

Obadiah (1)

—R. Been Sr.

Introduction

The last words of the very short prophecy of Obadiah are, "the kingdom shall be Jehovah's." Characteristically, most prophecies begin with warnings, calls to repentance, and announcements of judgments, but end with a reference to the glorious restoration of Israel. Somewhat of an exception to the rule, though not entirely, is the prophecy of Amos. He foretold mainly things that would take place in the near future. Only in the last chapter, in verses 11-15, does Amos speak of the day of the Lord, about the end times.

Overview

Like most prophecies, Obadiah, too, sees that which has already taken place as a picture, as a prelude, to the events of the last days. Both Amos and Obadiah spoke of the judgment over Edom. Amos foretold events concerning Edom that were fulfilled within two hundred years after they were uttered. He did not go beyond this. But Obadiah sees in the same events a similarity with those of the last days, immediately preceding the establishment of the Christ's kingdom, when Edom will once again make an appearance on the world stage. This reappearance of Edom and other nations on the world stage in the end time is something over which the rationalists always stumble. They only accept a prophecy as long as they can understand it with their human mind, and as long as it does not conflict with their "scientific," logical thoughts. Their thoughts refuse to accept that nations who have completely disappeared today will once more appear in the line of nations.

Then are the "simple," those who accept what God has spoken because *He* has spoken, much better off, for it is written, "The entrance of Thy words giveth light, giving understanding to the simple" (Ps. 119:130). And: "In Thy light shall we see light" (Ps. 36:10). The simple take their instructions only from the Word, and because they don't let the acceptance thereof depend on their by sin-spoiled and darkened understanding, they receive light to understand it.

It may be helpful and enlightening to occupy ourselves first with Edom, its past, present, and future, before we take a look at the actual prophecy of Obadiah.

"Esau, that is Edom." This remark occurs three times in Genesis 36 (vv. 1,8,19). It indicates that this nation is distinguished by the characteristics of its patriarch. Esau didn't get the name Edom at his birth. God wanted to show, through Esau as the firstborn of Rebecca's twins, that His sovereign choice according to the election of grace is one of the great principles of the ways God takes with men. Therefore God didn't give Esau the right of the firstborn, although he was born first, but to Jacob, the second, according to His determined counsel and sovereign will. The announcement of this divine choice was not made to Jacob, Esau, or Isaac, but to Rebecca, who had asked the Lord before her sons were born. Then God had said to her, "The elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:22), after the message that two nations would be born of her.

In this announcement there is not any mention of a curse on Esau, for before their birth neither the one nor the other had done either good or bad (Rom. 9:11). God simply used His prerogative to appoint the heir of the promises given to Abraham and Isaac. The curse over Esau was only pronounced when Edom, during the course of its long history, had rejected all calls to repentance (Mal. 1:3). *Esau personally* has never been cursed. Nevertheless, thousands of years after His appointing Jacob as heir, God could say about Esau that He had hated him, but this was prompted by the wrong *demeanour* of Esau.

Initially, God only took from Esau the right of inheriting the promises. That entailed that he could not exercise authority as family head over his brother Jacob. In the Epistle to the Hebrews the words, "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come" (Heb. 11:20) refer to the second pronouncement of the future portion of the two generations. Namely when Isaac had realized how wrong his sensual intent had been to bless Esau with the right of the firstborn. He then did not recall the blessing given to Jacob, on the contrary, he shortly after confirmed that blessing to Jacob when this one was leaving the parental home (Gen. 28:3-4). Hebrews 11:20 doesn't as much refer to the blessing of Jacob and Esau, as it does of *the act of faith of their father Isaac*, the only such act mentioned of Isaac.

Genesis 27:39 reads considerably different in various translations. The New Translation (NT) and the KJV read, "Behold, thy dwelling shall be (*of* is added here in the NT) the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above," the NT giving a footnote at *of*, saying: "some translate *without*." The NASB reads, "Behold, *away from* the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, and *away from* the dew of heaven above." The NIV reads, "Your dwelling will be *away from* the earth's richness, *away from* the dew of heaven above." These latter readings seem to have much merit. The NT continues, "And by thy sword shalt thou live; and thou shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou roves about, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck."

This can hardly be called a blessing. But it agrees with another place in the Epistle to the Hebrews where it says that Esau indeed wished to inherit the blessing, but that he was rejected (Heb. 12:16). Moreover, it is in agreement with the pronouncement of the Lord that the elder shall serve the younger. It also agrees with the history given by Scripture about Esau and his descendants. Esau received the name Edom when he showed an ungodly attitude towards the birthright (Heb. 12:16). To satisfy a bodily need he bartered this right away. Thereby he robbed himself of the blessing. When he came for it, he was rejected, not because God had determined that the elder would serve the younger, but because of his *despising the birthright*. Esau was a *materialist* through and through.

From the moment that the blessing passed him by, Esau nourished a deadly hatred for Jacob that he cooled as long as his father Isaac was alive. This also explains why Esau talked so friendly with Jacob under the pretence of magnanimity when, after many years, the two brothers met each other again at the brook Jabbok. For then, Isaac was still living. Yet, Esau had four hundred valiant men with him, a fact that caused Jacob to fear greatly. Perhaps Esau took these men along for that very purpose. Due to the amount of cattle they owned, the two brothers couldn't live together in the land of their sojourn. From this we see that Esau, too, had amassed great earthly wealth. After that, Esau withdrew to mount Seir (Gen. 36:6-8). In the plain of that mountain, the land of Seir, Esau had already settled (Gen. 32:3;14:6). This separation freed Jacob from a continual threat.

The sons of Esau conquered mount Seir and exterminated its primitive cave dwellers, the Horites, or subjected them. Edom settled in their dwellings that were hewn out in the rock. Both Jeremiah and Obadiah speak of these rock-dwellings (Jer. 49:16; Obad. :3). The prophecy of Isaac that Esau, that is Edom, would live of his sword has been completely fulfilled. In Edom's history the sword always ruled. It was continually at war with Israel and other neighbouring nations. Edom missed, again according to prophecy of Isaac, the fruitful soil. Driven by hatred that passed from father to son, it expanded its territory by means of the sword at the expense of Judah and Simeon. Yes, it was their purpose to conquer all of Israel. The Edomites had appointed that land as an inheritance to themselves (Ezek. 36:5). It would take us too far if we were to recall here all the wars, all the hatred, of Edom against Israel throughout the ages. It will suffice to mention a few events out of the history of Esau's descendants that show that this hatred has been perpetual.

The Amalekites were descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:12). They deceitfully attacked Israel in the wilderness from behind, and showed themselves to be enemies of God.

The Edomites plundered Jerusalem after it was taken by Nebuchadnezzar. They took the remaining Jews captive and bought Jewish slaves (Ps. 137:7; Amos 1:9,11).

Doeg an Edomite, was the traitor of David and murdered 85 priests of the Lord.

Haman, an Amalekite, sought in Esther's days to eradicate all the Jews. God punished him.

The various Herods mentioned in the New Testament, were descendants of Esau. They came from Idumea, Edom's earlier territory.

Herod the Great became infamous through the murder of the children of Bethlehem. He was the devil's instrument.

Herod Antipas was an adulterer who lived with the wife of his half-brother. He had John the Baptist beheaded (Mt. 14:3,10).

Herod Agrippa I maltreated some persons of the Assembly. He killed the apostle James and threw Peter in jail. As a precursor of the antichrist, he accepted divine worship (Acts 25:23).

Herod Agrippa II, before whom Paul stood, lived in incest (Acts 25:23).

In our days Edom has disappeared entirely from the world stage, without the least trail Edom's territory is now inhabited by the Nabataeans, an Arabian tribe. Also various other nations, e.g., Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines, are no longer

there. Scripture teaches that through the storm of God's judgments, first the ten tribes of Israel, and afterwards also the mentioned nations and others besides have been swept away. But Scripture teaches too that many of these nations, although they can at present no longer be distinguished, will in the future arise again *as nations* so that the judgment announced by the prophets may be executed over them.

We see then that, though the Scriptures give us many details of Edom's past, it is silent as to *its present* condition. For this the believer is entirely dependent upon the uncertain and contradictory presuppositions of human science. Since this has little merit, it is therefore wisest not to be occupied with their present condition, but to search God's Word for the things that are told us about the *future*.

To be cont'd

God Manifested in Flesh (2)

—H. L. Heijkoop

In the previous issue the author explained the significance of 1 Timothy 3:15, God manifested in flesh. He described that today the Man Christ Jesus is building the Assembly upon Himself, and what it means that it is the pillar and base of the truth. This truth as it has been revealed today will no longer be on earth once the Assembly has gone to be with Christ. In this issue the author continues to look at the results of God having been manifested in flesh.

1 Timothy 3:16

Here we see the results of this fact. In John 4 we read, "God is a Spirit," but here it is "God revealed in flesh." It certainly is true that, going to the Father, we can only worship Him in spirit and in truth. We can only approach Him in a spiritual way and with spiritual words, yet we have come to know Him as revealed in flesh. The Father has not come in flesh, but the Son. In Colossians 1:19 we read, "For in Him all fullness was pleased to dwell," and in Colossians 2:9, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Thus in 1:19, when the Lord Jesus was on earth, all the fullness of the Godhead *dwelt* in Him, and in 2:9, now and in eternity, all the fullness of the Godhead *dwells* in Him. Therefore the Lord could say, "Who has seen Me, has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9), and the Word of God says about Him that God does not give the Spirit by measure. In all the Lord Jesus said, and in all that He did, in all that He manifested, God was displayed. True enough, it was the Son who was on earth, and true too that the Son was God, but we may also say that the triune God was manifested in Him. The Lord spoke words and did works, but said, "The words that the Father has given Me, those I have spoken," and "the works the Father gave Me to do, those I have done." So we see for instance in Luke 4 that the Lord did everything through the Holy Spirit, so that also the Holy Spirit was manifested in what He did and said.

So it was with the work on the cross. All the fullness of the Godhead was in Him to "reconcile all things to Himself having made peace by the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:19-20). And in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read that the Lord Jesus "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself spotless to God" (9:14). God manifest in flesh — how wondrous! Those who have believed in the Lord Jesus during the time of His rejection, those who have received Him as their life, and who have received eternal life, they have come to know God in what He is within Himself. Now they know the Father as Father and the Son as Son. To them He says, "I ascend to My Father and your Father" (Jn. 20:17), and "Go to My brethren." The Holy Spirit dwells within them, in each one personally, and in all of them together as the house of God. God has been fully revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This knowledge will no longer be on the earth after the Assembly is taken up. The believers of the Old Testament never knew God this way and those after the rapture of the Assembly will not know Him in this way either, nor will the angels.

In verse 16 we read, "Seen of the angels." The angels had never been able to see God until the moment the Lord Jesus was born on earth. When He lay as a Babe in Bethlehem's manger, the angels saw their Creator for the first time. They worshipped Him. In Hebrews 1 they are called to do so, and in Revelation 5 we see that they do it. But the Father they do not know; they are not children, but servants; they serve *God*, and they see, and have seen God in the Lord Jesus. The Lord doesn't call the angels His brothers and the Father doesn't call them His children. That is *our* glorious portion, the portion of all who belong to the Assembly of the living God. Now they have the task to know this truth and to carry it with holy hands through the desert so that it will not become defiled but will arrive unspoiled in eternity. As long as the Assembly is on earth God will have a perfect testimony of His Son, a manifestation of all God's glory.

Yes, "God is manifested in flesh, justified in the Spirit." All that He has done, was in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thereby He gave evidence that He was indeed God. And not just that, but in the resurrection it was fully shown that He was God. That is said in Romans 1:4, "marked out Son of God in power, according to [the] Spirit of holiness, by [the] resurrection of

[the] dead." There we have "justified in Spirit."

We already spoke of "seen by the angels." Then it says, "preached among the nations." In the Old Testament God was not preached. If He was known, it was in Israel. Any who desired to approach Him had to go to Jerusalem where the house of God was, and even there He was not preached. Preaching is a New Testament activity. But now preaching is not just for the Jews, but for all the nations. And what is being preached? God manifested in flesh! *He* is preached. We often say that the gospel is preached; but what is the actual content of the Gospel? It is the Person of the Lord Jesus, the Man Jesus Christ. But He is God manifested in flesh. In Acts 4:12 it says, "For neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved." He is preached as God revealed in flesh. In Him we see God, that God is love, that God is light and must therefore judge the sinner, but that "He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him may not perish, but have life eternal" (Jn. 3:16).

In this world, where He was rejected, where men said, "We do not want this Man to be King over us," where they only had a cross for Him, and where, as far as their responsibility is concerned, they put Him to death, where He was buried, and where there was no place for Him, there He is believed on: "Believed on in the world." There there are men who have accepted Him, who have seen that He is the true God and who have believed on Him as such, not just *on* Him, but also *in* Him. They have put their full trust in Him. How do we know that we are children of God? Because we have believed in His Word. How do we know that our sins are forgiven? Because we have believed His word, "It is finished." How do we know that we will go to the Father's house? Because we have believed every word He has spoken, also that which He said, "I go to prepare you a place." Yes, He is "believed on in the world."

"Received up in glory." He is no longer on earth. He was on earth, God revealed in flesh. And the Holy Spirit has confirmed this testimony in the Word of God; the Holy Spirit within us is the power to understand the Word of God, so that we know God, the Trinity, but He Himself is in heaven. He is there at the right hand of the Father. According to Revelation 3, He is seated in the throne of His Father. The time is coming that He will return to earth to take possession of the world and to rule over the earth. He will cleanse the whole creation. On the basis of His work on the cross all will be brought back into complete harmony with God and He will take away sin from the earth as we read in John 1:29, and in this condition He will give up all things into the hands of the Father, so that God will be "all in all."

On the new earth, God will dwell in the midst of men. But before the Lord takes possession of the earth, He will draw us out of this world, outside of creation, and lead us into the uncreated heaven, into the Father's house, the eternal house of God. When we will be there, He will bring His judgments over creation. Through these judgments heaven and earth will be cleansed. But, as I said before, we will be with Him in the glory. Then the purpose of the Lord's coming on earth will be entirely fulfilled, as we see in Romans 8:29, "because whom He has foreknown, He has also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He should be the firstborn among many brethren." And as it is said in 1 John 3:2 "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is," and in Philippians 3:21, "Who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory." What a wondrous Person, this Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ!

The End

Outline for Bible Study (62)

125. The Temple-tribute. The Feast Of Tabernacles. The Woman Taken In Adultery. — Matthew 17:22-27; John 7:1-53; 8:1-11,59.

Outline

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| 1. The tribute money | Mt. 17:22-27 |
| 2. The Lord Jesus and His brothers | Jn. 7:1-9 |
| 3. The people at Jerusalem | Jn. 7:10-13 |
| 4. The Lord in Jerusalem | Jn. 7:14-36 |
| 5. The questions of dispute | Jn. 7:37-43 |
| 6. The officers, the Pharisees, and Nicodemus | Jn. 7:44-52 |
| 7. The woman taken in adultery | Jn. 8:1-12 |
| 8. Before Abraham was, I am | Jn. 8:12-59 |

Explanation

1. The yearly tax of one-third shekel was to pay for the show-bread and the daily offerings. Peter promised to pay this tax. The Lord explained that sons (both the Lord and His own) are free. However, the promise had to be kept. The Creator, the omniscient One, provided what was needed (Mt. 17:27).

2. The Lord's unbelieving brothers wanted Him to manifest Himself at the feast of tabernacles, seeking the honour from men. Every appearance, action, word of the Lord, however, was entirely subject to His Father. Therefore Jesus said to them: "My time is not yet come" (Jn. 7:6).

3. When the Lord Jesus went to Jerusalem at God's time, everyone was amazed at His Words, since He was not educated.

4. All were guilty before God, the rulers who wanted to kill the Lord, and the people, who did not accept Him as the Messiah though they had seen His signs (v. 31). Therefore Jesus said: "Yet a little while I am with you... and where I am ye cannot come." The only road to heaven leads via Golgotha. Who wants to be with the Saviour must in faith accept Him.

5. Upon the Saviour's invitation: "If any one thirst, let him come unto Me and drink" (Jn. 7:37), there arose disputes and divisions among them, but none came to Him (w. 40-43).

6. The officers didn't arrest the Lord but testified of Him (Jn. 7:46). When the Pharisees, who knew the law, asked, "Are ye also deceived?, timid Nicodemus asked, "Doth our law judge a man before it have first heard from himself, and know what he does?" This then was, and still is, God's demand (cf. Zech. 7:9).

7. The Pharisees asked the Lord to act as judge. The Lord had been sent to seek the lost, and would not judge (cf. Lk. 12:14). First He gave no answer, but finally said, "Let him that is without sin among you first cast the stone at her." He upheld the law, while testing their consciences. Were they sinless? Where was the guilty man caught in the act? They went out one by one beginning with the eldest. No one had condemned her (v. 10). Then Jesus said to her "Go, and sin no more" (v. 11).

8. The Lord, as the Light of the world (v. 12), let His light shine over the consciences (Jn. 1:9). The Lord's words showed that the Pharisees hadn't learned their lesson. Rather than sons of Abraham, they were slaves whom He had to set free (vv. 31-47). When the Lord showed that He was God, the Jews rejected Him, taking up stones to kill Him (w. 48-59).

Lesson

The atonement money (Ex. 30:11-16), paid only once by all who reached the age at which they were numbered, was for the atonement of their souls, and was therefore the same amount for rich and poor. When it comes to atonement all are equal before God ("all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" — Rom. 3:23). All who today want to be atoned with God find, through faith in Christ Jesus, that the price is paid (Mk. 10:45).

126. The seventy. The Good Samaritan. Jesus at Bethany — Luke 10

Outline

1. The seventy sent forth Lk. 10:1-16
2. The seventy returned Lk. 10:17-20
3. The lawyer's question Lk.10:21-29
4. The Good Samaritan Lk.10:30-37
5. The household at Bethany Lk.10:38-42

Explanation

1. The rejected Lord continued to call the people. How serious to reject His call. A terrible destiny awaits the towns who rejected the Lord (vv. 13-15) and those who did not listen to the preaching of the seventy (v. 16).

2. The disciples returned with joy about their many miracles; even demons had been subject to them in the Lords name.

Yet, it was more important that their names are written in heaven.

3. A lawyer asked (not with pure motives) how one could inherit life eternal (cf. Lk. 18:18). Life, — not "eternal life", but a life without end — was promised to all who obeyed the law (Lev. 18:5). As a result of the fall, however, man cannot obey, and death is the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23). The lawyer knew that the fulfilment of the law is complete love towards God and loving one's neighbour as oneself (cf. Dt. 6:3; Lev. 19:18). Though man thinks to please God with a show of religion, his selfish, daily conduct shows that he doesn't love his neighbour as himself. The lawyer's conscience felt this and therefore he asked: "Who is my neighbour?"

4. The Lord showed that man lacks the most important thing: love. The law demands it, but grace gives it (Rom. 8:3,4; 5:5). The Samaritan didn't ask: "Who is my neighbour?" His love made him the neighbour to anyone needing his help. The parable depicts the salvation and deliverance of man.

5. Martha, who lived in Bethany between Jericho and Jerusalem, received the Lord. The sisters must have been well-to-do, because they owned their own house and a tomb (Jn. 11:17), and Mary could pay for the ointment of great price. They believed in the Lord Jesus and He loved them (Jn. 11:25).

Martha did not allow herself the time to listen to the Lord; her service for Him came first. Service isn't bad and the Lord wouldn't have reproved her if she hadn't asked Him to rebuke Mary, who had chosen "the good part."

How different was Mary, who put the Lord and His Word above all (Ps. 45:2,3). Later this "good part" enabled Mary to do the "good work" that is spoken of in the whole world (Mk. 14:6-9; Jn. 12:3). Paul, who also had chosen "the good part," was diligent and faithful in his service for the Lord as well.

Lesson

"A certain man" went down from Jerusalem (the blessed city) to Jericho (a cursed city — Josh. 6:26). The road led through an area of mountain caves invested with robbers. The sinner, too, travels from the place of blessing to the city of destruction. Priests and Levites were not permitted to touch a dying or dead person. Neither sacrifices (priest) nor law and washings (Levite) can give the spiritually dead new life; the Lord alone, the true Samaritan who came from heaven to die for the lost, could do that. He loved God with His whole heart and His neighbours as Himself, yes, even more, He died for them.

The priest "happened" to go down that way, just as the law entered as an extra thing (Rom. 5:20). The Samaritan (the Lord Jesus — Jn. 8:48), did not "happen" to come by, but came according to the eternal counsel of God (1 Pet. 1:20; Heb. 10:7).

The Lord brings the saved sinner to the inn — into fellowship with the children of God — where he is taken care of until the Lord's return (v. 35; Jn. 14:3). Then He will reward all faithfulness according to His servants work (1 Th. 2:19; Rev. 22:12).

The Lord must have the first place in our hearts and lives. It isn't sufficient that we are converted and work for Him, He wants to be the joy and treasure of our hearts (cf. Rev. 2:2-4). We need rest and concentration for the Lord and His Word. Like Martha, many Christians rate service higher than fellowship with the Lord, and they are distracted by it.

To be cont'd

Free Will

—J.N. Darby

Those who hold the doctrine of free will lend support to the doctrine of the natural man's pretension not to be entirely lost, for that is really what this doctrine of free will amounts to. All men who have never been deeply convinced of sin, all persons with whom the conviction regarding sin is based only upon gross and outward sins, believe more or less in free will. It is the dogma of all reasoners, of all philosophers. But this idea completely changes the whole idea of Christianity and entirely perverts it.

If Christ has come to save that which is lost, free will has no longer any place. Not that God hinders man from receiving Christ — far from it. But even when God employs all possible motives, everything which is capable of influencing the heart of man, it only serves to demonstrate that man will have none of it. It only demonstrates that his heart is so corrupted,

and his will so decided not to submit to God (whatever may be the truth of the devil's encouraging him in sin), that nothing can induce him to receive the Lord and to abandon sin. If, by liberty of man, it is meant that no one obliges him to reject the Lord, this liberty exists fully. But because of the dominion of sin to which he is a slave, and willingly a slave, he cannot escape from his state and choose good (while acknowledging that it is good, and approving it); in this regard he has no liberty whatever. He is not subject to the law, neither indeed can be; so that those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

And here is where we touch more closely upon the bottom of the question. Is it the old man that is changed, instructed, and sanctified? Or do we receive, in order to be saved, a new nature? The universal character of unbelief is this — not the formally denying Christianity, nor the open rejection of Christ. No unbelief's character is this — to receive Christ as a Person, (it will be even said divine, inspired — but as a matter of degree), who re-establishes man in his position of a child of God.

Faith makes those who are taught of God to feel that without Christ they are lost, and that it is a question of salvation. Only their fright with regard to pure grace, their desire to gain men, a mixture of charity and of the spirit of man, in a word, their confidence in man's own powers, makes them to have a confused teaching and not to recognize the total fall of man.

For myself, I see in the Word, and I recognize in myself, the total ruin of man. I see that the cross is the end of all the means that God had employed for gaining the heart of man. It therefore proves that it was impossible to do so. God has exhausted all His resources, and man has shown that he was wicked, without remedy, and the cross of Christ condemns man — sin in the flesh.

But this condemnation having been manifested in another's having undergone it, it is the absolute salvation of those who believe. For condemnation, the judgment of sin, is behind us; life was the outcome of it in the resurrection. We are dead to sin, and alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Redemption, the very word, loses its force when one entertains these ideas of the old man, the idea of free will. It becomes an improvement, a practical deliverance from a moral state, not a redeeming by the accomplished work of another person. Christianity teaches the death of the old man and his just condemnation. It teaches redemption accomplished by Christ, and a new life, eternal life, *come down from heaven* in His Person, and communicated to us when Christ enters us by the Word. But some pretend that man can choose, and that thus the old man is improved by the thing it has accepted. Thus also the first step is made without grace, and it is the first step which costs truly in this case.

I believe we ought to hold to the Word; but, philosophically and morally speaking, free will is a false and absurd theory. Free will is a state of sin. Man ought not to have to choose, as being outside good. Why is he in this state? He ought not to have a will, any choice to make. He ought to obey and enjoy in peace. If he ought to choose good, then he has not got it yet. He is without what is good in himself, anyway, since he has not made his decision. But, in fact, man is disposed to follow that which is evil. What cruelty to propose a duty to man who has already turned to evil! Moreover, philosophically speaking, he must be indifferent; otherwise he has already chosen as to his will — he must then be absolutely indifferent. But if he is absolutely indifferent, what is to decide his choice? A creature must have a motive; but he has none, since he is indifferent; if he is not, he has chosen.

Finally, it is not at all thus: man has a conscience; but he has a will and lusts, and they lead him. Man was free in Paradise, but then he enjoyed what was good. He used his free choice, and therefore he is a sinner. To leave him to his free choice, now that he is disposed to do evil, would be a cruelty. God has presented the choice to him, but it was to convince the conscience of the fact that, in no case did man want either good or God.

That people should believe that God loves the world — this is very well; but that they should not believe that man is in himself wicked, without remedy (and in spite of the remedy), is very bad. One who does not believe this does not know oneself and does not know God.

The First Temptation of Christ

—*J. van Dijk*

While considering the temptations of the Lord Jesus in the wilderness, the character of the first of them struck me. Since, as the Lord is, so are we in this world (1 Jn. 4:17), the Lord's response to these temptations should be helpful guides for my own conduct. The second and third temptations (the order in Matthew is different from that in Luke) seem to have obvious answers: Of course one is not allowed to tempt God and to worship the devil. But what to make of the first

temptation? Is one not permitted to provide the necessities of life for oneself by using one's God-given ability?

Some say the Lord refused to make bread because He would never use His ability for His own benefit. Though there may be some truth in this, it was not how the Lord answered. One would expect that the Lord's response to Satan would provide an answer to our question. I like to ask, who of us would have taken God's word, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that goes out of the mouth of Jehovah does man live" (Dt. 8:3) to mean that one is not allowed to provide for needed food? Let us be honest, very few of us. To understand our Lord's response, we obviously need to take a closer look at our Lord and Saviour.

When the great decision was made that the Lord would come to this earth, He spoke, "Lo, I come to do Thy will" (Heb. 10:9). For a long time I read this as, "I come to go to the cross." This I now believe to be only partially correct. The Lord meant exactly what He said. He came to do the will of God. When God created this earth, He put Adam on it as His representative and made him to bear His likeness. That likeness was to be expressed in the complete harmony of Adam's actions with the will of God. In nothing was Adam to deviate from doing God's will; that is how God wished it to be. How differently it turned out! Then, after God had thoroughly tested man, and it had become abundantly evident that there was not one who did God's will, the Lord Jesus spoke the words we just quoted. He would be the One who would do God's will. He would do it in every little detail of His life. In His actions, in His speaking, in His thoughts, in every thing He had promised to do God's will — even in the matter of going to the cross.

Of this Satan seemed to have been aware. At least, he made an immediate effort to cause the Lord Jesus to stumble in this. What better way than to come with a subtle, legitimate suggestion that would seemingly not in any way rob God of His glory. Isn't it true that simply using one's God-given abilities to provide for the necessities of life is considered a virtue? It was not a matter of showing off, for the Lord was alone. It was not a question of luxury, for after forty days food is a prime necessity of life. Using the ability God gives us in a useful way honours God. Why then didn't the Lord follow Satan's suggestion?

I ask these questions, for I am convinced that many of us have failed in similar circumstances, myself included. Since it seemed reasonable enough at the time, we often have done what was within our capacity to do, and thereby really failed. It is so easy to say, "Of course the Lord refused to make bread," while we ourselves time and again fail to see how often we "make bread."

So that the Lord could properly fulfil His promise to His God, He continuously took the place of the dependent Man. Every morning His ear was alert to God's command (Isa. 50:4). In the morning He prayed to His Father (Ps. 5:3; 88:13; Mk. 1:35); at times of difficulties He prayed (Mt. 14:23; Lk. 6:12). The Lord Jesus was in constant communication with God. This is instructive for us. If He who is God — but who had voluntarily taken a place of subjection — needed this constant communication to enable Him to walk here as He had promised He would, how much more we? Let us not forget that we are to be as He is! We too are expected to do God's will only, and nothing besides. If we are inclined to say, "We can't," then we should realize that the Holy Spirit indwells us, and He is ever ready to guide us whenever we look to Him for the answers.

Going back now to the temptation, we see another thing. The Lord responded to each temptation with a quotation from Scripture. Though we have expressed surprise at the first of these, we do at least realize that His repeatedly quoting Scripture gives us an important clue how the Lord directed His life. It was entirely based on His communication with God, and the Word of God was His prime source for knowing God's will. Every action He took or didn't take, He substantiated from Scripture. That required a thorough knowledge of Scripture. He, being its Author, knew it of course. For us to achieve this, we need to read the Bible again and again to lay hold of as much of Scripture as is within our capacity. Do we read God's Word enough to be able to daily do His will alone? Do we know, not just God's commands, but His longing for things that will only be discovered by those who earnestly seek His will?

Now the Lord's response to the first temptation becomes much clearer. The Lord's words take on the meaning, "My life does not merely depend on bread, My life is primarily dependent upon the instructions I receive from God. Bread may be needed physically, but if God does not instruct Me to provide it, I would lose the precious harmony with Him. I only want to do His will, and since He has not yet spoken, I wait for His word."

You want to know what practical help this has given me? Recently this temptation provided me with answers to questions about a Christian's liberty. Is the Christian at liberty to do as he thinks best? Is every use of his God-given abilities of necessity pleasing to God? Is doing what seems best to him also the right path? To these very important questions the first temptation of the Lord Jesus provided the answer. I must always be directed by the Word of God if I am to walk according to His will. This is so in my individual conduct, and consequently, it is so in our collective conduct within the Assembly.

A Christian is not under law. This first means that he is not bound by the law of Sinai (his life is to be guided by the Holy Spirit, and the result of this will be better than what would be achieved by keeping the law). Secondly, it also means that he is not looking in God's Word for a set of New Testaments *dos* and *don'ts*, instead he looks there to find God's desires even those not expressed by a "Thou shalt." It is because the Lord Jesus used God's Word this way that Deuteronomy 8:3 guided Him. No one could say that it was a command not to make bread. It rather is an instruction that tells us what is of prime importance. Its consequence for the Lord was, not to make bread since God had not told Him to do so. So it should be for us. Though we have our abilities and freedoms, we need to look into God's Word if we are to know His desires, especially for those not expressed in command form.

David is a beautiful example of this. As a teenager, he searched for God's unspoken will. He had read in Deuteronomy 12:5-6 that there would be a place where God would make His name to dwell. No one in Israel had ever asked where that place might be, nor had God said anything further. Shiloh had been forsaken, but where was that place? This thought occupied David, giving him sleepless nights while he tended the sheep in Ephrathah (Ps. 132). God, who took note of David's desire to do His will, called him "a man after His own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). This teaches me that if I want to be a man after God's heart, my desire should be to find God's will, not just in His commandments but in all that He has recorded in His Word. Since I am set free from the bondage of sin, which in essence was doing my own will (enjoying my "freedom"), I am now free to do the will of God. The Spirit of God within me will guide me, and as long as I give Him control, I enjoy a liberty unknown to those who are outside of Christ. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." This is so much so, that I will be transformed into the image of my Saviour (2 Cor. 3:17-18). Then, and then alone, can I have any hope of answering to the expectation that God has for all those who are set free by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus.

These thoughts took on special meaning in the context of the question of Christian liberty. Maybe we all have at one time asked, "What is wrong with this, or with that?" When we did, we looked for our personal liberty. How does this orientation compare to the Lord's focus? Would the Lord have answered the way He did if such questions had been before Him? How different is the quest for the knowledge of what pleases God from that for the limits to which I can go! The one orientation will invariably lead me closer to Him who loved me, the other will at best never bring me closer. Rather, I am afraid, it will take me farther from God. A misunderstanding on my part in the search for God's will, will never lead me away from the Lord, while a wrong judgment in the quest for freedom will generally bring me farther from Him. Wasn't it so in Israel, that when they sought after what seemed right to them, they fell into the worst type of evil? It was their orientation that caused it.

I came to the following judgment: Two persons are doing the same thing, the one while earnestly seeking God's will but misunderstanding God's thoughts (2 Sam. 6:3), the other while looking for his so-called Christian liberty. The latter person will drift away from God, the former will, through God's grace, find the heartbeat of His Saviour. It is not in the first place a question of what is done (I am not saying that this is not important!) but of what condition of heart is causing one to act. If these things are so, we will be careful to search out God's wishes instead of seeking out our liberties. Our only wish will be to know what pleases and honours God.

Having said this much, I must acknowledge that I, as others, lack much; nevertheless, that should not cause me to attempt to lower God's standard. Neither does it change my desire to be like my Lord. It causes me to pray that these things may be accomplished in me while I am still here to honour Him in the place where He was rejected. I hope that this is your longing too. Let us pray for each other!

*Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift.
2 Corinthians 9:15*

Thanks be to God

*Thanks be to God for His great grace and blessing;
For His own guiding, keeping, and sustaining hand;
For tender mercy when the need was pressing;
For drawing us, and leading toward a better land.*

*For giving His own Son to be our Savior,
That He should bear our sins in agony alone;
For raising Him from death, the glorious Victor;*

For seating Him in glory on His Father's throne,

*For promising that soon this great Redeemer
Will rise and come for those who know His saving grace;
That they should glorify His name forever,
And see, with thankful, deep delight, His blessed face.*

L M. Grant

From the Editor's Desk

We greatly appreciate your comments on the articles we publish. No doubt some of you are helped, while others are disturbed by what we present. Both kinds of responses are welcome, for they keep us informed of what lives among you. Recently we received some critical comments. These keep us before the Lord. It is not a simple task to publish material that edifies and stirs the consciences, and yet refrain from creating undue contentions. Much prayer is needed to find the Lord's way in this. If you pray with us, we would be thankful indeed. In response to some comments, we like to apologize for the remark in vol. 17, No. 6, page 127, that appointing speakers [replacing the open meeting] "opens the door for corruption...once a door is opened, it is not long before Satan enters." Neither sentence is wrong by itself, but our putting things in this manner gave the impression that appointing speakers will unavoidably lead to immediate, serious evil. Thankfully we can acknowledge from experience that this is not so, nor was this meant. Yet, we are convinced that great blessings are forfeited by not adhering to the pattern that God has given in His Word. We considered it our duty to draw our brothers and sisters attention to such loss. Our wish is that all may consider these things in the light of God's Word, realizing, as one has fitly put it, that "we should have a 'Thus says the Lord' for all that we practice and hold" (R. K. Campbell in THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD). This issue contains an article on free will by J. N. Darby and I wrote one on the Lord's temptation in the wilderness. Both have a bearing on Christian liberty. In times of reevaluation it is most important to have the proper orientation in the way we approach matters. May the Lord Jesus alone be before us when considering such a far-reaching subject.

The Editor