

THE MINOR PROPHETS (7)

—R. Been, Sr.

Hosea. Chapter 1.

Now let us take a look at the important verses 10-11:

1. *Israel would not be destroyed forever, nor always be rejected.* In the future the number of the children of Israel would be as *the sand of the sea*. We mentioned already that Israel, although it has long been scattered among all the nations of the earth, nevertheless exists today and can be clearly identified. This fact alone should cause all to take note. Hosea does not speak of the promise given to Jacob at Bethel: "And thy seed (descendants) shall be as the dust of the earth" (Gen. 28:14), but of that which God gave to Abraham after the offering of Isaac: "I will richly bless thee, and greatly multiply thy seed (descendants)... as the sand that is *on the seashore*" (Gen. 22:17). Jacob reminded Jehovah of this last promise when he was fearful of Esau's violent actions (Gen. 32:12). The God of the unconditional promise will also perform this one in and through Christ, in whom all promises are "yea and amen." The law, given so long after these promises, does not annul them.

2. *Israel will return to God.* A tremendous change will be brought about in their condition. Their "stone" heart will be changed, God will give His law, the one of the new covenant, within them, writing it in their heart. He will be their God and they will be His people. All will know the Lord. Just as the ordinances He set for heaven and earth will never pass away, so sure has He determined the restoration of His earthly people Israel (Jer. 31:31-37). What or who then could hold back this restoration? One cannot possibly spiritualize words like these.

3. But the prophet utters an even more glorious promise. "*It shall be said unto them: 'Sons of the living God.'*" How correct and wonderful is the choice of words used by the Holy Spirit in this verse. Noting the context and the preceding expressions, one would expect to read here: "My people." These words are indeed used in the second chapter, but here it is so beautifully stated, "Sons of the living God." By this choice of words, but above all by the application of this verse in Romans 9:26 (which makes it impossible to misunderstand the purpose of the Holy Spirit), it is clear that the prophecy of verse 10, spoken after a divine "yet," *has already been partially fulfilled*. The first part has already been fulfilled in this sense that Israel has not been destroyed and Israelites can be found among all the nations, though the total fulfillment is still coming. But the words: "Sons of the living God" have also seen a partial fulfillment. Aren't there thousands true "sons and daughters of Abraham" added to the Church since the resurrection of the Lord Jesus? Just think of Peter's message on the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem and of the first seven chapters of the Acts. Since then tens of thousands Israelites have bent the knee for Jesus of Nazareth, they turned to God, and believed in the Son of God. *As far as their position as Israelites was concerned*, others, whether in Judea, Galilee or anywhere else, could say to them: "Ye are no longer the people of God." But in the same places it could be said of them that they are sons of the living God. Every distinction between Jew and Gentile had fallen away.

The verse quoted from Hosea in the Epistle to the Romans reads as follows, "Us (i.e. the vessels of mercy), whom He has also called, not only from amongst [the] Jews, but also from amongst [the] nations. As He says also in Hosea, I will call not-My-people My people; and the-not-beloved Beloved. And it shall be, in the place where it was said to them, Ye are not My people, there shall they be called Sons of [the] living God" (Rom. 9:24-26).

From this we see that the words: "Sons of the living God," have in Romans *a much wider application, for they also apply to the Gentiles*. In the prophecy of Hosea these words *only apply to Israel*, and have already been partially fulfilled by the adding of ten thousands of Jews to the Church of Christ. This addition is a firstfruit, which guarantees the future harvest (the restoration of Israel). When even the firstfruits testify of so much blessing over Israel, what shall it be when the full harvest is brought in? It will be as "life from among [the] dead" (Rom. 11:15). The Apostle Paul gives in the Epistle to the Romans an irrefutable dissertation of the acceptance of all Israel in a future day (Rom. 9, 10, and 11).

The Apostle Peter, who directs both of his epistles to the dispersed *Jewish* believers in Christ, says: "Ye who once [were] not a people, but now God's people; who were not enjoying mercy, but now have found mercy" (1 Pet. 2:10). With this he shows that they, Jews believing in Christ, possessed *even now* a blessing which in the *future* would be the portion of the entire

nation. *Even now* they could call themselves God's people, though not in the sense of an earthly people of God as Israel had been once. They had *even now* found mercy which in a future day would be extended to the entire nation. This, therefore, is in total agreement with the discourse of the Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Romans.

There is of course a *distinction in the character of the blessing*. The Jews who turn to God and believe in the Lord Jesus in the *dispensation of grace*, are added to the Church of Christ (Acts 2:47) and have a *heavenly* position and hope. The Israelites, who in the future will be again the people of God, do not belong to the Church and have an *earthly* blessing.

4. Verse 11 is entirely applicable to restored Israel: "*The children of Judah and the children of Israel, (the two and the ten tribes) shall be gathered together.*" Sometimes one wonders what Scripture should really say so as to be understood by the many Christians who reject the restoration of Israel and spiritualize its pertinent statements. Could it be more clearly put than it is here? Has, after the breach under King Rehoboam, Judah ever been united to Israel? Was it so in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah? It wasn't, was it? Yet in restored Israel there will not be a ten-tribe and a two-tribe nation, but rather one Israel consisting of the twelve tribes: Ephraim one with Judah! Ephraim will not envy Judah and Judah will not trouble Ephraim (Isa. 11:13). It will be *one* nation of twelve tribes!

5. "And they shall appoint themselves one head, and shall go up out of the land: for great is the day of Jezreel." There is no need to explain who that single head will be. It is the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Messiah, the true King. Restored Israel (all twelve tribes) will enjoy the greatest blessings under His blessed government. They will go forth out of the land from Dan (in the north) and Beersheba (in the south) to the holy city, to the house of the Lord to celebrate their feasts and to bring their sacrifices there. Everything will be far greater and more glorious than in the days of Solomon.

Jezreel, a place of judgment before, will then get its true significance. God has sowed, and there will be a great harvest, but only after God's severe judgment will have gone over the mass of unbelieving and apostate Jews. Earlier, under Jehu for instance, Israel has sowed evil and harvested rejection. But when God sows, when God gives His Son as Sacrifice, as Saviour, as High Priest, as Messiah, as King of Peace, what a harvest will be brought in then!

In the first chapter all God's acts towards His people are briefly presented. It gives a clear outline of the apostasy and the guilt of a corrupt Israel, but also of the grace of God *who now turns towards the nations and to those among Israel who are willing to accept this grace*. In the future, however, the people of Israel *in its entirety*, whereby we understand the remnants of the two and the ten tribes, will receive the blessing of entering into the earthly Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To be cont'd

JUDE (7)

— H. L. Heijkoop

And angels who had not kept their own original state, but had abandoned their own dwelling, He keeps in eternal chains under gloomy darkness, to [the] judgment of [the] great day (v. 6).

The word "and" links verses 6 and 7 to verse 5. As commented on in verse 5 these three form one whole. It is not "the angels," but just "angels." This is important. The former case would cause us to think of all the angels combined, at any rate of the total of all fallen angels, but this is not meant here. It is some angels, which are closer defined by the word "who" that follows.

The Greek word *arche*, translated "original state" is used 55 times in the New Testament. Its prime meaning is "beginning," and it is so translated 40 times (e.g. Jn. 1:1-2). In Acts 10:11; 11:5 it is translated "corners," the beginning of a sheet. It is also translated by "ruler" (Lk. 12:11 - KJV: "magistrate"; Ti. 3:1 - KJV: "principality"), "power" (Lk. 20:20), "rule" (1 Cor. 15:24) or "principality" (Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16, 2:10, 15; and Rom. 8:38). In all these cases the word is accompanied by the Greek word *exousia* (authority, or power). Romans 8:38 is doubtful, for manuscripts A, B, and S do not have *exousia*, though C, D, E, and most of the others do. That leaves John 8:25, and Jude 6. There is some difference of opinion as to the proper translation of John 8:25. The KJV translates it "from the beginning," taking it to speak of time. The New Translation, which we normally quote, uses it as referring to quality and gives: "Altogether that which I also say to you." Seeing the context, both the chapter and the whole gospel, I believe this to be proper. "Altogether" means then "in principle."

In Jude the word cannot be translated by principality. First, because it is not accompanied by *exousia* as in other places in the New Testament; secondly, the whole trend of thought in the epistle leads one to translate it by "beginning," "origin," thus: "original state." After all, the entire epistle deals with those who left their original place.

The Greek word for "dwelling" occurs only here and in 2 Corinthians 5:2 (our house which is from heaven). These angels, therefore, left the place for which God had designated them in the beginning. They left heaven as their *dwelling place*, as well as everything connected with it and all that it comprised. Some contend that the Bible nowhere says that the angels would never be allowed to come down to the earth. That argument is not valid for that is not the question here. Here it speaks of these angels leaving (and that for ever) their original dwelling place where God had put them in His creation order. The preposition "apo" before the verb signifies that they abandoned their dwelling place, leaving it for ever. The verb form (aorist) shows it to be a deed which they did once for all. The place they left was "their own" place, the place which God had specially given to the angels at creation.

These apostate angels are kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness to (*eis* - i.e. not "until" but "in view of") the judgment of the great day. The Greek word used here for "eternal" occurs only here and in Romans 1:20 (both His eternal power and divinity). "Under darkness" gives us the impression that darkness covers them entirely, thus shutting out all light. 2 Peter 2:4 says, that they have been delivered to chains of darkness. There, the place where they are kept is referred to as the abyss. This is not the place where the devil and his angels are kept for a thousand years (Rev. 20:3). For Peter calls it the "Tartarus," a name occurring nowhere else in the New Testament. It does not speak here of all the fallen angels, but only of a certain group who have fallen in a particular way, and who have already received a particular judgment. The devil and his angels, which we find from Genesis 3 till Revelation 22, have not left their dwelling place in this manner. Neither are they kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness. This proves that every creature, even the highest, falls when left to itself. Therefore are the angels who did not fall called "the elect angels" (1 Tim. 5:21).

Evidently there has been more than one fall of angels. Satan or the devil, as God's Word calls him, and his demons fell at a time before Genesis 3. They did not leave their original state in that sense and are not kept in eternal chains under darkness. Satan still had free access to God in Job's time. And Ephesians 6 tells us that he and his demons are still in heaven today. Revelation 12 tells us that they will only be cast out (thus not willingly) after we (the Church) is in heaven. He has tempted and deceived the human race since Genesis 3 and will continue to do so till Revelation 20. He has been the accuser of the brethren since Genesis 3 and this he will be as long as he has access to God, which is till Revelation 12.

Jude and Peter speak of other fallen angels. These did such terrible things that God could endure it no longer. He, therefore, has already put them in eternal chains under gloomy darkness so they can no longer practice their evil. What was their evil? They did not keep their own original state, but abandoned their own dwelling. The former is the principle, the second the fact through which the former took place.

In creation order, God gave to each creature its own place. No creature has the right to leave this place, and change that order. This is an abiding principle in God's Word (cf. Ex. 22:19; Lev. 18:22-23¹; 20:15-16). God only has the right to make changes in His own creation. This He did, when the Son of God became Man (Phil. 2; 1 Tim. 3:16). And He will do so again, when He gives the Assembly, united to Christ, a place above² the angels.

These angels left their own original state. We find this in Genesis 6. In the Old Testament, men are never called sons of God, for this name is used there for angels (cf. Job 1:6-12; 2:1). Angels are different from men. God created two men and told them to multiply (Gen. 1:28); He has made of one blood every nation of men (Acts 17:26). The angels have been created different; they neither marry nor are given in marriage (Lk. 20:36). Today there is not one angel more than God created initially. But Genesis 6 tells us that there were sons of God upon the earth during that time who had left their own dwelling place, preferring a place among men; they acted as if they were men on earth. Their deeds were entirely in conflict with God's created order. This was such open rebellion against Him, that He would no longer have the earth continue in this way. This

¹ This is one of the many proofs that the evolution theory is in contrast with God's Word and therefore wrong.

² 1 Cor. 6:3; Heb. 2:5-8; Rev. 5:6-11. Comparing Rev. 4 (where we see the Creator in connection with His creation) with Rev. 5 (where we have the result of redemption) we note how the living creatures (beasts) that in ch. 4 occupied the place of the angels (cherubim - Ezek., seraphim Isa. 6) are in ch. 5 united with the glorified saints, whereas the angels are there seen apart, as a group outside the inner circle of saints and living creatures.

was the cause of the flood. Doubtless, there was iniquity in man generally. Man was corrupt and wicked and this brought the judgment over all except Noah and his house. But besides, there was this exceptional iniquity, the terrible erosion of the bounds which mysteriously partition God's creation. In God's eyes this was so terrible that He destroyed the whole skeleton of the earthly creation, making an end of those fallen angels and the results of their actions (the giants, the heroes, men of renown), and the entire human race that was connected with them. Those fallen angels were "bound in eternal chains under darkness," so that they could no longer continue to carry men along in their terrible iniquity. The men who had joined them, are waiting in hades, in pain until the day of judgment (Lk. 16:23).

Satan and his followers exalted themselves in the pride of their hearts to God (1 Tim. 3:6; Ezek. 28:11-17). In this they differed from these angels who abased themselves in the wickedness of their heart to man, and that to man in a specially deeply fallen state. The distinction is very clear. God does not enter into details as to the evil. The divine principle of how we ought to face evil is: "But I wish you to be wise [as] to that which is good, and simple [as] to evil" (Rom. 16:19). God deals with us according to this principle. He does not tell us the details of the wickedness of the angels. What would be the value of occupation with those terrible things. We would only become more defiled by it. In Genesis 6, God's Word tells us only what is needful to show us how God's judgment will finally bring a definite punishment over the evil. Also here in Jude the judgment over these deeply fallen heavenly creatures is related to show us what the result is of such falling away, even in the case of such exalted beings. The condition of the assembly is compared with those angels who have not kept their original state, for the assembly also did not keep theirs either.

What is remarkable, is that Jude compares the behaviour, this terrible rejection of all that separates angels from man, with Sodom and Gomorrah. Is, therefore, the sin of these cities as great as of the mentioned angels? I don't believe that this is meant. But these cities committed a similar sin (although not as terrible as that of the angels) and suffered the same kind of judgment as the angels.

To be cont'd

JUDE AND SECOND PETER COMPARED

—H. L. Heijkoop

In our studies on Jude, we allude to many points of agreement between Jude and Second Peter, but also to points of significant difference. Under this heading we like to look a little closer at these things.

The two epistles have been written in the same period and deal with the same circumstances. Thus they appear to be much alike. But God never repeats anything in His Word without adding some new thoughts. Peter and Jude view the same conditions but from different perspectives. Both see the old evil creeping into the Assembly, the wicked things which had been present in former times as well. Jude views this as departure from the place God gave in His grace. He therefore limits himself, and must limit himself, to the Assembly, which had received this high place from God. Peter sees it as sin, and his view, going beyond the Assembly, covers the whole creation. Peter treats it as a question of man's responsibility before God (though in the light of Christendom), whereas Jude treats it as a question of the Assembly's relationship with God and Christ, it being the responsible bearer of the testimony under grace.

Therefore, when Jude speaks about the judgment, he doesn't go beyond the judgment of Christendom at the Lord's coming amidst His holy myriads, to execute judgment against all: and to convict all the ungodly *of them*. And speaking to the true believers, he mentioned their going to Him (vv. 21 & 24). Peter, on the other hand, goes as far as the day of the Lord, "In which the heavens will pass away with a rushing noise, and [the] elements, burning with heat, shall be dissolved, and [the] earth and the works in it shall be burnt up" (2 Pet. 3:10). The subject, then, of Jude's writing may be more limited than that of Peter, yet if we read it very closely we must notice that it has a much darker hue. To change the grace of God into lasciviousness is much more serious than the general concept of sin.

Thus we see in 2 Peter 2:1 the false teachers who deny the Master (despotes) who bought them. As we have seen, redemption is not the issue here, but having been bought. As such, all men, saved or lost, are under His authority. But Jude doesn't speak of denying only the Master, but also the Lord Jesus Christ. This can only be done by those who confess to be saved by Him, and who have accepted Him as Lord, thus by professing Christians.

In historical order, Peter gives three examples of sin and judgment from the Old Testament, but of the angels he doesn't say that they left their first state, but that they sinned, without going into details as to the character of their sin. He uses the flood as an example of a *general* judgment over a world living entirely in unrighteousness and rebellion. Then he adds the principle, that Noah the preacher of *righteousness* was saved. This principle he affirms with Sodom and Gomorrah where the *righteous* Lot was saved. Jude doesn't give an historical order but a moral order, as we have seen. He starts with the judgment over Israel that had fallen from the place of grace wherein God had placed them, a judgment not mentioned at all by Peter. Jude doesn't speak about the flood, and he does not just say that the angels sinned, but that they had left their original state. Also with Sodom and Gomorrah he points to their apostasy from the position God had once given them. In none of these three cases he speaks of the salvation of a remnant. Peter, relating in 2 Peter 2:9-10 how the Lord knows how to "keep [the] unjust to [the] day of judgment [to be] punished," describes them in words applicable not only to apostate Christians, but also to Moslems, Jews etc.

As mentioned, both speak of the old evil that reappears. But since it arises now in the Assembly, it gives those who are connected with it the character of apostates. This, Jude brings out. The flesh, bold presumption in the midst of the Assembly, ends in hard words against *Him* (v. 15). Judgment will follow it at His coming; Enoch prophesied of this.

There were in apostolic times three great roots of evil, paganism, Judaism and the gnosticism, the latter being the link between the first and the second. Gnosticism was the speculation of the human spirit about the invisible things, connected with ostensible harshness towards the flesh, by forbidding to marry, to eat meat, and such (cf. Col. 2:16-23; 1 Tim. 4:3).

Few are aware how much pagan philosophy had mixed with Judaism, or to what degree it has crept into Christianity, defiling it. Its influence, especially of the Alexandrian school, on the church fathers was terrible (e.g. Origenes). We can't read their books without being impressed by it.

In western Europe, where feelings are less speculative and less open to imagination, Christianity stayed more orthodox, though more influenced by Judaism. Yet it was not entirely kept from paganistic influences: i.e. the worship of saints and angels, a ban on marriage and on eating certain foods. Besides these, emphasis was put on human righteousness by good works and observance of rituals, which in fact deny the grace and authority of the Lord. All elements of Paganism, Judaism and Gnosticism can be found here and, though their complete development is still restricted, they are ready to reveal themselves openly when God removes the restraint.

Today we are hardly aware what a deliverance the reformation was. But protestantism has lost its moral power. It has turned to unbelief. The light that rejected the old Pagan-Gnostic-Jewish system, has become darkness. And since it has absorbed elements of this old evil, it turns, for want of inner strength, back to it, as a dog turns back to his own vomit (e.g. the Back-to-Rome movement).

THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH (2)

—A. v. d. Kammer

A Christian is called out of darkness to His wonderful light; the disciples were told: "Ye are the light of the world" (Mt. 5:14). Can God dwell and walk in our midst when we are connected with unrighteousness, darkness, Belial, unbelievers, or idols? Can *God* join Himself to these? If not, can *we* be connected with them, when we have God in our hearts? How little do many children of God think about it that the association of believers with unbelievers or with things and organizations of men and of unbelief is a connection of the name of the Lord with unrighteousness. The Lord therefore commands that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord, withdraws from unrighteousness (2 Tim. 2:19). For a serious child of God who values the blessing of fellowship with the Father, there is only one way, the God-appointed way: "Come out from the midst of them... and touch not [what is] unclean"!

It hurts deeply to see that many children of God do not love such words from Scripture (Jer. 6:10). Inevitably, as soon as someone dares to put the finger on such requirements of the Lord, voices of protest and unwill are heard speaking of "lack of love and narrow-mindedness." But why are such words in Scripture so little loved? Don't they belong to the Scriptures? Did not the Lord speak them? Especially here (2 Cor. 6:16-18), we are told twice that the Lord pronounced them! Shouldn't we then pay all the more attention to them? Isn't it better to experience the truth than to be contradicting the Word of the Lord?

Why do children of God avoid such words of the Lord? Oh, often it is because they feel that words like these touch their consciences and increase their responsibility. That's it! To distinguish His will requires obedience, and many want to avoid this.

Behind all this, however, stands the enemy who does not want to let the people of God go. Through Pharaoh's behaviour we learn to know the behaviour of the enemy when the departure of the believer from among the unbelievers is demanded. That demand was as unpleasant to him then as it is now. What tricks did he use, and with what slyness did he seek to hinder the people to leave the land. With no less deception and tricks he seeks today to twist the straight paths of the Lord to hinder the believers in implementing the separation between believers and unbelievers.

Shall I mention a few of his *deceptive remarks*? He tells you: "You can't look in someone else's heart, so you can't know at all who is a believer and who is an unbeliever." Or he comes with this one: "You are not about to fall into spiritual pride, considering yourself to be better and holier than others, so that you can separate yourself, are you?" Others he approaches with: "Our sacred customs, worship services, institutions, laws, and associations have proven to be good and useful for many years now. What harm could be in them?" Another of his favorites is: "When you separate yourself, your work for the Lord is finished. Among the unbelievers you have much better opportunity to win them for the Lord." And he has many more of these besides (Mt. 4:1-11).

Such deceptive words are as old as the Garden of Eden, they are just as cleverly devised as those to which Eve fell victim. It is depressingly sad and it drives one to tears to note that children of God readily take up such hollow arguments, echoing them thoughtlessly. Let us take a closer look at these arguments, starting with the first one.

The unknown Heart

True, we cannot look into the heart of anyone, but that we can, therefore, not know who is an unbeliever is a lie. This way of mixing truth and lie characterizes the speech of the serpent. The lie without an additive of truth would be easily recognized as deception by a child of God, therefore it is mixed with truth, and often with the highest and most precious truths. Most heresies to which the children of God have fallen prey have first been "smuggled" into their hearts because they were hidden in precious truths. We must avoid literature in which truths and heresies are mixed! (Ps. 93:5).

But let us return to the first objection. Let me ask you, if you are a child of God, having received the Holy Spirit: Can't you distinguish believers from unbelievers? Children of God who utter such things don't realize that they thereby deny the entire Scripture, for it makes constantly this distinction. Were the apostles allowed to say that the Thessalonians were converted, although no one could look another in the heart? And how can God tell us to love *the brethren*, and even that we have to give our lives for *the brethren* (1 Jn. 3:16), if we, according to such argument, cannot know the brothers at all? No, we should not look in the heart to distinguish an unbeliever, but the Lord has said, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Mt. 7:16-20). That is the distinguishing mark we have been given. *God* knows the heart of everyone, but *we* know the tree by its *fruits*.

Today we hardly need to look at the fruits. Most people readily confess to be unbelievers. The night of unbelief has become so dark in the Christ-rejecting Christendom, that they say it without blushing. We don't refer to prostitutes, drunkards, and blasphemers, but to pious and honourably walking Church members; those who are still interested in religion openly confess that they put a question mark behind the birth and resurrection of Christ and that He is for them no longer the eternal Son of God. Can you really not know them? What are you then going to do with the divine command from heaven: "Go out from among her, My people, and do not have fellowship with her sins and do not receive of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4).

Perhaps someone will say: But you forget that Christendom around us is not the "Church of God," but that they are the "*churches of the people*"! Precisely therefore! The churches of God are not the churches of the people, and these in turn are not the churches of God. Tell me, what concord has a child of God with such an association? "What part has a believer with an unbeliever?... For you are the temple of the living God... therefore go out of the midst of them... and I will accept thee... says the Lord" (Rev. 3:15-22).

Do you do this with readiness of heart or reluctantly? The answer your heart gives to this question tells unmistakably how your relationship with the Lord is. Suppose you have a daughter and you become aware that she is living in the house of bad people. You go to her and you say: "You better leave, I will take you in." Will she understand what you mean? And when you talk a little more with her and tell her that she belongs with you in the parental home rather than in the house of these people, would she not realize the truth of your words? If, however, you notice that she does not willingly, but grudgingly, or

reluctantly accept your invitation, how would you feel then, what would you say then? Thus our attitude gives the Lord the answer how our heart is towards Him and His Word. How must it have cheered God to see Abraham when "he went, as the Lord had commanded him."

To be cont'd

OUTLINES FOR BIBLE TEACHING (20)

41. MOSES AND AARON DENIED ENTRY TO PROMISED LAND. THE SERPENT OF BRASS. — Numbers 20:1-21:9 (see 2 Ki. 18:4; Jn. 3:14-15)

Outline

1. Moses' Fall at Meribah Num. 20:1-13
2. The Death of Aaron Num. 20:22-29
3. The Serpent of Brass Num. 21:4-9

Explanation

1. Past judgments had not brought Israel to their senses; they murmured against Moses and God, this time because of lack of water (Ps. 95:7-11). It became the cause of Moses' and Aaron's fall (Ps. 106:32,33).
2. As punishment, Moses and Aaron could not enter the land; the latter died on Mount Hor.
3. Israel was close to the land of blessing, but a new trial came. Israel murmured and longed to be back in the land of death and slavery, and tempted God (Ps. 78:35-37; 1 Cor. 10:9, 10). The fiery serpents came as God's judgment.

Lesson

In type the rock, Christ (1 Cor. 10:4), had already been smitten once (Ex. 17:5-6); it was not to be smitten again (Heb. 9:26-28). A word of faith spoken in connection with the rod of the priesthood (Aaron's rod, which had budded was a type of the resurrection of Christ) would have been sufficient to give the people water. Now the believer can speak with the risen Christ about his failures and needs; there is no need for Christ to suffer, shed His blood and become a sacrifice again.

The serpent of brass is a picture of Christ upon the cross (Jn. 3:14). Just as a look upon the serpent was sufficient then, so a look upon the Lord suffices for salvation today (Isa. 45:22).

42. BALAAM, THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET — Numbers 21:21-24:25

Outline

1. The victory over the Amorites Num. 21:21-35
2. Balak sends for Balaam Num. 22:1-19
3. Balaam goes to Balak Num. 22:20-35
4. Balaam's four prophecies Num. 23:1-24:25

Explanation

1. Allied with God, Israel was strong.
2. Balak, king of Moab, recognized that a higher, invisible power was fighting for Israel and wanted such help for himself. Balaam, a heathen seer (prophet) and sorcerer, living near the Euphrates, was to come and curse Israel.
3. Though Balaam had a certain knowledge of God and wanted to serve Him, his heart was not upright, but divided between God and Mammon. God warned him for his own soul's sake (1 Tim. 2:3,4) as well as for Israel's sake, seeking to prevent his going (2 Pet. 2:15, 16).
4. God, not allowing anyone to curse His weak people, changed the curse into blessing. He loved His people, small and unthankful as they might be (Dt. 23:5; Neh. 13:2). Israel knew nothing of Balak's designs, but God was watching and held His hand outstretched over them (Rom. 8:3 1).

Lesson

No foe can withstand God's people (Ps. 59:9-10; 91:4, 15). Rewards blind and corrupt (1 Tim. 6:10; Josh. 13:22). The four blessings and promises of Balaam show us:

- a. The complete separation of Israel (Num. 23:9).
- b. Israel's complete justification (Num. 23:21).
- c. The beauty and fruitfulness of Israel (Num. 24:5-7).
- d. The Lord Jesus as King over Israel (Num. 24:17).

To be cont'd

THE OLD PROPHET OF BETHEL (1 Ki. 13)

—*W R. Dronsfield*

Introduction

This is one of those stories in the Bible, I think one would call it a strange story. If any of you are Sunday School teachers, I perhaps would advise you not to tell it to the children, because the result will be that, after the story has been told, they will turn to you, and they will say, "It wasn't fair. The man of God should not have been killed by the lion. It should have been the old prophet of Bethel. It was his fault, not the fault of the man of God."

Children have a great sense of justice, but sometimes they are wrong, and in this case they are wrong. They have underestimated, of course, the greatness of God, that when God speaks He should be obeyed; and it doesn't matter who else tells us something different - we still should go on obeying the voice of God as we hear it. That is the lesson of this particular story. Also we learn from it that God does not change His mind. If God speaks, then it must take place. He can change His dealing with man. That's because men change and men fail. So, He brings in new things; but so far as the principles go, these do not change. And if we find something from the Word that we have to obey, then we should obey it, no matter how godly a person he might be who tells us that it is not so and that we should do something else. That is the moral of the story. But I would just like to speak a little more about it in greater depth.

One Sad Story

Perhaps it would be a good idea just to remind ourselves of the background, of what had happened before this incident took place. The ten tribes, you remember, had rebelled against Rehoboam and under Jeroboam, whom they made their King, they had settled down as a separate kingdom. Only two remained loyal to the line of David — to Rehoboam.

But still, of course, the temple of God was at Jerusalem, and it was God's strict instruction that sacrifices should be made at Jerusalem, at the altar and the temple of God. But when Jeroboam realized that, he said, "This is not at all a good thing. When the people from the ten tribes go down to Jerusalem to worship, their hearts will be drawn away back to the line of David, and before I know where I am, I shall be deposed, and they will be back to where they were before under Rehoboam." So, as a political expedient, he introduced other things. He arranged that two altars should be set up, one at Bethel, which means "House of God," and the other up in the north in the tribe of Dan. He made and set up golden calves by the altars; and said to the children of Israel, "These are the gods that brought you out of Egypt"; and he commanded they should worship there at those altars. This reminds us rather of what happened when Aaron set up a golden calf. Do you remember? He set up a golden calf because the people said, "We don't know where Moses has gone," and they were pressing him. They compelled him, and he weak-mindedly gave in and made the golden calf; and he said those very same words: "These are the gods that brought thee out of Egypt." Now Aaron did not intend to make the people actually turn away from Jehovah altogether, because the very next thing he says is, "Tomorrow is a feast unto Jehovah." He intended that they should somehow worship Jehovah with the aid of this golden calf. I do not know why a golden calf should have been representative of Jehovah in the minds of Aaron and of Jeroboam.

But even in the case of Jeroboam, he didn't intend the children of Israel to divorce themselves completely from the worship of Jehovah. Not at that time. He wanted them to worship Jehovah their God in those two centres which he had set up. When it says, "These are the gods that brought thee out of Egypt," remember that the word there in the Hebrew is "Elohim," translated "the gods." It's the plural number, very often used as meaning God Himself. "This is Elohim which has brought you out of Egypt." I think he merely intended them to worship Jehovah in those places, but the point is that he got the centres wrong. The centre Jehovah had set up was in Jerusalem, and he had set up two new centres — a sin which led to other sins. It led to complete idolatry later; but God said Jeroboam's sin was abominable to Him. And of every king of the ten tribes after that — not one was counted as being a good king that did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, although some of them did worship Jehovah.

Now Jehu was a case in point. He said, "Come, see my zeal for Jehovah." He really was zealous for Jehovah or thought he was; but when he did become king, he wouldn't change that which was set up by Jeroboam. He merely continued in the sin of Jeroboam whereby Jeroboam had made Israel to sin. So, we read that Jehu's heart was not right in the sight of God, and later on it led to worse things in Jehu's life.

The children of Israel were not turned away from their God so easily as that. Many still remained worshippers of Jehovah in the land of Israel, but they no longer came down to Jerusalem to worship as God had told them to do. There were 7,000 that hadn't bowed their knee to Baal in the time of Elijah later on. And I could mention other cases of godly men. For example, there was that vineyard, Naboth's vineyard. Naboth was a godly man. Many others were godly in Israel in that time, but every one of them had been made to sin in this, that they did not go down to Jerusalem to worship.

As soon as Jeroboam set up this altar in the wrong place, this man of God was sent down by Jehovah to cry against it, to proclaim that it was an abomination in the sight of the Lord. And you may say, "Why did a man of God come all the way from Judah to say that, when God had a prophet that He had used in His service for a long time? He was an old prophet. There he was in Bethel, just there at hand. God could have called him to just take a few steps, as it were, and go cry to that altar, and that, no doubt, he would have done. But God did not use the old prophet at Bethel, because the old prophet was himself defiled. He was in that land, in that place where the centre of worship had been changed. So, God desired a man who was undefiled by these things to come all the way from Judah in order to proclaim His message.

And God gave strict instructions to the man of God that he was to have no fellowship in that land at all. He wasn't to eat bread or drink water with anyone there. He wasn't even to return by the same path from which he had come, in case somebody might recognize him on the way and he might have fellowship with those he had passed previously. He was to go an entirely different route back from the altar of Bethel. Well, when King Jeroboam was healed in his hand, he saw that he could not do anything against this man of God because God was with him. So, he sought to get him to his side and he asked him to come and partake of his hospitality at his home. The man of God had absolutely no difficulty in refusing this temptation, and he told King Jeroboam that even if he were given half of his house, he wouldn't do such a thing as that, for God had told him that he must not eat bread or drink water in that place.

So he went on his way, obeying God so far; and he went a different way back from that from which he had come. Then we read about the old prophet of Bethel, how that old prophet heard there was man of God in the land. No doubt the old prophet's heart went after that man of God. He wanted fellowship with him, because they both were servants of Jehovah; and

so he felt it was most fitting that that man of God should come to him and have hospitality. He sent his sons off to invite the man of God to his house.

We read of the terrible thing that happened. The man of God said, No, he wasn't allowed to; he had been told he was to have no fellowship with that place or anyone in it. And then the old prophet said, "Ah, but I am a prophet, the same as you are." He was an old prophet. He had a lot more experience in the ways of God than his young one had. He said, "Last night an angel of God came down to me and spoke to me and told me that I had to invite you back home to have my hospitality," and when the man of God heard that, he believed him. He didn't think, "Why hasn't God told me, seeing that I was told directly by God that I must not do this thing? Why hasn't God told me of this change in His instructions?" He didn't say that. He just believed the old prophet, I suppose because he wanted to. That really is the reason, isn't it? He was hungry and thirsty, and so he wanted to believe this old prophet, and he turned aside and partook of his hospitality.

You read how the old prophet had to prophesy against himself and declare that because the man of God — he is still called the man of God — had disobeyed the word of the Lord, he would not return to the land of his fathers or to the sepulchre of his fathers. In other words, he would die before he reached there.

God's Centre Today

Now that is a very sad story, but it has a lesson for us today, and I want to just bring it before us as well as I can. Jeroboam had set up a centre of worship which was not the true centre. God regarded it as such a serious matter and had given the man of God these strict instructions, because God's centre of worship in those days foreshadowed Christ. The very first centre of worship was Shiloh, which actually is the name of the Messiah. Then the Lord's anointed, David, came in and Shiloh was discarded because of failure, and the centre was set up in Zion, where the ark of the Lord was placed. God regarded it as a very serious thing when they departed from the true centre of worship where the ark, which spoke of Christ, was.

But today in Christendom we see this very same sin recurring. The true centre of worship today is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is the true centre of gathering. We read of the spiritual house, and how we as living stones come to the Living Stone which is Christ Himself; and we are, therefore, built up a spiritual house around Him, as it were, He being the foundation stone. He is the Centre of the Assembly, the House of God.

And when we look at church truth, the Church is likened to a body. The Head of that body is Christ, and we are to hold the Head in heaven. There is no other head given to us as Head of the body - only the Head in heaven. No earthly head! No man or anything else is set up as the Head of the body, the Head of the Church - only the Lord Jesus Christ. And there is a unity in that body, the unity which comes from Christ Himself, Christ from whom the whole body is fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, as we read in Ephesians. That unity is the unity of the Spirit.

The Church of God is not an organization. It is an organism. It is a living thing, and the Holy Spirit is the means, the power of that unity which is in the Church of God.

And so it is even today in God's eyes. God sees the Church of God, which consists of every member of His body, every true believer in this world, as a living thing, the Body of Christ. In His eyes it still is so. But men have turned aside from this truth, which God values so much.

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