

THE FELLOWSHIP TO WHICH ALL CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED (3)

CHAPTER 4

Elders and Deacons

In the early days of the Assembly local assemblies sprang up in Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Colosse, Thessalonica, as well as in many other places. All these believers together formed the Church, the Assembly of God on earth at that time. Together they formed the one body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the house of God.

Although they formed together one body, they were of necessity separated from each other by distance and met in local assemblies in their various places.

The offices of overseer (elder) and minister (deacon) are connected with such local assemblies. In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:4-9 we read about these offices. An office is something entirely different from a gift. A gift is meant for the total Assembly of God, an office is limited to a locality since it has to do with a local assembly. An apostle, evangelist, shepherd, or teacher could exercise his gift wherever he might be, in every place and in every assembly. An overseer or minister was only active as overseer and minister in the place where he had been appointed and nowhere else.

The office of overseer

An overseer is someone who watches, who has the care for the spiritual well-being of the saints. The Greek word for overseer is *episkopos* (*epi* = over, *skopeo* = to look or watch). The word occurs five times in Scripture, once referring to the Lord Himself (1 Pet. 2:25), the other four times (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Ti. 1:7; Acts 20:28) to the office we are now considering; each time it is translated by "overseer."

The word *bishop* has been derived from the Greek word *episkopos*. Christendom has used the word to set up a system of priests and a government of bishops. This system of ritualism is far removed from any Biblical principle. An authoritative writer of the Church of England once admitted that there is a great difference between the office of overseer in the Bible and that of today's bishop. We have often wondered what Paul would think of it if he could see a photograph of the bishop of Canterbury in his official attire: Miter, Bishop's ring, Bishop's staff, etc.

Overseers or elders were appointed by the apostles. Their office was restricted to the local assembly. In every place there was more than one.

The prerequisites for an overseer are found in 1 Timothy 3. He had to be the husband of one wife. Men who had been converted from heathendom often had more than one wife. There were therefore believers with more than one wife, but the overseer was only allowed to have one.

He had to be sober, hospitable, apt to teach, someone who conducted his own house well. These characteristics assured that such a person had a good family life, knew how to control himself, possessed wisdom and tact as well as the ability to rule wisely. All these characteristics are needed for someone who watches over the assembly. He ought not to be a new convert, for that would open the door to pride. Besides he had to have a good testimony from those without.

From the instructions given by Paul to Timothy and Titus, it is evident that the apostle instructed them, as his deputies, to appoint overseers (elders) in the places where they worked. Titus had to appoint elders on Crete.

Should we still appoint overseers (elders) today?

With this we have arrived at an important point. In the Bible we find namely no indications that the office of elder must be continued. Paul appointed elders and he charged Timothy and Titus to appoint elders. But there is no indication that this authority to appoint elders still exists today. If God had wanted elders to be appointed today, He would certainly have given instructions for this, such as we find for the high priest in the Old Testament.

But why shouldn't we appoint elders, seeing the needed characteristics for such a person are mentioned in detail? The reason should be clear:

1. Even in the early days of the Assembly, before the moral decline that Paul had warned about, had set in, the Assemblies were not allowed to appoint their own elders. They were to be appointed by Apostles or their delegates. Besides, godly authority flows from above downward. If they in their days were not allowed to appoint their own elders, how much less we in our days of unscriptural divisions.
2. The office is not to be continued in an official capacity. Doubtless, it was wise that it was official in the early days. The Holy Spirit worked so powerful then that the moral condition of the men who were appointed for it were in agreement with the conditions mentioned for it.
3. Though it is true that today we have no officially appointed overseers or elders, yet there are older, God-fearing brothers, who care for the local assembly to which they belong; these do the work of overseer or elder.

It is certainly not without purpose that the qualifications for an overseer are mentioned in detail. Thereby we can judge if someone who thinks himself to be called by the Lord to this work is fit for it. The reason we do find the characteristics which ought to mark the overseer if he is to do his work well while we don't find instructions for the continuation of the office as such is, we believe, because God foresaw the decline and confusion that has come about in Christendom. Even early in the Church period a bureaucracy sprung up that was more of a curse than a blessing.

In this connection we should consider this: Had provisions been made to continue this office, each denomination would have usurped this right for itself. An elder was elder in the local assembly, but where is the local assembly today? Which group can call itself the Assembly of Christ at such and such a place? What pretense would that be! What quarreling would that cause!

Finally, the word "elder" is used, which in the Bible always speaks of a man that is no longer young. The Greek word for elder is *presbuteros*, from where the words presbyterian and presbyter have been derived. *Presbuteros* means an older person. By changing these simple words, giving them another meaning, large religious systems have been built up in which overseers or bishops are chosen by the elders.

The office of deacon (or minister)

The Greek word for deacon is *diakonos* which is the normal word for servant. At the beginning God-fearing men were apparently chosen in the assembly to take care of the financial matters of the assembly, such as the care for the poor, the provision of food, financial support, and similar matters.

Since deacons had to look after the financial affairs of the assembly, great care had to be taken in selecting them. Such a person should for instance not be double tongued: talk one way when a person is present and another way when that person is absent. In 1 Timothy 3:8-13 we read of the prerequisites for the deacon and his wife. It is clear why there is detailed information regarding the qualities of the wife, for a deacon's wife can help her husband in many practical ways related to his work.

The qualifications for a deacon are quite similar to those for an overseer. They too were appointed by the apostles or their delegates, for more than a business sense is needed to do the work of a deacon. We read about the appointing of seven men "well reported of, full of [the] [Holy] Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3).

Also for this office we don't find any instructions how to continue it officially, but because we do know what characteristics should mark such a person, we believe, that just as with an overseer, the work is to be continued by faithful men who by their deportment demand the trust of the assembly.

To be cont'd

OUTLINE FOR BIBLE STUDY (36)

75. JEROBOAM. THE PROPHET FROM JUDAH. THE HOUSE OF JEROBOAM DESTROYED. — 1 Kings 12:25-14:20; 15:25-16:28

Outline

1. Jeroboam's Idolatry 1 Ki. 12:25-33
2. The Prophet's Pronouncement 1 Ki. 13:1-32
3. The Prophets End 1 Ki. 13:11-32
4. Judgment Announced 1 Ki. 14:1-20
5. The House of Jeroboam Destroyed 1 Ki. 15:25-31
6. Zimri and Omri 1 Ki. 16:8-28

Explanation

1. Jeroboam was a mighty man, but he was also wicked. He seduced Israel into idolatry (calves and high places). He gave it a substitute for the service of Jehovah by erecting altars in Bethel and Dan, and ordaining priests from tribes other than Levi.

2. The Prophet from Judah announced that the priests of the high places would be burned upon Jeroboam's altar. To prove that the prophet's message was from God, the altar split in two at his word.

3. The prophet from Judah remained firm notwithstanding the temptation of Jeroboam. When the prophet from Bethel enticed him to come to his house, he fell.

4. God used the sickness of his child to bring another message to Jeroboam. His house was to be completely cut off, but since the Lord saw good in the child He took it to Himself.

5. The only further record of Jeroboam is of a war against Judah that cost the life of half a million of his men. After this nothing instructive is mentioned about Jeroboam, he dies and his son Nadab becomes King. The judgment foretold by the prophet came two years later when Nadab and all the other children of Jeroboam were destroyed by Baasha, who then became King.

6. Baasha was no better than Jeroboam. His son Elah reigned only two years when Zimri, one of his captains killed him according to God's prophecy (16:3). The people, however, appointed Omri as King; he reigned twelve years (16:23). He was more wicked than all the kings before him.

Lesson

We are all examples, be it for better or for worse. Time and again God refers to this with words like: "The sins of Jeroboam, wherewith he made Israel to sin" (Cf. 1 Ki. 16:31; 2 Ki. 10:31), using him as a warning example for His people. Though God showed Jeroboam how powerless he was by drying up his hand, and though God showed grace, the King did not listen and therefore all his house was destroyed (1 Ki. 14:10; Ps. 34:16).

Since God Himself had given him orders, the Prophet from Judah should have realized that God would not negate His charge in any other way than speaking to him directly. Now he heard God's judgment: "Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the word of Jehovah,... thy carcass shall not come into the sepulchre of thy fathers" (1 Ki. 13:22). It is an impressive lesson for every believer, especially for those in God's service.

In Galatians 1:8-9 we read that we have to adhere to the truth of the gospel even if an apostle or angel from heaven preaches differently (Cf. 1 Ki. 13:18).

The words God speaks of Jeroboam's child shows us that God cares even for the children of idolatrous parents. Many children that have died young may well have been taken by God for similar reasons.

Outline

1. Elijah at the Brook Cherith 1 Kings 17:1-7
2. Elijah at Zarephath 1 Kings 17:8-16
3. Elijah Raises the Widow's Son 1 Kings 17:17-24

Explanation

1. First God heard the prayer of Elijah that it would not rain. Then God provided for His faithful servant during the drought, the time of judgment.
2. Miraculously God provided unfailing nourishment for the prophet as well as for the widow and her son.
3. Elijah pleads with God to bring the soul of the dead boy back into him. God hears the prayer of His servant.

Lesson

Thus far idol worship had existed in Israel side by side with the worship of Jehovah. Ahab, however, domineered as he was by his wicked wife, Jezebel, introduced Baal-worship (sun-worship) throughout the whole country. In this dark time God raised up Elijah.

With a heart full of love for the people and zeal for God's honour, he appeared on the scene to save the people from destruction (drought — Dt. 11:16-17). The judgment took place only upon the prayer of Elijah (Jas. 5:17).

Elijah lived by faith and in a miraculous way God took care of him — he was fed by the ravens. When the brook dried up God sent him to a needy, gentile widow who was to take care of him (v. 9). How humiliating for Israel that rejected its prophets (Lk. 4:25,26).

Through God's chastisement (the death of her son) the woman came to confession of sin, and God gave a marvelous delivery (Ps. 50:15).

Even during the darkest times, God knows those who are faithful. He answers their prayers, takes care of them and blesses their testimony (Ps. 33:18-20).

To be cont'd.

JAMES

—J. van Dijk

James addresses his Epistle to the twelve tribes in the dispersion. These people had in common that they professed to know the God of Israel, the God whose Son was Jesus Christ, whether they acknowledged this latter fact or not. It is therefore a mixed company, some having been born-again and others not, yet all acknowledging God as their God.

To this mixed company James writes about a series of subjects which, if taken to heart, will cause the readers to examine themselves as to their true standing before the God they own. For those who are mere professors James' words contain a serious warning. For those who truly are the Lord's his words are a challenge: Do I measure up to what I am through grace? Because of its character, this Epistle will continue to address all God-fearing men even after the Church has been taken up; as Peter's writings it is as suited for the days of the remnant as it is for us in the day of grace.

The topics he touches upon are as follows:

1. Trust God in whatever circumstances you are.
 - a. You may experience tests; it is God who tests your faith (1:2-3)
 - b. Your social standing should not be the least hindrance between you and your God (1:9-10).
 - c. Temptation is not of God, but stems from within ourselves, where our sinful, old nature dwells (1:13).
 - d. God alone gives what is good (1:16-17).

2. Your relationship with others:
 - a. Do not speak hastily, and don't get angry quickly (1:19).
 - b. Do not have respect of persons (2:1).
 - c. Do not be one who claims to have faith, but who really doesn't have it (2:14).
 - d. Do not be quick to teach (3:1).
 - e. Do not think yourself to be wise (3:13).
3. Examine your relationships; know what is the root of your quarrels (4:1).
4. Do not speak against each other (4:11).
5. Realize that you are not able to determine even the nearest future (4:13).
6. Consider how you use your riches (5:1).
7. Have patience (5:7).
8. Do not swear (5:12).
9. See God's hand in your sufferings, and seek the prayerful support of others (5:13).
10. Seek to help those who have fallen, assisting them in their return to the Lord (5:19).

After the introduction of each topic a discourse follows outlining various points to consider in connection with it. James seeks to arouse the reader's conscience so that he may enter into the godly "wherefore" of the instruction.

Overall it can be said that, though we have genuine faith, we remain a frail people who are far from faultless. To realize this, and act upon it (judging and confessing it) will keep us in a proper relationship with our God as well as our fellow men. If we heed the instructions, we will prove to be true bondmen of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE PROBLEM OF UNANSWERED PRAYER (3)

—*J. Rouw*

In 1 Kings 19:2 we read about Elijah, "And Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, So do the gods [to me], and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time!" Elijah had killed four hundred idol priests and now Jezebel, the ungodly queen, said, "I'll make you pay for that one." When Elijah saw this, he arose, and went for his life. He came to Beer-sheba where he left his servant. "And he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a certain broom-bush, and requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough: now, Jehovah, take my life; for I am not better than my fathers. And he lay down and slept under the broom-bush. And behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, Arise, eat! And he looked, and behold, at his head was a cake, baked on two stones, and a cruse of water. And he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of Jehovah came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise, eat; for the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God" (vv. 4-8).

Moses gave the people of God the law, but Elijah brought the people back to God. He had stood on mount Carmel, built an altar there, and laid a sacrifice upon it, a bullock. Then fire had come from heaven, from God, in response to his prayer, consuming the animal as well as the altar, the wood, and the water that had run into the trench he had dug around it. Thus God had heard the prayer of Elijah. But now, in this chapter, he was totally despondent; he couldn't care about anything, he was tired of living.

Tired of living, more than anything he would have liked to die. That happens by times to people. It happens even to believers. Elijah said: "Lord Jehovah, please take me away, I want to die." But God said, "No." Through an angel he received cakes to strengthen him. And that is just what these special cakes did, for in the strength of that food he could walk forty days. And then he received a new task from God.

By times, we too sit down under our load. But God may very well have a new task for us just then. John Wesley was a famous preacher. When he was thirty five years old and very weak, he said to his wife: "I can't go on, I'm going to die.

Here are some lines to put on my grave: 'Here lies a man who accomplished little in his life, yet he received God's grace. His thirty-fifth year was the last of his life.' Put that on my gravestone." A few days later, however, he started to improve. He became eighty five years old. And after his thirty-fifth year he did more in his life than ever before. God has blessed his gospel message and his books all over the world.

Without dying

It is but an example. It resembles Elijah a little. But with Elijah it was even better. He had said: "Lord, I want to die." But then notice him walking with Elisha along the river Jordan. What happened there? Perhaps you will remember. Fiery horses and a fiery chariot come from heaven, and Elijah is allowed to come aboard. There he goes, straight toward the glory, without dying. Now, is that God's answer to his prayer or not? His was an unanswered prayer. He was not allowed to die while lying there under the juniper tree, but God said: "I have something more beautiful for you, you may go to heaven and you don't even have to experience a sickbed, pain or sorrows; alive straight to glory!" A wondrous thing!

I wanted to draw your attention to this. I would like to call out to you: Have a great trust in God's love.

Jehovah is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and truth! And would you doubt God's care? Don't! Keep on trusting, though your path is difficult, though it leads through a dark valley. The psalmist wrote it too: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." But also when you don't see a way out any more and you have lost all hope, He remains full of grace, He is full of love. Perhaps you will soon experience this in your life.

God does answer

And if on earth you don't get an answer on your disappointments, then you will get it above. You will wonder about the love of God. You will see that He does not make mistakes. Perhaps you think: "My life is ruined," or "All goes wrong." When you trust Him completely and can say to the Lord your God, "I don't understand a thing about it, but I will at Thy time," then He will show you wonders.

With the Lord, nothing is impossible. Would anything be too wonderful for the Lord? Look up Jeremiah 32:17 and 27. For that matter we read it already in Genesis. God had promised Sarah a child, but by human reckoning that was impossible, for she was already ninety years old. Then the angel, or actually God Himself, said: "Is [any] matter too wonderful for Jehovah?" (Gen. 18:14). Could you think of something God could not do? God is the Almighty One. This we see also in the account of Elijah.

To be cont'd

CONFERENCE OUTLINE (1)

Under this heading we will DV publish an outline of the conferences which have been held since 1967 in Winschoten in the Netherlands. We expect this outline to be helpful to those who would like to acquaint themselves with the thoughts of Scriptures on these subjects, without being simultaneously confronted with the thoughts of men, good as such thoughts may be in their own place and time. Perhaps these outlines may be a help to some to begin home Bible studies. May they be for blessing, in whatever way they are used. If they cause some to have questions on these subjects, we are prepared to seek to answer them with the Lord's help.

I. THE ASSEMBLY ON EARTH

- A. The beginning of the Assembly
 - 1. The Assembly announced — Mt. 16:13-20
 - 2. Her place on earth as replacing Israel — Mt. 18:15-20
- B. The Character of the Assembly
 - 1. As bride of Christ
 - a. Now on earth — Eph. 5:22-32
 - b. In eternity — Rev. 19:6-10; 21:2
 - 2. As the Body of Christ
 - a. Christ its Head — Eph. 1:23; 4:15-16; 5:23; Col. 1:18,24; 2:19

- b. The oneness of the Body — Rom 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12-13; Eph. 2:16; 4:4; Colossians
- c. Many members each with its own function — Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12: 12-27; Eph. 5:30; 3:15
- d. Ephesians: The body of the Head
- e. Colossians: The Head of the body
- 3. As House of God
 - a. According to God's counsels — Eph. 2:21
 - b. In a practical way today on earth — Eph. 2:22; 1 Tim. 3:15
 - c. As built by men — 1 Cor. 3:4-17
 - d. The condition of ruin — 2 Tim. 2:19-20 This has reference to points b. and c. above, and not to point a.
- C. The Assembly in her service and life
 - 1. In connection with her character as Bride of Christ — Eph. 5:24a,26,27,29; Rev. 19:8; 22:17
 - 2. In connection with her character as Body of Christ
 - a. Her common service — 1 Cor. 10:15-22; 11:23-26
 - b. Service and function of the members — Eph. 4:11-14; 1 Cor. 12:14-31; 14:26-40; Rom. 12:3-8
 - c. The leading in her service and life — 1 Cor. 12:1-12
 - 3. In connection with her character as House of God
 - a. Priestly Service — 1 Pet. 2:4-5
 - b. Order, Holiness, Discipline, Personal instructions — Ps. 93:5; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; 1 Tim. 1:20; Tit. 3:10-11; 2 Jn. :10-11
 - c. Admonishing, withdrawing and marking — Mt. 18:15-17; Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:6-15
 - d. Practical instructions for conditions of ruin — 2 Tim. 2:15-26
- D. Special Gifts
 - 1. Origin and Purpose of the gifts — Eph. 4:7-14; 1 Pet. 4:10-11
 - 2. The charge and responsibility in the service — Lk. 19:11-26; Mt. 25:14-30; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 4:1-5

II. THE FUTURE OF THE ASSEMBLY

- A. The heavenly character of the Assembly
 - 1. Its basis
 - a. The Person of Christ, His death and resurrection — Mt. 16:16,18; Rom. 1:4; Jn. 11:52-53
 - b. Our having died and having been raised with Him — Col. 2:12-13; 3:1-3; Eph. 2:5,6
 - 2. Its Heavenly Calling — Phil. 3:14; Heb. 3:1; 1 Cor. 15:47-49
 - 3. Heavenly Blessings — Eph. 1:3
 - 4. Heavenly Citizenship — Phil. 3:20
 - 5. Linked with her Head at God's right Hand — Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 1:18
 - 6. Only complete after the resurrection — 1 Cor. 12:13; 6:15,19; Eph. 1:23
 - 7. Our relationship to the Father and the Son
 - a. God's counsel — Rom. 8:29
 - b. The announcement — Jn. 17:1-3,6; 14:7-9.
 - c. The work of salvation — Jn. 20:17; Heb. 2:12,17
 - d. The Father's house — Jn. 14:2
 - e. The return — Jn. 14:3
 - 8. What ought to be our attitude on earth?
 - a. Strangers — 1 Pet. 1:1,17; 2:11
 - b. Seeking, thinking, striving, after heavenly things — Col. 3:1-2; Phil. 3:13-19
- B. How will the Assembly be taken up?
 - 1. What will the Lord do? — 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52; Jn. 5:28
 - 2. What will happen to those who sleep? — 1 Cor. 15:51-57; 1 Thess. 4:15-18
 - 3. What will happen to the living ones? — As above
 - 4. What kind of body do we receive? — 1 Cor. 15:35-55; Phil. 3:20-21
 - 5. Where will we be brought at resurrection? — 1 Thess. 4:17; Jn. 14:2-3
 - 6. Our position there. — Eph. 5:27; Lk. 12:37; Heb. 2:13
- C. When will the Assembly be taken up?
 - 1. Does anything have to happen first? — Mt. 24:14; Acts 1:6-7; 1 Thess. 5:1; Rev. 3:11; 22:7,12,20; 1 Cor.15:51-52; Mt. 25:1-7
 - 2. Are there indications that it will be soon? — Lk. 21:29-31; Mk. 13:28-29; Rev. 17:8-13; Dan. 9:26b-27
 - 3. Are there any indications in the condition of Christendom? — 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 4:3-4; 2 Thess. 2:1-10; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 3:3-6; 1 Jn. 2:18-23; Jude :17-19
 - 4. How far has the prophetic history of Revelation 2 and 3 been fulfilled?
- D. Position and service in heaven before the Millennium
 - 1. The Twenty four Elders

- a. Position — Rev. 4:4,6,9-11; 5:5-14
- b. Service — Rev. 5:8b
- c. Who they are *not* — Rev. 5:10 ("them"); 6:9-11; 7:1-8,9-17; 12:13-17; 13:7-8; 14:1-5,12; 15:2-4; 20:4b,9
- d. Who are they? — Rev. 4:4,10-11; 5:6-14; 7:13-17; 11:15-18; 14:3; 19:4; 1 Cor. 15:23; Heb. 11:39-40; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6
- 2. The marriage of the Lamb — Rev. 19:1-10
- E. The Assembly and the Lord's return to earth
 - 1. Who come with the Lord from Heaven? — Joel 3:11; Mt. 25:31; 1 Thess. 3:13; 4:14; 2 Thess. 1:7; Jude :14; Rev. 17:14; 19:14
 - 2. What character has this coming?
 - a. The coming of the Son of Man — Mt. 24:30
 - b. The day of Christ — 2 Cor. 1:143; Phil. 1:6,10; 2:16
 - c. The day of our Lord Jesus Christ — 1 Cor. 1:7-8; (1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5)
 - d. The day of the Lord — 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2-3
 - e. The revelation of Christ — 1 Cor. 1:7; Col. 3:4; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7,13; 4:13; 1 Jn. 2:28; 3:2
 - f. The appearance of Christ — 2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 4:1,8; Ti. 2:13; 1 Pet. 5:4
 - 3. The judgment of the living — 1 Cor. 6:2-3; Rev. 17:14; 19:14,19-21; (see also Mt.25:31-46 and Rev. 20:11-15?)
 - 4. Our responsibility in connection with Christ's coming — 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:5-12; Lk. 7:41-47
- F. The Assembly in the Millennium
 - 1. Her Service — 1 Cor. 6:2; Lk. 19:11-19; Rev. 20:4; Eph. 1:10-13,18; 1 Pet. 1:4
 - 2. Her place and glory — Rev. 21:9-22:5
- G. The Assembly in the eternal condition — Jn. 14:1-3; Rev. 21:1-8

To be cont'd.

PRIESTLY SERVICE (1)

—H. L. Heijkoop

Leviticus 8:31-36; 9:21-24

In chapter 8 of Leviticus, we find first the consecration of the priests, followed from verse 31 onward by instructions how the priesthood was to be exercised. After reading the entire chapter it will be clear to us that it speaks only about the service outside the tabernacle, that is to say, about that which concerns our testimony here on earth. It has no reference to the service we perform as priests on Sunday mornings, at any rate not to our entering the sanctuary to bring sacrifices. In the sacrifices of Leviticus 8, the blood is not brought into the sanctuary. The latter we see in Leviticus 16 which speaks of the great day of atonement to which Hebrew 10:19 refers when it says that we "have boldness for entering into the [holy of] holies by the blood of Jesus."

It is evident then that the service spoken of here is not the one in the sanctuary — no blood is brought into it — but rather of the service here on earth, in the wilderness, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. The tent of meeting was the place where God called the people around Himself. As soon as the tabernacle was set up (Ex. 40) and God had come to dwell in it, He called His people together at the entrance of the tent of meeting to speak to them there.

Here we see then that Aaron and his sons were consecrated to their service. The Epistle to the Hebrews shows clearly that Aaron is a type of the Lord Jesus and 1 Peter 2 says that all believers are priests. We, who are linked up with Him, the second Man, share in His dignity, for we are priests. He is the High Priest, and we are the priests, for we are united with Him. Here it says it this way: we are sons of Aaron, and therefore we too are priests.

Isn't it wonderful to be so united with the Lord Jesus? Hebrews 2 says that we are "all of one," and that He is not ashamed to call us His brethren (v. 11). When it comes to the consecration of the priests, all rests on the work of the Lord Jesus. He became High Priest after had finished the work. True, there is the exception referred to in Hebrews 2:17, when He offered Himself on the cross, but that is the only priestly service He accomplished on earth. Hebrews 5 tells us, however, that He became High Priest when He returned to heaven. God addressed Him as High Priest, based on His being the Son of God as Man rather than His being the eternal Son of God, which He is too of course. Hebrews connects it with Psalm 2, where the Lord is seen as King of Israel; in that connection God says, "Thou art My Son, I this day have begotten Thee" (Ps. 2:7). This Epistle shows that the High Priest is the Mediator between God and men. The Lord couldn't hold that position as God the Son. To be the representative of men before God He had to be Man; but on the other hand He had to be God to be the representative of God before men.

The truth of Psalm 2, saying that the Lord was also the Son of God as Man, is not the same as the Lord Jesus being the only-begotten Son of the Father. True, from eternity He is God and He couldn't but remain God, but *besides* this He became Man and also as Man He is the Son of God. Psalm 2 refers to this when saying: "Thou art My Son, I this day have begotten Thee." And the angel in Luke 1:35 speaks of the same thing when he says to Mary: "That Holy thing which shall be born shall be called Son of God." Thus the Lord Jesus is Son of God even as Man.

Now as said, the Holy Spirit links this fact to the priesthood. This is beautiful. As the only begotten Son He could never make Himself one with us, but as firstborn among many brethren He could do so. The second Man, the last Adam, is a life-giving Spirit, and all who have been made one with Him, all who have received His life, belong to the family of the second Man. And all who belong to that family are priests, for the second Man is Priest. Therefore, when Aaron and his sons are mentioned here, it refers to the Lord Jesus as He is now in heaven, and to us who are priests on earth on the basis of His work. He died on the cross not only to bear our sins, but also to make us priests.

From verse 31 onward we have our service as priests on the basis of the work of the Lord Jesus. We must feed ourselves with Him and His finished work. Verse 31 says explicitly that the flesh must be boiled. Exodus 12, which speaks of the passover lamb, says that it is to be roasted rather than boiled or sodden, for it speaks of Christ's bearing the judgment over our sins. Here, however, we have that part of the exercise of the priesthood which does not speak of the Lord's bearing our sins, but of His manner of serving God. One could compare it with Philippians 2. The Lord has "emptied Himself... and having been found in figure as a man, humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and [that the] death of the cross" (vv. 7-8). In this there is no mention of bearing our judgment, but of His being obedient. It tells us how He has devoted Himself completely to God. This is the food we need for the performance of our priesthood.

Now where should we boil the flesh and where should we eat it? At the entrance of the tent of meeting. When the Lord invites His own around Himself, where God is in the midst of His people, then and there we must observe how the Lord Jesus devoted Himself completely to God during His entire life. This we must eat to receive strength to serve in the same manner as He. It is as in John 6, we must eat His flesh, but then it adds: "He that eats My flesh... has life eternal" (v. 54). And two verses down it is repeated that one must eat it (v. 56). It is the food of eternal life.

From verse 33 we have the service itself: "And ye shall not go out from the entrance of the tent of meeting seven days, until the day when the days of your consecration are at an end: for seven days shall ye be consecrated." As we know, seven in the Word of God is the number of completeness. It speaks therefore of the entire time that we exercise the priesthood. And it all takes place at the entrance of the tent of meeting. All service for God proceeds from this place, the place on earth that expresses what will be found in eternity.

In 1 Peter 3:18 the purpose of the work of the Lord Jesus is presented: "For Christ indeed has once suffered for sins, [the] Just for [the] unjust, that He might bring us to God." Soon the Lord will come to bring us into God's house, then we will be forever with Him. But He desires to have us with Himself even here on earth, for that expresses the purpose of the work of the Lord Jesus and a foretaste of what it will be to be with Him for eternity. The entrance of the tent of meeting is the place where we are gathered unto His name, where He invites His own to come to Him, to be with Him. There we have to exercise our priesthood all the time that we are called to perform our task as priests.

Yet, today things are not identical to what we find in the Old Testament. In the beginning only the heads of the families were priests. Here we see how only one tribe was chosen for the priesthood, and of that tribe only one family performed the service. It will be like this in the Millennium, not every one will be a priest. And even the priests in Israel were not allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, we alone are allowed to do so. This is a characteristic of the priesthood found here.

But, as said, it is the service on earth, not the fact of entering into the sanctuary, and therefore not the service of bringing sacrifices into the sanctuary. It is our serving the Lord Jesus in the name of God while we are here below. What this means we saw in verse 35, "And ye shall abide at the entrance of the tent of meeting day and night seven days, and keep the charge of Jehovah, that ye die not; for so I am commanded."

We therefore must do the commandments of the Lord, observe, and practice all that He has said. It is a wonderful service. We are on earth to testify of Him, to be a witness of His rights. If we were to consider the Assembly, we would see the same thing. She is the body of Christ to be a witness of the glory of the exalted Lord, and she is the house of God to be a witness of God. Here the subject is not the Assembly but the priestly family, and they who belong to the Assembly, belong to the priestly family too. We know that they have to bring this into practice and keep the commandments of the Lord. They must see to it that all will be according to His commandments, that in an appropriate manner expression is given to His thoughts. In short, we must show that the Lord Jesus is Lord, and that God, the Holy Spirit, lives within us. It should be seen that we acknowledge the rights of God, that we not only speak of the Lord Jesus, but show in our lives that we

acknowledge Him as Lord and that we are not our own, but that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, so that He, the Spirit, can use us when and as He pleases.

And then follows the beautiful thing found in verse 36, "And Aaron and his sons did all things that Jehovah had commanded by the hand of Moses." We can understand this of Aaron. He is a type of the Lord Jesus and as such he is portrayed here. His personal weaknesses are not mentioned here, for as a type of the Lord Jesus he doesn't have a single weakness. But how beautiful that God's Word can say also of the sons of Aaron that they did all that the Lord had commanded.

To be cont'd

A SEED OF GOD (3)

— A.E. Bouter

A WORK OF GOD

In this chapter I'd like to elaborate a little on the connection between "a Seed of God" (COME AND SEE, Vol. 13, No's 3 and 4.) and a definite work of God. God plans, prepares, accompanies the process of forming and growing to reach a result for Himself (fruit) and for His people (food).

Psalm 126

These few verses present the same principles we came across earlier in our studies. The point I'd like to emphasize here is, that there seems to be a "hidden" link between (1) a work of God — verses 1-4; (2) the sorrows, exercises and trials of His people — verse 5; and (3) the sufferings, resurrection and glory of Christ — verse 6.

The exegesis of this Psalm sets before us the future restoration of the remnant of the ten tribes of Israel together with the two tribes in their homeland. But now we want to apply the moral principles of these verses to ourselves (according to the New Testament keys, 1 Cor. 9:9f; 10:6,11; Rom. 15:4; Gal. 4; Heb. 7 and others).

Verses 1-3 speak of the public result of a work of God done in sovereign grace, yet at the same time done in answer to the prayers of His people (v. 4). Verse 5 shows the hidden work of God in His people. It is a long process, which starts with sowing under difficult circumstances but ends with reaping. Think in this connection of God's ways with His people. Verse 6 gives the moral and divinely righteous basis of this process. It is found in the Person and the work of Christ. But He also identifies Himself with this hidden work of God, as we so often find in the Psalms and the Prophets (see e.g. Is. 63:9, "In all their affliction He was afflicted"). In other words: it is not only what He did for them in the past (although that is the perfect foundation for everything before God), but He is occupied with His people and He works in them now, as Eph. 5:26f clearly shows in relation to the Assembly (Christ will do that in the future for the remnants of Israel).

"He goeth forth and weepeth, bearing seed for scattering." Here we may see a link with John 12:24, Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 (see above), but also with the present hidden work of God in His people. He alone was the true Seed of God, the Man of sorrows. But He reproduces His own characteristics in those who belong to Him, until there will be a full, satisfying, and public result with which He will be specially identified: "He cometh again with rejoicing, bearing his sheaves." So there will be much fruit!

The work of God in relation to "a seed of God"

This leads us to Isaiah 28:23-29. This parable presents God's wisdom, displayed in the ways He secures fruit for Himself, despite the judgments He will bring over His people. Again, this passage refers to the future remnant(s) of Israel, yet there is much blessing for us, a remnant of God's sovereign grace today, when we apply the principles we find here to ourselves.

A remnant

Earlier we have seen that God, when His people as a whole reject His Word, causes His thoughts to take effect in a remnant. God's ways of discipline and His dealings in retribution display the wisdom whereby God brings about the

desired response in such a remnant which is instructed by Him. Therefore, at the end of the dispensation, this question is asked "Who [is] wise and understanding among you?" (Jas. 3:13-18)

In a touching appeal to His people in general (v. 23), God addresses this remnant in particular (v. 26). The judgments God was and is going to bring over them will, as it were, prepare the ground to produce fruit. As we have seen in Ps. 126, it is God who works, and He causes His people to produce fruit for Himself. So we find God, who was first presented as the Judge over His people (Isa. 28:21), introduced as the great "Farmer" who uses a certain pattern to secure fruit. He also is the great "Teacher" who instructs His own that they may know and understand His ways and cooperate with Him. As we have seen in Malachi, God wants this remnant for Himself, but also close to Himself, in true fellowship, that He may share His thoughts with them. In a similar manner He made known His ways to Moses, but only His acts to Israel (Ps. 103:7). In other words: Moses was near enough to God, for God to share His deepest thoughts with him, but the people as a whole was at a distance from God, and they observed only the outward appearance. A similar distinction is made in the passage of Isaiah 28 at which we are looking now.

A brief review of the passage

After Isaiah, moved by the Spirit of God (cf. 2 Pet. 1:21), has described the judgment and retribution which God would bring over the rulers and people, he invites them to listen to a parable about farm life from which they could draw some obvious lessons. (Our Lord Jesus used the same method: see e.g. Mt. 13, where we also find the distinction between those who were near and those who were at a distance). (1) The farmer ploughs and breaks up his land, but his labour is not an end in itself. (2) It is for the preparation of the ground, in order that it may receive the seed and bring forth fruit. (3) When the fruit is ready, a specific process of reaping and threshing follows.

So God may bring heart-breaking woe and suffering over His people, but His aim for them is to reap and enjoy blessings which He has in store for the faithful. It is God's wisdom which directs the varied activities of the husbandman, who adapts his processes to the seasons of the year and to the nature of the seeds. In like manner the wisdom of God directs the process of His dealings with His people (in plowing, sowing, forming, and in His governmental ways, retribution, discipline etc.), adapting His dealings to their moral condition and character.

To be cont'd