

Turning the World Upside Down (2) — A Study of the Book of Acts

—W.D. Hayhoe

Acts is the only book of Scripture detailing the history of the early Church. In the last issue, we identified six dynamic factors that enabled these early believers to “turn the world upside down” (Acts 17:6 — KJV):

1. *The proof of the resurrection*
2. *The position of the glorified Christ*
3. *The power of the Name*
4. *The presence of the Holy Spirit*
5. *The perseverance in prayer*
6. *The place of the Word of God*

In this issue, we present four more principles of Church growth found in the book of Acts.

7. *The Priority of Evangelism*

The book of Acts places a strong emphasis on evangelism. It shows us that this also is a vital part of true Church growth. Consider the following cluster of key words, each mentioned more in Acts than in any other New Testament book (the number of times they are used is given in parenthesis):

They boldly (12) preached (15), proclaimed (10), persuaded (17), and reasoned (10). They testified (10) to the people (48) and the Gentiles (50) in the cities (42).

The above paragraph speaks for itself. We often hear about the importance of witnessing in our actions. Well and good! But the witness of the early Church was certainly a bold verbal proclamation. They didn't keep quiet. It is sometimes said that evangelism is individual and is not the responsibility of the local church or assembly as such. However, we don't find any dichotomy between individual and collective witness in Acts. In the previous book of John, the Lord had said to his disciples, "As the Father has sent Me, even so send I you." In Acts we see this fulfilled.

J. N. Darby was a Christian pioneer of the mid-nineteenth century, who remained single all his life "for the gospel's sake" (Mk. 10:29). His monumental exertions contributed to the establishment of many hundreds of New Testament assemblies in France, Switzerland, Germany, Canada, United States, and the West Indies, as well as in his native land of Great Britain. He aptly expressed the individual and collective aspects of evangelism in the following two quotations:

"The assembly will not go on well, unless there is a spirit of evangelizing in it, to which the love of Christ will constrain them."

"A thousand more opportunities would present themselves of bringing Christ before people if we were living in the power of the Spirit of God."¹

Another practice that we see in Acts and in the whole New Testament is the flexibility of methods in preaching the gospel. The apostle Paul was the most adaptable of all men: "To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law... that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God, but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:20-22).

These verses teach us that there must be liberty to preach the gospel in many different ways, as long as the evangelists are subject to Christ and His Word. In Acts, we see a great liberty of individual action of the Spirit in evangelism. We must not lose this flexibility.

¹ J. N. Darby, "Substance of a Reading on Ephesians," 1874, COLLECTED WRITINGS, (Reprinted — H. L. Heijkoop, 1971), Vol. 27, pp. 78, 90.

One effective method of evangelism, practised in the book of Acts, in the revival of Wesley and Whitefield, and in the revival following 1859, is that of "home Bible studies" with unbelievers and new believers. In Acts, the first believers met "from house to house" (2:46); Peter spoke to Cornelius and his friends in a house (10:22); and Paul preached in Ephesus "publicly and from house to house" (20:20). There are many opportunities for this today too, not just for evangelists and teachers, but also for brothers or sisters who do not have any special public gift, but who have a real desire to reach out to others. What an unused field of service!

8. The Preaching of Repentance

Acts was written by "the beloved physician" Luke, one of the travelling companions of the apostle Paul. It follows the end of Luke's Gospel, where the resurrected Christ gave the great commission to his disciples in these four statements:

1. "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day;"
2. "and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations — beginning from Jerusalem."
3. "You are witnesses of these things."
4. "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Lk. 24:46-49).

We have already considered the witness of the resurrection, the proclamation in His name, and the power of the Spirit. Another key word in Acts is *repentance* (11). When the Jews in Jerusalem were first convicted by Peter's demonstration that Jesus really was the Christ, they asked him, "What shall we do?" Peter replied, "*Repent*, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (2:37-38). Then, in his second sermon, Peter repeated, "*Repent* therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away" (3:19). When Peter and the apostles were brought before the Council, they again emphasized that through Christ, God was granting "*repentance* to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (5:31).

Although the Jewish leaders had a special guilt for having crucified the Messiah, it wasn't only to them that repentance was preached. When the apostles heard that Cornelius and his family had believed they said, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the *repentance* that leads to life" (11:18). And in talking to the Athenian philosophers in the Areopagus, Paul said, "God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should *repent*" (17:30). Similarly, Paul told King Agrippa that he declared to Jews and "even to the Gentiles, that they should *repent* and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to *repentance*" (26:20). The apostle sums up the essence of his preaching in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders: "...solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of *repentance* toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (20:21).

Combined with the message of repentance is that of *forgiveness* of sins, through *faith* in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word "*forgiveness*" only appears 17 times in the New Testament, 5 of which are in Luke, and another 5 in Acts. In most of the latter appearances, forgiveness is mentioned in the same context as repentance (2:38, 5:31, 10:43, 13:38, 26:18).

The Greek words for "*faith*," "*faithful*," and "*believe*" are mentioned 60 times in Acts, the same number of times as in Romans. This theme also is very important, but perhaps can be left for a study on Romans.

Now which of these three components of the gospel is most neglected today in the evangelical world? Is it not repentance? Isn't that one of the main causes of the "easy believism" of much of Western Christianity? Oh, that the great preaching of repentance of such men as George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards would make a comeback! Then we would see real church growth! Then hearts would be truly born again, and lives would be truly changed for good and for God.

9. The Practice of Baptism

As the Second Awakening was taking place in Britain, another movement was under way in the United States, led by Thomas Campbell (b. 1807) and his son Alexander. Their distinctive teaching was that a person was not saved until he was baptized, and then only if he was baptized for the forgiveness of sins. They based this on Peter's preaching to the Jews, "Repent and let each of you be baptized... for the forgiveness of your sins" (2:37), and on Ananias saying to Paul, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (22:16). Present day denominations that come out of this tradition are the *Disciples of Christ and Churches of Christ*.

Baptism, however, is an *outward* public expression of the fact that a person has become a Christian. "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal. 3:27). The letters of Paul to the Gentile churches clearly teach us that through baptism we become identified with the death and burial of Christ, "We have been buried with Him through baptism into death" (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). Baptism brings us onto "Christian ground," and in this outward sense "saves us" (1 Pet. 3:21), just as passing through the Red Sea delivered the Israelites from Egypt (1 Cor. 10:2), even though the blood had already been put over the door and they were already safe from the judgment of God expressed in the angel.

What practice do we see in the book of Acts as regards baptism? Consider the following:

1. The Jews converted through Peter's preaching were baptized the same day (2:41).
2. The people that believed through the preaching of Philip were baptized soon after, before the apostles could come down from Jerusalem (8:12,16).
3. The Ethiopian eunuch was baptized immediately (8:38).
4. Paul was baptized soon after his conversion (9:18).
5. Cornelius and his house were baptized at once (10:48).
6. Lydia was baptized immediately (16:15).
7. The Philippian jailor was baptized at once (16:33).
8. The Corinthians believed and were baptized (18:8).
9. The Ephesian disciples were baptized as soon as they heard about the Christian baptism (19:5).

It seems clear that these converts did not wait to be instructed in a lot of teaching before they were baptized. It was something that was done as soon as possible. Several years ago, I visited a relatively new work in Peru, high up in the Andes. A baptism had been planned for the Saturday for some who had been recently converted. On Friday evening the gospel was preached in the town, and another soul was won for Christ. The next day, he too appeared at the baptism and wanted to be included. The local brethren judged him sincerely converted and he joined the others. Then the following day as we met to break bread together, he was with us there at the Lord's Table, sharing the bread and the wine. Just as it was in the Acts, I thought to myself!²

But how do we understand Peter's statement quoted above, "Repent, and... be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins"? It was necessary for the first Jewish converts to get baptized for the forgiveness of sins (2:38, 22:16) because their guilt of crucifying the Messiah was public, and they needed to make a public act of repentance before they could really experience deliverance from this guilt. We remember that they were all familiar with John the Baptist's preaching of the baptism of repentance a short time before (13:24, 19:4).

However, we never find this message taught to the Gentiles. In the story of Cornelius in Acts 10-11, the Gentiles believed and were given the Holy Spirit before they were baptized. Nor, it seems, was this taught to the Jews in other parts of the Roman empire. When the apostle Paul was preaching to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch in Asia, for example, he says, "through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed [justified] of all things" (13:38-39). The apostle Paul consistently taught that justification in God's sight is only obtainable through faith.

10. *The Pattern of the Church Established*

Jim Elliot was one of the five young missionaries martyred in Ecuador in 1956. His wife, Elizabeth Elliot, published excerpts from his diary in 1958.³ Chapter 14, titled *The Pattern Tested*, gives us his thoughts on the New Testament Church, written in 1951, before leaving the United States for Ecuador:

"The pivot point hangs on whether or not God has revealed a universal pattern for the Church in the New Testament. If He has not, then anything will do so long as it works. But I am convinced that nothing so dear to the heart of Christ as His bride should be left without explicit instructions as to her corporate conduct... It is incumbent upon me, if God has a pattern for the Church, to find and establish that pattern at all costs."

The second last chapter, *The Pattern at Work*, describes his attempts, four years later, to establish this pattern with the Indians in the jungle of Ecuador. Here we see these newly saved pagans sitting around on Lord's day morning

² Some say that today, with so many false doctrines around in Christendom, it is necessary to thoroughly instruct new converts before baptizing them. However, it is not clear to me that this is required by the Scriptures. In the New Testament, we find that the instruction usually took place after the new converts were baptized.

³ Elizabeth Elliot, *SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY: THE LIFE AND TESTAMENT OF JIM ELLIOT* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1958).

remembering the Lord in the breaking of bread as *He* had requested them to — the men praying and giving out hymns and the women being silent.

The "church pattern" found in Acts and in the rest of the New Testament is *the weekly breaking of bread*. After the resurrection, the disciples met together on the Lord's day, and the Lord came into their midst (Jn. 20:19). A week later, they again met together, and Thomas was with them (Jn. 20:26). It appears that at first they met daily to break bread in Jerusalem (2:42), but this no doubt could not be continued when the church was scattered through persecution (8:1).

Paul visited Gentile assemblies on the Lord's day for the breaking of bread and teaching: "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread" (20:7). In two other places he stopped to be with believers for seven days (21:4; 28:14). Part of the reason for this, no doubt, was to break bread with them. In his letter to Corinth, in which he writes about the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:23), he refers to the fact that they met together "on the first day of every week" (16:2). From the above considerations, it seems quite certain that the early believers broke bread weekly as a rule.

In her book, Elizabeth Elliot also describes the effort Jim put into teaching and training the young men along the New Testament pattern as regards teaching and preaching:

"Jim was able to show them that the Lord Jesus did not choose from among seminary graduates those whom He sent out to preach. They were common labourers in many cases, from the strata of society of their listeners. There was no dichotomy between clergy and laymen."

In Acts, then, we also see *the free action of the Holy Spirit in calling men to preach and teach* without their being appointed by other men. We can state, categorically, that we never find men appointing other men to preach or teach, in the New Testament. Consider Stephen (ch. 7), Philip (ch. 8 and 21), Paul (ch. 9), Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius and Manaen in Antioch (ch. 13), Silas (ch. 15), Timothy (ch. 16), Apollos (ch. 18), Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus and Trophimus (ch. 20), and the physician, Luke himself, only just alluded to in the many "we" sections of the Acts. There is no reason to believe that any of these men who were preaching and teaching in Acts were seminary trained or humanly appointed. Rather, their calling, equipping, and empowering for service were divinely guided by the Holy Spirit.

It is true that Christ appointed twelve apostles. Also, the apostle Paul appointed elders in the local churches. But their primary function was to give oversight, and not to preach or teach, although they should know how to apply the Word. In Acts 6, seven deacons were appointed to administer material things, not to preach. The Holy Spirit later used at least two of them, Stephen and Philip, to preach the gospel, but they were not appointed for this purpose. As for himself, Paul expressly points out that he was not sent "from men, or through the agency of men" (Gal. 1:1).

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

Outline For Bible Study (42)

87. The Reigns of Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah — 2 Kings 11:4-21; 12; 2 Chronicles 21-22

Outline

1. Jehoram 2 Ki. 8:16-24; 2 Chr. 21
2. Ahaziah (or Jehoahaz) 2 Ki. 8:25-29; 2 Chr. 22:1-9
3. Athaliah 2 Ki. 11:1-3; 2 Chr. 22:10-12

Explanation

1. Jehoram walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, for his wife, Athaliah, was the daughter of Ahab. He began by slaying his brothers. Edom and Libnah revolted under his eight year reign. God warned him by means of a letter from Elijah. The Philistines carried away his wife and his sons (except the youngest). He died a gruesome death as a judgment from God.

2. Ahaziah, Jehoram's youngest son, reigned one year and followed his father's example. With his cousin, king Joram of Israel, he fought against King Hazael of Syria. In that battle Joram was wounded. While Ahaziah visited him in Samaria, Jehu was sent by the Lord to judge the house of Ahab. Both Joram and Ahaziah were slain.

3. Athaliah, Ahaziah's mother, proceeded to slay the whole royal house of Judah. But for six years, her daughter Jehoshabeath, the wife of the high priest Jehoiada, hid her youngest nephew, Joash, in the temple.

Lesson

Despite the failure of these two kings, the Lord continued to think of Judah because of the covenant that He had made with David (2 Chr. 21:7). In the successors of Jehoshaphat the truth of Isaiah's word was displayed: "They that forsake the Lord shall be consumed" (Isa. 1:28). The mistakes and errors of Jehoshaphat took a severe toll on the kingdom of Judah. How detrimental to the people of God Jehoshaphat's lack of separation from the world proved to be!

88. The Reigns of Joash and Amaziah — 2 Kings 8:16-29; 11:1-3; 2 Chronicles 23-25

Outline

1. Joash (or Jehoash) 2 Ki. 11:4-21; 12; 2 Chr. 23-24
 - a. His Coronation
 - b. Joash and Jehoiada
 - c. Joash after Jehoiada's Death
 - d. Hazael of Syria Invades Judah
2. Amaziah 2 Ki. 14:1-20; 2 Chr. 25

Explanation

1a. When Joash was seven years old, the high priest, Jehoiada, took some men into his confidence and organized a successful plot against Athaliah. He then crowned and anointed the young king, Joash, and had Athaliah slain.

1b. During the life of Jehoiada, Joash served the Lord. Baal's temple was broken down and the house of the Lord repaired. In order to do this, the temple tribute was reinstated.

1c. After Jehoiada's death, the princes of Judah seduced Joash into idolatry. God sent several prophets; last of all He sent Zechariah the son of Jehoiada. Joash had him killed.

1d. God then allowed the Syrians to attack; Joash bought peace with the temple treasures. Later a small Syrian band overcame Joash' strong army and took away all the princes of Judah, leaving Joash behind, wounded. Some of his servants used this opportunity to slay him. He had reigned for forty years.

2. Amaziah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord although not with a perfect heart. He slew the murderers of his father. He then built a strong army and hired an additional 100,000 men from the ten northern tribes of Israel. When God told him that he would be killed in battle if he used them, he sent them home. He won the battle with Edom, but took their idols and set them up in Jerusalem. His campaign against Israel failed and cost him the treasures from the temple. His servants then caused him to flee to Lachish where they murdered him.

Lesson

Many believers start out as Joash did. But just as Joash relied on Jehoiada rather than God, so they also look for help from others rather than from God. Counsellors can never take God's place, although faithful believers can give good advice (Prov. 4:20-21; 6:20-23; 11:14). After Jehoiada's death, Joash leaned on the advice of the ungodly princes of Judah and everything went wrong (Prov. 19:27).

The Lord showed Amaziah His love: "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this" (2 Chr. 25:9). Amaziah believed God, and won the battle against Edom, but having become self-confident through the victory, he fell into idolatry (2 Chr. 25:14-16). In his pride, he failed to consult God and went into battle against Joash, King of Israel, even after Joash had warned him (2 Chr. 25:15-24). How easily pride leads us away from God and into an independent pathway!

To be cont'd

Introduction to Revelation

—H. A. Ironside

Harry A. Ironside was an outstanding Bible teacher and expositor. Born in 1867, he died in 1951 having authored expositions on 51 books of the Bible. He had the gift of understanding difficult parts of God's Word and presenting them in a simple and clear manner so that even the most unlearned could grasp them. The following extract is taken from the introduction to his book on Revelation.

It is certainly a cause for deep regret that to so many Christians the book of Revelation seems to be what God never intended it should be — a sealed book. The book of Daniel was to be sealed till the time of the end (Dan. 12:9), but of Revelation it is written: "Seal *not* the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand" (Ch. 22:10). It is clearly evident that this portion of Holy Scripture was given for our instruction and edification, but thousands of the Lord's people permit themselves to be robbed of blessing by ignoring it.

Significantly enough, it is the one book of the Bible which begins and ends with a blessing pronounced on those who read and keep what is written therein (Ch. 1:3; 22:7). Surely God did not mean to mock us by promising a blessing on all who keep what they cannot hope to understand! It is only unbelief that would so reason. Faith delights to appropriate every part of the sacred record, and finds that "they are all clear to him that understandeth."

The true title is given us in the opening verse. It is, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ"; not, the Revelation of St. John the Divine." There is no manuscript authority for this latter designation, and it shows all too plainly how far some early editor had slipped away from first principles. John was a saint as all believers are saints. He was *not* a divine! Such a title would have amazed him beyond measure. Nor is the book the revelation of John or of any other servant of God. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ Himself.

The word rendered "revelation," or "apocalypse," means literally an unveiling, or manifestation. So this book is the unveiling of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is its one great theme. It presents Him as the Son of Man in the midst of the churches during the present dispensation; and as the Judge and the King in the dispensations to come. If you would learn to appreciate Christ more, read this book, frequently and prayerfully. It reveals Him as the Lamb rejected, soon to reign in glory — the Lamb on the throne!

People often speak of the book of Revelations. There is no such book in the Bible. It is *the* Revelation — one blessed, continuous manifestation of God's unique Son, the anointed Prophet, Priest and King. Revelation is the crowning book of the Bible. It is like the Head-stone of Zechariah 4:7 that completes and crowns the whole wondrous pyramid of truth.

Of this vast pyramid, the Pentateuch of Moses forms the broad, solid foundation. Upon this is built up the Covenant History. Then the Psalms and Poetical Books. Then the Prophetic Series of the Old Testament. Higher up we have the Gospels and the Acts. Then the Epistles with their deep spiritual instruction; and to complete the glorious structure, this last, solemn, but exceedingly precious book, the Revelation, linking all the rest with the soon-to-be manifested glory of God.

Or if you think of Holy Scripture as forming a great golden circle of truth, we start with Genesis, the book of beginnings, and go on through the Testaments until we come to Revelation — the book of the last things; and, lo, we find it dovetails exactly into the book of Genesis, and thus perfects the inspired ring! The Word of God is one absolutely perfect, unbroken, and unbreakable circle.

A comparison of Genesis and Revelation will readily make this plain, and show how we have the types in Genesis and the completion of the truth in Revelation — in the one book the beginning, in the other the consummation.

Genesis gives us the creation of the heavens and the earth. Revelation presents a new heaven and a new earth. Genesis shows us the earthly paradise, with the tree of life and the river of blessing, lost through sin. Revelation gives us the

Paradise of God with the Tree of Life and the pure river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb — Paradise regained through Christ's atonement.

In Genesis we see the first man and his wife set over all God's creation. In Revelation we behold the Second Man and His Bride ruling over a redeemed world. In Genesis we are told of the first typical sacrificial lamb. In Revelation the Lamb once slain is in the midst of the throne. In Genesis we learn of the beginning of sin, when the serpent first entered the garden of delight to beguile Adam and Eve with his sophistries. In Revelation that old serpent called the devil and Satan is cast into the lake of fire. In Genesis we have the first murderer, the first polygamist, the first rebel, the first drunkard, etc. In Revelation all such, who refuse to accept God's grace in Christ Jesus, are banished from His presence forever. In Genesis we view the rise of Babel, or Babylon. In Revelation we are called to contemplate its doom. In Genesis we see man's city; in Revelation the city of God.

Genesis shows us how sorrow, death, pain, and tears, the inevitable accompaniments of sin and rebellion, came into the world. Revelation does not close until we have seen God wiping away all tears, and welcoming His redeemed into a home where sin, death, pain, and sorrow never come.

The End

A Seed of God (8)

—A. E. Bouter

The word "seed" occurs over 350 times in God's Word and is often used as a symbol of a new order of spiritual life. In the last issue, we considered the seed of Abraham, his many descendents, both natural and spiritual. In this final section, we look at the seed of David, the other great forerunner of Christ, and conclude with the "Branch," the Lord Jesus Himself.

Great David's greater Son

1. Christ, the Son of David

Have you ever noticed that the New Testament presents the Lord Jesus as the Son of David, on both its first and last page? In Matthew 1:1 He is called the Son of Abraham, as the One through whom all of God's promises are given and enjoyed; but He is *introduced* as the Son of David, as the One who exercises kingly power in order to bring these promises to realization. He is Emmanuel, God with us, the almighty God who is able to deal with every adverse and hostile power, the God who identifies Himself with David. Therefore He is called: Son of David. In Matthew His own people reject Him as King. Still, the kingdom of God remains a reality. It is called the kingdom of heaven because the King came from heaven and is now as a Man glorified in heaven. The kingdom established here on earth is now hidden and lowly, but soon will have full public glory under the Son of David.

On the last page of the New Testament, He is called the "Root and Offspring of David" (Rev. 22:16). Our Lord Jesus is the beginning of all God's plans. In that sense He is the Root of David. A root is necessary for stability and food. It is linked with that which is hidden and unseen, and yet essential. "Offspring" speaks of the fact that our Lord was a descendant of David. And so He says, "I am the Root and Offspring of David, the bright [and] Morning Star." He is the beginning (root), the true descendent (offspring), and the coming Star (Num. 24:17; Mt. 2:2; 2 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 2:28; 22:16).

2. Christ, the Seed of David

Romans 1:3 says that our Lord Jesus Christ has "come of David's seed according to flesh, marked out Son of God in power, according to [the] Spirit of holiness, by resurrection of [the] dead." As such, He is able to implement God's plans in relation to the seed of Abraham, at present in connection with the Church, and later with regards to Israel. God had said, "I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who shall do all My will" (Acts 13:22; Ps. 89:20; 1 Sam. 13:14). Paul quoted this remarkable verse when talking to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch, and then continued: "Of this man's seed according to promise has God brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus" (v. 23). What God had introduced in sovereign grace in the person of David, according to His own purpose and delight in David, we now see realised in the coming and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, His own beloved Son.

Living at the end of the Christian dispensation, we should be encouraged to know that God's purpose and work cannot fail. Amidst the failure and corruption of Christendom, the apostle Paul instructs us to "remember Jesus Christ raised from among [the] dead, of [the] seed of David" (2 Tim. 2:8). In this way we can carry out God's thoughts on the same basis of

sovereign grace. Just as David maintained God's rights in the presence of the wicked king Saul, so today our Lord Jesus, as the true seed of David, maintains God's rights in a world where everything is hostile to God. And so we too can honour God's thoughts today, as Paul wrote to Timothy. Thus, what we find first in David, then in perfection in the Lord Jesus, can continue and be reproduced morally in us at the present day.

3. Some characteristics of David and his Seed

David's life corresponded to God's thoughts in many ways. We can just consider two of these in this article.

a) David, the true shepherd-king

After the failure of Eli and Saul, God chose David to feed His people, and "he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and led them by the skilfulness of his hands" (Ps. 78:69). Now God would like to find these features among His people today. So, in Acts 20, when Paul gave his farewell message to the elders of the Ephesian assembly, he pointed out to them that he had acted with *integrity of heart*, "I have coveted [the] silver or gold or clothing of no one" (v. 33), and *skilfulness of hands*, "Yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my wants and to those who were with me" (v. 34). However, he also warned them that "there will come in amongst you... grievous wolves, not sparing the flock" (v. 29). Therefore, he added, "I ceased not admonishing each one [of you] with tears" (v. 31). May we have these same features of unselfish care for others that we see in David and Paul!

b) David, the true worshipper of God

In Psalm 138:1, David wrote, "I will give thee thanks with my whole heart." Then in Psalm 139:23, he continued, "Search me, O God, and know my heart." David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, is head of a whole generation of worshippers who are characterized by the same devotion and purity of heart.

In Psalm 132, although his heart is not mentioned explicitly, David's great desire to find a place for Jehovah is expressed, "I will not give sleep to mine eyes, slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for Jehovah, habitations of the Mighty One of Jacob" (v. 4-5). This was in answer to God's instruction in Deuteronomy 12:5. It is God's desire to dwell among His people in the land. It is His purpose, the longing of His heart, that His people should have the same interests at heart that He has. When we understand this, we can see how precious this attitude of David must have been to God. Therefore, God answered him, "Jehovah has sworn [in] truth unto David; he will not turn from it: Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne" (v. 11). Although David was not allowed to build the temple, he made the plans and appointed the singers to preserve the service and the praise of God.

Later on, in the books of 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, many references are found to David's ordinances, showing us how this line was preserved despite failure on the part of the people and attacks of the enemy. In the books of Chronicles, for example, we see things described from God's point of view. This review of the history of God's people is given in relation to David, for that is how God liked to think of His people. And so it is today. God likes to think of His people and of the history of the Church in relation to the Lord Jesus, the true David. These books also give us the details of the secret work of God in preserving this true line of David. Furthermore, written from the standpoint of the return from the Babylonian captivity, they once again show us God's sovereign grace in keeping a remnant that cares for His interests, just as David did. May these features of maintaining the service and praise of God also be found in you and me!

4. David, the royal seed who suffers

This Davidic line is also called the "royal seed," and as such it endures sufferings. The Lord Himself is the true Royal Seed who came to proclaim God's rights and to fulfill all righteousness (Mt. 3:15). But because He loved righteousness, He had to suffer for righteousness' sake (Ps. 45:7; Mt. 5:10). This is the great subject of Matthew's Gospel. We also will have to suffer if we truly seek "first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Mt. 6:33). For we are in a world where both God's rights and His true King are rejected, and where as a consequence, His disciples also will be rejected.

Peter, the "apostle of the kingdom," also writes about the "royal seed" in 2 Peter 1, referring both to the Lord Himself and to those who are linked with Him. But, in his first epistle, he first shows how this royal seed has to go through sufferings (1:6ff; 2:19-21; 3:14-18; 4:12-16; 5:8ff). God's rights are maintained in this royal seed (2:24), but the cost is suffering. In this way they represent the true King.

There is a striking example of the way in which God preserved this royal seed for Himself, in relation to the service of the house of God, in 2 Chronicles 22-23. The mystery of iniquity was working in the false queen Athaliah. But a daughter of the *king*, who was also the wife of the high *priest*, kept one of the princes of the seed of David hidden in the house of God. It is remarkable to see the *kingly* and *priestly* elements united in the preservation of the seed. This is also found in Melchisedec (Gen. 14; Heb. 7), Joshua (Zech. 6:11-13), and in believers, who are called both a "holy priesthood" and a "royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5,9).

Notice also, that it is in a remnant that these features are preserved. During the Babylonian captivity, God's rights were maintained by a small remnant outside of the land, Daniel and his three friends (Dan. 1:3). They continued as a true royal seed, willing to suffer, and ready to worship and to intercede for others. The whole book of Daniel displays this priestly attitude. Today it is still the same, as we see in the letter to the church in Philadelphia, and it will also be with the future remnant. In all these cases, the will of God is supreme, and the rights of the Lord are maintained — in our personal, family, and assembly lives — sometimes in the face of great opposition. When this happens, Christ will have His proper place as the true King among this remnant — a true royal seed.

In Proverbs we find a royal seed which is instructed in God's righteousness. Many references to "the king" are given in this book, with the Millennium ultimately in view, but giving help for today on how a royal seed may be preserved. The prophets bring out God's thoughts about what He started in the royal seed, but what man corrupted, and about God's work of sovereign grace in restoring (see e.g. Isa. 37:30-32; Jer. 2:21; Zech. 8:9-12).

Other seeds to consider

1. The holy seed (Isa. 6:13)

Isaiah, in the presence of God's holiness, realizes his own unworthiness, and his iniquity is taken away from him (Is. 6:1-13). Therefore he, as others after him, is a type of this future remnant, called "the holy seed." All outward greatness is gone, leaving only a trunk. But, in essence, every feature of what God had planned is preserved for God Himself. A holy seed will answer to God's likeness. It will not only represent God and His rights, but will also correspond inwardly with what God is in Himself.

Other prophets who also had a deep impression of God's holiness were Ezekiel (Ezek. 1), Daniel (Dan. 10), Paul (2 Cor. 6), and John (Rev. 1). When Daniel saw the vision of God's glory, no strength remained in him and his whole body trembled. From these we see that God wants to have a remnant for Himself which answers to His holy nature. They will be known as "overcomers" (Rev. 2-3).

2. The seed of Isaac

Isaac also represents the Lord Jesus, only now as the true Heir and heavenly Man (Gen. 24), for he never left the land. Isaac, however, is also a model for the Christian to help him realize his heavenly calling; although, like all of us, Isaac also had his shortcomings, as we see in Genesis 26. God would like to see this aspect of a divine seed in our lives also — enjoying the inheritance, dwelling in the heavenly land as a pilgrim and a worshipper, and being in His presence at the well (26:25).

3. The seed of Jacob

Jacob illustrates God's governmental dealings, His discipline and training for those who are in His school. Jacob's natural strength is touched. His self-will, self-confidence, and craftiness all gradually vanish under the work of God's Spirit in his life. Jacob "the supplanter" becomes Israel, "a prince of God," a prophet, and a worshipper. That which Jacob learned, every Christian has to learn. We all are in a sense Jacob's seed by nature, but then we have to be formed through experiences in God's school in order to become a true seed of Jacob — trained through testings and tribulations by the almighty God whom we now know as our Father. Jacob's new name was Israel, and we also become a seed of Israel through God's hidden work in us. The results of this work will be seen publicly, as also with the true Israel of God in the near future.

4. The seed of the Jews

The name of "Jew" was introduced after the Babylonian captivity, as we see in the book of Esther. It is derived from the name "Judah," which means "praiser of Jah" (the Lord). In a hostile world the seed of the Jews is faithful to their God and His laws, and thus a remnant of worshippers or praisers of Jah is preserved. Among these, Mordecai the Jew is seen in his

sufferings and glory, a striking type of the Lord Jesus. As we have already mentioned, this may be applied both to today's faithful remnant as well as prophetically to the remnant in the near future.

5. The seed of Aaron

This represents the priestly element. The seed of Aaron, a family of priestly sons, is preserved through deep spiritual exercises (Lev. 10; Num. 16). All of the details concerning the priesthood that we find in the Old Testament have been given for our instruction so that these features might be reproduced and manifested today in a true seed of Aaron. (See also Ezek. 43:19f.)

The Branch, the Sprout

It is good to finish these series with the Lord Jesus Himself, because some aspects of "the seed" are seen in a special way in His name of "Branch" or "Sprout." The Hebrew word actually has many different translations. The verb "to sprout" is used for the growth and budding of grass, plants, and trees, and even of the hair or beard. It is used metaphorically with regard to other things also: a posterity springing up (Isa. 44:4), trouble (Job 5:6), the future (Isa. 42:9), the restoration (Isa. 58:8), and righteousness and praise (Isa. 61:11). Of special significance are the passages that relate to the sprouting up of a shoot from the root or seed of David (2 Sam. 23:4; Jer. 33:15; Ezek. 29:21; Ps. 132:17; Zech. 6:12). The noun "sprout" is used as a messianic term at least five times. There is so much contained in these verses that we shall quote four of them completely.

1. Isaiah writes, "In that day [after the coming judgments have been executed] there shall be a sprout of Jehovah for beauty and glory, and the fruit of the earth for excellency and for ornament for those that are escaped of Israel" (Isa. 4:2; 11:1; 53:2). We see here a reference to Christ's divine nature (sprout of Jehovah) as well as to his human nature (the fruit or offspring of the earth).

2. Jeremiah writes, "In those days, and at that time, will I cause a Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell in safety. And this is the name wherewith she shall be called: Jehovah our Righteousness" (Jer. 33:15f, and also Jer. 23:5f).

We know from Hebrews 7:2 that our Lord Jesus is the true King of righteousness. Only through His wonderful Person and accomplished work can there be peace. These prophecies will still be fulfilled in the future, as also those made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Zadok, and David. However, according to 1 Corinthians 10:6 and other passages, we may apply the moral truth expressed in them to ourselves, because of our intimate relationship with "the Sprout." This is also confirmed by the way this messianic title "Branch" or "Sprout" is quoted in the New Testament from the Septuagint. We are now His companions, associated with Him in a priestly family.

3. In Zechariah, the Lord says to the returned remnant, represented by the high priest Joshua and his companions, "Behold, I will bring forth My Servant the Sprout" (Zech. 3:8). This is a reference to Isaiah's four prophecies of "the servant of the Lord" (Isa. 42,49,50,53).

4. And again in Zechariah, the last Old Testament reference to the Branch: "Behold a man whose name is [the] Branch; and He shall grow up [or sprout] from His own place, and He shall build the temple of Jehovah: even He shall build the temple of Jehovah; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be priest upon His throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between Them both" (6:12f). We may surely say His name is "Wonderful" (Isa. 9:6)!

(Scripture quotations are from the JND translation.)

The End