

THE MINOR PROPHETS (10)

—R. Been Sr.

Hosea 4

The defiled land.

With the fourth chapter begins the second section of the book of Hosea. It contains warnings, the exposing of the evil, and the prophet's admonitions. He utters them without respect of persons. In chapter 4 he describes in verses 1-5 the moral condition and in verses 6-19 the religious condition of Israel, with a short interruption to admonish Judah in verse 15.

vv. 1-5.

The chapter opens solemnly with the words: "Hear the Word of Jehovah." Until the end Jehovah continues to speak and admonish the people. Didn't He deliver them from Egypt with mighty hand and a strong arm? Doesn't this people rightfully belong to Him? Didn't He give them a suitable country?

For this reason Jehovah has now a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. Truth, goodness, and knowledge of God are sadly lacking, whereas swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and adultery are plentiful, and blood-guiltiness upon blood-guiltiness rests upon the land. Over the years God had visited this land with His judgments, therefore it languished, was dry and waste, and both man and beast suffered because of it.

Zechariah, the last offspring of the murderer Jehu, had been killed by Shallum, who in turn was killed by Menahem. Also the successors to Menahem (Pekahiah and Pekah) died violent deaths. When man leaves God, love and truth, which are diving characteristics, disappear as well, and make room for the works of the natural man: violence, corruption, and lying, things that call for God's inevitable judgment.

In these verses, we find a few times the expression: "the land." The land on which the eyes of the Lord rested continuously was not to be defiled. Long ago, before Israel had conquered even one single city in Canaan, the people had been circumcised at Gilgal; thereby the reproach of Egypt had been removed from them (Josh. 5:9). Circumcision depicts the removing of corrupt flesh, the evil nature of man. At that time the people had been given the explicit instruction to cleanse the land of its abominations. But Israel had failed to do so. Therefore the idols of the Canaanites would become a snare to them (Judg. 2:14). Later, in the days of Jeroboam (who introduced the worship of calves) this idolatry was declared the established religion. Among the two tribes idolatry was introduced by Ahaz, who, besides closing the doors of the Lord's temple, established high places in every city in Judah so that they might burn incense to other gods (2 Chr. 28:24-25).

In Hosea's days, God had not yet withdrawn Himself from the land. The throne of Jehovah was still in Jerusalem. But this very fact made the defilement of the people and the land so serious.

Since the people and the land were so defiled, nobody was blameless. All had to feel guilt, even the faithful remnant of those days, though they had received the charge to "plead with their mother," with the nation to whom they belonged. They had to separate themselves from this "mother" while testifying against her evil, but they had to do so in the realization that it was their common guilt. No one could pride himself of being righteous. The holiness of the Lord was the only reference point and the only yardstick. In our days, the relationship of true believers to Christendom at large is the same. They are not free either from responsibility for the decline and corruption found within Christendom, but they must testify on behalf of the Lord against the evil.

There was no need for any member of the remnant to strive or reprove, for even the priests, the only ones who could bring an atoning sacrifice for the people, had taken part in the corruption and the lying, they also stood accused. What good then would it do to take Israel to task? It was too late, the fate of the ten tribes was sealed; there was not the slightest hope of return. The time to make atonement for the people had passed. The nation, priests, prophets and all, would be eradicated.

Long ago God did have a glorious purpose with the nation Israel. He had intended to make it a priestly kingdom, a holy nation (Ex. 19:5-6). Shortly after, however, the people chose the golden calf, thereby breaking the covenant they had so solemnly entered upon. The broken tables of the law are sufficient evidence of this. Though God did show mercy to the people, He then called only the tribe of Levi to the priesthood, and out of Levi, only the house of Aaron was allowed to approach God. But after the sons of Aaron — Nadab and Abihu — had brought strange fire before the face of Jehovah, for which they suffered the death penalty, the liberty to approach God was further curtailed. After the death of his sons, Aaron was not allowed to enter the holy of holiest at all times, but only once per year, on the great day of atonement (Lev. 16:1-3,34).

vv. 6-14.

The people had lacked the most fundamental knowledge of God. This lack of knowledge had now become their ruin. That the prophet still speaks of "My (God's) people" is because he refers to them as they once were.

The priests, who had knowledge of God, had rejected this knowledge. Therefore the Lord also rejected them, they were no longer allowed to exercise the priesthood for Him. They had forgotten the law of their God; God would forget their children also. The more numerous the priests had become, the greater had become their sin. Had the priesthood been exercised according to God's thoughts, it would have been an honour for those involved. But from now on their glory would turn to shame.

Since the sins of the people brought them their food and income, the priests longed to practice their idolatry. Rather than opposing the people in their idolatry, they went along and frequently even took the lead, just so they might not lose the sacrifices of the people as their source of income. Worse yet, they even wanted the idolatry of the people to increase, for the more they sank into idolatry and superstition, the more sacrifices they brought. No sacrifice was too much to obtain the favour of the idols, and the priests took advantage of this. That is how low the priesthood had fallen. It had become a mere question of material benefit, a profession, even at the cost of the salvation of the people.

Many years later this very thing would happen in Christendom. The ill-reputed indulgences give a prime example how similar Hosea's picture is to that seen in Christian priesthood. In Christendom, however, all is even more serious since in this dispensation of grace God did not give a separate class of priests as He did in the days of Israel.

For this reason, the priests would, as far as the judgment was concerned, be put on one level with the people. God would visit their ways upon them, recompensing their actions. From other portions in Scripture we know that the judgment will be all the heavier over those who knew how to do good but who rejected it, and over those who caused others to sin.

Drunkenness, the gateway to immorality, had become very common among the ten tribes and disabled their hearts to sense what was good. No longer did they observe the ordinances of the Lord, but followed the lusts of the flesh.

In Hosea's days, the nation had fallen so deeply that it turned to its wooden idol image and to the magician's staff, to learn there the words and will of the idols. The word of the Lord had been replaced by the oracles of stock and staff by the mouth of apostate priests. Through their idol worship, the people had been entirely estranged from God.

In holy mockery, the prophet Isaiah describes this as follows: Someone planted a tree. The rain from heaven caused it to grow. Then he cut it down to use it as firewood. With this he warms himself and bakes his bread. From what is left he makes a god, an image, kneels before it and says, "Deliver me, for thou art my god" (Isa. 44:14-17).

The most senseless, superstitious practices had replaced the worship of the true God in Israel. It is ever the same: to the degree that the worship of the Lord is neglected, superstition increases, for man wants to have something to worship. But if he doesn't worship God, he degenerates both in religion and in morals, he will bow himself for wood and stone, and become a slave of superstition, the stock. There is not only a future judgment over committed sins, but also a present-day recompense for sin. People who sin are given over to wrong desires (Rom. 1:28). They become slaves of sin with all its consequences.

Time and again God had spoken of the one place that He had chosen to cause His name to dwell there. The Israelites had to come to that place, to bring their offerings there, and to appear there in the presence of the Lord. But the people, both the ten and the two tribes, had preferred the high places, the hills and mountains, to sacrifice there to the idols. In the days of Jeroboam I, politics had played quite a role in this. For the "religious awareness" of man, the forests and shade of the trees, found in "the temples of virgin woods," were to be preferred over a trip to Jerusalem. But their going to those places led to all kinds of immorality and fornication, things so inseparably connected with idolatry. The Lord would not

specially punish those who did these things. The idolatry and fornication themselves would punish them. And it wouldn't be long ere the entire nation would be taken into exile by the Assyrian.

v. 15.

In verse 15 the prophet still differentiates between the ten-tribe and the two-tribe kingdoms. He admonishes Judah that, though Israel practices idolatry, they should not become guilty of it. He therefore tells the people not to go to Gilgal and Beth-aven to swear there: "As Jehovah liveth." Under the God-fearing kings Hezekiah and Josiah the idols had been destroyed, and the heights where idolatry was practiced had been demolished.

Yet, Judah was not less guilty. The prophet Jeremiah says emphatically that Judah, when it saw how Israel practiced idolatry, did not fear the judgment of the Lord that had come in consequence of it, but rather followed Israel's example (Jer. 3:6-9). Here Hosea restricts himself to this admonition, but other prophets have threatened them with the Lord's judgment over their idolatry. The judgment finally came. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, and the people exiled to Babel.

Gilgal and Beth-aven represent the places where idolatry was practiced. After the rift between the two and the ten tribes, these two places had gone from Benjamin's into Ephraim's hands. Since they lay close to the border between the two nations they were easily reached by the people of Judah. Earlier Gilgal had been the place where the whole nation had been circumcised before their conquest of Canaan began (Josh. 5:2-5). Without this circumcision — thinking of course of the spiritual significance of it: the removal, and judgment of evil flesh — they would have been unable to take possession of the promised land. Since then the Israelites had returned to Gilgal before they went out for further victories. But now Gilgal had become the place where Ephraim practiced idolatry (9:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4; 5:5).

Bethel, which means "house of God," was the place where God had given rich promises to Jacob. This same Bethel, however, had become the centre of the worship of calves and of the false priesthood, both introduced by Jeroboam. How did it deserve the name Beth-aven, "house of iniquity," a name with which Hosea branded this place three times (4:15; 5:18; 10:5).

In both places nothing but idolatry, false priests, and false prophets were found. How needful was the prophet's warning to Judah not to go there. Judah still possessed Jerusalem, the city where the Lord caused His name to dwell. And though this city had also been affected by idolatry, that was still no reason to turn to Jeroboam's worship of calves whereby the name of the Lord was abused.

Today, in the midst of all the apostasy, unbelief, and superstition in Christendom — which will soon be judged by God, just as Judah's and Israel's was — there is also a faithful remnant. How can it secure itself against infection? How can it remain on the terrain of God's blessings? God did not require great things of Judah. He just didn't want them to go to Gilgal and Beth-aven. The same holds true for today. Do not have fellowship with "Gilgal" and "Beth-aven," the places of false religion, false priesthood, and false prophets. In times of decline, God first of all requires a negative testimony, which derives its strength precisely through its negativeness. The 7000 faithful ones in Elijah's days had *not bowed* their knee to Baal. The faithful ones in the epistle to Philadelphia had *not denied* the name of the Lord. Their watchword was: *Abstain*. Remain far from all which, under its appealing appearance and lofty label, only seeks to hide iniquity and human pleasure from the eyes of God.

vv. 16-19.

These verses speak again of Israel, the ten tribes who are as stubborn as a dumb, stubborn cow. There is not a thing that can be done with Israel, it has hardened itself in its evils. The Lord would leave Israel alone, as a lamb in the open field. Is it addicted to idolatry? Well, let them be! "Leave them alone," the Lord once spoke to the disciples, in a remark referring to the pharisees. They were "blind leaders of blind: but if blind lead blind, both will fall into a ditch" (Mt. 15:14).

Once more the prophet reviews the condition of the people. Their orgies are vile, they give themselves to adultery. Their shields, their great men, simply have a passion for the word "give." What must become of a nation with such leaders, leaders who revel in all kinds, who commit adultery, and thrive on kickbacks! It can only expect to be swept away by the wind, by the storm of judgment. Together with its idols, which are of course no safeguard against the judgment, it will come to ruin.

The previous three chapters all ended with a glance at the blessings, which in the far future would become Israel's portion. But this fourth chapter ends with the black night of a judgment that does not spare anything or anyone. Today more than ever it is true for believers that they should watch and be sober, so that the idols of this world may not entice them to leave the narrow path on which their Lord has gone before.

To be cont'd

OUTLINE FOR BIBLE STUDY (23)

47. THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN; THE CITIES OF REFUGE; JOSHUA'S DEATH — Joshua 11; 14; 15:13-14; 20, 22, and 24.

Outline

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| 1. Additional Conquests | Josh. 11 |
| 2. The Land apportioned; Caleb | Josh. 14 |
| 3. The Cities of Refuge | Josh. 20 |
| 4. The Two-and-a-half Tribes Go Home | Josh. 22 |
| 5. Joshua's Departing Address and Death | Josh. 24 |

Explanation

1. The Lord gave up all the enemies slain before Israel. All their strength was broken. But even after they had conquered the land the Lord said, "There remaineth yet very much land to take possession of" (Josh. 13:1).

2. All the land was divided among the tribes. The faith of Caleb, who besides Joshua was the only one of the old generation who had not died in the wilderness, was now rewarded with the city of Hebron.

3. One who sheds man's blood must himself be killed (Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:12; see also Dt. 21:1-9). For one who killed a person unintentionally, God assigned cities of refuge (cf. Dt. 19:4-5,10). The slayer had to stand trial before the council of elders (Josh. 20:4; Dt. 19:10-13,15; Num. 35:15-34). Thus God maintained justice. Still, he who had killed a person through carelessness or by mistake had to stay within the city of refuge till the death of the high priest, and could not enjoy his possessions.

4. The two-and-a-half tribes from across the Jordan, actually outside of the promised land, returned to their possessions which Moses had given them upon their request. The Lord had given rest (Josh. 22:4). The altar that they built indicated: "We belong to the Lord's people" (Josh. 22:22-29).

5. It took determination to say: "As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah!" Before Israel could truly do so they had to first "put away the strange gods" (Josh. 24:15,23).

Lesson

Israel is guilty of slaying their Messiah, for they cried: "Crucify Him!" In part they did it willfully, saying: "This is the Heir; come, let us kill Him and possess His inheritance" (Mt. 21:38). This part of Israel is given up to judgment. But in part they did it in ignorance (Acts 3:17; 1 Cor. 2:8). For them the Lord prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34).

Paul was "ignorant through unbelief" (1 Tim. 1: 13). One who had killed someone in ignorance was delivered by the death of the high priest. Like the manslayer, Israel cannot go up to Jerusalem to worship. The remnant that will trust in God in the last days, will fully experience this. When Christ shall appear — not after the order of Aaron but after the order of Melchisedec — the remnant will inherit the land and return to its vineyard and its fig tree.

With Joshua as our example, let us also put away everything that is not of God and with determination say, "We will serve Jehovah!"

48. THE FIRST JUDGES — Judges 1-5

Outline

1. Infidelity of the Israelites Judg. 2:7-13
2. The Anger of the Lord Judg. 2:14-23
3. Othniel Judg. 1:1-20; 3:1-11
4. Ehud and Shamgar Judg. 3:12-31
5. Deborah, Barak, and Jael Judg. 4:1-5:31

Explanation

1. Israel showed itself unfaithful in the promised land. Gilgal, the blessed place of circumcision (a type of the "putting off of the body of the flesh"— Col. 2:11), was given up and the children of Israel are now in Bochim. (lit., "place of weeping" — Judg. 2:1-5).

2. Because of Israel's unfaithfulness, the Lord would no longer dispossess the nations that were left after Joshua's death; He used them to prove Israel (Josh. 2:22-23).

3. Yet, God had mercy on the afflicted people and raised up a deliverer to save them out of their distresses (Ps. 107:6,13,19,28). In His grace God gave them forty restful years under Othniel after this servant's victory over the Syrians.

4. But because of their evil, God gave them eighteen years under Moab. Then God heard their cry and gave them a deliverance through Ehud that lasted eighty years. During that time Shamgar also judged Israel.

5. Despite the general decline in Israel, Deborah, a woman full of faith, retained the place of dependence God has given to every woman by calling upon Barak to prepare himself for the battle of the Lord. Barak, rather than simply obeying the Lord's command, responded, "If thou wilt go with me, then will I go" (4:8).

Lesson

What began with a seemingly minor failure to judge the flesh within (Gilgal) became soon much more serious, for idolatry and direct disobedience to God soon followed. The condition of Israel steadily declined and finally there was no man of character left in Israel. This is the sure outcome once we fail to judge the flesh within us. How good is God that He remained ever ready to hear and to give deliverance!

To be cont'd

JUDE (10)

—H. L. Heijkoop

But Michael the archangel, when disputing with the devil he reasoned about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a railing judgment against (him), but said, (The) Lord rebuke thee (v. 9).

It is no wonder that unbelief has always tried to deny that the epistle of Jude is part of God's Word, for in no other part of the Word do we find so many new revelations in such a compact form. Two so-called Church Fathers, Origen and Clement of Alexandria, claimed that Jude had adopted verse 9 from a Jewish, apocryphal book "The Ascension of Moses." Because of this, many refused to acknowledge that the epistle belonged to the Word of God.

Theologians from the last few centuries have written many books about this and other verses of this epistle. Most of them accepted the claims of Origen and Clement, others base their views on some statements of rabbis about the death and burial of Moses, of which God's Word speaks in Deuteronomy 34. Sad to say, many believing expositors are carried along

with this unbelief. They try to soften the opinion of the unbelievers, by suggesting that Jude only referred to the apocryphal account of the dispute of Michael with the devil to use it as an argument, just as a present-day minister might refer to a fairy tale to explain a point. Others assume the possibility that this story was a popular tradition in Israel which Jude used, rather than "The Ascension of Moses."

This is the result when we make the study and knowledge of God's Word a "science" in the sense this word has in today's society. When we do so, unbelievers have every right to join in and their allegations must be given due consideration. Then too, we can no longer base our stand on the fact that the "natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him; and he cannot know [them] because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). To understand God's Word, one must first of all be born again. Beside this, one needs also to be spiritual, this means that our thoughts, our feelings, our whole life, must be formed by the Spirit. Only then can one read the Word with the consciousness that it is *God's* Word, given to us through revelation from God, it can only be understood when God opens it for us. Realizing this, we will read it prayerfully, knowing that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truths (Jn. 16:13). We do not understand God's Word by means of our intellect, but only by means of our faith and our conscience (Heb. 11:1,3).

How could a communication such as we find in verse 9 come to us but through revelation on the part of God? Even if it would have lived as a tradition in Israel (not that there is any proof of this either in or apart from Scripture), they still would have known it only through a revelation from God. Why then not simply accept it for what it is in truth, the sovereign power of God who desired to make this fact *now* known, just as He in 2 Timothy 3:8 revealed the names of Pharaoh's magicians which had died many ages before. For faith these things present no problems. The Bible is given to us by God's revelation. "Holy men of God spake under the power of [the] Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). Each word (in the original) is therefore inspired by the Holy Spirit. We have no business weighing its merits, but must simply accept it in faith!

If we do so, it is surprising how this portion, in connection with other verses in Scripture, enlightens us. Several places in God's Word speak of the service of angels. They are God's messengers who convey announcements, or instructions from God to man. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out for service on account of those who shall inherit salvation?" (Heb. 1:14). In God's providential ways they serve us, for instance, by protecting us from dangers. Consider the story of Balaam. Has not every believer had the experience that he found himself taking a route he had no intention of taking, or that he, after planning to go a certain way, found he could not do so? Why was that? No, there was no voice from heaven to tell us not to go that way, but yet there was an impulse causing us to go via a different route.

In Acts 8 we have an example of this: "But [the] angel of [the] Lord spoke to Philip, saying, Rise up and go southward on the way which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza: the same is desert." Apparently there were two ways, one of which did not lead through the desert. Customarily, an evangelist does not take a road on which he is not likely to meet any people. In God's providence, therefore, the angel came to direct Philip to that road, because someone in need of the gospel would be there. But in presence of the eunuch it was not the angel but the Spirit who told Philip: "Approach and join." Angels are used in God's providence to serve believers. In Acts 8 God let an angel speak so we would know how He uses them even now, although they do not reveal themselves by *speaking* to us. But it is not the task of angels to lead God's children in their walk or service! The Holy Spirit dwells within us, and He will lead us. Therefore, we find a remarkable difference in Acts 9, just as we find the practical fact so clear in Acts 16:6-7. "For as many as are led by [the] Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Rom. 8:14, see also Gal. 5:17).

This explains why the link between God and Israel had such an angelic character. The law was given by angels (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19). The Lord revealed Himself as an angel on the mount of Sinai (Acts 7:38; Ex. 19). Also the Son of God is called many times in the Old Testament the Angel of [the] Lord (e.g. Zech. 3). The link between God and Israel was characterized by the government of God.

But Jude 9, together with a few other Scriptures, reveals something entirely different yet. Besides the things that are visible on earth, there are invisible things which are highly significant for God's people. This is especially revealed to us by those Scriptures that refer to Michael (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Rev. 12:7 and Jude :9).

From Ephesians 6 we know that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against authorities, against the universal lords of this darkness, against spiritual [power] of wickedness in the heavenlies." These Scriptures reveal to us that we are not alone in this struggle. If a battle rages on earth, it is because of a higher one going on, the war of the elect angels against the fallen ones, against the instruments of Satan, who ever attempts to cross God's counsels for this earth. It is true, God does no longer govern the earth in a direct, a visible manner. Satan is the prince and god of this world. But still, indirectly, behind the scenes, God governs. Satan can do nothing unless God allows it. Thus there is a link between each event upon earth and God's providence. The earthly powers may think that they do their own will (which is really the will of Satan, whose slaves they are), nevertheless they can only go as far as God allows. The horses run

between two mountains of brass, the counsels of God (Zech. 6). And the angels are the instruments through which God exercises His will in His providential government.

To know that Satan and his demons actually rule the earth and that men are just pawns in his hand, makes us aware that we need God's help. How can we maintain our stand against creatures who are so much mightier in strength and intelligence than we? This help is shown us in Jude 9 and the other Scriptures we referred to. God is over all, He directs all changes, though to the natural eye they seem to flow only from the will of man.

Michael means: "Who is as God?" A glorious name for the prince of the angels. The word "archangel" is used here and in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. This latter Scripture may give the impression that there are more archangels. But Jude gives the impression that there is only one, Michael. He is called *the* archangel. The word archangel is a union of the Greek words *arche* and *aggelos* (angel). The meaning of the word *arche* is beginning, first, origin (see comment on verse 6). Archangel means thus "the first, the highest angel." And, reading Jude, Daniel, and Revelation 12, this seems indeed to be Michael's place. Other angels may make war with the fallen angels, the demons, but it seems that Michael opposes the lord of the fallen angels, the devil (Rev. 12). The Lord, speaking to Daniel about Michael, says, "your prince," and later, "and at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people" (Dan. 10:21; 12:1). It is obvious that there is a special link between him and Israel. This is in harmony with the character of the link God has with Israel, which we saw in the beginning of this chapter.

The devil wanted to have the body of Moses. Undoubtedly this was when Moses died and God buried him (Dt. 34). God didn't want anyone to know the site of Moses' grave. We don't know of anyone else whom God buried, hiding his grave. But then, no one ever occupied a place in the life of an entire nation as Moses did. He was the instrument in God's hand through which they were saved out of Egypt. Through him they received the law and all the ordinances of God. From him they received their "organization," so that they became an orderly nation. He guided them through the wilderness to the promised land. True, during his life they rejected him, they even hated him for setting the Word of God before their consciences. We find this in nearly every chapter of Exodus and Numbers that speaks of their travels through the wilderness. The character of man, and perhaps especially of Israel, commonly rejects the servants of God during their life, at least as long as they speak to man's conscience. But once they are dead, man gladly honours these servants. The pricking of their consciences is past, and to worship a dead prophet gives one a halo of devoutness and zeal for the things of God. The Lord expressed this when he said: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets and adorn the tombs of the just, and ye say, If we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. So that ye bear witness of yourselves that ye are sons of those who slew the prophets: and ye, fill ye up the measure of your fathers!" (Mt. 23:29-32).

The devil, who, in his efforts to destroy the work of God had resisted the living Moses by causing the people to rebel against him, now wanted the body of Moses for the same purpose. If he could only make the people to worship it; yes, make it a source of idolatry! In 2 Kings 18:4 we see how inclined the people were to do such things. Hezekiah "broke in pieces the serpent of brass that Moses had made; for to those days the children of Israel burned incense to it." And don't we see the same thing in Christendom? Are not many dead "saints" worshipped? No man knew the grave of Moses, but what if it was not hidden from the devil? So God charged Michael to protect the grave. In the dispute that ensued, the devil railed; he was the liar from the beginning. But Michael acted entirely according to his name. He did not place himself on God's judgment seat, nor did he defend himself. He knew, he was not alike to God; he was only a servant. He did only what God had told him to do: to guard the body of Moses. There will come a day that he, on God's command, will again make war with the devil, but then not with words only, for then he will cast him out of heaven (Rev. 12:7-9). But God alone in his wisdom knows when the time is ripe for this, and Michael left this judgment to God.

Michael did not even defend himself, he did not reply with railing to the railing of the devil. He gave it all over to God. He knew that no one could defend his honour so well as God: "Who is like God?" What an example for us! Nowhere in Scripture do we read that we should defend ourselves or our own honour. Our task is in simple obedience to do what God has charged us to do. God has undertaken to defend us. This He can do immensely better than we. Don't we dare to leave it in His hands? What a splendid example we have in the Lord Jesus! "Who [when] reviled, reviled not again; [when] suffering threatened not, but gave [Himself] over into the hands of Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23).

Verse 10

But these, whatever things they know not, they speak rilingly against; but what even, as the irrational animals, they understand by mere nature, in these things they corrupt themselves.

But these, whatever things they know not, they speak railingly against,

With what contempt the Spirit of God speaks about these false teachers! Every time it is "these" (see verses 8,10,12,16,19). What a contrast between Michael and "these." Michael knew whom he had to face: the great rebel against God, the father of liars and the murderer from the beginning, the embodiment of wickedness. But he left all to God and railed not back when the devil did so.

But "these" speak railingly against things they know not. The Greek word for "know" speaks of intelligent, of spiritual understanding. As we saw in verse 4, these people are in the assembly. This is the difference with the first epistle of John, where they went out. They are baptised, and profess the Christian truth, but practically they rather reject the things they profess and they subject themselves to all kinds of corruption.

Beginning at Hebrews 6:4 we get more light on this verse. It is possible to have been enlightened, and to have tasted of the heavenly gift, to have been a partaker of [the] Holy Spirit, to have tasted the good Word of God, and the works of power of [the] age to come, and yet to fall away. Thus, to have experienced all these things and yet never to have possessed life from God. In this connection, it is important to note that neither Hebrews 6 nor Jude speak about new birth or the sealing of the Holy Spirit. These false teachers and their followers possessed a good knowledge of the Christian revelation, and experienced the blessings of the Holy Spirit's presence within the Assembly.

Feelings and understanding can go far in appreciating the wonderful works of God and the moral glories of the Lord Jesus. But they remained natural men. And "[the] natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him; and he cannot know [them] because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). How could they truly know the wonderful glory of Him who came in flesh, of God revealed in flesh? How could they understand the glory and reality of such high and lofty, Christian truths, as the unction and sealing of the Holy Spirit, predestination, sonship, the inspiration of God's Word. Well, all that they don't understand they rail at. What natural men, heathen, have done with their mind, their "logic" — to deny what it could not grasp, and finally saying that there is no God (1 Cor. 1:21) — these so-called Christians have done too. But their guilt is much greater. For first of all, the whole truth has been presented to them, and they professed to have accepted it. Then, they not only deny it, but they *rail* against dignities (verse 8). Railing is knowingly spreading an evil report that is not true. God's Word tells us that if it is done against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven (Mt. 12:31). This shows us that the will and the corruption of the natural heart is active.

but what even, as the irrational animals, they understand by mere nature, in these things they corrupt themselves

"Mere nature" means "by instinct." Thus the verse speaks of things which man as man knows apart from his understanding. These are for example such things as eating, drinking, and sex drive. In these they corrupt themselves, because they use these things to satisfy their own lusts and passions. For a man cannot act as an animal that has no understanding without lowering himself far below the animals. Actions which show that animals lack moral principles, show man to have immoral principles. That is the condition of people who seek to cover themselves with the cloak of the Christian profession.

To be cont'd

THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH (5)

—A. v. d. Kammer.

It is rather obvious that neither the Lord Jesus while He was on earth, nor the apostles did *cease to be Jews*; just as we don't lose our nationality. It would be a great mistake indeed to use this as an argument to prove that the Lord or the apostles did not break with the dead orthodoxy of the Jews, or the Jewish worship, and then to conclude that we should not separate believers from unbelievers nor go out from the midst of them. From the day that the Lord Jesus said to the Jews that they had made His Father's house into a den of robbers, He referred no more to the temple as "His Father's house," but as "*your* house," the house of the Jews. He completely broke all ties with their service, so much so that He no longer went to the feast of booths. When He finally went, He did not go to take part in the feast, but to call thirsty souls to Himself. Similarly Stephen did break his ties with the Jews. In his address to the Jews, he first spoke seven times of "our" fathers, but then the Holy Spirit caused him to say that they were "stiff-necked" and "uncircumcised" of heart and ears. After that remark — in the midst of his discourse — he changed his testimony. No longer did he speak of "our fathers" but of "*your* fathers" (Acts 7:44-45, 51-53). He severed every tie with them (cf. Jn. 2:16; Mt. 23:38; Lk. 13:35; Jn. 7 and Acts 19:9).

Don't all these objections show us how little man listens to words like these of the Lord? Is it all that difficult to understand it when the Lord says: "Come out from the midst of them, and be separated" (2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4)? "Keep also far from these" (2 Tim. 3:5). "Withdraw from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19-22). "And do not have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather also reprove [them]" (Eph. 5:10-11f). A child can understand it.

Many of God's children, whose consciences have been touched, have implemented the separation between the people of God and the world with its affairs. But there are others who, though they realize that they must be obedient, don't want to separate themselves completely. There is so much that is pleasant for the flesh. Perhaps this or that doesn't entirely agree with Scripture, but they just don't like to miss it. The "bread of God" from heaven and the love of the Lord alone do not entirely satisfy them. They want to have a little of Egypt's beauty, of its eloquence, art, etc. for greater enjoyment. Pharaoh generously accommodates such people by allowing them to go into the wilderness to sacrifice! "I," so he says, "will let you go, that you may sacrifice to Jehovah your God in the wilderness; only go not very far," and he adds, "Intreat for me" (Ex. 8:28). Yes, he even desires to be blessed by them (Ex. 12:32).

Many a Christian becomes the victim of these wiles of Satan! They leave, but only to some extent. They go, but "not very far." They separate themselves, but not entirely. They (though they are believers) resemble unbelieving Herod, who did "many things" John told him, but not all things (Mk. 6:20). They don't go a "distance of a three-day journey" to the other side of the Red Sea. They go, but not far enough to break all ties with the people of Pharaoh.

Moses was not as broad-minded as Pharaoh. He upheld the divine command, the "perfect" distance of a three-day journey from Pharaoh's people and country; the people of God must go entirely *out of their midst*. Many believe that it is sufficient to stay far from certain places and people. But the Lord says, "Go out of their midst!" Pharaoh understood better than many believers today what God meant. He finally said, "Go out of the midst of my people" (Ex. 12:31). He knew it was not to be a "staying-close," but a departing from his people and all that was connected with them.

It is the same people, whether attired for a ball or for the Lord's supper, dressed for sin or piety! Therefore our departure out of the midst of the unbelievers is to be a forsaking of all that is connected with them, whether things of pleasure or things with which they seek to serve God. That is departing from their midst.

What about other believers and pastors?

But, you may say, there are still believers found among them, even (though perhaps not many) believing shepherds and teachers who love the Lord. Am I better than they? Here is again one of those deceiving and misleading questions. We surely are not above them. It is most certainly not our task to discover or judge the motives of their position; Another, the Lord, does that. But even so, the Word of God to them and to us remains, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers," and "measure the model," and "depart from iniquity." No matter how difficult such a path of obedience may appear, believing shepherds and teachers should lead the way! But whether they stand or fall is only their own Lord's concern, *their* attitude has nothing to do with ours. Attempts to present the attitude of such brothers as yardstick and example for us are nothing but wiles of the enemy, designed to keep our eyes from Christ and His Word and fix them on men. It shouldn't be too hard to see this, should it? Not brothers are our example but Christ alone: and our guideline is His Word. All that doesn't agree with Christ and His Word must fall, even if it were spoken by an angel from heaven (Gal. 1:8). Gifted brothers to whom the Lord has entrusted much have a great responsibility to "walk straightforwardly, according to the truth" (Gal. 2:14).

We all know that the possession of great gifts of grace does not in the least assure our walking according to the light. *To have light and to follow the light* are two different things. We see this with Peter. God had given him light and shown him that the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles was no longer to be maintained (Acts 10). One day, when the test came, he and others with him failed to follow that light. Then the youngest of the apostles rose up and admonished the older apostle that he did not "walk straightforwardly, according to the truth" (Gal. 2:11-14). When we see that even an *apostle* is subjected to the Word of truth, then, certainly, the most prominent brothers are subjected to the judgment of the Word too. And Paul, who so courageously approached a prominent apostle with the truth, says to us, "Be my imitators, even as I also [am] of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

To be cont'd

Before reading further please lookup the Epistle of Christ. It is the fourth one from Acts. You have trouble finding it? Where are you looking? Let me give you a hint. The place to look for it is in the mirror (if you belong to the Lord Jesus). A reference to it you find in 2 Corinthians 3. It is the most-read one of all New Testament epistles. As a matter of fact all men, lost and saved, read it daily, and that means a lot!

Just the thought of it! Whether you like it or not, you are an epistle of Christ. One chapter in this long epistle is entitled The Home. In "Light in our Dwellings," J.A. von Poseck had this to say on that chapter:

"In the same measure, as we are at home in our blessings up there, and hold Christ the Head, we shall fill our place in our respective relationships down here. As risen with Christ, we are to seek things above ... A Christian who is not at home in Romans 8 and in Ephesians (I do not speak of mere intellectual attainments) will not shine much in a Christian home here below. And if the head of a Christian family, or any other believing member of it, does not know how to behave as head or member of his family, he only shows that he does not hold the Head above, nor realize his being a member of Christ. And in the same measure as we realize, what is the meaning of the truth that we shall be like Christ - for we shall see Him as He is - it will be seen in the assemblies and in our houses, that we are Christ-like in our daily lives here below, and our light will shine for the glory of God in the 'house of the living God,' and in our dwellings. We little think how often our 'manner of behaviour' at home betrays how little we are at home there above, and how loosely we hold that blessed Head at the right hand of God."

Yes, we are Christ's Epistle. Let's hope no one misreads it because something spilled over its pages!