

THE MINOR PROPHETS (8)

—R. Been, Sr.

Hosea 2

The Door of Hope

Say unto your brethren Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah. Plead with your mother, plead, for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband (v. 1-2a).

These words show that there was already a remnant in Hosea's days, Israelites who had "ears to hear." The prophet encourages these faithful ones to plead with their "mother," the people to which they belonged. These people are *Lo-Ruhamah* (not-favoured) and *Lo-Ammi* (not My people). But the remnant must be called *Ruhamah* and *Ammi*. The word "Lo" is not applicable to them, they are favoured and the people of God.

It is as if the prophet wants to say by this encouragement that it was then already possible to realize the remnant character. Then, and in the future, there were, and there will be, faithful Israelites who will know each other as belonging to the favoured ones (*Ruhamah*) and to the people of God (*Ammi*). God is their God. We cannot help but think of "Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom we have also access by faith into this favour in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1-2).

Just as there was a remnant in the dark days of Ahab who had not bent the knee for Baal, so there was in the days of Hosea. Even in the darkest times, God kept always a testimony for His Name. So there are in our days those who are faithful, who keep the Word and do not deny the Name of the Lord.

The words "brothers" and "sisters" cause us to think of the Lord Jesus during His stay on earth. The leaders of the Jews declared of Him that He cast out demons through the prince of the demons. The nation rejected Him. Leaders and people revealed themselves as *Lo-Ruhamah*, as *LoAmmi*, the not-favoured and no longer of God acknowledged people. But even in those days there were some untaught, simple persons who sought and followed Jesus. Once, when the Lord spoke to a large crowd and His mother and brothers sought to speak to Him, someone said to Him, "Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren are standing without, seeking to speak to Thee." In response He stretched out His hand over His disciples saying, "Behold My mother and My brethren; for whosoever shall do the will of My Father who is in [the] heavens, *he is My brother, and sister, and mother*" (Mt. 12:46-50). Now that He was rejected, He broke the tie that joined Him as Israelite through His mother and brethren to the Jewish nation. From now on they who listened to Him and followed Him were the members of His "family."

The remnant of Hosea's days had a *calling*, just as the faithful ones have today. They had to plead with their mother, with the nation of which the remnant itself was a part, but from which they were separated *in a moral sense*. This separation is expressed in the names. That nation, the mother, is *Lo-Ruhamah* and *Lo-Ammi*. But the remnant is called: *Ruhamah* and *Ammi*.

Actually it was Jehovah Himself who pleaded with His unfaithful people. But the faithful ones are called to plead also, for it is pleasing to the Lord when they follow the same line of conduct. When God testifies against the evil, then they, His faithful ones, must do this too.

The remnant could only plead, testifying against the evil in a suitable and humble way; their testimony was to be supported and strengthened by their separating from the evil that was found among the people. These "brothers" and "sisters" could not go further than that. They had to separate from the principles of the world, from all kinds of idolatry, and while departing from unrighteousness, call upon the name of the Lord. The faithful ones of our days ought to do the same (2 Tim. 2:19).

All else they had to leave to God. The Lord would deal with His sinful and guilty people according to His unimpeachable holiness and righteousness, but also according to His faithfulness and love. This was not their task, they had but to testify.

Verses 2b-3.

Again the nation of the ten tribes is warned in symbolical language to do away with their idolatry. If they didn't, it would be stripped naked, which means, it would come again in the condition in which it was when it was just born. The prophet Ezekiel describes this condition when God had not yet turned to Jerusalem, the representative of the entire nation of twelve tribes (Ezek. 16:1-14). She descended from the gentiles, it had been an unclean city. She is compared to a newborn baby for whom no one cared. No one had compassion on her. But when God passed by and saw her misery, He had compassion over her. He had done everything for her; He had caused her to live and to flourish and He had brought her to greatness. He had entered into a covenant with her, she had become His city. He had given her treasures and great privileges. Ten things are mentioned with which He had clothed and adorned her, all in symbolical language. The fame of her glory and beauty went out among the gentiles; they were perfect, for it was glory given her by Jehovah.

Through the sins of the people, both of the ten and of the two tribes, much of this glory had already been lost in the days of Hosea. But if the people would not listen now, they would fall back into the condition in which the Lord had found them long ago. They would sink into idolatry with all its awfulness and degeneration, devoid of all divine privileges and blessings in every respect: "stripped naked."

Verses 4-5.

God would not have mercy over the children of Jerusalem for they were children of whoredoms. The people had acted shamefully. They ran after idolatry, more so because they thought it gave a political as well as a material advantage. They believed that the idols of their powerful neighbours, like Egypt and Assyria, were more generous than Jehovah, and supposed that these idols were better equipped to secure a good harvest. How repugnant is this "running after," and how suitable is the picture of an immoral woman in verse 4. Israel had tasted the love and care of Jehovah when He delivered it out of Egypt and it followed the Lord in the desert (Jer. 2:1-3). It lost this love and care when it went after "the lovers." It will find this love and care back in the distant future through conversion and humiliation. The prophet Ezekiel tells us that especially the idolatry of Egypt and Assyria had been followed by Israel (Ezek. 16:26, 28-29).

Verses 6-9.

The Lord, however, would close off the way to the "lovers." Perhaps through political or economic causes. Then Israel would decide to return to the "first husband" for then it was better than now. We should not think that this speaks of repentance on the part of the people. Only purely material considerations filled the people, and caused them to return to the service of the Lord. It was simply because the advantages of the "lovers" were beyond their reach.

This description of Israel's condition is applicable to those who are Christians in name only. They seek the world, its advantages, its riches and prosperity, the pleasant existence, without seeking after God. If these advantages are for one reason or the other no longer attainable then the inclination grows to return to "religion." The prodigal had entirely different motives for his return.

Israel failed to realize that it was Jehovah who had given the corn, the wine and the oil, that He had multiplied the gold and silver. They had used all to serve Baal. Therefore He would take all these things from them, so that they might learn to be dependent upon Him. The heart of the people did not yet abhor idols. They didn't understand what demonical powers stood behind these images of wood and stone.

Verses 10-13.

Israel's "lovers" would come to see her foolishness and impiety. None of them would be able to deliver them. Everything would be taken from the nation. No longer there would be feasts, new moons, sabbaths, or solemnities. All mirth would cease. Vine and fig-tree, obtained from the idolatrous countries, the "rewards the lovers had given," would be desolated. That would be their punishment for their serving the idols and forgetting Jehovah.

And so it will happen to so-called Christendom. The outward religious forms, mixed with various forms of superstition, image worship, and worldliness, have remained with us till the present day. But soon these will be swallowed up by a general apostasy, followed by an unsparing judgment that will also affect the material things that so many have gone after.

Verses 14-17.

In these verses God opens a *door of hope* for the remnant of the ten tribes among whom Hosea mostly served; it is a vista full of grace. The Lord will bring this remnant into the wilderness of the nations, where there is nothing that can satisfy their Israelitish hearts. But He does not do this to forget them for ever. No, He does it for their salvation. Through the mighty working of the Spirit of God this remnant will one day become *hungry*, and come to itself, and arise and begin the long journey to their country. This journey will be long, for they have gone astray so far. Their proud heart will be entirely broken, their spirit entirely crushed. There in the wilderness of the nations, among whom they have been scattered through their sins, God will speak words to them that will touch their broken hearts and crushed spirits.

Once God had said of this nation, "Israel is My son, My firstborn" (Ex. 4:22). But Israel has become a lost son, a prodigal. But when this son returns with confession, what will he find? This question is answered in verses 15-17. He will find a fulness of blessing, just as the prodigal in Luke 15 found a heart full of love and a hand full of blessings.

The valley of Achor calls Ai to mind, the city that could not be conquered by Israel because there was a curse in the camp. Achan had stolen cursed property, and a great heap of stones still points to the place where God's judgment came over the thief (Josh. 7:25-26). This valley was therefore the place where, for the first time after the entering into the land, judgment had been executed over the nation. But in the future this valley of Achor, this valley of "trouble," will become a *door of hope* to the remnant of Israel. There it will find an all-surpassing grace of God and the choicest blessings.

The first of these blessings is joy, true joy in the Lord. The remnant will sing of the deliverance of the Lord in the valley of Achor, just as Israel once, "in the days of her youth," sang of the deliverance out of Egypt at the shore of the Red Sea. What a change for the remnant!

But the remnant will also regain her special relationship with God: it will call Jehovah again "My Husband." This is not a new relationship with God, but the old one, the one that the nation had lost through its unfaithfulness. Idolatry will no more be found with the remnant. Baal will never again be lord and master over them. The very memory of idols will be gone.

For the people of Israel as a whole, however, there will not be a "door of hope," nor will there be for Christendom. Isaiah speaks very clearly of a *remnant* that will return and of a judgment that is determined over the nation as a whole (Isa. 10:22). Although the nation of the ten tribes will prepare itself to return to the country, it will not get there; only the remnant will (Ezek. 20:38).

To be cont'd

THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH (3)

—A. v. d. Kammer

Spiritual Pride?

Now let us look at the second objection, the one of sickly *spiritual pride* and considering oneself to be better.

If a believer would separate himself because he feels himself better and holier than another, it would be terrible pharisaism. For the Lord does not demand our separation because we are better, but because He desires that we are connected with Him and He with us. With a "therefore" the Lord gives us in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 very clearly *the reasons for separation*. He says: "Be not diversely yoked with unbelievers":

1. "For what participation [is there] between righteousness and lawlessness... what consent of Christ with Beliar?..."
2. "For ye are [the] living God's temple.
3. "Wherefore come out from the midst of them."

With the first "for" God expresses that there is no connection between Him and unrighteousness, lawlessness, darkness, Beliar, unbelievers, and idol images. With the second "for" He shows us that if *we* are connected with them, we connect *Him* with them, because He dwells within us as *His temple*. And then the imperative conclusion of *His demand* follows,

"Wherefore come out from the *midst* of them, and be separated, says [the] Lord, and touch not [what is] unclean, and I will receive you." Could God speak more clearly? If you are sincerely minded to possess the truth and to follow it, ask yourself: "Is it so difficult to understand?" Note the lessons in the Old Testament. Abraham had to leave his parental home, not because he was better or holier than the other family members, but because God desired to accept him and bless him.

Israel was just as sinful a nation as the Egyptians and it came just as well under the judgment of God for its sins as they. Why then did God demand the departure, if it was not purer? Right! Because God wanted to join the nation to Himself and to reconcile it to Himself by the blood of the perfect Lamb. On the basis of "being better" the nation had no right to separate itself. But *God made* the separation. He said to Pharaoh, "I will put a separation between My people and thy people" (Ex. 8:23). He demanded the separation, the people just had to go. Because of what *we* are we have certainly no right to separate ourselves. But when *God* establishes the separation, demanding it because of what *He* is and His having united us *to Himself* on the basis of the blood, then we go on His command, or we are disobedient and resist His will (Heb. 2:1-4; 12:25-29).

God does not only want the confession of our lips, He wants us *to take a clear stand*. Do you confess to belong to the *Lord* rather than to the world? Did you ever give it any thought what this means? Do you confess to have another "Lord" than the world and yet maintain your connections with the world? You claim that the unbeliever is under the power and authority of the "prince of the world," whereas you are under the "Prince of life"; is there a connection between these two "princes"? If not, then can there be a connection between the subjects of these two princes? "What concord has Christ with Beliar, God with the devil"? There is just as little agreement in these cases as there is between believers and unbelievers. "What fellowship," so the Lord asks, "[is there] between light and darkness?" "What part for a believer along with an unbeliever?"

Do you confess that Christ is your *Lord*? Then be not joined to anything that requires concessions to be made to this "prince" and his people, or that does not allow the Word of *your* Lord to be the only deciding factor. Our connections can only be with His people, "with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22). The Lord says "from these turn away" who are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; having a form of piety but denying the power of it" (2 Tim. 3:4-5).

Good Traditions?

Now we come to the third objection, which claims that there would not be any evil in the good, centuries-old religious institutions and traditions. It is not a question of how old, how good, how useful they are, but whether what happens in the house of *God* has been given and is commanded by God. If God did not order us to do so, then what right and what value do these traditions and laws have? Where did they come from if they did not come from God? Who ordered them if God didn't? Can we serve God the way we want to? Are we allowed to arrange and regulate the things in His house, in His Assembly the way we want to, or as they seem good and useful to us? Didn't God Himself establish how we should serve and worship Him? We establish the order in *our house* and God has determined, and set the order in *His* house. We feel it as an encroachment upon our rights when someone prescribes other rules in *our* house; and so God feels it as an encroachment upon *His* rights if we depart from *His* rules, introducing other things. If this is the case with these traditions, then it is certainly evil (2 Tim. 2:20-21).

Often one can hear it being said, These things have been taught and accepted as correct for more than a hundred years, they must be right. Are they? The Roman Catholic Church teaches things that are older than a thousand years, does that make them right? The truth of God is mixed with so many theories of men that pretty well all of us have, from our young years on, been fed to a smaller or greater degree with corrupt theories. Therefore we must with all questions return to the Scriptures. The Scriptures alone are "divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching (of the will of God), for conviction (in case of contradiction), for correction (in case of departure of the will of God), for instruction in righteousness" (about all things - 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Scriptures are the only authority that is deciding in all questions, making an end of *every* contradiction.

When God called His people back, He showed Ezekiel the plans for His house in which He wanted to dwell and He told him, "Shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be confounded at their iniquities; and let them *measure the pattern*. And if they be confounded at all that they have done, make known to them the form of the house, and its fashion, and its goings out, and its comings in.... and write it in their sight, that they may keep the *whole* form thereof, and *all* the statutes thereof, *and do them*" (Ezek. 43: 10-11). The Lord thought it so important, that Ezekiel had to write it "in their sight," so that they might do all things accurately.

That is what we have to do as well. We too want to "inspect" the pattern of His Assembly as He has caused it to be written for us in the Scriptures, so that we may be "confounded and measure the pattern." *This pattern must stand* continuously before our eyes, so that we continuously compare and measure, whether the "fashion," "the entrances," "the exits," "the entire form" and appearance of the assembly to which we belong is according to the pattern.

Let us measure a few important traditions and see if they agree with the building God has set before us. Let us listen to Scripture!

1. *Who are the members of the assembly?*

Scripture tells us that it is those who the Lord has added by new birth, faith and sealing with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:41-42; 5:13-14), it is those who are the "saints in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:1-2). Do we practice this? Do we today also add others to the assembly than those who have come to Christ in living faith and who bear the seal of the Spirit? If so, then the "entrances" have been widened. And if unbelievers belong to it as well and are members of it, then Scripture still does not allow believers to be under one yoke with unbelievers who have become known as such by their fruits.

2. *How do they practice the ministry of God's Word?*

Scripture says that the *Lord* gave to the Assembly evangelists, shepherds and teachers (Eph. ph. 4: 11), that He divides the "gifts" whereby the assembly is edified, as *He pleases*, and that there must be *liberty* for the working of the Spirit of God and the free exercise of the gifts (1 Cor. 12 and 14). Do we practice this? If in the place of the *free exercise* of the Holy Spirit clergymen are found and a *class* of ministers has been established; if, rather than the Lord giving the shepherds, teachers, and evangelists, men prepare themselves for this through study; or if they are appointed by men (frequently not even born-again believers), then these are changes in the ordinances of God that are wrong.¹ And the Lord says, "Let every one who names the name of [the] Lord withdraw from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19).

3. *How is discipline maintained in the assembly?*

Scripture says, "Remove the wicked person from amongst yourselves" (1 Cor. 5:2, 11-13). Do we practice this? Are fornicators, drunkards, covetous persons, and those who live in sin removed from the midst of the assembly, or is this house order not maintained?

4. *How is the Lord's Supper kept?*

The Lord gave His Supper only to His disciples, that they might celebrate it "in remembrance of Him." And Scripture speaks of "one loaf, one body; for we all partake of that one loaf" (1 Cor. 10 & 11). If the Lord's Supper is something else than "in remembrance" of the Lord, and when other persons take part of it than those who are marked by the Holy Spirit as members of the "one body," then these are changes in the ordinances of the *Lord* that are wrong and wicked, and which have nothing in common with believers, disciples of the Lord.

5. *What place has the Word of God?*

Scripture tells us that, having been inspired by God, it is our light and teacher for the way. It is the outfit and authority for the "man of God" (1 Tim. 3:15-17). When "traditions and ordinances of man" are allowed to have a say in the house of God and the *Word of God alone* is no longer decisive, then the ground of Scripture has been left and the foundation given up.

Just for once test these five points *against Scripture* to see if you find yourself in: (1) an assembly with a mixture of believers and unbelievers; (2) one which often pays even unbelievers to conduct their "service"; or (3) one that permits those in their midst who live in sin; and further (4) an assembly in which the Lord's Supper is celebrated "for forgiveness of the sins of believers" together with unbelievers; and (5) one in which not the Word of God alone, but also the traditions and ordinances of man are decisive.

¹ *When Scripture speaks of "ministers" it does so to indicate the activity, but it never uses the word to indicate a class or as a title. Just because we have received a gift of grace does not give us the right to make it into a dignity, a class, or a title for ourselves (Rom. 10: 14; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; 2 Pet. 2:5).*

There are children of God who truly deplore these things, but they resist and don't allow the root that produces such fruits to be touched. However, deploring does not produce a cure; the root must be exposed. The wound must be touched if there is to be healing. We cannot withdraw from the light of the Word. It tests us, not in the points wherein God's Word and men are in agreement, but wherein they depart from each other. There where the will of God and the activities of men are in conflict, *there* it is tested whose side we are on. There is no neutral position; God loathes that (Rev. 3:15-16).

Let us earnestly search His Word.

To be cont'd

THOUGHT

And he appointed twelve that they might be with him, and that he might send them to preach. (Mark 3:14)

In our day, stress is generally laid upon work and service for the Lord rather than upon the cultivation of spiritual life. In this we have another example of the way in which our thinking is often contrary to the principles and illustrations found in the Scriptures.

Our service would be so much more effective and fruitful if we remembered that first He ordained us to be with Him.

Source: The Lord is Near, Oct. 23, 1984.

JUDE (8)

—H. L. Heijkoop

As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them, committing greedily fornication, in like manner with them, and going after other flesh, lie there as an example, undergoing the judgment of eternal fire (v. 7).

This example differs from the first two in this, that here only the evil and the judgment are mentioned, but not the first state wherein they were placed through grace. According to Deuteronomy 29:23, the surrounding cities were Admah and Zeboim. Zoar, which was also there, was saved upon Lot's request (Gen. 19:18-23). The Greek expression for "committing greedily fornication" conveys the idea that they did so to the uttermost, without any reservations. "Other flesh," is flesh of a different kind, different from what God had decreed. In case of the angels it was females of the human race. In Sodom and its surrounding cities, it was the unnatural things of Romans 1:27 as we read in Genesis 19, and *all* men joined in.

According to some, the "in like manner *with them*" would refer to Sodom and Gomorrah. The sense then would be, that the surrounding cities committed fornication and went after other flesh just as these two. Others, however, say it refers to the dreamers of verse 8.

In Wuest's opinion, the only solution that does justice to the grammar, is that it looks back² to verse 6. In view of the context, this appears correct to me, otherwise the initial "*as*," which expressly links this sentence with verse 6, would become very weak. Besides, the whole middle part of the sentence, speaking of fornication and going after other flesh, would no longer have any significance. And I don't believe that God's Word contains things without definite purpose. Reading the arguments of those who apply "*with them*" to Sodom and Gomorrah, one gets the impression that they *want* to see it that way, otherwise they are forced to acknowledge that verse six refers back to Genesis 6. That they definitely don't want!

The sense is, therefore, that Sodom and Gomorrah with the cities around them, who sinned in like manner as the angels of verse 6 (doing sins of the same character), lie there as an example (visible to everyone, in contrast with the fallen angels, of whom we know only through revelation) of God's penalty for departing from the God-given place. And this penalty is the "undergoing the judgment of eternal fire." That Sodom and Gomorrah are an example of the undergoing the judgment of eternal fire becomes very clear when we compare Genesis 19:24 with Revelation 20:10. God rained

² This is confirmed by the Expositor's Greek Testament, The Expositor's Bible, Alford, Gaebelein, and others. Alford mentions also: Arnaud, Augusti, De Wette, Herder, Huther, Lachman, Lud.-Cappel, Schneckenger, and Stier.

brimstone and fire on these cities, and hell is called the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 19:20, 21:8). I once read the following description of the Dead Sea: "In its basin high temperatures prevail and vapours rise up continually into an impenetrable mist, sometimes in pillars of clouds resembling smoke. This is presumably caused by hot fountains in the sea bottom, and can easily cause one to think of underground fire."

In these verses we can, I believe, see the following moral order:

Verse 5 - unbelief.

Verse 6 - rejection of God's authority: disobedience.

Verse 7 - giving free rein to the lusts of the flesh.

Repeatedly we find this order in God's Word. Unbelief always gives rise to disobedience and rebellion. The latter always leads to doing one's own will, the following of the lusts of the flesh.

To be cont'd

THE OLD PROPHET OF BETHEL (2)

—*W. R. Dronsfield*

Another Sad Story

Very early in the history of the Church, even at the end of the first century, we read that they had appointed a president, to be over the feast, the Lord's Supper. We read that in one of the historians, who when describing the early Christians, said how they used to come together, eat bread and drink wine, and that they had appointed a president to be over them and to arrange things as they came together. Right in the very earliest days, then, after the apostles had passed from the scene, we see that they were beginning to introduce organization and supplant the Head in heaven, not using the unity of the Spirit, the Spirit's guidance, but using the organization of men; and we know that it was God's mind that the Holy Spirit should use whom He will in the assembly. And so we are moved by the Holy Spirit in worship and ministry. But when spirituality declined, barrenness became apparent and soon many of the Christians began to introduce organization. Clerisy arose. Men were placed in charge. A division was made between the clergy and the laity — which means the people — and only the clergy were able to minister, to teach, and to worship vocally.

Gradually this system grew up until the Church of Rome became full-blown. Many false doctrines have been introduced by them. But the first point of departure is they have forsaken the divine Centre. They have not remembered that the Head is in heaven, and there is only one Head in heaven. And gradually it got so that the Bishop of Rome became the bishop of bishops. The Head in heaven was supplanted by an earthly head, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit was almost gone, because man's organization had replaced it.

Then came the Reformation, a wonderful event, when it was revealed to Luther and others that justification was by faith alone. They discovered the gospel again which had been largely lost. And as a result, the Church of Rome — and they regret it now — threw Luther out and thousands with him. And so other churches were set up, denominations — the Lutheran Church, Calvinist Church, and so on. The Church of England hived off the Church of Rome for very deplorable motives; but although they now had much light — and had recovered truths concerning the gospel and many other things — they did not rediscover the truth of the Church. They did not understand that their Head was in heaven and that all human organization was not in God's mind. So they all set up different systems, different methods of church government: Episcopies, Presbyterianism, various other things; and they all missed the mark. As it says in the letter to the Church of Sardis, which we believe speaks of Protestantism, their works were not found complete before God. They had rediscovered many things. Their works were good, but they were not complete before God.

As we look around today, we see groups of believers here, groups of believers there; and they are all governed by something, some sort of central organization, whether Pope or archbishop or moderator or president of the council or even just a committee. They all seem to have some organization. They call themselves denominations. They call themselves churches. They even call themselves religious bodies. But there is only one body in the eyes of God. There is only one Head, and there is no organization — there is only one Spirit which brings about this unity between assemblies, between churches and between believers.

So what is the simple believer to do today? He sees it all wrong that there should be all this multitude of sects and denominations. What could he do?

Lots of people see it's all wrong that there should be a multitude of sects and denominations, but they don't know the truth of the Church. So their idea is, "We must work hard to bring them all together, so that they are all together under one head again"; and many of them, therefore, are turning to the Pope of Rome as the most likely one who could be the head over all Christendom. It is surprising how many are doing so. Even some so-called Evangelicals are beginning to think, "Perhaps we could come under the umbrella of the Pope of Rome and still retain our own characteristics." That is their aim, but that's not the way.

If you bring together two sects, what do you form? You don't form anything like the Church of God. You just form a bigger sect. If you bring together all the sects, you won't form the Church of God. You would form a monstrosity. You would really form what is called in the Scripture, Babylon. You would have all of these terrible errors and doctrines and organizations all under one roof, under one umbrella, as it were, and it would be the apostate Church. That's what will happen one day soon: they will all come together, and I think true believers will have gone by then to be with the Lord.

What to do then?

What is a true believer to do today? The Scripture is quite plain: walk in simple obedience to His Word. "Where two or three are gathered together unto my name," the Lord said, "there am I in the midst." Come out from all these systems; come out from all these organizations. If we can find some to gather together simply unto the name of the Lord, then we can be walking in the unity of the Spirit, only holding the Head in heaven. There may be only a few. You may look around and you may say, "Oh, but how few there are with me! How very few there are that are doing this! Are we not called upon to be successful in our fellowship?" Not in that sense. We are only called upon to be obedient to the Word of the Lord and to conform to His mind and to His Word.

We see that happening in a weak way in Hezekiah's day when he invited many from these ten tribes to come and to hold the Passover with him during the revival in his time. It was just a weak picture of what happened in the last century, when many came out from sects and the systems just to gather to the name of the Lord, to the true Centre; and God honoured that little revival for the time being, and there was much blessing, and a very large number of assemblies were gathered together to the name of the Lord in most of the countries of Christendom.

We should still do the same today. People say, "But there are many godly people in the sects and the systems. Are we to separate from them?" Well, I can only say as in this particular story which I read, that this man of God was to have no fellowship in the place where a new centre of gathering had been set up — a new centre of worship. Although there was a man there who had been used of God and was a genuine prophet, he was to have no fellowship with him or any other person in that land while they remained in that position.

Of course, if the old prophet had come down to Jerusalem to worship, he would have been received into the fellowship of God's house with the greatest of pleasure, and quite rightly, too. But not while he was on false ground, not while he was there where the centre of worship had been changed. No, we should not separate from godly believers. We separate from the system in which they are.

In a way these systems are accredited in the eyes of men and made to look all right because of these godly Christians that still remain in them. But we should not do that; we should not in any way seek to help the systems of man, but should come out from them, because the Church is precious to Christ. Do we realize how precious these truths are to Christ Himself? He gave Himself for the Church. He loved the Church and gave Himself for it. And then even today in this confused state of things, even now, God is showing the Church to principalities and powers to demonstrate His all-varied wisdom. We cannot get out of Christendom, but we can, as individuals, turn to the Lord and come out from these systems to the true Centre.

The brethren of the last century used to say that even if there had been no false doctrine in any of these orthodox denominations and no error at all, they would still have come out from them because they were not gathered to the name of the Lord alone. That should really be our position today. The fact that there are errors and terrible things going on in many places, in many religious systems, today is an extra reason why we should now come out, but it is not the primary reason.

The true reason, the primary reason is that we are called upon to be members of the Lord's body alone, gathered to Him alone, and not to a sect or a denomination or a system or another body which completely ruins the truth of the assembly.

What to look for.

So, if you look around, you want to know, "Where shall I go? Where shall I go to worship? There is a group of believers over there. Shall I join myself to them?"

Well, do they have an earthly head who is supplanting the Head in heaven? Do they have a religious organization that is brought together by a central oversight in some way? If they do, then how can we join them? For we cannot join that which is not according to the Body of Christ. If we see another company that claims to be gathered to the name of the Lord, but they say they are independent of all other companies — they think that they as a local assembly are responsible only to the Lord for their doings, and not to other meetings that they are in fellowship with, because they are independent from them — well, they are not gathered unto the name of the Lord either. They are not gathered as the Body of Christ, for they deny its unity in practice.

Those dear brethren think that fellowship is simply a matter of friendship with other assemblies, and there is no practical unity in it, nor unity in discipline. Unity in work and in activity is foreign to them. They must not join together. They are independent. They do not realize that there can be any position between that of being independent assemblies and that of being members of a denomination where there is a central oversight. They fail to see the unity of the Spirit and that assemblies should be joined together in the unity of the Spirit. Well, that pathway is easier, but we should not go that way. We should go with those that covet just to gather around the name of the Lord and acknowledge the unity of the Spirit, the Body of Christ.

To be cont'd

OUTLINES FOR BIBLE TEACHING (21)

43. JOSHUA'S APPOINTMENT AND MOSES' DEATH. THE TWO SPIES. — Numbers 27:12-23; Deuteronomy 31; 34; Joshua 1-2.

Outline

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|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Moses End Announced | Num. 27:12-14 |
| 2. Joshua Appointed as His Successor | Num. 27:15-23 |
| 3. The Blessing and the Curse | Dt. 28:1-8, 15-20 |
| 4. Moses' Last Address | Dt. 31 |
| 5. Moses' Death on Nebo | Dt. 34 |
| 6. The Lord's Charge to Joshua | Josh. 1 |
| 7. Rahab and the Spies | Josh. 2 |

Explanation

1. Moses was not allowed to go over the Jordan because of his failure at the waters of Meribah (God's government), nevertheless God allowed him to see the land in communion with Himself (God's grace).
2. Joshua acquired the honour and the functions Moses had before (leader and judge).
3. Moses set the conditions for blessing and those for a curse before the people.
4. Before his death Moses addressed the whole congregation and Joshua in particular, encouraging him.
5. Moses' death on Mount Nebo shows how seriously God regards sin; his burial by Jehovah displays God's mercy and His righteous reward for manifested faithfulness (Heb. 3:5; 6:19; Rev. 14:13).
6. Joshua had a difficult task, but God had endowed him with courage and insight (Ex. 17:10), with faith and determination (Num. 14:6-7). However, he needed comfort, encouragement and admonishment from his God. God particularly directed

him to the law, His Word, to receive strength from it for his work; then he should have good success (Ps. 119:97-100; Isa. 40:31).

7. Rahab, recognizing God's righteous judgment over herself, cast herself into His arms and identified herself with His people (Heb. 11:31). She became an ancestress of David's house, from which the Messiah came (grace).

Lesson

The announcement of his death did not make Moses discontented or distressed; he was more concerned about the people and their future leader than about himself (humbleness and awareness of his own unworthiness; 1 Cor. 13:5).

Israel has brought the curse upon themselves because of their disobedience; today we see the literal fulfillment of Moses' prophecies.

The name Joshua is derived from Jehoshua (i.e. Jehovah and Hosea, the latter meaning deliverer — Num. 13:16) which means, Jehovah — Saviour; the Greek form for Joshua is Jesus. Joshua is a type of the Lord Jesus, who, as their leader, will bring the believers through this world, so full of temptations, safely to the heavenly Canaan (Heb. 2: 10; 4:8-9). The borders of this land are types of the world:

- a. The wilderness depicts its spiritual poverty.
- b. The high mountain its power.
- c. The great river its external affluence.
- d. The sea its perpetual unrest.

44. CROSSING THE JORDAN. JERICHO CAPTURED. — Josh. 3-6

Outline

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|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. The Passage of Jordan | Josh. 3 |
| 2. The Memorials In and at the Jordan | Josh. 4 |
| 3. The Circumcision and the Passover | Josh. 5:1-12 |
| 4. The Captain of the Lord's Hosts | Josh. 5:13-6:5 |
| 5. The Conquest of Jericho | Josh. 6:6-27 |

Explanation

1. In the passing over the Jordan, the ark went before; the people followed at a distance. When the priest's feet touched the water, the Jordan became dry.

2. God took great care to remind the people of His great deeds. The stones on the border of the Jordan would stand there as a memorial to what He had done.

3. The people had to be circumcised if they were to dwell in the land and to celebrate the passover.

4. The Captain of the host of the Lord is near: He is the Leader! With Him we are sure of the victory. With Him we are strong, without Him we are powerless. Canaan belonged to Israel, but they had to take possession of it (Josh. 1:3).

5. Jericho presented tremendous opposition. Israel's power is insufficient; only by faith could the city be captured (Heb. 11:30). God desires to have the honour of defeating the enemy for Himself; Israel had to persevere in waiting for the Lord and that in a perfect way (three times the number seven in Josh. 6:4). The whole city was burned with fire, the people were not allowed to touch anything.

Lesson

In the passover we see reconciliation, in the passing through the Red Sea deliverance and salvation from the power of the enemy, and in the passage over Jordan (a figure of death) we have a figure of the end of the believer's old corrupt human nature (Rom. 6:2-8).

Under Joshua's leadership the people took possession of the land. Likewise do believers, who are joined to the Lord Jesus, their true Joshua, take possession of the heavenly blessings (Eph. 2:6; 6:10-18; Heb. 4:8-9).

In circumcision we see the body of sin destroyed, the flesh with its passions and lusts crucified, the body of flesh put off (see Rom. 6; Gal. 5:24; Col. 2:11).

Jericho is a figure of the difficulties encountered by the believer who wants to walk in the truth (i.e. according to his heavenly position). The believer has to refrain from every association with the world, nor to have a heart craving for its treasures (1 Jn. 2:15; 1 Tim. 6:6-10).

To be cont'd