

**THE MINOR PROPHETS (11)**

—R. Been Sr.

Hosea 5

*The whole nation, Israel and Judah, is unclean.*

vv. 1-4.

In the fourth chapter we were shown how in Hosea's days both *the land and its inhabitants were defiled*. The gloomy closing remarks had reference to the leaders of the nation. There wasn't a priest or prophet who went out free. The fifth chapter then continues the subject of the fourth, starting with a word to the priest, to the house of the king and to the people. All, without distinction, fall under the judgment. Now the prophet doesn't speak in parables but directly; in clear language he announces to all that the judgment concerns them all, since they have become a snare at Mizpah, and a net spread on Tabor. Here, Mizpah is the city lying in a region that used to belong to Benjamin, rather than the one across the Jordan. All cities mentioned in chapters 4 & 5 were originally part of Benjamin. Mizpah was the place where the people used to come together, and so was Tabor, a centrally located mountain in the area belonging to the ten tribes. Both places had become a snare and a net because of the idolatry that was carried on there.

Mizpah was also the place where Samuel once judged the people. Then the children of Israel had done away their idols and sought after Jehovah. But soon after, the people had fallen into the same sin, and in Hosea's days it was the place where the people, after they themselves had been ensnared by the devil, became a snare for others. What did a foreigner find when he came to Mizpah? Was it a people devoted to God, cleansed from idolatry? Sad to say, no! He found there a people that craved for, and was entirely given to idolatry. For this stranger, Mizpah could only be a snare and a spread net, a dangerous temptation. Once a stranger had come, the daughter-in-law of Naomi, Ruth; she had come with the words, "Your God is my God." But if, in Hosea's days, another Ruth had come, what would she have found? A terrible idolatrous service, and that among the people who had been called to uphold the name of the Lord before the surrounding, heathen nations.

In verse 2 the prophet directs his remarks particularly to the apostate priests. It seems that the original text of this verse is rather difficult to translate. At least, there are various readings. The more usual ones give a similar sense as the New Translation: "And they have plunged themselves in the corruption of apostasy, but I will be a chastiser of them all."

Whatever the precise reading, it is clear that verse 2 speaks of priests that prey for victims, for some who will follow them in the apostasy from God and His service (cf. 4:8). These priests sank morally lower and lower through their desire for sacrifices whereby they could enrich themselves. They were as the leech, who "has two daughters: give, give!" (Prov. 30:15).

The long delayed but doubly deserved judgment would, therefore, first of all come over the priestly class. They, who through their position had a direct connection with God, were most guilty and would be beaten with many stripes.

Jehovah knew Ephraim, and Israel (two designations for the same people) was not hidden from Him. He knows that this nation commits adultery and that it is defiled. He knows that their actions are not meant to turn to God, for they are entirely engrossed in their adulteries and the idol service. *They don't even know Jehovah*. He knows all things and can pour out a righteous judgment over the priests and the people. He knows all, just as He knows all things of the dead who will one day stand before the Great White Throne to be judged according to what is established in the "books."

We like to interrupt our exposition for a moment to ponder the awful contrast: "*I know Ephraim*" and: "*They know not Jehovah*." What a withering exclamation! This nation, to which God had made Himself known, to whom He had revealed His holiness and His Being, this very nation had chosen immorality and impurity above God. And, sinking ever deeper into the morass of sin, it had lost all knowledge of God. And this is true as well of all who will soon be judged. They do not know the Lord, but He knows them and knows everything about them. During their life on earth, they had opportunity to come to know God. Through Christ they could have entered into a relationship with God (Jn. 17:3). But they were averse to do so. They liked their sins, position, or whatever it may have been, better. And soon it will be said to them, "You don't know Me, but I know you."

Now to continue with the second part of verse 4, "The spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them" (of Israel). In Matthew's gospel we read, "When the unclean spirit has gone out of the man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and does not find [it]. Then he says, I will return to my house whence I came out; and having come, he finds [it] empty, swept, and adorned. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits worse than himself, and entering in, they dwell there; and the last condition of that man becomes worse than the first. Thus shall it be to this wicked generation" (Mt. 12:43-45).

These words of the Lord Jesus are entirely applicable to Israel. The unclean spirit, of which He spoke, is that of idolatry. Of this it is said first of all, that when the Lord walked on earth it had gone out; this establishes that this spirit had previously been among the people. This agrees with verse 4 of the present chapter. Secondly: that this spirit of idolatry could no longer enter after it had gone out from among the people, although it attempted to do so. The condition of the people while the Lord Jesus walked on earth is compared with a house that has been swept with brooms, cleansed and then adorned. After the return from the Babylonian exile, the Jews have no longer been guilty of idolatry.

Thirdly: that this spirit of idolatry will nevertheless return one time, but then sevenfold reinforced, and that it will again dwell among the people. This last condition will be worse than the first. Today this is still prophecy. But when, together with the Assembly, the Holy Spirit will have left this earth, the materialistic Jews who have returned to the land will fall into the most horrible idolatry under the reign of the antichrist. Then the image of a man will be worshipped (Mt. 24:15; Rev. 13:11-18). It will be a demonstration of human might and grandeur, of man's ability and knowledge. The Jews will actually be worshipping themselves. What a terrible fall will this people have made then. No wonder that the great mass of the Jews will be eradicated, and the antichrist and the ruler of the then restored Roman empire will be cast alive into the lake of fire, the eternal punishment (Rev. 19:19-21).

v. 5.

Besides all the corruption of Israel, their heart was also filled with pride. This pride will testify against them; as a witness for the prosecution it will accuse them and increase the severity of their judgment. What a picture of man! Sunk to the lowest level, yet swollen with pride. Consequently Israel, Ephraim, would fall because of its iniquity. And Judah — which had been warned not to go the same way as Israel, not to come to Gilgal and Beth-Aven, but which had not been discouraged by the warning example — Judah would fall with Israel, the same judgment would come over them, although later than over Israel.

vv. 6- 7.

After the Lord's judgment had fallen on both Israel and Judah, and they would be in great affliction, they would seek the Lord with their sacrifices of sheep and cattle. But what would have been effective before the outpour of judgment will be in vain once the judgment has been executed. All their religious ceremonies will remain without result. Then God has withdrawn Himself from them. The same lot will befall professing Christendom. It will appeal to the privileges it once received. But even the maintaining of religious forms will not stay the judgment. The forms may be there, but God is not. That time has passed.

Care should be taken in applying the words, "He hath withdrawn Himself from them." When we apply this word spiritually to worldly Christians, who live with their heart far from God, such application can be the means to awaken their conscience. A service for the Lord with the lips alone is an abomination to God. To bring praise and thanksgiving (the sacrifices of this dispensation) while these are not found in the heart does also today not carry any blessing with it. Believers must therefore search carefully, in the presence of God, *how, not whether*, they seek the Lord.

But to apply the words, "He has withdrawn Himself from them," to unconverted people, who have not yet come to the Saviour, is foolish and harmful. Do we know how far the grace of God goes towards these unconverted people?

Verse 7 says that Israel and Judah have acted treacherously against Jehovah. Through their idolatry, a generation has grown up of strange children, a generation that is estranged from God. Every new moon could, so to speak, be the month in which Israel and Judah would be devoured, they and their possessions.

vv. 8-12.

Next the prophet reminds them of two places: Gibeah and Ramah. At one time Gibeah had been the scene of the sad and shameful drama recorded in Judges. The recollection of this should cause them to be ashamed. At Ramah, Samuel had been the Lord's judge to them. Did Gibeah speak of their fall, Ramah spoke of their return to the Lord. At the same time these names do remind of idolatry. Gibeah means: "Hill," and Ramah "High place." Was it not specially on the high places that the idol services were held?

But in Hosea's days the people had fallen even deeper. At Gibeah the tribe of Benjamin had committed abominable immorality, but at the instruction of the Lord all of Israel had turned itself against Benjamin. Then 25,000 men of the tribe of Benjamin had fallen. But in the days of Hosea the horn and the trumpet were blown at Gibeah and Ramah to officially call the people together at Beth-Aven (idol's temple) to serve the idols. And no one remonstrated against it. Now it was no longer "against Benjamin," but "with Benjamin," for Gibeah and Ramah as well as Bethel were places belonging to Benjamin.

Is it any wonder that Hosea depicts a complete collapse in verses 9-12? Ephraim will be destroyed. With certainty the Lord had made this known through the prophets. The princes of Judah had been like those who removed the God-given boundaries. God's wrath would be poured out like water over them. These judgments were righteous. They hadn't wanted it any different. The judgment couldn't be turned away. God would be a moth for Ephraim and rottenness to the house of Judah.

vv. 13-14.

Through all their ungodliness, Ephraim and Judah had also reached a social low. The neighbouring nations were all but trustworthy friends. To lean on them could only lead to disappointment. "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his sore (realizing the weakness caused by their low condition), then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb; but he was unable to heal you, nor hath he removed your sore." The name Jareb, meaning "he will contend," was not his real name, but a designation of the Assyrian king whose help Israel had sought.

In its blindness, Israel turned to its greatest enemy. In Scripture, Assyria is the great enemy of Israel. On the other hand, Assyria was the Lord's disciplinary rod, wherewith He chastened His people. It was a rod of discipline that the Lord would break after He had used it. Assyria, however, couldn't heal Ephraim either, nor could salvation be found with him. Why not? The answer is found in verse 14. It was, because Jehovah would be a fierce lion to Ephraim, and a young lion to the house of Judah. Nothing and no one could stay the Lord's judgment or save from it.

When a believer who has fallen away seeks help or support in the world, he will have the same experience as Ephraim. All may go well for a little while. The world at times may use its link with such a believer to its own advantage. As soon, however, as it derives no more advantage from him, the mask is removed and the truth of the Saviour's word becomes evident, "If the world hate you, know that it has hated Me before you. If ye were of the world, the world would have loved its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, on account of this the world hates you" (Jn. 15:18-19).

It is shameful for a believer to seek help from the world. By the cross of Christ he is separated from the world (Gal. 6:14). He will experience that the world's help is only available at a cost; one will always pay by losing great spiritual blessings which he possesses as a believer.

v. 15.

This chapter ends, however — just as chapters 1, 2, and 3 — with a word of hope. After the judgment the Lord would go away and return to His place. He would withdraw Himself from Ephraim and Judah (5:6), and set both of them aside, although not at the same time, so that He would officially no longer have dealings with them. All this is true, and yet, ... the Lord would not be forever a tearing lion for the people. But how long would it be? The prophet says, "till they acknowledge their trespass, and seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Me early."

After the judgment that came over the people, there would come a time in which the people would think to be able to re-establish their link with God by sacrificing sheep and cattle. But then they will experience that the Lord has withdrawn Himself from them. *God doesn't seek the sacrifices, but those who sacrifice, those who turn to Him with sorrow and repentance.*

Verse 15 casts, as it were, a glance at the far distant future. Hosea says only that there will come a time in which the people will acknowledge their guilt before God, then, in their fear, they will seek God's face. We can, however, give a short summary of that time with the help of what other prophets have spoken about it.

In the end time — that is the period from the rapture of the Assembly to the Lord's appearing for judgment in power and great glory — the great mass of the Jews who have returned to their land will fall into the most horrible form of idolatry for which they will be destroyed. There is, however, a remnant from the two tribes, that clings to God. This remnant will go through the great tribulation, whereby God will purify it. Then it will no longer expect help and salvation from Egypt or Assyria, but from Jehovah alone. They will stand firm, though many of them will have to pay for it by death. They will cry because of the sins of their people. There will be a tremendous wailing among them when they see that Jesus of Nazareth, who has been crucified by their people, and the Son of man, who appears in glory and power, is one and the same Person: Jehovah Himself. Through this acknowledgement of guilt, sorrow and repentance, their remnant will be saved and inherit the blessing of Christ's Millennium. As far as the ten tribes are concerned, also from among them there will be a remnant that will be gathered by the Lord from the four winds of the earth to receive a part in Christ's kingdom. The remnants of the two and the ten tribes will then form the new Israel. Then it will no longer be "Lo-Ammi" (not My people) but "Ammi" (My people).

*To be cont'd*

## **OUTLINE FOR BIBLE STUDY (24)**

### **49. THE LORD CALLS GIDEON. — Judges 6:1-7:14**

#### *Outline*

- |                                     |               |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Unfaithfulness and Warning       | Judg. 6:1-10  |
| 2. The Angel of the Lord and Gideon | Judg. 6:11-24 |
| 3. Gideon's Mission                 | Judg. 6:25-40 |
| 4. Gideon's Army                    | Judg. 7:1-14  |

#### *Explanation*

1. The evil done by the people caused God to deliver them into the hand of Midian, who robbed them of their food. In their need they cried to the Lord. Through the word of the prophet God reminded them that they had failed to listen when He told them not to fear the gods of the Amorites.
2. God in His mercy called Gideon into His service. Gideon was humble and insignificant, a man without physical strength (v. 15), but an excellent tool in God's hand (Ps. 33:16-18; 121:2).
3. God first commanded Gideon to destroy the idol in his father's house. Then God's Spirit empowered him to call Israel together. God graciously bore with Gideon's little faith, strengthening it through signs.
4. God instructed Gideon how to compose his army. God knew Israel's heart and took care that they could not say, "Mine own hand has saved me."

#### *Lesson*

Gideon's respect for the word of God and his love for the people were proof of his devotion, yet his sacrifice showed his lack of knowledge, but God used it to reveal His mercy. First Gideon was a worshipper, then he became a witness for God.

God's food, the burnt-offering, is not to be brought under the trees of nature, but on unhewn rock, for its basis is Christ.

The blessings of heaven were first upon the fleece of the lamb (Christ), not on the earth. But then, when the fleece was dry (when Christ was forsaken) the rich blessing of heaven came over the entire earth.

Those who come prepared for the battle will have no need to drink much, just a little refreshing by the way is sufficient for them at battle time.

God cannot give victory through man's might, but through hearts who enjoy only the bare essentials for service in this world. He can use those who only have an eye for God's cause, and who cleave to Him with an undivided heart. Only three hundred men met these criteria.

*To be cont'd*

## **THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH (6)**

—A. v. d. Kammer

*Should we leave where God blesses?*

Many children of God decry the mixing of believers and unbelievers and reject those things that deviate from the Word of God, but they think, "As long as God blesses in the midst of these things, so long I can safely be connected with them."

If this is your line of thinking then your approach is similar to Adam's, in that you use the blessing God gives, as an excuse for your disobedience. Just give it some thought: God gives you clear, not-to-be-mistaken directions. You don't follow these. When challenged about your disobedience, you reply that God's giving His blessing has been the reason. How terrible! Has God been subjected to your evaluation or have you been subjected to His Word? Not His blessing, but His Word is a lamp for your foot and decisive for your path.

In Numbers 20:1-13 we find that Moses and Aaron did not act according to God's Word; yet God allowed streams of blessing to flow for the people after the smiting of the rock. It could easily have been said, "Look how clearly God is on Moses' side, despite his disobedience." Did God really take Moses' side? He showed Moses His displeasure and His serious judgment. But you may ask, "Why did God bless in such circumstances, if He was so dissatisfied about the murmuring of the people and the attitude of Moses and Aaron?"

In that what God has purposed to do, He does not depend on our obedience or disobedience. He blesses according to His plan, even if we are unfaithful. He gave His blessing to the thirsty people, because He wanted to show mercy to them. He saves souls in the Roman church and even in circles where false doctrines are taught. But such blessings of His do not relieve us from our responsibility to sanctify Him through our obedience of faith. Moses and Aaron lost their right to enter the land. These things have been recorded as warnings for us (1 Cor. 10:11). Let us watch not to take the Lord's blessing as confirmation or acknowledgement of our position if the latter is not in agreement with His Word.

Another example! God gave Jonah a clear charge which he had to execute, but the way was not to Jonah's liking and rather than going to Nineveh, he went to Tarsis (Jon. 1). God was not pleased with Jonah's way, yet in this way He blessed the heathen crew of the ship. Jonah led them into the light and worship of the living God. But despite the blessing, God did not close His eyes for Jonah's disobedience. No matter how difficult it was for them, the man whom God had used in paths of disobedience to bring them the testimony of the Lord, had to be put overboard by the ship's crew and surrendered to the judgment of God.

Yet another one! God had admonished His people to leave Babel, and the faithful Jews had done so. The majority, however, stayed behind in the land of their imprisonment. Could God be pleased with them? Yet, God blessed them! They had "Joy and gladness, a feast and a good day and many among the peoples of the land became Jews" (Est. 8:17). The faithful Jews in Jerusalem couldn't boast of such a blessing. The grace of God can also bless there where no heed is given to the voice from heaven, "Come out of her, My people" (Rev. 18:4). His pleasure is with those who, no matter how weak they might be, are obedient to His Word, and who as His separated people refuse the habits of the world in their midst and who are not joined to the Amorites and the Moabites.

There was a day when God led His people out of Egypt, and His blessing followed them in the wilderness, "yet God was not pleased with the most of them" (1 Cor. 10:5). "But they that are perfect in [their] way are His delight" (Prov. 11:20), just as Joshua and Caleb who walked in obedience the path of faith.

Without agreement with Scripture, blessing and success in themselves are no proof of His pleasure, just as a lack of success is no proof of His displeasure. The Lord seemed to have no success. His disciples left Him. His life ended on the

cross. And we hear Him prophetically say, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent My strength for nought and in vain" (Isa. 49:4). But God testified that He had delight in Him (Mt. 3:17).

And what characterized the path of Him who left us His example that we might walk in His steps? (1 Pet. 2:21). He said, "Lo, I come to do Thy will" (Heb. 10:9). And when Satan addressed Him, just one thing stood out clearly, "It is written" (Mt. 4:1-10).

Turn your eye and heart from "It is written" to the circumstances, successes and blessings, and the enemy has reached his goal. Without your noticing it, he has led you from the straight path of obedience onto the byways of own thoughts and own will. Though you may be able to look on blessings full of grace, just as Moses, Jonah, and the Jews, but your soul will not enjoy the pleasure of His delight on this path.

Worship Him on the basis of grace. Through it a world that rejects Him is still daily blessed by Him with rain, sunshine, and food. But don't make the blessings of His grace into a cloak for your disobedience.

*To be cont'd*

## **JUDE (11)**

—H. L. Heijkoop

*Woe to them! because they have gone in the way of Cain, and given themselves up to the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core (v. 11).*

In the preceding verses Jude had unmasked them and displayed their true character; now he gives them a few very serious warnings. In doing so, he sums up some additional characteristics of departure displayed in them. In some respects these are progressive in nature, although subsequent forms do not make the former ones disappear.

They are:

1. The apostasy of nature: the opposition of the flesh to the testimony of God and His true people - the driving force with which this enmity empowers the will of the flesh.
2. Religious evil: teaching errors for wages, knowing that they contradict God's truth and are directed against the people of God.
3. Open opposition: rebellion by the religious teachers of the people against God's authority vested in His true King and Priest.

These three forms of evil once revealed themselves in Cain, Balaam, and Core. Now we see how they, through the energy of the enemy, reappear in each period of the Assembly. In fact, they are nothing but characteristic demonstrations of the corrupt human heart which resists the work of the Spirit of God. So, we ought to be on guard. It is not saying too much that, once we have been taught, we can easily discover all these corruptions in God's assemblies today.

Perhaps we can see a certain similarity between this verse and the dragon and the two beasts of Revelation 13.

It is remarkable, that all the examples Jude uses in his epistle, are found in the first books of the Bible. Four are from the first chapters of Genesis (vv. 6, 7, 11, 14), one is connected with Deuteronomy (v. 9). Among those mentioned in a more passing manner, one is from Exodus (v. 5) and three from Numbers (vv. 5, 11). Three of his examples (vv. 6, 9, 14) are entirely new revelations, not mentioned elsewhere in God's Word. Even the others are not often referred to in Scripture. The names of the three persons who serve as examples of those who have got in among the Christians are seldom mentioned in Scripture:

Cain only in Genesis 4, Hebrews 11:4, 1 John 3:12, and Jude 11.

Balaam only in Numbers with some references in Deuteronomy 23, Joshua 13 and 24, Nehemiah 13, Micah 6, 2 Peter 2:15, Jude 11, and Revelation 2:14.

Core is after Numbers only mentioned in the genealogical registers of Exodus 6 and 1 Chronicles, and in Jude 11.

Enoch is besides in Genesis 5 only mentioned in the genealogical registers in 1 Chronicles and Luke 3, further in Hebrews 11:5 and Jude 14.

From this we can see the special character of Jude's epistle, and how important it is.

The *above* reveals an underlying principle. The *very first departure gives the character of the end*. The first step from the right path indicates where things will end up. Therefore the beginning of man's history (Gen.) and the beginning of the history of God's earthly people (Num.) are mentioned in those Scriptures that speak prophetically about the Assembly's last days on earth.

Similarly we find in Daniel the history of the Babylonian empire, symbolizing what will be fully found in the last world power (Rome) during the end time. Other prophecies (e.g. Isa. 14) use the judgment over the king of Babel as type of the judgment of the last head of the fourth world empire. And so also, the judgment of unbelieving Israel in the wilderness is an example of the judgment awaiting the ten tribes (see e.g. Amos 5:25-27; Ezek. 20).

### *Woe to them!*

There is a serious tone in this prophetic "woe" pronounced over these corrupters of the truth. This "woe," giving vent to the holy indignation of the Spirit of God, carries with it the irrevocable sentence of judgment in the absence of repentance.

In the Gospels the Lord Jesus pronounced the woe over the privileged Jewish people, who in pride and hardness of heart rejected Him. In Matthew 11:21-24 and Luke 10:13-15 the Lord declared woe over the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and especially Capernaum where the Lord had performed most signs and wonders and where He lived. In Matthew 23:13-23 and Luke 11:42-52, He addresses His woe to the Pharisees and scribes, in Luke 6:24-26 to the rich and those that are filled, in Matthew 26:24 to Judas, in Matthew 18:7 and Luke 17:1 to the world which offends the children (causing them to sin). Finally, in Matthew 24:19, Mark 13:17 and Luke 21:23, He announces the woe of them who are with child and who give suck during the tribulation, because of the distress of those days.

In Revelation 8:13 a woe is pronounced over "them that dwell upon the earth," and in chapter 12:12 over the earth and sea because the devil is cast down upon the earth. Then in chapter 18:10, 16, and 19 woe is declared over great Babylon, the harlot or false bride of chapter 17. In chapters 9:12 and 11:14 the word "woe" is used to describe the judgment itself.

In the Acts and the Epistles the word occurs only in Jude 11, and finally — though there in a different context — in 1 Corinthians 9:16.

The woe the Lord pronounced over the Jews was terrible indeed. He had come in grace: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not reckoning to them their offences." He had begun His service with: "Blessed, Blessed" (Mt. 5:3-12), but He ended with "Woe, woe, woe"! Matthew 23:37-39 shows us how far the heart of the Lord was from judging the beloved city and its beloved people. But still, as Prophet, He had to *proclaim judgment*; just as He will once, as Judge, *execute judgment*, first when He comes on earth to judge the living, and later when He is seated on the Great White Throne and the dead stand before Him to be judged according to their works.

But are not the woes of Jude 11 and of Revelation 8 and 18 much more severe? How many more and higher privileges did Christendom receive than the Jews? Yet, Christendom is rejected and its judgment must come. And most of all, how awful is the woe in Jude, the only place in the Epistles! In the Acts and the Epistles the Holy Spirit witnesses of the Saviour and what He has done for man, and how He is constantly occupied with those who bear the Lord's name. And now woe is pronounced over them! Do we sense the weight of this "woe" which rests upon Christendom in the midst of which we dwell? Are we conscious of it?

*because they have gone in the way of Cain.*

The word "because" tells us that the "woe" comes over them for their having gone in the way of Cain, but what is the way of Cain?

Cain was the first man ever born. He was also the first murderer. Besides, with him the "world" began: his family formed the world system with its natural, false religion.

At his birth Eve revealed faith in the promise of God. She said: "I have acquired a man with (or "with the help of") Jehovah." Yet, she also revealed disobedience; not she but Adam had received the right, the insight, and the charge to give names (2:19-20). How can a creature have insight while acting in disobedience? Could a child of sinful parents be the promised "Seed of the woman" that would crush the serpent's head? Didn't she know that the spiritual does not come first, but the natural (1 Cor. 15:46)? More than any other truth, this one is clearly established throughout Scripture. For our own blessing, we ought to be thoroughly acquainted with this truth.

Cain was the natural man. His name is connected with "achievement" or "gain," and this was the whole character of his life and walk. The difference between him and Abel ("insignificant") was not in the absence or presence of religion. Abel walked by faith, Cain followed his nature. Faith is through *hearing!* From his parents, Abel had heard about the fall and the curse which had consequently come over the earth. Cain had heard this too, but the word of the report did not profit him, since it was not mixed with faith in him who heard (Heb. 4:2). He took no account of the fall, nor of the curse resting on creation, and just as little of the grace which revealed a future Saviour.

Both had heard how God had clothed Adam and Eve so that they could exist in God's presence. Abel accepted this in faith; his faith caused him to arrive at the conclusion of faith. Perhaps Cain thought it to be an interesting story, but he derived no conclusion from it for himself. He was totally indifferent to God's nature and God's will, and completely insensitive to man's moral condition. Cain had his own, natural religion; he knew God only according to his own thoughts. He was neither an atheist, nor an unbeliever; he was not a hypocrite, nor was he insincere. He just wanted to approach God in his own manner, in a way that took no account of what sin is in the eyes of God. He brought the work of his own hands — the fruit of an earth, cursed because of sin — and failed to acknowledge both that sin had brought on the curse, and that the work of his hands was defiled through sin. He knew not that thereby he brought only "the sacrifice of fools," the proof of an unconverted, unbelieving heart. How could God accept such an offer that only exalted man and humiliated God? Cain's type of evil is uttermost blindness towards God. It is the open unbelief of very religious people. It is the natural man's apostasy.

But a wrong relationship with God has always consequences for the relationship with men. Cain should have been a loving brother to Abel. Even a holy brother, because he shared a place of worship with him. But he became his murderer!

What had Abel done to arouse such hatred? Undoubtedly Abel's faith had produced brotherly affection and love for Cain. God's Word says: "Cain was of the wicked one, and slew his brother; and on account of what slew he him? because his works were wicked, and those of his brother righteous" (1 Jn. 3:12).

Nothing offends a man more than disrespect for his religion. And the offended feelings assume a deadly character towards those who consider one's religion not pleasing to God. Cain's hatred towards Abel stemmed from the fact that God accepted Abel's offer and rejected Cain's. The hurt of God's rejecting his worship broke out in hate towards the man whom God did accept. Murder is the result, then and ever since (Mt. 23:35; Rev. 18:24). Scripture lifts all veils, declaring the truth: worshippers of Cain's sort hate and murder (if they can) those that resemble Abel, because their own works are wicked, while those of the persecuted one are righteous.

And what is the outcome of Cain's history?: lies and impudence toward God (Gen. 4:9), attempts to render God's judgment powerless, and to undo the effects of the judgment through own efforts (vv. 17-24).

The way of Cain is, therefore, characterized by a religion which fails to take account of God's nature and God's will, of the moral condition of man, and of grace that presents redemption. It is connected with hate against the true witness and the true people of God, and ends with lies and impudence against God, efforts of cancelling the consequences of God's judgment by one's own efforts.

This then is the first characteristic of those who slipped unnoticed into the assembly, and who are now — yes, especially now — in her midst.

*and given themselves up to the error of Balaam for reward*

We notice that Scripture does not follow the historical order, for then Core should have been mentioned before Balaam. There is here rather a moral order, because the Holy Spirit wants to show the progression of evil.

Balaam was a man of great capacity. He possessed the highest intellectual and spiritual powers and abilities, outstanding knowledge and great eloquence combined with a prophetic outlook. But, above all, he was very religious, although his



religion had no desire for poverty, like Francis of Assisi. The fame of his spiritual power had spread far and wide: Balak, who lived at a distance of a 1000 km from him, had heard of him and was willing to pay anything for his help. But he was like a centaur out of Greek mythology: above a half-god, beneath a beast; he was a corrupt man. As the Latin proverb says: The corruption of what is best is worst. He was a man whose forehead was crowned with the light of heaven and whose heel was nailed fast in hell.

He knew Israel as God's people. He knew of their exodus from Egypt. He knew that the LORD (Jehovah) was their God. Notwithstanding this, and though the people had done him no harm, he did all he could to corrupt them: just for a bit of gold. He wished: "Let my soul die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!" (Num. 23:10). But as so many others, he preferred *to live* as the wicked, and that is not the way to die as a righteous person. Thus he died the death of the wicked in the midst of the enemies of God, by the sword of judgment (31:8).

He called the Lord: "Jehovah my God," but only to increase his price. He let the ambassadors wait, supposedly so he might speak with God, but his intention was to speak with the devil (cf. 24:1). He did not go to God, but God came to him, but not as Jehovah, the God of Israel. God did not recognize him as one who had communion with Him. God is Jehovah for Israel, the people with whom He has communion. When God tells him not to go because Israel is blessed, then he gives the impression that the price is too low. But when the second embassy comes he names his price (22:18; cf. Gen 23:10-16). Then, after God allows him to go, he leaves as early as possible. What business had he going if he could not curse the people? He knew quite well that Balak would not pay him for a blessing. But he was hoping to find a way to earn that house full of gold and silver. And while he, forced by God, loudly proclaimed the glories and blessings of Israel, he softly whispered into Balak's ear the meanest conspiracy one could imagine (Num. 25; 31:15-16; Rev. 2:14). He knew from experience that he could not draw the Lord away from Israel, so he tried to draw Israel away from the Lord by luring the people into fornication and idolatry through the women of Moab and Midian.

The error of Balaam is using religion, the things of God, for gain (1 Tim. 6:5; Ti. 1: 11). Religious seduction is using the name of the Lord, while the real inspiration comes from the devil. He *confessed* that he received his inspiration from the Lord (Num. 22:8, 19) though in reality he sought and found it with the devil (24:1). For wages, he sold to the devil what he had received from God.

Thus God's Word tells us that in the assembly, especially in our times — which are the last days of Christendom (v. 18) —, there will be men like Balaam: very talented men; otherwise they could not be compared with Balaam. They acknowledge the true God and are, to some extent, prophets of the truth, but greed rules their hearts, though they seek to give the impression not to care for money, honour or fame. When they can in one way or another profit by it, they will preach errors which corrupt God's people, full well knowing that their teaching is in conflict with God's revelation. How watchful must we be that we are not stupefied or corrupted by their poison!

#### *and perished in the gainsaying of Core*

In Balaam we saw the corruption of service, which showed itself in teaching of error. In Core we see the last step of departure: open rebellion against the Lord Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession (Heb. 3:1), and an arrogation of service (office) by those who claim to be the priesthood.

Core was a Levite, a Kohathite. He shared in the highest service among the Levites, the care for the things in the holiest: the ark, the table, the candlestick, the altar etc. (Num. 3:31). This man made common cause with Dathan and Abiram, sons of Reuben, the eldest son of Jacob.

With well-sounding words they rebelled against Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:3). One can always find fair words and good reasons for bad causes. The reasons may sound fair, but they really are blows against God and Christ. They *say* to stand for the rights of all the people. But God's Spirit is not deceived. Verses 8-11 show that Core was not satisfied with his levitical service but desired the priesthood of Aaron for himself. Verse 12 shows that Dathan and Abiram rejected Moses' authority. I believe that Jude thought of the whole rebellion.

With Core it was reaching for religious power; his was ritualism, which wishes to bring everything into the hands of a separate class that arrogates the priesthood to itself. Dathan and Abiram rejected divine authority; theirs was rationalism, which exalts the human mind, and will not bow to the authority of the Lord and His Word. Outwardly, these things may seem to be far apart, but they are one in their common rebellion against the Lord. The one appeals to man's religious zeal, the other to his intellect.

Moses portrays Christ as the Apostle of our profession, as the One who speaks the Word of God with authority. Aaron typifies Christ as the great Priest over the house of God. Thus, the gainsaying of Core symbolizes open rebellion, complete apostasy, the denial of Christ in His titles of Priest and King.

Jude shows to us that the evil of these men in Numbers 16 is a prophetic example of much that is now found openly in Christendom. Everyone knows that in the greater part of professing Christendom there are men who, because they claim to be priest in a special sense, exercise a virtually unlimited authority over those who acknowledge their claims. And besides, how many Dathans and Abirams, who set aside the authority of the true Moses, are there? To them, "freedom of conscience" is nothing but freedom (or liberty) to act and do as they please.

Jude's writing that these men perished has already come true for some individuals, but it is still future for these people as a whole. Some indeed have gone the whole route of departure, to complete apostasy. John writes about those who have gone out, but these were only examples of what soon would be in general: *the* falling away. That will be the ripe fruit of that which, from late apostolic times until today, has carried this character. If all of them would have gone out, all of Christendom would not have been infected through their presence. But as a class they remained. Don't we see in the assembly the same as in Numbers 16? Core was able to attract 250 leaders from Israel. And finally the entire congregation is under his influence and gathers against Moses and Aaron at the door of the tent of meeting (v. 19). Revelation 2 and 3 speak in a clear language about this.

What a grace that God's glory appeared to "all the assembly" before He executed judgment. It revealed the true character of the influences under which the nation had come. God opened a way of escape for all who in that last moment were willing to listen to Moses. "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye perish in all their sins" (v. 26).

Today we live in a time wherein the glory of the Lord has appeared and a way of escape is opened. "If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, [in separating himself from them], he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21). Today it is too late to try to correct the wrong in Christendom. Judgment has been announced. The only thing to do now is to: "Come out of her, My people, that ye have not fellowship in her sins, and that ye do not receive of her plagues: for her sins have been heaped on one another up to the heaven, and God has remembered her unrighteousnesses" (Rev. 18:4-5). When there is open rebellion, total apostasy, God's judgment will follow immediately.

What a grace of God that each one who, even in these last moments, listens to the voice of the true Moses will be saved from the judgment; even if he is a son of Core (Num. 26:11)! Doesn't this drive us to do, with burning zeal, what Jude wrote in verse 23? "But others save with fear, snatching [them] out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh"!

*To be cont'd*