

The Open Ministry Meeting

—J. van Dijk

Introduction

From time to time, those who meet in assemblies gathering unto the name of the Lord Jesus discuss the merits of "open ministry meetings." By this they mean meetings open to the leading of the Holy Spirit for the preaching of the Word of God. Originally, Christians gathering in such companies took care that all they did was based on God's Word. They sought God's will for their personal lives and also for their collective activities. Thus their manner of meeting was based on God's Word.

In those days they came together for prayer, *requesting* from their heavenly Father help in the needs that they knew they had. They met for ministry following the pattern found in 1 Corinthians 14. In these meetings, *they received* what the Lord wanted to *give* them at that moment, through such channels as the Lord Himself determined at that time. They also met for the breaking of bread, *returning* in worship to the Father and the Son under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Together these types of meetings — in some places held successively on the same day, elsewhere held on separate days — were the life-breath of the assembly. From these meetings they went out and served. The evangelist went out to bring the gospel to a lost world, the teacher to instruct his brethren, the shepherd to comfort and admonish the flock. All was according to the pattern found in Scripture.

Self-building-up versus Outreach

In the early days, many individuals in the assemblies engaged in all kinds of Christian activity. Yet, while actively engaged, they maintained the distinction between internal activities meant for the "family" (e.g., the breaking of bread) and those for outreach (e.g., gospel meetings). The former, they knew, were to be under the collective leading of the Holy Spirit, or "open" in nature. For these meetings they did not have a liturgy, a preset order of service, a preselected preacher, or prearranged prayers. All was according to Scripture under the leading of the Spirit. The activities towards those outside, they understood to be the responsibility of the individuals (i.e., individually led by the Spirit) who undertook such things.

Changes

But things changed. Perhaps since most brothers and sisters were present at the gospel meetings, the distinction between that which was for outreach and that which was for internal building up became more and more vague. When two meetings a week — one internal, open meeting for edification and another for outreach, where an appointed evangelist brought the gospel to outsiders — became too much, the open ministry meeting was given up and the gospel meeting retained. After all, the same people were present, since only few, if any, outsiders attended. And so it came about that many assemblies forfeited the open ministry meeting for a so-called gospel meeting. I say so-called, for in many places outsiders rarely visit such meetings.

Today there is still general agreement among these Christians on several important points regarding their collective conduct. First, they all agree that once a week each assembly should be together to remember the Lord in His death. Second, they agree that once a week each assembly should spend time in collective prayer. Initially they also agreed that each assembly should once a week be together to wait on the Lord for ministry. This last point, however, finds no longer general agreement. Was God's Word less clear on this point?

Some unanswered Questions

In the past year, this topic was raised when brethren from many assemblies were together to counsel on practical and spiritual subjects in the light of God's Word. Three questions were asked:¹

¹ As reported in a pamphlet entitled: "1990 General Brothers' Conference"

1. Are we moving away from the simplicity of the Scriptures when we abandon this meeting?
2. Should we not be more exercised in regard to such meetings?
3. Considering the simplicity of 1 Corinthians 14, would the voice of the Lord restore us to "first love" through returning to this simplicity, and thus bring us into line with God's thoughts?

None of these questions were answered. Instead the considerations largely dwelled on ideas about the character of what is conveyed to us in God's Word. Here we like to observe that if the answer to the first question is *yes*, the answer to the second one is *yes* as well. And if this be so, the answer to the third would, knowing the grace of the Lord, be *yes* as well. If, however, the first answer is *no*, then the second answer can only be *no* as well. Then too, a blessing cannot be expected from adhering to what our parents (then obviously mistaken about the bearing of the portion) thought God's Word said on this point. One thing is clear, the matter is important and deserves an unequivocally clear answer.

Open Meetings

It was observed that "an open meeting is not just for ministry." It appears that the impact of this statement went largely unnoticed. As said, an "open meeting" is a "meeting open to the leading of the Holy Spirit." We should realize that today all internal meetings of the assemblies but one are open in this sense. The breaking of bread is an open meeting. The prayer meeting is an open meeting. The ministry meeting, however, is very frequently not open but beforehand decided by some brothers. Why this exception? Why the change? It should not be because of past abuses, for, as often observed: Abuses of this meeting do not justify its abandonment. Abuses during the breaking of bread and the prayer meeting have not led to their abandonment.

What say the Scriptures?

Referring to 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, someone noted that we must distinguish between what the New Testament prescribes (i.e., commands) and what it describes. We need to look closely at this observation, for it infers that some of these verses might well be descriptive. The speaker himself stated that verses 34-35 are prescriptive, and that verses 27-33 contain regulations for tongues and prophecy. Since regulations are prescriptive in character, only verse 26 is left as possibly being descriptive in nature. The preceding verses in chapter 14 are instructive in character and not descriptive. By themselves, the words in verse 26, "Each of you has a Psalm," could be taken as either descriptive or prescriptive, as an observation of a fact or as an instruction. Since, however, the entire context is prescriptive, is it even reasonable to question the prescriptive character of this verse? Clearly none of these verses have a descriptive nature.

It was said that "because we have no longer sign gifts, we must be careful what we prescribe from 1 Corinthians 14." It is, however, not a question what *we* prescribe, but what *God's Word* prescribes. The context, not we, determines whether these verses are prescriptive or descriptive, and we have seen from the context that they are prescriptive.

Concerning the gifts that are no longer with us, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14, it is instructive to see how carefully and suited the Word of God is. It says, "If any one speak with a tongue, *let it be two or three, and separately.*" It doesn't say that the assembly *must have* some who speak in tongues, but that it is not to hinder them to speak. Today, we can still let, or allow (i.e., not hinder; e.g., by appointing speakers), speaking in tongues. Yet, today, there will be no one who will do so, for tongues have ceased. (We do not speak of the so-called tongues of today's charismatics. These so-called tongues are not the tongues referred to in the Bible).

Questions about Frequencies

The next observation was that a *weekly* meeting for open ministry is neither prescribed nor prohibited. True, but let us consider the breaking of bread. We have of course the Lord's request, but without any mention of frequency. We read in 1 Corinthians 11:26 "For as often as ye eat this bread...". This is an observation, a statement of a fact; it is descriptive: Whenever we break bread, we do show forth the Lord's death. The word "often" has frequently been said to suggest that we should not restrict the breaking of bread to a once-a-month or an even less frequent occurrence. That is a wrong conclusion. "As often as" simply means "whenever" (cf. Rev. 11:6). In Acts 20:7 we read, "And the first day of the week, we being assembled to break bread." The tense of this statement is said to show that the breaking of bread on the first day of the week was a regular event. (I don't know Greek, and take this to be so). Even so, Acts 20 is a descriptive narrative and not in the least prescriptive.

Yet, all assemblies have adhered to the weekly remembrance meeting. In a way it could be said that it is the major hallmark of the assemblies gathered unto the name of the Lord Jesus. As shown, they do so without any clear instruction to break bread *weekly*. Their reason for doing so stems solely (and rightly) from the verses referred to above and from Acts 2:42 (which also is descriptive). Why is this?

Answers

I believe it is because Acts 2 is a description of the practice of a company that was as yet unmarred by the interference of the flesh. The assembly was then in its pristine character, being what God wanted it to be. Unhindered, the Holy Spirit guided them and led them to do what we find described in this verse. Under such conditions, a description of a practice becomes as much a directive for us as a prescriptive passage. Three activities are described: Teaching, breaking of bread, prayer. Fellowship, which is mentioned too, is the unavoidable result for those who sincerely practice the other three.

Though the question of frequency is harder to settle, the Word gives descriptive guidance. In creation God Himself gave the weekly pattern. After the resurrection, the Lord Jesus appeared in the midst of His disciples on the first day of the week. Acts 20:7 reports how the early Church had established its pattern by taking its cue from this.

In answer to the first question then: Yes, we have moved away from the simplicity of Scripture. Christians do not only receive direction from the prescriptive statements, but also discern the mind of God from what is descriptive (though admittedly, in this greater care is needed). The Lord has said, "He that has My *commandments* (contained in prescriptive passages) and keeps them, he it is that loves Me." Then He continued to give an even greater blessing, "If any one love Me, he will keep My *Word* (contained in either prescriptive or descriptive passages), and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him" (Jn. 14:21,23). This latter precious promise is to those who do not only keep what is clearly commanded, but also what is given in God's Word in the form of descriptions (such as Acts 2) which guide us today. The Christian is not under law!

Relative Values

Prayer is the breathing of the soul to God. Yet we do not know what to pray (Rom. 8:26). How shall we know it better, but by taking care to learn to know the will of God? For this God has given us to sit under the ministry of His Word. How can we worship unless we have sat at the feet of the Lord Jesus? (Lk. 10:38-42). Evidently these three collective activities of the Christian company are equally indispensable. We often hear, "The worship meeting is the most important meeting," in the sense of "the most important meeting to attend." We ask, How can a feeble creature (even one saved by grace) ever give to God if it has not first received directly from God? True worship is returning to God what we have received from Him, and we will not receive without first expressing our needs in prayer (Jas. 4:2b).

Inconsistencies

We do insist on a weekly prayer meeting and on a weekly breaking of bread. Yet, we are not eager to sit and wait weekly for what God has to say to us by His Spirit. How is it that we rather have an appointed speaker though we know full well what Paul wrote to Timothy about choosing teachers (2 Tim. 4:3)? Is a weekly appointed minister better than a yearly appointed one? Will brothers who need to be admonished, and who have been admonished, be inclined to ask the one who admonished them to address them again? On the one hand, choosing speakers closes the door to what God wants to say to us (as far as our responsibility is concerned, for God will speak when He wants to). On the other, it opens the door for corruption, though it will come in an agreeable way (like evil often does). Once a door is opened, it is not long before Satan enters. Is this the reason for many of our why's?

Other Meetings

There is of course a place for meetings undertaken by gifted brethren on their own responsibility before God besides open meetings (Acts 11:30, teaching a large crowd). Yet, just as little as these brethren would replace the breaking of bread or the prayer meeting, so little should they replace the open ministry meeting with ministry that they themselves consider needful. Though these two forms of ministry are very similar in outward appearance, they are not to be confounded, for they are very distinct in basic character.

Conclusion

These considerations should therefore not cause us to discontinue any true gospel meeting, nor to abolish meetings initiated by a ministering brother, nor to do away with all prearranged meetings. We trust that they may help all to see that the open ministry meeting is as much an essential, Scriptural part of a healthy assembly life as the prayer meeting and the breaking of bread. Just like these, it should be held weekly for exactly the same reasons. The basis for a weekly ministry meeting is just as strong as the basis for the weekly breaking of bread and prayer meeting. One cannot deny the one and defend the other or vice versa, without wresting Scripture.

The End

We act as being under law if we obey only what is prescribed.

Outline for Bible Study (59)

119. The Twelve Sent Out. John The Baptist in Prison. Judgment Pronounced. — Matthew 10:1-20; 11:1-30; 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 3:19-20; 9:1-9.

Outline

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| 1. The twelve sent out | Mt. 10:1-20 |
| 2. John the Baptist imprisoned | Mt. 14:3-5; Mk. 6:17-20 |
| 3. The message for John the Baptist | Mt. 11:2-6 |
| 4. The testimony of Jesus about John | Mt. 11:7-11 |
| 5. Rejection of the Lord brings judgment | Mt. 11:12-24 |
| 6. Acceptance of Him brings blessing | Mt. 11:25-30 |
| 7. John's death | Mt. 14:6-12; Mk. 6:21-29 |
| 8. Herod's fear | Mt. 14:1-2; Mk. 6:14-16 |

Explanation

1. The Lord sent out the twelve disciples. He instructed them how to behave themselves as His messengers and gave them the needed power. These instructions are valuable for today and till the Lord comes to reign.

2. After Herod had imprisoned John the Baptist, many whom John had baptized had turned back. Others were now following the Lord Jesus, but some stayed with John and told him about the works of the Lord.

3. John, who had expected the Lord to display His power and glory, began to doubt Jesus' calling. His question showed confidence in the Word, but also ignorance about the Lord Jesus. Those not offended by the humble appearance of Jesus are blessed.

4. The Lord testified that John had not sought his own glory, like a reed moved by the wind. Because he had seen the Lord, John was more than a prophet. Yet, since Christians belong to the bride of Christ, even the least of them is greater than John the Baptist. John was beheaded before Christ died and rose and before the Church was founded by the Holy Spirit's descent.

5. John announced a righteousness judgment; the Lord promised grace; but all was in vain. John, who kept separated, was called a demon. The Lord, who reached out in mercy to tax-gatherers and sinners, was called a glutton and winebibber. Because the Lord did not establish the expected kingdom, He was misjudged and rejected. Those who believed in Him shared the same fate. A level of energy normally found in the violent is needed to enter the kingdom (v. 12).

6. The Lord gives rest to all who come to Him. Freeing them from the burden of guilt, He gives rest to their consciences (v. 28). The believer who follows Him also finds rest of soul (v. 29). There is still a third rest, the eternal rest in heaven (Heb. 4:9). From Christ one learns meekness and lowliness as well as submissiveness to the leading of God.

7. Herod beheaded John at his wife's request made through his daughter. Because John had not hesitated to faithfully speak out against the illicit relationship between the king and his sister in law, he paid for it with his life.

8. Herod feared man and became a murderer. Yet this did not end his fears. He feared the report of the righteous deeds of the Lord.

Lesson

Tyre had once in proud presumption rejected God, so had Sodom in its wickedness. Though both were judged, they shall once again be judged at the end of the age (Rev. 20:11-15).

Israel had received a greater blessing by having the Messiah in their midst, but since it rejected Him it shall receive a heavier judgment (Lk. 12:47,48). The greater the spurned blessing, the greater the judgment.

120. Jairus' Daughter and The Sick Woman. The Two Blind Men. The Dumb Man. The Man With The Paralyzed Hand. —
Matthew 9:18-34; 12:1-14; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6; 5:21-43; Luke 6:1-11; 8:41-56; 11:14-15

Outline

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| 1. Jairus' request | Lk. 8:41-42 |
| 2. The healing of the woman | Lk. 8:43-48 |
| 3. The girl raised | Lk. 8:49-56 |
| 4. Healing the blind and the dumb | Mt. 9:27-34 |
| 5. The Lord of the sabbath | Mt. 12:1-14; Mk. 3:1-6 |

Explanation

1. It must have been difficult for Jairus to come to the Lord. Respect and honor were at stake, but his need drove him. So it is often with us (Isa. 26:16). The incident with the woman put Jairus' faith to the test.

2. For twelve years the sick woman had tried everything only to become worse. The Lord was her only way out. She came to Him, believed, and was healed. After she had "told Him all the truth" (Mk. 5:33), she learned from the Lord Himself that she was truly healed (Lk. 8:48). Without His assuring word the woman would long have remained uncertain whether she was truly healed and saved. The word of the Lord ends all doubts. What marvelous tenderness the Lord displayed, "Daughter (or child) thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace" (Mk. 8:34).

3. Jairus must have feared the worst during this delay. When the death message came, the Lord immediately comforted him. The Lord used the girl's death to display His power and glory by calling her back to life! When we have entrusted a case to the Lord, things may seem to develop unfavourably, but will end gloriously! The Lord's resurrection power is more glorious than His ability to heal.

4. The blind and the dumb men display the need and misery of mankind, but also with the power of Christ. The Lord's works of love and mercy display His healing power.

5. The law permitted the hungry to pluck ears. The Pharisees objected to the disciples doing so on the sabbath. The Lord reminded them of David's actions when he was hungry (1 Sam. 21:6) and of the necessity for the priests to work on the sabbath (Num. 28:9). The disciples actively served with the Lord without taking much time to eat. They were, therefore, allowed to meet their need even on the sabbath. One greater than the temple was among them, the "Son of man," the Lord of the sabbath. The Pharisees' condemnation showed their lack of mercy. The Lord "will have mercy and not sacrifice" (Hos. 6:6). The sabbath should not prevent one from showing mercy, and so the Lord also healed the withered hand on the sabbath, though the Jews objected.

Lesson

Many Christians know the forgiveness of sins and the power of the Lord. Yet, their assurance of salvation, rather than being firmly established upon God's Word, flows from their feelings. Consequently they can neither rest nor truly worship until they are sure about their salvation (1 Jn. 4:18-19).

The man with the withered hand did not reason: "I cannot do that!" but did what the Lord told him to do. Sinners who come to the Lord must not reason, but believe (Acts 16:31).

To be cont'd

Priests and Levites

—J. N. Darby

All believers are priests; ministers, in their capacity of ministers, are only Levites. Their service is to minister to the priestly joy and service of the saints with God. Our service will meet with reward in heaven, our priestly place will be nearness to God and joy in Him.

Synopsis —Numbers 19

The Prophecy of Amos (5)

—R. Been Sr.

In chapters 1 and 2 we saw that the words "Thus says Jehovah..." (occurring eight times) announced judgments that are now history. The decision could and would not be recalled; the measure of sin of the mentioned Gentile nations, as well as that of Judah and Israel, was overflowing. Their closer relationship with God made Judah and Israel more guilty than the Gentiles. Especially in Israel, the ten tribes, unrighteousness had reached the summit through an utter lack of the fear of the Lord. Meanwhile Judah was guilty of despising and disobeying the divine Word, and even of idolatry. Judgment would come over the Gentiles because of their behaviour to Judah and Israel or toward each other. Judah and Israel, however, would be punished because of their behaviour toward the Lord.

Chapter 3

Wealth and Corruption

In chapter 3 Israel is again addressed. A last appeal goes out to the people: "Hear this word." When the name Israel is used here, we should not think of the ten tribes only, but of all twelve.

It is important to realize that when Amos prophesied, Judah (under king Uzziah) and Israel (under king Jeroboam II) had again reached a high degree of social well-being. Riches, wealth, a comfortable life such as had not been seen since Solomon's days, were enjoyed by both nations. This prosperity brought with it a degeneration of moral standards. Again we see from this that prosperity is not to be taken as a proof of God's pleasure. The entire atmosphere hanging over Judah and Israel was, in spite of the prosperity, loaded with impending judgment.

A comparison of the prosperous days of Judah and Israel and our own time shows that times of the greatest material prosperity are also times of the greatest moral degradation in which God is forgotten and neglected. When people relish in prosperity, having no longer an eye for spiritual values but only for bread and games, then, unexpectedly, comes the judgment of God. Though the Lord announces the judgment, warning man for it, *He does not inform man about the day and the hour of its execution.*

A Special People

Israel, here the twelve tribes, is admonished to listen to the word of the Lord spoken by the prophet Amos. God had not led ten and two tribes, two kingdoms, out of Egypt, but only *one nation of twelve tribes*. The division into two kingdoms was a result of sin, not a blessing, but a judgment. A time will come that the remnant out of the two and out of the ten tribes will again be restored as one nation under one king (Ezek. 37:21-22). At the time of the deliverance out of Egypt

Israel had been a unity, one nation of twelve tribes. The prophet Amos sees it as one when it is a question of judgment. Also at the time of its restoration it will again be one nation.

So it is with the Assembly. Christ has delivered Himself up for this one Assembly, consisting of all believers, rather than for the so many hundreds of denominations. In contrast to Israel, there will never come an end to this divided condition on earth, despite all ecumenical efforts. Yet there will be a time when the Lord Jesus will set His Assembly as one whole before Himself.

In the midst of all other nations, the Lord had only known Israel and destined it to occupy a separate, a special place. This brought with it a great responsibility for Israel which it has failed to meet. Therefore we read here, "Therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities." The degree of responsibility is proportional to the degree of privilege. God judged Moses, with whom He had spoken from mouth to mouth, more severely for a single fault than others who had been given fewer privileges. So it is with the nations. Those nations which have been enlightened by the knowledge of God's Word will be punished more severely than the nations who have lived in darkness and ignorance.

For many years the so-called protestant nations looked down upon those countries who lived in the darkness of Catholicism. They completely forgot that there, where the most light shines, the heaviest blows will fall.

The prophet uses the type of two walking together. They exchange thoughts while walking along the way. Since they agree with each other, they can walk together. They couldn't do so if they held entirely opposite views. Now, however, they are fit companions. The prophet's question challenges: Do Jehovah and Israel still belong together? The question urges most seriously that Israel has to turn and make a total about face, having a complete change of mind. If so, it could walk with God. The truth the prophet advanced by this picture can be applied both to individuals and to nations. Man's walk is with God; that is serious business!

Impending Judgment

The types the prophet uses in this and the next verse show that *the judgment is already at the door*, but Israel did not understand this. Amos, the herdsman, the man of the country, was well acquainted with the lion's roar. Would the beast roar if it had no prey? Would a young lion, (a picture of the lesser judgments) cry unless it had caught something? Would a bird be caught in a snare if no snare had been set? Would the snare snap closed when nothing has been caught? Israel lacked ears to hear. It had not feared nor trembled at the clear announcements of the prophets. That is the meaning of verse 6. Though the trumpet (the voice of the prophets) had been blown in the city, the people had not trembled but been engrossed with its material prosperity. It didn't understand either that when one or the other evil or calamity came over a city that this had come from the Lord.

Once the Lord Jesus said to the multitude that they had to discern the times. They had to understand that, although grace was still shown to them as a mild and fruitful rain, the judgment over them, presented as a searing southern desert wind, would soon be upon them. The Lord called them hypocrites. The signs of the weather they could discern, but not those of the times. They did not see the need of repentance so that they might escape the judgment. They did not take the announced judgment seriously. Therefore justice would come over them. Isn't it just the same with the present world? The apostle Peter speaks even of mockers who mock the coming judgment. Don't all things remain as they have been for many, many years (2 Pet. 3:3-4)? The sun still rises every day!

God's Prophets

The Lord had indeed spoken to Israel through local disasters, but as far as *the judgment* is concerned, He would not do anything before having revealed it to His servants, the prophets. It was the prophets' task to point to the coming judgment. As the judgment drew closer, the number of prophets increased. One thing the Lord kept for Himself, namely the day and the hour of the judgment. But the "lion" had already roared, the voices of the prophets had sounded, warned. If the Lord had spoken, which prophet would not prophesy of it? The prophets in Israel were the announcers of the words of the Lord, of His counsels.

Today, instead of prophets we have the Word of God, revealing the counsels of God. That Word announces the judgments that are about to come, but also God's mercy, which "glories over judgment" (Jas. 2:13).

The God-given evangelists, and in a wider sense all believers in Christ, have now been entrusted with the task to make known God's counsels contained in His Word. To do this according to the mind of God, they must of course know God's

Word. Even more important it is that, just as the prophets of the past, they maintain *no connections with the world*. The world will not listen to what God has revealed in His Word, despite the serious signs of the times. Yet, Christians should proclaim to all men the only means of escape from the judgments. Deep in the hearts of all men lives the fear for judgment, though this will of course never be acknowledged.

In verse 9 we read that Philistea, (Ashdod) and Egypt were called to assemble themselves on the mountains of Samaria. They were to observe the great disorder and oppression reigning in the ten-tribe nation. Then verse 10 says that the Israelites didn't know how to do right; in their palaces they gathered treasures obtained by violence and oppression. Therefore the Lord would cause the enemy to enter and destroy the entire country of the ten tribes, plundering their amassed treasures.

The Lord called Philistea and Egypt as witnesses of the unrighteous acts committed in Ephraim. He wanted these nations to understand that He would punish the iniquity of *those who are linked with Him* much more severely. The Lord was not going to use these two nations to chastise Ephraim because they were any better. The judgment over Philistea had already been announced because it had sold the captive Israelites as slaves to Edom (1:6-8). It often happens that, when one nation subjects another, the former thinks that God approves its deeds because it is better than the conquered nation. This, however, was absolutely not so.

The Remnant

Verse 12, which begins with: "Thus says Jehovah," speaks from a different vantage point. The incursions of Egypt and Philistea did not cause the ten-tribe nation to disappear. This only happened later as the result of the invasion of the Assyrians. Then the ten tribes went into exile to Assyria, and their land became an Assyrian province. During those terrible days of judgment the Lord would save a very small remnant of the nation that seemingly was entirely crushed. To show this, Amos uses the picture of a shepherd who, out of the jaw of a lion, still rescues the remnants of a sheep that has been pounced upon by the monster. These remnants are but two legs and a piece of an ear. That is how, though Israel would be wounded and devoured, something would remain that the Shepherd would recognize as belonging to Israel.

We read about this little remnant: "It may be that Jehovah, the God of hosts, will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph" when it seeks again the good things (5:15). And "Only that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob" (9:8), and then it tells us what the Lord will do at the end of days regarding the restoration of the Israel (9:11-15). That remnant will be the subject of God's care. He will cause it to appear again at His time, for God is faithful to His unconditional promises, which are based on His grace.

Israel had to hear, and afterward to speak of it, that the Lord at the time of judgment would also deal with the altar of Bethel. Its horns would be cut off and fall to the ground. The man of God from Judah had already spoken of this to king Jeroboam I. His prophecy against that altar had been confirmed when the altar split and its ashes fell to the ground (1 Ki. 13:2,5). About a hundred years after these words of Amos, king Josiah of Judah fulfilled his prophecy (2 Ki. 23:15).

All prosperity, all wealth amassed by the weakened population of Samaria would disappear in the storm of judgment. The prophet mentions the winter palace and the summer palace of the kings of Israel, the ivory houses as well as the houses of other important persons. The abundance and luxuriousness after which they strove and in which they gloried, all their pursuits, their highest goals in life, all falls under the prophet's lashing scourge. In sore, guilt-increasing contrast to this lust for wealth stands their oppression of the poor and needy (2:7-8; 3:10; 4:1; 5:11; 8:5-6).

Chapter 4

Kine of Bashan

We read here for the second time: "Hear this word." Now, however, the prophet addresses the ten-tribe nation, not, as in chapter 3:1, the twelve tribes. In spirit the prophet left the rural village of Tekoa to speak the word of the Lord in Samaria, the centre of luxury and wantonness. He calls the inhabitants of Samaria "Kine of Bashan." Bashan was a grassy plateau across the Jordan, where the cattle could be fattened. In past years this area had seem so desirable to the tribes of Rueben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh. Since they had much cattle, they decided to live there rather than across the Jordan. The fatted kine of Bashan were a suited picture of the inhabitants of Samaria who had become "fat." Scripture also speaks of the "Bulls of Bashan," when thinking of their brute force (Ps. 22:13, etc.).

The "food" for these "kine of Bashan," the inhabitants of Samaria, was profit obtained by their oppressing the poor and crushing the needy. The lords who pastured them, their kings, only thought of their own unquenchable thirst for ease and wealth, displaying nothing but self-interest. The people of Samaria said to these lords, "Bring, and let us drink" (2:8; 5:11; 6:6). The thirst for liquor was large in Samaria. This verse therefore paints in a few words the desire, the pursuit of material wealth, and the excesses that accompanied these. They prospered at the expense of the poor and needy.

Corruption

This characterization of Samaria is a little picture of the condition of the world at the eve of its destruction. Rulers and those ruled over strive more and more after material wealth. A government that satisfies the requirement: "Bring, so that we may drink," is welcome to the population. The rich display their mighty pride by amassing millions, while ruining small industries, making it impossible for them to exist. Mighty trusts set their prices, often much too high, and they rather destroy their products than lower their set prices. The destruction of food just because the minimum price cannot be obtained is a great shame, tempting God. They rather destroy than allow the small man, the poor, to profit from the God-given abundance. Increasingly governments seek to control industry, often at the expense of other nations. Yet, with all this wealth, cleverly controlled and kept in hand by the economy, crime and moral degradation are gaining ground rapidly. True moral rearmament is, despite much propaganda, foreign to the wish of men, for there is no fear of God in them. When God will send His judgment over this world, this whole economic system will be eradicated as well. Fear and terror will come over all men. The entire system in which they trust will collapse; an indescribable confusion will result. Nowhere will there be anything to hold on to.

Verse 2 contains a figure of speech that occurs often in the prophecies to indicate the results of a hostile invasion. It mentions fishing rods, to catch and kill each fish, and fishhooks, which speak of leading into captivity.

The last clause of verse 3 has been translated in various ways. The New Translation by JND has: "and ye shall be cast out to Harmon." This pretty well agrees with the NASB and the NIV, but is quite different from the KJV's, "And ye shall cast them into the palace." Luther's translation reads somewhat like: "and ye will be carried away to Haharmon." The word "Haharmon" has given rise to a multiplicity of comments by those who search the Scriptures; we believe the translation given by Luther to be the correct one. This we believe all the more when we note the context. The meaning of "Haharmon," however, cannot be ascertained. Dr. H. Rossier believes it to be the place to which the inhabitants of Samaria have been exiled.

Idolatry

In irony the prophet tells the Israelites to come to Bethel so that they may apostatize from God there, and to go to Gilgal to multiply their transgression. He tells them to bring there their sacrifices in the morning and their tithes on the third day. He encourages them to bring their thank-offerings with leaven and to publish their voluntary offerings, for that is what they loved to do. So spoke the Lord.

Besides the pursuit of wealth and the complete lack of fear of the Lord, the Israelites were characterized by their selfwilled religion. The most dreadful was that they had retained only the outward form of serving the Lord. They brought their sacrifices and tithes to Bethel in the way God had instituted, but instead of having the Lord as the object of their worship, they had the calf that Jeroboam I had set up.

In the past God had revealed Himself to Jacob at Bethel when he fled from Esau. Just before Jacob returned to Bethel, he had collected the idols of his family members and buried them under the oak at Shechem (Gen. 35:2-4). Much later that same Bethel had become the place where the calves were worshipped, a service that Jeroboam I had linked to the service of the Lord. To a degree, we see the same today in so-called Christendom. It has retained the outward appearance of serving God, but it has also introduced idols in its worship. The devil knows that imitation is his most powerful weapon.

Gilgal was the place where God, through circumcision, sought to teach the Israelites that the wicked flesh, man's nature, was offensive to Him, and was judged by Him. But also there the service of the Israelites was two-faced. On set days, the Israelites brought there their sacrifices and tithes. Then they sacrificed leavened rather than the unleavened bread that speaks of a holy, God-devoted life. They also announced their voluntary offerings, so that they might appear to be pious, though they had no intention of bringing these offerings.

The result of this self-willed, false religion was judgment over Israel. God had given cleanness of teeth to Israel. This means that they, through lack of bread, did not get dirty teeth from food residues. Famine is a terrible thing. Nevertheless, Israel had not turned to God, nor left the service of Jeroboam through which it sinned against God.

Unheeded warnings

Three months before the harvest God had given one city or region fruitful rain but not to another. He, who knows all things, knew also the cities or people who kneeled at the altar of Jeroboam. So it happened that the inhabitants of one city went to another for drinking water; it was their only way of survival. Their harvest withered. Despite this clear speaking of the Lord, Israel had not turned in repentance.

They had been beaten with blasting and mildew; vermin had devoured their nurseries and vineyards as well as their fruit trees, but they had not repented. God had sent the pestilence among them, as it had once affected the cattle in Egypt; invading armies had killed their young men by the sword. Their horses had been stolen, and the stench of their armies had entered their nostrils, but they had not turned to God. They had experienced an overthrow similar to that of Sodom and Gomorrah; they could well say that those who remained had been as wood plucked out of the fire, yet they had not repented.

Five times the deeply sad remark is made: "Ye have not returned unto Me." They had not listened to the oft repeated word of God's prophets: "Hear this word." Just as little they understood that the Lord Himself spoke to them through all these calamities and disasters. Is today's humanity any better? Has Christendom listened to the word of the Lord, to the many warnings and calls over the years?

Meeting God

What had to be done with a nation such as Israel? All that was left was universal judgment. Perhaps this or that pious, god-fearing Israelite might be plucked as a brand out of the fire, but the nation as a whole with its leaders was ripe for judgment. The Lord would surely allow this universal judgment to come. Therefore Israel had to prepare itself to meet their God in judgment.

And who is He whom they will meet? He is the great Creator, the Keeper of all things, the Almighty. It is He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, who makes known to man what are his thoughts and deliberations deep in his heart, all human motives and promptings. He makes the dawn darkness, and treads upon the high places of the earth. His name is Jehovah, the God of Hosts.

Once, Israel had met its God on mount Sinai, at the giving of the law (Ex. 19:10-11). Israel had not been able to bear this. Full of terror they had asked Moses that God would no longer speak with them. Then, there was not even a threat of judgment. How then could they now, now that the heavens were black with impending judgment, meet God? It could only result in a miserable disaster. It would be a foretaste of the last judgment during the day of the Lord. And what will be the end of Christendom or, speaking in general, of mankind when God acts in judgment?

To be cont'd

His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light. — Matthew 17:2

The Face of God

What quiet, holy rest divine,
In gazing on the Saviour's face,
To see pure love and glory shine
In radiant truth, yet tender grace.

That face once marred and spit upon,
Yet gentle, faithful, gracious, good:
Bearing cruel mockery and scorn,
As in the sinner's place He stood.

"Set as a flint," that blessed face
Would not turn back from deepest woe;
But to the cross in matchless grace
And love for guilty sinners go.

His face, the blessed face of God!
Beaming with radiant light divine:
In Him who once on earth has trod
Does every Godhead glory shine!

Sweet sight to set the heart at rest,
To banish sorrow, fear and care;
And bring the soul, forever blest
To Him, in His own light to share!

L. M. Grant