

IS CHRISTIANITY UNIQUE?

—J. van Dijk

An article titled "CREEDS AND CONTROVERSIES," written by John Valk, campus pastor at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, appeared in the Calvinist Contact of March 11th, 1988. In it he raises several questions, one of which is the following:

"How would Jesus deal with what may be the greatest challenge facing the theological enterprise in the last decade of this century and in the 21st century, namely, the issue of world religions? What would Jesus say to a sincere and devout Hindu, Buddhist, or Muslim? Would He condemn the means by which they seek contact with the divine as it has been revealed to them?"

Valk then continued:

"In the light of the knowledge and information we now have of non-Christian religions, perhaps it is time to take another good hard look at the theoretical answers which up to this point have satisfied our theoretical questions."

Considering this suggestion, one verse from God's Word immediately came to mind:

"And salvation is in none other, for neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). We will now look more in depth into this question.

What is so special about Christianity?

These various religions caused me to raise a question too, though my question has a different character. Some years ago I had hired a Hindu and a Buddhist for my engineering department. I wanted to speak to them of Christ and His salvation. But I realized that from their point of view (not from mine) there was no reason why I should present Christ to them as more excellent than their holy men. So I asked myself, How can I reasonably ask them to consider Christ?

I found the answer in the same truth that led me to Christ. From the Bible I knew that I myself was not able to satisfy God, but that He had found satisfaction in Christ's sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. For my salvation I had to believe what God said about my sinful condition, about Christ, and about His work. The only thing I could *do* was to turn in repentance to God for forgiveness for my sins and to believe His testimony that Christ's death was the answer to my sinful nature.

At the cross I found not only that my sins had been washed away because He bore them in His body on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24), but also that He had been made sin for me (2 Cor. 5:21). While condemning my sinful nature, He had caused me to die with Him, whereupon I had received Him as my life (Gal. 2:20). Eternal life had become mine! These very truths excluded all other means to approach God. The fundamental and essential truth of Christianity is this: If it were not for God lifting up man, man could never have fellowship with God.

This caused me to realize that a religion that comes from God must bear the mark of its origin. It must be essentially distinct from all others. *God's grace alone is able to meet man's depravity.* All others must of necessity spring from man's imagination and centre around the false idea that glorifies man, i.e. *The germ of good in man enables him to become acceptable to God.* Indeed, only Christianity bears the hallmark of God. "Ye are saved by grace, through faith; and this not of yourselves; it is God's gift: not on the principle of works, that no one might boast" (Eph. 2:9).

Approaching others

With this, I have approached Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims, both in my engineering department and later, while on trips to India and Sri Lanka. I have asked them if I were correct in assuming their religion in essence to be this: Be aware that there is a higher being or cause, live well, seek to do good, pay due attention to the rituals, and in the end you will receive blessing. They always admitted that I had grasped the essential character of their religion. Then I told them that all

religions but Christianity have this same essential character, and that because of its uniqueness, Christianity commanded their attention. If any one religion is from God, it *must* be unique in its essence. And if any religion is unique in its essence, it deserves the full attention of all men. Consider this:

o Christ is unique

He fulfilled exact prophecies — (Ps.22; Is. 53)

He was born of a Virgin — (Isa. 7; Mt. 1)

He lived a perfect sinless life — (2 Cor. 5:21)

He gave His life to save others — (Jn. 10:11)

He rose from the dead after three days — (Jn. 20)

He ascended to heaven forty days later — (Lk. 24)

He sent down the Holy Spirit — (Jn. 7:37-39)

o Christianity is unique. There is,

No other God — (1 Cor. 8:6)

No other Son — (Jn. 3:16)

No other way — (Jn. 14:6)

No other mediator — (1 Tim. 2:5)

No other sacrifice — (Heb. 10:12, 26)

No other name — (Acts 4:12)

No other Lord — (1 Cor. 8:6)

So, we can confidently tell Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims of the extraordinary uniqueness of Christianity, which compels all to consider it carefully. Christianity has every mark of having been revealed by the living God.

The question answered

But how does Scripture answer one who asks if the Lord would really "condemn the means by which they *seek* contact with the *divine* as it has been *revealed* to them?" God's Word says that no one *seeks* after God, unless He Himself has first touched the heart. There is no other *divine* than God Himself. Scripture does not know an abstract idea that could be labeled *divine*, it speaks only in terms of the living God and idols. And finally, there are no revelations apart from those given by the living God and these always correspond with His written Word (e.g. Amos 3:7; Mt. 11:27).¹ Anything else that men pass off as revelation is merely man's imagination.

Questions like these tend to confuse the children of God by raising doubts in their minds as to the value of the Word of God. "Has God said... ?" was Satan's question to Eve (Gen. 3:1). They seek to use man's knowledge as a cause for making the Word of God of none effect. However, our "increased knowledge" of other religions does not change God's instructions to us. Besides, the question assumes the notions of man to be revelations, thus elevating them to the level of the revealed Word of God. And it also pre-supposes that the heathen seek the divine, whereas God says that no one seeks God.

In the face of such things, we like to help all who trust in the blood of Christ for their salvation, by pointing them and their children to the truth of God's Word, so that they may be able to recognize the attack of the enemy. May God raise up men with wisdom, strength, and ability throughout Christendom, who will withstand the enemy when he seeks to attack in these ways.

TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN — A Study of the book of Acts, part one.

—W.D. Hayhoe

Introduction:

¹ For example God's revelation in nature. (Ps. 19).

In the Old Testament, there are seventeen historical books detailing the rise and fall of Israel as a nation. But in the New Testament, only Acts gives the history of the early Church. If we want to see how the early Church grew against tremendous odds, we must look at Acts. In it we see the dynamics of true Church growth.

Many people have the idea that this kind of growth was only possible at the beginning of the Christian era. Others will admit that it has also occurred at some other significant periods throughout Church history. In Great Britain, for example, there was the famous revival movement of John Wesley and George Whitefield, which started in 1739, and spread to Scotland, Wales, and North America. This revival, which lasted their lifetime, depended largely on the monumental exertions of these two great evangelists, although many others were involved as well. It is estimated that over half of the one million people living in the thirteen American colonies in the years 1740-1770 heard the gospel preached by Whitefield.

A hundred and twenty years later, starting in 1859, there was a "second great awakening" accompanied by Spirit-filled gospel preaching, which caused small groups of believers to spring up everywhere. This revival commenced in North Ireland, spread to Wales, Scotland, and England, and then to North America and Europe. This time there was not just one prominent person, but hundreds and thousands of evangelists were raised up by the Lord to faithfully and energetically preach the gospel wherever they happened to be.²

In more recent times, this kind of growth has occurred in many third world countries. We can think of the great revival in Indonesia, which started in 1965, and the one taking place today in South Korea, which we will refer to later. However, at the same time we should be aware that great growth itself does not necessarily mean that the doctrine is good. For example, a Pentecostal group known as the "Jesus only" movement, because they did not believe in the Trinity, was the fastest growing group in Colombia for many years.

We rejoice when we read about such times of great revival. At the same time we have to admit that we usually do not experience this kind of growth, neither in the countries of the Western world, where many of my readers will be living, nor in the developing countries. The Lord's work often appears to be declining rather than growing. Believers are concentrating on "holding fast" and surviving, rather than on increasing.

In the early church we clearly see both *quantitative* growth — souls saved out of the world, and *qualitative* growth — believers built up in their most holy faith. This is expressed as follows:

"So the Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase" (Acts 9:31).

Recently, as I was reading through Acts, the conviction came afresh upon me that the dynamic growth recorded in Acts resulted from factors that are all available to us today. In this article, we will attempt to identify some of these dynamic factors that enabled them to "turn the world upside down" (Acts 17:6 — KJV).

1. *The Proof of the Resurrection*

One of the important differences between Christianity and the great world religions is that the former is not primarily a philosophy, concept, way of thinking, or even a system of laws and regulations, but a living faith based on a series of *proven, historical facts*. Most important among these is the resurrection of Christ; with this, Christianity stands or falls.

Frank Morison was a young British lawyer educated in the first part of the 20th century. Like most of his fellow students, he accepted the German higher criticism of the Bible, and Huxley's agnostic belief that "miracles do not happen." However, he realized that the story of Christ was special. Therefore, he took time to study the last seven days of Christ's life in detail so he could write a book fully explaining all events without referring to the miraculous. But, as Morison says, "the book as it was originally planned was left high and dry." After studying the facts, Morison became convinced that the miracle of the resurrection really did happen — and the agnostic lawyer became a true believer!³

² This revival affected many different groups of believers. Some of the Brethren evangelists inspired by the 1859-60 revival were: J. Denham Smith, Donald Ross, Andrew Miller, Henry Moorhouse, Alfred Trench, C.H. Mackintosh, and Dr. W.T.P. Wolston. Moorhouse and Wolston were converted during the revival.

³ The Book which Frank Morison finally wrote, only now as a believer, is called *WHO MOVED THE STONE?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1930).

Now the first thing we notice in Acts is that the message that the apostles preached and practiced was based on the solid, historical fact of the resurrection. Christ had risen from the dead, and they were witnesses of this great event. "To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs" (1:3). This one fact changed everything. They themselves had changed from being a rather cowardly group of followers into a dynamic missionary force, all except one of whom would give their lives for the gospel.

Notice that everything depended on the factuality of the resurrection. Therefore, the first thing that the eleven disciples had to do, since Judas had hanged himself, was choose another disciple so that there would be a full twelve witnesses of the resurrection (1:22). Then the first gospel sermon, preached by Peter in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, hinged on the indisputable fact of the resurrection: "This Jesus, God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses" (2:32). In his second sermon, Peter spoke again of "*the One* whom God raised from the dead, — *a fact* to which we are witnesses" (3:15). Then the first persecution arose when the Pharisees and Sadducees heard that the disciples were "proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (4:2). And in their defense, the disciples again repeated, "Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead" (4:10). After they were released, they continued "with great power... giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (4:33).

This emphasis on the resurrection as an historical fact to which there were many witnesses continues throughout the book of Acts — when Peter preached to Cornelius, the Roman centurion (10:40-41); when Paul preached to the Jews and God-fearing proselytes in Pisidian Antioch (13:30-31); when Paul preached in Athens (17:18,31); and when Paul spoke to Festus and King Agrippa (25:19; 26:23,25). The resurrection of Christ is mentioned on the average once per chapter in the book of Acts. The Greek word for "raise/resurrection" occurs more here than in any other New Testament book.

Not only are our own lives changed completely, when we come to see the importance of the resurrection of Christ, but we make it a central point in our preaching to others, since it is the foundation of Christianity. As another has said,

"They preached facts then. I believe the gospel is really a great deal more powerful when we preach or bring forward the great facts of the gospel. There is immense power in these facts... I believe the more facts are brought forward by the evangelist, the more power will be in his testimony."⁴

2. *The Position of the Glorified Christ*

Closely connected to the resurrection of Christ is His exaltation to the right hand of God in heaven. It is hard to separate these two events, although they took place forty days apart. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached, "Therefore having been *exalted* to the right hand of God... God has made... [Him] both Lord and Christ" (2:33-36).

Again, in the following chapter, Peter assured the people that, "the God of our fathers has *glorified* His Servant Jesus" (3:13). When Peter was taken before the Council, he stated, "He is the One whom God *exalted* to His right hand as a Prince and a Saviour, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (5:31).

The position of a glorified Christ at the right hand of God in heaven was the vision that the apostles needed to carry out the great commission. Perhaps we can say that being witnesses of the resurrection of Christ gave the apostles the *conviction* of the truth of Christianity, while having a vision of the glory of the exalted Christ gave them the *motivation* to "abandon their lives" completely to Him. Many believers have the conviction but not the motivation.

The apostle Paul, while not being personally a witness of the resurrection (he accepted *their* witness, Acts 13:30-31; 1 Cor.15:4-8), was nevertheless a witness of the glory of the exalted Christ. A light brighter than the noonday sun shone down on him, and the glorified Christ spoke to him personally in Hebrew, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" This vision changed everything for him. He became the apostle of the ministry of glory (2 Cor. 3). This event was so important to Luke, the author of Acts, and to the Holy Spirit, that it is repeated three times in detail in His story of the early Church (Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-21; 26:10-18).

Can we too, in this day, have a vision of the exalted and glorified Christ? I not only believe that we can but that we must. The same apostle writes to the Corinthians of a vision that every true believer has had of "The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." He continues, "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4-6).

⁴ J.N. Darby, "Substance of a Reading on Ephesians," 1874, COLLECTED WRITINGS, (Reprinted —H. L. Heijkoop, 1971) Vol. 27, p. 76.

Every true believer has had this vision of the glory of the exalted Christ, but the problem with many of us is that the vision has become blurred. We no longer say, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8). And the loss of the vision of a glorified Christ has resulted in a loss of a missionary vision for lost souls. We, also, no longer say, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22).

True Church growth, according to God's Word, only takes place when men and women, convicted of the truth of the resurrection, and captivated by a vision of the exalted Christ, give up everything for Him. This is how it was with the first disciples.

I saw a human life, ablaze with God,
I felt a power divine:
As through an empty vessel of frail clay
I saw God's glory shine!

Then woke I from a dream, and cried aloud:
"My Father, give to me
The blessing of a life consumed by God,
That I may live for Thee."

3. The Power of the Name

The apostles spoke from great conviction and motivation, but the rulers and elders soon asked them, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" (4:7). What could they answer? Their only authority was the name of Jesus. Peter replied, "By the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene." He then continued, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is *no other name* under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (4:12). This was all the authority he needed to proclaim the good news. But what authority! What power in the name of Jesus! "All hail the power of Jesus' name!"

If you read the Acts carefully, you will find that the *name* is mentioned 35 times, more than in any other New Testament book.⁵ Consider, for example, these seven points:

1. The early believers taught in His name – (4:18; 5:28)
2. They spoke boldly in His name – (5:40; 9:27,28)
3. Many people called on His name – (2:21; 9:14; 15:17)
4. Miracles were done in His name – (3:6,16; 4:10,30; 16:18)
5. People were baptized in His name – (2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16)
6. The believers suffered for His name – (5:41; 9:16; 21:13), and above all
7. The name of the Lord was being magnified – (19:17)

The authority for the preaching of the gospel and the growth of the Church is the name of Jesus. There is no other. He Himself said, "Upon this rock (His person) I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18). And when it is built, all glory goes to Him, for He is the One whom "God has highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

What's in a name? The growth of the Church, the body of Christ, the most unique structure the world has ever seen. But beyond even this, the glory of Christ.

Has He found thy message true?
Truth, and truly spoken too?
Uttered with a purpose whole
From a self-forgetful soul,
Bent on nothing save the fame,

⁵ The early believers were quite familiar with the Psalms and Proverbs (they had no New Testament as yet), and were no doubt very aware of the significance of "the name" of the Lord, mentioned there over a hundred times. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runs into it and is safe" (Prov. 18:10). "Not to us, O Lord, but to Thy name give glory" (Ps. 115:1). See also Ps. 8:1,9; 20:1; 29:2; 52:9; 54:1; 61:8; 66:4; 72:19; 74:10; 75:1; 92:1; 113:1-3.

Of the great redeeming Name
And the pardon, life and bliss
Of the flock He bought for His?

4. *The Presence of the Holy Spirit*

"When the Holy Spirit did set in," said Jonathan Edwards, "as much work was done in a few days as at ordinary times in a year or two."⁶ This is what we see in the Acts. "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you," the Lord had told them (1:8). Consider the following:

1. They were all *filled* with the Holy Spirit — (2:1)
2. Peter was *filled* with the Holy Spirit — (4:8)
3. They were all *filled* with the Holy Spirit — (4:31)
4. The seven deacons were *full* of the Spirit — (6:3)
5. Stephen was *full* of faith and of the Holy Spirit — (6:5)
6. When dying, Stephen was *full* of the Holy Spirit — (7:55)
7. Saul was *filled* with the Holy Spirit — (9:17)
8. Barnabas was *full* of the Holy Spirit and faith — (11:24)
9. Paul was *filled* with the Holy Spirit — (13:9)
10. The disciples were continually *filled* with joy and with the Holy Spirit — (13:52)

Not only did the Spirit fill these early believers for power in testimony, but the Acts plainly demonstrate the free action of the Holy Spirit in directing the great missionary expansion of the Church. It was the Spirit who told Philip to approach the Ethiopian eunuch (8:29, this was how the gospel first arrived in the region of Ethiopia), and it was the Spirit who then snatched Philip away. It was the Spirit who sent out Paul and Barnabas on the first mission to the Gentiles, while the Antioch leaders were praying and fasting together (13:2). The Spirit forbade Paul to preach in Asia (16:6), or to go to Bithynia (16:7), so that he would go to Greece. And it was the Holy Spirit who clearly directed the historic decision of the Jerusalem council about the new Gentile converts (15:28).

Acts has been titled, "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." But perhaps the most complete and accurate title is, "The Acts of the ascended Christ through the apostles *by the Holy Spirit*." In fact, the Holy Spirit is mentioned more than 50 times in the book of Acts, more than in any other book of the Bible. This means that as you read through Acts you find the "Spirit" or "Holy Spirit" mentioned almost twice per chapter on the average. Everything depended on Him. In John, the Lord had comforted His sorrowing disciples by saying that if He went away the "other Comforter" would come, and they would do more than He had done when He was with them. In Acts, we see Him come bringing great blessing with Him.

However, in Acts we find not only comfort, liberty and power, but also a holy lifestyle, walking in the fear of the Lord (9:31). When Ananias and Sapphira lied about the money that they had given to the Lord, pretending that it was all that they had, Peter asked them, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (5:3). The result was that they lost their lives, and great fear came upon the whole Church (5:11), the fear or respect of God's holiness. The disciples saw that "holiness befits Thy house, O LORD, for evermore" (Ps. 93:5), and that "holy is the LORD our God" (Ps. 99:9).

This reminds me of an incident that happened several years ago. We had some rough neighbours. The man was out on the street corner one night, drinking with several of his friends. They began swearing against God and against the Lord. Then one of them starting swearing against the Holy Spirit. Almost immediately he lost his balance, fell from the curb, and was instantly killed by an on-coming car. He was killed instantly! His unbelieving comrades attributed his death to his swearing against the Holy Spirit. We can't treat the Holy Spirit lightly!

5. *The Perseverance in Prayer*

How do we access this great power available in the presence of the Spirit among us? The answer is, Only by "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:18). Times of concentrated prayer have always been the backbone of true revival and Church growth. In the Wesleyan revival, they felt the Lord's power especially after these "seasons of prayer." George Whitefield set aside one day a month for prayer and fasting. Writing about the 1859 revival, the different writers, such as C.H. Mackintosh, described the great and refreshing times of prayer.

⁶ Cited in GEORGE WHITEFIELD, by Arnold Dallimore, p.537.

For a present day example, consider the church in South Korea. In the last three decades the Christian church there has grown from 2% to 32% of the entire population. Many attribute this amazing growth to the early morning prayer meetings which often begin as early as 4:30 a.m. and sometimes last several hours. Besides these, there are regular prayer and fasting retreats held throughout the nation.

It shouldn't surprise us then to find that the Biblical pattern is the same. At the beginning, the eleven apostles "all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the* women" (1:14), while they waited for the endowment of the Holy Spirit. Then, when the Holy Spirit had been given and the Church was formed, they didn't stop praying. Rather, they "were continually devoting themselves... to prayer" (2:42).

When the disciples had to choose another disciple to fill Judas' place, they first of all prayed and then cast lots (1:24). The first miracle was performed when Peter and John were "going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer" (3:1). When they had been released from their resulting captivity, the Church prayed, and "the place where they had gathered together was shaken" (4:31) — the power of prayer! When the apostles chose the seven deacons for the administration of the food, they prayed (6:6). And the first martyr, Stephen, was killed while he was praying (ch. 7). Altogether we see the believers praying 28 times in Acts, once per chapter on the average.

A more careful study reveals the following interesting points about the role of prayer:

1. Peter, Cornelius, and Paul all received life-changing calls while praying — (10:9-15; 10:30; 22:17-21)
2. The church prayed before commending others to a special service — (6:6; 13:3; 14:23)
3. The apostle Paul and his group of friends prayed both upon arriving at and leaving congregations of believers (20:36; 21:5)
4. Those who were teachers prayed before ministering the word — (6:4; 13:2)
5. The whole church prayed when some were in prison or undergoing persecution — (4:24-31; 12:5,12)
6. The believers had a regular hour of prayer — (3:1; 10:2,3,9)
7. The godly women came together to pray — (16:13)

In a recent book that has spoken to many of us about the great importance of prayer, Arthur Mathews has this to say:

"Prayer is the cutting edge of any work for God. It is not a supplemental spiritual rocket to get some well-meaning effort off the ground. Prayer is the work and the working power in any spiritual ministry" (*Born for Battle*).

For the value of collective prayer, we refer the reader to C.H. Mackintosh's classic paper, *Prayer and the Prayer Meeting*.⁷

6. *The Place of the Word of God*

Just as *prayer*, so *God's Word* occurs 28 times in Acts, once per chapter on the average. Even at the very beginning, when the risen Lord says to them, "You shall be My witnesses," He may have been quoting from Isaiah 43:10,12. Following His example, the disciples quoted Scripture on many occasions:

- when they chose an apostle to replace Judas — (1:20)
- when Peter preached his first sermon — (2:17-21,25, 30,34)
- when Peter preached his next two sermons — (3:22; 4:11)
- when the Church gave thanks under persecution — (4:24)
- when Stephen argued his case with the Jews — (7:1-50)
- when Philip led the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ — (8:32)
- when Paul preached to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch — (13:33-35,41,47)
- when the "Jerusalem council" met — (15:16-18)
- when Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders — (20:35)
- when Paul realized that he had erred in speaking against the High Priest — (23:5)
- when Paul spoke to the Jews in Rome — (28:26-27)

In his book, *Death in the City*, Francis Schaeffer remarks that when Paul spoke to "the man with the Bible," the Jew, he often quoted Scripture, for they were familiar with the Word, and claimed to base their lives on it. However, when Paul spoke to "the man without the Bible," who was ignorant of God's Word, he often reasoned from God's revelation of Himself in nature (Acts 14; 17; Rom. 1). This may be a valid observation, although we do find that Philip and Paul certainly

⁷ Reprinted in *THE MACKINTOSH TREASURY* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1976) pp.460-469.

used the Scriptures in speaking to the God-fearing Gentiles who had some acquaintance with the Word (Acts 8, 13). And in Acts 14, when speaking to the pagans in Lystra, Paul may have quoted from Psalm 146:6 (14:15).

David Brainerd (1718-1747) was a New England Puritan who became known, in his short life, as "the apostle to the North American Indians." It is interesting to read how he moved among these ignorant pagans always with his Bible in his hand, using every opportunity to read from its pages. One day, after a particularly great time of blessing, he wrote in his diary:

"The Word of God at this time seemed to fall upon the assembly with Divine power and influence, especially towards the close of my discourse, there was both a soul melting and bitter mourning in the audience."⁸

In Acts, there is a much broader evangelistic use of the Scriptures than just the quotations listed at the beginning of this section. Again and again they were used to prove that Christ was the Messiah — that He accurately fulfilled the many Old Testament prophecies. This was true, of course, when Peter preached his first two sermons to the Jews in Jerusalem, as we have seen. Also, when Peter preached to the Gentile Cornelius and his friends, he made the point that all the Old Testament prophets bore witness of the Lord (10:43). In Pisidian Antioch, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome, Paul reasoned and persuaded from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ (13:16-48; 17:2-3,11; 18:4; 19:8; 28:23-24). Although this preaching usually started in the synagogues, it often ended up in public places and was heard by both Jews and Gentiles (13:48; 17:4,12; 19:9,10). Apollos, likewise, "powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (18:28). Let us have the same confidence in the power of God's Word to convict the lost as did these early Christians!⁹

*To be cont'd
(Scripture quotations are from the NASB.)*

OUTLINE FOR BIBLE STUDY (41)

85. THE REIGN OF ABIJAH AND OF ASA — 1 Kings 15:1-24; 2 Chronicles 13-16

Outline

1. Abijah's Victory over Jeroboam 2 Chr. 13:1-22
2. Asa Defeats Zerah 2 Chr. 14:1-15
3. Asa Puts Away Idols 2 Chr. 16:1-10
4. Asa and Syria war against Israel 2 Chr. 15:1-19
5. Asa's Death 2 Chr. 16:11-14

Explanation

1. Of Abijah we read, "His heart was not perfect with the Lord his God" (1 Ki. 15:3). Yet in the battle he trusted the Lord and He gave him the victory against great odds.
2. Of Asa we read, "He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord" (1 Ki. 15:11). He began by taking away the idol altars and high places in Judah. God then gave him the victory over the army of Ethiopia which was four times the size of his.
3. God blessed Judah and this caused Asa to continue with new zeal the work he had begun. God gave him peace until the thirty-fifth year of his reign.
4. But at the end of his life Asa began to rely on Syria rather than on the Lord. He even imprisoned Hanani, the seer, who was sent to rebuke him (2 Chr. 16:10).

⁸ Cited in DAVID BRAINERD, by Jesse Page, p.84.

⁹ The early believers didn't usually have copies of the Scriptures to carry around with them. They were available in the temple and synagogues, of course. But their frequent use in Acts indicates that the believers must have memorized large sections of them, especially the Psalms. Should not we, who have the whole Word of God, be equally diligent in memorizing it, and thus making it a vital part of our lives and service?

5. Even with his badly diseased feet, Asa did not seek the Lord but the physicians (2 Chr. 16:12).

Lesson

In the history of these two kings, the important point is the dedication of their hearts (Prov. 23:26). A heart completely dedicated to the Lord is necessary for all of us. Yet God also knew Asa's heart. His end shows that he was a proud man: admonition irritated him, and he built his own elaborate tomb.

86. THE REIGN OF JEHOSHAPHAT — 2 Kings 3:4-27; 2 Chronicles 17-20;

Outline

1. Reform and Prosperity 2 Chr. 17; 19:4-11
2. Leagues with Israel 2 Chr. 18; 20:35-37; 21:6; 2 Ki. 3:1-9
3. Moab and Ammon Invade Judah 2 Ki. 3; 2 Chr. 20

Explanation

1. Jehoshaphat served the Lord sincerely (2 Chr. 17:3-6). Unlike his father, he bowed his head and worshipped the Lord (2 Chr. 20:18). He vigorously pursued the things of the Lord.

2. Yet his failure to see the need for separation brought grief to him, but even more so to Judah after his death.

- a. His son married a daughter of Ahab — 2 Chr. 18:1; 21:6
- b. Although warned, he joined Ahab to regain Ramoth-Gilead — 2 Chr. 18:2-19:3
- c. With Ahaziah he built a navy to go for gold — 2 Chr. 20:35-37
- d. He joined Jehoram to punish Moab — 2 Ki. 3:4-27

3. He was always ready to help Israel in their battles. He personally relied solely on the help of the Lord. He made the attacks occasions for renewed experiences of Judah with God.

Lesson

We may be personally faithful, and yet fail to be separate in marriage, in re-establishing our spiritual inheritance, in business, or in helping to defend worthwhile causes.

Despite this failure, Jehoshaphat again and again proved his trust in God (2 Ki. 3:11; 2 Chr. 20:3-12). He teaches us that, if we confide in the Lord, He will make our paths plain (Prov. 3:1,5-8). "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:3-5; Prov. 16:3).

Not only did Jehoshaphat have confidence in his God (2 Chr. 20:20-22a), he also was grateful for God's deliverance and showed this publicly (2 Chr. 20:28)!

To be cont'd

A SEED OF GOD (7)

—A.E. Bouter

The word "seed" represents a new order of life introduced in the Lord, and reproduced in a new generation to which we belong today. In the February–March issue we considered Abraham's life in connection with this new seed in three aspects:

1. *First the natural, then the spiritual.*
 2. *Abraham's life for God, his pilgrim character.*
 3. *Why Abraham was called the friend of God.*
- In this issue we consider four more points.*

4. *Abraham, the father of all believers*

Through God's sovereign grace, sinful man is now justified by faith (Rom. 3:21-31). Jew and Gentile alike stand before God, both in their guilt and as objects of His grace, although a small difference is maintained between the two (v. 30). Thus by faith "a seed of God" is formed in believers from among the Jews (the circumcision) as well as from among the Gentiles (the uncircumcision). In response, we now recognize Abraham's seed in both groups. Abraham is the "father of all them that believe being in uncircumcision... and father of circumcision, not only to those who are of [the] circumcision, but to those also who walk in the steps of the faith, during uncircumcision, of our father Abraham" (Rom. 4:11-12).

All of Abraham's experiences described in God's Word have been given for the instruction and encouragement of his "seed." Each generation of his descendants has to learn the same lessons, although in different circumstances, in order that the "seed of God" may be formed and developed in it. In other words, the characteristics of Abraham's faith should also characterize the faith of his spiritual descendants, whether they be from among the Jews or from among the Gentiles.

5. *Spiritual succession and Abraham's Seed*

This brings us to an important Scriptural principle: There will always be *a seed of God*. God will make sure of this. God's work begun in Abraham will continue in his descendants. This, of course, we find in a perfect way with regard to our Lord Jesus, Abraham's true Seed. But God wants it to be true of us as well. There is no mixture allowed if we are to fully answer to God's desire (cf. Lev. 19:19; Gal. 4).

This we see too, when we look for the true mother (cf. Heb. 11:11f), which couldn't be Hagar; for all elements of the flesh, legalism, selfishness, self-confidence, and pride are excluded by true circumcision. No official succession in whatever form will guarantee the continuation of a true seed of God. In this we see again how God's sovereignty and man's responsibility work side by side in securing the seed of God throughout the generations (cf. e.g. 2 Tim. 2:1f; 2 Pet. 1:12-21; Jn. 21:22).

One most striking feature of Abraham's seed is the unconditional promises of God and His sovereign grace found throughout the Scriptures. "But to Abraham were the promises addressed, and to his seed: he does not say, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed; which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). Although we cannot now consider the entire context, it is clear that "the blessing of Abraham" comes to the nations on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection (Gal. 3:13-14). In Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 24:7, and especially in Genesis 22:17, we see how Abraham receives the promise of the land, the blessing. But in 22:17 we see this promise based on the sacrifice of Abraham's son, Isaac, who is a clear type of Christ, the true Seed of Abraham, of His sacrifice, death and resurrection (cf. Heb. 11:17-19). Again the promises are mentioned in order to make it clear that in Him, the Son of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, all God's promises are given, confirmed, and realised (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20). So Paul's conclusion is "If ye [are] of Christ, then ye are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:29). How closely all true believers are linked with Christ! This is the blessed secret of our dispensation! The seed — all true believers from Jews and Gentiles, seen in Christ Jesus — is identified with the Seed — Christ, the Head of this chosen, new generation.

The thought of a remnant, which we saw previously in Rom. 9:7f and 11:5, is confirmed in Hebrews. In chapter 2:16 we should read "He takes hold of [a] seed of Abraham." Not all his physical descendants are included in this. Only those who manifest the same spiritual features which characterised Abraham count for God as a true seed of Abraham. And so there is today a true seed of God, just as there will be in the future. Then, God will count the faithful remnant as the true Israel (Rom. 11:26).

6. *Abraham's children, sons and daughters*

God says about Abraham: "For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice, in order that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham what he has spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19). Here again "a seed of God" is linked with human responsibility.

(a) The word "children" speaks of representation. In the New Testament we see that the children of God represent God in this world, showing forth His excellencies, shining as lights, and manifesting His love. So Abraham's children, from among Jews and Gentiles, represent Abraham. In other words, what was characteristic for Abraham is reproduced in his children with the definite purpose to show forth these features — his call, faith, promises, pilgrimage, and worship — as a testimony for God in this world.

(b) The word "sons" suggests the satisfaction they give to God's heart. God called Abram not only to have him as a faithful witness of the only, true God, among, yet separate from the idol-worshippers in this world, but also to share the secrets of His heart with him and to receive worship in response to these revelations. The Bible develops this theme of sonship. The line of priestly "sons" (in Aaron's sons, and later in Luke's and Paul's writings) is started by Abraham (Gen. 12:7f; 13:18; 22:5-14). In 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 we see our responsibility in this respect. God wants to preserve this "line" of sonship for the satisfaction of His heart. This aspect is also presented in the story of Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10).

Of course our Lord Jesus was the true Son of Abraham; therefore the New Testament starts with Him. The lowly Man of Nazareth was at the same time God Himself. He who was named Jesus ("Jehovah saves") and Emmanuel ("God with us") was the true Son of Abraham who in due time answered perfectly to all the thoughts and desires God had initially brought out in Abraham.

(c) In Luke 13:16 we find a true "daughter" of Abraham. However, she could only function as such through the Lord's immediate intervention in sovereign grace, whereby He delivered her from the bondage of the law, Satan, and human-arranged ceremonies. Only then was she able to glorify God. Such deliverance is essential for the priestly company. We find this so throughout Luke's Gospel. What happened to this woman, happened to the entire generation of true sons and daughters of Abraham in those days. It still happens today, and it will happen in the case of the future remnant.

7. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice

(a) Abram gave up his land and his kindred. Although God had to help him with regard to his father's house God richly blessed him! The future remnant will go through the same exercises, and so must we if we are to be a true seed of Abraham. "Hearken, daughter, and see, and incline thine ear; and forget thine own people and thy father's house: and the King will desire thy beauty; for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him" (Ps. 45:10-11).

(b) Abram gave up his right of first choice (he was the elder), but God wonderfully answered him (Gen. 13:14-17)!

(c) Abram was able to give up everything this world offered him, presented by the king of Sodom, because he had met the royal priest of the Most High God (Gen. 14).

(d) Abram consented to his descendants going into bondage for 400 years in order that they would be enriched by God Himself, and so be introduced into the promised land, now described in a vastness as never before (Gen. 15).

(e) After the humbling experience with Hagar, Abram was ready to give up his own capacity to "produce" a seed and God introduced an everlasting covenant with Isaac, who was the "product" of God's own intervention (cf. Rom. 4; Heb. 11). So today too, God is committed to this new generation of Abraham's seed, to those who have learned to put aside the flesh in a practical way. With those, God may have real fellowship, as we see in Genesis 18.

(f) Abraham was ready to give up his "only-begotten son, Isaac," and through this deep exercise he learned to appreciate God's resurrection-power (Gen. 22). As we have seen before, it is on the basis of resurrection that God fulfills all the promises. In Genesis 22:17f we see an outline of these promises with regard to the spiritual descendants, from among both Gentiles and Jews, with regard to the future Israel, and with regard to the nations during the Millennium.

(g) Abraham had to give up his beloved Sarah in order to gain more understanding of the value of her resurrection (Gen. 23). He gave up everything by placing it under the administration of his steward (Gen. 24:10) for him to give it to his son (v. 36; 25:5). Here Abraham is in a sense also a type of God the Father who has entrusted all His treasures to the service of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 14-16; 1 Cor. 2:7,10,12).

So also our beloved Lord gave up everything, in order to gain everything (2 Cor. 8:9). So it was with Paul (Phil. 3; 2 Cor. 11f). And so it will be with Israel, as we see illustrated in Jonah's history. His self-sacrifice brought blessings to the nations.

To be cont'd