

## The Prophecy of Amos (6)

—R. Been Sr.

### Chapter 8

#### *A fourth vision*

This chapter starts with the fourth vision. The prophet sees a basket of summer-fruit. Neither Amos nor anyone else needs to establish its meaning. The Lord Himself did this by saying, "The end is come upon My people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more." This vision can be considered the conclusion of the three previous visions. When the ripe summer-fruits have been gathered the harvest is finished. Israel was ripe for the end. This meant that the Lord would no longer pass over the nation, no longer keep judgment from them. There was no longer the least hope for this. Israel, the ten tribes, stood before God with all its sins and unrighteousnesses. There was no blood of a passover lamb that would protect them.

The temple songs would be changed to wailing. Innumerable would be the slain and the dead bodies would be cast away in secret. Death would reign everywhere. Lazy rest and a life of sensuality would make room for a horrible death struggle full of terror. Sometimes individuals learn to pray in trouble, but at this time the calling upon the Lord would not be heard. There is a consciousness that the Lord judges in wrath.

#### *The verdict*

Those who went their way committing injustice are told to hear. Not to hear how they may escape the judgment, there is no more mention of repentance, but to listen to the verdict over them. They had oppressed the needy and caused the poor to fail. They had longed for the end of the new moon and Sabbath so that they could continue with their trade. They traded with a falsified ephah, prices, and weights. They sold the poor as slaves, and the needy, delivered in their power, they traded for a pair of shoes. They sold chaff and refuse for grain.

But the Lord does not forget anything. He keeps all their unrighteous deeds in mind. This He had sworn by the glory of Jacob, that is, by the glory He had once given to Jacob, the entire nation. As surely as He had done this, so sure it was that He would now not forget any of their unrighteous deeds. How serious this is! Much will escape the memory of an earthly judge. Besides, an earthly judge often doesn't know the true motives, thereby either punishing too severely or too lightly. Nothing, however, escapes God, and a statute of limitations is unknown to Him when He judges sins.

The whole earth would be astonished about the judgment executed over Israel; it would completely swallow Israel like the Nile overflows Egypt, for the earth would rise and sink like the Nile. Reading this, we may think of the terrible earthquake in Amos' days that symbolized the terrible events of the last days.

#### *The future*

And then Amos speaks for the first time about the events of the last days. There will be darkness over Israel. Their feasts will be changed into mourning, their songs into a dirge. It will be a day of general mourning comparable to the mourning for an only son, such as that in Egypt in the night when the firstborn were killed. We should not mistake this mourning with that of which Zechariah speaks. There we read of a remnant of Judah mourning about their rejection of the Messiah. Amos, however, speaks of a mourning about the terrors of the Lord's judgments over Israel in the last days. Then it will be worse for the ten tribes than it once was for the Egyptians when their firstborn were killed. They still had the hope of descendants. For Israel there will be nothing left, it will be the end of the ten tribes, a bitter day.

The prophet says that days will come in which the Lord will send a famine in the land. Here the land should not be understood to mean Palestine, but those lands to which Israel has been scattered. It will not be a famine for bread, and a thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the Lord. Before they were scattered, God still spoke to them through prophets. Now God will no longer speak to the ten tribes as one whole. What will be said about God on earth will be hidden for Israel. They will have ears, but they will not hear because of the hardening that has come over them. In this

respect they are like the rich man who sought to quench his thirst in hades, but was unable to do so (Lk. 16). During all their wanderings, they will not be able to quench their spiritual thirst, they will not find the word of the Lord. Nothing remains for them than to serve idols which, after all, they followed and by which they swore in the days when the word of the Lord came to them repeatedly. The next generation will succumb in misery. The end of Israel has come and it will not rise again.

All of this concerns the ten tribes as a whole. That God will yet save a remnant from among them is not mentioned here, but in the next chapter.

## Chapter 9

### *Mercy glories over judgment*

The description of the judgment that will come over the ten tribes as a whole in the last days is continued in verses 1-10 of this chapter. Afterwards, in verses 11-15 we see the triumph of God's mercy in His dispensations. Amos speaks about a remnant out of Israel that will be united with the remnant out of the two tribes. Israel will be restored as one nation under a king out of the house of David.

### *Judgment from the altar*

In verses 1-6 we read about the last vision of the prophet Amos. He saw the Lord standing upon the altar.<sup>1</sup> This "standing upon the altar," as seen by the prophet, is very remarkable. The altar of Bethel had been judged, its horns had been cut off (3:14). The man of God from Judah had announced this judgment over that altar (1 Ki. 13:2-3), and King Josiah had executed it, so that nothing was left of it (2 Ki. 23:15). Still, the altar of the Lord remained the place of sacrifice, the only firm foundation. Israel, the ten tribes, however, had despised this only foundation, this sole altar at Jerusalem, choosing rather the altars of Bethel, Gilgal, Dan, and Beersheba. For this reason this only true altar became to Israel the place of judgment over them. The Lord had already said that they would fall and not rise again (8:14). That was an announcement. In chapter 9:10 we find the execution of the judgment. The Lord stands on the altar as Judge. He is not in the temple; only the altar is mentioned. That altar was meant to be the basis of reconciliation for Israel. Now that they themselves had built altars, it became a place where judgment was meted out over them instead.

### *Thoroughness in Judgment*

The picture presented in verse 1 is not an allusion to the temple, but to the judgment night in Egypt. "Smite the capitals so that the thresholds will shake, and break them on the heads of them all!" (NASB). The angel of destruction would go around, the top doorsill would be smitten, the styles would tumble, the houses collapse, crushing their heads. The symbol Amos used was therefore a reminder of the judgment of the first-born and the earthquake in the days of Uzziah. In the night of judgment in Egypt Israel had been spared, guarded by the blood of the passover lamb. The angel of destruction passed their houses. Now, however, it had been said once and again that the Lord would not pass Israel by any longer (7:8; 8:2). He would go through the midst of them as He had gone in judgment through the midst of Egypt in days gone by (5:17). During the earthquake Israel had experienced how houses collapsed, crushing their inhabitants.

The main thought in verses 1-4 is that Israel would not escape the Lord's judgment. Those fleeing would not be able to escape, those who might initially escape would still not be saved. Even if they dug to Sheol, the Lord's hand would take them from there. Though they climbed up to heaven, the Lord would bring them down. Hiding themselves on the top of mount Carmel, the Lord would find them and take them from there. Even hiding at the bottom of the sea, they would be bitten there by a serpent. Everything is expressed in symbolic terms. When they would be hidden at the bottom of the sea — in the midst of the nations — then a "serpent" (Satan) would bite them, and they would become his prey. Though they might be taken prisoner, even then the sword would slay them in the foreign land. The Lord will set His eye on them for evil and not for good. What a terrible pronouncement!

### *The Judge*

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<sup>1</sup> The NASB and the NIV have "beside" and "by" respectively, but that is not right according to qualified Scripture students. The translation by JND and the KJV as well as Luther's translation have "upon the altar."

Who is He that executes this judgment? It is the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, who touches the earth and it trembles on its foundations, bringing sorrow among men. He causes the earth to rise like the Nile, and sink down like this river. He has built His upper rooms in the heavens and His vaults are founded on the earth. He calls the waters of the sea and the surface of the earth overflows (by earthquakes, tidal waves, etc.). Jehovah is His name.

Israel ought to remember that they were no better than the Ethiopians, and that God had also involved Himself with other nations. Just as He had brought Israel out of Egypt, so He had brought the Philistines from Caphtor (Crete) and the Syrians out of Kir. Israel had become a sinful nation, against which the eyes of the Lord were set to destroy it from off the earth. Yet, and here speaks the God of the promises to which He is faithful, the house of Jacob would not be utterly destroyed.

#### *And Yet...!*

True, He would shake the house of Israel, as one shakes a sieve, among all the nations among whom they had been scattered; yet, not a grain would fall to the earth. In His own time, God will show that He has kept all His chosen ones and that not one of them has been lost. Satan desired to sift the disciples as wheat, but the Lord Jesus kept Peter, although his path went through the deep. So also will the remnant of the ten tribes pass through the deep. Yet, as a whole, Israel, the ten tribes, will die through the sword; they who say that evil will not overtake or befall them.

#### *A remnant*

The remaining verses stand in stark contrast to what the prophet Amos has said so far. It was judgment upon judgment that he announced. His words, as far as the outlook for Israel was concerned, could well be summarized by the words: They will fall and not rise again (8:14). But then the Lord had said that He would not utterly destroy and eradicate the house of Jacob. A remnant of Israel would therefore be saved.

#### *The house of David*

Verses 11-15 speak of blessings during Christ's Millennium. They are actually the crown upon Amos' prophecy. "In that day..." This is the expression all the prophets have often used to point to the events of the last days. Well, in that day the Lord will again raise up the tabernacle of David that has fallen. Its breaches will be closed up, and what had fallen down will again be built up. The Lord will rebuild that tabernacle as in days of old. This "tabernacle" is the royal house of David concerning which God had promised His blessing. The "breaches" will be stopped.

David had been king over the ten as well as over the two tribes. After Solomon a breach had occurred, and the house of David had retained its link with only two tribes. During the course of time much of the glory of the house of David had been lost. Finally, at the time of the exile of the two tribes, came the total collapse. But "in that day" the Lord will bring this royal house back to the throne of Israel, the twelve tribes. He will build the house, making it great, as in days gone by.

#### *Comparisons*

Other prophets speak in detail about the glory of the royal house and the nation during Christ's kingdom of peace. Israel, formed out of the remnants of the ten and the two tribes, will be restored as one nation under one king out of the house of David. To be more precise, it will be under a viceroy, for Christ is the King, not just over Palestine, but over the entire world.

Amos, however, says only that Israel will inherit the territory of Edom. Edom will not have a remnant, as will be the case with Moab, Ammon, and Elam, and many other nations (Jer. 48:47; 49:6,39). All these remnants must submit themselves under the laws and government of Jerusalem, as capital of the last and only true world empire.

In Acts 15 the apostles and elders met in Jerusalem to consider whether or not the believers out of the nations could be accepted in the assemblies without first becoming Jews. Then James referred to the prophecy of Amos 9:11-12 as it is in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. The quotation therefore differs somewhat from what Amos said. James quoted Amos only to prove that the nations as such would call on the name of the Lord. That is why he had said earlier that the words of the prophets agreed that there was also salvation, blessing, for the nations (Acts 15:13-18).

## *The Millennium*

Then Amos speaks of the glory of the creation and the never-experienced blessings during the thousand-year reign of the Messiah. In Leviticus 26:5 the people had received the conditional promise that the time of harvest would last until the vintage, and the vintage till seeding time. Through the unfaithfulness of the people it had never been truly so. During the Millennium, however, the harvest will be so large that the plowman (for the next season) will begin plowing when the harvest is still in progress. So it would be with the vintage as well. The mountains would drip with new wine; the hills overflow with it.

The prophet Joel says this also (Joel 2:24; 3:18). The blessing is then no longer dependent on the obedience of man, but on God's faithfulness to His promises. Still, obedience will then be present in Israel of course, for all will know the Lord. All Israelites will possess new life from God, and have His laws written in their hearts and minds.

Israel, formed out of the remnant, will be restored in its entirety. The people will rebuild the ruined cities and dwell in them. They will sow, plant, and enjoy the abundant harvest. Never again will they be driven out of the land that the Lord has given them as it were for the second time.

## *Review*

What a blessed contrast between these closing verses and the rest of Amos' prophecy. Judgment came upon judgment, severe, but just, and finally the blessing. For Israel, judgment was never the last word. Not to destroy a nation, but to bring a nation to blessing is truly worthy of the Lord. It pleases Him to give this blessing to His people, causing them to enjoy it, and to call Himself their God. This is also true for today's believers. In Amos' prophecy we see the immutable ways of God with His people and the nations. Except in the last chapter, the prophet does not speak of things that are still future today, but about events that would occur in the then near future. This gives the prophecy a special value for all times. The sins committed in Amos' days are still being committed today, by believers and unbelievers alike. Amos tells us what the wages of this are. Under the pressure of discipline, the believer will search his heart, and humble and judge himself in repentance. Then the Lord will bless him.

Amos ends his prophecy by announcing the glory of Christ's reign of peace on earth. He declares that the salvation of God will reach far beyond the borders of Israel over the entire earth.

*The End*

## **A Righteous God and a Saviour**

—*W. D. Hayhoe*

*Which Old-Testament book, after the Psalms, is most quoted in the New Testament? Which book was most vital to the apostle Paul in confirming his thesis in Romans that our righteousness is from God? Which book refers to God as Saviour and Redeemer more than any other? Which book is called "the fifth gospel" because it talks so much of Christ's birth, servant life, and sacrificial death? The answer is Isaiah.*

## *Introduction*

Isaiah lived half way between the time of Moses and of Christ. In the eighth century B.C., Israel was at a crossroad. The nation was under attack by the expanding Assyrian and Babylonian empires. At the same time it was decaying within because of idolatry. Was there any hope? Just then God gave Isaiah a wonderful series of prophecies about the Messiah, the "Servant of the Lord." Together with these, the themes of righteousness, judgment, and salvation are developed in detail. Everything comes to a climax at the cross of Christ, pictured so graphically in Isaiah 53. The book of Isaiah as a whole gives a complete outline of God's ways with Israel and the nations, past, present, and future. It also presents the fatal problem of God's people rejecting the living God to turn to idols — a problem as real today as then.

## *The fifth gospel*

Although many Christians have not read through the book Isaiah as a whole, they are usually familiar with some of the beautiful prophecies about the Lord. Consider the following:

1. He will judge between the nations...and they will hammer their swords into plowshares (2:4).
2. Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a Son, and she will call His name Immanuel (7:14).
3. For a Child will be born to us...Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace (9:6).
4. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding...counsel and strength (11:2).
5. Behold, a King will reign in righteousness (32:1).
6. Behold, My Servant whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him (42:1).
7. I will make Him a light of the nations, so that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth (49:6).
8. The LORD God has given Me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one (50:4).
9. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief (53:3).
10. The Spirit of the LORD God is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to bring good news to the afflicted (61:1).

These prophecies are sprinkled throughout Isaiah, forming a recurring theme around which the other important messages of the prophet revolve. The New Testament believers made many references to these Messianic prophecies. Isaiah 53, for example, is quoted in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, and 1 Peter. In the synagogue in Nazareth, the Lord Himself read Isaiah 61:1, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk. 4:21).

### *The Structure of Isaiah*

Isaiah has 66 chapters, the same number as there are books in the Bible. Although this is merely a coincidence, as the chapter divisions are not inspired, it is a good memory aid. Furthermore, like the whole Bible, Isaiah divides into two parts: part one has 39 chapters—the Old Testament has 39 books; part two has 27 chapters—the New Testament 27 books. Isaiah 1-39 presents the failure and judgment of Israel, while Isaiah 40-66 introduces the theme of salvation through Christ.

Isaiah lived from about 770 to 700 B.C. During this time, Israel was being attacked by the Assyrian kingdom. The northern ten tribes known as "Ephraim," wholly given up to idolatry, were actually taken into captivity. The southern two tribes, known as "Judah," where Isaiah lived, were safe for the time, perhaps because of Isaiah's moral leadership and King Hezekiah's great faith in God. This constant Assyrian threat, and the offer of help to Israel from the competing kingdom of Egypt, is the context of Isaiah 1-39.

Isaiah 40-66 is not primarily historical but moral. Some secular writers have referred to it as the most sublime prose in the history of mankind. It was probably written by Isaiah in his later years — just as John wrote Revelation in his last years. The prophet looks into the future of the southern two tribes and foresees their being taken into captivity by the Babylonians because of continued idolatry. Their idols had come from Babylon, so they would end up there. However, Isaiah also prophesies of their restoration to the land through Cyrus the Persian. It is especially in these last 27 chapters that the great theme of the "Servant of the Lord" comes out. Christ will be the true Servant of God, suffering at Calvary for the nation (Isa. 53).

### *Answering the Critics*

Like Daniel, Isaiah has been among the books most attacked by the "higher critics." The differences in vocabulary and writing style between its two sections are so great, they say, that one person couldn't have written both. Even the conservative scholar Franz Delitzsch wavered on this. However, a recent book by R. Margalioth, *The indivisible Isaiah*, has demonstrated that the vocabulary is that of one writer. Not only are similar words used in the two sections, but they often appear in certain combinations peculiar to Isaiah. One important example of this is the title "Holy One of Israel." It occurs 26 times in Isaiah, 12 in the first part and 14 in the second, and only 5 times in all the rest of the Bible.

As to the differences in style between the two sections, we must remember that Isaiah probably wrote the latter section as an older man with a mature way of saying things. Divine inspiration does not overrule human personality. Besides, the great difference in theme between the two parts of Isaiah requires a different style. Another objection some raise is that the doctrine taught in the two sections is incompatible. However, those who read and study Isaiah in dependence on the Spirit see absolutely no foundation for this objection.

A third objection to the unity of Isaiah is historical. Since chapters 40-66 refer to the Babylonian captivity and restoration by Cyrus, which occurred more than a hundred years after Isaiah, the prophet couldn't possibly have written these

chapters, they say. Here we see blind unbelief at work. For the whole point of prophecy is that it foretells the future while speaking against the people's sin and rebellion. In fact, ironically enough, it is precisely in these chapters that Isaiah argues for the omniscience and transcendence of God in that He can foretell the future in contrast to the idols from Babylon, where astrology originated (41:22-26; 44:7; 45:21).

There are very good reasons for accepting the unity of Isaiah. The greatest is that the New Testament writers refer to both parts of Isaiah as actually written by him. In fact, the Lord Jesus himself refers to both parts of Isaiah in John 12, attributing both to Isaiah: "The word of Isaiah..." (v. 38), and "Isaiah said again" (v. 39). The first reference was to Isaiah 53:1, and the second to Isaiah 6:9. In the New Testament there are about 20 other quotations from both parts of Isaiah that mention Isaiah as the author.

As for the "external evidence," E. J. Young points out that "the only name that has ever been attached to the book of Isaiah, either to the whole book or to any part thereof, is the name of Isaiah the son of Amoz." Ecclesiasticus, written in the second century B. C., also supports Isaiac authorship, as does the newly discovered Qumran scroll dating to 125 B. C.

### *A righteous God and Saviour*

The book of Isaiah is an important link between Job's key question, "How can a man be right with God?" (Job 9:2), and Paul's famous answer, "The righteous man shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17). The apostle was actually quoting Habakkuk. However, the theme that he develops in Romans, that God provides our righteousness, is really a continuation of Isaiah. It is no coincidence, therefore, that of the 90 quotations of Isaiah in the New Testament, 19 are in Romans.

God used strong language in Isaiah in speaking to His people: "Righteousness once lodged in her [Jerusalem], but now murderers" (1:21; 5:7). The people for their part confess that "justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us" (59:9). Here is where the theme of Romans comes in. When God looked for righteousness from His people and found nothing but bloodshed, then He Himself brought righteousness, "Then His own arm brought salvation to Him, and His righteousness upheld Him" (59:16). Only God can cover us with righteousness, His righteousness made available through the work of Christ.

An in-depth word study of Isaiah further demonstrates this theme. In the "Old Testament section" (ch. 1-39), it is "*justice and righteousness*." Israel is "redeemed with justice, and her repentant ones with righteousness" (1:27; 5:16; 28:17; 33:5). The Messiah will establish His throne in justice and righteousness (9:7; 11:4; 16:5; 32:1,16). In the "New-Testament section" (ch. 40-66), it is "*righteousness and salvation*," "I bring near My righteousness, it is not far off; and My salvation will not delay" (45:8; 46:13; 51:5-6,8; 56:1; 59:16; 61:10; 62:1; 63:1).<sup>2</sup> These inspired details further show the relationship between Isaiah's two parts. The higher critics fail completely to grasp the divine unity of Isaiah.

Isaiah 45:21 refers to "a righteous God and a Saviour." At the cross of Christ, He demonstrated His righteousness in judging sin and His salvation in saving others, as it says in Romans 3:26, "that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Isaiah 45:22 can then continue, "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth."

### *An outline of the book*

How can we give in a few paragraphs the outline of a book of 66 chapters, where the themes are so carefully interwoven that it is like one of Handel's great symphonies? I can only present a rough outline as I see it:

#### Part 1: The Book of Judgment (1-39)

- 1-12 God's ways with Israel, the rejection of the Messiah, and the Assyrian attack.
- 13-27 Ten Oracles of judgment against the surrounding nations and the deliverance of Israel.
- 28-35 Five woes of distress on Judah and Ephraim.
- 36-39 Historical Link: Hezekiah, Assyria, and Babylon.

#### Part 2: The Book of Comfort (40-66)

- 40-48 God's first controversy with Israel: the infinite God versus the Babylonian idols.
- 49-57 God's controversy with Israel over the Messiah; Christ replaces Israel as God's Servant.
- 58-66 Israel judged and redeemed.

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<sup>2</sup> We also note that the Messianic prophecies in the first section of Isaiah refer to Christ as King, whereas those in the second section refer to Him as Servant.

## *No Other God*

The last section, giving the divisions of Isaiah, may have left you with the impression that Isaiah's message had little relevance to our situation today. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Isaiah is intensely practical. Consider, for example, his emphasis on the sin of idolatry that destroyed the people. Several important chapters (ch. 40-48) are devoted to the foolishness of idols in contrast to the omniscience of God. "Those who fashion a graven image are all of them futile, and their precious things are of no profit" (44:9). Isaiah also addresses the problem of materialism that had crept in among God's people from the pagan nations around them. "Their land had also been filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures" (2:7).

Do we not have the same problems today in the modern world, even in the Christian Church? Are not the idols of modern Babylon displacing God in our hearts? He who denies this should examine how he spends his leisure time and money. What about the idols of clothes, cars, houses, and sports, not to mention the more obvious ones of alcohol, drugs, and sex? Isaiah certainly challenges us too!

*(Scripture Quotations from the NASB)*

*The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad. Psalm 126:3*

### **Passing or Lasting?**

The days and weeks and months have quickly passed:

The year, as but a breath, fades fast away.  
Is all forever gone? Will nothing last  
Nothing but memories of a bygone day?

But faith responds with fullest confidence,  
"O no, for every day the hand of God,  
In tender grace, has been in evidence,  
Training us wisely for our greatest good."

This matchless grace in Christ our blessed Lord  
Is wonderful beyond our powers to tell:  
It draws the heart to value His pure Word,  
With willing, real desire to learn it well.

If this is our delight, then we shall gain  
From all the history of passing time;  
And in the future shall forever reign  
With Christ, God's Son, in peace and joy sublime.

*L. M. Grant*

## **God Manifested in Flesh**

—H. L. Heijkoop

### *1 Timothy 3:15-16*

These two verses stand in a close relationship to each other. The mystery of godliness we read about in verse 16 is connected with what is written in verse 15, the Assembly, the house of God, the pillar and base of the truth. Verse 16 gives the heart of the truth, and it is the task of the Assembly to display this.

In Numbers 4 we read about the pilgrim journey of the people of Israel. We note there, and in Deuteronomy 10:8, that their prime task was to carry the ark through the wilderness. The ark was not to be put on a wagon, but the sons of Levi

had to carry it upon their shoulders. We know that the ark speaks of the Person of the Lord Jesus. It was made of wood, and wood grows on this earth. Thus it has within it a picture of the human nature.<sup>3</sup> It, therefore, speaks of the Lord Jesus as Man. Yet, all was covered with pure gold. When the pure gold of the tabernacle is mentioned, it always speaks of the Lord Jesus. When gold is mentioned without the addition "pure," then it is a picture of ourselves. We, too, have received divine glory, but in our case the gold is linked with things that are not glorious, not divine. That is the truth presented in verse 16.

"God has been manifested in flesh." What a wondrous reality! God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who is from all eternity, has become Man, true Man. Yet He is the eternal God, but manifested so that men can see Him. God, says 1 Timothy 6:16, is "dwelling in unapproachable light; who no man has seen, nor is able to see." Had the Lord Jesus come to earth in all His divine glory, the whole creation would have been destroyed and all men would have been consumed. Even the angels cannot endure in His light, how much less we, sin-laden men!

And now we see here the wondrous, glorious fact: God manifested in flesh. All His divine glory veiled by His manhood, He came to earth just as every man, except Adam and Eve, had come. Only, all men have begun their existence by birth, but He has "come" in flesh. He was the eternal God, yet He became Man and was born as a baby from the virgin Mary. Who would be afraid of a baby, a little child, and that the poorest among men? He didn't have His own home, for Him there was not even room in the inn, only a manger was prepared for Him. Yet, He was the eternal God. That little child had created heaven and earth (Heb. 1:2), and He is "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3). Even when lying there as a babe in the manger, He carried the entire creation by the word of His power. Incomprehensible, beautiful truth!

Why did the Lord become Man? He desired to manifest Himself as Man to men and to save them from a righteous judgment. God had created man pure, but we know that the second deed recorded of Adam was sin. Then he received the wages of sin, spiritual death; no longer could he understand God. The original purpose of his creation had been to give him the ability to know God. That was the difference between him and all other earthly creatures. As them, he had a body and a soul, but besides these, he had received a spirit. Through that spirit man could communicate with God (for God is a Spirit) and stood far above all creatures on earth. Because of sin, however, he died spiritually and now he can no longer communicate with the living God.

Now, we read that the Assembly is "the Assembly of the living God" and that God lives in that Assembly. Thus, the living God lives in a living house. To establish this the Lord had to come on earth. He had to go to the cross to finish a work and open a way, a righteous way, on the basis of which God could bless these sinful men. That work was so enormously great, that only He could do it. No man could do it for another, for each had to die for himself. Not even an angel could do it. The elect angels may not have sinned, but they could still not die for men. Nor could they have endured the fierceness of God's judgment, it would have consumed them. To do this work, God Himself had to become Man, and as Man go to the cross to undergo the judgment of God, and to die as Man. Yet He was the eternal God and only because He was God, could He finish that work as Man. Because He has finished it and has borne the judgment over all sins of those who believe in Him, God's righteousness has been met. Now God can forgive us all our sins as soon as we have come to the Lord Jesus.

This, however, was not all. We had not only to undergo the judgment, we were dead and we needed to receive new life. Through that life we would again be able to communicate with God, in answer to God's original intent. Once Adam had been able to converse with God when God came to him. The Lord had to restore this ability.

When God Himself came on earth, He did not just restore all that man had spoiled. The Lord did much more: He gave us life. Not the life of Adam, but His own life, the life of the eternal God, of the God who had become Man. That is the wondrous result of His work. In his natural condition Adam could have known God to a certain degree. Now the Lord has given us a life that excels far above that of Adam.

Through this life the believer is infinitely better equipped to know God than he ever was through the natural life Adam had received, for it is the life of the Son Himself. The result is that we are partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), and the Lord says that we thereby know the Father as well as the Son whom He has sent (Jn. 17:3). We have the ability to know the Father and also the ability to know the Son. We received this ability at new birth, for that is the moment we received the new life.

Besides this, God has given us His Word, in which we find God manifested in flesh, His life on earth. In the Gospels we read the words He spoke, and of the works He did. All this manifests God — God spoke. Hebrews 1:2 says that God has spoken

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<sup>3</sup> When the author says, "human nature," he thinks of the perfect human nature Adam received at creation, rather than of the fallen human nature we have today. — The Editor



to us in Son. It does not say, "in *the* Son," for there is no article before Son. It could perhaps be translated with "as Son," for it was God Himself who spoke, manifesting Himself this way. This we read in John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we have contemplated His glory, a glory as of an only begotten with a father), full of grace and truth." Grace has come by Him, and on Him, the Son of the living God, the Assembly, the Church, is built.

The Man Christ Jesus is building the Assembly, but He builds her on Himself as Son of the living God, as the Source of life. She is the house in which the living God dwells. He Himself as Son of the living God is her foundation. When the Assembly was formed, God, the Holy Spirit came to dwell in her, and thus the truth is in the Church, the Assembly, alone.<sup>4</sup> She is "the pillar and base of the truth" (v. 15). Apart from the Assembly, there is no truth. Everyone else is under the rule of Satan, who is the prince and god of this world, and all that is outside the Assembly falls under his domain. The only place where truth is found is the Assembly. She herself is not the truth. The Lord is the truth and the Word of God is the truth. But God dwells only in the Assembly of the living God, and there alone the Lord can come in the midst of the two or three who are gathered in His name. To them alone He has given the Word of God in which all the truth is revealed. This entire truth she must firmly maintain.

When the Assembly has been taken up from earth, the truth will no longer be there. Then God will make other truths known. Actually these will be old truths that were already known before the cross had been revealed. Then the complete truth as has been revealed today will no longer be on earth. God manifested in flesh and men who are united to Him will no longer be found here below. For now, however, the Assembly is "pillar and base of the truth."

*To be cont'd*

## **Outline For Bible Study (61)**

**123. The Canaanitish Woman. The Deaf Man. The Feeding Of The 4,000. The Blind Man.** — Matthew 15:21-38; Mark 7:24-37; 8:1-26.

### *Outline*

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|--|--------------|
| 1. The Canaanitish Woman                 | Mt. 15:21-28 |
| 2. The deaf man                          | Mk. 7:31-37  |
| 3. The feeding of the four thousand      | Mk. 8:1-9    |
| 4. No sign for the Pharisees             | Mk. 8:10-13  |
| 5. The Leaven of the Pharisees and Herod | Mk. 8:14-21  |
| 6. The blind man healed                  | Mk. 8:22-26  |

### *Explanation*

1. When the Pharisees sought to kill Him, the Lord went north to Tyre and Sidon. The Canaanitish (or Syro-Phoenician) woman belonged to a cursed nation (Dt. 7:1-2). The Lord tested her faith. As "Son of David" He could only judge her (Lk. 1:69-71; Ps. 21:7-10). He did not answer her, because He was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel's house (Mt. 15:24). When, falling down, she called Him Lord, He replied that one couldn't cast children's bread to the dogs (Mt. 15:26). (Bread= blessings; children= Israel; dogs =gentiles). Rather than being offended, the woman humbly asked for the crumbs from Israel's table; then her child was healed.

2. Like Israel, the deaf-mute of Decapolis could neither hear the gospel nor praise God. In grace, the Lord accepts especially the poor, and thus He healed the ears and mouth of this man.

3. By feeding the four thousand, the Lord showed the same compassion as before with the five thousand.

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<sup>4</sup> In this paragraph, as elsewhere, "the Assembly" (and "the Church") always stands for the total of all believers. Some groups of believers refer to their circle of fellowship as "The Assembly." To take what is said here in that sense leads to the serious error, found in several sects, of stating that truth is only found within their circle. Truth is within the body of Christ as a whole. — The Editor

4. The Pharisees often asked for a sign (Mt. 12:38; Mk. 8:11-12). Sometimes they got an answer pointing to the Lord's suffering and resurrection (Jn. 2:18-19; Mt. 12:39-42). Here, the Lord, after saying that no sign would be given to this generation, left them.

5. As so often the disciples misunderstood the Lord when He spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. From His reprimand the disciples learned that He spoke about religious and political doctrines (Mt 16:12).

6. The blind man was healed (Mk. 8:22-26). Well might the Israelites proclaim: "He hath done all things well!" (Mk. 7:37). Such miracles were to teach them that He was the promised Messiah (Isa. 61:1; 35:5).

### *Lesson*

While testing the woman's faith, the Lord showed her that God only gives in free grace. To faith He always responds in mercy (Rom. 10:11-13).

As with the deaf-dumb man, so the Lord will open the ears and mouth of Israel and give it a new heart (Isa. 35:5-6,10). The Lord may leave — a serious warning for each unbeliever!

Walking among them, the Lord stretched out His hands to a rebellious people, while saying: "Behold Me." (Isa. 65:1-2).

**123. Peter's Confession. The Transfiguration upon The Mountain. The Demon Possessed Boy.** — Matthew 16:13-28; 17:1-21 Mark 8:27-38; 9:1-29; Luke 9:18-45

### *Outline*

1. Different Confessions Mt. 16:13-28
2. The transfiguration upon the mountain Mt. 17:1-13
3. The demon-possessed boy Mt. 17:14-21

### *Explanation*

1. After the Lord had left Israel's rulers, He asked the disciples what others said about Him. Eternal salvation depends on knowing and accepting Christ. The answer showed how blind many were before God. Only God can make known to one who Jesus is. Peter, taught by God, gave the true confession. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The *Son of God*, had been promised long ago. Nathanael (Jn. 1:49) and Martha (Jn. 11:27) had confessed Him as such and expected Him (Ps. 2:6-7,12). Peter added the word: "*living*," because the Lord Jesus has life-giving power (Jn. 5:21,26). That was the basis of Christ's announcing to His disciples, a new thing: He would build His Church (or Assembly).

The Lord called Himself "the Son of Man," and spoke of His suffering and death. He will come again in great power and glory. Some standing with Him, would see this heavenly kingdom glory before their death (Mk. 9:1).

2. The transfiguration on the mount fulfilled this promise (Mk 9:1-2; Mt. 16:28, 17:1). It displayed the glory of Christ's coming kingdom. The lowly, humble Christ was seen in majesty: "His face did shine as the sun" (Mt. 17:2; cf. Mal 4:2 and Rev. 1:16).

Moses (the lawgiver) and Elijah (the prophets) appeared on the mount with the King in His heavenly glory. Moses was the mediator of the old covenant; Elijah restores the apostate people for the new covenant. They symbolize that Israel shall share in the Lord's heavenly glory. Malachi 4:4-6 mentions both Moses and Elijah who spoke with Him of His coming trial. For Jew and Gentile, all depends on His death, here seen in connection with His heavenly glory. Peter wanted to make three tents, but the time to rest would only come (Mic. 2:10) after Christ had borne the cross, putting sin away. In the Millennium (the feast of tabernacles — Lev. 23:39-44), Israel will rest in booths (Zech. 14:9,16; Mic. 4:4-6).

When Peter put two men on the same level as the Lord, immediately a cloud overshadowed them as proof of God's presence. From this cloud, the Father declared Christ to be His Son, and He glorified Him. Moses and Elijah disappeared, for the Lord Jesus Christ alone is God's delight.

The disciples were not to speak of this experience until the Lord Jesus had laid the basis for that glory via Golgotha and resurrection. Only His death leads to glory; on earth we have to follow the Lord in self-denial. Thus the disciples had to come down with the Lord.

Then the disciples heard for the first time of the resurrection from (among) the dead (Mk. 9:9-10; Rev. 20:4-5; Jn. 5:29). The idea caused them to wonder.

The question about Elijah, prompted by Malachi 4:5-6, follows. The Lord explains that Elijah had come but had been rejected, just as He Himself would be. During the Great Tribulation (Rev. 11:3-6) the prophecy with regards to Elijah would have its final fulfillment.

3. After the Lord had come from the mount, He found His disciples in difficulties, for the scribes disputed with them (Mk. 9:14). Once they had been sent out to cast out demons (Mk. 6:13), now they were powerless through unbelief (Mt. 17:20). Faith is only sustained in close fellowship with the Lord — praying and fasting. Fasting involves a humble acknowledgment of one's sins (Jon. 3:5-9; Isa. 58:5-7; Zech. 7), and the abstaining from food and drink. The disciples lacked an attitude of self-denial. The lunatic boy came in belief to the Savior who said, "All things are possible to him that believeth, saying "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief". Then the Lord cast out the demon, and the child was healed.

### *Lesson*

"Thou art Peter (a stone) and upon this rock (Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God) I *will* build (then still a future thing) My Church" (Mt. 16:18). His Church was founded when He sent the Holy Spirit.

The Lord's transfiguration strengthened the disciples' faith (because soon Gethsemane and Golgotha would follow) for it confirmed the Old-Testament promises about the Messiah's coming in kingdom glory (2 Pet. 1:16-19).

Earlier the Lord had told the disciples that He would be raised (Mt. 16:21), and afterwards He spoke of that again (Mt. 17:23). The idea of resurrection never caused them to wonder. But when the Lord spoke of His rising from (among) the dead, we read that they wondered what rising from among the dead was (Mk. 9:10). It is connected with the first resurrection which is only taught in the New Testament.

*To be cont'd*