiving a good job or material benefit means that the Lord has blessed us. We have all been told to count our blessings one by one, counting such things as our degree, promotion, wife, house, and children. Although I do not say that such things are not blessings, I do say that they are not golden blessings, but muddy blessings. In Genesis 22, God did not bless Abraham in this way. Rather, He blessed him with the multiplied seed, saying, "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore" (v. 17). I do not care for material blessing. I care for multiplication. I would firstly like to see fifty churches in the United States, then a hundred, and then a thousand. I would also like to see that from the United States the multiplication would spread to Africa, Australasia, Europe, and even back to Jerusalem. This is the blessing I want to see.

Abraham was blessed with two categories of people, one likened to the stars of the heaven (v. 17; 15:5) and the other to the sand upon the seashore (v. 17), which is also likened to the dust of the earth (13:16). If you know history and the prophecies regarding Abraham's descendants, you will see that they are of two categories, one heavenly and the other earthly. We, the Christians, are the stars, the heavenly descendants of Abraham; and the genuine Jews, God's earthly people, are the sand, the dust. Eventually, the Jewish people will be God's priests on earth and will teach all the nations. This is prophesied clearly in Zechariah 8:20-23. Why are the Jews described both as the sand and as the dust? The sea signifies the world corrupted by Satan, and the dust is of the earth created by God. The Jews have been restored to God's creation. Hence, they are signified by the sand which is the dust beside the sea. Although they are an earthly people, they are not the dust under the sea, but the dust, the sand, by the seashore. They are separated from the corrupted sea, Satan's corrupted world. However, the stars are not only separated from the corrupted world but are also heavenly.

According to Revelation 20:8 and 9, at the end of the millennium Gog and Magog will fight against the camp of the saints and the beloved city. The camp of the saints is the camp of all the heavenly stars, and the beloved city, Jerusalem, is the city of the separated sand. The two categories of Abraham's descendants, who at that time will be caring for God's interests in the universe, will be attacked by Gog and Magog under Satan's instigation. That will be the last war in the universe, a war between the devilish people and Abraham's descendants.

The star is sown as a seed in Genesis 22 and will be harvested in Revelation 20 and 21. The New Jerusalem is composed of the twelve tribes of Israel, representing the Old Testament saints, and the twelve Apostles, representing the New Testament believers. Those represented by the Apostles are the heavenly stars, and those represented by the twelve tribes are the sand of the seashore. These two peoples eventually will be built together into the eternal New Jerusalem. Hence, the eternal New Jerusalem will be the ultimate consummation of Abraham's seed. This is God's blessing to Abraham.

After seeing this, we need to say, "Praise the Lord, God's blessing is not a good house, car, degree, promotion, wife, or child. It is the multiplication of the saints in God's recovery and the multiplication of the churches." I hope that one day a part of the New Jerusalem will be our multiplication as God's blessing to us. At that time, all the cars and houses will be gone. Only the multiplication in God's blessing will remain forever. We shall see the blessing in God's multiplication in the New Jerusalem for eternity.

Here in Genesis 22 we see a basic principle, that is, whatever God gives us will be multiplied. God gave Abraham one Isaac, and Abraham offered him back to God. Then this one Isaac was multiplied into numberless stars and sand. If Abraham would not have offered Isaac back to God, he might have had only one Isaac. But having been offered back to God by Abraham, Isaac was multiplied into the New Jerusalem. This is the way to have God's gift multiplied in us—offer back to God what He has given us.

(2) With Christ as His Unique Seed

God's blessing of Abraham eventually issues in Christ as the unique seed in whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed (v. 18; Gal. 3:16). In Galatians 3:16 Paul speaks of only one seed—Christ. We all are included in this one seed. Are we not all in Christ? Do you know the true significance of the short phrase "in Christ"? This phrase is used many times in the New Testament. In Christ we have been justified. In Christ we are sanctified. In Christ we have the sonship. Everything concerning us is in Christ. Hallelujah, we are in Christ! We are actually a part of Christ. Ultimately, all the heavenly stars and the earthly sand will be in Christ. As we have pointed out in the past, the New Jerusalem will be a great, corporate Christ. In the four Gospels we have the individual Christ, but at the end of Revelation we have the corporate Christ including all true believers.

In this one seed, Christ, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Have not the United States, Germany, Japan, China, and Great Britain been blessed? This is God's blessing. May we all expect that the blessing which we shall receive of God will be the multiplication that will issue in Christ, the unique seed. The multiplication that will spread to Europe, Africa, and throughout the earth must simply be Christ. All the churches on earth will just be the multiplication of Christ.

f) Christ Revealed in Three Ways

In Genesis 22 Christ is revealed in three ways: as the angel of the Lord (vv. 11-12, 15-18; Exo. 3:2-6), as the ram (v. 13; John 1:29), and as the seed of Abraham (v. 18; Gal. 3:16). When Abraham stretched forth his hand to kill Isaac, the angel of the Lord prevented him. Then Abraham saw a ram and killed it, offering it in Isaac's place. Afterward, it became a blessing in multiplication. This multiplication issues in Christ as the unique seed. Here we see the angel of the Lord stopping, the ram replacing, and the seed bringing the blessing. All three are Christ. This is too mysterious because Christ is everything. Christ was the One who told Abraham not to kill his son. Then He immediately became the ram caught in a thicket to replace his son. After the crucifixion, He became his unique seed in God's blessing. The angel of the Lord, who was Christ, provided the ram, a type of Christ, which eventually issued in the seed, who is also Christ. Christ is everything. We do not have a small, limited Christ. We have a great and unlimited Christ who is everything. Praise the Lord!

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE FIFTY-NINE

LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF SARAH

9) The Death and Burial of Sarah

In this message we come to Genesis 23, a chapter which records the death and burial of Sarah. When I was young, I did not see why this chapter was included in the book of Genesis. I could not understand why, when Abraham must have done many great things which are not recorded, twenty verses were used to describe how he spent his time, energy, money, and even his politeness to acquire a burying place. But the Bible does not waste any words. Since every word of the Bible is God's breath, Genesis 23 must be very significant. If we consider Genesis 1 and 2 as being important, we must also consider Genesis 23 as being important. Every Christian appreciates Genesis 1 because it gives a record of God's creation. We appreciate Genesis 1 not merely as a record of creation but also as a record of life. It speaks of God's image and dominion as related to the man created by God. We also appreciate Genesis 2 because it tells us of the tree of life. However, few of us appreciate a sepulcher. But Genesis 23 is focused on the matter of a burying place and gives us a detailed account of the purchase of a sepulcher. More details are included in this story than in any other record in the book of Genesis. While every other record is quite brief, this one gives a full and clear account of where the tomb was located, who owned it, how it was purchased, and the amount Abraham paid for it. This sepulcher is mentioned in a very significant way, for we are told that not only was Sarah buried there, but that Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah were buried there also. It is very significant that the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the components of the divine title of God who is the God of resurrection (Matt. 22:32).

Genesis 23 is a window through which we can see the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is not found in this chapter, but it can be seen through it. This chapter is like a telescope: through it we can see the eternal tabernacle that is far off in the future.

Genesis 21 gives us the record of the birth of Isaac. This was certainly worth mentioning. Following this, in the same chapter we are told that Abraham redeemed a well, planted a tamarisk tree, and called on the name of Jehovah, El Olam. As we have seen, in chapter twenty-two we have the offering of Isaac. Then, in chapter twenty-three, we have the death and burial of Sarah. These three chapters cover at least thirty-seven years. Although a great many things must have happened with Abraham during these thirty-seven years, only four things are mentioned: the birth of Isaac, the living in Beer-sheba, the offering of Isaac, and the death and burial of Sarah. These three chapters exclude many things which, according to our human concept, are important, but include a detailed record of the death and burial of Sarah. Because of this, we must pay close attention to Genesis 23.

*a) In Hebron—the Place of Fellowship
with God*

At the end of chapter twenty-two, Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac were dwelling at Beer-sheba, undoubtedly living near the covenanted well and the tamarisk tree. This was a miniature of the church life, for the church life is always by a well of living water and a tamarisk tree. Suddenly, at the beginning of chapter twenty-three we are told of Sarah's death. Although Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac were living at Beer-sheba, she died and was buried in Hebron, the place of fellowship with God. Sarah went on from Beer-sheba to Hebron. In like manner, if the Lord delays His coming back, I would like to live in the church life and die in the fellowship with God.

According to the map, Hebron is between Beer-sheba on the south and Jerusalem on the north. It is on the way from Beer-sheba to Moriah, where Jerusalem is. If the Lord delays His coming back, I would like to be buried in a place which is on the way to the New Jerusalem. Where are you living today? We all must answer that we are living in Beer-sheba, in the church by the well of living water and the tamarisk tree. Our church life is today's Beer-sheba. Before the Lord comes back, some of the older ones may leave Beer-sheba, the church life, die in Hebron, and wait there for the New Jerusalem. Hebron is not only a place of fellowship with God; it is also a way to Jerusalem. The cave of Machpelah in Hebron is the gateway to the New Jerusalem. Perhaps some day we shall hear Sarah testify, "When I entered into the cave of Machpelah, I entered into the gate which leads into the New Jerusalem." Sarah was not simply buried in the cave of Machpelah; she is now sleeping there, waiting for the day when she will wake up and find herself in the New Jerusalem.

b) Sarah's Early Death

Sarah died at the age of one hundred twenty-seven (vv. 1-2). Although this may seem to be very old today, at that time it was an early age to die. Abraham lived one hundred seventy-five years (25:7), living thirty-eight years after Sarah died. Sarah should not have died at such an early age. Her death, thirty-seven years after Isaac's birth (17:1, 17; 21:5), was abnormal.

c) Abraham's Suffering

Abraham and Sarah were the best couple in the whole universe. They truly loved one another, never having any consideration of divorce or separation. When Abraham was robbed of his wife, it was a great loss to both Abraham and Isaac. Isaac was a dear son to his mother, and she undoubtedly loved him very much. At the age of thirty-seven, he was still unmarried and lived with his mother. When he did marry at the age of forty (25:20), the Bible even tells us that Isaac was married in his mother's tent (24:67). Suddenly, the love between Abraham and Sarah and between Sarah and Isaac was broken, for Sarah, the wife and mother, was taken away by an abnormal death. Because of this, Abraham suffered greatly.

If you read Abraham's history, you will see that God was always taking things away from him. Lot separated from him, Eliezer was rejected, Ishmael was cast out, and Isaac was offered to God on the altar. Then his dear wife was taken away in death. What trials and sufferings Abraham passed through! According to our natural concept, Abraham, one who was so good with God, should not have suffered all these things. In chapter twenty-two Isaac was offered to God and returned to Abraham in resurrection. Suddenly, while Abraham was enjoying a happy life with his wife Sarah and his son Isaac, Sarah, the factor of his happiness, was taken away. The happiness in this family was dependent upon Sarah, the wife and the mother. When Sarah died, the atmosphere, life, and happiness of this family were all taken away, and the family itself was gone. What a suffering that was to Abraham!

As God's called ones, we should not expect to have a happy life here on earth. We must follow the steps of Abraham looking for a better country, for a city with foundations (Heb. 11:10, 16). Our temporary life on earth is the life of a traveler. Due to this, Abraham paid little attention to his dwelling place and simply erected a tent. He was a sojourner, a stranger, who was looking for a permanent dwelling place.

Abraham lived for thirty-eight years without Sarah's help (25:8). In the Bible, the number thirty-eight is the number of sufferings, trials, and tests. The children of Israel suffered trials and tests in the wilderness for a period of thirty-eight years. As we have seen, Isaac was forty years old when he married. In the Bible, the number forty also means trials, temptations, and tests. We also have another number in this chapter—four hundred—which is ten times forty. The first time the number four hundred is used in the Bible is in Genesis 15:13, where Abraham was told that his descendants would suffer affliction for four hundred years. Here in 23:16 we read that Abraham bought the sepulcher at the cost of four hundred shekels of silver. This indicates that it was a test, trial, and suffering.

As you read this chapter in the past, perhaps you did not have the feeling that Abraham was suffering. But notice two words in verse 2—"mourn" and "weep." Abraham mourned and wept for Sarah because he had lost his happiness and his family life. The Hebrew words translated "mourn" and "weep" indicate much more than just mourning and weeping. Abraham suffered intensely at losing his wife in his old age; he was deeply hurt. His great suffering is indicated by the numbers thirty-eight, forty, and four hundred.

d) Abraham's Testimony

Abraham, one who had suffered the loss of his dear wife, had a very strong testimony. The Hittites addressed him as lord and called him "a mighty prince" (v. 6). The Hebrew words translated "mighty prince" may also be rendered "a prince of God." In Hebrew, the word for "mighty" is the word for God. Abraham expressed God as a prince of God and was respectable as a mighty prince. In his own eyes, he was a stranger, but in the eyes of the people, he was a mighty prince and a prince of God. He was truly a weighty man.

We all need to be weighty and have the same kind of testimony that Abraham had. In our neighborhoods, occupations, and schools, we must not be light and allow others to look down on us. We must be weighty, and others must estimate us very highly. Although we should not estimate ourselves so highly, we must be high in the eyes of others. I hope that the teachers in the junior high schools will say that the young brothers from the church who are students in their class are mighty princes. Young brothers, do not just pray boldly in the meetings. You must also be weighty in school. Simply having good behavior does not mean very much. We must have weight. Gold and diamonds are weighty, but popcorn and cotton candy are light. If you are gold or diamond, you will have weight. As God's called ones, we Christians should be so weighty that people are surprised and say, "Why is this young man so weighty? He is neither common nor abnormal. Although he is a normal young man, there is no lightness with him. He must be a prince."

We are weighty because we have God in us. The called ones need to call on the name of Jehovah, El Olam. The more Abraham called on this title of the divine Being, the more weighty he became. God is gold. If we call on Him, we shall become golden. The more we call on the golden God, the more of His golden element will be infused into our being. Consider the difference between wood and petrified wood. Wood is light, but petrified wood is weighty. It is even more weighty than stone, because weighty minerals have been wrought into it. We all were born light, but we have been reborn to be weighty. In addition to our rebirth, we have the process of transformation. The way in which wood becomes petrified is through the continuous flow of water. This flow of water carries away the element of wood and adds in its place the element of various minerals, transforming the wood into a weighty, precious stone.

It is insufficient for us merely to be good neighbors. We must be weighty children of God. As God's called ones, we are now under His infusion. We must be so strong and weighty that people will say that we are a mighty prince, a prince of God.

As a mighty prince, Abraham was respectable (v. 6). He respected others and received their respect in return. He was also wise (vv. 3-13). In this chapter we see that Abraham had a wise way of communing with people, speaking to them in a very tasteful and wise manner. Furthermore, Abraham was honest and did not take advantage of anyone (vv. 14-16). His intention was to purchase the sepulcher. When it was politely offered to him as a gift, Abraham, after learning that its value was four hundred shekels of silver, agreed to pay the full amount. He did not seize the opportunity to take advantage of others, and he did not bargain about the price. He gave Ephron the price he asked, paying the full amount, the full money. Likewise, we should not impress people with our scarcity; we must show our riches. This is our testimony. I feel badly about the low level of morality in today's Christianity. What a poor standard of behavior there is! We must express God showing that we, as the children of God, are weighty, respectable, and honest. We should be willing to suffer loss, but not to take advantage of others. Whether we lose or gain means nothing. If we lose, we shall still live; if we gain, we cannot live any longer. How we must learn to be honest and respectable, expressing God in a weighty manner.

e) A Sepulcher of Choice

Verse 6 speaks of the "choice" sepulcher, referring to the best sepulcher. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He did not have a good dwelling place. But after He died, He was put into a very good burying place (Matt. 27:57-60). He lived in a poor home, but He was buried in a rich tomb. In the Bible, this is a principle. We should not live in a good home, but we should prepare the best tomb. Abraham paid more attention to the sepulcher than to the tent. Genesis does not say a word regarding how Abraham put up his tent, how much he paid for it, or exactly where he erected it. He pitched his tent like someone who goes camping in the mountains for a few days. Abraham, a true camper, was camping throughout his entire life. Although he did not care very much about the tent, he was very concerned for the sepulcher. In this chapter we find a full description in detail of the cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron. Not even the Old Testament city of Jerusalem is described in such a detailed way.

Let us now consider the meaning of this. In the light of the New Testament, we can see that Abraham was called by God and realized that he was a stranger, a sojourner, looking for a permanent city and a better country (Heb. 11:9-10, 16). As he was looking for this better country, his dear wife suddenly died. But Abraham did not give up his faith. Neither did he say to Isaac, "Isaac, your mother and I have been looking for a city with foundations and for the better country which God has promised us. We have always had this expectation. Now your mother is dead. How will she ever get there? What should we do? Probably our God is not trustworthy and we should not believe in Him anymore." Abraham did not speak in this way. As we examine the record in Hebrews, we see that Abraham was not disappointed and did not lose his faith. Rather, he had strong faith in the God of resurrection, believing that his dear wife would be in that city and in that better country. This belief implies resurrection.

Genesis 23 is not a chapter on resurrection; it is a chapter on the gate into resurrection. In Genesis 23 Sarah did not enter into resurrection; she entered into the gate. According to Abraham's realization, Sarah's death was the entering into the gate of resurrection. Abraham did not take this matter lightly. Although he might have been somewhat light with his tent, he was not light concerning the burying place of his wife. His intention in purchasing the cave of Machpelah was not only to bury Sarah there, but also to bury himself there. The word Machpelah in Hebrew means double or doubling. Everyone who was buried in this cave was buried as one of a couple: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah (v. 19; 25:9; 49:29-32; 50:13). Deep within, Abraham was filled with the expectation that one day his wife would be in the city of foundations. This implies resurrection. Shortly before his death, Jacob charged his sons to bury him in the cave of Machpelah. Although in ancient times it was not a small thing to take Jacob from Egypt to Canaan to be buried, Jacob's sons did it for him (50:13). By this we can realize that, as he was about to die, Jacob did not consider death as a termination but as a station, as the gate into the better country.

Abraham was filled with the hope of resurrection. He might have even loved the dead body of his wife more than he loved Sarah when she was living. If Sarah could have spoken to Abraham, she might have said, "Abraham, why are you so good to me after I have died? When I was living you never prepared a good tent for me. Now that I am dead, you have paid so much money to buy a cave in which to bury me. Why did you buy a cave with a field and trees? What are you doing?" Abraham might have said, "Sarah, you must realize that you are not being buried here. You will just rest here. I have prepared the best bedroom for you in which you may rest as you wait for that day. If that day is far off, I will come to be one with you and we shall rest together. This is why I have purchased the field as well as the cave. Look at the life in the field. It is not a place of death—it is a place of life."

In the Bible, a field signifies the growth of life, that is, resurrection. This is true even today. If you do not believe in resurrection, I would ask you to consider a wheat field. Not long after the grains of wheat are planted, they rise up again. In 1936, I was preaching the gospel to a group of students at Ching-Hua University in China. One evening, after I had preached, a young student came up to me and, wanting me to explain the matter of resurrection, said, "I have no problem with Christianity, but I cannot believe in the resurrection. How can we, in our modern, scientific age, believe in such a superstitious thing as resurrection? How can a dead person be resurrected? Yet, this is one of the main teachings in the Bible." I said to him that this was easy to explain. Through the window of the room in which we were sitting we could see wheat fields. I said, "Look at the wheat fields. Do you see the wheat that is growing there? Can't you see resurrection in these fields? The seed is sown into the soil, dies, and eventually the wheat comes forth. This is resurrection." This simple illustration convinced him, and he was saved. Now he is one of the leading co-workers on the island of Taiwan.

A growing field signifies resurrection, but driftwood signifies death. Abraham did not put Sarah into a place of death, but into a place of life, a place full of resurrection. The cave in which she was buried was in the end of the field (v. 9), and there were many trees nearby (v. 17). Suppose the cave of Machpelah was surrounded by piles of driftwood. Whenever anyone saw this, he would immediately have had the sense that it was a place of death, a place of termination. But the cave of Machpelah is not the place of termination; it is a place full of the expectation of resurrection. It is on the way to resurrection. In this place, Sarah could restfully sleep as she waited for that day to come. If she could speak, she might say, "I am not waiting in a place of death. I am in a living place. Look at the field and the trees. Someday, I'll be in resurrection." Sarah's death did not disappoint Abraham in his search for a better country and for a city with foundations. On the contrary, it stirred up his expectation of the coming day. Therefore, he devoted much attention and spent a large amount of money to purchase the burying place for Sarah, himself, and his descendants. If we have the

light from the New Testament, we shall realize that this indicates the expectation of resurrection. Once again I say that the sepulcher is the passageway, the gateway, into the expected city, the New Jerusalem. Hallelujah, the cave of Machpelah is on the way to Jerusalem!

We know that Genesis 23 indicates the expectation of resurrection because the Lord Jesus said that the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob is not the God of the dead but of the living (Matt. 22:31-32). In our eyes, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are dead, but in God's eyes, they are living.

Our forefather, Abraham, God's called one, did not care very much for the present, but he did pay attention to the future. The choice sepulcher was for the future. In principle, we also should not prepare a better home for the present but a gateway for the future. We are not here for today but for tomorrow. If the Lord delays His coming back, we all shall enter into this gateway. We should not pay too much attention to the present but rather to the future. We should live in a tent looking for the city which has foundations.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SIXTY

LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD THE MARRIAGE OF ISAAC A PRACTICAL LIVING IN ONENESS WITH THE LORD

The Bible reveals that God's eternal purpose is to express Himself through a corporate Body and that this purpose is fulfilled by the divine life. If we would probe into the depths of the book of Genesis, we must see these two things. In Genesis 1:26 we see that man was made in God's image. The man here is not an individual man but a corporate man. We may say that it is mankind, a corporate Body that can express God's image. In Genesis 2 we see that for the fulfillment of God's purpose we must have the divine life signified by the tree of life. In these two chapters we have two crucial words—image and life. Image reveals God's eternal purpose, and life unfolds God's way of fulfilling His purpose. Never consider Genesis as merely the record of God's creation and the history of some patriarchs. This view is too superficial. When we plunge into the depths of this book, we see that it is not merely a record of creation and history, but that it is a revelation of God's eternal purpose and His way of fulfilling it.

10) The Marriage of Isaac

With these two points in mind, let us now come to Genesis 24. Everyone who reads Genesis thinks of this chapter as the record of a marriage. However, the important thing here is not the marriage but what the marriage indicates, implies, and typifies. When we were on Genesis 1 and 2, we saw that those chapters are not only a record of God's creation but a record of life. Everything found in those chapters is related to life. Anything that is not related to life is excluded. If you read those chapters carefully, you will see that many aspects of God's creation are omitted because they are not related to life. In the same principle, only those aspects of Abraham's history which are related to life are recorded in chapters twenty-one through twenty-four.

The entire book of Genesis, a book of only fifty chapters, covers over twenty-three hundred years, the first twenty-three centuries of human history. If Genesis were a record of history, it would need hundreds of chapters to cover this span of time. The fact that such a long period is covered in just fifty chapters proves that Genesis is not a record of history. I say again that although Genesis apparently is a record of history, it actually is a record showing God's eternal purpose and the way of fulfilling it by life. Anything which is not related to God's purpose and its fulfillment by life is not recorded in this book.

Chapters twenty-one through twenty-four, covering forty years (25:20), mention five main things: the birth of Isaac, the growth of Isaac, the offering of Isaac, the death and burial of Sarah, and the marriage of Isaac. Although this record is brief, it is very meaningful. Here we see a proper birth and the proper growth. This birth and growth produced a burnt offering for God's satisfaction. After the birth and growth in chapter twenty-one, we have the burnt offering in chapter twenty-two. Then, as we have seen, in chapter twenty-three we have the death of Sarah and a detailed account of her burial. Following this, in chapter twenty-four, we see a wonderful marriage. But this chapter is not merely the record of a marriage; it is a story which has a deep meaning and significance in life.

a) A Practical Living in Oneness with the Lord

According to the common understanding of most Christians, the main point of this chapter is that Isaac is a type of Christ as the Bridegroom and that Rebekah is a type of the church as the bride. However, this is not the main point. The primary point is the practical living in oneness with the Lord for the fulfilling of God's purpose. We should not understand the Bible according to our common knowledge or tradition, but come back to the pure Word. Whenever we read any portion of the Scriptures, we must forget all we have learned in the past and look to the Lord for something new. Fifty years ago I read Genesis 24 carefully, doing my best to remember every point. Nevertheless, when I come to this chapter now, I do not care for what I had in the past. I like to come to this portion of the Word as if I were reading it for the first time. I can testify that just recently I have seen something new in this chapter.

Have you ever realized that in Genesis 24 we can see a practical living in oneness with the Lord? As we have seen, God has a purpose, and the way to fulfill His purpose is by life. These are the two governing points in understanding the Bible. If we would understand Genesis 24, we must apply these two governing points. Why does Genesis 24 give us such a record of Isaac's marriage? If we only read chapter twenty-four we cannot see the purpose of this record. In order to answer this question we must read the three foregoing chapters. Genesis 21:12 says, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." God called Abraham with a purpose. For the fulfillment of this purpose, God promised to give Abraham the good land and the seed which would inherit the land. God's eternal purpose is to express Himself in a corporate way. In order to have this corporate expression, God must have a people. This people is the seed of Abraham. Furthermore, in order to have the people to express God corporately there is the need of the land. What then is the purpose of the marriage in Genesis 24? Is it simply that a single man might have a happy, comfortable life? No. If you consider the Bible as a whole, you will see that Isaac's marriage was altogether for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. Without marriage, how could Isaac have

brought forth the seed? If this single man was to have seed for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, he had to get married. After Abraham had been tested in chapter twenty-two, God said, "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (22:17-18). Here we also have the seed for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Thus, Isaac's marriage was not common nor merely for his human living; it was for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

(1) Abraham

Abraham's living was a practical living in oneness with the Lord. Abraham did not suddenly have a vision in which God told him that He had a high purpose to carry out on earth, that He needed him, and that Isaac had to be married in order for God's purpose to be fulfilled. There is no such vision in chapter twenty-four. Rather, the record in Genesis is common and human. According to this record, a man had a son in his old age. When this son was thirty-seven years old, the wife and mother died, and the father buried her in a very meaningful way. The father and the son, both of whom were now unmarried, were left alone, living together in that sad condition for three years. The son might have said, "Father, where is my mother?" and the father might have replied, "Son, where is your wife?" The father was burdened to take care of his son. Perhaps he said, "I have lost my wife, and my son is now forty years of age. This surely is the right time for him to get married. But we are surrounded by Canaanites, none of whom would ever be accepted by God." There is no record that God said, "Abraham, let Me charge you to send someone to your own country to get a wife for Isaac. I will never allow you to take a Canaanite woman as a wife for your son." Although there is no record of God's saying this, Abraham did have this understanding. From where did he derive it? It came from his living in accordance with God's concept.

Abraham was a man who lived in oneness with God. If I live in oneness with a certain brother day after day, there will be no need for him to tell me of many things. I will already know what he likes and what he does not like, what pleases him and what offends him. If I love him and live in oneness with him, whatever I say and do will be in accordance with his likes or dislikes. I am sorry to say that many Christians do not live in oneness with God. When important matters arise, they kneel down and pray, "O Lord, what is Your will?" Eventually, they do not follow God's will but their own concept. We do not know God's will by praying in such a way. If we would know God's will, we must live in oneness with Him. If we live in oneness with Him, He will not need to tell us what He desires, because we shall already know it by being one with Him.

Although Abraham was desperate to take care of his son's marriage, he would not accept a Canaanite as Isaac's wife. If we had been Abraham, we might have taken the easy way and said, "There are many girls here in the land of Canaan. Why can't I choose one of them as the wife for my son? There may be one very nearby." Abraham did not think this way, but sent his oldest servant far away, back to the country from where he came, to find a wife for Isaac. Although God never told Abraham to do this, what Abraham did was according to God's inner will and concept. As we have seen, Abraham knew God's will and mind because he was living in practical oneness with Him.

Abraham was not the only person who had such a living. All those mentioned in this chapter were living in an atmosphere of oneness with God. Abraham, the oldest servant, Rebekah, Laban, Bethuel, and Isaac were all living in oneness with God. I hope that everyone in the churches will see that we need such a living for the fulfillment of God's purpose today. We do not need to pray and seek after God's will; we need to live in oneness with God. When we live in oneness with Him, we shall share His concept, and whatever we think and do will be in accordance with His feeling. God will not need to say anything, for we shall sense what He senses, knowing His inner feeling because we live in oneness with Him.

(a) Moving in Accordance with God's Economy

Abraham moved in accordance with God's economy (vv. 3-8). What he did in obtaining a wife for Isaac was for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. We long to see that all the marriages in the churches will be for the fulfillment of God's purpose. This kind of marriage requires a daily living in oneness with God. Young brothers, if everything you do is in accordance with God's economy, even your marriage will be the carrying out of His economy. You need to say, "Lord, what I am doing here today must be in accordance with Your economy. I am single now, but one day I will be married. May my marriage be for Your economy." This is the main revelation in Genesis 24. The primary thing in this chapter is not that Isaac is a type of Christ as the Bridegroom and that Rebekah is a type of the church as the bride. I say again that the primary thing revealed here is the practical living in accordance with God's economy for the carrying out of His eternal purpose. We need a life which resembles that of Abraham. His motive, action, and everything he did were in accordance with God's economy.

I doubt that Abraham was as clear about God's economy as we are today. Nevertheless, he told his servant that God had called him, had promised to give the land to his seed, and that the servant had to go to his country to find a wife for Isaac. In the light of the whole Bible, we can see that this was the carrying out of God's economy. How we need such a life today! Our motive, action, and all we do must be the carrying out of God's economy. This does not simply require that we know God's will and then do certain things. No, we need a daily living that is in oneness with God. We must be this kind of person. If we are such a person, whatever we say will be God's expression, and whatever we do will be for the fulfillment of His purpose. This is the life that we need for the church life today. Do not say, "Oh, I don't know the Lord's will concerning my marriage or my schooling. I must fast and pray for three days and nights." Let me tell you honestly that although I tried this for years, it never worked very well.

Consider the example of Abraham, the first of God's called ones. Since he was the first called one, we see in his case the principle of the first mention. Abraham did not act in today's traditional, religious way, fasting and praying to seek the Lord's will. He did not suddenly have a dream in which he saw Rebekah in the land of Chaldea waiting for Abraham's servant. As verse 40 indicates, Abraham walked before the Lord. As a person walking in the presence of the Lord, he did not need to fast or pray in order to know God's will. Since he walked in the Lord's presence, whatever he did was God's will and according to God's economy.

(b) Charging His Servant with the Lord

Abraham did not charge his servant to be faithful, honest, or to do a good work; he charged him with and by the Lord (vv. 2-3, 9, 40-41). Here we see that the atmosphere in which Abraham lived was the Lord Himself. By charging his servant with the Lord, he

brought him deep into the Lord. Likewise, we should not charge people with our wisdom or even with our love, but with the Lord.

(c) Believing in the Sovereign Lord

Abraham believed in the sovereign Lord, telling his servant that the Lord would send His angel with him and prosper his way (v. 40). Abraham seemed to be saying, "God will send His angel before you. Although I am sending you to do the job, I believe in God. In a sense, I don't believe that you can accomplish this work, but I trust in the living God. You don't need to be burdened or to worry. Just go and do the job, for my God will send His angel to do the work for you." What a life Abraham had! If we had been Abraham, we might have said, "My servant, you must realize that I have passed through many experiences. Let me now give you a map and tell you of the people and their customs." Abraham did not do this. Rather, he only charged his servant to serve by the Lord, assuring him that God would send His angel before him and prosper his way. Here we see Abraham's living faith.

(2) The Oldest Servant

(a) Faithful in Responsibility

Abraham's oldest servant was faithful in responsibility (vv. 5, 9, 33, 54, 56). He followed Abraham's footsteps in being faithful. I believe that he was infused by and with Abraham's life, seeing how Abraham did everything by trusting in the Lord. As a result, the servant also trusted in Him.

(b) Trusting in the Lord
for His Responsibility

Abraham's servant trusted in the Lord for his responsibility (vv. 12, 21, 42). He prayed to the Lord in a clear, humble, yet simple way. Everyone who truly believes in God is simple. When he came to the well near the city of Nahor, he prayed, saying, "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good success this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also; let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master" (vv. 12-14, Heb.). His prayer was answered immediately. Before he had even finished speaking, Rebekah came with her pitcher upon her shoulder. When he asked her for a drink, she not only gave him a drink but also drew water for all his camels. After she had done this, the servant was clear that Rebekah was the one and he gave her a ring and two bracelets.

(c) Looking for the Lord's Leading
in the Environment

The servant knew the Lord's will by looking for His leading in the environment (vv. 13-21, 26-27, 48-49). We also can see God's sovereignty in our environment. No one told the servant to go to the city of Nahor, the city of Abraham's brother. He just went there and at the well he met Rebekah, Nahor's granddaughter. Nothing was accidental; everything was ordained before the foundation of the world and was carried out through Abraham's servant, a man who trusted in God.

(3) Rebekah

(a) Chaste, Kind, and Diligent

In verse 16 we are told that Rebekah was "very fair to look upon, a virgin." Rebekah was chaste and pure. She was also kind and diligent (vv. 18-20). When Abraham's servant asked for a drink, she immediately gave it to him. She also drew water for his camels. It was hard work for a young woman to draw water out of the well and pour it into the trough for ten camels to drink, but she did it. If the young sisters want to be under God's sovereignty, especially with respect to their marriage, they need to be kind and diligent. Any young woman who is unkind and sloppy should remain single. When people ask you to do one thing, you must do two things for them. And the second thing should far surpass the first thing. You should not only give a man water to drink, but should also draw water for his ten camels. If you do this, you will be qualified to obtain your husband, your Isaac. This is some advice to all the young single sisters.

(b) Absolute

Rebekah was absolute (vv. 57-58, 61). Although Rebekah had never seen Isaac, she was willing to go to him without hesitation. She did not say to her mother, "Mother, I have never seen Isaac. Perhaps I should correspond with him first and afterward have him pay us a visit. Then I could decide whether or not to marry him." Rebekah did not talk in this way. Although her brother and mother were hesitating, wanting her to stay for at least ten days, she said, "I will go." She was absolute.

During the past forty years, I have seen a number of young sisters who developed mental problems as a result of considering marriage. Some spent days, weeks, months, and even years considering whether a particular brother was the one whom God had prepared for them. When such sisters came to me, I said, with a rebuking tone, "If you feel he is the brother, marry him blindly. But if he is not the one, forget about him and don't talk about it. The more you consider, the more you bother God, yourself, and me. How can I tell you yes or no? If I say yes, you will say that I do not know him well. If I say no, you will feel unhappy because you have already fallen in love with him. Don't think about it anymore. Either marry him or forget about him." I was serious in telling them this. Young sisters, if you want to be married, you must learn to be kind, diligent, and absolute.

(c) Submissive

Rebekah was also submissive (vv. 64-65). When she saw Isaac and realized who he was, "she took a veil, and covered herself." Sisters, do not put a piece of cloth on your head as a decoration or ornament. It must be a sign of your submission. Once you are married, you are no longer your own head. Your husband is your head, and your head must be covered. This is the true meaning of marriage.

(4) Laban and Bethuel

Laban and Bethuel were in the fear of the Lord (vv. 29-31). They were also very hospitable (vv. 31-33). Hospitality often brings in the greatest blessing. For Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel and the sister of Laban, to become Isaac's wife was a great blessing. That

blessing was secured by their being hospitable. If they had not been hospitable but rather had rejected Abraham's servant, that wonderful marriage would never have taken place. Furthermore, they accepted the Lord's sovereignty, saying, "The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good" (vv. 50-51, 55-60). Laban and Bethuel recognized that this was the Lord's doing and that they had no right to say anything about it. Here we see the atmosphere of their life, a life in oneness with God.

(5) Isaac

Isaac was not a man of activity, for he did not do anything. He simply dwelt by a well, by a place of living water. Verse 63 says, "Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide." Translators of the Bible are bothered about the rendering of the Hebrew in this verse. Some versions interpret it as meaning that Isaac went to the field to pray, and others say that he went to the field to worship. It might have been that Isaac was meditating in the presence of the Lord, possibly considering his marriage. He had lost his mother, did not have a wife, and the most trustworthy servant had gone on a journey. Isaac did not know if the servant would ever come back. The family had no safety or security, and he was in a desperate situation. Hence, he went out to the field to seek the Lord and meditate before God. While he was meditating, Rebekah came. After the servant had told Isaac all that had happened, Isaac took what his father had done for him and married Rebekah (vv. 66-67). His marriage was an inheritance, not a strife. He did not strive for a wife; he inherited what his father had done for him. He did not do a thing to get a wife. He only took what the father had secured for him. Acting in this way, he was one with the Lord that the purpose of God might be fulfilled in him. He had a real and solid marriage without a wedding ceremony.

(6) Fulfilling the Purpose of God

Isaac's marriage eventually fulfilled the purpose of God (21:12b; 22:17-18). The life of those in this chapter was not merely for their own human living; it was a life that issued in the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, a life which brought forth Christ and produced the kingdom of God for God's economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SIXTY-ONE

LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD THE MARRIAGE OF ISAAC A TYPE OF CHRIST MARRYING THE CHURCH

The Bible is a divine book composed with the divine concepts. Because of this, it contains many wonderful records, of which Genesis 24 is one. This chapter not only unfolds a living in oneness with God; it also implies something deeper than human living. This is the reason that it is difficult for the human mind to fathom the depths of the Bible. On the surface of Genesis 24, we have a record of human living, but in its depths there lies something divine. Although it is easy to view the surface, it is difficult to probe into the depths.

b) A Type of Christ Marrying the Church

In Genesis 24 we see a marriage which is a type of Christ marrying the church. In the New Testament we cannot find a verse which says that this marriage is a type of Christ marrying the church. However, the New Testament clearly reveals that Isaac, the son of Abraham, was a type of Christ being Abraham's unique seed (Gal. 3:16). Based upon the fact that Isaac was a type of Christ, we may infer that Isaac's marriage was a type of the marriage of Christ.

Because the Bible is a divine book composed with the divine concepts, we can see these concepts in the various biblical records. For example, we are all familiar with the story of Joseph. Although there is no word in the New Testament saying that Joseph was a type of Christ, any reader of the Bible can recognize that Joseph's story closely resembles that of Christ. Some Bible teachers say that we should not allegorize anything in the Scriptures unless the New Testament indicates that it is an allegory or a type of certain spiritual things. But we should not insist on this, for although the New Testament does not say that Joseph was a type of Christ, every Bible teacher recognizes that Joseph was an excellent type of Christ. As we read the story of Joseph, we see that it depicts the life of Christ. Many incidents in Joseph's life, such as his betrayal, are similar to those in the life of Christ. In the same principle, because Isaac is a type of Christ and because the marriage of Isaac resembles the marriage of Christ, we may say that the marriage recorded in Genesis 24 is a type of the marriage of Christ.

In Genesis 24 we have four main persons: the father, the son, the servant, and the bride. This is very meaningful. As we come to the New Testament, we see that the Triune God is working together to obtain a bride for the Son. What is the subject of the New Testament? If you say that the subject of the New Testament is just Jesus as our Savior, I would say that this is good, but that it is not all-inclusive. The subject of the New Testament is the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, working together to obtain the bride for the Son. The Father made the plan, the Spirit carries out the Father's plan, and the Son enjoys what the Father has planned and what the Spirit carries out. Who is the bride? The bride is a part of the human race which will marry the Son and become His counterpart. Matthew 28:19 speaks of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In the Acts and Epistles we see how the Spirit works according to the Father's plan to obtain the bride for the Son. At the end of the New Testament, in the book of Revelation, we see the bride. Revelation 19:7 says, "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready." Ultimately, the whole New Jerusalem, a city-lady, will be the bride (Rev. 21:2, 9-10). Although such a term as city-lady may sound strange, there is nothing wrong with using it, because the New Jerusalem will be a female, the wife of the Lamb, the counterpart of the Son of God. The entire New Testament is simply a record of the Triune God working together to gain a part of the human race to be the bride, the counterpart, of the Son.

(1) The Father's Plan

Firstly, we have the Father's plan. According to the King James Version, Ephesians 3:11 speaks of "the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." The word purpose is an archaic term for the modern word plan. When we speak of God's plan we are referring to God's purpose. In eternity past God made a plan, a plan to have the church for Christ (Eph. 3:8-11). God's plan is not

just to have a group of sinners, nor to have a group of redeemed ones. Such a concept is too low. God's plan is to have a bride for His Son.

We have heard time and time again that Christ came to save sinners. But have you ever heard a message telling you that Christ came to have the bride? John 3:29 says, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom." In the four Gospels the Lord Jesus told His disciples that He was the Bridegroom (Matt. 9:15). He came not only to save sinners but to have the bride. Are we still sinners? No, we are the bride! Praise the Lord that we are no longer sinners—we are the bride! Should we still come to God confessing our sins in a begging way? No, we must come to Him joyfully, saying, "Praise the Lord! I am so happy that I am no longer a sinner. I'm a part of the bride!" Christ came not merely to be our Savior and Redeemer; He also came to be the Bridegroom. God did not plan to save a group of poor sinners and bring them all into heaven. God planned to take a part of the human race and make them the counterpart of His dear Son. Eventually, in the new heaven and the new earth, we shall not have a group of pitiful sinners; we shall have the bride, the New Jerusalem, the wife of the Lamb.

As we have seen, God the Father planned to take a bride for His Son out of the human race. Abraham, a type of the Father, charged his servant, a type of the Holy Spirit, not to take a wife for his son from the daughters of the Canaanites but from Abraham's kindred (24:4, 7). In typology, this indicates that the counterpart of Christ must come from Christ's race, not from the angels nor from any other creatures. Since Christ was incarnated as a man, humanity has become His race. Do not always think of humanity as being so poor. Humanity is not poor. Because humanity is the race of Christ, it is dear and precious to God. Only out of humanity can God obtain the counterpart for His Son. Therefore, we all must be proud of being a part of humanity and must say, "Praise the Lord that I am a man! Thank Him that I was not created as a part of the angelic race but as part of the human race."

In Genesis 2 we see that God brought the living creatures to Adam to be named by him. Adam said, "This is a dog, and this is a cat. This is a monkey, and this is a donkey." As he looked at all those creatures, he did not find his counterpart among them. Thus, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, took one of his ribs, and built it into a woman as his counterpart (2:21-22). Hence, Adam and Eve were of the same race. This indicates that Christ's counterpart must come from His race, the human race. We all have been created as the human race, and as a part of the human race we all have been reborn. Only the human race is qualified to be the counterpart of Christ.

(2) The Spirit's Errand

While the father had a plan, the servant received a commission, an errand (v. 33). Abraham commissioned him to go to his race and take a wife for his son. This signifies that God the Father has commissioned God the Spirit. The New Testament reveals such a divine commission.

(a) To Reach the Chosen Bride

As Abraham commissioned his servant to reach the chosen bride (vv. 10-21), so God the Father commissioned God the Spirit to reach the human race. We all can testify that at a certain time the Spirit of God came to us. Perhaps you would say, "I didn't realize that God the Spirit came to me. I only know that someone preached the gospel to me." As that person was preaching the gospel to you, you were attracted by what he said and were willing to receive it. Although you did not understand everything he was saying, something deep within you was responding. In our mentality, many of us said, "I don't like this," but deep within our spirit we said, "This is very good." In my early ministry in China I did a great deal of gospel preaching. When the learned Chinese, who thought of Christianity as a foreign religion, heard our preaching, they said in their mentality, "This is a foreign religion; I don't like it." But, as many of them later testified, while they were saying this, something deep within them said, "This is what I need." What was it that caused them to respond in this way deep within? It was the Holy Spirit reaching them.

Rebekah never dreamed that she would be selected to be Isaac's wife. According to the custom of the time, she simply went to draw water late in the afternoon. But on this day something special happened. Before she came to the well, Abraham's servant was already there. This indicates the Spirit's coming to the human race (v. 10). Before we ever heard the preaching of the gospel or came to a gospel meeting, the Holy Spirit was already there waiting.

In Genesis 24, Abraham's servant, who had come to a well (v. 11), asked a woman to give him a drink of water (v. 17). In John 4, the Lord Jesus, who had come to Jacob's well (John 4:6), also asked a woman for a drink. Preachers often say that we are thirsty and need the living water to quench our thirst. But have you ever heard that the Holy Spirit is thirsty and needs you to quench His thirst? In Genesis 24 we see a servant who was thirsty after his long journey, and in John 4 we see a Savior who was thirsty after His tiring journey. Who was more thirsty in Genesis 24, the servant or Rebekah? The servant was. Likewise, who was more thirsty in John 4, the Lord Jesus or the Samaritan woman? The Lord Jesus was. Hence, as we preach the gospel, we must tell people that the Father, Son, and Spirit are thirsty for them.

Rebekah did not have the sense that she was thirsty; neither did she feel the need for a husband. It was the servant who was thirsty. By the time he had reached the city of Nahor, he was thirsty both physically and spiritually, thirsting for the woman who would be the proper wife for his master's son. In John 4, the Lord Jesus also was thirsty both physically and spiritually. As you are reading this message, the Holy Spirit is even now thirsty for you. Will you give Him a drink and quench His thirst?

When we heard the preaching of the gospel in the past, we did not realize that the Holy Spirit was thirsty for us. We might have thought, "Why is this preacher so ambitious to convince me?" But that was not the ambition of the preacher; it was the thirst of the Spirit. As you were listening to the preaching of the gospel, did you not sense that someone was desirous of having you? At the time you were saved, you felt that someone was chasing you. On the one hand, you said, "I don't like this"; on the other hand, something deep within you said, "You cannot run away."

As Rebekah went to draw water from the well that day, she was completely innocent, having no idea of what was to happen to her. She did not realize that by giving a man a drink of water and by drawing water for his camels she would be caught. But the father far away had made a plan to take a woman from her race as the wife for his son and had commissioned his servant to carry out this plan. Thus, the servant came to the city of Nahor and purposely waited there by the well. He was a real hunter hunting for a wife for Isaac.

If Rebekah had never spoken to the servant, she would not have been caught. But, as we have seen, what happened did not depend on her. The servant had already prayed that the Lord would give him success, saying, "Let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master" (v. 14). While he was still speaking in this way, Rebekah came. When he asked her for a drink of water, she not only gave him a drink, but said, "I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking" (vv. 18-19). Although Rebekah did not realize it, in doing this, she was caught.

Many of us can testify that, at the beginning, we did not think well of Christ. But at a certain time something deep within began to love Him. When I was a youth, I did not understand very much about Christ, but I did love Him. Although I could not explain it then, I simply began to love Him. But now I know the reason: in eternity, the Father had planned to catch me. Although I am just a little man, I am more than worthy of being caught by God. We all have been caught by Him according to His plan. Let me ask you, did you desire to be saved or to be a Christian? None of us did. But one day we heard the name of Jesus and responded to it in love. This is the sign that we have been chosen. Who brought the servant to the city of Nahor where Rebekah dwelt? And who brought Rebekah to the well where the servant was waiting? Undoubtedly, it was the Spirit of God. Our being saved did not depend on us. It was the result of the Father's plan and the Spirit's commission.

Abraham's servant eventually reached Rebekah through the satisfying water (v. 14). God's chosen ones are the satisfying water to the Holy Spirit. Today the Holy Spirit comes to seek God's chosen ones as Christ did at the well of Sychar (John 4:7). If anyone responds to Him and satisfies His desire, this is a sign that he is one of those chosen for Christ and that he will be gained by the Holy Spirit for Christ.

(b) To Bring the Riches of Christ
to the Bride

The Spirit also brings the riches of Christ to the bride (vv. 10, 22, 47, 53). After the camels had finished drinking, the servant put a golden ring on Rebekah's nose and two bracelets upon her hands (v. 22, Heb.). The best way to catch a person is to catch his nose. That Rebekah had a ring on her nose and bracelets upon her hands meant that she had been caught. After giving her these things, the servant asked her, "Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?" (v. 23). Once the servant was brought into Rebekah's home, he testified of Isaac's riches. After Rebekah's brother Laban and father Bethuel accepted the servant's proposal, he gave Rebekah more of Isaac's riches, articles of silver, articles of gold, and raiment (v. 53). He also gave precious things to her brother and her mother. This is exactly what John 16:13-15 reveals concerning the Spirit. In these verses, the Lord Jesus said that the Spirit will not speak of Himself, but that He will glorify the Son. All that the Father has is His, and the Spirit receives of His and discloses it to the disciples. Suppose Abraham's servant had said to Laban, "It is difficult for Abraham to earn a living in Canaan, and his son Isaac is not healthy. I have been sent to get a helper for him." Do you think that after hearing such a thing Rebekah would have said, "I will go"? No, she would have run away instead. But the testimony of Abraham's servant was not poor; rather, it was very rich. The servant said that the Lord had blessed his master Abraham, that he had become great, that he had given all things to his son Isaac, and that his master had charged him to find a wife for his son. As Rebekah was listening to this testimony, she was attracted to Isaac and was willing to go to him.

This is a picture of how the Holy Spirit comes to us testifying of the riches of Christ. Today Christ is the One appointed to inherit all the riches of the Father. We know this because the Spirit has told us of it through the Scriptures. Because of the Spirit's testimony, we have all been attracted to Christ. Every saved one who loves and seeks the Lord has been attracted in this way. We do not care for the things that the worldlings are seeking. We enjoy coming to the church meetings and telling the Lord Jesus how much we love Him. Oh, we love Him, we seek Him, and we praise Him! Over and over we say, "Lord Jesus, I love You."

Rebekah realized the riches of Isaac through the gifts which Abraham's servant brought forth to her. Today we realize the riches of Christ, which He has received of the Father, through the gifts that the Spirit has dispensed to us. Before Rebekah met Isaac in the good land, she had participated in and enjoyed Isaac's inheritance. It is the same with us in partaking of Christ's inheritance. Before we meet Him, we enjoy the gifts of the Spirit as a foretaste of the full taste of His riches.

(c) To Convince the Bride

The Spirit also convinces the bride (vv. 54-58). After the servant, typifying the Spirit, brought Rebekah the riches, she was convinced and was willing to marry Isaac. Although her relatives wanted her to linger, Rebekah, upon hearing the servant's testimony of Isaac, said, "I will go" (v. 58). She was willing to go to Isaac in the land of Canaan. Likewise, we are willing to go to Christ. Although we have never seen Him, we have been attracted by Him and we love Him (1 Pet. 1:8). Although Rebekah had never met Isaac, she loved him. When she heard about him, she simply loved him and wanted to go to a land far off to be with him. As long as we have the willingness to go to Christ, it is a sign that we are the chosen Rebekah. As I have watched the young people loving Jesus, I have said, "What are all these young people doing here? Why don't they seek the things of the world?" But deep within, I know the reason. We have all been convinced that Christ is the wonderful One. He is the most lovable One in the whole universe. How we love Him! As Rebekah was riding on the camel to be with Isaac, she must have said many times, "Isaac, I love you! Isaac, I want to see you and be with you!" It is the same with us today. As we are traveling on our long journey, we say over and over again, "Jesus, I love You. Jesus, I long to meet You and be in Your presence."

(d) To Bring the Bride to Christ

Eventually, the servant brought Rebekah to Isaac (vv. 51, 61-67). Although it was a long journey, he brought her through and presented her to Isaac as his bride. The Holy Spirit has convinced us and now He is bringing us to Christ. Although it is a long journey, eventually He will bring us through and present us to Christ as His lovely bride.

(3) The Church's Response

Now we must see the church's response. As we have seen, Rebekah responded immediately, being willing to go with the servant to Isaac. Although there is within our old, fallen nature a reluctance to follow the Lord immediately, we cannot deny that there is also

within us the willingness to follow Him. Although we are still in this old nature, it is nevertheless easy for us to follow the Lord. It is much easier to follow Him than not to follow Him. Do not believe the lie of the enemy that you can easily be frustrated in following the Lord. Tell the enemy, "Nothing can frustrate my desire to follow the Lord. Deep within me there is the longing to follow Him." Satan is a liar. Sometimes he even lies to us through preachers who speak negative things and tell us that we cannot love the Lord Jesus. Do not believe the lies, but declare, "No! I can and I do love the Lord Jesus!" We may even lie to ourselves, saying, "I'm so weak. I just can't follow the Lord. I'd better turn around and go back." We must reject this lie and say, "I will never go back. I will follow the Lord Jesus." Never believe the lie that you do not love the Lord. Tell the enemy, "I love the Lord Jesus. My loving Him does not depend upon my ability to love. It depends on His being so lovable. Because He is lovable, I cannot help loving Him." If I gave you a pair of old shoes, you would reject them, saying, "I don't care for those!" But if I gave you some diamonds, you would easily love them, not because you have the ability to love but because the diamonds are lovable. Likewise, we do not love the Lord Jesus because we are able to love; we love Him because He is so lovable. In Genesis 24, it was not Rebekah who was able to love Isaac and respond to him; it was Isaac who was lovable.

(a) Doing What the Spirit Expects

Our response to the Holy Spirit is that we always do what He expects. Abraham's servant expected that Rebekah would give him a drink of water and then draw water for his ten camels, and Rebekah did exactly what he expected (vv. 18-20), satisfying the servant's thirst. Often we have unconsciously done what the Holy Spirit expected, satisfying His desire, doing it without knowing what He expected. Our doing this was a sign that we were under the moving of the Spirit.

(b) Receiving the Gifts

After doing what the servant expected, Rebekah received the gifts. Firstly, the servant put a golden ring on her nose. Although ladies today like to put rings on their ears, here the ring is put on Rebekah's nose. In reading the Song of Songs, I was surprised to see that the Lord does not appraise the ears of the seeking one. Instead, He appraises her nose, saying, "Thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus," and, "The smell of thy nose like apples" (7:4, 8). In Song of Songs 2:3, the seeker says, "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." Because she had been enjoying the apples, her nose had the smell of apples. What is the significance of this? The function of the nose is to smell. Putting a golden ring on Rebekah's nose meant that her smelling function had been caught by the divine nature. Once we have this ring on our nose, we have the divine smell and taste. As the book of Hebrews says, we have tasted of the heavenly gift, the good word of God, and the works of power of the coming age (Heb. 6:4-6). Before I was saved, I had a particular taste. However, after I received the Lord, my taste changed. I had received the divine taste. Is there a golden ring on your nose? Is your nose like the high tower of Lebanon? According to Leviticus 21:18, no one with a flat nose could serve as a priest. We all must have a high nose, not a flat one.

We, the saved ones, have the divine smelling function with the divine taste. Since we have this taste, there are many things in the department stores which we cannot buy. What tells us not to buy these things? The golden ring on our nose. By our nose with the golden ring we smell that something is wrong with certain items in the stores. Because we have such a nose, we do not need others to tell us what to do or what not to do. The function of our smelling and tasting organ tells us what matches God's taste and what does not. We must have a high-tower nose and a nose with the smell of apples. Our spiritual nose must be a high tower in the Spirit. Our spiritual nose must be with the smell of Christ. The more we enjoy Christ as the apple tree, the more we have a nose full of His apple smell.

The servant also put two bracelets on Rebekah's hands (vv. 22, 47). In a sense, she was handcuffed. According to the New Testament concept, this means that we have received the divine function (Rom. 12:4). The more we are handcuffed by the Spirit, the more gift we receive of Him. We have not only received the divine taste; we have also acquired the divine function. The two bracelets given to Rebekah were ten shekels in weight and thus could fulfill the requirements of God's commandments. The weight of the golden ring on her nose, on the contrary, was just a half shekel. This half shekel signifies the first taste, the foretaste. The half we have tasted indicates that another half, the full taste, is coming. While the taste is only in part, the functions are in full. Do not say that you have only half a function. No, your function, your talent, is complete. Everyone has at least one full talent. The taste which we have received of the Holy Spirit is only partial, but the divine function which we have received of Him is complete.

Rebekah also received articles of silver, articles of gold, and raiment (v. 53), all of which indicate the riches of Christ. At first, Rebekah received a golden ring on her nose and two bracelets on her hands. After the acceptance of the servant's errand, more riches were brought forth. Likewise, after we came into the church life and accepted the Spirit's commission, the riches of Christ, the articles of silver, the articles of gold, and the raiment, were brought forth for our enjoyment.

By all these details we can realize that the record in Genesis 24 is altogether divine and implies the divine concept. This is not my allegorization; it is recorded in this way. Why was the golden ring just half a shekel and not three quarters of a shekel? Why were the bracelets ten shekels and not nine or eleven shekels? Why did the servant not bring forth all the other riches until his errand had been accepted? All this matches the revelation in the New Testament. Today we are not only enjoying the golden ring on our nose and the bracelets on our hands; we are also enjoying the articles of silver and of gold and the raiment. In the church life all the riches of Christ are ours.

(c) Following the Spirit

After receiving and enjoying all these riches, Rebekah followed the servant, traveling through the desert on a camel until she met Isaac (vv. 58, 61-65). Likewise, we are following the Spirit, traveling a long journey on a "camel." When we meet Christ, we shall dismount from our "camel." All the modern conveniences, such as telephones, automobiles, etc., are our "camels" today. Rebekah traveled through the desert on top of a camel, and we are traveling through the desert on today's modern "camels." According to Leviticus 11, a camel is unclean; yet it is useful. Many of today's conveniences are not clean in the eyes of God. Nevertheless, they enable us to travel through the desert. When we meet Him, we shall leave the "camels."

(4) The Son's Marriage

In a good sense, the son, Isaac, did nothing. This indicates that everything is planned by the Father and carried out by the Spirit. All the Son does is receive the bride.

Isaac received Rebekah at eventide (vv. 63-64). This implies that the marriage of Christ will be at the eventide of the age. At the close of this age, Christ will come to meet His bride.

Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent and loved her (v. 67). As we have seen, Sarah typifies grace. Hence, this means that Christ will meet us in grace as well as in love.

This chapter ends with the words, "Isaac was comforted after his mother's death." If I had been the writer, I would have said that Rebekah was comforted after her long journey. But the Bible does not say this. Do not consider your comfort, your satisfaction; rather, consider Christ's comfort, Christ's satisfaction. If Christ has no comfort and satisfaction, we cannot have any comfort and satisfaction either. Our satisfaction depends on His. Our comfort is His comfort, and His satisfaction is ours. Christ is now waiting for His comfort. When will He have it? On the day of His marriage. That day will come.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SIXTY-TWO

HAVING NO MATURITY IN LIFE

The Bible is a complete revelation. The content of this revelation is God's eternal purpose. As we have pointed out many times, God's eternal purpose is to work Himself into a corporate man so that He may have a corporate expression in the universe. If we would understand any portion of the Bible in a proper way, we must keep this matter in mind.

In this message we come to Genesis 25. Many years ago, I did not like the first part of this chapter. But since there are no wasted words in the Bible, this portion of Genesis 25 must be very significant. If we do not keep before us the purpose of the revelation in the holy Word, we shall be unable to see the significance of this part of Genesis 25. By His mercy, the Lord has shown us the depth of this portion of the Word.

In both Genesis and Romans we are told clearly that Abraham was very old when he begat Isaac. Romans 4:19 says that Abraham considered his body as good as dead. Yet, forty years after Isaac's birth, Abraham married again (25:1), and when he became one hundred forty years of age, he still begat six sons (25:2). How can we explain this? If he was as old as a dead person when he was a hundred years of age, he certainly must have been more like a dead person when he remarried at the age of one hundred forty. In chapter twenty-three Sarah died and was buried, in chapter twenty-four Abraham obtained a wife for Isaac, and in chapter twenty-five he himself married again. What does this mean?

Genesis 25 also includes a record of the birth of Jacob and Esau. Why is such a wonderful record included in the same chapter which names the six sons of Abraham's concubine? The record of Abraham's six sons is negative, whereas the record of the birth of Jacob and Esau is positive. If you were composing this chapter, would you put these two records together? None of us would have written this chapter in such a way. Nevertheless, according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it must be very significant.

e. Having No Maturity in Life

If we consider all these matters, deep in our spirit we shall realize that the Holy Spirit's intention in this chapter is to show that Abraham was not a person matured in life. Although he was old in his physical life, he was not matured in his spiritual life.

As we have seen, God's purpose is to work Himself into a corporate person that He might have a corporate expression. In order to accomplish this, God created the heavens, the earth, and man with a spirit as his receiving organ (Zech. 12:1). This man was created in God's image to express Him and with His dominion to represent Him in His authority. In Genesis 3 we see that Satan injected himself into man, and man became fallen. In chapters three through eleven man had at least four falls. After the fourth fall, God came in to call Abraham out of the fallen race and establish him as the father of the called race. God's intention in making Abraham the father of the called race was to work Himself into that race for the fulfillment of His purpose. Although God did not have the opportunity to work Himself into the created race, the Adamic race, He now had an opportunity to work Himself into the called race, the Abrahamic race. The record from the last half of chapter eleven through the first part of chapter twenty-five shows how much God worked with this person. However, when we come to the end of the record of Abraham's life, do we see a person who was matured in life and who expressed God in every way? No. Abraham was not yet such a person.

Many Christians appreciate Abraham too much. Although I respect Abraham and I do not belittle him, I must point out that, as the record of Genesis indicates, he was not matured in the divine life. Chapter twenty-four is wonderful, but it is not wonderful with respect to Abraham's life but with respect to his activity. Abraham did a wonderful thing in choosing a proper wife for his son; yet, immediately after this, he remarried. Genesis 25 does not say, "After Abraham had found a good wife for Isaac, he lived with them in the presence of the Lord for more than thirty years. One day, he called Isaac and Rebekah to him, laid his hands upon them, blessed them, and then went to be with the Lord." If the record were like this, we would all appreciate it, saying, "Here is a saint who was matured in life." What is the proof of the maturity in life? It is blessing others. When we are young, we receive blessings from others. But when we are mature, we pass on blessings to others. Although Abraham was old, he did not bless anyone. This proves that he did not have the maturity in life.

1) Marrying Keturah after Sarah Died

The record in Genesis 25 is not a record of blessing; rather, it is a record of remarriage. Abraham married Keturah after Sarah died. Is remarriage a sign of the maturity in life? Certainly not!

2) Begetting Another Six Sons after Isaac

Abraham's life may be divided into three sections: the section with Ishmael, the section with Isaac, and the section with the six sons. Ishmael was produced by Abraham's flesh, and Isaac was produced by God's grace. What about the six sons? They were produced by even more flesh. After the birth of Ishmael, Abraham's flesh was dealt with, and grace came in to replace it. But after the birth and growth of Isaac, Abraham's flesh became active again. In the first section, the section with Ishmael, Abraham's flesh was onefold, but in the third section, the section with the six sons, his flesh was sixfold, having been intensified six times. While the younger flesh produced one Ishmael, the older flesh produced six sons.

The Bible is honest, telling us that Abraham married Keturah and begat six sons by her. But Abraham knew God's will. Verse 5 says, "Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac." Isaac was the unique heir, the heir chosen, designated, and established by God. None of the other sons were reckoned as heirs (v. 6), for they were all sons of the concubine and, like Ishmael, were rejected by God. Abraham had two concubines. The first gave birth to Ishmael, and the second gave birth to six sons. But God did not want any of them. Both before and after the birth of Isaac, Abraham did something which God did not want. How can we say that such a life is mature?

3) Died without Maturity in Life

The intention of Genesis 25 is to show that Abraham did not have the maturity in life. He died without this, for as we have seen, he died without blessing anyone. Although Abraham was good, he was not mature in the divine life. It is right that we appreciate him, but we must realize that he had a great lack. He was called, had faith, and lived in fellowship with God, but, to use a New Testament term, he did not have sufficient transformation.

What is transformation? Once again I would like to use the example of petrified wood. As water flows through the wood, the element of wood is carried away and the elements of minerals are added in its place. As the mineral elements are wrought into the wood, the wood is transformed into stone. This is petrification. We are wood, and the flow of living water must carry away our natural element and bring into our being all the divine, heavenly, holy, and spiritual elements. In this way we are transformed.

If you read chapters twenty-three through twenty-five again, you will see that Abraham was not a fully transformed person. He was a man who lived in fellowship with God and who acted according to His leading, but he was not transformed in full. Rather, he remarried and exercised the flesh which had been dealt with by God to bring forth six more "Ishmaels." Although we must be like Abraham, we need to see that in himself he was not a complete pattern.

4) Buried with Sarah in the Cave of Machpelah

Undoubtedly Abraham died in faith. His two sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah (vv. 9-10), which he had obtained for Sarah in chapter twenty-three. It must be that his sons buried him according to his desire.

f. Needing Jacob and Isaac for His Completion

Although Abraham was good, he was not complete. He had to be completed and perfected by the lives of Jacob and Isaac. According to the implication of the divine record, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not three separate individuals. In like manner, their God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, is not three gods but the one Triune God. In Abraham, we see God the Father; in Isaac, we see God the Son; and in Jacob, we see God the Spirit. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the three-in-one, are the unique Triune God. In the same principle, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are a triune person. Being three-in-one, they are a complete person in the experience of life.

1) Jacob's Being Chosen

In Abraham's record we see the matter of calling. According to the divine revelation, however, calling is not the first item. God's selection comes before God's calling. When Abraham was in Chaldea worshipping idols, that was the time of God's calling, not the time of His selection. The time of God's selection was before the foundation of the world. In eternity past Abraham was chosen, and in Chaldea he was called. But where is the record of Abraham's selection? It is in Genesis 25 in the record of Jacob's selection. In himself, Abraham had no selection; his selection was in Jacob's selection. Abraham's life had neither a full beginning nor a complete ending, for he had neither selection nor maturity in life, both of which are with Jacob. In other words, as far as the experience of life is concerned, by himself Abraham cannot stand as a complete person in the eyes of God. He needs Jacob and Isaac. These three persons, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, represent the spiritual experience of a complete man. In the record of Jacob's life, there is no mention of being called. Where and when was Jacob called? He was called with Abraham in Genesis 11, just as Abraham was selected in Jacob. In Abraham we clearly see God's calling, but we do not see selection nor the maturity in life.

In Genesis 25 we have three genealogies: the genealogy of the children of Keturah (vv. 2-4), the genealogy of the sons of Ishmael (vv. 13-16), and the genealogy of Isaac (vv. 19-26). In the first two genealogies no one is selected by God. None of the sons of Keturah nor the sons of Ishmael were chosen by Him. Even Esau, one born of Isaac, was not chosen. Of all those named in this chapter, only one is chosen—Jacob. These three genealogies are put together in one chapter for a definite purpose—to show the kind of person God rejects and the kind of person He chooses. God chose the most naughty one, Jacob, whose name means a supplanter, a heel holder. If we were God, we would never have chosen such a naughty, supplanting one. Nevertheless, Jacob was God's choice. We see in this chapter that what Abraham produced was not what God wanted. None of his six sons was God's choice. In producing them, all he did was in vain. Likewise, none of Ishmael's descendants were chosen by God. After Isaac had been married for twenty years, he "entreating the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived" (v. 21). Rebekah gave birth to twins, the second of whom was God's choice. Of the more than twenty births recorded in this chapter, all were in vain except one. In this chapter God seemed to be saying to Abraham, "You have brought forth many children by your flesh, but all is in vain. Not one who is the result of your flesh is My choice."

This chapter reveals that the life which lacks maturity will always labor in vain. If we are not matured in life, although we may be quite active, doing many things, all our labor will be in vain. None of it is according to God's selection. Abraham was a dear saint with a very good life, but his life was not mature and he did much which was in vain. Nothing that came out of his flesh was God's choice.

Do you want to have a life like this? By the record of Abraham's life we see that he was not complete. He needed Jacob and Isaac to complete and perfect him. As this chapter reveals, for his completion and perfection he needed Jacob's being chosen.

2) Jacob's Maturity in Life

Abraham also needed Jacob's maturity in life. According to the book of Genesis, the first person to bless others was Melchisedec (14:18-19). As the book of Hebrews reveals, Melchisedec was a type of Christ. But even when Abraham was very old, much older than Jacob lived to be, he never blessed anyone. Although he received the blessing, he never passed on blessings to others. After Melchisedec, the next person to bless others was Isaac. But Isaac blessed blindly; he was cheated and did not bless in a clear way. Rather, he blessed the wrong person, giving the birthright to Jacob instead of to Esau (ch. 27). However, as the record at the end of Genesis reveals, Jacob, although he could not see well, blessed in a very clear way. After Jacob became mature, he blessed whomever he met. Wherever he went, he did nothing except bless others. When Jacob was brought before Pharaoh, the first thing he did was bless him (47:7). After talking a while with Pharaoh, Jacob blessed him again (47:10). Jacob was not only a blessed person; he was also a blessing person.

While it is easy to receive a blessing, it is not easy to bless others. A grandson cannot bless his grandfather, because the grandson lacks the maturity in life. Because Jacob was mature, he blessed everyone he met, including Pharaoh, who was an unbeliever, a Gentile king. Jacob did not feel that he had to do anything for anyone. His burden was simply to bless others.

Consider the case of Jacob's blessing the two sons of Joseph (48:8-20). When Jacob laid his right hand upon Ephraim instead of upon Manasseh, the firstborn, Joseph was displeased and attempted to move his father's right hand to Manasseh's head, saying, "Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head" (48:18). But Jacob refused and said, "I know it, my son, I know it" (48:19). Jacob seemed to be saying, "I may be blind physically, but I am very clear spiritually. You don't know what I am doing, but I know." Here we see that Jacob blessed Joseph's two sons with a clear, full, and rich blessing.

Jacob also blessed his twelve sons in a very clear way. These blessings are the foundation of the basic prophecies in the Bible. If we would know the prophecies in the Bible, we must go back to their foundation, to their basic elements, as seen in the blessings rendered by Jacob to his twelve sons. Jacob could bless his sons in a way that was full of divine revelation because he was fully matured in the divine life. He was born a Jacob, but he was transformed into Israel. He was born a supplanter, a heel-holder, but he was transformed into a prince of God. He had become so clear and full of life. When we are clear and full of life, we can do nothing but bless. This is a sign of maturity.

As we have seen, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob form one complete person in the experience of life. Abraham did not bless, because he did not have the maturity in life. Isaac, having some maturity but lacking the richness of the maturity of life, blessed in a blind way. Jacob, who was mature in life, blessed in a full and clear way. Whatever he spoke was the divine word, and whatever he blessed was a prophecy concerning God's economy with all His children. Eventually, Jacob became Israel, the expression of God.

If we have the light from the Scriptures as a whole, we shall see that the book of Genesis is a miniature of the complete revelation of the entire Bible. At the end of Genesis we see a man called Israel, a transformed person who is transparent, clear, and full of life. The transformed Israel is a seed, a miniature, of the New Jerusalem. At the beginning of Genesis we have man created in God's image. At the end of Genesis we have a transformed person, a man not only outwardly in the image of God, but a man in whom God has wrought Himself, making him His expression. Although many Christians appreciate Abraham, his life was not high enough. Israel's life was much higher.

3) Isaac's Enjoyment of the Inheritance

For his completion, Abraham also needed Isaac's enjoyment of the inheritance (24:36; 25:5). From the day Abraham was called by God, God began to rob him of things. Firstly, God took away his brother and then his father. Later, God rejected Eliezer, commanded Abraham to cast out Ishmael, and told him to offer Isaac on the altar. After Isaac had been returned, Sarah died. Abraham's life was not a life of enjoyment; it was a life of being robbed. Isaac's life, on the contrary, was a life full of enjoyment. Isaac did not do anything; he simply inherited all his father had.

In our Christian life we have the experiences of both Abraham and Isaac. On one hand we are always being robbed. God rejects whatever we have. He seems to say, "You like it, but I don't like it. You want to give it, but I won't take it. You want to preserve it, but I reject it." In a very good sense, God always acts contrary to our wishes and intentions. Abraham wanted to take his father with him, but the father was taken away. He wanted to have Lot, but Lot separated from him. He wanted Eliezer to be his heir, but Eliezer was rejected. He wanted to keep Ishmael, but God commanded him to cast out the son of the bondwoman. Abraham loved his son Isaac, but God required that he be offered to Him upon the altar. A while later, Sarah, Abraham's dear wife, was taken. I doubt that Abraham had much time for enjoyment.

But there is another side to our Christian life. While we are suffering the robbing, we are enjoying our inheritance. This is why the records of Abraham and Isaac overlap, whereas the records of those who preceded them, such as Abel, Enoch, and Noah, do not. The record of Isaac is mixed together with that of Abraham. While Abraham was suffering, Isaac was enjoying. While Abraham was weeping, Isaac was rejoicing. This indicates that our Christian life is a life of night and morning. Night is at our left hand and morning is at our right hand. In the Christian life, night and morning go together. Many times I have been unable to determine whether I was in the night or in the morning. While I was in the morning I was in the night, and while I was in the night, I was in the morning. On the one hand, I was Abraham being robbed of everything, and on the other hand, I was Isaac enjoying the inheritance.

We all have been selected with Jacob and have been called and have believed with Abraham. As we have been robbed with Abraham and have been enjoying with Isaac, one day we all shall be matured with Jacob. We should not say that a certain brother is a Jacob or Abraham or Isaac. We should call him a Jacob-Abraham-Isaac. He is Jacob at the beginning and at the ending, and he is Abraham with Isaac in the middle. These three are one complete person. As we have seen, the maturity in life is neither with Abraham nor Isaac but with Jacob.

The sign of the maturity of life is blessing. I have seen thousands of Christians. Nearly every one has been either supplanting or complaining. Some saints complain about the elders, the brothers, and all the churches. It seems that the only church they like is the New Jerusalem. Complaining is a sign of immaturity. When you have matured, you will not complain; you will bless, saying, "O God, bless all the brothers and all the churches." For the one who is matured in life, the supplanting hand has become the blessing hand. The more mature you are, the more you will bless others. You will not only bless the good ones, but the bad ones and even the worst ones.

Abraham's life was wonderful and has been appreciated by Christians throughout the centuries. But, as we have seen, he was not mature in the divine life. Our God is not only God the Father, but also God the Son and God the Spirit. He is not only the God of Abraham, but also the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. May we all see that we need all three aspects, the life of Abraham plus the lives of Isaac and Jacob. The Triune God is working within us as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit to make us the full expression of Himself. He is the Triune God, and we must be a person of three aspects in the spiritual experiences of the divine life. We need to be transformed in full. When we have been fully transformed, God will have the fulfillment of His purpose.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SIXTY-THREE

INHERITING GRACE

We have pointed out in previous messages that, according to the experience of life, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are three parts of one complete person and that we should not consider them as three separate individuals. If we know the life in the book of Genesis, we shall see that, in the eyes of God, these three persons are one complete unit in the experience of life.

3. The Second Aspect— the Experience of Isaac

a. Inheriting Grace

In this message we come to the second aspect of the experience of the called—the experience of Isaac (21:1–28:9; 35:28-29). It is not easy for Christians to understand the experience of Isaac. It is quite easy, on the contrary, to understand the three main aspects of Abraham's experience: being called by God, living by faith in God, and living in fellowship with God. But what shall we say about Isaac? As we read the record of his life in chapters twenty-one through twenty-eight, what do we see of the experience of life? We do not see that he was called, lived by faith in God, or lived in fellowship with God. According to Genesis, we see how Isaac was born, was married, and begat two sons. But it is difficult to say what experience of life we find in the record of Isaac.

In the record of Isaac's life the experience of grace is implied. What Isaac experienced was the inheriting of God's grace. The grace of God was not as fully revealed in the Old Testament as it is in the New Testament, because grace actually came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). After Christ came, there is a full and thorough revelation of grace, and in the New Testament the word grace is used again and again. The New Testament even closes with the mention of grace: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen" (Rev. 22:21). The Bible begins in the Old Testament with the word, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," and it ends in the New Testament with the word, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints." Although the record in Genesis concerning Isaac does not have the term grace, nevertheless such a thing is implied there. This is the reason that it is quite difficult for many to understand the Bible. In the Bible, there may be a certain thing but not the term to describe it. Although Isaac's experience is recorded in Genesis, it is difficult to designate the experience he had as the experience of grace.

According to the New Testament revelation, as far as the experience of life is concerned, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob should not be considered as three separate individuals, but as aspects of one complete person's experience of life. Abraham represents the aspect of being called, of living by faith in God, and of living in fellowship with God. Isaac represents the aspect of inheriting grace and enjoying the inheritance of grace. Jacob represents the aspect of being chosen, being dealt with by the Lord, and being transformed into a prince of God. In the experience of life, there is the aspect of enjoyment, the enjoyment of grace. Most of us have heard messages saying that the Christian life should be a suffering life, a life of bearing the cross and groaning in prayer. Have you not heard messages telling you that today is not the time of enjoyment but the time of suffering and of bearing the cross, and that our enjoyment will begin at the time of the Lord's coming back? I do not say that this is wrong, but I do say that it is only one aspect of the Christian life. There is another aspect—the aspect of enjoyment.

In the biblical and experiential sense, grace means enjoyment. Grace is the enjoyment in our Christian life. Our Christian life has three aspects: the aspect of Abraham, the aspect of Isaac, and the aspect of Jacob. In the aspect of Abraham we cannot see much enjoyment. Although Abraham was blessed and was enlarged, he did not have very much enjoyment. He lost his father, and Lot became a grief to him. Eliezer, in whom he trusted, was rejected, and Ishmael, the son he begat by his own endeavor with his concubine, was cast out. After Isaac was born, God required that Abraham offer him up as a burnt offering. Not too long after Isaac was returned, Abraham lost his dear wife. Throughout his whole life we can see the aspect of loss. Although the Bible does not show that Abraham suffered very much, he lost almost everything. Is this all the Christian life is? If it is, then the Christian life is only a life of losses. The matter of loss is just one aspect of the Christian life. Romans 5:2 does not say, "We have access into this loss in which we stand." No, it says, "We have the access by faith into this grace in which we stand." God has no intention of keeping us in loss. His intention is to bring us into grace, into the enjoyment.

God wants to bring us into the enjoyment of grace, but there is a frustration to this grace—the self. We ourselves are the frustration. Although Christ has come and grace has come with Him, and although we have been brought into the grace in which we stand, the greatest frustration to this grace is you and I. Hence, before we can have the experience of Isaac, we need Abraham who represents the first aspect of the experience of life. Abraham's life reveals that if we would enjoy God's grace and have the full enjoyment of God's riches, we must be dealt with, circumcised, and cut off. If Abraham had not been circumcised, Isaac would never have been born. Isaac came after Abraham's circumcision. After Abraham was circumcised in Genesis 17, God told him that Isaac would be born (17:19). Eventually, in chapter twenty-one, Isaac was born. Isaac came with God's visitation. He was born by God's visitation. God's

visitation equals the birth of Isaac. God visited Sarah and that visitation became the birth of Isaac. This is grace.

God has come to be enjoyed by His called ones. But if we would have this enjoyment, the self must go. Once the self has gone, Isaac comes. This means that grace comes. It is not easy to lose the self. In order for the self to go, we must suffer loss. Are you willing to lose yourself? I do not believe that anyone is willing to lose himself. Nevertheless, we must lose ourselves before grace can come. To lose the self is to lose our face. When we keep our face we lose grace. If we want to receive grace, we must lose our face. Brothers, as you deal with your wife in your daily living, you must be prepared to lose yourself. If you do this, grace will come. After Abraham was circumcised, Isaac came. This is the principle. With us, the self must go and then grace will come. We must firstly be Abraham and then we become Isaac.

It was not easy for Abraham to lose himself. In a good sense, God forced him to lose himself. When God called Abraham, He did not say, "Abraham, you must lose yourself and then I will come in to be your grace and enjoyment." No, when God called him, He promised to bless him. The blessing in the Old Testament somewhat equals the grace in the New Testament. What is the difference between blessing and grace? When God gives us something free, that is a blessing. But when this blessing is wrought into our being, it becomes grace. God promised Abraham that He would bless him. When the blessing was wrought into Abraham, it became grace. Abraham's self and natural man were the strongest frustration to God's blessing and forced God to deal with him.

The same is true in our experience. We all have been called, and God has given us the blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3). However, after being called, we are still in ourselves and exercise our self-effort to obtain God's blessing. When I was young, I realized that my flesh was not good. When I was told that the flesh had been crucified on the cross, I was very happy. Then I began to exercise my own effort to put the flesh on the cross. But in exercising my own effort, I frustrated God's grace. The crossing out of the flesh had already been accomplished; it did not need the exercise of my effort. Yet I, the self, was trying to put my flesh on the cross. That self was the greatest frustration to God's grace. It separated me from grace. If we consider our past experience, we shall see that after hearing the good news, we tried many times by ourselves to obtain the things we heard in the good news. Our self-effort has been a frustration to God's grace. Because of this, God has been forced to deal with us.

Being called by God, living by faith in God, and living in fellowship with God are all for the enjoyment of God. We have been called to the enjoyment of God, we must learn to live by faith in God that we may have the enjoyment of God, and we need to live in fellowship with God that we may participate in all His riches. All this is for one thing—the enjoyment of God. But we do not see this enjoyment with Abraham; we see it with Isaac. We all have had at least some experience of being called by God, living by faith in God, living in fellowship with God, and suffering loss. We are real Abrahams today. But we can also testify that, much to our surprise, in the midst of our loss there has been some enjoyment. While we were suffering a loss, unconsciously we were enjoying something. Whenever we suffered a dealing from God, we simultaneously had some enjoyment. While we were the suffering Abraham, we were also the enjoying Isaac. For this reason, the record of Isaac does not immediately follow the record of Abraham. Rather, it is mingled with the record of Abraham's life. While Abraham was still there, Isaac came in, for they were not two separate individuals in the experience of life, but two aspects of the experience of a complete person. We need the experiences of both Abraham and Isaac. Perhaps even today you had a certain experience and said, "I don't know why this has happened to me." But deep within you do know. In the midst of your loss, you gain and enjoy Christ. This is the experience of Isaac.

If we only had Abraham without Isaac, we would be very disappointed with Abraham's record. We would say, "What is the good of being the father of faith if it is only a matter of suffering loss?" But once we see the experience of Isaac, we shall say, "Now I understand why Abraham suffered the loss of so much. All the negative experiences of Abraham were for the positive enjoyment with Isaac." Abraham was for Isaac. Abraham acquired a great deal, having been blessed and having become enlarged, but he gave all that he had to Isaac (24:36; 25:5). Abraham suffered for Isaac's gain. The more Abraham suffered, the more Isaac gained. I would say, "Poor Abraham, you are just a suffering person. All that you have gained through your suffering is not for you but for Isaac." We all must realize that today we are not only Abrahams but also Isaacs. If you say to me, "Brother, you are a poor Abraham always suffering," I would reply, "Don't you know that I'm also an Isaac? I have suffered loss that I might gain. I lose as Abraham and I gain as Isaac. I'm not just Abraham. My name is Abraham-Isaac. On the loss side, I am Abraham; on the gain side, I am Isaac."

We are both Abraham and Isaac. As Abraham, we have been called by God, have learned to live by faith in God, and have learned to live in fellowship with God. At the same time, as Isaac, we do nothing except enjoy all we have gained from Abraham's experience. Which kind of experience do you appreciate more—Abraham's or Isaac's? Without Abraham's experience we cannot have Isaac's. God is dealing with us as He dealt with Abraham that we might have the experience of Isaac.

The matter of grace has been hidden, concealed, and veiled throughout the years. What is grace? Grace is something of God which is wrought into our being and which works in us and does things for us. It is nothing outward. Grace is God in Christ wrought into our being to live, work, and do things for us. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul says, "By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." This word is quite deep. Paul did not say, "By the grace of God I have what I have. I have a good car, a good job, and a good wife by the grace of God." He did not even say, "By the grace of God I do what I do." It is not a matter of doing, having, or working; it is absolutely a matter of being. Hence, Paul says, "By the grace of God I am what I am." This means that the very grace of God had been wrought into his being, making him that kind of person. In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, "No longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." If we put this verse together with 1 Corinthians 15:10, we see that grace is simply Christ living in us. It is "not I, but the grace of God," "no longer I, but Christ." Grace is not outside of us or beside us. It is a divine Person, God Himself in Christ, wrought into our being to be the constituent of our being. Because of the lack of revelation, Christians have misunderstood and misinterpreted grace, thinking of it as something outside of them. But grace is just the Triune God wrought into our being to be what we should be and to live, work, and do things for us so that we may say, "I am what I am by the grace of God. It is not I, but the grace of God."

We all have been taught to have good behavior and to love one another. As a result, we try to behave ourselves and to love others. But it does not matter whether we can love others or not, for God will never recognize our love. Abraham succeeded in bringing forth Ishmael, but God rejected him. God seemed to say, "No, Abraham, that is not what I want. I want something that has been wrought into you and worked out from you. You brought forth Ishmael without My visitation. I was in heaven and you were on earth bringing forth Ishmael. Because he was unrelated to Me and to My visitation, I will never recognize him. One day, I shall visit Sarah and My

visitation will bring forth Isaac. I will recognize only him." If we love others in ourselves, God will never recognize that love, because it does not come from His visitation. God wants to visit us, get into us, live for us, and even love others for us. He will only recognize that kind of love. Your love is an Ishmael; the love by God's visitation is an Isaac. Whether you are humble or proud, crooked or straight, means nothing. God does not recognize anything which comes out of you apart from His visitation. Whatever is not of grace is not recognized, not counted, by God. We all must say, "O Lord, I will not do anything without Your visitation. Lord, if You will not visit me and work something through me and out of me, I will do nothing. I will neither hate nor love, be proud nor be humble. I want to be blank. Lord, without Your visitation, I am nothing." God's visitation is the practical grace. When I love others and am humble by God's visitation, not by my self-effort, that is the enjoyment of grace.

As we have seen, God's intention is to work Himself into a corporate man that He might have a corporate expression. This is the basic concept of the divine revelation in the Bible. This is God's eternal purpose. God called Abraham with the purpose of working Himself into him, but Abraham had a strong self. This natural self was the strongest frustration to God's purpose. The same is true with us today. God's purpose is to work Himself into us to be our life and even to be our living, but our natural self frustrates this. Therefore, God must cut us and deal with us that He may get into us to be everything to us. God does not need us to love others and to be humble that society might be improved. If God wants a better society, He only needs to say, "Better society," and it will come into being. He calls things not being as being (Rom. 4:17) and does not need our help. God wants to work Himself into us to be our humility and our everything. He wants us to say, "Lord, I am nothing and will not do anything. I just open up to You that You might come in, make Your home in me, live in me, and do everything for me. Lord, You live and I'll enjoy Your living. Whenever You do something in me, I'll say, 'Praise You, Lord. This is wonderful! I am not the doer; I am an enjoyer, appreciating all You are doing for me.'"

God's intention today is to deal with Abraham that Isaac may come. His intention is to deal with our natural being that we may have the full experience of Himself in Christ wrought into us as our enjoyment. I have been experiencing married life for close to fifty years, experiencing much enjoyment and much suffering. Before I was married, I truly loved the Lord, and I often told Him how much I loved Him. After I was married, I went to the Lord and assured Him, saying, "Lord because I love You, I want to be the best husband." Eventually, I failed. I went to the Lord and confessed all my failures. After experiencing the anointing, I was happy and I made up my mind to try again to be the best husband. But I failed once more, and this experience of ups and downs was repeated again and again. Later, I even gave a message in which I said, "The Christian life has many nights and mornings. Never be disappointed over your failures. Just wait for several hours and you will be in the morning." For years and years I went through days and nights, nights and days. One day, I received the revelation and said, "Stupid man, who told you to do so? Christ is here waiting to be your grace. You must say, 'Lord, I am nothing and I can do nothing. Even if I could do something, it would never be recognized by You. Come, Lord, and do Your job and be the best husband for me. This is Your job, not mine. You charge me, and I return the charge to You and ask You to fulfill it. Lord, You be the best husband and I will praise You for it.'" Whenever I prayed like this, the Lord always did the best job. This is grace.

Grace is God working Himself into our being as our enjoyment. The very God today is not only God the Father, but also God the Son and God the Spirit. Moreover, God the Spirit is the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29), and this grace is the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7), which is "the varied grace" (1 Pet. 4:10), the "all grace" (1 Pet. 5:10), and the "sufficient grace" (2 Cor. 12:9). The Triune God is such a grace, and this grace is now with our spirit (Gal. 6:18). Grace is the divine Person of the Triune God as the Spirit indwelling our spirit. It is the Spirit of grace indwelling our spirit to be our enjoyment that we may enjoy God as our life and our everything, even as our living. This is why every one of Paul's Epistles ends with the words, "Grace be with you." For example, 2 Corinthians 13:14 says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Grace is not outside of us; it is in us. Whatever we call it, the Spirit of grace or the grace of life, it is something living and divine in our spirit. We do have such a divine reality, the Triune God Himself, in our spirit as our grace and enjoyment. When He loves others through us, this love is our enjoyment. When He lives Himself out through us, this living is also our enjoyment. Day and night we may enjoy His living through us.

Why then do we suffer? Because the self, the ego, the natural man, is still here and must be dealt with. Praise Him that no dealing is in vain. Every dealing from God is a breaking of our natural man that we may enjoy more of Him as our grace. Thus, we have Abraham and Isaac; we have the suffering of the loss and the enjoyment of the gain. This gain is not the gain of outward things; it is the gain of the indwelling One, that is, the Spirit of grace and the grace of life. Again I say, whatever God gives as a gift outside of us is, at the most, a blessing. When this gift is wrought into our being, becoming the life element within us, it is grace. The blessing must become the grace. In the Old Testament, God gave many things to His people as blessings, but all those things were merely outward blessings. Before Christ came, none of those blessings had been wrought into God's people. Christ came not only to die on the cross for us, but, after His death, to become the life-giving Spirit to enter into our being. Thus, in the New Testament, we have the terms "in Christ" and "Christ in you." Now He is in us and we are in Him. Whatever God gives us in Christ has been wrought into our being and has become grace, our enjoyment. Now we are not merely under His blessing; we are in His grace and His grace is in us. What are you enjoying today—blessing or grace? The New Testament never says, "Blessing be with you." Rather, it says repeatedly, "Grace be with you."

1) Born of Grace

After Abraham's natural strength and self-effort were dealt with by God, Isaac was born (17:15-19; 18:10-14; 21:1-7). This implies that Isaac was born of grace, which is represented by Sarah (Gal. 4:24-28, 31). The record of Genesis says this transpired at "the time of life" (18:10, 14). Whenever the effort of the natural life ceases, that is the time of life. At the time of life something is born in grace. Grace is related to life, and life goes with grace. Hence, grace is called "the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7).

2) Grown in Grace

Isaac was grown up in grace (21:8). By his history we see that he did not do anything. He was born and he was grown up. I do not say that he grew up, but that he was grown up. Like a farmer who grows apples in his orchard, God grew Isaac like a tree in His orchard. Isaac was grown up by God in grace.

Second Peter 3:18 tells us to "grow in grace." This indicates that to grow is the feeding and watering as revealed by Peter in 1 Peter 2:2 and by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:2 and 6. To grow in grace is to grow in the enjoyment of all that Christ is to us as our spiritual food and living water. All the riches of what Christ is to us are for our growth in life. The more we enjoy the riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8), the more we grow in life (Eph. 4:15).

3) Being the Heir in Grace

Isaac also became the heir in grace (21:9-12). All that his father had was his, for Abraham gave all his riches to this unique heir. Likewise, we should have no enjoyment in ourselves. All the enjoyment of the inheritance must be in grace.

4) Obeying in Grace

Isaac also obeyed in grace (22:5-10). In my reading of Genesis 22 in the past, I could not understand how Isaac, a young man, could have been so obedient. Eventually, I saw that he was obedient because he was saturated with grace. He was absolutely in grace, and his obedience was also in grace. That obedience brought in God's provision. It is the same with us today. Whenever we obey in grace, we shall meet the provision of God.

God's grace is powerful, enabling us to bear anything. Paul told Timothy to "be empowered in the grace" of Christ (2 Tim. 2:1). Grace can even reign over all things (Rom. 5:21). We should not fall from grace (Gal. 5:4) but rather be confirmed by it (Heb. 13:9). The more we bear in grace, the more provision of grace we meet and participate in.

5) Inheriting All from the Father

Isaac inherited all things from his father (24:36; 25:5). It was by grace, not by his effort, that he became the heir of the father's riches. He was not required to do anything that he might inherit the father's riches and he did not do anything for the inheritance. It was absolutely and unconditionally of grace.

In the New Testament, all the called believers are heirs of God's absolute and unconditional grace. God has called us and has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3). In Christ He has put us into grace that we might become the heirs of grace, inheriting all the riches of the divine fullness as our enjoyment. Our Christian life must be like Isaac's, doing nothing by himself, but inheriting and enjoying all that the father has. In the inheriting of grace, we must cease from the effort of our natural life that we may keep ourselves open and available for the enjoyment of grace.

6) Inheriting the Promise Given to His Father

Isaac inherited not only all that his father had, but also the promise which God had given to his father concerning the good land and the unique seed, which is Christ in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed (26:3-5). This promise was actually for the fulfillment of God's purpose that God might have a kingdom on the earth in which to express Himself through a corporate people. Both the good land and the seed are for the formation of a kingdom for God on the earth. In this kingdom God can be fully expressed in the seed, into which He will work Himself and which will be transformed into His image. This was a promise given to Abraham and inherited by Isaac. But it is a fulfillment with us today. Today we are enjoying the Triune God as our grace. Through our enjoyment of grace the kingdom of God will be realized and God in Christ will be fully expressed for eternity.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SIXTY-FOUR

RESTING AND ENJOYING

We thank the Lord that in the Old Testament He has given us a wonderful and clear picture of the experience of life. In the New Testament we have the revelation of the experience of life, but we do not have as clear a picture of it as we have in the Old Testament. We are all familiar with the proverb which says that a picture is better than a thousand words. Although we have spent many years considering the experience of life as revealed in the New Testament, we cannot be certain about it only by the words in the New Testament. We also need the pictures in the Old Testament. By the Lord's mercy, we have seen through the years that all the stories in the Old Testament depict the various aspects of the experience of life. Deep within, I feel that the Lord has shown us the full picture and has enabled us to understand its real significance.

As we have already pointed out, there are three aspects to every Christian's experience of life—the aspect of Abraham, the aspect of Isaac, and the aspect of Jacob. If we did not have this clear view, we would only consider Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as three separate individuals. But, after receiving the revelation and understanding it in the light of the New Testament, we realize that these three men are not three separate individuals, but three aspects of one complete person in the experience of life. Some, finding it difficult to believe that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob represent three aspects of one complete person, may say, "How can you say that Abraham is not a complete person? Abraham is just Abraham, and the same is true for both Isaac and Jacob." If you do not believe that these three people are three aspects of the complete experience of one person, I would ask you this question: Can you see God's selection in Abraham? The first item in our experience of God is His selection, His choice, which was made before the foundation of the world. We see this clearly in the New Testament (Eph. 1:4), but we cannot see it in the experience of Abraham. Thus, as far as God's selection is concerned, Abraham needs someone else to perfect him. The selection which we cannot find in Abraham's life is revealed in Jacob's. In addition to being selected, we Christians are also called. In Isaac we see neither selection nor calling. Hence, in himself, Isaac is not complete. Isaac's calling is in Abraham just as Abraham's selection is in Jacob. By these two examples we should all be convinced that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob depict three aspects of one complete person in the experience of life. In a sense, we are all Abrahams, for we have been called and have learned to live by faith in God and in fellowship with Him. Since we have also been put into the position of grace, we are also Isaacs. As we shall see in later messages, we are Jacobs as well.

The aspect of Isaac unfolds the matter of grace. We have not only been called and have learned to live by faith in God and in

fellowship with Him, but we are daily enjoying something of God. If we do not have any enjoyment in our Christian life, we will not be able to live the Christian life. Rather, we would be very miserable. Praise the Lord that we not only have the aspect of Abraham but also the aspect of Isaac, which is the aspect of grace. Grace simply means the enjoyment of God. It is God Himself becoming our enjoyment in our spirit. Many times we have difficulties which trouble us mentally and emotionally. Nevertheless, while we are suffering in our mind and emotion, there is a sweet sense deep within our spirit. It seems that if we did not have this suffering, we would not have this enjoyment. The Christian suffering brings us the Christian enjoyment. From the moment we called on the name of the Lord Jesus and received Him as our Savior, we began to have these two aspects in our experience. Perhaps the very night you received the Lord Jesus your wife gave you a difficult time, disagreeing with your becoming a Christian and calling it silly. She immediately began to persecute you, and you suffered in your mind, emotion, and senses. But while you were suffering, deep within you sensed something sweet which caused you to be happy. Thus, even at the beginning of your Christian life you had both the aspect of suffering, which is the aspect of Abraham, and the aspect of enjoyment, which is the aspect of Isaac.

b. Resting and Enjoying

In the previous message we saw that Isaac inherited grace. With him, everything was a matter of grace. He was born in grace, was grown up in grace, and was made an heir of grace. In this message we need to see that with Isaac there was also the matter of enjoyment. His life was a resting and enjoying life. The record of Isaac's life does not indicate that he suffered much. Rather, it reveals that he was always resting. This is proved by his meditating in the field (24:63). Could Isaac have meditated if he had not been quiet and restful? No. In order to meditate we must be restful. Whenever we are troubled, we are unable to rest. Isaac was always resting. In Genesis 24, he had lost his mother, did not have a wife, and his servant had gone away from him. Yet, he was not troubled. He went to the field to meditate, not to cry out to the Lord. He did not say, "O Lord, what should I do? I have lost my mother, I do not have a wife, and my servant has gone away. Lord, have mercy upon me!" Isaac did not cry out in that way. Instead, he meditated.

Although we cannot find the word resting in the record of Isaac's life, the fact is there nonetheless. Isaac was a very restful person. In spite of the troubles he encountered with the Philistines over the wells, he was always at rest. Although Isaac faced some troubles, he himself was not troubled. While the Philistines were contending for the wells, he remained restful. Isaac seemed to be saying, "If you don't want me to stay here at this well, then I'll go elsewhere. When you come to bother me there, I'll go to still another place." By this we see that Isaac was truly a restful person. Are you always restful? Consider your experience during the past twenty-four hours. Did anything bother you and cause you to lose your rest? Most of us would have to admit that we have been troubled. This shows that although we are Isaacs, we are not always resting. Recently I was doing some difficult and exhausting work on the book of Revelation. But I can praise the Lord that as I was working, I was very restful and I could say, "I have nothing and I can do nothing. There is no need for me to do anything, because the Lord is doing it all." We all need to be restful people.

Isaac was not only resting; he was also enjoying. His entire life was a life of enjoyment. When he was old, he still had the taste for "savoury meat" and asked Esau to go out to the field and prepare him the meat which he loved (27:1-4). When Rebekah heard this, she called Jacob to fetch her two kids of the goats that she might prepare the meat for Isaac (27:5-10). Eventually, after both Jacob and Esau had come with meat for their father, Isaac got a double portion. Esau, Rebekah, and Jacob were busy, but Isaac just sat there enjoying the meat. By this we see that Isaac was an enjoying person, always enjoying the provision of grace. This enjoyment was his destiny.

Enjoyment is also our destiny. Young brothers, do not worry about finding a wife. If you remain restful and full of enjoyment, the best wife will come to you. In our Christian life there is the aspect of enjoyment. I have been striving since I was twelve years of age. Now, after almost sixty years, I can testify that many times my striving has frustrated the coming of the enjoyment. If I had not striven, the enjoyment would have come much earlier and in a richer way. Why does striving frustrate the enjoyment? Because enjoyment is our destiny. We all have been predestinated for it. Young brothers, forget about your striving. Simply go home, pray, praise, and sleep. The next morning rise up, have a good morning watch, and eat a hearty breakfast. Do not worry about finding a wife. Rebekah will come to you. This is the enjoyment which is our destiny. Are we not the sons of God? How can the sons of God be pitiful people? We must declare, "Praise the Lord that I am a son of God! The almighty, all-sufficient God is my Father!" The word father denotes a rich provision. As long as we have a rich father, we have the provision and have no need to worry. We should simply enjoy this bountiful provision. This is our destiny.

1) Living in Beer-lahai-roi

Although enjoyment is our destiny, we must still take care of the place where we have the enjoyment. Let us consider the names of the places where Isaac had enjoyment. Firstly, we have Beer-lahai-roi, which means "the well of the living One who sees me" or "the One who reveals Himself" (24:62; 25:11). At Beer-lahai-roi God visits us and reveals Himself to us. Secondly, Isaac had some enjoyment at the well named Esek, which means contention. Esek was a place of contention, fighting, and quarreling. The third place was Sitnah (26:21). Sitnah means enmity, hatred, or opposition. The fourth place was called Rehoboth. Rehoboth has a positive meaning—"broad places" or "broad ways." The last place was called Sheba, which means an oath (26:22-33). Hence, Beer-sheba means the well of an oath. Isaac enjoyed grace at each of these five places.

Before we consider the significance of these places, we must see where Isaac was grown up. He was grown up in Beer-sheba beside the well and the tamarisk tree. Before he was married, he left Beer-sheba and went to the south country (24:62). As we have seen, in the Bible to go southward means to go downward. I do not believe that Abraham left Beer-sheba or Hebron when Isaac did. He remained either in Beer-sheba or in Hebron. After his mother had died and his servant had left, Isaac went downward to the south country. Then he returned. The King James Version says, he "came from the way of Lahai-roi." In Hebrew, it says he "came from going to Lahai-roi," meaning that he returned from Lahai-roi. As he returned from going to Lahai-roi, he gained a wife. If he had stayed in Lahai-roi, not returning to Beer-sheba or Hebron, he would have missed that meeting with Rebekah. When he came back from going to Lahai-roi, Rebekah came. Abraham's servant did not know that Isaac had left the place where Abraham was. It was of the Lord that Isaac return from his downward way. He returned because he was destined for the enjoyment.

We all have had similar experiences. After going downward, we suddenly said, "Oh, I must go back." The time of our return was the exact time that Rebekah came. I have experienced this a number of times. I have gone downward and then suddenly said to myself, "I

must go back." As soon as I returned, the enjoyment came.

As soon as Isaac had returned from going away, the enjoyment came. By coming back to the proper standing, he obtained a wife. However, after his marriage, he and his wife journeyed southward again. Genesis 25:11 says that after the death of Abraham, Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi. As a result of going downward, he found himself at enmity with the Philistines.

We need to see a clear picture of Isaac's record. He did not go downward as far as Egypt. He went southward to Philistia, to the land of the Philistines. According to the record in Genesis, God's people have difficulties whenever they go southward. Abraham had trouble in Egypt and in the land of the Philistines. His son Isaac also had trouble when he went to Philistia, for he had contention and enmity with the Philistines. Although he enjoyed the broad ways, the widening, at Rehoboth, he did not have the Lord's appearing there. In Lahai-roi, Esek, Sitnah, and Rehoboth there was no appearing of the Lord. The Lord did not appear to Isaac until he went up to Beer-sheba. The very night that Isaac went up from Rehoboth to Beer-sheba the Lord appeared unto him (26:23-24).

Here we must see a crucial point, a point about which many Christians are not clear. As Christians, we are destined for some enjoyment. Wherever we are and whether or not we are right or wrong, we have been destined for enjoyment. Even when Isaac went downward to Lahai-roi, he still enjoyed a well, the well of the living One who sees us and reveals Himself to us. Some might say, "This is wonderful. As long as I have the living One and He sees me and reveals Himself to me, that is good enough." In reading the Bible, however, we must keep the principle of the first mention. Lahai-roi, which is first mentioned in 16:14, was the place where Hagar went after fleeing from Sarah. Since Sarah represents grace, Hagar's fleeing from her meant that she had left the standing of grace. In the wilderness, in a place of suffering, God visited her. Hence, Lahai-roi was a place where one who had left the standing of grace could still have some enjoyment of God's visitation.

In the past we might have questioned whether our standing was right, feeling that we were somewhat removed from the standing of grace. Although we had this doubt within us, we still had some enjoyment and we comforted ourselves, saying, "If I were wrong, I would not have this enjoyment. But here I have the well of the living One who visits me. Since I have such an enjoyment, this place must be all right." But it is not all right. On the one hand, we are destined for enjoyment, and wherever we are we shall have some measure of it. On the other hand, we may have this enjoyment on the wrong standing, not in the place where Abraham planted the tamarisk tree, but in the place where Hagar escaped from grace. Lahai-roi was the place of one who had escaped from grace but who still enjoyed something of God's visitation. Nearly all of us have had this experience. We doubted our position, but we still had some enjoyment and felt confirmed by it. Do not take this enjoyment as a confirmation. Although the enjoyment is our destiny, we may have it on an improper ground, at Beer-lahai-roi, not at Beer-sheba.

A well signifies enjoyment and satisfaction. Throughout his entire life, Isaac never suffered thirst. Wherever he went, to a wrong place or to a right one, there was a well. His life was marked with a well. Some may argue with us, saying, "You say that I am wrong in my position, in my standing. Why then do I have a well here?" Your enjoyment of a well does not justify your standing, for the enjoyment is your destiny. In the past, many of us held the religious concept that if we are wrong, God will give us up and we shall not have any more enjoyment. But however wrong we may be, we are still children of our Father, and He will never give us up. I may be the most naughty child, but each day I continue to enjoy my father's provision. This enjoyment is our destiny, our portion.

When some hear that Isaac had a well wherever he went, they may think that, since this enjoyment is also their destiny, they may go wherever they want. Do not think like this. You may have a well for your enjoyment, but you will miss the Lord's appearing and be unable to fulfill God's eternal purpose. Later we shall see that God's purpose can never be fulfilled in Lahai-roi, Esek, Sitnah, or even in Rehoboth. It can only be fulfilled in Beer-sheba, and we must remain there. If we do, we shall experience the Lord's appearing and have the ground to inherit the promises to fulfill God's eternal purpose. Although we may have wells, even "a well of living water" (26:19, Heb.), in other places, those wells cannot enable us to fulfill God's eternal purpose. His purpose can only be fulfilled at the well near the tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba.

Although Isaac had some enjoyment at every place where there was a well, God was not satisfied and used the environment to force Isaac to return to Beer-sheba. God seemed to say, "Isaac, you are settled, but you are not settled in the right place. I shall stir up contention that will force you to go back to Beer-sheba." Isaac had been going down, but God used the circumstances to force him to come up from Beer-lahai-roi to Beer-sheba. Since Isaac did not have the heart to return, God had to force him to return to His place.

Some Christian teachers have encouraged the believers to follow the example of Isaac and not to strive with others. According to this teaching, when we dig a well and others take it, we should simply tolerate it and give it to them. If we go to another place and dig another well and others take it over, we should not fight for it but go to still another place. Eventually, we shall come to the third place, the place of broad ways. But this teaching does not see God's purpose, which was to bring Isaac back to Beer-sheba, the place where God appeared to him. At Beer-sheba, after the Lord's appearing, Isaac built an altar, called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent (26:24, 25). Isaac did not build an altar in any other place. The Lord's appearing with His promise and the testimony were all at Beer-sheba. Only at this place did Isaac receive the promise for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. He did not receive it at Beer-lahai-roi, the place of the living One who sees and reveals Himself; nor at Esek, the well of contention; nor at Sitnah, the well of enmity; nor even at Rehoboth, the well of the broad ways. Although Isaac had the enjoyment everywhere, he only had the Lord's appearing (which is different from God's mere visitation) in Beer-sheba. Only in the unique place, in Beer-sheba, could he inherit the promise and have a life of testimony for the fulfillment of God's purpose. It is only at Beer-sheba, the well of the oath, that we can have the Lord's appearing, inherit the promise, build an altar, call upon the name of the Lord, and pitch a tent as a testimony. Here and only here can we fulfill God's eternal purpose.

The enjoyment which we may have everywhere because it is our destiny is not a confirmation or a justification of our standing. The correctness of our standing can only be determined by the Lord's appearing, not merely by the enjoyment. In many places we have had the enjoyment, but when we were there, we had the deep sense that we did not have the Lord's appearing. Moreover, in those places we did not have an altar or a tent, and we did not call upon the Lord's name from deep within our spirit. Although we may have some enjoyment elsewhere, only in Beer-sheba can we fulfill God's purpose.

We have seen that Isaac enjoyed all the wells. Wherever he went there was a well for his enjoyment. This reveals that whether we are right or wrong in our standing there is a well for our satisfaction. In addition to enjoying the wells, Isaac secured a choice bride (24:61-67). He gained her without doing anything. As he was meditating in the field, she came to him. Isaac was not a doing person; he was an enjoying person. His father and his servant did everything to secure a bride for him. Isaac did not even go to Rebekah; Rebekah came to him. In all of history I have never heard of another case in which the bride came to the groom. All Christian natural doings are just a type of supplanting, a type of heel holding. Never supplant or hold the heel of others. Rebekah is your portion and she will come. Before the foundation of the world, it was destined that Rebekah would be yours. Do you believe this? Do you dare to claim it? Isaac received his Rebekah simply by meditating in the field, not by doing anything. This is enjoyment.

3) Gaining Twin Sons

After twenty years without having a child, Isaac gained twin sons (25:20-21, 26b). Did God not say in His promise that Isaac, the only seed of Abraham, would be the one in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed? Suppose Isaac never had a son. How then could this promise be fulfilled? And if this promise were not fulfilled, how could God's purpose be accomplished? Thus, it was not only Isaac who needed a son, but also God who needed a seed out of Isaac. Because Isaac did not realize this for twenty years, God did not do anything. God had a need and intended to do something about it, but He required the cooperation from the human side. For twenty years Isaac was only enjoying, not caring about his need for a son. But after twenty years, he realized that he had such a need and that his need corresponded to God's need. Once he realized this, he prayed and God answered his prayer.

The same is true with us today. When we realize that our need corresponds to God's need and then pray accordingly, God will answer our prayer. Actually, His answer to our prayer is the fulfillment of His purpose. Our need must be God's need, and the prayer for our need should also be the prayer for God's need. When our need corresponds with God's and when we then pray for our need, God's need will be met also. When Isaac prayed for a child, whose need was greater—Isaac's or God's? Surely God's need was greater. Nevertheless, the greater need of God could only be fulfilled in the smaller need of Isaac. Only when man realizes his need and prays for it does God have the way to come in to fulfill His need. God has a purpose, and we have a need which corresponds to God's purpose. But God cannot do anything until we realize our need and pray about it. Then God will answer our prayer to meet our need for the fulfillment of His purpose. Eventually, Isaac had a son, Jacob, who not only fulfilled Isaac's need but also fulfilled God's eternal purpose. Out of Jacob came Christ, who brings in the church, the kingdom, and the New Jerusalem. All these eternal things came about through the meeting of Isaac's need, a need which corresponded with God's need.

Enjoyment is our destiny, and wherever we go there will be a well. But in the enjoyment of God's grace, we must render Him our human coordination that He may fulfill His eternal purpose through us. This means that our enjoyment of grace will never be in vain, for the enjoyment of grace on our side eventually becomes the fulfillment of God's purpose on His side.

4) Receiving a Hundredfold Harvest and Becoming Great

Isaac received a hundredfold harvest and became great (26:12-14). The word great in 26:13 means rich. Isaac "became great and continued to grow great until he became very great" (Heb.). He became rich by fulfilling the regular duty of sowing and through the Lord's blessing. This also was a matter of enjoyment, but this enjoyment was not on the proper standing. Isaac might have said to himself, "My standing must be right. If it were not right, how could the Lord have blessed me with all these riches?" But God might have said, "Isaac, you are settled here and have gained great riches, but I do not agree with your standing. I shall raise up the circumstances to force you to leave this place." May the Holy Spirit show us such a vivid picture here. On the one hand, there is the proper enjoyment; on the other hand, there is the improper standing. Even if we lack the proper standing, we may continue to have the enjoyment. But do not think that this enjoyment justifies your standing. As long as we have the enjoyment, our need is met. But for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, we need to get on the proper standing. Nevertheless, even if we are not on the proper standing, God still grants us His rich provision. This is wonderful. What a wonderful God! What a wonderful provision! We have been destined for the enjoyment. Even when we are wrong in our standing, we may still have the rich enjoyment. But God will not let us go. He will use our circumstances to bring us back to the proper standing that the fulfillment of His purpose might be realized.

5) Finding the "Well of Living Water"

Before Isaac came back to Beer-sheba, he had enjoyment after enjoyment, grace upon grace. After receiving the hundredfold harvest, he found the "well of living water" and came into the "broad places," the "broad ways" (Rehoboth, 26:15-22). Although he had enjoyment in such a rich way, his standing was not right and he was forced to leave the broad ways and to come back to Beer-sheba.

6) Coming Back to Beer-sheba

When Isaac returned to Beer-sheba (26:23-33), the Lord immediately appeared to him, speaking to him and confirming His promise, saying, "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" (26:24). Then, here in Beer-sheba Isaac began to have the proper testimony. He built an altar, called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent (26:25). Here in Beer-sheba he had a life for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. Eventually, here in Beer-sheba the opposers were subdued (26:26-31). Beer-sheba is the right place, the place where we can have the proper standing, and the proper standing means a great deal both to God and to us.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SIXTY-FIVE

HAVING NATURAL WEAKNESS AS ABRAHAM AND LIVING IN THE NATURAL LIFE AS JACOB

In the past two messages concerning Isaac, we have seen that he was the heir of grace and that he rested and enjoyed throughout his entire life. Now we must see that with this grace-enjoying person there were still the natural weakness and the natural life. It is

difficult for us to understand this point. According to our natural, religious concept, we always think that if we are natural, we cannot have the enjoyment of grace. According to our religious concept, the enjoyment of grace depends upon how spiritual we are. In our teachings and exhortations, especially to our relatives and children, we say that in order to enjoy the grace of God we must be good, and that if we are not good, we are through with God's grace. Probably none of us has ever thought that participating in the grace of God does not depend upon our being spiritual. On the contrary, we all have thought that we must be spiritual in order to enjoy the grace of God.

Isaac was a model, a pattern, of the enjoyment of God's grace. In the whole Bible there is hardly another person who enjoyed grace as much as Isaac did. Throughout his entire life Isaac did nothing except enjoy the grace of God. His life was a grace-enjoying life. Nevertheless, in Isaac we see exactly the same natural weakness as we saw in Abraham. Furthermore, in Isaac we also see the natural life of Jacob. Like Jacob, Isaac lived in a natural way. Jacob loved his son Joseph according to his natural taste (37:3-4), and this caused trouble in the family. Joseph's brothers hated him because of his father's partial love for him. Isaac also loved Esau partially, loving him because he was a skillful hunter and could obtain the venison which Isaac loved (25:27-28). Thus, Esau was a father's boy. By this we see that Isaac and Jacob were the same as far as the natural life is concerned.

If you say that Isaac did not cheat anyone, I would point out that his wife Rebekah was his cheating helper. In a sense, Isaac differed from Jacob in the matter of supplanting, but this gap was filled by Rebekah. Every wife is a part of her husband; she is her husband's completion and perfection. Without Rebekah, Isaac probably would not have been an expert at cheating. But with Rebekah, he certainly became the same as Jacob. Jacob learned how to supplant from his supplanting mother, and his supplanting mother was the supplanting completion to his father Isaac. Therefore, in Isaac we see the natural life of Jacob.

Isaac was a grace-enjoying person. According to our natural concept, a person who has a natural weakness and who lives in the natural life can never enjoy the grace of God. This is our concept; it is not God's word. In the Bible, we cannot see that Isaac was very spiritual. He was a man who still had a natural weakness and who still lived in the natural life. Why then did he have such an enjoyment of God's grace? Simply because God had ordained it that way. With us Christians, there is the aspect of God's ordination. As we have already pointed out, it is our destiny to enjoy the grace of God. This destiny was preordained before the foundation of the world. Do not think that if you are spiritual, you are privileged to enjoy God's grace and that if you are not spiritual, you cannot enjoy His grace. This is a religious concept, and the Bible does not teach this. After hearing that enjoying grace does not depend upon our being spiritual, some may say, "If we don't need to be spiritual to enjoy God's grace, then let us be unspiritual." Do not say this. Neither being spiritual nor being unspiritual will help us to enjoy God's grace. It is entirely a matter of God's ordination, and it does not depend on what we are nor on what we can do. With us, there is the aspect of Isaac. We have been ordained by God to the enjoyment of grace. If we are spiritual, we shall not enjoy grace more, and if we are unspiritual we shall not miss the grace of God. But we should not say, "Let us do evil that good may come." Do not waste your time trying to be spiritual or trying to be unspiritual. Simply say, "O Lord, I worship You for Your ordination. You have ordained me to the enjoyment of grace." At the least, we all are a part of Isaac. In our being there is the aspect of having been ordained by God to the enjoyment of His grace.

When do you enjoy grace more—when you feel that you are spiritual and good in the eyes of God, or when you are down and feel that you are absolutely unworthy? I have enjoyed grace the most when I have been down. But we should not say, "Let us be down that we may enjoy grace the most." If you try to do this, it will not work. Again I say that it does not depend upon us but upon God's ordination. I hope that my word will encourage you neither to be spiritual nor to be unspiritual. Rather, I hope that it will encourage you to be nothing. But do not try to be nothing, for your trying is still something. If you could say, "I'll go home and forget everything," that would be wonderful.

In the record of Isaac's life we see a person who enjoyed God's grace in every way. Do you believe that a man who had such an enjoyment of God's grace could still have the natural weakness of lying in a substantial way? He lied in the way of sacrificing his wife. Perhaps we would say, "If I were such a person, I would never lie in that way." Do not say this. We may enjoy even more grace and then lie more substantially than Isaac did.

Consider your experience. Although you have never lied in sacrificing your wife, you have lied substantially to your wife. In my early years, I was much affected by religious concepts, believing that Christians, especially the so-called spiritual Christians, would never lie. Eventually, I discovered that Christians, including the so-called spiritual ones, also lie. Not only the worldly people lie; the Christians and the spiritual people also lie. This is the condition of the fallen race. What then shall we do? We should not do anything. God has selected us out of this fallen race, and His ordination has come to us. This does not mean that when we behave ourselves or become spiritual in the eyes of God, we shall then receive more grace. Although Isaac never tried to behave himself or to be spiritual, he continually enjoyed grace. I do not encourage you to be religious or to be unreligious. I do not encourage you to be anything, for the enjoyment of God's grace does not depend upon our being spiritual.

Isaac wanted to bless his son Esau. However, he mixed the blessing with his natural taste. In 27:3 and 4, Isaac said to Esau, "Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die." Isaac seemed to be saying, "Esau, before I die, I would like to eat venison one more time. If you get some venison for me, then I shall bless you." Here we see that Isaac mixed up God's blessing with his natural taste. Although we may wonder how such a person could bless others, Isaac did bless.

Isaac, who was not religious like we are, was not conscious of being unspiritual. Suppose you are a father who wants to give a blessing to one of his sons. I believe that you would be very cautious and alert, praying, fasting, and daring not to speak in the flesh nor according to your natural taste. If you were a Chinese brother, you certainly would not say to the son whom you are about to bless, "Son, go to Chinatown and get some Chinese food for me and then I'll bless you." No Chinese brother would dare to do this, because we are all so religiously conscious of being spiritual. We all would say, "Now that I am about to bless my son I must be with the Lord and not have my natural taste." Isaac, however, was bold, telling Esau, "Before I die I would like to eat venison once more. Get me the venison that I love and I'll bless you." Isaac was honest, saying, "My soul may bless thee" (27:4). What a mixture! Isaac, who continually enjoyed the grace of God, blessed blindly. But he blessed in faith, and his blessing was honored by God (Heb. 11:20).

When I read this portion of the Word as a young man, I was unable to understand how there could be so much mixture here. I said, "Isaac, what are you doing? If you want to eat venison, then don't talk about blessing. You shouldn't mix your natural taste with God's blessing. How can God honor a blessing that is mixed with your natural taste?" When Isaac plainly told Esau that if he would prepare venison for him he would bless him, he was not conscious of being religious. He was altogether outside of religion. There was no religion in his concept. If we had been there, we would have said, "Isaac, don't talk this way. If you want to have your natural taste, don't talk about God's blessing. God will never honor your blessing. Isaac, you are absolutely wrong." But Isaac would have said, "What are you talking about? I have never heard such religious talk. I don't have this concept. I have no religious consciousness whatsoever. I only know two things—that I want to satisfy my taste and that I want to bless my son. After I eat some meat, I shall bless my son. I don't know what it means to be spiritual or religious. I only know that I am the father, that he is my son, and that the greater always blesses the lesser." When I was young, I was much troubled about this, being unable to understand how Isaac, who enjoyed so much of God's grace, could still have the same natural weakness as Abraham and the same natural life as Jacob.

We need to see two points very clearly. Firstly, grace is not based upon what we are. Whether we are good or bad, spiritual or unspiritual, means nothing. Because God has ordained us to be the object of His grace, grace comes to us, and we cannot reject it. Secondly, as we have mentioned several times, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not three separate persons in the experience of life but represent three aspects of the experience of one complete person. This is why in Isaac we can see both Abraham and Jacob. Isaac had the natural weakness of Abraham and the natural life of Jacob.

c. Having Natural Weakness as Abraham

As we have seen, Isaac had the same natural weakness as Abraham (cf. 20:1-2, 11-13). Do you not have a natural weakness? Even the most spiritually conscious person has some natural weakness. What kind of weakness do you have? Although we all have some natural weakness, none of us can designate it. We know that we have such a weakness, but we do not know what it is. If you are certain that a particular matter is your natural weakness, that is not your weakness. Before Isaac was exposed in chapter twenty-six, he probably never realized that his natural weakness was the same as Abraham's. He might have thought that his weakness was one of many other things. But one day he went southward and his natural weakness was exposed.

By ourselves we can never know our natural weakness; it must be exposed. None of us is able to understand his own weakness. You yourself may not know your own natural weakness, but it is clear to everyone else because it has been exposed to them. Whoever would stay with you for a time would see your natural weakness. According to your religious concept, if you have some natural weakness, you should be through with grace. But God's grace is still with you. In the early days I also had this thought. But I have learned that grace does not depend upon what we are. Every object of divine grace has a weak point. Do not think that the Apostle Paul had no weakness. Peter, John, and Paul all had their weaknesses, but their weak points did not frustrate them from enjoying God's grace. Every one of us has his natural weakness. There has been only one person in history who had no natural weakness—Jesus Christ.

I am not encouraging you to be either spiritual or unspiritual, but I am encouraging you to be bold in the enjoyment of grace. Do not be deprived of the enjoyment of grace by your religious concept. Drop your concept and praise the Lord that you are the object of divine grace. Although we are unable to designate our natural weakness, we do know that we have some. Others, such as our wife, husband, or roommates, know what our weakness is. While others know, it is difficult for us to know. Some of us may not know our natural weakness until we see the Lord face to face. Praise the Lord that we are blind to our natural weakness. If we were not blind to our weakness, we would be frustrated from enjoying grace. While I am not encouraging you to keep your natural weakness, I am saying that it is good that we are unaware of it. When we are conscious of a certain weakness, our religious concepts frustrate us from the enjoyment of grace. But when we do not know our weakness, we only know to enjoy the grace of the Lord. In Genesis 26, Isaac's natural weakness was suddenly exposed. That exposure, however, did not frustrate him from the enjoyment of God's grace. In other words, the exposure of Isaac's natural weakness did not hinder him from trusting in God.

Isaac, leaving Beer-sheba, journeyed downward, southward, not to Egypt but to a place close to Egypt (26:1-2). God's intention was that His chosen people stay in the good land. Whenever the natural weakness of His people arose, they always went downward. We cannot find one instance in which God's people went upward, northward, when they were weak. The worst thing to do was to go downward to Egypt. This is what Abraham did (12:10). The second time Abraham went southward he only went as far as Philistia, the land of the Philistines (20:1). As Isaac, who was repeating Abraham's downward story, was going southward, God intervened and warned him, saying, "Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of" (26:2). Isaac's intention might have been to go down into Egypt, but God commanded him to dwell in the land of which He would tell him. Although Isaac did not stay in exactly the right place, he still had peace in enjoying God's grace. He was absolutely unconscious of being religious. How good it is to have no sense of being religious! However, once the enemy has injected something into our knowledge, it is very difficult to extract it. My burden in this message is to tell you that the enjoyment of God's grace does not depend upon our being religious. In Isaac we see a person who was not at all religious; yet he enjoyed the grace of God all the time.

Isaac not only did not stay in the right place; he also lied at the sacrifice of his wife (26:6-7) just as Abraham did. However, he and his wife were preserved by God's sovereign care (26:8-11). It was God's grace that kept him from the sacrifice of his wife.

d. Living in the Natural Life as Jacob

In Isaac there was not only the natural weakness but also the natural life. He still lived in the natural life. He did not live a so-called spiritual life all the time. After Isaac prayed, God gave him two sons, Esau and Jacob. Isaac loved Esau because he was a skillful hunter and Isaac "did eat of his venison" (25:27-28). Isaac's love for his firstborn son was altogether in the natural life according to his natural taste, as was Jacob's love for Joseph (37:3-4). Since the husband took the lead to have a partial love, the wife followed. Esau, a "skillful hunter" (Heb.), was a father's boy, and Jacob, a "quiet man" who dwelt in tents (Heb.), was a mother's boy. Every mother loves a child who quietly stays around her. No mother would love a wild child who enjoys sports all day long. In Isaac's family, the father had a partial love for Esau, and the mother had a partial love for Jacob. What kind of life was this? Was it a spiritual life, a resurrection life? No, although it was not a sinful life, it was a natural life. We should not think that we are different, for every

parent has some partial love. If you have several children, you will love one of them more than the others according to your taste, and all your children will know who is the object of your partial love. This partial love is not according to our spirit; it is according to our natural taste. We love a particular boy or girl because he or she suits our natural taste. This is the natural life.

The natural life always causes trouble. Out of this partial love in Isaac's family came the need of supplanting. Rebekah wanted her beloved son to receive the blessing. In chapter twenty-seven we see that she was very capable of supplanting (vv. 5-7). She taught Jacob how to supplant. In chapter thirty Jacob tricked his uncle Laban in the matter of the cattle (vv. 31-43). The principle is the same in chapter twenty-seven. Rebekah prepared savory meat and put goat skins on Jacob's hands and neck. When Isaac felt him, this caused him to say, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (27:22). Here we see that Jacob was taught the supplanting skill by his mother, who was a part of his father. In a sense, the mother cheated the father, meaning that the second part of a person cheated the first part of the same person. All such family cheating is self-cheating. Eventually, everyone in the family was cheated. When I was reading this chapter, I said, "Rebekah, you thought you were smart. Actually you were stupid. Didn't you know that God had ordained Jacob to be the first? There was no need for you to help." Rebekah, who tried to help her son, lost him. Genesis does not tell us how long Rebekah lived. She might have died before Jacob returned from Laban's home. This means that Rebekah lost her son by cheating. Rebekah probably did not live to see her son Jacob again. She thought that she was helping him; actually, because of her supplanting, she lost him.

It is difficult to believe that a person like Isaac could still have such a natural weakness and still live in such a natural life. Isaac suffered because of his natural life (26:34-35; 27:41-46; 28:6-9). Although Isaac was always enjoying grace, there was an aspect of suffering in his life. Both Isaac and Rebekah suffered because they lived in a natural way, for Esau's wives were "a bitterness of spirit" to them (26:34-35, Heb.).

Because of the partial love in this family, Esau hated Jacob and wanted to kill him. When Rebekah heard of this, she told Jacob to flee to her brother Laban and to stay with him until Esau's anger had turned away. But Rebekah told Isaac another story (27:46). She seemed to be saying, "The wives of Esau have caused us so much bitterness of spirit that I could not bear to live if Jacob took such a wife. We should send him away to get a wife." Rebekah told the same thing in two different ways. Every wise wife does this, telling one story in two ways. Like many wives today, Rebekah lied to Isaac by telling the truth. Her intention was to send Jacob away, protecting him from Esau, but she did not tell Isaac of this. Rather, she said that she was tired of her Gentile daughters-in-law and that she did not want Jacob to have such a wife, suggesting to Isaac that they send Jacob away to take a wife from their own race. According to her intention, this was a lie; according to her speaking, however, it was the truth. This caused suffering.

While Isaac was enjoying grace, he was also suffering because of his living in the natural life. The natural life will not frustrate grace, but it will cause us to suffer. It will not decrease the amount of our grace, but it will increase our measure of suffering. As long as you have one aspect of your natural life, it will cause you to suffer. If you do not want to suffer, you should not live in the natural life. Do not practice your cleverness, exercise your wisdom to help God, or do anything in your natural life. This will only add to your suffering. It is better for us not to live in our natural life.

Although Isaac lived in his natural life, God was sovereign over all. In a sense, the natural life helped God's sovereignty. God had predestinated Jacob to have the birthright and to participate in the blessing of the firstborn. While Rebekah's supplanting caused her to suffer, it was sovereignly used by God to fulfill His purpose. Everything was under God's sovereignty for the accomplishment of His purpose. Therefore, we all can say, "Praise the Lord, whether I am good or bad, spiritual or unspiritual, God's purpose is being fulfilled. No matter what happens, I am under grace and in the enjoyment of grace." Nothing should frustrate us from the enjoyment of grace. Nevertheless, if we would avoid suffering, we should not live in the natural life.

e. Not Having Much Maturity in Life

Isaac had some maturity in life, but not very much. Although he blessed, he blessed blindly (27:21-29). His blessing was according to his natural taste (27:1-4). He blessed blindly, not only physically but also spiritually, because he had been blinded by his natural taste. However, he did bless by faith (Heb. 11:20). He had said that his soul would bless, but eventually it was not his soul that blessed; it was his spirit that bestowed the blessing, and his blessing became a prophecy. No one can prophesy in the soul. If we would prophesy, we must be in our spirit. Thus, Isaac did bless in the spirit by faith.

Faith does not depend upon what we are; it depends upon what we see. Whenever you want to exercise faith, you should not look at yourself, at what you are, nor at your environment. You must look at what God is and to what He says. Then you will be able to exercise your faith in God and in His word. Isaac blessed by faith in this way. According to his situation, he was not qualified to have faith. But he did not consider what he was; he looked away to God and to God's promise, blessing his son by faith and in the spirit. If we would have faith, we must look away from ourselves, for if we look at ourselves, faith will disappear. Look unto God and see what He has spoken in His word. Then simply utter what God has already spoken. This is faith. Isaac blessed his son in this way.

f. Died in Faith at the Fullness of Days

Although there is no hint in the Bible that Isaac was very spiritual, he did not die in a miserable condition. He died in faith at the fullness of days (35:28-29). This is proved by the fact that his sons buried him, along with his wife Rebekah, in the cave of Machpelah (49:30-32). Before he died, he must have charged his sons to bury him in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and Sarah were buried. This proves that Isaac had the faith of Abraham.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SIXTY-SIX

BEING CHOSEN

In this message we come to the record of one of the most interesting people in the book of Genesis—Jacob. Genesis gives us the record of nine great persons. The first five—Adam, Abel, Enosh, Enoch, and Noah—are considered as five separate people. Although

there was some spiritual relationship between them, strictly speaking, Adam, Abel, Enosh, Enoch, and Noah have nothing to do with each other. However, when we come to the last four—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph—we see that, as far as the experience of life is concerned, they should not be considered as four separate individuals. As we have pointed out, with Abraham we do not have the matter of selection. The first item in Abraham's record is calling. But according to the New Testament revelation, the experience of God does not begin with God's calling but with His selection. Firstly, God selected us; secondly, He predestinated us; and thirdly, He called us. After God's calling, we have forgiveness, redemption, justification, regeneration, and God's full salvation. In this we can see that with Abraham we do not have the beginning of the experience of God. The beginning is with Jacob, for in him we see God's selection. In Jacob's record, however, we do not find God's calling. Therefore, we say once again that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob plus Joseph are not four separate persons; they are four aspects of one complete experience in life. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with Joseph each represent an aspect of the experience of life. As we shall see, Jacob stands for the transformed life and Joseph represents the ruling aspect, the kingly aspect, of this transformed life.

According to the New Testament revelation, the believers were firstly chosen by God in eternity past before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Secondly, the believers were predestinated according to God's selection. This also took place in eternity past. Then, in time, God called us. In God's calling, which follows His predestination, we receive forgiveness, redemption, justification, regeneration, and full salvation. In addition to all this, we must be transformed. Day by day we are under the process of God's transformation to be brought not only into the full sonship but also into the kingship. We were born sons of God, the royal sons, and we are undergoing the process of God's transformation that in the future we might be kings.

We do not see the kingship with either Abraham or Isaac. The kingship is with Joseph, who was a part of Jacob. When Jacob was welcomed in Egypt, apparently Pharaoh was the king over the world. Actually, the true reigning one was Joseph, not Pharaoh. But Joseph did not stand for himself; he stood for his father. Thus, at that time, the world was ruled by Jacob through Joseph.

All the saints are under the process of transformation in order to become kings. Hence, the proper, adequate, and complete experience of God goes from God's selection to our kingship. Selection was accomplished in eternity past, and the kingship will be for eternity future. Kingship is our destiny. In eternity past, God selected and predestinated us to be kings in eternity future. With Abraham we see neither the selection in eternity past nor the kingship in eternity future. In other words, Abraham's record has neither the beginning nor the ending of the experience of God, both of which are with Jacob. In Jacob's record, we have a very good beginning and also an adequate ending. Jacob, the heel-holder, the supplanter, was transformed into a prince of God. Eventually, he became Israel and was no longer Jacob. If we read the New Testament carefully, we shall see that the name of Israel ultimately appears in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:12). Although Israel is in the New Jerusalem, the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not found there.

4. The Third Aspect— the Experience of Jacob

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with Joseph are a complete unit in the experience of life. We should not consider them as four separate individuals, but as four different aspects of one's complete experience. Now we come to the third aspect—the aspect of Jacob. In Abraham, we have God's calling, justification by faith, living by faith in God, and living in fellowship with God. In Isaac, we have the inheriting of grace and the resting and enjoying. In Isaac we do not see justification by faith, for that is covered in Abraham's experience. But with Isaac we have the inheriting and enjoying of grace, which we do not see in Abraham's record. In this we see the different aspects of the experience of life. In Jacob, we see God's selection and God's dealings. Although we all love to inherit and enjoy grace, we do not like the dealings. In Jacob, we do not see the aspect of enjoyment; rather, we see the aspect of God's dealings. Because Jacob supplanted so much, God's hand was always upon him. Jacob's supplanting brought in God's dealings. God might have said, "Jacob, you are able to supplant, but I am able to deal with you. In every step of your supplanting, My dealings will come in." This was not God's punishment; it was God's dealings for the purpose of Jacob's transformation.

As I was considering this message in the presence of the Lord, I laughed when I noticed that Jacob began to fight even before he was born. Rebekah had conceived and "the children struggled together within her" (25:22). This fighting was probably started by Jacob, not by Esau. Esau's fighting must have been defensive. Jacob might have said, "Esau, you shouldn't go ahead of me. I must be first." Then Esau might have said, "No, I'm in front of you. I must get out first." The two children were fighting, and the mother, being unable to tolerate it, inquired of the Lord concerning it (25:22). Under the sovereignty of God, Esau came out first, but Jacob did not stop striving. After he came out, he still took hold of Esau's heel (25:26). Because of this, he was given the name of Jacob, which means heel-holder. Since Jacob was such a heel-holder, God had to deal with him. The issue of God's dealing was transformation. At a mature age, Jacob was no longer Jacob—he was Israel, a prince of God. Eventually, God put the whole world, including Pharaoh, under him.

I say again that these four persons constitute a complete unit of the experience of God. We are all Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with Joseph. At present, we are still under the process of God's transformation. But one day we shall all become Israels, the princes of God, ruling with our "Joseph" over all the world.

a. Being Chosen

In Jacob, we see God's selection, the matter of Jacob's being chosen (25:21-26; 1 Pet. 2:9). Do you believe that you have been chosen? How do you know this? Although we may stand on the Word of God and say, "I know that I have been chosen because the Bible tells me so," I would still ask this question: how do we know from our experience that we have been chosen by God? We know it by the fact that we cannot get away from Him. During the past fifty years of my Christian life, I have tried many times to get away from the Lord. I have even said to Him, "Lord, I am tired of the Christian life. I am running away." Although I tried to run away, I could not do it. While some Christian workers are afraid of your staying away from the Lord, I have the boldness to encourage you to stay away from Him. Try your best to do it, telling Him, "Lord, I don't love You anymore. I'm through with being a Christian." You may say this to the Lord, but He will reply, "Are you through with Me? It's not up to you. You may be through, but I am not. Where shall you go—to Egypt? If you go there, I'll go there to wait for you. When you get there, you will find that I'm already there." We all have been trapped, and there is no escape. This is strong proof that we have been chosen by God.

1) Before His Birth

Jacob was chosen before his birth, even before the foundation of the world (25:22-23; Rom. 9:11; Eph. 1:4). We, like Jacob, were also chosen before we were born. In eternity past, before God began to create anything, He chose us. Although we may think that we are quite small, we are big enough for God to pay attention to us. Even before the foundation of the world, God paid attention to us by selecting us in eternity past.

In my early ministry I was very bothered by the fact that a number of my friends who were very close to becoming Christians did not get saved. But many who were far off from the Lord and who I thought would never be saved did get saved. Some of them were saved after coming to just one gospel meeting. It seems that they were saved for no reason. Actually, they were saved because God had chosen them. Jacob, the naughty one, the heel-holder, the supplanter, was chosen by God. This was what determined his future. God's selection was the origination, the initiation, of Jacob's life. Do not think that you were saved by accident. No, our being saved was a fulfillment of God's selection.

2) According to the Foreknowledge of God

Our being chosen by God was according to His foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:2; Rom. 8:29). I like the word foreknowledge. Before we were born, God foreknew us. In eternity past, God chose us and predestinated us according to His foreknowledge.

3) Not of His Own Strife

Jacob was not chosen by God of his own strife (25:22-23, 26). Likewise, our being chosen is not according to our struggling. Jacob was somewhat foolish. Of course, he did not have the knowledge that we have. If he had known that he had been chosen, he would have had no need to struggle and could have told Esau, "Esau, you may go out first. No matter who gets out first, I have been chosen. It does not matter how fast you are or how slow I am. The birthright is mine because I have been chosen." But because Jacob did not have this revelation, he struggled.

4) Not of His Own Works

Romans 9:11, referring to Jacob and Esau, says, "The children not yet being born, nor having done anything good or bad, (that the purpose of God according to selection might remain, not of works, but of Him who calls)." In this verse we see that Jacob's being chosen was not of his own works. Before the children had done neither good nor bad, God had told Rebekah, the mother, that the "greater shall serve the less" (Rom. 9:12). This proves that God's selection does not depend upon our works. Whether we are good or bad means nothing.

5) Of God Who Calls

Romans 9:13 says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." When I read the record of Jacob and Esau as a youth, I felt sorry for Esau, saying, "Esau was much better than Jacob. Why did God say that he hated Esau and loved Jacob?" Do not say that God is not fair. He is God. He is the Maker, the Creator. His selection does not depend on us; it is absolutely up to Him. It is not of our struggle or works, "but of Him who calls." We are not the Creator—He is. In Romans 9, Paul, replying to the opposers, seemed to be saying, "Don't you realize that you are just a piece of clay and that God is the Potter? Doesn't the Potter have the right to make anything He wants out of the lump?" By this we see that our being chosen is absolutely of God who calls.

6) Of God's Mercy

God's selection is also of God's mercy (Rom. 9:14-16). God said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. 9:15). We all are the objects of God's mercy. How we thank Him that He has had mercy on us! "It is not of the one who wills, nor of the one who runs, but of God, the One who shows mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

7) Of God's Grace

God's selection is also of His grace (Rom. 11:5). It is somewhat difficult to understand mercy and grace as they are related to God's selection. Although we were selected and foreknown by God in eternity past, when God came to call us, we were in a pitiful situation, a situation which required God's mercy. The enemy, the Devil, might have said to God, "Look at this one who is Your selection. How pitiful he is!" Then God might have said to Satan, "Satan, don't you realize that this is a very good opportunity for Me to show My mercy? Without such a pitiful person, how could I show My mercy? If everyone were perfect and up to your standard, I would have no one on whom to show mercy. Satan, this chosen one is the right one to be the object of My mercy." What about grace? As we have seen, grace is something of God wrought into our being. Although we were so pitiful, God did not reject us. Rather, regardless of Satan's accusations, He had mercy on us. God might have said to Satan, "Satan, I shall not only show mercy to My chosen ones, but I shall work Myself into them." When God is wrought into our being, that is grace. We are not only the objects of God's mercy; we are also the objects of His grace. We are under God's mercy, and His grace is within us.

I can testify that I am under the divine mercy and that in me there is the divine grace. This is all due to God's selection. Is this not your experience as well? We all can testify that though we were most pitiful and miserable, God came in and granted us His mercy and we repented. At that very time, something divine—God's grace—was wrought into us. Now we are not only under God's mercy; we also have His grace, the living person of Christ as the Spirit, within us. This is God's selection. In the record of Jacob's life, we see something which can be designated as mercy and something which can be designated as grace.

8) Followed by God's Predestination

God's selection in eternity past was followed by His predestination (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:5). It is difficult to explain the meaning of the word predestination. According to the Greek, it means to be pre-marked. God has marked us out beforehand. Before we were born, God foresaw and foreknew us. We not only were chosen by God in eternity past; we were also pre-marked, and His mark is now upon

us. Even the angels know that we have been pre-marked. Hence, predestination means that God has marked us out beforehand for a certain destiny—to be His sons. He has chosen and predestined us unto sonship (Eph. 1:4-5).

9) Followed by God's Calling

God's selection is followed by His calling (Rom. 8:28). God selected us in eternity past and called us in time. We cannot experience God's selection or predestination, but we have all experienced His calling. We all have been "hooked." I can testify strongly that one day, as a very ambitious young student, I was "hooked" by the Lord. Although I tried my best to get off the hook, I never succeeded. Every Christian has had the same experience. We were going our way and then one day the Lord "hooked" us. What can we do? We have no choice. The more we try to get off the hook, the bigger it becomes. This hook is large enough to cover the whole universe. Wherever we go, the hook is there. If you escape to a Las Vegas casino, you will find that the hook is there. This is what it means to be called. Many parents have rebuked their God-hooked children, saying, "Why are you so stupid? Why must you go to meetings every night? Don't you know that you have a future?" We go to meetings because we have been caught by the divine hook. Who can resist this hook? No one. When this divine hook comes to visit you, there can be no resistance. This is the Lord's calling, His gracious visitation.

10) For God's Purpose

We have been selected and called for God's purpose (Rom. 9:11). Not many Christians know what this purpose is. When I was young, I heard message after message and read book after book about Abraham. Those messages and books spoke of justification by faith and of Abraham's being the father of faith, but none of them ever said that God called Abraham with a purpose. In Abraham, we cannot see this purpose, because he had no maturity in life. We do not see the beginning of the experience of God in Abraham; neither do we see the adequate ending of the proper life in his experience. Suddenly, as Abraham was living in Chaldea, God shined upon him and he was "hooked." God called Abraham, and he was caught. But the genuine beginning did not start in Chaldea; it started with God's selection before the foundation of the world. This beginning is found in Jacob, not in Abraham. We have seen that Abraham's life ended with a second marriage. After he had become so old, he married again and brought forth six sons. This certainly is not the maturity in life. We do not see that Abraham was transformed into a prince of God. If we would see the beginning and ending of the experience of God, we must come to Jacob. Jacob's experience of God began in eternity past and will last until eternity future.

What is the purpose of God's calling? It is to transform His called ones into kings. We can see this purpose in Jacob, but not in Abraham or Isaac. Isaac only knew to eat "savory meat." If you were to ask Isaac about his purpose in life, he might have said, "My purpose in life is to enjoy." Isaac did not know anything else. In like manner, most Christians today do not know what the purpose of their life is. They may say, "We have been saved to live a happy life, to have peace and joy today, and to go to heaven in the future." But the New Testament clearly reveals that the purpose of God's selection, predestination, and calling is sonship (Eph. 1:4-5). We have been predestinated unto sonship. We are not common sons; we are royal sons, sons of the royal family who are destined to be kings. Romans 8:29 says, "Whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son." This is God's purpose. God's purpose in selecting, predestinating, and calling us is to make pitiful sinners into royal sons so that, after the process of transformation has been completed, we may reign as kings.

Genesis 1:26 reveals that God's purpose in His creation of man was that man might express Him in His image and represent Him with His dominion. The New Testament also says that we have been made priests and kings (Rev. 1:6; 20:6). As priests, we bear the image of God to express Him, and as kings, we have the dominion of God to represent Him. During the millennial kingdom, we shall express Him in His image as His priests and we shall exercise His dominion with His authority to rule over the earth as kings. Now, we are daily undergoing the process of transformation that we might bear the full image of God and exercise His authority.

If we look at ourselves, we shall say, "The more I look at myself, the less I look like a son of God, much less like a king. How pitiful I am! Although I have been saved for many years, I'm still so poor." Praise the Lord that we realize that we are so poor. Do not be disappointed or discouraged. This is why we are under the process of God's transformation.

Of the fifty chapters in the book of Genesis, twenty-five and a half are devoted to the record of Jacob with Joseph. In these chapters we see that Jacob was under God's dealings and discipline. Everyone who was involved with or related to Jacob became a means whereby God dealt with him. God used his father, mother, brother, uncle, wives, and children. But when Jacob finally came out of the oven, he became a prince of God.

What was the purpose of Jacob's experience? Was it for him to have peace, joy, and a happy life? If we say this, Jacob would reply, "I don't agree with you. In my whole life I have not had much peace, not even when I was in my mother's womb. God did not put me first; I had to fight for it. And when I lost the fight, I had no peace. I cheated my brother, and he wanted to kill me. Then my mother helped me to flee to my uncle Laban. Laban was much more skillful than I in cheating. Don't talk to me about peace. I haven't had much peace or joy, but I've had many dealings." God's purpose for Jacob was not to give him peace, joy, and a happy life and then to take him to heaven. God's purpose was to deal with this pitiful supplanter until he was transformed into a prince of God bearing His image to express Him and exercising His dominion to represent Him. This is God's goal. When we come to the end of Genesis, we see that Israel was exactly this type of person. When he saw Pharaoh, he did not say a word. He simply stretched forth his hands and blessed him (47:7, 10). Jacob bore the image of God, expressing Him in a full way. Furthermore, through Joseph, he was the one who had dominion over the whole earth, representing God on the earth. Thus, at the end of Genesis we see God's goal, the goal of His selection. Today we are on the way of Jacob. We have all been called, justified, and are enjoying God's grace. At the same time, we are under God's dealings. Not only is God's little finger upon us, but also His thumb. This is God's dealing and God's transformation. This will make us not only a son of God, but also an Israel, a prince of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SIXTY-SEVEN

BEING DEALT WITH

The book of Genesis contains the biographies of nine great persons: Adam, Abel, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The longest record is that of Jacob's life, occupying nearly half of the book of Genesis. Why does the book of Genesis devote so many pages to this person? If you read Genesis carefully, you will see that Jacob's record, unlike Abraham's, includes many details. Enoch's biography is less than half a chapter in length, and the biography of Enosh occupies only a few verses. Although Noah was an important person, Genesis does not give him very many pages. The reason Jacob's record is so long is that in the experience of life nothing takes as long a time as transformation does. We were called in an instant, saved in a moment, and forgiven and regenerated in less than a minute. Transformation, however, requires our whole lifetime. Since the day we were saved, we have been undergoing the process of transformation.

In Abraham we see God's calling and justification. In Isaac we see a person who was always enjoying God's grace. It seems that Isaac did not want to know anything, nor exercise anything of himself. When Jacob deceived him, he knew that something was wrong, for he said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (27:22). If I had been Isaac, I would have studied the matter for a long time before blessing anyone. Isaac doubted whether it was Esau. While Isaac knew the voices of his sons and distinctly heard Jacob's voice, "he discerned him not" (27:23). This means that Isaac did not like to exercise his discernment. He was not lazy in eating, but he was idle in exercising his discernment. Not much space in the book of Genesis is devoted to the aspect of Isaac.

b. Being Dealt With

In Jacob we do not see God's calling or justification; neither do we see the enjoyment of grace. Rather, we see how he was dealt with by God (25:19–32:21). Even when Jacob was in his mother's womb, God dealt with him. Throughout his life he was constantly under God's dealing. God's dealing was for his transformation. Jacob was born a supplanter, a heel holder. God's intention, however, was to have a prince of God. How could such a supplanter become a prince of God? Only by transformation. It is easy to change a material building, but it is difficult to change a supplanter into a prince of God. This cannot be done overnight; it takes a lifetime. Because Jacob represents the aspect of transformation, he has such a long biography.

In 25:19-34; 27:1-46; and 28:1-5, we see four persons—Jacob, Esau, Isaac, and Rebekah—each of whom is distinct from the others. Although Jacob and Esau were twins, they were absolutely different from one another. "Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents" (25:27, Heb.). Jacob was quiet, subtle, and crafty, and Esau was wild, rude, and physically strong. As Jacob and Esau were fighting in their mother's womb, Esau won because of his strength. While Jacob was struggling to get out first, Esau seemed to say, "What are you doing? Let me go first." Jacob was crafty in the mind, and Esau was strong in the body. When Esau learned that Jacob had cheated him, he threatened to kill him. Esau seemed to be saying, "Jacob, you have supplanted me. My mind cannot defeat your mind, but one day I will kill you." In this we see that Jacob and Esau were absolutely different.

Isaac and Rebekah were also different from one another. Rebekah was clever, ingenious, skillful, and capable of manipulating the whole family. She both developed Jacob's craftiness and directed her husband. Isaac was fully under Rebekah's manipulation. As a result of her manipulation, both Esau and Isaac were supplanted. They were not only supplanted by Jacob but also by Rebekah. When Isaac sent Jacob away, he might have thought that he initiated it. Actually, this was initiated by Rebekah. After she had spoken a few words to Isaac, he sent Jacob away to Laban (28:1-5). Rebekah manipulated Isaac in this matter.

Isaac, Rebekah, and Esau worked together for Jacob's good. God used the three of them to transform Jacob. In this we see that all things work together for the good of those who are called by God (Rom. 8:28). Later we shall see that Laban as well as Jacob's wives, maids, sons, and daughter were used by God to transform him. Every circumstance, situation, and person found in the record of Jacob's life was used to transform this supplanter into a prince of God.

We cannot find a story telling us as much about transformation as the story of Jacob does. Jacob had been chosen and predestinated. God's purpose with this chosen one was to transform him into a prince of God. God does not like to transform good, simple, straight, honest, high-level people. He prefers to transform supplacers like Jacob. What kind of person are you? Are you good, straight, and honest, or are you a Jacob? We all, including the sisters, are Jacobs. Have you not supplanted others? Sisters, you have probably supplanted your mother, husband, and children. Some fathers-in-law have supplanted their sons-in-law, and some uncles have supplanted their nephews. Do not think that you are so good. I do not consider myself to be good like Abraham or Isaac. No, I think of myself as a Jacob. Knowing that we are Jacobs should be an encouragement to us. Do not say, "Oh, I'm so bad and low. I'm not a high-level person." If you are like this, praise the Lord. You are the right person to know God's mercy and grace.

God has not chosen the good people. If we had made the choice, probably all of us would have chosen Esau instead of Jacob. Comparatively speaking, Esau was better than Jacob. He never cheated or supplanted anyone. But God did not choose Esau; He chose Jacob. Everyone who has been chosen by God is a naughty one. If you are good, then you must not be chosen by God. While Abraham is the example of justification by faith, Jacob is the example of being chosen. Have you been chosen? Then you must be a Jacob, because God only chooses Jacobs. God is God, and we must worship Him as God. He has sovereignly chosen Jacob, the one who was such a supplanter.

1) Being Born the Second

God sovereignly arranged the environment and circumstances pertaining to Jacob's life. When Jacob and Esau were in their mother's womb, they fought over who would be born first (25:22-26). Jacob was subtle and seemed to be saying, "We are both in the womb. Whoever gets out first will be the firstborn and have the birthright. I must not lose the birthright." Thus, Jacob began to fight. Under God's sovereignty, Jacob had a smart mind, but he did not have much physical strength. Esau, on the contrary, was not so intelligent, but he was physically strong and defeated his brother, not allowing him to be born first. Although Esau suffered the cheating of Jacob's mind, Jacob was defeated by Esau's strength. If Jacob had had both a smart mind and great physical strength, Esau could not have done anything and Jacob could have had whatever he wanted. But God was very wise and seemed to say, "Jacob, I'll let you have a smart mind, but I will not give you much physical strength. Your brother may be dull, but I shall make him stronger than you. You

will have a smart mind, and he will have a strong body." Thus, even before he was born, Jacob was defeated by Esau and was born the second.

Although Jacob was defeated, he would not admit that he had been defeated. Instead, he held on to Esau's heel (25:26), indicating that he refused to admit defeat. The same is true with us. Many times we are defeated by our Esau, but we do not admit it and still hold on to his heel. Sometimes the sisters are defeated by their husbands, but, refusing to admit defeat, they hold on to the husband's heel. At other times, the husbands are defeated by their wives and they become the heel holders. Perhaps even today you have had such an experience. We all are Jacobs. God has chosen us, and we are under His dealing hand.

Let me share something from my own experience. I have been in a number of local churches. In every church the elders felt that they were under my dealing, but I felt that I was suffering their dealing. In the first two or three places I was not clear, but later I became very clear about God's dealing hand. I came to realize that one of the elders was my Esau, that another was my Isaac, that still another was my Rebekah, and that I was their Jacob. I needed all of them. God can never be wrong. All the co-workers, elders, and leading sisters whom God has given me have always been my opposite. For example, when I preferred to have a careful person, God did not give me one. But every dealing has been a profit to me. Every incident has helped to transform me a little more. When certain things happened, I was unhappy with all the dear Isaacs, Rebekahs, and Esaus. But deep in my heart I could say, "Praise the Lord. I am thankful for everyone and everything."

It was no accident that Jacob was born to Isaac and Rebekah and that Esau was his brother. All this was prearranged by the Father for Jacob's transformation. From the time he was in his mother's womb, Jacob needed one to be physically stronger than he was. We often say that twins are the same. But if Jacob and Esau had been the same, Jacob could never have been dealt with. Jacob was a quiet man who always exercised his mind, and Esau was a hunter who exercised his physical strength. Thus, Esau was exactly what Jacob needed.

Do not be dissatisfied with your married life, for your husband or wife is the best one for you. Out of a hundred married people, probably not one husband would say that he is satisfied with his wife, and probably not one wife would say that she is satisfied with her husband. Before we were married, we all had a dream about married life. Eventually, our marriage turned out to be the opposite of our dream. But whatever our husband or wife is like, he or she is God's gift to us and is exactly what we need. Throughout my whole life I have never seen a person whose second marriage, after remarrying following a divorce, was better than the first. I know of some who were married four times and who have said that each marriage was worse than the preceding one. The marriage of those who have been chosen by God is under His sovereignty. Rebekah was brought to Isaac and she became his wife. Whether she was good or bad, she was Isaac's destiny. He had no choice. I have had much experience in spiritual life, in human life, and in married life, and I can advise you not to take your choice. If you make your own choice, you will suffer.

*2) Being Forced to Leave
the Loving Mother
and the Father's Home*

Look at the picture of Jacob's experience. It was not his choice that Esau be his brother, nor that Isaac and Rebekah be his parents. The father Isaac, the mother Rebekah, and the brother Esau were all an exact match for Jacob's need. As we have seen, when Jacob was in his mother's womb, he struggled and was under the dealing of God's sovereign hand. From the very beginning of his life, Jacob was defeated. That was the start of his transformation.

Jacob's father was an enjoying person who did not exercise much discernment. Being a simple person, he just enjoyed grace all day long. He did not like to think, consider, or exercise himself very much. He did not like to do anything. As he was meditating in the field, Rebekah came to him. Isaac simply enjoyed. Whether the sky was clear or cloudy did not make any difference to him. As long as he could eat and enjoy, he was satisfied. When Jacob came to him disguised as Esau, Isaac did not exercise his discernment. When Rebekah was concerned that Jacob might marry one of the daughters of Heth (27:46), Isaac called him, charged him not to take a wife of the daughters of Canaan, and sent him to Laban, his mother's brother. Isaac's simplicity was for Jacob's benefit. If Isaac had not been so simple but had exercised more control, it would have been difficult for Jacob to get the birthright and receive the blessing.

As we have already pointed out, Rebekah was the opposite of Isaac. She was full of consideration. She might have exercised her mentality day and night considering how to obtain the birthright for Jacob. She might have been constantly watching to see how Isaac was dealing with Esau. If she had not been watching, how could she have overheard the conversation between Isaac and Esau regarding the blessing (27:1-5)? After overhearing this conversation, she immediately called Jacob in and told him what to do (27:6-13). Because Isaac and Rebekah were so different from one another, Jacob obtained the birthright and received the blessing.

Esau was a careless person. Regarding the birthright, he seemed to say, "Jacob, do you want the birthright? It doesn't mean very much to me. If you give me something to eat, I'll give it to you." By this we see that Esau was rude and careless. The simple father, the ingenious mother, and the rude and careless brother caused Jacob to suffer and to be dealt with.

After Jacob had supplanted the birthright (25:27-34) and the father's blessing (27:5-29), Esau hated him and intended to kill him (27:41). When Rebekah learned of this, she told Jacob to go to her brother Laban until Esau's fury had turned away (27:32-45). After telling Jacob this, she manipulated the father to send Jacob away. This brought Jacob into the pit of God's transformation. Although it was difficult for Jacob to leave his loving mother and his father's home, he was forced to escape (27:42-28:5). He had no choice. He was forced to flee into a strange land. Later on we shall see that when Jacob was in Laban's home, he was in the oven. Laban, Leah, Rachel, the maids, and all the children were used by God to burn Jacob on every side. Jacob suffered from every angle, in every corner, and in every aspect. God placed him in such a situation that he might be transformed.

As we read Genesis 25, 27, and 28, we see that God's sovereign hand was upon Jacob to transform him. At that time, however, Jacob did not realize that he was under God's transformation. He only knew his brother's rudeness and hatred, his mother's cleverness, and his father's simpleness. Actually, he was under God's dealing day after day. Not one day was wasted. Every person he met and everything that happened to him was a dealing. Jacob surely represents the aspect of transformation in our spiritual life. If we would

know what transformation is, we must read Jacob's story again and again.

By reading Jacob's story, I have become fully convinced regarding God's dealing hand. After I began to comprehend this, I realized that everything that happens between others and myself is a dealing for me. The elders, the brothers and sisters, my wife, and my children are not to blame. Everything is under God's sovereign hand as a dealing for my profit. I have needed it all. Perhaps tomorrow I shall need another dealing. The Lord knows what kind of wife, husband, children, in-laws, and grandchildren we need. Nothing is accidental. Everything has been prearranged and happens according to God's plan and schedule. Nothing is either too late or too early. Everything occurs on time. Eventually, we shall say, "Father, thank You for Your sovereign hand. Thank You for Your dealing, for Your prearrangement, and for everything You have done. Now I know that everything has been under Your sovereignty. I am just a chosen Jacob under Your hand."

Do you think that Jacob liked to go to Laban's home? No, he was forced to go. He was not sent by his father or mother; he was sent by the sovereign hand of God. Yes, Jacob was God's choice, and God planned to give him the birthright. Nevertheless, God knew that His chosen one required a great deal of transformation. Thus, it was not merely a matter of the birthright nor of the blessing; it was also a matter of transformation. From the first day until the last, God's hand was upon Jacob. How we must thank and praise the Lord! He has chosen and predestinated us, and now we are under His sovereign hand that we might be dealt with day after day. God is dealing with us through all kinds of persons and circumstances. In the past, a brother said to me, "Everyone in my life has been arranged by God except my wife." I said to him, "Brother, your wife is the number one person whom God has arranged for you." Without exception, every person in our life is used by God for our transformation.

*3) God's Sovereignty in Fulfilling
the Purpose of His Selection*

Now we must consider God's sovereignty in fulfilling the purpose of His selection. Firstly, we need to see that Esau despised and sold the birthright (25:30-34). The birthright, which God intends to give to His chosen people, includes three things: expressing God, representing God, and participating in the kingdom of God. We all have been chosen to express God in His image, represent Him with His dominion, and participate in His kingdom. The practical kingdom of God today is in the church life. By our second birth we all have obtained the birthright that we might express God in His image, represent Him in His dominion, and participate in His kingdom, both in the church today and in the kingdom in the future. Every regenerated person has this birthright.

Due to his love of physical enjoyments, that is, his love for the world and the worldly enjoyments, Esau despised his birthright (Heb. 12:16-17). The seller of the birthright should not blame the buyer. Although Jacob was subtle in buying it, Esau was willing to sell it. The deal could not have been consummated by one party alone. Like Esau, many regenerated Christians have despised their birthright, loving the worldly enjoyments and not caring for the preciousness of God's birthright. Most of today's Christians are like this. They do not care to express God, to represent Him, nor to be in God's kingdom in the church life. Thus, when the kingdom comes, they will have no share in it. In their life today they have sold their birthright. Due to the enjoyment of the physical things, they have neglected and despised their birthright. If they cared for God's expression, representation, and kingdom, they would stay in the proper church life, which is God's kingdom today.

How we thank the Lord that in the midst of today's degradation He has brought us into the church life, where we are practically in God's kingdom and where we are practicing how to express God and to represent Him. Here in the practical kingdom of God we are enjoying our birthright. We are unhappy with anything which frustrates us from expressing God or hinders us from representing Him, and we feel badly about anything that keeps us from the proper church life. If you are a Christian who is not practicing the expression of God and the representation of God in the practical kingdom of God today, then you are probably one who is despising your birthright. Be careful! None of us should despise our birthright, giving it up for a little enjoyment of the physical things. Rather, we must despise all the things of today's world. Nothing is as precious as our birthright. Nothing is more valuable than expressing God, representing God, and participating in the kingdom of God. If we remain in the church life enjoying our birthright, we shall share in the coming kingdom where we shall express God and represent Him for His purpose. This is our birthright. May we all be today's Jacobs, not today's Esaus. We should praise the Lord for His selection and thank Him for His transformation. Yet, we must be warned to honor and respect our birthright.

God was sovereign in Esau's despising and selling of the birthright, in Rebekah's ingenuity in her partial love, and in Isaac's blindness in blessing. All that Esau, Rebekah, and Isaac were and did worked together for Jacob's good, that God might sovereignly fulfill the purpose of His selection. Praise God for His sovereignty! And thank the Lord for His dealing with us in every situation.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SIXTY-EIGHT

BEING DEALT WITH

(2)

4) The Dream at Bethel

In this message we come to a very crucial turn in Jacob's life—his dream at Bethel (28:10-22). Although we are all familiar with the story of Jacob's dream, I doubt that we know the true significance of it. If we would know the significance of this dream, we must understand why Jacob had it where and when he did. Why did he not have this dream when he was at home with his parents? Once we find the answer to this question, we shall see what this dream means to us all.

a) Wandering on His Lonesome Journey

Jacob had this dream while he was wandering on his lonesome journey (28:10). Jacob had been born into a very good family. He had an excellent father, a loving mother, and an interesting brother. Before the foundation of the world, God chose and predestinated him to have the birthright. In the story of Jacob we see God's intention and man's desire. God intended that Jacob be the first, and Jacob also desired to be the first, not the second. Thus, Jacob's desire corresponded to God's intention. This indicates that if we have a

desire which corresponds with God's intention, then that desire must originate with God and not with ourselves. God intends to give us the birthright, and we also desire to be the first. This desire is not wrong; it is absolutely right. However, we must learn the lesson of not exercising our natural ability and our natural strength to fulfill God's intention and to satisfy our desire. Our natural strength and ability present a problem.

By reading the book of Genesis along with the whole Bible, we see that God intended to give the birthright to Jacob and that Jacob desired to get it. However, Jacob's natural strength had to be dealt with. Therefore, God sovereignly caused him to be the second. Although God had chosen him to be the first, God caused him to be born the second that Jacob might learn that his natural man was altogether unworthy and had to be cut off. God wants to give us the birthright, but our natural man is unqualified for it. We need to be transformed. Because God knew that Jacob needed transformation, He made him number two instead of number one. Without such a sovereign arrangement, Jacob's natural man and natural strength would never have been exposed. If God had put Jacob ahead of Esau, Jacob might have thought that he was very spiritual. He would not have struggled, because he would already have been the first. But God knew what was in Jacob and He put Esau first that Jacob's natural man might be exposed. Even while he was still in his mother's womb, Jacob struggled to come out first. This was God's arrangement.

Whatever happens to us is according to God's arrangement. Do not think that you are too small to be worthy of such a sovereign arrangement. God has a purpose for us—to give us the birthright. Since our natural man is not qualified for this, God must transform us. He does not do this simply by His creating hand, but by a long process which can only be carried out through all the circumstances of life. As we have seen, God used Isaac, Rebekah, and Esau to deal with Jacob. Although these three people never held a conference to discuss how to deal with Jacob, they nevertheless worked in a good coordination for this purpose, because everything was under God's sovereign hand. God arranged for Esau to be born first. He also arranged for Esau to be physically strong but not to be skillful in exercising his mind. Although he could not exercise his mind very well, he could exercise his physical strength to defeat Jacob. Furthermore, God arranged for Jacob to have a father who only knew to eat and enjoy. Even when Isaac realized that something was wrong when Jacob came to him disguised as Esau, he only cared for his eating. This was the reason that he had become blind. While Isaac was neutral, Rebekah, who was very clever, was partial, very much favoring her beloved son Jacob. These three persons worked together to cause Jacob to leave his loving mother and his father's home and to become a lonesome wanderer.

In ancient times it was a great thing to travel from Beer-sheba to where Laban lived. It was not a small matter for Jacob to leave his mother, father, and the environment in which he had been raised and to take such a long journey. Having become a lonesome wanderer, he must have suffered a great deal on this journey.

If you consider your past with the proper understanding, you will realize that your experience was exactly the same as Jacob's. Not many of us were saved when we were in a good home under our loving mother's care. Most of us were saved when we were lonesome and had been forced to suffer. Some had lost their mother, father, fiancée, wife, husband, or children and had become lonesome. In principle, at the time many of us were saved, we were suffering and lonesome. During the years in which we were under the care of our loving mother, the heavenly dream did not come. When did the first dream from heaven come to you? We all have had such a dream. The first dream of our spiritual life was our salvation. As we shall see, every spiritual vision is a dream. In what kind of situation were you when you had your first dream? As many of us can testify, our circumstances were not at all pleasant. Some were suffering, others were lonely, and still others were in an unpleasant environment. We had been forced to suffer, to wander, and to become lonesome. When, according to our consciousness, we had lost everything on earth and we were suffering and were lonely, the first heavenly dream came to us.

b) Sleeping Homelessly with a Stone as His Pillow

Speaking of Jacob, Genesis 28:11 says, "He lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took one of the stones of that place, and made it his pillow, and lay down in that place to sleep" (Heb.). Jacob was in the wilderness and had no lodging place. Needing something on which to rest his head as he slept, he took a stone and made it his pillow. What is the meaning of this? It means that all human doing had been put away. There was no house, no lodging, nor anything made by man. Everything there in that place was God's work. When Jacob was at home, the situation was very different. There everything was made by man. But that night in the wilderness, there was nothing man-made. Everything in that environment had been made by God. If you examine your past experience, you will see that the first dream of your spiritual life came at a time when nearly everything man-made had been crossed out and put aside. All that remained was the heaven and the earth created by God. When Jacob lived at home, he could lodge in a man-made dwelling and rest on a man-made pillow. But in the wilderness he had to rest on a God-created stone.

If I had been Jacob, I would have been more clever, using either wood or clay instead of stone. I do not think that I could have rested on a stone. But Jacob did not use either wood or clay. As we shall see, it is very meaningful that he used a stone for a pillow. If you had been Jacob, would you have used clay or stone? I would have made a pillow out of clay and rested my head upon it. But this would have been something man-made. The stone which Jacob used for a pillow, on the contrary, was something created and prepared by God.

As nearly all the called ones can testify, before they were saved, they were forced to suffer, to be lonesome, and to be in an environment in which everything man-made had become nothing. According to their understanding, everything man-made was useless, and they trusted in God's creation, in the things made by God. It was at such a time that the dream from heaven came.

The principle is the same today. If you want another heavenly vision, then you must have some suffering. When the brothers give you a difficult time or when your wife troubles you, the heavenly dream will probably come once again. If you are always happy and in a pleasant situation, maybe no dream will come. Most heavenly visions come at a time when you are suffering or ill-treated. Nearly all the visions I have seen have come in times of suffering. No one likes to suffer. But when suffering comes to us under God's sovereign hand, we cannot reject it, saying, "Suffering, I don't like you. Go away." The more we say this, the faster the sufferings will pursue us.

I know from my own experience that the vision does not often come when we are happy; it comes when we are suffering. When we are happy in the wonderful church life, the heavenly dream may not come. But when we are troubled by the brothers, the sisters, and the elders, the dream comes. If you have not had a heavenly dream since you were saved, this may prove that you have not been

suffering. If there is no suffering, there may be no dream. But whenever we are deprived of so many man-made things and are brought to the place where there are only the God-created things, that is, when we are cut off from what is of man and put our trust in what is of God, the vision comes. The heavenly vision comes in this way.

Consider Jacob's experience. He had been chosen and predestinated by God. But because he was struggling and striving to get what God intended to give him, he found himself in difficulty. Then God sovereignly came in to force him to leave his home, bringing him into a situation where he was lonely and without the help of man. Suppose you had been Jacob, having to leave your home and family and being so lonely. How would you have felt? If I had been he, I would have been completely disappointed. Nevertheless, at that very time, the dream came.

c) *Dreaming of a Ladder Which Typifies Christ*

Genesis 28:12 says, "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it." The center of this dream was a ladder. In this dream, did the ladder come down from heaven? No, it was already there on earth, and Jacob only needed to have a vision of it. Before he had the dream, he could not see the ladder. This means that everything necessary for receiving the birthright was there long before we were saved. The problem was that we could not see it. We had to have a vision in order to see it. Do not think that in his dream Jacob saw the ladder descending like Peter saw the sheet descending from heaven (Acts 10:9-16). Jacob did not see something coming down; he saw something which was already on earth. We are not told that the ladder reached the earth but that it was "set up on the earth" and that "the top of it reached to heaven." It was a ladder already existing on earth, not one descending from heaven.

What about the angels of God on the ladder? When I read about them in years past, I always thought that they were descending and ascending. But this verse says that the angels were ascending and descending. This means that the angels were there before Jacob had the dream. When he saw them, they were firstly ascending and then descending. If Jacob had seen the ladder coming down from heaven and the angels of God descending on it, his dream could have been taken as an answer to Jacob's desire or prayer. If Jacob had said, "O God, I'm lonely and want to see a vision from heaven," and a ladder had come down from heaven with angels descending on it, it would have been the answer to his prayer. But it was not at all like this. Without even praying, Jacob suddenly saw a ladder set up on the earth, the top of which reached to heaven. That the angels were ascending and descending on this ladder indicates that the dream was not an answer to Jacob's prayer but that it had been preplanned by God.

Do not think that your salvation was an answer to your prayers. Before you prayed, salvation was there waiting for you. It was not that you prayed and then suddenly salvation descended from heaven and fell upon you. No, before you were saved, salvation was waiting for you, but you had to be forced to leave your home and every man-made situation and be brought into a lonesome environment. Then your eyes were opened to see what was already there.

In verse 12, unlike John 1:51, we are not told that Jacob saw heaven opened. Jacob did not see heaven opened, because it was opened before he even got to that place. When was heaven opened to you for your salvation? Did you fast, pray, and cry to the Lord to open heaven to you and then suddenly see heaven opened? No, heaven has never been closed to God's chosen people. Although heaven is open to us, we still need to come to Bethel. We may not want to come here, but we have no choice. Like Jacob, we have been forced to come here. Many of us came into the church life because we had no choice. We were forced to come. You may say, "If I had a way, I would get out of the church life." But, thank the Lord, you do not have a way. Perhaps you have said, "I don't like the situation in the church life. I want to go away." But praise the Lord that this is impossible. We all have been forced to come to Bethel, the place where we see the already-existing ladder. There is no need for us to beg and wait for heaven to be opened. Once our eyes are opened, we see that the ladder is already here. This is the heavenly vision, the heavenly dream. In this dream we do not see a ladder descending; we see the ladder which is here already.

When we come to the New Testament, we see that Christ is the ladder which Jacob saw. In John 1:51 Jesus said to Nathanael, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." Christ is the One who brings heaven to earth and joins earth to heaven. Firstly, He brings heaven to earth and then He joins earth to heaven. Genesis 28:12 says that the ladder was "set up on the earth." According to our concept, Christ has gone away from the earth. But according to God's concept, Christ has been set up on earth, and no one can move Him. For nineteen and a half centuries, people have tried their best to shake this ladder, but they have been unable to do it. Do not think that Christ is coming down. No, He has already been set up on earth.

According to your deep, inner sense, where was Christ at the time you were saved—in heaven or on earth? According to your natural concept, He was in heaven. But according to your inner sense, Christ was directly in front of you, for He had been set up on earth. We have all experienced this. However, due to the influence of religion, we went along with our mental figuration instead of with our experience. In our experience of salvation, Christ was on earth.

Our Christ, who is the ladder bringing heaven to earth and joining earth to heaven, is now not only in heaven but also here on earth. Christ has been set up on earth and He is reaching into heaven for the purpose of coming to us and bringing us to Him. As we have already pointed out, in Jacob's dream the angels of God were ascending and descending on the ladder. The angels are waiting to ascend. I believe that whenever a sinner receives the Lord Jesus and is saved, many angels ascend to heaven bearing the good news. Firstly, the angels gladly ascend to heaven and then they immediately descend with good things for the new believer. This traffic does not start from heaven; it starts from earth and goes to heaven and back to earth again. In like manner, whenever we repent and say, "Lord, I want to gain more of You and to be gained more by You," the angels, who truly are reporters, bring the news to heaven.

Christ, the sent One, the One who brings heaven to earth and joins earth to heaven, is here on earth right now. Many times in my room I have had the sense that Christ was there. As soon as I responded to Him, it seemed that some angels, moving faster than a rocket, ascended to heaven to report the good news. Many of us can testify that on some occasions we had such a wonderful time with the Lord that we had no words to describe what was happening. That was a strong proof that the angels were there ascending and descending. Then, as we continued to have this good time with the Lord, we went a little further with Him, and the angels happily ascended to heaven again to report something new and to descend immediately with more good things for us.

According to the proper vision, the angels of God are ascending and descending. There is no need for us to pray or fast. We simply need to be forced by God's hand to leave everything human and to come into an environment where we have a dream and our blind eyes are opened. Then we shall say, "Amen, Lord Jesus. The ladder is here, and the angels are ascending and descending on it." When we were saved, something like this happened to us. But we did not have the words to explain it. Today, Christ, the ladder, the center of the universe, is here. This ladder has been set up on the earth and is waiting for us to see and touch it again and again. Whenever we have a vision, we may not have the understanding or the words to describe it, but we sense that a ladder is before us. Whenever we enjoy a spiritual experience, we have the sense deep within that something either before us or inside us is joining us to heaven and that if we touch it, we touch heaven. This is Christ. Often, when we have a further experience in the church life, we smile and say, "Why didn't I see this before? How stupid I was! Something has been set up on earth that reaches to heaven, and when I touch it, it brings me and joins me to heaven." This is the ladder. As we shall see in the next message, this ladder produces Bethel, the house of God, the gate of heaven. Using today's term, it produces the church.

Jacob's dream at Bethel was not of him; it was absolutely of God. Jacob had lost everything and was fully disappointed. He had become a hopeless and homeless case. But, much to his surprise, in the midst of his disappointment, the dream came. What is this dream? It is simply a vision, a seeing. In our experience, the ladder was there, but we did not see it. Now that we have the sight, we see the ladder which was there all the time. This is the significance of Jacob's dream.

Every spiritual experience is a dream. I cannot tell you how many dreams I have had through the years. Coming into the church life is a dream. Knowing the practicality of the church is also a dream. Many times we have said, "My, this experience is so good that it must be a dream. What a dream has come to me!" The more dreams we have, the better, for the more dreams we have, the more we touch and enjoy the ladder.

The center of every spiritual dream is Christ as the ladder, as the One who brings heaven to earth and joins earth to heaven. Whenever we sense deep within that we have been brought into heaven and have been joined to and made one with heaven, and that heaven has been made one with us, that is an experience of Christ. We should forget about trying to overcome sin and weaknesses. The proper experience in life is to have a dream of Christ as the heavenly ladder which has been set up on earth and which brings us into heaven. Do not try to overcome sin, nor to conquer your weakness. When you touch this ladder, you will be in heaven, heaven will be yours, and there will be much traffic between earth and heaven and between heaven and earth. You will have whatever you need, and every negative thing will be under your feet. This is the experience of Christ as the heavenly ladder.

Do not pray that the ladder will come down to you. Whether you pray or not, as long as you are God's chosen one and have a desire which corresponds to God's intention, you will sooner or later be forced to come to Bethel where you will have a dream. The purpose of this dream is always that we see Christ as the ladder. This heavenly ladder issues in Bethel, the house of God, the church. Here, in 28:10-22, we see the Christ who brings forth the church. This is truly a dream.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SIXTY-NINE

BEING DEALT WITH

(3)

Genesis 28:10-22 is the most crucial word in the revelation of God. If we know the Bible, we shall realize that here there is a radical turn, a new start, in the divine revelation. In the first twenty-seven chapters of Genesis, the term the house of God (Bethel in Hebrew) is not used. But in this chapter, the matter of God's house is revealed. The house of God is not merely a place; it is a living composition of living people. Where these people are, there the house of God is also. Hence, it does not depend upon the place but upon the people. If the people move, then the place where they once were is no longer God's house. How can a place be called the house of God? Only because the real, living house of God, a living composition of living people, is there.

Genesis 1:26 says that man was made in God's own image. This is wonderful. Man is man; he is not God. Nevertheless, he has God's image. In other words, man looks like God. It is correct to say this. If anyone has your image, he surely looks like you. It is very significant that God made man in His own image.

In 2:7 we see that the man who was made in God's image was constituted with dust. Do you realize that you were made with dust? No one is an exception. We were not made with gold, diamond, or steel; we all were made with dust. Is dust precious? Would you put a handful of dust into your pocket and keep it? No one would do this. Nevertheless, we were made out of dust. Romans 9:21 reveals that we are clay vessels. Dust and clay are nearly the same. When water is added to dust, the dust becomes clay. According to our material constitution, we are not precious.

In chapter twenty-eight the term changes from dust to stone. The stone in this chapter becomes the rest for the man of dust (v. 11), for the stone now holds the dust. It is quite meaningful that Jacob, a man of dust, rested upon a stone. Consider the picture in chapter twenty-eight. Here we see a tired, lonesome, disappointed, dusty man, a man who was not certain of his future. Needing some rest as the sun was going down, "he took one of the stones of that place, and made it his pillow, and lay down in that place to sleep" (v. 11, Heb.). The way to know the Bible is by the Bible. If we only read Genesis 28, we shall not know what it means. But when we read the whole Bible with the heavenly light, we see the meaning of the stone in this chapter. When Peter first came to the Lord, the Lord changed his name saying, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which translated means a stone)" (John 1:42). Approximately three years after this first meeting with the Lord, Peter, responding to a question asked by the Lord, said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Then the Lord Jesus said to him, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). The Lord seemed to be saying, "Peter, do you remember that on the first day you came to Me I gave you the name stone? This should not merely be a name—it must be a fact. Peter, you are a stone. I shall build My church upon this rock." Thus, Matthew 16:18 reveals that the stone is for the building of the church.

What is the church? First Timothy 3:15 says that the church is the house of the living God. Ultimately, in eternity, the house of the

living God will be the New Jerusalem. In Revelation 21 we see that the New Jerusalem is not built with clay or dust but with precious stones. Speaking of the New Jerusalem, Revelation 21:11 says, "Her light was like a most precious stone, as a jasper stone, clear as crystal." This is not my allegorization; it is the divine revelation.

We need to look at the Bible with a bird's-eye view. In Genesis 1 and 2 we see that although man was made in the image of God, he was constituted with dust. While the image of God is for God's expression, dust certainly is not suitable for the expression of God. Hence, there is the need for transformation. Transformation is not merely a change in form; it is also a change in nature, for the word transformation denotes a metabolic change. We need to have a change in nature that our nature and appearance might no longer be that of dust. In Genesis 2 man is dusty, but in Revelation 21 he is precious stone. In eternity, there will be no need for cleaning. While we are on this dusty earth, we must clean every day. But because there will be no dust in the New Jerusalem, there will be no need to clean it. All the dust will be transformed into precious stones.

In Genesis 2 we have a man of clay, and in Genesis 28 we see a man of clay resting upon a stone. The Bible is surely written by God. In no other book do we find a portion such as 28:10-22. This passage is short, but it is crucial, deep, and meaningful, including the whole Bible in its scope. In verse 11 we see the stone which Jacob used for a pillow. As everyone knows, a pillow is something upon which to rest. In verse 18 this pillow-stone becomes a pillar. A pillow is for rest, but a pillar is used for support in a building. In the temple built by Solomon, there were two main pillars (1 Kings 7:21). Galatians 2:9 says that James, Peter, and John were pillars in the church. Furthermore, Revelation 3:12 says that the overcomers will be pillars in the temple of God. In Genesis 28 we have the stone, the pillow, and the pillar. But this is not all. Eventually, this pillar becomes Bethel, the house of God. Moreover, in this short portion of the Word we see a ladder set up on the earth, the top of which reached to heaven (v. 12). It is impossible for any man to have written this record. How could Jacob have dreamed such a dream? According to human history, no one has ever had such a dream. But Jacob saw a ladder on which the angels of God were ascending and descending. This indicates that the angels were already there waiting for the time to ascend. When Jacob saw the ladder in his dream, the angels might have immediately ascended to heaven to report the news that Jacob had come and had seen the ladder. After Jacob had awakened out of his sleep, he realized that this place was not only the house of God but also the gate of heaven (v. 17).

In addition to all these wonderful items, there is another important item in this chapter—the matter of our living. Many times when we preach the gospel, the sinners ask, "If I believe in Jesus, will He take care of my living?" Some saints ask a similar question: "If I love the Lord and live for Him, what will happen to my living? Don't I need to take care of this?" We all have the problem of making a living. But in this short record we see that God takes care of our living. As we shall see, taking care of our living is secondary. In verse 15 the Lord said to Jacob, "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." Here the Lord seemed to be saying, "Jacob, I will be with you and I will take care of your living. I'll give you bread to eat and raiment to put on." This corresponds to the Lord's word in Matthew 6:33: "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." If we seek His kingdom, God will surely take care of our living.

Although God had promised to be with Jacob and to keep him, Jacob still made a deal with Him, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God" (vv. 20-21). Notice the word "then" in verse 21. If God would do so many things for Jacob, then Jacob would take Him as his God. But if God would not do these things for him, then there would be no deal. Jacob seemed to be saying, "If You give me food and clothing and take care of my living, then I'll take You as my God, this pillar shall be Your house, and I will return to You the tenth of what You have given to me." This was a very profitable business arrangement. Jacob was saying, "Lord, You must first give to me, and then I'll give to You. If You give me a dollar, then I will return a dime to You." God says that if we seek His kingdom, then He will give us bread. But we say that God must first give us bread and then we shall seek His kingdom. There is no need for you to make such a deal with the Lord. Simply be a lump of clay and allow the Lord to work on you, and He will add to you everything you need. The word add in Matthew 6:33 implies that something basic has already been given and that other things are simply added to us. As we shall see, God will give us the land, the seed, and the blessing. To all this, He adds food, clothing, and the other things we need for our living.

I love this portion of the Word because its span is so wide, covering the whole Bible from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. This is why I say that it is such a crucial portion. It covers everything from the dust to the stone, from the creation to the building of God's house. It covers the matters of bread, clothing, the house of God, the ladder, and the heavenly things.

In this passage, Jacob firstly found rest and ultimately he received the promise that there would be no problem regarding food and clothing. Everyone is looking for rest. Rest always includes satisfaction. If we are not satisfied, we can never be at rest. Whenever we come to the Lord, the first thing we receive is rest. As lonesome, disappointed people who do not know where we are going, we need rest. As those who seem to be hopeless, who have no future, and who have lost almost everything, we long for rest. Praise the Lord for His rest! This rest is upon the stone, and this stone is in the very place where God's house is. Here is our place of rest.

*d) Being Met by God
the First Time*

In verse 13 we see that here Jacob was met by God for the first time. We all need to be met by God. This is basic. Jacob was born into a godly family. Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, and Rebekah were all godly people. Although it is good to be born into such a godly family, we must still have our own direct, personal meeting with God. Everyone in your home may eat, but you must still be an eating person yourself. Do not say, "Oh, my grandfather was Abraham, my grandmother was Sarah, and my parents are Isaac and Rebekah." What about you? Everyone in your family is an eating person, but do you yourself eat? Concerning God, Jacob had acquired knowledge, but he had not eaten anything. He had been born into a godly family, but before the dream at Bethel, he himself had had no direct meeting with God. But, much to his surprise, here at Bethel, God met him for the first time. Jacob did not intend to meet God. It was God who was waiting there for him. God had already come down from heaven and was there on earth.

The experience of the Samaritan woman in John 4 is similar to Jacob's experience in Genesis 28. The Lord Jesus, who had come down from heaven, went to the well purposely to meet her. To that Samaritan woman, Jacob's well was Bethel, and Jesus was there as the heavenly ladder. If, like Jacob, she had had an actual dream, she would have seen the angels ascending to heaven to bring the

good report that she had met the Lord. The angels might have said, "The sinful Samaritan woman, the one who has had so many husbands and who is living with a man who is not her husband, has come to Jesus!" The situation was the same when you came to the Lord. Jesus, the heavenly ladder, was waiting for you. On the day you were saved, you had your first dream and were met by God for the first time. How wonderful this is! If you examine your experience, you will say, "Praise the Lord! Now I understand what happened to me that day. Before I was saved, the heavenly ladder had been set up on earth, and God was waiting there to meet me."

When God first met Jacob, He said, "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac" (v. 13). This implied that God was to be Jacob's God. We all have experienced the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac. Since the God of Abraham is the God of justification and the God of Isaac is the God of grace, this means that we have experienced the God of justification and the God of grace. Although we have experienced such a God, we also need to meet and experience the God of Jacob. This means that God will be to us the God of transformation, the God of dealings. Knowing the God of Abraham means that we are justified, and knowing the God of Isaac means that we enjoy the grace of God. But we must also have a dream in which the God of Jacob says, "I shall be your God. I shall be the God of a heel-holder, the God of a supplanter. The more you supplant, the better I can deal with you. The more you hold the heels of others, the more I shall put you into the oven. I shall be to you the God of Jacob." Eventually, the Bible says that God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and that this God is not the God of the dead but of the living (Matt. 22:32). My God is not only the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac; He is also the God of Jacob, the God of dealings who deals with me all day long. If we only stay with the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, never experiencing God as the God of Jacob, we shall not have the needed transformation. Whose God do you love—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, or the God of Jacob? While we love the enjoyment, none of us loves the dealings. God is the Triune God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Be prepared—one day you will meet Him as the God of Jacob.

Often the brothers and sisters like to sing about the glorious church life. However, the more we stay in the glorious church life, the more we are dealt with. Nearly all of us can testify that since coming into the church life, God has dealt with us. Before we came into the church, we did not have many problems. But after we came into the church and began to sing of the glorious church life, things began to happen one after another. You might have said, "What is this? Perhaps I am wrong." No, you are not wrong—you are right. Because you are on the right track, the track of transformation, all these things have been happening to you.

God measures our environment and everything that happens to us. For example, He may let you have a little illness, but that illness is measured and will not kill you. This is similar to what God did with Job when He charged Satan not to go beyond a certain limit (Job 2:6). This is God's dealing. In the following chapters of Genesis, we do not see that Jacob enjoyed very much. Rather, wherever he went, God was there dealing with him. God seemed to say, "I am the God of Jacob. Eventually, I want to be the God of Israel. When your transformation is complete, My dealings with you will be over."

*e) Being Promised to by God
the First Time*

None of God's dealings is without a promise. Every time we suffer a dealing there will be a promise along with it. The more dealings we suffer, the more promises we shall have. In 28:13-15 we see God's promise to Jacob. According to Jacob's experience, God's promise did not come before His dealing. The promise is not firstly that we shall be provided with food and raiment. It firstly is that we shall have the land and the seed and that we shall be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Here we see three things—the land, the seed, and the blessing. According to the consistent revelation of the Bible, the land is for the kingdom. In His creation, God created man in His own image and gave him dominion over the earth, over the land. Thus, the land is for the dominion, the kingdom. The seed is for the expression, for the spreading of the image. In 28:13 and 14 we have the same two things that are found in Genesis 1:26—image and dominion. After this, we become a blessing. Our blessing is simply Christ, for Christ becomes our blessing to others.

If we examine our experience, we shall see that whenever we suffered or had some dealing from God, we received the land and had the sense that we were in the kingdom. Furthermore, we sensed that something of God was expressed through us and was spreading out of us. This is the seed. In addition to this, we became a blessing to others, to our neighbors, relatives, friends, and everyone around us. God's promise was not only given to Jacob; in principle, it is also given to us. When we are under God's dealing, we participate in the land, the seed, and the blessing. We share in the territory and the expression of God and we become a blessing to others.

God knows our need. In verse 15 He said to Jacob, "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." Here God was promising to give Jacob food and clothing and to bring him back to his father's land in peace. The people in religion know nothing about the land, the seed, and the blessing. Often when they give a testimony, they say something like this: "Praise the Lord that His presence is always with me. Recently, I took a tour of Chicago and God's presence was with me. Throughout all the years He has been giving me food, clothes, and all that I need." I have hardly ever heard a testimony in which someone said, "Praise the Lord! After God dealt with me, my territory has been enlarged. God has truly been transforming me. He is spreading His expression through me. What a blessing has followed this!"

f) His Reaction

(1) Calling the Place the House of God

Now we come to Jacob's reaction. Firstly, after waking out of his sleep, he called that place the house of God (v. 17). Where did Jacob get the concept of the house of God? Abraham did not know of this. As we have pointed out, we do not find this term before Genesis 28. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all lived in tents. Why then did Jacob not say the tent of God but rather the house of God? Surely this is not only a dream but a revelation. Although Jacob did not actually see the house of God, he termed what he saw the house of God, saying, "This is the house of God." Certainly this came from divine revelation.

God has revealed His economy not only in clear words but also in the lives of human beings. Jacob, a man living altogether on the human level, had a dream. In that dream he saw something, and after he awoke he said, "This is the house of God." Undoubtedly, this concept of the house of God came from God Himself.

Jacob also called the place where he met God the gate of heaven (v. 17). Whatever he saw there pointed to heaven. It was a place on earth, but it was joined to heaven. Hence, he called it the gate of heaven. Whenever we have a spiritual vision, we sense that we are at the gate of heaven. We are on earth, but we see and experience the things of heaven.

(3) Making the Pillow-stone a Pillar
and Anointing It

Verse 18 says, "Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had made his pillow, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it" (Heb.). How peculiar it was that Jacob set up the stone for a pillar. If I had been he, I would never have done that with the stone. What is the meaning of this? It certainly corresponds to the whole revelation of the Bible. The most striking thing here is the anointing of the stone with oil. It was sovereign that the oil was there. Where did Jacob get it? Did he, an escapee, bring it with him when he fled from home? I do not know. According to my opinion, pouring oil upon the stone would only have caused a mess. But according to the Bible, this act is very significant. In the Bible, the stone undoubtedly signifies a transformed man, a lump of clay which has been transformed into a stone. In typology, the oil signifies the third Person of God reaching people. When God reaches you, He is the Spirit. Thus, the stone which was set up as a pillar and which had the oil poured upon it, is a symbol that the transformed man is one with the Triune God. Now the Triune God is not only in heaven but also on a transformed man and is one with this transformed man. This man is God's expression on earth. When you look at the stone, you see the oil. When you look at the transformed man standing on the earth, you see the expression of God. How did Jacob know to pour oil on the stone? Before chapter twenty-eight, there is no record of this type of action. Nevertheless, after waking up from his dream, Jacob did this.

(4) Naming the Place "Bethel"

After pouring oil upon the top of the pillar, Jacob "called the name of that place Bethel" (v. 19). Why did Jacob call the name of that place Bethel, the house of God? As he was anointing the pillar, he was under the anointing of the Spirit. That pillar represented himself, the transformed Jacob. I do not believe that at that time Jacob understood what he was doing. He was not as clear as we are today.

In John 1:51 the Lord Jesus said to Nathanael, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." The title the Son of Man indicates that God no longer is merely God but that He has become a man. This reveals that God is no longer just in the heavens but that He has become a man living on the earth. The ladder has been set up on earth because God has become a man. Before He was incarnated, He could not be called the Son of Man. When the Lord Jesus told Nathanael that he would see the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man, Nathanael must have realized immediately that this was the fulfillment of Jacob's dream.

Jacob's dream is a revelation of Christ, for Christ as the ladder is the center, the focus, of this dream. Here with this heavenly ladder we have an open heaven, the transformed man, the anointing upon this man, and the building up of the house of God with this man. The church life today is the complete fulfillment of Jacob's dream because the church life is the gate of heaven, the place where the pillar and ladder are, and the place where the angels ascend to heaven bearing good news and descend to earth bringing something heavenly. Bethel is here in the church life. We are today's Bethel. In Genesis 28, both the place and the stone were called Bethel. The stone was not only called Bethel; it was made Bethel. Why was the place called Bethel? Because the Bethel stone was there. The church life is like this. We all need to see this marvelous dream.

(5) Vowing

When God makes a promise, there is no need for us to make a vow. If I had been Jacob, I would simply have said, "Lord, thank You." But instead of thanking the Lord and praising Him, Jacob vowed that he would take God as his God, make the pillar-stone the house of God, and give God a tenth of all that He would give him on the condition that God would be with him, keep him, give him bread and raiment, and bring him back to his father's house in peace (vv. 20-22). Jacob's vow was conditional. Our being in the church life is also conditional. Although we all are happy in the church life, deep within we have a condition and say, "I will remain in the church life and be a part of the church life as long as God gives me bread." Although we may not say this in words, it is nonetheless deep within us. Suppose you lose your job and are unemployed for many months. Besides this, you become quite ill. Will you still sing about the glorious church life? Not only will there be no church life, but probably there will not even be a pillar. Your love for the Lord and for the church is conditional. When Jacob promised to give the tenth to God, it meant that if God did not give anything to him, then he would not give anything to God. Jacob seemed to be saying, "Let's make a deal. If You want something from me, then You must first give me something. If You don't give anything to me, what can I give to You?"

Did Jacob believe in God? Yes. If he did not believe in Him, he would not have spoken about God's being with him. But since he believed in God, why did he still have such a condition in his vow? Because he was human, just like we are today. On the one hand, we believe in God; on the other hand, we have a term. Hardly anyone loves the Lord unconditionally. I have heard many brothers and sisters say that they consecrate themselves absolutely to the Lord. Whenever I hear such testimonies, I ask, "Are you really absolute with the Lord?" If the Holy Spirit were to write an account of your experience, it would probably be exactly the same as Jacob's. My record, for certain, is just the same as his. But there is no need to worry about our living. God will give us the land, the seed, and the blessing, and, in addition to all this, He will take care of our living, providing food, clothing, and everything we need. If we seek first the kingdom of God, the Father will give us whatever we need for our living. This is the dream of Jacob.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SEVENTY

BEING DEALT WITH

(4)

As we read Jacob's record in the book of Genesis, we need to remember that the whole Bible is the word of life. The Bible contains

teachings, stories, prophecies, and types, most of which apparently are unrelated to life. But since the whole Bible is the word of God as life, we should not consider the stories in the Bible as mere stories. We must look to the Lord that He might show us the life in all the stories. Most Christians have considered the stories in the book of Genesis merely as stories, neglecting the life found in them. When we were young, many of us enjoyed hearing the stories in the Bible. Undoubtedly, the stories in the Bible are the best. May the Lord give us a way to receive the nourishment of life in all the stories in the Bible.

We have pointed out that as far as the experience of life is concerned, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph should not be considered as four separate individuals. In the experience of life, these four persons are one complete unit. In Abraham, we see God's calling, justification by faith, living by faith in God, and living in fellowship with God. But in the experience of God there are not only God's calling, justification, faith, and fellowship; we also have been selected and predestinated. In Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob we see various aspects of the experience of life. Only by putting these three people together with Joseph do we see the completion of the experience of life. We have seen that Jacob needs Joseph to complete him. The New Testament reveals clearly that we have been predestinated to be the sons of God (Eph. 1:5), even the royal sons of God. All God's sons shall be kings. In the book of Revelation we are told that the saints will even be co-kings with Christ to rule over the nations in the kingdom (Rev. 2:26-27; 20:4, 6). We do not see the kingship in either Abraham or Isaac. Even if we look at Jacob himself we cannot see the kingship. It is clearly revealed in Joseph. During the time of the last chapters of Genesis, the whole world was under the reign of Pharaoh. Pharaoh, however, was merely a figurehead. The real ruler on earth at that time was Joseph. Since Joseph represented Jacob, the ruler over the earth was actually Jacob. Jacob ruled through his son Joseph who was the ruling aspect of Jacob's life. Therefore, the experiences of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph constitute one complete experience of life. This experience of God begins with selection and consummates with kingship.

Genesis 1:26 reveals that God's goal in His creation of man was for man to express Him in His image and to represent Him with His dominion. Although we see something of God in Abraham, we do not see in him very much of the image of God. Furthermore, in neither Abraham nor Isaac do we see God's dominion. Even in Jacob himself we can barely see God's dominion. God's dominion is seen in Joseph. In Jacob with Joseph God's image and dominion are clearly revealed. Eventually, Jacob was called Israel, the prince of God. His name includes God's name. In the transformed name of Jacob we have the name of God. Because Jacob had truly been transformed into God's image, in his being there was the expression of God. While Jacob had the expression, Joseph had the dominion. Hence, as one complete unit, they expressed God and represented Him. If we would see this, we must have spiritual enlightenment. We need to pray, saying, "Lord, open our eyes. We don't just want to read the stories in the Bible and get knowledge from them. We want to see the light of life in these stories and be nourished by the life they contain."

In Abraham we cannot see much of God's dealing. Neither do we see God's dealing in Isaac, for God never dealt with him. Isaac simply loved to eat. According to our opinion, none of us would agree with this, saying, "God, why do You deal with me all the time? Why didn't You deal with Isaac? Isaac even sold Your blessing for savory meat." In 27:3 and 4, Isaac said to Esau, "Go out to the field, and take me some venison; and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die." If a brother did this today, we would say, "Brother, you shouldn't do this. This is too fleshly and worldly." But Isaac was not rebuked for doing this. In fact, although Isaac blessed blindly and wrongly, God honored his blessing. This clearly indicates that Isaac does not represent the life which has been dealt with by God. Jacob's life is the life which represents God's dealings. Time after time, God did not let Jacob go. Instead, He kept His hand upon him.

In chapter twenty-nine, Jacob, after coming to Laban's home, was put into the transformation room. As we have seen, Isaac, Rebekah, and Esau worked together to force Jacob to escape from his home. Isaac was simple, easygoing, and not disposed to exercise his discernment. This was his disposition and character. Rebekah, however, was clever, ingenious, and manipulative. Being a strong wife and mother, she manipulated the whole family. Esau, the brother, was not very intelligent, but he was physically strong and seemed to say, "Jacob, I don't know how to exercise my mind as you do, but I do know how to exercise my fist. You may be smart, but one day I will kill you." These three people worked together as a team to chase Jacob away, forcing him to leave his loving mother and his father's home. We know that Jacob suffered on his journey by the fact that he "lifted up his voice and wept" when he saw his cousin Rachel (29:11). Jacob had been very lonesome. All that he had experienced prior to coming to Laban's home was simply to bring him into the room of transformation. In chapter twenty-nine, Jacob was admitted to this room.

5) God's Sovereignty in Leading Jacob to Meet Rachel and Laban

God sovereignly led Jacob to meet Rachel and Laban (29:1-14). After traveling a very long distance, Jacob came to a certain place, supposing it to be the place where his uncle Laban lived. The Bible does not say that Jacob was groping for the right place, moving from one place to another. No, it says that he came to just one place and that he immediately discovered that it was the place where Laban lived. After conversing briefly with some people at the well, Jacob met Rachel, his uncle Laban's daughter. It was sovereign of God that Rachel came and not Leah. We know that this was God's sovereign arrangement because in 28:15 God promised Jacob, saying, "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." God was faithful and kept His word, regulating Jacob's steps and bringing him to Laban's dwelling place. Then God brought Rachel to meet Jacob at the well. In 24:13-32, Rebekah and Laban were met by Isaac's servant. Here Rachel and Laban are met by Jacob himself. In this we see God's sovereignty.

We all are God's chosen ones. If you believe that you are a chosen one of God, then you must believe that whatever happens to you is of God. Whatever happened to us in the past, or is taking place in the present, is of God. Never be discontented with your circumstances. As one of God's chosen ones, your destiny is in God's hand and your destination is under His direction. Your coming into the church life was not an accident. It was brought about by the hand of the God who has chosen you. Not only are we under God's thumb; we are also in His hand. Whenever you are about to deal with something, you will hold it fast in your hand. Do not be afraid of being under God's thumb, for this is a sign that you are in His hand. Simply say, "Praise the Lord! I'm under His thumb and in His hand." As today's Jacobs, we all are in God's hand.

6) Laban's Cheating in Marrying His Two Daughters to Jacob

When Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother and that he was Rebekah's son, she ran and told her father (29:12). In 29:13 and 14, Laban "ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house." Then Laban said to Jacob, "Surely thou art my bone and my flesh" (29:14). Laban was a politician. After Jacob had stayed with him for a month, Laban, thinking that Jacob should be useful to him, said, "Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? Tell me, what shall thy wages be?" (29:15). Laban was wondering how to catch, keep, and utilize Jacob. No one in the book of Genesis is smarter than Laban. Not even Jacob could outsmart him. Although Jacob was smart, God was smarter and seemed to say, "Jacob, you are smart. But I'll prepare one who is even smarter than you are." Laban was not born accidentally; he was born according to God's preparation for the sake of Jacob's transformation. Before surgery is performed in an operating room, many instruments are prepared. In like manner, Laban, who resembled a curved knife, was prepared for Jacob.

Laban seemed to be saying to Jacob, "You shouldn't serve me for nothing. Tell me what you want as a wage." Jacob, who loved Rachel, was honest with Laban and said, "I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter" (29:18). Love makes people blind and foolish. When I read Jacob's story, I said, "Jacob, you were stupid. You shouldn't have said that you would work seven years for Rachel. You should have said that you would work seven months." How could someone as crafty as Jacob have been so foolish? Because he loved Rachel and wanted to secure her at any cost. However, Jacob also was quite clever, realizing that if he had proposed a short term of employment, Laban would not have agreed to the deal. Therefore, because he was afraid of losing Rachel, Jacob offered to work for Laban for seven years that he might have her as his wife. It is not a small thing to work for such a long period of time. If I had been Jacob, I firstly would have offered to work for seven months and then I would have bargained with Laban about the length of time.

Laban was greedy, robbing his nephew for seven years. The Bible does not say that after the seven years were expired, Laban called Jacob and told him that it was time to marry Rachel. No, it was Jacob who said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her" (29:21). Jacob seemed to be saying, "Laban, my seven years have been fulfilled. Where is my wife? I have worked for you, and now you must give me my wage." Laban was very smart. After gathering together all the men of that place and making a feast, he took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob, "and he went in unto her" (29:22-23). The feast was during the day, but the marriage was at night. That night Laban beguiled Jacob, giving him his elder daughter Leah in place of Rachel. When Jacob discovered the next morning that Laban had cheated him, he said, "What is this thou hast done unto me? Did not I serve with thee for Rachel? Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?" (29:25). Jacob did not care for Leah, whose eyes were dull; he loved Rachel who was "beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance" (29:17, Heb.). After Jacob had complained to him, Laban said, "It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfill her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years" (29:26-27). Laban was truly a crooked knife. Nevertheless, Jacob agreed to this arrangement, having been beguiled by Laban to work a total of fourteen years for Rachel, the wife of his preference.

God's sovereign hand was in this situation. Jacob loved Rachel, but God sovereignly kept her away from him. While Jacob did not labor one day for Leah, she was given to him as a free gift, as an addition. In this we see that God will let you have your preference, but you must pay the price for it. Your preference will always cost you a great deal, for besides giving it to you, God will give you an addition. God seemed to be saying, "Jacob, do you love Rachel? I will give her to you, but you must pay the price. After you pay this high price, I shall give you an addition. This addition is according to My will."

Rachel was Jacob's wife according to his choice and preference, but Leah was his wife according to God's concept and will. Proof of this is found in 49:31, where we are told that Jacob buried Leah in the cave of Machpelah, the wonderful cave in which Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah were buried. Notice that Leah, not Rachel, was buried there. God is consistent. In His eyes there is one wife for one husband. God did not recognize Rachel as Jacob's wife, because she was Jacob's preference. Leah was Jacob's real wife. In addition to giving Jacob his preference, God taught him many lessons. In like manner, you, a worker for the Lord, may prefer to have a certain brother as your co-worker. But that co-worker is selected by you according to your preference, not by God according to His will. Our God is great. If you want your preference, God may say, "I shall let you have your preference. But this is a good opportunity for Me to give you some dealings and transformation and to teach you some lessons. Eventually I shall give you as your real co-worker the one whom I have selected and whom you do not like."

God gave Leah to Jacob. Did Jacob love her? Probably not. In 29:31 we are told that "Leah was hated." Firstly, she was hated by Rachel and then she was hated by Jacob who undoubtedly was influenced by Rachel. Some have taught that God never allows us to have our choice. This teaching is inaccurate. God will permit you to have your choice, but along with it, you will have a certain amount of dealing and transformation.

7) The Competition, Envy, and Wrestling between Jacob's Wives in Bearing Children

Jacob's two wives competed in bearing children. This competition put Jacob into the oven, making him like an ant in a hot oven. Four women, Laban's two daughters and their two maids, made life difficult for Jacob. If he had had no preference, he would only have had one wife. Eventually, due to his having a preference, he was given four wives. As we have seen, Rachel, the wife of his choice, was not his real wife; his real wife was Leah, the one he did not like. Because of the rivalry between Rachel and Leah, their two maids, Bilhah and Zilpah, were given to Jacob as wives (30:4, 9). These four women were a team playing against Jacob. As we compare Jacob with Isaac, we see that Isaac was very simple. He had no preference, but accepted whomever and whatever came to him. Thus, the best wife, Rebekah, was given to him. In Isaac's case, there were no complications. But there were many complications in Jacob's case because he had a preference. Nevertheless, Jacob's having his own preference was also under God's sovereignty. Do not despise yourself, saying, "I just hate myself. Why wasn't I born simple?" Rather, you should praise God for your not being simple, saying, "O Lord, thank You for not creating me as a simple person. Praise You, Lord, that I am so complicated." Have you ever thanked and praised God in this way? Do not say, "Oh I'm sorry for the mistakes I made in the past." Even your mistakes are under God's sovereignty. If many of us had never made any mistakes, we would probably not be in the church life today. Praise the Lord that our mistakes have brought us into the church life. Praise God for His sovereignty!

I laugh whenever I read of Laban's beguiling Jacob. In all of human history, there probably has not been another time when a father-in-law has played such a trick on his son-in-law. Only in the Bible do we read of such a thing. During the night, Jacob was dreaming

of having his choice, but when the day dawned, he saw that he had been given the one he did not like. Here we see God's sovereignty. Then, in addition to Leah and Rachel, two other wives were given to Jacob. Jacob surely did not intend to have four wives. As all the married brothers can testify, one wife is enough. But Jacob no longer had a choice. Four wives were given to him, and there was nothing he could do about it. He was surrounded by them and was no longer free to do what he wanted.

One day, Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, found some mandrakes in the field and gave them to his mother Leah (30:14). According to Song of Songs 7:13, mandrakes are a type of love fruit. When Rachel wanted the mandrakes, Leah said, "Is it a small matter that thou hast taken my husband? And wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes also?" (30:15). To this Rachel said that Leah might have Jacob that night in exchange for Reuben's mandrakes. When Jacob came from the field that evening, Leah met him and said, "Thou must come in unto me; for surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes" (30:16). Jacob had lost his freedom. He was like a volleyball being passed from one person to another. Jacob was in such a predicament because his wives were competing with each other in childbearing.

As we read Jacob's story, we must worship God for His being so sovereign, fair, and purposeful. Jacob loved Rachel, not Leah. But the hated Leah bore him four sons (29:31-35), and the loved Rachel was barren (30:1-2). Genesis 29:31 says, "When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren." Although Leah was hated, she found favor in God's eyes. When Leah gave birth to her firstborn, Reuben, whose name means "See a son," she said, "Surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction" (29:32). Leah's second son was named Simeon, whose name means "Hearing." After giving birth to Simeon, she said, "Because the Lord hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also" (29:33). Leah's third son was named Levi, whose name means "Joined." When Levi was born, Leah exclaimed, "Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons" (29:34). In 29:35 we are told that Leah "conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, "Now will I praise the Lord: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing." The name Judah means "Praise." After bearing these four sons, Leah could do nothing except praise the Lord.

When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she envied her sister and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die" (30:1). When Jacob heard this, he was angry and said, "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" (30:2). Do you think that Jacob had much enjoyment in this situation? No, he was constantly troubled. Rachel then gave Jacob Bilhah her handmaid as his wife (30:3-4). God was sovereign in this matter also. Bilhah gave birth to two sons: Dan, whose name means "Judging," and Naphtali, whose name means "My wrestling" (30:5-8). At the birth of Dan, Rachel declared, "God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son" (30:6). Whether God had vindicated Rachel or not is known only to Him. But according to Rachel's understanding, God had vindicated her. When Bilhah gave birth to Naphtali, Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed" (30:8, Heb.). In Hebrew, the word mighty in this verse (great in KJV) is the word for God. Hence, this phrase may be rendered as "wrestlings of God." This does not mean that Rachel fought with Leah; it means that she went to God many times, saying, "O God, You must judge and vindicate. You have given four sons to my sister Leah, but You have not given any to me." She wrestled in this manner with the "wrestlings of God." In other words, she had wrestled in the presence of God, and, after the birth of Naphtali, she thought that she had prevailed and won the case. However, Dan and Naphtali were not brought forth by her, but by her maid.

When Leah saw that Rachel's maid had given birth to two sons, she seemed to say, "If Rachel can give her maid to Jacob, then why can't I do the same? Let me do it, too!" Leah then gave her maid Zilpah to Jacob as a wife and she bore him two sons—Gad and Asher (30:9-13). Gad means "Fortunate," and Asher means "Happy." When Gad was born, Leah said, "Fortunate!" (30:11, Heb.), and when Asher was born, she said, "Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed" (30:13). In a good sense, Leah was fortunate because she had borne Jacob four sons herself and two more through her maid. She thought that she was happy and that all women would bless her. In Hebrew, the words happy and blessed are of the same root. Thus, a happy person is a blessed person and a blessed person is a happy person. This was Leah's concept. God gave Leah two more sons: Issachar and Zebulun (30:17-20). The name Issachar means "Hire." When he was born, Leah said, "God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband" (30:18). Deep within, Leah must have thought that Issachar was born because she had hired Jacob by giving Reuben's mandrakes to Rachel. This is a further indication of the competition between these women. When Zebulun was born, Leah said, "God hath endowed me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons" (30:20). Leah seemed to be saying, "I don't want Jacob to leave me. I want him to stay with me." In this record we clearly see the competition between Jacob's wives.

At this point, Rachel still had not borne any children of her own. Let us consider the chronology. Jacob went to Laban's home approximately in the year 1760 B.C. and he was married in approximately 1753 B.C. Eight years later, Joseph was born. Under God's sovereign hand, Rachel was barren, not bearing any children until eight years had passed. Then God gave her a son whom she called Joseph, saying, "The Lord shall add to me another son" (30:24). The meaning of the name Joseph—"Adding"—indicates that Rachel wanted God to add another son to her. Her desire was fulfilled six years later with the birth of Benjamin (35:16-20). Delivering Benjamin was a very difficult ordeal for her, costing Rachel her life. Giving birth to Benjamin as she was dying, Rachel "called his name Benoni: but his father called his name Benjamin" (35:18). Benoni means "Son of my sorrow." How meaningful it is that Jacob changed the child's name to Benjamin, which means "The son of the right hand." In the Bible, Benjamin is a type of Christ. Firstly, Christ was Benoni, the Son of sorrow (Isa. 53:3), but eventually He became Benjamin, the Son at the right hand of God (Matt. 26:64).

Rachel gave birth to two sons, but in delivering the second she lost her life. This means that Jacob gained his last son at the cost of his beloved wife. These experiences were like knives which cut Jacob to pieces. Jacob loved Rachel, but she was barren. After giving birth to Joseph, she expected to have a second son. This desire was fulfilled at the cost of her life. Jacob loved Joseph and Benjamin. Among all his twelve sons, they were his two favorites. Although Jacob gained these two sons, God never allowed him to have Rachel, his dear wife, and these two favorite sons at the same time. In the following chapters we shall see how much Jacob suffered over Joseph and Benjamin. In all this, Jacob was constantly under the working of God's sovereign, transforming hand.

How meaningful it is to read these chapters and how helpful it is to see the life they contain. Although these chapters seem quite long, they contain much nourishment for us. The more we consider Jacob's record, the more we realize that our record is exactly the same as his. In God's eyes, Jacob's story is the story of us all. We are today's Jacobs under God's hand, for God is now accomplishing His transforming work in us. Thank Him for His hand and thank Him for His transforming work. Regardless of our situation, environment, and circumstances, we are always under His transforming hand.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-ONE

BEING DEALT WITH

(5)

Jacob's record in Genesis 30 and 31 is very interesting. Based upon the two principles that the Bible contains no wasted words and that everything in the Bible is the word of life, we must look to the Lord that we might see the life in this record. I have spent a considerable amount of time in this section of the Word. Many years ago, I took this record merely as a story. But after realizing that whatever is found in the Bible is the word of life, I began to seek the life in this portion of the Word. After I was enlightened, I realized that this record is full of life.

All the main items in 30:25-43 and 31:1-16, 38-42 can be classified under three headings: Laban's squeeze, Jacob's trick, and God's blessing. The three main parties in this record are Laban, Jacob, and God. Two of these parties are visible and one is invisible. Laban, the first party, squeezed Jacob, and Jacob, the second party, tricked Laban. Neither of these two parties, however, could make the final decision. This was made by the third party, the invisible party, God Himself. However much Laban squeezed Jacob, Laban was bound to lose, and whatever tricks Jacob might have played on Laban, it was not Jacob's tricks that made him rich. The last word was not spoken by Laban or Jacob; it was spoken by God, the Lord of all. If we would see the life in this section of the Word and receive the supply of life it contains, we must pay attention to these three parties. If we see them, we shall appreciate this section of the Word.

As we have pointed out, Abraham represents a life justified by God and living in fellowship with God, and Isaac represents the life which enjoys God's grace. In Jacob we see the third aspect of the spiritual life—transformation. Jacob, a man under God's transforming hand, represents the life of transformation. Laban's squeezing of Jacob was sovereign of God. Jacob needed Laban's squeezing hand, and God used it for Jacob's transformation.

As you read the record of Jacob's life, do not read it for others. Read it for yourself, for you are the unique Jacob. Even the sisters are Jacobs. While many sisters have Laban husbands, they, the tricky wives, are Jacobs. Since they are so tricky, God has given them husbands like Laban to squeeze them. However, we may also say that many Jacob husbands have married Laban wives. Nearly every husband is tricky. Although a certain married brother may appear to be a gentleman, he is actually a tricky Jacob. Every husband plays tricks on his wife. But however tricky we may be, God is sovereign. Jacob's record is our biography and autobiography. The record in the Bible is our biography, and the record in our daily living is our autobiography. We are writing our autobiography day by day. In dealing with others, we are tricky; in suffering others' dealings, we are squeezed.

Jacob had been chosen to be the expression of God. How could such a supplanter become God's expression? Not by outward correction, but only through the process of transformation. How can transformation be accomplished? Only by our being placed, by God's sovereign arrangement, into a certain environment and under the hand of certain people. He is sovereign in His arrangement of our environment. To the brothers and sisters who are soon to be married I would say this word: Brothers, do not think that you are about to marry a good sister. No, you will marry a squeezing Laban. Sisters, be prepared. You will not marry a spiritual giant but a tricky Jacob. God is sovereign in this matter.

Although God has chosen us, we are supplacers, heelholders, and must be transformed, whether we like it or not. I have heard many among us saying, "Lord Jesus, I love You." Do you know what it means to say this to the Lord? It means that you agree with His dealing. When you say, "Lord Jesus, I love You," you are actually saying, "Lord Jesus, I'm one with You and I'm ready for You to deal with me." Probably you have not realized what is involved in saying, "Lord Jesus, I love You." Suppose a young lady tells a young man that she loves him. This word involves a great deal and should not be spoken lightly. By speaking this simple word, she sells herself to him. Likewise, when we say, "O Lord Jesus, I love You," we are caught by Him and we become involved in the process of transformation. As many of us can testify, we had no problems before we began to love the Lord. But since we began to say, "Lord Jesus, I love You," we have had one problem after another. These problems, however, do not kill us. Sometimes we may be plagued with so many problems that we want to die. But at such a time the Lord will say, "You may want to die, but I will not let you die. I will keep you alive that you might be transformed. I did not predestinate you to die. I predestinated you to be conformed to the image of the Firstborn Son of God." If we approach this portion of the Word in this light, we shall see how living it is.

8) Laban's Squeeze

Let us now consider Laban's squeeze (30:25-43; 31:1-16, 38-42). In chapter twenty-nine Laban received Jacob for hospitality (29:14). After a while, Laban might have discovered that Jacob was quite smart and that he could be very profitable to him. Appearing to be kind, Laban said to Jacob, "Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?" (29:15). Laban seemed to be saying, "Jacob, it is not fair for you to stay with me without being paid. Tell me what you want." Laban might have perceived that Jacob had fallen in love with his daughter Rachel, and he might have said within himself, "Jacob, I will not let you have my daughter cheaply. You love her, and I will give her to you, but you must pay the price." Laban was wise and did not say this to Jacob, but he knew Jacob's heart. When Laban asked him about wages, Jacob said, "I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter" (29:18). As we have pointed out, love blinds people and makes them foolish. Because his love for Rachel had made him foolish, Jacob pledged himself to work for seven years to get her. If I had been Jacob, I would not have worked longer than twelve months. Laban was satisfied with Jacob's offer. When these seven years were expired, however, Laban did nothing concerning Jacob's marriage to Rachel. This shows that he had no heart. Thus, Jacob was forced to say, "Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her" (29:21). But Laban gave Jacob Leah instead of Rachel. When Jacob realized this, Laban justified himself by saying that it was not the custom in their country to give the younger daughter before the firstborn (29:26). Regarding Rachel, Laban said, "Fulfill her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years" (29:27). Here we see Laban's squeeze. If you recall your past, you will see that you also have been squeezed, perhaps by your husband or wife.

Laban was crafty and cunning, and Jacob could not defeat him. Twice Jacob said that Laban had changed his wages ten times (31:7,

41). Jacob complained to Laban, saying, "Thus have I been twenty years in thy house: I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle; and thou hast changed my wages ten times" (31:41). Furthermore, Jacob said to him, "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" (31:42). Jacob seemed to be saying, "Laban, not only have I worked fourteen years for your daughters and six years for your cattle, but you were not even willing to let me have my wives, children, and flocks. You have tried to detain them all." What sufferings Jacob passed through under Laban's squeezing hand!

Laban squeezed Jacob in many ways. He trapped Jacob to labor for him fourteen years for his two daughters and then he charged him to labor six years for his flock (31:41). As we have seen, he changed Jacob's wages ten times, probably reducing them every time he changed them. The more Laban demanded of Jacob, the less he paid him. Laban also required Jacob to bear the loss of any cattle which had been torn by beasts or stolen (31:39). How unfair this was! But Laban thought that it was absolutely fair and seemed to say, "Be careful about my cattle. You must replace any that are torn by beasts or any that are stolen." Could you tolerate working under such a squeezing hand? Jacob, however, was patient and endured Laban's squeeze for twenty years. At times, Laban might have threatened Jacob, saying, "If you do not want to work for me according to my demand, then you may leave. I shall keep my daughters, my grandchildren, and my flocks." Jacob was frightened at the prospect of this. Although he had been greatly enlarged, Jacob was still fearful of Laban. When he did escape, he was afraid to tell Laban that he was leaving, fearing that Laban would rob him of his wives, children, and flocks. Laban was a native and Jacob was a stranger. It is always easy for a native to deal with a stranger. Laban must have threatened Jacob with the loss of everything. Nevertheless, Jacob endured it. Besides all this, Laban caused Jacob to be consumed by heat in the day and by frost in the night (31:40). Because Laban treated him in this way, Jacob could say, "My sleep departed from mine eyes" (31:40). As Jacob was shepherding Laban's flock, he was in the open air and had no place to sleep. There was no shade from the heat during the day and no protection from the frost at night. In that region the temperature is hot during the day and cold at night. As Jacob suffered the heat and the cold, his sleep fled away because he was under the pressure of Laban. Finally, as we have already pointed out, Laban tried to detain Jacob's wives, children, and flocks (30:26; 31:14-15, 42). While none of us would be willing to work for someone like Laban, Jacob worked for Laban for twenty years. During this time, he was under Laban's squeezing hand.

If we read the record in this light, we shall say, "Lord, how I worship You. Since the day I began to love You, things have happened to me in the same way and according to the same principle." Look back upon your years in the church life and recall the times you have been squeezed. Just as the natural Jacob needed a squeezing Laban, so our natural disposition also needs the squeezing. Laban's squeezing hand was no accident; it had been prearranged by the sovereign God. Isaac, Rebekah, and Esau were used by God to put Jacob into the transformation oven, and Laban was the fire burning in this oven. All these people were used by God for Jacob's transformation. Do not complain about your situation. Sometimes, as I was complaining, I suddenly saw the light, and God seemed to say, "Why do you complain? Don't you know that this is My arrangement? Your wife, your children, and all your brothers in the church have been prearranged by Me. It is foolish for you to complain." Your wife, husband, and children are exactly what your disposition needs. We may be mistaken, but God can never make a mistake. Everything is of the Lord's hand, and there is no need to complain. Instead of complaining, we should simply say, "Thank You, Lord, for such a good Laban."

9) Jacob's Trick

Although Jacob was squeezed and threatened by Laban, he could still play tricks on him (30:31-43). One day Jacob told Laban that he wanted to go back to his own country and that Laban should give him his wives and his children for whom he had served so many years (30:25-26). Laban answered, "I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake" (30:27). Laban seemed to be nice, but he was crafty. Crafty people are always nice. Whoever is nice to you is crafty, but whoever is bold with you is honest. Laban was very crafty with Jacob, saying that he had learned that by having Jacob stay with him, he had received the Lord's blessing. When Laban said to Jacob, "Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it," Jacob answered, "Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me. For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude; and the Lord hath blessed thee since my coming: and now, when shall I provide for mine own house also?" (30:28-30). Jacob seemed to be saying, "I have worked here for many years, but still I cannot provide for my own household. When shall I be able to provide for my own family?" Laban, realizing that if Jacob would leave, God's blessing would depart with him, seemed to say, "Stay with me. I don't care how much I pay you. Simply tell me what you want. As long as we are under God's blessing, everything will be all right."

Now we see that Jacob, who had suffered Laban's squeeze, had a way to steal Laban's wealth and make himself rich. When Laban asked him what he should give him as wages, Jacob said, "Thou shalt not give me any thing: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep thy flock: I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the black cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire. So shall my righteousness answer for me in time to come, when it shall come for my hire before thy face: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and black among the sheep, that shall be counted stolen with me" (30:31-33, Heb.). Jacob seemed to be saying, "Uncle Laban, promise me one thing and I will stay. Take from your flock all the speckled, spotted, and black cattle and leave all the white ones with me. From now on, the cattle which are spotted, speckled, and black will be mine." Laban thought that this was an excellent suggestion, for he knew that the white cattle could only produce white cattle and that they could not produce any that were speckled, spotted, or black. Hence, Laban removed from his flock all the cattle which were not purely white and gave them into the hand of his sons (30:34-35). The flock left to Jacob was purely white. Probably thinking that, once again, Jacob had fallen into his trap, Laban "set three days' journey betwixt himself and Jacob: and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks" (30:36). As we shall see, this gave Jacob the opportunity to play his trick on Laban.

In playing his trick, Jacob took rods of poplar, hazel, and chestnut trees and "peeled white stripes in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods" (30:37). Jacob then set these striped rods before the flocks in the watering troughs, "that they should conceive when they came to drink" (30:38). In 30:39 we are told that "the flocks conceived before the rods, and brought forth cattle striped, speckled, and spotted." Jacob then separated his cattle from Laban's cattle. Furthermore, when the stronger cattle conceived, "Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the cattle in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods. But when the cattle were feeble, he put them not in: so the feebler were Laban's and the stronger Jacob's" (30:41-42). Thus, the speckled, spotted, and striped cattle were stronger, and the white cattle were feebler. I do not believe that Jacob's scheme actually worked; it was merely an

invention of Jacob's clever mind. But whether or not the trick worked, the results appeared, and Jacob thought that his plan had been successful.

When Jacob saw that the countenance of Laban was not toward him as before, the Lord said unto him, "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee" (31:2-3). Then, according to 31:4-5, "Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock," and told them that their father's countenance had changed toward him. After this, he related a dream he had had during the time the cattle were conceiving. In this dream he saw that "the rams which leaped upon the cattle were striped, speckled, and spotted," and he heard the Angel of God saying, "Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are striped, speckled, and spotted: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee" (31:10-12). When I read the account of this dream in the past, I doubted the truth of it. I thought that Jacob was lying because he did not want to divulge his trick to his wives. Eventually, I discovered that the dream was not a lie, for in relating it, Jacob said that the Angel of the Lord had spoken to him, saying, "I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me" (31:13). Since this word cannot be false, the dream must have been true. While Jacob was playing his trick on Laban with the striped branches, God spoke to him in a dream, telling him to see that all the rams which leaped upon the cattle were striped, speckled, and spotted. In this way God indicated to Jacob that he did not acquire these cattle by his trick but by God's sovereignty. The principle here is the same as that in Jacob's gaining the birthright. While Jacob did his best to obtain it, it was actually given to him. Apparently, Jacob secured the birthright by his trick; actually, it was given to him by God's sovereignty. Likewise, apparently Jacob gained the riches of the flock by his trick; actually, these riches came by God's sovereignty.

There is a difficult problem in this section of the Word. In chapter thirty we are told that only white cattle were conceiving before the rods, but in the dream speckled, and spotted striped rams, not white rams, were leaping on others. How can we reconcile this? There are two ways. The first way is to claim that the dream was a lie. I cannot accept this. The second way is to say that this is a matter of God's sovereignty. According to this way, God changed the white cattle into speckled, spotted, and striped cattle in a way similar to His changing Balaam's curses into blessings (Num. 23:11-12; 24:10). However, regardless of the way we explain this occurrence, I do not believe that the speckled, spotted, and striped cattle were conceived through Jacob's trick but through God's sovereignty. Jacob's dream in chapter thirty-one reveals that it was God's sovereignty that actually produced these results. Compare this once again with the case of Jacob's securing the birthright. If God had not been sovereign in that situation and had not given Jacob the birthright, Jacob never could have obtained it through trickery. The principle is the same here. Jacob did not become rich through his trickery but through God's sovereignty.

Jacob had been chosen by God and he was under God's blessing. There was no need for him to play tricks in order to become rich. Since Jacob was under God's blessing, God granted him His blessing. Apparently, Jacob gained these riches through the success of his trickery; actually, they were given to him by God's sovereign, blessing hand. In principle, it is the same with us today. We also are God's chosen ones and are under His blessing. There is no need for us to strive or to play tricks in order to get God's blessing. God will grant us the blessing we need. Nevertheless, after being saved, we all have struggled and played tricks to get the blessing. In many cases it seemed that the blessing did come through our struggling and trickery. Actually, the blessing came through God's sovereignty. It is the same with everything related to us. We should not think that any blessing has come through our successful endeavors. Rather, we must realize that every blessing, whether spiritual or material, has come through God's sovereignty.

10) God's Blessing

Now we must consider God's blessing. God blessed Laban because of Jacob (30:27, 30). Through His blessing, God preserved Jacob from Laban's squeeze (31:7-12, 16, 42). We must bow down, worship God, and learn the lesson not to care for how much we are squeezed by others. As God's chosen people, we are under His blessing. Although others may squeeze us, we do not need to play tricks on them. The more tricks we play, the more squeezing we shall suffer. But whether or not we play tricks, the blessing will be ours because we are destined for it.

Jacob began to play tricks in his mother's womb and he did not stop until he was transformed. Only when we come to the last few chapters of Genesis do we see that Jacob had ceased playing tricks. After Jacob had been transformed into a prince of God, he no longer played any tricks. In like manner, only after we have been fully dealt with and transformed will we stop playing tricks.

As we have pointed out, in this record there are three main parties: the squeezing party, the trick-playing party, and the blessing party. God might have told Laban, "Laban, I shall use your squeeze as a means to transform Jacob, My chosen one. You cannot rob him of My blessing. The more you squeeze him, the more I shall bless him." Moreover, God might have said to Jacob, "Jacob, you did not become rich because of your tricks, but because of My sovereign blessing. You put the white cattle in front of the striped branches, but the dream indicates that the results did not come because of your tricks. In My eyes, the white cattle were actually speckled, spotted, and striped cattle. My sovereign blessing, not your tricks, has made you rich. We all must learn not to fear any environment or squeezing and not to play tricks. Although you may continue to play tricks on others, one day your trick-playing nature will be dealt with."

Although Jacob was tricky, God still blessed him. In the dream, God did not rebuke him; rather, He comforted him, saying, "I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee" (31:12). God saw Jacob's suffering and affliction under Laban's hand and seemed to say, "I am the God of Bethel, the God of your father. I shall take care of you." As we read this record, we see that God did not care for what Jacob did; He only cared for His purpose. All that God did was for Jacob's building up and transformation.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-TWO

BEING DEALT WITH

(6)

11) *The Stone with Oil Poured upon It
and the House of God*

Jacob's dream is the most crucial point in the whole book of Genesis (28:10-22). Not even 1:26 is as crucial as Jacob's dream in chapter twenty-eight. One of the most striking aspects of this dream is the stone. After traveling on a long journey, Jacob, being tired and lonesome, took a stone, made it his pillow, and slept in the open air. This might have been the first time in history that a man used a stone for a pillow. Have you ever laid your head upon a stone for rest? I have never done this. Firstly, Jacob made that stone a pillow; secondly, he set it up for a pillar (28:18). A pillow is for resting and a pillar is for building. Do you realize that one day your pillow will become a pillar? Later we shall see what this pillow is. In 28:22 Jacob said, "This stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house." In addition to the stone, the pillar, and the house, there was the oil poured upon the top of the stone (28:18). How could Jacob, a lonesome wanderer, have had oil with him? I do not know. Nevertheless, early in the morning, he poured oil upon the stone. Hence, in this dream there are four basic elements: the stone, the pillar, the house, and the oil. These four items are the basic factors with which the Bible is composed.

As we have mentioned several times, God's intention is to make man His corporate expression. In the book of Genesis we cannot see that God obtained such an expression. In 1:26, a declaration of God's purpose in making man, we are told that man was made in the image of God. But here we do not see that God gained His expression. God did not have His expression with Adam, Abel, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, or Isaac. As we come to Jacob, we see that he was a supplanter, a heel-holder, a very crafty young man. Under the light of the whole Bible, we know that this young supplanter was chosen by God and was predestinated to have the birthright. Before the foundation of the world, in eternity past, God predestinated him to have the birthright. As we have pointed out, the birthright includes three things: expressing God as priests, representing Him as kings, and inheriting God's inheritance as heirs. This birthright is absolutely for the corporate expression of God on earth. The events in Genesis 28 occurred approximately twenty-two centuries after the creation of man. God called Abraham approximately two thousand years after the creation of Adam, and the period of time from Abraham until Jacob was about two hundred years. During this long period of time, God did not obtain what He desired.

While Jacob, the young supplanter who had gotten into trouble due to his supplanting, was on his lonesome journey, he had a dream. What Jacob saw was a dream; it was not yet a fact, because Jacob was still a supplanter. Deep within, he was probably still holding on to Esau's heel. How could such a supplanter be the house of God? It was impossible. Hence, at that time, Jacob's dream was only a dream. For example, although it is impossible for us to land on the moon right now, we may dream that we have landed on the moon. This may be a dream, but it is not a fact. We need to have dreams in our spiritual life. I have had a number of dreams in the past and I would like to have another one today. If you have had no dreams since you were saved, your situation must be most pitiful. How many dreams have you had since you were saved? Every spiritual vision is a dream.

What is the significance of a dream? The principle of a dream is that in it something impossible happens to you. Our being saved was a dream, the initial dream in our spiritual life. Although getting saved was an impossibility, we have been saved. Coming into the church life was also a spiritual dream. Everyone who has come into the church life has had a dream in which something impossible took place. I like these heavenly dreams.

As we have seen in Jacob's heavenly dream four things were revealed: the stone, the pillar, the house, and the oil. These four things are rarely found before Genesis 28. For instance, apart from the onyx stone in 2:12 no stone is mentioned in the foregoing twenty-seven and a half chapters. However, we do find mention of the bricks used for building the devilish city and demonic tower of Babel (11:3). When we were studying chapter eleven, we pointed out that bricks signify human work, the issue of human effort with clay. Every religion is represented by bricks, for every religion is a human effort with clay. Mankind is clay, and religion works upon mankind to produce bricks. No pillar is mentioned before Genesis twenty-eight. When the Bible speaks of the city and tower of Babel, no pillars are mentioned. Do not think that the Bible is common. It is not common; rather, it is unique. In the temple constructed by Solomon there were two great pillars (1 Kings 7:21). In Galatians 2:9 we are told that Peter, James, and John were pillars of the church. Moreover, in Revelation 3:12 we see that the overcomers will be built as pillars into the temple of God. Like the pillar, neither the house nor the oil is mentioned prior to chapter twenty-eight. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all lived in tents. But after having his dream at Bethel, Jacob did not speak of a tent; he spoke of God's house.

As we have pointed out elsewhere, in the Bible a stone is mainly for God's building. When Peter first came to the Lord, the Lord changed his name from Simon to Cephas (John 1:42), saying, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which translated means a stone)." Approximately three years later, the Lord questioned His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" (Matt. 16:13). After Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," the Lord Jesus said to him, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church" (Matt. 16, 18). In saying this, the Lord reminded Peter of what He had done three years ago in changing his name from Simon to Cephas. Later, in writing his first Epistle, Peter said, "You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2:5). In this one verse Peter mentions both the stone and the house. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul held a similar concept, telling the believers at Corinth that they were God's building (1 Cor. 3:9). In 1 Corinthians 3:10 Paul tells us to take heed how we build. We must be careful of how and with what we build, for our work will be tested by fire. If we build with gold, silver, and precious stones, our work will remain. So we see, that in 1 Corinthians 3 Paul also speaks of stone for God's building. As we come to the book of Revelation, the ultimate end of the Bible, we see a city built up with precious stones. According to the principle of the Bible, a city is always the enlargement of a house. When a house is immensely enlarged, it becomes a city. There will be no temple in the New Jerusalem because the temple will have been enlarged into a city. That city will be an enlarged house built with precious stones. How consistent is the Bible! By all these portions of the Word, we see that stone is the material for the building of God's house.

What is God's house? God's house is simply God's satisfaction, rest, and expression. The kind of house you live in expresses the kind of person you are. If you are a dirty person, you will have a dirty house, and if you are a clean person, you will have a clean house. Ten years ago I was taken to the so-called hippie section of San Francisco. I could not believe that people could live in such a filthy environment. Although I did not see any hippies at that time, I could tell by the condition of their lodgings that they were dirty, sloppy people. Our house is our expression. If you visit a house in which a Japanese family lives, you will know, simply by walking through it, that it is inhabited by Japanese. The same is true of the lodging of a Scot. In like manner, God's house is His expression. Eventually, His house will be enlarged into a city, and that city will have the same appearance as God. According to Revelation 4:2 and 3, God has the appearance of jasper, and according to Revelation 21:11, the whole city of New Jerusalem will also have the

appearance of jasper. This means that the city will have God's appearance and be His expression. We may even say that this city will be God's enlargement.

Although the stone and the house are most crucial, there is still the need of the oil. In typology, oil signifies God reaching man. God is triune. The Father is the source, the Son is the course, and the Spirit is the flow reaching us. Jacob's pouring oil upon the stone signifies the Triune God flowing to reach man. God is in heaven, but He has been poured out upon man. When the Triune God reaches man, He makes man the house of God. Before the oil was poured upon the stone, the stone was merely a stone. But after the oil had been poured upon it, the stone became the house of God.

a) A Homeless, Restless Situation

In Genesis 28, Jacob was in a homeless and restless situation (v. 10). When man is homeless, God also is homeless (Isa. 66:1). Thus, in Genesis 28, both Jacob and God were homeless. In like manner, when man is thirsty, God also is thirsty, and when man is unsatisfied, God also is unsatisfied. When the Lord Jesus came to the well of Sychar (John 4), He was thirsty, and a thirsty woman came to Him. Both the Samaritan woman and the Lord Jesus were thirsty. When man is homeless and restless, God is also homeless and restless. Genesis 28 is a picture showing that both God and man were homeless. What is man's real home? For eternity, man's home will be God. If you do not have God, you do not have a home. No unsaved person can ever feel at home, for man's real home is God. What is God's home? Man. Man's home is God, and God's home is man. Whenever man is separated from God, both God and man are homeless. For example, a divorce always affects both the husband and the wife. We cannot say that the wife is divorced and that the husband is not. Thus, when man is homeless, God is made homeless, but when we are at home, God also has a home. When we have God as our home, we become God's home. That night in Genesis 28, Jacob was separated from God, and both he and God were homeless. Since Jacob was homeless, he was also restless. A homeless person is a restless person. Home is sweet because it is restful. Many times after I have completed a long journey, upon returning home, I have said, "Praise the Lord, I'm home!" This means that I can rest. But that night Jacob and God were homeless and without rest.

b) The Stone

We have seen that Jacob took a stone and made it his pillow. For years I could not understand the significance of this. Although we cannot understand it according to the outward word, we can understand it according to our inward experience. Before we were saved, we had no rest. We always felt that we were either in the air or in the bottom of the sea. We had nothing solid to hold, support, or sustain us. Although you might have been a millionaire, your money could not support you. Rather, it deprived you of peace and rest. Whether we were old or young, male or female, before we were saved, we had no solid support. But one day we were saved and something happened deep within us. What we experienced deep within produced something which became our solid support. After being saved we might have had troubles. Nevertheless, deep within, we had the assurance that there was a solid rock upon which we could rest. This solid rock is the very nature, the very element of Christ, which has been wrought into our being.

As men, we were made from the dust of the ground (2:7). Romans 9 indicates that we are vessels of clay, not of stone. If I had been Jacob, I would have made a pile of clay and rested upon it. In God's eyes, however, clay can never be our rest. Our human life, our natural human life and being, cannot be our rest. It does not matter how well educated we are nor what position we have. As long as we do not have the divine nature within us, we are merely clay. This clay cannot be our solid support. None of us found rest until we were saved. On that day, something divine, something of Christ, was wrought into us and became the solid support within us. This is our rest, our pillow. Our pillow is the divine element, the very Christ, which has been wrought into our being. As we were taking our human journey, we suddenly had a dream in which Christ Himself was wrought into us. Christ's nature is the rock which has been wrought into our nature of clay. Hence, we have a rock upon which we can lay our head.

Often unbelievers have said of Christians, "I have noticed that in times of trouble you have peace within. Why don't I have it?" The reason unbelievers do not have peace is because they do not have the divine element in them. They only have the clay of the fallen human element. If you would know how poor clay is, pour water on it. After a short time, it will become muddy. But the more you pour water upon a stone, the cleaner and brighter it becomes. Let the troubles come. They are water that washes. Every trouble which a Christian undergoes is like cleansing water. I thank God that I have been cleansed by troubles many times. Be prepared to be cleansed. Since the day we were saved, we have had a stone upon which we can lay our head. Now, however deep and dark is the night, we can rest our head upon this stone. I doubt that there is another Christian writing which says that the stone in Genesis 28 signifies the very divine element which has been wrought into our being to become the pillow for our human life. Non-believers do not have this pillow. Their pillow is the poor clay of human nature. But our pillow is a stone, the divine element, Christ Himself, which has been wrought into us. The more difficulties we have, the more we need this pillow. Seemingly, a stone is not restful. But according to our experience, it affords us a solid rest. This stone is not the objective Christ, the Christ far away from us; it is the Christ who has been wrought into our being, the subjective Christ on whom we may lay our head. This is the Christ who becomes our experience, the One whose divine element has been wrought into us. This Christ is the pillow of our human life. Praise the Lord for this pillow!

After having the dream, Jacob set up the stone for a pillar (28:18). The stone upon which we lay our head must become building material. Before coming into the church life, we could not understand this. But now, having come into the church, we realize that the very stone upon which we lay our head for rest must become a pillar, that is, the stone must become the material for God's building. Praise the Lord that we have been saved and are at rest. But what about God's rest? He cannot have rest until the stone upon which we rest our head has been set up to be a pillar for His building. God will not set up this pillar—we must do it. Our pillow must be set up to be a pillar. In other words, our experience of Christ must become a pillar.

I do not believe that, apart from us, any Christians know that their experience of Christ must be set up as a pillar. Before we came into the church life, we did not set up a pillar. But after coming into the church life, day by day we are setting up our experience of Christ to be a pillar. It is no longer just a pillow but a pillar. It is not only a matter of our rest; it is a matter of God's building for His rest. Is the very Christ whom you have experienced merely your rest, or is He the building material for God's house? The answer can be proved by our experience. Firstly, we laid our heads upon Christ and found rest. Eventually, we turned our experience of Christ into a pillar, into the material for God's building. Whatever we have experienced of Christ must become the material for the building of

God's house. In other words, what has been our pillow must become a pillar. What do you have today—a pillow or a pillar?

There is no building among most Christians because, at best, they have only a pillow, not a pillar. Before we came into the church life, we also had only a pillow for our rest. But a short while after coming into the church, we set up our experience of Christ as a pillar, turning it into worthy material for God's house. Forty-five years ago, my pillow stood up to become a pillar. It was no longer merely a pillow under my head; it was a pillar for the building of God's house. While a pillow is good for our rest, God needs a house in which to rest. How can this house be built? Only by our pillow becoming a pillar. Firstly we have the stone, then we have the building.

c) The Oil Poured upon the Stone

Jacob not only set up the stone as a pillar; he also poured oil upon it (28:18). Many Christians talk about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There is no need to talk very much about it. As long as you set up your pillow to become a pillar, the oil will be poured upon it. What an experience of oil we have had since we came into the church life and our pillow stood up to become a pillar! What an experience of the Holy Spirit! I can testify that when I say, "Pillow, stand up," I experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. I have experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit many times. When your pillow stands up, the oil will be poured out. I do not say this in vain. This can be proved by our experience. When we say, "Lord Jesus, I love You," we may be somewhat excited. But when we go further and say, "Lord Jesus, I love Your church," we are so excited that we can hardly contain ourselves. Some Christians condemn us, saying that we make the church more important than Christ. Why do we talk so much about the church? Because the more we talk about it, the more excited we become. All Americans love desserts, such as ice cream, pie, and cake. The church life is like a dessert. If you only have Christ without the church, your meal may be like a few slices of Jewish bread. It is solid, but it is not dessert. The church life is the best dessert, a dessert which is even larger than the meal. This is why the church people like to say, "Amen, Lord. I love You and I love the church. I'm for Christ and the church. I consecrate myself to Christ and the church." When the pillow is set up to be a pillar, it is fully baptized. This is the genuine baptism of the Holy Spirit. In John 1 we also have the baptism, the stone, and Jacob's dream (vv. 33, 42, 51).

d) The House of God

After the oil was poured upon the pillar, the pillar became the house of God. The issue of saying, "Lord Jesus, I love You and I love the church," is the house. Before we came into the church, we were individualistic. But since coming into the church and testifying how much we love the church, we find that whenever we are individualistic, we lose the dessert. Instead of dessert, we have bitter medicine. Whenever you enjoy the wonderful church life, you have dessert every day. But whenever you are the slightest bit individualistic, you begin to taste the bitter medicine. There is not even the need to be individualistic. Even if you say that you don't like a certain brother, you will sense a bitter taste. If you say, "The church life is wonderful, but I don't like that sister," there will be no dessert. At times, we have sugar-coated medicine. After a while, however, the sugar coat melts and we taste the bitterness.

The genuine experience of Christ becomes the building material, and this building material consummates in the building of the house of God. Here God has rest and satisfaction, and here we also have rest and satisfaction. Jacob's dream was first fulfilled when the children of Israel erected the tabernacle after being delivered out of Egypt. That was the first house of God among men, the first fulfillment of Jacob's dream. The tabernacle indicated that God and man had found rest, that God's dwelling place on earth was the satisfaction and rest for both God and man. After the children of Israel had constructed the temple in the good land, God had a more solid house on earth. Then, in the New Testament, we have the church as the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15). Eventually, in the new heaven and the new earth, we shall have the New Jerusalem as God's eternal dwelling place (Rev. 21:1-3). There God and we shall have eternal rest and enjoy eternal satisfaction. Today we are all in the fulfillment of Jacob's dream. We not only have the stone and the pillar; we also have the house. In fact, we are the house (Heb. 3:6). This house is the composition of divinity with humanity, the composition of the Triune God with human beings. Here we have the house which becomes the rest for both God and man. Now we are not only in the dream but also in the fulfillment of the dream. Thank the Lord for the stone, the pillar, the house, and the oil. In the church life we experience all four of these.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-THREE

BEING DEALT WITH

(7)

All Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16) and the whole Bible is a book of life. Do you truly believe that Genesis 31, the chapter which we shall consider in this message, is the breath of God? When I was young, I thought that surely every word and phrase in Ephesians was inspired by God, but I did not appreciate Genesis 31 as much as I did Ephesians. Do you believe that the record in this chapter is the word of life? There is no mention of life in this chapter. Rather, there is the mention of the stealing of household images and of diplomatic talk. Is this the word of life? If we would see how Genesis 31 is the word of life, we need to consider it along with the whole Bible.

In Genesis 28, as Jacob was on his way to Laban's home, he had a dream. The significance of that dream was that it revealed how God was desirous to have a house on earth and that His intention was to make His called one a stone, the material for His building. Is the Jacob revealed in Genesis 31 the proper material for the building of God's house? No, he was not a gentleman but a subtle man when he saw the dream. Do you believe that a subtle man like Jacob could become the precious material for the building of God's house on earth? If you answer, "Yes," it is because you know that you are the same as Jacob. We all are Jacobs. But the subtle Jacob is intended to be the material for the building of God's house. This chapter reveals that through God's dealings, such a subtle one can become the material for God's dwelling place. This chapter continues the record of God's dealings with His chosen one. Because this chapter gives us a view of God's dealings with Jacob, it is surely the word of life.

Jacob stayed with Laban for twenty years. In 31:7 Jacob said that Laban had changed his wages ten times. The number ten signifies the completion of a certain dealing. Jacob seemed to be saying, "Laban has not changed my wages nine times but ten times. He has dealt with me in a complete way." The number twenty, which is double the number of completion, is composed of two times ten. God

put Jacob under Laban's hand for twenty years that Jacob might have a thorough dealing. But after those twenty years were over, we see in Genesis 31 that Jacob was still not a fully transformed person. We may find this disappointing, saying, "If the process of transformation cannot be completed in twenty years, then how long will it take? The Lord may come back before it has been accomplished." However, if you compare the Jacob in this chapter with the Jacob in some of the earlier chapters, you will see that he certainly has experienced an amount of transformation. A great change has taken place in Jacob after spending twenty years with Laban. At the beginning of these twenty years, he was truly a supplanter, but at the end of that time, he was at least somewhat transformed. As we read chapter thirty-one, we see that the subtle Jacob has undergone a significant change. But although he has been somewhat transformed, in this chapter he is still quite natural.

Perhaps you are wondering how this chapter reveals Jacob's naturalness. Jacob was afraid of Laban, probably realizing that he could not defeat him. Jacob admitted that he was unable to do this. This is the reason that he fled from Laban, stealing away from him. If he had been bold, being assured that he could have defeated Laban, he would not have fled. Rather, he would have said, "Laban, you have treated me very badly. Now I am leaving you. Good-by!" But Jacob did not dare to do this. Instead, he stole away. As Laban was pursuing the departed Jacob, God spoke to him in a dream the night before he overtook Jacob, saying, "Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob from good to bad" (v. 24, Heb.). Laban was more subtle than Jacob, but this time God forced him to be honest. Laban even told Jacob of what God had spoken to him, saying, "It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt; but the God of your fathers spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob from good to bad" (v. 29, Heb.). If I had been Laban, I would have never told Jacob of this. Nevertheless, Laban was foolish enough to speak of it. Then after upbraiding Laban for searching through his possessions, Jacob said, "God hath seen mine affliction and the labor of mine hands, and rebuked thee yesternight" (v. 42). Jacob seemed to be saying, "Laban, you have power in your hand, but I have God with me. Your power cannot defeat my God." Because of what Laban had told him, Jacob became quite strong with him. This was a reaction of Jacob's natural man. If Jacob had been truly spiritual, when Laban related his dream, he would simply have said, "Praise the Lord. O Lord, thank You." Jacob could have said, "Laban, since the God of my father has spoken to you, there is no need for me to say anything. Praise Him!" But even if Jacob had said this much, he would have exposed the tail of his natural man. If not even the tail of the natural man remained, he would have said nothing except, "Praise the Lord, Uncle Laban." And then he would have turned to the Lord, saying, "O Lord, I praise You. How I thank You that I am in Your hands." After hearing how God had spoken to Laban, charging him not to do anything to Jacob, Jacob was emboldened to rebuke Laban to his face, pointing out how he had searched his stuff, had forced him to bear the loss of what was stolen, and had changed his wages ten times (vv. 36-41). Jacob seemed to be saying, "See what you have done! I served you twenty years and you have changed my wages ten times. Now you have searched through all my things and have found nothing. What is the meaning of this?" Although this may appear to be frankness, it is the frankness of the natural man. Here Jacob is revealed not as a bad man or as a subtle man but as a natural man. This indicates that Jacob had not yet been fully transformed.

Before chapter thirty-two, there is no record that Jacob prayed. In 32:3-4 Jacob sent messengers to Esau, commanding them to address Esau as his lord. The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him" (32:6). When Jacob heard this news, he was afraid and prayed about it to the Lord. Fearing that Esau was planning to kill him and his family, Jacob was forced to pray. According to the record of Genesis, this is the first instance of Jacob's praying. Before this, Jacob did not pray because he had always had his own way. When it came to fleeing from Laban, he used his skillful way, talking to his wives in a very convincing tone and persuading them to stand with him against their father. Unlike Esau, Jacob was not a good fighter, but he certainly was a good speaker.

The record in Genesis 31 exposes our own situation, giving us an accurate picture of what we are. This surely is the word of life. Although the word life is not mentioned in this chapter, the very life in the Gospel of John, the Gospel of life, is found here. In John 10:10 the Lord Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and may have it abundantly." The way to have life abundantly is in Genesis 31, not in John 10. Genesis 31 is a revelation of our being.

Throughout all my years in the ministry, I have seen many cases concerning the relationship between husband and wife, and often I have been asked to mediate between a husband and wife. Every sister who has asked me to mediate between her and her husband has expected that after I prayed for them, her husband would be changed into an angel. Many of us still cling to this concept. Some sisters may say to themselves, "My husband is so pitiful. Surely if the elders and the leading sisters pray for him, the Lord will change him into an angel. If my husband cannot be an elder in the church, he can at least be a deacon." Although the Lord will certainly answer this prayer, He will not answer it according to our way, but according to His way. The Lord's way is not magical. Do not expect that in one day your husband will be changed into an angel and that you will be able to testify about it in the next church meeting.

Many of you have been in the church life for several years. Perhaps you have been praying for yourself, asking the Lord to transform you. Have you been transformed? You must admit that you are still somewhat natural. In the meetings, we all appear to be transformed, but how do you appear at the dining table with your wife? Many of us must admit that we are exactly the same as the Jacob in Genesis 31. I praise the Lord that there has been a significant change in many of the saints throughout the years. But where are you today—in Genesis 48 or in Genesis 31? You must admit that, at best, you are in chapter thirty-one. We cannot have the maturity of life, the transformation of life, overnight, or even in a few years. It is a life-long matter. It does not grow like a mushroom.

If you study the biography of Jacob, you will see that even when he was in his mother's womb God began to deal with him. The natural life of Jacob realized that two were in the womb. Although he tried his best to be born first, God allowed his brother to come out first. Since that time, in chapter after chapter, we see the striving of Jacob. But at the end of the book of Genesis, Jacob's striving is over. As Jacob worshipped God, the supplanting hands now leaned upon the top of his staff, the sign of his pilgrim life on earth (Heb. 11:21). At the end of Genesis, Jacob was thoroughly transformed. Only at the end of his lifetime was his transformation complete. Transformation requires our whole lifetime. Do not expect it to be accomplished in a few years. I believe that every day and even every hour something is working for our transformation. Nevertheless, this takes a long time. Of the fifty chapters in this book, the record relating to Jacob occupies more than half of them. This is the long record of a transformed life. The Lord Jesus can save us instantaneously, we can consecrate ourselves quickly, and we may even come into the church life in a very fast way. But it takes a long time to be transformed. We need to have a great many ups and downs. Sometimes within one day we may have three ups and three downs. This is our natural being, our natural life.

In the matters of God's selection and transformation, Jacob is the prototype in the Bible. Romans 9 tells us this. But throughout the generations not many Christians have seen this, thinking that the chapters dealing with Jacob's history are merely interesting stories. Few Christians view these chapters as the record of the model of a transformed life.

12) The Change of Jacob's Circumstances

In chapter thirty-one Jacob's circumstances suddenly changed. His cousins envied him (v. 1), and his uncle's countenance changed toward him (v. 2). This change was for Jacob's benefit. In this chapter, Jacob was in the middle of the process of transformation. God sovereignly prepares everything for our transformation. We must believe this. Nothing in Genesis 31 was accidental; everything was pre-planned. According to God's sovereignty, Laban had many sons. In the past, I thought that it would have been better for Jacob if Laban had had no sons and the two daughters. But Laban had several sons. Throughout the twenty years of Jacob's stay with Laban, Laban and his sons regarded Jacob as a profit to them. Laban admitted that Jacob's stay with him was a blessing (30:27). But 31:1 says, that Jacob "heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory." (Glory here means riches—v. 16.) This is a fact. According to Jacob's record, God revealed in a dream how He took the cattle from Laban and gave them to Jacob (31:11-12). Throughout the years, Laban's sons saw their father's flocks decreasing and Jacob's continually increasing. At a certain point, being envious of Jacob, they could not tolerate it any longer. This was not an accident. At the same time, "Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before" (v. 2). During the past twenty years, Laban's countenance might have smiled upon Jacob because Jacob was a cause of his profit. But after Laban realized that Jacob was no longer a cause of his profit, his countenance changed toward him. When anyone sees that you are causing his profit to wane, his countenance will change toward you. Do not believe that people are really good to you. Everyone is selfish and lives for himself. After staying with Laban for fourteen years, Jacob told him that he was leaving (30:25-26). However, he might actually have had no heart to go. This was just his policy to gain something from Laban. Laban saw clearly that God's blessing was with Jacob and he did not want him to go. Therefore, they negotiated and agreed upon the terms according to which Jacob would remain with Laban for another period of time. But after several more years had passed, Laban realized that all the increase was on Jacob's side, and thus he changed his countenance toward Jacob. This also was pre-planned by God. Because it was time for Jacob to go back, God arranged for his cousins to express their attitude and for Laban to change his countenance.

Jacob must have been seriously exercised concerning whether he should stay or leave. At that juncture, God intervened and said to Jacob, "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee" (v. 3). If Jacob had been a completely transformed person, he would have immediately praised the Lord and told the Lord that he was trusting Him for His clear guidance. But Jacob did not pray. Instead, he called his two wives to his flock, not daring to talk with them in his uncle's presence. After he talked with them about the change of circumstances, they consented to leave their father (vv. 4-16). These changes in Jacob's circumstances and environment were all prearranged by God.

13) Jacob's Fleeing from Laban

All the changes in Jacob's environment were indicators that he should go back home. Jacob did go, but not in a noble way. Do you think that Jacob fled from Laban in a proper way? No, he stole away from Laban. But what would have happened if he had not fled from Laban in the way he did? Laban would have exercised his power to detain his daughters and their maids and all their children. He probably would have told Jacob, "Jacob, if you want to go, then go, but you must leave everyone and everything with me." Because Jacob feared this, he stole away.

Although Jacob's way of leaving was not the right way, God allowed it to happen. Because he was not yet mature, Jacob had a weak point. Why did Jacob not put his trust in God? Since God is all-powerful and all-capable, Jacob should have trusted Him to protect his wives and children. It is easy to talk about trusting God, but it is not easy to practice it. Trusting God is not a doctrinal matter. If you had been Jacob, would you have dared to go to Laban and say, "Uncle Laban, I am leaving"? It is not easy to do this, for it requires the maturity of life and a measure of faith. In order to have the necessary measure of faith, we need the growth in life. Jacob, however, did not have this. I do not condemn Jacob; rather, I wholly sympathize with him. Many times we also have been placed in situations where we had no choice except to flee, to steal away. It would be easy to rebuke Jacob for not leaving Laban publicly in an honorable and noble way. But if we examine ourselves, we shall see that many times we have done things without letting our husbands or wives know about them.

In this chapter we are told that Jacob stole the heart of Laban (v. 20, Heb.). While Jacob stole Laban's heart inwardly, Rachel stole the household images outwardly (v. 19). Even among those God-fearing people there were still idols. These were not the temple idols but the household idols, the idols which they worshipped in their homes. Because they were considered so important, Rachel stole them and Laban searched for them. Do not think that because Jacob was a saint called by God that he had an upright family. Apparently some of us have a very proper family, but God knows that we still have some household images. If the Bible did not mention these idols, no one would have ever believed that Laban or Jacob had idols in his family. But even Jacob's weakness in stealing Laban's heart was permitted by God.

We all make mistakes, but God can never be mistaken. Certainly it was not noble of Jacob to run away, but even this was under God's permission. Do not regret your mistakes, for even your mistakes work for your transformation. None of us is absolutely honest, noble, faithful, or upright. Only the Lord Jesus is such a person. We all have our weak points, our natural weaknesses. Jacob fled from Laban because he was weak in faith and weak in the ability to sacrifice. Perhaps Jacob should have said, "Regardless of what I would lose, even if it would be my life, I must be honest with God." It is easy to say this, but try to practice it. When the time comes, you will also flee and steal another's heart. All our mistakes, even our wrongdoings, are under God's sovereignty, and He uses them to transform us. Now I am not encouraging you to make mistakes. I hope that you do not make any mistakes. Forty years ago, I charged people not to make mistakes. But I no longer do this, because I realize that it is foolish to do so. However strongly I encourage you not to make mistakes, you will continue to make them. No one wants to make mistakes. I can testify that day after day and year after year, I have prayed to the Lord that He would keep me from making mistakes. Although I hate mistakes and have no intention of making them, I still have made some big mistakes. What then is the use for me to charge others not to make mistakes? If I were a teacher of ethics, I would command you not to make mistakes. But I am not a teacher of ethics. I am one who is helping you to be transformed.

In order to transform us, God will use our mistakes. I can testify that if I had not made certain mistakes, I would not be as transformed as I am today. The greatest amount of transformation in my life has come about through my mistakes. Nothing troubles me more than my mistakes. Whenever I thought that I was all right, the Lord allowed me to make a mistake. Nothing helps us to be transformed like our mistakes. This does not mean that I am saying that we should do evil that good may come. No, if you intentionally make mistakes, those mistakes will not help your transformation. They will depress and condemn you. But as we try our best to avoid mistakes, we may pray, "O Lord, keep me in Your presence and never allow me to be mistaken. Lord, I fear and tremble in Your presence." Although we may pray like this, after a period of time we may still make another mistake, and the Lord will sovereignly use it for our transformation.

14) Laban's Pursuing after Jacob

As we have seen, Laban pursued Jacob and overtook him (vv. 22-55). Laban had the power to hurt Jacob, but God warned him in a dream not to do anything to him (v. 24). Although Laban could not do anything, he did what all human beings do—he complained. He expressed his anger through complaining about Jacob's fleeing (vv. 26-29). Complaining is the best way to ventilate your anger. Next, Laban accused Jacob of stealing his images (vv. 30-35), and then, after the images were not found, Jacob rebuked Laban for his mistreatment (vv. 36-42). After this, Laban was subdued and, being subtle, he changed his attitude and made a covenant of peace with Jacob. This is a good example of human diplomacy.

This chapter reveals that no man is trustworthy. In chapter twenty-seven, Jacob's mother, Rebekah, thought that Laban would be a protection and help to her beloved son, Jacob. Thus, she sent Jacob away to her brother. But consider what Laban did to Jacob. No human being, even our closest relative, is trustworthy. Never put your trust in any human being. If we realize that we are God's called ones and that we are now undergoing His process of transformation, we must realize that everything is a matter of God's hand. It is not a matter of anyone's being trustworthy. While we should not trust any human being, we should thank the Lord that everyone in our environment is under God's sovereign hand for our good. You may think that you have a faithful and trustworthy uncle. But such an uncle will not be very helpful for your transformation. As we read this chapter again and again, we can see that we should neither put our trust in anyone nor blame anyone. Whether our uncle is honest or not, we must still say, "Praise the Lord. God is sovereign. I am not in my uncle's hand, but in God's sovereign hand. Even my uncle who is not trustworthy is in God's hand for the sake of my transformation." We all need to see this and to know that nothing in our environment is trustworthy. Do not trust anything, any person, or any matter. Everything and everyone in our environment is an instrument sovereignly used by God for our transformation. If, for the sake of your transformation, you need an honest person, God will give you one. But mostly we need a Laban and cousins like Laban's sons. Do not complain, but thank God for everyone, saying, "Lord, I thank You for all my cousins. And I thank You for my uncle and even for my weaknesses." Praise the Lord that even our weaknesses are a means employed by God for our transformation.

In the scene portrayed in this chapter, the crucial person is the invisible God with His invisible hand. This chapter is not merely a story of human life; it is the revelation of the transforming God with His transforming hand. We all must see the God revealed in this chapter. The crucial character is neither Laban nor Jacob, but the hidden God who sovereignly prepares our environment for our transformation. In this chapter, God is hidden, yet He is on the alert, knowing the exact time to intervene and to speak to Jacob or to Laban. He does whatever He intends to do. Thus, the crucial person here is the sovereign, transforming God. If we see this picture, we shall rest in Him, believing that whatever we are and wherever we are, everything is all right because everything is under the sovereign hand of the transforming God.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-FOUR

BEING DEALT WITH

(8)

Genesis 32 and 33 contain a very strange experience in the life of Jacob, the chosen one. We have already pointed out that Jacob did not trust in the Lord. Since the time he was born, he exercised his natural ability to do things for himself. In chapter thirty-one he fled from Laban, and God delivered him out of Laban's usurping hand. Because Laban told him that God had warned him not to hurt Jacob, Jacob took the opportunity to boldly rebuke him (31:24, 36). Nevertheless, the Lord brought him through that difficulty. However, in front of Jacob was another serious problem—his brother Esau.

15) Jacob's Fear of Esau

Jacob was in a dilemma. Behind him was Laban and in front of him was Esau. I believe that while Jacob was fleeing from Laban and returning to the land of his fathers, he was greatly disturbed by these two men. It was difficult for him to remain with Laban and it was just as difficult for him to return to the place where Esau was. By God's mercy, he was released from Laban, but now he had to confront Esau.

a) Met by the Angels of God

Genesis 32:1 and 2 say, "And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's camp: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim," which means two camps (Heb.). As Jacob went on his way, he was probably thinking about how he would face his brother. Perhaps he said to himself, "I have been delivered from my uncle, but how shall I deal with Esau, my brother?" Much to his surprise, the angels of God met him, indicating that they would protect him. God's angels are always invisibly present with His chosen people. In this instance, the angels appeared to Jacob and he saw them. He did not see a small number of angels; rather, he saw two camps of them. This reminds us of Psalm 34:7, which says, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." The presence of two camps of angels should have been a great encouragement to this troubled Jacob. However, he was still afraid that his brother would smite him.

b) Still Trusting in Self-striving

After Jacob saw the two camps of angels, he should have been comforted. Nevertheless, he did not trust in these two camps of angels. God's purpose in showing him this vision of angels undoubtedly was to comfort him, to strengthen him, and to cause him to trust in God's celestial armies. But Jacob did not put his trust in what he saw. Rather, Jacob, who still trusted in his self-striving (vv. 3-8), imitated God's two camps of angels by dividing his people into two camps. Instead of putting his trust in what he saw, he copied the technique. Although we can only guess at what Jacob was thinking when he did this (perhaps he thought that each of the two camps of his household would be protected by the two camps of the angels), one thing is clear—Jacob did not exercise trust in God nor in the vision of the angels; rather, he expended his time and energy in exercising his natural ability. Verses 7 and 8 say, "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two camps; and said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape." This was Jacob's cleverness. But actually it was not clever at all, for if Esau could have smitten the first camp of women and children, why could he not have also smitten the second camp? But this dividing of his people was the best that Jacob could do.

c) Also Calling on the Lord

After making these arrangements, Jacob probably was still not at peace. Thus, he did something unusual—he prayed (vv. 9-12). This is the first record of Jacob's praying in his entire life. (In 28:20-22 it was his vow, not his prayer to God.) During the twenty years Jacob was under the squeezing hand of Laban, there is no record that he prayed. Although Laban changed his wages ten times, Jacob did not pray. In principle, we all are Jacobs. We have received the promise of God and we have come to know God, but still we do not pray. No matter what happens to us, we do not pray. Instead of exercising our spirit to pray, we exercise our mind to consider and our natural strength to face every problem. Jacob did not pray when he was with Laban; instead, he employed his natural strength to manage the situation. But now, being about to face Esau, he was brought to a place where he had no more skill. All his skill, technique, ability, and strength had been exhausted. When he learned that Esau was coming with four hundred men, he was frightened. The most he could do was divide his people into two groups, thinking that if the first were sacrificed, the second might be spared. Because this was the best Jacob could do, he was forced to pray.

Jacob prayed a very good prayer. His prayer was much better than the prayers of most Christians today. Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will do thee good" (v. 9, Heb.). Here we see that Jacob prayed by holding on to the Lord's word. The best way to pray is to take God's word as the standing for your prayer. Jacob seemed to be saying, "Lord, didn't You say that You would do me good? Now I stand on Your word and ask You to do something about it." Although this verse seems to indicate that Jacob was quite experienced in prayer, there is no hint in the previous record that he prayed at all.

In verse 10 Jacob said, "I am smaller than all the lovingkindness and all the faithfulness which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two camps" (Heb.). I like Jacob's expression here. He seemed to be saying, "Lord, my capacity is so small that it cannot contain all Your lovingkindness and faithfulness." Here, Jacob was humble in the presence of God, confessing that he was not worthy of God's rich lovingkindness and faithfulness toward him and that he had passed over Jordan with just his staff, but that the Lord had increased him to two camps. Here we see a vivid picture of two camps in the heavens and of two camps on earth. Due to this, the chosen one should have been perfectly at peace. In the next verse Jacob continued, saying, "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me and the mother with the children." Here we see Jacob's fear of Esau.

The high point of Jacob's prayer is in verse 12: "And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." In this part of his prayer, Jacob touched God's economy, for he spoke of the seed. To pray like this is not only to hold on to God's word but also to touch His heart. God had chosen Jacob with the goal of having seed for the fulfillment of His purpose to have a corporate expression of Himself on earth. Jacob probably did not understand this, but he still prayed very well. As we study this prayer, we see that it was marvelous in every respect. I hope that we all shall pray like this.

d) Further Striving by Himself

After praying such a marvelous prayer, Jacob surely should have been at peace. But he was still active. Instead of sleeping, he "took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother" (v. 13). He divided this present into nine droves "and delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove" (v. 16). The purpose of this was to see what Esau's attitude toward Jacob would be. Jacob was clever, sending a present of nine droves of cattle to Esau with a space between each drove. This increased the distance between him and Esau and allowed him time to learn what Esau would do so that he might have the opportunity to prepare himself for a battle.

Consider the whole picture. Firstly, Jacob divided his people into two camps. Then, after praying an excellent prayer, he should have gone peacefully to sleep. But instead of doing so, he formed nine droves of cattle as a present for Esau in order to increase the distance between himself and Esau, thus giving him time to prepare to cope with the situation. This is a portrait of a very strange experience. On the one hand, Jacob prayed earnestly, but on the other hand, he exercised his wisdom. This is a photograph of ourselves. Although Jacob might have done this only once, I have done it many times. On the one hand, I tried my best to prepare for coping with a troublesome situation, and on the other hand, I prayed earnestly to the Lord. No matter how good my prayer was, I still did not trust in it. Jacob prayed very well, but he had no trust in his prayer. If he had, he probably would not have been so active afterward. If I had been one of Jacob's servants, I might have said, "Jacob, after praying such a prayer, you don't need to do so much."

Jacob called the nine droves of cattle a present, but they were actually a bribe. I do not believe that Jacob had such a good, loving heart toward his brother Esau. This present did not issue out of a heart of love but out of a heart of fear. Its purpose was to appease Esau. Jacob even said, "I will appease him with the present that goeth before me" (v. 20).

While Jacob's people and servants might have been sleeping peacefully, he himself could not rest. He was desperate before God. It was a matter of life or death. Jacob anticipated that a slaughter was coming, feeling quite certain that Esau would slay him and his family. Hence, Jacob had no peace. Suddenly, as Jacob was left alone, "there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day" (v. 24). This combatant was not an angel but the Lord Himself in the form of a man. Only the Bible could have this kind of story. Much to Jacob's surprise, in the depths of the night, while he was desperate, a man came to him trying His best to pin him down.

Because Jacob would not give in, the two of them wrestled all night until the breaking of day. Before this, Jacob was afraid of being slaughtered. Now, he was afraid of being defeated in this wrestling match and he thrust all his energy into the struggle. The Lord did not subdue him immediately so that He might expose to Jacob how natural he was and how great his natural strength was. Eventually, the Lord touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, causing him to become lame. Still, Jacob would not let Him go until He blessed him. We shall consider this more in the following message.

In his dream at Bethel, Jacob received the firm promise from the Lord. The Lord had told him, "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" (28:15). Moreover, when it was time for Jacob to leave Laban, the Lord said to Jacob, "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee" (31:3). But Jacob still trusted in himself and exercised his natural skill and ability to save himself from the difficult situation. He also had a desperate time with the Lord. It would seem that after all this, Jacob would no longer do anything. But in chapter thirty-three we see that Jacob had not yet ceased from his own striving. There is no indication, even in this chapter, that Jacob trusted in the Lord.

After wrestling with the Lord who came in the form of a man, "Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men" (33:1). After all the Lord's promises, after his prayer, and after wrestling with the Lord, Jacob still had something new to do. He divided his wives and children again. His first division was a division of his people into two camps according to the two camps of the angels. His second division was that of his present into nine droves. But now, after reconsidering the matter, he redivided his people according to his heart. "He divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph last" (33:1-2, Heb.). Because Jacob loved Rachel and Joseph, he put them last. Even here, at the last minute, Jacob still exercised his skill to cope with the situation. The two maids and their children went first, to be a sacrifice if necessary. The second group, including Leah and her children, followed. Rachel, the one he loved so much, and her child, Joseph, were last. This is the work of the supplanter, the one who is altogether natural. He had had the promises of God, the dealings and sufferings, the excellent prayer, the wrestling, and the previous dividing of his people, but still he did something else. This is what I mean when I say that this chapter relates a strange experience.

e) Esau's Welcome of Jacob

After all this, when Jacob saw Esau, he was bold, yet humble, to go to the front to meet him (33:3-4). Verse 3 says, "And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother." In a sense, he was honest and faithful to his wives and children and went to the front to pioneer the way. Jacob's coming to him in this manner greatly surprised Esau who "ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (v. 4). Both Jacob and Esau wept. By this we see that all of Jacob's fears were products of his own worrying and that all he did was in vain. He did not need to divide his people into two camps, to pray the best prayer, to present nine droves of cattle as a gift to Esau, to wrestle with the Lord in the form of man, and to divide his wives, children, and maids the second time. If he had truly known God and had trusted in Him, he would have been continually at peace, saying, "I am not worried about Esau because God has promised to bring me back to my father's land. He even told me to go back, and I have the peace that He will bring me there. No matter what Esau might do to me, I am not concerned because my God has given me His word."

We all must learn from Jacob's experience. We do not need to do so much. Are we not today's Jacobs, the chosen ones? Surely we are. Has not the Lord given us His promise? Certainly He has. Are not the camps of angels encompassing us? We must believe that they are. We may think that certain people are our enemies. The enemy, Satan, may inject thoughts into our minds regarding our Laban or Esau. All such thoughts are vain. Recall your past. Have you not done many things which eventually proved to be useless? Whatever we did was in vain. Many times I have said to myself, "Man, you are really stupid. You have wasted your time and energy in doing things in vain. Nothing of what you have done was a help, for the Lord did not use them." Surely Jacob never dreamed that Esau would have come to him with such fervent love. God frustrated Laban by speaking to him in a dream and also He aroused Esau's brotherly love toward Jacob. Hence, Esau did not come to Jacob with hatred or with the desire for vengeance; rather, he came with warm, brotherly love. Esau had forgotten the suffering Jacob had caused him. But Jacob, the supplanter, had not forgotten what he had done to his brother. In this we see God's marvelous acts.

I would like to say a word especially to the young brothers and sisters. Undoubtedly, you love the Lord. By loving the Lord, you have the assurance that you are one of the chosen ones. As chosen ones, the Lord's promise, His goal, and His destination are for you. The Lord has charged us all to advance toward the goal, to go on to our Father's land where we can enjoy the riches of the Lord for His eternal purpose. So we simply need to enjoy peace in Him. Do not be bothered by any Labans or Esaus. Whatever happens, simply rest in Him. If you cannot take my word now, wait for a certain period of time, and you will discover that all the things that worried you will come to nothing. You do not need to do anything, for actually there is no real trouble either in front of you or behind you. Apparently, there is a great deal of difficulty; actually, because you are God's chosen ones under His all-sufficient care, there is no difficulty at all. You are God's chosen ones assured with His promise and charged with His goal. Now you are on the way. I do not care about all the opposition and rumors. Many times I laugh at them. As long as we are on the way to reach God's goal and as long as we have His promise as His chosen ones, everything is all right.

These two chapters are a portrait revealing what kind of God our God is. I can testify of His lovingkindness and faithfulness. If Jacob was smaller than all the Lord's lovingkindness and faithfulness, then I am even smaller than he. No matter what our circumstances are, the Lord is here. We do have Him, His promise, His goal, and His armies. Forget about your skill and your ability to cope with the situation. Jacob was very skillful, dividing his people firstly in one way and then in another. As we have seen, the second division of his people was according to his heart's desire to preserve Rachel and Joseph. But nothing he did was useful; everything was in vain. What a good picture this is for us today.

As I was preparing this message, I was greatly helped. I said to myself, "Poor man, you are still at least somewhat like Jacob. On the one hand, you have the word of God, you trust in God, and you have prayed to Him. On the other hand, you still have so many kinds of dividing. Eventually, the person you are afraid of is one who loves you." Many times, the ones whom we were afraid of became our helpers. This happened to Jacob with Esau. Jacob had a great deal of wealth and needed help to transport it. Esau brought four

hundred men to help him, but Jacob was frightened when he heard of this. The people whom he feared were actually his helpers.

Sometimes the Bible has a play on words. For example, there were two camps of angels, and Jacob divided his people also into two camps. Later, he divided the cattle into nine droves. When Esau beheld all these droves, he did not call them droves, but camps, saying, "What meanest thou by all this camp which I met?" (33:8, Heb.). Esau seemed to be saying, "Jacob, did you send these camps to fight against me? What does this mean?" Jacob replied, "These are to find favor in the sight of my lord...Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee" (vv. 8, 11, ASV). Notice that Jacob changed the word from present to blessing. Apparently he was saying, "Esau, I do not come to fight against you but to give you this blessing. These are not camps; they are my blessing to you." After this, Jacob and Esau were at peace.

Esau, having a good heart, said to Jacob, "Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee" (v. 12). Jacob, however, was still somewhat fearful of Esau and did not want to stay in his presence very long. Using his cleverness once again, he said, "My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die. Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir" (vv. 13-14). In other words, Jacob was saying, "Please leave me. I don't want to stay with you. As long as you are here, I am threatened." When Esau said, "Let me now leave with thee some of the folk that are with me," Jacob said, "What needeth it? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord" (v. 15, ASV). As long as Jacob could see Esau's face or the faces of Esau's men, he could have no peace. Many times, even after we have passed through a certain thing, the tail of that problem is still within us, and we do not want to be reminded of it. Actually, that was not a troublesome thing; it was a loving thing. Esau came with a loving heart. But Jacob's fear had not entirely subsided. This is an accurate picture of our experience.

If I had been Jacob, I might have said to myself, "Stupid man, you didn't need to do anything. You have the Lord's promise and you are moving toward His goal. You saw His angels and He Himself even wrestled with you, changed your name to Israel, and gave you a blessing. What else do you need? You should not do anything." Jacob, on the contrary, was very busy, scurrying about like an ant on a hot frying pan. In these two chapters there is no hint that Jacob had any enjoyment. I doubt that he either ate or slept well. He was constantly busy, thinking about how to face the situation and how to deal with Esau. Even when Esau came to him in a loving way, Jacob still did not trust him but asked him to go on ahead of him. Actually, Jacob was saying, "Esau, don't stay here. Take your four hundred men and go ahead. Your men frighten me. I don't want any one of them to stay with me." What a strange experience this was!

16) Jacob's Return to Canaan

God is faithful, and eventually Jacob returned to Canaan (vv. 17-20). Verse 18 says, "And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem." This could also be translated, "And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem." He returned to Canaan by the way of "Salem" (v. 18). Salem, the second half of the word Jerusalem, means peace, safety. Thus, for Jacob to return to Canaan by the way of "Salem" meant that he came safely in peace. In a later message we shall see that Jacob followed the tracks of Abraham. According to chapter twelve, when Abraham entered Canaan, the first city he visited was Shechem. Jacob also came safely to the city of Shechem. This proves that God kept His word and fulfilled His promise, for He had promised Jacob that He would bring him back safely to the land of his fathers. Jacob did not make this journey by himself; God made it for him. Here, in Shechem, Jacob did the same two things that his grandfather did: he pitched a tent and erected an altar (vv. 18, 20). Now he began to have a testimony. During the previous twenty years, he had neither the altar nor the tent, indicating that he did not have the proper life as a testimony of God. Now, having returned to the proper ground in the proper place, he had a life with the testimony of God. Here we see that this chosen one of God has been brought back, by God's grace, to the proper standing for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-FIVE

BEING BROKEN

c. Being Broken

Genesis 32:22-32 relates a crucial experience in the life of Jacob, God's chosen one. This is truly an extraordinary portion of the Holy Word. It is unique, and there is no other passage in the Bible that is similar to it. However, due to the lack of experience, most Christians have not paid adequate attention to this part of Scripture. By the Lord's mercy, in this message we must consider this vital experience in Jacob's life and be helped by it.

Jacob's experience in this chapter is very practical, personal, and intimate. What could be more intimate than wrestling with someone for at least half a night? The Lord in the form of man wrestled with Jacob "until the breaking of the day" (v. 24). The Lord God would never wrestle with a stranger or with an unbelieving sinner. Notice that we are not told that the man "came" to wrestle with Jacob. There is no verse which says, "While Jacob remained there alone considering his trouble, the Lord came to wrestle with him." No, it simply says, "There wrestled a man with him," indicating that the man was already there and that there was no need for him to come. This reveals that the Lord had been with Jacob all the time.

Why did the Lord suddenly begin to wrestle with Jacob? There certainly must have been a reason for it. It was due to Jacob's background. As he was returning to his father's land, he had two problems—Laban behind him and Esau in front of him. Having been released from the usurping hand of Laban, he was now desperate as he faced the coming confrontation with his brother, Esau. It was at this time that the wrestling took place. Jacob's messengers had returned with the report that Esau was coming to meet Jacob with four hundred men. When Jacob heard this report, he was terrified. According to Jacob's understanding, if Esau was coming to welcome him, there would have been no need of the four hundred men. It seemed to him that Esau was like a captain coming with an army. Undoubtedly, Jacob thought that Esau was coming to smite him. Believing this, Jacob was forced to pray. After praying an excellent prayer, he divided his gift of cattle for Esau into nine droves. But he had no peace, because his problem was still directly in front of him. Therefore, as verses 22 and 23 say, "He rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his

eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had." After doing all this, Jacob was alone and was probably considering the situation further and wondering what to do in case Esau would attack him. Jacob's burden was heavy, his situation was serious, and he was desperate.

The Bible gives no indication that Jacob prayed when he was alone. Many times, when you are not troubled, you pray, but when you are deeply troubled, you do not pray. The more you are troubled, the less you pray. Because the trouble is difficult and the situation serious, you simply cannot pray. Why? Because you have not yet been knocked down. No matter how serious the problem is, you have not been knocked down. Like Jacob, on the one hand we cannot go on, but on the other hand we do not pray. Rather, we remain there and ponder the situation, asking ourselves what to do.

While Jacob was considering how to cope with his problem, much to his surprise, a man began to wrestle with him. I say again that we are not told that the man came and wrestled with him. The text simply says, "There wrestled a man with him." As we read this portion of the Word today, we immediately realize that this man was the Lord. But at the beginning of the wrestling, Jacob did not realize that the man was God. He might have thought that his assailant was one of Esau's four hundred men. When this man began to wrestle with him, Jacob refused to let him prevail. Perhaps Jacob said to himself, "This man has come to arrest me, but I will not let him do it."

At this point we need to ask four questions. First, why did the Lord as a man wrestle with Jacob? What was the need of this? When the Lord appeared to Abraham, He did so as the God of glory. But here we do not see that the Lord appeared to Jacob, but that He wrestled with him as a man. Second, why could the Lord, who is the Almighty, not prevail against Jacob, a little man? Third, why did the Lord wait so long before touching the hollow of Jacob's thigh? Why did He not do it at the very beginning? The Lord must have wrestled with Jacob for at least six hours, perhaps beginning at midnight and continuing until dawn. Why did the Lord tolerate this wrestling for so long? And fourth, why did the Lord refuse to tell Jacob His name? On many other occasions, the Lord revealed His name to people, telling them who He was. But here, after being asked by Jacob to reveal His name, He declined to tell him, keeping His name a secret. Although I do not claim to be able to give a complete answer to all these questions, we can, through our experience, at least partially answer them.

In this portion of the Word, we do not have an appearing of the God of glory; neither do we have a visitation from the Lord. To Abraham, the Lord firstly appeared as the God of glory (Acts 7:2). Later, in Genesis 18, the Lord visited him and shared a meal with him. But this experience of Jacob's was neither an appearance of God nor a visitation from the Lord; it was a dealing. When you were saved, the Lord appeared to you, and many times after that you have had sweet and pleasant visitations of the Lord. But besides the Lord's appearing at the time of our salvation and His visitation in moments of fellowship, there are times when the Lord deals with us. At the beginning of these dealings, we do not realize that the Lord is present. We think that our husband, our wife, or an elder is affording us a difficult time. Eventually, we realize that it is not a matter of our husband, our wife, or of one of the elders; it is God who is here dealing with us.

This gives us the answer to the first question concerning the Lord's wrestling with Jacob in the form of a man. God does not deal with us in an apparent way, appearing as the God of glory. At the beginning of every dealing, we always think that some person is wrestling with us. Often, the wrestling lasts a long time. With Jacob, it might have been six hours, but with us, it may be six weeks, six months, or even six years. Sisters, how long have you been wrestling with your husband? Perhaps you wrestle with him every day. You realize that, as a Christian, there can be no separation or divorce. But you certainly feel free to exchange words with him. Perhaps you say to yourself, "It is unfortunate that I married this man. Since I cannot divorce him, I can at least argue with him." Some wives have been wrestling with their husbands for a long time. The same, of course, is true with us husbands, for we also wrestle with our wives. With many of us, married life is a wrestling life. Although we may think that we are wrestling with our husband or wife, the other party is actually not our husband, our wife, an elder, or any circumstance, it is the Lord Himself who is wrestling with us. In our experience, we eventually realize that the Lord is here. For example, a sister may eventually say, "It is not my husband who is wrestling with me—it is the Lord."

If we understand the answer to the first question, we should be able to answer the other three questions. In His appearing for our salvation, the Lord reveals Himself as the Lord of glory, but in His dealings with us, He keeps Himself secret. Whenever we undergo a dealing, we think that it comes from a person or a situation; we do not consider it as coming from the Lord. But whenever a dealing comes, we must realize that the Lord is there. Do not ask His name. Frequently, sisters have asked me, "Brother Lee, why did the Lord give me such a husband?" And often brothers have said, "Brother Lee, doesn't the Lord know everything? Since He does, why doesn't He do something about my wife?" The answer is that the Lord's dealing is a secret. Through Jacob's experience we can realize the name of the One who is wrestling with us. For a sister, the Lord's name might be "husband," and for a brother, the Lord's name might be "wife." In some cases the name of the Lord might be "hard-dealing elder." If we would be honest and open, many would admit that they have questions about their marriage. Many have asked, "Why?" A brother may ask, "Of all the young sisters in the church, how did I happen to marry this one?" Whenever we are dealt with, we do not recognize at first that it is the Lord's doing. Sometimes we do realize it, but refuse to admit it. If we did admit it, we would certainly stop wrestling immediately. Therefore, we strive to the uttermost not to be subdued; rather we exert ourselves to subdue the other party, in most cases not realizing that we are actually wrestling with the Lord.

Let us now consider the second and third questions. If the Lord subdued us immediately, how would we ever be exposed? Some may ask, "I have been praying for my wife for years. Why doesn't the Lord answer me? Why does she never change?" The answer is that you need to be exposed. The Lord wrestled with Jacob in order to expose how natural he was. This exposure required at least half a night. We also need a long time of trouble. Many of us are still wrestling. The Lord is attempting to subdue you, but you are fighting to subdue your circumstances. Perhaps your wife is being used by the Lord to subdue you, but you exercise your strength to defeat her. Hence, the wrestling continues. I hope that in this message the light will shine upon you and that you will say, "Oh, now I see! For years I have been wrestling. Now I see that the purpose of this is to expose how natural I am. The problem is not with my wife—it is with my natural strength. I am still just a natural man."

What was wrong with Jacob that the Lord had to wrestle with him? There was nothing wrong. The reason the Lord wrestled with Jacob was because he was still so natural. Here the dealing is not with anything sinful; it is with the natural life, with the natural man.

It takes a long time to expose our natural life. We need an extended period of wrestling before this can take place. Through this period of wrestling, our naturalness, like Jacob's, is utterly exposed. As we read chapters thirty-one, thirty-two, and thirty-three, we see how natural Jacob was. He had been dealt with and he had suffered a great deal, but, in chapter thirty-two, he was still natural. He did not trust in the Lord, and he was absolutely unable to express the Lord. He was natural, and his expression was full of himself.

At a certain point during this night of wrestling, the Lord touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh. Verse 25 says, "And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him." The Lord touched the sinew of Jacob's thigh. The sinew of the thigh is our strongest muscle. The Lord's intention was not to subdue Jacob but to expose him. After exposing his natural life, the Lord touched Jacob's thigh. It was immediately dislocated, and Jacob was crippled. As verse 31 points out, Jacob "limped upon his thigh" (Heb.).

After his thigh was dislocated, Jacob might have thought to himself, "This wrestler is greater than I am. He has not killed me, but he has certainly touched me and made me limp." Realizing that this wrestler was greater than he, Jacob asked him to bless him (v. 26). I doubt that even at this time Jacob realized that this wrestler was God. After touching him, the wrestler said to Jacob, "Let me go, for the day breaketh" (v. 26). But then Jacob said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Heb.). After Jacob said this, the Lord asked Jacob what his name was (v. 27). Since the Lord already knew Jacob's name, why did He ask him this question? It was to cause Jacob to realize who he was and to force him to admit that he was Jacob, the supplanter. After Jacob divulged his name, the wrestler said, "Thy name shall be no more called Jacob, but Israel; for thou has wrestled with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (v. 28, Heb.). The name Israel means "wrestler with God." Many Christians know that Israel means "the Prince of God," but, as the best lexicons and translations make clear, this meaning is secondary. The primary meaning of the name Israel is a "wrestler with God."

After Jacob heard that his name had been changed to Israel, a wrestler with God, he immediately realized that this wrestler was God. Perhaps he said to himself, "Oh! This One is God, and He has called me the wrestler of God." Then Jacob said, "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name" (v. 29). The Lord replied, "Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?" (v. 29). The Lord did not tell Jacob His name. In our experience, the dealing Lord is always a secret. However, although He did not reveal His name to Jacob, the Lord blessed him. After blessing Jacob, there is no record that the Lord left him. The Lord had been with him all the time and, even after the wrestling, He was still there. The Lord neither came nor went; He simply wrestled with Jacob. If that was Jacob's experience in Old Testament times, it is even more true with us today. The Lord will never leave us. Whenever we require a dealing, He will render the precise dealing we need.

Verse 30 says, "And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." After the Lord blessed him, Jacob fully realized that the wrestler was God and he named that place Peniel, which means "the face of God."

After considering Jacob's experience in this chapter, we may think that he had been transformed by it. Actually, however, there was no transformation at all, for chapter thirty-three reveals that Jacob was still Jacob. There was no change in his way of living. He was still planning, dividing, and doing everything possible to cope with the situation. Although there was no change in his way of living, there definitely was a change in his life, his very life had been touched. After his experience at Peniel, he limped. Both before and after the Lord touched him, he could do anything, but after the Lord touched him, whatever he did was done with a limp.

With us Christians there are two kinds of failures and weaknesses—those without a limp and those with a limp. For example, we may lose our temper with or without a limp. I may lose my temper with a brother, but even in this losing of my temper, others will notice that I am limping. If you do nothing, others will be unable to perceive your limp. But the more Jacob acted, the more his limp was exposed. Let me say, however, that we should not try to imitate a limp. Imitation never works.

We in the churches in the Lord's recovery are God's chosen ones. We are in His hand, we are on His way, and I am fully assured that we are also under His dealing. Whether or not you realize it, recognize it, or admit it, the fact is that you are under the Lord's dealing. Sooner or later, you will have the sense that you have been touched by Him. When that time comes, you will know that you are limp and that you will never be the same. You may still have your weaknesses, but you will not be the same. If you still can be the same, it is an indication that you have never experienced the Lord's touching.

With Jacob, the Lord's touching was once for all. But with us, there may be several touchings. Nevertheless, the principle is the same. Many of us can testify that since the day we first loved the Lord, especially since we came into the church life and began to follow the Lord in His recovery, we found ourselves in circumstances where we were being dealt with. We were constantly wrestling. For a long time, we did not realize that the Lord was dealing with us. One day, the Lord suddenly touched us, and we came out lame. After that, we were not the same. Perhaps we were still natural or weak, but we were not the same.

Do not expect that by one touch your whole living will be changed and that you will be totally transformed. No, with Jacob, the touch occurred in chapter thirty-two, but the maturity, the ripening, was not fully manifested until chapter forty-seven. From chapter twenty-six through chapter thirty-two, there were many failures, mistakes, and wrong doings. After being touched by God, in chapter thirty-three apparently he had not changed very much, but actually, in life, he had had a great change. Prior to chapter thirty-two, Jacob was natural, never having been touched by the Lord. But after chapter thirty-two, whatever he did, he did with a limp. From then on, the impression he gave to people was quite different. When he bowed down to Esau, he was still natural, but his limp testified to the Lord's touching. Have you ever realized that as Jacob walked toward Esau and bowed down to him, he was limping? Esau did not see a whole Jacob, but a crippled one. Here we see that while there was no change in his living, a change had occurred in his life. It was not the outward living that was touched by the Lord; it was the inward, natural strength that was touched by Him. The sinew of Jacob's thigh had been touched.

Few Christians realize the crucial significance of Jacob's experience in this portion of the Word. Most devote their attention to dealing with outward sin, wrong doings, and worldliness, never thinking that their natural life, natural strength, must be touched. But the Lord is not only concerned with changing our outward living; He desires even more to touch our natural life. Whether or not you exchange words with your wife, if your natural life has not been touched, you are still natural. In the eyes of God, there is not much difference between losing your temper with your wife or controlling it. If you lose your temper, you are you, and if you control your temper, you are still you. But once Jacob had been touched, though outwardly he was the same as before, inwardly his natural

life had been dealt with. Humanly speaking, of course, I like to see the brothers and sisters change their attitudes towards their spouses. But deep within, if their inward being remains the same, I do not appreciate this outward change. When you behave badly, it is difficult for the Lord to work Himself into you. But when you are good, it is the same. In fact, it may be more difficult for the Lord to work Himself into you because you are so good. It is not a matter of outward change or improvement; it is a matter of inward touching. Your inward sinew, your inward natural strength, must be touched by the Lord. We all need this touch.

As we follow Jacob, we may be touched again and again, for with us the touch may not be once for all. After we wrestle for a while, we shall have the deep conviction that we have been touched. The Lord always touches us at a certain crucial spot. Whenever He touches a particular part, we are lame and can no longer be the same in our inward being. From then on, we limp and are no longer whole.

Among the thousands of people in the church life, there are many different kinds: the clever, the wise, the crafty, the proud, the arrogant. According to religion, the correct way is to change our outward behavior. But God's way, the way of life, is different. God did not say to Jacob, "Jacob, I have wrestled with you, touched you, changed your name, and given you My blessing. From now on, you must not exercise your craftiness or use your natural strength to face the situation with your brother, Esau. Don't be crafty any longer. Trust in Me and let Me take care of this matter." There is no such account in the Bible. There is simply the record of Jacob's being touched. The Lord touched his thigh, changed his name, and gave him His blessing—that is all. No sermon, no instruction, was given to him. Whatever Jacob did after that, such as divide his folks into three groups, was up to him. Often, after the Lord touches us, He does not tell us what to do. Instead, He leaves us to ourselves, allowing us to do whatever we like. If we examine our experience, we shall see that this is so.

Those, especially the elders, who care for others are fond of instructing people. Frequently they say, "Brother, you were mistaken. Now that the Lord has blessed you, you should not treat your wife the same way. Surely for the sake of the Lord's glory, you must change." The sisters who engage in shepherding may charge others, saying, "Sister, you should not exchange words with your husband any longer. You should not do this—you should not do that." This is our way, but it is not the Lord's way. After touching Jacob's thigh and blessing him, the Lord gave him no instruction. He did not even say a word. Rather, after that touch, Jacob still exercised himself. He seemed to say to his people, "You all stay back. Let me go forward to see my brother Esau." But as he walked toward him, he did so in a limping way. What a difference between our natural concept and God's way! What a difference between the religious practice and the Lord's touching!

I do not want to hear of instructions that are given to you; rather, I like to see that, one by one, so many of you are touched by the Lord. Often, sisters have come to me complaining about their husbands. However, as they accuse their husbands before me, I am happy because in their accusations I notice that they are limping. Perhaps only a few days earlier they came to me without any sign of having been touched. But now, although they still complain and accuse their husbands, a definite limp is perceivable. I do not rebuke these dear sisters, for I am happy to see that they have been touched. One touch is better than all kinds of instructions. The Lord's touching of our natural life is much better than a hundred messages. This is our need today.

Verse 31 says, "And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he limped upon his thigh" (Heb.). After the touch, the sun rose upon Jacob. He was crippled, but he was in the light. Anyone in the Lord's recovery who has light must be a crippled one. No one under the light is still whole; everyone under the light of the heavenly shining is lame. In the dark night, Jacob was strong and every part of him was whole. But after he was touched, the sun rose upon him and he was full of light. He was under the shining of the heavenly light, yet he was a crippled man. Because we are truly in the Lord's hand and are following His way, many of us are having this kind of experience.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-SIX

AFTER BREAKING

Second Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture is God-breathed. Do you believe that Genesis 34, the chapter which we shall consider in this message, is God-breathed? We need to look to the Lord that He would show us how this portion of the Word is the breath of God. When I was young, after I had read chapters like Genesis 34 once or twice and the story had been fixed in my memory, I skipped over them. Whenever I came to this chapter in my reading of the Old Testament, I would remember that Jacob's daughter was defiled and that his sons mercilessly killed people and plundered the city, and I passed over it. However, the Lord has shown us that even this chapter is the breath of life. Although there is life in this portion of the Word, it takes experience to appreciate it.

d. After Breaking

In order to apprehend the life in chapter thirty-four, we must look both backward and forward. Prior to this chapter, Jacob had been delivered out of all his troubles. For twenty years, Jacob was retained under Laban's squeezing hand, and he was very troubled by this. Eventually, it was impossible for Jacob to stay with Laban any longer and he left his uncle's home. God had told Jacob that He wanted him to return to the land of his fathers. Jacob, however, could not forget what had happened there, for it was there that he had deceived his father Isaac and had supplanted his brother Esau. Although he was willing to return to the land of his fathers, he had to confront the great problem of facing his brother Esau. Nevertheless, taking the word of the Lord and utilizing his skill and cleverness, he stole away from Laban, not informing him that he was leaving. By stealing away from Laban, he overcame his first difficulty, that of being under Laban's squeezing hand. But then there was a second trouble: Laban pursued Jacob and finally caught up with him. But God intervened, telling Laban not to say anything either good or bad to Jacob. Thus, Jacob was wholly delivered from the hand of Laban. But the greatest trouble—facing Esau—still lay in front of him. Because of this, he had a long night of wrestling with an unidentified opponent who actually was the Lord Himself. But Jacob passed through this crisis, and the Lord delivered him from the problem with Esau. After this, Jacob had no more difficulties for a while.

1) Having Only Returned to Shechem

After he had been delivered out of all these troubles, "Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his

cattle" (33:17). Succoth was on the east side of the Jordan. This indicates that while Jacob was at Succoth, he had not yet crossed the Jordan River to enter into the heart of the land of Canaan. Genesis 33:17 does not say that Jacob came to Canaan. The land of Canaan is not mentioned until the next verse, where we are told that Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, "which is in the land of Canaan" (v. 18). In God's eyes, when Jacob journeyed to Succoth and built himself a house there, he had not yet come back to the heart of the good land. By Jacob's building a house for himself and booths for his cattle, we see how much Jacob was still natural and for himself. He certainly neglected the dream he had had at Bethel. After Jacob had fled from Esau, he had a dream in which he saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven. When he awoke from that dream, he called the name of that place Bethel and poured oil upon the stone which he had used for a pillow, saying, "This stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house" (28:22). At Bethel, Jacob made a vow to God, promising that the stone would be the house of God. In other words, he promised God that he would build a house for Him. Surely, Jacob forgot about this. If I had been there, I would have asked Jacob, "Jacob, why did you come back? Does God want you to build a house for yourself and booths for your cattle? What about the house of God?" When Jacob was a stranger in a foreign land, we could sympathize with him, for it is difficult for anyone to be an alien. But now he has come back to the territory of the land of God's promise.

If you read the Old Testament carefully, you will see that the territory east of the Jordan was never recognized as being the best part of the good land. But when the two and a half tribes of Israel came to this territory, they were attracted by it. This caused Moses to be unhappy with them. These two and a half tribes did receive this land, but they lost some of God's blessing. When the Assyrians came to attack the children of Israel, they firstly came to the land east of the Jordan, and these two and a half tribes were the first to be captured (1 Chron. 5:26). The strategic cities, such as Jerusalem and Bethlehem, are in the heart of the land west of the Jordan. Therefore, the territory east of the Jordan, where Succoth was, was not in the heart of the land of God's promise.

The Bible affords us a very brief record of Jacob's stay at Succoth. Eventually, Jacob realized that Succoth was not the proper place for him to stay with God, and he crossed over the Jordan and journeyed to Shechem. In his journey back to the good land, Jacob crossed three rivers: the Euphrates, the Jabbok, and the Jordan. In coming to Shechem, Jacob was following the footsteps of his forefather Abraham (cf. 12:5-6). This indicates that Jacob had been brought on to the right track. In Shechem Jacob erected a tent and built an altar (vv. 18-20). This reveals that he had begun to live the tent life and to have the altar testimony. This was far better than building a house for himself and booths for his cattle. In Succoth Jacob built nothing for God. In Shechem, on the contrary, he built nothing for himself or for his cattle; rather, he built an altar for God and erected a tent for his living. How good it was that he not only followed the steps of his forefather, but also had the tent life and the altar testimony.

This was good, but it was not Bethel. If you read chapter twelve you will see that after Abraham arrived at Shechem, he continued onward to Bethel (12:6-8). Jacob had his dream at Bethel (28:10-22). When he was told by the Lord to return to the land of his fathers, that was an indication that he should return to Bethel to fulfill his vow to build a house for God. I simply cannot understand whether he forgot this dream or whether he was unwilling to pay the price. But he firstly came to Succoth and then continued onward to Shechem. In Shechem he began to live as a called one. Before then, Jacob never lived as a called one. Using today's Christian terms, Jacob never lived the Christian life. Prior to that time, he was supplanting all the time. That was the life he had lived since birth. He supplanted others and held on to their heel. However, by the time Esau came to meet him, Jacob had been broken. Although Esau came to him with an honest and good heart, Jacob, even after he had been broken, was still supplanting. Supplanting until the very last minute, Jacob arrived safely at Shechem, where he began to live a tent life with an altar testimony.

Although Jacob had a tent with an altar in Shechem, this fell short of God's standard. There was a tent for Jacob, but there was no house for God. An altar had been built for God, but God still did not have a house. According to the Old Testament, the building of the altar must bring us to the building of the temple. In the rebuilding of the temple, the first item to be recovered was the altar (Ezra 3:1-3). In front of both the tabernacle and the temple was the altar. It is the same in our experience. Firstly, we have an absolute consecration and build an altar; then we continue until we come to the building of the church, the house of God.

2) Still Needing the Dealing in His Circumstances

Although what Jacob had at Shechem was good, he still needed the dealing in his circumstances (34:1-31) because he had not yet come back to Bethel. Jacob must have been very happy and content in Shechem, which means "shoulder" and signifies strength. After Abraham arrived in Shechem, he was strengthened. Jacob's experience must have been the same. Jacob even purchased a parcel of land there and spread his tent on it (33:19). Surely he was strengthened to live there as one of God's called ones. But he had not yet attained God's goal. One day, something suddenly happened: his only daughter, Dinah, was defiled (34:1-2). At that time, Jacob had eleven sons and one daughter. If he had had eleven daughters and one son, the situation would have been much different. For one of eleven daughters to be defiled would have meant a great deal less than for his only daughter to be defiled. It was a most serious thing for Jacob's only daughter to be defiled.

This unusual and extraordinary happening must have been of God. Dinah went to see the daughters of the land (34:1). If she had not done this, she never would have been defiled. By going to see the daughters of the land, she found herself in difficulty, and this unfortunate event took place. Do you think that this was an accident? Jacob and his household might have thought it was, but in God's eyes it was not; it took place under His sovereign hand. This does not mean that God intended that Jacob's daughter be defiled. It means that this unfortunate occurrence transpired under the sovereign hand of God to perfect Jacob, His chosen one.

The principle is the same today. God had a purpose with Jacob and He certainly has a purpose with every one of us, His called ones. God's purpose with Jacob was not that Jacob might follow his forefather's footsteps, erect a tent, build an altar, be strengthened, and be settled. None of these is the fulfillment of God's purpose. In brief, God's purpose is to have His house on earth, to build Bethel here on earth. Shechem was good for Jacob, but it could never satisfy God's desire. Therefore, while Jacob was settled, satisfied, and happy, this unfortunate event happened to him.

If Jacob had had eleven daughters and just one son, the one son would have been unable to do anything about this and could have caused no difficulty. But when the one daughter of Jacob was defiled, all of his sons rose up (vv. 7-31). They could not tolerate this. Eventually, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, slew all the males in the city of Shechem and plundered the city. Consider Jacob's

situation. He was the one who had been chosen and called by God and he was God's testimony on earth. He was following the track of the pioneer of God's called ones, living in a tent and worshipping God by an altar. He was the unique testimony of God on earth. But look at what happened! His only daughter was defiled. How could this happen to a man who had just begun to live the life of God's called ones, the life of a tent with an altar? If I had been Jacob, I probably would have been doubtful, saying, "What is this? I love the Lord more than ever. As soon as I begin to have a proper life, following the footsteps of Abraham, this happens to me. Why?"

Following their father's deceptive methods, Jacob's sons devised a scheme to get revenge. They accepted the claim of Hamor and Shechem in a deceptive way, saying that Shechem and Hamor could take Dinah on the condition that all the males among them be circumcised (vv. 13-17). This proposal was pleasing to Hamor and Shechem, and they promptly accepted it (vv. 18-19). Then, on the third day, when all the males were sore from the circumcision, Simeon and Levi, brothers of Dinah, "took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out" (vv. 25-26). After this, they went on to plunder the city and to seize all the sheep, oxen, asses, wealth, wives, and children. They even plundered everything that was in the house (vv. 27-29). Jacob refers to this slaughter in 49:5-7.

In Exodus 32 the slaughtering hand of Levi became a blessing. When the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf, Moses said, "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me," and "all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him" (Exo. 32:26). Then, when Moses said, "Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses" (Exo. 32:27-28). Here in Genesis 34, Levi, along with Simeon, slaughtered all the males of Hamor's city. Later, near Mount Sinai, Levi's descendants slaughtered the worshippers of the golden calf. Furthermore, in Numbers 25:7 and 8 one of Levi's descendants slaughtered the fornicators. Due to the action taken in Exodus 32, the Levites became priests to God.

Consider the situation Jacob faced in this chapter: his daughter was defiled and his sons deceived people, killed them, and plundered their city. Is this the family of God's called one, the family of one who is the unique testimony of God on earth? Why did all this happen to Jacob? Dinah, the eleven sons, and all the slaughtered people were a sacrifice for the perfecting of one man—Jacob. Perhaps you cannot believe that the Lord will sacrifice many for your sake. But to sacrifice many for the perfecting of one is a great thing. In Genesis 34 this one was the unique person in, with, and through whom God's eternal purpose was to be fulfilled. Dinah, the eleven sons, and all the men in the city of Shechem might have been spared, but if Jacob, the unique one, had been damaged, what would have happened to God's eternal purpose? Often the Lord will sacrifice others for the sake of perfecting you. I have seen and experienced this myself. If you have the insight, you will be able to see that even today the Lord is sacrificing many others that you might be perfected. Shechem, Hamor, all their countrymen, and even Dinah and Jacob's eleven sons were sacrificed for Jacob's sake. Everything recorded in this chapter was for his perfection.

In 34:30 Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house." Jacob seemed to be saying, "You have made everything miserable for me. You have caused me to stink among all the people in the land. Now I don't have any peace or safety. If the people attack us, we will all be killed." Jacob had come to Shechem in peace and safety. Now he was in a situation where all his safety had vanished. Probably he could no longer sleep well. His daughter had been defiled and now, due to the trouble caused by his sons, he could not remain at Shechem.

In 35:1 God spoke to Jacob, saying, "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." Notice the word "and" at the beginning of this verse. This indicates that this word spoken to Jacob by the Lord immediately follows the events of the previous chapter. After what had happened to him, Jacob was able to take in whatever God wanted to say. If God had spoken the same word to him a few days earlier, Jacob might have said, "Would God say this? This must be my imagination. I have been following my forefather's footsteps, living the tent life and worshipping God with the altar in the proper way. Why must I leave this place?" Undoubtedly, God intended to speak this word to Jacob a lot earlier. In Shechem, everything was good for Jacob, but it could not satisfy God's desire. Prior to the difficulty in chapter thirty-four, God could not speak to Jacob. If He had spoken to him, Jacob would not have listened. But now, after the daughter had been defiled, after the sons had caused trouble, and after Jacob had lost his peace and safety and was considering what to do, God intervened and spoke to him, telling him to go up to Bethel. After all this had taken place, Jacob could heed God's word about going up to Bethel. Without being in a difficult environment, we are often unable to listen to the word of God. God is not so foolish as to speak a word to us in vain. Rather, He waits until certain things happen to us.

God told Jacob to go up to Bethel. However, according to geography, Bethel is south of Shechem. Since Bethel is southward, why did God not say, "Go down to Bethel"? We cannot understand this according to our natural view. God seemed to be saying to Jacob, "Jacob, you are still down, for you are not up to the level of My desire. You must arise and go up to Bethel." God spoke to Jacob in a very meaningful and careful way, telling him to go up to Bethel, to dwell there, and to build an altar to the God who had appeared to him when he was fleeing his brother Esau. This word is short, but its significance is profound. In other words, God seemed to be saying, "Jacob, you have forgotten your vow. At the least, you have neglected to fulfill it. After that dream at Bethel, you vowed to build a house for Me. What about it? I asked you to come back, delivered you out of the hand of Laban, rescued you out of your trouble with Esau, and brought you back peacefully and safely to the land of your forefathers. But I did not do this that you might settle down. This is not My purpose. My purpose is that you go to the place where you had the dream, the place where you vowed to build a house for Me. Don't remain at Shechem, for this should not be your dwelling place. This is merely a place on the pathway to Bethel. Now go up to Bethel, dwell there, and build an altar to the very God who appeared to you."

Do not simply regard this as a story about Jacob. You must take it as your biography. I can testify that I have done the same thing as Jacob. I simply forgot my vow, my consecration. I believe that all of us have made a consecration to the Lord, especially during a time of trial or difficulty. We made a vow, saying, "O Lord, if You will bring me through these difficulties safely, I will consecrate myself to You and take You as my God and build a house in this place for You." In principle, we all have made a vow similar to this. But have you fulfilled your vow? Probably none of us has. By this we see that we all are Jacobs. His history is actually our autobiography. To make a vow to the Lord and to consecrate ourselves to Him is one thing, but to fulfill our vow and to carry out our consecration may require the sacrifice of a daughter, eleven sons, a Shechem, a Hamor, and many other people and things.

The Christian life is often a stormy life. When we first heard the gospel, we might have thought that after becoming a Christian our lives would be peaceful and that there would be no storms. Perhaps we thought that our boat would sail safely in Christ without a storm. But throughout the more than fifty years I have been a Christian, there has been one storm after another. Eventually, I came to realize that the Christian life is full of storms. What is the purpose of these storms? Although I was not clear fifty years ago, I am very clear today. Actually, it is not a matter of storms or peace—it is absolutely a matter of whether or not we are being transformed for God's building to fulfill God's purpose. Your life is stormy because you are stubborn, because you are so much like Jacob. You need many storms because you have not yet been transformed into Israel. You may say to yourself, "I am at Shechem and everything is safe. Let us sail on peacefully." This peace may last a short time, but suddenly a storm comes, your Dinah is defiled, and everything is in turmoil. This is our life. Do not blame Him; it is we who make it so difficult for Him to work on us. Although we never prayed, "Lord, send us a storm," all kinds of storms have come. But no storm has killed us. After fighting through so many storms, we are still living. The Lord certainly has sacrificed much for our sake. Dear ones, many of you are still young. You are now on the boat and it is too late for you to repent and jump out. You need the storms.

What happened to Jacob in chapter thirty-four made a profound impression on him. When he was old and was bestowing his blessing on his twelve sons, he was unable to forget what Simeon and Levi had done. In 49:5 and 6 Jacob said, "Simeon and Levi are brethren; their swords are weapons of violence. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their company, my glory, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung oxen" (Heb.). According to Jacob's word, Simeon and Levi not only killed men but also hamstrung oxen, cutting the nerves to cripple them. Jacob never forgot that. This was the worst trouble he had ever passed through. It was much heavier than his difficulty with Esau. It greatly terrified him, causing him to fear that the people of the land would attack him and kill him. Even at the time of the blessing of his sons, Jacob could put no trust in them. He said, "O my soul, come not thou into their secret," that is, stay away from them. The trouble Simeon and Levi caused Jacob touched him in the depths of his being. After that happened, Jacob immediately took the word of the Lord to go up to Bethel. From that moment Jacob began to be transformed. Prior to that time, he had had no change.

Jacob had left Padan-aram and, having been pursued by Laban, was delivered out of his hand. He was also rescued out of his trouble with Esau, and came to Succoth, where he built a house for himself and booths for his cattle. I believe that Jacob did not have the peace to remain there. Thus, he traveled onward to Shechem, following the steps of his forefather and beginning to have the proper tent life with the altar testimony to live as God's called one. But his life at Shechem was not up to God's standard. God's goal is to have Bethel, His house on earth. Like Jacob, many brothers and sisters today are still living in Shechem. They have followed the footsteps of the forerunners and they have been strengthened. They have the tent life with an altar testimony and they are living as God's called ones. But God's desire is not satisfied because they are not yet up to His level. Because of this, certain unfortunate things happen to them again and again in order to prepare their heart to listen to God's word to arise, to go up to Bethel, to dwell there, and to build an altar. We need to see all these steps. In the next message we shall see that, in chapter thirty-five, Jacob began to be transformed. His transformation began after the Lord spoke to him about going up to Bethel.

Today, nearly all seeking Christians are like Jacob, living a good life in Shechem but neglecting God's goal in Bethel. But in the Lord's recovery He wants us to pass through Shechem and go up to Bethel, to pass through our individual life to go up to the corporate church life. If we have not arrived at the corporate church life, we still fall short of God's goal. This is why however good we are in Shechem, we do not have the satisfying peace and safety. This forces us to take the Lord's word to leave Shechem and to go up to Bethel to have the proper church life in His house on earth.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS
MESSAGE SEVENTY-SEVEN
A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF GOD'S BUILDING
IN THE SCRIPTURES
THE SEVEN EYES

The book of Revelation is the consummation of the Bible. If we did not have this book, the Bible would lack a proper conclusion. As a book of consummation, nearly everything in Revelation is something previously mentioned in the Old Testament. According to the black and white letters, we do not see anything related to God's building in Revelation 4 and 5. However, there is the matter of the seven eyes which are the seven Spirits of God. There is a secret to understanding the signs and symbols in the book of Revelation: whenever a symbol appears in this book, find where it is mentioned in the Old Testament. For example, in Revelation chapter one we have the lampstands as a symbol of the churches. In order to understand the significance of the lampstands, we must read Exodus 25 where the lampstand is first mentioned, and also Zechariah 4 where it is mentioned the second time. In the same principle, if we would know what the seven eyes of God are, we must also go back to the Old Testament.

The seven eyes are mentioned in Zechariah 3:9 and 4:10. Zechariah implies that these seven eyes, which are the seven lamps, are related to the Spirit. When Zechariah asked the angel, "What are these?" the angel answered, "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:4, 6). This word implies that the seven lamps are related to the Spirit of God. The book of Revelation tells us clearly that these seven eyes of God, which are the seven lamps, are the seven Spirits of God. Zechariah reveals that the seven eyes of God, which are the seven lamps on the lampstand, are also the seven eyes of the stone. By means of the seven eyes, Christ as the Lion and the Lamb unveiled in Revelation 5 is connected to the stone spoken of in Zechariah 3. Therefore, the One with the seven eyes is not only the Lion-Lamb but also the stone. He is the Lion-Lamb-stone: the Lion to destroy the enemy, the Lamb to redeem us, and the stone to build God's house.

THE GOAL OF GOD'S ECONOMY

God's economy is not for salvation. Salvation is neither the goal nor the consummation of God's economy. It is simply a procedure, a process, to reach God's goal. God's goal is the building of His eternal dwelling place. This building is the church today and the New Jerusalem in eternity.

CHRIST AS THE STONE FOR GOD'S BUILDING

Many Christians are familiar with Acts 4:12, which says, "And there is no salvation in any other; for neither is there another name under heaven given among men in which we must be saved." I have used this verse many times in preaching the gospel. I boldly told people that only one name in the entire universe could save them. It was not the name of Confucius or Plato; it was the name of Jesus. In recent years I learned that the Jesus in Acts 4:12 is the stone. The previous verse says, "This is the stone which was despised by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone." If we read Acts 4:10, we shall see that this stone is clearly identified with Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Jesus Christ, the One who was crucified and raised from the dead, is the stone set at naught by the Jewish builders. He has become the head cornerstone, and there is salvation in no other one. Those who rejected Him not only rejected the Savior but also the building stone, even the head cornerstone.

The cornerstone connects the walls of a building. In the corner of a building there are many stones, and among them is one called the head cornerstone. The Jews in ancient Palestine gave attention to three kinds of stones in building their houses: the foundation stone, the head cornerstone, and the topstone. The building was laid upon the foundation stone, the sides of the building were joined by the head cornerstone, and on the roof was the topstone. These three stones held and protected the whole building. In Isaiah 28:16 Christ is the foundation stone, in Zechariah 4:7 He is the topstone, and in Acts 4:10-12 He is the cornerstone. In Acts 4 Peter not only preached Christ as the Savior but also as the building stone, as the leading cornerstone that joins the walls together. Peter had this concept because he realized that God's redemption in Christ is for His building. Thus, in his first Epistle Peter could say, "To whom coming, a living stone, having been rejected by men, but with God chosen, held in honor, you yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2:4-5).

GOD'S REDEMPTION BEING FOR HIS BUILDING

Of all the gospel messages delivered today, hardly one is concerned with God's building. The preaching of the gospel in Christianity certainly misses the mark. Because we are still under the influence of Christianity, we simply do not have the impression that God's redemption in Christ is for the building. In the concept of many Christians, salvation is everything. A great many hymns praise the Lord as the Lamb, saying, "Worthy is the Lamb." But there is hardly a hymn that says, "Worthy is the stone." If you stood up in a meeting of Christians and praised Christ by saying, "Worthy is the stone," they would think that you were crazy, or that you had taken in a peculiar concept. This is the situation today. However, in the Lord's recovery the Lord has brought us on farther. We not only see, as Martin Luther saw, that the Christ is the Lamb for our redemption for us to be justified by faith in Him. We also see that this Lamb has seven eyes, which are also the seven eyes of the building stone. God's economy is not for redemption; it is for His dwelling with man through redemption. Because man fell, there was the need for redemption. Redemption is the process by which fallen man is brought back to God for the fulfillment of God's economy to build His dwelling place. But pitiful Christianity remains attached to the procedure, forgetting and neglecting God's goal. Due to this, we must trumpet loudly the words, "Worthy is the stone."

Let us now consider some verses in Matthew 21. Verse 9 says, "And the crowds who went before Him and those who followed cried out, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" This verse, which was uttered in the warm welcome rendered to the Lord Jesus, is a quotation of Psalm 118:26. Psalm 118:26 says, "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Who is the "he" mentioned in this verse? The answer is in verse 22 of the same psalm: "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." Verses 22 and 23 of Psalm 118 are quoted by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 21:42. Psalm 118:23 and 24 say, "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." The "day which the Lord hath made" is the day of resurrection. On the day of resurrection the Lord God made Jesus of Nazareth the cornerstone. This is the day the Lord has made and we should rejoice and be glad in it. Every Lord's Day we should rejoice and be glad.

When the Jewish builders were troubled by the welcome given to the Lord Jesus and were jealous of Him, the Lord said to them in Matthew 21:42, "Have you never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the cornerstone; this was from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" The Lord Jesus seemed to be saying, "Didn't you hear the people praising Me, saying, 'Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord'? Their praising was a quotation of Psalm 118. In this Psalm there is another verse. Have you never read it? It says that the stone the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes." By quoting this verse from Psalm 118, the Lord indicated that the Jewish people, as the builders of God's building, would not only reject the Savior but also the building stone. As a result of their rejection, they would have no part in God's building. We must be deeply impressed that we were not saved merely to be saved. We were saved that we might be a part of God's building. When we preach the gospel, we should not only preach salvation and redemption, but also God's building, telling the people that if they do not receive the Lord Jesus, they will not have the leading building stone and will have no share in God's building. God's goal in His salvation is His dwelling place, the New Jerusalem. In our preaching of the gospel, we, like Peter, must tell people that God's redemption in Christ is for them to become a part of God's dwelling place.

GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

In the previous message we saw that God told Jacob to go up to Bethel (Gen. 35:1). Ultimately, the New Jerusalem will be the eternal Bethel. Jacob never built anything, but his descendants firstly built the tabernacle and then the temple. The book of Revelation says that the New Jerusalem is God's tabernacle and that there God Himself and the Lamb are the temple (Rev. 21:22). This is Bethel. God's eternal purpose is to have this dwelling place, and He is working on it today. Even during Jacob's lifetime God was working on Jacob for His dwelling place, for Bethel.

We must be enlightened by and fully saturated with the thought that in this universe God is doing only one thing—building His eternal habitation. He is not interested in anything else. Creation and salvation are both for this purpose. Whatever blessings He has bestowed upon us are also for this purpose. However, many Christians have made other things the goal, things like salvation, spirituality, holiness, and victory. But these are merely individualistic, personal houses, not God's building. Spirituality is an individualistic, personal house. If you do not care for God's goal, even your salvation may become a personal home. If we had a clear view of God's goal, we would feel sorrowful about today's situation. Nearly every Christian is building his own little house. For some, tongue speaking is a cottage; for others, holiness is a house; and for still others, spirituality is a shed. Today, hardly any Christians

care for God's building. Because of this, we have the boldness to say that we in the Lord's recovery are the unique Christians caring for God's building. If we all cared for God's building, God would have done a great thing among us. Nevertheless, I am concerned that after reading this message some may still say, "I'm not interested in this. I want to have peace and joy. I wish Brother Lee would give more messages on the Lord's mercy and grace, and tell us how the Lord wants to give us His joy and bestow His blessings on us." It is possible for even joy, peace, and blessings to be drugs. Most of the teachings given out week after week in the chapels and cathedrals are drugs. When you were there, you were drugged. You did not hear a clear word to sober your mind. I hope that through this message all our minds will be sobered and that we will be bold to declare, "I only care for God's building. I don't care for my salvation, my joy, my peace, my holiness, or my spirituality." As long as you care for God's building, everything, including salvation, holiness, victory, and spirituality, peace, and joy, will be yours.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

We need to have a bird's-eye view of God's building as it is unfolded in the Bible. The Bible is a large book containing thousands of items. If we do not have a bird's-eye view, we can easily get lost. We need to see the major points in the Bible. After working with the race of Adam, God came in to have a new start by calling out Abraham to be the father of another race, the called race. God was no longer working with the created race but with the called race. Abraham was followed by Isaac and Jacob. If we do not have the bird's-eye view, we shall neither understand God's purpose in calling Abraham nor His purpose with Isaac or with Jacob, the supplanter. As Jacob was fleeing from his brother Esau, he had a dream (28:10-22). After waking from that dream, he spoke some words which were a wonderful prophecy. Jacob called the name of the place Bethel and even set up the stone that he had used for a pillow to become a pillar. Hence, Bethel was not merely a place but also a pillar with oil poured upon it. This is the greatest prophecy in the Bible because it governs the entire Bible. After uttering this prophecy, Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house" (28:20-22). God was faithful and brought him back safely. However, Jacob did not fulfill his vow. Rather, he settled down in two places, firstly in Succoth and secondly in Shechem. Eventually, a turmoil arose, and Jacob lost his safety and peace. At that precise moment, God intervened and spoke to him, saying, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there" (35:1). Jacob did not have the actual Bethel during his lifetime. He never saw the house of God. It was not until Moses brought the children of Israel out of Egypt and erected the tabernacle that Bethel was realized among the children of Israel. Later, the tabernacle was replaced by the temple prepared by David and built by Solomon. At that time, Bethel was established on earth.

Prior to the building of the tabernacle, however, there was the house of Israel, which was nearly the equivalent of the house of God, for in the name Israel the name God appears. The last two letters of the word Israel—el—are a Hebrew word for God. When Israel was multiplied into the house of Israel, it is implied that this house was a house for God. Therefore, the house of Israel was the house of God. The only difference was that the house of Israel was not as definitely formed as the tabernacle or the temple. Nevertheless, as long as Jacob's family had become the house of Israel, in the eyes of God it was equal to the house of God. Eventually, among the house of Israel, there was the tabernacle and, following that, the temple, both of which were symbols of the house of Israel as God's dwelling place. This is a history of Bethel. Later, the temple was destroyed by the Babylonian army, and the children of Israel were held in captivity seventy years. Then a decree was issued to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-3). Hence, from the beginning of the Old Testament until the end, we have just a few main things: Jacob, his house, the tabernacle, the temple, and the rebuilding of the temple. This is a bird's-eye view of the Old Testament.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

All these main points in the Old Testament are merely types. Because of this, there was the need for the Lord Jesus to come as the reality. When He came in His incarnation, He set up a tabernacle for God and tabernacled among us (John 1:14). In John chapter two He revealed to the Jews that He was not only the tabernacle but also God's temple (2:18-21). Thus, when He was on earth, He was both the tabernacle and the temple. When Peter, the leading apostle, was first brought to the Lord, the Lord changed his name from Simon to Cephas, which means a stone (John 1:42). In John 1:51, the Lord Jesus said to Nathanael, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." This word indicates that the fulfillment of Jacob's dream rested upon His building the house of God.

After approximately three years with His disciples, He brought them out of the religious realm and atmosphere to the border of the so-called holy land, and there He asked them this question: "Whom do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). After Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," the Lord said, "I also say to you that you are a stone, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:16, 18, Gk.). The Lord revealed that He was the rock and that Peter was a stone. This word must have made a deep impression upon Peter, for some time later he rebuked the Jewish builders, and seemed to say, "You Jewish builders crucified Him on the cross, fully rejecting the building stone. But God has raised Him up and has made Him the head of the corner." In 1 Corinthians 3:11 Paul says that the church is built upon Christ as the foundation, and in his first Epistle Peter says that all who come to the Lord will be living stones built together into a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:4-5). This is Bethel, the house of God. Ultimately, this Bethel will be enlarged to consummate in the New Jerusalem. On the one hand, the New Jerusalem will be the tabernacle of God among men; on the other hand, there God Himself and the Lamb will be the temple. This is the bird's-eye view of God's building.

THE MAIN STREET

In looking at any map we must find the main streets. This matter of the building is the main street in the Bible. Throughout the centuries, thousands of Christian books have been written, but most of them have missed the main street. Instead, they concentrate upon the minor streets. Holiness, sinless perfection, spirituality, tongues, and healing are some of these minor streets. All those who concentrate on these things will miss the mark, which is Bethel, the house of God. In Deuteronomy 12:5 and 6, God seemed to be saying, "You must not offer your burnt offerings and tithes at the place of your choice. You must go to the place I have chosen for My name and for My habitation." Today, this place is the church, for in the New Testament we see that the church is the place God has chosen for the Lord's name and for His habitation. Many famous Christian teachers have said that two or three gathering together in the name of the Lord Jesus are the church. They say this because they are blind and do not see the vision of the main street.

A THOROUGH CLEARANCE FOR GOD'S BUILDING

This matter of God's building is of great significance. Day and night, the burden is coming concerning the building of God's house. I believe that in the next few years this burden will increase, and that message after message will be given on God's building. Today, the Holy Spirit is digging all the gold for the building out of the mine of the Word.

In the next message we shall see what Jacob did after God told him to arise and go up to Bethel. He made a thorough clearance, not only with respect to himself but with respect to his entire household. Few Christians today have had this kind of clearance. When Jacob and his family stole away from Laban, Rachel, his beloved wife, stole the family idols (31:34). Prior to chapter thirty-five, we are not told that Jacob did anything about it. He simply tolerated his wife's bringing this abomination with her. But after God told him to go up to Bethel, "Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments" (35:2, Heb.). They not only put away the foreign gods; they also changed their garments, that is, they put off the old man and put on the new man (Eph. 4:22-24). Genesis 35:4 says, "And they gave unto Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem" (Heb.). Here we see that earrings are equal to idols and that Jacob buried them both. Jacob made this thorough clearance, telling his people that they were going up to Bethel and that there they would make an altar unto God (35:3).

THE CHURCH AS THE TABERNACLE

Much later, the tabernacle was built. Many items are related to the tabernacle. In the outer court there were the altar and the laver; in the Holy Place there were the showbread table, the lampstand, and the incense altar; and in the Holy of Holies there was the ark of testimony containing the golden pot, the budding rod, and the tables of testimony. All this is for Bethel. Every step of Jacob's life was involved with Bethel. This is a type. Today, we have Bethel in the church, because the church is the tabernacle filled with content. In the church we have the altar, the laver, the showbread table, the lampstand, the incense altar, and the ark of testimony. Everything in the tabernacle is for the building of the church.

OUR NEED TO SEE A GOVERNING VISION

We all need to pray, "Lord, show me this governing vision. Oh, I need to see this bird's-eye view." Here in this vision we have everything—holiness, spirituality, gifts, healing. Now we can see why, after nineteen centuries, the Lord Jesus still has not come back. He has not come back because Bethel has not yet been solidly built. The Lord has been and still is waiting for the consummation of His building. In Matthew 16:18 He said, "I will build My church." This word cannot be in vain; it will certainly be fulfilled. Our burden today is for this. As I check with my spirit, day after day and night after night the burden is coming. This burden is not a matter of a doctrine, but of the Lord's building of His church. We all must say, "Lord, help me to get through all other things. Lord, I only care for the building of Your church." This is the Lord's recovery today. This is the building of Bethel and the fulfillment of Jacob's dream. We are burdened for this.

I have been attending the Lord's table meeting since 1932. I can testify that I have never enjoyed a meeting at the Lord's table as I have tonight. This is another indication that the Lord is about to turn us from all minor things to His major goal—Bethel. When you were attending the so-called communion in the denominations before you came into the church life, did you ever hear of oneness, of the Body, of Bethel? But tonight at the Lord's table meeting we declared to the whole universe that we are one and that we are Bethel, the house of God. Who can deny this? When we make this declaration, we have the full satisfaction, the proof, that the Lord is satisfied with Bethel, with the building of His house. Brothers and sisters, we all must prepare ourselves for this burden. From now on, we shall see the Lord riding throughout the whole earth for the building of His church. He will absolutely fulfill His prophecy—"I will build My church."

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-EIGHT

BEING TRANSFORMED

(1)

The Bible begins with God's creation and ends with God's habitation. We all need to be impressed with these two words—creation and habitation. The consummation of the Bible is God's eternal dwelling place. If we would know the Bible, we must keep these two things, God's creation and His habitation, firmly in mind. We have seen that the book of Genesis contains nearly all the seeds of the truths concerning God's economy. Perhaps the last seed in this book is the seed of Bethel, God's habitation. Not only at the conclusion of the Bible, but even in the latter part of Genesis, we have the consummate end of God's economy—Bethel, God's dwelling place. The word Bethel means the house of God, or the temple of God, the dwelling place of God.

The book of Genesis covers the biographies of eight great persons: Adam, Abel, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with Joseph. We must include Joseph's life as part of Jacob's. In Adam, we have God's creation, and in Jacob, we have God's habitation, Bethel. With Jacob we do not merely see God's selection. Most Christian teachers have spent considerable time on the matter of God's selection of Jacob. Yes, God's selection is the beginning, but what is the ending, the consummate goal, of God's selection? It is Bethel, God's dwelling place. God created, selected, called, and saved us for the purpose that He might have a dwelling place for eternity. This seed of the building, like all the other seeds in the book of Genesis, is developed throughout the whole Bible. If we would understand the significance of this seed, we must consider the entire Bible.

Following Jacob, we have the house of Israel. The house of Israel was actually the house of God. After the exodus from Egypt, there was among the house of Israel the building of the tabernacle, and following the tabernacle, there was the building of the temple. Hence, the Old Testament is a record of eight great men, from Adam through Jacob, plus the tabernacle and the temple. The construction, destruction, and rebuilding of the temple bring us to the end of the Old Testament. What do we have in the New

Testament? Again, we have two main things: the tabernacle, which was Jesus (John 1:14), and the temple, which is the church (1 Cor. 3:16). The consummation of the church as the temple is the New Jerusalem. One meaningful and simple way of memorizing the Bible is to remember the eight great men from Adam through Jacob, the tabernacle and the temple as the types in the Old Testament, and the tabernacle and the temple as the reality in the New Testament, the ultimate issue of which is the New Jerusalem. These thirteen items cover the entire Bible.

What is the subject of the Bible? Some may say that it is man's fall, God's redemption, our repentance, God's forgiveness, our regeneration, and our salvation. Obviously, all these things are found in the Bible. Others may point out that the Bible mentions things such as serpents, scorpions, and frogs. The Bible, containing more than a thousand chapters, is not a simple book. Even one chapter may contain many points. But what is the subject of the Bible? Studying the Bible is similar to studying a human being. Although medical students have studied anatomy and physiology for centuries, they have not exhausted the study of the human body, one-third of a human being. They know something about man's body, but nothing about the soul and the human spirit. Man is very complicated. Nevertheless, he is still a man, a complete unit. We cannot refer to a man as being a heart, a kidney, or a nose. A man has a nose, but he is not the nose and the nose is not the man. Some say that the subject of the Bible is justification. Justification is included in the Bible, but it is no more the subject of the Bible than a man's nose is the man himself. If we would know what the subject of the Bible is, we must see that the Bible tells us of eight men, beginning with Adam in God's creation through Jacob with God's house, Bethel, and that following this we have the tabernacle and the temple in the Old Testament and the reality of the tabernacle and the temple in the New Testament, consummating in the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21 says that the New Jerusalem is the tabernacle of God and that God and the Lamb are the temple in it. Hence, the New Jerusalem is the ultimate issue of Bethel.

e. Being Transformed

At the time of chapter thirty-five, Jacob must have been approximately a hundred years of age. Although Jacob had passed through many things, prior to this chapter, we are not told that he had ever made a thorough clearance. He suffered many things in relation to his brother, his uncle, and his cousins, suffering twenty years under the hand of his uncle Laban. But Genesis never says that as Jacob was undergoing those sufferings he purified himself or made a clearance of himself. Rather, we are told of Jacob's skill and supplanting. But, as we shall see, when God told him to arise and go up to Bethel, Jacob made a thorough clearance.

The first time God appeared to Jacob was in a dream (28:10-22) in which Jacob saw heaven opened and a ladder extending from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending upon it. When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he was inspired to call the name of that place Bethel, and the stone that he had used as his pillow he set up for a pillar and poured oil upon it. Following this, he vowed that if God would bring him back safely to the land of his fathers, then the stone which he had set up for a pillar would be God's house (28:22). In this dream God paid Jacob a gracious visitation and caused him, undoubtedly in the spirit, to speak concerning God's eternal economy. If Jacob had not been inspired by the Spirit of God, how could he, a supplanter, have spoken a word revealing God's eternal purpose? It would have been impossible. God unveiled to Jacob His heart's desire, which is to have Bethel.

However, that dream at Bethel did not change Jacob at all. It seems that after the dream had transpired, the inspiration returned to heaven. Jacob's manner of life was unaffected. It is the same with us. At Bethel, Jacob prophesied in a wonderful way, speaking of God's house, but it seems that the prophecy returned to heaven. Like Jacob, many of us have had a dream, a revelation, or an inspiration in which we uttered a word of prophecy, if not to men, then at least to angels. But the next day we continued to live the same as always. After his dream at Bethel, Jacob continued his supplanting, especially the supplanting of Laban, as if he had never had the dream. In fact, he was even more "Jacobean" after the dream than before.

In chapter thirty-three, Jacob was still Jacob. The heavenly dream and the sufferings had not changed him. But something occurred in chapter thirty-four that touched Jacob's heart. His only daughter became defiled, and his sons caused him trouble by slaughtering people and plundering their city. These events touched Jacob deeply and caused him to make a radical turn. After this, God came in to speak to him.

1) God's Reminding— Back to Bethel

God did not give Jacob a sermon. Rather, because Jacob's heart had been touched and, as a result, he was ready to hear the word of God, God simply said, "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" (35:1). Here we see that God told Jacob to do four things: to arise, to go up to Bethel, to dwell there, and to make there an altar to God who had appeared to him. The turn, or the change, Jacob made in chapter thirty-five was very significant.

2) Jacob's Response

In 35:2-7 we see Jacob's response to God's word. Before this chapter, there is no record of a man who was walking in the presence of God and who cleared himself and his whole household. Verse 2 says, "Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments" (Heb.). For the single purpose of going up to Bethel, Jacob and everyone with him had to make a thorough clearance and to purify themselves. In this chapter God did not say, "Jacob, you are going to Bethel to build an altar there; you should realize that you must be holy. I am holy, and you must be holy also. You must rid yourself of all your foreign gods, purify yourself of every defilement, and change your garments."

Recently, an elderly Christian, a man who had been a preacher for over forty years, asked if we teach our people to dress in a certain way. He had observed the way the brothers and sisters dressed and wondered if we taught them to do so. I told him that during the past fourteen years we had never laid down any regulations about clothing. However, anyone who has been touched by God for His dwelling place will sense that something within is charging him to clear himself and to purify himself. You may tolerate certain defilements and looseness in your life. But whenever you touch the church and you mean business with the Lord to have the church life, something within charges you concerning those things which are not fitting for the church life. Immediately after God commanded Jacob to arise and go up to Bethel, Jacob charged his people to get rid of the foreign gods, to purify themselves, and to change their garments. Later we shall see that changing the garments signifies changing our manner of life, that is, putting off the old

manner of life and putting on a new man. Although God did not tell Jacob to do this, something deep within him required this of him. If he had been charged to go to a worldly place, he would have sensed no need to purify himself. Rather, he would have been ready to defile himself even more. Jacob had such a radical change because he had been touched for Bethel, for God's eternal dwelling place.

a) Making a Thorough Clearance

(1) Putting Away Their Foreign Gods—Idols

Firstly, Jacob told his household and all that were with him to put away the foreign gods that were among them (35:2). When Jacob and his household were fleeing from Laban, Rachel took the household images (31:34-35). Prior to chapter thirty-five, Jacob never charged Rachel to put them away. But after God had told him to go up to Bethel, everyone had to abandon their foreign gods, their idols. This is a shadow, a type, that is developed throughout the Bible. According to both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the first thing we must eliminate for the sake of God's dwelling place is our idols.

Many may claim that they have never had anything to do with idols. Materially speaking, it may be true to say that you have no idols. But we must know, spiritually speaking, what an idol is. An idol is anything that replaces God. Your education, your ambition, your position, your name, your desire, and your intention may replace God in your life and thus become idols. If you view the matter in this light, then you will have to admit that you have had many foreign gods. If your relative or friend replaces God in your life, then he is an idol to you. Our parents, spouses, and children may all become our idols.

Do you know why people worship idols? Undoubtedly, they worship them because of Satan's seduction. But there is a reason on the human side why people do this. People worship idols for the sake of gaining long life and happiness. Satan threatens people, telling them that if they do not worship idols, they will not have long life and happiness, but that if they worship idols, then they will have long life and happiness. Happiness includes many things: money, position, ambition, fame, a name. Many have idols due to their desire to be healthy. Why do you have something that replaces God? Simply because that thing may make you happy. Unlike Rachel, Jacob had no literal idols, but in his supplanting he had some idols. In fact, his supplanting was an idol. Why did Jacob supplant others? Because of his desire for happiness and enjoyment. Today, man has lost God and, pursuing foreign gods, seeks his happiness in idols. But God is our long life and happiness.

When God spoke to Jacob regarding Bethel, Jacob received the revelation concerning his life and realized that his life on earth was not for his own happiness. His life was for Bethel, for God's house. Thus, Bethel became his goal, the destination of his human life on earth. Formerly, his goal was his own happiness. Now, his goal and destination were replaced. No longer was his goal something for himself but something absolutely for God. In Shechem, Jacob had everything. But due to the trouble caused by his sons, he lost his safety and peace. At that juncture, God seemed to say, "Jacob, go up to My house. Here in Shechem you don't have safety and peace. Safety and peace are at Bethel. You must go up there." Thus, Bethel became Jacob's goal and destination. Jacob realized that the goal of God's house was holy; it was not a common thing. No one could enter into the house of God with idols, pollution, and old, filthy garments. Therefore, Jacob charged his household and everyone with him to put away all the foreign gods.

(2) Purifying Themselves

Jacob also charged everyone to purify themselves (35:2). We must not only put away the foreign gods, but also purify our whole being. In other words, our whole being, manner of life, and expression must be changed. This is not merely regeneration or a little change in life. Rather, it is a full transformation. Here in Genesis 35, Jacob was transformed.

In the Bible, purifying ourselves means to be purified from every pollution. Our whole being must be cleansed from anything that is pollution in the eyes of God. In 2 Corinthians 7:1 Paul says, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Paul's concept in 2 Corinthians 6 and 7 was the same as Jacob's in Genesis 35. Because the Corinthians were the temple of God, Paul told them to purify themselves. There can be no agreement between the temple of God and idols (2 Cor. 6:16). Idols are idols, and the temple of God is the temple of God. Which side do you take? If idols, then go to your idols. If the temple of God, then come to the temple without any idols.

When you came into the church life, no one told you anything, but deep within something convinced you that certain things had to go for the sake of the proper church life. Every one of us had such a clearance upon coming into the church. At that time, we cleared away many, if not all, of the foreign gods, forsaking the things, the matters, and even the persons we trusted in for happiness, saying, "I don't like to keep these things anymore. All foreign idols must go." In the church life, not an inch of ground can be surrendered to foreign gods. Furthermore, when we came into the church life we were purified. At least, we aspired to be pure, saying, "For the sake of the church life, I want to be pure in my whole being, in my mind, emotion, and will." We had the same desire that Jacob had. On the day Jacob's people went up to Bethel, they purified themselves, and among them there were no foreign gods.

Many of us, including myself, realize that we are not very good. Perhaps even today you have said, "Oh, I am not so good. My thinking is still not very pure." However, compare your present manner of life with your past. Although you should not be proud of yourself, you should say, "Lord, thank You. I am not very pleased with myself, but as I compare the present with the past, I have to thank and praise You that I am quite different from what I was." Although in chapter thirty-five Jacob was not yet mature, he had undoubtedly changed from what he once was. In the next message we shall see how radically transformed Jacob actually was. God again changed his name from Jacob to Israel. God told him that he should no longer call himself Jacob but Israel.

I have known many of you for twelve years or more. I know that many of you are unhappy with yourselves today. When someone asks you how you are doing, according to custom, you say, "I'm fine." According to your inner sense, however, you are not so fine. Perhaps you have just repented, crying to the Lord; but when someone asks you how you are, you say that you are fine. Although you may say "fine" to a brother, you never say this to the Lord. We should neither be proud nor disappointed. Compare yourself with what you were twelve years ago. Has there not been a great change? Who changed us? We all must admit that we did not change ourselves; we were changed by being in Bethel, in the church life. If you deliberately stay away from the church life for a few weeks, your former ugliness will return, the fox tail will become visible, the serpent tongue will be exercised, and all the bugs will be active. But if you continue coming to the church, contacting the church again and again, the fox tail will be removed, the serpent tongue will be cut off,

and the bugs will be poisoned. As long as you come to the church, the bugs will all be exterminated.

The church life is the most effective purification. Recently, I experienced a great deal of purification in the prayer meeting. As I was sitting in the meeting joining in the prayers, I was bathed and purified. I would not say that I was purified by the prayers, but I was purified by the church. The church is a large bathroom where we all are bathed and purified. If the church does not have this function, I am fearful that it will not long remain the church. As long as the church is the church, it will function this way. Often, when it is time to go to the church meeting, something within begins to purify us, telling us to cleanse ourselves. On our way to the meeting, we have frequently prayed, "Lord, I'm going to the meeting. Forgive me of this, cleanse me of that matter, and take that away from me." This is the purification for going up to Bethel. Let us all purify ourselves, for we must arise, go up to Bethel, and meet our God. We cannot meet Him in an old, polluted way. We must be purified. This purification is not a matter of our working, but of the working of the divine hand upon us. When we take care of His Bethel, His divine hand will purify us.

(3) Changing Their Garments

In addition to putting away the foreign gods and purifying themselves, they changed their garments (35:2). According to the Bible, to change garments means to change your manner of life. Ephesians 4:22-24 reveals that the old manner of life was the life of the fallen humanity and that the new manner of life is of the church. The church is the regenerated, new creation, and humanity is the fallen, old creation. When we were unsaved, we lived a manner of life that was of the fallen, old creation. Now, after having been saved and regenerated and having been brought into the church life, we must have a new manner of life. We must put off the old man and put on the new man. To put off the old man is to put off the old garments, the old manner of life, and to put on the new man is to put on the new manner of life, the church.

After putting away the foreign gods and purifying ourselves, we must change our garments, changing our manner of life. We should no longer express ourselves in an old way, but express ourselves as the church, as the new man in the new manner of life. We were the old, fallen creation, but now we are the new, regenerated creation. Many of our relatives, friends, colleagues, and neighbors can testify that after we came into the church life, our manner of life drastically changed. The church has changed and continues to change our manner of life. This is for Bethel.

(4) Burying Their Earrings

Verse 4 says, "And they gave unto Jacob all the foreign 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" (Heb.). Not only were the idols buried, but also the earrings. Earrings are self-beautifying items. These were dealt with in the same way as the idols. Many people's earrings, ornaments, are equal to idols in the eyes of God. When those in Jacob's household were putting away the foreign gods, they also put away their earrings. This indicates that to their conscience their earrings were as abominable as their foreign gods. After touching the church, many sisters had the same conviction and put off this kind of abominable ornament. This is not something related to morality but to the house of God.

God did not charge Jacob to make such a clearance. Still less did He say, "Jacob, you must tell your household and everyone with you to make a clearance and to purify themselves." Why, then, did Jacob charge everyone in this way? Because the house of God is not an individual matter. It is not only Jacob. The house of God must be the house of Jacob becoming the house of Israel. Eventually, all the descendants of Jacob became the house of God, Bethel. The real Bethel was not the tabernacle; it was the children of Israel. Likewise, we must see that today we are the church. We must be purified not only because we are going to Bethel, but because we are to be Bethel. We must put away all foreign gods and abominable ornaments, purify ourselves, and change our garments. Putting away the foreign gods also means putting away all foreign trusts. We must be cleansed in our whole being, inwardly and outwardly, from every pollution, and we must change our manner of life. This is all for the church life.

(5) Terrifying the Enemies

Verse 5 says, "And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob." It is very encouraging to see that their enemies were terrified. Due to the trouble caused by his sons, Jacob was afraid that the city people would fight against him and kill him. But after Jacob and all those with him had put away the idols, purified themselves, and changed their garments, a terror from God fell upon the city people. Their clearance and purification terrified the enemy. This indicates that if, for the sake of the church life, we put away all foreign gods and self-beautifying and abominable ornaments, purify ourselves, and change our garments, the demons and besetting sins will be terrified. There will be no need to fight to overcome; the enemy will be terrified and the victory will be ours. Have you ever terrified sins? Have you ever terrified gambling, drinking, or smoking? Perhaps you have found these things difficult to overcome. If so, it is because you have not put away foreign gods, purified yourselves, and changed your garments. If you do all this, all the "bugs," "scorpions," and "gophers" will be terrified and will flee and hide. I have read some books about overcoming sin and the world. Forty or fifty years ago I practiced what I read in those books. But the more I practiced, the more defeated I was because I was not in the church. Being in the church by putting away the foreign trusts, purifying ourselves, and changing our garments terrifies sin and worldliness and gives us the victory. Are you troubled by the little "gopher" of your temper? It will be terrified. Genesis 35:5 says that the people of the cities did not dare to pursue Jacob. God gave Jacob a prosperous journey up to Bethel. Whenever we are in the church, all the "gophers" are terrified.

b) Going Up to Bethel

After making a thorough clearance, Jacob and all his people arose and went up to Bethel (vv. 3, 6). At Bethel, he built an altar to God and "called the place El-Beth-el" (v. 7), realizing that God was God to him at Bethel. We must respond to God's call or reminder to go up to the church where we can build the altar of our real consecration and experience God in a practical way. After we come into the church, we all realize the need of a real consecration. By such a consecration, we experience God being God to us in His house—the church.

3) God's Clearing

Verse 8 says, "Deborah, Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth." For quite a while, I could not understand why, at this juncture, Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died. There are no wasted words

in the Bible. Deborah was a nurse to Jacob's mother, Rebekah. Rebekah must have died prior to Jacob's return. Thus, Deborah must have been very dear to Jacob as a comfort in place of his mother. At the precise time Jacob had the experience of Bethel, Deborah, his comfort, was taken away by God. As many of us can testify, when we put away the foreign gods, purified ourselves, changed our garments, and came into the church life, God intervened to take away our "Deborahs," our nursing mothers. Many of us had a "Deborah," someone or something loving, sympathizing, and soothing. But the day we came into the church life God spontaneously took our nurse away, and our "Deborah" died. The church life is a life that does not require a nurse. None of the church people needs a nursing mother. But, sorry to say, some of us still like to have some nurses to sympathize with us and to soothe and to comfort us like a mother taking care of an infant. Any word spoken positively regarding nursing mothers is addressed to babes. After being in the church for so long, do you still need someone to nurse you? Nevertheless, even the older ones still desire a "Deborah" to soothe and care for them. But if we mean business with the Lord for Bethel, He will remove our nurses.

In these verses we see that three things were buried: the idols, the earrings, and the nurse. All were buried under an oak. The oak is a symbol of flourishing life. Hence, all the foreign gods, the self-beautifying items, and the nurses are buried under the flourishing life, especially the life in the church. This is not a doctrine, but something that corresponds to our experience. The life in the church flourishes like an oak tree, but underneath it are the "Deborahs." We put off the idols and removed the earrings, but God caused our "Deborah" to die. This is a real purification, both from our side and from God's side. We put away and God took away. We put away the foreign gods, the earrings, the pollutions, and garments, and God took away the nurses. In the church life we do not need sympathy or nursing. All our "Deborahs" must be buried.

The oak under which Deborah was buried was "beneath Bethel" (v. 8). This indicates that our experience of the taking away and the burying of our "Deborahs" is not on a high plane; rather, it is beneath the level of the church. The church as the house of God is on the highest plane, and here in the church we must have some experiences that are also on the highest plane, such as the experience of Christ as our life and our person. To experience the burial of our "Deborahs" is rather low; it is beneath Bethel. Hence, the burial oak was called Allon-bachuth—the oak of weeping. This is not a matter worthy of our rejoicing.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-NINE

BEING TRANSFORMED

(2)

Genesis contains the seeds of nearly all the truths in the Bible. If we observe this principle, whenever we come to certain points in this book, we shall recognize that they are developed in the following books of the Bible. In other words, in order to understand any point in Genesis, we need to trace its development elsewhere in the Scriptures. Without the other books, we simply cannot understand Genesis. Genesis is not merely a book of stories. If we would derive the life, the supply, the revelation, and the vision from all the points found in the book of Genesis, then we must follow their development in all the subsequent books of the Bible.

The truth concerning the house of God was sown in chapter twenty-eight. If you read the Bible carefully, you will see that the house of God was first mentioned in this chapter. The house of God, Bethel, is mentioned in relation to a vision granted to Jacob in a very extraordinary way. Firstly, Jacob had a dream and then his dream was interpreted under divine inspiration. In his dream, Jacob saw the heavens open and a ladder set up on the earth extending from earth to heaven. Upon the ladder the angels of God were ascending and descending. With any dream, we firstly have the facts in the dream and then the proper interpretation. Jacob did not have a Daniel to interpret his dream for him; instead, this supplanter became his own Daniel. He certainly did an excellent job interpreting his dream, saying, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (28:17). Jacob said that this place, Bethel, was dreadful. If you would go to heaven, you must pass through this dreadful place, for the house of God is the gate of heaven.

After his dream, Jacob also made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God" (28:20-21). Instead of speaking to God in an intimate prayer, he made a vow. As part of his vow, Jacob said that the stone which he had set up for a pillar would be God's house (28:22). In Jacob's vow we see a further interpretation of his dream. Upon waking, Jacob said that that place was the house of God. Then he promised that the stone he used for a pillow would be built up into God's house. We see here that the house of God will be built with the stone which was Jacob's trust. The stone that Jacob used as a pillow is a shadow, a prefigure, a type, of Christ. Only Christ is the real rock that can be the pillow upon which we can lay our weary head. The very Christ on whom we rest will become the house of God. This is the material for building the house of God. In Genesis 28 we have the first mention of the stone for God's building. Of course, in chapter two the onyx stone is mentioned, but it is not mentioned in a clear way. The stone which is our trust will become the house of God. This means that the Christ whom we experience as our rest and trust will become the building material for God's house.

In chapter thirty-five the vision of Bethel came again. This time, however, it did not come just as a dream; it came as a reality. It was not only a vision, but a fact and an experience. The difference between chapters twenty-eight and thirty-five is that chapter twenty-eight was merely a dream. Bethel, the gate of heaven, the ladder, the angels—everything was seen in a dream. At most, we can only say that this dream was a vision. Up to that point there was no fact, no reality. The fulfillment of the dream comes into being in chapter thirty-five.

4) At Bethel

In this message we need to consider Jacob's experience at Bethel (35:6-7, 9-15). In Genesis 35 Jacob underwent a major change. As we saw in the last message, Jacob reacted to God's charge to arise and go up to Bethel by having a thorough clearance. This thorough clearance was not only made by him but by all those who were with him. Jacob was not only concerned with himself but with everyone with him. This is a strong proof that he had had a radical and thorough change. Undoubtedly, Jacob had been transformed.

a) Jacob Having Built

Jacob came to Bethel, "he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-Beth-el" (vv. 6-7). The first thing Jacob did at Bethel was to build an altar. Although Jacob had built an altar in Shechem, he did not call that altar "El-Shechem." He could not use the title of God for the altar he built in Shechem. This means that the altar in Shechem did not touch God's heart; it was not the altar He desired. Likewise, we may build altars everywhere without building the altar God desires. You may build an altar in Las Vegas, but you cannot call it the altar of God in Las Vegas. But when Jacob acted on the word of God, arising, going up to Bethel, dwelling there, and building an altar to God, he built an altar according to God's desires, not according to his own intention. God did not ask him to build an altar in Shechem, for that was not His choice. God's desire was to bring him back to Bethel. Thus, the altar built by Jacob in Shechem was neither according to God's desire nor according to His word. But because the altar Jacob built in Bethel was built at the word of God, he had the boldness to call it "El-Beth-el."

You may do many things for God, such as preaching the gospel and rendering other service to Him. You may even establish a meeting and designate it as the church. However, you do not have the confidence or the boldness to say that that is something of God. This is even true in small things. For example, you may love a brother, but not have the boldness to call that love the love of God. Although you do love that brother, you do not love him at God's word. Rather, you love him by your own choice and according to your personal taste. Because it is your love, you cannot say that it is "El-love," the love of God. You cannot call it the love of God until you love people at God's word and not according to your taste. When God tells you to love a certain brother, you must love him at His word. If you love the brother in this way, then your love will be the love of God.

Many missionaries have gone to the mission field without having the assurance that their mission was "El-mission." Many have told me that while they were working they had no peace. They did not have the confidence, assurance, or boldness to say that their mission work was the work of God. They were doubtful about it and could not attach God's name to it.

Many Christians today are forming groups. The larger groups become denominations and the smaller groups remain free groups. However, the founders of those groups do not have the confidence to call them the church. But when we in the Lord's recovery say that we are the church, they are offended. Deep within them, they lack the assurance to say that they are the church. A man is a man, and a woman is a woman. You cannot call a man a woman. Fifty years ago I began to say, "This is the church." The more I said this, the more confident I became because this really is the church. If it is not the church, then what is it? I am a man. The more I say that I am a man, the more assured I am of being a man. If you do not call me a man, then what would you call me? You may do many different things—start a mission work, establish a meeting, form a Bible study—but it all may simply be a good work done in Shechem, not in Bethel. Hence, you cannot call that work "El-Beth-el." However, when Jacob built the altar in Bethel, he had the boldness to call it "El-Beth-el."

The significance of an altar is consecration. An altar is built for the purpose of offering things to God. Before I came into the church life, I thoroughly consecrated myself to the Lord. However, after coming into the church life, I renewed my consecration. This renewed consecration was absolutely different from the consecration I had made prior to coming into the church life. Many of us can testify to this. You might have offered yourselves to the Lord many times before coming into the church, but once you came into the church, you had the deep conviction that you needed to offer yourselves anew and that there was a great difference between this consecration and any previous one. At best, your past consecration was at the altar in Shechem; it was not at the altar in Bethel. Consecration made before coming into the church is one thing, and the consecration made within the church is another.

b) God Appearing to Jacob

After the altar was built, God appeared to Jacob again (v. 9). Jacob's experience was somewhat different from Abraham's. When God first appeared to Abraham, there was no altar. But God appeared to Jacob, not only at Bethel, but in front of the altar. Before we came into the church life, we did have some experience of God's appearing. However, we were not at Bethel in front of the altar. Being by the altar at Bethel makes a great difference. Now, after coming into the church and building an altar, God appears again. Many of us can testify that after coming into the church life and consecrating ourselves to the Lord anew, we had the deep conviction that the Lord had appeared to us. We had the appearing of the Lord in our personal experience. It was not a mere doctrine. As long as we have built an altar at Bethel, we should have the appearing of God. This should not happen once in a while; it must be a continual experience. Daily and even hourly, we should experience the appearing of the Lord. In other words, we should walk in the Lord's presence.

c) God Blessing Jacob

When God appeared to Jacob in Bethel, He blessed him (v. 9). What blessing we have received since coming to Bethel and building an altar! When I was young, I liked the hymn that says, "Count your blessings, name them one by one." I encourage you to count your blessings, making a list of all the blessings you have experienced in the church life. How profound are the blessings in the church! Outside the church, no one can have the blessings found in Bethel.

d) God Reminding Jacob of His New Name

In His appearing to Jacob at Bethel, God also reminded him of his new name, saying, "Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called anymore Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name; and he called his name Israel" (v. 10). God seemed to be saying, "Jacob, didn't I change your name? Why then do you still call yourself Jacob? Now I remind you that your name is no longer Jacob and that you must call yourself Israel. Don't call yourself Jacob anymore, for that means that you live, walk, behave, and have your being in a 'Jacobean' way. You must live, walk, and have your being like Israel. Don't you know that you have wrestled with Me and have overcome Me? You must show the universe that you are an overcomer. You are not only a prince of God, but a wrestler of God. You must live in this way." This reminder had a background: the trouble caused by Jacob's sons and Jacob's fear and loss of boldness. Although he had been bold to wrestle with God, he was timid in facing the city people. In fact, he was terrified of them. But in reminding him of his new name, Israel, God seemed to say, "You don't need to be afraid of them. If you are afraid, it means that you have forgotten the name I gave you. I have given you the name 'the wrestler of God.' If you can wrestle with God, then you certainly can wrestle with anyone. If you can overcome Me, then whom can't you overcome? Jacob, you don't need to be afraid of anyone. I have given you the

name Israel. I was not offended by your wrestling with Me; rather, I appreciated it. Thus, I have given you the name 'the wrestler of God.' From now on, you should not be a supplanter, but a wrestler of God. Wherever you go, you must proclaim, 'I am the wrestler of God! The wrestler of God comes!' Jacob, behave yourself like a wrestler of God. Why must you be so timid? After you took My word to come here to Bethel, all the city people were terrified of you. You don't need to be afraid of them. Why should you be Jacob anymore? Forget about being Jacob and call yourself Israel."

The name Jacob means supplanter, heel-holder. Which do you want to be—a supplanter or a wrestler of God? Our original name was Jacob, but now our name is Israel. Do you believe this? If you do, then why are you still afraid of your temper? Why do you not rise up and say, "Temper, you must know that I am a wrestler of God. I am Israel." Whatever you fear will become your portion. If you are afraid of losing your temper, be assured that you will lose it. But if you tell your temper that you are Israel, the wrestler of God, the little "bug" of temper will disappear. Some of you may say, "I don't feel that I am Israel." No one asked you to feel it. God did not say to Jacob, "Jacob, don't you feel that you are Israel?" If God had done this, Jacob certainly would have replied, "No, I never feel like I am Israel. According to my feeling, I am still Jacob." Take heed to God's word. Which is more trustworthy—your feeling or God's word? Forget your feelings, considerations, understanding, and natural sight and listen to God's word and to His reminder. God has already said that our name should be called Israel. Why then are you still Jacob? From now on, we all must be Israel. Here in Bethel, Jacob began to call himself Israel. Would you say that you are Israel? Do you have the boldness to proclaim this, or do you still say that you are so weak? We are at Bethel and we are Israel. Both Bethel and Israel end with the letters e-l, indicating that both names imply the name of God. Do not look at yourself; listen to His reminder. This should encourage us and prepare us for God's promise.

e) God Promising Jacob

(1) To Be Fruitful and Multiply

In verse 11 God said to Jacob, "I am God, all-sufficient: be fruitful and multiply" (Heb.). This is the first item of God's promise. At Bethel, God promised Jacob that he would be fruitful and multiply. All of us in the church life, including the least and the youngest, need to believe this promise and claim its fulfillment, saying, "Lord, I do not agree with being a solitary believer. I stand on Your promise to be fruitful and multiply." If you do this, after a certain time, there will be thirtyfold, then sixtyfold, and then a hundredfold. When I was young, I prayed this way many times, and the Lord has surely answered my prayers. We all must pray to be multiplied. The Lord will answer our prayer and honor His promise. The way of the Lord's recovery is narrow and will never become a mass movement. No mass movement can be of the Lord's recovery, because the Lord's recovery is a matter of a multiplying life. Look at the plants: they have life and multiply. We are living with a divine life, and this life is a multiplying life. We have the confidence that we shall multiply. Pray for this and stand on His promise, taking hold to His word. Some may say that this was only a promise given to Jacob and that none of the Old Testament promises are for us today. Literally speaking, this is true. But all the promises made to Israel are types. Since we are in the reality today, the promises in type are also for us. Stand on the Lord's word and say, "Lord, what You promised Jacob was a shadow, but it must be a reality to me."

(2) To Be a Nation with Kings

God also promised Jacob, saying, "A company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins." Firstly, we have "a company of nations," indicating multiplication, and then we have kings, indicating the kingdom. Following Jacob, there was the nation of his descendants. Then there was the kingdom of his descendants under David and Solomon. In New Testament times there was the kingdom under his descendant, Jesus Christ; in the next age there will be the millennial kingdom; and after that, the eternal kingdom in the new heaven and the new earth. This one matter of the kings requires all the subsequent books of the Old Testament and the New Testament for its fulfillment. Revelation 11:15 is a part of this promise made to Jacob: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever." Even the church today as God's kingdom on earth is included in this promise. I am aware that when some hear this they will argue with me, saying that by mixing the church with Israel I am teaching wrongly. Literally speaking, this may be correct, but remember that everything in Jacob's life was a type to be fulfilled by us. Do not be satisfied to have one or two people saved through you. Rather, you should say, "Lord, I am not happy with this. I want to see the kingdom. I need the multiplication that will issue in the kingdom." This is a great matter. Do you have the faith for it? We all must say, "Lord, I would have the faith to be multiplied, not for my empire, but for Your kingdom."

(3) To Inherit the Land with His Seed

Still another aspect of God's promise to Jacob is mentioned in verse 12: "And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land." Here, Jacob is given the promise of inheriting the land with the seed. This promise is like a huge mountain. Do not think that the land mentioned here is simply the narrow strip of the land of Palestine. That narrow strip of land was a type of Christ as the good land. Christ as the good land for our possession eventually will be the stone that falls from heaven in Daniel 2. This stone will become a mountain filling the whole earth. Do you believe that the entire earth will be a great mountain and that there will be no plain, only a holy mountain? This great mountain is Christ.

f) Jacob's Reaction to God's Promise

In verses 14 and 15 we see Jacob's reaction to God's promise. Every time the Lord speaks to us, we must react. We should not be dull, dumb, or dead. Because I am living, I react to whatever people say. If a brother had no reaction whatever to anything I said to him, I would conclude that he was either dull or dead. When I speak to my grandchildren, they are very active and aggressive because they are living. When God spoke to Jacob, he reacted immediately.

(1) Setting Up a Pillar of Stone

Verse 14 says that "Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had talked with him, even a pillar of stone." The first thing that Jacob did in reacting to God's word was to repeat what he had done in Bethel the first time—to set up a pillar of stone. Nothing in our first dream that was truly of the Lord can ever be forgotten. When we return to the vision, we must repeat it. In 28:18 Jacob set up for a pillar the stone he had used for a pillow and he called the name of that pillar Bethel. He repeated this in chapter thirty-five. This is a crucial point. Deep within, Jacob was convicted that he was held by God to build Him a house on earth. Perhaps Jacob said to himself, "I could never forget my experience at Bethel. Now, after returning to Bethel, God talked to me much more than He did

before. Many years ago, I set up a stone as a pillar for His house. Now, after listening to Him again, I must repeat this." Jacob had vowed that a house would be built for God on earth. Eventually, this was completed by Solomon who built the temple as God's house.

(2) Pouring a Drink Offering
on the Pillar

Now we come to a very weighty matter—the pouring of the drink offering upon the pillar (v. 14). In chapter twenty-eight, Jacob poured oil upon the stone that he had set up for a pillar. But in chapter thirty-five there is some further development. Before he poured oil upon the pillar, he poured a drink offering upon it. Probably very few of us know the true significance of the drink offering. If you consult the commentaries for a definition of it, you will be unsuccessful. But by reading other verses, such as Numbers 15:1-5; 28:7-10; Philippians 2:17; and 2 Timothy 4:6, along with our experience, we can grasp the genuine significance of the drink offering.

According to Leviticus chapters one through seven, God charged His people to offer various offerings, without mentioning the drink offering because this offering was additional. Later, God charged Moses that His people, after entering into the good land, had to offer Him the drink offering in addition to the basic offerings in Leviticus 1 through 7. Hence, the drink offering was additional to the basic offerings. The basic offerings included the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. In addition to all these basic offerings, the children of Israel had to offer the drink offering (Num. 15:1-10; 28:7-10). (The drink offering mentioned in Exodus 29:40-41 was for the service of the priests, and the drink offering mentioned in Leviticus 23:13, 18, and 37 was for the firstfruit offered to God after the Israelites had entered into the good land and had labored on it, v. 10). In both Philippians 2:17 and 2 Timothy 4:6, Paul considered himself to be a drink offering. In Philippians 2:17 he said, "But if even I am poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and priestly service of your faith, I rejoice and rejoice with you all." Here Paul told the Philippians that he was being poured out as a drink offering upon their sacrifice or offering (the Greek word can be rendered either way). Paul seemed to be saying, "You Philippians are offering something to God. I am happy to be poured out as a drink offering upon your offering." Shortly before Paul was martyred he said to Timothy, "For I am already being poured out, and the time of my departure is at hand." What was the drink offering poured upon? According to the Old Testament, the drink offering was always poured out upon one of the basic offerings. When Paul was about to be martyred, upon what was he being poured out as a drink offering?

As we shall see, he was being poured out upon Christ. According to Leviticus, we may offer Christ to God as the basic offerings. By offering Christ in this way, we have some experience of Christ. This experience makes us happy, and we become people filled with joy, with new wine. As those who offer Christ to God, we shall be filled with new wine. We shall have wine within us. Eventually, this wine will saturate our entire being and we ourselves will actually become wine. When Paul said that he was being poured out as a drink offering, he himself, through his rich experience of Christ, was the wine that was being poured out as a drink offering upon the Christ he had experienced and offered to God. If you could check with the martyrs like Peter and Paul, they would all testify that their martyrdom was just a pouring out upon Christ of their joy with their whole being. All the martyrs were poured out as a drink offering upon Christ to God. They experienced Christ to such an extent that when they offered Christ to God as the basic offerings, they themselves were also poured out as a drink offering upon Christ. If we have the genuine experience of Christ day after day, this experience will fill us with joy as with divine wine. Then we shall be drunken with wine and become wine for God, saying, "O God, I would like to be poured out upon Christ as a drink offering to You." Often in the Lord's table meeting I have realized that a number of saints have experienced Christ to such a degree that when they offered Christ to God at the Lord's table, there was the indication in their prayer and praise that they were ready to pour themselves out upon Christ to God. This is the drink offering, and it can only be experienced in Bethel.

The seed of the drink offering is sown in Genesis 35. If we would understand it, we must read Numbers 15 and 28, Philippians 2:17, and 2 Timothy 4:6. Then we shall understand that we must not only offer Christ to God as the basic offerings, but also as the drink offering. We need to be filled with joy by experiencing Christ that we may become wine for God and be willing to be poured out as a drink offering upon Christ to God. This experience is deep and quite subjective. You may say, "O Father God, I offer myself as a drink offering upon Christ to You." Although you may say this, if you have not experienced Christ to the extent that you are filled with joy and are drunken with heavenly wine, you will not have the joy and the willingness to be poured out as a drink offering to God. In the church life there are the possibility and the potential of experiencing Christ so much that we shall be saturated with the divine wine and even become wine. Oh, in the church life I am filled with joy and am willing to be poured out upon Christ as a drink offering for God's satisfaction.

God enjoys drinking wine. He does not want the wine made from grapes, but the wine made from Christ's saturating us. God is not interested in grapes—He is interested in you with Christ. We must become wine through the experience of Christ. The only place where we can become God's wine is in the church. I assure you that in the church your experience of Christ will bring you to the point where you will be filled with heavenly joy and will become the divine wine and be willing to be poured out upon Christ for God's satisfaction. This is the reaction of Israel in Bethel. I have the complete confidence that from now on there will be many reactions like this in the local churches. Many dear saints will say, "Lord, I'm so saturated with Your joy that I'm drunken. I have become wine to satisfy my God. Now I am willing to be poured out, even to be martyred." Recall that Paul said that he was already being poured out upon Christ for God's satisfaction. In the church life we all must be saturated with heavenly joy so that we might be ready and willing to sacrifice ourselves, to be poured out upon Christ for God's satisfaction. In the church life we all can experience Christ to the degree that we are willing to be poured out as a drink offering.

(3) Pouring Oil upon the Pillar

As we have pointed out in chapter twenty-eight, pouring oil upon the pillar signifies the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon God's chosen people for the building of God's house. But here the pouring of the oil upon the pillar follows the pouring out of the drink offering upon the pillar. This indicates that our pouring ourselves out as a drink offering to God brings in the outpouring of the Spirit of God for His building. The more we pour out ourselves with Christ as an offering to God for His house, the more the outpouring of the Spirit of God will be brought in. The building of God's house needs this.

(4) Calling the Place Bethel

Verse 15 says, "And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Beth-el." In Genesis 28 Jacob called the place Bethel, but in Genesis 35, being convinced that it was Bethel, he again called that place by this name. The longer we remain in the church and the more we experience Christ in the church, the more we shall be assured that this is Bethel, and the more bold we shall be to say, "This is the church and I am in it." This is not simply a term, much less a designation or a denomination; it is our conviction and our declaration of the fact. We are fully assured that this is Bethel. Praise the Lord that we all can say, "I am now in Bethel. This is the church."

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE EIGHTY

BEING TRANSFORMED

(3)

5) The Experience at Bethel

We have seen that many crucial seeds of the truth are sown in the book of Genesis. The house of God, Bethel, is one of these seeds. However, not many Christians know what the experience of the house of God is. Undoubtedly, many know that, according to the New Testament, the house of God denotes the church (1 Tim. 3:15). But where is the practical and proper church life? Although there are millions of Christians on earth, very few of them have the genuine church life. Many merely sit in the congregation for the Sunday morning service and listen to a minister or pastor. But this is not the practical and proper church life revealed in the Bible. According to the Bible, in the genuine church life every saved one must be a living, functioning member. Every member of the Body of Christ must function. Not only do the members function, but they also live together to express God in Christ in a living, daily way. This is the practical church life revealed in the Bible. The truths regarding this practical church life are sown as seeds in Genesis.

Prior to chapter thirty-five, God was called the God of a certain person, for example, the God of Abraham or the God of Isaac. He was the God of individual persons. But in 35:7 we have "El-Beth-el," the God of the house of God. He is no longer simply the God of individuals; He is now the God of a corporate body, the house of God. Many Christians only experience God as their individual God. Not many have the experience of God as the God of the house of God. How much experience do you have of God as the God of a corporate body? We all must experience God in such a way that He is not only God to us individually, but also the God of the house of God. There is a great difference between the two.

In Genesis 35 we see a crucial and radical turn. However, not many children of God appreciate this. They read this chapter again and again without recognizing the radical turn contained in it. Before this chapter, God was the God of individuals. He was the God of Abel, the God of Enosh, the God of Enoch, the God of Noah, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac. But here He is no longer just the God of individuals, but El-Bethel, the God of the house of God. In Hebrew, "El" means God. In the title El-Bethel this Hebrew word for God is used twice, at both the beginning and the ending of this title. In a sense, the God of the house of God is double. We must admit that we do not yet have much experience of this. But we thank the Lord that after coming into the church life, we have had some experience of God's being God to us as a corporate body. In the church life, we do experience God corporately and not only individually. We all can testify that the God we experience in the church life is much richer and sweeter than the God we experience in our individual life. This is why we like to spend more time in the church life. Individually, we can experience the God of Abraham or the God of Isaac, but we cannot experience God as the God of Bethel. We can only experience the God of the house of God in the church life. If many years ago you had been told about the God of the corporate body, it would have sounded like a foreign language to you. But today this is not foreign to us. We are familiar with this experience and we appreciate it much more than our individual experience of God.

This does not mean, however, that there is not the aspect of experiencing God in an individual way. Even today, there is still this aspect. Never forget that the truths in the Bible have two aspects. This is also true of the experience of God, for the experience of God has a corporate aspect as well as an individual aspect. Many Christians today either have no experience of God or have just the individual experience of God. They lack the experience of God in a corporate way. But in meeting after meeting of the church life, we experience God in a corporate way.

At this point, I need to speak an honest word to some of you. Although you meet with us week after week, you do not have the corporate experience of God. For instance, you pray daily in your private life, but you never pray in the church meetings. In the meetings, you are observers, like a spectator at a ball game. You watch others play, but you yourselves do not play. You never participate in the meetings. Furthermore, some of you criticize those who do participate, saying that they are too bold or too quick. But what about you? Are you here to be critics, spectators, or to participate in the church life? This indicates that some among us do not appreciate the experience of God in a corporate way. Some of us still do not pray in the meetings. If you were asked to pray, you would always excuse yourselves. This reveals that you consider others as the priests and yourselves as the common people. By doing this you establish a clergy-laity hierarchy. In the eyes of God, this is heretical. We all must pray to overthrow this clergy-laity system.

According to my registration, the prayer meeting in Anaheim is better than that in any other church. I have visited nearly all the churches and I can testify that the prayer meeting in Anaheim is the best. The reason is that there is no clergy or laity in our prayer meeting. Although many pray, no one completes a prayer by himself. Rather, it may take many of us to finish one prayer. In the old, traditional way, when someone prayed, he not only finished one prayer but perhaps two or three other prayers at the same time. Either people did not pray at all, or they would pray several prayers in succession. But in Anaheim after someone prays a short sentence, someone else will follow him. In this way, many function together to offer one prayer. This is the experience of El-Bethel, the corporate experience of God.

Genesis 35 is a radical turn from the individual experience of God to the corporate experience of God. Before this chapter, El-Bethel is not mentioned. Elohim was revealed in chapter one, and Jehovah was revealed in chapter two. Later, God told Jacob that He was the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac. But, as we have pointed out, in chapter thirty-five we see a new divine title—El-Bethel, God of the house of God.

Elsewhere in this message we shall see the significance of God's telling Jacob that his name was no longer Jacob but Israel. God said to Jacob, "Israel shall be thy name" (v. 10), and Jacob seemed to say to God, "Your name is El-Bethel." Who are you today—Jacob or Israel? What does Israel mean? To answer that it means a wrestler of God is too doctrinal. Israel is the church people, and El-Bethel is the church life. We are the church people in the church life. This is not doctrine; it is experience. The church people are a people filled with God, and the church life is a corporate life of God. The church people are a people filled with God living together to enjoy God and to express Him. This is Israel in El-Bethel.

a) Jacob's Altar

At Bethel, Jacob built an altar (vv. 6-7). Jacob's experience of the altar was progressive. When he saw the vision at Bethel (28:18-19), he did not erect an altar. Although he did an excellent job of interpreting his dream, he only set up a pillar. During the years at Padan-aram, Jacob did not build an altar on which to offer something to God. Instead, he employed many gimmicks to supplant Laban. After leaving Padan-aram, Jacob firstly returned to the eastern part of Jordan to Succoth (33:17). In 33:17 and 18 the Bible does not say that Succoth is in "the land of Canaan," as it does with Shechem. At Succoth, Jacob built a house for himself and booths for his cattle, but he did not erect an altar for God. This reveals that he cared for himself and for his cattle, but that he did not care for God. Eventually, Jacob left Succoth and journeyed to Shechem in the land of Canaan, where he pitched his tent and erected an altar (33:18-20). Jacob called that altar "El-elohe-Israel," which means the God of Israel. This altar was built to the God of Jacob's individual, personal experience. In calling the altar El-elohe-Israel, he was actually calling it the God of himself. Many Christians are like this. They seek spiritual experiences for themselves individualistically. They have learned how to experience Christ and how to trust in God individualistically. God is not El-Bethel to them; He is El-elohe-Israel. But few Christians care for God's being the God of the house of God. On the contrary, nearly all Christian seekers care for God's being their God. Some of them might say, "Was not God the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? What is wrong with saying that God is my God? Oh, this wonderful God is my God!" Perhaps their book of Genesis does not have more than thirty chapters. They must proceed to chapter thirty-five and see that God is no longer merely the God of individuals, but the God of the house of God.

At Bethel in chapter twenty-eight, in Padan-aram, and in Succoth, Jacob had no altar. In Shechem he did build an altar. Although it was good to build an altar in Shechem, this altar was not built at the house of God; it was not built in the church life. Rather, it was erected at a place somewhat removed from the church life. If you consult a map, you will see that Shechem was not too far from Bethel. The word Shechem means shoulder, signifying strength. When Jacob came to Shechem, he was strengthened, for Shechem was a place of strengthening. Likewise, when we come to our "Shechem," we also are strengthened. Nearly all the revivals in today's Christianity take place in "Shechem." These revivals merely strengthen people. Many Christians need a "Shechem," a revival, once a year to strengthen them. No revivalists care for the church life. They are only concerned with strengthening people to go on in the Christian life. Nothing related to the church is covered by them.

The altar built at Shechem was called El-elohe-Israel, by the name of God as related to an individual, not El-Bethel, by the name of God as related to a corporate body. Some may say, "Isn't it good to be strengthened at Shechem?" But look at what happened to Jacob in chapter thirty-four. After he had settled down in Shechem, trouble came to him. He had a tent for his dwelling and an altar on which to sacrifice something to God. Although Jacob might have been satisfied, God was not. Thus, the experience of chapter thirty-four was necessary. Trouble came, and this trouble caused Jacob to lose his peace. Following this, in 35:1, God could say, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God." God seemed to be telling Jacob, "I don't want you to stay in Shechem. It is not adequate merely to be strengthened in the Christian life. A strengthened life can never satisfy Me. I desire the church life. I don't want strength—I want the house of God. I don't want you to remain in Shechem, but to go up to Bethel." After Jacob arrived at Bethel, he made an altar and called it El-Bethel.

Jacob's experience of the altar was a gradual progression. There was no altar in Padan-aram or in Succoth. The altar in Shechem was erected to the God of his individual experience; it was not an altar for the experience of God in a corporate way. The individual experience of God is good, but it is insufficient. We need to go on from the individual experience to the corporate experience.

An altar is for consecration. Probably all of you have consecrated yourselves to the Lord. But where was that consecration—at Shechem or at Bethel? Was that an experience of El-elohe-Israel or of El-Bethel? Before I came into the church life I had consecrated myself more than once. But the consecration I made after coming into the church life was much higher than any previous consecration. My consecration before the church life was only for myself. It was for me to be holy, spiritual, victorious, and acceptable to God. But my consecration after coming into the church life was different. When you live individualistically, you do not need very much consecration. After you get married, however, you find that your spouse is a troublemaker and that you need to consecrate yourself for this new situation. You may say to the Lord, "Lord, before getting married, I consecrated myself to You to be holy, spiritual, and victorious. Now that I am married I must consecrate myself to You for this. I like the windows opened, but my wife wants them closed. I need a consecration to match this situation." This consecration is new and different. Later, you have children, and this requires a further consecration. When you come into the church life, you not only have one troublemaker but hundreds of them. Many are afraid to come to Anaheim, thinking that it is too large and that the elders here are so strong and straight. They prefer to go to a smaller locality. This indicates that when we come into the church life we need a greater and greater consecration. When you get married, you need a consecration; when you have children, you need a greater consecration; and when you come into the church life, especially to the church in Anaheim, you need the greatest consecration. Without the topmost consecration, you could not bear the church life in Anaheim. You may say to yourself, "Oh, how difficult it is here in Anaheim! There are 'policemen' everywhere. I simply cannot adapt to this situation." Since you cannot adjust to it, you must build an altar to match it. As we all know, in front of the temple there was an altar, and no one could enter into the temple without first lingering at the altar. You must stop at the altar and offer yourself, putting yourself on the altar to be slaughtered. Then, after you have been resurrected, you will be free to enter into the temple.

What is the significance of an altar? An altar is for slaughter. Some have said, "The church life is good, but I cannot stand those leading brothers." Others have said, "I appreciate the church life, but I cannot bear the leading sisters. They are too holy. Their holiness slaughters me." Where then should you go—back to Shechem or Padan-aram? You have no alternative except to climb on the altar at Bethel and be slaughtered. The altar in Shechem is an individual altar, but the altar in El-Bethel is a corporate altar. This is the altar of the house of God, and you must present yourself upon it for the house of God. I have done this many times and, years ago,

I was slaughtered. Now, no one can offend me. You cannot offend anyone who has been slaughtered. If you do not take in this word and build an altar at El-Bethel, you will not remain in the church forever. One day, you will either walk away or become indifferent. When you are happy, you will come to the meetings, but when you are unhappy, you will not come. It seems that the church is the church, that you are you, and that you and the church have nothing to do with each other. If you do not become indifferent, you will leave because you have been offended. The church is full of offenders. I was slaughtered long ago for the church life in mainland China. Thus, none of you can slaughter me anymore. I cannot be offended by you. This is the experience of the altar built at Bethel. If you can still be offended, it means that, although you may have an altar in Shechem, you do not have an altar in Bethel. To have an altar in Bethel means to have a consecration for the church life. You need to purposely and specifically offer yourself to the Lord for the church life. If you do this, you will never be offended. Rather, you will be prepared for trials, tests, and sufferings. We all need such an altar. This is the experience at Bethel, the experience of the church life.

If you read chapters twenty-eight through thirty-five again, paying attention to this matter of the altar, you will notice the progression from no altar to the highest altar, the altar at El-Bethel. We need a definite, specific consecration for the church life. We need to say, "Lord, now I would make a thorough and specific consecration to You, not that I might be holy, spiritual, or victorious, but that I might experience Your house and remain in it." In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul said to Timothy, "If I delay, that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God." We need to experience God in His house and to behave in the house of God. This requires a definite consecration and a special altar. The common, ordinary altar that we experienced in the past will not be adequate for this. We all need the topmost consecration at the altar in Bethel.

In the past centuries, a number of books have been put out by Christian teachers on the subject of consecration. But, as far as I know, none of them tells Christians to consecrate themselves for the house of God. Mrs. Hannah W. Smith's famous book, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, places great stress on the matter of consecration, but it is only for a happy Christian life. She even considers consecration to be a secret of the happy Christian life, but she says nothing for the church life. The Keswick Convention, with which Mrs. Smith had much to do, also emphasized consecration. Actually, in the early days, the messages given at the Keswick Convention were focused on consecration. However, as far as I know, nothing was mentioned regarding consecration for the church life. In nearly every revival in Christianity consecration is stressed, but one can hardly hear of the consecration for the house of God. Because Christians have not seen the church life, all their altars are, at best, built in "Shechem." But in the Lord's recovery today we must build our altar at Bethel. We need the topmost consecration for the church life to fulfill God's eternal purpose and to satisfy His heart's desire.

b) God's Appearing

Jacob also experienced a progressive advancement in the matter of God's appearing. God appeared to him in a dream in chapter twenty-eight, but that appearing was not substantial. Nothing that we see in a dream is substantial. It may be correct, but it is not concrete. Nebuchadnezzar saw a great image of a human body in a dream (Dan. 2:31), but that image was not as substantial as a real human body, and the two iron legs in the dream were not as solid as the two sections of the Roman Empire. While Nebuchadnezzar beheld those things in a dream, he had no experience of them. Likewise, although Jacob experienced God's appearing in his dream, in El-Bethel he solidly experienced God's appearing. The Lord spoke to Jacob when he was in Padan-aram (31:3), but that was not a solid appearing of the Lord. In 35:1, the Lord also spoke to him, but that also was not a solid appearing. Only in El-Bethel did Jacob experience God's appearing in a substantial way. This is the progress in Jacob's experience of God's appearing.

Many of us can testify that before entering into the church life we had some experience of God's appearing. God did appear to us, but that appearing was not solid. But after coming to the church life and being in it for a time, we can testify that here God's appearing is not only real but also solid. If anyone would leave the church life after remaining in it for a time, he could never deny that while he was in the church life he had experienced the appearing of God in a solid way. Before we came into the church life, the appearing of God was rather vague. But the appearing of God in the church is always substantial. It is so concrete that it seems that we can almost touch it. The best experience of God's appearing is only in the church.

c) God's Blessing

There is also a progression in God's blessing. In the vision in Bethel (28:13-15), in Padan-aram, and in Shechem (31:3; 35:1), Jacob was not given God's blessing. God did bless Jacob in Peniel, but there He did not bless him solidly (32:29). Jacob was not given God's substantial blessing because he was not yet in the place where God intended him to be. At Peniel, we are told that God blessed Jacob, but we are not told in what way He blessed him. However, in chapter thirty-five, at Bethel, the blessing is very solid. There, God blessed Jacob, saying, "I am God, all-sufficient: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; and the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land" (vv. 11-12, Heb.). These are the solid items of God's blessing in Bethel.

d) Jacob's Experience of His New Name

In Bethel, Jacob experienced his new name. His name had been changed at Peniel (32:28, 30), but he experienced his new name at Bethel (35:10). At Bethel, Jacob's entire being was changed and he became a new person—Israel. No matter how good we were as Christians before we came into the church life, we were not new. But after we came into the church life, something within demanded us to be new. We had to be a new husband, a new parent, a new child. We all experience this inward demanding daily. We realize that, from now on, we must be another person. This is the experience of transformation.

The church life is a transforming life. In the church, everyone is under the process of renewal. We are being renewed day by day (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16). We are not being corrected, for that means nothing, but we are being renewed. The church is altogether a new man (Eph. 2:15), and the church life is the life of the transformed Israel. It is a new life with a new person and a new being. Here, in Bethel, we experience the new life, which is God in Christ. Here, in the church life, we are becoming newer every day. The longer we stay in the proper church life, the newer we become. Your chronological age may get older, but your being becomes newer. All the elderly brothers and sisters must become newer, quicker, stronger, and fresher. In their sharing they need to be louder and faster than the young people.

I expect that all the points in this message will become your practical experience. In the church life, we need the highest consecration, the consecration for the house of God, not for individual enrichment. If we have this, then we shall have God's appearing in a substantial way and enjoy His full blessing. Then we shall daily become newer and newer. This is the experience at Bethel, the experience of the church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-ONE

BEING TRANSFORMED

(4)

We need to consider further the experience at Bethel. In this message we come to God's promise.

e) God's Promise

We may be quite familiar with the term promise. In this portion of the Word, however, God's promise is not common. The God who gives the promise in chapter thirty-five is God all-sufficient (v. 11, Heb.). We need to give attention to the revelation of God's titles in the book of Genesis. In chapter one, God is only revealed as Elohim, and in chapter two we see the title Jehovah (rendered Lord in the King James Version). Elohim is God's title as Creator in relation to His creation, and Jehovah is His title in His relationship with man, revealing how God is related to man. The title the all-sufficient God, or God all-sufficient, is not revealed until 17:1, where God said to Abraham, "I am the all-sufficient God; walk before me and be thou perfect" (Heb.). In the past, we did not adequately realize the significance of this title. We thought that it simply meant that God was everything to us. Undoubtedly, it is correct to say that God's all-sufficiency means that He is everything to us. But for what purpose is this title of God revealed? I have given a number of messages in the past on this title of God, telling people that it denotes that God is rich and that He is our all-sufficient supply. He is everything to supply all our need. In a sense, this was right. God is all-sufficient in order to supply us. But for what does He supply us? Does He supply us merely in order that we might be saved or be spiritual? No. If we would see the purpose for God's being the all-sufficient One, we need to read Genesis 35 and compare it with Genesis 17.

The purpose of God's revealing Himself as the all-sufficient God is for His building. Just as Elohim is for God's creation, so the all-sufficient God is for God's building. Do not understand the Holy Word by your imagination. Understand the Bible by the Bible itself, by comparing one portion of the Word with another. How do we know that Elohim is for God's creation? All Bible students agree that the first mention of an item in the Bible establishes a principle for that particular thing. The first mention of Elohim is in Genesis 1. In this chapter, God is revealed for His creation. Therefore, this establishes the principle that Elohim basically denotes the creating God, God the Creator.

Genesis 17:1, the first mention of the title the all-sufficient God, El-Shaddai, clearly reveals the significance of this title. Prior to that time, Abraham had been called by God for the purpose of becoming the father of so many of God's called ones. God did not intend that Abraham fulfill this by the exercise of his natural strength, and God did not give Abraham a child until his natural strength had been exhausted. Abraham, however, neither understood God adequately, nor had faith in Him for this. Instead, he followed his wife's proposal that he bring forth a child by using his natural strength with a concubine. God was offended by this and did not speak to Abraham for thirteen years. Do not think that God cannot be offended, or that He will always be patient with you. We are nowhere told in the Bible that God is all-patient. In Abraham's case, God was offended, not by sin, but by the exercise of Abraham's natural strength. In God's economy, nothing offends Him more than your exercise of your natural strength. Whenever a called one of God uses his natural strength to do something for the accomplishment of God's purpose, God will be offended. In a sense, using your natural strength is an insult to God. God does not need your help. To exercise your natural strength means that you are capable of helping God. This indicates that God is not sufficient and that He needs you to assist Him. When God spoke to Abraham again after an interval of thirteen years, He said, "I am the all-sufficient God." If you read this chapter carefully, you will see that God's being all-sufficient is for us to produce the materials for His house.

Genesis 17 and 35 correspond to each other in at least three ways. Firstly, both chapters reveal that God is all-sufficient. God revealed this divine title to both Abraham and Jacob. Secondly, in both chapters a change of name occurs. Abraham's name was changed from Abram to Abraham, and Jacob's name was changed from Jacob to Israel. In spiritual life, the change of name signifies transformation, not merely the change of label. You may say, "Witness Lee, you have done something wrong. From now on, you are not Witness Lee but Charles Ford." This change of label means nothing. According to the Bible, to change your name is to change your being. Formerly, you were Abram; now you are Abraham. Previously, you were a supplanting Jacob; now you are Israel, the wrestler of God. This is the change, not of a label, but of your being, of your constitution. Hence, chapter seventeen speaks of the transformation of Abraham and chapter thirty-five speaks of the transformation of Jacob.

Thirdly, in both chapters we have God's promise. God's promise to Abraham is repeated in His promise to Jacob. God's promise to Jacob in chapter twenty-eight was indefinite. In 28:14 God said, "Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth." If I had been Jacob, I would have said, "Lord, I don't want my descendants to be dust. Instead of millions of particles of dust, I would rather have a few kings." Although God's promise in chapter twenty-eight speaks of dust, His promise in chapter thirty-five speaks of kings and nations (v. 11). A nation denotes a kingdom. God's promise in 35:11 is a repetition of His promise in 17:6. In both instances, He promised that nations and kings would come forth. In Jacob's dream at Bethel, God told him that his seed would be as dust. But now, in the actual experience at Bethel in chapter thirty-five, God's promise has advanced. Here, there is no mention of dust. Instead of dust there are nations with kings. The focus of the promise in this chapter is to be fruitful and multiply to bring forth nations with kings. Thus, Genesis 17 and 35 correspond to each other in three respects: in the revelation of the divine title, the all-sufficient God; in the changing of human names; and in the promise of multiplication for bringing forth nations with kings.

Now we can see the purpose of the title the all-sufficient God. The all-sufficient God is for the building of God's house. We all need to take in this word. The all-sufficient God is for the building of Bethel. God is all-sufficient for the church life, for the building of His house on earth. You cannot experience the all-sufficient God in an individualistic way. In order to experience the all-sufficient God,

you must be in Bethel, in the house of God, in the church life.

This truth is proved by our experience. Before we came to the church life, many of us had some experience of God. But as we all can testify, we did not experience God as the all-sufficient One. Although I experienced God in various aspects, I did not experience Him as the all-sufficient One until I came into the church life. But after being in the church life for many years, I can say, "Hallelujah, what an experience of the all-sufficient God I have in the church life!" God is too all-sufficient to be experienced by just a few individual believers. As individuals, we are too limited. God's all-sufficiency requires a corporate body. We need the house in order to experience this aspect of Him.

Recently, we had a marvelous prayer meeting here in Anaheim. I believe that that meeting will stand as a memorial for eternity. All the utterances in the prayers were unique. In our prayers we prayed about the travailing woman and about the prevailing, victorious man-child. It was wonderful! We could never have prayer like this alone in our rooms; we must be in the church. Any local saints who missed that prayer meeting certainly missed a great deal. This is an experience, not of Elohim or of Jehovah, but of the all-sufficient God. In that prayer meeting I was above the third heaven enjoying the all-sufficient God. Only in the church life is it possible to realize the all-sufficiency of our God.

When I hear of the opposition from our critics, I do not feel hateful toward them; rather, I feel full of pity. How much they are missing! Their traditional religion is frustrating them and keeping them from God's up-to-date move. What an all-sufficient God we are experiencing in His present move! This is not a teaching or a doctrinal understanding; it is our experience of God in the church life. The all-sufficient God is revealed for the building of Bethel and He is experienced in the church life.

The New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament term "the house of God" is "the church." In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul said, "But if I delay, that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth." For us today, Bethel is not history; it is the church of the living God. The Bethel in the Old Testament is a type of the practical experience of the church life. What poverty there is in today's Christianity! Most Christians think of Bethel as past history. They do not realize that the church life today is Bethel. The reason that they do not understand this is that they do not have the church life. Praise the Lord that in the Lord's recovery we have the church life!

In the church life, our experience of the all-sufficient God is increasing day by day and even minute by minute. Our church life in Anaheim has greatly increased in the last two years. If you compare January, 1977 with January, 1975, you will see the difference. Surely, 1977 will be a great year in the Lord's recovery. In October of this year there will be in Taipei an international conference of the churches. Only the Lord knows what will happen at that time, or even next week. I believe that some very significant things are about to happen. The church life is marching on; it is advancing day and night. Many of us can testify that the church life has advanced since this afternoon. Hallelujah, the all-sufficient God is for the church life, today's Bethel!

(1) Not in Padan-aram

In Padan-aram, God did not give a promise to Jacob (31:3). Why did God not give him a promise there? It certainly was not because God changes, for God never changes. No promise was given to Jacob in Padan-aram because that was not the proper place. In Padan-aram, Jacob was not in the right position to receive God's promise. If we would receive God's promise, we must be in the proper place. I say strongly that many things can only be received in the church life. Outside of the church life, you do not have the position to receive these things.

(2) Not in Succoth or in Shechem

Eventually, Jacob left Padan-aram and journeyed to Succoth, which means "booths" (33:17). In Succoth, which was on the border of the good land, Jacob built a house for himself and booths for his cattle, but he did not erect an altar for God. Later, Jacob traveled from Succoth to Shechem. We have seen that in Shechem he built an altar. But this altar was built at the place of his own satisfaction, not at the place of God's satisfaction. Thus, God changed Jacob's circumstances that he might be stirred up and receive the charge to arise and go up to Bethel. Neither in Succoth nor in Shechem did Jacob receive God's promise.

(3) Only in Bethel

Only in Bethel did God give His promise to Jacob (35:11-12). The promise in chapter thirty-five is more solid than the promise given to Jacob in the dream (28:13-14). Before we came to the church life, we never had a solid promise given to us by God. The most solid promises are always given in the church life. Our experience after coming into the church life is that nearly every day is a day of promise. This means that every day is full of expectations. Outside the church, we had no hope. Did you have hope before coming into the church life? No, we only had disappointment and discouragement. But now, in the church life, everything is so definite and meaningful. Morning, noon, and night we have hope. All these hopes are the promises we are receiving day after day.

All the promises given by God and received by us in the church life are for God's building. They are not for our little cottage or hut. In the past, some of us desired to build a little cottage of holiness, and some of the sisters expected to build the little hut of a good married life. Many wives who have not found married life enjoyable have sought to find a happy married life in Christianity. Even after coming into the church life, many sisters still have deep within them the hope of finding in the church the happy married life they have been seeking. Their intention is not for the building up of the house of God; it is to build the little hut of their married life. But the experience of many of us is this: when we were endeavoring to build a little hut for ourselves, God blew upon it. In my experience years ago, God firstly blew away the roof and then the walls. After that, my hut was gone. But do not think that all the church people are miserable because the hut of their married life has been demolished. We have a much better married life, not in our little hut, but in the house of God. Today, in the church life, I can testify and boast to the enemy concerning the wonderful married life I have in the church. If you did not have the church life, what a miserable married life you would have! When we tried to build a little hut for ourselves, we were unsuccessful. But when we brought our married life into the church, we found ourselves in a mansion. Praise the Lord that we are here for the house of God!

Before I came into the church life, I also attempted to build a little house of patience. As many of you know, I am a quick person. It takes a great deal of energy for a fast person to be patient. I even hate to get a busy signal when I dial the telephone. Realizing as a

young man that I lacked patience, I attempted to build a little house of patience. I also did my best to build houses of holiness and victory. I wanted very much to be victorious over my temper. A fast person is impatient, and impatience causes us to lose our temper. I was quite aware that I was impatient, unholy, and defeated. Although I tried to build houses of patience, holiness, and victory, I was not successful in building even one of them. When I came into the church life, I did not immediately forget these houses. Rather, I still attempted to build them. But one day I saw that it was foolish to build these small houses, for I already had one large house—the church life. As long as we are in the church life, patience, holiness, and victory are ours.

Let me share with you something I have experienced many times. When I was on the verge of losing my temper, I thought about the church, and immediately my temper disappeared. Perhaps I said to myself, "I am about to lose my temper with the elders." But, by the Lord's mercy, I thought about the church, and my temper vanished. There is not always the need to even experience the church life. Even a thought about the church life can quell our temper. You may say, "Brother Lee, this is superstitious. How can a little thought about the church life take away your temper?" I cannot explain this, but I know that I have experienced that even a thought about the church can make you victorious. If you actually live in the church life, what holiness and victory you will have! When you get into the New Jerusalem, will you still be seeking holiness, humility, and patience? No, when you get into the New Jerusalem, all this vocabulary will be terminated. There will be no patience, just God Himself as the all-sufficient God. In the church life we have a miniature of the New Jerusalem today. No other Christians experience holiness as much as we do. We are not building our cottages and huts. We are only for the unique building—the house of God. This house is a mutual habitation. Both we and God abide here. Praise the Lord that we are now in the church life experiencing God in a corporate way!

The promise in 35:11, given by the all-sufficient God, is mainly for us to be fruitful and multiply. It seems that this resembles gospel preaching. Although there may be some similarity between this promise and gospel preaching, the preaching of the gospel today is a form of fruit-bearing. While preaching the gospel might be an outward activity, bearing fruit is an inward overflow of life. To be fruitful and to multiply means to bring forth children, to produce something out of the riches of your inner life. This can only happen through the overflow of the rich inner life.

Suppose we were all "monkeys" and God said, "Monkeys, be fruitful." If this were the case, a great many "monkeys" would be brought forth. Certainly, God does not desire this kind of multiplication. God wants the multiplication of Israel, not of Jacob. As we have seen, the name Israel has the Hebrew letters for God—El—in it. Our multiplication must be the multiplication of God. The "monkey" multiplication is not the multiplication of God because a "monkey" does not have the essence, the element, of God in it. It lacks the "El." But Israel contains some part of God. We need to be transformed for multiplication. Before Abram became Abraham, God never told him to be fruitful. If God had spoken this word before Abram had become Abraham, the natural man, not the transformed one, would have been multiplied. Only after Abraham had been circumcised and had experienced the changing of name did God promise to make him "exceeding fruitful" (17:6). It is the same with Jacob. In chapter twenty-eight, God did not promise Jacob that he would be fruitful and multiply. There, He only said that Jacob's seed would be as dust. But it is different in chapter thirty-five. Here, God promised Israel that he would be fruitful and multiply and that nations with kings would come out of him. This is not the multiplication of "monkeys," but of Israels.

In their gospel preaching, many Christians have brought forth "monkeys," which are not good for the church life. Do you want to have a multiplication of "monkeys"? No. We must have the multiplication of Israels. In order to have this, we need to be transformed from Jacob into Israel because only Israel can bring forth Israel. Hence, the promise in this chapter is based upon the fact of Jacob's being transformed. This also is for the building of God's house.

Although I brought some people to the Lord before I came into the church life, none of them came into the church life. I brought them into Christianity, but, as hard as I tried, I could not bring them into the church life. But after I entered into the church life, hundreds of others who were brought to the Lord in my early preaching not only came to salvation, but also entered into the church life. You may say, "Brother Lee, before you came into the church life, you were Jacob, and, thus, you brought forth other Jacobs." That is right. But after I came into the church life and experienced transformation, nearly all those whom I brought to the Lord became the material for the building of the local church life, for the building of the house of God. There is a great difference between gospel preaching and this kind of multiplication. We are not merely preaching the gospel by carrying on certain outward activities; we are living the church life to bring forth the proper fruit for the church life.

Notice that verse 11 does not say that this multiplication is for Bethel. Rather, it indicates that it is for nations with kings. This reveals, or at least implies, that the proper church life must be the kingdom. The result of our multiplication must be the church life, and this church life must be the kingdom.

There is a problem with interpreting the phrase "a company of nations" in verse 11. How many nations actually came out of Jacob? Only the nation of Israel issued from him. However, in Hebrew the word translated "company" means a multitude. Furthermore, in 17:5 Abraham is called the "father of a multitude of nations" (Heb.). What are the many nations of which Abraham is the father? I do not believe that God counts the Arab nations because they are the descendants of Ishmael. Only one nation, the nation of Israel, has come out of Abraham. We need the whole Bible to develop any of the seeds found in the book of Genesis. Undoubtedly, Israel was a nation, a kingdom. The church, the millennium, and the New Jerusalem in eternity will also be kingdoms.

Even today, the church life must be a nation, a kingdom. Our multiplication must result in nations. This means that whatever fruit we bear must issue in the church life, which will be a genuine kingdom of God with kings. We are not only here for the church life, but also for the kingdom. For the church we do not need much discipline, but for the kingdom we need considerable discipline.

At the end of the Gospel of Mark, the Lord said to His disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15), and in the conclusion of Luke it is written, "That repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations" (Luke 24:47). But in Matthew 28:19, the Lord said, "Go therefore and disciple all the nations." The Gospel of Matthew is concerned with the kingdom, and in this Gospel the church life today is the kingdom. Matthew 16:18-19 indicates this: "On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens." In these verses the words church and kingdom are interchangeable. This reveals that the church is the kingdom and that the kingdom is the church. The church life today must be the kingdom. Because in Christianity there is no kingdom, it is true to say that in Christianity there is

not the proper church. In Christianity there is no discipleship, no discipline. We must bear the fruit who will be genuine disciples, those who will come under the divine discipline so that the church life might truly be the kingdom. In the church life today, there is the need of discipline. If we do not accept this discipline today, how can we expect to reign during the kingdom age? If you have never been disciplined under God's authority, you will not know how to rule over the nations. The church life is a preparation for the kingdom, and in it we are now being disciplined to be Christ's co-kings.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-TWO

BEING TRANSFORMED

(5)

f) Jacob's Doing

(1) Building a Pillar

In this message we shall still dwell on the experience at Bethel. In 35:14, at Bethel Jacob eventually set up a pillar of stone as he did after having the dream when he was at Bethel the first time (28:18). There, this pillar of stone was called the house of God (28:22). If Jacob had not called this pillar the house of God, we would never realize that the pillar of stone was for the building of God's house. We would think that it was simply a mass of rock. But now we know that this stone can become a house. This indicates that the pillar will become a building, the house of God.

In the book of Genesis, there are two kinds of pillars—the pillar of stone (28:18; 35:14) and the pillar of salt (19:26). Which kind of pillar do you want to be? Certainly, we all want to be pillars of stone. The pillar of stone indicates building in strength. Solomon set up two pillars in the porch of the temple (1 Kings 7:21). The first pillar was named Jachin, which means, "He shall establish," and the second was named Boaz, which means, "In it is strength." The pillar of stone not only indicates building, but building in strength. The pillar of salt indicates shame, for a pillar of salt is useless for God's purpose. Lot's wife, who was one of God's called people, became a pillar of shame. She should have been building material, but due to her degradation she became shameful material.

During the course of this life-study, we have seen again and again that nearly everything in this book is a seed of the truth that is developed in the following books of the Bible. The way to study Genesis is to trace all its points in the subsequent books of the Bible. The way to study the book of Revelation is just the opposite. If you would understand Revelation, you must trace its points backward in the foregoing books. In this message we need to follow the development of the seed of the pillar.

(a) A General Sketch

aa. For the Temple

After Solomon built the temple, he purposely added the two pillars. According to our natural concept, we would think that Solomon should firstly have built the pillars and then the temple. But it was after he had built the temple that he proceeded to build two pillars and to place them in front of the temple (1 Kings 7:15-22). If we could have seen that temple, our eyes would have firstly attended, not to the temple itself, but to these two pillars. The size of these pillars is seemingly out of proportion to the size of the temple. The disproportionate size of the pillars is significant. It indicates that the two pillars in the temple are like a huge signboard. Today, when we approach a certain building, there is a sign designating what that building is. Likewise, in front of the temple were two pillars which said, "God shall establish," and, "In it is strength." These two pillars declare to the whole universe, including mankind, Satan, and all the fallen angels, that the Lord establishes and that strength is in the building. The Bible emphatically says that the first pillar is called Jachin and the second Boaz. We have pointed out that the name Jachin means, "He shall establish" and that the name Boaz means, "In it is strength." This reveals clearly that the building of God's house is altogether dependent on the pillar. This is the reason that Jacob did not build the house of God, but only set up a pillar.

In chapter twenty-eight, Jacob was still a supplanter. Nevertheless, this supplanter received both the vision and the interpretation of the vision. He interpreted his vision, his dream, by setting up a pillar and calling it God's house. This interpretation was much better than Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. Daniel merely interpreted; he did not set up anything or take any action. Jacob, however, not only interpreted his dream verbally, saying, "This is the house of God"; he also set up a pillar and called it the house of God. How could Jacob, an unrepentant, unregenerated, and untransformed supplanter, have done such a wonderful thing? Nevertheless, he did it, and we all must say, "Thank you, Jacob, for opening the heavens that we might see the house of God."

For the building of God's house, the heavens were opened by a supplanter. I believe this because the Bible tells us so. I do not trust in my concept, for according to my concept, it would be impossible for a supplanter to do this. I could easily believe that a godly and pious person like Daniel, a man who prayed daily, could have interpreted a spiritual dream. But it seems neither fair nor logical for a supplanter to do this. But he did it spontaneously. This is absolutely a matter of grace. As Romans 9:11 indicates, it is "not of works, but of Him who calls." Romans 9:13 says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." Grace is not a matter of fairness. Do not question God, saying, "God, why do You hate Esau? To me Esau is better than Jacob. It is unfair for You to love Jacob and hate Esau." To this, God would reply, "I simply love Jacob and hate Esau. What do you have to say about this? When I hate, I have the position to hate, and when I love, I have the grace to love." Who are you—Esau or Jacob, a good man or a supplanter? We all must confess that we are Jacobs, heel-holders, supplacers. The church is filled with heel-holders. If you are not a heel-holder, you will miss God's grace. We are true heel-holders, but we are heel-holders in grace. No one can deny this. I can shout and declare, "Praise the Lord that I am a heel-holder in grace. Grace makes me different."

Although in chapter twenty-eight Jacob was a supplanter, by the time we come to chapter forty-eight we see that this supplanter has been thoroughly transformed into a man of God. This man of God is the pillar. In a sense, the house of God was built with this pillar. When you enter into the temple of God in the universe, the first thing you see is this God-man, this Israel standing before God's building. After Jacob was transformed into Israel, he stood in front of God's building as a signboard of God's house.

As we proceed to the New Testament, we see that the Lord Jesus came through incarnation. His incarnation was the erecting of a tabernacle (John 1:14). This tabernacle, which was erected that God might dwell among men, was a precursor of the temple. When you see a little boy, you know that a full-grown man is coming. Likewise, when you see the tabernacle, you realize that the temple is coming. As the tabernacle, Jesus was the indicator that God's temple was soon to appear. This is why the Lord changed the name of Simon, the representative of the first group of disciples, to Cephas, which means a stone (John 1:42). In Matthew 16:18, after Peter had answered the Lord's question, "Who do you say that I am?" by saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," the Lord Jesus responded, "You are a stone" (Gk.). The Lord seemed to be saying, "I am Christ, the rock, and you are a stone to be built upon Me for the building up of My church." In his first Epistle, Peter later said, "You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2:5). Consider also the case of the Apostle Paul. Formerly, he was an opposer of God's building, doing everything possible to persecute, damage, and lay it waste. But as he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the church, he was caught by the Lord and became not only the material for the building, but also a wise masterbuilder (1 Cor. 3:10).

In Galatians 2:9 Paul said that James, Cephas, and John were reputed to be pillars. At that time, they were respected by the saints as pillars. The pillars in 1 Kings 7:21 refer to the building of the temple of God in the Old Testament, but the pillars in Galatians 2:9 refer to the building of God's house in the New Testament. Many Christians realize that Peter and John were disciples and apostles, but not many realize that they were also pillars. They were not only disciples discipled by the Lord and apostles who discipled, taught, and edified others; they were also pillars, signboards of God's building in the New Testament. If you came to Peter, John, and James, they would not declare doctrine or religion to you. Instead, just as the pillars in front of the temple did not declare religion, teachings, or commandments, but the temple, so they would declare the house of God. When anyone saw the two pillars in front of the temple, they immediately realized that the temple was there. Likewise, when we see Peter, James, and John, we realize that the building of God's house is there. Many Christians view things through colored glasses. When you speak to them of Peter, they simply think of him as an apostle. Do you have the concept that Peter is a pillar? For years, whenever I thought of Peter and John, I considered them as apostles, not as strong pillars. Recently, however, the Lord has revolutionized my concept. Now whenever I think of Peter, James, and John, I think of three large columns standing before me. When we see these columns, we do not think of religion or doctrine; we think of the house of God. These pillars stand in the universe to declare Bethel, God's temple.

cc. In the New Jerusalem

Do not think that in this matter of the pillars I am allegorizing the Bible. The letters G-o-d spell "God," and the letters d-o-g spell "dog." This is not allegorization; it is reading. God, who is the best typesetter, has printed some very clear words for our understanding. Firstly, in Genesis 19:26 He typeset a negative pillar, the pillar of salt. By mentioning this negative pillar, God is asking us whether we want to become a pillar of salt. In chapter twenty-eight, we have the pillar of stone, and in 1 Kings 7 we have the two pillars in front of the temple. In Galatians 2:9 pillars are mentioned again, this time with respect to the temple of God in the New Testament. In Revelation 3:12, the Lord again speaks of the pillar, saying, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God." The pillar in this verse does not refer to the temple in either the Old Testament or the New Testament, but to the New Jerusalem in the coming kingdom and in eternity. The temple of God is in three stages, three dispensations: the Old Testament stage, the New Testament stage, and the stage in the kingdom and in eternity. First Kings 7 covers the Old Testament stage, Galatians 2:9 covers the New Testament stage, and Revelation 3:12 covers God's building in the kingdom age and in eternity. This is God's way of typesetting. We put G-o-d together and we read the word "God." Likewise, as we put 1 Kings 7:21, Galatians 2:9, and Revelation 3:12 together, we can say, "Now I understand why, in interpreting his vision of God's house, Bethel, Jacob set up a pillar. The pillar is an indicator, a signboard, a designation, of the house of God."

In 1 Kings 7:21 there were just two pillars, and in Galatians 3:9 there were only three pillars. How many pillars will there be in the coming age? The number will not be written by the Lord, but by you and me. No one knows how many pillars there will be. We can only say, "Whosoever will may be." Whosoever will may be a pillar in the temple of God. The door is wide open. Unlike certain outstanding universities who only accept a limited number of their applicants, there is no limitation to the number who desire to be and may become pillars in the temple of God in the coming age. The number, whether it be a thousand or a million, is open. If the number were limited to two, none of us would have an opportunity. It would be hopeless for us to be pillars. But the number is not limited—it is, "Whosoever will may be." Are you willing to be made a pillar? I am. What mercy the Lord has upon us!

Consider the size of the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle. It was a cube of ten cubits in each dimension (Exo. 26:8,16). The Holy of Holies in the temple was somewhat larger, being a cube of twenty cubits in each dimension (1 Kings 6:20). But consider how large the Holy of Holies in the coming New Jerusalem will be. The entire city, which is twelve thousand stadia in length, breadth, and height, (approximately 1,363 miles, about the distance from Los Angeles to Dallas) will be an enlarged Holy of Holies (Rev. 21:16). For the small Holy of Holies, two pillars were sufficient. But how many pillars will be needed for the enlarged Holy of Holies? The answer is, "Whosoever will may be." There is a place for you. If you would not occupy this place, there would be a vacancy in eternity.

I have been reading and studying the Bible for more than fifty years. The Bible is too profound, and no one can understand it to the uttermost. I believe that what I am ministering to you in this message has been mined from the depths of this book. In the Old Testament, two pillars indicated the temple of God, and in the New Testament, three pillars declared God's building. But the pillars in the coming kingdom and in the New Jerusalem in eternity will be numberless. Today, whosoever will may be one of these pillars.

dd. The Need to Be in Bethel

Now we need to consider how to become a pillar. I believe that all of us, young and old alike, are eager to know this. If you would know how to be a pillar, you must consider five different places: the place of Lot's wife, who became a pillar of salt; the place where Jacob set up the pillar at Bethel; the place of Solomon, where he built the two pillars; the place of Peter, James, and John, who were pillars of the New Testament church; and the place of the church in Philadelphia, where we see that whosoever will may be a pillar. Is your position that of Lot's wife? To this question, you should certainly answer, "No!" But is your position that of Jacob, the two pillars in the temple, the three pillars in the New Testament, and that of the ones in Philadelphia in Revelation 3:12? To this, you must answer, "Yes," for your position must be in each of these four places. Firstly, you need to take the position of Jacob, then the position of Solomon's pillars, then the position of the three pillars, and finally the position of Philadelphia. If you would be a pillar in the coming New Jerusalem, you must escape the place of Lot's wife. As long as you stay with her, you cannot be a pillar of stone. Recall

the Lord's warning in Luke 17:32: "Remember Lot's wife." Today, many Christians are in the position of Lot's wife. This is even true of some of us. It seems that many do not care whether they become a pillar of salt or a pillar of stone. But you must care. If you do not care now, you will care someday. Someday, you will not only repent of your indifference, but also regret it.

After we have escaped the position of Lot's wife, we must come to Bethel. During the past fifty years, we have been burdened by God with Bethel. We simply cannot keep away from the church. We have been condemned for this and people have said that we are too extreme regarding the church. They accuse us of being too much for the church and of not caring for gospel preaching, Bible teaching, or other types of Christian work. My answer to this accusation is this: "I am not yet enough for the church. I am not 'crazy' enough for the church." Do not think that this is my concept. If you read your New Testament, you will see that the pillars—Peter, James, John, as well as Paul—were "crazy" for God's building. Through the years, many have argued with me, saying, "As long as we preach the gospel, win souls, teach people the Bible, and help them to love the Lord, isn't this good enough?" My answer is, "Where is the church? In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus said, 'I will build My church.' Where is this builded church? Can the Lord's word fail to be fulfilled? Where, with whom, and by what way will He build His church?" Now is the time for the building of the church. Here and now, with us, the Lord is building His church. Many Christians devote their attention to the study of prophecy. The greatest prophecy is the Lord's word in Matthew 16:18—"I will build My church." Do not be occupied with Israel, Antichrist, the restored Roman Empire, or the ten horns. Rather, you must devote your full attention to the Lord's declaration in Matthew 16:18. Throughout the centuries, and even today, this church has not yet been built up. Because of this, we are burdened about the church.

If you would be a pillar of stone, you must be in Bethel. Bethel is the unique place. The place of Lot's wife is the right position to become a pillar of shame, and Bethel is the proper place to become a pillar for the building. When some Christians hear this, they will say, "Brother Lee, do you mean that only those in the church can become pillars of stone? What about those of us who are not in the church?" My answer is, "The surest way to become a pillar is to get into the church." We are all familiar with the need for insurance. You may be fortunate enough never to have an accident, but it is still wise to have insurance. When those outside the church argue with me about this matter, I have often said, "Friend, I have peace within me. Whether my way is right or wrong I really do not care. But I know that as long as I remain on this way, I am at peace. How about you? While you are arguing with me, do you have peace?" Many have said, "No, I don't have peace." Then I have replied, "Why do I have peace, yet you don't have it? It is because you are not on the way. Please don't argue with me." To all our Christian friends, I would say this word: "Come to Bethel and get into the church. This is the best insurance company. Here we are all insured." It is significant that, in chapters twenty-eight and thirty-five, Jacob set up a pillar in Bethel, in the house of God. Today, the house of God is the church. In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul said, "But if I delay, that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth." If you would be a pillar of stone, you must be here in Bethel.

ee. Coming to Bethel Twice

Jacob came to Bethel twice. According to my experience, this indicates that we all come into the church twice. The first time we come in a dream, and the second time we come in actuality. In 1925, I had a clear dream, but it was not until seven years later, in 1932, that I came into the actuality and practicality of the church life. Many of you have had a similar experience. When you first came into the church, it was, for quite a period of time, a dream. You might have been in a dream for a number of years. But after those years, it was no longer a dream, and you could say, "Oh, I am actually and practically in the church life. The past years have been a dream. Thank the Lord for keeping me in this dream, but now I have the actual experience." Firstly, Jacob had the dream. More than twenty years later, he was brought into the experience.

If you compare chapters twenty-eight and thirty-five, you will see a great difference between them. Everything in chapter twenty-eight, being a dream, is somewhat vague; nothing is definite. In the experience in chapter thirty-five, however, everything is definite and practical. Nevertheless, we thank the Lord that the dream in the beginning was a true picture. Everything in the reality is the same as that in the dream. In this, there is no difference. The only difference is that the dream is indefinite and that the actuality is definite. We need both the dream and the practicality. We praise the Lord that today we are in the practicality of the church life.

In the practicality of Bethel in chapter thirty-five, Jacob not only set up a pillar, but poured a drink offering upon it. In chapter twenty-eight there was no pouring out of a drink offering, only the pouring out of oil. But here, prior to the pouring out of the oil, there was the pouring out of the drink offering. This experience is very subjective. In Bethel, we firstly have the dream and then the actuality. In the actuality we build a pillar and pour ourselves upon it. This is very meaningful. Jacob did not pour out the drink offering upon himself or upon the earth; he poured it out upon the pillar. We shall see more of this in another message.

ff. The Christ on Whom We Rest
Being Constituted into a Pillar

According to 28:18, Jacob "took the stone that he had made his pillow, and set it up for a pillar" (Heb.). The pillar was the stone he had used for a pillow. This stone depicts Christ as our rest. Jacob did not have this dream when he was at home, but when he was traveling on his pilgrim journey. Like Jacob, we also are pilgrims. As we are traveling on our way, we see the vision of the church. Everyone who is on this pilgrim way is weary and needs rest. Where can we find this rest? The answer is the Lord's word in Matthew 11:28: "Come to Me all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." Christ is the stone on which we may lay our weary head and find rest. The Christ on whom we rest is the constituent of the pillar. We ourselves are not the material for building the pillar. This material must be the Christ on whom we rest and whom we experience. It is the Christ wrought into our being who is constituted into the pillar.

In today's Christianity it is very difficult for people to have the constitution of the pillar because few have been instructed how to experience Christ in a subjective way. When you were in Christianity, were you ever told how to experience Christ's being wrought into you? Recently, I told some brothers and sisters that we in the church must not only love the Lord and live for Him—we must also live by Him. Oh, there is a vast difference between living for Christ and living by Christ. If you live for Christ, it is you who do things for Him, but you remain yourself and Christ is not wrought into your being. To live by Christ, however, means that Christ is wrought into us. By having Christ wrought into our being, we become material for the building. The stone for the pillar is firstly Christ. Following this, it is Christ experienced by us and wrought into us. Now this stone is not merely Christ, but Christ within us. Christ is wrought into our being, and we become one with Him. In this way, we become the building material for the pillar.

This experience is only possible in the church life. At the least, we can say that the greatest possibility of having this experience is in the church life. The reason for this is that outside the church, in the so-called Christian religion, very few are taught to have Christ wrought into them. I am fully assured that, from now on, message after message will be given instructing us how to live by Christ. This working of Christ into our being is true transformation. When the element of Christ is added into us, we become the material for the building of the pillar. This all takes place in Bethel, the place where Jacob was.

In 1964, I was invited to speak to a certain group in Dallas. My hosts, who appreciated my ministry, were very kind to me. However, they told me, both in plain words and by suggestions, that the people in Dallas were not ready to hear about the church. They said, "Brother Lee, please sympathize with us and do not say a word about the church." I did not promise to comply with their request. Rather, I said, "I fully realize the situation. But I assure you that the more I talk about Christ and minister Christ as life to the people, the more they will desire to have the church. Even if I do not say a word about the church and only minister Christ as life, they will still have the desire for the church." In the last meeting, I was burdened to speak a word about the church. When I stood up and asked the people to read Romans 12, they were disappointed. But I said to myself, "I don't care whether I offend you or not. If I do not release my burden, I cannot live." I then gave a strong word concerning the church, and they were offended by it. Later, I learned that a certain brother, who had not yet come into the church life, had attended that last meeting. Many had been praying for him. During that meeting, which was the only meeting he attended, he was caught for the church life. Although I had offended those people, the Lord gained this brother. Today, this brother has become a pillar.

gg. Being Perfected to Be a Pillar

How can you tell that someone has become a pillar? In the church life we realize that if certain brothers are taken away, everything collapses, but if they are present, they are pillars supporting the whole building. The Lord is not concerned about those who are offended; He cares for those who will become pillars. The pillars can only be perfected in Bethel. In other words, the pillars can only be set up in Bethel. No pillar for God's house has ever been set up outside of Bethel. If that brother whom I met in Dallas had not come into the church but had remained in a denomination, he could not have been perfected to be a pillar. He was perfected in Bethel, in the church life. After we experience Christ in a subjective way and are definitely and absolutely in the church life, we still need a great deal of perfection.

Let us consider further the pillars mentioned in Galatians 2:9. When the Lord called Peter, he was a fisherman. He was raw, wild, and unperfected. But after the Lord had spent three and a half years working on him, he was perfected and, on the day of Pentecost, he was set up as a pillar. When Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost, the angels might have rejoiced and said, "This is Boaz. This is the sign that God's building is coming." If you read the book of Acts, you will see that Peter was a pillar standing in front of the New Testament temple of God.

Young people, this is a word from my heart. The Lord's recovery is spreading, and I have the assurance that it will spread at a good pace. But the rate of the expansion of the Lord's recovery depends upon the pillars. I believe there will be churches in all the major cities of this country and in all the leading countries on earth. For this, there is the need of the pillars. I hope that you young people will see this. If you see it, you will say, "Lord, I cannot deny that You have appointed me to Your way and that I have heard Your up-to-date word. I realize that I must experience Christ in a subjective way and that I must be perfected in the church life in Bethel. Lord, have mercy on me and grant me the grace I need."

Young people, my burden is that you realize that your responsibility is tremendous. If during the coming years many of you will be perfected, the Lord's recovery will spread at a rapid speed. How much the Lord has done through those who have been perfected to be pillars! What do you think the Lord could do if He had a hundred more?

My burden is not simply to release a message. It is to help you see that today we all have the golden opportunity to be perfected and to be made pillars. Because we are at Bethel, our opportunity is much greater than Peter's was. Peter was in the Gospels, in the beginning of the New Testament, but we are at the end of the New Testament, even in Revelation 3:12. I believe that the opportunity we have today is unique in history. Never before has there been such a church life as there is today in Anaheim, and never before has the Lord's ministry of the Word been so bright and rich. Do not exercise your mentality or hold to your opinion. Your opinions will take you nowhere. Drop your opinions, love the Lord, take Him as your life and as your person, and live by Him in the church life. Learn of those who have become pillars. They have devoured, absorbed, and soaked in everything of the church and of this ministry. Follow them to know nothing and to daily be saturated with the church life and with the Word of God. If you do this, I believe that after a few years many of you will become pillars. Then wherever you go, the pillar, the signboard of God's building, will go with you. We all are in the church and under this ministry. Today is surely a golden opportunity ordained by the Lord.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-THREE

BEING TRANSFORMED

(6)

I am still burdened about the pillar. Based upon the principle that nearly everything in the book of Genesis is a seed that is developed in the following books of the Bible, we come to 1 Kings 7:13-22, a strong portion in the Word regarding the pillars. In Jacob's calling, Jacob's being transformed was mainly related to this matter of the pillar. After his dream at Bethel, Jacob set up a pillar (28:18). When he returned to Bethel, he also set up a pillar (35:14). When Jacob set up the pillar the first time, he said, "This stone which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house" (28:22). This indicates that the pillar was not only the pillar, but also that it would become Bethel, the house of God. In 1 Kings we have the first mention of the temple. Prior to that, there was the tabernacle, but no temple. The most striking feature of the exterior of the temple was the two pillars. In 1 Kings chapter seven we have a detailed picture of these pillars. I am burdened that, having considered the seed of the pillar in Genesis, we now look into the development of this seed in the following books of the Old Testament. Later, we shall consider the consummation of this seed in the New Testament.

The pillars of the temple were built by Solomon through Hiram, "a worker in brass" who was "filled with wisdom, and understanding, and skill to work all works in brass" (1 Kings 7:14). Much of what is found in the Old Testament, such as the tabernacle and the temple, is a shadow, a type. We need to know the fulfillment of all these types. Solomon was a type of Christ, and Hiram was a type of the gifted person in the New Testament. Undoubtedly, the Apostle Paul was a gifted person; he was the New Testament Hiram. Ephesians 4:11 and 12 say, "And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints." The gifted persons are given by the Head to the Body to perfect the saints. That the pillars were not built by Solomon directly but by Solomon through Hiram indicates that today Christ does not build up the pillars directly but through the gifted persons. Thus, we must submit to the hands of the gifted persons, just as the brass was subject to the skilled and gifted hands of Hiram.

bb. Two Pillars

According to 1 Kings 7:15, Hiram "fashioned two pillars" (Heb.). In the Bible, the number two is the number of testimony. These two pillars stood in front of the temple as a testimony. The thought concerning the pillar in the book of Genesis is that of testimony. After Jacob had arranged a settlement with Laban, he "took a stone, and set it up for a pillar" (31:45), and this pillar was a testimony (31:51-52). Undoubtedly, when Jacob set up the pillar in chapter twenty-eight, his concept was also that of a testimony. Under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, he said that this testimony would be the house of God. The temple in the Old Testament certainly was a testimony to God. The principle is the same with respect to the church today. According to 1 Timothy 3:15, the house of God, which is the church, is the pillar. This means that the church as a whole stands on earth to testify God to the universe. Therefore, the two pillars in front of the temple in the Old Testament were a strong testimony of God's building.

cc. Of Brass

Now we come to a crucial point—the two pillars were made of brass (1 Kings 7:15). In Genesis the pillar is a pillar of stone, but in 1 Kings 7 the pillars are pillars of brass. A stone indicates transformation. Although we are clay, we can be transformed into stone. But what does brass signify? It signifies God's judgment. For example, the altar at the entrance of the tabernacle was covered with brass indicating God's judgment (Exo. 27:1-2; Num. 16:38-40). The laver was also made of brass (Exo. 30:18). Furthermore, the serpent of brass put on a pole (Num. 21:8-9) also testified of Christ's being judged by God on our behalf (John 3:14). Therefore, in typology, brass always signifies God's judgment. That the two pillars were made of brass clearly indicates that if we would be a pillar, we must realize that we are those under God's judgment. We should not only be under God's judgment, but also under our own judgment. Like Paul in Galatians 2:20, we must say, "I have been crucified. I have been crucified because I am not good for anything in God's economy. I am only qualified for death." Many brothers are intelligent and capable and many sisters are quite nice. Nevertheless, we must recognize that actually we are not good at all. We are not even worth a penny. We are only good for death. To say, "I have been put aside, condemned, and put to death," is a type of self-judgment. What is your judgment regarding yourself? You must answer, "My judgment of myself is that I am good for nothing and that I have been crucified."

If you think that you are qualified to be a pillar, then you are already disqualified. Let me relate something concerning Brother Nee's practice relating to the appointment of elders. Brother Nee said that no one who was ambitious to be an elder should ever be an elder. Therefore, many of us in mainland China said, "Don't think that you can be an elder and do not be ambitious to be an elder. If you are ambitious to be an elder, you can never be one." When I first came to Shanghai in 1933, I met a certain brother. I later discovered that he was very ambitious to be an elder. Brother Nee told me that just because this brother was so ambitious to be an elder he was not qualified to be an elder. Whoever is ambitious to be an elder is disqualified from being one. More or less, as some brothers can testify, we have practiced this during these years in the United States. A few among us have hunted for eldership. They have even moved from place to place seeking an opportunity to be an elder. After realizing that the eldership in a particular locality had been filled up, they moved to another locality where there were many openings. However, those openings could only be filled by those who had no ambition to be elders. Once we discover that a brother is ambitious to be an elder, he will be fully disqualified for eternity. The reason for this is that such a brother is not a person under God's judgment. We all must say, "I am not qualified. I am poor, sinful, fallen, and corrupt." Moreover, we must say, "Lord, I am so fallen, sinful, and corrupt. How could I bear the responsibility of the eldership? I am not qualified for this." This is the experience of brass. To justify ourselves and to qualify ourselves is to be through with the brass. Those who experience brass are those who are constantly under judgment.

During the early years in China, I sometimes wondered why Brother Nee was so strict in this matter. Eventually, I learned that whoever was ambitious to be a leader in any aspect of the church life became a problem. There was not one exception to this. However, all those who became a true profit to the building of the church were those who did not think of themselves as being qualified for leadership. Rather, they always said, "I am not qualified. I am too poor. My disposition is not suitable, and I am still too much in my natural life. I do not consider myself to be good." To say this is not only to be under God's judgment, but also under self-judgment. What is your evaluation of yourself? Do not say, "No one else is good except me." Whenever you say this, you are finished, and the Lord would never put His seal upon this evaluation of yourself. We all must have the realization that we are fallen, corrupt, and no good. We all must feel that in us, that is, in our flesh, there is nothing good (Rom. 7:18). We should say, "I am worthy of nothing but death. How could the brothers think that I should be one of the elders? I am terrified of this possibility." I do not speak this in vain. In the past years some have said, "Why was Brother So-and-so appointed to be an elder and I was not?" He was appointed instead of you because you feel that you are qualified. Your self-approval disqualifies you. The Lord will never choose anyone who considers himself to be qualified. If you think that you are qualified, then you have nothing to do with brass. Instead, you are self-made gold. The experience of brass is that we are always under God's judgment and under our own self-judgment. We all must apply this word to ourselves, saying, "Lord, have mercy upon me, for in me there is nothing good." This is the reason that we have been crucified. If we think there is something good in us, we are liars.

In Galatians 2:20 Paul said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." We may also apply his word in 1 Corinthians 15:10, which says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." In Galatians 2:20, Paul said, "No longer I who live, but Christ" and in 1 Corinthians 15:10, he said, "Not I, but the grace of God." Paul seemed to be saying, "Whatever I am, I am by the grace of God. By myself, I am nothing. By myself, I could never be an apostle or a minister of God's living word. I labored more than the others, but it was not I who

labored—it was the grace of God." This is the experience of brass.

In typology and in figure, the two brass pillars in 1 Kings 7 tell us that we must be under God's judgment as well as under our own self-judgment. We must judge ourselves as being nothing and as being only qualified to be crucified. I say this not only to the brothers, but also to the sisters. None of us is good for anything. We must consider ourselves as those under God's judgment. If an elder is not under God's judgment, he cannot be a good elder, and if a leading sister is not under God's judgment, she cannot be a proper leading sister. I fully realize and can testify that in order to minister the Word of God, I must always be under self-judgment. While I may spend only a short time praying positively for the meeting, I may spend a long time in self-judgment, judging myself as being poor, unworthy, fleshly, and natural. Sometimes, I even sigh and groan, saying, "O Lord, when will the time come that I can minister Your word apart from my flesh?" Do not think that as I stand here ministering to you, I am so good. No, I am too poor. As long as we are in the natural life and in the old creation, we are pitiful. We must serve under God's judgment and minister under our own realization of God's judgment. I am one who has already been judged. My natural being, my flesh, and myself have all been judged by God, and I am still under this judgment. If we have this realization, then we become brass.

Although the brass shines, it has no glory. With the shining of gold, on the contrary, there is glory. The shining of brass signifies that we are under God's judgment. If an elder shines like brass, then he is an elder who has been and who still is under God's judgment. He is not the golden lampstand standing for God's glory; he is the brass pillar standing for God's judgment. Do you intend to be a pillar or a leader among the children of God? If you do, then you must be under God's judgment. I hope that the Holy Spirit will speak this to you. In the temple of God there is no pride, no self-boasting. In the temple of God, the pillars are of brass. Those who bear the burden are judged beings. All the elders are brothers who have been and who are still under God's judgment. Furthermore, this judgment is fully realized by themselves. They recognize that they are under God's judgment because they are sinful, fallen, and corrupted, because there is nothing good in them, and because they are not qualified for anything in God's economy. I could repeat this word again and again and again. Do you know why there is so much fighting in Christianity? It is because there is no brass. There is no judgment by God. Rather, all the "pillars" there are wooden columns. The more responsibility you bear in the proper church life, the more you must realize that you are under God's judgment. You are just brass under the judgment of God. Do not release yourself from this judgment even for a moment. Instead, you must remain under the realization of God's judgment and stay with the brass.

dd. Eighteen Cubits High Apiece

The pillars were "eighteen cubits high apiece" (1 Kings 7:15). As we shall see, the circumference of each pillar was twelve cubits. Eighteen cubits is half of three units of twelve cubits. In other words, eighteen is half of three complete units. The three units signify the very Triune God who has been dispensed into us. If we would be pillars, we must firstly judge ourselves and then be filled, saturated, and permeated with the Triune God. As I was wondering why each pillar was a half of three complete units, the Lord said, "Stupid man, have you not given several messages saying that the standing boards in the tabernacle were each one and a half cubits wide? Didn't you say that no board could stand by itself, but that it had to stand with another? Don't you see that it is the same with the pillars? Just as the two boards standing together made three complete cubits, so the two pillars make three complete units." Then I said, "Now I understand, Lord."

If you would be a pillar, you must be filled, saturated, and permeated with the Triune God. However, no matter how much you have been filled with God, you are still only a part. At most, you are one half. You can never have God completely. The very God who is in you is also in your brother. Because you are not a full unit, you need others to complete you. All the spiritual giants think that they can be complete individually. But the Bible reveals that everyone is only a half. The standing boards in the tabernacle were a half (Exo. 26:15-16), and each of the pillars in the temple is a half.

When they hear this, some may say, "Brother Lee is allegorizing the Bible." If I am allegorizing, then I have the ground to allegorize. Why does the Bible not say that the pillars were seventeen or nineteen cubits high? Would it be possible to allegorize if the pillars were this height? No, it would be impossible. But, as I was seeking the Lord, He showed me that in this section of the Word twelve is the complete unit and eighteen is one and a half units. This indicates that although we might be filled with the Triune God, God will never wholly commit Himself to us individually. No matter how much of God we gain, we are not the whole; we are only a part. We need one another. I need you, and you need me. The Lord always sent out His disciples two by two (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1; Acts 13:2). I am not the number thirty-six. At most, I am the number eighteen. No matter how tall you are, you must realize that you are only eighteen cubits and that you need others. Do not say, "I am perfect and complete. You all need me, but I don't need you." It is foolish to say this. At most, we can be only eighteen cubits. Some sisters dream about being filled with God. But no matter how much they are filled with Him, they could never be more than half a unit. They need others.

ee. Twelve Cubits Round

Now we come to the circumference of the pillars. First Kings 7:15 says, "A line of twelve cubits did compass either of them about." As far as language is concerned, the composition of this verse is very peculiar. Instead of speaking of the circumference, it says that a "line of twelve cubits" encompassed the pillars. Even this rendering is not an exact, literal translation; it is somewhat of an interpretation. One version says, "a circumference of twelve cubits." This rendering is simple and I prefer it. Nevertheless, the Bible has no waste of words, and we must consider the meaning of the actual composition of this verse. It means to use a thread as a line to measure around the pillars. The purpose of this is to impress us with the completion and perfection of our being mingled with God in His eternal administration. The number seven, which signifies perfection and completion in God's move in this age, is composed of four plus three. This is a matter of addition. But the number twelve, which is composed of four times three, is a matter of multiplication, indicating that the creature is mingled with the Triune God and that this mingling must be complete and perfect in God's eternal administration. The pillars are not square, rectangular, or triangular; they are round, circular, signifying that their perfection is eternal.

As we put together the brass, the height of eighteen cubits, and the circumference of twelve cubits, we see that in order to be a pillar we must be under God's judgment and that we must be fully, thoroughly, and completely saturated with God. We must be brass and we must be twelve cubits around. Nevertheless, no matter how completely we have been mingled with God, we are still only a half; we need another half. If any elder is like this, he will certainly be an outstanding elder. If any leading sister is like this, she will be a most excellent sister. This kind of person certainly can bear the responsibility.

Our problem is that we do not condemn ourselves. Rather, we vindicate, justify, approve, and excuse ourselves. Often we say, "That is not my mistake; it is Brother So-and-so's mistake. I am always careful. I am not wrong." This is self-vindication. After we vindicate ourselves, we proceed to justify and approve ourselves. We do not need to be tested, for we have already approved ourselves. In our eyes, there is no problem with ourselves. Sometimes, however, we are caught in a mistake. Then we excuse ourselves, perhaps by saying, "I made that mistake because the meeting was so long and I was tired." How often we make exits for ourselves! We have four big exits: self-vindication, self-justification, self-approval, and self-excuse. Even when we are caught in a mistake, we still excuse ourselves. For example, a sister may say, "I type poorly because the others have the best typewriters and the worst typewriter is allotted to me." In the past, I have had a lot of self-vindication, self-justification, self-approval, and self-excuse.

Very rarely does a husband or wife at the beginning of an argument, say, "I'm sorry. This is my mistake. Please forgive me." Rather, the wife says, "Do you know why I was so strong with my husband? It was because he is always late. Throughout our whole marriage, his lateness has troubled me." Then the husband will say, "My wife never sympathizes with me. I am busy and have a great deal of work to do. When I am overworked like this, how can I help being late?" This is self-vindication, self-justification, self-approval, and self-excuse. If we would daily crucify these four things, there would be no fighting whatever in our homes.

It is inadequate for us simply to be the number four. We must be number seven—four plus the Triune God. This, however, is still the initial stage, not the consummation, which is the number twelve. In order to be the number twelve, we must be filled, saturated, and mingled with God. When we are fully saturated and mingled with God, we are adequate for God's eternal administration. Nevertheless, as we have pointed out, even after we have become the number twelve, we are still only eighteen cubits in height. We are only half a unit. If we were all like this, there would be no problems. Instead of fighting with others, we would condemn ourselves, saying, "Lord, I need You. I have been crucified, and Christ lives in me. It is not I, but the grace of God that is with me." This is the brass, the judgment, and the twelve cubits, the mingling of God with man. Since we are, at most, only a half, we need others for God's economy and administration. If you pray over these points, you will see that this is the pillar that can bear the responsibility in the house of God.

ff. Two Capitals

On the top of each of the pillars was a capital five cubits in height (1 Kings 7:16). The capitals were the top coverings of the pillars. The fact that each capital was five cubits in height and not six or seven cubits is significant. As we have pointed out several times, in the Bible the number five denotes responsibility. Consider your hand: the four fingers and the thumb are for bearing responsibility. If we had just four fingers, we could not bear responsibility in a proper way. The number four signifies the creature, and the number one signifies the unique God. When the unique God is added to human beings, our number becomes five.

For example, the ten commandments were written in groups of five on two tables of stone, and the ten virgins were divided into five wise ones and five foolish ones. Therefore, the two capitals five cubits in height indicate the bearing of responsibility. If you say that this is my allegorization, I would reply that I have the ground to allegorize, for we are not told that the capitals are four and a half or six cubits in height, but that they are five cubits in height. The combined height of the two capitals totals ten cubits. The number ten signifies fullness in responsibility. Both the ten commandments and the ten virgins indicate fullness. Therefore, in the Bible the number ten reveals fullness of human responsibility toward God. Our ten fingers for working and ten toes for moving and walking indicate this.

gg. Nets of Checkerwork
and Wreaths of Chainwork

First Kings 7:17 speaks of "nets of checkerwork, and wreaths of chainwork, for the capitals which were upon the top of the pillars; seven for the one capital, and seven for the other capital" (Heb.). To what do the nets of checkerwork and wreaths of chainwork refer? After consulting many versions, I discovered that the checkerwork resembles a trellis, a frame with small square holes that bears a vine. Furthermore, the word "work" in this verse implies a design. Hence, checkerwork is a checker design and chainwork a chain design. As we shall see, this checker design is for the growth of the lilies. This trellis is the setting for the lilies. In a sense, it is a net to hold the lilies. The chainwork is like a wreath encompassing the outside of the capital. Hence, upon the capitals are nets of checkerwork and wreaths of chainwork.

What does all this signify? We have seen that the number five, the height of the capitals, denotes responsibility, and that two times five means fullness of responsibility. But why are there also on these capitals nets of checkerwork and wreaths of chainwork? While I was burdened to understand this, the Lord showed me that this is the intermixed and complicated situation. The burden and responsibility borne by the pillars in the family, in the church, and in the ministry is always in a complicated and intermixed situation. We may often like to straighten out these situations, but we cannot do it. If you straighten out one complication, there will be three others to take its place. If you attempt to make one matter clear, the situation will become even more unclear. The more you try to make it understandable, the more it will be misunderstood. Do not say, "Last night Brother So-and-so was unhappy with his wife." If you talk like this, you will be involved. The more we try to explain ourselves, the more misunderstanding there will be, and this misunderstanding will multiply. Through many years of experience, I have learned that the best way to avoid misunderstanding is to say as little as possible. Sometimes, you should not even say the words, "Praise the Lord," to your wife. If you do this, she may say, "Why are you so spiritual? Don't you realize that your praising condemns me? When you praise the Lord, you are saying that you are spiritual and that I am carnal." The church life is a checkerwork surrounded by a chain, and the eldership is a most intricate trellis with the strongest chain.

I know of a certain dear one who holds the concept that wherever he is, those around him should be like angels. They should all be very spiritual, going to bed early and rising early in the morning to pray-read the Word. If everyone would be heavenly, then this dear one would be happy. But there is no place on earth like the one envisioned by this dear one. In many homes, some stay up late talking and then sleep until late in the morning. Upon waking, some may complain that it was too cold with the window open all night, and others may complain that it was so stuffy that they felt like they were suffocating.

Every situation faced by the church members is a checkerwork, a trellis encircled by a crown of pins and thorns. I have a large family and I am also in a large church. I have many children and grandchildren and many dear brothers and sisters. Wherever I am, in

Taipei or in Anaheim, I cannot escape the checkerwork and chainwork. In a sense, Anaheim is wonderful, but it is full of checkerwork and chains. Even the angels know that I am constantly in an intermixed and complicated situation. My children and all the problems brought to me by the brothers and sisters in the churches create more checkerwork for me. It is our destiny to be in this situation. We must not only bear the responsibility in this intermixed and complicated situation, but also live in the midst of it.

hh. The Capitals Being of Lily Work

In order to bear the responsibility in this complicated situation, we must live by faith in God. First Kings 7:19 says, "And the capitals that were upon the top of the pillars in the porch were of lily work" (Heb.). The lily signifies a life of faith in God. Firstly, we must condemn ourselves, realizing that we are fallen, incapable, unqualified, and that we are nothing. Then we must live by faith in God, not by what we are or by what we can do. We must be a lily existing by what God is to us, not by what we are (Matt. 6:28, 30). Our living on earth today depends upon Him. How can we possibly bear the responsibility in the intermixed and complicated church life? In ourselves, we are incapable of doing this, but we can do so if we live by faith in God. It is not I, but Christ who lives in me—this is the lily. It is not I who bear the responsibility—it is He who bears it. I live, not by myself, but by Him, and I minister, not by myself, but by Him. If you sisters are mothers in the church life, you must say, "I am not a mother in the church by myself, but by Him." In Song of Songs 2:1 and 2 the seeker says, "I am the lily of the valley." Then the Lord replies, "As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters."

What earthly architect would have designed a brass pillar bearing brass capitals with lily work on the top of them? Humanly speaking, this is not meaningful, but spiritually speaking, it is very significant. On the one hand, we are the condemned and judged brass; on the other hand, we are the living lilies. The brass means, "Not I," and the lily means, "But Christ." Those who are lilies can say, "The life that I now live, I live by the faith of Jesus Christ." By all this we can realize that we are lilies bearing an impossible responsibility in an intermixed and complicated situation full of checkerwork and chainwork. The elders should not say, "Lord, take these complications away." Rather, they should expect more complications. I am quite certain that the more you pray for the complications to be reduced, the more complications there will be. All the checkerwork is the base, the bed, in which the lilies grow.

According to the context, the chainwork, being wreaths, was a form of decoration. But this decoration is filled with complications. When you come to my home, do not expect everything there to be clear and simple. If you stay with me for a while, you will find many complications and complaints. But all this is the beauty of my family, for it is a wreath, a crown. Every elder expects the church life to be clear-cut like a Chinese bean cake where every piece is cut square and neat. They want everything in the church to be accurate and fine. The only place like this is the cemetery. The proper church life, like the church life in Anaheim, is a net of checkerwork and a wreath of chainwork. This is the place where the elders bear the responsibility in full. This cannot be understood simply by studying the passage, but by interpreting this portion of the Word in the light of our experience.

ii. Two Hundred Pomegranates

Verse 20 says, "And the capitals upon the two pillars had pomegranates also above, over against the belly which was by the network: and the pomegranates were two hundred in rows round about upon the other capital" (Heb.). Hallelujah for the two hundred pomegranates! Around each capital was a projection, like a belly. Encompassing the projection on each capital were two rows of a hundred pomegranates each. This indicates two times of a hundredfold expression of the riches of life. If you contact these elders who daily bear the responsibility in the intermixed and complicated situation, you will see that they express pomegranates, the riches of life. All the complaints, dissatisfactions, and troubling telephone calls eventually form a projection full of pomegranates. How wonderful this is!

jj. The Capitals Being Four Cubits in Diameter

The diameter of each of the capitals is four cubits (1 Kings 7:19). This indicates that the number twelve, the circumference of the pillars, is composed of four times three. While the circumference of the pillar is twelve cubits, the diameter of the capitals is four cubits. This implies that the pillars with their capitals are the number four, that is, the creatures, human beings, but that they are multiplied by the Triune God. Being mingled with the Triune God, they eventually become the number twelve. If you put all this together, you will see that it is very meaningful. It implies that those who judge and condemn themselves and count themselves as nothing will be able to bear the responsibility in full in the midst of a complicated situation because they do not live by themselves but by God. Eventually, they do not express their capability, qualification, intelligence, understanding, and wisdom—they express pomegranates, the riches of life two-hundredfold.

kk. Two Pillars Standing in the Porch of the Temple

Finally, we are told that the names of these two pillars were Jachin and Boaz (1 Kings 7:21). Jachin means, "He shall establish," and Boaz means, "In it is strength." These two pillars standing on the porch testify that the Lord will establish His building and that genuine strength is in the building. Even today, the building of the church gives this testimony. By the details of the picture in 1 Kings 7, we see how we can be a pillar in the building of God, judging ourselves, living by faith, bearing the responsibility, and expressing the riches of life.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-FOUR

BEING TRANSFORMED

(7)

In this message we shall again devote our attention to the two pillars at the temple. We have seen that when Jacob was first at Bethel, he set up as a pillar the stone he had used for a pillow and called it the house of God (28:18, 22). We have pointed out again and again that nearly everything in the book of Genesis is a seed that is developed in the following books of the Bible. The full development of the seed of the pillar is in Revelation 3:12, where the Lord Jesus says, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God." Between Genesis and Revelation, there are many portions of the Word concerning the pillars. Each time the two pillars at

the temple are mentioned we see more of the details regarding them. Not every aspect of the pillars is found in any single portion.

Today's Christians have very little concern for God's building, which is for the accomplishment of God's economy. Although most Christians neglect this, the Bible strongly emphasizes it. If we would know the building, according to the biblical way, we must firstly see the pillar, for the pillar is a signboard of God's building. If we see what the pillar is and decide to become a pillar, then we are on the way of God's building. The pillar is so crucial that the Bible mentions it over and over again. Because most Christians have no understanding of God's building, they do not pay attention to those portions of Scripture which mention the pillar. But by the Lord's mercy we have been so deeply impressed with the pillar that we simply cannot get away from it. The Bible has no wasted words. Hence, whatever it reveals is meaningful and crucial for us. Because, at this end time, God is completing His building, we must carefully consider what the pillar is and how we can become a pillar.

I would like now to stress three positive aspects and two negative aspects of the pillars covered in the last message. The three positive aspects are the brass, the lily, and the pomegranates. The pillars themselves were made of brass. On the top of the capital were the lilies and around the capital were the pomegranates. I doubt that any human designer would ever have put these three things together. But how crucial and meaningful it all is to us! Brass signifies death under judgment. We must be under judgment, realizing that we are good for nothing but death and that we have been crucified (Gal. 2:20). Furthermore, we all have been buried in baptism (Rom. 6:4). Thus, we are a people under the judgment of death. But after death comes resurrection, and the lily grows upon us in resurrection. The pomegranates surrounding the capital signify the expression of the riches of life. Therefore, in the pillars we see death, resurrection, and the expression of life. Praise the Lord that many of us can testify that day by day we are the brass growing lilies and expressing pomegranates. Are you not such a person? If you are not, then you are not qualified to be a pillar and you have nothing to do with God's building.

The two negative aspects of the pillars are the checkerwork (the network) and the chainwork. The checkerwork and chainwork signify the intermixed and complicated situation. The checkerwork is a lattice composed of intersecting bars. This indicates that, in our experience, we are daily being crossed out. As we undergo this, we are held by the chainwork. Many times we brothers are under the crossing out of our dear wives. Although we may desire to escape this, we are held by the chains and cannot slip away. We may be cut into pieces, but not one piece can escape. The sisters can all testify of the same thing in relation to their husbands. Some in the church life say that they cannot bear the crossing out of the elders. However, the chainwork is also there. In the church life we have both the checkerwork and the chainwork. Praise the Lord for these two negative things, because the brass, the lily, and the pomegranates can only be connected by them.

Not long after I was saved, I learned that I had been crucified with Christ. But I did not know how this crucifixion could practically be applied to me. It is applied by the checkerwork, the network. Without the network and the chainwork, our co-crucifixion with Christ and His living instead of us would be mere doctrine. We may know the doctrine of being crucified with Christ and recite Galatians 2:20 over and over only to discover that this does not avail. I did this again and again without success. I repeated the words, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." Later, I experienced the network and the chainwork in the church life. It has been through these two negative things that the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ have been practically applied to my life. Eventually, therefore, the three positive things and the two negative things become one unit. We have the brass, the lily, and the pomegranates joined by the checkerwork and the chainwork. All five are joined in the pillar.

II. Two Bowls of the Two Capitals
on the Top of the Two Pillars, Two Cubits High

In addition to all the points covered in the previous message, we must cover nine further points in this message. God, His Word, and His dealing with us are not simple.

On the top of the capitals which were on the pillars were two bowls (2 Chron. 4:12; 2 Kings 25:17). Each bowl, including the network, was two cubits high (see definition below). What does this signify? The bowls are round. (Darby translates the Hebrew word for bowls as "globes.") On the top of each capital there were two bowls, one above the other. Around the capitals were "chains like a necklace," or "chains at the collar," (2 Chron. 3:16, Amplified Bible; Darby's New Translation) that divided the capital into two sections. The first section was the base. Although 1 Kings 7:16 says that the capitals were five cubits high, 2 Kings 25:17 says that the capitals were three cubits high. The reason for this is that three cubits is the height of the base of the capital and five cubits is the height of the whole capital. In other words, there were three cubits for the base and two for the bowls. Here, the number three does not signify the Triune God. Rather, it signifies the process of resurrection. In the Bible, two numbers, three and eight, signify resurrection. Three signifies the process of resurrection, and eight, the first day of a new week, denotes the freshness of resurrection, the new beginning in resurrection. The three cubits of the base of the capital are closely related to the network and the chainwork. This reveals that the network and the chainwork are for the process of resurrection. Moreover, the number two, the height of the two bowls, signifies testimony. The two cubits of the two bowls on the two capitals of the two pillars signify testimony by living as a lily and by expressing the riches of life.

If you read all the portions concerning the two pillars, you will realize that the bowls are composed of the network, the chainwork, the lilies, and the pomegranates. The pomegranates are not on the base of the capital, but on the chainwork surrounding the bowls. The network covers the bowls, the chainwork surrounds the bowls, the pomegranates are upon the chainwork, and the lily grows upon the network. All these things together are the bowl. If you consider this in the light of your experience, you will realize that through the crossing out by the network and the restriction of the chainwork, you live as a lily to express the riches of the life of Christ. This is a living testimony coming out of the process of resurrection.

In our homes we are in the checkerwork and held by the chainwork. This is also true with the brothers and sisters in the church. Those who serve in the business office have undoubtedly experienced the checkerwork and the chainwork there. Surely in the business office there is much checkerwork and chainwork. But along with the checkerwork and the chainwork, there are also the three days. All those who serve in the business office are on the way of the three days, that is, they are in the process of resurrection.

The lilies appear on the top of the bowls on the third day. It does not matter how nice, gentle, or humble we are, for none of this is the lily. Rather, it is our natural life. The more we experience the crossing out, the more the lily grows on the third day. Every brother

desires to have a nice wife, and every sister wants a gentle husband. However, no matter how nice or gentle we are, we are not lilies. The lily only grows on the third day in the midst of the checkerwork and the chainwork. When in all the intermixed and complicated situations we come to the third day, the lily will grow. Then we shall also have the pomegranates, the expression of the riches of life. This is the bowl—the glory, beauty, decoration, and crown. This is a testimony. I hope that the Spirit will speak more of this to you.

We all have been judged and we need to judge ourselves under God's judgment. It is easy to be a brass pillar, saying, "I'm fallen, corrupted, sinful, and good for nothing but death." But to pass through the three days of the process of resurrection in the midst of the crossing out of the checkerwork and the limitation of the chainwork is very difficult. But the more we are in the checkerwork and the chainwork, the more we are in the three days, the more the lily grows, and the more of the pomegranates we express. Then we become a living testimony, not of anything natural, but of the process of resurrection under the crossing out of the checkerwork and the restraint of the chainwork. There is no escape. We must stay in the checkerwork and chainwork. It is exactly like being buried for three days and coming out through the process of resurrection. As we pass through this experience, the lily grows and the pomegranates are expressed. Every pillar must bear the testimony of living by faith to express the riches of Christ through the process of resurrection under the crossing out of the checkerwork and the restriction of the chainwork. The brass in the two pillars in front of the temple indicates that we are under the death-judgment, which brings us into the process of resurrection, signified by the three-cubit height of the base of the capitals. This process of resurrection brings us through the network and the chainwork to grow the lily and to bear the pomegranates for a testimony. This is the way for the pillar to bear the responsibility, signified by the five cubits, the total height of the capitals.

The bowls on the capitals were not square, but round. This roundness signifies that living by faith in God and bearing responsibility in the midst of all the complications is not legal but always flexible. When we live in the Spirit, nothing is legal. Rather, we are flexible in every situation. Both the young and the old are legal. The old have their old legal way, and the young have their fresh legal way. Because of this, I am reluctant to give many instructions during the training. If I do this, all the young will take these instructions in a fresh legal way. Nearly every Christian is legally square. If we are not square, then we are triangular or even pentagonal. Some of the older sisters like to eat and go to bed at an exact time. This legality has killed many of the young people. While it is good for you to be regulated, for the sake of others, you need to be flexible. Some elders are very square. However, others are so round that they are political. A politician has no sides. Although we should be round we should not be politically round. Those who serve in the business office should be round. If you are square in your serving, you will kill everyone. Instead of being square, you must be flexible to fit into every situation. This is the way we should be in our daily living. As we are in the midst of the checkerwork and the chainwork, we must be flexible.

mm. Four Hundred Pomegranates
on the Two Networks

Second Chronicles 4:13 says that there were "four hundred pomegranates on the two networks, two rows of pomegranates on each network, to cover the two bowls of the capitals which were upon the pillars" (Heb.). There were four hundred pomegranates on the two networks, with two rows on each network to cover the two bowls of the capitals upon the pillars. Why does it not say that there were three hundred or five hundred pomegranates? The Lord Jesus said that we can bear fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold (Matt. 13:8). The hundredfold increase is the highest. Thus, we can express the riches of life a hundredfold. We know that the number four signifies us, the human creatures. The hundredfold expression of the riches of life is upon the creatures. That the four hundred pomegranates were arranged in two rows on each of the two pillars indicates a testimony. We must be strong, not simply in declaring that we are the testimony of Jesus, but in having a testimony by living. We need a testimony of the experience of the riches of the life of Christ four hundredfold. Although we may have problems in the church life, in our work, and at home, we also have the life of the lily, which, in the Bible, signifies a life lived by trusting in God. The Lord knows that I daily have one problem after another. If we live by ourselves, we cannot bear these problems. But we are lilies among thorns (S.S. 2:2). The thorns are just the problems. Our wife, children, grandchildren, the elders, and the co-workers are all "thorns." Although I am surrounded by so many "thorns," I praise the Lord that I am still living. I have not been "thorned" to death. I am living today, not like a giant, but like a lily. I do not live by my ability, but by faith in my God. I am simply a lily among thorns. The more thorns there are, the better, because the thorns give the opportunity for the Lord's ability to be expressed. We are different from the worldly people, who have no God in whom to trust.

Many seeking Christians are looking for a church life that is heavenly in every respect. They want everyone in this heavenly church life to be an angel. I am not imagining this; I have actually met people like this. Many of these seeking ones have traveled from "church" to "church" in pursuit of such a heavenly "church." If they find one, their heavenly "church" is soon exposed to be more than earthly. The way to determine whether or not a church is proper is mainly by the ground of the church, not by our measure of the heavenliness of the church. Today on earth there is not an angelic, heavenly church. Shortly after coming into the church life, you will find yourself in the midst of "thorns" and you will say, "I thought everyone here was an angel. But now I see that many of them are not angels but thorns. I cannot bear this." Although I may be a "thorn" to you, you also are a "thorn" to me. Eventually, we "thorn" one another and love one another. This "thorning" helps us grow. During the past three years in Anaheim, this "thorning" has helped us to grow. If everything in the church were smooth and angelic, there would be no testimony of the riches of life.

nn. Out of One Hundred Pomegranates,
Ninety-six Being Exposed to the Open Air

Out of one hundred pomegranates, ninety-six were exposed to the open air (Jer. 52:23). Since every row had one hundred pomegranates, why did Jeremiah 52:23 suddenly speak of ninety-six pomegranates? Because the record in Jeremiah 52:23 concerns the destruction of the pillars by the Babylonian army, some think that four of the pomegranates on each row of chainwork were broken. But if you read this chapter carefully, you will see that this was not the case. The King James Version says, "There were ninety and six pomegranates on a side." This rendering is incorrect. The Hebrew words translated "on a side" should be "towards the air." Hence, this verse should read, "There were ninety and six pomegranates towards the air, and all the pomegranates upon the network were an hundred round about." Notice that all the pomegranates upon the network numbered one hundred. All were there, but only ninety-six were towards the air. The Hebrew word translated "side" in the King James Version is ruach, the word for spirit, wind, breath, and air. Ruach denotes something real yet invisible. The New American Standard Version says that there were ninety-six "exposed pomegranates." However, the margin gives the literal translation of "windward," which means towards the wind or towards the air.

Ninety-six pomegranates were exposed and four were covered. What is the significance of this? Ninety-six is composed of twelve times eight. Twelve signifies eternal completion, eight signifies resurrection, and the air signifies the Spirit. Therefore, the expression of the riches of life is eternally complete, in resurrection, and in the Spirit. This is the nature and atmosphere of our expression of life. Our expression of the riches of life is twelve, eternal; it is not seven, temporal. Moreover, it is also the number eight, the freshness of resurrection, not the number three, the process of resurrection. Here, it is not the process of resurrection, but the freshness, the beginning, the new start, of resurrection. Also, it is absolutely a matter in the Spirit. That the ninety-six pomegranates were exposed to the open air means that the expression of the riches of life is in the reality of the spiritual air, which is invisible. While we can sense it, we cannot touch it. In John 3:8, the Lord Jesus spoke of both the wind and the Spirit, saying, "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." The regeneration of the Spirit resembles the moving of the wind. The wind blows and the Spirit regenerates. Our expression of the riches of life is not only eternal and in the freshness of resurrection, but is absolutely in the atmosphere of the Spirit. Whenever people see upon us the expression of the riches of life, they will immediately sense that they are in the Spirit and that there is some fresh wind, air, and atmosphere there. However, whenever we enter into a situation filled with death, we sense stuffiness. But when we are in a situation filled with the expression of the riches of life, we find ourselves in a spiritual atmosphere and sense that refreshing air is present. This is what it means for ninety-six pomegranates to be towards the air.

oo. Of the Four Hundred Pomegranates,
Sixteen (Four of Each Hundred) Being Hidden

Of each hundred pomegranates, four were hidden. Because the Bible has no wasted words, there must be some significance relating to our experience in this verse. The only way I can understand it is by experience. That four of every one hundred pomegranates were hidden indicates that while our expression of the riches of life is eternal, in resurrection, and in the Spirit, our natural being, signified by the number four, must be covered. Our natural life, our natural being, our self, and our ego must be wholly concealed. Although I have sought to discover how these pomegranates were hidden, I have been unable to do so. It is a mystery known only to the Lord. However, if we examine our experience, we shall say, "Amen." When the riches of Christ are expressed, others can see the eternal expression of the riches of life in resurrection and in the atmosphere of the Spirit, but it is difficult to say where our natural man is. How meaningful it is to see that our ego is covered! Whenever "I" appears, the big number four will be there, but the ninety-six will be gone. Instead of air, there will just be the natural life, the old man, and the ego. But whenever the number four disappears, we shall have the ninety-six pomegranates, the rich expression of the life of Christ in the open air.

pp. The Pillars Being Hollow
and Their Thickness Being Four Fingers

Jeremiah 52:21 says, "The thickness thereof was four fingers: it was hollow." Each pillar was a cylinder whose walls were four fingers thick, and within each pillar was a large hollow space. This signifies that God's building is of the human creature, represented by the number four, filled with the Spirit. Undoubtedly, the brass pillar is the condemned and judged human creature. Within the judged creature is an empty space that must be filled with an invisible reality. We should not be muddy, thin, and filled with sand, for then there would be no hollow space within. Rather, we must be brass, four fingers thick, and hollow. Then it will be possible for our hollow space to be filled with reality, the Spirit.

qq. The Two Pillars Measured
with One Height of Thirty-five Cubits
with One Cubit Covered

Second Chronicles 3:15 says, "Also he made for the front of the house two pillars of thirty and five cubits long" (Heb.). The two pillars had a combined height of thirty-five cubits, with one cubit covered. In the last message I said that each of the standing boards in the tabernacle was one and a half cubits wide. These boards stood horizontally side by side. But with the pillars it is not only a matter of being horizontal, but also of being vertical. The pillars were measured vertically, with one standing above another. This indicates that God's building is not only horizontal, but also vertical with some part hidden. Although it is easy for two brothers to stand side by side, it is difficult for one brother to be under the other. It is also difficult to be above others. If the building is to be strong, it must be vertical. The more vertical it is, the more space there will be. We should not only stand side by side with one another, but also above one another. In order to stand side by side, there is no need of sacrifice or to have any part covered. But if we would stand vertically, there is the need for some part to be covered.

First Kings 7:15 says that each pillar was eighteen cubits high, but 2 Chronicles 3:15 indicates that the two pillars were thirty-five cubits long. According to 2 Chronicles 3:15, one cubit is missing. This cubit must have been covered and sacrificed. One reference book says that half a cubit went into each of the pedestals. I do not accept this explanation because the Bible does not say that the pillars had a pedestal or a base. Another reference book says that a cubit was lost in the joint to the capital. I believe this explanation to be correct. This means that in order to be vertical, there is the need of sacrifice. If you consider your experience, you will see that there is no sacrifice required to be side by side with others. But if you would be under someone, like the pillar under the capital, you must sacrifice. If you do not sacrifice, you cannot have anyone above you. You would either cast others away or leap over them. In order to let others be above you, you must give in and sacrifice a part of yourself. Sisters, you need to sacrifice so that someone can be above you. You should not only be measured horizontally but also vertically. Throughout the years, I have always been under someone. To be under others is to bear others and to be partly covered by them. It is by this sacrifice that we can have the vertical building.

rr. The Network and the Chainwork on the Two Capitals
Being Seven on Each

First Kings 7:17 says, "And nets of checkerwork, and wreaths of chainwork, for the capitals which were upon the top of the pillars; seven for the one capital, and seven for the other capital." Here we see that the network and the chainwork on the two capitals were seven on each. This indicates that all the complicated situations are temporal, not eternal. All the crossing, breaking, and suppressing are temporary, yet they are complete, for they are in the number seven. One day, all this will be over, and there will be no more checkerwork and chainwork. Instead of network and an entwined wreath, we shall have a golden crown.

ss. The Number Three Being Hidden

Notice that in these two pillars the number three is hidden. This indicates that the Triune God is hidden. That the pillars are twelve cubits in circumference and capitals four cubits in diameter implies the presence of the number three. The number three, the Triune God, is real but invisible. In every situation the Triune God is real, but He is hidden.

tt. The Brass, the Lily, and the Pomegranates
All Being on the Two Pillars

The brass, the lily, and the pomegranates are all on the two pillars. This reveals that death, resurrection, and the expression of life are all a testimony in God's building. Today, we are here with this testimony. All these points are crucial, and I hope that you will spend time to pray and fellowship about them until they get into you and become your experience. Then we shall know what a pillar is and how we can become a pillar.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-FIVE

THE BUILDER OF THE PILLARS— THE SKILLFUL HIRAM

(1)

In this message, a parenthesis in our study of the pillars, we shall consider Hiram, the builder of the pillars (1 Kings 7:13-15). In 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles the Bible has much to say about Hiram. Although David and Solomon both prepared skillful men for the building of the temple, Hiram is the only one of these skillful builders mentioned by name. The Bible not only mentions Hiram's name, but also gives his background in a detailed and meaningful way, telling us of his mother and father and of Hiram himself. As we study the Bible, we must realize that it has no wasted words. Everything it stresses or repeats is meaningful. Instead of considering some verse as mere repetition, we must find the significance in each repetition.

When I spent much time studying the two pillars in 1 Kings 7 nearly fifty years ago, I did not see any light. I only saw that the names of the two pillars were Jachin, meaning, "He shall establish," and Boaz, meaning, "In it is strength." But as we have been considering Jacob's dream and his experience at Bethel, I began to study these two pillars again. This time a great deal of light, like the fourth-day light (1:14-19), shined upon me. In my study of the pillars I found that many verses mention Hiram, the builder of the pillars. I knew by the speaking of the Spirit within that I had to pay attention to this. While I was considering the pillars, light also came concerning Hiram's mother and father, neither of whom is named in the Scriptures. I was especially bothered by the fact that, according to the Hebrew text, 1 Kings 7:14 says that Hiram was of the tribe of Naphtali. As I considered all these things further, I realized that I needed one complete message to discharge my burden on the builder of the pillars.

When you hear about the builder of the pillars, you may say, "I don't think that I could ever be a builder. As long as God's mercy and grace would make me a pillar, I would be more than satisfied." But do not be so limited. God's grace is unlimited. It can not only make you a pillar, but even a builder of pillars. Although I am not saying that all of us will be pillars or builders of pillars, I believe that in the coming years many, even some sisters, will become pillars. If you do not believe this word now, I would ask you to wait for several years. Then you will see many pillars raised up in the Lord's recovery. When that time comes, I will be happy. Furthermore, I believe that a good number of us will also become Hirams, the builders of pillars. God needs these Hirams. Only one temple was built in Solomon's time, but today many local churches need to be built. How many Hirams will be required for this work! Every local church needs at least one Hiram. Whenever there is a Hiram in a local church, that church is in glory. Thank the Lord that He has raised up a number of Hirams in the past. But I believe that in the future the Lord will perfect many more Hirams.

I. HIS MOTHER BEING A WOMAN OF THE DAUGHTERS OF DAN

Let us now see the constituent, or the constitution, of a Hiram. We need to know the constitution of those who are builders, not of the building generally, but of the pillars specifically. Firstly, Hiram's mother was "a woman of the daughters of Dan" (2 Chron. 2:14). No one can tell whether Dan here refers to the tribe of Dan or to the city of Dan. Nonetheless, it is certain that it refers to people from Dan, for the city of Dan was also of the people of the tribe of Dan. Hiram's father was a Tyrian, a man of Tyre, a pagan country. Hence, Hiram's mother was from the holy land and his father from a pagan country. As strange as it seems, the Bible further says that Hiram himself was of the tribe of Naphtali (1 Kings 7:14, Heb.). Therefore, his mother was of Dan, his father was of Tyre, and he himself was of Naphtali. How could he be of the tribe of Naphtali, since his mother was of Dan and his father of Tyre? The Bible does not tell us. It is a secret. In the light of the New Testament we may apprehend the significance of this secret. The New Testament unveils to us that we were born a sinful and worldly man. But we have been regenerated and transformed to be a man in resurrection. To be a man in resurrection by being regenerated and transformed is to be transferred into the tribe of "Naphtali" and to no longer be of "Dan" or of "Tyre."

Let us take the example of an elder who has been transformed. An elder should not be a gentleman, but a transformed man. Although a certain elder is the son of a woman from "Dan" and of a man from "Tyre," he must be transferred into a person from the tribe of "Naphtali." In the church life the tribe of "Naphtali" is the tribe of transformation. Once we are in the tribe of "Naphtali," we are no longer the same as our "Danite" mother and our "Tyrian" father. You may think it is too much to say that Naphtali may be interpreted as the tribe of transformation. But read on, and surely you will be convinced that this is so. Among the twelve tribes, only one tribe, the tribe of Naphtali, is the tribe of transformation. Judah is the tribe of kingship, Levi of priesthood, and Joseph of the double portion. Naphtali is the tribe of resurrection. To be in resurrection means to be in transformation.

The tribe of Dan is the tribe of idolatry that caused God's people to stumble and fall from God's way. Genesis 49:17 says, "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward." According to Judges 18, this is exactly what the Danites did. They took Micah's images which he had in his house and the priest whom Micah had hired to serve in his house. Judges 18:31 says, "They set them up Micah's graven image, which he made." This was the greatest stumbling to the children of Israel; it was the biting of the adder that caused the rider to fall backward. Furthermore, Jeroboam, the king of the

northern tribes, set up golden calves in Bethel and in Dan to cause the children of God to stumble (1 Kings 12:28-30). Due to this, in 1 Chronicles 2 through 9, where all the other tribes of Israel are mentioned in detail, there is no mention of Dan. In these chapters Dan is cut off from the record of God's people. Moreover, in Revelation 7, where we have the sealing of the children of Israel, there is no mention of the tribe of Dan.

Let us consider further some details relating to the tribe of Dan. Genesis 49:17 says that Dan was "a serpent by the way, an adder in the path." Dan was an adder, a poisonous snake, biting the horse's heels, "so that his rider shall fall backward." In the race of God's economy, this adder bites the horse and causes the rider to fall backward. This word in 49:17 was not spoken by a slanderer; it was uttered by Jacob as part of his blessing of his sons. When it was time to bestow his blessing upon Dan, Jacob had to be faithful to God's inspiration. Immediately after speaking the words recorded in 49:17, Jacob said, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." This means, "Lord, save me from this serpent, this adder." In 49:16 Jacob said, "Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel." Here, Jacob was praying that Dan might continue as a tribe. This indicated that he was in danger of being omitted. Hence, his father's prayer was also a prediction. God heard this prayer. In the book of Ezekiel we see that in the coming millennium the tribe of Dan will be recovered (Ezek. 48:1).

These details concerning Dan indicate that to be a mother who is "a woman of the daughters of Dan" is to be a mother in sin. All our mothers are mothers in sin. In Psalm 51:5 David said, "In sin did my mother conceive me." The fact that Hiram's mother was of Dan indicates that his origin, like ours, was of sin. Even the Apostle Paul said that he was the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Spiritually speaking, in God's eyes Paul's mother was also a "daughter of Dan." We all must confess that our mothers are also those of "Dan." If you would become a builder of pillars, you must firstly admit that you are a person born in sin. We may seem to be nice, humble, kind, gentle, and pure; but because our mother is of "the daughters of Dan," our origin by birth is the origin of the serpent. In Matthew 23:33 the Lord Jesus addressed the religious ones as "serpents" and a "brood of vipers." If you were to say to me, "Brother Lee, you are no good; you are a generation of vipers," I would nod my head in agreement. In us, that is, in our flesh, nothing good dwells (Rom. 7:18). We all must recognize what our origin is. Our origin is that of a woman from the tribe of "Dan," the tribe of an adder biting the horse's heels and causing the rider to fall backward from God's economy.

II. HIS FATHER BEING A TYRIAN

Hiram's father was a Tyrian, a man of Tyre (1 Kings 7:14). According to Ezekiel 28, Tyre was a place filled with commerce (Ezek. 28:16). Tyre was a commercial center, a place of international trade, like today's Hong Kong. Because Tyre was filled with merchandise, she was one with Satan (Ezek. 28:12). Ezekiel 28 reveals that the king of Tyre was one with Satan and even the very embodiment of Satan. Where commerce is, there Satan is also, for Satan is in commerce. If you would see Satan today, go to the commercial city of Hong Kong.

III. THE MARRIAGE OF HIS PARENTS BEING AGAINST GOD'S HOLY REGULATION

The marriage of Hiram's parents was against God's holy regulation (Deut. 7:3). A woman of the tribe of the serpent married a man from the country of Satan. What a combination! This woman of the tribe of the serpent married a man from the country of Tyre because of riches, commerce.

Not only in Hiram's day but today also you need skill to make money. For this reason there are many technical colleges in the United States. These technical schools teach skills, techniques, and trades that enable people to earn money. The only goal of colleges and universities is to train people to be money makers.

I would encourage you all to learn how to make money. I have encouraged my grandchildren to study medicine. Although some saints have tried to discourage them from studying medicine, telling them that they only need to read the Bible and love the Lord, I have said, "Don't listen to this talk. Those who say this don't know life. You must listen to your grandfather. He knows life better than you all. Go to study medicine." One of my grandsons took my word and earned all A's in his first year of pre-medical studies. Do not think that this is a kind of love for the world. As you shall see, I have a definite purpose in doing this. Hiram became the builder of the pillars. But if his father had not been a Tyrian, he would not have had the skill to fashion the pillars. We all were born of a "Danite" mother and we all need a "Tyrian" father. The more of a "Tyrian" our father is, the better. If you think that I am too extreme in saying this, I would ask you to read this message to the end.

IV. BECOMING ONE OF THE TRIBE OF NAPHTALI

According to the Hebrew text of 1 Kings 7:14, we are also told that Hiram was of the tribe of Naphtali. Although his mother was a Danite and his father a Tyrian, Hiram eventually became one belonging to the tribe of Naphtali.

A. A Hind Set Free

In 49:21 Jacob said, "Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth beautiful words" (Heb.). Here Jacob spoke of Naphtali with high favor. A hind does not seem to be related to beautiful words. But we must not understand the Bible according to our natural mind; we must understand the Bible according to the Bible.

1. Trusting and Rejoicing in God

A hind signifies a person who trusts in God in a desperate situation. Habakkuk 3:17 and 18 say, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no food; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Heb.). Those who trust in God and rejoice in God in the midst of a desperate situation, a situation in which every source of supply is cut off,

are hinds.

2. Walking Upon High Places

Habakkuk 3:19 says, "The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places." Those who trust in God walk, not in the valleys, but upon the tops of the mountains. If you do not know how to exercise faith in God when you are in a desperate situation, at that time you will creep in the valleys. You will never walk and skip upon the mountains. Only those who trust in God when they are in a desperate situation can leap upon the mountaintops. People may say, "Look! The fig tree does not blossom, the vine does not bear fruit, the olive labors in vain, the fields yield no food, the flocks are cut off in the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls. Oh, the situation is desperate, and we are finished!" When you hear this, you should say, "Praise the Lord! Now is the time for me to trust in Him." If you are like this, you will not be discouraged. Rather, you will leap and skip like a hind upon the mountaintops.

3. Living in Resurrection

The hind is also mentioned in the title of Psalm 22, which says, "Upon the tune of the hind of the morning" (Heb.). This psalm is about Christ in resurrection through crucifixion. The first verse was uttered by the Lord Jesus on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" However, verse 22 says, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the assembly will I praise thee" (Heb.). This verse is quoted in Hebrews 2:12, which relates the resurrected Christ to the church. Hence, Psalm 22, sung to the tune of the hind of the morning, is on Christ in resurrection for the church. In the Old Testament the hind refers not only to a person who trusts in God and walks upon the mountaintops, but also to one who lives in resurrection for God's assembly, for the church life.

Are you a "hind," or are you a "turtle"? I never saw a turtle skipping upon the mountaintops. Turtles are found in low places near water. Those who trust in God are not "turtles" but "hinds." They are in resurrection for God's assembly, the church. Only by regeneration and transformation can we be this kind of person. Naphtali is the tribe of the hind, and a hind signifies a regenerated and transformed person, a person who trusts in God, walks on the mountaintops, and lives in resurrection for the church life. How wonderful!

B. Giving Beautiful Words

Naphtali also gives beautiful words. Naphtali was in the land of Galilee (Matt. 4:15). All the first group of apostles came from Galilee, and in Acts 1:11 they were addressed as "men, Galileans." Out from these Galileans, people of Naphtali, came beautiful words, that is, the preaching of the gospel. In the New Testament we see that the word which came out of these Galileans was the word of life (Acts 5:20), the word of grace (Acts 14:3), the word of salvation (Acts 13:26), the word of wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8), the word of knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8), and the word of building (Acts 20:32).

V. HIS TYRIAN FATHER DYING AND HIS DANITE MOTHER BECOMING WIDOWED

The Apostle Paul was truly a Hiram. I do not know who Paul's mother was, but, spiritually speaking, I am certain that she was a "daughter of Dan," a daughter of the tribe of the serpent. Undoubtedly, in principle, Paul's father was a "Tyrian." Paul was brought up "at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:3), a doctor of the law. At that time, law was the highest science among the Jews, and whoever became a doctor of law was considered to be most outstanding. Gamaliel taught Paul everything regarding the religion of their forefathers. Paul's studying under Gamaliel was equivalent to studying in a seminary today. Although a seminary does not teach a trade and thus is different from a technical college, the principle of both a seminary and a technical college is the same in teaching knowledge.

Consider also the example of Moses. Moses was born of a Jewish mother, but he was brought up in the royal family in Egypt. Acts 7:22 says, "Moses was trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was powerful in his words and deeds." He was a scholar in Egypt. Paul was a scholar of religious knowledge, and Moses was a scholar of secular knowledge. However, again the principle was the same. Eventually, both Moses and Paul became pillar builders. In 1 Corinthians 3:10 Paul said that he was "a wise masterbuilder." Both Moses and Paul had a "Danite" mother and a "Tyrian" father. The royal Egyptian family was Moses' "Tyrian" father, for it was there that he learned all the wisdom of Egypt. This was the source of his Egyptian skill. The teaching of Gamaliel was the source of Paul's knowledge. In this way, Gamaliel became Paul's "Tyrian" father.

Now we must see a crucial point: All the "Tyrian" fathers must die. Hiram learned his trade from his Tyrian father, but eventually this Tyrian father died. As far as Moses was concerned, the royal family of Egypt died and was cut off. After Moses had learned everything of the Egyptians, that Egyptian source was terminated. Likewise, after Paul had learned everything from Gamaliel, the source of Gamaliel was cut off. In like manner, we all must be sons of a widow. Our father must die, but our mother may remain as a widow. Our Egyptian father or our Gamaliel must die, leaving us as the sons of a widowed mother. This means that the source of our secular or religious skill must die, but that the source of our human being must still exist. Today, we all must have a deceased father and a widowed mother.

In Moses' time, no one could have understood God's plan for the tabernacle like he could, because no one else had gained all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Moses acquired the wisdom of the Egyptians before he was forty years of age. After gaining it, he thought that he was qualified to deliver his people out of the hands of the Egyptians (Acts 7:23-25), but he failed in this endeavor. After Moses fled from Egypt, he lived in the wilderness for forty years. By the time he was eighty years of age, he considered himself to be a dead man. In his Psalm, Psalm 90, Moses said that people may expect to live to be seventy, and that the stronger ones may live to be eighty (v. 10). When Moses was eighty years old, he might have said to himself, "I am finished. What can I do? Forty years ago I could have done something, but I cannot do anything today. I am not yet dead, but I am dying." As Moses was dying there in the wilderness, he one day saw the burning bush (Exo. 3:2). Although the bush was burning, it was not consumed. In the vision of the burning bush God seemed to be telling Moses, "Moses, I will make you burning, but I will not burn you. I don't need you to be the fuel. When you were forty years of age, you had a great deal of fuel, but now you are old, dried up, and have no more fuel. I have come to make you

burning." At the time of this vision, Moses' "Tyrian" father had finally died. Later, as Moses led the children of Israel in the wilderness, what he had learned in the royal palace became useful. Because no one else had all the wisdom of the Egyptians, no one else could have done the work he did in the wilderness.

The principle is the same with a brother who has gained a great deal of Bible knowledge in the past. This knowledge of the Bible is his "Tyrian" father. But this "Tyrian" father must die. The source of his Bible knowledge must be terminated. Then whatever he has learned in the past will become useful in resurrection, and he will be able to deliver a word as few others are able to do. Just as the wisdom of the Egyptians became useful in the resurrected Moses, so whatever we learn in college, seminary, or Bible school will become useful in resurrection. However, if our "Tyrian" father still lives and we remain in the natural life, the "Tyrian" skill will be of no avail to the building up of God's temple.

I encourage all the young people to get a college degree. Do not make spirituality an excuse for not studying. Rather, study more diligently than the secular students, get the highest grades, and go on for advanced degrees. Do not stop with one Ph.D., but get two or three Ph.D.'s. Also learn to speak a number of other languages. Gain the "Tyrian" skills and the "Egyptian" knowledge. Become a doctor in biology, medicine, or nuclear physics. But then let the "Tyrian" father die. I have told you how I encouraged my grandson to study medicine. Now I will tell you what is truly on my heart. After he finishes medical school, I will say, "Forget about being a doctor and use your medical training to interpret the Bible." His medical training will make him very useful. Young people, gain all the up-to-date knowledge, graduate from college, and then say goodbye to your "Tyrian" father. Graduate from seminary and then say, "Seminary, thank you and goodbye. I have nothing more to do with you, but I will use the skill I have gained from you."

Young people, you all must study. Do not use the three weekly life-study messages as an excuse. You must both study earnestly and read the life-study messages. Otherwise, I would have no trust in you because the Lord would put no trust in you. You must acquire the "Tyrian" knowledge and graduate from the "University of Tyre." But after you gain your "Tyrian" education, you must put your "Tyrian" father in a coffin and bury him, so that your "Danite" mother becomes a widow. Then you will be of the tribe of Naphtali, useful in resurrection for God's building.

Some may ask me about the Apostles Peter and John, pointing out that they had no higher education and that in Acts 4:13 they were described as "uneducated and unlearned men." This, of course, is true. But who was the leading pillar builder in the New Testament? Undoubtedly, it was Paul. Peter wrote just two Epistles, but Paul wrote fourteen Epistles. Peter even recognized his shortage by recommending Paul's writings, saying, "Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you" (2 Pet. 3:15). Peter even confessed that some of Paul's writings were difficult to understand (2 Pet. 3:16). Peter seemed to be saying, "You must read Paul's writings to learn something deeper than I can give you." We need Peters today, but we also need Pauls, those who can write more epistles. Some may still say, "How about the Apostle John? Didn't he write a gospel containing twenty-one chapters and the book of Revelation containing twenty-two chapters?" John's "Tyrian" education only enabled him to do this much; he could not do what Paul was able to do. John could say, "In the beginning was the Word," "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men," and "Behold, the Lamb of God." John could tell people that if they believed in Him, they would have life, but that if they did not believe in Him, they would die. But John was not able to write Romans chapters four or seven or the book of Ephesians. If John had been asked to do this, he might have said, "I am not able to do it. Go to Brother Paul." John was qualified to see the vision of the great harlot and of the New Jerusalem, but he was not the one to write books like Romans, Ephesians, and Hebrews.

There is a need in the Lord's recovery today for those with the highest education. Young people, you must endeavor to gain the best education. Arrange your daily schedule in this way: seven and a half hours for sleep, one and a half hours for eating, one hour for exercise, eight hours for study, and six hours for spiritual things. If you expend your energy in this way, by the time you are thirty you will be able to begin your ministry like the Lord Jesus did (Luke 3:23). Continue your studies until you are thirty. If many take this way, we shall have no shortage of pillar makers.

Do not get married too soon. I do not like to see the brothers getting married before the age of twenty-five. Do not be burdened down too soon with marriage and children. Rather, use your time and energy for studying. The age of twenty-six is soon enough for brothers to begin having children. Furthermore, I do not like to see the sisters getting married before the age of twenty-two. If the sisters marry too early and have children too soon, they may be overburdened and even spoiled. Follow the schedule I recommend until you are twenty-five years old and see what will be the issue. This surely is good for God's recovery.

Are you anxious to be a Hiram? If you are, then you must be related to your "Tyrian" father, learn the "Tyrian" skill and trade, and gain the wisdom of the "Egyptians." Do not stop your schooling too soon. You should get a master's degree, or preferably a Ph.D. All the church people must be learned ones. We are neither ignorant nor undereducated. Rather, we would have the highest education. We would acquire all the wisdom of the "Egyptians," but we would not work for the "Egyptians"—we would work for the holy tabernacle. We should be able to say, "I know medicine and nuclear science, but I am not working for that. I am working for the building up of the church. I have learned a trade, but I am not occupied with this. I am building the pillars for the temple of my God." For this, our "Tyrian" father must die, our "Danite" mother must be widowed, and we must belong to the tribe of "Naphtali," the tribe of transformation. Be a person full of learning, but do not use your learning for secular business. Use it fully for the Lord's building work. Your life and your being must not only be transformed but also transferred. You must no longer be of "Dan" or of "Tyre," but absolutely of "Naphtali." As hinds that have been freed, we would trust in God, walk upon the mountaintops, and live in resurrection for the church life, giving forth words of life, grace, salvation, wisdom, knowledge, and building. If we are like this, then we shall be builders of pillars.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-SIX

THE BUILDER OF THE PILLARS— THE SKILLFUL HIRAM

In this message we shall consider further the builder of the pillars, the skillful Hiram (1 Kings 7:13-14; 2 Chron. 2:13-14).

It is not easy to know the Bible. Sometimes when translators have difficulty with a particular passage, they assume that the manuscripts are in error. However, when we probe into the depths of the revelation of the Bible, we must worship God. Often what at first glance appears to be a mistake in the manuscripts turns out to be a mysterious truth hidden in the Scriptures. This is true with respect to 1 Kings 7:14. The King James Version renders the verse as, "He [Hiram] was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali." According to this rendering and the understanding of most translators, the modifier, "of the tribe of Naphtali," goes with the word "widow." This would mean that this verse says that the widow was of the tribe of Naphtali. But 2 Chronicles 2:14 says that Hiram was "the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan." How could a daughter of Dan also be of the tribe of Naphtali? Some translators, neglecting the Hebrew text of 1 Kings 7:14, tried their best to reconcile this discrepancy, but they failed. By studying the Hebrew text we have learned that this verse should be translated as follows: "The son of a widowed woman; and he was of the tribe of Naphtali." Thus, Hiram, the son, was of the tribe of Naphtali. This solves the problem.

In this record of Hiram, the pillar builder, we have three peoples: the people of Dan, the people of Tyre, and the people of Naphtali. Hiram's mother was of Dan, his father was of Tyre, and he himself became one of the tribe of Naphtali. We do not know how a man whose mother was of Dan and whose father was of Tyre could be of the tribe of Naphtali. We only know that the Bible tells us so.

VI. HIRAM'S TRANSFER TO THE TRIBE OF NAPHTALI BEING MYSTERIOUS

The Bible is profound, and many things revealed in it are mysterious. Although there seems to be no reason for Hiram to be of the tribe of Naphtali, the Bible clearly tells that he was of this tribe. If we consider the significance of Dan, Tyre, and Naphtali, we shall worship God. Dan was a people of the serpent that bit the horse in the race of God (Gen. 49:17), and Tyre, a center filled with commerce, was related to Satan (Ezek. 28:12, 16). How marvelous that a man born of a woman of the people of the serpent and of a man of the people related to Satan could eventually become one of the tribe of Naphtali.

Naphtali is a hind (Gen. 49:21), which is useful to God. The description of the hind in the Old Testament record is very significant. According to the Bible, a hind signifies a person who trusts in God when he is in a desperate situation. Due to this trust, the Lord causes him to walk, even to skip, upon the high places (Hab. 3:17-19). The title of Psalm 22 reveals that the hind also signifies the very Christ who, having passed through the suffering of crucifixion, has entered into resurrection for the sake of the church. Hebrews 2:11 and 12 reveal that the resurrected Christ is for the church. Therefore, the hind signifies a person who trusts in God, who walks upon the mountaintops, and who lives by the resurrected Christ for God's building.

Which do you prefer to be—a serpent, a "Tyrian," or a hind? I certainly prefer to be one of the tribe of Naphtali, trusting in God, walking upon the high places, and living in the resurrected Christ for God's building. Hiram was such a person.

When some read this, they may think that it is merely allegorization or inference. It is not wrong to make inferences. If we see the letters b-o-y, we may rightly infer that they spell the word "boy." This inference is not only correct, but also necessary. In order to make inferences related to what is found in the Bible, we must firstly know the Bible. Many who do not know the significance of the tribe of Dan or of the country of Tyre would say, "Dan is Dan and Tyre is Tyre. We don't care for all these things." Genesis 49:21 says, "Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth beautiful words" (Heb.). Perhaps you have never paid attention to this verse. Naphtali is a hind that is released and freed. This hind knows no bondage and is not held in any fold; rather, it is freed to skip on the mountaintops. We must be such persons, persons who are freed from every bondage and man-made fold.

Now we must ask how a man born of a Danite mother and a Tyrian father could become one of the tribe of Naphtali. It is mysterious. A portion of the personal history of every Christian should be mysterious. Every Christian has a mysterious history. When I was young, I enjoyed playing soccer. I could play soccer all day long. But when I went to play again after I was saved, a strange thing happened. As I waited for the ball to come my way, I found that my feet would not move. When the ball did come to me, I simply could not play. Formerly, I was the fastest one in running and carrying the ball, but now I could not move and I eventually withdrew from the game. Others were shocked, and some said, "What happened?" I answered, "It is difficult for me to say." This is mysterious. Have you not had mysterious experiences like this? If not, then I doubt that you are my brother or sister in the Lord. Although I was a natural born soccer player, I suddenly became another person. For about fifty-five years I have not returned to play soccer.

There is a mysterious element in our regenerated life. Yes, we were born of a "Danite" mother and of a "Tyrian" father, but we have been regenerated to be another person. Even the young ones among us can testify that certain mysterious things have happened to them. Part of their human history is mysterious. The more you take this way, the more mysterious you will become. My wife has to admit that many times she cannot understand me. On occasion, something causes anger to rise up in me, but a few minutes later I begin to say, "O Lord Jesus! Praise the Lord! Amen!" Although my wife exercises her ability to understand what is going on within me, she simply cannot fathom what happens to me. Because this is so mysterious, I can only say, "Praise the Lord!" How mysterious this is!

Both Dan and Tyre are visible, but Naphtali is invisible. People could see that I was born of my natural mother and father, but they could not see how I became such a mysterious person. Every spiritual "Naphtalite" is invisible and mysterious. People should not be entirely able to understand you. If your classmates in school can understand everything about you, you are finished. You are not a wonderful Christian, for a wonderful Christian should not be that understandable. Instead, you should be a puzzle to your classmates or those with whom you work. You must also be a mysterious person in your married life. Although your dear wife may be a good sister, you should be somewhat mysterious in her eyes. If you are not mysterious, I do not believe that you are a good brother. The sisters should likewise be somewhat mysterious to their husbands. Before the Lord, I can testify that I do not understand certain things about my wife. She should not be able to bear so much, but due to the mysterious life within her she is able to bear much more than I think. We Christians have a mysterious source and origin. We even have a mysterious Originator within us.

It is a secret to us how Hiram became one of the tribe of Naphtali. We must bow our heads and worship God for this mysterious

element concealed in Hiram's history. How marvelous that his history not only records that his mother was of the tribe of the serpent and that his father was of the nation of commerce, a country related to Satan, but that he became one of the tribe of Naphtali. Hence, his history implies a mysterious part of his life that was used by God for His building. Although in the Bible the reason for this point is not mentioned, according to our experience we can understand that this is the mysterious part of our Christian life. The greater this mysterious portion is, the better, because it is this part that made Hiram one of the tribe of Naphtali and that made him the builder of pillars. Likewise, it is this mysterious part that makes us good for God's building. We should not live as one born of "Dan" or of "Tyre." Rather, we must live as one who has been transferred into the tribe of Naphtali. Hallelujah! Today, I am not of "Dan" or of "Tyre"—I am of the tribe of "Naphtali."

**VII. THE TYRIAN FATHER,
THE SOURCE OF SECULAR SKILL,
HAVING TO DIE THAT THE SON
WHO LEARNED THIS SKILL
THROUGH THE WORLDLY FATHER
MAY BE RELEASED FROM
THE WORDLY TIE**

Hiram's Tyrian father died. What a difference there would have been if his mother had died instead of his father! If that had been the case, this record would not match our experience, and it would be impossible to allegorize this portion of the Word. Praise the Lord that our "father," not our "mother," has died. This means that the source of secular skill has been cut off by God. The father signifies the source of skill, and the mother signifies human existence. If our "mother" died and our "father" lived, we would be "ghosts" fully involved with the world. We must go on existing as humans. Even Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live" (Gal. 2:20). The old man, the old "father," has been crucified; yet we still exist. That "I" who continues to exist is the "mother" of our human existence.

Moses is a good example. He was raised in the royal Egyptian family where he learned all the wisdom of the Egyptians. At the age of forty, he considered himself qualified to deliver his people from the usurping hand of the Egyptians. However, he failed because his "Tyrian" father, his connection with Egypt, still remained. This indicated that the source of his skill had not been cut off. The Lord intervened to break that connection, and Moses fled to the wilderness. Although Moses' "Tyrian" father, the royal Egyptian family, died, he himself continued to exist. The widowed "mother" remained. Although she continued to live, she was no longer tied to her husband.

Let us now apply this to our own experience. You may earn a Ph.D. from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. But after you earn this degree, Massachusetts Institute of Technology must die. This does not mean that you must die. You must continue to exist, but your existence must be widowed, separated from the worldly source. You continue to possess your skill, but the origin and source of that skill has been cut off. Your continued existence is the "mother," and the source of your skill, which has been cut off, is your deceased "father." Now you possess the skill without the source, and your human existence is no longer tied to your worldly origin.

Many of the young brothers and sisters are unbalanced and say, "We are in the Lord's recovery and we are expecting the Lord to come back soon. He may come back in two years. Why then should we worry about finishing high school and preparing ourselves for college? We should spend our time to pray-read and to fellowship with other brothers and sisters. Since the Lord is coming soon, why should we waste our time reading and studying?" If this is your attitude, the Lord may delay His coming back until you have learned to study. Actually, you should not just aim to finish high school, but also to graduate from college, and even to earn a Ph.D. I know what is on the heart of the young people. Many sisters think that it is sufficient to graduate from high school or, at most, junior college. They may say, "We sisters will not be elders. Why should we waste our time in school? Isn't it good enough to learn to type and make six hundred dollars a month? Let us enjoy an easy Christian life and a happy church life." Sisters, you must abandon this concept. No matter how much you love the Lord, if you hold this concept, you will never be very useful to Him. No time spent in studying is wasted. As young people, you must use your time to study. Although the Lord may come back in a few years, you must still study and learn the "Tyrian" skill. If you are under the age of twenty-three, your time must be devoted to your education. You should finish your university course by the age of twenty-two or twenty-three. This is not a regulation of the church in the Lord's recovery; this is my teaching. From now on, when young brothers and sisters come to me, I shall ask them what year they have finished in school. If anyone aged twenty-two would say that he has not yet graduated from high school, I would not waste my time in talking to him. Such a person, four years behind in school, might be retarded and would be unable to understand my fellowship concerning the Bible. But if a brother would tell me that he has just finished his first year of graduate school, I would be happy to talk with him concerning the depths of the Bible.

Although you should do your best to earn an advanced degree, after you have earned it, you must be prepared to sever the worldly ties. Do not burn your diploma (you will need that for business purposes), but say within yourself, "My 'Tyrian' father has died. The day of my graduation will be the day of his funeral." After you have labored for years to earn your degree, you must put your "Tyrian" father in a coffin and bury him. Never boast that you have graduated from a university. After Moses left the royal Egyptian family, he never mentioned it again. That family was buried. But many Christians with earned doctorates always like to put the title "Dr." in front of their names. Fifty or sixty years ago, people liked to say that they had graduated from Oxford or Cambridge. Although some boast of their education, after we have earned our degrees, we must bury Cambridge, Oxford, and every other university. The father of our "Tyrian" skill must die and be buried. The skill is useful, but the father has a foul odor.

As you read this, you may say that you do not understand what I am talking about. This is mysterious, and there is no need to understand it. The best Christians are those who study diligently and who afterwards seem to forget that they have earned a degree. Their unbelieving relatives and friends will not understand this. To them, it is mysterious that we would devote so much time and labor to earn a degree and then not respect it. Praise the Lord that they do not understand us! This is another aspect of our Christian mystery. We Christians have many mysterious aspects. For example, I know of some Christians who freely spend money on others, but not on themselves. Their relatives do not understand why they are so strict with themselves and so generous with others. We Christians must be people with a mysterious history. How mysterious of us to earn a degree and then to cut off our "Tyrian" father!

If this father does not die, he will bind us to the world, and our education will become the strongest tie. In my ministry throughout the years I have learned that no highly educated person can understand the Bible unless he cuts off this worldly tie. Being proud of your education will hinder you from knowing the Scriptures. No matter how educated you are, you must humbly tell the Lord that you are a teachable little child and that in your whole being you are utterly empty. You should be able to say, "Lord, although I have three Ph.D.'s, I know nothing. I am not filled up by my education. I am empty in my spirit, in my mind, and in my whole being." Many highly educated professional people are filled to the brim. For this reason, even after they are saved, they are unable to receive anything from the Word. Their pride has usurped them. We need to cut the tie with our "Tyrian" father and become like a child who knows nothing. Although we have knowledge, we would not be proud or filled with knowledge; instead, we would be empty. If we are like this, we shall be able to understand the Bible.

We need some brothers and sisters with doctor's degrees. It would be very beneficial to have some with Ph.D.'s in biblical Hebrew and Greek. It would also be helpful for some to earn Ph.D.'s in space science and nuclear physics. The church should not be poor or on a low level. Rather, it should have the highest people on earth. Young people, this must become your burden.

VIII. THE DANITE MOTHER, SIGNIFYING HUMAN EXISTENCE, REMAINING AS A WIDOW

Although the "Tyrian" father must die, the "Danite" mother, our human existence, must remain as a widow. Young people, if you take this word, after a number of years you will be able to say, "Lord, I thank You for that word about the 'Tyrian' father and 'Danite' mother. I have earned a doctor's degree, and the father of this degree has died, but the 'Danite' mother still lives. As the son of this widowed mother, I still possess my skills." If you are like this, you will certainly be useful in the Lord's hand.

Although we believe that the Lord is coming soon, we should still expect to have a long life on the earth for the Lord's use. In my early ministry I repeatedly prayed Solomon's prayer for wisdom in coming in and going out among God's people (1 Kings 3:7, 9). I can testify that the Lord has answered my prayer, helping me learn how to behave in the house of God and how to come in and go out among the saints. In addition, I have often prayed that the Lord would give me long life. I do not want to learn the things of God and then die shortly afterwards. Rather, I want to live a long life so that everything I have learned may be useful. All the young people should have this attitude and say, "Lord, I know You are coming soon. But I don't want to see You in resurrection—I want to see You in rapture. I want to live a long life until You come, not that I might have enjoyment, but that I might be useful for Your purpose on earth."

When my mother died in 1945, I wept. Although I have undergone many sufferings in the thirty-two years since then, I have hardly wept at all in these years. However, when in 1972 the news came to me that Brother Nee had died, I wept. I wept because I knew him intimately, had spent many years with him, and had received great help from him for the Lord's recovery. Year after year, he saw new things and had new experiences. Nearly everything he learned he passed on to me. From 1952 until he went to the Lord in 1972, he was in prison. I am sure that during those twenty years he learned many things, but not one word came out. This was the real reason I wept. How different the situation would be today if Brother Nee were still alive among us. Although I thank the Lord for those who are bearing the ark with me, I nevertheless constantly have a deep feeling of loneliness. If Brother Nee and my other senior co-workers were still living, I would not have this feeling. When I was with them on mainland China, I had some more experienced ones with whom I could have fellowship. I could refer matters to them, and they would always render me the help I needed. But when I refer matters to the brothers today, I feel that I am alone. I hope that in the coming years all of you will have many others with you on your level.

That the "Tyrian" father must die and our mother must keep on living means that we should ask the Lord to give us a long life. We should say, "Lord, I don't want to die early. I want to live to be eighty or ninety. If You do not come then, I am willing to die. But I still prefer to live until You come." We all, especially the young people, should pray like this.

The Lord has been merciful in answering my prayers for long life. But do not think that I have never had any diseases or illnesses. I have had a stomach ulcer, and it took me two and one half years to recover from a serious case of tuberculosis of the lungs. In order for our human existence to remain, we must stand against any weakness. Tell the Lord that you do not want to have a weak, unhealthy body. Do not think a spiritual person must be physically weak. Do not hold the concept that only by being physically weak can you learn to trust in the Lord. This concept is too spiritual. If you are too spiritual, you are not truly spiritual at all. Rather, you should say, "Lord, I don't agree with having an unhealthy body. Grant me a good appetite, the proper digestion, and the best sleep. Lord, promise me, as you have promised others, that my strength would be as my days. Every day must be filled with strength. I don't want to spend one day lying idly in bed. I refuse that kind of existence. I want to have a strong, healthy existence that is useful for Your purpose."

In addition to praying in this manner, you must also learn to take proper care of your body. Do not be unwise in your eating. The Lord has given me a good wife who exercises control over my eating. If it were not for her, I would take every opportunity to eat dessert. But because of her concern for my diet, I am healthy today. Daily, I eat the most healthy foods. Do not commit gradual suicide over a period of years by eating unwisely, but learn to keep yourself healthy. Take care of your body that your widowed "Danite" mother may go on living. Our purpose in this is not our health, but our being useful to the Lord.

In spite of the opposition, rumors, and criticisms, the Lord is opening doors throughout the country. He has given us an open door that no one is able to shut. But we are short of pillars. Recently, we have heard testimonies of what the Lord is doing in various places. However, we do not have the pillars to match the Lord's move. Doors are also opening in Europe, but there are not enough pillars. We must admit that we are short of pillars. This lack is due to the past situation. But, beginning now, we must cut off our past and go on. The young people must arise and tell the whole universe that the past situation is over. Young people, speak to the Lord, saying, "We young people have no history. We all will rise up. Lord, be merciful to us and do everything You can in the next several years to make us all pillars." This is my burden. I long to see that after some years many young ones will be ready to be sent out. If we had two strong pillars to go to one of the new places, within a few months three other localities would open up. The open doors always multiply like this. We go to one place, and our going there opens up other places. It all depends upon the pillars.

Most of the older ones among us have wasted many years. All the years spent sitting in Christianity have been wasted. Year after year went by, but everything remained the same. Our young people must not be like this. Even one month must make a difference. Nevertheless, the older brothers and sisters should not be disappointed. It is not too late for them to go on. There is a great need for those who can shepherd others. We all must endeavor to become useful.

I am certain that the way we are now taking is absolutely right. Do not consider any other way—dive into this flow and stay in it. Use this opportunity to learn, to be trained, to be adjusted, to be saturated by the Lord, and to be made useful for Him. We all must learn this way and never return to the old way.

I hate the old way. According to the old way, many go to the meetings clinging to their opinions and thinking that they are so experienced. When the brothers minister the Word, they "discern" the message (actually they are being critical), wanting to determine whether or not the brothers are scriptural. It is not your responsibility to discern the brothers. Let the Lord take care of that. Instead, you must learn your own lessons and have all the dealings necessary to make you useful. We all should hold this attitude. Do not think that you are too old to be useful. Everyone who wants to be useful can become useful.

This is not a doctrine; it is my practical fellowship with you all, especially with the young ones. Young people, I hope that your whole being will be open so that you may make a clear decision and say, "Lord, this is it. From now on, I will do everything possible to learn all I need to learn. Lord, I ask You to help me in this matter. After I graduate, my 'Tyrian' father must die, but my 'Danite' mother must continue to exist. Lord, grant me this kind of living that I may be useful to You."

**IX. THE SECULAR SKILL BEING USEFUL
FOR GOD'S BUILDING ONLY IN RESURRECTION
AFTER THE WORLDLY FATHER HAS DIED
AND THE LEARNED SON HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED
TO THE TRIBE OF NAPHTALI**

The secular skills we gain will only be useful for God's building in resurrection, that is, after the worldly father has died and we have been transferred into the tribe of Naphtali. After your "Tyrian" father has died and your "Danite" mother has become widowed, you must not remain a natural person. Anything natural is a waste. Instead of being natural, we must exercise ourselves to be in resurrection in every aspect of our living. This is a great matter. The more you exercise yourself to be in resurrection, the more useful you will be. You must be in resurrection even in your relationship with your wife. All the skills we acquire must be in resurrection.

Years ago, I often wrote a letter two or three times because after the first writing I felt that some phrases were too natural and were not in resurrection. Hence, I destroyed the letter and began again. After exercising like this to write a letter, I would still wait a day before mailing it. My purpose in doing so was to determine whether or not that letter was truly in resurrection. We all must learn to do things and to have our being in resurrection. This is a basic matter.

**X. THE TRANSFERRED NAPHTALITE
NEEDING TO BE FETCHED
OUT OF TYRE AND TO COME
TO KING SOLOMON IN JERUSALEM
WHERE GOD'S BUILDING IS**

Hiram was fetched out of Tyre and was brought to King Solomon in Jerusalem. This means that the transferred Naphtalite must be fetched out of Tyre and come to King Solomon in Jerusalem where God's building is (1 Kings 7:13-14). King Solomon was a type of Christ, and Jerusalem, the place where God's building was, signifies the church. Today's Solomon and God's present building are both in the church. In a very good sense, the church today is Jerusalem. Although your "Tyrian" father has died, your widowed "Danite" mother continues to exist, and you are in resurrection, you still need to come to the church because this is where God's building is. God will not build His temple in Tyre. Although you may be very useful, if you remain in Tyre, you will be useless as far as God's building is concerned. If you remain in Tyre, you may be qualified, but your standing, your ground, will be wrong. The Lord must fetch you out of Tyre and bring you to Jerusalem. If your "Tyrian" father dies, your "Danite" mother goes on living as a widow, and you are in resurrection and have come to Jerusalem, then you will be useful for God's building.

**XI. THE CASES OF MOSES WITH JOSHUA
AND PAUL WITH TIMOTHY**

You are probably familiar with the cases of Moses with Joshua (Num. 27:15-23) and of Paul with Timothy (1 Tim. 1:1-3; 2 Tim. 1:1-2, 6-8; 2:1-3). Moses and Paul firstly became pillars themselves and later became pillar builders. Moses built Joshua and Paul built Timothy. Moses did not actually bring the children of Israel into the rest; Joshua, who was a pillar built up by Moses, did this. Likewise, Paul built up Timothy, and Timothy became a pillar standing to bear the church testimony. In the cases of both Moses and Paul we see that their "Tyrian" fathers died. In Philippians 3, Paul, speaking of his religious background, said, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." Paul had learned a great deal at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), but Gamaliel, the source of Paul's skill, had to be cut off. However, Paul's human existence remained. Furthermore, both Moses and Paul were in resurrection. They were also fetched out of "Tyre" and brought to the place where God's building was. With Moses this building was the tabernacle, and with Paul it was the church. History records that Moses and Paul were more than useful in the hands of God. They were not only pillars; they were also pillar builders. This is the need in the church today. In order for this need to be met, we all must pray to the Lord, saying, "Lord, for the sake of Your building, make me a pillar and a pillar builder."

**LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS
MESSAGE EIGHTY-SEVEN
BEING TRANSFORMED**

We have seen that Jacob twice set up a pillar in Bethel (28:18, 22; 35:14). Not only did he set up a pillar, but he called it "the house of God." As we have pointed out again and again, nearly every item in the book of Genesis is a seed of a truth developed in the following books of the Bible. Knowing this principle is basic to our understanding of the book of Genesis. If we would understand this book, we must follow the development of the items it contains throughout the following books of the Bible until they reach their ultimate consummation in the book of Revelation. In past messages we have considered the development of the pillar in 1 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and Jeremiah. Now we shall trace this development into the New Testament, where we have a clear word regarding three aspects of pillars: the apostles as pillars of the church, the church as a whole being the pillar, and the overcomers as pillars in the New Jerusalem.

- (c) Related to the Building of the Church
 - aa. The Apostles Being the Pillars of the Church

Galatians 2:9 says that James, Cephas, and John were reputed to be pillars. Here Peter is called Cephas. We know that Cephas was Peter and that Peter was Cephas. In using the name Cephas in this verse, the Bible reminds us of the change of Peter's name. When Peter was first brought to the Lord, He changed his name from Simon to Cephas, which means a stone (John 1:42). Undoubtedly, this change of name indicated that the Lord's intention was to transform him into a stone for God's building. Although we are accustomed to reading of Peter and John, in Galatians 2:9 Paul purposely speaks of Cephas and John to show us that, if we would become pillars, we need to be transformed. The natural Simon must be transformed into a Cephas, a stone.

Now we must consider the question of how a natural man can become a pillar of the church. This can only be accomplished through transformation. According to the New Testament, transformation depends upon regeneration. By regeneration a new life is put into us. This life is a life that will transform us. By our natural birth we inherited an old, sinful, natural life. This life is absolutely useless in making us pillars. But thank the Lord that regeneration imparts into us a life different from our natural life. This new life is the divine life, the very life of God. In the Gospel of John this life is called eternal life (John 3:16). The eternal life sown into us at the time of our regeneration is the seed of transformation. Hallelujah, all the regenerated ones have received this divine life! We all have this seed of transformation. However, although many Christians devote a great deal of attention to regeneration, very few pay attention to transformation. Few Christians have ever heard a message about transformation, and there may even be some among us who have never prayed for their own transformation. I strongly urge you to pray for your transformation. Formerly, we needed regeneration; now we need transformation.

A human being is composed of three parts: spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23). When we believed in the Lord Jesus, called on His name, applied His blood, and received Him as our Redeemer and our life, the divine Spirit entered into our spirit as the Spirit of life. As a result, we were regenerated and received the divine life, which was sown into the depths of our being as the seed of transformation. But what about our soul, which is composed of the mind, the will, and the emotion? We have the divine life in our spirit, but we still need to be transformed in our mind. Romans 12:2 proves this: "Be transformed by the renewing of the mind." Transformation takes place through the renewing of our mind, emotion, and will. These basic inner parts of our being need transformation. This transformation will make us stones for God's building.

Through regeneration plus transformation we become stones for God's building. Today, God's building is the church, God's house, God's temple. First Peter 2:4 and 5 reveal that Christ is the living stone and that, when we, the regenerated ones, come to Him, we also become living stones to be built up into a spiritual house, which is the church as the temple of God. Today God's building is the church, but in the future it will be the New Jerusalem. If we read Revelation 21 carefully, we shall see that the New Jerusalem will be the enlargement of the temple of God. Today, the temple of God is a house, but in eternity the temple of God will be a city, which of course is much greater than a house. The New Jerusalem will be built with precious stones (Rev. 21:18-20); in it there will be no dust, clay, or wood. Our destiny is to be precious stones built into the New Jerusalem.

Now we come to the crucial matter of how clay can be transformed into stone. We were made clay (2:7; Rom. 9:21, 23), but the New Testament reveals that we are stones. There seems to be a contradiction here. From the natural perspective we are clay, but from the spiritual, transformed perspective we are stones. But how does this transformation from clay to stone take place? Transformation is the adding of Christ into our being. To be transformed is not only to have Christ imparted into our spirit; it is to have Him spread from our spirit into every inward part of our being. Very few Christians have seen this.

Recently, I was told of a group of Christians who argue strongly that Christ is only in the third heaven and that He is not in us. The Bible reveals and we also preach that Christ today is in the third heaven at the right hand of God. Nevertheless, He is also in us. Both matters are covered in Romans 8. Romans 8:34 says that Christ is at the right hand of God interceding for us, and Romans 8:10 says that Christ is in us. Hence, Christ is both in heaven and in us. But these Christians ask, "Was not Christ resurrected with a body of flesh and bones? Since Christ has been resurrected with a body of flesh and bones, how could He get into you?" According to the Bible, we definitely believe that Christ was resurrected physically with a body of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). But listen to this: On the day of resurrection the resurrected Christ, having a body of flesh and bones, came into a locked room (John 20:19-20). How did He get into the room? He certainly did not appear as a ghost (Luke 24:37, 39). We must reverently confess that we cannot figure out this matter.

Colossians 1:27 says, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Although Christ was resurrected with a body of flesh and bones, He became the life-giving Spirit in resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45). As the life-giving Spirit, Christ is in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). Furthermore, Christ is growing and increasing within us. The more Christ is added into us, the more we are transformed from clay into stone. I doubt that those who refuse to admit that Christ is in them are able to be transformed. They surely could not deliver a message on transformation. But we are not simply concerned for messages—we are concerned for transformation. We need to be transformed, and transformation is only possible by having Christ imparted into us each day. Morning after morning, we need to gain more of Christ. Each day Christ must be increasingly added into our being.

Consider the example of Peter, a Galilean fisherman. Peter was rough, uncultured, and of a quick disposition. He was quick to talk, quick to act, and quick to make mistakes. Peter also had the good point of being quick to repent, to return. The Peter in the Gospels was eventually changed into another person called Cephas in the Epistles. We may take, as an illustration of this, Peter's slow response to the vision in Acts 10:9-16. There is a marked difference between the slow Peter in Acts 10 and the quick Peter in the Gospels. Furthermore, Peter's two epistles reveal that he had become a cautious person. By this we see that his disposition had been changed and that his being had been transformed. He had absolutely become another person. His word concerning Paul (2 Pet. 3:15-16) proves that he had been transformed and had become another person.

Recall that one day Paul rebuked Peter to his face (Gal. 2:11). If we put Galatians 2 together with 2 Peter 3 we see that the Peter who had been rebuked by Paul spoke kind words concerning Paul and positive words concerning his writings. In most situations today, if one brother rebuked another, the brother who received the rebuke would not forgive the brother who rebuked him. Because this is the practice, one brother rarely rebukes another. In today's Christianity we seldom hear of rebukes, but of political talk. Some may praise others' to their face, but criticize them behind their back. This is the political practice of today's Christianity. Most Christians are politicians. Paul, on the contrary, was not a politician; he was a frank, direct, and straight rebuker. He even rebuked Peter. According to our concept, Peter should have said, "Who are you? When I was the leading apostle, you were still a young man persecuting the church. Now, as a newcomer, you have neither the qualifications nor the position to rebuke me." Peter, however, did not react in this manner. In his word in 2 Peter 3 he acknowledged that he was inferior to Paul in writing of God's economy. He admitted that some things Paul said were deep and difficult to understand. This attitude indicates that Peter was no longer natural, but that he had been transformed into another person. I hope that after a number of years many of you will be so transformed that you will be honest, frank, and straight in rebuking others, and that those who are rebuked will be transformed to receive such a rebuke. By reading the New Testament we clearly see that Peter was transformed into Cephas, one of the pillars of the church. Peter, who himself was a living stone, said that we also are living stones. This means that in order to be pillars we must be transformed by having Christ added into us.

bb. The Church Being the Pillar
of the Truth

In the New Testament we are also told that the whole church is the pillar. First Timothy 3:15 says, "But if I delay, that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth." It is difficult to understand the word truth in this verse. Some say that truth means doctrine. Although this is correct, it is inadequate. In Greek, the word truth denotes something real and solid. Hence, truth means reality. However, truth is not simply a solid reality, but also the expression of this reality. Truth is not vain doctrine; it is the expression of reality, doctrine constituted with reality and conveying that reality. The church is the pillar bearing the truth, that is, bearing the expression of the reality.

The reality borne by the church is revealed in 1 Timothy 3:16: "And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness, who was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." The truth in verse 15, the expression of the reality, is the mystery of godliness in verse 16. The mystery of godliness is God manifested in the flesh. When Christ was on earth, He was God manifested in the flesh. Outwardly, He was a man in the flesh; inwardly, in actuality and in reality, He was God. God in His reality was manifested in the man Jesus. God was reality, and Jesus as a man in the flesh was the manifestation of God. This is the very truth mentioned in verse 15, and this is the mystery of godliness. Godliness means God-likeness. The mystery of godliness is the mystery of God-likeness. When Jesus lived on earth as a man in the flesh, the people who beheld Him saw in Him the likeness of God. Although He was a man, He expressed God. This God-likeness was a mystery. The mystery of godliness must be continued in the church today.

The church is the continuation of the mystery of godliness. In message eighty-six we saw that Christians have a mysterious part in their being. In principle, the whole church should be a mystery. If some unbelievers come into our meetings and survey the situation, they will not be able to understand it. Although we consider ourselves common and simple, the unbelievers will say, "What is this? What attracts them to these meetings? There is no entertainment or outstanding speaker. Who are these people? They seem to be neither modern nor old-fashioned. We cannot say what kind of people they are." The reason for this is that we are mysterious. Do not think that I am referring to our outward appearance. I am referring to something of God manifested in us. Because this is real yet invisible, it is difficult to define. If the church is merely pure, clean, gentle, humble, and holy, we have missed the mark. The church must be the continuation of the manifestation of God in the flesh. To some of our critics, the continuation of the manifestation of God in the church is a form of evolution into God. To accuse us of teaching evolution is a slander to us and a blasphemy to the Lord. The proper church life is a continuation of the manifestation of God in the flesh. This manifestation is the truth held by the church as the pillar. If as the church we hold this testimony, we shall be able to say that we are the continuation of the mystery of godliness.

We do not want to express our own holiness or anything of ourselves. We want only to express our God and to see Him manifested in our flesh. We admit that we are still flesh, but the very God who lives in our spirit will be manifested, expressed, in our flesh. This manifestation must not merely be individual, but corporate. The proper church life is the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh.

The only way the church can be the corporate expression of God in the flesh is by transformation. Everyone in the church must be transformed. Occasionally we refer to the older brothers or to the younger brothers. However, in the church we should not think of some as older ones and of others as younger, for we all are being transformed. Although we may not yet be fully transformed, we are at least in the process of transformation. Forget your age and concentrate upon the fact that you are in the process of transformation. If I still think of myself as a Chinese, I am finished. In the church there is neither old nor young, Chinese nor American, Jew nor Greek (Col. 3:11). In the church we are being changed by having Christ added into us. You should not be an old brother or a young brother, but a brother into whom Christ is being added daily. The older ones may need to remind the younger ones not to call them older brothers, and the younger ones may need to ask the older ones not to speak of them as young brothers. Furthermore, we should not refer to some brothers as "Yankees" and to others as Southerners. There are neither "Yankees" nor Southerners in the church; there are only transformed brothers. There is no black, white, yellow, red, Jew, or Greek; instead, there are only the transformed people—people into whom Christ is being added daily and who are the expression of God in Christ. This is the church as the pillar supporting and bearing the mystery of godliness.

After hearing the messages on Hiram, the builder of the pillars, many young people have been motivated to further their education. This is excellent. In order to be a capable pillar builder you need to acquire a good education and to experience the termination of the source of that education. However, if you earn the highest degree but are lacking Christ, you are still nothing. The basic element that can constitute you into a pillar is not a college degree; it is Christ added into you. No matter how many degrees you have, if you are short of Christ, you cannot be a pillar. The basic element in being a pillar is neither your education nor capability, but your Christ, the very Christ added into your being. This is the essential factor in being constituted as a pillar. A pillar must be the continuation of the manifestation of God in the flesh.

(d) Consummated in the New Jerusalem

Now we must go on to the pillars in the New Jerusalem. Revelation 3:12 says, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall by no means go out anymore, and I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from My God, and My new name." In this verse we see the consummation of the pillar in the New Jerusalem.

aa. The Overcomer Who Keeps the Lord's Word
and Denies Not His Name
Being Made a Pillar in God's Enlarged Temple

According to Revelation 3:12, we all may become pillars in the New Jerusalem. In Revelation 3:8 the Lord Jesus said, "You have a little power and have kept My word and have not denied My name." Then in Revelation 3:11 He said, "Hold fast what you have that no one take your crown." Firstly, the Lord tells those in the church in Philadelphia that they have a little power, that they have kept His word, and that they have not denied His name. Then He tells them to hold fast what they have. They must keep the word of the Lord and not deny the name of the Lord. If we do this, we shall be overcomers, and the Lord will write upon us the name of His God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and His new name. Now we must consider what it means to keep the word of the Lord and not to deny the name of the Lord. These matters are deep and difficult to explain.

A superficial understanding of keeping the Lord's word is that the Lord speaks a certain word and we keep it; He tells us to do something and we do it. This is correct, but it is shallow. In order to keep the Lord's word we must do two things: on the positive side we need to receive all that He is into us, and, on the negative side, we need to kill all our concepts and opinions. It is not simply a matter of the Lord telling us to love one another or to wash one another's feet and of our proceeding to love others and to wash their feet. This understanding is too superficial. The Lord's word represents the Lord Himself. If we would receive the word as the expression of the Lord Himself, we must drop our opinions and concepts.

Your opinions frustrate you from keeping the Lord's word. Probably, you have rarely kept the word of the Lord because you have been hindered by your opinions. In this message we have been speaking about transformation. As Romans 12:2 indicates, transformation primarily deals with the mind. We are transformed by the renewing of the mind, which is the source of our concepts and opinions. To be transformed is to have our concepts and opinions slain. None of us can say that he has no opinions or concepts. Some may ask, "Should we be wooden boards without any feeling, knowledge, or sense?" Of course not. We need to be living. But the more living we are, the more we are filled with opinions and concepts. The more I have prayed about this matter and considered my experience, the more I have realized that to keep the word of the Lord is actually to be transformed.

The way to be transformed is to receive the word of the Lord into us and to keep it. Most of us do not keep the Lord's word because we are hindered by our opinions and our concepts. Everyone is opinionated. Those who minister the Word often pray that the Lord would remove the opinions of those hearing the Word and take away the veils of their concepts. A word may be clearly uttered, but your concepts and opinions may frustrate you from keeping it. If we would keep the Lord's word, we must firstly drop our opinions and then have the Lord Jesus added into our being.

Now let us consider what it means not to deny the Lord's name. A name always denotes a person. When I call a brother's name, the brother himself comes. Therefore, not to deny the name of the Lord means not to deny the Person of the Lord.

All denominational names, such as Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian, must be forsaken. A name means a great deal. Although you may not realize it, if you take a denominational designation, you are actually rejecting the name of Christ, and thus you are rejecting the Person of Christ. Although you may not intend to do this, this is nonetheless the fact. If it is not your intention to deny the name of Christ, then you should not have any denominational name. In the past some missionaries and pastors have consulted me about this matter. They have all told me that they do not care for the denominational names. I told them that, since they did not care for these names, they should forsake them. It is a serious matter to take another name above the Lord's name. Apparently, for many, it is insufficient merely to be a Christian. They take on other names and say, "I am a Lutheran," "I am a Presbyterian," or, "I am a Baptist." To do this is to deny the Lord's name. One hundred and fifty years ago the Brethren saw the light on this matter and forsook every other name and declared that they held just one name—the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the unique name. However, it is not merely a name in letters, but a name in Person.

If we do not deny the name of the Lord, then we have His Person as ours, and His Person becomes our designation. When you go to work, perhaps in a large corporation with hundreds of employees, there is no need for you to label yourself as a Christian. You simply need to express the Person of Christ. To fail to express the Person of Christ actually means to deny His name. We must live in such a way that Christ is expressed through us. If we express Christ, the One we express will, in the words of others, become our designation. Others will say that we are Christians. The Person we express becomes our name, our designation. People will not say that you are Chinese or a "Yankee." The only designation they will give you is that of being a Christian.

Approximately forty years ago, a brother was an employee in a large company. His fellow workers called him "Jesus." When they saw him, they said, "This is Jesus," apparently in a despising way. At the time of the Japanese invasion of China, many of the employees in this company were planning to escape. Having money and other valuables that had to be left behind, they looked for someone to whom they could entrust their possessions. After considering a number of possibilities, they finally decided to entrust their money and belongings to the brother, the one they called "Jesus." This shows that they were trusting in Jesus. The brother, of course, never said that his name was Jesus. Rather, he expressed the Person of Christ in his living, and his life was his designation. This is the true

significance of not denying the name of the Lord. The church in Philadelphia lived by the Lord, and His life was lived out by that church. Therefore, His Person became the name of those saints.

To keep the word of the Lord and not to deny the name of the Lord means to forsake our opinions and concepts, to receive the Lord's word into us, and to gain more and more of the Lord Himself. If we do this, we shall live Him out as a Person. The name of this Person is Jesus. To keep the Lord's word is not merely a doctrinal matter, and to confess His name is not simply to utter a few statements. To keep His word means to receive Him into our being, letting go of our concepts and opinions that He may have the ground within us; and not to deny His name is to live out Christ as a Person so that He becomes our designation. This indicates transformation.

bb. Bearing the Name of Christ's God,
the Name of the City of Christ's God,
and Christ's New Name

In Revelation 3:12 the Lord said that He would write upon the overcomer "the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from My God, and My new name." In Revelation Christ called God, "My God" because in this book He stands on the position of a sent One, as One sent by God to accomplish His economy. The Lord also held to this position in the four Gospels, always standing on the ground of One who had been sent by God. He had been sent by God and from with God to accomplish God's purpose. He never acted according to His own will, but always according to God's will (John 6:38). Even when He was on the cross, He said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). We also must stand on this position today, saying, "I am a sent one. I have been sent by the Lord to accomplish His purpose. I have no other position, opinion, or concept. It is His will, not my will, that must be done." To say, "My God," indicates that we do not act on our own; it indicates that we are doing the will of God. We are not working for our career; we are accomplishing His purpose. Having the name "My God" written upon you designates you as this kind of person. You, like the Lord Jesus when He was on earth, are not doing your own will, but are accomplishing God's will. You do not act on your own, but constantly walk in God's will. This is the significance of the name of "My God."

The Lord also promised to write upon the overcomer the name of the New Jerusalem, the city of His God. This is deep. It means that the New Jerusalem is a building, not according to any man's will, but according to the will of God. All those built into this city are people like the Jesus revealed in the four Gospels. They do not act according to their own will, but according to God's will. Only those who are like this are qualified to be labeled with the name of the city of Christ's God, the New Jerusalem.

Finally, in Revelation 3:12 the Lord promised to write upon the overcomer His new name. If we are the kind of person described in this message, we shall surely have new experiences of Christ. Most Christians have only the limited experience of Christ as their Redeemer. Not many have the experience of Christ as their life. Most of those who do experience Christ as life experience this in a shallow way. How long is your experience of Christ? Your experience of Him should not be a mere fraction of an inch; it must be many miles in length. Christ is not only our Redeemer and our life—He is our King, Prophet, Priest, light, power, righteousness, holiness, transformation, and many other things. Some hymns in our hymnal list more than fifty items of what Christ is to us. The more you experience Christ, the newer He will be to you, and the more His name will be written upon you. Firstly, Christ as Redeemer is written upon you. Later, Christ as life, light, humility, patience, and love will also be written upon you. His name is inexhaustible. The writing of His name upon you depends upon your experience. The more you experience Him, the longer will be the writing of this name. This is like a movie camera that operates as long as the automobile in which the photographer sits is moving. When the automobile stops, the camera stops as well. No one can say what is the new name of Christ spoken of in this verse because it is simply the designation of your new experience of Christ. When you experience Christ in a certain way, that aspect of Christ will become your designation, the new name written upon you. If we would become pillars, we need to be transformed by having Christ added into us again and again. In this way our experience of Christ will be lengthened, and we shall say, "Not my will, but His will"; we shall not act on our own, but according to His heart's desire. Then the name of God, the name of the city of God, and the Lord's new name will be written upon us.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-EIGHT

THE WAY TO BE PERFECTED AS A PILLAR

In this message we need to consider how we can be perfected as pillars for the Lord's move. The kind of pillar I am talking about, of course, is the pillar in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:13-22), the pillar in Bethel (Gen. 28:18, 22; 35:14).

OUR NEED TO BE IN TODAY'S BETHEL

If we mean business with the Lord to become pillars, then we must discover where Bethel is today. Otherwise, we shall be seeking the right thing in the wrong place. If we remain in the Catholic Church, the denominations, the charismatic movement, or the free groups, it will be impossible for us to be perfected as pillars. Do not think that such a statement indicates we are being narrow-minded or shortsighted. We must be in today's Bethel, the church. There is no other place for us to be made pillars in God's building. The pillars perfected in other places are not pillars for Bethel, God's building, but for other things. Through the past centuries, some spiritual giants have been perfected to be pillars for the denominations, for the mission fields, or for certain movements. However, through my years of observation, I have not seen any pillars perfected for the Lord's building outside the local churches. We must be clear that the pillars about which we are speaking are the genuine pillars for God's building. If we want to be such a pillar, then we must ask where God's building, today's Bethel, is. We should not take this matter lightly.

A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

In 1933 I was burdened by the Lord, even forced by Him, to give up my job and to serve Him full-time. I had not studied in a Bible school or seminary. At the time I was working in a corporation. When the Lord was dealing with me about giving up my job, I could

not eat or sleep well for three weeks. To serve the Lord full-time required an extreme exercise of my faith, and nothing in my environment favored this decision. I simply did not know how I would care for my living. Eventually, however, I had no choice except to quit my job. After I made this decision, I received a brief note from Brother Nee. In this note Brother Nee said, "Brother Witness, as to your future, I feel that you have to serve the Lord with your full time. How do you feel about it? May the Lord lead you." This note, dated August 17, 1933, the middle of my three-week struggle with the Lord, was a strong confirmation. I had resigned from the corporation, but I had little faith; I was still doubting that I had made the right decision. At that very juncture, that note arrived from Brother Nee. After I read it, I said, "The Lord willing, I will visit this brother and find out why he wrote that note to me at that time."

With this purpose in mind, I went to Shanghai to visit Brother Nee, and he received me as his guest. I stayed with him for several months and I received great help from him. Of course, my first question was why he had written that note on August 17. He told me that as his boat was sailing back to China on the Mediterranean Sea and he was sitting silently in his cabin alone, he was burdened to pray for the Lord's move in China. While he was praying, the Lord pointed out to him that he had to write me that note. Then I told him that the date on which he wrote this note was in the middle of my three-week struggle with the Lord. This report confirmed for Brother Nee that what he had written was absolutely right. Through this note he and I were builded together even more than before. We were deeply assured that the Lord had put us together. From this time, he treated me as a new learner, and I honored and respected him, my senior co-worker, as one who could perfect me.

Because there was not that much work for Brother Nee and me to do in the early days, I often went to him in his home for long periods of time. At these times he perfected me in many different ways. Before the Lord I can testify that we never spent any time in gossip. Brother Nee, an outstanding gift given by the Lord to perfect others, always used the time to perfect me. He certainly knew what I needed. He gave me the proper understanding of church history from the first century until the present; he shared with me the biographies of nearly all the founders of the different denominations; and he perfected me with respect to the inner life, the church life, and the Lord's move.

ONE FLOW

One day Brother Nee told me that he and the other co-workers were burdened that I move to Shanghai with my family to stay with them and work with them. He asked me to bring this matter to the Lord. As I took the matter to the Lord and prayed about it, the Lord showed me from the book of Acts that in His move on earth there is only one flow. This flow started from Jerusalem and spread to Antioch, and from Antioch it turned to Europe. The Lord told me that for His move in China there should not be two flows or two origins. I had been burdened for north China. Before I had gone to see Brother Nee, I had conducted a thorough study on the Song of Songs in the summer of 1933. But although I was definitely burdened for north China, Brother Nee and the co-workers felt that I should move to Shanghai, stay there, and work with them. At this time the Lord showed me that I had to get into the one flow that had started from Shanghai. I saw that from Shanghai the flow would proceed to the north and to other parts of the country. Therefore, I decided to move to Shanghai and to stay there. From that time onward, I have been in the flow. I have been absolutely clear that this is the Lord's flow and His move on earth in His recovery. Using today's word, I knew that I had found Bethel.

THE MINISTRY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FLOW

Because I knew I was in the Lord's flow and that this flow had already started, I also realized that there was a ministry responsible for that flow. As the result of seeing this, I strongly decided to forget all my past learning and experience. The fact that I had been able to conduct a detailed study on Song of Songs indicates that I had some knowledge and that I could do something. I had learned a good deal about the Bible in my seven and a half years with the Brethren. I knew the types, the prophecies, and various other things. Moreover, a church had been established through me. Nevertheless, I realized that the Lord's flow on the earth must be one, that the flow had already begun, and that there was a ministry carrying on this flow. I knew that I had to be in the flow and to be under the ministry responsible for the flow.

Those who were with us in the early years can testify that, apart from the messages I gave in the meetings, I never said anything. In view of the fact that Brother Nee was present, I dropped all my concepts, all my learnings, and all my experiences. He was the one used by the Lord to start the flow and he had the ministry to carry on the flow. There was no need for my opinion. However, this does not mean that I did nothing. During the next eighteen or twenty years, I did a great deal. But everything was according to Brother Nee's leading, not according to my opinion. I never ministered anything according to myself; I only ministered the messages delivered by Brother Nee. In those years I never expressed my opinion or concept; instead, I wholly followed Brother Nee.

The Lord is flowing in His move on earth. This flow was not started by you, but by others. Furthermore, there is a ministry responsible for the flow. It is difficult for me to speak about this because now the matter is very much related to me. If I were still on the mainland and the flow were related to Brother Nee's ministry, I would have the ground to say much more.

THE SECRET TO BEING PERFECTED TO BE A PILLAR

Let me now tell you the secret to being solidly perfected to be a strong pillar for the Lord's move. Certain brothers have been perfected because they have had no concepts of their own. Recently, one brother declared strongly that he only knows to follow the ministry of Brother Lee and to absorb everything of this ministry. There have been others among us who were quite opinionated. They often said, "Brother Lee says such-and-such. Is this right? Is the church right? Just a week ago, I learned about a mistake made by the church." None of these opinionated ones has yet been perfected. But those who haven been perfected to be pillars are not like this. Even when they see certain mistakes, they forget about them, having no time to waste discussing them. They only desire to soak in all the positive things.

FEASTING ON THE POSITIVE THINGS

According to God's principle in His creation, in order for anything to grow there is the need for a negative side. Take the example of a chicken. We all appreciate chicken eggs, breasts, and legs, but we certainly do not care for chicken dung, feathers, and bones.

Nevertheless, without dung, feathers, and bones, a chicken cannot grow. In order for a chicken to be a chicken, it must have these things. But it is not our portion to eat them. We should enjoy the eggs, the breasts, and the legs, and forget the dung, the feathers, and the bones. If we concentrate on the positive aspects of the chicken, we shall receive much nourishment.

I admit that the church in Los Angeles has made certain mistakes, and I confess that I have made mistakes. The elders can testify of this. Everybody makes mistakes. No one can deny this. I have had to make mistakes in order to grow. These mistakes are my "dung." If you eat this, you are foolish. I also admit that I have "feathers." The church in Los Angeles also has had a certain amount of "feathers" and "bones." However, without these "feathers," "bones," and "dung," neither the church in Los Angeles nor my ministry would be able to exist. Do you intend to gather up the "feathers" and say, "Look! This is the church in Los Angeles. Look! This is what Brother Lee has done. See all these awful 'feathers.'" If you do this, you will not damage the church in Los Angeles or my ministry, but you will surely damage yourself. To do this is not wise. These who have been perfected to be pillars, who surely are not less intelligent than you, are wise. Their eyes are much clearer than yours. But they refuse to devote their attention to the negative things. They would say, "Although Brother Lee has some 'dung,' he has a great many eggs. I don't care for the 'dung' issuing out of his ministry—I want to eat all the 'eggs,' 'breasts,' and 'legs.' I have no time to hear about 'feathers' and 'bones.'" Let us follow the example of such brothers to forget the negative things and to feast upon the "eggs," "breasts," and "legs." This is my burden in this message.

Are you in Anaheim as a spy, investigating whether or not Witness Lee has any "dung"? I cannot live without "dung." To be sure, both "feathers" and "bones" can be found here in Anaheim. The elders have made many "bones." But I would stand, even dance, upon all the "bones" they have made; I would not be so foolish as to eat them.

Three or four of us knew Brother Nee very intimately. He fully opened himself to us, and we knew his imperfections. But we realized that these imperfections were the "dung" that enabled him to exist. Unlike others, we would not cling to his "feathers," nor to the "bones" of the "chicken" in Shanghai. If we had done this, we would have sacrificed ourselves. I never suffered such self-inflicted damage. Rather, I enjoyed the fresh, nourishing "eggs," "breasts," and "legs" of Brother Nee's ministry. When a great turmoil was aroused against his ministry, I was not ashamed to say that I was an absolute follower of Brother Nee. I did not care what others said about his mistakes. I only knew how grateful I was to him for the perfection he had rendered to me. I knew the nourishment I had received from him. Even when we are in the New Jerusalem, I shall be able to say that the Lord used Brother Nee to perfect me. Apart from his ministry, I would never be the person I am today.

How foolish it would be for anyone in the church to devote his time to finding "dung" or stuffing his pockets with "feathers," saying, "This is a 'feather' from that 'chicken' Witness Lee, and these are the 'bones' of the church in Anaheim. Don't you know that the church in Anaheim has made mistakes?" If this is your intention, you are wasting your time. You are in the wrong place. Neither Witness Lee nor the church in Anaheim would pay you for exposing them. But do not think that we are afraid of being exposed. Whatever Witness Lee is, he is what he is. Whether the church is genuine or not, the church is what the church is. Neither the church in Anaheim nor my ministry is afraid of exposure. On the contrary, we appreciate it. But what will you gain by exposing us?

FINDING THE FLOW AND GETTING INTO IT

The Lord is still working and moving to accomplish something on earth. In order for Him to fulfill His purpose there must be a flow. Among the many activities taking place in Christian circles, there must be the flow of the Lord's move. Surely you believe that the Lord is still living, moving, and working on earth. According to the principle, there must be one flow of the Lord on earth. The Bible reveals that there has always been just one flow. There was one flow with Abel, Noah, and Abraham, and at the end of the Old Testament there was still only one flow. It is the same in the New Testament. Because the Lord is still living, moving, and working on earth, there must also be just one flow on earth today.

Since there is only one flow on earth, we should do everything necessary to find out where the flow is. It is certainly worthwhile to travel and study in order to find it. I am not a stupid person who follows things blindly. Before I leaped into the flow, I searched and researched thoroughly. I had given up my job, my family, and everything I had. I did not want to waste my sacrifice. Hence, I took time to study the matter. Eventually, I was convinced that this is the flow, and for more than forty-five years I have not had a doubt about it.

After we have seen that there is one flow and we have discovered where the flow is, we must get into it, forgetting our past learnings, concepts, understandings, and viewpoints. As far as the flow is concerned, all this means nothing. For many, it is rather late to say that they know nothing. They should have said this at the very beginning. From the very day I told Brother Nee that I would move to Shanghai, work with them, and learn of the brothers, I abandoned everything and followed that unique ministry. I shall never regret that decision. Hallelujah for that choice! No one can measure the nourishment and perfection I received as the result of turning this way. Certain brothers among us have been the same. They have no time to care for "dung," "feathers," or "bones." They only have time to absorb all that is in this flow. This is the proper way to be perfected as useful pillars for the Lord's move.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-NINE

BEING TRANSFORMED

(9)

At Bethel Jacob did some very significant things. He built an altar, set up a pillar, poured a drink offering upon the pillar, and then poured oil upon the pillar (35:7, 14-15). In this message we shall consider Jacob's pouring the drink offering and the oil upon the pillar he had set up.

(2) Pouring a Drink Offering
upon the Pillar

Remember that nearly every item mentioned in the book of Genesis is the seed of a truth developed in the following books of the

Bible. Because 35:14 is the first mention of the drink offering, this verse is the seed of the drink offering. If we had only this verse, it would be difficult to know the meaning of the drink offering. In order to understand the significance of the drink offering, we must trace its development in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

We have pointed out that Jacob twice set up a pillar in Bethel. The first time he did not pour a drink offering upon the pillar; he simply poured oil upon it. The reason Jacob poured oil but not wine upon the pillar the first time was that in the Bible oil does not require very much experience on our part, but wine depends upon our experience. At the time of Jacob's first visit to Bethel, he did not have any experience of the Lord. Rather, he was a young supplanter and had no wine to pour out to the Lord. Thus, in chapter twenty-eight he could not pour out the drink offering. But twenty years later, after he had been touched by the Lord and had been somewhat transformed, he returned to Bethel. Because he had had some experience, he had wine to pour out upon the pillar as a drink offering to the Lord. Please keep in mind that the drink offering is absolutely related to our experience.

(a) In Addition to the Basic Offerings
after the Experience of the Riches of Christ

Although all the offerings are types of Christ and are for our experience, there is a difference between the basic offerings and the drink offering. The sin offering, one of the basic offerings, was a type of Christ for the experience of sinners. Before sinners come to offer the sin offering, they do not have any experience. They gain experience by presenting the sin offering to God. No experience is required beforehand. Before you can pour out a drink offering, however, you must have a measure of experience. Without experience, you will not be able to have this offering because the drink offering is composed of our experience of Christ.

In the first seven chapters of Leviticus we have the five basic offerings: the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. There is no need to experience Christ before you offer Him as these basic offerings. But the drink offering is absolutely dependent upon our experience. This is quite important. Many believers have no understanding of the basic offerings, much less an understanding of the drink offering. The reason for this is that they are short of the real experiences of Christ. By the Lord's mercy we in His recovery must experience Christ in a practical, daily way. Daily we should experience Him as our burnt offering, meal offering, peace offering, sin offering, and trespass offering. In the beginning we offer Christ only in this way. But as we progress in our experience of Christ, we eventually discover an offering that is in addition to these basic offerings—the drink offering.

Suppose a certain man has been saved for just one day. He certainly has had no time to have the experience of Christ. But if he remains in the proper church life, the saints will help him to realize that he needs to live by Christ, taking Christ as his life in a practical way. As he learns to live by Christ, he will gradually realize that Christ is so much to him. The saints will no doubt help him to see that Christ is his burnt offering. He will realize that he should be absolutely for God; however, he will find that he is not able to be absolute. Nevertheless, Christ is his absoluteness. Through this experience, Christ will become his burnt offering for God's satisfaction. Furthermore, he will enjoy Christ as his meal offering, as the One who not only satisfies God, but who also feeds and supplies him. Then he will daily take Christ as his food, and Christ will nourish him and support him to live in the presence of God that God might be satisfied. In this way he will experience Christ as the meal offering. In like manner, he will experience the other basic offerings. By experiencing Christ in this way, he will eventually become a person filled and saturated with Christ. The very Christ who saturates him will be his wine, and the brother himself will be saturated with this wine and actually become one with the wine.

Some may wonder what ground we have for saying that Christ is wine. This is not my word; it is the Lord's word in Matthew 9:17. In this verse the Lord said, "Neither do they put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are destroyed; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved." The Lord spoke this word in His answer to some disciples of John the Baptist who asked Him why His disciples did not fast (Matt. 9:14). The Lord wisely answered their question in a marvelous way with two parables. Firstly, He said, "No one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for that which fills it up pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear is made" (Matt. 9:16). Secondly, He spoke about not putting new wine into old wineskins. What is this new cloth and new wine? Both the new cloth and the new wine are Christ. The new cloth is Christ as our new, unique, complete, and perfect righteousness for us to be justified before God. As the new cloth Christ is our righteousness to cover us. The new wine is Christ as the stirring life, as the life that stirs us up to make us happy and even "crazy." To be "crazy" is to be drunken. Christ as the new cloth covers us outwardly and Christ as the new wine stirs us and makes us "crazy" inwardly. In other words, Christ causes us to be drunken. All Christians must be "crazy" like this.

In the summer of 1935 Brother Nee stayed in my home town. During this time we had a conference in which we were all "crazy." Brother Nee did not stir us up to be "crazy"; we were "crazy" already. When he saw how "crazy" we were, he gave us a supplementary message telling us that we all need to be "crazy," beside ourselves (2 Cor. 5:13). He said that if any Christian has never been "crazy," then he is not yet up to standard. He said, "If you are always nice, formal, gentle, and regulated, you are below standard. You must be 'crazy' in the Lord like a drunkard."

Most Christians today are cold, quiet, and dead. The dead are formal and never make mistakes. The most regulated place on earth is a cemetery. Everyone there is quiet and orderly and never disturbs others. Most Christians are like this. Although they think this is beautiful, it is actually dreadful; it is a stench. Christians should be living. The reason many are not living is that they are short of the experiences of Christ. If we experience Christ day after day, eventually the Christ we experience will become wine in us. The more we experience Christ, the "crazier" we shall become. Since the time you were saved, how often have you been "crazy" in your fellowship with the Lord? Have you ever been in a state where you were so happy that you were not able to control yourself, even beside yourself with joy? Have you ever been so joyful that you did not know whether to jump, to dance, or to shout? The more we are "crazy" like this with the Lord, the better. Not only the young people, but even the older brothers and sisters should be "crazy" in their inner chamber with the Lord. As we are with the Lord, we must say, "Oh, what joy! What wine! I simply cannot stand it!" This is the experience of Christ as wine.

If we experience Christ as our sin offering time after time, this offering will eventually become wine. The reason is that Christ as the sin offering will make us happy and cause us to rejoice. However, if you very seldom enjoy Christ as your sin offering, it will not become wine in your experience. But if you experience Christ as the sin offering, and as the other basic offerings daily, Christ as all

these offerings will become wine and cause you to be exceedingly happy and joyful. The more we experience Christ in all His riches, the more the elements of His riches will make us "crazy." Thus, whatever we experience of Christ will become our new wine.

In Matthew 9:16 and 17 the Lord told the disciples of John the Baptist that He came as the new cloth to cover us and as the new wine to satisfy us and to stir us up. How we need to experience Christ today! We need to experience Him as our burnt offering, meal offering, peace offering, sin offering, and trespass offering. Ultimately, our experience of Christ becomes the element within us stirring us up to be ecstatically happy. As we continue in this enjoyment, we shall even become one with the wine.

A drunkard is a man who has become one with the wine he drinks. Wine has saturated his whole being, and he even has the appearance and aroma of wine. We may say that this man is just wine. We Christians, like a drunkard saturated with wine, must be saturated with Christ until we become wine. Christ is the wine, but the wine must saturate us until it becomes us. When we become drunk of Christ and with Christ, we become wine to satisfy God, and we are qualified and ready to be a drink offering. The drink offering is not merely Christ Himself; it is the Christ who saturates us until Christ and we, we and Christ, become one.

In the first seven chapters of Leviticus, we have the basic offerings, but not the drink offering. The drink offering is mentioned in Leviticus 23:10-13, verses related to bringing the firstfruits of the harvest of the good land to the priest. Although the harvest was for the enjoyment of the children of Israel, they were required to bring the firstfruits of the harvest to God that He might have the first enjoyment. A sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest was waved before the Lord. Hence, the firstfruits were a wave offering, typifying Christ in resurrection as the firstfruit being waved unto God (1 Cor. 15:20). Along with this sheaf of firstfruits, the children of Israel had to offer a burnt offering with a meal offering and a drink offering. It is in this context that the drink offering is mentioned in Leviticus.

There was no mention of the drink offering in connection with the five basic offerings in Leviticus 1 through 7 because at that time the offerers had no experience of Christ. They were like Jacob at Bethel the first time. But after they had entered into the good land, had experienced Christ, and had gained something to offer God, they were required to offer the drink offering to match their other offerings. Numbers 15:1-10 and 28:6-10 indicate that the drink offering always matched the basic offering. The drink offering was in proportion to the size of the basic offering: a fourth of a hin of wine for a lamb; a third of a hin for a ram; and half a hin for a bullock (Num. 15:4-10). This indicates that the more we experience Christ, the more of a drink offering we become. If you experience Christ only as a little lamb, you will be a drink offering of one fourth of a hin. But if you experience Him as a ram or as a bullock, you will become a larger drink offering. In other words, the more you offer Christ to God, the greater must be the drink offering to match it. Our experience proves that the more we experience Christ, the more we become the drink offering. As we offer Christ to God, spontaneously we have the drink offering to match our offering.

Although the lamb, the ram, and the bullock are types merely of Christ, the wine is not merely Christ. The Bible clearly indicates that the drink offering could not be offered to God by itself. It could only be presented to match one of the basic offerings. The basic offerings are Christ, but the drink offering is not just Christ Himself; it is the Christ who has saturated us until the wine has become us. Although the wine in Matthew 9:17 was only Christ, Paul said, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering" (2 Tim. 4:6, Gk.). The wine in 2 Timothy 4:6 was the Christ of Matthew 9:17 who had saturated Paul and who had made him wine. Formerly, this wine was only Christ; but now it becomes us that we may be poured out as a drink offering. This pouring out depends upon our experience of Christ. Here in Bethel, in God's house, we must be poured out as a drink offering.

Suppose a group of believers assembles every Sunday, but hardly any of them has the real experience of Christ. Could they be the drink offering? Certainly not. Because they cannot be a drink offering, this gathering of Christians cannot be considered as the house of God. The only pillar that can be rightly called the house of God is the pillar upon which the drink offering has been poured. If there is no drink offering poured upon the pillar, then there must be something wrong with that pillar. We must have doubts about any gathering of Christians in which there is no pouring out of the drink offering. In any meeting that is truly the house of God those meeting together will be a drink offering.

By the New Testament alone we cannot clearly and adequately understand spiritual things, especially the things concerning Christ and the church life. We also need the pictures in the Old Testament. We have a very vivid picture in Genesis 35. Here we see Jacob setting up a pillar and pouring the drink offering upon it. In chapter twenty-eight Jacob even called this pillar the house of God. There must have been a reason for all this to be recorded in the Bible. The reason is that the pillar indicates that the house of God is a matter of the building. If we do not have the drink offering poured out upon the pillar, it is questionable that we have the genuine building. Although many are talking about the building—thank the Lord for this—we must still ask whether or not a drink offering has been poured out upon the pillar.

The drink offering does not come from wine out of the winepress; it comes from our experience of drinking the wine. The winepress itself cannot produce a drink offering. God will not be satisfied merely with wine from the winepress. He will be fully satisfied with those who have enjoyed Christ as wine to such an extent that they have become drunk with Christ and have themselves become the wine to satisfy God. This wine is not the direct wine from the winepress; it is the indirect wine from those who drink Christ as the wine. This is deep. I believe that if many among us continue to go on with the Lord for another period of time, they will become such a drink offering and will be able to say, "Lord Jesus, I am already being poured out upon You as a drink offering." No recently saved person can say this. But there are some among us who can faithfully and honestly say with full assurance that they are already being poured out as a drink offering for the Lord. Wherever there is the drink offering, there is also the pillar set up as the house of God. This matter is deep, practical, and touches something deep in our experience. It touches us very deeply to see a person who is so saturated with Christ that his only interest is Christ and the church.

(b) For the Priestly Service

In Exodus 29 is the consecration of the priesthood. In verses 38 through 42 we are told that the priests had to offer the daily continual burnt offering with the drink offering. This indicates that in the priestly service the drink offering is needed to match the continual burnt offering.

(c) For the Nazarite

The drink offering was also related to the law of the Nazarite (Num. 6:13-17). A Nazarite was a person wholly consecrated to God. When the days of a Nazarite's separation were fulfilled, he had to offer a burnt offering, a sin offering, and a peace offering. Along with these offerings, he also had to offer a drink offering. The Nazarite was qualified to offer the drink offering because he was one who had experienced God to a great degree. This also proves that the drink offering comes from our experiences of the Lord. If we do not experience Him, we cannot have a drink offering. The drink offering is not merely the Lord Himself objectively; it is our subjective experience of being made one with the Lord to the extent that He becomes us. The Christ whom we experience in this subjective way is the wine we pour out to satisfy God for God's building.

(d) For the Church Life

We have pointed out that a drunkard's only interest is wine. His mind is constantly preoccupied with thoughts of wine. Even his dreams are dreams of wine. We must be like this about the church, the house of God. Besides Bethel, we should have no other interest. Consider the example of the Apostle Paul. His writings reveal that he was "crazy" for the church; he was drunk with Christ and interested only in God's house, God's temple. His terms for Bethel were "the church" and "the Body." He was drunk for the church. Some have said, "You church people are crazy. The only thing you know is the church." Once a lady approached me after a meeting and said, "Mr. Lee, why do you always talk about the church? Why don't you speak about the family life?" I answered, "I don't talk about the family because you talk about it so much. I must be interested in the church." The church should be our only interest. What is your interest today—school? business? family? My only interest is the church. We all need to be such "drunkards" for the church. Before his martyrdom, Paul said, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering." If our only interest is the church, then we are ready to say the same thing. It has only been through experience that I have come to understand why Jacob set up a stone and poured a drink offering upon it. At Bethel, we who are interested only in the house of God spontaneously become a drink offering.

According to Romans 16:3-5, Aquila and Priscilla were such people. This couple was absolute for the local churches. Their only interest was the church, and they were willing to be martyred for it. They risked their necks for the Apostle Paul and for the churches. Because Aquila and Priscilla risked their necks for the churches and were interested only in the churches, they were undoubtedly a drink offering; they were ready to be poured out.

We need to go over the verses regarding the drink offering again and again. I repeat that the drink offering is in addition to the basic offerings we have experienced. We should not say that it is sufficient merely to have the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. If this is our attitude, then we are poor in experience. Our burnt offering must be accompanied by the drink offering. The basic offering, which is Christ Himself, must always be complemented by a matching offering, the drink offering. The matching offering is not merely Christ Himself; it is the Christ who has saturated us and who has made us one with Him. We must be those who have the drink offering to match the basic offerings. The larger our offering is, the larger our matching offering must be. If we offer only the basic offerings, our offerings will be poor and short of experience. We need to offer Christ daily as our basic offerings. At the same time we must have something to match these offerings. The matching offering comes from our experience of the basic offerings. The more the basic offerings make us one with Christ, the more we become the matching offering, the drink offering. After we have come to this point, we are fully assured that we are at Bethel.

If we fit together the verses concerning the drink offering like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, we shall see that the drink offering is mainly for the church. The first mention of the drink offering is in Genesis 35. The first mention of a matter determines the principle of that matter in the Scriptures. The drink offering is first mentioned in relation to God's building, for this offering was poured out upon the pillar. If we read about the drink offering in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers without having Genesis 35:14 as a basis, we shall not realize that the drink offering is for the building of God. But we must return to the first mention of the drink offering, where we see that it was not only for the worship of God, but also for the building of Bethel. The last mention of the drink offering is 2 Timothy 4:6. Here the drink offering is also for the church, for Bethel. Therefore, from the first mention to the last, the drink offering is mainly for God's building, not mainly for the worship of God. Apparently, the drink offering is for worship; actually, it is for the house of God, for the building of the pillar, the signboard of God's temple.

We need to have a good number of saints who are ready to be poured out upon God's building. This is genuine martyrdom. Martyrdom is the pouring out of a drink offering full of the experience of Christ. When you are filled to the brim with the experience of Christ, then you will be ready to be poured out, to be martyred, for the building of God. We need this in the Lord's recovery today. We are not told whether or not Aquila and Priscilla were martyred. But we know for certain that in their spirit, attitude, and way of life they had already been martyred. Hence, they were a genuine drink offering, not only for the worship of God, but even the more for God's building.

When Jacob poured the drink offering upon the pillar, he undoubtedly felt that he was worshipping God. To him, the pouring out of that offering was an act of worship. The word "offering" denotes something related to the worship of God. This worship, however, is not a religious ritual; it is for God's building. Today in the Lord's recovery we need many saints to experience Christ to the extent that they are so filled with Him and saturated with Him as wine that they become the very wine to be poured out upon God's building for His worship and satisfaction in His building. This is the meaning of the drink offering.

(3) Pouring Oil upon the Pillar

Genesis 35:14 also tells us that Jacob poured oil upon the pillar. He did this after he had poured the drink offering upon it. I used to think that Jacob was mistaken in doing this and that he should have poured the oil first. But Jacob was not mistaken. According to our experience, it is the pouring out of the drink offering that brings in the oil. If we are ready to be poured out as a drink offering, we are also ready to experience the outpouring of the Spirit. The more we are prepared to be poured out as a drink offering, the more of the oil we shall enjoy.

After the pillar was set up, it was sanctified by being anointed with oil. The same was true of the tabernacle. After it was erected, it was sanctified by the holy anointing oil (Exo. 40:9). The pillar was set up, the drink offering was poured upon it, and then the pillar was sanctified by the oil. The oil poured upon the pillar sealed it. This simply means that the pillar was sanctified. The pouring out of the oil caused the building of God to be absolutely holy, sanctified, and separated unto God. If a good number of us will be ready to be

poured out as a drink offering upon God's building, the Holy Spirit will immediately be present to sanctify the church. This is the sealing of the Spirit. No matter how much we experience the Holy Spirit, if we are not ready to be poured out as a drink offering, we do not have a layer of sanctifying oil upon the church. But if many are ready to be poured out as a drink offering, the church will be anointed with oil, and the church life, being sealed with a layer of oil, will be sanctified.

The real experience of the Spirit is in relation to the pouring out of the drink offering. Consider the experience of the one hundred and twenty on the day of Pentecost. As we all know, on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out (Acts 2:33). Before this took place, the one hundred and twenty were ready to be poured out as a drink offering. When Peter stood up with the eleven, he was already being poured out. The result was that the oil, the Holy Spirit, came down upon them. The oil did not come before they were ready to be poured out as a drink offering. You may remark that Peter was not martyred at that time. This, of course, is true. But you must realize that he stood there like a martyr and risked his neck. Although the Jewish religionists were opposing him, he was not afraid of them. In the eyes of the angels, all the hundred and twenty were already being poured out as a drink offering. Thus, the oil was poured out to sanctify and to seal them. On that day the church at Jerusalem was anointed with a layer of heavenly oil. Unlike today's Christian organizations, the church was holy, separated, and sanctified. May all the churches in the Lord's recovery be like this. I hope that a good number of saints will be already poured out as a drink offering so that the Holy Spirit as the heavenly oil will come upon the church to seal it, sanctify it, and make it absolutely separated to God. This is the experience at Bethel.

(4) Realizing Bethel

After Jacob did all these things at Bethel, he called the name of the place Bethel (35:15), indicating that he realized that this was the house of God where God spoke to him (28:13-15). Today, the church is the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6). Like Jacob at Bethel, we also must have the practical experiences for the church life. We must build an altar of consecration, we must set up a pillar for God's building, and we must be ready to be poured out as a drink offering upon God's building that the divine oil may be poured upon it to sanctify it for God. To do this is to realize the practical church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE NINETY

BEING TRANSFORMED

(10)

After remaining in Bethel for quite a long time, Jacob journeyed on from there (35:16). Apparently, this journey away from Bethel was not a positive move. But Jacob's leaving Bethel does not mean that he left the house of God; it means that he was going on in his spiritual experience. Although he had come to Bethel, had stayed there, and had done certain things there, he still had to go on.

We have seen that Genesis is a book of seeds and pictures. We need to understand the significance of all these seeds and pictures. The picture of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a portrait of our spiritual life. The experience of these three men is a picture of the spiritual life of one person following the Lord.

6) *Deeper and More Personal Dealings*

a) *The Death of Rachel*

As Jacob was journeying on from Bethel, he experienced a very deep and personal dealing: his beloved wife, Rachel, died as she was giving birth to Jacob's last son, Benjamin (35:16-20). This experience was a matter related to both death and birth, a matter of both loss and gain. Jacob lost Rachel and gained Benjamin. If you had to make the choice, would you prefer to keep the mother or to gain the son? The popular Christian concept is to have both the mother and the son. But in the divine economy, if you would gain the last son, you must let go of the mother. Without loss there can be no gain, and without death there can be no birth. Birth comes out of death, for apart from death there is no resurrection. If Rachel had not died, Benjamin could never have come forth.

Rachel represents Jacob's natural choice. Although Jacob had four wives, only Rachel was the natural and original choice according to the desire of Jacob's heart. He was forced to accept Leah and also constrained to take the two maids, Bilhah and Zilpah. But Leah and the two maids were not the choice of Jacob's heart. If you read Genesis carefully, you will see that Jacob's heart was absolutely set on Rachel; he had no heart for the other three. Recall what Jacob did when he feared an attack of Esau and his men. He put the two handmaids and their children at the front, followed by Leah and her children in the middle, and Rachel and Joseph at the rear (33:1-2). The fact that Jacob placed Rachel and Joseph at the rear to protect them in case of attack reveals that Jacob's heart was set on Rachel.

Everything in the Bible is purposeful. The death of Rachel is recorded here in chapter thirty-five with a definite purpose. As Jacob was taking his journey, he must have been joyful knowing that Rachel was pregnant again. Perhaps he expected his beloved wife to give him another boy. But as Rachel was giving birth to her second child, she died, and Jacob's natural choice, the desire of his heart, was taken away from him.

Before the experience at Bethel, God tolerated Jacob's natural choice, allowing him to have his heart's desire. But after the experience at Bethel, his natural choice was taken from him. Many of us can testify that before we experienced the church life, we still had our natural concept, natural choice, and natural desire. God even bestowed His blessing upon them. Consider, for example, the birth of Rachel's first child, Joseph. When Joseph was born, Jacob was very happy and might have said, "This is God's blessing upon the desire of my heart. God has blessed my choice." However, after his experience at Bethel, Jacob lost his natural choice.

After you experience the church life, your natural choice must be left behind. Before you came into the church, you still had your natural choice, and God tolerated it. But after experiencing the church life to a certain extent, God will tolerate it no longer. I hope that this will not frighten the young people and cause them to draw back from the experience at Bethel. When they hear about this, some may say, "If this will happen, I will never come to Bethel. Rather, I will stay on the other side of Bethel and go no further. Then I will not lose my natural choice." Yes, after you have had some experience at Bethel, you will lose your natural choice, but you will gain

Benjamin, who is a type of Christ.

(1) Bringing in Christ as the Son of Sorrow (Benoni)
and as the Son of the Right Hand (Benjamin)

Verse 18 says, "And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died,) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin." This child was given two names, one from his mother and one from his father. Benoni means "the son of sorrow." Rachel gave him this name because she was suffering and in sorrow. But Jacob immediately changed his name to Benjamin, which means "the son of the right hand." In this whole universe there is only One who is both the Son of sorrow and the Son of the right hand—and that One is Christ. On the one hand Christ is Benoni, and on the other hand He is Benjamin. Christ is a wonderful Person with these two aspects. No one has suffered as much sorrow as Christ, and no one has been exalted as high as Christ. Isaiah 53:3 describes Him as "a man of sorrows," Acts 2:33 says that He has been "exalted to the right hand of God," and Hebrews 1:3 says that He is seated "on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Firstly, Jesus was the Son of sorrow, the Son of suffering. Rachel was not the only one to experience this sorrow; Mary, the mother of Christ, also experienced it. According to Luke 2:35, her soul was pierced by the sufferings of her son. But after thirty-three and a half years, in resurrection and ascension Christ became the Son of the right hand of God. Hence, no one can deny that Benjamin was a type of the suffering and exalted Christ.

Suppose you had been Jacob. Would you have been willing to gain this Christ at the cost of losing the desire of your heart? As long as you stay in the church, experience Bethel, set up a pillar, and pour yourself out upon it as a drink offering, you will have no choice. Rachel must die that Benjamin might be born. Hallelujah, Rachel has gone and Benjamin has come!

More than fifty years ago, I heard messages and read books about expressing Christ and manifesting Him. But I was bothered by the fact that I did not know how to lift up Christ or to express Him. For many years I was not able to find the way. Some said that in order to express Christ we must be crucified. But how can a person crucify himself? It is impossible for anyone to nail himself to the cross. Eventually I learned that the way to lift up Christ and to express Him is in the church life. Through the church life "Rachel" will have a marvelous and encouraging delivery, dying that the wonderful Christ may come forth. I have tried every way to uplift and express Christ, and I can testify strongly that none of these ways has been effective. However, after I came to the church and stayed here for a period of time, my "Rachel," my natural choice, was taken away, and Benjamin was brought forth.

The record in the Bible of the death of Rachel and the birth of Benjamin is surely admirable. What a wonderful record it is! Why did Rachel's death not come before Jacob's experience at Bethel? Certainly this was according to the sovereignty of God. In God's sovereignty, Rachel's death occurred right after Jacob's marvelous experience at Bethel. In verse 16 Jacob must have been full of joy from his experiences at Bethel. Also, he eagerly anticipated the birth of another child of his beloved wife, Rachel. But as Rachel's child was being born, Jacob's natural choice was dying. Although Rachel named her second son Benoni, a name of sorrow, Jacob immediately changed the name to Benjamin, a name of encouragement. The fact that Jacob changed the name of his son proves that he was not disappointed or discouraged by the loss of Rachel. Instead of being despondent, he was filled with assurance, faith, and hope. Jacob seemed to say, "No, his name must be Benjamin. He is not the son of sorrow—he is the son of the right hand." What faith and hope Jacob had! However, if this had taken place before Jacob's experience at Bethel, he would have said, "Amen, his name must be Benoni because he is a son of sorrow. Indeed, this experience is sorrowful." But after his experience at Bethel, Jacob was a transformed person.

Verse 21 indicates that Jacob had truly been transformed: "And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar." Here, after the death of Rachel and the birth of Benjamin, Jacob is actually called Israel for the first time. We are not told that Jacob journeyed, but that Israel journeyed. By that time Jacob had become a transformed person. Prior to this, his name had been changed from Jacob to Israel (32:27-28; 35:10), but he had never actually been called by his new name.

(2) Rachel Having Brought Forth Joseph,
a Nazarite, a Type of Christ

Jacob had twelve sons: six, including Levi with the priesthood and Judah with the kingship, were born of Leah; two, Joseph and Benjamin, were born of Rachel; two, Dan, the worst, and Naphtali, one of the best, were born of Bilhah; and two others, Gad and Asher, were born of Zilpah (vv. 22-26). Benjamin and Joseph, the two sons of Rachel, are both types of Christ. Although Joseph was born first, in typology he is the continuation of Benjamin. The record of Joseph's birth does not indicate that he is a type of Christ. But, as we have seen, the birth of Benjamin clearly reveals that he is a type of Christ. Benjamin, the son of sorrow and the son of the right hand, is continued by Joseph. From chapter thirty-seven to the end of the book of Genesis, we have the record of Joseph's life. Joseph, a Nazarite, one separated unto God, is surely a type of Christ (49:26, "separate" in Hebrew is "the Nazarite").

Joseph typified Christ as both the Son of sorrow and the Son of the right hand. After his suffering and exaltation, Joseph was seated next to Pharaoh on the throne. When we come to the record of Joseph, we shall see that in every respect he is a type of Christ. For the time being, one example is sufficient to illustrate this. When Joseph was in prison he had two companions (40:1-4). Later, one of these companions was saved and the other perished (40:20-22). When the Lord Jesus was on the cross, He was accompanied by two thieves, one of whom was saved and one of whom was lost (Luke 23:32-33, 39-43). How marvelous is this typology! During the first part of his life, Joseph suffered as the son of sorrow. During the second part of his life, he was exalted to be the son of the right hand. He was lifted up to the throne at the right hand of Pharaoh and was empowered to administer the life supply to all the people. However, as we have pointed out, in typology Joseph is the continuation of Benjamin, the son of sorrow who became the son of the right hand.

Benjamin and Joseph were born of Rachel, Jacob's natural choice. According to God's ordination, natural things are not wrong. God has ordained that we get married. Although married life is natural, it is ordained by God. Never say that natural things are not good. If you say this, then you should stop eating, for eating is a natural necessity ordained by God. Young people often say, "Why must we be troubled with food and clothing? And why do we need to sleep? If God had created us without the need for food, clothing, and sleep, life would be wonderful. Besides, who likes to stand in front of a hot oven, and who enjoys washing dishes? How good it would be if we were not bothered by such things. I wish we could exist without all these necessities." Nevertheless, God has ordained marriage, eating, sleeping, and clothing. Although these things are natural, they have been ordained by God.

Like all men, Jacob needed a wife. When he came to the home of his uncle Laban in Padan-aram, the first person he met was Rachel (29:9-11), and she immediately became his choice. Certainly this was sovereignly arranged by God. As Jacob looked at Rachel, he might have said, "This is my choice." Jacob loved Rachel and agreed to serve Laban seven years for her (29:18-20). God was sovereign in causing Jacob to meet Rachel first, and He was also sovereign in allowing Laban to play a trick on Jacob. Although Laban had betrothed Rachel to Jacob, at the time of the marriage he gave him Leah instead (29:21-25). Laban's deceitfulness frustrated Jacob from having his choice. Jacob then made a deal with Laban to serve another seven years for Rachel. In order to have his choice he was willing to suffer this. As Jacob was working those years for Rachel, every time he saw her, he must have yearned for her. But he could not have her. Although none of us would have been this patient, Jacob patiently waited out this time, and eventually Rachel was given to him.

This record is full of spiritual meaning. God has ordained us to have our natural choice. But under God's sovereignty we must be kept from having it for a period of time. On the one hand, Jacob was frustrated from having his natural choice; on the other hand, he was permitted to have it. This means that although God has ordained something for us, He will not allow us to have it according to our way and according to our time. Undoubtedly, Rachel was ordained by God for Jacob. But God did not permit Jacob to have Rachel according to his way and his time. Jacob wanted to have Rachel immediately. After Jacob finally had her, he certainly desired to keep her for the rest of his life. However, at a certain point God seemed to say, "Jacob, I shall take Rachel away from you." I do not speak this in vain. From my experience I know it is real.

God has ordained us to have our natural choice, but not according to our way and our time. You may wonder why God bothers us like this. His one purpose in doing it is to bring forth Christ. God has ordained you to have a wife, but He will not allow you to have her in your way and at your time. His purpose is not to make you suffer. God is not cruel. His purpose is to bring forth Christ. God has also ordained you to eat, but not to eat in your way. Even in this, God's purpose is to bring forth Christ.

Some of you know that I am very fond of dessert, especially ice cream. But God has sovereignly placed me under the controlling hand of my dear wife. When I do get to eat ice cream, it is not according to my way or at my time. My wife can testify that many times I long to eat ice cream at noon, but she tells me to wait until dinner. By this I have learned the lesson of not getting my natural choice in my way and at my time, but according to His way and His time. His purpose in this is not to make me suffer; it is to bring forth Christ. Whenever my dear wife tells me to wait until dinner time to eat ice cream, I simply return to my study. I never quarrel with her about it. This example from my experience illustrates the principle.

Suppose, being a man and having the strength to fight, I would say to my wife, "This is my home, this is my family, and you are my wife. Serve me ice cream right now! I refuse to wait until dinner time!" If I lived like this, there would be no bringing forth of Christ. There would be no Benjamin and no Joseph.

Recently I encouraged the young people to gain the highest education. Many now have this ambition. I know some young lovers of the Lord who made the choice to get a good education. Although they did get the education they desired, they did not get it according to their way or according to their time, but according to God's way and God's time. Apparently, this caused them a measure of suffering. But God's purpose is not to cause suffering—it is to bring forth Christ, to bring forth Benjamin and Joseph.

We all must learn that we are not in our own hands. Rather, we are in the hands of the Lord. As long as we are His chosen ones and we love Him, we are in His hands. He will bring us to Bethel, and we shall stay at Bethel under His hand. Sooner or later, we shall journey on, and at His time His hand will take away our desire, our choice, that Benjamin may come forth.

The book of Genesis issues in Joseph on the throne with power and authority to administer the life supply to all people. This issue proceeds directly out of Jacob's experience with Rachel. Without Jacob's experience with Rachel, neither Benjamin nor Joseph could have come into being. I repeat, the consummation of the whole book of Genesis comes out of Jacob's relationship with Rachel. The proper experience of Jacob with Rachel is that our natural choice, ordained by God, is not given to us according to our way and our time, but according to God's way and God's time. Whatever our choice is—whether it is related to marriage, eating, or manner of dress—it will be given in the Lord's way and in His time.

Even as you are dressing yourself, you need to say, "Lord, what is Your way? What is Your time?" Young people, all your daily needs and necessities have been ordained by God. But do not expect to get anything according to your way and your time. That would never bring forth Christ. If you would be used by God to bring forth Christ, your necessities must be given you, not according to your way and your time, but according to God's way and God's time.

The Bible does not say that Jacob mourned after the death of Rachel. Jacob was clear that the loss of his wife was under the sovereign hand of God. Instead of being disappointed, he was greatly encouraged, immediately changing his son's name from "the son of sorrow" to "the son of the right hand." In this matter Jacob was not weak; he was very strong, knowing that Rachel's death was of God. This is confirmed by the fact that the Holy Spirit called him Israel in verse 21. This proves that he was fully transformed.

Prior to chapter thirty-five, Jacob had passed through many dealings, especially during his twenty years with Laban. But those dealings were not as deep and as personal as the loss of his dear wife. This dealing was deep and personal, and it touched the very depths of his being. After you have known the church life to a certain degree, you also will have such an experience. Something will happen that will touch you, not superficially, but deeply. Your heart's choice will be taken away so that you may bring forth Christ as Benjamin and as Joseph. Thank the Lord for this clear picture and for this word. I believe that a good number of us need this message just at this time.

*b) The Defilement of Jacob's Concubine, Rachel's Maidservant,
Having Changed the Birthright*

The loss of Rachel was not the only painful thing that happened to Jacob as he journeyed from Bethel. Another deep hurt was the defilement of Jacob's concubine by Reuben (v. 22). This also was a heart-touching and heart-rending experience. Verse 22 contains the very significant words, "And Israel heard it." You may wonder how such an immoral deed could have taken place in this godly family. Nevertheless, it happened.

The defilement of Jacob's concubine by Reuben caused the birthright to be changed (1 Chron. 5:1; Gen. 48:22). Reuben, born of Leah, was the firstborn. Actually and practically as the firstborn son he was the one to inherit the birthright. But due to the fact that he defiled Jacob's concubine, he lost his birthright, and the birthright was given to Joseph.

After the relationship between Jacob and Rachel had been fully dealt with, one of their sons was given the birthright. This is very meaningful. Deep in Jacob's heart, he felt that Rachel, not Leah, was his wife. Therefore, according to Jacob, the firstborn should not have been Reuben, but Joseph. Although it was of God that Reuben was the firstborn, it was not according to the desire of Jacob's heart. God had sovereignly caused Jacob to marry Leah and to bring forth Reuben. However, Jacob's heart was set on Rachel and Joseph. In his eyes, Joseph was truly the firstborn. God is fair. Having forced Jacob to marry Leah and to bring forth the firstborn through her, He eventually loosed His hand and let Reuben go. Reuben fell, and the birthright was adjusted.

This should come as a comfort to you. You may be concerned about God's dealing so thoroughly with your natural choice, with the desire of your heart. But God will eventually act to adjust the situation. By the loss of Rachel Jacob gained a second son who typified Christ, and by the defilement caused by Reuben the birthright was adjusted. We should not be troubled by what happens to us. Rather, we all must believe that everything is under the sovereign hand of God. The defilement of Jacob's concubine by Reuben was shameful, but even such a shameful thing was used to bring a positive result. The birthright should not have gone to Reuben, but according to natural birth he did possess it. Thus, in His sovereignty, God allowed Reuben to fall that the birthright might be transferred to the proper person. How marvelous this is! However, never use God's sovereignty as an excuse to say, "Let us do evil that good may come."

7) Entering into Fellowship

After experiencing these deeper and more personal dealings, Jacob entered into full fellowship with the Lord at Hebron (v. 27). The fellowship at Hebron means intimacy, peace, satisfaction, and joy. It is wonderful to be in the church life. However, at the beginning of our experience in the church life, we do not have full fellowship. This fellowship is at Hebron. Many who are in the church life today are not in a spiritual situation that is intimate, peaceful, satisfying, and joyful. Although you are in the church life, you still need to journey on, passing through deeper and more personal dealings until you come to Hebron and enter into full fellowship with the Lord. In this fellowship you will have complete joy, satisfaction, peace, and intimacy between you and the Lord.

Verse 27 says, "And Jacob came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre, unto Kiriath-arba, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned." Abraham had come to Shechem (12:6), had passed through Bethel (12:8), and had dwelt in Hebron (13:18; 18:1), and Isaac spent nearly his whole life in Hebron. Jacob, therefore, followed Abraham's footsteps to come to Shechem (33:18), to pass through Bethel (35:6), and to dwell in Hebron. We all need to come to Hebron. Although we are in the church life, we do not have rest, full peace, satisfaction, joy, and intimacy until we journey onward in our spirit to Hebron. Here in Hebron we enjoy wonderful intimacy with the Lord. Hebron is also the place where we mature in life. In 37:1, Jacob began to mature because he was in Hebron.

8) Released from the Tie with His Father

In verses 28 and 29 we are told of the death of Isaac. When Jacob was at Hebron, his last earthly tie, the tie with his father, was cut. Some may say, "We all must honor our parents. Why would you say that the tie was cut when Jacob's father died?" On the one hand, it is good to have our parents with us, but on the other hand, every relationship is a tie. After Jacob came to Hebron and entered into full rest, God took away his father and set him completely free from every earthly tie. At the end of chapter thirty-five we see a person completely transformed and set free. Jacob is now in Hebron, in full rest, joy, satisfaction, intimacy, and fellowship with the Lord. At Hebron there is nothing between Jacob and the Lord. Here he can sing, "Nothing between, Lord, nothing between." In Jacob we see a person thoroughly dealt with by God and wholly adjusted by Him. Every tie has been cut and he is fully free to enjoy intimate fellowship with the Lord in Hebron.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE NINETY-ONE

THE THREE PILLARS AND THE ONE TOWER IN JACOB'S LIFE

As we trace the history of Jacob, we see that in his life there were three pillars and one tower. Although Jacob set up pillars four times, he erected them in just three places—at Gilead, at Bethel, and on the way to Bethlehem (31:45; 28:18, 22; 35:14, 20). Because Jacob set up pillars in three places, twice setting up a pillar at Bethel, there were actually three pillars in his life as landmarks of his experience. In addition to these three pillars, Jacob also experienced a tower, the tower of Eder (35:21). We must believe that everything recorded in the Bible has a special significance. In this message we must consider, as a parenthesis, the significance of the three pillars and the one tower in Jacob's life.

I. THE THREE PILLARS

A. The Pillar at Gilead

The three pillars set up by Jacob were landmarks in his life. They divided his life into three sections. In the first section Jacob experienced God's care. From the day of his birth, he was under God's care. However, Jacob, a supplanter, a heel-holder, thought he was under his own care. Eventually he realized that he was not under his own care, but under God's care. If Jacob had been under his own care, he would not have been able to deal with his cunning uncle, Laban, or to confront his strong brother, Esau. Rather, he would have been totally defeated by Laban or absolutely destroyed by Esau. But because Jacob was under God's care, neither Laban nor Esau could harm him. Although Jacob did everything possible to take care of himself, he gradually learned that he was under God's care.

Recall how Jacob left Laban. He did not leave in a glorious way; rather he was afraid of Laban and stole away from him in a somewhat shameful manner (31:20-21). In doing so "Jacob stole the heart of Laban the Syrian" (31:20, Heb.). Thinking that he had to

flee for his own protection, Jacob secretly stole away from Laban. Later Jacob realized that he was not protected by his skill, but by God's care. Although Laban did not know of Jacob's flight until three days later, he still pursued him until he caught up with him (31:23). The night before Laban overtook Jacob, God said to him, "Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob from good to bad" (31:24, Heb.). God seemed to be telling Laban, "Don't do anything to Jacob. You must leave him in My hands." Laban was unwise in relating to Jacob what God had told him the previous night (31:29). If Laban had not divulged this, he could have made a deal with Jacob. Jacob used what God had told Laban as the ground to rebuke him, saying, "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 mine affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight" (31:42). As Jacob was rebuking Laban, deep in his heart he might have felt grateful to God for protecting him. God was sovereign over all his circumstances for his existence.

Laban then said to Jacob, "Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee" (31:44). Jacob responded to Laban's proposal by taking a stone and setting it up for a pillar (31:45). Although Laban intended to pile up a heap of stones, Jacob set up a pillar. This pillar was a testimony of God's care of Jacob. Jacob had come to see that his living was altogether under the care of God. Hence, he set up this pillar as a strong testimony of God's care for him.

Jacob was under God's care for more than twenty years. Although he was in Laban's squeezing hand for such a long time (Laban changed his wages ten times—31:41), God was with him all the while, and His hand was upon him. Therefore, as Jacob was making a deal with Laban, he set up a pillar to testify that he was under God's care. This pillar was for Jacob's existence. Many of us have also set up such a pillar. If you consider your own Christian experience, you will see that the first stage of your Christian life was the stage of experiencing God's care. Even before we were saved, our intention was to have God's care. When we heard the good news of the gospel, our intention in believing in the Lord Jesus was to have His care. For many years we, like Jacob, have been under the care of our heavenly Father. At the end of the first stage of our Christian life, we need to set up a pillar testifying of God's care. However, if you have been with the Lord for quite a long time, it may be too late for you to set up this pillar. Rather, you need to set up the second pillar, the pillar at Bethel.

B. The Pillar at Bethel

Years before Jacob set up this pillar at Gilead, he had set up a pillar at Bethel (28:18, 22). However, Jacob set up that pillar immediately after having a dream. Once again we see that Jacob's biography is also our biography. Not long after we were saved, we heard something about the house of God and we responded to what we heard. But everything we heard and did was like a dream. We did not actually experience the house of God. In Genesis 28 Jacob had a dream. After that dream, he had a real experience, not of the house of God, but of the care of God. At the end of this stage of his experience he set up a pillar at Gilead as a landmark to testify of God's care. As we shall see, in our Christian life we need three pillars, three landmarks, the first of which is the pillar testifying of God's care for us.

After Jacob had left Padan-aram and had returned to the good land, he did not go directly to Bethel. God had to intervene and call him to Bethel, saying, "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" (35:1). This indicates that Jacob had no intention of fulfilling the vow he had made to God at Bethel twenty years earlier. He had probably forgotten it. Instead of journeying directly to Bethel to fulfill his vow, Jacob journeyed to Succoth, where he built a house for himself and made booths for his cattle (33:17). Later he traveled to Shechem, where he bought a parcel of land and spread his tent (33:18-19). After the serious trouble following the defilement of Jacob's daughter, Dinah, God came in and told Jacob to arise and to go up to Bethel. When Jacob came to Bethel the second time, he did not have a dream. He had been ordered by God to go there, to dwell there, and to build an altar there to the God who had appeared to him when he was fleeing from Esau. At Bethel Jacob consecrated himself to God so that He might fulfill His purpose of having Bethel, the house of God. Here at Bethel Jacob set up the second pillar, the second landmark in his life (35:14). As 28:22 indicates, the pillar in Bethel was called the house of God. Therefore, the first pillar was a testimony of God's care, and the second was a testimony of God's house.

Because Jacob's history is also our experience, we all must worship the Lord. Many of us have set up pillars both at Gilead and at Bethel. We can testify, not only of God's care, but also of God's house. Jacob's first pillar was a testimony of God's care for his existence. When Jacob, a poor supplanter, arrived at Laban's house, he had nothing. But when he returned to the good land, he had acquired great riches. He had armies of people and armies of flocks and herds. In his vow made in 28:20 and 21, Jacob said, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God." In other words, Jacob was actually saying, "If the Lord will not give me food and clothing, and if He will not bring me back to my father's house in peace, then I will not take Him as my God. Rather, I will forget about Him." What a deal Jacob had made with God! Nevertheless, God met all the conditions of Jacob's vow, supplying him with food and clothing, giving him peace, and even increasing him with armies of people and flocks. But here in chapter thirty-five God seemed to be saying, "Jacob, now you must go to Bethel. You should no longer be concerned for your food, your clothing, and your peace. You must take care of Me and My house. Jacob, I have been taking care of you for years. Beginning now, you must take care of Me."

Many of us can testify that years ago we set up a pillar at Gilead. At that time our testimony concerned God's care for us. We testified that our God was faithful, kind, gracious, and rich. But today our testimony is not that of the first pillar, the testimony of God's care; it is the second pillar, the testimony of God's house. However, not many Christians today take care of God's house. Most are primarily concerned about their own needs, and the pillar they set up is only a testimony of God's care. Very few experientially set up a pillar to testify of God's house. To have the pillar of God's care without the pillar of God's house is not normal. As today's Jacobs, we must set up the second pillar for God's building. Praise the Lord that many of us have done so. In our Christian life we have not only the first section, the section of God's care, but also the second section, the section of God's house. Nevertheless, we must journey on and set up the third pillar.

C. The Pillar on the Way to Bethlehem

My burden in this message is the third pillar, the pillar on the way to Bethlehem (35:16-20). At Bethel Jacob built an altar and set up a pillar. Not only did he answer God's call; he also consecrated himself to God for the fulfillment of His desire to have Bethel.

However, Jacob's life did not end at 35:15. Verse 16 says that he journeyed on from Bethel. As Jacob was journeying on, he had an experience that was a matter of both joy and suffering, a matter of both gain and loss. Jacob gained a son, Benjamin, and he lost his beloved wife, Rachel. If you had to make the choice, would you prefer to gain the son or to keep the wife? In order to gain the son, you must sacrifice your wife, and in order to keep your wife, you must be denied the son. Although Jacob had eleven sons, not one of them was a full type of Christ. He had had many experiences, but not one of them was adequate to bring forth Christ. Thus, he was confronted with a choice—to keep Rachel or to gain Benjamin. This is a crucial matter, and we all must face it.

Actually, the choice was not made by Jacob. If he had preferred to keep Rachel, he could not have done so. Furthermore, if he had wanted to reject Benjamin, he would not have been able to do this. Both the death of Rachel and the birth of Benjamin were in the hand of God.

Leah, the one Jacob did not love so much, had brought forth six sons. Rachel, the object of Jacob's love, had brought forth only one son—Joseph, whose name means "addition." When Joseph was born, Rachel expected to have a second son and said, "The Lord shall add to me another son" (30:24). In her expectation of having another son, she seemed to be saying, "God has taken away my reproach and has given me a son. But one son is not sufficient. I want another one. Hence, I shall call the name of my first son Joseph." This should imply a prayer, a prayer answered at the cost of Rachel's life. Rachel had such a prayer in 30:24, and the answer came in 35:18. In order to gain her desire, Rachel had to lose her own life. In 30:24 she did not actually realize what she was saying. Rachel expected that God would give her a second son, but she did not know that this would cost her her life. Many of us have done the same thing. We prayed for a particular matter without knowing what it would cost to have our prayer answered.

At the time of the delivery of Rachel's second child, Jacob must have been happy. But he suddenly realized that Rachel, the desire of his heart, was dying. Benjamin was coming, but Rachel was departing. The fact that the birth of Benjamin and the death of Rachel occurred simultaneously means that Jacob gained a son by losing his natural choice. The crucial point in this message is that Jacob gained Christ through the loss of his natural choice. The third pillar in Jacob's life was a testimony of God's dealing with his natural choice.

It is wonderful to have the testimony of God's care and the testimony of the house of God. But not even the house of God is God's ultimate goal. God's ultimate goal is to express Christ. The expression of Christ is not an individual matter; it is a corporate matter in the house of God. The church as the house of God is for the expression of Christ. In order to express Christ, we must have the church. However, most Christians think they can express Christ without the church. But it is impossible to express Christ adequately apart from the church. In addition to the pillar of God's care and the pillar of God's house, we must have the third pillar, the pillar for the corporate expression of Christ. This pillar is costly.

Genesis 35:20 says that Jacob set a pillar upon Rachel's grave, and that this "is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day." This grave marked the death of Jacob's natural choice, the choice of his heart. Rachel was the first person Jacob met when he arrived at Laban's home, and he immediately fell in love with her. He did everything necessary to have her as his wife, and eventually she was given to him. Rachel did not die of old age; she died prematurely in childbirth. The fact that she was still able to bear children indicates that she was not in her old age. All of Leah's six deliveries of her sons and the one of her daughter went very well, but Rachel died in giving birth to her second child. Her death was allowed by God.

The death of Rachel signifies the death of our natural choice. The first two pillars we set up are not for us to have a happy life—they are for us to exist to build the house of God for the expression of Christ. Although Jacob had eleven sons, not one of them was a complete type of Christ. Not one of them was the son of sorrow and the son of the right hand. Joseph was excellent, but prior to the birth of Benjamin, he was not a type of Christ. In typology Joseph is the continuation of Benjamin. This implies that no matter how many spiritual experiences we have had, up to this point, not one of them is the expression of Christ. We still need Benjamin. In order for Benjamin to be born, our natural choice, our "Rachel," must die.

God used Rachel to bring forth Benjamin. But by His using her to bring forth Benjamin, He took her away. God will also use the "Rachel" we love. But through His using our "Rachel," He takes her away from us. If you examine your experience, you will realize that God uses your choice, your desire. But by using it, He takes it from you.

Rachel's death was not only a suffering to Jacob; it was also a suffering to Rachel. Matthew 2:18 says, "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she would not be comforted, because they were no more." For many years I could not understand how Rachel, who had been buried for more than seventeen hundred years, could still be weeping. Nevertheless, this verse says that, even at the time of the birth of Christ, Rachel was still weeping over her children, all of whom were descendants of Benjamin. Benjamin truly was "the son of sorrow," and Rachel was right in giving him this name. Benjamin's birth not only took Rachel's life, but also the life of his descendants more than seventeen hundred years later. Because Christ had been born in Bethlehem, Herod slew all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and younger (Matt. 2:16). Rachel was weeping over all her children, those who had been killed by Herod because of the coming of Christ. This means that Rachel suffered martyrdom for the coming of Christ. Rachel's weeping could be heard at Rama. Rachel was buried on the way to Bethlehem, and Rama is just two hundred yards from Bethlehem. Thus, Rachel's grave was close to both Bethlehem and Rama. This region was populated with the descendants of Benjamin, the son of Rachel.

After Rachel died and was buried, she still had to wait for more than seventeen hundred years to pass by. Not even losing her life for the birth of Benjamin was sufficient; she had to weep more than seventeen hundred years later for her descendants who were to suffer martyrdom for Christ. Rachel not only suffered at the time of her delivery; she even suffered more than seventeen hundred years later. The purpose of her suffering was the bringing forth of Christ. Firstly Benjamin, the type of Christ, came, and secondly Christ, the real One, came. Unlike us, God is not bound by the matter of time. For this reason, we need not be concerned about the interval of more than seventeen hundred years between the death of Rachel and the birth of Christ.

Jacob had set up a pillar at Gilead and a pillar at Bethel, but now he had to set up the third pillar on the way to Bethlehem. In our Christian life we also must have the landmark of the third pillar at Rachel's grave, the place where our natural choice is buried. Our love, our desire, and our choice will one day be brought to an end and buried. Upon the grave of our natural choice we must set up a

pillar. This pillar is a signboard of the death and burial of our natural choice, the desire of our heart. Some person, some thing, or some matter we love dearly will die and be buried, and a pillar will be set up upon the grave to testify that our choice has been buried. Then we shall journey on to Bethlehem, the place where Christ is born. The pillar on the way to Bethlehem directs people to Christ.

When Jacob first met Rachel and fell in love with her, he did not know what trouble she would cause him. It was because Jacob loved Rachel that he was given Leah and the two maids, Zilpah and Bilhah. Without Leah and these two maids, he would not have had their ten sons to cause him problems. The more Jacob loved Rachel, the more trouble he had. Although Leah had given Jacob four sons, Rachel was childless and she complained to Jacob (30:1). To this Jacob said, "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" (30:2). Jacob seemed to be saying, "Rachel, why do you complain to me? Why don't you complain to God?" Eventually God hearkened to Rachel and gave her a son, Joseph (30:22-24). At the birth of Joseph, Rachel expected that the Lord would add to her another son. She did give birth to a second son, but as we have seen she lost her life in this childbirth. Thus, she called her second son "the son of sorrow." Furthermore, Rachel even suffered the martyrdom of the descendants of Benjamin for the coming of Christ. If you had been Jacob and could have foreseen all the troubles that would have come upon you for loving Rachel, would you still have loved her? You probably would have said, "Rachel, no matter how lovely you are, I dare not get involved with you. If I do, I will have too many troubles." Jacob of course did not know what was ahead of him. When Rachel died, he had no choice except to bury her and to set up the third pillar. He had set up the first pillar at Gilead and the second at Bethel; now he had to set up the third pillar upon Rachel's grave.

Today you may be very happy in the church life. But one day your "Rachel," the choice of your heart, will die that Benjamin might be brought forth. I am fully assured that Benjamin will be brought forth in the church life. Moreover, we must expect that even long after the death of our "Rachel," we shall still be weeping for her martyred descendants, those who suffered martyrdom for the coming of Christ.

Rachel wept because she was natural. Instead of weeping, she should have rejoiced. If she had exercised her spirit, she would not have wept; she would have rejoiced and exulted, saying, "The one whom I have called 'the son of sorrow' is a shadow, a type, of the real Son of sorrow who will be born in Bethlehem." In the picture in Genesis 35 Rachel signifies our natural choice. To our natural choice, the birth of Benjamin is a sorrow. But to Israel it is a cause of rejoicing. The coming of Benjamin was a sorrow to Rachel, and the coming of Christ was a weeping to her. But both the coming of Benjamin and the coming of Christ were a joy to Israel. Certain things will happen in the church life that our natural man will consider a suffering and a sorrow. But to Israel, the spiritual man, these things will not be a sorrow, but a joy. Instead of weeping, there will be rejoicing.

In the first stage of our Christian life we experience God's care; in the second we experience God's house; and in the third we experience the bringing forth of Christ, the expression of Christ. The bringing forth of Christ and the expression of Christ cost us our natural life, our natural love, and our natural choice. Everything natural will eventually die and be buried. However, our natural choice will continue to suffer for a long time.

We all need three pillars, three types of testimonies. Years ago in Taipei in fellowship with the elders I pointed out that most of the testimonies in the church meetings were merely about God's care. Rarely did we hear a testimony regarding the house of God or the expression of God. At that time I did not see the picture of these three pillars as clearly as I do now. Our Christian life must have three sections: the section of God's care, the section of God's house, and the section of the expression of Christ. In the church meetings the younger ones, those who are newly saved, should testify of God's care. This is a wonderful testimony to hear from babes. But we also need some testimonies regarding God's house and the expression of Christ. If we have these three kinds of testimonies, it will be an indication that in the church we have the pillar of God's care, the pillar of God's house, and the pillar of the expression of Christ.

God's ultimate goal is the expression of Christ. This will cost our natural choice, our natural desire, and our natural life. In neither the first nor the second pillar do we see death and the grave. Only with the third pillar do we have the death of Rachel and the grave. But the pillar erected upon Rachel's grave is on the way to Bethlehem. Thus, this pillar is on the way to Christ, and it directs people to Christ. If you would journey onward to Bethlehem, you must be on the way where there is such a pillar. Not even after you arrive in Bethlehem will there be very much joy. Instead of joy, there will be killing. Firstly, just one person, Rachel, died. Even more than seventeen hundred years later, many of her descendants were martyred that Christ might be brought forth.

I believe that in the Lord's recovery this word will be fulfilled and that we shall experience these things. May the Spirit of the Lord interpret this picture to you in a strong, clear way. What I am speaking here is no mere doctrine or interpretation. It must be the record of our life history. Many of us can say that we have the first two pillars. Perhaps soon some will have the third pillar with the death of Rachel and the grave. Along with this death and burial, there will be the coming of Christ. No matter how much martyrdom and weeping there will be, there will also be a wonderful birth—the birth of Benjamin and the birth of Christ. There will be the coming of Christ and the expression of Christ. This is God's goal and God's testimony.

II. THE ONE TOWER

After Jacob set up the third pillar, he "journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Eder" (35:21). In Hebrew Eder means "flock." In Micah 4:8 the same Hebrew phrase is rendered "tower of the flock." Here at the tower of Eder something defiling, shameful, and immoral happened to Jacob: his son Reuben committed adultery with Jacob's concubine. This did not take place at the pillar, but at the tower.

I believe that the tower of Eder, the tower of flocks, indicates the ease of life. Jacob had many flocks. As he passed by the tower of Eder, he might have considered it a good place to rest. Instead of proceeding to Hebron, his destination, he stayed by the tower of Eder. This indicates that Jacob had come to a place where he could enjoy an easy life. As he was enjoying this easy life, something sinful occurred. Sin, especially the sin of adultery, always comes in when we are at ease. The fact that Reuben committed adultery with Jacob's concubine at that place was an indication that Jacob should not have stayed there. He should have journeyed on directly to Hebron. If he had not spread his tent by the tower of Eder, probably this evil thing would not have occurred.

Although Jacob set up three pillars, there was no need for him to build the tower of Eder because it was already standing there as a

snare. As you are on your way following the Lord, there will always be a tower nearby to snare you. The way to escape this trap is not to stop or even look at it. Instead of spreading your tent by the tower of Eder, you must pass it by. No matter what stage of the Christian life we are in, there is always a tower to snare us. The ease of life is always a temptation to the followers of the Lord Jesus. Every follower of the Lord realizes that his final destination is a long way off. Because the journey is so long, you expect to find a place of rest along the way. But whenever you come to a tower of flocks, you should not think of it as a place of rest—it is a snare. Pass it by and go on. No matter how exhausted you are in following the Lord, you must say, "Lord, help me. I don't want to rest at any tower. Whenever I come to a tower, I will flee from it. I will never take it as a place of rest." If you do this, you will be protected and saved from the snare.

The desire of Jacob's heart was to take Rachel as his wife. If God had not intervened through Laban, Jacob would immediately have taken Rachel as his wife. Then whomever Rachel brought forth would have been Jacob's firstborn. However, God came in and, in a sense, forced Jacob to take Leah as his wife. Thus, Reuben was actually the firstborn son, and the birthright went to him. This, however, was contrary to the desire of Jacob's heart. Furthermore, it did not seem fair. While Jacob was enjoying the ease of life at the tower of Eder, Reuben committed adultery with his father's concubine. This evil deed caused him to lose the birthright (49:3-4). First Chronicles 5:1 and 2 clearly indicate that the birthright was given to Joseph. Here we see God's sovereign adjustment of the birthright. Reuben lost the birthright because of his defilement, and Joseph gained it because of his purity (39:7-12). When Potiphar's wife tempted Joseph to commit adultery with her, he refused. Because Joseph kept himself pure, he gained the birthright Reuben had lost due to his defilement at the tower of Eder. Therefore, even Jacob's mistake was used by God to adjust the birthright. Praise the Lord for the mistake that brought about the adjustment of the birthright! But never use this fact as an excuse to say, "Let us do evil that good may come." Rather, we must bow down and worship God for His sovereignty.

The sovereign God, being fair and just, did not give all three parts of the birthright to Joseph. He gave Joseph the enjoyment of the double portion of the land, but He gave the priesthood to Leah's third son, Levi, and the kingship to her fourth son, Judah (49:10; 1 Chron. 5:2; Deut. 33:8-10). Levi received the priesthood because of his faithfulness to God (Deut. 33:9), and Judah obtained the kingship because of his love toward his brothers and his care toward his father (37:26; 43:8-9; 44:14-34). In this we see the sovereignty of God. He is behind everything and everyone. When we see this picture and how everything in it fits together, we must worship God. Hallelujah, we are under God's hand!

Jacob's biography is our history. In Jacob's life there were three pillars and one tower. We also shall have the three pillars and the one tower. I can testify that I have experienced all these things. I believe that as the years go by many of us will remember this message. Thank the Lord for the three pillars and for the one tower.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE NINETY-TWO

BEING MATURED THE PROCESS OF MATURITY

(1)

In this message we come to the most pleasant section of the book of Genesis, chapters thirty-seven through fifty. All children like the stories in these chapters. When the writer came to this section, he changed his way of writing. The record of the first thirty-six chapters is brief and emphatic, but the record of the last fourteen chapters is very detailed. Chapter thirty-seven, for example, contains many details. This section is so detailed because it is very practical for our human life. No section in the book of Genesis is more practical than this last section of fourteen chapters.

Before we consider chapter thirty-seven, I would like to call your attention back to the beginning of this book. In the reading of any book we must understand the subject, the purpose, of that book. After reading through the book of Genesis, a book of fifty chapters, you still may not know the subject. What is the subject of this book? When I was young, I was told that Genesis covers two main things—God's creation and man's fall. Genesis begins with the words, "In the beginning God created," and it ends with the words, "He was put in a coffin in Egypt." I was told that because the first verse speaks of God's creation and the last verse speaks about Joseph's being put in a coffin in Egypt, Genesis is a book about God's creation and man's fall. Although this view is not wrong, it is a very inadequate understanding of this book.

It is not easy to understand the Bible. In fact, it is even difficult to understand ourselves. Although we have hair on our heads and ten toes on our feet, do hair and toes make a whole man? Is this a complete person? Certainly not. All the crucial parts and organs, such as the heart and the lungs, are between the hair and the toes. Likewise, the most important parts of Genesis are between the first verse and the last verse of the book.

Genesis 1:26 is a very crucial verse. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion..." Notice two significant words here—image and dominion. Yes, man was created by God, and he fell. But we must consider in what way and for what purpose man was created. The Bible says that man was made in the image of God. Nothing is higher than God. Thus, man was made in the image of the highest One. Perhaps you have never regarded yourself this highly before. Because we bear the divine image, we should have a high regard for ourselves. We are not low creatures; we were made for the purpose of expressing God and exercising His dominion. The subject of Genesis is man bearing the image of God and exercising God's dominion over all things. We bear God's image that we might express Him, and we have God's dominion that we might represent Him. Therefore, we are God's expression and representation. This is the heart of Genesis.

In order to know this in a progressive way, we need all fifty chapters of this book. All the generations recorded in it—Adam, Abel, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph—are for one purpose: to show that God's economy in the universe is to express Himself through man. This is God's purpose, God's goal, and the desire of God's heart. God's purpose and economy are related to man.

The record of all the generations included in this book is a portrait of God's divine economy. In Adam we do not see much of God's expression and dominion. Although Abel believed in God, we do not clearly see in him God's expression and dominion. Enosh realized that he was fragile and weak, and he began to call on the name of the Lord. But in him we scarcely see God's expression or dominion. Enoch walked with God. Therefore, we see in him a little of God's expression; however, we see nothing of God's dominion. Although with Noah we do see a little of God's expression and dominion, it is rather vague; it is not definite, impressive, or clear. In Abraham we see less of God's expression and dominion than we do in Noah. Although many Christians have overly exalted Abraham, he was only on the first level of the doctrine of Christ. Abraham was the father of faith for justification, which is merely the beginning of the doctrine of Christ. Furthermore, we can hardly see God's expression and dominion in Isaac. Isaac, the one who inherited everything from his father, only cared for eating. As long as he was given something good to eat, he would grant his blessing blindly.

It is in Jacob that we see the expression of God. However, prior to the last fourteen chapters of this book, we do not see much of God's expression in Jacob. But in these last chapters we do see in him very much of the expression of God and the dominion of God. Although in this section Jacob was old in years, his spiritual eyes were very keen. Wherever he went, he perceived the real situation and blessed people accordingly. Moreover, his blessing became God's prophecy. Jacob truly bore the image of God and expressed Him. Even Pharaoh, the highest ruler at that time, was under Jacob's blessing. When Jacob was brought into the presence of Pharaoh, Jacob did not say, "Hello, how are you? How old are you?" Rather, he stretched forth his hand and blessed him (47:7, 10). This indicates that Pharaoh was under Jacob, the one who was God's expression.

Jacob's blessing upon the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, was also a prophecy. Isaac, cheated by Jacob, blessed him blindly. However, Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh was much different. Joseph brought his two sons to Jacob, expecting that Manasseh, the firstborn, would receive the birthright. But Jacob placed his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, the younger, "guiding his hands wittingly" (48:14). When Joseph attempted to move Jacob's hand from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's, Jacob refused and said, "I know it, my son, I know it" (48:19). Jacob seemed to be saying, "My son, you don't know what I am doing, but I know. I know God's heart. My blessing is God's expression and God's speaking. The word of my blessing is God's prophecy."

Here in Jacob we see a man who was one with God and who expressed God. Jacob's speaking was God's speaking. Do not think that speaking is an insignificant matter. According to the New Testament, the Son expressed the Father mainly by His speaking. The Lord Jesus said, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words which I speak to you, I do not speak from Myself; but the Father who abides in Me, He does His works"; and, "The word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me" (John 14:10, 24). Thus, to express God is mainly to speak for God and to speak Him forth to others.

We have seen that Jacob, God's expression, bore the image of God. But what about God's dominion? The book of Genesis ends with Joseph exercising dominion over the whole earth. Although Pharaoh was the king, he was merely a figurehead. The acting king was Joseph, who is a part of Jacob in the experience of life. In Jacob with Joseph we see the expression of God with the dominion of God. Never separate Joseph from Jacob. The record of the last fourteen chapters of Genesis mixes the two together. This indicates that Joseph is the reigning part of Jacob, and that Jacob and Joseph should not be considered as separate persons.

In this section Jacob was suffering, and Joseph was reigning. In chapter thirty-seven Joseph gave no impression that he was suffering. This chapter reveals that Jacob, not Joseph, was suffering. Some may argue and say, "When Joseph was cast into the pit, was he not suffering?" This is your interpretation, but this chapter does not tell us this. Jacob, on the contrary, suffered greatly. Although he did not weep at the death of Rachel, he wept sorrowfully when he concluded that Joseph had been devoured by a wild beast (vv. 33-35).

The record in the Bible has a purpose. Genesis, a book of God's image and dominion, shows a complete picture of how human beings can be remade and transformed to express God in His image and to represent Him with His dominion. The last fourteen chapters of Genesis indicate that after Jacob had become Israel, he bore the image of God and exercised the dominion of God. The book of Genesis is complete; it ends the way it begins. It begins and ends with God's image and dominion. In the closing chapters of Genesis, God must have been happy, and He could have said, "Now I have a man on earth expressing Me and representing Me. This man bears My image and exercises My dominion. His words are My prophecy, and his actions are the exercise of My dominion." This is the subject of the book of Genesis.

f. Being Matured

1) The Process of Maturity

In chapter thirty-seven Jacob was an old man. With respect to both time and geography, he had journeyed a long way and had finally come to Hebron. Jacob had passed through many things. Probably no one in the Bible has passed through as many intermixed and complicated situations as Jacob did. He was dealt with by God to such an extent that he had lost nearly all he had cared for. At the time of chapter thirty-seven, Rachel had died, and Jacob was living in Hebron, enjoying the fellowship that his forefathers Abraham and Isaac had known there. It seems that Jacob had retired at Hebron. However, there is no retirement in the spiritual life, and God intervened to upset what appeared to be Jacob's retirement.

I believe that at Hebron Jacob tried his best to have a calm life. As Jacob was in fellowship there he may have had many memories. In the stillness he may have thought, "I shouldn't have grabbed Esau's heel. I shouldn't have cheated Esau or my father. Also, there was no need for me to lose my mother and to flee to my uncle Laban. Moreover, I didn't have to love Rachel so much. My, what trouble loving her caused me! Why was I so foolish? I shouldn't have been cheated by Laban. Why did I promise to work all those years to get Rachel? During the years I was with Laban, I had to suffer the heat and the cold." If you had been Jacob, what would you have done in your retirement? You might have said, "From now on, I simply want to lead a quiet life. There will be no more supplanting, no more heel-holding. Esau, Laban, and Rachel are all gone. Now is the time for me to be quiet and to enjoy life." Surely Jacob must have been enjoying a calm life there in Hebron.

Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other sons, and he made for him a coat of many colors (v. 3). If Jacob had not been in retirement, he would not have been able to make such a coat for Joseph. A busy father could not spend the time to do this. But Jacob was enjoying life and he had plenty of time to make the coat for his favorite son. This is a proof that he had retired. The mention of

the coat of many colors is a little window through which we can see Jacob's character, desire, intention, goal, and disposition.

a) *The Dealings in the Last Stage*

After having had so many dealings under God's hand, Jacob was undoubtedly tired of human life. He was weary of supplanting, cheating, struggling, and fighting. His life was calm and he had a favorite son who was the treasure of his heart. Because of the partiality of his love for Joseph, he made him a coat of many colors. Was Jacob right in doing this? Why did he not make such a coat for Reuben, the oldest, or for Benjamin, the youngest? Although Reuben had defiled himself by committing adultery with Jacob's concubine, Benjamin was the baby of the family and was too young to have done anything wrong. Nevertheless, Jacob's heart was set firstly on Joseph and secondly on Benjamin. Jacob was partial. As we shall see, Jacob's partiality toward Joseph caused him to suffer.

Everything in this chapter is under the sovereign hand of God; nothing is coincidental. For example, immediately after Joseph's brothers had cast him into the pit, a company of Ishmaelites appeared on the scene, and his brothers decided to sell him to them. Then Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's chamberlain. All this was under God's sovereignty. In fact, even Jacob's partiality toward Joseph was under God's sovereignty. In chapter thirty-seven God exercised His sovereignty to deal with this partiality so that Jacob might mature.

Prior to this chapter, Jacob was a transformed person; however, he was not yet mature. To be transformed is to be changed in our natural life, whereas to be matured is to be filled with the divine life that changes us. We may be transformed in our natural life, yet not be filled with the divine life. Chapters thirty-seven through forty-five are a record of the process of Jacob's maturity. This process began in 37:1, and it lasted until 45:28. In the last five chapters of this book we see a Jacob who has fully matured. Probably in all his life Jacob never suffered as much as he did in these nine chapters. They are truly a story of Jacob's suffering. In these chapters we have the dealings in the last stage of Jacob's life. The sufferings he underwent here deeply touched his personal feelings. After these chapters, Jacob had no further dealings. Rather, he was fully matured, he was filled with the divine life, and he had the expression of God and the dominion of God.

For God's expression and dominion there is the need of maturity. Only a mature life can bear God's image and exercise His dominion. Even in chapter thirty-seven Jacob could not bear God's image or exercise God's dominion. Although he was transformed, he was not yet mature. His partiality toward Joseph proves that he was not mature. This partial love was a weak point. Do not think that a transformed person cannot be partial in his love or have other weak points. Therefore, God sovereignly placed Jacob under His hand that he might become mature.

(1) *Jacob Being Robbed of the Treasure of His Heart
under God's Sovereign Hand*

In order to become mature, Jacob firstly had to suffer the loss of Joseph, the treasure of his heart. It seems impossible that Joseph could have been lost. He could easily have died of a certain illness, but how could Jacob have lost him? Although he was not to die, because he was still very useful, he had to be taken away from Jacob. Now we need to consider by what way Jacob's loss of Joseph took place.

(a) *Joseph Bringing His Father Evil Reports of His Brothers*

Verse 2 says that Joseph brought to his father evil reports regarding his brothers. Of all the twelve sons of Jacob, only two were good—Joseph, who was seventeen years of age, and his younger brother, Benjamin, who was still a small child. The other ten brothers were dirty and evil, and Joseph constantly brought to his father evil reports about them. The first of these ten brothers, Reuben, committed adultery with his father's concubine (35:22); and the fourth, Judah, committed fornication with his daughter-in-law, who was disguised as a harlot (38:12-26). Levi and Simeon were cruel, having avenged the defilement of their sister, Dinah, by slaying Hamor and Shechem and plundering their city (34:25-29). The fact that these brothers conspired to slay their own brother in the flesh indicates how sinful they were. It is difficult to believe that they were the sons of a chosen, holy family and that they were to become the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel chosen of God. However, had his brothers been good instead of evil, Joseph would never have been lost.

(b) *Israel Loving Joseph More Than All His Sons*

As we have seen, "Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors" (v. 3, Heb.). Because of the partiality of Jacob's love for Joseph, he had to lose him in order to mature. The loss of Joseph was mainly due to Jacob's partial love for him.

(c) *Joseph's Brothers Hating Him*

Verse 4 says, "And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him." Jacob's partial love for Joseph caused his other sons to hate Joseph. Because a partial love for a child creates hatred among the other children, parents should avoid it. Our love must be equal and impartial. Joseph's brothers also hated him because he was good and because he gave evil reports about them to their father.

(d) *Joseph Having Two Dreams that Caused His Brothers
to Hate Him More*

Joseph had two dreams that caused his brothers to hate him even more (vv. 5-11). These dreams came from God. There were two dreams because two is the number of confirmation and testimony. Both dreams refer to one thing, for both the sheaves and the stars bowed down to Joseph. In our eyes Joseph's brothers, being adulterers, fornicators, murderers, and haters, should have been condemned to hell. But Joseph did not dream about thorns and robbers surrounding a gentle teenager. Rather, he dreamed of sheaves and stars. A sheaf is a bundle into which wheat is bound after reaping. This indicates that, in God's eyes, Jacob's sons were His crop on earth. Moreover, they were not a green crop; they were a ripened and harvested crop that had been bound into sheaves. In the second dream the members of Joseph's family are signified by the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars. They were bright lights shining in the heavens. We have pointed out in the life-study of Revelation that the sun, the moon, and the stars in Revelation 12 and

Genesis 37 represent the totality of God's people. During Joseph's time, his family was the totality of God's people on earth. According to our view, they were evil and dirty, but according to God's view, they were bright and heavenly. Likewise, according to our human nature, we are ugly, evil, and unclean. Nevertheless, we have been chosen, redeemed, forgiven, regenerated, and transformed. Thus, we are God's farm, God's crop. Eventually, we shall be God's harvest; we shall be reaped by Him and become sheaves. Furthermore, we are heavenly lights. What a vision this is!

God was sovereign in giving Joseph these dreams, for they reveal the nature, the position, the function, and the goal of God's people on earth. God's people are His harvest and His lights. As the harvest, they have life, and as the heavenly hosts, they have light. In the first dream there is life, and in the second, light. Life and light are two characteristics of God's people.

In the first dream the sheaves bowed down to Joseph's sheaf, and in the second, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to him. When Joseph told his father and brothers about his second dream, Jacob rebuked him and said, "What is this dream that thou has dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" (v. 10). Joseph was not political; rather, he was genuine, frank, faithful, and straight. If he had not frankly told them about his dreams, there would have been no problem with this. In the church life we should be like Joseph, not like politicians. However, not many among us are frank, straight Josephs; instead, most of us are "wise" politicians. You may have a dream, but you would never tell others about it. Joseph on the contrary was genuine, frank, open, and transparent; he was happy to tell his brothers about his dreams. But this provoked their hatred even more, and Joseph's transparency caused him to be "crucified." Many times I also have been "crucified" for my transparency. However, if I become political, I shall no longer be like Joseph. Humanly speaking, Joseph was wrong in telling his brothers about his dreams. If we had been Joseph, many of us probably would have said, "You know, I had a good dream last night." When others asked us about the dream, we would say, "Forgive me, I can't tell you about it." This is the political "wisdom" of today's Christians. Will you be a politician or a Joseph? If you are a Joseph, you will be "crucified" for your frankness. Because of Joseph's dreams, his brothers hated him more than ever.

(e) Joseph's Brothers Going Shepherding

Joseph's brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem (v. 12). Shepherding was their means of making a living. Through this livelihood of theirs they sovereignly had the opportunity to put Joseph away from Jacob.

(f) Joseph Sent to See His Brothers

Later Joseph was sent by his father to see his brothers (vv. 13-17). This also was sovereign of the Lord. The fact that Jacob sent Joseph to see his brothers is another indication that Jacob was enjoying life. If he had been busy, he would not have thought of sending Joseph to do this. But because he had nothing to do, he suddenly thought about his sons and was concerned for them. When Joseph was asked to go to his brothers, he was obedient. He did not gossip or speak idle words. Rather, he took his father's word and went to find his brothers.

(g) Joseph's Brothers Conspiring to Slay Him

When Joseph's brothers "saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him" (v. 18). They gave Joseph a title, saying to one another, "Behold, this master of dreams cometh" (v. 19, Heb.). They conspired together to slay Joseph and then to deceive their father about what had happened (v. 20).

(h) Reuben Wanting to Deliver Joseph out of His Brothers' Hands

Reuben, the eldest brother, wanted to deliver Joseph out of their hands. When he heard of their plot, "he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him....Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him" (vv. 21-22). Reuben's intention was to take him out of their hands and to deliver him to his father.

(i) Judah Proposing to Sell Him and Not to Slay Him

In Reuben's absence Judah, the fourth brother, proposed that instead of slaying Joseph, they sell him to the Ishmaelites (vv. 25-27). Judah said, "What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh." (vv. 26-27).

(j) Joseph Being Sold to Ishmaelites of Midian

Joseph was sold to Ishmaelites from Midian (v. 28). Ishmael was the son of Abraham by Hagar, and Midian was the son of Abraham by his last wife, Keturah. Both the Ishmaelites and the Midianites represent the flesh. Hatred is related to the flesh, and the flesh is connected to the world represented by Egypt. Due to his brothers' hatred, Joseph was handed over to the flesh, and the flesh brought him down to Egypt. But God is sovereign over all. In His sovereignty, He used everything, including the flesh and the hatred of Joseph's brothers. Every negative thing in this chapter—the hatred, the flesh, Pharaoh, and Pharaoh's chamberlain, Potiphar—was sovereignly used by God to fulfill His purpose.

(k) Jacob Losing the Treasure of His Heart

Through God's sovereignty, which was exercised in all these seemingly coincidental matters, Jacob lost the treasure of his heart (vv. 31-35). After the death of Rachel, Jacob's heart was wholly set upon Joseph. Suddenly and much to his surprise, Joseph was snatched away. Jacob's sons deceived him into believing that Joseph had been devoured by an evil beast (vv. 32-33). When Jacob heard this news, he "rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days" (v. 34). To Jacob, there was nothing more on earth. He was not only broken; he had been robbed to the point where he had nothing left. Although his children tried to comfort him, he refused to be comforted and said, "I will go down into Sheol unto my son mourning" (v. 35, Heb.). Jacob was utterly despondent, and nothing could comfort him. He had lost his heart treasure. How deep and personal was this dealing!

In principle, sooner or later we all shall pass through such a dealing. Do not be frightened at the prospect of this. Praise the Lord that we not only have chapter thirty-seven, but also chapter forty-seven, where we see a glorious result. Chapter thirty-seven is simply a

narrow underpass. Jacob had to walk this narrow underpass and experience a suffering that touched his heart profoundly that he might mature. Nothing in his entire life touched him as personally and as deeply as the loss of Joseph.

(I) The Midianites Bringing Joseph to Egypt
and Selling Him to Potiphar

Joseph, however, was not lost. God was preserving him in Egypt. Joseph's being brought to Egypt was actually his transfer from "high school" to the "university." In Egypt he would receive his higher education, the education which would prepare him for kingship. Jacob, of course, did not know this. In Jacob's eyes, Joseph had been devoured by a beast. But in God's eyes Joseph was being prepared for kingship. Therefore, God could say, "Jacob, there is no need to mourn. Instead, you must rejoice because your son is in Egypt being prepared to be a king."

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE NINETY-THREE

BEING MATURED THE PROCESS OF MATURITY

(2)

Before we consider further Jacob's dealings at Hebron, we need to point out the difference between transformation and maturity. The last stage of transformation is maturity. Maturity means the fullness of life. When one is mature, he has no shortage of life. The more life we have, the more mature we are. An infant is obviously not mature, but a grown man is mature. For a human being to be mature means that his life has come into fullness.

Transformation is a metabolic change in life. Thus, transformation is not a matter of fullness; it is a matter of change. Plants do not require transformation, because they are simply plants. But we, the children of God, need transformation. Only through transformation can we reach maturity. We have a natural life, but this life is not good for God's economy. Although our natural life does not need to be replaced, it does need to be metabolically changed. We must not only have an outward change in appearance, but also an inward change in nature. Although our human life is necessary for God's economy, it should not remain a natural human life; it should be a human life that has been transformed in nature so that the divine life may be mingled with the transformed human life to become one. This is a deep matter.

At least two verses in the New Testament unveil the matter of transformation. Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind." The Greek word translated "transformed" in this verse also appears in 2 Corinthians 3:18. According to the Greek, this verse should be rendered, "And we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit." The word "transformed" in these verses indicates that in our Christian life we need a metabolic change. We do not need outward correction and alteration; rather, we need an inward change in nature and in life.

This metabolic change begins with regeneration. When we were saved, we were not only justified and our sins forgiven; we were also regenerated. At regeneration a new life, the divine life, was put into our spirit. From the time of our regeneration, this life has been transforming our natural life. As the divine life changes our natural life, it imparts more and more of the divine life into our being. Therefore, transformation is the change of our natural life. When this change reaches the point of fullness, the time of maturity has come. To repeat, the last stage of transformation is maturity. Maturity is not a matter of our being changed; it is a matter of having the divine life imparted to us again and again until we have the fullness of life.

Let us now apply this matter to Jacob. Although Jacob underwent many changes between chapters twenty-five and thirty-seven, we do not see any further change in him after chapter thirty-seven. In chapter twenty-five Jacob was a supplanter, a heel-holder. As we read from chapter twenty-six to thirty-six, which covers a period of approximately twenty-five years, we see how Jacob changed. Everything that happened to him during these years was for his transformation. When in chapter thirty-seven Jacob lost his beloved son, Joseph, he was absolutely different from the person he was in chapter twenty-seven. In a spiritual sense, the Jacob in chapter twenty-seven had several hands to use in grasping whatever he wanted. He grasped what belonged to his father, to Esau, and, later on, to Laban. However, in chapter thirty-seven Jacob did not even use his own two hands. The Jacob in this chapter seems to have no skill or ability; instead, it seems that he is not able to do anything. This indicates that he has absolutely changed. From chapter thirty-seven until the end of this book, we do not see any further change in this man. In these chapters we see a person who has not only been changed; we see a person who is full of life. In chapter thirty-seven we see neither change nor the fullness of life. The change took place before this chapter, and the fullness of life was reached after it.

I would ask you to read chapters twenty-seven, thirty-seven, and forty-seven once again. In chapter twenty-seven we see a supplanter. He had many hands, he was able to do everything, and no one could defeat him. Whoever came in contact with Jacob—his father, his brother, or his uncle—was the loser. Jacob, on the contrary, always came out ahead. He made a gain from his brother, from his father, and from his uncle. He even made a gain from Rachel, Leah, and their two maids. However, at the time of Rachel's death, Jacob began to suffer loss. But even this loss produced a gain, and that gain was Benjamin. In chapter thirty-seven Jacob underwent another loss, the loss of Joseph. In this chapter Jacob did not gain anything. From this point onward, Jacob lost one thing after another. Eventually, in chapter forty-seven, he gained the fullness of life. The fullness of life is blessing, which is the overflow of life. When you are filled past the brim with life, this life will overflow into others. This overflow is the blessing. Therefore, in chapter twenty-seven we see a supplanter; in chapter thirty-seven, a transformed man; and in chapter forty-seven, a mature person. Jacob's transformation began at the time God came in to touch him (32:25), and it continued until chapter thirty-seven, when the process of transformation was relatively complete. However, in this chapter Jacob did not yet have maturity, the fullness of life. In order to gain this, he had to experience the dealings in the last stage, the dealings at Hebron.

Now we must consider how Jacob, a transformed person, could be filled with life. Human beings are vessels. However, unlike jars and bottles, we are not vessels without feeling, sense, or will. If you want to fill a bottle with a certain liquid, the bottle has no opinion

or feeling about it. There is no need to have the consent of the bottle before we fill it. But it is difficult to put something in us living vessels because we are filled with opinions, desires, and intentions. Parents know how difficult it is to put medicine into their children. Likewise, it is not an easy matter for God to put His life into us.

Now I want to point out a hidden matter in this book. Jacob's first dealing in the last stage was the loss of Joseph. Joseph was seventeen years old when he was sold (37:2), and he was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh (41:46). Following this, there were the seven plenteous years. It was probably one or two years later that Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain. Therefore, from the selling of Joseph to the sending of Jacob's sons to Egypt was a period of at least twenty years. The Bible does not afford us any record of what Jacob did during these years. It only gives us an account of what Joseph experienced. As far as the record of Jacob is concerned, this period of twenty years was a time of silence.

What do you think Jacob was doing during this time? If you had been Jacob, what would you have done? I have considered this matter very much, and I think I have discovered something. During these years Jacob had nothing to do. He had no lack and he had no ambition. Jacob had cared only for Rachel, not for Leah and the two maids. After Rachel died, Jacob's heart was set on Joseph, who was taken away from him about a year later. After Joseph was taken away, Jacob had virtually nothing left. Therefore, during these silent years he was a person without any ambitions, interests, or things to do. This must have been the time God imparted Himself into Jacob more and more. How different were these twenty years from the twenty years with Laban! During the twenty years with Laban (31:41), Jacob had struggled against Laban and had been concerned about dealing with Rachel, Leah, the maids, and all his children. But in these twenty years at Hebron Jacob was released from any bondage or occupation. He was not only retired—he was free.

The only thing that could not be taken away from Jacob was God's presence. At Hebron Jacob constantly lived in fellowship with God. Through the loss of Joseph, Jacob became a jar that was absolutely open to God. Joseph's presence might have been a hindrance to Jacob's openness to God. But now, after the loss of Joseph, Jacob was free from every frustration and was completely open to the Lord. Undoubtedly, Jacob thought about Joseph day after day. He had concluded that Joseph had been devoured by an evil beast, but this had not been confirmed. Hence, Jacob might have thought that perhaps he would see Joseph again. This pressed Jacob to God and opened him up to God. The more he thought about Joseph, the more open he was. During all these years, Jacob was a jar open to the heavens, and the heavenly rain was continuously falling into him. In this period of time Jacob was daily in the presence of God, being filled with the divine life.

(2) Jacob Being Stricken with Famine

Suddenly, beyond Jacob's control, he was struck with famine, for "the famine was in the land of Canaan" (42:5). God used this famine to deal with Jacob and to lift up Joseph. We have seen that in the twenty years between the loss of Joseph and the coming of this famine, Jacob had nothing to do. He probably felt that his life was over and that he was waiting to go to his people, that is, to die. He never thought that he would go to Egypt to have another new beginning. Of course, he never considered that Joseph would be there waiting for him. Jacob might have thought, "What new thing can happen to me? I am old, I have had four wives, and I have many children and grandchildren. My life is over." But as he was thinking this, God's hand suddenly came upon him, and Jacob was stricken by famine. What an exercise this severe famine must have been to Jacob's entire being! Before the famine struck, he was at peace; he was not short of anything. But suddenly there was no food. As the head of such a large family, he was certainly exercised about what to do in the midst of this famine. God used it to press Jacob.

God also used this famine to uplift Joseph. To Joseph, the famine was a great thing. If there had been no famine after the seven plenteous years, Pharaoh would have said to Joseph, "Joseph, you have fooled me in interpreting my dream. After the seven years of plenty, the famine has not come." But the famine did come, and it was Joseph's power and authority. The seven years of plenty were a partial fulfillment of Pharaoh's dream, but Joseph's interpretation of that dream had not been completely confirmed. Pharaoh was probably waiting to see what would happen after the seven years of plenty. If the famine had not come, he might have executed Joseph. Thus, Joseph needed the seven years of famine in order to be uplifted. This famine was Joseph's glory. God used it to crown him. Joseph's reign was a type of the millennium, of God's heavenly reign over the earth.

(3) Jacob Being Forced to Send His Sons
to Egypt to Buy Grain

Because of the famine, Jacob was forced to send his ten sons to Egypt to buy grain (42:1-3). He had lost Joseph, and now he had to send away ten of his remaining eleven sons. In ancient times it was a long journey from Hebron to Egypt; it took about eight to ten days to travel this distance. After the ten sons had left for Egypt, only the youngest, Benjamin, who was in his early twenties, remained with Jacob. The ten sons must have been away from Jacob for nearly a month. This period of time was a great exercise to this old man. He might have thought, "Now my ten sons are gone. I wonder what will happen to them. Will they return safely? Will they be able to buy food and bring it home with them?" What an exercise this was to Jacob! This dealing was not for Jacob's transformation; it was for his maturity. God used it to fill Jacob with the very element of the divine life.

(4) Jacob's Second Son, Simeon,
Being Detained in Egypt

When Jacob's sons returned from Egypt with the grain, Jacob learned that Simeon had been detained in Egypt (42:24, 36). This also was a suffering and an exercise to him. When we consider these chapters again on Joseph's side, the reigning side, we shall see how wise Joseph was. He did not keep the money, but rather had it put into the bags of grain (42:25). When one of them discovered that his money had been put in the mouth of his sack, he told his brothers about it, "and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?" (42:28). When they returned home and discovered "every man's bundle of money was in his sack," they all, including Jacob, were afraid (42:35). Jacob seemed to say, "What is this? One of my sons has been detained, and you have brought back the grain, but the money is in your sacks. Suppose we finish this grain, and the famine continues. What shall we do then? We will have to go back to Egypt to buy more grain. But what shall we do with this money?" Jacob also learned the sad news that Benjamin had to go to Egypt. After he heard this, he said, "Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me" (42:36). Although Reuben promised to bring Benjamin back to Jacob, Jacob did not listen to him. Rather, he said, "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is

dead, and he is left alone" (42:38).

(5) The Famine Becoming Severe

Genesis 43:1 and 2 say, "And the famine was severe in the land. And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the grain which they had brought out of Egypt, their father said unto them, Go again, buy us a little food" (Heb.). At this point Judah reminded Jacob that in order to buy food again in Egypt, they had to take Benjamin with them. Thus, due to the severity of the famine, Jacob was forced to send his youngest son with his brothers to Egypt to buy grain (42:4, 36; 43:1-15). What a suffering this was to Jacob! God was emptying this jar, taking everything away from him. After Benjamin went with his brothers to Egypt, Jacob was left alone without any of his sons. Joseph had been taken away, Simeon had been detained in Egypt, and now all the others had also gone down to Egypt. Perhaps that night Jacob said, "What do I have left? All my twelve sons are gone, and I don't know what will happen to them. On the first trip one of my sons was detained. I cannot say how many will be detained the second time." Although this was a great suffering to Jacob, the main point here is not his suffering—it is the fact that he was being emptied out by God. God took away everything that had previously filled him, and now Jacob was completely empty. But, as we shall see, on the day Jacob received the good news about Joseph, he was completely filled with the fullness of life.

God had taken away Rachel, Joseph, Simeon, and finally all the remaining ten sons, including Benjamin. When Benjamin was with his brothers in Egypt being reconciled to Joseph, Joseph was very happy. Jacob, however, was at home alone, being emptied out by the Lord. Night after night Jacob probably had the deep sense that he was an empty vessel. Everything that had once filled him had been taken away. This was altogether sovereign of the Lord. The Lord was preparing him to be filled with the divine life.

Let us now consider the situation from Joseph's point of view. The way Joseph dealt with his brothers was also sovereign of the Lord. Joseph detained Simeon and then had all the money bags returned to the others (42:24-25). What was Joseph's purpose in detaining Simeon? Why did he not detain one of the other brothers? I believe that Simeon was the leader of the conspiracy against Joseph. Simeon was cruel. He and Levi had killed Hamor and Shechem and destroyed their city (34:25-29). In 49:5 Jacob said, "Simeon and Levi are brethren; their swords are weapons of violence" (Heb.). I also believe that Simeon took the lead in proposing that Joseph be killed. Although Joseph's brothers did not recognize him, he was very clear about them. When he first saw them, he gave them a difficult time in order to touch their conscience. They said to one another, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us" (42:21). Then Joseph "took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes" (42:24). This must have caused Simeon to consider what he had done to Joseph. During his imprisonment, Simeon might have thought, "Why am I the only one being detained? Oh, I never should have done that to Joseph." What Joseph did to Simeon was truly sovereign of the Lord.

Not even when the brothers came to Egypt the second time did Joseph reveal himself to them immediately. If I had been he, I would have said, "I am Joseph. How good it is that you have come back with Benjamin, my brother. Please return home and tell my father about me." Instead of doing this, Joseph had a feast prepared for his brothers (43:16). This surprised them and caused them to be afraid. After the feast, Joseph commanded that his brothers' sacks be filled with food, that their money be put in the mouth of the sacks, and that his silver cup be placed in the sack of the youngest. Surely Joseph's brothers must have been happy to leave Egypt. But Joseph's steward overtook them and accused them of stealing his master's cup. When the cup was found in Benjamin's sack, the brothers "rent their clothes" and returned to the city (44:13). They must have been terrified. Joseph, however, was not punishing them; he was touching their conscience. It was only after all this that Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

God sovereignly did not allow the good news about Joseph to reach Jacob at an early date. As Joseph and his brothers were happy together in Egypt, Jacob was suffering in Canaan, waiting for his sons to return. The longer Jacob's sons remained in Egypt, the more he suffered. But the more Jacob suffered, the better it was for him. Jacob's long wait for the return of his sons was surely a trial. This was under the sovereign hand of God to prolong Jacob's suffering that he might be emptied of everything. When the good news came to Jacob, he was absolutely empty.

Our preoccupations frustrate the growth of life. Due to these preoccupations, there is not much room in our being for the divine life. But when Jacob heard the news about Joseph in Egypt, he had been emptied of every preoccupation. Nothing was occupying his inner being. Rachel had died, his twelve sons had gone away, and Jacob had been utterly emptied out. He was so empty that when the good news came, he was not excited by it. In fact, his heart was even rather cold (45:26, Heb.). When the news came regarding Joseph, Jacob had not only been transformed; he was completely filled with the divine life. He had become mature.

Jacob's history must also become our biography. We must believe that everything in our daily life is under God's sovereign hand. Everything that happened to Jacob was for his transformation and maturity. In order to be transformed, Jacob had to be pressed into situations that gave him no choice except to undergo a change. Like Jacob, after we have been changed, God will sovereignly use persons, things, and events to empty us of everything that has filled us and to take away every preoccupation so that we may have an increased capacity to be filled with God.

If we read the book of Genesis again and again, we shall see that the two main aspects of Jacob's experience are transformation and maturity. It is not simply a matter of being chosen, called, saved, and regenerated. We still need the process of transformation and the process of maturity. However, few Christians pay attention to these matters. For this reason, God's economy has been frustrated among His children. Because there is such a lack of transformation and maturity among God's people, we have not yet seen the accomplishment of His eternal purpose. But this lack is now being made up in the Lord's recovery, which today is the recovery of Christ as life and of the church as our living. In the coming days many saints in the Lord's recovery will be transformed. Even now, some are in the process of maturity. The Lord is working among us, on us, and in us to transform us and to cause us to mature.

When I was young, I read a number of books about overcoming sin, but I did not read one book about transformation. With us today it is not simply a matter of overcoming sin. Even if you overcome every sin, you still need to be transformed. If we are not transformed, the overcoming of sin does not mean very much for God's economy. For God's economy we do not merely need the overcoming of sin; we also need the transformation of our being and the fullness of His life. God is concerned about transformation and maturity. This is His need today.

Along with maturity, we also have the aspect of reigning. The mature life becomes the reigning life. We have pointed out that Jacob and Joseph should not be considered as two separate persons, but as two aspects of a complete person who has the fullness of experience. We all should have the aspect of maturity and the aspect of reigning. Actually, it was not Joseph who was reigning in Egypt—it was Jacob, Israel. If you could have asked an Egyptian who was reigning over him, he would have said that a Hebrew, an Israelite, was reigning. Israel was reigning in Egypt because Israel had matured in life. Only a matured life can be used by God for His kingdom, for His reigning.

From Jacob's experience we see that everything that happens to us is under God's sovereignty for our transformation and maturity. Nothing is accidental. God's eternal purpose can only be accomplished through our transformation and maturity. Jacob's experience is an excellent illustration of this.

b) Jacob's Reaction

Jacob actually did not react to all these dealings in the last stage for his maturity. He no longer had his own activity. Rather, without any struggle, he absolutely submitted to his circumstances. He took all the situations as they happened (43:11, 13). Concerning the probable loss of his sons, he said, "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved" (43:14). What submission this was!

In his early days Jacob always trusted in his own skill and ability. However, after the dealings in the last stage, his trust was no longer in himself, but in God. Jacob had come to know God's mercy. In his experiences through all his life, he eventually realized that it was God's mercy, not his skill and ability, that had counted in his situations. And he had also learned that this merciful God is all-sufficient, not only almighty, to meet his needs in every kind of situation. Hence, Jacob said to his sons, "God all-sufficient give you mercy before the man" (43:14, Heb.). Now his trust and rest are altogether in the mercy of his all-sufficient God, no longer in himself and in his ability. Here we see a man who has been fully transformed for maturity.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE NINETY-FOUR

BEING MATURED THE MANIFESTATION OF MATURITY

(1)

In the last message we pointed out the difference between transformation and maturity. Transformation is the metabolic change in life, and maturity is the fullness in life. Maturity is the last stage of transformation. As we are being transformed, we are also being filled with life. The more we are transformed, the more we are filled with life. No one can be filled with life without being transformed. The degree of the filling is in proportion to the degree of transformation. When we have been completely transformed, we shall be filled with life in its fullness.

From chapter twenty-five to chapter thirty-two we see no change in Jacob's life. According to the record of chapter twenty-five, Jacob began supplanting even before he was born. Jacob's transformation began from the time God touched him. This took place in chapter thirty-two. Although in chapters twenty-five to thirty-two there is no transformation, no change in life, these chapters are full of dealings. Remember, Jacob spent twenty years under the hand of Laban. During those years he suffered one dealing after another. After those twenty years of dealings, one night, at Peniel, the Lord came and touched Jacob's strongest part, his thigh, and Jacob became lame. That marked the beginning of Jacob's transformation, and the process of transformation continued from chapter thirty-two to chapter thirty-seven. In these chapters we see a picture of how Jacob was being transformed. However, after the time Jacob lost Joseph in chapter thirty-seven, we see no further change in Jacob's life. The reason for this is that at that time his transformation was nearly completed. Thus, in chapter thirty-seven Jacob's maturity began.

There are three distinct periods in Jacob's life: the period of dealings, the period of transformation, and the period of maturity. If you compare three chapters, twenty-seven, thirty-seven, and forty-seven, you will see the dealings, the transformation, and the maturity. In chapter forty-seven Jacob's maturity reaches its peak and it is fully manifested. In this message we shall consider the manifestation of Jacob's maturity.

2) Manifestation of Maturity

a) No Blame at Hearing That Joseph Was Still Alive

The first sign of Jacob's maturity is the fact that he did not blame his sons when he heard the news about Joseph's being alive in Egypt (45:21-28). Although they had conspired to kill Joseph, eventually sold him into slavery, and lied to their father about him, Jacob did not blame them. If he had not been mature, he would have said, "What have you done to me? Don't you know that you nearly killed me?" But, according to the record of chapter forty-five, Jacob did not blame anyone.

Genesis 45:26 and 27 mention Jacob's heart and his spirit. Although some so-called Christians think that the spirit and the heart are the same, we know by the true light of the Bible that the heart is the heart and that the spirit is the spirit. Verse 26 says that "Jacob's heart became numb" (Heb.), and verse 27 says that "the spirit of Jacob their father revived." When Jacob heard the good news concerning Joseph, his heart became numb. Some versions say that his heart became cold. The Hebrew word means numb, having no feeling or sense. Although Jacob's heart was numb, his spirit revived.

We need to be like Jacob. In certain situations, our heart should be numb, and our spirit should be revived. Recently, many of the young people have been getting "drunk" with Christ. But I would ask them these questions: Is your heart numb? Have you been revived in your spirit or in your heart? I am not certain that they have been revived in the spirit. Perhaps their excitement is a mixture of the spirit and the heart. This mixture indicates that there has been no division between soul and spirit. According to Hebrews 4:12, the spirit must be divided from the soul. A mature saint is one who is revived, living, and excited in spirit, but numb in heart. Although we should be hot in spirit, we should be cold in heart. Our spirit must be a stove full of blazing fire, but our heart must be a refrigerator.

When we are young in our spiritual life, we are revived mainly in heart, and we are numb in spirit. The younger you are, the more you are revived in heart and numb in spirit. But as you grow, you become somewhat numb in heart and revived in spirit. In chapter forty-five we see that Jacob was a mature saint. Hence, the Bible says that his heart was numb, but that his spirit revived. This was a manifestation of his maturity. Such a saying about the heart and the spirit can be found only in the Bible, not in any secular writings.

Because Jacob's heart became numb and because his spirit was revived, he did not blame anyone or anything. In his heart there was no feeling, sense, or reaction. His soul life was completely deadened, and his heart was like wood. Because Jacob's soul and spirit had been divided, the good news concerning Joseph issued in the reviving of his spirit, not in the stirring up of his heart.

Do not think that I intend to cool down the excitement of the young people. No, the young people must be excited. Children are children, fathers are fathers, and grandfathers are grandfathers. How childish for a grandfather to be easily excited! It is the children who should be excited. If they are not, they may be physically or mentally ill. Healthy children are always easily excited.

When I returned from a recent trip to Europe, I brought back some souvenirs for two of my grandchildren. To the one, a boy of seven years of age, I gave a nutcracker, and to the other, a boy less than four years of age, I gave a little toy car. These boys were so excited that they could hardly eat, sleep, or stand still. The older boy even brought his nutcracker to school to show his teacher and classmates. We were very happy to see the excitement of our grandsons, for it was an indication that they are living and healthy. However, suppose I gave such a gift to one of the elders and, in his excitement, he showed it to the other elders. If he did this, I would doubt that he was the proper brother to be an elder. It is wrong for an older person to be excited like this. The young people, on the contrary, are young people, and they need to be excited.

Because Jacob was not excited, he did not blame others regarding the loss of Joseph. No one can learn this merely by being taught. Teaching about it simply does not work. If I teach my seven-year-old grandson not to blame his brother, it will be of no avail. As soon as I turn my back, he will blame his younger brother. Because he is at the blaming age and has a blaming life, he cannot keep from blaming others. Of course, this does not mean that we should not train our children. We must discipline them. But learning not to blame others depends on the growth of life, not upon outward teachings.

In Genesis chapter forty-five we see a saint who did not pretend, perform, or act. Because he had come into maturity, his heart was numb, and he did not blame others. Some may think that verse 26 indicates that Jacob's heart was shocked at the good news and that it became numb because of the shock. I do not believe this. When a young person receives some shocking news, his mind, emotion, and will continue to be active. They are not numb in the least. I have seen some who were severely shocked, yet their soul was very active. But when Jacob, an old man, received the good news about Joseph, he had no reaction: his heart was numb. This is a sign of Jacob's maturity in life.

Young people, do not try to imitate this maturity. There is no need to perform. You are young people, not fathers or grandfathers. Therefore, do not try to behave like a grandfather. Do not act as if you were numb in heart and revived in spirit. I appreciate it when my grandchildren are excited, for that behavior is genuine, natural, and spontaneous. It is not a performance. The young people should not be troubled by this message on the manifestation of maturity. I say again, the young need to be excited. If a young person is not excited, he is not normal. Do not pretend to be more mature than you are. Pretending only kills.

*b) Offering Sacrifices to God at Beersheba
before Going to See Joseph*

Genesis 46:1 says, "And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac." In 35:1 God told Jacob to arise and go up to Bethel and to make an altar there unto God. But in 46:1 Jacob went to Beersheba to offer sacrifices on his own initiative. This verse does not say that he offered a sacrifice; it says that he "offered sacrifices." He went to Beersheba for the purpose of offering sacrifices to God. This verse does not tell us that Jacob prayed, praised, or gave thanks to God. Rather, it says that he offered sacrifices. He did so that he might have true fellowship with God. Using New Testament terms, Jacob offered for God's satisfaction the Christ he had experienced in many aspects. This is the worship God desires to receive from us. But this worship is related to our growth in life. When we are matured, we shall frequently worship God in this way. God did not ask Jacob to go to Beersheba and offer sacrifices. Jacob went there of his own accord to offer Christ for God's satisfaction.

The next verse says, "And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night." Notice that this verse does not speak of a vision, but of visions. During that night in Beersheba, God appeared to Jacob at least twice and spoke to him. When we are young in life, we often say, "Lord, what is Your mind? Please tell me what You want me to do." However, in chapter forty-six Jacob did not say this. Instead of asking God for guidance, he offered sacrifices for His satisfaction. Then, during the night, God appeared to him. Here we see the kind of fellowship a saint mature in life has with God. There is no praying, praising, giving of thanks, or seeking. Instead, there is the offering of Christ to God for God's satisfaction. In this kind of worship, Jacob had fellowship with God, and God appeared to him. This surely is another manifestation of Jacob's maturity.

We cannot imitate Jacob's degree of life. Our degree of life is always related to our growth in life. If we do not have the growth, we simply cannot have the degree. Although you may pretend, perform, or act, you still do not have the degree of life you are imitating. Therefore, we all need to grow. When we grow into a certain degree of life, spontaneously we shall have the manifestation of life related to that degree of life.

*c) No Excitement Showing Looseness of Self
at Seeing Joseph*

Another sign of Jacob's maturity was that he displayed no excitement showing looseness of self at seeing Joseph (46:28-30). Jacob was not excited, because his heart had become numb. It is all right for young people to be excited, but there should be no looseness in their excitement. There must still be a certain amount of control. Sometimes my grandchildren are so loose in their excitement that they are destructive. One of them became so excited that he even walked on the furniture. Children who display such looseness need to be disciplined. Nevertheless, you young people must be excited, and the churches and halls filled with young people must be

exciting places. You may even "raise the roof" with your excitement.

The more the young people are excited, the better it is; for the more excited they are, the faster they grow. I have never seen a numb child grow. Children need to be active and excited. This indicates that they are living, healthy, and normal. I enjoy the excitement of the young people because it is a sign of their normality. This assures me that they will grow. However, in your excitement there should not be any looseness or lawlessness. In the midst of your excitement, your spirit may say, "Be careful. Don't do too much or go too far." This control is right.

Young people, I encourage you to be excited. Although I am an old man, I do not like to be in an old people's meeting. I prefer to attend the young people's meeting and stay in a church filled with young people. Although they may not yet have transformation and maturity, they are living. The presence of life gives me the assurance that growth, transformation, and maturity will eventually follow.

d) No Begging after Arriving in Egypt

After Jacob arrived in Egypt, he did not beg for anything. However, when he was young, he begged wherever he went. He not only begged; he supplanted others and robbed them. Jacob expected to have everything for himself. If he stayed with you, what was in your pocket would sooner or later end up in his.

In the early years, Jacob robbed his father, his brother, his uncle, and even his wives. Eventually, when he was old, he himself was robbed and was bereft even of his sons. But, in his maturity, he did not beg for anything. According to his position after he arrived in Egypt, he had the standing to claim everything. However, he did not ask for anything. This is a strong sign of maturity. A mature person is not demanding. Instead of demanding, requiring, or asking, Jacob stretched forth his hands to bless others. If we beg, ask, and demand, it proves we are young in life. We, the saints, should not place demands on one another. However, this cannot be performed; it is the issue of the growth in life.

In any family the children are very demanding, much more demanding than anyone else. The grandfather, on the contrary, demands nothing; instead, he is constantly giving. But all day long the little children are asking for candy, cookies, and toys. My grandchildren are constantly asking their grandmother for things. The younger you are, the more demands you make. You may make demands of the elders, and of the brothers and sisters, but you never make demands of yourself. This proves that you are like a little baby. A baby does nothing except make demands. While the Lord may take some time to answer my prayer, the prayers of the babies are answered immediately. Making many demands is an indication that you are young.

Excessive praying may also be a sign of immaturity. Some young saints, thinking that the elders are not humble or diligent enough, pray for them in a childish way. Not praying for the elders in this way is a proof that you have grown up. Praying improperly for the elders indicates that you are young. The more you pray for them, the less mature you are. If you do not pray for the elders, then you must be grown up.

Many prayers for the church are also childish. Some saints pray, "Lord, I dare not tell you about the church. But, Lord, You know the situation. O Lord, do something about it." This kind of prayer is actually a condemnation of the church. When you pray like this, you accuse the church. To pray this kind of prayer is to ask the Lord to deal with the church. You pray so much for the church because, in your eyes, the church does not satisfy your requirements. Paul, however, did not pray for the church in this manner. Fifty years ago, I also prayed in the way of blaming, begging, demanding, and accusing. But the Lord can testify for me that during the past six months I have not prayed for the elders in Anaheim. This does not mean that they are perfect; it means that I do not make demands of them and that I am not inwardly bothered by them.

Do not try to imitate this characteristic of maturity. Do not say, "Brother Lee told us that for six months he did not pray for the elders. From now on, I won't pray for them either." If you are able to keep from praying for the elders for six months, it is an indication that you have grown. It reveals that you are not begging or making demands.

e) No Activity for Himself while Living in Egypt

When Jacob went to Egypt, he did not engage in any activity for himself. This also is a manifestation of his maturity. Do not think that Jacob was lazy, tired, or lacked the energy to act. If he had not been able to do anything, he could have ordered his sons to do things for him. However, he did not do this. Rather, he was fully satisfied and rested absolutely in God's sovereignty. He did not depend upon his own endeavors. From his experience through the years, he had come to know that his destiny was in the hands of God, not in his own hands. As Jacob was about to bless the two sons of Joseph, he spoke of God as the One who had shepherded him all his life long (48:15-16, Heb.). Jacob's word in 48:15 and 16 is a reference to the Triune God. Here we see the Triune God in Jacob's experience, not in doctrine. In these verses Jacob said, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which shepherded me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from evil, bless the lads." Here we see a threefold mention of God: the God before whom Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who shepherded Jacob his whole life long, and the Angel who delivered him from evil. The God before whom Abraham and Isaac walked must be the Father; the God who shepherded Jacob his whole life must be the Spirit; and the Angel who redeemed him from all evil must be the Son. This is the Triune God in Jacob's experience.

Jacob experienced God's sovereign, shepherding care. Shepherding includes feeding. The shepherd meets every need of the sheep, who only eat and rest. Every provision for their existence comes from the shepherd. The example of the shepherd is a marvelous illustration of Jacob's realization that his destiny and existence were absolutely in the hands of the shepherding God. Thus, after he had matured and had arrived in Egypt, he did nothing for himself. This is another sign of the maturity of life.

f) Blessing People All the Time

Now we come to the strongest sign of Jacob's maturity: his blessing of others. The first thing Jacob did after arriving in Egypt was bless Pharaoh (47:7, 10). Although Pharaoh was the highest person on earth, he was under Jacob's blessing hand. According to Hebrews 7:7, "the lesser is blessed by the greater." Thus, the fact that Jacob blessed Pharaoh was a proof that he was greater than

Pharaoh. After Jacob had been ushered into Pharaoh's presence, he did not speak to him in a polite, political way. He stretched forth his hand and blessed him. This is absolutely different from human culture and religion. As Jacob was leaving Pharaoh's presence, he blessed him again.

Blessing is the overflow of life, the overflow of God through someone's maturity in life. In order to bless others, we must be filled to the brim with life so that life overflows to them. Having such an overflow of life, Jacob blessed Pharaoh and the two sons of Joseph (48:8-20).

Jacob's father, Isaac, blessed blindly. But Jacob's blessing of his two grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, was full of insight. Although his physical eyes were dim, his spirit was clear (48:10). Joseph presented his sons to Jacob, placing Manasseh, the firstborn, at Jacob's right hand and Ephraim at Jacob's left hand. Joseph expected that Jacob would place his right hand upon Manasseh's head and his left hand upon Ephraim's head. But being very clear inwardly about what he was doing, Jacob crossed his hands and placed his right hand upon Ephraim's head. Joseph was not happy with this and he said, "Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head" (48:18). But Jacob refused and said, "I know it, my son, I know it." Jacob guided his hands purposefully and intelligently. Unlike his father, Isaac, he did nothing blindly. Because he was mature and because he was one with God in life, he was clear in the spirit. In his spirit he knew that it was God's will to establish Ephraim above Manasseh.

Later we shall see that Jacob's mature life was filled with blessings. Jacob blessed his twelve sons, and those blessings were prophecies relating to the destiny of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob was so filled with life that he overflowed blessings to everyone he met. This is the strongest manifestation of Jacob's maturity in life.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE NINETY-FIVE

BLESSING

As we have pointed out many times, the book of Genesis is a book of seeds. Nearly every item in this book is a seed developed in the following books of the Bible. This is true also with the matter of blessing. In this message, another parenthesis in our life-study, we shall consider the seed of blessing sown in Genesis and its development in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

I. THE PRINCIPLE OF BLESSING

Hebrews 7:7 says, "But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater." In this verse we see the principle of blessing: that the greater blesses the lesser. To be greater or lesser is not mainly a matter of age. It is a matter of the measure of Christ. We are greater or lesser according to our measure of Christ. In Matthew 11:11 the Lord Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, Among those born of women, there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is smallest in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he." Here the Lord Jesus says that John the Baptist was greater than all who had preceded him. However, the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. The reason John was greater than his predecessors was that he was very close to Christ. Although Abraham was great, he did not see Christ. However, John the Baptist saw Him. But, although John was so close to Christ, he did not have Christ in him. Those in the kingdom of heaven are not only close to Christ; they have Christ within them. For this reason the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. The great ones in the Old Testament could say that Christ was coming, and John the Baptist could say that Christ was in front of him. But all of us in the kingdom of heaven can say that Christ is within us. We can even say, "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). Hence, we are closer to Christ than John the Baptist and all who went before him.

Whether we are greater or lesser depends upon our measure of Christ. If you have more of Christ, you are greater. If you have less of Christ, you are lesser. If by having more of Christ we are greater than others, then we are qualified to bless them; for the greater always blesses the lesser. The reason for this is that the greater one has a larger measure of Christ to give to others. If you are greater than I, it means that you have a greater portion of Christ than I. If so, then you have something more of Christ to minister to me. To bless others means to minister Christ to them. Those who have just a small measure of Christ need the blessing of those who have a greater measure. We bless them with the very Christ in whom we participate and whom we enjoy. If we enjoy Christ more, then we have more of Christ to minister to others. This ministering of Christ is blessing.

II. THE MEANING OF BLESSING

It is rather difficult to give a proper definition of blessing. Years ago I could only say the blessing was asking or wishing something good for others. But after years of experience I can say that blessing is the overflow of God through someone's maturity in life. God cannot flow Himself into others without a human channel. If Christ had never been incarnated, God would not have been able to flow to man, because there would not have been a channel. God's flowing needs humanity as a channel. The only humanity God can use as the channel is one saturated and permeated with God. For this reason Jacob did not bless anyone until he had become mature. Jacob did not bless Laban or Esau. Even when he saw his brother Esau after the twenty years with Laban, he did not bless him. It was not until he went down into Egypt that he blessed Pharaoh, the highest ruler on earth (47:7, 10). At that time Jacob was filled with God. Through Jacob's blessing of Pharaoh God's blessing overflowed to Pharaoh.

A child two years of age cannot bless anyone; however, a child of seven or eight may perform some kind of blessing. This illustrates the fact that blessing others depends upon maturity in life. Maturity in life is a matter of being filled with God. When you are full of God, you have the overflow of God, and thus you are able to bless everyone you meet. Years ago I could not say such a word about blessing. This understanding of blessing does not come from reading books; it comes only from experience.

III. THE FIRST CASE OF BLESSING

The first case of blessing in the Bible is Melchisedec's blessing of Abraham (14:18-20). Melchisedec was a type of Christ. Therefore, Melchisedec's coming to Abraham was Christ's coming to him. Melchisedec came to Abraham with bread and wine, just as the Lord also comes to us with bread and wine. Furthermore, Melchisedec came as the eternal priest, and Christ became a priest according to

the eternal order of Melchisedec (Heb. 5:6). A priest brings people to God. If you would bless others, you must be God's priest. Later we shall see that in the Old Testament God commanded the priests to bless His people. Blessing is the overflow of God, and this overflow is brought to people through the priests. The first blessing was bestowed by a priest. We all need to be priests, those who bring people to God.

If we would bless others, we must be close to God ourselves. We must be priests who bring others to God. People need God's blessing because they are far away from Him. A priest eliminates the distance between God and the people; he brings those who are far off into the presence of God. On the shoulders of the high priest were two onyx stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and on his breastplate there were twelve stones, also engraved with the names of the twelve tribes (Exo. 28:9-12, 15-21). Whenever the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies, he wore the breastplate and the shoulder plates. This indicated that he brought the people of Israel into the presence of God. We all realize that a priest serves God, but we may never have seen that he also eliminates the distance between the people and God. Before you are blessed by a priest, there may be a distance between you and God. But after he blesses you, this distance is taken away, and you are brought into the presence of God to share in the enjoyment of God. When Melchisedec blessed Abraham, that blessing brought him into the presence of God. Melchisedec even said, "Blessed be Abram of the most high God" (14:19). If you read Genesis 14 carefully, you will see that Melchisedec blessed Abraham with nothing other than God. He did not say, "Be blessed with a good house"; neither did he say, "Be blessed with two sons." Instead, he said, "Be blessed of the most high God." In this way, Melchisedec brought Abraham much closer to God.

IV. THE BLESSING OF THE PRIESTS

In Numbers 6:23-27 we see a pattern of blessing. Here God commanded the priests to bless the people by saying to them, "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." The blessing here is not onefold or twofold; it is threefold. The blessing is threefold because it is a matter of the dispensing of God into man. This involves the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Trinity is not a matter of doctrine; it is a matter of God's dispensing Himself into His people.

The first aspect of the blessing in Numbers 6 is related to God the Father's blessing and keeping power. The second aspect is related to the shining face of God the Son and His grace. The word "gracious" in Numbers 6:25 means more in Hebrew than the English word gracious conveys. The Hebrew meaning is to stoop in kindness to those who are inferior. This indicates that by becoming a man the second of the Trinity stooped in kindness to us, the inferior ones. When He became man, He surely stooped down from the heavens. This is grace.

I like the words "make his face shine upon thee." Have you not experienced this? Second Corinthians 4:6 says that the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the true light, which is God Himself (John 8:12, 1 John 1:5). God Himself as light shines over us in the face of Jesus Christ. Thus, the second aspect of the threefold blessing is related to God the Son who stooped in kindness to visit us that we may have grace. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us...full of grace and reality." Because the Lord has stooped in kindness to us, we now have this blessing.

The third aspect of the blessing is related to God the Spirit's countenance and His peace. The lifting up of the Lord's countenance upon us and the giving of peace is certainly the gracious work of the third of the Trinity, the Spirit. Today the Spirit is constantly lifting up God's countenance over us and giving us peace. He gives peace not only in our environment, but also in our being—in our heart, in our spirit, and even in our mind. In the Spirit, through the Spirit, and with the Spirit we have peace. Others may be troubled in heart, mind, spirit, and environment, but we should not be troubled. Wherever we are, we have peace because the Spirit of God is with us and His countenance is uplifted over us.

In summary we may say that blessing is the bringing of people into the presence of God, into the very enjoyment of God. The threefold blessing in Numbers 6 is the pattern of blessing by the priests in the Old Testament. This pattern reveals that the proper blessing is to bring people into the presence of God, into the light of His face, and into the shining of His countenance that they may participate in His grace and may have peace. This surely is the proper blessing. How wonderful! How marvelous!

V. THE BLESSING OF THE APOSTLE

In 2 Corinthians 13:14 the Apostle Paul also gives a pattern of blessing. This verse says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." We have seen that a priest brings people to God. An apostle, however, brings God to people; he comes to people with God. In 2 Corinthians 13:14 we see a gracious visitation of the Triune God. In the blessing of the Apostle Paul, the Triune God comes to people for their enjoyment. This enjoyment is the love of God as the grace of Christ by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Love, grace, and fellowship are not three separate things; they are three aspects or stages of one thing. They are the three stages of God for our enjoyment. Love is within, grace is love expressed, and fellowship is the transmission of grace into us. Love is within God Himself. When this love is expressed, it is grace, and grace is transmitted in the fellowship. I may love a certain brother, but this love is within me. How can it be expressed? I may express it by giving him a Bible. The Bible represents grace as the expression of the love I have within me for this brother. In order to communicate this grace to him, I must actually hand the Bible to him. This is fellowship.

In the Old Testament the basic thought with respect to blessing is that of bringing people into God's presence. But in the New Testament the Apostle, coming with God, not only brought people into the presence of God; he also brought God into them. There is a great difference between the Old Testament pattern of blessing by the priests and the New Testament pattern of blessing by the Apostle. The New Testament blessing is much higher and deeper. On the one hand, to bless others is to bring them into the presence of God; on the other hand, it is to bring God into them as love, grace, and fellowship.

All Christians are familiar with the word blessing. One hymn even says, "Count your blessings, name them one by one." Undoubtedly, the concept of blessing expressed in this hymn is that blessing is a matter of being given a good wife, children, education, promotions, houses, and cars. According to this hymn, these are the blessings we should count one by one. More than thirty-five years ago, I sang this hymn during the last few hours of the year. I would gather some together and say, "Let us count the blessings of this past year,

one by one." But the blessing according to the pure Word is much different from this. According to the Old Testament pattern of the blessing by the priest and the New Testament pattern of blessing by the Apostle, the proper blessing is to bring people into the presence of God and to bring God into them as grace, love, and fellowship that they may enjoy the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Hence, blessing is a matter of enjoying the Triune God.

VI. THE LORD'S BLESSING CROSSING MAN'S NATURAL MANEUVERING

Now we come to some practical points concerning blessing. The Lord's blessing crosses man's natural maneuvering (48:13-20). When Joseph brought his sons Manasseh and Ephraim to Jacob, he maneuvered the situation so that the firstborn, Manasseh, would be in front of Jacob's right hand. The father put the firstborn in front of the grandfather's right hand to receive the first blessing and the second in front of the left hand to receive the second blessing. Joseph's maneuvering was according to the natural concept. According to the natural concept, Joseph was right. However, Jacob crossed his hands. Although his eyes were dim, he was very clear in his spirit. Genesis 48:17 says, "And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it was evil in his eyes: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head" (Heb.). Then Joseph said, "Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn: put thy right hand upon his head" (v. 18). Jacob refused and said, "I know it, my son, I know it" (v. 19). Thus, the Lord's blessing crossed man's maneuvering.

Because parents have their natural taste, natural choice, and natural concept, they are always maneuvering the situation. But maneuvering must be crossed out. I have done a good deal of maneuvering, even in the preaching of the gospel. As I considered the audience, including some who were brilliant and very promising, I said to myself, "These are the good ones." However, most of them never believed at all or else believed in a sloppy way. But others, whom I considered useless, believed in a good way and became useful.

Another kind of maneuvering is found in the church service. In the past we thought that certain ones were trustworthy, spiritual, and superior. But many times we were disappointed because they did not measure up to our expectations. Our maneuvering does not correspond to God's blessing. Maneuvering is our choosing, our selecting. More than thirty years ago I said, "These are very good. They are growing, they will be built up, and they will be one." Eventually, however, the best ones did not come from the group I had chosen; they came instead from another direction. This is an instance of the crossing of hands.

The Lord never places His hand according to our maneuvering. Therefore, in our families, in the preaching of the gospel, and in the church service, we must learn to keep our hands off. We should simply bring our two sons to God and trust them to His sovereign hand. We all are Josephs. We like to bring our Manasseh to the right hand of the Lord and our Ephraim to His left hand. But time after time the Lord crosses His hands. If you consider the church life and study church history, you will see that God's blessing is always sovereign, never subject to man's maneuvering. For example, Peter was a leading one in Jerusalem. Do you believe he prayed that Saul of Tarsus would become an apostle? Certainly not! Rather, Peter might have prayed, "Lord, Saul is too active. I ask You to bind him." But the Lord's hand crossed over the twelve Apostles and was placed upon Saul. Apart from Peter, James, and John, nothing is mentioned about the other Apostles in the book of Acts after the first chapter. But as Saul was on the way to Damascus, the Lord guided His hand purposely, and the blessing came upon him.

We parents should not have our own taste concerning our own children. We simply cannot tell which of them the Lord will choose. We cannot foresee which of our children will be saved. It absolutely does not depend on our maneuvering; it depends on the Lord's blessing.

In the church life I have come to have no trust in my choice. Often my hand has been held back in the choice of elders, deacons, and the leading ones in the church service because I have no trust in my discernment. Most of the time our choosing leads to maneuvering, and God's crossing hand comes in to bless the one we did not choose. Those who are parents and those who are leading ones in the church service must be careful about their choosing. Do not exercise any kind of maneuvering according to your likes and dislikes, for God's blessing always crosses our maneuvering.

There is something about Jacob's blessing of Ephraim which should be very encouraging to us all. Probably there have been times when you considered yourself hopeless and useless. During the past few months I heard of many who were disappointed and felt this way about themselves. Some even felt that life was meaningless. Some may have said, "I have believed in the Lord Jesus, and I have come into the church life. I know that I must function in the church, but I have not been chosen to do anything. Apparently, there is no hope for me. If I cannot function in the church, then life has no meaning." Be encouraged; you are not through. Among many churches, especially the large churches, there has been an atmosphere that made people feel they are not needed. Although in a large church only a few can be elders, everyone is still important. Do not maneuver your situation in any way, for the Lord's blessing hand will cross over to you.

Although we never know where the spiritual blessing will go, we do know that the blessing hand of the Lord always crosses man's natural maneuvering. You may say, "This is the firstborn," but He says, "I know it." The Lord's crossing His hands may be evil in your eyes, but it is altogether beautiful in His eyes. Blessing does not depend on your maneuvering; it depends on God's desire and selection. In any selection we make there is the possibility of maneuvering according to our taste or choice. Do not maneuver, and do not be disappointed. Rather, believe that the Lord's hand will cross over to you.

VII. MAN'S NATURAL CONCEPT HOLDING BACK THE LORD'S BLESSING HAND

We have seen that Joseph tried to hold back his father's blessing hand. This indicates that man's natural concept holds back the Lord's blessing hand. In the church life, the Lord will raise up many we do not like, and some of them will become the best elders. Surely I have had my human feelings, concepts, and tastes. But my natural concepts have been crossed out. We simply do not know from which direction Saul of Tarsus will come. The one you think is the best may turn out to be the worst. But one of the opposers will become today's Apostle Paul. Although you do not like him, the Lord likes him. Many will be raised up who do not fit your

concept. Forget your selection. It will never work. If it did, there would be no need for predestination. This is the reason the New Testament nowhere records the names of the children of the Apostles. Only the names of the spiritual sons are given. Paul called Timothy his "child in faith" (1 Tim. 1:2) and Titus his "genuine child according to the common faith" (Titus 1:4), and Peter spoke of "Mark my son" (1 Pet. 5:13). The names of the Apostles' children are not mentioned because not all of them were predestinated. Likewise, we must also admit that not all our children have been predestinated. However, do not allow the matter of predestination to cause you to neglect the preaching of the gospel. To do that is to go to an extreme. Do not maneuver anything. Simply bring the boys to God and let Him make the choice. Do not let your natural concept hold back the Lord's blessing hand.

VIII. JACOB'S SUPPLANTING HANDS BECOMING BLESSING HANDS

Jacob's supplanting hands eventually became blessing hands (25:26; 47:7, 10; 48:14-16). In chapter twenty-five we see that Jacob began his supplanting even when he was in his mother's womb. How skillful he was in supplanting! But in chapters forty-seven and forty-eight we see that these two supplanting hands have become blessing hands, bringing people into God's presence and ministering God into people so that they may enjoy Him. Would you have believed that Jacob's supplanting hands could become the blessing hands of a mature person? Here we see the growth and maturity in life. A supplanter, a heel-holder, became the greatest person on earth at the time. He was able to bless Pharaoh because he had become greater than Pharaoh. He became this kind of person by the way of life. We need the growth in life and the maturity in life so that we may be filled with Christ to become those who are able to bless others.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS MESSAGE NINETY-SIX THE SHIFTINGS OF THE BIRTHRIGHT IN THE SCRIPTURE

Genesis is a book of seeds. In this message, a parenthesis in our life-study, we shall consider another one of these seeds—the seed of the shifting of the birthright.

Perhaps you have never imagined that the birthright could be shifted. The birthright is the special portion of the firstborn. In nearly every race of people, especially in ancient times, the firstborn in a family inherited a special portion. Among the ancient Jews, this portion was usually a double portion of the land. According to the Bible as a whole, the birthright includes the double portion of the land, the kingship, and the priesthood. The priesthood brings people to God, and the kingship brings God to the people. The book of Genesis reveals that this birthright can be shifted from the firstborn son to the second son. In this book there are at least four cases of the shifting of the birthright: from Esau to Jacob (25:22-26, 29-34); from Zarah to Pharez (38:27-30); from Reuben to Joseph (49:3-4; 1 Chron. 5:1); and from Manasseh to Ephraim (48:12-20).

Furthermore, in the New Testament the birthright is shifted from Israel to the church. In Luke chapter fifteen the Lord Jesus indicates by means of the parable of the prodigal son that the publicans and sinners are like the second son, and that the self-righteous Pharisees are like the first son (Luke 15:1-2, 11, 25-28). However, in Matthew 21:28-32 the Lord shifts the birthright from the Jews to the publicans and harlots. Here the Lord reveals that the publicans and harlots are like the firstborn son who at first did not obey his father's word but later repented and obeyed it. Then the Lord likened the Pharisees to the second son who said that he would fulfill his father's word, but who actually did not obey it. Originally, the Jews were the first son. At the beginning of the Lord's ministry, they were still first. But at the end of His ministry, the Lord Jesus shifted the birthright from the Jews to the church. His word in Matthew 21:28-32 was spoken at the end of His ministry. In these verses the Lord likened the publicans and the harlots to the firstborn. The church is composed of redeemed and regenerated sinners. In God's economy they are the ones who have received the birthright. Hence, Hebrews 12:23 speaks of the church of the firstborn.

I. FROM ESAU TO JACOB

In 25:22-26, 29-34 we see the shifting of the birthright from Esau to Jacob. Although Esau was the firstborn (v. 25), Jacob was predestinated to have the birthright (v. 23). The shifting of the birthright from Esau to Jacob reveals that receiving the birthright is a matter of predestination. It does not depend on our natural birth. Although you may be an Esau by birth, this does not mean that you are predestinated to have the birthright. This is absolutely a matter of God's sovereignty; it does not depend on us. As we consider the five cases of the shifting of the birthright, we must worship God for His sovereignty and say, "O Lord, we thank You for Your sovereignty. Everything depends on Your sovereign predestination."

Jacob, the one predestinated to have the birthright, was very covetous and did everything possible to get the birthright himself. When Jacob and Esau were still in their mother's womb, they were fighting over the birthright. I believe that this fight was initiated by Jacob. But, according to God's arrangement, Esau was stronger. If you read the Bible carefully, you will see that Esau, as a hunter, was strong and rather large in physical stature. Jacob, on the contrary, as one who stayed home with his mother, must have been rather small. I do not believe that a husky young man would always stay home with his mother. Because Jacob was smaller and weaker than Esau, he could not obtain the birthright by fighting for it with his physical strength. Although Jacob fought for the birthright in the womb, Esau defeated him, was born first, and gained the birthright. Jacob's struggle had been in vain.

Jacob, however, refused to give up the fight. I believe he stayed with his mother mainly for the purpose of conspiring with her to gain the birthright. Perhaps Jacob's mother eventually agreed to help him gain the birthright. In order to supplant his brother and gain the birthright, Jacob did two things. The first was to maneuver Esau into a situation where he was willing to sell the birthright to him (vv. 29-34). Jacob was exceedingly subtle and clever. He was very skillful. Through his cleverness he gained his mother's cooperation, and Rebekah, who was more clever than Isaac, stood with Jacob. This clever Jacob tempted Esau to sell his birthright.

Jacob probably observed Esau's activities over a period of time. He might have noticed that after hunting Esau was always hungry. Because hunting arouses one's appetite, a hunter enjoys a good meal after a hunt. Anyone who engages in exhausting activity, such as

hard work or play, afterwards desires some hearty and nourishing food. Jacob analyzed the entire situation—the environment, Esau's psychology, and Esau's appetite after hunting. Jacob might have said to himself, "Aha! I have a way to get the birthright. While Esau is hunting, I shall prepare soup for him." Genesis 25:29 says, "And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint." Esau was hungry, and the soup had been prepared. Esau said to Jacob, "Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint" (v. 30). To this, Jacob replied, "Sell me this day thy birthright" (v. 31). When a person is hungry, he will eat anything and pay any price for it. Thus, Esau said, "Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" (v. 32). Esau seemed to be saying, "The birthright is something for the future. What good does it do me now? But here is a bowl of soup in front of me. It is actual, present, and practical. Who knows when I shall have the birthright? I don't know when it will come. For now, I need something real and practical." Hence, Esau agreed to Jacob's proposal and sold his birthright. On the one hand, the birthright depends on God's sovereign predestination. But on the other hand, whether or not we shall have the birthright depends on our attitude and our deeds. Esau's attitude was poor, and his act was foolish. He was absolutely wrong to accept Jacob's offer. Nevertheless, using today's terms, he signed the contract and gave up his birthright.

Although Esau had sold the birthright, he did not have the standing to give the blessing of the birthright. This blessing was not in his hand; it was in the hand of Isaac, his father, the representative of God. Therefore, the second thing Jacob did to gain the birthright was to deceive his father into giving him the blessing of the birthright (27:18-29). Probably Jacob's maneuvering of Esau was initiated by Rebekah who, in all likelihood, had been maneuvering the whole situation. Jacob was the learner, and his mother was the tutor. After Esau had been maneuvered into selling the birthright to Jacob, Rebekah waited for the opportune time to help Jacob receive the blessing of the birthright from Isaac. Although this had to take place before Isaac died, it could not be too early. If it had been too early, Isaac's eyesight would still have been keen. Hence, Rebekah waited until Isaac's eyes were dim. When she heard that Isaac was about to bless Esau, Rebekah said to Jacob, "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee" (27:8). Rebekah seemed to be saying, "Now is the time to deceive your father." Jacob obeyed his mother and deceived Isaac into blessing him blindly. As a result, Jacob obtained not only the birthright, but also the blessing of the birthright.

Jacob's maneuvering, however, was unnecessary. If he had done no maneuvering or deceiving, God would have had a way to give him the birthright. Apparently, Jacob's maneuvering and deceiving helped him to acquire the birthright. Actually, it caused him to suffer. From the time Jacob deceived his father, he never saw his mother again. Although Rebekah loved Jacob, due to her cleverness she lost him and never saw him again. Jacob had to flee to Laban's home and suffer there under his hand for twenty years. Do not learn of Rebekah. If you do, you will suffer.

Through the case of the shifting of the birthright from Esau to Jacob, we see that the birthright depends on God's sovereignty. We also see that we should never maneuver or deceive in order to gain the birthright. In other words, there is no need for us to struggle for the birthright. Moreover, we should not be so loose as to sell our birthright. Although we may not be able to gain the birthright by our own effort, we can sell it if we have it. It was not because of his doing that Jacob gained the birthright, but Esau lost it because of his wrongdoing.

II. FROM ZARAH TO PHAREZ

In 38:27-30 we see the shifting of the birthright from Zarah to Pharez. This case illustrates the fact that the granting of the birthright does not depend on man's doing. Zarah was trying to come out first. He "put out his hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first" (v. 28). But human doing cannot manage, direct, or guide the birthright. Although the midwife never thought that Pharez would be born first, Pharez was actually born first (v. 29). When he came out, the midwife said in surprise, "How hast thou broken forth?" (v. 29). The Hebrew here is very difficult to translate. It may be rendered, "Wherefore hast thou made a breach for thyself?" or, "How hast thou made a breach! Breach be upon thee!" or, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" The midwife had to admit that Pharez had obtained the birthright. Hence, receiving the birthright does not depend on man's maneuvering.

III. FROM REUBEN TO JOSEPH

The third case of the shifting of the birthright, the shifting from Reuben to Joseph (49:3-4; 1 Chron. 5:1), contains a strong warning. Reuben, the firstborn, lost the birthright because of his defilement. God had intended to give the birthright to Reuben, the firstborn, but Reuben lost it by indulging in defilement. The birthright was shifted from Reuben to Joseph, who fled from that kind of defilement (39:7-12). God is just. He took the birthright from the one who indulged in defilement and gave it to the one who fled from it. (Although the birthright was shifted from Reuben to Joseph, Joseph received only the double portion of the land. He did not receive the priesthood or the kingship. Rather, Levi received the priesthood and Judah, the kingship.)

Never think of fornication as something insignificant. God hates it. We live in an age of Sodom. The whole world today, including the United States and especially Sweden and France, is a Sodom. Many men and women live together without being married. Certainly this will bring in God's judgment. In the Bible God exercised a special judgment over Sodom because the people there indulged in lust without any restriction. Nothing offends God more than this indulgence. Nevertheless, many young people today, even young women, have no sense of shame regarding this. Indulging in fornication will always cause you to suffer loss. There will be no need for God to judge you deliberately because a natural judgment will come upon you spontaneously. The case of Reuben reveals that, although you may be predestinated to have the birthright, you may lose it by indulging in fornication.

Every Christian who commits fornication will lose his birthright. This birthright includes the full enjoyment of Christ with the priesthood and the kingship. To have the birthright is to have the right and the position to enjoy Christ in full. It is also to have the right to be priests and kings. If we lose our birthright, we lose the enjoyment of Christ. Any Christian who commits fornication loses this enjoyment immediately. This sin will also keep any believer from being a priest and a king. Furthermore, no fornicator will enter into the millennial kingdom to have the fullest enjoyment of Christ and to be a priest of God and a king with Christ (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5). Only the overcomers will share this enjoyment, be God's priests, and be the co-kings of Christ. Take heed: defilement may cause you to lose your birthright.

IV. FROM MANASSEH TO EPHRAIM

Now we come to the fourth case, the case of the shifting of the birthright from Manasseh to Ephraim (48:12-20). Manasseh was the firstborn (v. 14). When Joseph brought Ephraim and Manasseh to Jacob to be blessed by him, he tried to maneuver the blessing of the birthright according to the natural birth (vv. 13-17). However, Ephraim received the blessing of the birthright because Jacob crossed his blessing hands (vv. 14, 17-20). I have the strong feeling that Joseph's maneuvering of the situation reminded Jacob of the maneuvering he had done in his youth. He might have remembered how he had maneuvered his brother to obtain the birthright and deceived his father to receive the blessing. As Jacob crossed his right hand and placed it upon the head of Ephraim, the second son, he might have said to himself, "Jacob, there was no need for you to maneuver anything. Ephraim is not doing anything, yet you place your right hand upon him. Why did you maneuver so much when you were young?" I believe that, as Jacob crossed his hands, he had very deep feelings within him. If Joseph and his sons had not been present, Jacob might have openly expressed his regret. You may think that you are right in maneuvering certain situations. But after a number of years you will feel ashamed of what you have done and say, "What a shame it was to do those things!"

We must believe that Jacob did not guide his own hands. Certainly they were guided by the Spirit. The Spirit's guidance was a blessing to Ephraim, but it was a rebuke to Jacob. Perhaps the Lord said to him, "Jacob, you didn't need to do anything. Look at Ephraim. Although he is doing nothing, he is receiving the birthright. Why did you maneuver so much and cause yourself such suffering?" Like Jacob, I also did certain things when I was young, but I later regretted them. Young people, you need to realize that the blessing is not in your hands; it is in the hands of the old ones. Whether we shall cross our hands and place our right hand upon your head does not depend on you. It depends on us. If you want to receive the blessing, you must have the old ones. If you stay away from them, you will miss the blessing. The old ones will not bless you unless you honor them. Young people, you simply cannot go on without the blessing of the older ones. You desperately need their help.

V. FROM ISRAEL TO THE CHURCH

Now we come to the last case of the shifting of the birthright in the Scriptures, the shifting of the birthright from Israel to the church. This is very important. In Exodus 4:22, the Lord said to Moses, "Thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn." Although Israel was God's firstborn, Israel lost the birthright because of unbelief (Matt. 21:32; Rom. 11:20). According to Luke 15, in the beginning of His ministry the Lord still considered Israel, represented by the Pharisees, as the firstborn son and the publicans and sinners as the second son. But according to the enjoyment in Luke 15, it was the second son who received the birthright, for the second son enjoyed the fatted calf, which is Christ. This indicates a shifting of the birthright. By this we see that the Pharisees lost the enjoyment of Christ, but the repentant publicans and sinners gained this enjoyment. This means that they gained the birthright.

Toward the end of His ministry, in Matthew 21, the Lord indicated that the repentant publicans, harlots, and sinners, of whom the church was to be composed, were the first son and that the unbelieving Pharisees, representing Israel, were the second. Matthew 21:32 says, "For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and you, when you saw it, did not later regret it so as to believe him." Due to unbelief, Israel, the first son, was cut off, and the second son was grafted into the birthright. Thus, the repentant and believing sinners have become the constituent of the church, and the church today is called the church of the firstborn (Heb. 12:23). We in the church are a group of firstborn sons who possess the birthright. This birthright gives us the right to enjoy Christ to the fullest, to be priests of God, and to be co-kings of Christ. Although we have the birthright, the New Testament warns us of the possibility of losing it (Heb. 12:16-17). Be careful: you may lose your birthright.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE NINETY-SEVEN

BEING MATURED THE MANIFESTATION OF MATURITY

(2)

g) Prophesying with Blessing

In this message we shall consider another manifestation of Jacob's maturity in life: his prophesying with blessing (49:1-28). Although we are familiar with what it means to prophesy, we may not be familiar with prophesying with blessing. Genesis 49 is the only chapter that reveals this matter. Although Moses' blessing in Deuteronomy 33 is close to what is found in Genesis 49, the blessing there is not as rich as the blessing here. Both portions of the Word are prophecies concerning Israel, but in Genesis 49 there is a richer blessing than in Deuteronomy 33.

The prophesying in chapter forty-nine is a manifestation of maturity, for our speaking always reveals where we are and how mature we are. A baby cannot speak at all, but a child over a year old may begin to say a few words. His speaking reveals that he is a small child. It is the same with other age groups: a young man speaks like a young man, a middle-aged person like a middle-aged person, and a grandfather like a grandfather. Hence, our speaking not only represents our age, but also the kind of person we are. If you are quick, you will not speak slowly. If you are slow, you will not speak quickly. If you are a high person, you will not speak in a low way, and if you are a low person, you will not speak on a high level. Thus, our speaking reveals what we are and where we are.

It has been said that the wisest thing to do is not to speak at all. If I stood before a group of people without saying anything, they would not know whether I was deep or shallow, quick or slow. I would be a mystery. However, during the past fourteen years, every fiber of my being has been revealed to you all through my speaking. Even children seven or eight years old know me rather well because they have listened to my speaking. Because I speak so much, I am not able to conceal myself. The best way to conceal yourself is not to speak. During my early years in the ministry, I was quite wise, for I never said anything in the conferences of the co-workers. Because that was my policy, I was a mystery to the other co-workers, and no one could understand me. Although it is difficult to speak, it is more difficult not to speak. When the opportunity presents itself, you simply will not be able to refrain from speaking. I doubt if you could stay with me for sixty minutes and not say a word. I am certain that after a few minutes you would be speaking.

Now let us briefly trace the matter of Jacob's speaking as it is revealed in Genesis. The first record of his speaking is in 25:31, where Jacob said to Esau, "Sell me this day thy birthright." Gaining the birthright was the desire of Jacob's heart; it was his dream and aspiration. For a long time he had been waiting for the opportunity to get it away from Esau. When the opportunity finally came, the first word out of Jacob's mouth recorded in Scripture was the word about selling the birthright.

In chapter twenty-seven Jacob spoke in a deceitful way to Isaac, his father (vv. 19-20, 23). In 27:19 Jacob lied to his father, saying, "I am Esau thy firstborn." When Isaac asked how he had found the venison so quickly, Jacob said, "Because the Lord thy God brought it to me." Then Isaac said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (v. 22), and he asked, "Art thou my very son Esau?" (v. 24). To this, Jacob replied, "I am." Thus, Jacob's speaking in chapter twenty-seven was absolute falsehood.

Jacob's speaking in chapters twenty-nine through thirty-two is full of self-interest, self-ambition, and self-gain. Through his speaking recorded in these chapters many aspects of the self are exposed. Jacob's speaking was so selfish that it almost seemed that he did not have a spirit. If we had a brother like that among us, we would doubt that he had been truly regenerated.

Jacob's speaking to his brother Esau in chapter thirty-three was a performance. In this chapter Jacob several times addressed Esau as, "My lord" (33:13-14). Deep within, Jacob never recognized Esau as his lord. The reason he addressed his brother in this way was that he was afraid Esau would kill him. Jacob was an actor, a politician, and his display of humility before Esau was a performance.

By the time of chapter thirty-five, however, Jacob's speaking had undergone a change. His speaking in this chapter begins to resemble that of a regenerated person, a child of God.

In the chapters that follow Jacob's loss of Joseph, Jacob spoke very little. This indicates that, as we grow in life, our speaking will firstly change in nature. The characteristic of our speaking will change. Eventually, the amount of our speaking will be greatly reduced. The more we grow, the less we shall speak. At present you may not be able to withstand the temptation to speak. But after some years have gone by and you have had much more growth in life, you will not speak no matter how great the temptation is.

We can trace Jacob's progress in life by following his progress in speaking. The change in his speaking reveals his growth. Eventually, Jacob grew to the point that, even when he lost Joseph, he had very little to say. However, many of us have a great deal to say over such insignificant matters as losing a pair of socks. If a young brother in the brothers' house loses a pair of socks, he may shout, "Where are my socks? What has happened to them?" But when Jacob lost Joseph, the treasure of his heart, he did not say very much. This was a healthy sign. But talking a great deal over a pair of socks is a sign of immaturity, a sign of childishness. Too much talking reveals that you are childish. In this we see that our speaking is a sign of how much we have grown. There are some among us who used to be quite talkative several years ago. But now they talk very little. I hope that after another period of time, they will hardly talk at all. The reason for their not talking will not be that they are unhappy; it will be the fact that they have grown in life. The more we grow, the less we talk.

Consider Jacob's reaction at hearing the news that Joseph was alive and in Egypt. He said very little; in fact, he said hardly anything at all. If we had been Jacob, we would either have been furious with the other sons, ready to beat them, or we would have been extremely excited, running from one son to another and saying, "Joseph is still living!" In either case, there would have been a great deal of talk. But Jacob said very little. Furthermore, he had little to say after he had gone down to Egypt. When Jacob was ushered into the presence of Pharaoh, he did not say anything. Rather, he simply blessed Pharaoh. There was nearly no talk, but there were strong blessings (47:7, 10).

Because of his maturity, Jacob's word in chapter forty-nine was very weighty. Every word he uttered here became a prophecy. Because this chapter is so deep, it is closed to many Christians. They have neither probed the depths of this chapter, nor do they know what it is talking about. In Genesis 49 we see a person who has fully matured. This man does not speak in a shallow, light, idle manner; he speaks in a way that is full of life and maturity. This indicates that our growth in life will be manifested in our speaking.

This message on prophesying with blessing is quite deep. It is not deep in doctrine; it is deep in experience. Although few among us have come to the level of this experience of life, this message is still needed as part of our life-study of Genesis. It will help us both in the growth of life and in the matter of speaking. Be impressed with the fact that your speaking reveals where you are. Whenever you are about to speak, you should say to yourself, "My speaking reveals me." Realizing this will help us a great deal.

Jacob's word in chapter forty-nine is the kind of word that cannot be found elsewhere. It is not a word of instruction, encouragement, or exhortation. Neither is it merely a weighty word nor just a word of prediction. Rather, it is a word of prophesying with blessing. Although it is a prophecy, it is a prophecy saturated with blessing. It is not easy to speak this kind of word. Isaiah was the highest among the prophets. However, among the many prophecies in his book, it is difficult to find one prophecy with blessing. Isaiah prophesied, but he did not prophesy with blessing. But in Genesis 49 Jacob not only prophesied; he prophesied with blessing. His blessing flowed out of his prophetic word.

(1) Four Requirements
for Prophesying with Blessing

(a) Knowing God

In order to prophesy with blessing, we must fulfill four requirements. The first requirement is to know God, the desire of God's heart, and the purpose of God. God, God's desire, and God's purpose are all revealed through Jacob's word in this chapter. The remainder of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament are the development of Genesis 49. In other words, nearly the whole Bible is the development of Jacob's word spoken in this chapter. How high, deep, and profound is this word! This chapter is a very rich seed, a seed that undergoes a marvelous development in the rest of the Scriptures. In order to speak such a word, we must know God, we must know God's heart, and we must know God's purpose.

(b) Knowing People

The second requirement is to know people, to know the actual situation of every person involved. You may think that, because it

should be easy for a father to know his son, it was easy for Jacob to know his twelve sons. However, it is often very difficult for parents to truly know their children. Many times we know our children in a blind way like Isaac knew Jacob. Seemingly, we parents know our children; actually, we know neither what they are nor where they are. But Jacob had a thorough understanding of his sons. Every situation, condition, and hidden problem was clear in his sight. Likewise, if we would speak such a word in the church, we must know the church, the elders, and all the brothers and sisters. This is not easy. Although we meet together day after day, probably I do not know you too well. Although I have been meeting with the elders for a number of years, I still may not know them very well. We should not know people according to our mental understanding; rather, we must know them according to the spirit. Genesis 49 indicates that Jacob had a proper understanding of his sons. He knew their deeds, their situations, and their condition. Jacob was an expert in knowing people. He had a spiritual x-ray. As he was prophesying with blessing, this heavenly x-ray made the situation of each son crystal clear in his sight. His knowledge of his sons is expressed in his brief word about each one.

(c) Having the Riches

Although we may know God, God's heart, and God's purpose and although we may know the situation of others, we shall still not be able to bless them if we are poor. A certain dear one may be pure, absolute for God, and worthy of a rich blessing. However, if I am poor, what blessing can I grant to him? Spiritually speaking, I may just have a dime and I may need to keep two cents for myself. Thus, I could only give an eight-cent blessing. Jacob, however, was full of riches. Because he had no lack of riches, he could bless others. In fact, the capacity of those receiving his blessing fell far short of his riches.

(d) Having a Strong, Active Spirit

In addition to the three requirements already covered, we need a strong, active spirit. Jacob's word in this chapter was spoken as he was dying. When many Christians are about to die, not only their body, but their whole being is weak. Thus, they do not have a strong spirit to exercise in prophesying by blessing others. Although Jacob was dying physically, he was vigorous spiritually. In his body he was dying, but in his spirit he was strong and active. Therefore, in order to prophesy with blessing, we must have the knowledge of God, the knowledge of people and their situations, the riches of God, and a strong spirit.

(2) Not a Gifted Prophet

Due to the influence of today's Christianity, many think that only prophets can prophesy. But where is the verse saying that Jacob was a prophet? Jacob was not a gifted prophet predicting the things to come, but he still prophesied. In 49:1 Jacob said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days." This was the opening word of his prophecy.

Today many Christians are talking about the gifts. But what gift did Jacob have? I would say that the only gift he had was the gift of supplanting. In chapter forty-nine Jacob did not say "Reuben,..thus saith the Lord." Nevertheless, the most profound prophecy in the Bible is the one uttered by Jacob in this chapter. This is the only prophecy that requires the whole Bible for its development. Although it is such a deep prophecy, it was not spoken by a prophet or by a gifted person.

(3) A God-constituted Person

Jacob was not a gifted prophet; he was a God-constituted person. He was not constituted with gifts, with utterance, or even with function; he was constituted with God. Because he had been infused, saturated, and thoroughly permeated with God, his speaking was God's speaking. His word was God's word. Whether we consider his word a prophecy or a blessing, it is the kind of speaking that is lacking in the churches today. What the churches need today is the speaking of God-constituted persons.

At this point we need to consider some verses in 1 Corinthians 7. In 1940 I received great help from Brother Nee regarding these verses. In one of his talks he said that 1 Corinthians chapter seven reveals the peak of Paul's Christian experience. When I first heard this, I could not understand it, because it was very different from my concept. I was familiar with chapter seven of 1 Corinthians. I knew that it talked about marriage and virginity. Thus, I said to myself, "How can this chapter be the peak of the Apostle Paul's Christian experience?"

Brother Nee referred us to verses 10, 12, 25, and 40. In verse 10 Paul says, "But to the married I charge, not I but the Lord, A wife should not be separated from her husband." Here Paul was assured that the Lord's commandment was that Christian wives should not leave their husbands. Because Paul was convinced that this was the Lord's commandment, he was bold.

But in verse 12 he said, "But to the rest I say, not the Lord." Regarding the matter of a brother having an unbelieving wife, Paul said, "I say, not the Lord." If I had been there, I would have said, "Brother Paul, if it is not the Lord, then you should not speak. Since you know that it is not the Lord, why do you speak? We don't want to hear you. You are just a saved sinner; you should not say anything by yourself." When I heard Brother Nee speak about this verse, I said to myself, "If it was not the Lord speaking, why did Paul keep on talking?" Nevertheless, the word Paul spoke was recorded in the New Testament and became the word of God. According to verse 12, Paul's word became an inspired word in the Holy Bible.

Moreover, in verse 25 Paul said, "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give my opinion as having received mercy of the Lord to be faithful." If I had been there, I would have stopped him and said, "Brother Paul, since you don't have the commandment of God, please don't speak." Not only did Paul not have a commandment from the Lord; he even gave his opinion. We probably would have said, "Paul, we don't want to hear your opinion. We want to hear the word of the Lord." Although I had read 1 Corinthians 7 many times prior to hearing that word from Brother Nee, I had never seen these verses, and I was shocked when he pointed them out to us. Although Paul simply gave his opinion, for more than nineteen hundred years, his opinion has been regarded as the word of God. Thus, Paul's opinion became God's word.

Finally, in verse 40 Paul said, "But she is more blessed if she so remains, according to my opinion; but I think that I also have the Spirit of God." Here we see that Paul taught according to his opinion. According to Paul's opinion, a widow would be happier if she remained in her widowed condition. The reason Paul was bold to speak this way is given in verse 25: he had "received mercy of the Lord to be faithful." We need the mercy of the Lord to make us faithful to Him. If we have this mercy, we may be bold.

At the end of verse 40 Paul said, "But I think that I also have the Spirit of God." The little word "also" here means a great deal. Paul seemed to be saying, "I not only have my opinion; I also have the Spirit of God." Notice that Paul did not say, "I have the assurance," or "I believe"; rather, he said, "I think." This indicates that he was not certain. Although he did not have the assurance that he had the Spirit of God, we all recognize chapter seven of 1 Corinthians as the word of God. Eventually, as I was listening to Brother Nee that day in 1940, I agreed with his word that 1 Corinthians 7 records the peak of Paul's Christian experience. Paul's opinion was God's word.

In principle, it is the same with Jacob in Genesis 49. Whatever Jacob uttered in this chapter was God's word. Although it was his opinion, it was also the word of God. In 49:3 and 4 Jacob seemed to be saying, "Reuben, you are my firstborn; however, because you have been defiled, you cannot enjoy the preeminence of having the birthright." Jacob's word to Reuben was somewhat of a prediction, for it concerned the loss of the birthright; it was also somewhat of a curse, for it pointed out that Reuben was to be bereft of the birthright. This was not the speaking of a young man nor even of an ordinary human being. It was the utterance of a man who was filled with God, a man who had been constituted with God in his entire being. At the time of chapter forty-nine, Jacob was a God-man, a man filled, constituted, permeated, and even reorganized with God. Thus, whatever he spoke was God's word; whatever he thought was God's thought; and whatever opinion he expressed was God's opinion. Neither a young person nor a middle-aged person can speak this kind of word. It can only be uttered by one who has come to full maturity. Jacob's speaking in this chapter reveals that he had fully matured.

My burden in this message is to impress you all, especially the young people, with this fact that your speaking exposes where you are. If you have a lot to say when you lose your socks, that should remind you of your immaturity. This kind of reaction makes evident your need for the growth in life. Forget that pair of socks and seek to gain more life. If you have to say something, you should say, "I need more life." Do not say, "Where are my socks?" Rather, say, "Brothers, do you know where my growth in life is?" Whenever a brother asks about his socks, the others should say, "Here is your growth in life."

Many of us are talkative. We were born this way. It is our nature, disposition, and characteristic to be talkative. Whenever you are talkative you should be reminded that your talkativeness is a sign that you need to grow in life.

(4) Jacob, the Father in the Flesh,
and Israel, God's Mouth

Genesis 49:2 says, "Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father." This verse is in the form of Hebrew poetry, which is always written in pairs. The first part of the pair in verse 2 is, "Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob," and the second part is, "And hearken unto Israel your father." The begetting father was Jacob, and the speaking father was Israel. All twelve sons were born of Jacob, the father in the flesh, a supplanter, a heel-holder, and a liar. But the blessing and prophesying father was no longer a Jacob; he was Israel. In his natural being, Jacob could never have uttered such a word. It was only because of his maturity that he was able to speak this kind of word. Jacob did not say to his sons, "Hearken unto Jacob your father"; he said, "Hearken unto Israel your father." Israel was not only a transformed person, but also one matured in the divine life. We all would enjoy hearing testimonies from those who were Jacobs many years ago but who are now Israels. We need more Israels, those who speak not only for God, but also with God. Whatever they say is God's utterance. In Genesis 49 Israel was fully permeated, saturated, constituted, and reorganized with God. Because he was one with God, whatever he spoke was the word of God. Therefore, in this chapter we have a prophecy that is permeated with blessing.

Verse 28 says, "All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them." Is this a prophecy or a blessing? Although it is a prophecy, it is prophecy filled with blessing.

The Jacob in chapter forty-nine is spiritually and divinely knowledgeable. He knows God, and he knows the situations of his sons. Furthermore, he has the necessary riches with which to prophesy and bless. Therefore, he can speak a prophecy permeated with all manner of blessing. In his speaking there is no error, opaqueness, darkness, emptiness, or vanity. Rather, his speaking is a rich, deep, profound prophecy permeated with blessing. This is absolutely different from the "Thus saith the Lord" common among Christians today. In just a few minutes you may receive the gift to speak that kind of prophecy. But it takes many years to grow to the stature where you can utter the kind of word spoken by Jacob in this chapter. This is not a matter of gift or function; it is a matter of growth and maturity.

To be mature is to be constituted with God. All that God is must be constituted into our being. Every fiber of our being must be reorganized and permeated with the element of God. When this has taken place, like Jacob, we shall be the kind of person who can prophesy with blessing. In this maturity we are divinely knowledgeable, knowing thoroughly the things of God and the situations of other people. In this maturity we also have the riches to speak a blessing prophecy.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE NINETY-EIGHT

BEING MATURED THE MANIFESTATION OF MATURITY

(3)

In this message we shall continue with the subject of Jacob's prophesying with blessing (49:1-28). In the previous message we pointed out that although this word of prophecy was spoken by a man, it was nonetheless the word of God. Because, in his maturity, Jacob was one with God, whatever he said was God's word. Most Christians have a difficult time understanding Genesis 49. When I first began to study this chapter about fifty years ago, I found that it was not easy to learn the meaning of the prophecies recorded here. This is a very significant chapter, for it is virtually the conclusion of the book of Genesis.

According to the record of Genesis, the human race began with Adam and continued with Abel, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob. Eventually, Jacob was no longer an individual, because he became the father of a house that was chosen by God. This house, the house of Jacob (46:27), was composed mainly of Jacob's twelve sons. Later, these twelve sons became the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. This indicates that God's intention is to have a house, not individuals. The house of Israel was a type of the church, which is God's house today. In the Old Testament we have a house, the house of Israel, and in the New Testament we also have a house, the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15).

Whatever is spoken regarding the house of Israel is a type, a picture, and a shadow of the church. When I was with the Brethren teachers, they told us to differentiate those parts of the Bible that were for the children of Israel from those that were for the church. In a sense, this is correct, for we should not mix God's word concerning the house of Israel with His word concerning the church. However, because the church is a spiritual entity, it is difficult for us to understand it. Thus, we need the picture of the house of Israel in the Old Testament. The principle is that the Bible uses types and figures to portray spiritual things. Anything that is spiritual is mysterious. For example, because New Jerusalem is spiritual and mysterious, the Bible uses a city to illustrate it. Likewise, without the picture of the house of Israel, we would find it difficult to adequately comprehend the church. However, when we examine the picture in the Old Testament, we are able to understand many aspects of the church revealed in the New Testament. Therefore, what is spoken concerning the children of Israel is not only for them; it is also for us.

Based upon the principle of using types and pictures to portray spiritual realities, we must apply to ourselves all that is said about the twelve tribes of Israel. Physically speaking, of course, we are not the twelve tribes of Israel; however, spiritually speaking, we are the twelve tribes because they are pictures of us. If we want to know ourselves, we should look at the photograph of ourselves in these twelve tribes. Do not think that the prophecies in Genesis 49 are only concerned with the sons of Jacob. These prophecies probably concern us more than they do Jacob's twelve sons.

The number twelve is composed of three times four. Firstly, Jacob prophesied concerning his first three sons, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi (vv. 3-7). These three brothers are subdivided. Reuben stands alone, and Simeon and Levi are grouped together. According to their activities, Simeon and Levi were one.

Before we examine the significant aspects of Jacob's prophecy regarding Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, I wish to point out that according to Jacob's prophecy with blessing, it is possible for our natural status and disposition to be changed. Perhaps you were born good. But do not be proud of your goodness, for you may become bad. If you were born bad, you should not be disappointed. Rather, you should have the faith that you will become good. This is both a warning and an encouragement. As the firstborn, Reuben had the preeminence. However, he lost his preeminence, and his natural status, his status by birth, was changed. Therefore, we should neither be disappointed nor complacent. Instead, we should be careful lest we lose our birthright.

Moreover, although you were not actually born the first, you may become the firstborn. Joseph was born eleventh, but he eventually became the first. In most cases of the shifting of the birthright in the Bible, the birthright is shifted from the first to the second. Upon hearing this word, a thoughtful person may say, "I was born neither number one nor number two. I was born number eleven. No matter how many times the birthright is shifted, it will never be shifted to me." But be confident and be encouraged. Although you may be number eleven, God still has a way to make you number one. He did it with Joseph. Be impressed with the fact that it is possible for your natural status to be changed either for the better or for the worse. Do not blame God for making you number eleven instead of number one. If we try to blame God in this way, He may say, "Dear child, read Genesis 49 again. Although you were born number eleven, your status can be changed to number one."

Throughout the years, I have been speaking to the elders about their disposition. I admit that my word on this matter has been strong and sharp as a two-edged sword piercing into the brothers. When the elders ask me how they can be more useful, I always tell them that their usefulness depends upon their disposition. I have often told them that their natural disposition is the main reason they are not useful. Many have been disappointed by this word. But here in Genesis 49 there is some good news for those who have been disappointed about their natural disposition. In this group of three brothers we see not only that our natural status may be changed, but also that our natural disposition can be used by God. However, as we shall see later in this message, God can use our disposition only if certain conditions are met.

Jacob put Simeon and Levi together in his prophecy because they were the same in character and disposition. Their disposition was exposed in chapter thirty-four, the chapter that records the defilement of their sister, Dinah, and their revenge on Hamor and Shechem. Simeon, Levi, and Dinah were all born of the same mother. Thus, these brothers dearly loved their sister. When they learned that she had been defiled, their disposition was exposed by the way they killed all the males in the city of Shechem, plundered the city, and even hamstrung the cattle. How cruel they were! The cruelty of Simeon and Levi terrified Jacob. In his entire life Jacob had never been as frightened as he was in chapter thirty-four. Nevertheless, in God's sovereignty, the events in that chapter were a great help to Jacob's maturity. These events were the strong sunshine that helped to burn Jacob into maturity. Therefore, in chapter thirty-five we see a real change in Jacob's life.

Jacob, however, could not forget what Simeon and Levi had done. Hence, in 49:6 Jacob said of them, "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their company, my glory, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung oxen" (Heb.). The word "glory" ("honor" in KJV) refers to the spirit. What Simeon and Levi had done made such a deep impression on Jacob's spirit that he could not grant them any blessing. In Deuteronomy 33, however, Moses did bless Levi. The blessing in Genesis 49 was by a father who had a loving concern for his sons. But the prophecy in Deuteronomy 33 was by an old man who represented the law. Whatever he prophesied was the judgment according to the law. Nevertheless, that judgment was filled with mercy, and Levi received a blessing.

Although Jacob loved his sons and was very concerned about them, he could not give a blessing to Simeon and Levi. Genesis 49:5 says, "Simeon and Levi are brethren; their swords are weapons of violence" (Heb.). The word regarding Simeon and Levi being brethren means that they were companions, that they formed one company. Their swords were weapons of violence. As we have pointed out, verse 6 reveals their cruelty. In verse 7 Jacob said, "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." Jacob did not say, "Cursed be Simeon and Levi"; rather, he said, "Cursed be their anger and their wrath." Although they deserved to be cursed, their father did not curse them; instead, he cursed their

anger and exercised judgment over them to divide them. The best way to deal with those who are cruel is to scatter them. Regarding Simeon and Levi, Jacob seemed to say, "Simeon and Levi were too cruel. They showed no mercy or kindness. Yes, Hamor and Shechem were wrong in defiling Dinah. It would have been sufficient to kill them. Simeon and Levi didn't have to kill all the males of the city nor to hamstring their oxen. I will not allow them to stay together. The best thing to do is to scatter them."

(5) Concerning Reuben

(a) Being the Firstborn to Have the Preeminence
in Dignity and in Power

Let us now consider Jacob's word to Reuben. Because Reuben was corrupted, defiled, and full of germs, in Jacob's blessing with prophecy he is isolated from all the other brothers. Verse 3 says, "Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, the preeminence of dignity, and the preeminence of power" (Heb.). As the firstborn, Reuben had the preeminence in dignity and in power. Look at the words Jacob used to describe him: "my firstborn," "my might," "the firstfruits of my strength," "the preeminence of dignity," and "the preeminence of power."

(b) Having Lost the Preeminence of the Birthright
because of His Ebullition in Lust

Although Reuben had the preeminence of the birthright, he lost it because of his defilement. Verse 4 says, "Ebullient as water, thou shalt not have preeminence; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch" (Heb.). The Hebrew word rendered "unstable" in the King James Version is very difficult to translate. I believe that the best rendering is "ebullient," which means boiling, to move violently. Reuben, who was boiling over with lust, moved violently to defile his father's bed. In doing that, Reuben went too far. That indulgence in lust caused him to lose his birthright. Because in his ebullience Reuben had defiled his father's bed, Jacob said that he would not have preeminence. Thus, the preeminence of the birthright was taken away from him.

As Jacob was prophesying regarding Reuben in chapter forty-nine, he undoubtedly remembered that he had already given the birthright to Joseph (48:5-6). Jacob did not give it to Joseph by accident; rather, he must have considered the matter for a long time. According to 48:5, Jacob said, "And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine." Furthermore, in 48:22, Jacob said, "Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." Therefore, Joseph received two portions of the land, one portion for Ephraim and another for Manasseh. Eventually, this prophecy was fulfilled in Joshua 16 and 17. When the land was divided by lot, Joseph received two portions. This was not accomplished through human maneuvering; it was accomplished through lot, which was controlled by God for the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy.

At this point I need to say a strong word, especially to the young people. Do not think that defilement is an insignificant matter. We were made by God in His image. Because we have the image of God, we are honorable, even according to our natural make-up. Although other sins may not damage our body, fornication causes direct damage to our physical body, a vessel of honor (1 Cor. 6:18; 1 Thes. 4:4). Because we have been regenerated, our body is now the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Therefore, not only do we bear the image of God in our physical body, but after regeneration our body is the temple of God. Therefore, you must keep your body in an honorable way. Nothing damages your body as much as fornication. The practice of the world today is utterly hellish, devilish, and satanic. How devilish it is for young people to have contact with one another without any restriction! I wish to warn all the young people, even the young brothers and sisters in the church life, to exercise certain restrictions upon their contact with one another.

As a young brother coming into the ministry, I went to Shanghai to receive help from Brother Nee. During those days, Brother Nee had many long talks with me. The first instruction he gave me, as a brother in the Lord's ministry, was never to contact a member of the opposite sex alone, but, for my protection, to always have the presence of a third party. I have never forgotten this word; it has been a great help and protection to me. By the Lord's mercy, I have followed his word throughout the years.

We are fallen human beings, and we all have lusts. None of us can say that he does not have lust. In 1930 there was in my home province a particular so-called Pentecostal movement. A certain group declared that because they had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they no longer had any lusts. Thus, males and females began to live together. However, this practice resulted in fornication, and great shame was brought upon the Lord's name. Because of the fornication among this group, the door to the gospel was closed in that district for quite a period of time. Approximately fifteen years ago, the same kind of thing occurred in Korea. Many Korean Christians who had had so-called Pentecostal experiences began to contact one another without restriction, and the result was fornication.

Remember, you are still in the flesh. For a male and a female of the same age to be alone gives opportunity for the enemy to tempt them. Because your past experiences have already convinced you of this, there is no need for me to say too much. Never consider fornication as an unimportant matter. As we have seen, nothing damages your honorable physical body as much as fornication. What a shame it is that some of those in the government want to legalize homosexuality! To do this is to turn this country into a Sodom.

Reuben lost the preeminence of the birthright because of one sin. Today this preeminence is the top portion of the enjoyment of Christ. The double portion of the land signifies the top portion of the enjoyment of the riches of the all-inclusive Christ. Once anyone commits such an awful and terrible sin, he is through with the top enjoyment of Christ. Not only the young people but even those who are middle-aged must be aware of the danger of being alone with a member of the opposite sex. To do this is to take a great risk, for it opens the door for the subtle one to come in. You do not know how subtle and how evil your flesh is. The lusts in our flesh are terrible! Thus, we should have no trust in ourselves. Do not think that it is impossible for you to commit such a thing. The best protection is following the word I received from Brother Nee.

Do not say that my word is the word of a conservative Chinese man from the Far East, and that you live in modern America. As one who is over seventy years of age, I have passed through all the human experiences. Please take heed to my word regarding fornication. Again and again in the New Testament the Apostle Paul issued the warning that no fornicator would have any

inheritance in the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5). When we come to Matthew 5 in our life-study, we shall see how strict the Lord Jesus was regarding this matter. Never be loose in contacting members of the opposite sex. For the Lord's name, for the church's testimony, for your protection, and for the honor of your physical body, you must follow this principle of not being alone with a member of the opposite sex. If you follow this principle, you will be preserved. Remember, due to his defilement, Reuben's natural status, the status derived from birth, was altogether changed.

(c) In Danger of Dying and Decreasing

In Deuteronomy 33:6 Moses uttered a prophecy regarding Reuben. This prophecy, a judgment according to the law, was spoken through an experienced, sympathetic old man. Moses said, "Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few." This word implies that, according to the law, Reuben should have died. According to his sin, Reuben should have died (Ezek. 18:20). Although Reuben should have died, Moses was merciful in executing the judgment of the law. As an old judge, he judged the twelve tribes according to God's righteous law, but he nonetheless judged mercifully and sympathetically. Moses was concerned either that Reuben would die or that the number of his tribe would be greatly decreased. By this we see that fornication not only causes us to lose our birthright; it may also cause us to die or to be decreased. Therefore, we must flee fornication (1 Cor. 6:18).

Joseph received the birthright because he fled from the very defilement that Reuben indulged in (39:7-12). Joseph did not go in the house purposely to be with Potiphar's wife. He was a servant working in the house, and she tempted him. Joseph fled from this temptation. Whenever this temptation comes, the only way to deal with it is to flee. Do not talk or reason with the other party—run away. Reuben lost the birthright because of his defilement, and Joseph obtained it because of his purity. God is righteous, just, and fair. Reuben was on the dark side, and he lost; Joseph was on the bright side, and he gained. Because Reuben was in danger of dying, or at least of being reduced, Moses prayed that he would not die. Anyone in the church life who commits fornication will be in a very dangerous position. He will not only lose the top portion of the enjoyment of Christ; he will be in danger of dying or of being reduced. This is the experience of Reuben.

The birthright is composed not only of the double portion of the land, but also of the kingship and the priesthood. As the firstborn, Reuben should have inherited all three blessings. Due to his defilement, he lost not only the double portion of the land, but also the kingship and the priesthood. As we have seen, the double portion of the land was given to Joseph, the kingship was given to Judah (1 Chron. 5:2), and the priesthood was given to Levi (Deut. 33:8-10). This typifies that today, if we allow ourselves to be defiled, we shall lose the double portion of enjoying Christ, the kingship, and the priesthood.

(6) Concerning Simeon and Levi

(a) Receiving No Blessing because of Their Cruelty

We have seen that Simeon and Levi received no blessing because of their cruelty (34:25-30). Their cruelty in slaughtering and plundering the city of Shechem frightened their father to such an extent that he could not give them any blessing. Their indulgence in their disposition caused them to lose the father's blessing.

(b) To Be Scattered in Israel

Jacob was frightened by Simeon and Levi's cruel disposition. Hence, he would not allow them to dwell together. Rather, he exercised judgment over them to scatter them among the children of Israel so that they would not be able to behave cruelly according to their disposition.

(c) Simeon Being Omitted in Moses' Blessing

Simeon was omitted from Moses' blessing recorded in Deuteronomy. According to the righteous law of God, Simeon had no ground to be blessed. It is not an insignificant matter to be omitted from the record of God. Simeon was altogether too natural, never exercising any restriction over his natural disposition. I believe he was the one who initiated the plot to kill Joseph. Therefore, when Joseph's brothers came down to Egypt the first time, Joseph arranged for Simeon to be kept in prison. While he was in prison, Simeon might have said to himself, "I shouldn't have done that to Joseph." Simeon must have had a very cruel disposition. No matter what our disposition may be, we should not indulge in it. Simeon lost all the enjoyment of Christ through indulging in his disposition. He needed to share another's rich portion of Christ, the rich portion of Judah. Because "the part of the children of Judah was too much for them," Simeon was scattered among the people of Judah (Josh. 19:1, 9).

(d) Levi Receiving the Priesthood
because of His Faithfulness to the Lord

Although Simeon and Levi were companions, Levi eventually took the opportunity to have his natural disposition changed. Both Simeon and Levi had a disposition to kill others. But at the time the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf, Levi's killing disposition was used by God (Exo. 32:29). When Moses came down from the mountain with the tablets and saw the people worshipping the golden calf, he said, "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me" (Exo. 32:26). Out of all the tribes, only one tribe, the tribe of Levi, gathered together unto Moses. Why did Simeon not join Levi? They were of the same natural disposition. However, when God's call came, one answered it, and the other refused to respond. This indicates that, although we may have a very ugly disposition, our disposition may still be useful in God's purpose. However, there are certain conditions that must be met. Firstly, we must consecrate ourselves; secondly, we must exercise our disposition against our natural likes and dislikes; and thirdly, we must use our disposition in a renewed, transformed way. Because the inhabitants of the city of Shechem were Levi's enemies, it was easy for him to kill them. But it was quite another matter to kill parents, brothers, sons, and relatives. In order to do this, you must exercise your disposition against your desire and use it in a new way, a way that is both for God and with God. Both Simeon and Levi, having a killing disposition, were able to slay others. However, the slaying of the men in Shechem did not require them to exercise their disposition against their own desire. Simeon did not join Levi in carrying out Moses' command because he was not willing to pay the price. Simeon might have said, "It was all right to kill the people of Shechem, but it is crazy to kill our brothers, our children, and our relatives. Yes, they all worshipped the idol. But God is merciful, and He will forgive them. Why must we kill them?" At that time, these two companions were separated. The one used his natural disposition for God, with God, and in a new way, and the other did not. Levi used his disposition in the way of transformation. Thus, Levi's natural disposition, his slaying disposition, was

transformed.

Do not think it is impossible for your disposition to be used by God. It may be used by Him if you use it against your natural desire and in a transformed way. I have known some brothers whose will was very strong. Perhaps you would say that their will was stubborn. But because their stubborn will was used for God, with God, and in a new way, they were used by Him. God cannot use one whose will is like jelly. Such a will must be transformed into steel. The principle here is that our natural disposition can be changed and used by God. Levi not only slaughtered the men of Shechem, but also hamstrung their oxen. Through transformation work a disposition was not only used by God to kill the idol worshippers, but also to slay the sacrifices for offerings to God. Our natural disposition will be useful if three conditions are met: consecration, using it against our natural desire, and using it in a renewed and transformed way.

Because Levi's disposition was changed, he became a great blessing. God's Thummim and Urim were with him (Deut. 33:8), and he had the privilege of coming into the presence of God to serve Him. Although the double portion of the land is rich, the privilege of entering God's presence is intimate. The priesthood can be considered as the sweet portion of the birthright. Levi received this portion.

(e) The Scattering of Levi Becoming a Blessing
to the Children of Israel

In 49:7 Jacob said that Levi should be scattered among the children of Israel. According to Joshua 21, this prophecy was fulfilled through the casting of lots. Because of Levi's faithfulness and absoluteness, Levi was scattered among the children of Israel. Moses, a God-man, was very happy with Levi. However, he could not annul the prophecy of Jacob; rather, he had to fulfill it. Therefore, the Lord said to Moses, "Command the children of Israel, that they give unto the Levites, of the inheritance of their possession, cities to dwell in; and ye shall give also unto the Levites suburbs for the cities round about them" (Num. 35:2). Each of the twelve tribes had to set aside some cities for the Levites. The selection of these cities was made by lot. There was no maneuvering in this matter, for the lot did not permit the exercise of any maneuvering. Altogether, the Levites were given forty-eight cities (Num. 35:6).

Out of these forty-eight cities, six were to be cities of refuge (Num. 35:6; Josh. 20:7-9). These cities were conveniently located throughout the land of Israel. Three were on the east side of the Jordan, and three were on the west side. A manslayer could easily flee to one of these cities of refuge. Therefore, the scattering of Levi according to the curse actually became a blessing. The Levites brought people to God and God to the people. Thus, in ancient times, it was a blessing to have some Levites in your city or in your territory (Judg. 17:7-13).

These cities of refuge are a type of Christ. We all are manslayers, and Christ is our city of refuge. Do you really think that you have never slain anyone? We all have slain our parents, our husband or wife, or our children. The brothers in the brothers' house have all slain one another. After we have slain someone, we need to flee to a city of refuge; that is, we must run to Christ.

The scattered Levites not only brought others to God; they also brought God's refuge to sinful people. We may apply this to our situation today. If we are true Levites, wherever we are, Christ will be present as a city of refuge for others. Our dwelling will be a city of refuge into which sinners can flee for salvation. In this way we bring God's refuge to sinful people. The sinners do not need to run to a cathedral; they simply need to flee to God's refuge, to the cities where God's priests dwell. In these days the saints in Anaheim are grouping together according to neighborhoods. I hope that each group will be a city of refuge and that many unbelievers will flee to this refuge. In this refuge those who have committed sins will find the covering they need. Because there are so few Levites, there are hardly any places of refuge in the city of Anaheim. We must be today's Levites. We must be desperate, absolute, and faithful to slay our fleshly desires so that we may be God's Levites, God's priests. If we are Levites, then wherever we live, our dwelling place will be a city of refuge into which sinners may run for salvation.

Through the cases of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi we see the possibility of either losing or gaining. Whether we shall lose or gain depends upon our attitude and upon our reaction to various situations. May God have mercy on us so that we may react in a way that will cause us to gain and not to lose.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE NINETY-NINE

BEING MATURED THE MANIFESTATION OF MATURITY

(4)

In this message we come to 49:8-15, the most difficult section of this chapter. In order to understand these verses, we need a strong spirit and a clear mind.

As I pointed out in the last message, the twelve sons of Jacob are divided into four groups of three. This is not according to my opinion; it is absolutely according to the arrangement of the Bible. The books of Moses reveal that the twelve sons of Jacob are arranged in three different orders: the order according to birth, the order according to blessing, and the order according to encampment. Let us first consider the order according to birth. Jacob's twelve sons were born of four mothers. The first was Leah, Jacob's proper wife. The first four sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, were born of Leah. The second mother was a maid named Bilhah. Jacob's fifth son, Dan, and his sixth, Naphtali, were born of her. Jacob's seventh and eighth sons, Gad and Asher, were born of another maid, Zilpah. The ninth and the tenth, Issachar and Zebulun, were also born of Leah. Finally, Joseph, the eleventh, and Benjamin, the twelfth, were born of Rachel. This is the order according to birth.

In the order according to blessing, the first three sons are Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, the same as in the order according to birth. They are followed by Judah, Zebulun, and Issachar. Thus, the first two groups in the order according to blessing include the six sons born of Leah. However, in the order according to birth Issachar precedes Zebulun, but in the order according to blessing Zebulun

comes before Issachar. The third group includes Dan, Gad, Asher, and Naphtali. According to birth, the order was Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher, but according to blessing, it is Dan, Gad, Asher, and Naphtali. Later we shall see that Gad was moved from this group and replaced Levi in the group with Reuben for encamping. The fourth group is composed of the sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin, the same according to blessing as according to birth. (In the encampment, Joseph became two tribes through Ephraim and Manasseh.)

In the book of Numbers we see the order according to encampment. This book reveals that the twelve tribes of Israel were encamped around the tabernacle. At that time, they were armies, and they camped as armies. The arrangement of the tribes around the tabernacle went from the east, to the south, to the west, and then to the north. According to the encamping order, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun were on the east, toward the sun; Reuben, Simeon, and Gad on the south; Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin on the west; and Dan, Asher, and Naphtali on the north. Gad was placed with Reuben and Simeon because Levi had been uplifted and taken into the tabernacle, the center of the camp. Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin were the equivalent of Joseph and Benjamin. Through Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph became two tribes to inherit the double portion of the land.

In the foregoing message we considered the first group in the order according to blessing in Genesis 49: Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. In that message we saw mainly the changing of the birthright and the transformation of the natural disposition. The outstanding feature of the first group is that it reveals that our natural status and disposition can be changed. In this message we come to the second group, composed of Judah, Zebulun, and Issachar. Verses 8 through 15 are very difficult to understand. In order to understand chapter forty-nine, we must know the Bible in black and white. Furthermore, we must know the history of the children of Israel, we must have the experience of Christ and the church life, and we must know how to allegorize the Bible. If you do not know how to allegorize the Scriptures and interpret the poetry of the Bible, how could you be able to understand such a portion as Genesis chapter forty-nine? In verse 9 Judah is likened first to a young lion and then to a lioness, and verse 11 speaks of the choice vine and of binding the foal to the vine. When those who oppose the allegorizing of the Bible read this portion of the Word, they will have no way to understand it. Verse 13 says that Zebulun will be a haven of ships and dwell at the haven of the sea; verse 14, that Issachar is a strong ass couching between the sheepfolds; and verse 15, that Issachar saw that "rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant." What does all this mean? Because this is so difficult, very few Christians have any understanding of it at all. The only way to understand it is to allegorize it.

However, it is not an easy matter to allegorize the Bible. In order to understand such a portion as 49:8-15, we need several things: the knowledge of the Bible in black and white; the knowledge of the history of the children of Israel; the experiences of Christ and the church life; the wisdom to allegorize the Bible; and the knowledge of how to apply the types to today's situation. When we have all this, then we shall be able to see the true significance of this portion of the Word.

The Bible is very economical. Not one word is wasted. Jacob's prophecy with blessing in chapter forty-nine is poetry. Poetry is the most thoughtful and meaningful form of writing. Jacob's utterance of prophecy with blessing is stately and filled with grandeur.

(7) Concerning Judah

As we consider these verses, we need to be impressed with the fact that in the first group, composed of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, Christ has not yet come. We do not see Christ in Reuben, in Simeon, or in Levi. What we see in Levi is his absoluteness, his desperation, and his faithfulness. It was due to these characteristics that the Lord gave him the priesthood. Although Levi had the priesthood with the Urim and Thummim, we do not see Christ in him. Only when Judah comes does Christ appear. Judah typifies Christ. In fact, we may even substitute the name of Christ for Judah in this prophecy. Although Jacob had twelve sons, Christ came only out of Judah. In Revelation 5:5 He is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Hence, because Christ came out of Judah, He belongs to Judah. In order to understand verses 8 through 12, we must apply these verses to Christ and substitute the name of Christ for Judah.

We can all testify from our experience that once we were Reubens. Were you not a sinful Reuben before you were saved? Were you not, like Reuben, one boiling over with lust? We also were Simeons, those who were natural and filled with the natural disposition. Everything we did was according to our lusts and our disposition. But praise the Lord that we were saved and became a Levi! Now we are qualified to come into the presence of God and, with the Urim and Thummim, to receive God's vision and God's revelation. Furthermore, as priests, we can bring others into God's presence and learn the Lord's mind regarding them. Is not your experience somewhat like this? Although you may be the least among the saints, day by day you come into the presence of the Lord. As you stand in His presence, you sense that there is something shining and enlightening within you. This is the Urim and the Thummim. At times you bring others to the Lord and pray for them. Perhaps you say, "O Lord, remember my father, my brother-in-law, and my sister-in-law." This is the priesthood. Neither Reuben nor Simeon had a function like this. Only Levi did. And we also have it today. We are no longer Reuben and Simeon; rather, we are today's Levi.

However, although I had been a Levi for years, I can testify that I had little experience of Christ. Thus, in addition to the experience of Levi, we need the experience of Judah, that is, the experience of Christ. It is good to come into the presence of the Lord to receive enlightenment, revelation, and vision, and it is good to bring others into His presence. Nevertheless, we still need Christ as a young lion, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Have you ever experienced Him as a strong lion? As the young lion, Christ is for fighting, for putting His hand on the neck of His enemies. To place the hand on the neck of our enemies means to defeat them, to subdue them, and to gain the victory over them.

(a) Praised and Worshipped by His Brothers

Verse 8 says, "Judah, thy brethren shall praise thee: thy hand shall be upon the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee" (Heb.). Here we are told that Judah's brothers will praise him and that his father's children will bow down before him. This means that Judah's brothers will praise and worship him for his victory. Does this actually refer to Judah or to Christ? It refers to Christ. Thus, I say again, we may substitute Christ for Judah and declare, "Christ, Thy brethren shall praise Thee, and Thy Father's children shall bow down before Thee."

Verse 9 says, "Judah is a young lion: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up," and verse 8 says, "Thy hand shall be upon the neck of thine enemies." We need to see the picture portrayed here. A lion dwells on the mountain. When he goes after some prey, he descends from the mountain. As he is waiting to seize his prey, he crouches. But after he has taken his prey, he brings it up the mountain with him. Thus, the words, "From the prey, my son, thou art gone up," mean that the lion has gone up the mountain to devour his prey. After eating it, the lion no longer crouches; instead, he couches, that is, he lies down. This indicates that, after swallowing up his prey, he is satisfied and lies down to rest.

We need to apply this picture to Christ. Christ was firstly the young lion crouching as He waited for His prey. After seizing His prey, He brought His captive to the heavens where He enjoyed him. This reminds us of Ephesians 4:8, which says, "When he ascended up on high, he led a train of vanquished foes" (Gk.). This train of vanquished foes was Christ's prey. Now, after enjoying the prey He has captured, He is satisfied and rests in the heavens. To put it in plain words, this means that Christ is now sitting on the throne in the heavens. But according to the poetry of verse 9, after devouring His prey, Christ was satisfied and couched to enjoy His rest.

Have you ever seen such a vision or experienced such a Christ? In your experience, do you have Christ as a young lion? Do you also have Him as the satisfied lion who lies down to rest? Years ago, when I was young, I was troubled by many kinds of enemies. But one day I saw that my enemies had already become a prey to my Christ. My temper, my problems, my weaknesses, and all my other enemies were Christ's prey. He went to the cross and captured them, and in resurrection He led a train of vanquished foes to the heavens for His enjoyment. Now, in the heavens, He is no longer fighting; He is couching. He is lying down to rest, and I am experiencing Him as a resting lion. He is couching, and I also am resting. Why should I be troubled by anything? I simply need to enjoy this victorious, satisfied, and resting Christ.

I know the situation of the brothers and sisters, especially of the young people. In the last message you learned that you were a Levi. However, during the past week, you have probably been troubled by some enemies. Perhaps an enemy came in through your roommate, your parents, your husband or wife, or your own disposition. But after you have read this message, I hope you will also be able to say that you are a Judah. Immediately after Levi, Judah appears. This means that Christ has come. Today our Christ is no longer the young lion; He is the resting lion. When the Apostle John was weeping because no one was qualified to open the scroll of God's mystery, an elder said to him, "Do not weep; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome to open the scroll and its seven seals" (Rev. 5:5). This verse does not say that our Christ will overcome; it says that He has overcome already. He has captured the prey and swallowed him. Hallelujah, all the enemies have been devoured by Christ! Today Christ is not the fighting One; He is a couching One, the resting One sitting in the heavens. If you see this, you will forget your enemies, your temper, and the troubles caused by parents and children, and you will say, "Hallelujah! Lord, I worship You and praise You! Lord, You were the young, fighting lion. But today You are resting in the heavens as the victorious lion. And now I am partaking of all You have done."

Notice that, according to the Hebrew, verse 9 says, "He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lioness." Why does this verse first speak of a lion and then a lioness? The young lion is for fighting, for gaining the victory, and couching is the sign that the fighting lion has won the victory, has devoured the prey, and is now resting in satisfaction. Here we firstly have the young lion and then the couching lion. But what is the significance of the lioness? It is that the lion is about to bring forth many cubs, many baby lions. Thus, Christ is not only the fighting lion and the resting lion, but also the producing lioness. Christ is our mother lion, and we are all His lion cubs. In the last message we saw that we have become priests. In this message we need to see that we also have been made lion cubs. When the enemy troubles you, you should realize that you are a baby lion. Let the enemy challenge us all he wants. We are not merely priests; we are also lions. Christ is the producing lioness who has brought forth us as His many cubs.

The last part of verse 9 says, "Who shall rouse him up?" Some versions say, "Who dares to rouse him?" This means, "Who dares to defy Him?" Today, not only is Christ the lion; we also are lions.

(c) Producing Kings, Rulers, and Christ

Verse 10 says, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be" (Heb.). The scepter here denotes the scepter of the kingship or of the kingdom. Psalm 45:6 says, "The sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre." The scepter, a symbol of the kingdom, refers to the kingly authority of Christ. Thus, the scepter in verse 10 refers to Christ's kingdom, Christ's kingship. For the scepter never to depart from Judah means the kingship will never depart from Christ.

Hebrew poetry is written in pairs; hence, "the ruler's staff" in this verse is synonymous with "the sceptre." Undoubtedly the ruler here is Christ. The Hebrew word for ruler in this verse means lawgiver. Christ is the One who gives the law, for He has the staff and the scepter. He is the Ruler who has the authority, the staff and the scepter of the kingship.

This verse says that the ruler's staff will not depart from "between his feet." The words "between his feet" are a poetic term denoting seed or posterity. Thus, they refer to Judah's descendants. This means that the tribe of Judah will always have kings. According to 1 Chronicles 5:2, Judah has the kingship, and rulers come out of his posterity.

(d) Having Shiloh

This authority will continue until Shiloh comes. The word Shiloh means "Peace bringer." Most good Bible teachers agree that Shiloh refers to Christ in His second coming. When Christ comes the second time, He will come as the Prince of peace, as the One who brings peace. At that time, the whole earth will be filled with peace.

Verse 10 also says, "And unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be." The peoples here are equivalent to the nations. At the second coming of Christ, all nations will submit to Him and obey Him. Isaiah 2:1 through 3 and 11:10 indicate that from the beginning of the millennium at the Lord's second coming, all nations will obey Christ. They will come to Him to receive God's instructions.

Verse 11 says, "Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes." This verse is extremely difficult to understand. In the Bible an ass, or donkey, signifies one who labors very hard, especially laboring in the matter of transportation. Even the Lord Jesus rode upon an ass into the city of Jerusalem (Matt. 21:5, 7). Although an ass is usually used for labor in travel, in verse 11 the ass is not laboring; it is bound to the vine. This signifies that labor was over, that the destination has been reached, and that the rest has begun. Do not think that the word "binding" in this verse is negative. No, it is very positive. Any ass used for long journeys would certainly enjoy being bound to a vine. Whenever a rider binds an ass to something, even to a stake, the ass will be happy. In the poetic language of verse 11, the binding of the ass depicts rest. According to this verse, even the donkey has stopped his work. The ass here is not bound to a stake, but to a fruitful vine full of vegetation.

If we consider this picture, we shall see that it signifies that labor is over and that the harvest has come. We know that this verse refers to the harvest because it speaks of wine, the produce of the vine. This implies the riches of the harvest. The latter part of verse 11 says, "He washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes." This indicates that there is an abundance of wine. The supply of wine is so bountiful that people not only drink it, but even wash their clothes in it. Revelation 6:6, speaking of famine, says, "Do not harm the oil and the wine." This warning indicates the scarceness of wine during famine. However, in Genesis 49:11 there is an abundance of wine. The words "the blood of grapes" refer to grape juice. Have you ever seen a country with such riches that its inhabitants even washed their clothes in grape juice? Although America is a rich land, it is not that rich. What a picture we have in verse 11! This picture shows that labor is over and that rest in the enjoyment of the riches has begun, even for the donkeys. Now is not the time for sowing the seed; it is the time of harvest. Verse 11 is a poetic description of the millennium, the coming age of the thousand years. In that age, labor will cease, and instead of labor, there will be rest. If you still choose to labor, you should bind your ass. Do not loose it. According to Leviticus 23, on the day of the feast of Tabernacles, no one was permitted to work. Labor was prohibited because everything had been accomplished. All that remained was to enjoy the produce of the rich harvest. The feast of Tabernacles typifies the millennium. During the millennium there will be no labor because all the labor will have been completed in the preceding dispensations. The asses, the laboring ones, will be bound. Instead of labor, there will be the rich enjoyment of an abundant harvest. There will be so much wine that we shall wash our clothes in it.

Verse 12 says, "His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk." In the Bible wine symbolizes the joy of God's salvation of life. The first miracle the Lord Jesus performed was that of changing water into wine (John 2:1-11). This wine signifies not only redemption, but also the salvation of life and the salvation in life. When we have the salvation of life, this salvation becomes the wine that constantly stirs us to rejoice. Along with the wine, we have milk. Just as the source of the wine is the vineyards, the source of the milk is the sheepfolds spoken of in verse 14 (Heb.). Milk signifies the nourishment of life that satisfies us.

When someone is dying of starvation, the area around his eyes becomes greenish grey. But in this verse the eyes are not greenish grey; they are "red with wine." Furthermore, the teeth are "white with milk." The calcium contained in milk produces healthy teeth with the proper color. These figures regarding the eyes and the teeth indicate that, when the asses are bound and labor is over, the produce of the rich harvest will be more than sufficient. It will be so adequate that people will even wash their clothes in wine. Eventually they will have eyes that are red with wine. Also, their teeth will be strong and white.

This rest and enjoyment depend on Christ as the fighting, resting, and producing lion. As such a lion, He has brought forth us, His baby lions. Because the work has been accomplished, there is no need for us to labor. Instead, we should simply rest and enjoy the rich produce of the good land. Today we are enjoying the wine and the milk. Whenever people look at us, our eyes should be red and our teeth white. This is a picture of the church life today and of the millennium in the coming age.

Even in today's church life, all the asses should be bound. Often the brothers and sisters bring a laboring ass with them to the meeting. This indicates that they are still laboring and journeying and that they have not yet come to their goal, their destination. But all these asses must be bound. Because we have already entered into rest and have come to our destination, there should be no laboring or journeying. We have reached our destination, our goal, the place where we can enjoy the boundless supply of wine and milk. Do you still need a laboring donkey? Some of the older ones always have a donkey with them. It seems they are still journeying, still laboring. After hearing one of my messages, they expect to labor and journey even more. But verse 11 says that we must bind our ass to the rich vine. This means that we must cease our laboring and our journeying. Today, in the church life, we are in the goal, the destination. Here there is no labor, only rest and enjoyment. I expect to see all the asses bound. Instead of laboring, go home to wash your clothes in wine. Then come to the next meeting with red eyes and white teeth. Come full of milk, full of joy and nourishment.

(8) Concerning Zebulun and Issachar

(a) Zebulun Being at the Haven of the Sea

After Judah, Zebulun comes in. Verse 13 says, "Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for a haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon." This verse says Zebulun is a haven for ships. The method of transportation here has been changed from asses to ships. We cannot understand the poetry in this verse without referring to the New Testament. The fulfillment of this verse is in Matthew 4:15, which says, "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, way of the sea beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations." Christ began His ministry from Zebulun in Galilee, and it was the Galileans who brought the glad tidings of Christ to all the earth. The Galilean disciples were a haven of ships. They brought forth the good news of Christ as the fighting, resting, and producing lion to every part of the world represented by Zidon.

(b) Zebulun Rejoicing in Going Out

Deuteronomy 33:18 says, "Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out." According to this verse, Zebulun had to go out. And Zebulun did go out. All the Galileans went out with the glad tidings of the victory of Christ, bearing the word of the victorious, restful, and productive Christ. These Galileans went forth with Christ's victory, Christ's satisfaction, and Christ's productiveness. This is the glad tidings.

Although Zebulun went out, Issachar stayed in the tents (Deut. 33:18). Thus, Zebulun rejoiced in going out, and Issachar rejoiced in his tents. One had to go out, and the other had to stay.

Genesis 49:14 says, "Issachar is a strong ass couching down between the sheepfolds." In interpretation, this is linked to the foal and the colt, the young ass, in verse 11. The young ass there is tied to the rich harvest; hence, the strong ass is couching, resting, here. Issachar is not working; he is couching, that is, he is lying down and resting between the sheepfolds. Are you today's Issachar? Are you couching or laboring? Some think I am always working. But they are wrong. They do not realize that my working is my couching. There is a hymn which says that as we work, we rest. If I do not work, I have no rest. The more I work, the more I rest. As I am working, I am couching. In the Lord's recovery there is no need for laboring asses. Although we need strong asses, they should couch, not work. According to the picture portrayed in this verse, Issachar is couching between the sheepfolds. Although the strong ass does nothing, the sheep produce the milk. I can testify that I am a strong ass couching down and watching the sheep produce milk. While you are producing the milk, I am resting.

(d) Issachar Enjoying Rest in the Rich Land
and Becoming a Servant under Taskwork

Verse 15 says, "And he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant under taskwork" (Heb.). Issachar saw that the rest was good and that the land was pleasant. Issachar, the strong ass, is resting and enjoying the pleasant, rich land, which is Christ. At such a time, he bows his shoulder to bear burdens and thus he becomes a servant under taskwork. This means that he serves in order to have something to offer to the Lord. Instead of "under taskwork," the King James Version says "unto tribute," which is a payment given as an offering. Without experience, we cannot understand this matter. According to Christian experience, proper Christians do not labor as hard-working asses. Rather, they rest as strong asses. While they are resting, they enjoy the riches of Christ. Through the enjoyment of these riches, they become willing to bow their shoulder, take up a burden and serve for tribute rendered to the King. In the proper church life, we do not labor as common asses. Instead we lie down to rest and enjoy both the finished work of Christ and the riches of Christ. By this enjoyment we are willing to bow our shoulder and lift up a heavy burden, serving to gain tribute to render to our Master, our King. Although this will be completely fulfilled in the millennium, we have a foretaste of it in the church life today.

In the church life we experience our Christ as the fighting, resting, and producing lion. Due to His victorious work, there is a rich produce, a rich harvest. Thus, there is no need for our labor. But there is the preaching of the glad tidings concerning Christ; for Zebulun, the haven of ships, sends out the good news of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. We also have the experience of Issachar. We are not laboring; rather, we are resting and enjoying the riches of Christ. As we rest and enjoy Christ in such a way, we are willing to bow our shoulder to bear a heavy burden to do the taskwork, the work assigned by our King-Master, so that we may be able to render tribute to our King. Thus, today's church life is a miniature of the coming millennium. If you pray over all the points covered in this message and digest them, you will see that in this portion of the Word we have a portrait of the coming millennium. This portrait reveals that we may now participate in a miniature of the millennium. By considering this picture, we shall know where we must be today.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS
MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED
THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE BLESSING PROPHESIED
CONCERNING JUDAH, ZEBULUN, AND ISSACHAR

(1)

In this message I am burdened to give a further word on 49:8-15. The language used to describe the group composed of Judah, Zebulun, and Issachar is strange, new, and foreign to our understanding. In these verses a number of figures are used in relation to Judah: a young lion, a couching lion, a lioness, the scepter, the ruler's staff, the foal bound to the vine, the ass's colt bound to the choice vine, the garments washed in wine, and the clothes washed in grape juice. Have you ever heard of someone washing his garments in wine or his clothes in grape juice? Verse 12 speaks of eyes that are red with wine and teeth that are white with milk. With respect to Zebulun we have the figure of a "haven of ships" (v. 13), and Issachar is likened to a "strong ass couching down between the sheepfolds" who sees that the rest is good and that the land is pleasant and who bows his shoulder to become a servant under taskwork (vv. 14-15, Heb.). All these points are rich, and we need to be impressed with them.

None of these points could be covered in Genesis 1, an account of God's creation. According to the record of Genesis 1, on the sixth day God made man in His own image. At the time of Genesis 1 it was impossible to have a word about Judah being a young lion, a couching lion, and a lioness, or a word about tying our donkey to the vine. Neither was it possible to hear of garments washed in wine. Although in Genesis 2 we have a garden and the two trees, we find none of the points mentioned in 49:8-15. Because these matters are part of the prophecy with blessing uttered by a man who was both transformed and mature in the divine life, they can only be found in chapter forty-nine.

In Genesis 2 Adam was wonderful, for he was able to give names to all the animals. This indicates that he was very capable. However, although he could name the animals, he could not utter a prophecy with blessing. Adam was merely a created being. He did not have the divine life wrought into him. In Genesis 1 and 2 he had not yet fallen. In a sense, we need to appreciate the fall of man. The children who fall the most are the strongest. A child who has never fallen is surely very weak. Adam, the man in Genesis 1, was perfect, but he was not very strong. However, Jacob, the man in Genesis 49, was not only perfect, but also strong. If this transformed Jacob had been surrounded by serpents, he still would not have fallen. Instead, he would have crushed the head of those serpents and cut off their tails. Which do you prefer to be—Adam in chapter one or Jacob in chapter forty-nine? I prefer to be Jacob.

In chapter forty-nine Jacob uttered a prophetic blessing which Adam could never have spoken. Only Jacob was qualified to utter such a blessing. Adam, however, was altogether unqualified for this because he did not have the divine life wrought into him and he was never transformed or matured in the life of God. But Jacob was not only created and fallen; he was regenerated, and the divine life

had been wrought into him. Although there is no record that Adam's name was changed, we are told that Jacob's name was changed to Israel. Adam means "red earth," but Israel means "the prince of God." Do you prefer to be red earth or the prince of God? Red earth can never prophesy such a word as Jacob spoke in chapter forty-nine.

Jacob passed through the full experience of man's fall. I doubt that anyone else has ever fallen as low as Jacob. Although Jacob's story is our biography, we cannot compare with him as far as the fall is concerned. Jacob was the expert in being fallen. No one can surpass him in this matter. Jacob cheated, robbed, and supplanted everyone, including his mother. The fact that he utilized his mother proves that he supplanted her. (To supplant a person is simply to utilize him, to usurp him.) On one occasion Jacob even did his best to supplant God. That night at Peniel Jacob exercised all his energy to grasp God, to supplant Him, and to compel Him to do something for him (32:24-31). Jacob, of course, could not defeat God. Eventually, God touched his thigh, and Jacob became lame. Because Jacob supplanted everyone, he fell all the way to the bottom. Nevertheless, eventually he was transformed and matured and reached the peak of the experience of the divine life. Therefore, in chapter forty-nine he was able to speak a rich word of prophecy with blessing.

Prior to this chapter it was impossible for such a word to be spoken, for there was no one transformed and mature enough to do it. Furthermore, before chapter forty-nine the proper environment had not been created. The imparting of a heavenly vision always requires a suitable environment. In order for Jacob to speak the word recorded in 49:8-15, he had to be transformed and matured, and he had to have the sons over whom to prophesy. Let us now consider the spiritual significance of the blessing prophesied in these verses, a portion of the Word that requires the entire Bible for its development.

I. CONCERNING JUDAH— THE GLAD TIDINGS OF CHRIST

Verses 8 through 12 concern Judah. Verse 9 says that Judah is a lion. In Revelation 5:5 Christ is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah. This proves that Genesis 49 needs Revelation 5 for its development. It also proves that these verses of Jacob's prophetic blessing require the whole Bible for their development. My burden in this message is to impress you with the spiritual interpretation of these verses.

We have seen that Genesis is a book of seeds. Nearly all the truths in the Bible are sown as seeds in Genesis. In the New Testament there are three main truths concerning Christ.

The first is the truth of the victory of Christ. The fact that Christ is victorious means that He has accomplished everything God required of Him. In this accomplished work He took care of sin, solved the problem of the world, defeated Satan, abolished death, and eliminated every negative thing. He has gained the full victory for the accomplishment of God's purpose. This is the victory of Christ, the first basic truth in the New Testament regarding Christ.

The second main truth is the truth of the authority of Christ, the kingdom of Christ. Because Christ has won the victory, He has been made Lord of all. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him (Matt. 28:18). Furthermore, He has received the universal and eternal kingdom of His Father. Thus, He has the authority, the kingship, and the kingdom.

The third main truth in the New Testament concerning Christ is the truth of the enjoyment and rest in Christ. Christ has accomplished everything in His victory and He has received the authority and the kingdom so that we may have enjoyment and find rest in Him. What enjoyment and rest we have in Christ! These three truths are a summary of the New Testament.

Because the New Testament is the harvest of the seeds sown in Genesis, we must now locate the seeds of Christ's victory, of Christ's kingdom, and of the enjoyment and rest in Christ. They are found in Genesis 49:8-12. These five verses contain three wonderful seeds: the seed of Christ's victory, the seed of Christ's kingdom, and the seed of the enjoyment and rest in Christ. How I thank the Lord and worship Him that, at this end time, He has opened this portion of the Word to us!

A. The Victory of Christ

1. Christ as the Young Lion Overcoming the Enemies

In 49:8 and 9 we see the victory of Christ. Genesis, a marvelous book, is a book of pictures. In his prophecy Jacob likened Judah to a lion in three aspects: a young lion, a couching lion, and a lioness. The young lion is for fighting, for seizing the prey. Verse 9 says, "Judah is a young lion: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up" (Heb.). The words "thou art gone up" imply that the young lion first had to come down. He came down from the mountain to the plain to capture his prey. After the young lion seized his prey, he went up to the mountaintop again to enjoy it. When Christ was on earth and was crucified on the cross, He was a young lion seizing the prey. And what a prey He captured! It included the whole world, all the sinners, and even Satan, the serpent. From seizing His prey Christ has gone up to the mountaintop, that is, to the third heaven. This means that from His victory, He has ascended to the heavens. Ephesians 4:8 says that when Christ ascended to the height, He led captive those taken captive. Christ gained the victory; He put His hand upon Satan's neck. Hallelujah, He has put His hand upon the neck of His enemies! As the young lion, He has overcome all His enemies. Many chapters in the New Testament reveal how Christ came as a young lion, how He went to the cross to seize His prey, and how He ascended to the mountaintop in the third heaven.

2. Christ as the Lion Couching in Satisfaction after Enjoying the Prey

Genesis 49:9 also says, "He couches, he lies down as a lion" (Heb.). Christ is also a couching lion, the lion couching in satisfaction after enjoying His prey. After a lion has enjoyed his prey and has been satisfied, he couches; he lies down to rest in satisfaction. The figure of the couching lion in verse 9 describes Christ as the One enjoying His rest in the heavens. After gaining the victory and enjoying the prey, He was satisfied. Thus, He is now resting in the heavens in His satisfaction. This rest and satisfaction is the issue of Christ's victory. Christ is no longer fighting; rather, He is couching.

3. Christ as the Lioness Producing Cubs

In verse 9 (Heb.) Christ is also likened to a lioness. As a lioness, He has produced many cubs. We all are Christ's cubs. In a very real sense, the church is lion country, and everyone in the church is a baby lion. Have you ever realized that you are a lion cub? If we saw the situation from God's viewpoint, we would realize that in the eyes of God the church is a country of lions. Toward men we are lambs following the Lamb; but toward Satan we are lion cubs. Although you may not have such a realization, Satan recognizes this fact. He knows that all the believers in the Lord's recovery are lion cubs. Frequently we need to tell Satan, "Satan, don't touch me. Don't you know that my family is the lion family?" Christ is the young lion, the couching lion, and the reproducing lioness, and we are His lion cubs. This is the full victory of Christ. This is why verse 8 says that Christ, typified by Judah, is to be praised and worshipped.

B. The Kingdom of Christ

1. The Authority and Kingship of Christ

Christ's victory brings in the kingdom (v. 10). Even on earth today, wherever there is a victory, there is also a kingdom. Christ ascended to the heavens, and there He was given all authority. There He also received the kingdom. If we have the divine sight, we shall see that the entire earth is the kingdom of Christ. The nations today use Christ's calendar. According to history, the kingdom belongs to the one whose calendar is used. The fact that the nations use Christ's calendar indicates that they are His kingdom. Even the nations who oppose Christ follow His calendar. For this reason, Christ may laugh at them and say, "Although you oppose Me, you are using My calendar. In this way you are recognizing Me as your King." Christ is the King, and everyone is under His rule. If you do not believe this, I would ask you to wait for a period of time. Eventually you will see that the whole earth will be the kingdom of Christ.

Christ has been commissioned with all the authority in heaven and on earth. This should not be merely a doctrine to us. We must realize that we are under His authority. Verse 10 says, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet" (Heb.). It is correct to translate the Hebrew word rendered "scepter" as "authority." To say that the scepter will not depart from Judah means that the authority will not depart from Judah. The scepter here signifies royal, kingly authority. Christ has this authority, and we all must come under it. We, the kingdom people, are under the heavenly ruling of Christ.

We Christians also need to learn how to exercise the authority of Christ. As we face certain hardships and difficulties, there is no need to pray in a begging way. Instead, we should pray with the exercise of authority. When the children of Israel were pursued by the Egyptians, the Lord told Moses to lift up his rod and stretch out his hand over the sea (Exo. 14:15-16). Moses did so. That was an exercise of divine authority. Likewise, instead of begging, we should exercise the authority of our King and command the difficulties to flee. Because we are under the heavenly ruling, we have the position and the right to speak to difficulties, hardships, and attacks. We may say to them, "You must flee. I do not allow you to remain." We all must learn to exercise such authority.

In order to exercise this authority we must first be under the ruling of Christ. If we are rebellious and command Satan to flee, he will say, "Who are you? I will not obey you because you don't obey Christ. As one who does not obey his King, you have no position to command me." Therefore, we must be the obedient kingdom people. Our obedience gives us the position to exercise the King's authority. This is the kingdom. In the kingdom everything has been accomplished, every enemy has been defeated, and every problem has been solved.

2. Christ Coming as the Peace-bringer

Verse 10 says that the scepter will not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until Shiloh comes. Shiloh means Peace-bringer. The proper kingdom is a realm of peace. If you do not have peace, you are not actually in the kingdom. The King must be the Peace-giver, the Peacebringer. When our King comes back, He will come as the great Shiloh who brings peace to the whole earth. But there is no need for us to wait until that day to enjoy Him as our Shiloh. We may enjoy Christ as Shiloh today.

Consider the example of family life. In a sense, family life is a stormy sea full of turmoil. We never know when a storm will come. I have been sailing on the family-life sea for many years, and I can testify that it is often very stormy. In Matthew 14 we read of the disciples' experience on a stormy sea (Matt. 14:22-33). When Jesus was about to go up into a mountain to pray, He charged His disciples "to step into the boat and to go before Him to the other side" (Matt. 14:22). When evening had come, the boat was being tossed by the waves. Eventually, after praying there on the mountaintop, the Lord came to the disciples in the boat, walking on the sea (Matt. 14:25). When He entered the boat, the wind ceased (Matt. 14:32). This is very meaningful. The storm ceased because there can be no storm where Jesus is. The storm is not afraid of us, but it is afraid of the heavenly King. Although the storm may trouble us, it cannot trouble Him, for He walks upon the waves. In the midst of the stormy family-life sea we should not pray in a begging way. Instead, we should exercise the authority and say, "Lord, You are walking upon the sea. You are the King and You have the authority. Now I exercise Your authority over this stormy situation." Try to pray like this.

In the eyes of God the victory has been won, the kingdom is here, and peace is present. Everything has been accomplished. Therefore, we should not look at our environment. In Matthew 14:28 Peter said, "Lord if it is You, command me to come to You on the waters." Peter seemed to be saying, "Lord, if it is You, give me the word and I'll come to You. You are walking on the sea, and I'll walk on the sea also." The Lord said, "Come," and Peter came out of the boat and walked on the water to go to Jesus (Matt. 14:29). Peter had the faith to jump out of the boat and to walk on the waves. But when he began to look at the environment, his faith disappeared, and he began to sink. Peter's experience is a lesson to us not to look at our environment, but to stand on the Lord's word. Faith is a matter of standing on His word. Faith is not based on the environment; it is based on the word of the Lord. If you jump out of the boat and stand on the Lord's word, many problems will be solved. You have prayed too many begging prayers. Instead of begging, issue a command to the environment and say, "I will not allow you to disturb me. Jesus is King. The kingdom is His, and He is Shiloh. Therefore, I must have peace in my surroundings."

Often before troubles come our way, we have accepted them already. This is entirely a matter of psychology. Before Satan, the subtle one, attacks you, he first takes you over in a psychological way. Job said, "For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and

that which I was afraid of is come unto me" (Job 3:25). Before Job's difficulties came upon him, he thought about those difficulties and became afraid of them. To be afraid of something means that you have already received it. Whenever you are fearful, you must immediately say, "Satan, get away from me. I am not afraid of anything, I do not accept this fear." Fear is Satan's calling card. If you accept his calling card, Satan himself will come. Every fear is a calling card. Before Satan sends you the actual difficulty, he first sends the fear of that difficulty. Do not accept Satan's calling card of fear—throw it away. This is a matter related to spiritual warfare. Some brothers have been afraid of being laid off from their jobs. A few days after they accepted this fear, they were laid off. Do not receive the thought of being laid off, but say, "Satan, I will never be laid off. Although everyone else may be laid off, I will still be employed. Because I am in the kingdom, I don't accept this fear." Christ has won the victory, and the issue of His victory is the kingdom.

3. The Submission and Obedience of the Nations

Genesis 49:10 says that unto Shiloh "shall the obedience of the peoples be" (Heb.). This word refers to the millennial kingdom. When Christ will come the second time as Shiloh, all the peoples will submit themselves to Him and obey Him. In principle, it is the same today. Where the authority and kingdom of Christ hold sway, there will be the submission and obedience of the peoples.

C. Rest in the Enjoyment of Christ's Riches in Life

1. Ceasing from Labor and Resting in the Enjoyment of Christ's Life

Now we come to the heart of my burden in this message. Verse 11 says, "Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine." We all must bind our donkey to the vine. I hope that this saying will become a proverb among us. In the Bible a donkey is an animal used for transportation. The prophet Balaam traveled by means of a donkey (Num. 22:22). When the Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem shortly before His crucifixion, He also rode upon a donkey (Matt. 21:5). According to the Bible, a donkey is always used for traveling toward a goal. To tie a donkey to something indicates that the journey is over, that you have arrived at your destination, and that you have reached your goal. To bind a donkey is not a negative thing. Any donkey would be happy to be bound to a vine. A donkey's labor is to travel to a certain destination with a certain goal. What a meaningful picture we have in 49:11! All the worldly people today are donkeys traveling, striving, laboring, and journeying to reach their goal. Without one exception, all Christians are also journeying, striving, and laboring donkeys. I certainly used to be like this when I was young. I was striving to overcome sin with the goal of one day becoming an overcomer. That was my destination, my goal. I continued my striving until the day I saw the vision of binding my donkey to the vine. I saw that there was no need for me to labor or travel to reach my destination because I had already come to my destination and I had already reached my goal. Our destination is the vine, the living Christ who is full of life. We must bind our donkey to this vine. This means that we must cease our labor and our striving and rest in Christ, the living One.

Suppose a brother tells you of his desire to be holy. Holiness is his goal, and the holy country is his destination. He tells you that he is striving and endeavoring to reach this goal; he is laboring to be filled with holiness and to dwell in the holy country. What would you say to this brother? You should say, "Brother, bind your donkey to the vine. There is no need for you to labor and strive to reach the goal of holiness. Christ is here. He is the vine, the source of life. Christ is so rich in life. Bind your donkey to Him. This means that you must cease your striving and rest in the rich, living Christ."

Suppose another brother, recently married, says to you, "Brother, as one in the Lord's recovery, I want to live a victorious life. My wife is a great test to me. Day and night I am striving to keep from being angry with her. My goal is never to lose my temper with my wife." What would you say to this brother? Firstly, you must be one who has had the experience of binding your donkey to the vine. After you have experienced this yourself, others may come to you with their problems. When they do, you should say, "You need to bind your donkey to the vine. Cease from your labor and your striving. There is no need for you to strive, because Christ has won the victory. The scepter, the kingship, and the kingdom all belong to Him. You simply need to rest in Him as the vine." How often have you heard that you must cease from your striving and simply rest in Christ, the source of life? I believe that many of us have done this. But I hope that in the recovery we shall have a new proverb to help us in this matter: Bind your donkey to the vine. This proverb is a proverb of rest. Sisters, why are you still striving? You need to bind your donkey to the vine. People used to bind their donkeys to stakes. But we do not bind our donkey to a lifeless stake; we bind it to a vine that is full of life. Just recently I have seen a clear vision concerning this matter. However, hundreds of times in the past I bound my donkey to the vine. I stopped my journeying, ceased my striving, gave up my goal, and forgot my destination. I could give up my goal because I had already reached it, and I could forget my destination because I had already arrived at it. Holiness is Christ. The power to overcome our problems with our wives is also Christ. We are already in Christ. How foolish it is to continue journeying, striving, and endeavoring! All such labor is vain. When I saw this vision, I bound my donkey to the vine.

When many young brothers first come into the church life, they are striving donkeys. In the meetings they even compete with the others. But whenever you strive, endeavor, and compete, you are not at rest. Instead of striving and competing, you should tie your donkey to the vine, which is Christ, the source of life, the One who is full of life. Christ is not only the vine, but even the choice vine, the very choice source of life. We must stop our labor and rest in Him.

Now we must see how to bind our donkey to the vine. In gaining the victory over the enemy, Christ is the lion. But to us He is the vine for our satisfaction and rest. It is through His victory that He can be the vine. If Christ had never won the victory, He could never be the vine to us. But because the victory is Christ's, He is our vine full of life. Thus, we must cease our labor and be tied to Him and rest in Him.

As some read this message, they may think that I have gone too far in interpreting these figures to apply to Christ. But if you do not interpret verse 11 in this way, how do you interpret it? What does it mean to bind your donkey to the vine? Some may say that this is a reference to the riches of the tribe of Judah, that it is a figure showing that the tribe of Judah was so full of wine that even the laboring donkeys could be bound to the vine. This is correct. But remember that verse 11 is also a picture and an illustration. We have

seen that according to Revelation 5:5 Christ is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Based upon the principle of interpreting the lion in verse 9 as the victorious Christ, we may say that the significance of binding our donkey to the vine is that we cease our labor at Christ who is the source of life. This is not an imaginative interpretation. It is a proper, genuine, and sound interpretation according to the principle of the Bible. We thank the Lord for giving us this proper interpretation. Hallelujah, we have the vine to which we can bind our donkey! Are you still laboring? Are you still striving and journeying to reach your goal? Even the young ones among us must say, "Praise the Lord! I don't need to labor, strive, or journey. I simply need to bind my donkey to the vine."

2. Soaking Our Behavior in the Enjoyment of the Riches of Christ's Life

Verse 11 also says, "He washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes." Years ago, I could not understand what it meant to wash our garments in wine and our clothes in the blood of grapes. In the Bible our behavior in our daily living is likened to garments. Figuratively speaking, garments or clothes signify our behavior. They represent our walk and acts. Hence, to wash our garments in wine and our clothes in grape juice signifies that we soak our behavior, our daily walk, in the enjoyment of the riches of Christ's life.

Both grape wine and grape juice are for nourishment. Grape juice is mainly for quenching our thirst, whereas grape wine is mainly for stirring up our excitement. Our thirst needs to be quenched, but our excitement needs to be stirred up. Every Christian must be "crazy," beside himself, in a proper sense. Every Christian who binds his donkey to the vine will be happy and excited. This is the function of grape wine. The grape juice that we drink is for quenching our thirst. On the one hand, the rich Christ stirs up our excitement; on the other hand, He quenches our thirst. We need to soak our behavior, our daily walk and actions, in the rich enjoyment of Christ's life. Then our behavior will be permeated and saturated with the full enjoyment of the riches of Christ's life. Then others will say, "Look at these Christians. Look at how they live and conduct themselves. Surely there must be something to what they are." This something is the rich life of Christ as the cheering wine to stir us up and as quenching juice to satisfy us. Such Christians are happy, satisfied, excited, and even beside themselves with joy. Because they are so excited, they become exciting. Their behavior, their daily walk, and all their actions are full of Christ's life as wine and as juice.

Are you the kind of Christian who is always dissatisfied? Are you a Christian who does not know how to be happy, who always has a wrinkled brow and a long face, who always looks sad? All those in the kingdom of Christ must be smiling, happy, pleasant, excited, cheerful, and satisfied. This indicates that we are soaking our behavior in the rich enjoyment of the life of Christ.

3. Being Transformed with the Rich Enjoyment and Rich Nourishment of Christ's Life

Through resting in the enjoyment of Christ's riches in life, we are transformed. Verse 12 says, "His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk." This signifies transformation by the rich life of Christ. When we are transformed in this way, our appearance is changed. Those who suffer from famine have a gray color around their eyes. Because they lack adequate nourishment, they are short of the blood supply to their eyes. But we, the kingdom people who enjoy Christ, are never undernourished. On the contrary, we are so fully nourished that our eyes become red. This indicates that we have been transformed from death to life. If my face were gray, you would be very concerned about my health, probably expecting that I would not live very long. But my face is not gray. My complexion is very healthy because I eat nourishing meals. Hallelujah, I have been transformed from death to life! According to verse 12, the eyes are red with wine. This redness does not come from outward coloring or painting, but from the inward, energizing wine.

Verse 12 also speaks of teeth that are white with milk. Our teeth have two functions. The first is to eat, to receive food into the mouth; the second is to help our utterance. The whiteness of the teeth here indicates the sound, healthy function of the teeth. Because I have received the proper nourishment, I have healthy, white teeth to take in God's Word as food and to utter His Word that others may be nourished. In order to take in the Word of God as our nourishment and to utter it for others' nourishment, we must have healthy teeth. Not many Christians are able to take in God's Word in a proper way or utter it in a strong way. But every sound, healthy Christian must be one who receives God's Word properly and who utters it richly.

We in the church life are ceasing from our labor, resting in Christ, and enjoying the riches of Christ's life as grape wine and as grape juice. We are also soaking our behavior in this rich enjoyment. Eventually, we shall have the fragrance of Christ. Then our entire being will be fully transformed and full of life, and we shall be able to take in God's Word as our nourishment and to speak it to others for their nourishment. This is the enjoyment and rest in the victorious Christ. Therefore, in verses 8 through 12 three significant seeds are sown: the seed of Christ's victory, the seed of Christ's kingdom, and the seed of our enjoyment and rest in Christ. These seeds, requiring the Old and the New Testaments for their development, are the real glad tidings, the true gospel. These glad tidings were proclaimed by Jacob in his prophecy with blessing concerning Judah.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED ONE

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BLESSING PROPHESIED CONCERNING JUDAH, ZEBULUN, AND ISSACHAR

(2)

According to the Old Testament, the twelve sons of Jacob are arranged in four groups of three. Jacob's prophetic word of blessing in chapter forty-nine is based upon these groups. We have already covered the first group, the group of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. That group was utterly evil in the eyes of God. Reuben was defiled, and Simeon and Levi were cruel. The record of the first group is the beginning of the record of the twelve sons of Jacob. What a poor beginning it was! However, this should be an encouragement to us because our beginning was also very poor.

The second group is composed of Judah, Zebulun, and Issachar. Because Christ comes in with this group, it is the group of victory. In this group we have the gospel, the preaching of the gospel, and the church life.

Some may think that it is too much to say that in Genesis 49 we find the preaching of the gospel and the church life as the issue of that preaching. Remember, the first tribe in the second group is Judah, and the most significant aspect of the record concerning Judah is the lion. Verse 9 says, "Judah is a young lion: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lioness" (Heb.). This verse is interpreted by Revelation 5:5, where Christ is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Without Revelation 5:5, it would be difficult to interpret Genesis 49:9. But with Revelation 5:5 before us, no one can deny that Judah signifies Christ.

Although the New Testament often interprets the signs and symbols in the Old Testament, it does not always give every detail of these interpretations. Regarding Judah as a lion, Genesis 49 has three aspects: the young lion, the couching lion, and the lioness. Revelation, however, simply speaks of the Lion of the tribe of Judah in a general way, saying nothing of these detailed aspects. Those who are legal would say, "Now don't go too far. We can only say what the New Testament says. We must not say any more." This is legality. Genesis 49 reveals that Judah is a lion in three aspects, but the New Testament only gives us an interpretation in a general way. Why then should we not continue on to supply the interpretations of the details?

There are at least two or three places where the New Testament indicates that it did not tell us everything (Heb. 5:11; 9:5; 11:32). Consider Hebrews 11:32: "And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, and both David and Samuel, and the prophets." Here the writer of Hebrews seems to be saying, "I do not have time to tell you everything. I have only included part of what the Old Testament says. I have left a great deal untouched." What then should we do about this? We must go to the Lord ourselves and inquire of Him. The writer of Hebrews took the lead to give us a way to interpret the Old Testament. He did not have the time to interpret everything for us. He left something for us to work out by going directly to the Lord ourselves. No one can disagree with this principle. Nevertheless, some Christian teachers argue that if the New Testament does not speak about a certain thing, we should not say anything about it either.

Although there is a very clear interpretation of Judah in Revelation 5, what is spoken in the New Testament concerning Zebulun and Issachar? There is a partial interpretation of Zebulun in Matthew 4:15, but there is no interpretation whatever of Issachar. According to those who insist that we should be silent when the New Testament is silent, we should not say anything about Issachar. But we do not agree with such a short-sighted concept. The fact that the tribe of Judah has a spiritual significance is fully proved by Revelation 5. Should not the tribes of Zebulun and Issachar have a spiritual significance as well? Would there be a spiritual significance to Judah, but no spiritual significance to the other tribes in the same group? To say this is not logical; it is absurd.

As we pointed out in the foregoing message, with Judah there are three main points: the victory of Christ, the kingdom of Christ, and the rest in the enjoyment of Christ's riches in life. We see the victory of Christ in verses 8 and 9, the kingdom of Christ in verse 10, and the rest and enjoyment of Christ's riches in life in verses 11 and 12. These three points are not an arbitrary interpretation of these verses. If you think my interpretation is arbitrary, I would ask you why in verse 9 the young lion is mentioned before the couching lion and the lioness. Why is there this sequence? Why is the lioness not put first? Following the threefold mention of the lion, we have in verse 10 the scepter and the ruler's staff, denoting the kingship and the kingdom. Why does the kingdom follow the lion? Why is it not mentioned first? After the kingship, we have, as the third item, the rest in the enjoyment of Christ's riches in life. If you do not follow the interpretation put forth in the previous message regarding binding the donkey to the vine, how do you interpret these words? What do they mean? Furthermore, what does it mean to wash your garments in the wine? Also, what is the meaning of eyes that are red with wine and teeth that are white with milk? As the New Testament only gives us the interpretation for verse 9 in Revelation 5:5, there should be some interpretations for verses 11 and 12. What are these interpretations? Concerning all the points in verses 9 through 12, we need to spend much time quietly in the presence of the Lord, saying, "Lord, what would You say about this? What does it mean to bind the donkey to the vine?" The Lord would say, "If you look into the Bible, you would see that a donkey is used for journeying toward a goal. This journeying donkey is always laboring." Then you would say, "Surely I am such a donkey. I need to bind this donkey to the vine." The vine spoken of in verse 11 is Christ. In John 15:1 Christ said, "I am the true vine." Thus, to bind the donkey to the vine means to bind our donkey to Christ. This is just one illustration of the correct way to understand this portion of the Word.

II. CONCERNING ZEBULUN— THE PREACHING OF CHRIST'S GLAD TIDINGS

A. Shipping Out the Riches of Christ

Verse 13 says, "Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for a haven of ships." This verse does not say, "Zebulun shall dwell at the stable full of horses and donkeys." Furthermore, it does not say that Zebulun would dwell on the mountain. The tribe of Judah dwelt in hilly country, in the region around Mount Zion, where the capital of the nation was located. Zebulun, however, dwelt at the haven of the sea. This is very meaningful.

Judah signifies the victorious Christ, the One who gained the victory for the kingdom so that His people may rest in Him. Surely Judah must dwell on the mountain. But Zebulun dwelt at the haven of the sea, at a seaport. A port is for exporting goods, for sending out ships. Thus far in this portion of the Word, we have seen two methods of transportation: donkeys and ships. Pictures like these are often used in the Bible. For example, John 1:29 says, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" This simple picture of the Lamb of God depicts a great deal. Likewise, much is portrayed by the pictures of the donkey and the ships in chapter forty-nine. A donkey is an animal that transports things by its own labor. But in the ancient times the ships sailed by the power of the heavenly wind. No doubt this refers to the shipping out of the gospel of Christ. Judah was the factory producing the gospel, and Zebulun was the haven exporting the gospel produced by Judah.

Matthew 4:15 indicates that Zebulun was part of Galilee. The Lord Jesus began His ministry of the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom from Galilee. After His resurrection, the angel charged the women to tell the disciples, "Behold, He goes before you into Galilee; there you shall see Him" (Matt. 28:7). There in Galilee the resurrected Christ met with the disciples and charged them to

preach the gospel. The disciples "went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus appointed them," and it was there He said to them, "Go therefore and disciple all the nations" (Matt. 28:16, 19). Zebulun was part of the region of Galilee. Acts 1:11 reveals that the first preachers of the gospel were men of Galilee. In Acts 1:8 the Lord had said to these Galileans, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the remotest part of the earth." By all this we see that Zebulun signifies the preaching of the gospel. Judah signifies the gospel composed of the victorious Christ, the kingdom of Christ, and the rest in the enjoyment of the riches of Christ. This is the gospel represented by Judah. Thus, Judah is the tribe producing the gospel. After the gospel is produced, there is the need for the preaching of the gospel. Therefore, Zebulun comes in to carry out this mission, to discharge the burden of sending forth the gospel.

The proper way to send out the gospel is not by donkeys journeying by their own hard labor. The proper way is to export the gospel by sailing ships empowered by the heavenly wind. In Acts 1:8 the Lord told the Galilean preachers to wait until they had received the power from on high, and Acts 2:2 says, "And suddenly there came a noise out of heaven like a rushing violent wind." From that time onward, the ships began to sail. One of these living ships was named Peter. On the day of Pentecost, Peter was not a donkey journeying and laboring, telling others that Jesus was the Savior and they had to believe in Him or else they would perish. He was a ship sailing by the power of a rushing mighty wind. The preaching of the gospel in today's Christianity is carried out mainly by laboring donkeys. But as you read Peter's message in Acts chapter two, you see that on the day of Pentecost he was sailing like a ship, not plodding along like a donkey.

I would also point out that the gospel goes out by sailing ships, not by steam ships powered by man-made engines. Do not use any gimmicks in the preaching of the gospel. To preach the gospel by means of gimmicks is to change the sailing ship into a steamer. History proves that the gospel has never been exported by either donkeys or steamers. According to church history, whenever the gospel has been carried out, it has been carried out by sailing boats, by saints who sailed like ships under the power of the heavenly wind.

If you do not interpret verse 13, in this way, then how do you interpret it? Was Zebulun a haven of ships for shipping out potatoes, oranges, or olives? Do not neglect the context of the whole Bible. The interpretation of the second group of three tribes is governed by Judah. The significance of Judah controls the interpretation. Judah signifies Christ as the gospel. According to spiritual history, the book of Acts follows the four Gospels, and the Acts is the book of the Galilean preachers. These Galilean preachers were ships sailing by the power of the heavenly wind. Since Judah has produced the riches of Christ, Zebulun is needed to export these riches to the nations.

B. Reaching the Gentile World

Verse 13 also says, "And his border shall be unto Zidon." It does not say that his border shall be unto Jerusalem. Zidon was a heathen city outside the holy land. It was located on the sea, and from it the sea traffic went to the uttermost parts of the earth. Because verse 13 is poetry, it must be interpreted in an allegorical way. In this verse we have the haven of ships and the border of the Gentile world. The history of the preaching of the gospel in Acts corresponds to this. In Acts the early preachers sailed from the holy land to Asia Minor and then across the Aegean Sea to Greece, Rome, and Spain. The Apostle Paul took a ship from the holy land and sailed firstly to Sidon (Zidon) and eventually to Rome (Acts 27:3; 28:14). Therefore, verse 13 was fulfilled in the history of the gospel preaching recorded in Acts.

One day I looked into Darby's Synopsis to see what he had to say about Zebulun. He said that the border being unto Zidon indicates mixture with the Gentile world. Even such a great biblical scholar as Darby was mistaken in his interpretation of Zebulun. As he sought to interpret the significance of Zebulun, he must have forgotten Judah, the first tribe in this group. Moreover, he must not have considered the significance of Zebulun as revealed in the New Testament. In the New Testament, we see that Zebulun was in Galilee of the nations, whence the Galilean preachers were sent forth. Thus, we must be careful in accepting the opinions of others. Although we have followed some scriptural teachers, we do not follow anyone blindly. Rather, we check every point thoroughly and carefully with the Bible. According to history, after the gospel was produced in Judah, the preaching of the gospel was carried out by Zebulun.

In the record of Judah the significant word is lion, and in the record of Zebulun the significant word is ships. The lion is singular, whereas the ships are plural. There is just one Christ, but many Galilean preachers. There is one gospel, but many ships. The church in Anaheim is a haven of ships. We are ships in the haven being prepared to sail out with Christ as the gospel. Young people, are you not Galilean ships ready to sail out? As ships, you must be ready to sail. But do not sail forth to start a movement.

C. Rejoicing in Going Out

Hundreds of years after Jacob uttered the prophetic blessing recorded in Genesis 49, Moses, an old lawgiver, said, "Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out" (Deut. 33:18). The going out mentioned in this verse refers to the shipping out. Thus, the word of Moses corresponds to the word of Jacob. Jacob likened Zebulun to ships, which, of course, are for going out, and Moses told Zebulun to rejoice in his going out. If we go out for the preaching of the gospel, we shall rejoice. The person most full of rejoicing and happiness is the gospel preacher. If you are a ship sailing by the power of the heavenly wind, you will be happy, rejoicing, and beside yourself with joy. Following Judah, Zebulun comes in as the preaching of the gospel. Hallelujah, we have Judah as the four Gospels and Zebulun as the book of Acts!

III. CONCERNING ISSACHAR— THE CHURCH LIFE

Now we come to Issachar. It is important that Issachar does not precede Zebulun. What is the spiritual significance of Issachar? Verses 14 and 15 say, "Issachar is a strong ass couching down between the sheepfolds: and he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant" (Heb.). After the four Gospels and the Acts, we have the Epistles, which cover the matter of the church life. Therefore, Issachar signifies and represents the church life.

A. Resting in the Church

Issachar is likened to a strong donkey couching between the sheepfolds (v. 14). The mention of the donkey in verse 14 connects this verse with verse 11, which speaks of binding the young donkey to the vine. Thus, the donkey links Issachar to Judah. In Judah, in the gospel, we have the young donkey bound to Christ the vine. In Issachar, in the church life, we have the strong donkey couching between the sheepfolds. In Genesis 49 couching means resting in satisfaction. After Christ, the young lion, seized His prey and enjoyed it, He couched, rested in His satisfaction. Here in verse 14 we have a strong donkey couching down between the sheepfolds. In Judah we are young donkeys, but here in Issachar we are strong donkeys. These strong donkeys are neither laboring nor journeying, but couching. When you first came into the church life, you were probably a young donkey. But now, after a number of years in the church, you may be a strong couching donkey.

Notice that this couching donkey is not resting in the sheepfolds; rather, he is resting between the sheepfolds. Every denomination and religion is a fold. Today, we are not resting in any denominational fold. Instead, we are resting outside the folds. In chapter ten of John the Lord made it clear that Judaism was a fold holding God's flock and that He came into this fold for the purpose of leading the flock out of it. In John 10:16 the Lord said, "I have other sheep which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one flock, one shepherd." Hallelujah, this couching donkey is not resting in any fold; he is couching between the folds. Although he is not very far from the folds, he is not in any of them. This is exactly our situation today. We are not very far from the denominational folds; we are among them.

You may be wondering how a donkey could be among the sheepfolds. In a sense, we all are sheep of the flock. But according to our natural man, we all are donkeys. Many times I have been rather happy with myself before the Lord and I praised Him, saying, "O Lord, thank You that I am in Your church. I am one of the many sheep in Your flock." However, at other times I looked at myself and said, "You don't look like a sheep. Probably you are a donkey, a horse, or a cow. Sometimes you even look like a buffalo." At night when all your work is over and you are sitting quietly in the presence of the Lord, you may say, "Lord, how I praise and thank You that I am in Your flock." But at the same time you may look at yourself and say, "Poor me, I don't look like a sheep. I look like a horse or a cow." According to our nature, none of us is a sheep. Instead, we are either donkeys or horses, cows or buffaloes. Nevertheless, we are also the transformed ones. Although I was a typical Chinese, I have been transformed. I was born Chinese, but I have become a Christian through regeneration. By origin, I was a donkey. But by regeneration I am now a sheep resting among the denominations. Thus, we are a flock of transformed donkeys resting between the sheepfolds. We admit that we were not born sheep. Nevertheless, today we are the flock couching between the sheepfolds.

As Issachar couched down between the sheepfolds, "he saw that rest was good" (v. 15). We all have seen this good rest. What good rest there is between the folds! This is the rest in the church life, which is to cease from our labor and rest in Christ (Matt. 11:28). As we are couching here, we see that this rest is good.

B. Enjoying the Pleasant Christ

Verse 15 also says that Issachar saw "the land that it was pleasant." As we are resting in the church life among the denominational folds, we enjoy the good rest and the rich pleasant land. This land is Christ. If you consider your experience, you will realize that this is true. As we are resting in the church life among the denominations, we see the good rest and the pleasant land, which is Christ as our green pasture. If you do not interpret these verses in this way, they have no meaning. But in this interpretation these verses are full of meaning and they strengthen our experience.

C. Issuing in Taskwork as a Tribute to the Master

Verse 15 also says, "And bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant under taskwork" (Heb.). This is true to our experience. As we rest in the church life, couching between the denominations, realizing the rest, and enjoying the pleasant land, we are willing to lower our shoulder to serve and to bear some responsibility. We become a servant under taskwork. Taskwork does not refer to the work of our choice, but to some assigned work. It is not our chosen work, but the work assigned by the Lord. It is the task assigned by the Head to us as members of the Body. Whatever we do as an assigned portion of the Body service is taskwork. Eventually this taskwork becomes a tribute offered to our Master. After the producing of the gospel, we have the preaching of the gospel. As the issue of the preaching of the gospel, we have the church life. In the church life we all are donkeys couching down among the divisions, seeing the good rest, and enjoying Christ as the pleasant land. As we are couching, spontaneously we say, "Lord Jesus, I love You. I would like to bear the burden of the work You have assigned to me. I am willing to bear such a burden under Your taskwork so that I may have something to offer You for Your satisfaction." This is the tribute we offer to our King. How marvelous!

D. Rejoicing in the Church Life

Deuteronomy 33:18 says, "Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents." We have seen that Moses told Zebulun to rejoice in his going out. Now we see that Issachar is to rejoice in his tents. Undoubtedly, the tents here refer to the church life. For the preaching of the gospel, we must be joyful in our going out. But for the church life, we must be joyful in remaining in the local churches.

IV. THE CONSUMMATION

A. The Peoples Invited to the Mountain of God

After the producing of the gospel, the preaching of the gospel, and the issue of the preaching of the gospel, the church life, we come to the consummation, which is found in Deuteronomy 33:19. This verse says, "They shall invite the peoples unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand" (Heb.). Firstly, in the consummation the peoples are invited to the mountain of God. In the church life today we are inviting others to the

mountain of God, that is, to the kingdom of God. Of course, this invitation will be completely fulfilled during the time of the millennial kingdom. In the millennial kingdom all the peoples, the nations, will be invited through preaching to God's kingdom in Mount Zion. But we have a miniature of this in the church life today. Due to the preaching and the church life, that is, due to Zebulun and Issachar, the peoples are invited to God's kingdom, to the mountain of God. This verse with "the peoples" invited links Issachar to Judah, to whom "shall the obedience of the peoples be" (v. 10, Heb.).

B. Sacrifices of Righteousness Offered to God

Secondly, on the mountain the peoples will offer sacrifices of righteousness to God. In God's kingdom in the church life today such righteous offerings are being presented to Him (1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15-16; Phil. 4:18). All the sacrifices we offer to God in the church life are of righteousness, according to the righteous requirement of God. It will also be so in the coming kingdom (Mal. 3:3).

C. The Church and the Kingdom Becoming Our Enjoyment

Thirdly, the church and the kingdom become our enjoyment. This is signified by the words, "They shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand." In order to interpret this portion of the verse, we must consider the parables of the treasure and the pearl in Matthew 13:44-46. In Matthew 13, the treasure refers to the kingdom, and the pearl refers to the church. I believe the abundance of the seas in verse 19 is the church. Undoubtedly, the seas signify the nations, the Gentile world. Out of the Gentile world the church is brought forth as the abundance. All the Gentile believers are the abundance of the seas, the abundance of the nations. This is the church. The kingdom is the treasure hid in the sand, or hid in the earth. If we would apply the proper interpretation of these two parables in Matthew 13 to Deuteronomy 33:19, we would see that the result of the gospel, of the preaching of the gospel, and of the church life as the issue of the gospel is the enjoyment of the church life and the kingdom. Even today we are sucking of the abundance of the seas and of the treasures hid in the sand. We are sucking of the church life and of the kingdom life. The church life is the abundance out of the nations, and the kingdom life is the treasure hidden in the earth. Even today it is still hidden. The outsiders do not understand what we are doing in the church. They may say, "I can't understand those people. It seems they go to meetings almost every night. What are they doing?" We are sucking of the abundance of the seas and of the treasures hidden in the sand.

In this second group of Jacob's sons we have the gospel signified by Judah and fully recorded in the four Gospels; the preaching of the gospel signified by Zebulun and fully recorded in the book of Acts; and the church life signified by Issachar and fully recorded in the remaining books of the New Testament beginning with Romans. The result is the enjoyment of the church life and the kingdom life. It takes the whole Bible to understand Genesis 49. It takes the entire New Testament to interpret even the second group alone. In the four Gospels we see Judah as the gospel, in Acts we see Zebulun as the preaching of the gospel, and in the Epistles and Revelation we see Issachar as the church life. The consummation of all this is our enjoyment, our sucking, of the rich church life and of the kingdom. Hallelujah, today we have Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, and the consummation! With Judah we have the lion, the one Christ, and the one gospel; with Zebulun we have the many ships and the many Galileans; and with Issachar we have the tents, the many local churches. We have Christ as the gospel, we have the preaching of the gospel, and we have the church life. Now we are the flock couching between the sheepfolds enjoying the church life and the kingdom life.

Some Christians today only care for Judah, only care for the victorious life in Christ, and others care for Zebulun, for the preaching of the gospel. But very few care for Issachar, for the church life. In the Lord's recovery, however, we must care for all three of this group: for Judah, the victorious life; for Zebulun, the preaching of the gospel; and for Issachar, the church life, so that we may have the full enjoyment in Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED TWO BEING MATURED THE MANIFESTATION OF MATURITY

(5)

In this message we come to the third group of Jacob's twelve sons. As we have seen clearly, the prophecy with blessing in Genesis 49 portrays not only the lives of the twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament, but also the spiritual life of Christians in the New Testament. This is based on the principle that the twelve tribes of Israel are a type of the church with all the believers. Thus, everything in chapter forty-nine is a type, a shadow, a picture, and our experience today is the reality, the fulfillment, of Jacob's prophecy with blessing.

The prophecy with blessing uttered by Jacob is poetry. It is difficult to understand the language of poetry. Poetic language is meaningful and descriptive, but it is not easy to probe the depths of its meaning. If you are able to probe into the depths of the poetic language in this chapter, you will realize how meaningful, rich, and profound it is.

There is another reason many readers of chapter forty-nine have difficulty understanding it, and that reason is the shortage in their Christian experience. Even if we are able to understand the poetic language in this chapter, we may lack the experience necessary to know how to make the application. In order to understand such a prophetic record, we must know the language in black and white, we must know the history of the twelve tribes of Israel, we must know the significance of the poetic figures, and we must have experience. Jacob used many poetic figures in this chapter: a young lion, a couching lion, a lioness, a foal, a young donkey, wine, the vine, garments, the haven, ships, the serpent, and the horned snake. In order to know the significance of these figures and to know how to interpret all these types and apply them to our situation, we need experience. The reason this chapter has been closed for centuries is this lack of experience.

More than fifty years ago, I sat at the feet of a great Brethren teacher. He gave a number of messages expounding Genesis 49,

showing us how these prophecies were fulfilled in the following books of the Bible. However, he had a great shortage in the matter of experience. All he had was the knowledge of the language in black and white. But because he did not know the spiritual significance of the figures, he did not apply any of them to today's Christian experience. Therefore, I did not receive from him any help in life or spiritual experiences. Nevertheless, I still thank God that I heard from him the interpretation and exposition of this chapter in a historical and scriptural way. Later, by putting this chapter together with my spiritual experience, I was able to get into the depths of the significance of this prophecy with blessing.

This record concerning Jacob's twelve sons begins with Reuben, a sinner. No one has been more sinful than Reuben. Although Paul said that he was the chief of sinners, I would say that Reuben was actually the foremost sinner, more sinful than Saul of Tarsus. What a terrible sin he committed! At the beginning of our Christian experience we also were sinners. How we thank the Lord for His mercy! Although I was once a Reuben, now I have been saved. Although this prophecy with blessing begins with a sinner, it ends with the two beloved sons of Jacob, Joseph and Benjamin. It begins with a sinner and ends with a king, a reigning one, one in power and authority. Between Reuben and Joseph we have Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, and Naphtali.

We have seen that this prophetic record begins with a group of sinners, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Reuben's sin was lust, and the sin of Simeon and Levi was the anger that issued from their disposition. Matthew chapter five also speaks of the sins of lust and anger. After this group of sinners, who were filled with lust and anger, Christ came in as the lion. Judah is Christ as our glad tidings. Following him is Zebulun, the haven for shipping out the gospel, and Issachar, the enjoyment of the church life. How wonderful! Are there still some Reubens among us today? We have to declare that in the church there are no Reubens and no Simeons and that all the Levis have become priests. Thus, there are no more sinners. Christ is here and He is everything. Because Christ is here, we have the glad tidings that are shipped out through the preaching of the gospel, and we have the church life. Hallelujah, we are no longer sinners! We are in the church life. On the one hand, we are the haven to ship out Christ; on the other hand, we are the tents to stay with Christ in the full enjoyment of Him.

(9) Concerning Dan

(a) A Young Lion Fighting for More Land

Deuteronomy 33:22 says, "And of Dan he said, Dan is a young lion: he shall leap from Bashan" (Heb.). The mention of the young lion in this verse links the second and third groups of the twelve sons, showing that the third group is the continuation of the second. The crucial figure in the second group is the lion; and Dan, the first of the third group, is also called a lion. As a young lion, Dan is not fighting for the prey, but for more land (Josh. 19:47; Judg. 18:27-29). By this we see that the young lion has progressed from fighting for the prey to fighting for the land. In typology, to fight for more land means to fight for more Christ. The young lion in Judah was for seizing the prey. But the young lion here is fighting for more land, fighting to gain more Christ. In Judges 18 we see Dan as a young lion, fighting for more land.

(b) A Serpent, a Horned Snake on the Way,
Biting the Horse's Heels
and Causing the Rider to Fall Backward

After Dan obtained the city of Dan in Judges 18, an idol, made by Micah, was set up in it (Judg. 17:4-5; 18:30-31). At that time God's tabernacle was in Shiloh. But in the city of Dan there was an idol. Today we have the light to understand the spiritual significance of this. It means that some Christians have been able to gain more of Christ. But after gaining more of Christ, they set up another center of worship. According to the book of Deuteronomy, in the good land there should have been only one center of worship for God's people (Deut. 12:11, 13-14, 21; 14:23-26). At that unique center there were God's name and God's habitation. During the time of the book of Judges, the center of worship was in Shiloh, where God's tabernacle and priests were. Although Dan gained the victory, this victory made him independent. All independence comes from pride. Do not think that spiritual gain cannot make you proud. Even the gain of Christ can make us proud. This is what is called spiritual pride. Those who are spiritually proud will not be subject to others. Rather, they say, "Why must we go to Shiloh? We can set up something ourselves." Immediately after Dan's victory, another center of worship, with the idol made by Micah, was established in the city of Dan.

If you consider the history of Christianity, you will see that this kind of thing has happened again and again. A certain individual or group of believers has been victorious in gaining more of Christ. But this gain of Christ made them proud and independent. Because they were not willing to submit to others, they set up another center of worship. They should have gone to the worship center in Shiloh, for the priests ordained by God were in Shiloh. But they set up something man-made and man-ordained. This is the creeping in of the serpent, the subtle one.

The serpent of Genesis 3 appears again in Judges 18. In this way Dan, the young lion, became a serpent. Genesis 49:17 says, "Dan shall be a serpent on the way, a horned snake on the path, that biteth the horse's heels, so that his rider shall fall backward" (Heb.). The serpent here is worse than the serpent in Genesis 3, for here it is a horned snake. Without knowing the history in the Old Testament, the spiritual significance, and how to make the practical application, it is difficult to understand this verse. However, if we know all these things, we shall see that there have been many Dans in Christian history. First these Dans were young lions gaining more of Christ, but they eventually became serpents, even horned snakes, setting up other centers of worship. Even today, many spiritual ones who have gained something of Christ have set up another center of worship in addition to the unique center ordained by God and established by Him. We must apply this to ourselves and ask if we are setting up other centers of worship. It is a shame and a sorrow to say that during the past fifteen years at least two or three who were once among us have done this very thing. They gained something, but that gain made them proud and independent, unwilling to submit to what the Lord has ordained. As a result, other centers were set up. These have caused some to fall backward.

In Genesis 49 this was prophecy. But today we see the fulfillment of this prophecy in past history and in the present situation. Once again, this convinces us that the Bible is truly inspired by God. How impressive is the picture given here of Dan! Today we see centers of worship with spiritual idols, with so-called spiritual images. The idol and the separate center of worship became the greatest stumbling block to the nation of Israel. By reading the historical books in the Old Testament, we see that by taking in this idol Dan truly became a horned snake. This snake bit the horse's heel and caused the rider to fall backward. This means that the snake became a great frustration and held the people back. As they were riding on, Dan bit the heels of the horse and caused them to fall backward;

that is, he frustrated them from going on.

(c) Jacob Waiting for the Lord's Salvation

At this point Jacob said, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord" (v. 18). After speaking about Dan as a serpent by the way and a horned snake on the path that bites the horse's heels, Jacob cried to the Lord for salvation. If we see the situation of today's Dans, we also will cry "O Lord, save us. Lord, save us from the Dans, from the idols, and from the other centers of worship. Lord, save us from the serpent and from the horned snake. O Lord, save us from the biting of the serpent." Jacob not only prayed; he also called on the name of the Lord. This verse does not say, "I am waiting for thy salvation," or, "I will wait for thy salvation." It says, "I have waited for thy salvation." Jacob seemed to be saying, "Lord, with this situation with Dan, nothing can help except Your salvation. Only Your salvation can save us from this harm, this damage. Lord, I have already waited for Your salvation. Lord, I have cried to You. I have called on You. Lord, we need Your salvation."

Throughout history, many Dans have become serpents setting up idols to frustrate others. Our heart has been deeply hurt by this. In 1969 another center of worship was set up, and many young people have been frustrated by it. The heels of many horses were bitten, and many young riders fell backward. The only thing we can do about such a situation is to call on the Lord and say, "Lord, I have waited for Your salvation." In the past we have seen the Lord's salvation and we are still seeing it today. I can testify that many have been saved from the bite of the serpent.

We have seen that Dan is firstly the continuation of Judah, the continuation of the victory of Christ. Then Dan fell into the worship of idols. Whenever the worship of idols is introduced, the serpent is there. Behind every image there is an evil spirit. Behind every idol is the subtle one seeking the worship of people. Thus, when the image was set up, Dan became a serpent. In other words, because Dan was one with the idol, he became Satan. After this terrible fall, God's salvation came. Praise the Lord for His salvation! History testifies of this, and our present surroundings and environment confirm it. We have seen the fall, and we have seen a situation where the serpent has come in. But we have also seen the salvation of the Lord. Hallelujah, a great many have been saved! O Lord, we have waited for Your salvation.

(d) Still Being One of the Tribes (Scepters)
Judging His People

Jacob prophesied that Dan would judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel (v. 16). This prophecy with blessing indicates that Jacob was concerned that Dan would be cut off. According to the Mosaic law, anyone who set up an idol or worshipped an idol had to be cut off from the people (Deut. 13:5-18). Among the twelve tribes, the tribe of Dan brought in an idol. Thus, according to the law, Dan should have been terminated as a tribe. Therefore, Jacob, not wanting to see one of his sons cut off, blessed him prophetically out of a loving heart. This is the reason Jacob said that Dan would still be a tribe judging his people. This word was particularly fulfilled in Samson, who was of the tribe of Dan (Judg. 13:2, 24; 15:20).

Jacob said that Dan would judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. The Hebrew word for tribe firstly has the meaning of branch, then stick, staff, and scepter. A scepter signifies authority. Therefore, the Hebrew word for tribe actually means scepter. Every tribe has a scepter, an authority. The twelve tribes were twelve scepters, twelve powers, twelve authorities. During the time of Samson, the tribe of Dan certainly became a scepter. With Samson, the tribe of Dan was a power, a real authority. This is the meaning of Jacob's prophetic blessing concerning Dan in verse 16. Jacob's word meant not only that Dan would remain as a tribe, but also that Dan would be a scepter, an authority. This prophecy has been fulfilled.

(e) His Tribe Omitted in First Chronicles and Revelation,
but Included as a Tribe in the Millennium

In 1 Chronicles 2-9 the tribe of Dan was omitted in the record of the holy people of God. In 1 Chronicles 2:2 Dan's name is mentioned, but in the following record his tribe was omitted. Furthermore, the tribe of Dan is also not mentioned in the record in Revelation 7. It is a serious matter to be omitted from God's record of His people. We find this warning in the New Testament in Revelation 3:5, where we are told that he who overcomes will not have his name erased out of the book of life. This implies that the names of the defeated believers will be erased from the book of life during the coming age of the kingdom. This does not mean that the defeated believers will perish. The tribe of Dan did not perish. But because Dan fell and became one with God's enemy, becoming the serpent and bringing in a stumbling block to God's people, his name was omitted in the record in 1 Chronicles and Revelation.

Many Christians today have become Dans. Although they have become one with Satan in bringing in stumbling blocks to frustrate God's people, they seem not to care about what they have done, or to have any feeling concerning it. Yes, God will forgive them, but their names will not be found in the record during the time of the coming kingdom. There will be a certain situation in which their names will be omitted. Although Dan was omitted in the record in 1 Chronicles and Revelation because of his evil, he will still be a tribe in the millennium because of his father's blessing (Ezek. 48:1). This is a picture of God's mercy.

We should not read the record of Dan merely as history. We must see it as a shadow, a figure, of our experience as Christians. Although we may be the continuation of Judah, of Christ's victory, we must be careful. Often, after a time of victory there is the danger that our gain of Christ may immediately cause us to be proud and independent, making us unwilling to submit to others. At such a time we may set up another center of worship and thus become one with God's enemy, Satan. This will cause us a great loss. We shall not perish, because once we are saved, we are saved forever. But there is the definite possibility that in a certain period of time and in a certain situation we may be omitted in the record of God's people.

(10) Concerning Gad
(a) Raided by a Raiding Band and Raiding Their Heels

Because of the failure of Dan, Jacob called on the Lord for His salvation. The Lord has answered this call. Thus, after Dan we have Gad as his continuation. Verse 19 says, "Gad, a raiding band shall raid him: but he shall raid their heels" (Heb.). With Dan we see the defeat, but with Gad we see the victory brought back. Do not consider Dan separate from Gad or Gad separate from Dan. They are part of a whole. Dan ends with failure, but Gad, who shall raid the heels of the raiding band, comes in with the recovered victory.

Deuteronomy 33:20 says, "Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad." By this victory Gad was enlarged by God. It is exactly the same in our spiritual experience. Some time ago we may have been defeated, but by means of God's mercy through the prayer of some saints, the salvation of the Lord has come to us. Thereby, we regain the victory. Now we are no longer Dan—we are Gad, the one who raids the heels of the enemy. Through this victory, we are enlarged by God. Many of us can testify that God has enlarged us.

(c) Dwelling as a Lioness, Tearing the Arm,
Even the Crown of the Head of the Prey

Deuteronomy 33:20 also says, "He dwelleth as a lioness, and teareth the arm, even the crown of the head" (Heb.). Here we see that Gad is a lioness. Gad is not couching: rather, he is dwelling. This is an improvement over Judah as a couching lion. The Gad who is dwelling as a lioness tears the arms and even the crown of the head of the prey. In Moses' poetic language here, the top of the head, the crown, refers to the skull. This prey, of course, is not an animal, but a person. Gad tears the arm of his prey, even the head, the skull of his prey. This means that Gad is so strong that he not only defeats his enemy, but also tears him to pieces. He even tears his skull into pieces. The poetry here describes the tearing of the enemy to the uttermost. As Gad, we smash Satan into pieces. In Deuteronomy 33 the lioness is not couching for enjoyment; she is dwelling, settling down, and tearing the enemy to pieces. It seems that Gad could say, "Enemy, don't bother me. I want to dwell here peacefully. But if you trouble me, I will not only tear your arm, but I will also tear your skull into pieces. After that, no one will see your figure again."

(d) Providing the First Part of the Good Land for Himself

Deuteronomy 33:21 says of Gad, "He provided the first part for himself, for there a portion of the lawgiver was reserved" (Heb.). Victory always gives us enlargement, which is the expansion of space. Therefore, this verse says that Gad provided the first part for himself. For years I was not able to understand this. According to the history in the Old Testament, the first part refers to the first part of the good land east of the Jordan River. In their journeys, the twelve tribes firstly entered this part, which was on the east side of Jordan. Desiring this rich, fertile land, Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh begged Moses to give it to them. Although Moses agreed, he charged them not to stay there, enjoying their good land, while their brothers had not yet obtained their portion of the land. Thus, Moses charged them to fight the battle for the rest of the land (Num. 32:1-32). After that, they would divide the land justly. If the two and a half tribes had stayed there and had not gone on to fight for the rest of the land, they would not have been just. Thus, Gad provided the first part for himself. There a portion was reserved for the lawgiver. This points to the fact that Moses, the lawgiver, was buried there (Deut. 32:48-52; 34:1-6).

(e) Coming with the Heads of the People
to Execute the Justice of the Lord
and His Ordinances with Israel

Verse 21 also says, "And he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the Lord, and his ordinances with Israel" (Heb.). Gad came with the heads of the people, the leaders, to take the rest of the good land to execute the justice of the Lord in dividing the land and His ordinances with Israel (Josh. 22:1-5). Dan's failure was his pride. When he gained more land, he became proud and set up another center of worship. He did not care for his brothers. In your spiritual experience, you must beware of pride when you gain more land, more of Christ. Never set up another center of worship. On the contrary, you must take care of your brothers. Do not say, "I have won the victory. I have more land, more Christ. I don't care about the others. I will stay here to enjoy my victory." If you do this, you will be defeated. Even though you have gained the land, you must press on to take care of the need of your brothers. You have obtained your portion, but what about the portion of your brothers? You must fight the battle to get the rest of the land so that all your brothers may have their share. To enjoy your portion of the land without helping your brothers obtain their portion would not be just. It would not be the execution of God's justice. You must go on with the other leaders to fight the battle for the rest of the land. Then all your brothers will have a portion. To do this is to execute the justice of the Lord and to keep His ordinances with Israel.

Gad had a number of good points. He recovered the victory, he was enlarged, and he tore the enemy to pieces. Furthermore, although he provided a place for himself, he did not enjoy it until he helped his brothers gain their portion. He went on with them to fight until everyone had a portion. This was the execution of the justice of the Lord and of His ordinances with Israel. Again I say, Dan warns us not to be proud, to be independent, or to set up another center of worship. Gad helps us to know that even after we have gained the victory and have been enlarged, we should not forget our brothers. We should not rest in our portion until we have helped our brothers gain their portion. To win a spiritual victory and to gain Christ is truly wonderful. But beware of pride. You may set up a separate worship center, neglecting your brothers. Never do this. Do not enjoy the portion you have gained until you have helped your brothers win theirs. Do not be proud and do not forget your brothers. Hearing this should be a help to us all. Now we know what we should do after gaining the victory of Christ. We should not establish another center, but we should take care of our brothers, fighting for the sake of their portion.

(11) Concerning Asher
(a) Rich Food and Royal Dainties

After Gad comes Asher. The sequence here is certainly under God's inspiration. Verse 20 says, "Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties." Asher's bread is fat; that is, his food is rich. When we have the victory of Christ and help our brothers gain their portion before we enjoy our own, we have rich food. This rich food even becomes royal dainties, the royal food. It is not food for the common people, but food for kings, for the royal family. What we enjoy in the victorious life is not only regular food, but also royal dainties. No one can deny that the food in the church life is rich. In fact it is so rich that it becomes the royal dainties. We are not only a lion family, but also a royal family. We are a kingly family, and our dining is royal. Whatever we feed on in these life-study messages is royal dainties.

(b) More Blessed Than the Sons
and Most Favored among His Brothers

Deuteronomy 33:24 says, "Asher shall be blessed more than [the] sons; let him be favored among his brethren" (Heb.). You may

wonder how Asher could be more blessed than Judah or Joseph. For Asher to be more blessed than the sons means to be more blessed in the riches of food and minerals.

(c) Dipping His Foot in Oil

Deuteronomy 33:24 also says, "Let him dip his foot in oil." Judah was to wash his garments in wine, but here Asher is to dip his foot in oil. Revelation 6:6 speaks of not harming oil and wine. In times of famine oil and wine become scarce. Undoubtedly the oil here is olive oil. According to both history and geography, there is an abundance of olive trees in this part of the good land. For this reason, it is rich in oil. The fact that Asher will dip his foot in oil indicates that, as far as food is concerned, he is richer than all the other tribes.

(d) Iron and Copper under His Sandals

Deuteronomy 33:25 says, "Under thy sandals shall be iron and copper" (Heb.). Iron and copper are for fighting the battle and for building. Oil is food for nourishment, but iron and copper are materials for fighting and for building up the kingdom. Because Asher is so rich, the most favored in food and minerals, he is more blessed than the other tribes. He has the food for nourishment and the minerals for weapons and building materials.

(e) His Rest Being as His Days

Deuteronomy 33:25 also says, "And as thy days, so shall thy rest be" (Heb.). The Hebrew word rendered "rest" here is not the common word for rest. This word is very difficult to translate. It means safety, security, strength, peace, and quietness. It denotes a leisurely life, a life in which there is sufficiency, with no need to worry or rush. Thus, Asher was to have a leisurely life, a life that was safe and secure, with sufficiency guaranteed. This means that throughout life he would not lack anything. He would have the rich food for nourishment, the weapons for defense, and the materials for building. Instead of scarcity, there would be sufficiency, rest, peace, and leisure. He would constantly enjoy life.

Unless you have come into this stage of the spiritual life, you may not understand what I am talking about. But there is such a stage. If you have not yet arrived at it, I encourage you to go on. One day you will come to such a country. In this realm there is no need to hurry or rush. Here there is safety, security, and peace. Here we are short of nothing. We have food, weapons, and materials. When you have arrived at this stage, there is no need to worry or care about tomorrow, and there is no anxiety. Rather, there is continual rest in the riches of food and in the strong iron and copper. At least some of us have come to this point. This is the maturity of life.

(12) Concerning Naphtali

(a) A Hind Let Loose

Genesis 49:21 says, "Naphtali is a hind let loose." Immediately after Asher comes Naphtali, who is neither a young lion nor a lioness, but a hind. According to the Hebrew text, the title of Psalm 22 speaks of the hind of the morning, indicating that the resurrected Christ in Psalm 22 is a hind let loose. With Naphtali we have not only the victorious Christ as a lion, but the resurrected Christ as a released hind skipping on the mountaintops. Nothing can frustrate Him, and no one needs to pave the way for Him. He is the resurrected hind. Because He is in resurrection, He can leap upon the high mountains.

(b) Giving Beautiful Words

Verse 21 also says, "He giveth beautiful words" (Heb.). The resurrected hind in Genesis 49 corresponds to the resurrected Lord in Matthew 28. Matthew 28 firstly reveals that Christ has risen and then it tells us that when the disciples were gathered together to Him, He charged them, saying, "Go therefore and disciple all the nations..teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). This is to give beautiful words. In resurrection we can utter beautiful words. This is the maturity of life in resurrection. In order to say something beautiful for Christ, we must be in resurrection. When we are in resurrection, it is easy to speak beautiful words for the Lord.

(c) Satisfied with Favor
and Full with the Blessing of the Lord

Deuteronomy 33:23 says, "O Naphtali, satisfied with favor, and full with the blessing of the Lord." Here we see that Naphtali is satisfied with favor. Favor in the Old Testament is the equivalent of grace in the New Testament. Thus, Naphtali is satisfied with grace. When we are in resurrection speaking beautiful words, we also are satisfied with grace. Often as I am speaking, I am satisfied with favor, with grace. This verse also says that Naphtali is filled with the blessing of the Lord. He is satisfied with grace and full of blessing. This is the victorious and matured life in resurrection. As we speak for Christ to nourish others, we ourselves are satisfied with grace and filled with blessing.

(d) Possessing the Sea and the South

Deuteronomy 33:23 also says, "Possess thou the sea and the south." The result of speaking beautiful words in resurrection and of being satisfied with favor and full of blessing is the possessing of the west and the south. For Naphtali to possess the west is to possess the Mediterranean Sea, which was on the west of Naphtali's portion of the good land. Therefore, some versions render the Hebrew word in this verse as "west." Actually, it denotes the sea, because the sea was to the west of the good land. The word "south" signifies the land. The sea, the west, signifies the Gentile world, and the south, the land, signifies the Jewish world. Therefore, to possess the sea and the land signifies possessing the Gentile world and the Jewish world. In other words, Naphtali is to possess the whole earth.

In order to take the earth, we must begin from Reuben and continue through Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, and Asher until we come to Naphtali. When we have become Naphtali, we shall possess the west and the south, the sea and the land. We shall be qualified and empowered to take the earth. How wonderful! When we are Naphtali, it is easy to take the earth because we are in resurrection speaking beautiful words, and we are satisfied with favor and full of blessing. Thus, we are ready to possess the sea and the land, the Gentile world and the Jewish world. We are ready to take the earth.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED THREE

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF DAN, GAD, ASHER, AND NAPHTALI

In this message I am burdened to give an additional word concerning the spiritual significance of Dan, Gad, Asher, and Naphtali. In a sense, I love this group more than the group that includes Judah. Judah's group is the second, and this group is the third, which, of course, is more advanced. We have seen that there is a link in this third group connecting it with the second. Judah is a young lion and a lioness (49:9, Heb.), Dan is a young lion, and Gad is a lioness (Deut. 33:22, 20, Heb.). Thus, these two figures, the young lion and the lioness, link the third group to the second.

When I was young, I often studied Genesis 49. Many times I felt that these words were not very meaningful. For example, verse 21 says that Naphtali is a hind let loose and that he gives beautiful words (Heb.). I could not understand how a hind could give beautiful words. It seemed to me that the hind and the beautiful words were not related to each other. Furthermore, I wondered how a hind could speak. Consequently, for quite a long period of time, I did not care for Genesis 49. However, when we probe into the spiritual significance of this chapter, we see how meaningful all of it is. In message one hundred we considered the rest in the enjoyment of Christ's riches in life (pp. 1282-1287). We saw that we need to bind our donkey to the vine and soak our garments in wine. If we do this, our eyes will be red with wine and our teeth white with milk (vv. 11-12). One brother may ask another, "Have you bound your donkey to the vine?" The other may reply, "Brother, have you soaked your garments in wine?" Then the first brother may ask, "Are your eyes red with wine?" The second may respond, "Are your teeth white with milk?" The outsiders may think that this is the secret, mysterious language of the church people. No matter what others may say, how meaningful these new proverbs are to us! "Bind your donkey to the vine!" "Soak your garments in wine!" I want my eyes to be red with wine and my teeth to be white with milk. In order for this to take place, we must first rest in Christ and then soak our being, our behavior, in the riches of the life of Christ. Then we shall experience transformation, and our appearance will be changed. Our eyes will be red with wine, and our teeth will be white with milk, indicating that they are strong to take in the Word and to utter it to others.

The sequence in these four groups in chapter forty-nine is marvelous. It corresponds both to the history of the church and our spiritual experience. Firstly, we have Reuben, signifying that we all began as sinners. After Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, Judah comes. This means that Christ has come as the victorious lion. Following Judah, Zebulun, and Issachar, we have the fall of Dan. Dan's fall, however, was not only a failure and a defeat; it was apostasy. After the apostasy of Dan, we have the recovery with Gad, the sufficiency in Asher, and the consummation with Naphtali. In church history we also see the apostasy, the recovery, the sufficiency, and the consummation. If we cannot see the consummation today, we shall surely see it in the next age and especially in the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem. Naphtali will be completely fulfilled when New Jerusalem is manifested in the new heaven and new earth. The New Jerusalem will be the eternal Naphtali. These four items—apostasy, recovery, sufficiency, and consummation—also match our Christian experience. After a downfall, the apostasy, we have the recovery. Then come sufficiency and consummation. We have seen these things in the Lord's recovery. Throughout the years in the recovery we have been with Judah, binding our donkey to the vine and soaking our garments in wine. Our eyes have become red with wine and our teeth white with milk. But suddenly the apostasy of Dan came in. Nevertheless, following Dan there was the recovery with Gad.

I. THE APOSTASY OF DAN

A. Gaining More Christ by His Victorious Life

Dan was the continuation of Judah, for Judah was a lion and Dan was a young lion. As the continuation of Judah, Dan was successful in gaining more Christ by his victorious life (Deut. 33:22; Josh. 19:47; Judg. 18:27-29).

B. Being Individualistic and Independent

Because Dan was successful and victorious, he became proud, individualistic, and independent. He cared only for himself, not for others. As Judges 18:30 says, "The children of Dan set up for themselves the graven image" (Heb.).

C. Setting Up a Divisive Center of Worship and Ordaining a Hired "Priest"

Dan's apostasy was the setting up of a divisive center of worship (Judg 18:30-31; 17:9-10; 1 Kings 12:26-31; 2 Kings 10:29). In a divisive way Dan set up a center apparently for the worship of God. Many use the matter of the worship of God as a cloak for setting up a divisive center. Some would say, "What could be wrong with doing such a thing for the worship of God? Isn't it better to set up a center of worship than to go to a movie theater?" According to the history in the Old Testament, nothing throughout the generations was more sinful or more damaging to God's people than Dan's act of setting up a divisive center of worship. In Deuteronomy 12, 14, 15, and 16 the Lord through Moses charged the children of Israel at least fifteen times not to offer their burnt offerings in the place of their choice. They were commanded to go to the unique place the Lord had chosen for His name and for His habitation. Deuteronomy 12:13 and 14 say, "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: but in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee." The Lord seemed to be saying, "When you enter into the good land, you must not offer your burnt offerings in any of the places you see. You must go to the unique place, the place I have chosen for My name and My habitation. You have no right to choose any other place. You must go to this unique center. It is this center that keeps My people in oneness." Again and again Moses, the elderly, loving lawgiver, charged the children of Israel concerning this matter. If you read these chapters, you will see that Moses charged the people concerning the unique place, the place the Lord had chosen for His name and for His habitation. The reason the Lord commanded Moses to issue this charge repeatedly was that He was concerned about maintaining the unity of His people.

After the children of Israel entered the good land, the tabernacle, the house of God, was in Shiloh (Judg. 18:31). As long as the tabernacle was in Shiloh, Shiloh was the unique center for the worship of God. As the unique center, it should have maintained the

unity of God's people. However, Dan set up another center in the north, which caused the first division among the children of Israel. In this way God's people were divided, not by a movie theater, but by a worship center. Today Christians excuse themselves by saying, "We are doing something here for the worship of God. What is wrong with this? God is not narrow; He is omnipresent. You have Him with you in your place. Is He not also here with us in our place? Certainly God is not as narrow as you are. He is everywhere. How can you limit Him to a particular place?" Nevertheless, God enjoys being limited for the purpose of keeping the unity of His people. Most Christians today are too free. Like the Danites, they feel free to set up another center of worship.

Judges 18:30 says, "The children of Dan set up for themselves the graven image" (Heb.). Here we see that the Danites did something for themselves. They did not care for the other tribes. Thus, the source of their apostasy was not caring for their brothers. Not caring for the other parts of the Body is the source of apostasy. This apostasy crept in under the guise of the worship of God. The principle is the same today. Many Christians set up other centers, not for gambling or dancing, but for worshipping God. Although this seems so positive, it is actually done by the self and for the self. Every divisive center is established for someone's self-interest. Such a practice causes not only division, but also competition.

If Dan had not set up another center of worship, there would have been only the unique center of worship in Shiloh. There would have been no competition. No matter how far the Israelites were from Shiloh, they had to go there to worship. But after Dan set up his center of worship in the north, he used the matter of convenience as a good selling point for his cargo. He could say, "You don't need to travel to Shiloh. Look, we are worshipping God right here in your own neighborhood." A divisive group in New York has done something very similar. A member of this group called an elderly sister and said, "Come meet with us. We meet in Chinese and have a Chinese flavor. In America it is difficult to have some Chinese flavor. Come meet with us and enjoy this Chinese flavor." This was their method of salesmanship for their cheap, divisive cargo.

Like the children of Israel, all Christians should be one, and the worship of God should have only one center. But the Danites could use the convenient location of their worship center to persuade their neighbors to meet with them for the worship of God. Suppose you were a neighbor of the Danites and one of them said to you, "Brother, why are you so foolish as to travel all the way to Shiloh? We are worshipping God right here in Dan. Why don't you meet with us?" This is competition. Today there is much competition in Christian salesmanship, with every Christian group trying to sell its cargo. This is sinful. What a shame to see this competition among today's Christians!

Some argue with us, asking, "Why are you separate from others?" Certainly Shiloh is separate from all other places. Shiloh is only one with Shiloh. Today some say, "Why do you call yourselves the church and say that the others are not the church?" We would answer, "Shiloh is Shiloh. No other place is Shiloh. On this earth, there is just one Shiloh. These other groups do not call themselves the church. Instead, they have taken other names. As long as they keep these names, this is an indication that they are not Shiloh. Rather, they are divisive places of worship."

Judges 18:31 says, "And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh." The words, "all the time the house of God was in Shiloh," indicate competition. After Dan had set up a divisive center in competition with Shiloh, it was never taken away. For the whole time the tabernacle was in Shiloh the graven image was in Dan. This indicates that there was competition. Later, the temple was built in Jerusalem as the continuation of the tabernacle. After the temple had been built by Solomon, Jeroboam, in the next generation, set up a more solidly established idol in Dan to compete with the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:26-31). Jeroboam feared that if the people went to worship at Jerusalem, they would return to Rehoboam, the king of Judah (1 Kings 12:27). "Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, 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. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan" (1 Kings 12:28-29). Jeroboam seemed to be telling the people, "You don't need to go to Jerusalem. We have a worship center right here." But what he did came out of the fear that his kingdom would be lost. Thus, the competition between Dan and Jerusalem was intensified. Firstly Dan competed with the tabernacle at Shiloh. Later he competed with the temple in Jerusalem.

In the Old Testament we firstly see the competition of the graven image in Dan with the tabernacle at Shiloh. Then we see the competition of the golden calf in Dan with the temple in Jerusalem. After the temple of God was solidly built, the idol in Dan also became more solid. Both the tabernacle in Shiloh and the divisive worship center in Dan were set up by the common people. However, the temple in Jerusalem was built by a king, Solomon, and the divisive center was also strengthened by a king, Jeroboam. This is a very clear picture of the competition. The situation is the same today. When the church is solidly built, the denominations will also become more solid. The strengthening of the denominations comes from their competition with the church. Sooner or later, other groups will compete with the Lord's recovery. They may oppose and criticize us at first, but later they will imitate us and compete with us. Fifteen years ago terms such as the life-giving Spirit and the human spirit could not be heard among Christians in the United States. But recently even a paper put out by some Catholic charismatics used many of the terms of the Lord's recovery.

We need to understand the proper meaning of apostasy. Apostasy means to be distracted from the right track in following God. Apostasy is worshipping God in a devilish way. Whenever someone uses the worship of God as a cloak to take a devilish way, he has fallen into apostasy. The Roman Catholic Church is a total apostasy. No wonder it is called the apostate church. The Roman Catholic Church worships God, but it worships Him in a devilish way. Although those in Catholicism worship God in name, they are actually worshipping idols. The Roman Catholic Church does exactly the same thing Jeroboam did when he set up the idols and said, "Behold thy gods, O Israel." Jeroboam seemed to be saying, "This is the God you must worship." In reality that was not God; it was a golden calf. Hence, apostasy is worshipping God in a way that is false and devilish.

Today's Christianity is filled with apostasy. Apostasy is universal. Many who claim to be worshipping God are in fact worshipping idols. If you visit a Catholic cathedral, you will see people worshipping the idols that are along the walls and burning candles to the so-called saints. In name they worship God and Jesus; in actuality, they worship idols. According to G. H. Pember, one of the idols in the Roman Catholic Church is Buddha, who was assimilated into Catholicism under the name of St. Josaphat. What apostasy!

The words "for themselves" in Judges 18:30 are very significant. Many who claim to be worshipping God are really doing something for themselves. Apostasy is doing something for the self under the cloak of worshipping God. Jeroboam had no heart for God. Rather,

his heart was for his own little empire. In his heart he feared that the kingdom would return to the house of David (1 Kings 12:26). Using the name of God as a cloak, he did everything possible to preserve his empire. This is apostasy. The whole of Christendom today is an apostasy. So many are doing things for themselves under the name of Jesus Christ and under the cloak of the worship of God. This is the reason the Lord needs a recovery. The Lord's recovery will always offend others. As long as the recovery is here, the divisive groups will stand condemned. As long as the temple was in Jerusalem, the golden calf was under condemnation. Was it possible for Dan to love Jerusalem? No, there could be no reconciliation between Dan and Jerusalem. Often others have come to me and said, "Brother Lee, please don't be so bold. Why not be a little nice?" I replied, "To whom should I be nice? To the serpent? To the horned snake? To the graven image? To the golden calf? I hate the golden calf, and I would like to burn the graven image and crush the head of the horned snake." How can we be kind to today's apostasy? There can be no compromise. Do not try to compromise with the serpent, the horned snake. If you are kind to the snake, you will be poisoned by it. If you try to be nice to today's apostasy, you will be damaged. The testimony is the testimony, and apostasy is apostasy. In Jerusalem there was God's temple as His testimony, but in Dan there was apostasy. Both in church history and in our own Christian experience we have seen this very thing. There may have been times when we were distracted from the right way in following God and fell into a type of apostasy. We might have said that we were working for the Lord when we were actually working for something else. This is apostasy.

Dan did not care for the other tribes; he cared only for his own tribe. After he won the victory and gained the expansion, the enlargement, he did something for himself. This was the source of his apostasy. According to the Old Testament, the Lord never forgot Dan's apostasy. In the eyes of God it was the worst sin in His economy. Nothing is more damaging than divisiveness. Nothing is more destructive than division among God's people. Divisive worship centers are often related to idols. Because the Devil lurks behind idols, by setting up an idol Dan became a serpent. Whenever you become divisive, no matter how good your reason may be, there will be something behind you—the serpent, the subtle one. The whole history of the church testifies of this and our experience confirms it. Whenever you do not care for others, but only for your interests, doing something merely for yourself, the serpent is at hand. The best way to be safeguarded from falling into apostasy is taking care of others. Suppose Dan had contacted the other tribes and said, "Brothers, do you agree that I set up another worship center in the city of Dan?" Had he done this, the others would have said, "Brother, don't do this. Deuteronomy 12, 14, 15, and 16 forbid us to have any other center of worship that we may come to the unique center." If Dan had consulted the other tribes, he would have been kept from apostasy. But being individualistic, he set up another worship center and fell into apostasy.

Dan fell into apostasy because he cared only for his own interests. In principle, every divisive center of worship is the same. Those who establish them care only for their interests, their desires, and they neglect all the other saints. They are like Dan, who cared only for his tribe, not for the others.

Dan not only set up a divisive center, but also ordained the hired "priests" (Judg. 18:30; 1 Kings 12:31). To hire the common people to be priests was profane because it destroyed God's holy ordination. In the downfall of the church, many unsaved ones have been hired to do the service of God. This is apostasy. In God's New Testament economy, all true believers are made priests of God (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). But degraded Christianity has built up a system to ordain some of the believers to do the service of God, making them a clerical hierarchy and leaving the rest of the believers as laymen. This also is a form of apostasy. To have the clergy and the laity is an apostate practice which we must abhor and abandon.

II. THE RECOVERY WITH GAD

A. Coming Back to the Victory of Christ

Praise the Lord that, under the inspiration of God, after Dan, Jacob spoke of Gad! With Gad we see recovery. After the apostasy of Dan, Gad came in to recover the lost victory (49:19). The victory of Judah, the lion, had been lost by Dan's apostasy, but Gad regained it and even enlarged it. Gad is not a young lion, but a lioness producing cubs. He is the continuation of the victorious Judah and Dan.

B. Enlarged by God

God was so happy about Gad's recovery of the victory that He enlarged him. Deuteronomy 33:20 says, "Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad." Gad was enlarged not only by God, but also for God. He was enlarged for the executing of God's justice among God's people.

C. Crushing the Enemy by the Productive Life of Christ

Gad crushed the enemy by the productive life of Christ. Deuteronomy 33:20 says, "He dwelleth as a lioness and teareth the arm, even the crown of the head" (Heb.). Gad crushed the enemy not as a lion, but as a lioness producing young lions. This implies that his destruction of the enemy is a corporate matter. It is the same with us today in the Lord's recovery. We are the young lions destroying the enemy in a corporate way.

D. Taking Care of the Brothers

The best aspect of Gad is not merely that he crushed the enemy's head, but that he would not enjoy his victory by himself. Although he gained land on the east of the Jordan, he would not enjoy it until the other tribes had won their portion of the land. Gad went with the other tribes to fight the battle to gain more land so that all the tribes might be able to have their share. The New Testament interpretation of this Old Testament figure is that we must always take care of the brothers, the members of the Body.

For many years I could not understand Moses' word in Deuteronomy 33:21. This verse says, "And he provided the first part for himself, for there a portion of the lawgiver was reserved; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the Lord, and his ordinances with Israel" (Heb.). Although I studied this verse again and again, especially the last part about the heads of the people, I simply could not understand it. But today I understand this verse. The "first part" refers to the land east of the Jordan. Gad provided that part for himself; yet he would not remain there to enjoy it. Instead, he came with the heads of the people, the princes of the other tribes, to fight the battle for the rest of the land. Here we see the action, the move, of the Body. Dan took care of himself individualistically, but Gad took care of the Body corporately. In the church today we would say that Gad was filled with the

sense of the Body.

The reason for Gad's success was that he let go of his own enjoyment in order to take care of the Body. This is justice in the eyes of God. It is the executing of the justice of the Lord. In New Testament terms, it is the accomplishment of God's will. When the children of Israel entered the good land, it was God's will in His justice that His people be settled. God did not want only Gad; He wanted all the twelve tribes to be settled to become His kingdom that His ordinances may be observed. This is to accomplish the will of God. Romans 12:1 and 2 say that if we present our bodies a living sacrifice, we shall be able to prove what the will of God is. According to Romans 12, the will of God is simply to have the Body life. Thus, to have the Body life, to take care of the needs of others, is to execute God's justice for observing His ordinances. Nothing is so just as caring for the members of the Body. No ordinances can be observed without the execution of God's justice. God's New Testament ordinances can only be observed in the Body of Christ, which is built up by the mutual care of its members in justice.

Dan's failure was that he was individualistic. Gad's success was that he was corporate, moving with the brothers. Dan was for himself, but Gad was for all the tribes. Whenever you are concerned only for your own spiritual interests, you are a Dan. But when you forget your own spiritual interests and care for all the other brothers, that is, care for the Body, you are a Gad. We must care for the Body and move with the Body. Are you a Dan or a Gad? Are you taking care only of your locality or of the whole Body? As long as we do not care for the Body, we are today's Dan, and we have fallen into a form of apostasy.

III. THE SUFFICIENCY OF ASHER

A. The Exceeding Blessing and Surpassing Grace

After the recovery with Gad, we have the sufficiency of Asher. The account of Asher begins with the exceeding blessing and the surpassing grace. Deuteronomy 33:24 says, "Asher shall be blessed more than [the] sons; let him be favored among his brethren" (Heb.). Asher received the exceeding blessing and the foremost grace. Many of us are able to understand this language. In Dan's apostasy we lost all the blessing and the grace, but in Gad's victory the blessing was recovered and the grace was returned. Now in Asher we are enjoying the exceeding blessing and the surpassing grace.

B. The Rich Provision of Life

In Asher we also see the rich provision of life. Firstly, Asher has the rich provision for living and growing. Genesis 49:20 says, "Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties." Deuteronomy 33:25 indicates that Asher also has the rich provision of life for fighting and building. The first part of this verse says, "Under thy sandals shall be iron and copper" (Heb.). The fat bread and royal dainties are for Asher's living and growing, and the iron and copper are minerals for fighting and building. Asher certainly received the richest provision.

C. The Bountiful Supply of the Spirit for Our Daily Walk

Asher also has the bountiful supply of the Spirit for his daily walk (Gal. 5:25). Deuteronomy 33:24 says, "Let him dip his foot in oil." This certainly is figurative speech. The spiritual significance of dipping the foot in oil is being full of the Spirit. In typology oil refers to the Spirit of God. Asher does not have a mere trickle of oil, but enough to dip his feet in. This means that in Asher we have the rich, bountiful supply of the Spirit (Phil. 1:19). Oh, we can walk in oil! A number of times in the Lord's recovery I have had the sense that we are walking in oil. I worship, thank, and praise the Lord, saying, "Lord, this is too rich! The supply of the Spirit here is too rich! Our oil is so bountiful!" Do you have oil in which to dip your feet? We do. We have the fat bread, the royal dainties, and the rich, bountiful oil in which to dip our feet.

D. The Absolute Rest with Peace, Strength, Security, and Sufficiency

Deuteronomy 33:25 says of Asher, "And as thy days, so shall thy rest be" (Heb.). When we have the exceeding blessing and surpassing grace, the rich provision of life, and the bountiful supply of the Spirit, we have absolute rest with peace, strength, security, and sufficiency. This was the experience of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:11-13. He was content in any situation. I can testify that this week I have had the deep sense that I am walking in oil and that I have satisfaction, peace, and rest. I have also been full of strength. Thus, I have security and sufficiency. The Lord is my Shepherd, and I have no want, shortage, or lack (Psa. 23:1). Instead of want, I am full of sufficiency. I have fat bread, royal dainties, deep oil, and iron and copper under my sandals. Everywhere there is provision. Hence, I am safe and secure, and I have rest and strength. Do you have the boldness to say that you have this security and sufficiency? Or would you say that this morning your wife gave you a difficult time and that you barely endured it? You need to be able to say, "This morning my wife gave me a difficult time. But praise the Lord that I walked in deep oil! Now I have rest, peace, security, strength, and sufficiency. My strength is as lasting as my days. As my days, so shall my rest, my security, and my sufficiency be." This is the experience of Asher.

IV. THE CONSUMMATION WITH NAPHTALI

Although Asher is wonderful, he is still not the end of Jacob's poetic prophecy with blessing. After Asher comes Naphtali (49:21). How good it is that Jacob had twelve sons! This number is truly sufficient, even eternally sufficient. When Jacob needed someone to represent sinners, he had Reuben. When he needed someone to expose the evil, cruel disposition, he had Simeon. When he needed someone to express the victory of Christ, he had Judah. He also had Dan to represent apostasy, Gad to signify recovery, and Asher to portray sufficiency. Now we come to Naphtali.

A. Experiencing the Resurrected Christ and Uttering the Beautiful and Pleasant Words of Life

Genesis 49:21 says, "Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth beautiful words" (Heb.). In his prophetic blessing Jacob used many animals as figures: a lion, a lioness, a donkey, a foal of a donkey, a serpent, a horned snake, and a hind. Naphtali is neither a lion nor a donkey, but a hind. We thank God both for His creation and for Jacob's poetry. A hind is a lovely animal, so living and active. Although a hind is not proud or especially large, it is quite strong, able to skip upon the mountaintops. According to the Hebrew text, the title of Psalm 22 speaks of the hind of the morning. Years ago I heard a message by Brother Nee in which he said that the hind of the morning signifies the resurrected Christ. Psalm 22 firstly speaks of Christ's death on the cross. Then, beginning with verse 22, it proceeds to His resurrection. Psalm 22:22 says, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the assembly will I praise thee" (Heb.). This indicates that in His resurrection Christ declared the name of the Father to His brothers and praised Him in the midst of the assembly, the church. Thus, this psalm eventually issues in the resurrection of Christ as the hind of the morning. Resurrection surely is a morning, and Christ in His resurrection is the hind of the morning.

Genesis 49:21 says that as a hind Naphtali gives beautiful words. When I was young, I could not understand the relationship between the hind and the beautiful words. It seemed that these things were absolutely unrelated. But now we can see the significance of this in our spiritual experience. When you experience Christ as the resurrected One, you will be filled and bubbling over with pleasant words. Instead of gossip, out of your innermost being will flow living waters through the words you speak. This means that all your words will be rivers uttered out of the resurrected Christ. In Matthew 28 and Acts 2 we see that the speaking of the pleasant words is intimately related to the resurrected Christ. After Christ was resurrected, He told His disciples to come to Him on a certain mountain, and there He charged them to go forth to speak not with their natural words, but with the resurrected Christ as their words (Matt. 28:16, 18-20). Thus, on the day of Pentecost Peter stood up to speak beautiful words (Acts 2:32-36). Peter's message that day was a proof that he had been experiencing the resurrected Christ. Because he had been experiencing this resurrected Christ, his teeth were white.

Rich words, pleasant words, beautiful words, words of joy and life—all these come out of the experience of the resurrected Christ. The more we experience Christ as the resurrected One, the more we have something to say. We could never be silent. Everyone who experiences Christ as the resurrected One will be bubbling over with beautiful words. This does not mean that we shall be talkative. No, it means that because we are filled with Christ, we are bubbling over and always have something to say. Christ is the word of God, the word of life, and the word that is spirit. I am filled with this resurrected Christ; thus, I have many words to utter. The principle here is that we always utter what is filling us within. The word we speak comes out of the abundance of our inner being. When our inner being is filled with Christ, we must speak lest we burst. Now we can understand why Naphtali, a hind let loose, gives beautiful words. Because he has experienced Christ, he is filled with beautiful words.

B. Satisfied with God's Grace and Full with God's Blessing

Deuteronomy 33:23 says, "O Naphtali, satisfied with favor, and full with the blessing of the Lord." The favor and blessing here link Naphtali with Asher, who is more blessed than the sons and favored among his brothers. In the Lord's recovery we are daily satisfied with rich grace and full of God's blessing. This blessing does not refer to the material blessing, but to the blessing in the spirit, the blessing in life, the blessing in the heavenlies. What grace we have tasted and what blessing we have enjoyed since coming into the church life! We all can testify that in the Lord's recovery we are satisfied with the rich grace and full of the rich blessing (1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 13:14).

C. Taking the Earth for the Lord

Deuteronomy 33:23 also says of Naphtali, "Possess thou the sea and the south" (Heb.). Naphtali will possess the west, the sea, the Gentile world, and the south, the land, the nation of Israel. This means that Naphtali will take the earth. It is the resurrected Christ experienced by us who will take the earth. At the end of Psalm 22 we see that the resurrected Christ will gain the nations. Psalm 22:27 says, "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee" (Heb.). All the nations will submit to Him, obey Him, and worship Him. Naphtali, the one who experiences the resurrected Christ, will possess the sea and the land. When we truly experience Christ in resurrection, we become those who will take the earth by preaching Christ (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8; Rom. 15:19).

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED FOUR

BEING MATURED

THE MANIFESTATION OF MATURITY

(6)

In this message we come to the last group of Jacob's twelve sons mentioned in his prophecy with blessing, the group composed of Joseph and Benjamin (49:22-27). The twelve tribes of the sons of Jacob in the Old Testament are always grouped together. In Numbers 2 we see the arrangement of the twelve tribes around the tabernacle: Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun on the east; Reuben, Simeon, and Gad on the south; Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin on the west; and Dan, Asher, and Naphtali on the north.

Among the twelve sons of Jacob, only three were types of Christ: Judah, Joseph, and Benjamin. Judah was a type of Christ as the overcoming victorious Lion. Joseph was a type of Christ as the beloved Son of the Father bringing all the riches to feed the world. Benjamin was a type of the ascended, exalted Christ. When he was born, his mother called him Benoni, which means "son of sorrow," but his father changed his name to Benjamin, which means "son of the right hand." Therefore, Judah, Joseph, and Benjamin typify Christ in a full way. Although Reuben was the firstborn, he lost the birthright because of his defilement. Hence, in God's administration, Judah took the lead. However, without Joseph and Benjamin, the history and significance of the twelve tribes of Jacob would have no conclusion. Joseph and Benjamin provide an adequate, full conclusion of the history of the twelve sons of Jacob.

The twelve sons of Jacob are a complete type of God's people, including all of us. We have seen that the history of God's people begins

with sinners, for we were all sinners like Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Reuben was full of lust, and Simeon and Levi were full of anger. Thus, the history of God's people began with sinners who were full of lust and anger. Then came Christ, typified by Judah. Later Naphtali appeared as a hind set loose and giving beautiful words. If the history of God's people ended with Naphtali, it would be good, but not adequate. For an adequate conclusion both Joseph and Benjamin are needed.

This history of God's people begins with sinners. Eventually these sinners are transformed into Levis with the priesthood and even into Judahs with the kingship. Then Naphtali, the resurrected Christ, brings forth beautiful words. This means that we once were Reubens and Simeons, but we need to be transformed into Levis, Judahs, and Naphtalis. Furthermore, we must go on to become Josephs and Benjamins.

Before we consider the significant aspects of Joseph and Benjamin, I wish to point out that Joseph and Benjamin, two sons born of one mother, Rachel, are two aspects of one person. When Jacob saw Rachel, he fell in love with her, and his heart was set on her. However, he did not firstly marry Rachel, but Leah, who brought forth six sons. Although children had also been born to the maids of Rachel and Leah, Rachel herself did not bear any children until ten sons had been born. Only then did Rachel give birth to Joseph, whose very name indicated that another was to be added. This signifies that in himself there was no completion with Joseph; there was the need of another part. Benjamin, therefore, was Joseph's completion. Thus, Joseph and Benjamin are one. If you read the Old Testament, you will see that it places Joseph and Benjamin together as a unit. Eventually, Joseph received the birthright and through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, inherited the double portion of the land. In this way Joseph became two tribes, the tribe of Ephraim and the tribe of Manasseh. Furthermore, the tribe of Manasseh received two portions of the land: one half of this tribe received land on the east of the Jordan River, and the other half received land on the west. Joseph and Benjamin are one. The fact that Joseph was the eleventh son and Benjamin, the twelfth indicates that they were close to each other in sequence. Thus, among the twelve sons, Joseph and Benjamin were the last pair. Later they became the three tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, which were encamped at the rear of God's dwelling place. Judah was the leading tribe in the front of the tabernacle, but Joseph was at the rear.

Let us now consider the significant aspects of this group. Joseph was very faithful, and he was absolutely victorious. According to the record of the Old Testament, Joseph was the first perfect person. No one who preceded him, including Noah, was perfect. But in Joseph we can find no fault; he was utterly perfect in his behavior. Joseph was perfect because he was altogether victorious. Furthermore, the Old Testament likens Joseph to an ox full of strength (Deut. 33:17, Heb.). He was not a fierce lion or a threatening wolf, but an ox full of strength. As an ox, Joseph had two horns: Ephraim and Manasseh. With these two horns Joseph will push the peoples together to the ends of the earth. This indicates that Joseph is strong in victory.

Joseph also trusted in God and believed in Him. Because Joseph was perfect and victorious, and because he trusted in God, God blessed him. No one in the Bible received a blessing greater than that given to Joseph. As we shall see, he was blessed with ten items in time and in space, with everything from eternity past to eternity future and from heaven to earth. Joseph received everything. The entire universe became a blessing to him.

Benjamin is described as a tearing wolf (49:27, Heb.). Also, God's dwelling place is with Benjamin (Deut. 33:12). Thus, Jacob's prophecy with blessing ends with the fullness of the universal blessing and with God's dwelling place. The end of Genesis 49 requires Revelation 21 and 22 for its complete development.

(13) Concerning Joseph

(a) A Son of a Fruitful Tree by a Fountain

Genesis 49:22 says, "A son of a fruitful tree is Joseph, a son of a fruitful tree by a fountain; whose branches run over the wall" (Heb.). Firstly, Joseph is a son of a fruitful tree. This son is, of course, the bough of a tree. If Joseph is the bough, the son, then the fruitful tree must be Jacob. According to the record of the Bible, no one prior to Jacob had twelve sons. (Twelve is the number of eternal completion.) The fact that Jacob had twelve sons means that he was very fruitful. Jacob was the son of Isaac, and Isaac was the son of Abraham, the father of the called race. In the Bible God is called the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Exo. 3:6; Matt. 22:32). This title is also the title of the Triune God. The God of Abraham refers to God the Father, the God of Isaac refers to God the Son, and the God of Jacob refers to God the Spirit. As we have pointed out, we should not consider Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as three persons, but as three aspects of one person. In like manner, the three of the Triune God are three in one. Jacob signifies the coming of the Spirit, the third of the Triune God. The Father was in the Son, and the Son became the Spirit. Thus, the Spirit is the issue of our God.

If we touch the spirit of the Bible, we shall see that, as a fruitful person, Jacob signifies the producing God. God is the fruitful tree. This is proved by the fifteenth chapter of John, where Christ says that He is the vine tree. Christ as the embodiment of God is the producing tree. Christ truly is fruitful. Here in Genesis 49 we see a son of this tree. The Son of God is the branching out of God. For this reason, in the Old Testament Christ is called the Branch (Jer. 23:5; Zech. 6:12). The Bible is deep, profound, and far beyond our understanding. On the one hand, the Bible says that Christ is a tree and, on the other hand, it says that He is the branch. Is He then the tree or the branch? He is both. As the embodiment of God, He is the tree, but as the branching out of God, He is the branch. Joseph, a type of Christ, was also the son of a fruitful tree, the branching out of God. Joseph was God's branching out. As we all know, the branch of a tree is part of the tree. Thus, Joseph, the son of Jacob, was part of Jacob, the fruitful father. Speaking typically, Joseph was Christ as the Son of God who was the branching out of the fruitful God.

Verse 22 says that Joseph is a son of a fruitful tree by a fountain. The fountain is God. The tree is God; the fountain is also God; everything is God. Jacob, a type of the fruitful tree, lived by God as the fountain. A tree requires water. If it has water, it will grow fruitfully. Jacob realized that all his fruitfulness came from God as the fountain. Here we are told that Joseph, as the son of Jacob, branches out all the riches of this tree that come from the fountain.

(b) His Branches Running over the Wall

The son, the bough, of this fruitful tree has branches that run over the wall. Chapter forty-nine is filled with figurative speech. In verse 22 we have a garden, a wall, and a tree inside the wall. The bough of this tree has many branches, and these branches run over

the wall. According to the figure, this means that Jacob was moving out beyond the wall. He was not limited to the good land, but he ran out over the wall to Egypt, spreading beyond the limits of the good land into another region. Today, Christ as the very Joseph within us is spreading over the restricting wall. The wall cannot restrict Joseph's spreading; it cannot limit the branching out of this bough. We have this Joseph within us. This means that we have Christ within us as today's Joseph. Our Joseph has many branches which are running over the wall. These branches run over all limitations, for example, the limitations of family, school, or the restrictions of the opposition. No matter how high the wall may be, Joseph's branches will run over it. No matter how high the opposing wall may be, the very Christ within us will run over the wall by means of the many branches.

(c) Having Been Harassed by the Archers

Verse 23 says, "The archers have bitterly harassed him, and shot at him, and lay in wait for him" (Heb.). This refers to Joseph's suffering. His brothers were like archers who attacked him and shot arrows at him. When they were shepherding the flock of their father, Joseph was sent by their father to visit them, and they were actually lying in wait for him. When he came, they seized him.

(d) His Bow Remaining Firm and the Arms of His Hands
Being Made Strong and Agile

However, Joseph's brothers did not gain the victory over him. Verse 24 says, "But his bow remained firm, and the arms of his hands were made strong and agile by the hands of the mighty one of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel)" (Heb.). Joseph's brothers were not victorious because Joseph's bow remained firm and the arms of his hands were made strong and agile by the mighty One of Jacob. This mighty One of Jacob was Jacob's shepherd and his stone. Jacob had a shepherd who took care of him, and he had a stone on which to stand. Both this Shepherd and this rock were the mighty One of Jacob. Joseph was made strong through this mighty One of his father.

(e) Helped by the God of His Father
and Blessed by the All-sufficient

The God of Joseph's father helped him and the all-sufficient One blessed him. Verse 25 says, "Even by the God of thy father, who helpeth thee; and by the All-sufficient, who blesseth thee" (Heb.). When we combine the blessings mentioned in 49:25-26 with those in Deuteronomy 33:13-16, we see that the blessings bestowed upon Joseph were of ten aspects. First, he was blessed with the precious things of heaven (Deut. 33:13). Certainly some of the blessings of the precious things of heaven should include rain and snow. Second, he was blessed with the dew. Third, he was blessed with the blessing of the deep that lies beneath. This refers to the springs, fountains, and waters underneath the earth. Fourth, he was blessed by the precious fruits brought forth by the sun (Deut. 33:14). After that, as the fifth blessing, he had the blessing of the precious things put forth by the moon. We need both the sun, which typifies Christ, and the moon, which typifies the church. Some fruits are brought forth by Christ, and some precious things are put forth by the church. All these were among the blessings bestowed upon Joseph. The sixth blessing Joseph received was the blessing of the best things of the ancient mountains, and the seventh was the precious things of the eternal hills (Deut. 33:15, Heb.). In all these blessings all of time and space is included. From ancient times to eternity, all of time is included, and from heaven to earth, including the deep under the earth, all of space is included. This indicates that all the good things in the universe have become blessings to Joseph. The eighth blessing includes the precious things of the earth and its fullness (Deut. 33:16). Certainly this must include minerals such as gold and silver. The ninth blessing is seen in Genesis 49:25: "Blessings of the breasts, and of the womb." The blessings of the womb are for begetting, and the blessings of the breasts are for nourishing. These refer to the producing of life. This is the only blessing that is of life. The tenth blessing is "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush" (Deut. 33:16). Later we shall see that the One who dwelt in the bush (Exo. 3:4) will dwell in the temple, in the church, and then in the New Jerusalem. All the bushes will be transformed into precious stones. Formerly, God dwelt among the bushes, but eventually He will dwell among the precious stones in the New Jerusalem. This is the very desire of God's heart, His good will. All these things are included in the universal blessing bestowed upon Joseph.

The greatest blessing is the dwelling of the One who dwelt in the bush. God's dwelling among us is the foremost blessing. Suppose your father gives you many things and then leaves you and goes away. This would not be very good. The Father has given us so much, but eventually He gives us His ultimate blessing --His dwelling. As we read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, we see that God has given us many good things. But what God finally gives us is His dwelling.

All these blessings are Christ's inheritance. Hebrews 1:2 says that God has appointed Christ Heir of all things. All the good things throughout time and space are the inheritance of Christ. This is God's blessing to Christ. And we are Christ's partners participating in His inheritance. Joseph here represents Christ. All the blessings of the Father go to Him. In the New Testament we are told that all things have been given to the Son. These are the blessings in space, in time, and in life. All this is Christ's inheritance, and we, His partners, join Him to inherit all these blessings. It is not simply a matter of salvation or of the kingdom. All the things in time from ancient times to eternity, everything in space from heaven to underneath the earth, and all the producing and nourishing aspects of life are the blessings bestowed upon Christ.

This Christ was the One separate from His brothers (49:26). The Hebrew word rendered "separate" is also the word for Nazarite. According to Numbers 6, certain Israelite males were separated from the others to live absolutely for God. Joseph was such a one. He was the first Nazarite in the Bible, separate from his brothers, and Christ became the real Nazarite, separate from all the people. Thus, Joseph typified Christ as the Nazarite, the One who was separated from the common people to live wholly for God. This separated One has received the blessing of the whole universe. The universal blessing is bestowed upon the crown of the head of such a Nazarite.

(f) His Majesty Being like the Firstborn of His Ox,
and His Horns Being like the Horns of the Wild Ox

Deuteronomy 33:17 says, "His majesty is like the firstborn of his ox, and his horns are like the horns of a wild ox: with them he shall push the peoples together to the ends of the earth: and these are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and these are the thousands of Manasseh" (Heb.). Joseph was strong, like the firstborn of the ox. This ox has two horns. One was Ephraim, and the other was Manasseh. With these two horns the ox pushes together the peoples to the ends of the earth. This also is a picture of Christ. Christ is a

strong ox with two horns, pushing the peoples together as He desires. This will take place at the Lord's coming back. Today the peoples are scattered and spreading. But the day will come when Christ as the strong ox will push the peoples together. He may say, "Russians and other nations, don't spread yourselves out. I shall push you together to the ends of the earth." Remember, Genesis 49 is a prophetic record of the entire history of God's people, beginning with sinners and ending with the Christ who inherits all things and takes over the whole earth. Christ is not only fruitful, victorious, and blessed to the uttermost; He is also full of strength to push the peoples on earth according to His purpose.

For centuries, the Russians, inhabitants of a cold region, have been trying to spread to the south, to the Mediterranean Sea. When they tried to reach the Persian Gulf, the British fought them back. Then they built the Siberian railroad to the Far East in order to reach the sea, and after that they constructed the Manchurian railroad to the Pacific. But the British helped the Japanese to defeat them. Today the Russians are trying to penetrate the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. For this reason, Egypt is very important. The hidden intention of the Russians is to take over the good land, including Jerusalem. But eventually Christ, the strong ox, will come with two horns and push the Russians back to the northern region. He may say, "Russians, your destiny is to live in a cold region. Do not try to come down to the Mediterranean Sea, which is reserved eternally for My people." This strong ox will push back the Russians and other peoples to the uttermost. If you think I am speaking nonsense, I ask you to wait and see. Sooner or later, this will happen. The crucial center of international relations today is the Middle East, and many nations want to spread into that region. But Joseph, the strong ox, will come with the ten thousands of Ephraim and the thousands of Manasseh to push the peoples back to the ends of the earth. He may say, "Get away from the Mediterranean Sea. This region is for My people. You must not come here!"

(14) Concerning Benjamin

(a) A Tearing Wolf

Now we come to the two main points concerning Benjamin. Genesis 49:27 says, "Benjamin is a tearing wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and in the evening he shall divide the spoil" (Heb.). In Hebrew the word translated "tearing" means "to tear into pieces." For years I was troubled by the word "wolf" in this verse. Although a lion or a tiger seems positive, a wolf is not positive. However, Christ is not only the overcoming lion, but also the tearing wolf. Benjamin, a tearing wolf, is also a type of Christ. Therefore, the reference to a wolf here is positive, not negative. In the morning he will devour the prey, and in the evening he will divide the spoil, that is, prepare the spoil for the next morning's meal. This means that Christ is not only the overcoming One, but also the tearing One, the One who eats His enemy.

(b) Dwelling by the Lord, and the Lord Covering Him
All the Day Long and Dwelling between His Shoulders

Speaking of Benjamin, Deuteronomy 33:12 says, "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders." The words "by him" indicate that Benjamin will be the Lord's neighbor. He will dwell next door to the Lord. Because he will dwell next door to the Lord, he will dwell in safety. Certainly anyone who dwells by the Lord will dwell in safety. This verse also says that the Lord will cover, overshadow, Benjamin all day long and even dwell between his shoulders. Here we need to point out that Jerusalem was not located in the territory of Judah, but in the territory of Benjamin (Judg. 1:21). If you consult a map, you will see that the territory of Benjamin lies with two shoulders toward the south and that between these two shoulders of Benjamin was Jerusalem, where the temple, the Lord's dwelling, was located.

The Lord's dwelling was a cover that overshadowed Benjamin all the day long, as the Lord will overshadow His people in eternity with His tabernacle (Rev. 7:15). Today the church as the Lord's dwelling is also a cover that overshadows the church people.

Among the twelve sons of Jacob, the first was a sinner, and the last became the dwelling of God. In Genesis chapter three we all were sinners, but at the end of the Bible, in Revelation 21 and 22, we all become Benjamin, the dwelling of God. This is the reason I said that, without Joseph and Benjamin, there would not be an adequate conclusion of the history of God's people. But with Joseph we see that Christ receives the all-inclusive blessing of the universe, and with Benjamin we see that God is dwelling among His chosen people. This is the New Jerusalem and the new heaven and new earth. The new heaven and new earth are the sphere in which every blessing is bestowed upon Christ. Everything in this new sphere will be part of the blessing granted to Christ, and within this sphere will be a certain place, the New Jerusalem, which will be God's eternal dwelling. All this is pictured by the lives of Joseph and Benjamin.

Today we are in the church life, and ultimately we shall be in the New Jerusalem. Do you know who will be there? Joseph and Benjamin. In the proper church life today there is no Reuben or Simeon. Eventually, in the church life there will be only Joseph and Benjamin, the blessing of the Lord and the dwelling of God. The time will come when the church will be just Joseph and Benjamin. The church will be under His blessing universally and it will be His dwelling. The conclusion of the entire Bible as the record of the history of God's people is the universal blessing and the eternal habitation of God. The new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem portray the universal blessing inherited by Christ and God's habitation. We shall go all the way from Reuben to Benjamin, from sinners to God's habitation. Joseph is a sign of God's full blessing, and Benjamin is a sign of God's eternal dwelling. In the churches today we have a miniature of the things to come in the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem; for we are enjoying the foretaste of the full blessing, and we are God's dwelling. In a sense, we all are Josephs and Benjamins. We are a blessed people, and we are the dwelling of God. This is Joseph and Benjamin.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED FIVE

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF JOSEPH AND BENJAMIN

(1)

I became familiar with the history of Jacob's twelve sons long before I realized how sweet and wonderful their history was. The more time I spend on Genesis 49, the more I appreciate these twelve sons. It is very worthwhile to delve into their history. The first four

sons—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah—were all sinful. But Joseph and Benjamin, the last two, are without fault or defect. They are perfect. Between the first four sons and the last two, we have the other six sons. With Dan we see apostasy; with Gad, recovery; with Asher, sufficiency; and with Naphtali, resurrection. If you put together the record of these twelve sons according to Genesis 49, you will have a portrait of yourself. On the one hand, when I look at these twelve sons of Jacob, I marvel at them; on the other hand, I am thankful to God, because in them I see a picture of myself. I also see the very Christ I have experienced and the salvation and transformation that are in Christ. In the past we all were Reubens, Simeons, Levis, and Judahs, but today we are Josephs and Benjamins.

Two of the sinful ones, Levi and Judah, were transferred into something positive. Levi was transferred into the priesthood, and Judah was transferred into the kingship. Thus, among the twelve sons of Jacob, we eventually have the priesthood, the kingship, and finally the ultimate consummation, which we see in Joseph and Benjamin. In the following message we shall see that the ultimate consummation is of two things: blessing and dwelling. We shall be brought fully into the universal blessing under God, and then we shall become His dwelling. Sinners become God's priests and kings, and ultimately they are under His universal blessing and become His eternal dwelling. If we saw the significance of this record, we would shout and praise the Lord. We would say, "Once I was a Reuben, but today I am a Levi, a Judah, a Joseph, and a Benjamin!" For eternity, we shall be the kings under God's blessing, and we shall be God's dwelling.

Have you ever realized that the Bible could be so wonderful? Have you ever seen that in one chapter, Genesis 49, we could have an abstract of the whole Bible and a summary of the history of the twelve sons of Jacob, of the history of the nation of Israel, of the history of the church, and of our own spiritual history? Everything is here. Although this chapter is poetic and very profound, it is nonetheless quite simple. It is all-inclusive. It includes all the Bible, it encompasses the history of the twelve tribes, it indicates the history of the church, and it portrays our personal history. How wonderful! Without doubt, this summarizes God's dealing with His chosen people. God's dealing with His people began with sinners, it proceeds to transformation, and eventually it reaches the ultimate consummation, which is the blessing and the dwelling of God.

Among Jacob's twelve sons, there are various types of persons. How I thank God for giving Jacob twelve sons. What if Jacob had had just one son? In the eyes of God, Abraham and Isaac each had just one son, for God counted only Isaac and Jacob, not Ishmael or Esau. But God's economy required twelve tribes. For this, Jacob had to have twelve sons. Not even ten tribes would have been sufficient. One day, after the death of Solomon, the kingdom of Israel was divided into two parts with ten tribes in one part and two in the other. But not even these ten tribes were sufficient; there had to be twelve. We need to remember the names of Jacob's twelve sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin. In this message we shall consider part of the spiritual significance of Joseph and Benjamin, covering three matters: fruitfulness, victory, and trust. In the following message we shall consider the blessing and the dwelling.

I. FRUITFUL

A. A Son of a Fruitful Tree

Genesis 49:22 says, "A son of a fruitful tree is Joseph, a son of a fruitful tree by a fountain; whose branches run over the wall" (Heb.). Joseph was very fruitful. He was fully occupied with fruitfulness, having no time for anything else. He had no time to argue with his brothers or to fight with others. People become occupied with negative things because they are not fully occupied with positive things. It is not profitable for a large number of saints to be gathered together and not be fully occupied. In such a case they will not be occupied with the positive things. Rather, spontaneously they will become occupied with negative things, just like the man in Matthew 12 who was vacant and who became possessed with seven demons (vv. 43-45). That man was like a clean, unoccupied apartment. Many saints are clean, but they are empty, unoccupied. Therefore, negative things come in. The saints need to be occupied with positive things. Then they will have no capacity, time, or energy for things such as gossip. Gossiping proves that not all our energy is being used. Joseph, however, was not an unoccupied person. As we shall see in later messages, from the time of his youth, he was occupied with positive things. He was occupied with his father's will, his father's mind, his father's interest, and his father's commission. Hence, there was no opportunity for the "gophers" or "dogs" to come in. If a room is filled with twenty people, no gopher would dare to come in. But if the room is unoccupied, gophers and dogs may try to come in. The best way to keep the saints from negative things is to fill them with positive things. Again I say that from his youth, Joseph was fully occupied with positive things, mainly with fruitfulness.

When Joseph's father and eleven brothers and their families came down to Egypt, they became the channels for the branching out of Joseph's fruitfulness. At that time in Egypt Joseph was not simply branching out personally; he was branching out God's administration with seventy people. Joseph was very fruitful. The entire world was under the branching out of Joseph. Joseph was a picture, a type. This means that the fulfillment must be with the church. The church people should be the most fruitful people. Acts chapter two reveals how fruitful Peter and the other eleven apostles were. Throughout the centuries, all who have loved the Lord and who have been occupied with Him have also been fruitful.

Verse 22 says that Joseph was a son of a fruitful tree. The word "son" here indicates a bough or a branch. Most versions translate the Hebrew word as "bough," which is a large branch. This means that Joseph was a branch of a fruitful tree. In the entire universe there is just one fruitful tree, and that tree is Christ. As the branch of God, Christ is a fruitful tree. Zechariah 6:12 says, "Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH." This branch is Christ. Christ as the branch of God has branched out God to humanity, eventually becoming a tree. In John 15, a chapter on fruitfulness, the Lord Jesus said, "I am the true vine" (v. 1). Christ is the vine tree. In John 15:5 the Lord said, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit." As branches of such a fruitful tree, we all need to be fruitful.

Do not consider your weaknesses, failures, or the pitiful situation around you. Church history has two sides—a dark side and a glorious side. When we look at the glorious side, we see abundant fruitfulness. Not only Peter and Paul but all those who love the Lord have been fruitful. Sometimes we may say, "We are weak, our situation is not promising, the increase is coming slowly, and the number remains small." But if you have the heavenly view, you will see that the church is very fruitful and that the history of the church is a history of fruitfulness. Again I say, do not look at the situation from the dark side, but from the glorious side. God is

victorious, and the church is fruitful. The branch is branching out. Peter, Paul, and all the lovers of Christ throughout the centuries have had many branches.

B. Branching over the Wall

These branches are branching out over the wall (49:22), that is, they are spreading Christ over all restrictions, magnifying Him in all circumstances (Phil. 1:20). Genesis 49:22 says that Joseph's branches run over the wall. The wall signifies restriction. Since the day of Pentecost, wall after wall has been erected to restrict the spreading of the branches. One day Peter was even put into prison (Acts 12:3-4). But not even that stronghold could restrict the branching out. Year after year, decade after decade, and century after century, walls have been raised up by the opposers and by the enemy to restrict the church's fruitfulness. But the branches have run over the wall every time.

I can testify of this by what I have seen and experienced during the past fifty years. During these years I have seen the fruitfulness of the branches. Brother Nee, raised up by the Lord in China, was certainly a bough of a fruitful tree, a branch of the fruitful Christ. When I was with him, I became very clear that nothing could restrict his testimony. Brother Nee was burdened to bear a testimony of Jesus that was opposed to organized Christianity. As a result, even many Christians put up walls to restrict him, and they spread rumors about him. Let me give you an illustration of the evil rumors. After he was saved, Brother Nee received great help from a sister named Margaret E. Barber. Miss Barber had a co-worker named Miss Gross. Both Miss Barber and Miss Gross were missionaries who had come from Britain to China. However, by the time Brother Nee was saved, they had left their missions and were in China living by faith in God. Because Brother Nee received so much help from Miss Barber, Miss Gross also came to know him. Since Brother Nee was under the helping hand of Miss Barber, he was simultaneously also under the help of Miss Gross. In 1929 Miss Barber went to be with the Lord, and Miss Gross remained and moved to Shanghai. One day Miss Gross heard the report that a woman was living with Brother Nee, and she came to him to check with him about this. Brother Nee was still single, and, like Miss Barber, Miss Gross, as an elderly sister, loved him and was very concerned about him. Miss Gross said, "I have heard that a woman is staying with you. Is this true?" When Brother Nee answered, "Yes," Miss Gross rebuked him, asking how he, a single young man, could have a woman staying with him. Brother Nee related this incident to me himself to help me understand something about self-vindication. He told me that he was happy to be rebuked. He also told me that the woman staying with him was his mother. He said this, not to vindicate himself, but to render some help to me. When I asked Brother Nee why he did not tell Miss Gross about this, he replied, "She didn't ask me who the woman was. She only asked whether or not a woman was staying with me. When I told her that a woman was living with me, she rebuked me. I didn't say anything." This is one illustration of the rumors spread about Brother Nee.

Another illustration: Immediately after his wedding, a great turmoil was stirred up in Shanghai. This was another wall raised up by the enemy. Brother Nee showed me a newspaper, the leading newspaper in Shanghai and perhaps in all of China. In huge Chinese characters there was a negative article regarding his marriage. Brother Nee said to me, "Witness, in my whole life I never heard about such a thing happening after a wedding."

Today many rumors are being circulated about us, but as yet none of them are as evil as the rumors spread about Brother Nee. The fact that a rumor was circulated concerning a woman staying with Brother Nee indicates that the enemy was constantly trying to raise up walls to restrict his fruitfulness. But Brother Nee's fruitfulness has run over the wall. Today his fruit can be found throughout the earth. No one can wall it in. Even if some raise up a wall one hundred forty-four cubits high, the branches will still run over it.

As the years went by, I saw all the things that happened to Brother Nee. I thank the Lord that I was allowed to see those things and experience them with him. Thus, when I hear the rumors spread about me, I can laugh and say, "I am prepared for this. In the past I saw a wall one thousand feet high. But your wall is a mere fifteen feet." I would like to tell all the opposers throughout the United States, "I don't think you can build a wall one thousand feet high. Probably the highest wall you can build is five hundred feet. However, I have already experienced branching over a wall one thousand feet high." The Lord knows that I am not boasting. At least two elderly brothers from China among us here can testify that in the past I suffered together with Brother Nee. Having rumors spread about us is nothing new. If possible, we should tell the opposers they are wasting their time, for they cannot suppress this testimony. The higher the walls are built to restrict us, the faster the branches will spread over them.

In Acts 5 Gamaliel spoke a good word: "Stay away from these men and leave them alone; for if this counsel or this work is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them, lest perhaps you even be found fighters against God" (vv. 38-39). If this is not the Lord's recovery, it should be overthrown. If it is not the recovery, let it sink to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. But if it is the Lord's recovery, the opposers should be careful, for they will suffer shame. They will never be able to defeat this testimony. The more they try to hold it down, the higher it will rise up. Church history testifies of this.

Let me share a little of my personal experience. After I was saved, by the mercy of the Lord I became a seeking Christian, one who sought the Lord. The Christians in my home town loved me. One day, however, I was caught by the Lord for His recovery, and a church was raised up in my home town. According to the outsiders, I was the one doing the preaching and teaching there. Before the church was raised up, some of the Christians invited me to speak at their meetings. They even provided transportation to and from the meeting. In China, that was considered an expression of love and respect. But after the church was raised up there, those very ones who invited me to the meetings and even provided transportation for me completely ignored me when they saw me on the street. Then rumors were spread about me. Some of those rumors said that I was teaching heresy. I have been condemned as heretical from the time I first came into the church life. This is nothing new to me.

Fifty years ago, my home town was the most famous city in North China for Bible knowledge. Hearing the rumors that my teaching was heretical, certain young men, sons of fundamental Christian preachers, came to the meetings to find out for themselves what was going on. Prior to this, instead of attending services of their fathers' denominations, they went to operas, theaters, and gambling places. When these young men were engaging in such sinful activities, their parents were not very concerned. However, when some of them were attracted to the church life and caught by it, the pastors began to warn them not to attend the meetings. One of these young men said to a certain pastor, "When I was going to the gambling places and to the theaters, you did not come to warn me about what I was doing. But now that I am going to a place where I can listen to the Word of God and where I am receiving much help in spiritual life, you come to warn me not to go there. Do not come to me again. I have been helped by attending these meetings, and I

intend to keep on receiving this help." This shows that the branches were running over the wall.

Throughout the years, the opposers have followed me from my home town to many other places, including Taiwan. A certain preacher purposely went to Taiwan from my home town to try to destroy my ministry. When I was bothered by the opposition, the Lord said, "Look at Paul, and read the book of Acts again. Wherever the apostles went, the opposing Jews followed and caused trouble."

Recently, one of the brothers received a letter from Australia, written by a traveling preacher, filled with negative statements about me. In the whole letter there was nothing positive concerning me. However, several years ago the same man who wrote this letter had written another letter in which he praised me very highly. In the letter written several years ago, this traveling preacher said, "To me, Witness Lee has always been a great man of God in his personal life, and a most fruitful servant of God in his ministry. I'm sure I cannot lace his shoes. I would be a happy man if I thought the Lord would give me half the reward, or even one tenth, He has for His eminent servant." But recently the same person has written a letter filled with slanderous lies about me. It is difficult to believe that both were written by the same person. This second letter was written because the fruitful branch has spread to Sydney. Some, seeing the branching out in Australia, were stirred up and wondered what they could do about it. Hence, this letter was written in an attempt to restrict the branching out of the Lord's recovery in Australia. When I consider things such as this in the light of 49:22, I am happy, for the branches are still running over the wall. What is happening today exactly corresponds to what is written in this verse. The opposers are wasting their time. The more walls they raise up, the more branching out there will be.

How can a traveling preacher, one who preaches the gospel in the name of the Lord Jesus and teaches the Bible, speak lies, even slander a brother? This is the poor situation of today's Christianity. There is no conscience and no moral standard. As long as some can frustrate the Lord's recovery, they are happy. But no wall can frustrate the spread of the branches. In fact, the opposition actually helps the Lord's spreading. This is the experience of Joseph.

In 1958 I was invited to England. From that time onward, some have tried to restrict the Lord's recovery from spreading to Europe. But when the Lord's Recovery began to spread there, they were not able to do anything. The branches are spreading over the wall in Germany, Switzerland, and even in Denmark and Sweden. No one can restrict the spreading of Joseph. If we are today's Joseph, who can restrict us?

Rumors about us have also been spread in Central America and in South America. But praise the Lord that His recovery in Brazil is spreading like wild fire! None of the "firemen" know what to do about it. Before this wild fire began to spread, the opposers in Christianity circulated rumors concerning me and the churches. I ask you to wait for another period of time and see what will happen. Everything depends on whether or not we are today's Joseph. If we are, no one and nothing will be able to restrict the spreading of the branches over the wall.

II. VICTORIOUS

A. Overcoming the Archers' Attack

Genesis 49:23 and 24 say, "The archers have bitterly harassed him, and shot at him, and lay in wait for him: but his bow remained firm" (Heb.). Joseph overcame the archers' attack. The spiritual significance of this is that in all suffering we more than conquer (Rom. 8:36-37). The sufferings cannot suppress us; rather, we subdue the sufferings.

B. Being Made Strong by the Mighty One

Although Joseph was persecuted, harassed, and attacked, he remained strong. He was not only strong, but also agile. Verse 24 says, "The arms of his hands were made strong and agile by the hands of the mighty One of Jacob" (Heb.). The more Joseph suffered and the more he was attacked, the more he became strong. His suffering also trained him to be agile. In order for our arms and legs to be agile, we need to be trained by suffering. Joseph was a trained person; he was trained through his sufferings. It is the same with us today. All the opposition and the rumors only help us to be agile.

Joseph, of course, was made strong and agile by the mighty One of Jacob. The source of his strength and agility was God. If you read Joseph's history, you will see that God was always with him. When he was tempted by Potiphar's wife, he said, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (39:9). This indicates that God was with him. His strength and his agility came from God.

Today in the Lord's recovery we are empowered in the grace of Christ to withstand all opposition for the Lord's testimony (2 Tim. 2:1). Our strength is not of ourselves, but of the Lord. As long as we have Him as the source of our strength, no opposition can suppress us.

C. Tearing like a Wolf

In 49:27 Benjamin is likened to a tearing wolf: "Benjamin is a tearing wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and in the evening he shall divide the spoil" (Heb.). The term "wolf" is not a pleasant term. However, whenever you tear anything, you cannot be nice; rather, you must be like a wolf. When we had to tear down some things in order to complete the building of the meeting hall in Anaheim, I observed the expressions of those who were doing this work. The expression on every face was fierce. A gentleman cannot tear down anything. Whenever you are about to tear something down, you must be a wolf. Benjamin was a wolf.

In 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul says, "Overthrowing reasonings and every high thing rising up against the knowledge of God, and taking captive every thought unto the obedience of Christ." When I was young, I thought that Paul was proud in saying this. Speaking about overthrowing reasonings and every high thing and about capturing thoughts is not nice, humble, gentle, mild, or kind. When Paul wrote those words, he was a tearing wolf. Many times when I contact others I am humble and nice. But at certain times I am like a wolf tearing things into pieces. In ordinary talk, I am a gentleman, but there are times when I show no mercy. Sometimes my co-workers and even my dear wife have asked me to be merciful toward others. But can you ask a tearing wolf to be merciful? If a wolf

could speak, he would say, "In my language there is no such word as mercy." A tearing wolf shows no mercy. We are not tearing people into pieces; we are tearing Satan. We are also tearing into pieces the dissenting thoughts and reasonings. All these high things must be torn to shreds.

D. Pushing like an Ox

Deuteronomy 33:17 says, "His majesty is like the firstborn of his ox, and his horns are like the horns of a wild ox: with them he shall push the peoples together to the ends of the earth: and these are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and these are the thousands of Manasseh" (Heb.). Joseph is likened to a pushing ox. In the previous message I pointed out that when Christ comes back, He will push the Russians away from the good land. I definitely believe this. But we also may experience Joseph as a pushing ox today. As I have considered my past experiences and the experiences of Brother Nee, I realize that I have certainly seen the pushing victory. The opposers joined forces to squeeze us, but there was the pushing victory, the pushing strength, and the pushing horns. Wait for a while, and you will see Joseph's pushing strength. Joseph is fruitful, and he is victorious in tearing and in pushing. We in the Lord's recovery today are all Josephs strong in tearing the opposition and in pushing the opposition away.

Many of you have read the booklet entitled, What a Heresy—Two Divine Fathers, Two Life-giving Spirits, and Three Gods! Although this booklet has been out for several months, no one has written a booklet in reply to it. The mouths of the opposers have been shut, and their writing hands have been amputated, for they have no way to take care of Isaiah 9:6 and 1 Corinthians 15:45. No matter how some may twist Isaiah 9:6, they cannot eliminate the title Father found here. This verse says that a Son is given to us and that His name is called the everlasting Father, or the Father of eternity. This Father certainly is the Father of the Godhead. If you say that the Father in Isaiah 9:6 is not the Father of the Godhead, then you hold the heresy of believing in two divine Fathers. But in the whole universe there is only one source, the Father in the Godhead. There cannot be another Father as another source. Do not tell me about history or about the Nicene Creed or any other creed. I do not care for the creeds—I only care for the pure word in Isaiah 9:6.

First Corinthians 15:45 says, "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." Some, opposing us, have twisted this verse and said, "It says 'a spirit,' not 'the Spirit.'" But do not forget the modifier "life-giving." This verse speaks of the life-giving Spirit. Do you believe that this Spirit is different from the Holy Spirit of the Godhead? If so, then you believe in two life-giving Spirits. That is heresy! In fighting this battle, I am a wolf tearing the enemy to pieces.

Some of the opposers appeal to the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed is like a pair of shoes two inches long, but our feet are twelve inches long. Do you intend to cut your feet to fit into your little shoes, or will you get a pair of shoes to fit your feet? The book of Revelation speaks of the seven Spirits, but are the seven Spirits covered by the Nicene Creed? No! The New Testament also speaks of the life-giving Spirit, but does the Nicene Creed contain any reference to the life-giving Spirit? No! Thus, that pair of shoes is too short. The vision we have is much greater than what is contained in that creed. We must not reduce the vision to match the shoes; rather, we must throw away those old shoes and take the pure word of the Bible. Let all of Christianity oppose us. Eventually, we shall see what the outcome will be. In the Lord's recovery we have both the tearing strength and the pushing strength. Sooner or later, the enemy will not only be defeated and subdued; he will unconditionally surrender. God is leading us in triumph (2 Cor. 2:14). The truth is the truth, Joseph is Joseph, and Benjamin is Benjamin.

III. TRUSTING

Genesis 49:24 also speaks of the Shepherd, the stone of Israel, and verse 25 says, "Even by the God of thy father, who helpeth thee; and by the All-sufficient, who blesseth thee" (Heb.). These verses indicate why Joseph and Benjamin became the ultimate consummation: they trusted in the mighty One of Jacob. They trusted in the Shepherd of Israel, and they stood upon the stone of Israel. They trusted in the all-sufficient One. The New Testament equivalent for trusting in the All-sufficient is Philippians 4:13, which says, "I can do all things in Him who empowers me." The equivalent of the Shepherd of Israel is seen in 1 Peter 5:4, which says that Christ, the Chief Shepherd, will appear. Finally, the New Testament equivalent of the stone of Israel is seen in Christ, the rock of the church. First Corinthians 10:4 says, "For they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ."

In Jacob's prophetic blessing of Joseph we see that Joseph's fruitfulness and victory came out of his trust in the Lord. If we would be today's Joseph and Benjamin, we must be those who trust in the mighty One, in the Shepherd of Israel, in the rock of the church, and in the all-sufficient One. My conscience testifies that without trusting in the Lord, I can do nothing. If I do not pray about everything I do in the Lord's recovery, I would have no peace. I pray about everything I do in the Lord's recovery, praying until I have the peace and the assurance. Before I deliver a message, I pray about it until I am fully inspired and empowered. The life of Joseph is a trusting life, a life that trusts in God for its living. This is the secret of Joseph's fruitfulness and victory.

Although the language of poetry is economical, Jacob nonetheless used different titles of the God who is worthy of our trust: the mighty One, the Shepherd, the stone, the All-sufficient, and the God of thy father. We are not the first generation to trust in God. Rather, we are one of the later generations. We see the testimony of our forefathers' trust in their God, and now their God has become our God. Hence, we follow in their footsteps to trust in their God, who is the mighty One, the all-sufficient One, the Shepherd, the rock, and the foundation. Hallelujah, we are standing on Him and trusting in Him! Therefore, we are fruitful and victorious.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SIX

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF JOSEPH AND BENJAMIN

(2)

Jacob's prophecy regarding his twelve sons ends with a blessing that includes ten items. The history of these twelve sons begins with a sinner, that is, it begins with sin, even with a gross sin, not a refined sin. At the beginning we have a person who is full of sin, and at the end we have a person who receives the universal blessing. Thus, the prophecy ends with the full blessing. With Joseph, everything

is a blessing, and the blessing is everywhere. There is blessing upon blessing.

The Bible is a wonderful book; no human mind can fully understand it. The more we study the Bible, the more we realize how little we really know it. The Bible is too profound. The ten blessings related to Joseph, for example, require the whole Bible for their development.

IV. BLESSED

A. With the Precious Things of Heaven

First are the blessings with the precious things of heaven above (49:25). The precious things of heaven above certainly include rain and snow. These precious things must also include the angels, for the angels certainly are a blessing to us. They are our servants and even camp around us (Heb. 1:13-14; Psa. 34:7). Every believer has at least one angel. For example, Acts 12 speaks of Peter's angel (v. 15), and in the Gospel of Matthew the Lord Jesus indicates that we have angels (18:10).

The material things in the Old Testament are shadows of the reality in the New Testament. In the New Testament the blessings are spiritual blessings. Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." In this verse we have the words blessed and blessing. We are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. The word "places" is not found in the original text. It is difficult to say what the words "the heavenlies" definitely refer to. Certainly this includes the heavenly nature, the heavenly position, the heavenly condition, the heavenly situation, the heavenly atmosphere, and the heavenly capacity. The spiritual blessings are of a heavenly nature, in a heavenly situation and atmosphere, and under a heavenly condition. In other words, every aspect of these spiritual blessings is heavenly. Today we are enjoying these heavenly blessings. According to the New Testament reality and fulfillment, the precious things of heaven above are the blessings in the heavenlies.

Ephesians chapter one reveals that one of these heavenly blessings is God's selection. God did not select us on earth, but in the heavens. Thus, our selection is heavenly, with the heavenly nature, under a heavenly condition, and in a heavenly atmosphere. A second spiritual blessing is predestination. Predestination is nothing earthly; rather it is heavenly. After God selected us, He predestined us, marked us out, in the heavenlies. This marking out is heavenly in nature, in atmosphere, and in condition. Although the worldly people know nothing of the heavenly blessings, we are enjoying them, for we have been selected and predestinated by God from heaven. We all have been marked out, and wherever we go we bear this heavenly mark. This mark was made in the heavenlies before the foundation of the world. Therefore, it is not anything earthly, but heavenly. The adoption to be the sons of God is another heavenly blessing mentioned in Ephesians 1. Redemption and forgiveness are also included among these heavenly blessings. Although we are on earth, we are nonetheless enjoying the heavenly redemption and the heavenly forgiveness. The One who redeemed us and who has forgiven us is the very God in heaven. Our redemption and forgiveness come from the heavens. Besides all these, in Ephesians 1 there are also other items listed among the spiritual blessings.

The heavenly rain and snow also come down upon us. There are many who do not like snow. However, those who live where there is snow are often healthier than those who live in a warm climate. Whether we like it or not, in our spiritual life our heavenly Father sometimes sends snow upon us. It is healthy to be outside in the snow; it is a marvelous enjoyment as well. Rain is good, and snow is enjoyable. These are some of the precious things of heaven above. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we are under God's blessing of the precious things of heaven.

B. With the Dew

Joseph was also blessed with the dew (Deut. 33:13). Dew is a finer blessing than either rain or snow. The Bible uses dew to describe God's merciful favor (Lam. 3:22-23). This indicates that something from the heavens is always descending upon us. This something is not very strong and bold; it is fine and gentle, seeming to come quietly, a little at a time. This is the dew. Psalm 133 says that the blessing upon the unity of the brothers is like the dew of Hermon that descends upon the mountains of Zion. Mount Hermon, to the north of Mount Zion, is much higher than Mount Zion. The dew of Hermon must descend upon Zion by means of a strong north wind. The dew comes from the north. Do not think that only the snow comes from the north, for dew also comes from that direction. Sometimes the Father sends us the rain and at other times He sends the snow, but more often He sends the dew. Every morning the Lord's mercy is like the dew. This is the reason we must keep morning watch. If you do not attend morning watch, you will miss the dew. After the sun rises, the dew will disappear. If you would enjoy the dew, you must rise up early in the morning. This dew is not as cold, sharp, or troublesome as the snow. It comes from the heavens by the blowing of the north wind. But when it comes, it comes gently and quietly, a little at a time. If you consider your experience, you will realize that you have had some experience of the dew. This dew that comes upon us waters us a little at a time. How gentle and fine it is!

C. With the Deep, the Springs, Lying Beneath

Both Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 say that Joseph was blessed "with the deep that lieth beneath" (Heb.). This must refer to the deep springs underneath the earth. The blessings upon Joseph begin with heaven above, proceed to the snow and the dew in the air, and then go on to the springs in the earth. By the mention of the dew and the deep, the springs, we realize that the precious things of heaven above should no doubt refer to rain and snow. According to the New Testament, the real spring is not underneath the earth; it is within us. John 4:14 says, "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a spring of water welling up into eternal life." We have a spring of divine life welling up from within us. What a blessing! Therefore, we are constantly receiving and enjoying the blessings that come from above, from within, and from the air. Some of the blessings from above are like rain and snow, some of the blessings from within are like springs, and some of the blessings in the air are like the dew. We Christians, today's Josephs, are fully under these blessings.

D. With the Precious Fruits Brought Forth by the Sun

Deuteronomy 33:14 speaks of the blessing "with the precious fruits brought forth by the sun" (Heb.). The fruits of plants are produced by sunshine. Without sunshine, no fruit tree could grow very well. Many fruits are actually formed and even constituted with sunshine. Since the sun is a type of Christ, the spiritual fruits brought forth by the sun signify all the riches of Christ. In the universe, and especially to us, Christ is the real sun. In Ephesians 3:8 Paul speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Nearly all the riches of Christ are items that have been processed. For example, Christ is our life. But this life is not a "raw" life; it is a processed life. The life which we have received of Christ and by which we are living is a processed life. Christ has many precious fruits, and life is one of them. Patience is another. This patience, however, is a processed patience. Christ is also our submission, but this submission is a processed submission. It is easy to say that Christ is everything to us; however, it is not so easy to itemize all the aspects of what He is to us. We need to come together for the purpose of fellowshipping regarding the riches of Christ and itemizing them. But do not speak about things in an objective way. Instead, itemize all the subjective aspects of Christ.

Fruit is what comes into being after passing through a particular process. All the riches of Christ are fruits, and every fruit has passed through a process. All the riches of Christ are blessings, and we are under these blessings today. Here I am not merely speaking about the riches of Christ, but about the riches of Christ as blessings to us. Every item of the riches of Christ is a blessing. What a blessing it is to be under the patience of Christ! And what a blessing to be under Christ's encouragement! I am encouraged by Christ, and Christ is my encouragement. This encouragement is a processed fruit that I enjoy today. The Bible also says that Christ is our way (John 14:6). Often we feel that we do not have a way to handle a certain situation. But our experience proves that Christ is our way. We need to trust in Him, live by Him, and take Him as our everything. When we need a way out of a difficulty, Christ is the way. He is also the way for us to handle our situations. Is this not a blessing to us? Whatever Christ is, is a blessing. His riches are the precious fruits brought forth by the sun.

E. With the Precious Things Put Forth by the Moon

Deuteronomy 33:14 also speaks of "the precious things put forth by the moon." The Holy Spirit never uses the wrong word in the Bible. Notice that this verse says that the sun has brought forth, but that the moon has put forth. The sun produces, but the moon does not produce. Thus, fruit is brought forth by the sun, but the precious things are put forth by the moon. In reality, Christ is the sun, and the church is the moon. The fruits are brought forth by Christ, but they are put forth by the church. One of these fruits is forgiveness, and another is justification. Other fruits put forth by the church are reconciliation, redemption, and eternal life. We receive forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, redemption, and eternal life not directly from Christ, but indirectly through the churches.

First Thessalonians 2:14 says, "For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus." This verse indicates that the Gentile churches followed the churches in Judea. The churches in Judea had been established longer, and they had learned and experienced a number of things. Whatever they learned and experienced was put forth to the Gentile churches, and the Gentile churches enjoyed their fruit. Nearly all the riches of Christ we enjoy day by day do not come directly from Christ, but come indirectly through the churches. Whatever the church in Anaheim enjoys and experiences will be put forth to all the other churches, and what the other churches experience will be put forth to the church in Anaheim. Recently the churches in Taiwan helped us to eat and digest the life-study messages. This is a fruit put forth by the churches in Taiwan. The blessings upon us include all the experiences of the church.

F. and G. With the Best Things of the Ancient Mountains and with the Precious Things of the Eternal Hills

Genesis 49:26 speaks of the blessing unto the "utmost bound of the eternal hills," and Deuteronomy 33:15 says, "And with the best things of the ancient mountains, and with the precious things of the eternal hills" (Heb.). The words "ancient" and "eternal" indicate that this blessing refers to time, but the words "mountains," "hills," and "utmost bound" indicate that the blessing also refers to space. Together time and space equal the universe. Hence, this verse indicates that the blessing we are under is universal, from eternity past to eternity future and from the ancient mountains to the eternal hills, even to the utmost bound. This, of course, is poetic language. It indicates that the blessings we are under are universal, covering all of time and space. The mention of the mountains and hills implies that the plain is included, for it is impossible to be on the mountain without passing through the plain. Therefore, the mountains, the hills, and the utmost bound imply all of space, including even the meeting hall and your place of dwelling. The universal blessing is long and wide, and it reaches from eternity past to eternity future. It is so spacious that we cannot travel through it. The blessing we are under is everywhere. Every time, morning, afternoon, and evening, day and night, is a time of blessing.

When you get into the new heaven and the new earth, you will see that at every time and in every place there will be a blessing. At that time there will be no more sea, meaning that there will be no curse. The entire universe will be a blessing. In space there will be blessing, and in time there will be blessing. The new heaven and the new earth will be nothing but a blessing. At that time you will understand that our blessing is from eternity past to eternity future and from the ancient mountains to the eternal hills, even to the utmost bound. At every time and in every place we are under this blessing.

H. With the Precious Things of the Earth and Its Fullness

Deuteronomy 33:16 speaks of the "precious things of the earth and its fulness" (Heb.). In 1 Corinthians 3:21 and 22 we find a New Testament word that corresponds to this: "For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours." According to these verses, "all things" includes death. Thus, even death, which includes all negative things, is a blessing. We, the children of God, are the blessed people. We are the Josephs under God's blessing.

When I was young, I did a great deal of selection. For instance, I told the Lord that I wanted to be healthy, not ill, and that I did not

want to suffer from certain kinds of things. I wanted to have everything that was good. Eventually, however, the selection did not depend on me. Things did not turn out to be according to my choice. When I first came into the Lord's ministry, I prayed very much and asked the Lord to give me a co-worker who was always nice, one who was neither too strong nor too weak. In my prayer I said, "Lord, You know me and You know what I need. I need a nice person, one who is neither too quick nor too slow." But today I do not like to have any selection. Sometimes the co-worker who is not so nice in my eyes is the one who becomes the greatest blessing to me.

The same is true in married life and in family life. It is difficult for me to tell anyone what kind of wife is the best wife. When I was young, I could tell you, but I cannot tell you today. Perhaps the wife who seems to be the worst will become the greatest blessing to you. You need to believe that all things, including a difficult wife, are blessings. Furthermore, whether your children are nice or naughty, they are a blessing to you. Many times naughty children are a greater blessing than nice ones. You may ask the Lord for nice children, but He may give you naughty ones. However, even those naughty ones are a blessing.

It is even a blessing to have something stolen from us. When something was stolen from me in my youth, I became angry. But today it does not matter whether you give me something or steal something from me. It does not matter whether I gain a thousand dollars or lose a thousand dollars. Perhaps losing a large amount of money will be a greater blessing than receiving the same amount. But one thing I know—everything is a blessing; everything is a gain. But when I was young, I would lose my peace for several hours even over losing a handkerchief. But if today I lost something worth a thousand dollars, I still would have the peace to sleep soundly. To suffer over the loss of something like this indicates that you are under the curse. When the worldly people lose even a small amount of money, they cannot sleep. But if we lose a large amount, we can still praise the Lord for the blessing that such a loss will bring in. As long as I am not touched by a particular loss, I am blessed. Because we are under the blessing, no loss is truly a loss to us. Although we are not yet in the new heaven and the new earth, we have a foretaste of it today. We need the vision to see that we are today's Joseph and that everything is a blessing to us.

I do not like the rumors that are being spread about us. But others can testify for me that I praise the Lord because all these rumors are blessings to us. They are a form of free advertisement. Because of these rumors, my name has become famous throughout the world. I did not have to pay anything for all this advertising. I have never gone to Central America or to Africa, but my name is known there. Thus, even the rumors are a blessing.

Whether or not all things are blessings does not depend on what happens; it depends on who we are. If we are Joseph, everything is a blessing. But if we are Reuben, everything is a curse. My burden in this message is to impress you with the fact that to us everything is a blessing. There is no need to list all the items of the universal blessing in detail. All things are blessings. This is not a mere doctrine; it is what I have experienced.

Nothing bothers me because I realize that everything is from my Father. Everything, good or bad, positive or negative, is a blessing. We all must believe this. Even if we lose something, that loss is a blessing. Paul said that all things are ours, whether Paul, Peter, Apollos, life, death, or any other thing. Formerly, we were Reubens, but now we are Josephs. As long as we are Josephs, whatever betide, everything is a blessing. If you hate me, that is a blessing. If you love me, that also is a blessing. If you rob me, that is a blessing. If you give me something, that also is a blessing. No matter how you treat me, with love or with hatred, what you do to me is a blessing. If you do not do anything, that also is a blessing. I am altogether blessed. Because I am not a Reuben, but a Joseph, I am a blessed person. Praise the Lord that in the church we are Josephs!

Consider Joseph's experience. He was hated and betrayed by his brothers, and he was placed into some difficult situations. Nevertheless, everything that happened to him was a blessing. What his brothers did to Joseph turned out to be a blessing. When Joseph made himself known to his brothers in Egypt, he said, "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5). Joseph also said, "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (50:20). Joseph seemed to be saying, "You don't need to be afraid of me or worried about what I will do to you, for everything you did to me was a blessing." Everything in the universe is a blessing to us. Time, space, the heavens, the earth, the air, the things underneath the earth, all persons, all matters, and all things—everything is a blessing to us. Oh, we must believe this! In the early days I held this as a mere belief. But now I can testify with an honest heart that in my experience it is truly so. Everything that happens to us is a blessing.

In Jacob's prophecy with blessing there is a condition for blessing the first ten sons, but not with Joseph. Joseph's blessing is unconditional. If we saw this, we would simply pray, "Lord, I don't know what is good or what is bad. Lord, I only pray that Your will be done." Everything depends upon whether you are a Reuben or a Joseph. It does not depend upon the heavens, the earth, the air, or anything else. If you are a Reuben, everything will be a curse and a loss. But if you are a Joseph, everything will be a gain. Nothing in heaven, on earth, or under the earth could be a loss to you. Rather, all things will work together for good to you as long as you love the Lord (Rom. 8:28). Even the most insignificant thing works together for your good. Your neighbors, in-laws, and friends all work together for your good because you are blessed.

All the New Testament believers are Josephs. You may not feel that you are a Joseph, but the Lord says that you are. As long as you are a believer, you are no longer a Reuben, but a Joseph. Because you are a Joseph, everything that happens to you is a blessing. Heaven, earth, the snow, the rain, the dew, and everything under the earth is a blessing to you. This is the reason the New Testament tells us to thank the Lord for all things (Eph. 5:20; 1 Thes. 5:18). I wonder whether the parents of naughty children ever thank the Lord for their naughty children. If you have a naughty child, you must thank the Lord, saying, "Lord, how I thank You for this naughty child. Lord, I thank You for this dissenting, rebellious child. What a blessing this child is to me!" If such a child remains a Reuben, everything will be a curse to him. But if he believes in the Lord, he will become another Joseph, and then whatever happens to him will be a blessing. If you read the New Testament carefully, you will see that the New Testament believers are the blessed people. We are those under the universal blessing. This is why we should not curse anyone (Rom. 12:14). Because everything is a blessing to us, we cannot help but bless others. Even if others do something bad to us, that bad thing is a blessing. Hence, there is no need for us to curse them; instead of cursing, we would bless them. We may say, "Thank you for hating me. God bless you. Your hatred is a blessing to me. I can bless you in any kind of situation. If you treat me well, I bless you. If you mistreat me, I still bless you." Praise the Lord that we are the blessed people!

If you see this, you will realize that you are under God's blessing. However, we often still speak in a natural way. When we gain something, we thank the Lord for His blessing. But when we lose something, usually we do not thank Him. We need to see the vision that we are Josephs, that we are the blessed people, that we are under God's blessing. Whatever happens to us, good or bad, we should say, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! This is a blessing."

We often ask people, "Are you saved?" But now we should learn to ask them, "Are you blessed?" Whenever we are asked this question, we should reply, "Yes, we are blessed." Fundamental Christians often speak of believers as being blood-redeemed and Spirit-regenerated. We need to learn to say that we are the universally blessed people. Our home, family, and all that belongs to us is a blessing, no matter how bad things may sometimes be. We never know what the result of a thing will be. Today something may seem to be good, but it may turn out to be bad. However, a certain thing may seem very bad, but turn out to be good. Only the Lord knows. Whether things are good or bad, the result is the same. It does not make any difference whether our children are nice or naughty, whether our husband or wife is easy to live with or difficult. To Joseph everything is a blessing. If you see this, you will enjoy rest and peace. You will say, "Hallelujah! We have been selected, predestinated, called, and saved, and now we are being blessed." We are the blessed people, those under God's blessing, and everything is a blessing to us. All things are ours.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SEVEN

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF JOSEPH AND BENJAMIN

(3)

As we have pointed out a number of times, the record of Jacob's blessing found in Genesis 49 begins with a sinner and ends with the universal blessing and the eternal dwelling. If we have a proper knowledge of the Bible, we shall see that the entire Bible issues in the universal blessing of God and in His eternal dwelling. For eternity, we shall be under the universal blessing to be God's eternal dwelling. This is the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem. The new heaven and new earth will be a realm of universal blessing. We shall be under this blessing in order that we may be the New Jerusalem. According to the picture in Revelation 21 and 22, in the environment of the new heaven and new earth there is nothing but blessing, blessing upon blessing. Everything in that environment will be a blessing to the New Jerusalem, God's eternal dwelling. We, God's chosen people, shall be that dwelling within and under the universal blessing. This is the ultimate consummation of the revelation of the Bible.

It is very interesting to see that the short record of Jacob's prophetic blessing issues in the same conclusion as does the entire Bible. Although there is no sin in the first two chapters of Genesis, sin enters the scene in chapter three. The sinner in Genesis chapter three was a real Reuben. However, in the last two chapters of the Bible, there will be the real Joseph and Benjamin. We may say that Joseph is the sign of the universal blessing. All the blessings are upon the head of the one who was separate from his brothers. Benjamin is the symbol of God's eternal dwelling. Hallelujah, the church in the Lord's recovery today is a miniature of the universal blessing and the eternal dwelling! In the churches we have blessing upon blessing. Under such a blessing, we are the dwelling of God.

These two matters, blessing and dwelling, are found in the New Testament Epistles. Probably not many Christians have paid attention to these matters in the Epistles. But these two words provide the outline of the Epistles, for all the Epistles are on God's blessing. Take Ephesians as a representative illustration. Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." Here we have the matter of the blessings. Ephesians 1:23 speaks of the Body, and Ephesians 2:22 speaks of the habitation, both of which are symbols of God's dwelling. In Ephesians 3:16 and 17 the Apostle Paul prayed that the Father would strengthen us through His Spirit into the inner man that Christ may make His home in our hearts. Hence, in the short book of Ephesians, both the blessings and the dwelling are covered. God has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings in the heavenlies for the purpose that we might become His dwelling.

If you would ask me to say what the Epistles reveal, I would say that they reveal the matters of blessing and dwelling. To see this, however, we need light and vision. Without light and vision, we may read the Epistles again and again and see only things such as the charge for wives to submit to their husbands and for husbands to love their wives, to redeem the time, to be diligent, and to love our neighbors. If we view the Epistles with our natural sight, without the light and the vision, we shall mainly see these minor points and miss the blessing and the dwelling in the Epistles. The New Testament is concerned with the matters of blessing and dwelling.

So many excellent and wonderful points are covered in Genesis 49. How I thank the Lord that Jacob's first son was Reuben and that the last two were Joseph and Benjamin! If Joseph and Benjamin had been the first two and Reuben the last, everything would have been upside down. Praise the Lord that once we were Reubens, but today we are Josephs and Benjamins! I can testify that I am today's Joseph and Benjamin. Day and night, I am under God's blessing, and I am God's dwelling place. Even the young people, those in junior high and high school, must be Josephs and Benjamins. Before we came into the church, we never realized the significance of Joseph and Benjamin. But if we in the Lord's recovery are not Josephs and Benjamins, then who is? Are you not a Joseph and a Benjamin? Are you not under God's universal blessing, and are you not God's eternal dwelling? As today's Benjamin, God dwells in me, and not only in me, but between my shoulders.

I. With the Blessings of the Breasts and the Womb

In the previous message we covered the first eight aspects of the universal blessing. In his blessing of Joseph, Jacob used many poetic expressions, such as ancient mountains, eternal hills, and the utmost bound of the eternal hills. These particular expressions indicate time and space, all time from the ancient times to eternity and all space from heaven to under the earth. Hence, these poetic expressions refer to the universal blessing, for time plus space equals the universe. We have a blessing that fills the entire universe. Throughout time and space, we are under this blessing. God's blessing fills the universe, from eternity past to eternity future and from the heavens above to the depths underneath the earth. Everywhere and at every time there is nothing but blessing. Oh, we all must see this vision and have this realization! There is no need to wait for the coming of the new heaven and the new earth, for in the

church life today we are in the foretaste of this universal blessing.

Although the first eight items of the blessing bestowed upon Joseph are universal, they are rather common. If you examine them, you will see that nothing of life is involved; neither is there anything of dwelling. Hence, we need to consider the last two items, one of which involves life and the other, dwelling. Remember, the record in Genesis 49 is poetic and poetry often uses symbols. One picture or symbol can take the place of a thousand words. Under the inspiration of God, in 49:25 Jacob spoke of "blessings of the breasts, and of the womb." In this poetic utterance, the womb signifies the producing of life, the begetting of life, and the breasts signify the nourishment of life. In His creation, God only blessed the living creatures and man (1:22, 28). He did not bless His work accomplished on the first four days. He did not bless the sun, the moon, the stars, or the vegetation on the earth. But on the fifth day God blessed the living creatures in the waters and the fowl in the air, and on the sixth day He blessed man. Thus, among all the works of His creation, God blessed only the living creatures and man. This impresses us with the fact that God is for life. God's intention is to have the producing life. The fact that Joseph was blessed with the blessings of the womb and of the breasts indicates that he was blessed with the begetting and nourishing life. These figures should not be applied to the animal life, nor even to the human life, but to the eternal life. The eternal life is the highest life, the most productive life. In the New Testament we see that the producing life is not the animal life nor the human life, but the eternal life. Today we in the church are experiencing the eternal life as the producing life. The many items of blessing in the church include the breasts and the womb, the producing and nourishing life.

Look at the picture given in Revelation 21 and 22. In these chapters we have the new heaven, the new earth, and the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem there is the river of water of life. In this river of life grows the tree of life. In the entire new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem, the central item is the flowing life. No doubt, all the other aspects of the universal blessing are present, such as the blessing of the heavens, the blessing of the dew, the blessing of the earth, and the blessing of the things beneath the earth. But Revelation 21 and 22 do not mention the other things. These chapters mention only the flowing of life with the tree of life, something that provides nourishment. If you simply read Genesis 49 according to the black and white, you will not see the matter of the producing and nourishing life. You must get into the spiritual significance of the poetic expressions used in this chapter. Hallelujah, in the church life we have the blessing of life, the blessing of the breasts and of the womb, the blessing of the flowing river!

If we have every blessing except the blessing of the breasts and of the womb, this signifies that we are without the producing and nourishing life. If that is the case, we are a poor church. If the producing animals and human beings were taken away from the earth, the whole meaning of the universe would be lost. The meaning of the entire universe depends upon the animal life and especially upon the human life. Suppose in Southern California there were grass, flowers, and trees, but no animals or human beings. When the angels saw such a situation, they would say that it was full of blessing, yet short of life. But the angels are happy to see so many living creatures on earth. In the church life we enjoy the womb and the breasts, the producing and the nourishing. In the church life today we certainly have a flowing life. In the New Jerusalem, we shall have it even more.

J. With the Good Pleasure of Him Who Dwelt in the Bush

Finally, Joseph was blessed with "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush" (Deut. 33:16). The last item of the universal blessing is God's dwelling. The One who dwelt in the bush has a good will, a good pleasure. Anyone who lived in a bush would expect to have a better home. If you were dwelling in a bush, your good will would be to have a better home. I would not like to live in the bush with you, but I would like to live with you in a better home. Suppose a young man who lives in a bush desires to marry a certain young lady. The good will of the one in the bush is to live with his wife in a nice house after they are married. Before the tabernacle was built, the Lord dwelt in the bush (Exo. 3:4). God delivered His people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt with the intention that they would build first the tabernacle and then a temple for Him. Moses saw a vision of God in the bush, and God spoke to Moses from the bush. But in Leviticus 1:1 God spoke to Moses out of the tabernacle. God blessed the children of Israel with this good will. This is God's best will, with which He has blessed His chosen people. God has blessed the children of Israel with the best blessing—to have His dwelling. What blessing could be greater than this? Eventually, Aaron, a sinner, is able to enter into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies. What blessing could be greater? The highest blessing is to enter into God's dwelling and stay in His presence. Even we ourselves become this dwelling.

At this point I wish to point out that we cannot understand the Bible according to our natural concept. Although you may read the Bible and be able to recite many verses, you cannot see anything until the vision comes. If you hear this word about God's dwelling, Exodus will be a new book to you. The book of Exodus begins with the vision of God in the bush speaking to Moses with the intention that one day Moses would lead the children of Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness to build a tabernacle for God. What a blessing! In the entire Old Testament, there is no blessing higher, greater, or sweeter than the blessing of God's dwelling place. Often the psalmists expressed their desire to be in God's temple. Psalm 84:10 says, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." No blessing is as sweet or great as the blessing of God's dwelling. This is the ultimate blessing.

The New Jerusalem is called the tabernacle of God. When the Lord Jesus became flesh, He was a tabernacle of God (John 1:1, 14). He was also God's temple (John 2:19, 21). Following Him, the church was built up to be God's temple (1 Cor. 3:16). Eventually, the entire New Jerusalem will be an eternal tabernacle, the central blessing among God's blessings. The new heaven and new earth will be a blessing, but the center of that blessing will be the New Jerusalem, God's tabernacle. In the New Jerusalem God will dwell with us, and we shall dwell by Him.

V. DWELT

A. By the Lord between Benjamin's Shoulders

Genesis 49:27 says that Benjamin is a tearing wolf (Heb.). But Deuteronomy 33:12 says of him, "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders." To the enemy, Benjamin is a tearing wolf. Nevertheless, according to Deuteronomy, Benjamin is the beloved of the Lord. How could a tearing wolf be the beloved of the Lord? The Lord loves Benjamin, the tearing wolf, because God's dwelling place was in the territory of Benjamin. Many

Christians think that Jerusalem, where the temple was located, is in the territory of Judah. However, it is in the territory of Benjamin, very close to Judah. The kings came out of Judah, but the capital, Jerusalem, was in Benjamin. The capital was the site of God's dwelling place. According to geography, the territory of Benjamin is shaped like two shoulders, and Jerusalem is located between the two shoulders. Hence, the Lord dwelt between the shoulders of Benjamin.

It is the head, of course, that dwells between the two shoulders of our body. This indicates that the dweller in Deuteronomy 33:12 is the Head. The very God who dwells in the temple is the Head. This means that in God's dwelling there is the headship, the lordship. The language of Deuteronomy 33:12 is poetic. Years ago, this verse was altogether a puzzle to me. I did not know what it meant to say that God dwelt between the shoulders of Benjamin. But after years of studying the Bible and of experience with the Lord, I began to understand. If you consider your experience, you will realize how real it is that God dwells between our shoulders to be our Head. Whenever we have God's dwelling, we have the headship. Thus, there is the throne within the city of New Jerusalem.

Deuteronomy 33:12 also says that the Lord will cover Benjamin all the day long. How did the Lord cover Benjamin? The tabernacle was a covering, for Revelation 7:15 says, "He who sits upon the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them." God's building is a tabernacle, and a tabernacle is an overshadowing. This tabernacle is both Christ and the church. Today we are under the overshadowing of Christ and the overshadowing of the church, for both Christ and the church are the overshadowing dwelling place of God under which we are dwelling.

B. Benjamin Dwelling in Safety by the Lord

Deuteronomy 33:12 says that Benjamin will dwell in safety by the Lord. Benjamin will be a neighbor of the Lord. Because he lives next door to the Lord, he dwells in safety. Likewise, as long as we dwell by the Lord, we are safe. Although we may not have very much experience yet, we nonetheless can testify that we are today's Benjamin, that God has His dwelling place between our shoulders, and that all our being is under His overshadowing. He is the Lord, and His kingly throne is with us. We have the dwelling, He is here, and we are dwelling by Him. God and we are neighbors. What a blessing!

If you take this concept of God's dwelling found in the first book of the Bible and read the book of Psalms in the light of it, the Psalms will be new to you. The entire book of Psalms is concerned with this matter of God's dwelling. Many verses concern the city, the temple, the house, the dwelling place, or the tabernacle. If we put all these verses together, we see that the Psalms are absolutely concerned with God's dwelling. It was in one of the Psalms that Moses said, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations" (Psa. 90:1). If we would take the Lord as our habitation, we must firstly be His habitation. If God has no dwelling built up on earth, we could never have Him as our habitation. But when He has a dwelling on earth, He becomes our habitation and we become His habitation. This is what is called the mutual habitation, which is revealed in John 14 and 15, particularly in the words, "Abide in Me and I in you" (John 15:4). "Abide in Me"—this is our habitation; "and I in you"—this is His habitation. In John 14:23 the Lord Jesus said clearly, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him." We shall be God's dwelling, and He will be our habitation. If we all praise the Lord for this, we shall be with Him in His dwelling place.

The last of the ten aspects of the universal blessing is the matter of dwelling. Thus, eventually all the blessings consummate in the dwelling. The reason God gives us so many items of blessing is that we may be His dwelling. Why did God save you? It was for His dwelling. Why does He give you grace upon grace? For His dwelling. Why is God doing everything for you today? It is all for His dwelling. All the blessings issue in God's dwelling. This is God's good will, the desire of God's heart. What God wants is a dwelling place.

This is revealed in Isaiah 66:1 and 2. In Isaiah 66:1 we see that heaven is God's throne and the earth is His footstool, but God does not yet have a place of rest. Many Christians think of going to heaven. To them, heaven is a lovely place. But God does not love heaven as much as these Christians do. He wants a place of rest. Isaiah 66:2 reveals that God's resting place is neither heaven nor earth, but man. God is looking to a man. This verse says, "To this man will I look, to the poor and contrite in spirit, who trembleth at my word" (Heb.). This verse corresponds to Matthew 5:3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." The kind of man who is God's rest is a man who is poor and contrite in spirit. God's good will is to have this kind of man. God's will is that we would be poor and contrite in our spirit, empty for Him. However, if our spirits are filled with things other than God, we are not poor in our spirit. If such is the case, God cannot have His dwelling with us. Many Christians today are full in their spirit. They are filled with so many things, even fundamental things, that there is no room in their spirit for the Lord. God needs a vacant spirit. His desire is that your spirit would be made vacant for Him. One who is poor in spirit is one whose spirit is vacant, unoccupied, ready for the Lord to come in.

According to Isaiah 66:1 and 2 those who are poor and contrite in spirit are the place of God's rest. No other place in the entire universe, in the heavens or on the earth, is God's rest. As those poor and contrite in spirit, we should be able to say, "Lord, come in. Lord, I'm vacant, unoccupied, ready for You. Come in, make Your dwelling in me, and settle Yourself in me." No matter how long you have been in the church life, you need to pray such a prayer, to ask the Lord to have His dwelling in you. In Ephesians 3:16 and 17 the Apostle Paul prayed that the Father would strengthen us with power through His Spirit into our inner man so that Christ may make His home in our hearts. Paul prayed that Christ would be able to dwell in us. It is not simply a matter of loving the Lord or of serving Him; it is a matter of His making His home in us. The service we render the Lord will not satisfy Him as much as our becoming His dwelling place. We all must be the Lord's dwelling. This is what He desires, and this is what He is seeking. This is God's good will. The uttermost blessing is to become God's dwelling place. His dwelling is also our dwelling. When our God is at rest, we also find rest in His dwelling.

This concept of God's dwelling and of our dwelling with Him is found throughout the Old Testament and the New. Throughout the centuries and the generations, God has been desiring a dwelling place. Sorry to say, most of God's people have not seen this. But today in His recovery He comes to us again and again regarding His dwelling. I am not speaking something that I have not experienced myself. Whenever I have opened up the Bible during the past twenty-five or thirty years, I have mainly seen one matter—God's dwelling. In many chapters of the Bible, God's desire for a dwelling place is covered. This is the desire of God's heart, His good will. If you are blessed with the good will of Him who dwelt in the bush, you are the most blessed person.

In a sense, even today the Lord is still in the bush. Look at the situation throughout the earth. What is there except bush? Where is the tabernacle? Many cannot even see the shadow, much less the reality. But how we must worship the Lord that in His recovery we not only see the shadow, but we are in the dwelling. We can say, "Lord, praise You! With us You are not in the bush. You are in Your dwelling."

We have seen that the Lord blessed Joseph with the good will of Him who dwelt in the bush. Who is this One who dwelt in the bush, and what is His good will? If we do not interpret this verse in the way we have, then how should we interpret it? By reading the entire Bible, we can discover who it is who dwelt in the bush and what His good will is. The One who dwelt in the bush is no doubt the One who called Moses to build the tabernacle for Him. He lived in a bush, but He expected to have a tabernacle built of precious materials. That was His good will. The children of Israel were blessed with this good will. Do you believe the Lord delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt simply that they might be saved? Their deliverance was not merely for their salvation, but for God's dwelling place. Everything God did to them and for them was for the purpose that the tabernacle might be erected among them. After the tabernacle was set up, the glory of God came down and filled it (Exo. 40:34). At that time, the children of Israel were the most blessed people on earth, blessed with the good will of the One who dwelt in the bush, the One who now dwelt in the tabernacle. Thus, the tabernacle became the greatest blessing to the children of Israel.

It is the same today. The Lord's good will is to have the church. Because we are in the church, we are the most blessed people. Before the church came into existence, the Lord certainly was in the bush. Practically speaking, before the church came to this locality, the Lord was in the bush. He surely was not in a tabernacle. But today the church is here, and we can say, "Praise the Lord! He is no longer in the bush. Now He is in the tabernacle, and we are here with Him. We and God are neighbors. We are today's Benjamin dwelling in safety by the Lord. Hallelujah!" What could be better than this? As long as I have the dwelling of the Lord and I am in it, that is sufficient. This is the experience of Benjamin, Joseph's younger brother.

Benjamin is a good match to Joseph. Likewise, the church is a good match to God's blessing. Throughout the years, God has blessed you. You simply cannot deny that you have been under His blessing. But the purpose of His blessing is for the good will of the One who dwelt in the bush, and this good will is to have the church life as His dwelling. Today, God can boast to the enemy, Satan, "Satan, look, today I have a place of rest. My resting place is the church. Once I said that heaven was My throne and the earth was My footstool, but I had to ask where My rest was. Satan, I tell you, the church today is My resting place. I am satisfied, and My chosen people are satisfied also."

Many of us can testify that since the day we were saved, we have never been as satisfied in our spirit as we are in the church life today. This is not to say that the church life is perfect. No, it is not perfect. But here in the church life we are satisfied. We passed through many places without being satisfied. We did not find satisfaction until we came into the church. On that day we said, "This is home. I am satisfied." The reason we sense that we are home and are satisfied is that the church is God's tabernacle, God's dwelling. The Lord is no longer in the bush, but in the tabernacle. How happy I am that we are under the universal blessing and that we are God's dwelling!

This blessing is universal, and this dwelling is eternal. The church life will last forever. The old heaven and the old earth, including the old environment, will be terminated, but the church life we are in today will last forever. This is the eternal dwelling. I assure you that when you enter into eternity, you will recall your experience in the church life. You may say, "Oh, I can never forget what I experienced in the church life." Wait, and you will discover that this is true. Deep within, we have the full assurance that the church life is eternal.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED EIGHT

THE ULTIMATE CONSUMMATION OF GOD'S OPERATION IN THE BIBLE

With this message we conclude the series of messages on chapter forty-nine. Chapter forty-nine is a record of Jacob's prophetic blessing of his sons. These blessings are given in figures, signs, and symbols, all of which need to be allegorized. We have seen that in Genesis the seeds of nearly all the truths in the Bible are sown. The seeds sown in this book are developed in the following books and are harvested in the book of Revelation. Because Genesis is a book of the seeds of the truths contained in the Bible, the conclusion of chapter forty-nine must correspond to the conclusion of the whole Bible. In the last two chapters of Revelation there are two main things: the universal blessing and the eternal dwelling of God with men.

Before we consider this universal blessing and the eternal dwelling, we need to review chapter forty-nine. The first four sons of Jacob were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. According to the record of the Old Testament, these four sons were evil. The first and the fourth, Reuben and Judah, were full of lust. The second and the third, Simeon and Levi, were full of anger. Lust and anger characterize evil people. In the constitution of the kingdom of the heavens decreed in Matthew chapters five, six, and seven, the Lord Jesus covered lust and anger in a strong way. If a man can be kept from these two things, he will not be sinful. A man becomes sinful mostly because he is full of lust and anger. We praise the Lord that in His grace He saved the first four sons of Jacob. Moreover, two of them were transformed into something marvelous. Levi was transformed to become the priests, and Judah was transformed to become the kings. Sinners have become priests and kings. This has been accomplished by a kingly salvation.

This salvation was sent out to the Gentile world by Zebulun, the fifth son of Jacob. After the gospel was shipped out by Zebulun, Issachar came in as rest, rest in the gospel accomplished by Judah and preached by Zebulun. The saved one rests in God's salvation. After Issachar came Dan and with him a form of apostasy. Although Dan deviated from God's way, Gad came in to restore the situation. Thus, with Dan we have apostasy, and with Gad we have recovery. The recovery with Gad issues in the sufficiency of the riches of Christ symbolized by Asher. Naphtali, who follows Asher, signifies resurrection in which are the riches of Christ.

After the first ten sons, we come to the last two, Joseph and Benjamin. If you read the record of these two sons carefully, you will see that there is no account of any defect or failure in them. Although there is a long record regarding Joseph in the Bible, there is no hint

that he was wrong in anything or that he failed. Joseph was perfect. Although we cannot say that Benjamin was perfect, there is no record of any defect in his life either. Joseph was called the son of a fruitful tree, and Benjamin, the son at the right hand. It is very meaningful that Joseph was fruitful and that Benjamin was at the right hand of God. Both are in resurrection. These two characteristics can easily be applied to the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the only Son of the fruitful tree, and He is also the only Son at the right hand of God. Hence, both Joseph and Benjamin were types of Christ. Joseph was a type of Christ issuing in God's unlimited, boundless, universal blessing. The perfect Christ typified by Joseph brought in God's boundless blessing. Benjamin was a type of Christ as the One who brought in God's eternal dwelling place.

Genesis 49:22-26 and Deuteronomy 33:13-16 indicate that the blessing upon Joseph is universal and eternal. It is from the ancient mountains to the eternal hills. This indicates space and time. The blessing that Christ has brought in fills every part of the universe. When the new heaven and the new earth come, there will be nothing but blessing in the whole universe. There will be blessing upon blessing. This is the life of Joseph, the life that issues in blessing.

The record concerning Benjamin in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 is very short. But this short record gives us a clear picture of Benjamin's life. His life issues in the dwelling of God. Eventually, this dwelling becomes God's eternal dwelling. In the record of Joseph and Benjamin we find a strong indication of what the desire of God's heart is. In his word concerning Joseph, Moses spoke about "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush" (Deut. 33:16). When God called Moses, Moses saw a burning bush. Out of that burning bush God spoke to him. Moses later came to realize that the God who dwelt in the bush desired to have a dwelling place on earth. This was the reason He called the children of Israel out of Egypt, led them into the wilderness, and charged them to build Him a tabernacle. When God called Moses, He spoke to him out of the bush. But after the tabernacle was built, God spoke out of the tabernacle (Lev. 1:1). This reveals that God's intention was to have a dwelling place with man on earth.

Deuteronomy 33:12 says, "And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders." This verse says that God will dwell between Benjamin's shoulders and that Benjamin will dwell in safety by the Lord. In other words, Benjamin will be the next-door neighbor of the Lord. Many think that Jerusalem was in Judah, but it was actually in Benjamin. Although the king came from Judah, the capital was in Benjamin. Jerusalem, the capital, was the dwelling place of God. Geographically speaking, it was located between Benjamin's shoulders. Because the Lord made His home there and Benjamin lived in the Lord's neighborhood, Benjamin dwelt in safety.

The concept of blessing and dwelling is very strong in Jacob's prophetic blessing of his twelve sons. These two matters issue in the universal blessing and the eternal dwelling. As we have pointed out, the ultimate consummation of the Bible is precisely these two things. In Genesis chapter three, man became a sinner. Out from among all the sinners, a good number have been saved. Many of the saved ones have been transformed into priests and kings. The kingly salvation has been preached as the gospel of the kingdom, and the saved ones have come to rest in this gospel. After the apostasy and the restoration, we have the issue of the riches in resurrection life. Therefore, all that is covered in the Bible is represented by Jacob's prophetic blessing.

Both in the Bible and in history there have been many Reubens, Simeons, Levis, and Judahs. Moreover, many saved ones have been transformed into priests and kings. Out of the kingship has come a salvation preached as a kingly salvation. The saved ones, as symbolized by Issachar, rest in this salvation. But Dan, the fall into apostasy, has come in. Following the apostasy, there is the recovery, the restoration, with Gad, which issues in the riches of Asher and in the resurrection of Naphtali. Eventually, Joseph and Benjamin appear, both of whom typify Christ. This is a general sketch of the Bible. This sketch, however, is rather doctrinal; hence we need to come now to the matter of experience.

We were Reubens and Simeons who have been saved and transformed into Levis and Judahs. In the church life today we are priests and kings. However, Dan, the apostate church, has come in. But following Dan came Gad signifying the recovery, which issues in the sufficiency of Asher. Asher is in Naphtali, in resurrection. All this results in Joseph and Benjamin. Therefore, today we are not Reubens and Simeons, but Levis, Judahs, Josephs, and Benjamins. From my conscience, I can testify that I used to be a Reuben and a Simeon full of lust and anger. But through the years I have been transformed into a Levi, a priest, and into a Judah, a king. Furthermore, I have been transformed into a Joseph, one full of blessing, and into a Benjamin, one who has become God's dwelling place. How about you? Are you a Joseph and a Benjamin?

Let us now consider the universal blessing and the eternal dwelling in more detail.

I. THE UNIVERSAL BLESSING— THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

A. All Things Made New

In Revelation 21:1 John saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Revelation 21:5 says, "And He who sits upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new." The universal blessing has a very peculiar and strange characteristic: all things are made new. God's blessing does not go with anything old. Rather, His blessing goes with things that have been renewed. If we expect to receive blessing from God with respect to our spiritual life, health, our families, or our homes, all these things must be new. We need to be renewed, and our families and our homes need to be renewed also. According to the Bible, anything that is kept away from God is old, but anything that comes back to God is new. For example, you may have a new wife. However, if your wife is away from God, she is an old wife, even if you married her just today. But if a man has been married to his wife for fifty years and his wife has come back to God, she is a new wife.

Whether a person or a thing is new or old depends upon its relationship with God. Only God is new. There is no suggestion in the Bible that our God needs to be renewed. We are the ones who need the renewing. The heavens and the earth and everything in them need to be renewed, but God is ever fresh and ever new. He is the most ancient One, yet He is the most new One, the most fresh One. Our way of reckoning oldness is different from God's. Our way is to count by the age. But God's way is to count on the relationship of someone or something to Him. If a wife is close to God, she is new. If she gets closer to God, she becomes newer. And if she is one with God and mingled with God, she is the newest wife. As strange as it may sound, even a desk, a table, or a chair, if they are

consecrated to the Lord, can become new. For example, a sister may say, "Lord, this morning I consecrate to You my kitchen and all the utensils, furniture, and appliances in it." If she does this, her kitchen and everything in it will become new. You may have a brand new house. However, if this house is kept away from God, it will become an old house. You may have a poor, old car. But if you say, "Lord, this is Your car; take a ride with me," your car immediately becomes a new car. On the contrary, you may have a new car and put two movie stars in it and your car becomes very old.

The new heaven and the new earth will be filled with God's blessing because the first heaven and the first earth will have passed away. Many years ago I thought that the new heaven and the new earth were absolutely new. Later I learned that the new heaven and the new earth will be the old heaven and the old earth renewed. It is the same with us. When we were regenerated, we were renewed. To be renewed means to come back to God and to have something of God put into us. The first heaven and the first earth became old because they were kept away from God by Satan, the head of the angelic race, and then by Adam, the head of the human race, both of whom were rebellious against God. Because the angels and mankind were kept away from God, both heaven and earth became old. Praise the Lord that in Christ we have come back to God and have received something of God into us! Thus, we are renewed.

We all expect to receive some blessing from God. The secret of receiving God's blessing is to bring everything to God and to let Him get into everything. For example, bring your kitchen to God and allow God to come into your kitchen. Do the same thing with your children and even with your bank account. If you bring your children and your bank account to God, there will be blessing. Although we are not actually in the new heaven and new earth today, we may have a foretaste. Many times I have the realization that I am in the foretaste of the new heaven and the new earth because I am surrounded by blessing. Everything around me is blessing.

B. No More Sea

When the new heaven and new earth appear, there will be no more sea (Rev. 21:1). The sea is the source of the demons, which keep things away from God. Since Satan's rebellion, God has been continually working to eliminate the sea. In Genesis 1 God limited the water of the sea. Throughout the centuries, God has done much to reduce the sea. Every time a sinner is saved, the sea is limited a little more. If a hundred sinners would be saved today, the sea would be limited a great deal. Eventually, in the new heaven and new earth, the sea will be reduced to nothing. The source of the things which have kept heaven and earth away from God will be no more.

C. No More Tears, Death, Sorrow, Crying, and Pain

Revelation 21:4 says, "And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain—they shall be no more; for the former things have passed away." When the sea is no more, there will also be no more tears. All tears come from the sea. After the sea has been dried up, it will be impossible for us to shed tears.

Furthermore, there will be no death, which includes sickness and weakness. According to 1 Corinthians 11, we first have weakness, then sickness, and finally death. To say that there will be no more death also means that there will be no more weakness and sickness. The sea is the source of death, weakness, and sickness. When the sea has been eliminated, there will be no more tears, no more death, no more weakness, and no more sickness. Moreover, there will be no more sorrow, crying, or pain. Although you may have read the Bible for years, you have probably never realized that the source of sorrow, crying, and pain is the sea. Spiritually speaking, the sea causes all these things. When the sea is no more, these things also will be no more.

D. No More Curse

Revelation 22:3 says, "And there shall no longer be any curse." Today on earth there is a curse almost everywhere. But the day is coming when there will be no more curse, for the source of the curse—the sea—will be dried up.

E. No More Night

Revelation 22:5 says, "And night shall be no more." To say that there is no more night means that there is no more darkness. Under God's universal blessing everything will be bright and crystal clear. There will be no darkness, no opaqueness. This is the condition of the new heaven and the new earth.

We need to apply all these aspects of the universal blessing to ourselves. In your life is there still the sea? Are there still tears, death, weakness, and sickness? Are there sorrow, crying, pain, the curse, and darkness? If these things are in your life, it indicates that you are short of blessing. When we come to the life of Joseph, we shall see that in his life there was no darkness, opaqueness, or curse. Even the result of his being put into prison was not a curse, but a blessing. Although he was persecuted by his brothers, the issue of that persecution was blessing.

Today we may have a foretaste of the new heaven and the new earth in which there is no curse, only blessing. If we still quarrel with our wife or husband, we are under the sea, death, weakness, sickness, and darkness. We are in a thick night without light. But suppose in our married life there is neither quarreling nor complaining, but praises to the Lord. This indicates that the sea in our married life has been dried up.

One characteristic of Joseph is very striking. Although he suffered a great deal, he never complained. When he made himself known to his brothers, he seemed to say, "It was not you who sent me here. It was God. I don't complain against you—I praise God." With Joseph, there is no complaining, only praising, because he was under the blessing, not under the curse. If you complain, it is a sign that you are still under the curse. You may have many reasons to complain, but every reason is a curse. If you are one under God's blessing, there will be no complaining. Instead of complaining, you will say, "Praise the Lord! Everything works for good to me!"

It is easy to read the Scriptures in an objective, doctrinal way. But we need to see that the things recorded in the Bible are for us even today. Do not wait for the new heaven and new earth. Today we can live in a foretaste of the conditions of the new heaven and new earth. We can live without complaint, blame, curse, or darkness. We can have a life full of blessing. All our tears may be tears of joy, not tears of sorrow. This is a miniature of the universal blessing which we may enjoy today.

The word "universal" means that blessing is everywhere. It does not mean that I am blessed when my wife is good to me and cursed when she is not good. Whether or not something is a blessing does not depend on your wife—it depends on you. If you complain, the way your wife treats you will be a curse. If you praise the Lord, it will be a blessing.

Let me tell you a secret: Our praises turn the curse into blessing. This is the reason the New Testament tells us to thank the Lord for all things (Eph. 5:20). This includes rumors, persecution, defamation, opposition, and condemnation. We need to praise God for everything. When we praise Him for all things, even the unpleasant things become good things. When we thank the Lord for the opposition, it becomes a blessing. This is the secret of enjoying the universal blessing today. Although we are living in a dark age we may have a foretaste of life in the new heaven and new earth. It all depends upon our realization and practice. If we practice praising instead of blaming, we shall be under the blessing. Otherwise, we shall be under the curse. Hallelujah, in the church we are in a miniature of the new heaven and new earth! Everything here is a blessing.

II. THE ETERNAL DWELLING—THE NEW JERUSALEM

A. The Tabernacle of God with Men

Now we go on to consider the eternal dwelling. Revelation 21:3 says, "And I heard a loud voice out of the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be with them." According to the New Testament, God's people are His dwelling place. Some Christians think that God's dwelling place is among us not in an inward way, but in an outward way. If there are one thousand saints and God is dwelling among them, they will consider God to be number one thousand one. God, however, is inside of us, and His dwelling place is among us in an inward way. If one thousand saints are together and God is among them, God is not number one thousand one; rather, He is in the one thousand saints.

Some Christians do not believe in the matter of the mingling of God and man. Nevertheless, the Bible is filled with the thought that God is mingled with His people, for God's people become His dwelling place. God's dwelling is both small and large. When we come together, we all are one corporate dwelling. However, if I stay at home, I myself am God's dwelling. If I come together with others and insist that I myself am God's dwelling place and that all the others are individual dwelling places for Him, that will be erroneous. When we come together, we are not many dwellings; we are one dwelling place of God. However, when we are all at home alone, we are each God's dwelling. At such a time, God has many dwellings. When I am alone, I may say, "Lord, now You have a house. I am Your house, Your dwelling." But when I come to the meeting of the church, I should not come as an individual house of the Lord separate from the others. If I do that in the meeting, I will no longer be God's dwelling. When I am alone, I have the sense that I am God's dwelling and that God is with me. But if I still cling to this concept in the church meeting, I will sense that I am no longer the house of God. When we come together, we are just one house, one dwelling of God. This is a matter of experience, not a matter of doctrine.

When God dwells in us, we enjoy Him as our neighbor. God is the best neighbor. Therefore, we will never be alone, for He is always with us. Because God is beside us, we have safety. Everyone today, especially little children, desires safety. When my grandchildren are with their grandmother, they feel safe. But in the presence of a stranger they feel insecure. When God, the best neighbor, is with us, we are safe.

B. Constituted of God's Redeemed

The eternal dwelling of God is composed of His redeemed, both of the Old Testament represented by the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and of the New Testament represented by the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. In His redemption God dwells within and in His people. Hence, we shall be His eternal dwelling.

C. God and the Lamb Being the Temple

Pay no attention to the misleading teaching that there is no mingling of God and man and that we do not have the divine nature in us. What God has bestowed upon us and imparted into us is much more than this. Eventually, we become God's house, His dwelling, and God and the Lamb become our temple (Rev. 21:22). The New Jerusalem will be the tabernacle of God, God's dwelling place, composed, on the one hand, of all the redeemed and, on the other hand, of God and the Lamb. In God's eternal dwelling there will be no temple because God and the Lamb will be the temple. In the Old Testament the temple was not only the dwelling place of God, but also the place in which the priests served God. As God's redeemed people, we shall dwell in God forever. We shall be His dwelling (John 14:23), and He will be our dwelling (Psa. 90:1). Thus, there will be a mutual dwelling. God will dwell in us, and we shall dwell in Him. He will become our enjoyment, and we shall become His enjoyment. To see His face will be our pleasure, and to see our face will be His joy.

D. God Being the Light, and the Lamb Being the Lamp

In the eternal dwelling God within us will be our light, and Christ will be our lamp to express the very God who is within us (Rev. 21:11, 23; 22:5).

E. God's Throne Being the Source of Supply

Revelation 22 says that we may enjoy God's throne. When He dwells in us, His throne is with us, right within us. Therefore, we have the throne, the authority of God, as the source of supply.

F. The River of Water of Life with the Tree of Life Being the Supply

Out of the throne of God flows the water of life with the tree of life in it as the supply (Rev. 22:1-2). If we have God dwelling in us, we

have the life supply.

G. God's Authority, Face, and Name Being the Chief Enjoyment

In the New Jerusalem we shall participate in His authority and enjoy His face and His name (Rev. 22:3-4). We shall see His face all the time, and His name will be on our forehead forever. This will be our chief enjoyment in the New Jerusalem.

These are different aspects of God's dwelling in us. We do not need to wait for the New Jerusalem to experience them. Even today we can experience all these things. However, when we enter the New Jerusalem we shall discover something new. We may say, "Oh, we have never experienced these things in such a way. Now we are discovering something that we never thought we could experience."

At the end of chapter forty-nine there are no more sinners, no more Reuben and Simeon. Instead, there is Joseph, indicating that God has become our blessing, and Benjamin, indicating that we have become God's dwelling place. Because Benjamin was the place of God's dwelling, he enjoyed God's presence. Benjamin enjoyed safety, and God enjoyed Benjamin as His dwelling place. God has become our blessing, and we have become God's dwelling place. Whatever God is, whatever God has, and whatever God can do becomes our enjoyment and blessing; and whatever we are and have becomes God's dwelling place. Eventually, God and we, we and God, become one. In the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem there are no more sinners and no more sea, death, weakness, sickness, tears, sorrow, pain, or night. Everything is God. God is a blessing to us, and we are a dwelling place to God. We enjoy Him, and He enjoys us. This is the ultimate consummation of Jacob's prophetic blessing upon His twelve sons. Today we are these twelve sons enjoying God to the uttermost and becoming God's dwelling place. Therefore, we can enjoy God, and He can be in us to enjoy all that we are to Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED NINE BEING MATURED THE MANIFESTATION OF MATURITY

(7)

h) Departing in an Excellent Way

In this message we come to Jacob's departure, which we shall consider in some detail.

Genesis is a long book, composed of fifty chapters. The record of Jacob's life occupies more than half of this book, about twenty-five and a half chapters. In past messages we have seen how Jacob was born, how he had been selected by God before his birth, and how he was striving, even when he was still in his mother's womb. He continued his striving throughout most of his life. Jacob lived to be one hundred forty-seven years old. In Genesis 49 we read of Jacob's departure from this life. The quality of a man's life and the outcome of his life are determined primarily by the last stage of his life, not by the first stage. It can be compared to runners in a race. It does not mean much that you run well at the beginning of the race. The final result is what counts. In this message we come to the final stage of the life of this wonderful person, Jacob. We need to see how he behaved himself at the time of his departure.

In the Bible, the best departure from this life besides that of the Lord Jesus was the Apostle Paul. When Paul was about to depart, he declared, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me in that day" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). What an excellent departure this was! I hope that we all shall be able to make such a declaration at the end of our race. Although the departure of the Apostle Paul was most excellent, I still love the departure of Jacob, for his departure was lovely and pleasant. Paul's departure was simple. He had no wife and no children. At the time of his departure, he was alone in prison, and there were not many complications. With Jacob, however, there were a great many involvements.

Due to God's ordination and due to his own striving, Jacob became involved with various matters and people. For example, Jacob had four wives: Leah, Rachel, and the two maids. Although his heart was to have Rachel, he was cheated by Laban, who gave him Leah instead. Of course, Rachel was also given to him. In actuality, who was Jacob's genuine wife—Rachel or Leah? According to the record of Genesis, Jacob treated both Leah and Rachel as his genuine wife. He buried Leah in the cave of Machpelah where Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Rebekah were buried. By burying Leah in the cave of Machpelah, where the genuine wives of the fathers were buried, Jacob indicated that he recognized her as his real wife. Later, however, as he was departing, he made a sovereign arrangement for Rachel. By doing this, he was telling his descendants that he considered Rachel his real wife. Jacob's life was so involved that it is difficult to determine who his real wife was.

Jacob's four wives gave birth to twelve sons, each of whom was in a category of his own. If there had not been so many categories among Jacob's sons, it would have been impossible for the history of Israel, the history of the church, and even our own personal history to be represented by them. In the prophetic blessing pronounced upon Jacob's twelve sons in chapter forty-nine, we see a representation of the history of Israel, the history of the church, and of our personal history. In order to have such an all-inclusive picture, there was the need of an intricate involvement. Throughout his life, Jacob became involved not only with his wives and sons, but also with various geographical regions. He was born in the good land, but he journeyed to Padan-aram, and later returned to the good land. During the years of his retirement, he moved to Egypt with his family. Each of these moves produced more involvements. Jacob became involved even with Pharaoh, the most powerful person on earth at the time. Jacob had involvement upon involvement, including involvements with the Arameans and the Egyptians. This involvement is also seen in his burial in the good land. The Canaanites thought that it was an Egyptian funeral when it actually was a Hebrew one. A company of Egyptian horsemen and chariots attended the burial of a Hebrew gentleman. Besides all this, Jacob was involved with God. What involvements Jacob had! If we put together all the portions of the Word that speak of Jacob's involvements, we shall rejoice before the Lord and say, "Praise the Lord! Hallelujah for the Lord's rich word!"

In spite of Jacob's manifold involvement, he departed from this life in an excellent manner. His departure was not only triumphant; it was also pleasant and excellent. No one wants to face death. It is always a sad thing for someone to die. Nevertheless, I am fond of the record of Jacob's departure. In this record we do not have a morbid picture, but a very pleasant painting. After reading this message, I believe that many will be convinced that, in certain respects, Jacob's departure was more inspiring than that of the Apostle Paul. More than three chapters are given to the account of Jacob's departure, but only a few verses are given to Paul's. Let us now consider the details of Jacob's departure, one by one.

(1) Asking Joseph to Put His Hand under His Thigh

Genesis 47:29 says, "And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh." This matter of having Joseph place his hand under Jacob's thigh has been a problem to many Bible students. Jacob did not say to Joseph, "Do your best to get a physician to heal me." Rather, he asked him to place his hand under his thigh. What is the significance of this? No doubt, it means to swear. But why did Jacob not have Joseph raise his hand if the significance of this act were only that of taking an oath? Instead of guessing, we should understand the Bible according to the facts contained in it. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can trace what happened to Jacob's thigh during his lifetime. On the eighth day after he was born, Jacob was circumcised in a part of his body close to his thigh. Then after Jacob had been striving for more than ninety-five years, God came in to touch his thigh. Thus, Jacob experienced both circumcision and a divine touch. First, something was cut off from a place very close to his thigh. That was circumcision. Years later, Jacob experienced a divine touch that caused him to walk with a limp. If you look deeply into the significance of these two things, you will see that both have the same meaning. To be circumcised is to have our flesh, our natural life, cut off. Jacob had been chosen to inherit God's covenant. But his flesh, his natural life, was not useful for this. Rather, it was a hindrance.

Consider the case of Abraham. God's covenant was made with Abraham in Genesis 15. Abraham, however, used his natural strength with Hagar to fulfill God's promise. God was offended by this and stayed away from Abraham for thirteen years. Thirteen years later, God came back to Abraham and seemed to say, "Abraham, I am the all-sufficient One. I will keep My promise. Because I have promised to do something for you, I don't need you to use your natural strength to fulfill what I have promised. What you did with Hagar greatly offended Me. For that reason, I have stayed away from you for these thirteen years. Now I have come to tell you that in My presence you must cut off your natural strength." From that day onward, God's covenant of grace became the covenant of circumcision. The covenant of circumcision means that the covenant of grace cannot be fulfilled or inherited through man's natural strength. If we would inherit God's promise of grace, our natural strength must be circumcised. On God's side, this covenant is a covenant of grace. But on man's side, it has become the covenant of circumcision. God still intends to give grace to man. However, in order to receive God's covenanted grace, we must have our natural strength cut off.

Jacob's circumcision was a sign that he was not supposed to live by his flesh or natural strength. Nevertheless, after his circumcision, Jacob continued striving in the flesh. Although he had been circumcised, he lived as one who had not been circumcised. How much he exercised his strength to inherit God's promise! He used his ability to supplant and to scheme as if he had never been circumcised. Symbolically Jacob had been circumcised; but in reality he was not circumcised until he had been dealt with by God for many years and was in his nineties. For twenty years Jacob was under the hand of Laban, who nearly exhausted Jacob's strength. Eventually, Jacob was forced to leave Laban and return to the land of his father. As he was on the way home, God raised up circumstances to force him to go to Him. Laban was pursuing him, and Esau was awaiting him. Hence, Jacob was in a dilemma, wondering what to do. He seemed to say to himself, "What shall I do? If I go backward, Laban is there. But if I go forward, Esau is there. There is no place to which I can flee." At Peniel he sent away his wives and children and stayed alone to make a deal with God. That night Jacob was so strong in his flesh that he even wrestled with God. The Lord touched Jacob's thigh. That was Jacob's real circumcision. From that time onward, Jacob was lame.

As Jacob was departing this life, he did not have strength even to walk; he could only lie on the bed. As we have seen, Jacob's real circumcision took place when God touched his thigh. Now his lying on the bed was another genuine touch from God. After the first touch, Jacob could no longer walk in a normal way, but now he could not even get out of bed. His natural strength truly had been terminated. Thus, we may consider this as Jacob's third circumcision. At the time of his first circumcision, he was hardly affected at all. After the second circumcision, his thigh was touched and he became lame; however, he could still move. But now at the time of the third circumcision he had no ability to move at all. This was the time for him to trust absolutely in the grace of God. When you cannot do anything, when you are not able to move, and when you have no strength, that is the time for you to trust in God.

Because Jacob had no more trust in himself, he asked Joseph to place his hand under his thigh. This indicated that Jacob recognized that he had no strength to do anything for himself. The only thing he could do was trust in God. His son Joseph, the premier of the leading country on earth, certainly could do something for him. Whatever would be done for him after his death would be done by Joseph. Thus, Jacob asked him to place his hand under his thigh, recognizing by making this request that he had been dealt with by God to the uttermost. Jacob was declaring to the whole universe that he no longer had the strength to do anything for himself. Rather, he could only cleave to God's promise of grace. During his lifetime Jacob had learned one thing: that he could not do anything for himself. All he had done was in vain. Thus, he came to trust in God's promise of grace. To him, that promise was the promise of circumcision, of terminating his natural strength to inherit God's promise.

How vivid and beautiful is this first aspect of Jacob's departure! Here is a man who has learned by experience that it is all a matter of God's grace, not a matter of his doing. He realized that he had been circumcised, that he had been touched by God and was not able to do anything. I repeat, when Jacob was eight days old, he was circumcised. When he was more than ninety years old, he was touched by God and became lame. Now at the age of one hundred forty-seven he was confined to bed, unable to do anything. He surely needed God's grace, which at that time was represented by Joseph and was concentrated in him. Joseph was a type of Christ. Jacob's trust was in God's grace, which is focused in Christ. His confidence was no longer in his thigh. The thigh is the strongest part of our being, for by the strength of our thigh we walk and support ourselves. Jacob's thigh had been circumcised and touched. Because he had been fully terminated, he turned absolutely from his natural strength to God's grace in Christ. Joseph's hand, signifying the hand of God's grace, was not placed upon Jacob's thigh, but under it. This indicates that the strong hand of God's grace bore Jacob for the fulfillment of God's covenant of promise. It was not by Jacob's strength, but by the hand of Joseph, that Jacob was brought to the good land for his actual inheritance. It is not by our strength, but by the grace of Christ that we inherit God's promise.

Humanly speaking, no one wants to die. Jacob, however, viewed his death as sleep (47:30, Heb.). Although no one likes to die, everyone enjoys sleeping. It is so sweet to sleep, especially when we are exhausted. For one hundred forty-seven years, Jacob had been bearing a heavy burden and had many involvements. After enduring so many problems, the time had come for him to rest, to sleep. Thus, he considered death as sleep. He might have said, "My grandfather Abraham is resting. Why should I still strive and bear burdens? I would like to sleep as well."

By viewing death as sleep, Jacob indicated that he believed in resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13-16). He was not a Sadducee, an ancient modernist who did not believe in resurrection. Those who sleep wake up after they have had adequate rest. When I wake up after a good night's sleep, I am refreshed. Jacob has been sleeping for thirty-seven hundred years. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, some of Jacob's descendants, the Pharisees and Sadducees, were arguing whether or not Jacob would wake up, that is, whether or not he would be resurrected. The Pharisees, the ancient fundamentalists, believed in the resurrection, but the Sadducees did not. The Lord Jesus, of course, believed in the resurrection. He even told the Sadducees that God was called the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, indicating that He is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt. 22:32). Jacob is still resting, waiting for the time of resurrection. Perhaps when we see him, we shall say, "Good morning, Jacob."

(3) Charging Joseph Not to Bury Him in Egypt,
but in the Good Land

Jacob charged Joseph not to bury him in Egypt, but in the good land (47:29-30). Although he gained much in Egypt, he had no heart for that place. His heart was in the good land. Hence, he charged Joseph to bury him in the good land, in the cave of Machpelah, where his fathers had been buried, that he might inherit the good land. By charging Joseph in this way, Jacob indicated that he had faith in God's promise. He believed that one day the good land promised by God would be the portion, the inheritance, of his descendants. As Jacob was departing, he was a man full of faith. I hope that when we depart we also shall be those full of faith, not faith in something vain, but faith in what has been promised by God in His Word. There are many promises in the Bible for us to believe in. When we depart, we must depart in faith in God's trustworthy word written in the Bible.

The record of Jacob's departure makes no mention of his illness, of his will, or of the way he distributed his properties among his children. The good land was their inheritance, and God's promise was the will Jacob bequeathed to his children. Although the record of Jacob's departure says nothing of his illness or bequests, it gives a beautiful, vivid picture of his life in the presence of God. Truly Jacob was a man of God. As he was dying, he was not threatened by death. Rather, because he was full of faith and hope, he enjoyed his departure.

(4) Worshipping God on the Top of His Staff

As Jacob was dying, he worshipped God (47:31, LXX; Heb. 11:21). It is not an insignificant matter that a dying man would worship God. Jacob worshipped God on the head of his bed. As we have seen, his being confined to bed revealed that he had no more natural strength, that he could not move, and that his trust was completely in God. Hence, he worshipped God there.

The Septuagint translates the last part of 47:31 as "on the top of his staff." In writing Hebrews 11:21 Paul quoted, not the Hebrew text, but the Septuagint. Thus, Hebrews 11:21 says, "By faith Jacob, when dying..worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff." Spiritually speaking, this is very significant. The bed signifies that Jacob had no human strength, but the staff signifies that he was a person filled with the experience of God in his life. The staff was a symbol of Jacob's life of sojourning. In Genesis 32:10 Jacob said, "For with my staff I passed over this Jordan." Throughout his life of sojourning, God was continually with him. Therefore, at the end of his life, Jacob worshipped God on his bed, signifying that he had no strength, and on his staff, signifying that the God whom he worshipped had shepherded him throughout his life.

Jacob's worship of God was not without personal experience. He was not worshipping an objective God. When he was dying, he was worshipping the God whom he had experienced in a full way in a life of sojourning. This was a holy ending of such a matured sojourner. I hope that when we depart from this earth we shall worship God in this way, not worshipping One whom we have not experienced, but worshipping the One whom we have experienced throughout our lifetime. Jacob did not speak about God in a doctrinal way or worship Him in a formal way. He worshipped God according to his experience. The God whom Jacob worshipped was closely related to Jacob's staff, which was a testimony that Jacob was a sojourner on earth (Heb. 11:13) and that he was always under God's leading (Gen. 48:15). According to Hebrews 11:13, he was among those who died in faith expecting one day to enter into what God had promised.

To worship on the top of the staff requires putting the hands on the staff. Jacob asked Joseph to put his hand under his thigh, indicating that Jacob put his full trust in the hand of God's grace. But Jacob put his hands upon the staff, indicating that he recognized that he had always been under God's care of grace throughout his entire life.

(5) Remembering Rachel's Sorrowful Death

In 48:7 we see that as Jacob was departing he remembered Rachel's sorrowful death. He was faithful to her in giving her son Joseph a double portion (48:5-8, 20, 22). What Jacob did with respect to Ephraim and Manasseh in chapter forty-eight was done in remembrance of Rachel. Jacob's first son was Reuben, and his second was Simeon. His eleventh son was Joseph, the first son born of Rachel. Jacob's twelfth son, Benjamin, was also born of Rachel. His first two sons were born of Leah. Jacob, however, desired to make the two sons of Joseph, who was born of Rachel, his first two sons to replace Reuben and Simeon. In Jacob's heart, Joseph's two sons became his first two sons. In chapter forty-eight Joseph presented his two sons to Jacob, and Jacob said, "And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine" (v. 5). In other words, they would replace Reuben and Simeon. Jacob seemed to be saying, "Joseph, your sons Ephraim and Manasseh are no longer for you; they are for me, and I am for Rachel." The birthright among Jacob's sons was shifted from Reuben to Joseph through Jacob's desire to remember Rachel, who was continually on his heart. By doing this, spontaneously Jacob made Rachel his genuine wife. God honored what Jacob did and made it a fact by the allotting of the land at the time the children of Israel entered the good land.

Today among the human race there is no faithfulness between men and women. But in the case of Jacob we see Jacob's faithfulness and honesty toward Rachel. From the day he first saw her, he fell in love with her, and his heart never changed. Jacob was faithful, and God honored this faithfulness. Jacob made Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, his first two sons years after Rachel's death. During all these years, Jacob never forgot her. He was still faithful in his love toward her. Genuine love between a man and woman is always honored by God. If you do not love a woman, you should not marry her. But if you marry her, you must love her, and love her with a love that is faithful and honest. In human society today, this kind of love has been lost. A man may love someone today and change a short time later. Nothing offends God's ordination more than such unfaithful love. If you marry a certain person, you must love her to the uttermost. How good it is to see a dying man who still remembered the one he loved! Jacob's love never changed. Some might have said to him, "Jacob, you are one hundred forty-seven years old, and you are about to die. Rachel has been dead for forty years. You don't need to be concerned about this. Why do you need to call Joseph in and ask him to give you his two sons to replace your first two sons? Jacob, simply rest on your bed until you die." Nevertheless, Jacob's faithfulness to Rachel in making Joseph's two sons his first two sons so that Joseph as his firstborn might inherit a double portion of the land is recorded in God's holy Word. Sovereignly, when the portions of the land were allotted under Joshua (Josh. 24), the portion Jacob gave to Joseph was allotted to Ephraim and Manasseh. This means that what Jacob did was honored by God. A husband should never change his love for his wife. If you are faithful in your love for her, God will honor that faithfulness. This is the highest morality.

(6) Realizing that God Had Shepherded Him
All His Life Long

In 48:15 Jacob spoke of God as the One who "shepherded me all my life long unto this day" (Heb.). I hope that all of us will be able to say at the time of our departure that our life was under God's shepherding. May we be able to say, "I was not a sheep without a Shepherd. The Lord has been my Shepherd my whole life long. Now as I am about to die, I am still under His shepherding. I do not choose my own way. He is leading me, and I am under His shepherding."

(7) Prophesying concerning His Twelve Sons

As Jacob was dying, he prophesied concerning his twelve sons (49:1-2). Jacob did not prophesy by saying, "Thus saith the Lord." Rather, he prophesied by being one with God to speak for God. Whatever Jacob spoke became God's word. Jacob was God's mouthpiece. This is the kind of prophecy we find in the New Testament. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul said that he had no commandment of the Lord, yet he would give his opinion as one who had received the mercy of the Lord to be faithful. Nevertheless, what he spoke was the word of God, for Paul was absolutely one with God, and what he said was God's word. The fact that Jacob could prophesy in such a way was a strong sign and manifestation that he was matured in life. Because he had become one with God, he was mature in life. Therefore, whatever he uttered was God's speaking. He did not claim that God told him to say certain things; neither did he declare, "Thus saith the Lord." He simply spoke, and whatever he said was God's word. God honored it and fulfilled it. God has certainly fulfilled the prophetic blessing pronounced by Jacob upon his twelve sons. This proves that he departed in the maturity of life. His departure reveals his maturity.

(8) Buried with High Honor

In 50:1-13 we have the record of Jacob's burial, which was more grand than a state funeral. When Joseph went to bury his father, "with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt...And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company" (50:7, 9). This indicates that Jacob was buried in a stately manner, full of honor. Because Jacob was full of hope, expecting to be resurrected, he charged his son Joseph to carry out his burial in a way corresponding to God's promise. Only unbelievers, those who have no faith in God, neglect the matter of their burial. If we have faith in resurrection, we should make a good arrangement for our burial, an arrangement that will show others that we are not without hope. We expect to be resurrected in a glorious manner to meet the Lord.

The departure of the Apostle Paul was triumphant. However, the departure of Paul was that of a martyr, whereas that of Jacob was normal. Martyrdom does not reveal the normal departure of a man who loved God. We see such a normal departure in the record of Jacob. For this reason, although I appreciate the departure of Paul as a martyr, I love Jacob's departure more because it provides a picture of a normal departure of one of God's children. Regarding Jacob's departure, there is nothing sad or unpleasant. On the contrary, everything is encouraging and edifying. Whenever I read these chapters describing Jacob's departure, I am edified and say, "Lord, grant me the grace never to fear death. When death comes under Your arrangement, I want to take it just as Jacob did." This attitude, however, requires the maturity in life. Jacob, who had become Israel, was mature in life. Therefore, he could depart in such an excellent way.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED TEN

BEING MATURED THE REIGNING ASPECT OF THE MATURED ISRAEL

(1)

Genesis is a wonderful book. The more we study it, the more we realize that no human hand could have written it. Apparently Genesis is simply a book of stories; however, when we probe into the depths of this book through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we find that it contains something profound related to our experience of life. If we read superficially, we shall not be able to understand why the events of chapter thirty-eight are put after those of chapter thirty-seven. Not until we discover the spiritual significance of these chapters can we appreciate the deep meaning of their sequence.

According to the record of the book of Genesis and according to our spiritual experience, Joseph should not be considered a person separate from Jacob, but rather as an aspect of Jacob's biography. When we first came to Abraham in this life-study, we pointed out that, in spiritual experience, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not three separate individuals. Instead, they represent three aspects of the experience of one saint. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob represent three aspects of one spiritual man, and their biographies portray

different aspects of the complete life of a saint. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are three aspects of one person, somewhat like the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are the three of the Godhead. In the record of Genesis, God revealed Himself as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. But the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not three separate Gods; He is one Triune God. In a similar way, spiritually speaking, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not three separate persons, but three aspects of one complete person. Therefore, we have not only the Triune God, but also a complete man of three aspects.

It is difficult to determine whether Abraham or Jacob comes first. According to the historical record, Abraham was the grandfather, and Jacob was the grandson. According to spiritual experience, however, Jacob must come first. Jacob was chosen before he was born (Rom. 9:11-13). This means that the complete saint was chosen as Jacob before birth. The book of Ephesians reveals that this selection took place before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Thus, the complete person was chosen as Jacob. He was also fallen as Jacob. Then this chosen and fallen one was called as Abraham. With Abraham, he not only was called, but also was justified and lived a life by faith. Furthermore, he inherited and enjoyed all the riches of Christ as Isaac. After he had been called and justified, and while he was living a life by faith, he inherited all the riches of Christ and enjoyed them. But this is not all. As Jacob, he also struggled and suffered because of his strivings. Moreover, he was dealt with and became matured. All this is the experience of Jacob. For all these experiences—the choosing, the fall, the calling, the justification by faith, the living by faith, the inheritance and enjoyment of the riches in Christ, the self-struggling, the sufferings, the dealings, and the maturity—there is the need of three persons, the need of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

These three represent you and me. We are chosen and fallen as Jacob. We are called, we are justified by faith, and we live by faith as Abraham. We inherit the riches of Christ and enjoy them as Isaac. We struggle, suffer, are dealt with, and mature as Jacob. When Jacob was matured, his name was changed. Not only was his disposition transformed, but his name was changed from Jacob, a supplanter, to Israel, a matured prince of God, one who could reign for God.

3) The Reigning Aspect of the Matured Israel

The matured Israel has a reigning aspect. We have seen the process of Jacob's maturity and the manifestation of his maturity. His maturity was fully manifested in his excellent departure from this life. Now we must see the reigning aspect of this matured life. Therefore, in this message we come to the reigning aspect of the matured Israel, an aspect fully portrayed in the biography of Joseph.

Because Joseph represents an aspect of Jacob, we should not consider Joseph a person separate from Jacob. This is the reason the last fourteen chapters of Genesis combine the record of Joseph's life with the record of Jacob's. Genesis blends the biographies of Joseph and Jacob because they are actually the biography not of two persons, but of one. This blending of the record indicates that Joseph is an aspect of Jacob. If you read the record in Genesis from chapter thirty-seven through chapter fifty, you will see that Joseph is an aspect, a part, of Jacob. He was Jacob's expression. Wherever Joseph was, Jacob was there also. When Joseph was in power, it was actually Jacob who was reigning. Hence, their biographies are blended together as the biography of one person.

For years I tried to divide each of the books of the Bible into sections. But when I came to the last chapters of the book of Genesis, I could not tell whether it was a section pertaining to Jacob or to Joseph. Eventually I gave up trying to divide this part of Genesis into sections. Because at that time I did not see the matter of life, I did not appreciate the excellence of the composition of Genesis. But we need to recognize that these chapters are part of one biography with two aspects. The day I saw this light I was very happy. Spiritually speaking, Joseph is not separate from Jacob. Rather, he represents the reigning aspect of a matured saint.

a) Joseph's Life—Being the Generation of Jacob

Genesis 37:2 says, "These are the generations of Jacob." Then it goes on to tell us of the life of Joseph. This proves that Joseph's life was a part of Jacob's generation. Joseph's biography is an aspect of Jacob's history.

b) Joseph Being a Type of Christ

Joseph's biography indicates that he had no defects. According to the record, he was altogether perfect. In the Bible Joseph is the perfect one in the Old Testament, and Jesus is the perfect One in the New Testament. The four biographies of Jesus in the New Testament reveal that He was perfect, without defect. The record of Joseph in the Old Testament reveals that he also was perfect. Some may say that in order to be a type of Christ, Joseph had to be perfect. But was not David a type of Christ? Certainly he was. But David, a type of Christ, committed gross sin. Solomon also was a type of Christ, but he too was sinful. With the exception of Joseph, all the personal types of Christ in the Old Testament had some shortcomings.

As a type of Christ, Joseph signifies the reigning aspect of a matured saint, the mature Israel. Certainly the reigning aspect of such a person must be perfect. None of us, of course, is perfect. However, in our reigning aspect we are perfect. Whenever we are reigning in the spirit, we are perfect. Nevertheless, you may say, "I am not perfect. Rather, I am like Judah." However, the aspect of you which is like Judah is not your reigning aspect, but your fallen aspect. Yes, according to your fallen aspect you are like Judah in chapter thirty-eight. Both chapters thirty-seven and thirty-nine are chapters of perfection. Chapter thirty-eight, on the contrary, is a chapter of perversion. Thus, the reigning aspect is in chapter thirty-seven and the fallen aspect in chapter thirty-eight. Perhaps yesterday you were reigning for God, but today you may have committed sin, even a gross sin. This reveals the fact that we have various aspects. In this message we shall deal only with the reigning aspect.

I hope that we all shall see that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with Joseph are one person. Joseph is not a separate aspect of a complete spiritual person as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are. Rather, as we have seen, Joseph is an aspect of Jacob. The Bible does not say that God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, and the God of Joseph. This would make God quaternary instead of triune. There are only three. But when we come in Jacob to the stage of maturity, we see that with the mature life there is the reigning aspect. Neither Abraham nor Isaac reigned. But Joseph reigned representatively for Jacob. In other words, Jacob reigned through Joseph.

In 1:26, when God created man, He said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion..." In the last few chapters of Genesis we see an Israel expressing God's image and exercising His dominion. The exercise of God's dominion

over all things is manifested in Joseph's life, whereas God's image is expressed in Israel. Joseph is not separate from Jacob, but is an aspect of the life that expresses God's image. The two aspects of expressing God's image and exercising God's dominion must be found in one person. Therefore, what is found in Joseph's life may be called the reigning aspect of the matured Israel. Without this light, you will not be able to understand this portion of the Word. Sorry to say, most Christians do not have this light.

Our goal must be to express God with His image and to represent Him with His dominion. For this, we are chosen and fallen as Jacob; we are called, we are justified, and we live by faith as Abraham; we inherit the riches of Christ and enjoy them as Isaac; and finally we struggle, we suffer, we are dealt with, and we reach maturity as Jacob. We all have the "Jacobean" struggling nature within us. If we were told not to struggle, we would struggle just the same. Struggling, however, is not necessarily wrong. If one has been a Christian for years but has never struggled, it means that he is not one who is seeking the Lord. It also means that he is not interested in gaining the birthright. But once we realize something about the birthright, we shall struggle to be holy and spiritual, and our "Jacobean" struggling nature will come out. When you struggle, be prepared to suffer. Along with the suffering, you will be under God's dealing hand. You may be smart, but God has a Laban who is smarter than you are. Be prepared to suffer and to be dealt with by the hand of God. Eventually you will reach maturity, and the reigning aspect of the matured Israel will be seen in your life. This is the reigning aspect represented by Joseph.

Again I say, Joseph is not a complete person, but simply an aspect of a matured saint who has passed through the experiences represented by the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. After passing through all these experiences, the matured saint has an aspect that is constituted solely of Christ. Because this aspect of him is the constitution of Christ, it is perfect. Joseph represents this constituted aspect of a matured saint. In each of us there is a part that is constituted of Christ. Even if you have just been regenerated, a part of you, your regenerated spirit, has been constituted of Christ. This is the beginning of Christ's constitution in you. The process of being constituted of Christ will continue until it reaches its climax when the reigning aspect comes forth in you. When you are fully matured, you will have this top portion, this top aspect. This is the constitution of Christ, an aspect of the mature life constituted of Christ.

No doubt, Joseph is the perfect type of Christ because he portrays the constituted aspect of a mature saint. If the aspect of you which is constituted of Christ is not perfect, then surely no part of you could be perfect. In us who are fallen, saved, called, redeemed, and regenerated there is nothing perfect except the constituting Christ. Hallelujah, we have Christ's constitution within us! I repeat, Joseph represents the constitution of Christ in Jacob's mature life. This aspect, Christ constituted in the matured saints, is perfect. Hence, it perfectly typifies Christ.

(1) A Shepherd

This perfect aspect is a shepherd. Joseph, like Abel, was a shepherd (37:2). This typifies the aspect of the constitution of Christ in the mature life that is the shepherding life to take care of others. In chapter thirty-seven Joseph not only fed and shepherded the flock; although he was the second youngest brother, he was sent by his father to shepherd his brothers. Thus, Joseph shepherded not only his father's flock, but also his father's sons. The Lord Jesus also came as a shepherd (John 10:11).

Although you may be new in the church life, you nevertheless have the constitution of Christ within you. Christ has been constituted into you, and this becomes the constitution of Christ in your spiritual life. This is what gives you the burden to take care of others. This is shepherding. The constitution of Christ in our spiritual life has a shepherding aspect. It is vain to encourage people to shepherd others. The more I charge you to shepherd others, the less you will shepherd them. Shepherding is not a matter of our instigating others to do something, but of Christ's constitution within them. The part of our being that has been constituted of Christ is the part that shepherds others. I have full confidence in that part of you. We cannot shepherd anyone, but Christ constituted into us is the Shepherd.

The reigning aspect is firstly the shepherding aspect. If you do not have the burden to shepherd others and to feed them, you will never be able to reign. Reigning authority comes from the shepherding life. Eventually, Joseph reigned over his brothers. But he did not reign over them until he had already shepherded them. He was sent by his father to shepherd his brothers and to feed them. In like manner, Jesus came not as a King to rule others; He came as a Shepherd.

As the Shepherd, Christ was killed by His own people. This is revealed in John 10, where we are told that the good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep. Jesus came as the Shepherd and was killed, giving His life for His flock. In principle, the same thing happened to Joseph in chapter thirty-seven. Although he was sent to shepherd his brothers, they nearly killed him. Joseph gave his life in order to carry out this kind of shepherding. It is good that we have a shepherding life within. But if you are to shepherd others, you must be ready to be killed by those you are caring for. The very ones you desire to shepherd will not appreciate your shepherding. Instead, they will kill you. They may think of you as a strange, peculiar person, and they may call you a "holy" brother. Many have said to me, "Brother Lee, if I stay by myself and do not love the church and care for the saints, I have no problems. But when I begin to love the church and take care of the saints, the saints kill me." They kill you because you shepherd them.

(2) The Father's Beloved

Joseph, the one with the shepherding aspect, was also his father's beloved (37:3-4). Likewise, Christ was the Father's beloved Son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Only that aspect of us that is constituted of Christ is beloved in the eyes of God. Praise the Lord that we have Christ's constitution within us! This part of us is beloved of the Father. You can testify that at times you have had the deep sense that the Father was present with you, and you could sense Him saying, "This is My beloved." The words spoken of the Lord Jesus at His baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration have also been spoken to you. You have had the deep sense that God the Father was present. Whenever you have this sense, it is a proof that you have the constitution of Christ, which is pleasing to the Father. Of that part of your being the Father will always say, "This is My beloved."

Although you may be young in the Lord, I believe that you have experienced the Father God in heaven being very happy with you and pleased with you. However, now you may not be pleased with yourself, considering your shortcomings and faults. The reason for this is that we have two constitutions, the constitution of Christ and the constitution of the old Adam. When you are with the constitution of Christ, you can hear a heavenly voice saying, "This is My beloved," because God the Father is pleased with you. But when you are

with the old constitution, the constitution of Adam, not even you are pleased with yourself. Rather, you hate that aspect of your being. Joseph represents the very constitution of Christ in the matured life of Israel, that part which is called by the Father, "My beloved."

(3) Ministering to the Brothers according to the Father's Will

In 37:12-17 we see that Joseph ministered to the brothers according to his father's will. In this matter also Joseph was a type of Christ, for Christ came down from heaven to do the will of the One who had sent Him (John 6:38).

There is not a word in the Bible saying that Joseph was a type of Christ. However, if you read this section of the Word, you will admit not only that Joseph was a type of Christ, but that his biography is virtually the biography of Christ. Joseph's life was a copy of Christ's.

At this point I would like to say a word regarding allegorizing the Bible. Some Bible teachers say that we should consider as types only those things in the Old Testament that the New Testament specifically says are types. I followed this teaching for a number of years, but I was eventually released from it, having realized that it went too far. Although there is not a word in the New Testament saying that Joseph was a type of Christ, no one in the Old Testament was a more exact type of Christ than Joseph was. This indicates the fact that some things in the Old Testament are types which are not referred to as types in the New Testament. Because of this fact, I no longer hold this teaching. Joseph was a shepherd, the father's beloved, and the one sent by the father to minister to his brothers. In all these aspects he was the same as Christ.

(4) Hated and Harassed
by the Brothers to Whom He Ministers

Although Joseph was a shepherd and the father's beloved and although he ministered to his brothers according to his father's will, he was hated and harassed by the brothers to whom he ministered (37:4-5, 8, 11, 18-36). The same was true of Christ (Acts 10:38-39). Christ was sent to minister to the children of God, but they hated Him. According to the Gospels, the Jewish leaders hated Christ, conspired against Him, and plotted to kill Him. This was also Joseph's experience with his brothers. In 37:19 and 20 his brothers said, "Behold, this master of dreams cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him..." (Heb.). Thus, they conspired and plotted against their brother Joseph.

Joseph's brothers harassed him through the Ishmaelites, who were Midianites (37:25, 28). Both the Ishmaelites and the Midianites were descendants of Abraham. Abraham had three wives: Sarah, Hagar, and Keturah. Through Sarah, his genuine wife, Abraham brought forth Isaac. Through Hagar, Sarah's handmaid, he brought forth Ishmael, the product of Abraham's flesh. Finally, through Keturah, Abraham brought forth Midian. Only one son—Isaac—was brought forth by grace. Both Ishmael and Midian were brought forth through the flesh. Therefore, in the Old Testament both Ishmael and Midian signify the flesh, the natural strength. Joseph, a descendant of Isaac, was sold to the descendants of Ishmael and Midian, to the Ishmaelites, the Midianites. It seems that the Bible erroneously uses the terms the Ishmaelites and the Midianites interchangeably. In chapter thirty-seven, verse 25 speaks of the Ishmaelites and verse 28, of the Midianites. Were the ones to whom Joseph was sold Ishmaelites or Midianites? According to the Bible, both the Ishmaelites and the Midianites were of the same category. In the eyes of God the Ishmaelites and the Midianites both signify the flesh. Thus, Joseph was sold through the flesh. The same thing happened to the Lord Jesus. If the Jewish leaders had been in the spirit, they would never have delivered Jesus Christ to Pilate. Christ was delivered to Pilate by the Jewish leaders through the flesh. When the Jewish leaders delivered Jesus to Pilate, they were no longer Israelites; they were Ishmaelites and Midianites. Their delivering up of the Lord Jesus was done in the flesh.

Joseph was sold through the flesh to Egypt (37:28, 36), which signifies the world. The fact that Joseph was sold through the flesh to the world indicates that the flesh is linked to the world. It was the same in the case of the Lord Jesus. Through the flesh, the Jewish leaders delivered Christ to Pilate, the Roman authority, who certainly was in Egypt, that is, in the world.

(5) Viewing His People as Sheaves of Life
and as the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars of Light

(a) As Sheaves of Life

Now I have a heavy burden to share something very meaningful with you. If you had been Joseph, would you have considered your brothers heavenly and full of life and light? In 37:2 we are told that Joseph brought to his father an evil report regarding his brothers. Furthermore, according to chapter thirty-seven, Joseph's brothers were full of hatred and anger, and according to chapter thirty-eight, they were full of lust. In chapter thirty-seven we see the hatred and anger of Joseph's brothers, and in chapter thirty-eight we see Judah's lust. Joseph saw the evil of his brothers and reported it to his father. But Joseph had two dreams (37:5-9). In the first dream Joseph saw sheaves in the field. This dream reveals that, at the most, Joseph was just a sheaf and that, at the worst, his brothers also were sheaves. God gave Joseph this dream, and in it he had God's view of his brothers. Joseph might have said to his father, "Daddy, my brothers are so poor. How I have suffered from their evil! Oh, they are full of anger and lust!" But God came to give Joseph a dream, and He seemed to say, "Joseph, in My eyes you are the same as your brothers, and they are just as good as you are. You are a sheaf, and they also are sheaves. The only difference between you and them is that I have chosen you to reign. But this does not mean that you are better than they are."

If we do not have experience, we shall not be able to understand the word in the Bible regarding Joseph's dream of the sheaves. When you first come into the church life, you may say, "How wonderful the church life is! The brothers and sisters are all marvelous! How I love the church!" However, the more you love the church and care for the saints, the more "gophers," "turtles," and "scorpions" you will see. Then you will say, "Lord, what is this? Lord, the situation in the church is pitiful. Not even the elders are any good. And look at all the sisters! I don't want to sit near them in the meetings." At such a time you need a heavenly dream. When the dream comes, the Lord will tell you, "You are not any better, and the others are not worse than you. You are all sheaves of life in Me. There are no 'gophers,' 'scorpions,' or 'turtles' among My people. All are sheaves full of life." If I had not seen such a heavenly dream, I would have quit long ago. But I have seen the dream. I have seen that I am a sheaf and that all those who in my eyes are "gophers" are sheaves also. In the eyes of God, they are sheaves.

Years ago, I prayed many accusing prayers to the Lord; I reported to Him the evils I had seen. In my prayers I said, "Lord, I have

given up my job and consecrated my life and my future for this work. But, Lord, look at this people!" Eventually, however, the dream came, and the Lord said to me, "You are not better than they. At the most, you are just a sheaf, and, at the worst, they also are sheaves." At the beginning I was troubled and argued with the Lord, saying, "Lord, You are not thorough. You are superficial. Don't You see their heart?" But the Lord said, "I don't look at them from your view. I see them from My view. In the New Jerusalem there are no 'gophers' and 'scorpions.'"

One day I received great help by reading Balaam's prophecy in Numbers 23. According to the book of Numbers, the children of Israel had done many evil things. Balaam was hired by a heathen king to curse Israel and to expose the evil in Israel. But God spoke through Balaam, and Balaam said, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel" (Num. 23:21). God seemed to be saying, "I have not beheld any iniquity in My people. I do not see any perverseness in them."

Elijah complained against Israel saying, "The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:10). Elijah was accusing Israel before God. Being displeased with this, the Lord replied, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18). Do not go to the Lord in the way of accusing others before Him. Instead, you should say to Him, "Lord, since You see no iniquity, I do not choose to see any either. All the 'gophers' and 'scorpions' are sheaves, and I love them."

However, this is not easy to do. You may even think that I am teaching you to lie, for you may say, "Brother So-and-so is pitiful. I could never say that he is a sheaf." But who is right—God or you? And what about the dream? If you have seen the heavenly dream, then you have seen that in God's view all His people are sheaves full of life to produce food for the meal offering to satisfy God and man.

(b) As the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars of Light

In the Bible there is the principle of confirmation by two witnesses. Thus, Joseph had two dreams. In Joseph's second dream he saw the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowing down to him (37:9). This indicates that in the eyes of God all the condemned and accused people are full of light. Be careful not to accuse the brothers and sisters. The reigning aspect of the maturity of life never condemns others. Rather, it shepherds and appreciates them. It says, "Oh, the church life and all the saints are wonderful! The saints are sheaves full of life. How nourishing and satisfying they are! Furthermore, they are heavenly luminaries full of light." If you say that it is a lie to speak this way and that you cannot do it, it means that you have not seen the dream, the vision. You are lacking the heavenly view.

Let me address this question to those who have been in the church life a long time: Do you still feel that the church is so good and that all the saints are wonderful? If you are honest, you will admit that you have criticized certain saints to your wife or husband. Perhaps some years ago you felt positively about all the brothers and sisters, but not today. Years ago, according to your natural view, all the saints were so good. But today you need the view of the heavenly dream. In Genesis 37 there are two dreams. One is of sheaves full of life, and the other of the heavenly host full of light. This is God's view, the heavenly view, of His people. Because I have this heavenly view, I am greatly encouraged. I am not working with "gophers" and "scorpions." I am serving the sheaves, I am under the sun and moon, and I am walking among the stars. The dream Joseph saw is similar to the vision in Revelation 12, where God's people are signified by the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and with the crown of twelve stars upon her head. We need such a vision to see God's people from the heavenly viewpoint.

One thing is certain: Whoever condemns the church or blames the saints will suffer the loss of life. There is not one exception to this. You may be right, and the church may actually be wrong. The condition of the saints may be that of "gophers" and "scorpions." But if you condemn them, you will suffer the loss of life. However, if you say, "Lord, I praise You because Your people are full of life and light," you will be the first to participate in life. For this reason, I dare not say that the brothers and sisters are not good. Rather, I always say, "Praise the Lord! How good the saints are!" When I do this, I enjoy life. But if I were to criticize the brothers and sisters, I would immediately suffer death. No one who speaks negatively concerning the church or the saints enjoys life. On the contrary, all those who speak negatively suffer death. We need to say, "Praise the Lord, my brother will be a heavenly light! If he is not so today, he will be in the future." With God there is no time element. There is no clock in heaven, only eternity. As God views His people from the standpoint of eternity, He sees them all as sheaves full of life and as the sun, moon, and stars full of light.

(c) Positioned in Heaven, but Living on Earth

Although God's people are positioned in heaven as the sun, the moon, and the stars, they are living on earth as sheaves (Phil. 3:20; 2:15), for sheaves grow in the field. Today we are the heavenly people living on earth.

We are God's people. I have been encouraged, strengthened, and edified by this. I have complete faith in you all, and I expect to see you all in the New Jerusalem. I like to have an eternal view, not the view from the earth. I do not want to view things according to my limited sight. Rather, I would use the divine telescope. If you say that the brothers and sisters are so bad, it means that you are extremely shortsighted. But if you use the divine telescope to see through time, you will behold the New Jerusalem where there is nothing but sheaves and stars. In the New Jerusalem there are no "gophers" or "scorpions." There, everything is full of life and light. When we consider Joseph's dreams, we realize that no human mind could have conceived the book of Genesis. Only God could have caused Joseph to have these dreams.

(d) Actually Being Sinful

Although Joseph saw these two dreams, he still suffered the hatred and conspiracy of his brothers in that very chapter. Furthermore, in the following chapter we see Judah's lust. This indicates that actually the sons of Jacob were evil. Nevertheless, in the heavenly view they were not evil; they were sheaves full of life and stars full of light. The reason these two chapters are put together is so that we may have a contrast. In God's view the sons of Jacob are bright, but actually they are dark. In actuality they were sinful. Now we can understand why chapter thirty-eight follows chapter thirty-seven.

(e) Christ Still Coming through Them

Although the sons of Jacob were sinful, Christ still came through them (38:27-30; Matt. 1:3). Out of the gross sin committed in chapter thirty-eight, two sons were born, the first of whom was a forefather of Christ. Pharez, mentioned in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1, was one of Christ's forefathers. According to the holy word of Scripture, Christ came through the sinful sons of Jacob. It is similar to David's sin with Bathsheba. The issue of that sin was Solomon, who was also a forefather of Christ, one through whom Christ came (Matt. 1:6).

Do not believe that the church is not good, and do not complain against the saints or say that they are "scorpions." Out of a seemingly hopeless church, full of saints who, in your eyes, are "scorpions," Christ will come forth. However, this does not mean that we should do evil that good may come. Rather, it is a testimony of God's sovereign grace. Whether the believers are good or bad, we must be careful not to speak against them. If we do, God will say, "I do not see any iniquity or perverseness among them. My Christ will come through them. Don't you condemn them." We all need such a heavenly vision.

The mature life has a reigning aspect. The more mature in life you become, the less you will speak negatively concerning the saints or the church. When we came into the church, we had a church-life honeymoon. The honeymoon, however, never lasts very long. After your church-life honeymoon has ended, you may say, "I thought the church would be so good. But actually it is not good at all. If I could find something better, I would certainly not stay here. But, sorry to say, I cannot find anything better. However, I'm still looking. I may even go somewhere to start something on my own. Regardless of what I do, the church here is certainly not very good." Whenever you speak like this, you will suffer death. But one day the heavenly dream will come, and your view will be revolutionized. You will realize that you dare not say anything negative concerning the church or the saints. On the contrary, you will say, "This is the church, and this is God's people. In God's eyes the believers are all sheaves. They are also the sun, the moon, and the stars." When you come to this stage, you will not dare to say anything negative about the church.

After seeing such a vision, I have nevertheless said at times, "Yes, I have seen that the church is wonderful. But actually it is not so." In saying this, the "tail" was exposed. Even this "tail" caused me to suffer death. Eventually, I was completely subdued and convinced, and I said, "Lord, I forget my short sight and use the divine telescope. The church is excellent, marvelous, and wonderful. There is nothing wrong with the church. It is perfect and complete." When I speak like this, I am full of life and I enjoy life. To me, every brother and sister is wonderful, and I love them all, including the backsliders. The more I speak this way about the brothers and sisters, the more I am full of life. I believe many of us have experienced this. We are not the ones to judge. God is the Judge. And He is not judging the saints; He is working on them to transform the "scorpions" into sheaves and the "gophers" into stars. Eventually, we all shall be sheaves and stars. May we all have this eternal view.

(6) His People to Be under His Reign

Eventually, all Joseph's people will be under his reign (37:8). Joseph signifies the reigning aspect of the mature life. Only the mature life can reign, just as Christ reigns over the Jews (Matt. 27:11; John 19:19).

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS
MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED ELEVEN
JOSEPH'S LIVING CORRESPONDING
WITH HIS VISION

The book of Genesis, in which nearly all of the truths in the Bible are sown as seeds, may be considered a biography of eight great men: Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. These eight men are arranged in two groups of four. Adam, Abel, Enoch, and Noah make up the first group; and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph form the second. The first group represents the created race, the Adamic race, whereas the second group represents the called race, the Abrahamic race. Because of the failure of the created race, God had a new start with the called race. The created race began with Adam and ended with Noah. At both the beginning and the ending, the created race was a failure. Adam, the head of God's created race and its representative, became fallen. With Abel we have the coming back to God. In Adam, man fell away from God; but through God's redemption, Abel came back to Him. Enoch, who came after Abel, not only returned to God, but also walked with God. The issue of his life was a type of the rapture. Enoch was raptured out of death unto God. Enoch's life issued in Noah, who also walked with God and who had an experience of reigning, although his reigning was neither adequate nor full. However, Noah's reigning issued in a fall. Noah's descendants rebelled against God at Babel, and that rebellion resulted in God's giving up of the created race. Forced to have a new beginning, God visited Abraham and called him out of the rebellious created race. This marked the beginning of a new race, the called race, the Abrahamic race.

With this called race God certainly achieved a great success. Beginning with Abraham and continuing through Isaac and Jacob, the way rose higher and higher. Eventually we see a full reign in Jacob. As we have pointed out, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph should not be considered separate individuals. Rather, they represent four aspects of a complete, mature saint. In them we see God's selection, God's calling, and justification by faith. We see how a called and justified saint can live in the presence of God by faith to enjoy all the riches of the inheritance. However, such a one still strives to gain the birthright. But all his struggles cause him nothing but suffering. In his sufferings God's hand comes upon him to deal with him, and he is dealt with by God until he becomes mature. Hallelujah, in the called race we see the maturity of life! This matured life has a reigning aspect, an aspect portrayed by the life of Joseph. This is the reason that in the book of Genesis Joseph is so excellent and marvelous.

When I was young, my mother used to tell us Bible stories. She spent a long time on the story of Joseph. Oh, how I sympathized with this excellent one when I heard that he was cast into a pit and sold into slavery! Although I loved Joseph and realized that he was someone special, I did not know why he was so excellent. I knew only that Joseph was very good and that I wanted to be like him. Even after I had ministered the Word for years, I still did not know the reason for Joseph's excellence. But now I can boldly give you the reason Joseph was excellent: it was because he was the reigning aspect of the mature life. And he was the reigning aspect of a matured Israel, not of Jacob. Thus, Joseph was the cream of a matured life.

What we see in Joseph, of course, is simply a shadow. In reality and in actuality, the reigning aspect typified by Joseph is Christ

constituted into our being. We all are Jacobs, but we have the constitution of Christ within us. On the day we were regenerated, Christ was constituted into us. Eventually this Christ becomes our constitution. That part of our being that is constituted with Christ is neither our flesh nor our mind; rather, it is our spirit. Second Timothy 4:22 says that Christ is with our spirit. This means that Christ is constituted into the depths of our being. The Christ-constituted aspect of our regenerated being is fully represented, portrayed, and typified by Joseph. Because Joseph represents the reigning aspect of a victorious and mature life, his life is recorded in the Bible in such an excellent way.

I. LIVING AS A SHEAF OF LIFE

The first three chapters regarding the reigning part of a matured life are chapters thirty-seven, thirty-eight, and thirty-nine. As a child, I used to dislike these chapters because they were filled with hatred, plotting, and betrayals. Chapter thirty-eight is a record of Judah's incest, and in chapter thirty-nine we see darkness and the indulgence in lust. Have you ever loved these chapters? After I was saved and began to love the Bible, I did not spend much time on these chapters. Having become familiar with the story found in them, I did not care to read these chapters again. When in 1955 I conducted a study on the book of Genesis, I skipped over them. But during the twenty-three years since that study was conducted, I have received more light. After I came to this country, I saw the value, the preciousness, of Joseph's dreams, which are the controlling view of these chapters. If you have not seen the vision of Joseph's dreams, you will be able to know no more than the story contained in these chapters. You will not be able to know the depths of the significance of this story. Joseph's dreams controlled and directed his life. Joseph conducted himself in such an excellent way as the reigning aspect of a mature life under the direction of this controlling vision.

Chapter thirty-seven begins by telling us how Jacob loved his dear son Joseph, and how Joseph reported the evils of his brothers to his father. Then we are told about Joseph's dreams (37:5-10). In these days the Lord has shown us that Joseph's dreams reveal the actual situation of God's people in His eyes. God's people are all sheaves of life. A sheaf is a bundle of wheat full of life and life supply. The sheaves contain life grains which are good for life supply. Do not say, "I don't like the Israelites, because they are so evil." Remember the case of the Gentile prophet Balaam who was bribed to pronounce a curse upon Israel. At that time, Israel actually was evil. Nevertheless, Balaam, under the control of God, said that God had not beheld iniquity in Jacob nor perverseness in Israel (Num. 23:21). On the contrary, in God's eyes all His chosen people are sheaves of life, full of life supply. Furthermore, God's people are like stars shining in the sky.

After telling us of these two dreams, the record of the book of Genesis reveals that Joseph's brothers plotted to kill him and that he was sold into slavery in Egypt. In chapter thirty-eight we see the incestuous sin of Judah, and in chapter thirty-nine, the darkest temptation and most unjust treatment of Joseph. According to the sequence of events in these chapters, we see that Joseph's excellent behavior was under the direction of his dreams. In his first dream he saw that he was one of the sheaves; and he was not a sheaf falling down, but a sheaf rising up. I believe that from the time of that dream Joseph realized where God had put him and what God wanted him to be. He no doubt understood that God wanted him to be such a sheaf. He was not to be driftwood full of death, but a sheaf standing up full of life. If you had had such a dream, would you not be influenced, if not controlled, by it? Would this dream not govern your behavior and direct your conduct? Certainly it would. I believe that Joseph's dream of the sheaf directed his behavior.

This was also true of the second dream, the dream of the sun, the moon, and twelve stars. Suppose you had a dream in which you were the star that was worshipped by the other stars. Would you not as a result esteem yourself highly? Would you not say, "My, I am a star! I am not a scorpion or something low and dark. I am a bright star shining in the heavens." If you had been the one to see such a vision, would it not control you? If it did not control you for the rest of your life, it would at least govern you for a period of time. You would begin to behave like a shining star and say, "Last night I saw that I was the star worshipped by all the other stars. From now on, I must act like such a bright star. In the past I have been dark, but I must not be like this any longer. Instead, I must be bright and shining."

Joseph behaved so excellently and marvelously because he was directed by the vision he saw in his dreams. Children are influenced by what they see on television. I have observed my own grandchildren act out what they saw on a certain program. If even the little ones are influenced by what they see, then how much more was the young man Joseph influenced by the heavenly vision, the vision that he was a sheaf rising up full of life and that he was a star worshipped by all the other stars! Do you not believe that Joseph was influenced and impressed by this vision? I definitely believe that he was. The point I am making is that Joseph's excellent and marvelous behavior was due to the vision he received. The vision of his two dreams controlled his life and directed his behavior. He behaved as the sheaf standing up and full of life, and he conducted himself like a heavenly star shining in the darkness. With this viewpoint, you are able to understand the significance of these three chapters.

A. His Brothers Giving Vent to Their Anger

In these chapters two gross sins are recorded. In chapter thirty-seven there is the sin of anger (37:18-28). Joseph's brothers seized the opportunity to give full vent to their anger. This was not an insignificant case of anger. The one Joseph's brothers were plotting to kill was not a thief, but their own brother in the flesh, the dear son of their own father. If they had had any human affection at all, they would never have considered doing such a thing. Reuben, however, did think of how it would affect their father; and Judah suggested that they not kill him, but sell him, which was far superior to shedding his blood. Nevertheless, in chapter thirty-seven we see the anger of Joseph's brothers. In the next chapter, chapter thirty-eight, we have Judah's indulgence in lust, even in incest (38:15-18). After the fall of man, the first issue to come forth was the killing of a brother in the flesh. And the sin that brought in the flood as God's judgment upon the fallen race was the indulgence in lust. These two sins, the sins of murdering a brother in the flesh and of indulging in lust, are repeated here.

B. Joseph Emerging from Anger, Surviving in a Death Situation

The anger of his brothers afforded Joseph the opportunity to live as a sheaf of life. While all his brothers were drowning in the water

of anger, Joseph, the reigning aspect of the mature life, lived as a sheaf of life, emerging from the death water of human anger. The record, under God's inspiration, uses fallen anger as the background to demonstrate how much life was in the sheaf. This sheaf was filled with life. When all the rest had sunk into the death water of human anger, this sheaf emerged and survived in that situation of death.

Is this not also the record of our life? Day after day, we are surrounded by the death water of human anger. But instead of drowning, we emerge out of the death water and survive. If this is a portrait of your daily life, then you are the reigning aspect of the victorious life. Although, humanly speaking, we are prone to lose our temper, we nonetheless have the constitution of Christ that emerges out of the situation of anger. Thus, we are today's Josephs, sheaves of life rising up and standing up.

II. LIVING AS A STAR OF LIGHT

A. His Brother Judah Indulging in Lust

The second gross sin, the indulgence in lust, also afforded Joseph an opportunity. The indulgence in lust seen in chapter thirty-eight is a symbol of darkness. In this chapter Judah was utterly in darkness. Judah behaved in a blind way, and blindness signifies darkness. If he had not been in blindness, in darkness, how could he have committed adultery with his daughter-in-law? Where was his conscience? Where was his eyesight? His eyes had been blackened and blinded, and he was in darkness. That evil woman in chapter thirty-nine, the wife of Potiphar, was also in darkness. If she had not been in darkness, how could she have behaved in such an evil way? Thus, in chapters thirty-eight and thirty-nine we have a portrait of darkness.

B. Joseph Overcoming Lust, Shining in Darkness

But in the midst of this darkness we see Joseph as a bright star shining in the heavens (39:7-12). Conducting himself as a shining star, Joseph seemed to be saying, "All you people are under darkness, but I am shining upon you. How can I, a bright star, do such a dark thing? I cannot forget my dream. My dream controls me and directs me. As a heavenly star, I would never sell my position." If you have this light as you come to these chapters, you will see that Joseph was one who lived a life that corresponded to his vision. Joseph was not only a dreamer; he was also one who practiced, one who lived out, what he saw in his dream.

As today's Josephs, we also must have some dreams. Others should say that we are dreamers. Many of my Christian friends consider me a dreamer. In talking about the overcoming life and the practice of the church life, they have said to me, "Brother Lee, these are wonderful ideas, but they are just dreams. No one can live such a victorious life on this earth, and it is impossible to have the practice of the church life. We must wait for that day. Let's not dream any more. Rather, let's wake up from the dreams." But I not only have dreams—I practice what I see in my dreams. You may think that I am merely a dreamer, but I am also one who fully puts my dreams into practice. I can testify that it is very possible to have an overcoming life and to have the practical church life. This is not simply my dream; it is my practice and my experience. Like Joseph, I have had some dreams, the dream of the sheaves and of the bright stars. By the Lord's mercy, I have lived according to my dreams. I have behaved and conducted myself according to the vision I have seen. Although some say, "These are merely dreams without any possibility of fulfillment," I must declare that these are heavenly revelations of the facts. Do you not believe that the victorious life is entirely possible? And do you not believe that the practical church life is available today? We are not dreaming in vain. We have a vision that controls us.

We all know what it is to lose our temper. I am no exception. It is not a good thing to keep our temper within us. On the contrary, in a sense we feel better when we give vent to it. However, when I am about to lose my temper, the vision of the sheaf comes, and the Lord asks me, "Are you a sheaf rising up? If you are, then what about your temper?" As soon as the Lord speaks to me in this way and I respond to Him, my anger is gone. Even if I wanted to lose my temper, I would not be able to do so. It is possible for us all to live without anger and loss of temper. As you are about to lose your temper, the Lord may say, "Are you a sheaf? Are you one in the church, in the Lord's recovery?" As soon as you say that you are a sheaf, your anger will vanish.

Just as we all have anger, we also have lust. If you have no lust, then you must be a bench or a stone. Every human being has lust. The way to control our lust is to be subdued, controlled, and directed by the vision. Oh, we have a vision controlling us! The people perish when they do not have a vision. Because we have seen the vision, it is very difficult for us to indulge in lust.

The function of the vision is similar to that of brakes in a car. In times of danger, we step on the brakes. The vision of the heavenly star is a powerful brake for our spiritual car. We are not driving a car that is without controls. When we are driving properly in the right lane, there is no need to use the brakes. But when the car begins to go out of control, the brakes work immediately. Hallelujah for such a controlling vision! Many of us can testify that before we came into the church life, we were like a car without brakes. But after coming into the church life, we saw the controlling vision, and powerful brakes were installed in our car. Here in the church life we have the vision of the sheaf and the vision of the star.

III. LIVING THE KINGDOM LIFE

Joseph's life under the heavenly vision was the life of the kingdom of the heavens described in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. According to the constitution of the heavenly kingdom revealed in these chapters in Matthew, our anger must be subdued and our lust conquered (Matt. 5:21-32). If we claim to be the kingdom people, yet we cannot subdue our anger or conquer our lust, we are finished. Instead of being in the kingdom, we are on the seashore. We are those giving vent to our anger and indulging in lust. But all the kingdom people subdue their anger and conquer their lust. This is the kingdom life.

In the kingdom life today, kings are being trained. We, the kingdom people in the kingdom life, are being trained to be kings, to be Josephs, to be the reigning aspect of the mature life. For this, we must subdue our anger and conquer our lust. What a wonderful picture Joseph's life is of our experience today! Day by day, we are subduing our anger and conquering our lust. Instead of agreeing with our anger or cooperating with our lust, we reject our anger and condemn our lust, because we are the reigning aspect of the mature life. We have the constitution of Christ within us, and we are being prepared to reign as kings.

IV. ENJOYING THE LORD'S PRESENCE

A life such as Joseph's always has the presence of the Lord (39:2-5, 21-23). Wherever the presence of the Lord is, there is authority. If you have the presence of the Lord, the authority of the Lord will be with you. For example, in captivity Daniel had the Lord's presence; therefore, the Lord's authority was with him. Even a child in a family may have the Lord's presence and therefore be the genuine authority in that family. In the case of Joseph, Potiphar, an officer in Pharaoh's palace, was in control of things. Eventually, however, Potiphar was under Joseph's control because Joseph had the Lord's presence. Also consider Joseph's experience in prison. Although there was a ruler over the prison, eventually this ruler was not the actual ruler. Instead, Joseph, a prisoner who had the presence of God, became the ruler. Both in Potiphar's house and in the prison Joseph became king.

Wherever the constitution of Christ goes with the presence of God, there will be the reigning part. In the coming kingdom it will be this part that will be the co-kings with Christ in the kingdom of the heavens. Thus, the reigning aspect of the mature life is a life that always enjoys the presence of the Lord. The authority in this universe is the Lord Himself. Wherever His presence is, there is authority, the ruling power. As long as we have the Lord's presence, we have authority, even if we are in prison. Although we may be prisoners, we shall eventually become rulers. We shall rule wherever we are. This indicates that we are the reigning aspect of the mature life.

A. Prospered by the Lord

In the presence of the Lord, Joseph was prospered by Him (39:2-3, 23). Where the presence of the Lord is, there is not only the Lord's authority, but also prosperity brought about by the Lord's sovereignty. While Joseph was undergoing ill-treatment, he enjoyed the prosperity that came to him under the Lord's sovereignty.

B. The Favor with the Lord's Blessing

In the Lord's presence, Joseph was favored with the Lord's blessing wherever he was. The Lord's blessing always accompanies prosperity under His sovereignty. When Joseph enjoyed prosperity, he and those who were involved with him were blessed (39:4-5, 22-23).

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED TWELVE

BEING MATURED
THE REIGNING ASPECT OF THE MATURED ISRAEL

(2)

In the book of Genesis, Joseph represents the reigning aspect of the mature life. As such a representative, Joseph typifies Christ, for the reigning aspect of the mature life is Christ constituted into our being. Therefore, in the record of Genesis Joseph typifies Christ.

(7) Betrayed

We have seen that Joseph typifies Christ as the beloved Son of God, as the One sent by God the Father to shepherd God's people, and as the One who was persecuted by those whom He was sent to shepherd. In addition, according to the four Gospels, Christ was betrayed (Matt. 26:14-16). Joseph, as a type of Christ, also was betrayed (Gen. 37:27-28). In the Bible sense, to be betrayed means to be despised, depreciated, dishonored, or disregarded. When Judas was about to sell Christ, he certainly was lowering down the value of Christ to the uttermost. In Matthew 26 we see that Christ was a test to all those around Him. Some hated Him. Mary, however, appreciated Him and poured valuable ointment upon Him. To Mary, Christ was valuable, and she highly appreciated Him. But Judas despised Christ, dishonored Him, and disregarded Him. He depreciated Christ to such a degree that he sold Him for a cheap price, for thirty pieces of silver, which according to Exodus was the price of a slave (Exo. 21:32). Thus, in the Bible to betray someone means to depreciate him.

Whenever you are depreciated by someone, it means that you are betrayed by him. Whenever your wife depreciates you, she is betraying you. Likewise, if the brothers disregard you, it means that you have been betrayed. Consider how you evaluate yourself. In your thinking are you not valuable? We all regard ourselves as valuable. Therefore, when we are depreciated by others or disregarded by them, we are betrayed. You may think that during the years you have been in the church life you have never seen a betrayal. However, in the church life people are often betrayed in the sense of being disregarded or depreciated. Day after day, husbands may depreciate their wives or wives may disregard their husbands. If some saints talk about another saint in a depreciating way, they are betraying him.

We all think of ourselves as valuable. In actuality we are valuable because we have Christ in us. Do you not have God within you? In the Bible God is likened to gold, and Christ is likened to a treasure. Our God is the gold within us, and Christ within us is the treasure in the vessel. The unbelievers do not have such a high value because they do not have Christ within them. At most, they are simply muddy vessels. But we have the greatest treasure within us. Therefore, we should not think that we are not valuable. We need to declare to the angels, "Angels, you must realize how valuable I am. I'm valuable because Christ is in me." Furthermore, you may boast to Satan and to the demons, "Satan, I want you to know that I have God and Christ within me. Demons, you are not destined to have Christ in you. But I have Christ in me and therefore I am valuable." This is not pride; on the contrary, it is true humility. I would like to tell everyone, including the angels, the Devil, the demons, and everyone on earth, that I am valuable because I have Christ; therefore, you must not despise me or disregard me.

We must learn not to sell our brothers. Joseph was sold by his brothers. If they had regarded him as a sheaf or a star, they would not have sold him. The fact that they betrayed Joseph means that they depreciated him and disregarded him. In principle, the same thing happened to the Lord Jesus. Although He was precious and valuable, Judas depreciated Him and sold Him for thirty pieces of silver.

Peter, James, John, and all the other Apostles followed the footsteps of the Lamb, and they also were depreciated. This was also true of the Apostle Paul. Throughout the centuries, the followers of the Lamb have been betrayed. Like Christ, they have been depreciated, disregarded, and despised. As we follow the Lord today, we also are being depreciated. We endure many sufferings simply because we are despised and disregarded. Those who oppose us depreciate us and disregard us. If they appreciated the treasure within us and recognized the preciousness of what the Lord has wrought into us, they would neither despise us nor disregard us. Certain ones oppose us because they depreciate us. This depreciation is actually a form of selling us, and it is a sign of betrayal. Do not think that such a betrayal happened only to Joseph or to Christ as typified by Joseph. On the contrary, it has happened to all the followers of Christ and it is our experience today.

Before we were saved, many of us were highly regarded by our parents, relatives, and friends. But after we were saved and began to seek the Lord, our friends, relatives, and in some cases even our parents began to despise us. This is betrayal. Christ's crucifixion began with His betrayal. He was crucified after He was betrayed. It was the same in principle with Joseph. He was not directly cast into prison. First he was sold, and his being sold was the stepping-stone into prison. Christ's betrayal was the stepping-stone to the cross. It is not an insignificant matter to be betrayed. All the persecution and opposition today is a type of betrayal. Those who oppose us are betraying us; they are selling us at a cheap price. Although we are valuable, the opposers sell us for such a low price, even for nothing.

(8) Delivered into the Prison of Death

Joseph's betrayal was followed by a period of confinement, a period of imprisonment (39:20). Joseph was with two criminals, who typified the two criminals with Christ, one of whom was restored and the other executed (40:1-23). It was the same with Christ. After Christ was betrayed, He was put into the prison of death (Acts 2:23). He was crucified between two criminals, one of whom was saved and the other perished (Luke 23:32, 39-43). Christ was confined in the prison of death for three days and three nights. As a type of Christ, Joseph had the same experience as Christ. He was rejected by his brothers, sold by them, and eventually cast into prison. Christ suffered the same things. Firstly, He was rejected by His brothers; then He was sold by one of His people, and eventually He was cast into the prison of death.

Although Christ was resurrected after His death, His resurrection did not come immediately afterward. Humanly speaking, the three days of Christ's confinement in the prison of death were not a short time. No night has ever lasted for three days and three nights. At the longest, night lasts from evening until morning. But the night Christ spent in the prison of death lasted for three days and three nights. If we had been Mary Magdalene, it would have been a long time to us, because she loved Christ, had followed Him, and had seen Him crucified and buried. After Christ's death and burial, Mary had no heart to eat or sleep. Instead, she waited for something to happen. I do not believe that all the disciples could have forgotten that before His death Christ had said that He would be resurrected after three days. Even if they were not clear about what He had said, they must have been impressed with something regarding His resurrection. This must have been especially true of the sisters, for they often have a better memory than the brothers. Although Peter might not have been impressed with Christ's coming resurrection, I do not believe that Mary Magdalene forgot that Jesus said that after three days He would rise from the dead. It was very difficult for her to wait for those three days. It would have been difficult to wait even three hours. At last, on the third day, the tomb where Jesus was buried was found empty. The three days and nights that Christ had been confined in the prison of death were a long night. Joseph's night of confinement lasted approximately ten years. When Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt, he was about seventeen years of age; and when he was released from prison, he was thirty. If you read the Bible carefully, you will see that it was not long after Joseph was sold to Potiphar that he was cast into prison. Joseph, therefore, was in prison for a long period of time, a long time of darkness.

According to the Bible, it is the young people, not the older ones, who experience this lesson. When Joseph was put into prison, he was less than twenty years old. Every young person needs such a period of confinement. Young people, because you are so free, you need to be confined. In this country the young people are eager to be eighteen years of age, for then they can be free like birds released from a cage. I have observed this with my own grandchildren. At the age of eighteen, they think they can be released from the cage. However, if the young people love the Lord and are today's Joseph, they will be placed into the Lord's confinement after they have been released from their cage. Young people, the Lord's confinement is awaiting you.

We have seen that Joseph represents the reigning aspect of the mature life. However, before Joseph was enthroned and came into power, he was imprisoned. This indicates that before enthronement, there is confinement. In Joseph's dreams, there was no indication that he would be imprisoned. The dreams must have made Joseph very happy. In them he saw himself as a standing sheaf and as a shining star. Joseph was so excited about his dreams that he told his brothers about them, not realizing that they would be offended by them. Enthronement did not immediately follow Joseph's dreams. Instead, there was betrayal leading to imprisonment.

After hearing this, some of you may say, "The previous messages on Joseph were wonderful and glorious, but I can't take this word. I quit." But even if you quit, God will not quit. You need to realize that you are a kite on a string, and that string is in the Lord's hand. The Lord would say, "Do you intend to give up? I will not allow you to give up."

If Joseph had not had those dreams, he probably would not have been in any trouble. But he had two dreams and in his excitement told his brothers about them. Joseph, however, was not immediately enthroned. Instead, he was depreciated and imprisoned. Some of the young people may think that if they follow Jesus Christ and are in the Lord's recovery, everything will be glorious. However, the young people need a period of confinement. This is very important for them. How I thank the Lord for what confinement has done for me!

Your prison may be your wife. Many of you young people were not married when you came into the church life. In the church you had the opportunity to make the best selection. However, after the honeymoon, you found that your dear wife became your confinement. You may say, "What has happened? Now that I am married I am no longer free." That is correct. Your husband or wife is your prison. Every marriage and every home is a prison. Thank the Lord for all these prisons. As many of us can testify, this confinement lasts a long time. I have been in this type of prison for a great many years, and because I still need confinement, I am still in prison. I still have some lessons to learn.

Now we come to my burden in this message: I want to share with you, as a parenthetical word, the secret of how to spend your time during your imprisonment. This is the secret of enjoying your imprisonment. Without this secret, I could not understand Genesis 40 in a full way. Now I would like to present to you the secret of what we should do during our period of imprisonment. When the time comes for you to be imprisoned, you will understand that what I am presenting to you in this message is altogether workable.

I. JOSEPH TRIED BY HIS DREAMS NOT BEING FULFILLED

Joseph was tested by the fact that his dreams were not fulfilled. Immediately after Joseph had his dreams, he told his parents and brothers about them. Not long after that, he was sold into slavery and then cast into prison where, I believe, he stayed over ten years. In his dreams there was no indication or implication that Joseph would suffer. However, immediately after Joseph had those dreams, he had to endure suffering. Likewise, I can testify that the throne does not immediately follow the vision of Christ, the church, the cross, or the inner life. Instead, there is suffering, trial, betrayal, and imprisonment. According to our natural concept, we think that immediately after we see a vision, something glorious will happen in our life. But this is not the case. After the vision, trials will come. Young people, do not think that after you have seen the vision of Christ, the church, the cross, the inner life, or the Spirit, you will have a glorious time. No, you will suffer and be imprisoned.

If I had been Joseph, I might have had doubts about my dreams and said to myself, "These dreams are not something real. I dreamed that I was a sheaf standing up, but actually I have been made low. I saw that I was a star shining in heaven, but actually I have been cast into the dungeon. What has happened is the exact opposite of my dreams." I would certainly have doubted my interpretation of my dreams. I would have regarded them as unreal.

Those of us who have been in the church life for many years have had this experience. Perhaps some years ago you saw a wonderful vision concerning Christ and the church life. Perhaps you even sang about the glorious church life. But what has actually happened in the church life has not been that excellent or glorious. Therefore, you might have said, "I thought I was in the good land of Canaan, but I actually was in Egypt. I dreamed that I was surrounded by sheaves, but actually I am surrounded by 'Egyptian scorpions.' According to the vision I saw and according to the messages Brother Lee gave us, I expected to be in the third heaven. But now I am in a dungeon, in a pit. Instead of being in Jerusalem, I am in Egypt." Many of us can testify of experiences like this. Following the vision there came, not enthronement, but imprisonment.

II. JOSEPH HAVING THE FAITH AND THE BOLDNESS TO INTERPRET THE DREAMS OF HIS TWO COMPANIONS IN PRISON

During his imprisonment, however, Joseph had the faith and the boldness to interpret the dreams of his two companions in prison even though his dreams were not yet fulfilled (40:8-19). It was just like Abraham praying for Abimelech to have children when God's promise to him about having a son had not yet been fulfilled (20:17-18). It is the same with us in the church life today. Some brothers and sisters are what we may call old-time dreamers. They are those who had dreams a long time ago. Although they were excited by the visions they saw and the wonderful messages they heard, they were later sold into Egypt. Instead of being surrounded by sheaves, they found themselves surrounded by "Egyptian scorpions"; and instead of being in the third heaven, they found themselves in prison. Then some latecomers joined them in prison, just as Joseph was joined in his confinement by the chief cupbearer and the baker. Joseph might have been in prison for nine or ten years already before he was joined by them. These latecomers also had some dreams. They could not understand their dreams, but Joseph was able to interpret them. Although Joseph's dreams had not yet been fulfilled, he had the faith and the boldness to interpret the dreams of his companions. If I had been Joseph, I would have said, "I interpreted my own dreams, but these interpretations have not been fulfilled. How can I have the boldness to give others the interpretation of their dreams? Even if I did know the meaning of their dreams, I would not have the assurance to tell them, because I don't know that my interpretations will be fulfilled." However, although Joseph's interpretation of his own dreams had not been fulfilled, he still had the boldness to say to his companions, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me them, I pray you" (40:8). Joseph seemed to be saying, "I had two dreams, and God gave me the interpretation of them. I still believe in these interpretations, although they have not yet been fulfilled. I have the faith to interpret your dreams for you." Do you have the boldness to say that the church life is wonderful, even when you are surrounded by some "Egyptians"? Could you say this even when your dream of the church life has not yet been fulfilled and the church life is not wonderful to you? Joseph believed not only for himself, but also for others. It is easy to believe for others when your dreams have been fulfilled. If your dreams have been fulfilled according to your interpretation, it is easy to interpret the dreams of others. But in Joseph's case, even after a period of about ten years, the interpretation of his own dreams had not been fulfilled. It was difficult for one in such a situation to interpret the dreams of others. Nevertheless, Joseph did so.

I have been engaged in the ministry of the Word for years. I saw certain visions in the early years and I interpreted what I saw. But even many years later the things that I saw and interpreted had not actually happened. When some latecomers needed my help, I wondered what to do. I wondered if I should say something like this: "I had some dreams many years ago, and I was given the interpretation of these dreams. But even until now my dreams have not been fulfilled. Therefore, I don't have the heart, the assurance, or the boldness to interpret your dreams for you. You should go talk to someone else." Joseph was not like this. Although his dreams had not yet been fulfilled, he still had the boldness and the assurance to interpret dreams for others. I can testify that I have done the same thing. I have encouraged others to go on according to the vision they saw, even though my visions had not been fulfilled. Certainly I was right in doing this. All the old-time dreamers must suffer something for the sake of the latecomers.

Andrew Murray once said a word like this: The good minister of the Word should always minister more than what he has experienced. This means that we should speak more according to the vision than according to the fulfillment of the vision. Even if our vision has not been fulfilled, we should still speak of it to others. The time will come when our vision will be fulfilled. Joseph's dreams were eventually fulfilled through his interpretation of the dream of the cupbearer.

III. JOSEPH CONFIRMED AND STRENGTHENED BY THE FULFILLMENT OF THE DREAMS

OF HIS COMPANIONS IN PRISON

It was just a matter of days before the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker were fulfilled. When the dreams of Joseph's companions were fulfilled, Joseph was confirmed and strengthened. If I had been Joseph, I would certainly have been encouraged, and I would have said, "Even though I have not yet seen the fulfillment of my dreams, I have the confirmation that the fulfillment will certainly come. I interpreted the dreams of these two men, and the interpretations have come to pass. This will also happen in the case of my dreams. My fulfillment will also come."

IV. JOSEPH TRIED FURTHER BY HIS DREAMS NOT BEING FULFILLED FOR ANOTHER PERIOD OF TIME

The fulfillment of the dreams of Joseph's companions came in a few days. But Joseph was tried further by the fact that his dreams were not fulfilled for another period of time (40:14, 23). Genesis 41:1 indicates that another two full years went by. During these last two years, the test was most difficult. Before the cupbearer left the prison, Joseph pleaded with him to remember him, saying, "But remember me with thee when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house" (40:14, Heb.). Joseph seemed to be saying to the cupbearer, "When you are restored, remember me with you. Don't just remember yourself. When you are doing well and everything is going well with you, please remember me." Nevertheless, the chief cupbearer forgot Joseph (40:23). Joseph's dreams were confirmed, but they were still not fulfilled.

Before the confirmation of Joseph's dreams, Joseph had faith; and after the confirmation was given, he had more faith. The more faith we have, the more testing we shall suffer. Suppose you were Joseph there in confinement. What would you have said? Joseph might have said, "I had two dreams many years ago, and they have not been fulfilled. But these two men had a dream, and their dream was fulfilled after three days. How long will it be before my dreams are fulfilled?" Thus, the last two years were the most difficult period of Joseph's time of testing.

What we are describing in this message is not a mere doctrine. As we follow the heavenly vision, we shall trace Joseph's footsteps. Never think that Joseph was enthroned immediately after he saw the vision. No, he had to pass through a long period of trial and testing. The visions Joseph saw not only controlled his life; they also sustained his faith. This does not mean, however, that if your faith is stronger, the length of time until the fulfillment of your dreams will be shortened. Rather, the stronger your faith is, the longer the period of testing will be. Joseph's time of testing was much longer than that of his companions because he was more valuable than they. Because they were not so valuable, the time of their fulfillment came very quickly. Actually, for those two latecomers, there was nearly no testing. They each had a dream, and a few days later their dreams were fulfilled. Because Joseph was important and valuable, the time of his testing could not be shortened.

Young people, do not think that in just two years you will become a giant. No, like Joseph, you must wait until you are thirty years of age. The Bible is always consistent. For instance, the priests had to be thirty years old before they could enter into the full priesthood, and the Lord Jesus also began His ministry when He was thirty. Thus, in this matter also Joseph typified Christ. When he was thirty years of age, he was fully put into the ministry.

Some of you may think that this word about waiting until the age of thirty to be put into the full ministry is a contradiction of what I have said elsewhere regarding the elders of the church in Jerusalem probably being under the age of thirty. Yes, I did say that Peter, James, and John were probably between twenty-five and twenty-eight years of age when they became elders. However, we must pay attention to the principle, not to the literal figures regarding physical age. You may have a heart that is absolutely for the Lord, and you may have seen some visions. But do not think that you will be enthroned immediately. Instead, you must be prepared to be depreciated and confined. I am proud of the young brothers and sisters, many of whom are still teenagers. I am proud of the fact that they love the Lord so much and that they have seen certain things that most pastors have not seen. However, these young people must be ready not to be honored, but to be betrayed.

This was the experience of Brother Nee. Brother Nee was a very intelligent person. He was so keen in learning English and Chinese that his parents even hired a private teacher to instruct him in the Chinese classics. At the age of seventeen, he was saved and he began to love the Lord. Brother Nee wanted to attend a Bible school in Shanghai, founded for the training of young people by Dora Yu, the prevailing evangelist who had brought Brother Nee to the Lord. His mother, who also loved the Lord, agreed that he should go. Because both Brother Nee and his mother had been saved through the preaching of Dora Yu, they respected her very much. Although Brother Nee was an intelligent young man who eventually became the outstanding gift of this age to the church, he was rejected by Dora Yu, and after a period of time was sent home from Bible school. Brother Nee, who was very much seeking the Lord, was betrayed by the very one who had brought him to the Lord. Instead of appreciating his intelligence, Dora Yu depreciated him, misunderstood him, and rejected him. The reason he was sent home was an incident over an errand he was asked to take care of. It took him a longer time to take some mail from a suburb to the post office in downtown Shanghai than Dora Yu expected. Thinking that he was passing his time in amusement, Dora Yu sent him home to his mother. Thus, Brother Nee was rejected and misunderstood, that is, he was betrayed. However, Brother Nee was not discouraged. He left Shanghai, returned home, and went on to love the Lord all the more. He recognized that this experience was the Lord's dealing with him. Time after time, Brother Nee was betrayed.

Young people, be prepared for this. After you begin to seek the Lord, certain things will happen to you that seem unreasonable. Do not think that because you love the Lord and seek Him, everything will be glorious for you. No, sometimes you will be misunderstood, even by the brothers and sisters and the elders. Firstly you will be betrayed; then you will endure a period of confinement. We all need such confinement. Be assured, however, that wherever you will be, God's presence will be there with you.

Wherever you are, you will bring either life or death. To the cupbearer, Joseph brought life. In the cupbearer's dream we see a vine full of life. But to the baker, Joseph brought death, because the baker was devoured by birds. It is not an insignificant matter to be a Joseph, for wherever you go, people will either receive life or suffer death. Either they will go to Christ typified by the vine full of life,

or they will be devoured by Satan, represented by the birds of the air. In 2 Corinthians 2:14 the Apostle Paul said, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in the Christ, and manifests through us the savor of the knowledge of Him in every place." In verse 16 Paul says, "To the one a savor from death unto death, to the other a savor from life unto life." To the cupbearer, Joseph brought restoration. To the baker, Joseph brought execution. No matter who a person may be, if he contacts you, it will be either life or death to him. This is a very significant matter. This is the experience of Joseph.

Apparently as Joseph was in confinement, he was suffering. Actually, however, he was not suffering; he was learning valuable lessons and experiencing what was necessary for his enthronement. Without the lessons learned during confinement, how could Joseph, a young man, be enthroned in Egypt to rule over the whole country? It would have been impossible. Joseph was trained by his imprisonment. His confinement was truly an exercise for him. Young people, any confinement that you must undergo will be a training, an exercise, and a time of learning as a preparation for your enthronement. In order to come to the throne, you need to undergo the sufferings of betrayal and confinement. No one can skip over these sufferings. No ministry has ever been used by the Lord that has not passed through betrayal and imprisonment. Only by passing through betrayal and imprisonment shall we be qualified to ascend to the throne. After you have been trained through confinement, you will no longer be a youngster; rather, you will be a man qualified under God's training.

Do not think that Joseph was an exceptional case. No, Joseph's case is normal. You and I shall all be like him. Hallelujah for the vision! And hallelujah for the betrayal, for the confinement, and for all the lessons! Praise the Lord that we have the way to go on!

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED THIRTEEN

BEING MATURED THE REIGNING ASPECT OF THE MATURED ISRAEL

(3)

In this message we come to Genesis 41, which unfolds more of the details of Joseph's life. As we have pointed out, Joseph represents the reigning aspect of a mature life. As the representative of such a life, he is an excellent type of Christ. It is rare to find in the Old Testament such a complete and full type of Christ. Therefore, on the one hand, Joseph represents the reigning aspect of the mature life and, on the other hand, typifies Christ in a full way. Throughout the record of Joseph's life there are two lines: the line of the type of Christ and the line of the secret of the reigning life. In this message we shall consider further the line of Joseph as a type of Christ, and in the next we shall consider the line of the secret of the reigning life. In previous messages we have covered eight aspects of Joseph as a type of Christ. In this message we shall cover seven more aspects.

(9) Resurrected from the Prison of Death

Joseph typified Christ as the One resurrected from the prison of death (41:14; Acts 2:24). Christ was not arrested and cast into prison. Rather, He walked willingly into prison, that is, He went into the prison of death voluntarily. Although He entered into death willingly, the gates of Hades, which is the power of death, the authority of darkness, immediately rose up and sought to keep Him there forever. But as Acts 2:24 says, it was impossible for Him to be held by death. Christ stayed in the prison of death for three days. During those days, the power of death did its best to imprison Him. But Christ could not be held by death because He is resurrection (John 11:25). Which is more powerful—death or resurrection? Resurrection is definitely more powerful than death. Thus, death could not hold Christ, who was not only life, but also resurrection. Therefore, Christ walked out of death. To Him, this walking out of death was His resurrection. As Joseph was released from the dungeon, so Christ was also released from the prison of death.

All Christians should be familiar with three things: the incarnation of Christ, the crucifixion of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ. I believe that we in the churches know these three matters.

(10) Enthroned with Authority

Joseph also typified Christ as the One enthroned with authority (41:40-44; Matt. 28:18; Acts 2:36; Rev. 3:21). On the same day Joseph was released from the dungeon, he was enthroned to be the actual ruler over the whole land of Egypt. In like manner, after Christ was resurrected, He was enthroned with authority. Acts 2:36 says that the crucified and resurrected Christ has been made both Lord and Christ. On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter seemed to be saying to the Israelites who had rejected the Lord, "The One you rejected, put on the cross, and killed, God has raised up from the dead. Not only so, God has made Him the Lord of all." This refers to Christ's enthronement. What a great matter this is!

(11) Receiving Glory

When Christ was enthroned, He received glory (Heb. 2:9). Joseph also typifies Christ in this regard, for when he was released from the dungeon, he received glory (41:42). Joseph's opposers not only sold him and despised him, but cast him into a dungeon. In chapter forty-one the prison is called a dungeon. The living conditions in Joseph's dungeon were far worse than the conditions of the prisons in this country today. The dungeon into which Joseph was cast was a pit. Those who put him there did so with the intention that he would be severely distressed. But God lifted him up and not only placed him on the throne, but also gave him glory. You may be wondering how we can prove that Joseph received glory. The proof is in the fact that he was clothed with beautiful garments and made to ride in the second chariot of Pharaoh (41:42-43). His being clothed with fine linen was in contrast with his being stripped by his brothers of his coat of many colors (37:23). When people saw him clothed with such beautiful garments and sitting in Pharaoh's chariot, they must have realized that here was a man in glory.

(12) Receiving Gifts

When Joseph was released from the dungeon and uplifted to the throne, he received gifts (41:42). Christ also has received gifts (Acts 2:33). Many Christians know that Christ resurrected, ascended, and has been crowned with honor and glory, but not many know that after Christ's ascension, enthronement, and glorification He also received gifts. Acts 2:33 says that Christ received of the Father the

promise of the Holy Spirit, which He has poured out. What Christ received of the Father was a gift. In ancient times, many centuries before Christ, the same thing happened to Joseph. Joseph was not only glorified, but also received gifts.

In his glorification Joseph was given three things: a golden ring, some garments, and a golden chain. The ring was put on his hand, the chain was placed on his neck, and the garments covered his entire body. These three items portray in a full way the gifts that Christ received in His ascension to the heavens, the gifts that He has passed on to the church. When the prodigal son came home, he received the first two gifts, the ring on his hand and the robe on his body (Luke 15:22). At that time he did not receive the golden chain, which was to be given later.

Ephesians 1:13 says that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. This indicates that the Spirit of salvation is likened to a seal. We know that we are saved because we have been sealed. Fifty years ago I bought a gold-edged, leatherbound edition of the Bible. As soon as I got it, I put my seal in the front of it to indicate that it belonged to me. I was afraid that otherwise it might be lost and I would have no way to prove that it was mine. After my Bible was sealed, however, I could prove that it belonged to me. Likewise, before we were saved, we were among the common people. But on the day we received the Lord Jesus, we were sealed. The seal of our salvation is the Holy Spirit of God. From that time onward, we have had a seal upon us. Suppose my Bible could say, "I don't like Witness Lee. I would like to belong to someone else." But my seal in the Bible would keep it from belonging to someone else. In like manner, we may feel that we do not want to belong to the Lord and that we would like to go along with Satan. Nevertheless, one who has been saved and sealed can never get away from the Lord. Even if it were possible for you to go into hell, you would still bear this seal.

The ancient Egyptians used their ring as a seal. Whatever they sealed with their ring was something important to them. Thus, the ring, the seal, received by Joseph typifies the Holy Spirit received by Christ. At the time of Christ's ascension and enthronement, Christ received of the Father the Holy Spirit that He might use Him as a seal to put on all His believers. Whenever anyone calls on Him, He puts this seal upon him.

As a saved one, you have a living seal on you. Even if you were to go to a gambling casino in Las Vegas, you would still have this seal upon you, and it would make you feel that, because you belong to Jesus, you should not stay in such a place. As our Joseph, Christ has received the seal from the Father, and with it He has sealed us. Now this seal is within us and upon us.

The second of the gifts Joseph received was the garments. We believers need at least two garments, one for salvation and the other for victory, for reward. The prodigal son in Luke 15 received just one garment because he was simply a saved one. He had not yet become victorious. After we have been saved and have received the garment of righteousness to justify us, we need to go on to live a victorious life. If we do, then in addition to the garment of salvation we shall receive another garment.

Often I have pointed out that the queen in Psalm 45 has two garments (vv. 13-14): one corresponds to the objective righteousness for our salvation, and the other to the subjective righteousness for our victory. The New Testament reveals that we believers should have two garments. The first garment is seen in Luke 15, and the second is found in Revelation 19. The garment of salvation is good for us to be justified before the Father. But in order to attend the wedding feast of the Lamb we need another garment. Both garments are Christ. The first, the garment of salvation, is the objective Christ. It is Christ put upon us (Gal. 3:27), Christ given to us to be our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). When the prodigal son came back home, he was not qualified to sit down with his righteous father. He needed a garment of righteousness to cover him and to qualify him for this. This garment is the objective Christ as our righteousness, which justifies us before the righteous God. But after we have been justified, we need to live out Christ. When Christ is lived out of us, He becomes our subjective righteousness, not just something put upon us, but something lived out of us. This is the subjective Christ as the second garment. Christ has been given to us as these two garments.

Our Christ is the real righteousness before God. Apart from Christ, there is no righteousness in the universe. In this universe there is only One who satisfies all of God's righteous requirements, and this One is Christ. Although it may not sound logical, this righteousness has been given to Christ. You may wonder how Christ can be righteousness, yet have this righteousness given to Him. Nevertheless, this is the biblical way of speaking, and we need to learn to speak the biblical language. The unique righteousness in this universe is Christ; yet this righteousness has been given to Christ that He may put it upon His believers. Christ is the righteousness that has been put upon us objectively for our justification. This righteousness which has been given to Him by the Father has been passed on by Him to us. Furthermore, He is constantly giving Himself to us so that we may live Him out of us. This is wholly a matter of gift.

The matter of Christ being righteousness yet having righteousness given to Him involves the Trinity. If this righteousness had never been given by the Father to the Son, it would not be so legally effective. Although the unique righteousness in the universe is Christ Himself, without this righteousness being given by the Father to the Son, not even the Son would have the right to use it. Therefore, the Father gave it to the Son so that the Son might pass it on to His believers, firstly as the objective righteousness, then as the subjective righteousness.

We all have received the first garment, and there is no problem regarding our salvation. We are saved and we shall spend eternity with the Lord. This is more certain than a policy from the most trustworthy insurance company. But what about the second garment? We cannot at the present time be as certain of this as we are of the first garment, for we may not have paid the necessary premium for this second policy. We need to gain the second garment so that we may receive the reward. Praise the Lord that both the objective garment and the subjective garment are gifts! Both have been given by the Father to the Son, and the Son has given them to us. If you asked me if I have these two garments, I would answer, "I certainly have the first garment, and the second garment is within me and it is in the process of coming out." You also have received the second garment and have it within you. Now you need to pray, "Lord Jesus, process Yourself out of me. Lord Jesus, come out of me to be my second garment." We all need this garment.

Related to the second garment is the third item, the golden chain placed around Joseph's neck. In the Bible a chained neck signifies a subdued will. When the children of Israel were disobedient, the Lord referred to them as a stiff-necked people (Exo. 32:9). It would be very uncomely for a person with a stiff neck to wear a golden chain. It would be beautiful, however, to see a golden chain on a neck that is bowed. The chained neck signifies a will that has been conquered and subdued to obey God's commandment. When your neck

has been conquered and subdued in this way, it is chained. Have you ever seen a woman wearing a necklace while quarreling with her husband? I have. When I saw this, I said to myself, "You should take off that necklace. Since you are being stiff-necked, you should not be wearing a necklace." Even a man's necktie is a type of chain. There is an amount of refinement related to wearing such a chain. The golden chain on the neck signifies the Spirit for obedience. Acts 5:32 says that the Spirit is given to those who obey God. Hence, the Spirit is given not only as a gift for salvation, but also for obedience.

How I admire the sequence of the things in the Bible. If I had listed the gifts given to Joseph, I would have mentioned the ring first, then the chain, and finally the garments. When I was young, I was bothered by the fact that the garments are mentioned before the golden chain. But the sequence of the three gifts in verse 42 is according to the spiritual sequence. In the spiritual sequence we firstly receive the Spirit for salvation. This is the seal. Then we receive the garment of righteousness, and we begin to live out Christ. In order to live out Christ, we need to have a chain on our neck. This means that our neck must be conquered, subdued, and chained by the Holy Spirit. Oh, the Holy Spirit will chain you! It will chain your stiff neck and cause it to be soft and subdued. Many saints in the church life have had their necks chained.

This is even true of some of the teenagers among us. When I was a teenager, I had a stiff neck. Although my mother loved me very much, my neck was still very stiff. Many of you teenagers are like this. However, when you call on the Lord Jesus, you are spontaneously chained. The Lord puts His chain on your neck, and your neck is softened and subdued. Sometimes your disposition may cause you to be unhappy with your mother. Nevertheless, because your neck has been chained, it is no longer as stiff as it used to be. When your neck was so stiff, there was no chain on it. But today you have been chained by the Holy Spirit, chained by the Spirit for obedience. Thus, others can see on your neck the beauty of the Holy Spirit for obedience expressed in your submission. You have been subdued, and you are submissive to your mother and father. Someone may say, "When I am eighteen years of age, I will have my freedom." This is not the testimony of a person chained with a golden chain. One who has a chain on his neck is submissive to his parents and to his teachers. When your neck is chained, it bears a certain type of beauty, the golden beauty of the Spirit for obedience.

These are the gifts received by our Joseph and passed on to us. I can boast that on my hand I have a ring, that around my entire being I have a robe, and that another robe is coming out from within me along with the golden chain around my neck. Hallelujah, Christ has received gifts and He has passed all these gifts on to me! Now I also have received gifts in Him. All this is typified by Joseph.

(13) Becoming the Savior of the World,
the Sustainer of Life (the Revealer of Secrets)

Because Christ was resurrected, enthroned, glorified, and received gifts, He is the Savior of the world. As the Savior of the world, He is also the Sustainer of life and the Revealer of secrets (Acts 5:31; John 6:50-51). Joseph typified Christ in these three aspects, for these titles are all included in the name Zaphnath-paaneah given to Joseph by Pharaoh (41:45). This name firstly means the Savior of the world; secondly, the Sustainer of life; and thirdly, the Revealer of secrets. We all know that Christ is the Savior of the world. As the Savior of the world, He is the Sustainer of life and the Revealer of secrets. All these titles were ascribed to Joseph. Firstly, Joseph was the revealer of secrets, then the savior of the world. He became the savior because he sustained the life of the people.

Regarding Joseph's being the sustainer of life, the record of the Bible is marvelous. Pharaoh had two dreams, the first of cows and the second of ears of corn (41:1-7). Why did Pharaoh not dream of seven turtles and seven black stones? Both the cows and the grain are good for food. Today we enjoy eating steak, which comes from cows, and bread, which comes from grain. Here we see two kinds of life—the animal life and the vegetable life. We need to enjoy both kinds of life. According to the ordination in the Bible, before the fall man ate only of the vegetable life (1:29). After the fall, however, man was told to eat meat because of the need for the shedding of blood for redemption (9:3). Thus, after the fall, man had to take as his supply the vegetable life and the animal life. Actually, the animal life must come first, for the fallen ones need to be redeemed before they can enjoy life. At the Lord's table we see the bread and the blood. The blood comes out of the Lord's animal life for redemption, and the bread comes from His regenerating life. In the Gospel of John the Lord is likened to a lamb. In John 1:29 John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb." This is the animal life for redemption. In John 12:24 the Lord compared Himself to a grain of wheat falling into the earth to reproduce by regeneration. This is the vegetable life for regenerating. Both kinds of life are mentioned in Genesis 41.

As we consider this, we realize again that the Bible is truly a divine book. No human being could have composed it. The more I probe into the depths of the Bible, the more I am convinced that its contents are divinely revealed. Surely it is the Word of God. Who other than God could have written such a chapter as Genesis 41? Today, the life supply we receive from the Lord Jesus as the Sustainer of life includes both the animal life for redemption and the vegetable life for production. Hallelujah, day by day we are nourished in this way! Simultaneously Christ is both the Savior of the world and the Sustainer of life.

He is also the Revealer of secrets, the One who interprets dreams. Have you ever considered how many dreams the Lord Jesus interpreted when He was on earth? By dreams I mean revelation, the secrets He has revealed to us. He interpreted at least seven dreams in Matthew 13 and a number of others in Matthew 24 and 25. Truly the Lord is the Revealer of secrets.

(14) Taking the Church

In 41:45 we see that Joseph took as his wife Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah, priest of On. Joseph's wife was a heathen, an Egyptian. Joseph took her during the time he was rejected by his brothers. This also is a type portraying how Christ has taken the Gentiles as His wife during the time of His rejection by the Israelites. As He was staying with the Gentiles, He obtained a wife from among them.

In the book of Genesis we have seen three wives who portray the church: Eve, the wife of Adam; Rebekah, the wife of Isaac; and Asenath, the wife of Joseph. As the wife of Adam, Eve portrays how the church comes out of Christ and is a part of Christ. She typifies how the church is the same in life and nature as Christ and eventually becomes one Body with Him. Thus, Eve typifies the church being a part of Christ, coming out of Christ, returning to Christ, and being one with Christ. Rebekah portrays the church as the called and selected one, the one from the same source as Christ. Isaac came from a particular source, and Abraham's servant was sent to that source to select and call a wife for Isaac and to bring her to him. This selected one was Rebekah. Asenath portrays the church

taken out of the Gentile world by Christ during His rejection by the children of Israel. During the time of this rejection, Christ came to the Gentile world, stayed there, and received the church out of the Gentile world.

Of his wife, Asenath, Joseph begot two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. The name Manasseh means, "Causing to forget." When Manasseh was born, Joseph said, "God hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house" (41:51). This indicates that with the birth of Manasseh Joseph forgot all his afflictions. When Manasseh was born, Joseph seemed to say, "Praise the Lord! He has caused me to forget my afflictions." This reveals that when the church is productive, Christ will declare that He has forgotten His afflictions. If in the gospel meetings of the church in Anaheim some fruit is produced, Christ will declare to the whole universe, "Manasseh! I have forgotten My affliction."

The name of Joseph's second son was Ephraim, which means "Fruitful" (41:52). When Ephraim was born, Joseph said, "For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." With Joseph, instead of affliction, there was fruitfulness. When we preach the gospel and produce fruit, Christ will be happy and declare, "There is no more affliction. But look at all the fruit!"

(15) Supplying People with Food

Joseph supplied food to the famished people (41:56-57). As such a supplier of food, he typified Christ as the One who supplies people with food (John 6:35). Today, what a Supplier of food Christ is! He supplies food to the famished people.

As we read the story of Joseph, we find that it is inexhaustible. Although we may read it again and again, we cannot exhaust its riches.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS
MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED FOURTEEN
THE SECRET OF JOSEPH'S RELEASE
AND EXALTATION

This message is a parenthesis covering the secret of Joseph's release and exaltation.

**I. JOSEPH BECOMING QUALIFIED IN AGE
AFTER THE FURTHER SUFFERING OF TWO YEARS**

When some read chapter forty, they may have the desire to speak to the Lord on Joseph's behalf and ask the Lord why He kept Joseph in prison for such a long time. Joseph was seventeen or eighteen years of age when he was first put into prison, and he was about twenty-eight years of age when he interpreted the dreams of his two companions in prison. Although he had been in the dungeon for at least ten years prior to the release of his companions, his own dreams still had not yet been fulfilled. Perhaps you would say, "Lord, this is too much. You have tested Joseph for ten years already. Why didn't You release him when You released his two companions? After Joseph had interpreted the dream of the cupbearer, he asked the cupbearer to remember him. But the cupbearer forgot Joseph, and nothing happened. Lord, it is easy for men to forget. But You are God, and You cannot forget things. Why did You keep Joseph in prison for another two years?" One day I was enlightened to see that Joseph remained in prison for another two full years (41:1) because it was necessary for him to reach the age of thirty (41:46).

Today many young people expect to be released from their cage as soon as they turn eighteen. But according to the Bible, we need to reach the age, not of eighteen or even twenty-eight, but of thirty. Those who served God as priests began to do so in a full way at the age of thirty (Num. 4:3). The ones under thirty were apprentices, not fully functioning priests (Num. 8:24). When the Lord Jesus began to minister, He also was thirty years of age (Luke 3:23). Thus, if Joseph had come to the throne at the age of twenty-eight, he would not have typified Christ in this matter. He had to be thirty years of age. After I saw this, I was convinced that these further two years were necessary for Joseph to be qualified. If he had not stayed there for two additional years, he would have been under age.

Young people, no matter how long your trial may be, do not be disappointed. You need to recognize that your trial is of God. No one can be enthroned without being tried and tested. Although we like to be enthroned immediately, God would say, "The time is not yet. Do not talk to Me about enthronement. You need to be put into the dungeon." If you seek the Lord, the Lord will put you into a dungeon. Perhaps all who are around you—your wife, your children, the elders, and the brothers and sisters—intend to respect you; however, whatever they do only serves to put you into a dungeon. We have nothing to say about this. Without the dungeon, we cannot ascend to the throne. Do not be a dungeon dropout; stay in the dungeon until you graduate and receive the crown. You need the last two years.

Although I may have no intention of putting you in a dungeon and although you may have no intention of putting me in a dungeon, what actually happens is that we put one another into a dungeon. When you were married, did you intend to put your wife into a dungeon? Surely you had no such intention. But this is just what you have done. Unintentionally and unconsciously, we put others into a dungeon. My children have done this to me. Sometimes they tell me how much they love me, but within myself I say, "Your love puts me into a dungeon." Nevertheless, we need to say, "Hallelujah for the dungeon! Although I have been here for ten years, I need to stay another two years." Again I say, do not drop out of the dungeon. Stay there and stay there gloriously, with praises to the Lord, not with the gnashing of teeth.

Madame Guyon was one who could praise the Lord in her dungeon. She even wrote a poem in which she likened herself to a bird in a cage. Here is the first stanza:

A little bird I am,
Shut from the fields of air,
And in my cage I sit and sing
To Him who placed me there;
Well pleased a prisoner to be,
Because, my God, it pleaseth Thee.

Madame Guyon grew to love her cage, which was her dungeon.

If Joseph had not stayed in the dungeon for twelve years, he would not have been qualified to rule over the land of Egypt. For this, he had to be thirty years of age. Those twelve years in the dungeon accomplished a great deal for him, not through objective education, but through subjective suffering and discipline. Be patient; eventually you will be qualified to rule. But in order to be qualified, you need to stay in the dungeon for another period of time.

II. JOSEPH RELEASED FROM PRISON INDIRECTLY THROUGH HIS INTERPRETATION OF THE CUPBEARER'S DREAM

Now we come to my burden in this message. My burden is to point out that Joseph was released from prison through his speaking by faith. Joseph dreamed that he was a sheaf rising up and that his brothers were bowing down to him. Ten years went by, and still this dream had not been fulfilled. If this had happened to us, we would have been disappointed to the uttermost and said, "Forget about this dream. I'm through with being a dreamer and with hearing about dreams." If Joseph had done this, he probably would never have been released from prison. He was released from the dungeon by speaking. However, Joseph was not released at the time he interpreted the dreams of his two companions. He interpreted their dreams by speaking in faith. If I had been the one interpreting dreams for others, I would have been afraid they would ask about my own dreams, because I would have had the vision, but not the experience or the fulfillment of the vision. Thus, I would not have dared to say anything for fear that someone might say, "What are you talking about? Don't talk about dreams until your own dreams have been fulfilled. I don't believe in you." But no matter whether his dreams had been fulfilled or not, Joseph spoke boldly by faith. If he had been questioned, he might have said, "Yes, I have had two dreams. Although they have not been fulfilled, I still believe in them. Perhaps tomorrow they will be fulfilled." Eventually, by his speaking Joseph was released from prison. If he had not spoken to the cupbearer, there would have been no one to tell Pharaoh about Joseph. It was the cupbearer who brought the news to Pharaoh that there was someone in prison who could interpret dreams (41:9-13). Therefore, Joseph was released from prison indirectly through his interpretation of the cupbearer's dream.

I have experienced this myself. In 1957 I was somewhat troubled by a problem that had arisen in the churches in Taiwan. But one day the Lord showed me that I should forget about the problem and begin to speak concerning the kingdom and the New Jerusalem, telling people that the church life today is a miniature of the New Jerusalem. Thus, I began to speak boldly, first in Taipei and then in Manila. An elderly British missionary attended the meetings in Manila and heard my messages. After one of the meetings, he came to me and said, "Brother Lee, do you mean these things to be for today or for the future?" When I said that I meant both, he replied, "The New Jerusalem will certainly be in the future, but I cannot see it here today. How can you say that it is both present and future?" Nevertheless, I continued to say that it was both. He would not believe it, but I did. Eventually, he left the church life. This indicates that the more you say no to the vision, the more you will be out. You may say, "There is no such thing as the church life; this is simply Brother Lee's dream. Let's forget about it." But the more you say this, the more you will be out of today's church life. We need to say, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! I believe that the church life is here today." The more you say this, the more you will be in it. This is a dreamer's vision.

We all need to speak like dreamers. Do not wait until you have the experience before you speak. Speak first. Speak immediately after you have seen the vision and then you will have the experience. Andrew Murray once said that a good minister always speaks more than he has experienced. In a sense, a good minister must be a boaster. During the years I have been in this country, I have spoken so boldly about the church life that some might have thought that I was boasting. Regarding the church life, some asked me, "Brother Lee, does this work?" I answered, "Why not?" For those who have said that it was impossible to have the church life, it has been impossible. In 1962 we had our first conference in the United States. Immediately after that conference, I was invited to a brother's home in Whittier. One day my host asked me, "Brother Lee, do you intend to say that what you minister actually works?" I replied, "I can assure you that it does. I would even sign a guarantee to this effect." Whether or not the vision works depends upon your mouth. If you say, "No," it will not work for you. But if you say, "Yes," it will work for you, even though it does not work for others. It all depends on whether you say yes or no. If you say no, it will be no; and if you say yes, it will be yes. Concerning the dream, the vision, it matters a great deal whether we say yes or no; for either our yes or our no will come true.

III. JOSEPH GIVEN AUTHORITY DIRECTLY THROUGH HIS INTERPRETATION OF PHARAOH'S DREAMS

Joseph's speaking not only released him from prison, but also ushered him to the throne. Joseph spoke himself to the throne. He was given authority directly through his interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams (41:25-44). If I had been the one interpreting dreams for Pharaoh, I would have been very cautious, fearing that Pharaoh would ask me about my own dreams. I would have been afraid that Pharaoh might say, "You don't have any experience. How can I listen to your interpretation? Your dreams have not been fulfilled. How then can my dreams be fulfilled? Go away from me." Joseph, however, was bold to speak, to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, and through his speaking he was given authority. Do you want to be released? Do you want to receive authority? If you do, then you need to speak. The more you speak, the more you will be released. Do not say that you are not qualified to speak, for the more you say that you are not qualified and that you are in the dungeon, the longer you will remain in the dungeon. But the more you speak, the more released you will be. Release will come through your speaking. In our experience we have found that the more we speak, the more released we are. I cannot tell you how released I am through my speaking. When I return home after speaking in the meeting, I am happy and refreshed. My speaking releases me from every kind of imprisonment. I do not care about so many things, for I speak my way out of the dungeon. Learn to speak yourself out of your dungeon. The best way to be released is to speak.

If you want authority, you need to speak. Speaking is what gave Joseph his authority. His speaking not only put him on the throne, but it secured for him authority over all the land. The more you speak, the more authority you will have. Release and authority both come through speaking. Whether you are at home, at school, or at work, you need to speak. Every time you come to the meeting, you should speak. We should be speaking all the time. The more we speak, the more release we shall enjoy, and the more authority we shall receive.

IV. JOSEPH MINISTERING FOOD TO PEOPLE THROUGH HIS INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS

Through his speaking Joseph also became a supplier of food. He ministered food to others through his interpretation of dreams. You may say that you are poor. You are poor because you are silent. Why are you so silent at school, in your neighborhood, or in the meetings? Why do you not speak? You may say, "Oh, I don't have enough experience to speak anything. I've been in the church life for many years. At the beginning, I heard that the church life would be glorious. But now I don't feel that it is very glorious. Thus, I don't have the assurance to speak anything about the glorious church life." However, the less you speak of the glorious church life, the less you will be in such a church life. You need to speak contrary to your feeling. Say something that is not according to your feeling, but that is according to your vision. When you declare that the church life is glorious, you will be in the glorious church life you are speaking into being. If you say, "I don't have it," then you will not have it. But if you speak, you will supply others with food. By your speaking you will have the release, the authority, and the food. Hallelujah, this all comes through speaking!

From time to time over the years, certain ones have said, "Brother Lee, how do you get so much life? Every time I see you, you are refreshed and full of life." I answer that I am refreshed and receive life by speaking. If I were to go to a certain place and were not to speak, I would be ready for burial. However, when I speak, I am released, I receive authority, and I have the food to supply others. I can testify to all that because I do the most speaking, I am more released, I have more authority, and I have more food. Oh, we all must learn to speak! Do not speak according to your experience—speak according to your vision.

V. JOSEPH'S LIFE BEING A LIFE OF DREAMS

Joseph was truly a dreamer, and his life was a life of dreams. A victorious and overcoming Christian will always be a dreamer. You need to have dreams, and you need to interpret the dreams of others. Day by day, let us all speak according to our vision, according to our dreams. Furthermore, we must interpret the visions of others, and we must live according to our vision. We should not speak according to our feelings, but according to the vision. We are visionaries. Because we are visionaries, we do everything according to the vision. Although a certain thing has not yet come to pass, we speak according to what we have seen of it, and we find that our vision is being fulfilled.

When we compare Joseph with the other outstanding men in Genesis, we see that he is unique in dreams and in suffering. None of the seven other great men had as many dreams as Joseph had; Joseph was always involved with dreams. His life was also unique with respect to suffering.

Dreams require interpretation, and interpretation is a matter of speaking. Therefore, Joseph was constantly speaking. Through his speaking, all the dreams were fulfilled. Firstly, Joseph spoke himself into trouble. If he had not spoken about his dreams, he would not have gotten into trouble. His brothers hated him and sold him into slavery simply because he spoke about his dreams. If after having these dreams Joseph had been silent, there would have been no problem. His sufferings came from his speaking.

After the Boxer Rebellion, many saints in England prayed desperately for the vast country of China. The Lord answered their prayers by coming in and doing a marvelous work in the colleges throughout the country. Thousands of students, including a good number of brilliant ones, were captured by the Lord, and many of them saw a vision. I was one of these students, and I was very familiar with the situation. Brother Nee was not the only one to see something concerning the church. Many others did also. However, they were afraid to speak of their dream concerning the church. These students were afraid of the missionaries, whose goal was to advance their mission work, their mission church. They were fearful that if they spoke something different from what the missionaries were doing, they would get into trouble. Because of his bold speaking, Brother Nee was betrayed. In the middle 1920s he published twenty issues of a paper called *The Christian*. In the articles in this paper Brother Nee spoke according to his dream. As a result, people laughed at him, and he got into trouble. The missionaries, teachers, and theologians, all of whom were older than he, disregarded him and opposed him. Brother Nee had seen a vision of local churches in every city throughout China. A quarter century later, his dream was fulfilled. By 1948 there were about five hundred local churches in the provinces of China.

Before Brother Nee's dream was fulfilled, however, he suffered a great deal, not only from outsiders, but even from turmoil stirred up by insiders. Due to this turmoil, his ministry was set aside for a number of years. Brother Nee once told a certain brother that there was no possibility to ever resume his ministry. This is an indication of the severity of Brother Nee's sufferings. He suffered so intensely that he felt that it was impossible for him ever to resume his ministry. But, much to his surprise, the Lord did something in 1948 to restore his ministry. In the forthcoming biography of Brother Nee now in preparation all this will be made clear. As a result of the restoration of Brother Nee's ministry, hundreds of churches were raised up in the cities of China. This was due to Brother Nee's speaking, to his sounding of the trumpet, and to that of a few co-workers who were faithful to him.

Let me give a testimony of our experience in Taiwan. When we first arrived in Taiwan, we found it to be a backward, primitive island. Nevertheless, we began to speak according to our vision. There were many missionaries there, especially those from the Southern Baptist denomination. With the mainland of China lost, they invested a great deal of money in their work on the island of Taiwan. Although we were small in number, we spoke according to our vision. This speaking of the vision caused trouble, for it stirred up opposition. Some said, "Are only you the church? What do you mean that you have the church life and that we don't?" Our speaking was strong. We published books and a little magazine entitled *The Ministry of the Word*, which has had more than three hundred issues. Today, through this magazine, we are still sounding the trumpet. During the past twenty-eight years, we have done a great deal of speaking. Our speaking has caused trouble, and we have suffered much opposition as a result.

However, whether the missionaries agreed with us or not, they eventually were subdued and had to admit that ours was the best work in Taiwan. In the church in Taipei alone there are more than twenty-three thousand members. Before our dream began to be fulfilled in Taiwan, we suffered a great deal. Although we suffered criticism and defamation, we never stopped speaking. The more others tried to keep us from speaking, the more we spoke. We kept on speaking ourselves into trouble.

As we have seen, Joseph firstly spoke himself into trouble. But later he spoke himself out of trouble and into the fulfillment of his dreams. All this happened through his speaking. Both the trouble and the fulfillment came by speaking. It is the same with us today.

When we speak about the glorious church life, some may shake their heads in disbelief and wonder whether this can be worked out in the United States. Some have even said that it is impossible. But it did work. During the past fifteen years in the United States, this dream has been fulfilled.

I first saw this vision fifty years ago, and wherever I have been—in China, in Taiwan, or in the United States—I have spoken according to it. Whoever has said no to this vision, to him it has been impossible for it to be fulfilled. But to those who have said, "Yes, it is possible," to them it has been possible. The more we say that the church is glorious, the more glorious it is. I believe strongly that the church in Anaheim will be glorious, for we shall speak ourselves into this glory. Be prepared first to speak yourself into trouble and then to speak yourself out of trouble and into the fulfillment of your dreams. These three things will happen to us all.

Some of you may be familiar with a slanderous book called The God-Men. The preface to this book was written by a man by the name of David Adeney, whom I met more than twenty years ago when he was engaged in a student work in the Far East. He appreciated our meetings, and he sometimes attended the Lord's table meeting in Hong Kong. Once he came to Taiwan to carry out a work on the campuses. He came to realize that our work at National Taiwan University was better than the work of others. Because our gospel preaching was so prevailing, he admired it. One day he came to see me and told me that our work on the campuses was very good and that he wondered whether or not we could work together. I told him that I respected his work for the gospel and that, as far as the gospel was concerned, we could work together. However, I pointed out that his goal was different from ours. The goal of our preaching was to build up the local church, but his preaching eventually would help the denominations. In our conversation I was very frank with him. I said, "Brother, you need to see clearly where we are and where you are. We have two different goals. Our goal is to build up the local church as the Lord's recovery; and your work would eventually help the denominations." In our conversation, according to what he told me, I said to him that he was out of Babylon, but only halfway to Jerusalem. He was not yet in Jerusalem. Recently I received a note from a young brother telling me that this Brother Adeney had told him that in Taipei I once had said to him that he was out of Babylon, but not yet in Jerusalem. I was pleased to hear that he still remembered this word.

It is difficult for me to believe that such a brother, who expressed himself to me in a very nice way, could write the preface to the slanderous book entitled The God-Men. If I were speaking with him face to face, I would say, "Brother Adeney, don't you believe that we are God-men? How could you write a preface to a book defaming us in this matter?" In his preface he gave people a vague, ambiguous, negative impression about me. I feel very sorry for him that he became involved in such a defaming work.

All this trouble has come from my speaking. The opposition from Melodyland and the Bible Answer Man is the result of my speaking. Today I am still speaking myself into trouble. The more opposition there is, the more I speak. I am still speaking, and I intend to speak even more. I may speak myself into trouble, but the ones who oppose this speaking will suffer loss because of their opposition.

Suppose when the cupbearer and the baker told Joseph about their dreams, he did not have the faith or the boldness to interpret them. Joseph could have said, "You know, friends, more than twelve years ago I had two dreams. I interpreted these dreams, but even now I still have not seen them fulfilled. Now I don't know whether those dreams were real or not. I dare not say." Many who saw the vision of the church during the past fifty years held an attitude similar to this. Some said, "Brother Lee, we dare not say that what you are doing is wrong. We also have seen something like this, but we're not sure about it. Time will tell." If Joseph had expressed such an attitude to his companions in prison, nothing would have happened.

What do you suppose would have happened if Joseph had been uncertain in talking to Pharaoh? Suppose Joseph had said, "Pharaoh, I have had some dreams, but they have not been fulfilled. My interpretation of the chief cupbearer's dream has been fulfilled, but I don't know whether my dreams will ever be fulfilled. However, if you like, I will interpret your dreams for you." If Joseph's attitude had been like this, Pharaoh would have sent him back to prison. He would not have wasted his time with Joseph. But, although Joseph's dreams had not been fulfilled, he was bold to tell Pharaoh that God would give him an answer of peace (41:16). We all must learn to do this. Because of the vision, I cannot remain silent. When I speak, I am restful, joyful, and happy. The more I speak, the more released I am.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS
MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED FIFTEEN
BEING MATURED
THE REIGNING ASPECT OF THE MATURED ISRAEL

(4)

To many readers of the book of Genesis, the stories of Joseph are like the stories told to kindergarten children. However, we must remember that in the book of Genesis the seeds of nearly all the spiritual truths are sown. Whether the record of Joseph is merely a series of kindergarten stories or the seeds of the divine truths depends upon our point of view in reading it. If we look at the record of Joseph's life from the point of view of a kindergarten child, we shall read it merely as a story for children. But if we see that Jacob had passed through so many tests and had become matured in life, we shall see that the record of Joseph is not merely a story, but a revelation of the reigning aspect of a matured saint. If we view the record of Joseph as being the reigning aspect of a mature saint, our understanding will be revolutionized. Genesis 42, therefore, which we shall consider in this message, is not a kindergarten story; it is part of the reigning aspect of a mature life.

What we see in the life of Joseph is the rulership of the Spirit. You may have heard of the regeneration of the Spirit, the conviction of the Spirit, the inspiration of the Spirit, the infilling of the Spirit, the anointing of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit, the light of the Spirit, and the life of the Spirit, but the term the rulership of the Spirit is something new. We all need to be under the rulership of the Spirit. This aspect of the Spirit is higher than any other aspect. It is even higher than the building of the Spirit. The rulership of the Spirit is the topstone, the capstone, of the structure of the teaching of the Spirit. The record of Joseph's life is a revelation of the rulership of the Spirit, for the rulership of the Spirit is the reigning aspect of a matured saint.

Two lines run throughout the record of Joseph's life: the line of Joseph as a type of Christ and the line of Joseph's personal life. We

see these two lines in chapter forty-two. In order to have an adequate interpretation of this chapter, we need to consider both lines. We need to follow these two lines to the end of the record of Joseph's life. Both lines afford us light and nourishment. When I was a young Christian, I heard a great deal about Joseph being a type of Christ. However, what I heard only included the general points. Many details were left out, and certain chapters were even skipped. I also heard about Joseph's personal life, but the emphasis was mainly on those aspects of Joseph's life which could edify the young saints and teach them to be patient, forgiving, and loving. None of the messages I heard about Joseph used the term life. In this message we shall cover a number of matters pertaining to Joseph as a type of Christ. In the next message we shall consider more of Joseph's personal life. If we consider chapter forty-two carefully, we shall see that it gives a vivid portrait of Christ.

(16) Recognized by the Children of Israel

(a) The Whole Earth Being under Famine

Genesis 41:56 says, "And the famine was over all the face of the earth," and verse 57 says that "the famine was severe in all lands" (Heb.). At the time of chapter forty-two the whole earth was under famine. This is exactly the situation today. A famine is a severe shortage of food, the means by which human beings maintain their existence. Food, however, not only maintains our existence, but also gives us satisfaction. When we eat and drink, we do not merely have the sense that we are maintaining our existence, but that we are being satisfied. When I am filled with good food, I am happy. Thus, a famine actually denotes dissatisfaction. The whole world today is dissatisfied.

The nation of Israel in particular is experiencing such dissatisfaction. This nation is aggressively striving and struggling to maintain its existence. If you visit Israel, you will certainly sympathize with them, for they definitely need protection and safety to secure their existence. Israel seems to need the Golan Heights and the settlements along the Sinai wilderness to secure its existence. The reason the nation of Israel is striving and struggling is that it is under famine, under dissatisfaction. The United States, the leading country on earth, is in the same situation. It also is experiencing dissatisfaction. We need to apply Genesis 42 to today's world situation. If we do, we shall see that the entire world is in a famine.

(b) Food Being Only Where Christ Is

According to Genesis 42, food was to be found only where Joseph was (vv. 5-6). This indicates in type that food is only where Christ is. In other words, satisfaction can only be found in Christ. Where Christ is, there is satisfaction. Today, Christ is in the church. If you are in the church yet are not enjoying satisfaction, it indicates that you are in a famine. I can declare to all that I am not in a famine. Day by day I am nourished, filled, and satisfied with good food. Oh, the church is the land of satisfaction, the region of satisfaction, because Christ is here! Food, nourishment, and satisfaction are only where Christ is.

I truly sympathize with the nation of Israel. There is no need for them to struggle and strive or to negotiate with Egypt. They need to turn to Christ. The prime minister of Israel does not need to go to Washington or to Cairo; instead, he should carry out negotiations with Christ. If the Jews would call on Him, everything would be settled. Neither Cairo nor Washington can solve Israel's problem of dissatisfaction. The famine will end only when they turn to Christ and go where He is. Perhaps some saints of Jewish origin should write a letter to the Israeli prime minister telling him that the only person who can solve Israel's problems and give satisfaction is Christ. Some day the Jews will turn to the Lord Jesus. When they realize that all their struggles are in vain, they will be forced in their desperation to turn to Christ. Praise the Lord that we have taken the lead to turn to Him! We are pioneers in this matter. More than fifty years ago I turned to Christ, having come to the realization that I was in a land of famine and that I was very dissatisfied. We who have turned to Christ have found food, nourishment, and satisfaction, for the food is found only where Christ is.

(c) The Children of Israel Forced to Turn to Christ

The Scriptures prophesy that the children of Israel will be forced to turn to Christ just as Joseph's brothers were forced to turn to him for food (42:1-5). Zechariah 12:10 says, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." In Romans 11:26 Paul says, "So all Israel will be saved, as it is written, The Deliverer will come out of Zion, He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob." In the future, Israel will be forced to turn to Christ. Presently they are neither willing nor inclined to do this because they are ignorant of Christ. Although the prime minister of Israel is an intelligent man, he, along with all others in the Israeli government, is ignorant concerning Christ.

(d) Ignorant concerning Christ

Genesis 42:8 says, "And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him." Just as Joseph's brothers were ignorant of him, so the people on earth today are ignorant of Christ. We, however, are knowledgeable regarding Him. Oh, we know Christ! We in the churches are not stupid. We know the world situation better than the political leaders do. We are at least as intelligent as the diplomats are, if not more intelligent. Because we are not stupid, but rather the most clever of people, we know where we must spend our time. The church is the best place for the young people to spend their time. When I was a teenager, I wasted time in so many activities. Eventually, I realized how dissatisfied I was and I turned to Christ. Now I am in the good land, the land of the church. I enjoy this land because Christ is here. We used to be ignorant concerning Christ, but now we are very clear regarding Him.

Whenever I read the newspaper, I realize that those diplomats discussing matters at the conference tables are, in the eyes of God, speaking ignorantly. They are altogether ignorant and foolish. All the conferences held in Geneva are filled with vain talk. It is much better that we come here and talk about the Bible. Our talk is most sensible, reasonable, logical, and even philosophical. Because we are no longer ignorant of Christ, we know what we are doing here.

(e) Christ Testing Them

We have pointed out that 42:8 says that Joseph knew his brothers, but they did not know him. Because they did not know him, Joseph tested them. This also is a type of Christ's testing Israel after they have been forced to turn to Him in ignorance. Today the nation of Israel is still struggling by itself. The Jews do not realize their need to turn to Christ. But after they have been forced to turn to Him, although in ignorance, Christ will put them to the test.

In 42:17-24 we see that Joseph disciplined his brothers. This typifies Christ's disciplining the children of Israel. Christ expects that the nation of Israel will turn to Him. But He is not loose or careless. When Israel is in the process of turning to Him, He will not only test them, but also discipline them. According to the prophecies in the Bible, the reformed nation of Israel will suffer many tests and endure a great deal of discipline. The Lord will chasten them that they may learn.

(g) Christ Showing Love to Them

As Joseph was disciplining his brothers, he loved them in a secret way (42:25). This secret love frightened them. According to the prophecies in the Bible, the Lord will also exercise His sovereign authority to provide for all the needs of the nation of Israel. There is no need to worry about Israel, for we have the assurance that the sovereign Lord will provide whatever Israel needs for its existence. For example, if the little nation of Israel needs certain territory, the Lord will give it to them. He has a way to do this, because He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is higher than all the presidents on the earth. Whether or not Israel will retain the Golan Heights or the Sinai does not depend upon the decisions of presidents and diplomats. It depends upon the Lord's sovereignty. If I were a Jew living in the nation of Israel, I would rest in the Lord. I have no doubt that even today the Lord is extending His sovereign love to Israel in a secret way. The Lord will continue to do this on Israel's behalf in the future. If you read the newspapers, you will see this happening again and again.

The Lord will test and discipline Israel and at the same time extend His secret and sovereign love to them because He needs them. The record of Joseph's life in the book of Genesis reveals that Joseph needed his brothers. Whose need was greater? Did Joseph's brothers need him more, or did Joseph need them more? I would say that Joseph needed his brothers more than they needed him. Yes, Joseph had become the ruler in Egypt. However, Joseph was not yet satisfied, for he was still expecting to see the fulfillment of his dreams. In Egypt Joseph was very lonely and he longed to see his father and his brothers. He needed the fulfillment of his dreams, and he needed his father and his brothers. Thus, his need for them was greater than their need for him.

The principle is the same today with respect to the Lord Jesus. Whose need is greater—does the nation of Israel need the Lord Jesus more than the Lord Jesus needs the nation of Israel? I would say that the Lord's need of Israel is greater than Israel's need of the Lord. Likewise, we need the Lord Jesus and the Lord Jesus needs us. Again I would ask: Whose need is greater—do we need the Lord more than the Lord needs us? The Lord needs us more than we need Him. If you know this, you can tell the Lord, "Lord Jesus, how I thank You for taking care of my need. But, Lord, Your need of me is greater than my need of You. I may not care whether or not I go to hell, but You care about it very much." Do you dare to say this to the Lord? At least a few times I have said, "Lord, I thank You for Your care. But, Lord, I realize that You need me more than I need You. Lord, I know that You care about losing me." Whenever I have said this to the Lord, I have had the deep sense within that the Lord was smiling and very happy. He seemed to be saying to me, "O my little child, you know Me so well." We should not pray to the Lord out of the fear of being sent to hell. We should not say, "O Lord, I'm afraid I might be lost and sent to hell. Lord, have mercy on me and rescue me from hell. Oh, don't let me go to hell!" If you pray like this, the Lord may say, "What are you talking about? You are not so pitiful, and I don't need to have that much mercy upon you. I have already shown great grace to you. Don't you realize that I need you more than you need Me?"

(h) Ignorant of Christ's Love

Because the Lord needs the nation of Israel more than Israel needs Him, He loves them in a secret way. However, just as Joseph's brothers were ignorant of his love (42:27-28, 35), so the nation of Israel today is ignorant of Christ's love for them. We also have been ignorant of His love for us. I am somewhat concerned that many among us are still ignorant of the Lord's love. Are you clear about His love? Do you realize that you are not in the church because of your determination, but because of His love for you? The fact that you are in the church is the strongest proof that the Lord loves you. This does not mean, however, that the Lord Jesus does not love those outside the church. He certainly loves them, but they are missing His love. Although we may not be missing His love, we may be ignorant of it. I hope that from now on none of us will be ignorant of Christ's love. Rather, we should say to Him, "Lord, thank You for Your love. The fact that I am in Your presence is proof that You love me. Lord, how I thank You that I am here enjoying Your presence! Hallelujah for this sign of Your love!"

In this message we have covered eight aspects of the recognition of Christ by the children of Israel. If you consider the prophecies in the Old Testament and the New Testament, you will see that all these aspects are in the prophecies concerning Israel's relationship with Christ, their Messiah.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SIXTEEN

JOSEPH'S DEALING WITH HIS BROTHERS

In this message, another parenthesis in our life-study, we come back to the line of Joseph's personal life. I love the line of life even more than the line of Joseph as a type of Christ. As I was contacting the Lord with a praying spirit, the Lord showed me the points in chapter forty-two regarding Joseph's personal life which we shall cover in this message.

**I. JOSEPH NOT OUT OF CONTROL
IN SEEING HIS DREAMS FULFILLED**

Joseph must have been very happy to see the fulfillment of his dreams. Chapter forty-two reveals that his brothers came to him and bowed down to him. Joseph was seventeen years old when he had his dreams. At the age of thirty he was exalted to rule over the land of Egypt. About nine years later Joseph's brothers bowed themselves down to him. This means that Joseph would have been probably thirty-nine years of age when his brothers came to him. Thus, about twenty-two years after his dreams, Joseph saw them fulfilled, but not until he had been betrayed and imprisoned. Then he spent many years in the dungeon and eventually was elevated to the throne at the time of his exaltation. But still Joseph did not see the fulfillment of his dreams. He had interpreted the dreams of his companions in prison and the dreams of Pharaoh, and the fulfillment of those dreams was a strong confirmation that his own dreams

would be fulfilled. Nevertheless, Joseph had to pass through a long period of testing. It may seem to us that his patience would have been exhausted. Could you have waited twenty-two years for the fulfillment of your dreams? Joseph did.

Then on a certain day his brothers came and bowed down to him. If we had been Joseph, we would not have been able to contain our excitement. We would have jumped up and shouted, "Hallelujah! Don't you know that I am Joseph? How happy I am to see you!" We would have been beside ourselves with excitement. If the sisters among us had been there, they would have first wept and then embraced all the brothers. Joseph, however, was not out of control when he saw the fulfillment of his dreams. Rather, he was calm and his excitement was under control. He was able to control himself in such a way because he was a person with the rulership of the Spirit.

If you cannot control your own excitement, you cannot be a proper ruler. The ruling aspect of the mature life knows how to be calm, even in the most exciting situation. You may say, "Didn't Joseph weep when he saw his brothers?" Yes, he did. Joseph was a human being full of sentiment and normal feelings, not stone or wood. Nevertheless, even in his weeping we see that he was a person who ruled himself. Apart from Joseph, no one else could have controlled himself in such an exciting situation. But he conducted himself outwardly as if nothing had happened. This is the ruling life, the victorious life.

Often it is necessary for us to hold back our excitement. When Aaron's two sons were killed in the presence of God, Moses' words to Aaron implied that he should not weep, and immediately Aaron held back his tears (Lev. 10:1-7). Many times we also must hold back our tears and place ourselves under the rulership of the Spirit. A proverb says one who rules his spirit is better than one who takes a city (Prov. 16:32). The fact that Joseph remained calm under the rulership of the Spirit proved that he was the one qualified to carry out such a vast administration. Even in the most exciting of circumstances, he was not touched by any excitement. On the contrary, he remained calm, sober, and reasonable.

II. JOSEPH NOT HASTY TO SHOW HIS GLORY TO HIS BROTHERS

When Joseph saw his brothers bowing down to him, he was not hasty to reveal his glory to them (cf. 45:13). Not until his brothers' third trip did he reveal himself to them and expose his glory to them. Concealing our glory is even more difficult than holding back our excitement. You may be successful in restraining your excitement, but it is virtually impossible for anyone not to expose his glory. Joseph, however, was successful in this matter. He did not reveal his glory to his brothers immediately. This is another reason Joseph represents the reigning aspect of the mature life. He certainly had the qualifications of a ruler. Not until our self and our natural man have been thoroughly dealt with can we keep from revealing our glory to others. Joseph was a man who had been thoroughly dealt with and who was living under the rulership of the Spirit. Thus, he was qualified to be the reigning aspect of the mature life.

My burden in these messages is not merely to pass on teachings. It is to help you see the life in the book of Genesis and to know the way of life. The life manifested in the story of Joseph is not the human life, much less the fallen life. Moreover, it is not even the good natural life. Rather, it is the resurrection life, the life of God. Although Joseph was in an exciting situation, he did not display any looseness. This is life. With Joseph we see not only life, but also the way of life, which is to keep ourselves under control. Never think that Joseph was not human. He was full of human feelings and sentiments, but he kept himself with all his feelings under the rulership of the Spirit. Therefore, in Joseph we see not only the mature life, but a reigning life and the way of this reigning life. We all, especially the young people, need such a life and such a way that is the reigning aspect of a mature person. This life is not easily excited, and it does not reveal its glory. Instead, in the midst of excitement it remains calm, controls itself, and conceals its glory.

III. JOSEPH BEING WISE IN DEALING WITH HIS BROTHERS

Joseph was very wise in dealing with his brothers. He was not at all loose. If I had been Joseph, I would have said to them, "Hallelujah, let us dance and have a feast! Let us be happy together." But Joseph did nothing like this. On the contrary, he was calm, sober, and wise. Joseph did not say, "Reuben and Judah, you did what was right. But you, Simeon, were wrong, because you took the lead to put me into the pit. You need to be punished for this." Instead of saying such things, Joseph was wise in at least three ways.

A. Causing Them to Realize Their Guilt in Hating and Selling Him

Joseph put all his brothers into prison for three days. He did this for the purpose of causing them to realize their guilt in hating him and in selling him (42:21). If I had been Joseph, I would have put them into prison for three hours. I would have been too excited to keep them there any longer. I would not have been able to wait until I could feast with my brothers. Even if my brothers could have been patient, I would not have had the patience to wait three days. Three hours, however, would not have been adequate for Joseph's brothers to realize their guilt. They needed to be in prison for three days. During those days, they must have talked a great deal about what they had done to Joseph. Thinking that Joseph was not able to understand them, they even spoke in Joseph's presence about what they had done to him. But Joseph knew what they were talking about. How Joseph's brothers regretted what they had done to him! But Joseph seemed to say to himself, "Talk is not adequate. I should put them into prison so that they can become sober. Let them fellowship with one another in prison for three days and three nights." This was Joseph's way to cause his brothers to have a thorough realization of their guilt. When we are in a pleasant situation, it is difficult to realize our guilt and to repent. But if we are cast into prison, it is easy for us to repent and to condemn ourselves.

B. Disciplining Simeon

Joseph was also wise in his discipline of Simeon. In 42:19 and 20 Joseph said to his brothers, "If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry grain for the famine of your houses: but bring your youngest brother unto me." At first Joseph thought that one brother should be sent to bring the youngest brother and that all the rest should remain in prison. But after three days Joseph changed his mind and decided that only one should stay in prison and that the others should go to bring the youngest brother to him. Therefore, he "took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes" (42:24). I believe that it

was Simeon who took the lead in plotting to murder Joseph. I also believe that Simeon took the lead to bind Joseph and to cast him into the pit. As 49:5-7 reveals, Simeon was a person given to anger. Thus, Joseph had him bound and put into prison. What do you suppose Simeon thought about there in prison? I believe that he repented to the uttermost and regretted what he had done. Perhaps he said, "Why did this man choose me? Why did he set his eyes upon me? Maybe it was because I took the lead in the plot against Joseph." Simeon was in prison for at least half a year, having been accused of being a spy. This was a serious crime and it could have cost him his life.

Do not think that Joseph was cruel and merciless for treating Simeon in this way. On the contrary, he was full of mercy. The ten brothers deserved their three days in prison, and Simeon deserved a longer period of imprisonment. Joseph was wise in doing this. He was controlled by a life that gave him a sober discernment. Whatever Joseph did to his brothers was right. He did neither too little to them nor did he do too much. We in the church life need to have such a life of discernment. If we have this discernment, we shall know what to do with the brothers and the sisters. We shall know how far we can go with them and where we need to restrain ourselves.

C. Testing Them with Respect to Benjamin

Furthermore, Joseph displayed his wisdom in testing his brothers with respect to Benjamin (42:15, 20, 36-37). In 42:15 Joseph commanded that the youngest brother, Benjamin, be brought to him. By singling out Benjamin in this way, Joseph helped his brothers to think about Joseph himself. If I had been Joseph, I would have said, "Don't forget what you did to Joseph." Joseph, however, wisely referred to Benjamin. As soon as he referred to Benjamin, his brothers were reminded of Joseph. This must have touched their consciences. In 42:13 they said to him, "Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not." If I had been Joseph I would have asked, "Where is that one whom you say is not? What happened to him?" In his wisdom, Joseph touched his brothers' consciences.

IV. JOSEPH SHOWING LOVE TO HIS BROTHERS

Joseph's brothers were under his control, and he could have done whatever he wanted with them. If he had wanted them beheaded, he had the authority to command it. He also could have feasted with them if he had wanted to do that. But as one representing the reigning aspect of the mature life, Joseph behaved in a proper way toward everyone. Because not all his brothers were the same, he did not treat them all in the same way. The one who was the most evil required the most thorough discipline. As a type of Christ, Joseph did the same thing to his brothers that Christ will do to the nation of Israel in the future. First, Joseph disciplined them. In a sense, he terrified them. When I read about this as a child, I wondered why Joseph did not show love to his brothers. I thought that he should have immediately said, "I am Joseph, and you are my brothers. Let us embrace, dance, and have a feast." I wondered why, instead of showing love for his brothers, Joseph put them into prison. Joseph did everything soberly and with discernment. But this did not mean that he had no love for his brothers. On the contrary, he had a great deal of love toward them. However, at the time he could not openly display his love for them. Rather, he had to extend love to them in a secret way. He did this by restoring their money and by giving them provision for their journey (42:25). Because Joseph's brothers did not understand his wise dealing with them, they were frightened by his secret love.

I hope that the Spirit will speak more to you regarding these matters than I am able to utter. In the church life we need to learn to be calm and to restrain ourselves. We also need to learn not to show our glory. Moreover, we must learn to do things not in a careless and foolish way, but in a sober and discerning way. Finally, we also must have love for the brothers, even for those who require discipline. This is the life of Joseph. In the church life we need a calm life, a sober life, and a discerning life. If we have such a life, we shall know how to relate to the brothers and sisters. But whatever we do must be underlined with a secret love, a love that cannot be shown openly.

Verse 28 says, "And their heart went out, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?" (Heb.). This was the response of Joseph's brothers when they found their money in the mouth of their sacks. When they found the money in their sacks, their heart went out, that is, their heart was exercised. They might have wondered about what had taken place in Egypt. They were terrified of what had happened there.

Joseph was a very sober person. I do not believe that anyone else could have done what he did. Genesis 42:9 says that Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed of his brothers. Now, after twenty-two years, his dreams were fulfilled. If we had been Joseph, we would have forgotten everything in our excitement at seeing our dreams fulfilled. We would have said, "Now that our dreams have been fulfilled, let us forget everything else and be happy." But if Joseph had done this, enjoying to the uttermost the fulfillment of his dreams, he would not have been able to do anything to help his brothers. As far as he was concerned, he was ready to enjoy the fulfillment of his dreams. He did not need any more discipline. His brothers, however, certainly did need discipline. Thus, Joseph did not act for himself, but for his brothers. Rather, for their sake he was willing to sacrifice the enjoyment of the fulfillment of his dreams for a period of time.

Joseph's dreams were fulfilled in his brothers' coming to him and bowing down before him. If Joseph had intended merely to enjoy the fulfillment of his dreams, he could have said to his brothers, "I am Joseph, and I am so happy to see you. Let us eat together. Then you go back and bring my father here." Even in ancient times it would not have taken more than a few weeks for them to return home and to come back with their father. Joseph could have said, "I cannot wait any longer to be with my father. I've been away from him for more than twenty years. Now I want to enjoy his presence. I want to see him as soon as possible." No doubt Joseph desperately desired to see his father. But for the sake of his brothers he was willing to postpone his enjoyment. Joseph's sacrifice of this enjoyment caused him to delay the enjoyment of the fulfillment of his dreams for at least another six months. The brothers had to go home, exhaust the food supply, and return for more grain. Eventually, their father came to Egypt to see Joseph.

Suppose you were Joseph. Could you have waited such a long time? As the ruler, Joseph could have done what was necessary to have his father brought to him immediately. But he disciplined his brothers for their good at the sacrifice of his own enjoyment of seeing

his father. I repeat, Joseph was a sober, disciplined person. His personal temperament and sentiment were absolutely controlled by life. He did not go along with his own feelings. Instead, his sentiments were under the control of resurrection life.

All those who take the lead in the church need such a life. Without this kind of life we do not know how to help others. If we do not have such a life, we shall contact people according to our feelings, according to whether we are happy or sad. But Joseph did not deal with his brothers according to his sentiments, but according to their need. If he had acted according to his desire to see his father, he would have had his father brought to him immediately. But in order to discipline his brothers, he delayed his enjoyment of seeing his father for at least six months. He sacrificed his enjoyment of the immediate presence of his father for his brothers' good.

Apparently Joseph was treating his brothers in a rough way. As the nine brothers were returning home, they might have said, "My, that man really was rough with us! How he mistreated us! We were not only misunderstood by him, but also mistreated." When they returned to their father, they did not return joyfully, although they had the food they required. Then they told their father the sad story of what had happened to them in Egypt. They did not realize that Joseph loved them in a hidden way. As we have seen, he loved them in a secret way by restoring their money and by affording them sufficient provision for their journey. Joseph had no thought of revenge. He considered only what would be good for his undisciplined brothers. Even in the enjoyment of the fulfillment of his dreams, he was not selfish. He did not care for himself, but for his brothers, and he paid a great price to perfect them.

Those who take the lead among the children of God need to learn this lesson. We should not contact the saints in the church life according to our sentiments, but according to their need. Like Joseph in his dealing with his brothers, we should be neither strict nor loose in contacting the saints. Do not think that Joseph was strict with his brothers. He was sober in dealing with them in order to perfect them, but he was not strict with them. Neither was he loose, saying, "I forgive you all. I don't care about what you did, for I know that God sent me here. Let us just praise the Lord." If Joseph had treated them like this, there would have been no perfection.

According to his natural being, it was difficult for Joseph to put his brothers into prison for three days. He simply was not that kind of person. For him to do this was to go against his good nature. Nevertheless, in order to meet his brothers' need for discipline, he did this. In the church life we should not always be so kind. At certain times the leading ones need to be rough and tough. However, if you are rough with someone, you need to be rough in the right way. Otherwise, your toughness will kill him. The point here is that we should not deal with others according to our temperament, sentiment, or natural being. Neither should we deal with them according to our own enjoyment. Rather, we must contact others according to their need. Perhaps Joseph said to himself, "For the sake of my brothers, I must be tough and talk to them in a rough manner. I must put them into prison for three days." Like Joseph, we all must learn to deal with others according to their need and not according to our feelings.

The church life is similar to married life. According to God's ordination, there should be no divorce. Neither in married life nor in the church life should there be divorce. In the eyes of God, there is no escape, no emergency exit, from the church life. If you say that the church is no longer the church, it means that you are divorcing the church life. If five years ago you said that this was the church, how can you say that it is not the church today? How could you claim that a certain man is not your husband if you have been living with him for the past several years? There are many different kinds of people in the church life. It is not only difficult for us to remain together, but it is hard for a man to stay with his wife for a long period of time. Anyone who has done so can tell you that it is not easy. For this reason, this country is full of divorces. I once read statistics which indicated that in California there were nearly as many divorces as marriages. But there are no divorces among the young people married in the church life. We can boast to the demons that among the young people in the churches there is no divorce. Because the Lord's grace has been with these young people, they have learned to deal with their spouse, not according to their disposition, but according to resurrection life. In this matter of marriage we have enjoyed great success.

In the church life, however, we must admit that we have shortcomings. Although we have no divorces in our married life, in the church life sometimes the leading ones do not contact others in a proper way. We do not always contact them according to their need, but according to our sentiment, feeling, and enjoyment. In the coming years many young ones among us will be raised up by the Lord to take the lead. When they assume the lead, they must learn not to take the lead according to their sentiment, but according to the discernment that comes from being controlled by resurrection life. If they do this, they will contact the saints according to their needs and not according to their own sentiments. They will be like Joseph who dealt with his brothers according to their needs, even if he had to act contrary to his own desire for the enjoyment of the fulfillment of his dreams. In his dealing with his brothers, Joseph even went against his natural being. According to his natural constitution, he was not the kind of person to be rough with others. But because the brothers needed this kind of treatment, he dealt with them in this way. Joseph did everything according to the need of his brothers. Not one thing he did was according to his desire, enjoyment, preference, or sentiment. Even in the matter of the fulfillment of his dreams, he ignored his feelings and took care of his brothers and of what would be good for them.

With respect to the leadership in the church life, we have not been altogether successful. By leadership I refer not only to the elders, but to anyone who takes the lead to help others. This includes those involved in shepherding. As we contact others in the way of shepherding, we must not do so according to our feelings. Rather, it should be according to the need of others. To learn this is to learn a great lesson. Joseph is an excellent example of proper leadership. He was a leader who did not act according to his need, desire, disposition, or sentiment. On the contrary, he did everything according to the need of others and for their good. When he spoke roughly to his brothers, it was for their good. When he put them into prison for three days, it was for their good. When he bound Simeon and kept him in prison for a longer period of time, it was for his good. We have seen that Joseph loved his brothers to the uttermost. However, he did not love them in a loose way, but in a sober way according to his brothers' need and for their good. We all need to practice this in the church life today.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEEN

BEING MATURED

THE REIGNING ASPECT OF THE MATURED ISRAEL

The story of Joseph's being recognized by his brothers is the longest story in the book of Genesis, occupying three and a half chapters, from the beginning of chapter forty-two to the middle of chapter forty-five. When I was young, I thought that Joseph was too hard on his brothers. I thought that it was all right for Joseph to be hard on them the first time they came to Egypt to buy grain. As a man of God, he had the patience to discipline them, and for at least six months they underwent a trial. However, when they came to Egypt the second time, I thought that Joseph should not have done anything further to discipline them. According to my opinion, Joseph should have immediately revealed himself to them. However, Joseph did not do this.

For a long time I wondered about the reason for this. Certainly the first test of Joseph's brothers was necessary. We all agree with Joseph in testing them the first time. However, perhaps you also have wondered why Joseph tested his brothers again. On the one hand, he spread a feast for them and ate with them. But on the other hand, he gave them more trouble. What was Joseph's purpose in doing so? I believe Joseph expected his brothers to notice certain hints or indications and thus to recognize him. There should have been no need for Joseph to reveal himself to them directly.

In order to understand chapter forty-three, we need to remember that Joseph is both a type of Christ and also the reigning aspect of the mature life. Because Joseph was a type of Christ, we should not criticize anything he did. We are far below Joseph's standard. Whatever he did was the best, whether we agree with it or not. The Christ typified by Joseph could not do anything wrong. We would not do the same thing Joseph did because we are not as mature as Joseph was. We do not represent the reigning aspect of the matured life; we represent disobedience. This is the reason we do not agree with Joseph. However, if we came up to Joseph's standard, we would admit that what Joseph did to his brothers was the best. In his dealing with them there was no trace of childishness or foolishness. On the contrary, his dealings were wise and full of discernment. He dealt with his brothers so that they might be disciplined. Nothing he did to them was for his own benefit.

(i) The Children of Israel Further Forced to Turn to Christ

Just as Joseph's brothers were forced to turn to him again, so the children of Israel will be forced to turn to Christ (43:1-15). According to the Bible, the house of Israel will return to Christ at the end of this age and recognize Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah. However, before they do this, they will need to be tested. The book of Zechariah reveals that the remnant of Israel will be put on trial. Even a good number of the Israelites will be killed. At the time the house of Israel turns to Christ, not very many Israelites will remain. They will be tested because they refuse to return to the One they need.

Consider the nation of Israel today. How they are struggling to protect themselves! Since 1918 I have been watching the world situation. Before the reformation of the nation of Israel, the Jews were scattered, and people paid little attention to them. Especially since 1967 the Middle East has been the focus of world news, the most crucial place on earth. Israel is opposed by nearly the whole world. Both the Arab countries and the United Nations condemn them. At times even the United States disagrees with Israel. Thus, she must fight for her existence. Israel is condemned by other countries because she has possession of the Golan Heights and the land west of the Jordan River. Israel insists on keeping these territories because she needs them to maintain her existence. However, if the nation of Israel would turn to Christ, everything would be solved. But Israel will not turn to Christ until she is forced to do so.

(j) Still Being Ignorant of Christ

Joseph's brothers were ignorant concerning Joseph (43:18-21), and the Jews today are ignorant of Christ. Joseph's brothers did not know that he was the ruler in Egypt. But their dissatisfaction due to the lack of food forced them to turn to Joseph. According to the prophecies in the Old Testament, the house of Israel will turn to Christ for no reason other than their need to maintain their existence. Apart from turning to Christ, there will be no way for them to exist.

It was the severity of the famine that forced Joseph's brothers to come to him again. The first time they came to Egypt they obtained some food on which to live. Thus, they returned home and stayed away from Joseph for another period of time. This is a portrait of the dealing of Christ with the house of Israel today. Unless Israel is forced to turn to Him out of their need to maintain their existence, they will never turn to Christ. Because the food brought home by Joseph's brothers was exhausted, and because the famine continued to be severe, they were forced to go again to the very one whom they did not want to see. I believe that after the first contact with Joseph his brothers had a bad impression of him. Perhaps they said, "If possible, we will never go back to that man. We don't want to see him again. He treated us very badly." The house of Israel is the same today regarding Christ. They do not want to even talk about Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the steering wheel is not in their hands; it is in Christ's hands. At a certain time, they will return to Him.

Joseph was wise and very experienced. He did not allow his excitement at seeing his brothers or his desire to see his father to cause him to act foolishly. Rather, he was wise and calm, disciplining his brothers at the sacrifice of fulfilling his desire to see his father. If I had been Joseph, I would have revealed myself to the brothers as soon as they came to me the second time, and I would have told them to hurry back to my father and bring him to me. I would not have even taken the time to feast with my brothers before sending them back to get my father. But if Joseph had been like this, he would not have been qualified to be the ruler of the world. Joseph was a person full of wise discernment. Thus, he was a full type of Christ. Christ never does anything according to His excitement. The world situation is under His hand. The car is not being driven by any worldly leader, but by the Lord Jesus. He is managing the situation in the Middle East.

From the time Joseph's brothers first came to Egypt, they were undergoing a test. I do not believe they had any happy times after meeting Joseph in Egypt. They would not have been able to forget Simeon who was in prison there. They also realized that their supply of food obtained in Egypt was limited. They knew that one day it would be exhausted and that they would have to return to Egypt and face that man again. Their need for food forced them to return to him.

In order for Joseph's brothers to recognize him, they had to pass through a certain process. According to the prophecies in the Bible, the house of Israel will need to pass through a similar process in order to recognize Christ as their Messiah. Christ will deal with them again and again until the house of Israel is forced to turn to Him. There simply will be no other way for Israel to exist.

When Jacob charged his sons to go back to Egypt and buy more food, they told him that they could not return to Egypt unless the

youngest brother, Benjamin, went with them. Without having Benjamin with them, they would not have had the boldness to face that man in Egypt. They realized that it would be useless for them to return to Egypt without him. What a test this was! Eventually, Jacob was forced to agree with this condition. Jacob seemed to say, "For the sake of your lives and the lives of your children, I am willing to sacrifice my youngest son. I give him to you. Go down to Egypt and buy food." Do you think that Joseph's brothers were happy as they were traveling from the land of Canaan to Egypt? Do you think that they were singing and saying, "Praise the Lord, we are going to Egypt again!?" Certainly not. On the contrary, all the way to Egypt they might have been saying to one another, "What shall we do with that man who put Simeon into prison? Probably the first thing he will do is put our youngest brother into prison. He may even seek a reason to take all of us as his slaves. Furthermore, he may seize our donkeys. What shall we do?" I am rather certain that Joseph's brothers were afraid of becoming slaves and of losing their donkeys, which undoubtedly were very dear to them. I believe that as they were traveling to Egypt they were trying to find a strategy to use in facing Joseph.

(k) Christ Showing More Love to Them

After the brothers came the second time, Joseph showed them love by feasting with them in his residence. Although they did not recognize him, he wanted to indicate to them that he was intimate with them, even as he was testing them. At the end time, Christ will do the same thing to Israel. On the one hand, He will test them further, while on the other hand, He will take care of them in love.

(l) Still Being Ignorant of Christ's Love

Although their Messiah will show love to them, the Israelites will continue to be ignorant of Christ's love. I am assured that Christ is for Israel. Whether or not we are for Israel means nothing, for we are mere men. But it is vitally significant that Christ is for Israel. However, Israel today is ignorant of Christ's love. Eventually, after they have been forced to turn to Him, Christ will be forced to reveal Himself to them. At that time the house of Israel will recognize Him as their Messiah.

Now we come to another parenthesis. My burden in this message is actually on the parenthesis. In 43:1-15 Joseph's brothers were still learning their lesson, and in 43:16-34 Joseph still left them under his test. Although he showed them love, he did not reveal himself to them directly. Joseph tested his brothers because he was trying to induce them to recognize him. Joseph's brothers were stupid. If we had been they, we would have recognized Joseph by the many indications of his identity. Let us now consider these indications.

When Joseph's brothers came back, Joseph did not say a word. Rather, he charged his steward to invite the brothers to his residence, the home of the ruler of the earth. If I had been one of Joseph's brothers, I would have said, "We are foreigners visiting this country. We don't deserve this much attention. Why would such a high ruler invite us to his home to eat with him?" Perhaps you would say that Joseph's brothers thought that he would trick them and make them his slaves. Perhaps they had this thought. At any rate, they did not appreciate Joseph's invitation, but rather were frightened by it. Thus, they told the steward that the last time they had purchased grain they had paid the money, but the money had been placed in their sacks. They told him that they had not done this. The steward said, "Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks" (43:23). The steward seemed to be saying, "It was not that your money was returned to you. It was a gift from your God and from the God of your father." After Joseph's brothers had visited him the first time, Joseph must have spoken to his steward about them, at least telling him that they were Hebrews and that he had come to Egypt from their land. He must have told the steward that they knew God and feared Him. Otherwise, how could an Egyptian steward have answered in such a way? From whom had the steward received this kind of knowledge? He no doubt had received it from Joseph. This was an indication to Joseph's brothers that someone in Joseph's residence knew their background. After indicating to them that there was no problem regarding the money, "the man brought the men into Joseph's house, and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their asses provender" (43:24). He also brought Simeon out to them. Thus, the problems regarding the money and Simeon were solved.

Eventually, Joseph came in and asked, "Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?" (43:27). No matter how much Joseph had disguised himself, there must have been some sign of affection in the way he asked about his father. Joseph was not a stone, but a man full of affection. The tone of his voice in asking about his father must have been an indication of who he was. Verse 29 says, "And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son." After saying this, Joseph ran into his chamber and wept. At that point Joseph's brothers should have asked themselves, "What is this? Why does the ruler ask about our father in such an affectionate way? And why did he not finish speaking to our youngest brother? He went out and came back with his face washed. What does all this mean?"

Immediately after Joseph returned, he had his brothers sit before him, "the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth" (43:33). The brothers wondered at one another. Certainly they should have realized by this indication that this ruler was Joseph. There must have been particular features in Joseph's countenance that they could have recognized, even after twenty-two years. If they had put all the indications together, they would have said, "This is Joseph." They should have remembered that Joseph was taken to Egypt, and they should have realized that this man was Joseph.

Verse 34 says, "And he took and sent messes unto them from before him: but Benjamin's mess was five times so much as any of theirs." There must have been a purpose in Joseph's giving Benjamin a portion five times greater than that of the other brothers. His intention must have been to indicate to his brothers that he was Joseph and that he loved his younger brother. If I had been there, I would have had the boldness to ask the man if he was Joseph. However, none of his brothers did this. Rather, they had no discernment.

With respect to our knowing the Lord it is exactly the same today. The Lord showed Himself to us and we saw Him, yet we did not know Him. He did many things for us with a good intention, but we were frightened by what He did. Everything He did was motivated by love, but we had evil thoughts regarding it all.

Joseph had a loving intention in inviting his brothers to his home for a feast. But they had the evil thought that he was planning to seize them and make them slaves. Verse 18 says, "And the men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said, Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in; that he may seek occasion against us,

and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses." The money and the donkeys were veils that kept Joseph's brothers from recognizing him. The donkeys meant a great deal to them, but they meant nothing to Joseph. Later, when Joseph sent his brothers back to get his father, he sent chariots with horsemen. Their money and their donkeys meant something to them. These were all they had. They were also afraid of being taken as slaves. It is the same with us today. The Lord may be directly in front of us and He may have done a great deal for us, but we cannot recognize Him or what He has done. Rather, we are afraid. Joseph's brothers should have realized that the ruler of world would not have cared about their donkeys. We are the same way. When we came to Christ and then into the church life, we might have wondered about our money, our security, or our family. Joseph's brothers were poor. But they were under the rich care of the ruler of the earth. If I had been there, I would have said, "Forget about the money and the donkeys. I want only Joseph. I love him." In knowing the Lord, we are all as foolish as Joseph's brothers. Instead of considering Him, we consider ourselves, our money, and our donkeys. Joseph's brothers should have turned their eyes on Joseph and looked at him. If they had done so, they would have realized that the man resembled Joseph. But for them to look at Joseph, they had to forget their money. However, they kept their eyes on their money and might have said to one another, "Don't you realize this is a lot of money? We must be careful not to lose it." I doubt that Joseph's brothers set their eyes on his countenance adequately. If they had done so, they would have recognized him. Levi might have said to Reuben, "I am quite sure this man is Joseph. Let us not be afraid, but be bold and ask if he really is Joseph."

Today there are not many who know the Lord in this way. However, there are a few who recognize the indications of the Lord's deeds and realize that what happened to them was of the Lord. In our knowing of the Lord, most of us are exactly like Joseph's brothers. We do not consider Him. Instead, we consider our money, our possessions, and ourselves. Joseph's brothers did not search for the reason that a high ruler would do such things for them. They were fully occupied with their own interests. They had no thought that the man who was dealing with them might be Joseph. It is the same with us. No matter how many good things the Lord has done for us, we still do not understand what the Lord is doing. The Lord does everything with a good intention, but we regard it as a curse. Even if we knew it was a blessing, we still would not receive it.

Joseph's brothers had no discernment. Even after he had seated them according to the sequence of their birth, they still did not realize who he was. They had become preoccupied even before they had left home to travel to Egypt. Joseph's heart was good, but their thought concerning him was evil. They were totally preoccupied by their evil thoughts. We would do the same thing if we had evil thoughts towards someone who, with a good intention, invited us to his home for dinner. Due to our evil thoughts, we might fear that poison had been injected into the food. Although we might not be able to refuse the invitation, we would be afraid to eat the food set before us. Our host's intention is love, but our thought is evil. Joseph's brothers were filled with such thoughts. These thoughts were the colored glasses that kept them from seeing who Joseph was.

In addition to all these indications of Joseph's identity, there are two further indications. Verse 32 says, "And they set on for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians, which did eat with him, by themselves: because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews; for that is an abomination unto the Egyptians." Three tables were prepared, one for Joseph, one for the Egyptians, and one for the brothers. This indicates that the Egyptians did not eat according to the Hebrew way. In what way do you suppose Joseph ate, in the Egyptian way or the Hebrew way? Certainly he must have eaten in the Hebrew way. Joseph's brothers should have recognized that here was an Egyptian eating in the Hebrew way, a way that was abominable to the Egyptians. Joseph ordered the tables to be set up this way in order to indicate to his brothers that he was a Hebrew. The brothers should have considered that this ruler was a Hebrew. How stupid Joseph's brothers were! If I had been there, I would have said, "Levi, this man is a Hebrew. Furthermore, he is younger than we are. Look at his face. Isn't he Joseph?" Although Joseph spoke the Egyptian language, they should have recognized his voice and his intonation. Nevertheless, they still failed to recognize him.

Still another indication is found in verse 26: "And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves to him to the earth." When Joseph's brothers were bowing down to him, they should have remembered his dream. Twenty-two years before Joseph had had a dream, and now it was being fulfilled. If you had been one of Joseph's brothers bowing down to him, you might have said, "This might be Joseph, the master of dreams." Although Joseph's brothers had heard about the dream and were in the fulfillment of the dream, they did not recognize Joseph.

Perhaps you are wondering why Joseph did not simply reveal himself to his brothers at that time. If Joseph had done this, he would have been very childish. He preferred to give them some indications to help them to recognize who he was. How sweet it would have been if they had recognized him! However, due to their preoccupations and stupidity, it did not happen this way.

All of us today are under the hand of our Joseph. What we should do and where we should go is up to Him. How long it will be before we come back to Him depends on how much food He gives us. If He gives us food to last ten years, then we shall return after ten years. But He will not give us this much. Rather, He gives us a limited amount to force us to come back to Him sooner. Joseph knew that his brothers would return after a certain period of time. He knew how many people there were in his father's family and he knew how much food to give them. They were under Joseph's control. Hallelujah, we today are under the Lord's sovereign hand! Do not worry about the present or the future. You are not under your own control, but under the Lord's control. Do not trust in your donkeys, that is, in your degree or in your job. Your destiny is under the hand of the Lord Jesus, and your future is under His control. I would like to share with you the good news that the Lord is still lovingly and sovereignly caring for us. What He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do is all motivated by love. In love He is seeking to induce us to know Him through the various indicators He gives us. All that He has done are indicators to lead us to know Him. Do not remain preoccupied, setting your eyes on your money, your donkeys, or yourself. Look away to Jesus and set your eyes on Him. If you do this, you will see Him, recognize Him, and know Him.

I like this story of Joseph and his brothers because it portrays my situation in knowing the Lord. How stupid I have been! The Lord has always been good to me, but I have constantly been worried that I would be damaged or suffer loss. All that Joseph did to his brothers was motivated by love. It is the same with the Lord Jesus in relation to us. If we would consider our past before the Lord, our tears would begin to fall and we would say, "Lord, I realize that my past has been just like that of Joseph with his brothers. You have always been good to me, but I have not recognized Your love because I have been occupied by evil thoughts and by my own concerns. Lord, I had no concern for You, and I never focused my eyes or my attention upon You. Lord, forgive me and help me from now on to keep my eyes away from everything other than You. Lord, I don't care for anything, not even for the invitation. I care only for You and

for being in Your presence. Lord, as long as I am here in Your presence, I am satisfied." This is the way to know the Lord.

If Joseph's brothers had been like this, with no preoccupations and no concerns for their money, their donkeys, or themselves, and if they had focused their eyes on Joseph, they would have seen certain features in his face which would have enabled them to recognize him. They also would have recognized him through what he had done for them. Hence, they would have said, "We should not forget that we sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt. Remember that his servants spoke of our God and our father's God. Also, we were seated at the table according to our birth. Moreover, consider the way this man treated Benjamin, and the affection in his voice when he asked about our father. When he spoke to Benjamin, he almost broke down and cried." How many indications there were to Joseph's brothers that this man was Joseph!

It is the same with us today in knowing the Lord. Do you think that the many good things that have happened to you have been accidental? No, they have all taken place with a purpose. But in the past we did not recognize what God was doing. May the Lord help us to know our Joseph. He has no evil thoughts toward us. Rather, His concern for us is a concern of love, and His intention is to induce us to know Him. The best thing is to know Him.

Even after Joseph's brothers had been dealt with so much, they still did not realize that they were meeting with Joseph. As we shall see in another message, their ignorance eventually forced Joseph to be patient no longer, but to reveal himself to them. My burden in this message is that we would be clear regarding the way to know the Lord. I can testify that many times the Lord has shown His love to me and has dealt with me in certain ways, yet I did not recognize Him or what He was doing. I was completely ignorant. But today we have a clear vision. Now we recognize Joseph and understand that everything He does is with the intention of helping us to know Him. May we all learn this lesson.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEEN

BEING MATURED THE REIGNING ASPECT OF THE MATURED ISRAEL

(6)

As we consider the story of Joseph, we need to remember that in his record there are two lines: the line of Joseph as a type of Christ and the line of life. It is difficult to find in the Old Testament anyone besides Joseph who was such a perfect type of Christ. He typified Christ in a detailed way.

(m) Christ Giving the Remnant of Israel the Last Test

In 44:1-13 Joseph gave his brothers the last test and gave them even more time to consider him. Christ will do the same thing to the nation of Israel. The prophecies in the Bible say that Christ will test the ignorant children of Israel, but they do not give the details. However, the record of Joseph's dealing with his brothers gives us a detailed picture of this. Even today the nation of Israel is ignorant of the fact that Christ is testing them. As we follow the world news, we should hold a view different from that of the worldly people. When I read the news, I am aware that what is happening in the Middle East is part of Christ's testing of Israel. The Israeli prime minister and his cabinet do not know that Christ is testing them. They claim to need the Golan Heights and the settlements along the Sinai to secure their existence. However, Christ knows better than they do what they need for their security. Do you not believe that what is happening to Israel today is a test? I certainly do. This is Joseph's testing of his brothers in order to teach them and discipline them. I expect this testing to continue year after year. The Lord Jesus Christ knows how to deal with the nation of Israel.

(n) Still Remaining Ignorant of Him

As Joseph gave his brothers a further test, they still remained ignorant of him (44:14-34). The same will be true of the nation of Israel as Christ continues to test them. What patience Joseph had! I do not have nearly the patience that he had or the patience that the Lord Jesus has with Israel today. If I had been Joseph, I would have revealed myself to the brothers much sooner than he did. And if I were the Lord Jesus, I would immediately tell the whole world that the Israelites are my brothers. Joseph, however, dealt with his brothers patiently. They were ignorant of him, and the Egyptians were ignorant of what was going on. Only Joseph knew what he was doing. The situation is the same today. Only the Lord Jesus, not the United Nations or the ruler of any country, knows what is taking place. Although He is giving the nation of Israel a difficult time, there is a definite purpose in all He is doing.

(o) Christ Acknowledging the Ignorant Israel

Eventually, Joseph acknowledged his ignorant brothers (45:1-4, 14-15). I believe that the time is near when Christ will acknowledge the ignorant nation of Israel (Rom. 11:26). The acknowledgment of the United Nations does not mean anything. What counts is Christ's acknowledgment. The day is coming when Christ will tell the world, "Don't touch the nation of Israel. Whoever touches her touches the apple of My eye. The Israelites are My brothers."

(p) Eventually Recognizing Christ

Joseph's brothers eventually recognized him (45:15), and the Israelites will eventually recognize Christ (Zech. 12:10). Until they recognize Him, Christ will continue to deal with them patiently. Recently I read that some Jewish scholars have begun to study the case of Jesus. It seems that these scholars are eager to learn more about who Jesus is. Instead of acknowledging the Jews now, Christ is giving them a further time to consider Him. These Jewish scholars who are studying the case of Jesus admit that Christ has gained a great deal of credit for the Jewish people, for Christ came from the nation of Israel. He was and still is a Jew. If Christ had come out of your country, you certainly would be proud of Him.

If we keep all these points in mind as we follow the news in the Middle East, we shall be happy and praise the Lord. All that is happening today was foreshadowed in Joseph's dealing with his brothers. In a sense, what we are seeing today is a motion picture of

what has already taken place. Even as I am speaking about these chapters in Genesis, the events foreshadowed in them are taking place in the Middle East. What is happening today is the fulfillment of what is portrayed in this portion of the Word. Praise the Lord for His wisdom and patience! He knows what He is doing with Israel. In not too long a time, Christ will make an open recognition of the nation of Israel. He will do this by descending from the heavens to the earth. The Savior out of Zion will come to the land of Israel and recognize the nation of Israel as His nation.

Now we come once again to a parenthesis covering certain matters on the line of life. I love the line of Joseph as a type of Christ, but, as far as I am concerned, the line of life is more practical. The line of the type concerns Israel, but the line of life concerns you and me.

Although there were many clear indications of Joseph's identity, his brothers could not recognize him because of their blindness and preoccupations. Because his brothers were so blind and ignorant of him, Joseph was compelled to take a further step to reveal himself to them. Joseph must have prayed concerning his dealing with his brothers. He did not deal with them according to his personal feelings or desires, but according to the Lord's leading. Whatever Joseph did to his brothers was according to the Lord's leading.

No one else could have had the patience Joseph had. As we have pointed out, it took twenty-two years for his dreams to be fulfilled. After such a long period of time, Joseph had an intense desire to see his father. How could a man have had such patience? How could he have been able to control his emotion, his love, and his desire to see his father? Joseph's patience and self-control must have been of the Lord.

After the last test, at least one of Joseph's brothers, Judah, had improved. This is indicated by the way he spoke to Joseph about taking care of their father and their youngest brother (44:18-34). When Joseph's brothers sold him, they hated him and did not care for their father or youngest brother. Rather, they acted according to their hatred. But the way Judah spoke to Joseph indicated that he cared about his father and his youngest brother. This touched Joseph very deeply and convinced him that his brothers had learned their lesson. Thus, immediately after this, Joseph acknowledged them. Prior to this time, the brothers were still learning the lessons. The lessons were not completed until at least one among them had improved and had learned to care for his father and youngest brother. Until that time, Joseph exercised great patience in testing his brothers.

In my opinion Joseph should have revealed himself to his brothers immediately after feasting with them. However, he did not do this. Instead, he charged his steward to fill their sacks with grain and to return their money (44:1-2). No doubt Joseph's brothers were happy. If I had been one of the brothers, I would have said to the others on the way back to Canaan, "What do you think about that ruler? Why was he so nice to us? He is the ruler of the whole earth and we are foreigners coming to buy food. Yet he invited us to his home and feasted with us. He even gave Benjamin a portion five times greater than what he gave the rest of us. Moreover, he seated us according to our birth. What is this all about? Who is this man?" I believe that Joseph expected his brothers to talk like this. He expected them to thoroughly consider him. But they were careless and they did not do this. There must have been certain features of Joseph's face that would have enabled them to recognize him. But his brothers were too blind to notice them.

Suddenly, much to their surprise, the steward caught up with them and said, "Wherefore have ye repaid evil for good?" (44:4, Heb.). He then accused them of stealing Joseph's cup. The brothers replied, "Wherefore saith my lord these words? God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing: behold, the money, which we found in our sacks' mouths, we brought again unto thee out of the land of Canaan: how then should we steal out of thy lord's house silver or gold?" (44:7-8). According to Joseph's plan, the cup was found in Benjamin's sack (44:12). This should have caused the brothers to wonder why that ruler in Egypt paid so much attention to their youngest brother. Joseph's brothers were terrified. As 44:13 says, "They rent their clothes, and loaded every man his ass, and returned to the city" (Heb.). When they saw Joseph again, "they fell down before him on the ground" (44:14). This also should have reminded them of Joseph's dreams. However, they still did not understand what was happening to them.

As we read this story, we see Joseph's patience and wisdom. Only a matured person has such patience and wisdom. The more matured we are, the more wisdom and patience we have. Although Joseph was just about forty years of age, in his spiritual life he was matured. Because he was spiritually mature, he had great wisdom and patience. Thus, he was not governed by his desire or emotion, but directed by his wisdom and patience.

In the church life today we all, especially the elders, need a life of wisdom and patience. What the elders do should not be under the direction of their emotion, desire, or intention. Although your intention may be very good, you may cause damage to others if you are governed by your good intention. None of the elders or leading ones in the church or in the work should be governed by his intention. On the contrary, we must be governed by our wisdom and patience. It takes no maturity to be directed by your intention or desire. But it does require maturity to be directed by patience and wisdom.

In the story of Joseph's revealing himself to his brothers we do not see any display of childishness on his part. Being full of patience and wisdom, he conducted himself according to the maturity of life. He was tried by his brothers' ignorance and blindness. But instead of being manipulated by his intention or desire, he was completely under the control of his wisdom and directed by his patience. In patience and wisdom he gave his brothers all the tests they needed. Because we are not as mature as Joseph, we may think that he was too severe and troublesome in dealing with his brothers. But Joseph was not a troublesome person; he was a person fully matured and governed by wisdom and patience. He knew what was the best time to reveal himself to his brothers. His acknowledgment of them was not directed by his desire or his feelings; it was completely under the direction of God's wisdom.

In wisdom, Joseph gave his brothers another test. By giving them this test, he gave them another opportunity to consider his identity. But, as we have seen, they remained ignorant. Therefore, he arranged for them to be brought back to him. When they returned, they were fully subdued. Judah said to him, "What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves?" (44:16). When Judah spoke to him like this, Joseph still did not reveal himself to them, but continued to be patient, testing Judah to the uttermost. I do not say that Judah was mature in life, but at that moment he had improved very much. By the way he spoke to Joseph we see that he was a subdued, broken man. The attitude and spirit in which he spoke to Joseph about his father touched Joseph deeply. It was through Judah's talk with him that Joseph became convinced that his brother had learned his lesson. That was

the right time for Joseph to reveal himself to them. At that time, all his emotions burst forth.

Do not think that Joseph was emotionless like wood or stone. No, he was full of emotion. Look at the way he wept when he revealed himself to his brothers (45:1-15). He told all his servants to leave the room, and then his emotions burst out. This indicates that Joseph was very emotional. Since he was so emotional, how could he have refrained from expressing his emotion for at least several months? The fact that he could do this was a sign of his maturity.

If we do not know how to control our tears, laughter, or anger, it means that we are childish in life. The strongest sign that we are matured is that we are able to control our emotion. As we pointed out in a previous message, when the two sons of Aaron were burned in the presence of God, there were indications that Aaron was forbidden to weep (Lev. 10:1-3). Aaron might have said, "My two sons have just died in my sight and you ask me not to weep. Moses, you are not human." Both Moses and Aaron were in the presence of the Lord. Moses could serve God in His presence because he knew how to control his feelings of sympathy for his brother. Aaron took Moses' word. Whether or not you should weep, laugh, or be angry depends upon the Lord's presence. We are not in the world, but in the presence of the Lord in the Holy of Holies. When you are about to express your emotion, you should not do so according to your feeling. Rather, you must express your emotion according to God's presence. Does God's presence allow you to laugh? Does it allow you to weep? You should not say, "I have just lost my sons and I am very sorrowful. I simply cannot control myself. I must weep." If you say this, it reveals that you are not mature. Joseph could be the ruler in Egypt because he was mature. Being mature, he ruled over himself and over the whole earth. At the right time Joseph wept regarding his brothers. Even this reveals that he was a person fully under the control of God's guidance. In chapters forty-two through forty-four Joseph did not weep in the presence of his brothers. But in chapter forty-five, after the brothers had passed through the dealings and had learned their lessons, Joseph wept.

Joseph had been very concerned for his brothers. His concern for them is seen in the fact that he charged them not to quarrel with one another on the way home (45:24, Heb.). This indicates that they had been quarreling. Through the various tests Joseph exercised discipline over his brothers. Reuben or Levi might have said, "Throughout our entire life we were never disciplined as much as we were in these last months." They were disciplined by the patient and wise Joseph. Everything Joseph did in relation to his brothers was not for himself, but for them. In this we see Joseph's perfection in life. However, his perfection was not for himself, but for his brothers. He exercised patience and applied great wisdom. He constantly controlled his emotion and, prior to chapter forty-five, he did not weep regarding his brothers except privately after he had seen Benjamin (43:29-31). Although he had great emotion, he was not controlled by it.

In our married life we need to learn to control our emotion. Some say that to overcome our besetting sin is difficult. But this is not as difficult as controlling our emotion. To overcome your emotion is the most difficult thing. Are you able to control yourself when you are about to lose your temper? In this matter we all must learn of Joseph. When his emotion was about to burst forth at seeing Benjamin, he turned aside to weep privately and to wash his face. Likewise, if you are about to lose your temper at home, you should go to the rest room, let out your feelings privately, and then wash your face. Do not think that this discipline is for the older people but not for the young people. Joseph was still in his thirties when he exercised control of his emotions regarding his brothers. At the most, he was in middle age. Thus, you should not excuse yourself. Whenever you are about to lose your temper, remember what Joseph did.

When some hear this, they may say, "Brother Lee, didn't you say that the resurrection life within us is able to overcome everything? Why do we need to turn aside from others when we are about to lose control of our emotion?" The reason is that your natural life is so strong. I do not want simply to tell you the story of Joseph. My burden is that we would see the life Joseph lived. In Joseph's life his temper, disposition, emotion, intention, and desire were all under the control of God's leading. Joseph may have said, "God didn't lead me to acknowledge my brothers earlier than I did. I had no freedom to behave otherwise. I had to conduct myself according to the Lord's leading. I certainly wanted to reveal myself to them immediately and have them bring my father to me as soon as possible. But the choice was not up to me. It was a matter of the Lord's leading. I had to do what was best for my brothers. According to the Lord's leading, I had to put them to the test."

The result of the way Joseph revealed himself to his brothers was excellent and blameless. At the time Joseph revealed himself to them, the atmosphere was very good. In that atmosphere it was easy for him to forgive them. Actually, however, within Joseph there was not the thought of forgiving them. He fully understood that it was the sovereign God, not his brothers, who had brought him to Egypt. Because his dealing with his brothers was full of patience, wisdom, and self-control, the result was so excellent that he did not even need to forgive them. Realizing that God had sovereignly sent him to Egypt to fulfill His purpose, he spontaneously received his brothers. He embraced them and took them in.

When we are under the control of life in patience and in wisdom, we shall be like Joseph. We shall not blame or condemn anyone. There will not even be the need to forgive others because we shall not blame them. We shall be willing to accept everyone and we shall have a broad heart to embrace all the weaker ones, even those who have seriously offended us. However, instead of feeling that we have been offended, we shall realize that everything that has happened to us was according to God's sovereignty. Everything under God's sovereignty is for our good, for the fulfillment of His purpose, and for the edification of others. Because Joseph was sold by his brothers, good came to them. Through all their dealings with Joseph, the brothers were educated and edified. Therefore, the issue of the whole matter was excellent. Joseph not only carried out God's eternal purpose, but also built up his brothers. If we bring these matters regarding Joseph into our prayer and fellowship, we shall see more and we shall be nourished. Furthermore, we shall learn how to behave in every situation.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED NINETEEN

BEING MATURED

THE REIGNING ASPECT OF THE MATURED ISRAEL

As we have pointed out many times, the book of Genesis contains the seeds of nearly all the truths in the Scriptures. If we would get into the depths of the record of Joseph's life, we must find the seeds sown there and see that this record contains an account of a reigning life. Before we consider the seeds and the reigning life found in chapters forty-five through forty-seven, we need to consider two further points regarding Joseph as a type of Christ.

(q) Christ's Revealing His Exaltation and Glory
to Repentant Israel

When all the tests were over and the time was ripe, Joseph revealed himself and his exaltation and glory to his brothers (45:8, 13). This typifies that one day Christ will reveal Himself to the remnant of Israel. Christ, the exalted One in the heavens, has His own temperament. He knows what He has to do to test Israel, and He knows how long the test should last. At the right time, the trial of Israel will end. After all the saints have been raptured and after the judgment at the judgment seat of Christ has been carried out, Christ, with the overcoming saints, will be revealed from the heavens, and the remnant of Israel will see Him. At that time they will realize who Jesus of Nazareth is and say, "Jesus of Nazareth is our Messiah. He has been exalted and enthroned as Lord of all."

When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, they no doubt were shocked to see him and to remember what they had done to him. However, Joseph's revealing himself to them was wholly a matter of grace. Likewise, as a matter of grace, Christ will reveal Himself to the remnant of Israel. At exactly the right time, Christ will reveal that He has been exalted and that no one in the universe is higher than He. When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, he said that God had made him a father to Pharaoh, the lord of all his house, and the ruler throughout all the land of Egypt (45:8). Even Pharaoh was under Joseph's instruction. When Christ will reveal Himself in His glory to the remnant of Israel, the Jews will realize that He is far greater than they expected their Messiah to be.

(r) Israel Participating in the Enjoyment of Christ's Reign

After Christ reveals Himself to the remnant of Israel, He will begin His millennial reign. During the millennium, the Jews will participate in the enjoyment of Christ's reign, just as Joseph's brothers participated in the enjoyment of his reign (45:18; 47:4-6). Joseph's brothers enjoyed the best portion of the land in Egypt. This is a type of the millennium in which the Jews will enjoy the best things of earth. According to Zechariah 14:16-19, the Egyptians and those from the other nations will be required to present offerings to the Lord in Jerusalem. If a nation refuses to go up to Jerusalem with offerings for the Lord, no rain will fall upon their land. Because the Jews will be one with God, whatever is offered to Him will be their portion and enjoyment. According to the Old Testament, what was offered to God became the portion of the priests. In like manner, what is offered to God during the thousand years will become the portion of the Jews, who will be the priests instructing the people on earth, especially the Egyptians, in the way to worship God. I believe that during the millennium many Egyptians will repent for the way they dealt with Israel in this age. The Egyptians may say to the Jews, "We repent. We didn't know that you were such a people. Whatever we have that you want, just take it." This will take place according to the prophecy and the type in the Old Testament.

Now we come, once again, to a parenthesis regarding the matter of life. Remember, nearly everything in the book of Genesis is a seed. The first book of the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew, reveals Christ on the one hand and the kingdom of God on the other hand. Matthew also clearly indicates that we realize God's kingdom by denying ourselves. In Matthew 16 Christ, the church, and the kingdom are all revealed. In this chapter the Lord Jesus told His disciples that if anyone would follow Him, this one would have to deny himself. At the end of Genesis we find a seed of the truth of self-denial. In the closing chapters of Genesis, Christ is typified by Joseph, and the kingdom is foreshadowed by the house of Israel. Because Joseph denied himself, the kingdom of God could be realized in a practical way. The entire universe belongs to God, and God desires a kingdom. Although Pharaoh was ruling in Egypt, the kingdom of God was nonetheless realized through the reign of Joseph. The reigning of Joseph was the kingdom of God, which is for the fulfillment of God's purpose. According to the book of Exodus, the purpose of God is to have a dwelling place on earth. But at the end of Genesis we see a miniature of God's kingdom.

In all of history we cannot find anyone to match Joseph. Although he was offended by his brothers to the uttermost, he did not seek revenge. With Joseph, there was no thought of revenge. Rather, he denied himself and rendered the adequate and necessary discipline to his brothers. Joseph did not discipline his brothers for his own sake, but for their sake. Having no thought of revenge, he was concerned that his brothers might be perfected and built up so that they might live together as a collective people. The fact that Joseph charged them not to quarrel on the way home reveals his concern for them (45:24). The desire of Joseph's heart was that his brothers would be a people living together as God's testimony on earth. Joseph seemed to say to them, "I have done everything for you, and you have all you need. Now go back with thanksgiving to God to see my father and bring him back to me. But I am concerned that you might quarrel with one another on the way." Joseph's word about quarreling also indicates that he disciplined his brothers. He disciplined nine of the brothers in a general way and Simeon in a specific way. By this we see his discipline was sober; it was not motivated by anger.

Joseph was a person who denied himself. Whatever he did was based upon the principle of self-denial. I do not know of any other person who was offended to the degree Joseph was, yet who had not the slightest desire for revenge. When he revealed himself to his brothers, they were terrified (45:3, Heb.). Joseph, however, not only forgave them, but received them and comforted them. He said, "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (45:5). Here we see that the offended one comforted the offending ones.

Often when Christians forgive someone, they say, "Yes, I forgive you, but I also want to remind you of the seriousness of what you have done." This kind of forgiveness does not mean anything, for actually it is not forgiveness at all. When Joseph forgave his brothers, he comforted them and told them not to be angry with themselves, but to forget what they had done to him. He said that their selling him into slavery was God's doing to preserve life. Joseph did not blame his brothers for what they had done; rather, he regarded them as God's helpers. They had helped God to get him to Egypt.

In verse 7 Joseph said, "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance." The Hebrew word rendered "posterity" is better translated "remnant." God's purpose required a remnant. His intention was that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would build Him a tabernacle so that He might establish His kingdom on earth. If the remnant had been cut off, God's purpose could not have been fulfilled. In that case, the book of Genesis would have been the last

book of the Bible. Knowing that the famine would have terminated everyone living in the land of Canaan, God prepared a way for the remnant of the chosen and called race to continue to exist.

Joseph was able to comfort his brothers because he realized that God, not they, had sent him to Egypt. He might have said, "Thank you for selling me. If you had not done that, how could I be here today?" Whether or not we forgive others depends upon our vision and realization. If we know that we are here for the Lord's recovery, we shall not care how much others offend us. We shall realize that the more we are offended, the more good will result. If Joseph's brothers had not sold him into slavery, how could his dreams have been fulfilled? His dreams were fulfilled through the ones who hated him. Joseph had a thorough realization of this and thus he could forgive his brothers for the way they mistreated him.

It should be the same with us today in the church life. If we realize that we are here for the Lord's purpose, for the Lord's recovery, then we shall know that whatever happens to us is for God's purpose. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to the purpose." Joseph loved God; therefore, whatever happened to him was for good. To be unwilling to forgive those who have offended you indicates that you are shortsighted. But if you see into the depth of what God has done, you will never seek revenge. Instead, you will always be willing to forgive those who have offended you. You will say, "Praise the Lord! Whatever happened to me was for good, not only for me, but for God's people. Whatever happens to me works good for the kingdom of God."

Joseph's realization that God was the One who had sent him to Egypt is a seed of the truth found in Romans 8:28. Joseph's life is an illustration of this verse and an example of how everything works for good for those who love God. The seed sown in the book of Genesis grows in Romans 8:28 and is harvested in Revelation 15, where we see the overcomers standing on the sea of glass, which signifies trials, tests, and sufferings. Joseph's brothers helped him come to the throne. If they had not sold him into slavery, he could not have come to Egypt. Hence, their selling of him ushered him to the throne. Do not complain about what your wife or husband or the saints in the church do to you. For those who love God, everything works together for good. The crucial matter here is whether or not we love God. If you love Him, even an accident works good for you. But if you do not love Him, not even graduating from a university with a doctorate will work good for you. I have suffered much throughout the years, but I have been comforted by the fact that everything works good for me. Whenever I undergo suffering, I remember Romans 8:28 and I am comforted immediately.

As a young man of seventeen years of age, Joseph needed to undergo trials and testings. Because Joseph was the favorite of his father Jacob, he lived in a pleasant environment, and there was no way for him to suffer anything. He was always under his father's protection. But one day, according to the Lord's sovereignty, Jacob sent Joseph to his brothers, and they sold him into slavery. Through the sufferings that came upon him as a result of this, Joseph was trained to be a ruler. In this matter we see God's wisdom.

Firstly, Joseph had the dreams in which he saw his brothers bowing down to him. But in order for this vision to be fulfilled, Joseph had to undergo a great deal of suffering, especially at the hands of those closest to him. Joseph suffered constantly from the time he was seventeen until he was thirty. Joseph needed to pass through all these sufferings so that he might be perfected and qualified. God had sent Joseph to Egypt to preserve life so that a remnant might remain for the fulfillment of His purpose.

Do not be frightened by this word regarding Joseph's sufferings. Perhaps you have asked the Lord to make you today's Joseph. The Lord will answer this prayer by causing you to undergo certain sufferings. During times of suffering you may say, "How long, O Lord? The dreams of others have been fulfilled, but where is the fulfillment of my dream?" Eventually, you will be released. Joseph was patient and denied himself. He did not do anything for his own enjoyment, but for the discipline and perfection of his brothers.

In order to strengthen his brothers, Joseph revealed to them his exaltation and glory, and he told them that God had made him a father to Pharaoh. In 45:13 he said, "And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt." Joseph's brothers considered him like Pharaoh. But Joseph seemed to say, "I'm the father of Pharaoh. I am even higher than you realize, for God has made me the father of Pharaoh. You have seen all my glory. Go back and tell my father all you have seen." Joseph was not being showy. Rather, he was strengthening his brothers so that they might bring their father to him.

After suffering for thirteen years, Joseph was enthroned to be the ruler of the earth. He certainly longed to see his father. We may wonder why he did not do something to satisfy this longing as soon as he was enthroned. He could have sent chariots from Egypt to bring his father to him. However, it was nine years before he had Jacob brought to him. Joseph had the power and the position to do something, but he did not do anything. If I had been Joseph, I would have done something immediately. I would have taken an army of chariots and gone to visit my father. Had I found that he had died, I would have visited his sepulcher. Certainly it would have been normal for Joseph to do such a thing. The fact that Joseph did nothing about this for nine years does not mean that he had no thought of his father. Joseph was not stone or wood, but a living person full of emotion, a person who loved his father very much. Having been separated from his father for many years, he must have thought about him a great deal. He probably realized how close Egypt was to his father's home in the land of Canaan. He knew that the journey there would take just several days. Nevertheless, because he was under the sovereignty of God, he did not do anything.

Joseph preferred to remain under God's sovereign hand and not to initiate anything. He might have prayed, "Lord, it was You who sent me here, brought me through all the sufferings, and put me on the throne. It was You, Lord, who kept me from my father. Lord, I realize that all this has been of You. Thus, I dare not do anything. Rather, I would like to wait for Your sovereign time." I definitely believe that Joseph prayed this way. This reveals that he was a self-denying person. Although he had been enthroned to be the ruler of the earth, he nevertheless did nothing for himself or for his own enjoyment. He was wholly for God's interest. Joseph's life was a life that waited for God's sovereign timing. Instead of initiating the contact with his father himself, he remained continually under God's sovereignty, praying, "Lord, You do it. Unless You do it, I will not do anything." Young brothers and sisters, I expect the Lord to do much with you for His recovery. But you must learn the lesson not to go ahead by yourselves. Don't do anything on your own. Rather, keep yourself under God's sovereignty and let Him initiate something. Whatever needs to be done must be initiated by Him.

How sweet is the record of Joseph's life! Because Joseph was fully under God's guidance, there was no need for him to regret anything he did. Joseph is a living illustration of what is revealed in the New Testament. He was a self-denying person who had no self-interest, self-enjoyment, self-feeling, self-ambition, or self-goal. Everything was for God and for God's people. Therefore, when

the time was right, he extended a warm invitation for his father to come to him.

We can learn many lessons by considering Joseph's life. Joseph had dreams and he interpreted his dreams and the dreams of others. All these dreams were fulfilled. Nevertheless, Joseph realized that he still lacked one thing, and that one thing was his father's presence. Humanly speaking, nothing could satisfy Joseph except the presence of his father. However, he did nothing of himself to secure his father's presence. Instead, he was patient, constantly waiting for the right time. For nine years he did nothing. Finally an opportunity came to do something. But, realizing that the perfection of his brothers had not yet been accomplished, he still did nothing. Only when his brothers had been edified did he extend the invitation. This invitation was initiated by God's sovereign hand. God sovereignly prepared the environment to indicate that the time was right for Joseph to send for his father.

When Joseph did send for his father, he himself did not go to get him. What was the reason for this? We cannot say that he did not have the time, for when his father died he had the time to bury him. In order to answer this question we need to discover what the Bible does not say. (This is one of the ways to study the Bible.) The reason Joseph did not go was that he was restricted. He did not want to do anything according to his emotion. Rather, his emotion was restricted. Joseph did not leave Egypt to see his father; neither did he send someone to find out whether or not a caravan was coming. In fact, Jacob "sent Judah before him unto Joseph, to direct his face unto Goshen" (46:28). Jacob seemed to be saying to Judah, "Judah, go to Joseph and tell him that I'm coming and ask him to direct us to him."

Do not think that Joseph was not eager to see his father. He certainly longed to see him. But even on the day of his father's arrival, Joseph was still at home. He did not make a special trip to meet his father on the way. Again I say that Joseph was a person fully under God's restriction. However, when he heard that his father had arrived in Goshen, he "presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while" (46:29). This proves that Joseph was very emotional and that he had a heart for his father. But he did not act according to his emotion; rather, he always acted under God's restriction. Because of this, he was able to be the ruler.

If you cannot rule yourself, you cannot be a good ruler. Suppose you lose your temper whenever you feel like it. If so, then you are through with the rulership of the Holy Spirit. But if we are under the rulership of the Spirit, we shall ask the Lord to have mercy on us when we sense that we are about to lose our temper. Only by being under God's restriction can we rule others. To be under God's restriction is the best discipline to prepare us for kingship in the coming age. No childish person, no one who has not been restricted, will be a king in the coming kingdom. In this matter of living under restriction, we see the maturity of life. May this word be a help to all who love the Lord, the recovery, and the church life.

In the Lord's recovery we have people from different backgrounds with different dispositions and concepts. Because of all these differences, we need to be restricted. If we are not restricted but express our emotion freely, we shall cause damage. We may regret later what we have done, but it may be too late. You may say, "I have the right to express my feelings like this." Yes, you have the right to do so, but you damage others. Do you want a proper church life? If you do, then you need to be under God's restriction. Consider again the picture of Joseph. He could bring in the kingdom only by being a person who denied himself. If he had acted according to his feelings and not according to God's guidance, everything would have been spoiled. But Joseph was a person wholly under God's restriction. Therefore, the kingdom of God could be brought in through him. In order for the kingdom to be realized in a practical way, there had to be a person who lived under restriction and who denied himself.

It is the same with us today. Do you want to have a pleasant church life? Then you must be under restriction and deny yourself. We all need to learn this. Suppose Joseph had not been a self-denying person. In such a case it would have been impossible for the kingdom of God to be brought in and realized in a practical way. Joseph's self-denial, his restriction under God's sovereign hand, was the key to the practice of the kingdom life. Thank God for Joseph's self-denying life. Through such a life God's purpose was fulfilled, and the kingdom was brought in, realized, and practiced. Through this fulfillment, the children of Israel shared in the enjoyment of the kingdom.

Joseph had the position and the power to do whatever he desired. However, he did not do anything for himself. More than forty years ago, I heard someone say that the strongest thing is to be able not to do something that you can do. You have the power, the position, and the opportunity to do a certain thing, yet you still do not do it. I became familiar with the story of Joseph many years ago. But in the past I did not see that after Joseph had been enthroned to be the ruler of Egypt, he did not use his power to see his father. After Joseph was enthroned, he did nothing to rescue himself from being alone, even though he had been separated from his father for thirteen years. When the brothers first came down to him, he still did not do anything. Joseph had the power and the position to do something about his situation, but he did not do what he had the power to do. This indicates that he was the most powerful person, one who has the strength not to do what he is able to do. Joseph was such a person because he was under God's hand, under God's restriction.

During the first nine years of his rule in Egypt, Joseph must have contacted the Lord again and again. Perhaps as he prayed to the Lord regarding the possibility of visiting his father, the Lord instructed him to do nothing about it. Week after week Joseph might have prayed, "Lord, is now the time for me to do something to have my father brought here?" I believe that the Lord said to him, "No, this is not the time. There is no need for you to do anything to fulfill your dream. Simply wait and allow Me to do it." By means of his prayer Joseph might have been confirmed in believing that his dreams were of God and that God Himself would fulfill them. Because there was no need for him to do anything, Joseph remained silent. He had the strength not to do what he had the power to do. When his brothers came to Egypt the first time, he did nothing to have his father brought to him. Even when the time was right for his father to come to him in Egypt, Joseph did not go out to meet him on the way. I believe that this was the result of his being under the Lord's restriction. Joseph knew that there was no need for him to do anything to fulfill his dreams. This is the real denial of the self and the genuine bearing of the cross.

To bear the cross means that you refrain from doing what you have the power to do. You are qualified and empowered to do everything necessary to fulfill your desire, yet you refrain from doing so. A person like this is the strongest person. The strongest person is not the one who is able to do something, but the one who is able not to do what he has the power to do. This self-denial is the unique way to usher in God's kingdom and to realize the kingdom life. As we shall see in the next message, the kingdom life came

in through Joseph's ability not to do what he had the power to do. We need to be such people today.

There is no doubt that, in ourselves, we cannot be such people. Our life is not the kind of life that has the power not to do what it is able to do. When we have the opportunity to do something, we simply do it. But the life of Christ has the power not to do what it is capable of doing. This fact is the key to the four Gospels and to the life of the Lord Jesus. Often He had the position, the power, and the right environment to do many things, but he also had the power not to do those things. For example, He could have asked the Father to send twelve legions of angels to rescue Him; yet He had the strength not to do this (Matt. 26:53). This life of self-denial, of bearing the cross, is the life that ushers in the kingdom.

LIFE-STUDY OF GENESIS

MESSAGE ONE HUNDRED TWENTY

BEING MATURED THE REIGNING ASPECT OF THE MATURED ISRAEL

(8)

As we have pointed out a number of times, in the story of Joseph there are two lines: the line of the type and the line of life. Before we consider further the line of life, we need to see another point regarding Joseph as a type of Christ.

(17) Reigning

Joseph was a type of Christ reigning in His kingdom during the millennium. If we take note of the prophecy in the story of Joseph, we shall see that his record is a picture of Christ's reign in the millennial kingdom.

(a) Supplying People with Food

According to this picture, Christ will do four things during the millennium. First, He will supply people with food, that is, He will satisfy everyone's needs (47:15-17). Although the whole earth was under a famine, Joseph was able to satisfy everyone's hunger. Today everyone is hungry and no one is satisfied. But when Christ is reigning during the coming thousand years, He will meet everyone's need and satisfy everyone's hunger.

(b) Keeping People Alive

As Joseph was reigning in Egypt, he kept people alive (47:19, 25). Because Christ will satisfy everyone's needs, He will be able to make everyone alive, to make everyone living. If you examine the prophecies regarding Christ's reign in the millennium, you will see that Christ will make everything living. Today, death is everywhere; everyone and everything is dying. But during the millennial reign of Christ, there will be hardly a sign of death. Rather, everything and everyone will be full of life.

(c) Keeping the Land Producing

Joseph also kept the land producing. He gave the people not only food, but also seed (47:19-23). In the millennium Christ will make everything productive. In today's situation, on the contrary, everything is diminishing. But when the millennium comes, everything on earth will be productive. In order to produce, we must have seed. While food is for satisfaction, seed is for production. As He reigns in the millennium, Christ will not only afford people food to satisfy them, but supply them with seed to make them productive.

(d) Taking Special Care of Israel

Joseph also took special care of Israel (50:21). This typifies that during the millennium Christ will take special care of Israel. Israel's specific function on earth is to testify of God. Although Christ is in favor of Israel, today Israel has no faith in Christ. The Jews worship God, but they do not have the proper faith in God through Christ. Instead, they believe in God in their own way. However, whether or not Israel is in unbelief, they are still the testimony of God, even today. There will be many nations on earth during the millennium, but only one nation, Israel, will be God's testimony. For this reason, Christ will take special care of Israel. When He renders this care to Israel, it will indicate that He is absolutely for God's testimony. Likewise, the reason Christ loves the church is that the church is God's testimony. Therefore, in the millennium Christ will satisfy everyone, make everything alive, make everything productive, and take good care of Israel as God's testimony.

Now we come to the line of life. When I first read that Joseph collected money, cattle, and land in exchange for food, I said, "Joseph, you are a robber. You not only robbed the people, you extracted everything from them. You collected their money, livestock, and land. Eventually, you collected their very being. Joseph, what kind of landlord are you?" Joseph alone held the lifeline, and the lifeline was food. Those who wanted food had to give something to Joseph in order to get it. If they wanted satisfaction, they had to pay for it with money, cattle, or land. First Joseph "gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan" (47:14). Verse 15 says, "And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? for the money hath ceased" (Heb.). When the people said this to Joseph, he told them to give him their cattle. Thus, the people brought their cattle to Joseph, and "Joseph gave them bread in exchange for horses, and for the flocks, and for the cattle of the herds, and for the asses" (47:17). A year later, the people came to Joseph again in need of food once more. This time there was no need for negotiation because there was a mutual understanding between Joseph and the people. The only thing they had left was their land and themselves. Therefore, they told him to buy them and their land for bread (47:19). Eventually, in Egypt Joseph was the only landlord, banker, and cattle raiser.

Joseph had the supply of life, the supply of food. According to our natural concept, Joseph should simply have given it away. But we should not bring our natural, worldly concept to the reading of the Bible. Joseph had the life supply, and the people needed it. They had to do something in order to get it. Before we see what the people had to do, we need to point out the reason Joseph became so rich and had the life supply. It was because of all his sufferings. From the time Joseph was seventeen years of age, he had been suffering. Even after he had been enthroned and was in power, he was still suffering because he was separated from his father. As we pointed out in the previous message, he had the power and the position to do everything necessary to have his father brought to him.

But he refrained from doing so because he was in Egypt to fulfill God's will. In order for God's will to be fulfilled, Joseph had to suffer. Although he was the ruler, he suffered until the day his father was brought to him. Because of his suffering, he had the riches. It is the same today in the church life. It is those who suffer who are able to give others the supply of life. This thought is found in the hymn regarding the grapevine (Hymns, #635). The last two stanzas were arranged by Brother Nee:

Not by gain our life is measured,
But by what we've lost 'tis scored;
'Tis not how much wine is drunken,
But how much has been outpoured.
For the strength of love e'er standeth
In the sacrifice we bear;
He who has the greatest suff'ring
Ever has the most to share.
He who treats himself severely
Is the best for God to gain;
He who hurts himself most dearly
Most can comfort those in pain.
He who suffering never beareth
Is but empty "sounding brass";
He who self life never spareth
Has the joys which all surpass.

If we do not suffer, we have nothing to give others. Because the grapevine undergoes many sufferings, dealings, cuttings, and breakings, it produces rich wine to cheer man. Brother Nee realized that the more we suffer, the more we have to give. Without suffering, anything we say is like tinkling brass. We may make noise, but there is no life in what we say. Therefore, as this hymn says, our life is measured not by gain, but by loss. Therefore, the reason Joseph could be so rich was that he had suffered. During the years of his suffering he stored up the riches.

During the seven years of plenty, Joseph stored up the grain. He did not take care of his own interests. It was not an easy task to store all that grain. For seven years Joseph gathered the grain and stored it in barns. This was a big job. On the one hand, Joseph was laboring; on the other hand, he was suffering because he was separated from his father. During these seven years he did not care for himself, but made arrangements for others to be taken care of in the future. What he did in the seven years of plenty was for the people. He did this at the cost of taking care of his own interests, at the cost of seeing his father.

If we would be able to supply food to others, we must undergo a long period of suffering. Joseph did not have all the grain when he was seventeen years of age. He did not have the grain until he was thirty-seven years of age. At that time he became rich not in power, but in food and in the life supply.

It is the same today in the church life. The older, experienced ones have the supply. Again and again, Brother Nee stressed that we must take care of our physical life so that we shall not die at an early age. In one of his trainings Brother Nee asked the trainees what age they thought was the most useful age. Then he pointed out that a brother once said that the most useful age is from seventy to eighty. Because of this, Brother Nee charged the trainees to take care of themselves and not to commit gradual suicide. He told them to sleep well, eat well, drink well, and exercise well so that they might have a long life. When Caleb was eighty-five years old, he said that he was just as strong as he was at forty. The riches are not with the inexperienced ones. In order to be rich, we need to suffer for a long period of time. It took Joseph twenty years, from the age of seventeen to the age of thirty-seven, to become rich. Eventually, after many years of suffering, the food was in his hands. Because he had the food, all the hungry ones came to him.

According to my opinion, Joseph should have been generous with the people and said, "Whenever you need food, simply come to me and I'll give it to you." When I read Genesis 47 as a young man, I thought that Joseph was not generous. It seemed to me that he squeezed everything out of the people. I praise the Lord for showing me why Joseph was not generous. The reason is that the life supply should not be sold cheaply. If anyone in the church life is willing to give away the life supply in a cheap way, we must question whether the supply he has is genuine. The genuine life supply is never sold cheaply. Joseph seemed to be saying to the people, "Do you want the supply? If you do, then you must pay the price." The concept of generosity is a worldly concept. Joseph was in another realm, where there was neither generosity nor scarcity, just the supply and the price. Many Christians today sell things cheaply. But in the Lord's recovery nothing is cheap. If you want the food, you must pay the price. The greater the price you pay, the greater supply you will receive. Some today are opposing the Lord's recovery. But deep in their heart they know that this way is not wrong. They oppose it because the cost of taking it is very high. Thus, they take the cheap way and criticize the costly way. We cannot receive any food supply without a cost. Joseph will not sell you the food at a cheap price.

The people who came to Joseph for food paid four kinds of prices: their money, their cattle, their land, and themselves. How happy I am that the record in the Bible is so complete! These four items cover all the prices we need to pay today. When we pay with our money, cattle, lands, and ourselves, we receive all four types of supply. The first supply is not as rare or precious as the fourth supply. Each supply is more precious than the previous one, and the last is the most precious of all.

Let us now consider what money signifies. According to a superficial understanding, money is what we depend on. Actually, money represents convenience. The monetary system in this country is very convenient. In Joseph's time the people used silver. They had to carry silver with them and weigh it out when making a purchase. But today when we pay a bill, we simply write out a check for a certain amount. This is very convenient. However, when the supply in our checking account is depleted, we lose this convenience. At such a time we may worry about paying our bills. We all like to have a surplus in our checking account. But what will you do if this supply runs out?

Some are not willing to pay the price for the supply because they are concerned about losing their conveniences. Some may say, "Should I take the way of the church? Surely this way is good, but if I take it, I will lose certain conveniences. My wife or my relatives

may be unhappy with me." But the more conveniences you give up, the more life supply you will have. Today's Christians, however, keep their conveniences, but have no life supply. In many cathedrals, chapels, and church buildings people hear messages every Sunday about conveniences. They go to these places to get more conveniences. For them, to take the way of the Lord's recovery is costly and inconvenient. Yes, if you take this way, you will lose your conveniences, but you will gain the supply.

The second item the people had to pay for the food supply was their cattle. It is easy to understand what is signified by cattle. Cattle signifies the means of our living. Joseph's brothers were concerned about their donkeys, worried that Joseph would find some excuse to take them away. Today you may care very much about your automobile. Perhaps you are afraid that it will be stolen. If so, your automobile is your donkey. For those with a doctoral degree, their degree is their donkey. For others their position is their donkey. But Christ, the rich One, the Supplier, is here, and He is neither generous nor stingy. Although He does not want to squeeze anything out of you, for your sake He requires that you pay a price. He will never sell His supply cheaply. After you pay your money, you need to pay with your cattle. Only by handing over your cattle will you receive the second supply. When both our money and our cattle have been handed over to Him, we shall be restful and at peace.

After handing over our cattle, we need to hand over our land. The land represents our resources. The Lord Jesus is a "robber"; He "robs" His lovers of everything. He takes our money, our cattle, and our land. He may say, "Give me your land. Do not keep the resources under your control, but hand them over to me." This is not a teaching, but an observation of what I have seen in the lives of many. Some dear ones were able to pay their money, but not their cattle. Others could give up their cattle, but not their land. Their concept was that the Lord Jesus always gives them things, but never "robs" them of things. But the Lord Jesus in His recovery "robs" us of everything—of our convenience, our means of livelihood, and our resources. If you are willing to give the Lord your lands, you will receive the third supply.

The last item the Lord requires is ourselves, including every aspect of our being. The Lord Jesus will claim every part of you. Have your ears been claimed by Him? If they have, you will not listen to anything other than Christ. Have your lips been claimed? If so, then they will be used differently. Has your whole being been claimed by the Lord Jesus? I doubt that very many have handed over their whole being to the Lord. Why are there still so many opinions, and why is there so little oneness and building in today's Christianity? It is due to the fact that very few are willing to hand themselves over to Christ.

Although you have heard many messages on consecration, you have probably not heard a message on handing yourself over to the Lord. Regarding consecration, we have been influenced by the Keswick Convention, which followed Mrs. Hannah Whitall Smith in emphasizing consecration as the key to everything. Do you want to be holy? Then you must consecrate yourself. Do you want to have your prayers answered and be victorious? Then you must consecrate yourself. But although we followed the Keswick teaching regarding consecration for years, we eventually discovered that it was not all that was needed for the life supply.

Consider what happened among us in 1948. Due to some confusion and turmoil, Brother Nee had to discontinue his ministry for a number of years. Some of us were burdened that his ministry be resumed, and we did our best to bring this about, but we could do nothing to help the matter. Before his ministry had been recovered, some of us had arranged to meet with him in his home for a time of fellowship. Although there were about thirty who wanted to attend that fellowship, Brother Nee would allow only me and two sisters to meet with him. He was not willing to sell his supply cheaply. Eventually, he allowed the others to sit in on the fellowship in a room adjoining his living room. The first morning no one said anything for a long period of time. Finally, unable to tolerate the silence any longer, I asked him to say a word about the confused situation of the churches in the provinces of Fukien and Kwangtung. In response, he poured himself out like Niagara Falls for more than an hour. His word was full of light, power, and impact. For at least six years he had not spoken a public word in that district, although a few had contact with him privately. Brother Nee's fellowship that day concerned the line of Jerusalem. (See the last chapter of *Further Talks on the Church Life*.) After he stopped speaking, no one said a word. Then one sister said, "Why don't we take Brother Nee's word and practice it?" With tears, everyone present said, "Amen! We want to practice it." Then Brother Nee replied, "If you intend to practice this way, you must hand over in writing yourself and everything you possess." My point in sharing this is that we need to hand ourselves over to the Lord. Perhaps you have consecrated yourself to Him, but have never handed yourself over to Him. Today Christ is claiming not only your money, cattle, and land, but also yourself.

By making the last payment, the payment of themselves, to Joseph, the people partook of the top portion. When you pay the first, second, and third price, you enjoy the first, second, and third portion. But when you pay the highest price, you enjoy the best portion. Eventually, we receive not only food for satisfaction, but also seed for reproduction. In order to get the food and the seed, we need to pay the full price. Before handing over ourselves, we must hand over everything else. After they gave everything to Joseph, the people could say, "Praise the Lord, we are released! We don't care for our money, cattle, land, or even ourselves. We just enjoy the rich supply." All that remained was the enjoyment. What a great blessing it is to give up everything for this enjoyment!

When the Lord Jesus comes, the whole earth will be under one landlord and one banker. All the land will belong to Christ, and we shall hand over whatever we have and whatever we are to Him. We are the enjoyers, not the lords. At that time in Egypt everything was under the hand of one lord. Joseph moved the people to cities "from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof" (47:21) in order to have an even distribution. There were no rich and no poor. It is the same today regarding the spiritual supply. Christ has the riches. The amount of these riches that He is able to supply us depends on what we are willing to pay. If we are willing to make the first payment, then we shall receive the first supply. But if we are willing to make the other payments, we shall receive more supply. If we make the fourth payment, we shall receive not only the food to satisfy ourselves, but also the seed to produce something for others. How marvelous this is!

If you study Genesis 47, you will see that eventually the whole land of Egypt became a land of enjoyment. No longer were there distinctions between high and low and rich and poor. All the people became enjoyers on the same level because everyone and everything was under the same lord. This is a picture of the millennium. In the millennium there will be no capitalism or socialism. Everyone will be on the same level because everything will be under the Lord's hand. He will have bought everything, and He will have claimed everything and everyone. Truly the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof (Psa. 24:1).

The situation during the millennium will be very different from today. Before Joseph came to the throne, the people were on different

levels. But after he was enthroned and the people came to him for food, Egypt became a prefigure of the millennium with all the people on the same level. Everything was under one man and belonged to him because that man had the riches and could claim everything. It must be this way among us in the church life today. Because Christ has claimed everything of us, we all are now on the same level enjoying the riches of Christ. All the points mentioned above also are seeds that are developed in the New Testament.

Joseph not only supplied the people with food, but also took care of his father's burial (49:29-31; 50:1-14). The burial of Jacob was not a simple matter. According to Hebrews 11, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all received the promise of the good land, but died without inheriting it. This is a strong indication of resurrection. Abraham died with the expectation that he would be resurrected. No doubt Isaac and Jacob had the same concept. Jacob died in the hope that one day he would rise up to inherit the land. For this reason, he charged Joseph not to leave his body in Egypt, but to bury him in the land of his fathers. Jacob realized that death to him was a time of sleeping and that on the day of resurrection he would rise up to inherit the good land. This is the significance of the burial of Jacob. The fact that Joseph buried him according to his request indicates that he had the same faith as his father. He also believed that they would rise up to inherit the good land.

Joseph also supported his brothers and comforted them (50:15-21). Joseph's brothers could not forget what they had done to him, and they were afraid that after their father's death Joseph would do something to get revenge. Joseph wept when he heard his brothers' request, for he had no thought of rendering evil to them. Rather, he said, "Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save many people alive" (50:19-20, Heb.). Joseph also promised to support them and their little ones. Then he comforted them and spoke kindly to them (50:21). Joseph seemed to be saying to his brothers, "Your intention was evil, but God's intention was marvelous. He intended to send me here to save many lives. Please do not be bothered. I thank you for what you did to me. You helped God to fulfill His purpose." In the church life we need this kind of spirit. Even if others offend you, you need to consider that whatever they do to you is of God. If you take everything as of God, all the offenses will be over.

Joseph comforted those who had offended him. What grace he had! Because the offended one could comfort the offending ones, they could enjoy a pleasant life in the kingdom. Remember, Joseph and his brothers represented the people in the kingdom. Because of Joseph's excellent spirit, they could enjoy a good time together in the kingdom. But suppose Joseph wanted to render evil to his brothers. If such had been the case, the kingdom would have been an impossibility.

Like Jacob, Joseph died in faith. As he was dying, he charged the children of Israel not to leave his bones in Egypt, but to bring them into the promised land (50:22-26). This indicates that he expected the resurrection. He believed that one day he would rise up to inherit the good land and participate in all the enjoyment that would be there. Hallelujah for Joseph's victorious end! In the consummation of the book of Genesis we see Christ, the kingdom, and all the aspects of the overcomers. How we thank the Lord for all this!

In the beginning of this book, God created man in His image to express Him, and He gave man His dominion to represent Him. After the experiences of so many called ones, this book concludes with a life that, in Jacob on the one hand, expressed God in His image and, in Joseph on the other hand, represented God with His dominion. How excellent and wonderful this is!

However, what is portrayed in Genesis was still a shadow in the age of typology. By Joseph's time the reality had not come. Hence, in this sense, Genesis concludes with a verse showing that Joseph died and was put in a coffin in Egypt. He died expecting the age of fulfillment in which he would share in the reality. In brief, as a whole, the book of Genesis begins with God's creation and ends with man's death and his being put in a coffin, even in Egypt. Because of the fall, death, the coffin, and "Egypt" are the destiny of fallen man. Thus, fallen man needs God's redemption, which is fully revealed and typified in the next book, Exodus.