

Obadiah (2)

—R. Been Sr.

Introduction (continued)

All prophecies speak of a national resurrection of nations, of kingdoms. The same nations over which they had pronounced judgment — a judgment that in many cases has also been executed initially — will again be present in the last days. As a whole these nations will not rise again to inherit a blessing but to be judged.

From several nations, however, a remnant will be saved and make up the new nation, just as the remnants of the ten and two tribes of Israel will form restored Israel. Their national resurrection, however, will first of all be so that the judgment that the prophets have announced by may be executed over them as a whole. Only then will Christ's kingdom over the entire earth, the only kingdom that will never be shaken, be established. All the prophets speak of this kingdom. After the judgment over the various nations has been executed, no nation will be at enmity with God or the Lord Jesus Christ, or against Israel.

Scripture clearly mentions the rising again of the *Roman Empire* as a world power, *Israel*, the *Assyrian Empire*, and various smaller nations among whom is *Edom*.

Many interpreters of Scripture believe the idea of national resurrection to be an error. They realize that it flows from the literal reading by some Christians whose prophetic view they reject. These interpreters *spiritualize* the prophecies and then apply them to Christendom. Other "interpreters," the rationalists, make things even worse. Since national resurrection goes against the grain of their human understanding, against their "scientific logical thinking," they claim, there is no such thing. How terribly arrogant it is that people with sin-darkened minds declare the pronouncements of an almighty God null and void! Their opposition flows from the way they look at the Bible. It is just, so they allege, a "collection of historical documents," which, as all historical science, is subject to criticism.

This view would be laughing matter, if it were not so serious. What would remain of the absolute, divine authority of the God-given Holy Scripture?

Never will the truth be found among those who presume to criticize Scripture, for they put their human judicial wisdom above the thoughts of God. Their presumptuousness will considerably increase their judgment when they stand with their eternally existing bodies before the Great White Throne. Believers in Christ, those born to eternal life by the Word of God, who live from day to day by that Word, do not take the objections and denials of these so-called "scientists" into account at all. They hold on to the Word of the Lord (Jas. 1:18).

The restoration of the *ten* tribes of Israel may seem even more impossible than that of Edom. Yet, it will take place immediately after Christ has established His kingdom on earth.

There is *no one who knows what has become of these ten tribes* since their exile by Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, in the year 721 BC. Where have they gone? To which countries, among which nations have they been scattered? Today, after nearly twenty-seven centuries, nobody can answer these questions. Research into this has not been lacking. Often people thought to have discovered them, but soon it became evident that it wasn't so. Neither in China nor in India has any trace of the ten tribes been found. Yet, it is for the believer sufficient that God knows where they are hidden and that He will bring them back.

This restoration of a remnant of the ten tribes is announced in a great number of Scriptures. We will just mention a few. "Jehovah, save Thy people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I bring them from the north country, and gather them from the uttermost parts of the earth... a *great assemblage shall they return hither*. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them... There is hope for thy latter end, saith Jehovah, and thy children *shall come again to their own border* (Jer. 31:7-9, 17).

The Lord will make a new covenant with the entire nation, consisting of twelve tribes (Jer. 31:31-34). For this to be possible, *a remnant of both the ten and the two tribes must be present*

The Lord says to the Messiah, "It is a small thing that Thou shouldest be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to *restore* the preserved of Israel; I have even given Thee for a light of the nations." then follows a description of Israel's return (Isa. 49:6, 13, 22-26).

The prophet Ezekiel describes the return of the ten tribes, which will be entirely different from that of Judah, the two tribes. *For Judah as a whole will be judged in the land*, but the rebellious of the *ten tribes* will fall under judgment *when they are on the way to the land* (Ezek. 20:34-38). *Only a remnant out of the ten tribes* will enter the land.

The same prophet speaks of the future *national resurrection* of the entire house of Israel in the well-known vision of the dead bones that are brought to life (Ezek. 37:1-14).

Zechariah says, "And I will strengthen the house of Judah (the two tribes), and I will save the house of Joseph (the ten tribes)... *I will hiss for them, and gather them...* I will bring them again out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out, of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and place shall not be found for them" (Zech. 10:6-12).

The prophet Isaiah speaks of it that the Lord will for the second time "acquire the remnant of His people which shall be left, from Asshur, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush (Ethiopia), and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea." He will "*assemble* the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah." The ten and the two tribes will once again be united as in the beginning of Israel's history. Then, several nations, the Philistines, Edom, Moab, and Ammon will be restored and be judged by Israel (Isa. 11:11-14).

As far as the *restoration of Judah*, the two tribes, is concerned, a great number of Jews is still scattered among all the nations of the earth. They bear the indelible characteristics of their race. Very many Scripture portions confirm their *return to Palestine*. But they will return in unbelief, with modern ideas, and estranged from God, as far as the whole is concerned. One remarkable fact has already occurred. Millions of Jews have returned to their land and have established the independent State of Israel in 1948. We may see this *as a preparation, a first phase*. Today there are still millions of Jews who have not returned to their land in many countries. One day, however, essentially all of Judah will have returned. Then the great mass of these unbelieving Jews will fall a ready prey to the deception of the antichrist, who in the last days will be king, viceroy in Palestine. Then, the mass will fall back into idolatry, seven times worse than ever before. At the appearing of the Lord Jesus for judgment, this mass will be judged. Two thirds of those who have returned will be destroyed (Zech. 13:8). The other third will call to God while going through the Great Tribulation. They will be purified by it and restored to God (Zech. 13:9). This remnant of Judah will inherit the blessing of Christ's kingdom in common with the remnant of the ten tribes.

As we have already remarked with a few words, also *Edom*, of whom the prophecy of Obadiah speaks almost exclusively, will at the end of the days be restored nationally. This we will show later on in more detail.

Balaam already prophesied that a star would come out of Jacob, a sceptre would rise out of Israel (Num. 24:17-18). This prophecy would have been fulfilled when the Lord Jesus came to His people if they had not at that time rejected and crucified its Messiah. Now it will be fulfilled when Christ will establish His kingdom on this earth. At that time, too, will Edom be subjected. From this flows that *Edom will then be restored as a nation*. In history this pronouncement has never been fulfilled.

The victory song of Psalm 108 gives the words of the Messiah as well as of restored Israel. The psalmist calls, "Upon Edom I will cast my sandal" (a sign of subjecting). And, "Who will lead me unto Edom?" God will do this, God, who once rejected Israel, but who will then have restored it. Here too we have a reference to *a then-existing Edom*.

Psalm 83 is very obviously prophetic in character. In the last days the nations who are mentioned in the psalm will form an alliance to destroy the united nation Israel and to take possession of their land. The first nation mentioned is nationally restored Edom; it will head up the coalition. This too has never been fulfilled (Ps. 83:1-8).

The prophet Isaiah says that "wrath of Jehovah is against all the nations, and His fury against all their armies." Isaiah says this in view of the final judgment over the nations that will precede the establishment of Christ's kingdom. He adds that the sword of the Lord will "come down upon Edom" (Isa. 34:1-8). *Then Edom must exist!*

The same prophet tells us that the Messiah will come from Bozrah, the capital of Edom, where He has executed judgment (Isa. 63:1). *Has this ever happened?*

In the last days, things will take a turn for the better in the lot of Moab and Ammon, but the cities of Edom will become "perpetual wastes" (Jer. 48:47; 49:6, 13). *Moab, Ammon, and Edom will therefore have again a national existence in the*

last days, so that all three may be judged. Of the first two, however, a remnant will remain in existence. Edom, to the contrary, will be totally destroyed.

Edom will drink the cup of God's wrath. His unrighteousness will be visited. When? As soon as *the punishment of the unrighteousness of Zion has been accomplished* (Lam. 4:21-22). He surely must be blind who fails to see that this speaks of the future. Until today Jerusalem still bears the consequences of her unrighteousness and she is still trodden down by the nations.

When all the Lord's efforts to bring Edom back from his evil ways had failed, and the hatred of Edom only increased, God said, "I hated Esau (Edom)." This sealed Edom's judgment. When Edom responded, "We are broken down, but we will build again the ruined places," God replied, "They shall build, but I will throw down" (Mal. 1:2-5). This total destruction will come over nationally restored Edom.

This will suffice, although there are many more places in Scripture that show irrefutably that *in the last days several nations will be restored nationally in order to undergo the judgments pronounced by the prophets*. Some of these nations will have a remnant.

The prophetic events are linked to the fact that nations that have long ago disappeared will again exist for a short time in the last days. Rationalistic and unbelieving "interpreters" of the Bible will continue to deny this, because it does not suit their "scientifically logical thoughts." Their denial, however, will have no significant effect upon the national restoration of many nations in the last days. The system of these "interpreters" twists the Word of God, denying and eroding its authority. It takes from the events of the last days the entire bearing for heart and conscience. It directs the eyes away from Christ and His glory to fix them on one or the other battle of the past which does not contain any spiritual value.

A *system* can never deny itself; it can only be judged in those who so convincingly propagate it and in those who adhere to it. Those who through their scientific education have come into contact with these corruptive doctrines, and have been influenced by them, must be seriously warned in order that they may reject what has been set before them. It is a dangerous thing for one's spiritual life to criticize the Word of God. Many have come so far as to congratulate themselves that "the doctrine of *literal* inspiration has long been dead in theological circles." Because they have given up *the full* inspiration of the Scriptures (for the word *literal* is only deceiving in nature), their so-called piety is no longer able to resist the attacks of modern unbelief. Initially they may sigh under this, but because they have allowed the sword, the Word of God, to be damaged and to be robbed of its sharpness, they have nothing in their hand but a useless weapon, instead of a "sharp, two-edged sword."

To be cont'd

The Prayers of Nehemiah

—M. Vogelsang

Introduction

The book of Nehemiah is an important book for our days. It presents a faithful remnant, desirous of maintaining the place of true separation, according to God's thoughts, during days of failure. The leader of this remnant was Nehemiah, a faithful servant of God, who took up this difficult task in prayerful dependence upon his God.

Prayer has always been a sign of such dependence. The Gospel of Luke, the Gospel of His perfect manhood, often shows the Lord Jesus, our perfect example, in prayer. Nehemiah was a man of prayer too. In the following sections we want to study his prayers in some detail.

His Prayer of Humiliation (1:4-11)

His first prayer is mentioned as early as the first chapter. Nehemiah was the cupbearer of the King of Persia when his brother Hanani and some men from Judah told him about the circumstances in Jerusalem. How sad and humbling these circumstances were! "The wall of Jerusalem also is in ruins, and its gates are burned with fire" and those left of the captivity "are in great affliction and reproach" (1:3).

Verse 4 mentions Nehemiah's reaction to this report. "And it came to pass when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven." His mourning drives Nehemiah to pray, and he prays "for days." What an intensive prayer! That the activities of chapter 1 took place in the month Chisleu, the third month of the civil year. The second chapter starts with the month Nisan, the seventh month. When we realize this, we may suppose that Nehemiah mourned and humbled himself for about four months.

The first chapter records his prayer. First Nehemiah confesses the sins of the people, and humbles himself about their condition, identifying himself with them. "I pray before Thee... confessing the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against Thee: both I and my father's house have sinned" (v. 6). But then he reminds God of His promises: "If ye return to Me, and keep My commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heavens, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set My name there" (v. 9).

Isn't this a suitable principle of prayer in the present day of weakness among God's people? We certainly have to humble ourselves and confess that we have failed to be a public testimony for the Lord. On the other hand, we, too, may count on His promises.

His Prayer in daily Circumstances (2:4)

The second chapter records how, while performing his duties, Nehemiah finds himself in a situation where an immediate response is called for. Nevertheless, he doesn't give up his position of dependence: "So I prayed to the God of the heavens" (2:4). This prayer was obviously shorter than the first one. Though it was a quick prayer, it shows Nehemiah's spirit of dependence.

I am sure we all know situations in our daily routine in which there is no time for a long prayer. Sometimes there may only be time for a "Lord, help!" It is pleasing to our Lord if we realize in every situation that we are unable to do anything without Him.

His Prayer for the Work of the Lord (4:4-5)

The enemy had not been idle. He had been trying all along to hinder the work at the wall, and, if possible, to stop it altogether. In chapter 4 the enemy continues the activities he began in chapter 2:9. Despisingly he scorns and mocks at the people of God.

This causes Nehemiah once again to pray. He sees the enemy's intent and tells God about it in his prayer: "For we are despised" (v. 4). Actually it was not Nehemiah and the people who were despised but God — it was His people and His work. So Nehemiah could pray: "For they have provoked [Thee to anger before] the builders" (v. 5).¹

Let us think about this when we pray for the Lord's work, that it is His work! He will care for it! Every scorn, every mockery that we have to endure in His work is His reproach, the reproach of Christ.

What is the result of Nehemiah's prayer? "But we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together to the half thereof; for the people had a mind to work" (v. 6).

His Praying and Watching (4:9)

The enemy, however, is not content with scorn and mockery. Oh, no! When he sees that the work is blessed, that the wall rises and its breaches become fewer and fewer, then he attacks openly. In this case extreme watchfulness is necessary. It is very precious to see that, also in such a situation, Nehemiah doesn't show any trust in his own strength but displays again this beautiful sign of dependence: prayer! "Then we prayed to our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them" (4:9). Prayer is mentioned first. Even for watchfulness we need His power.

Through manifold temptation,
My soul holds on her course,

¹ The NT and the NASB don't have "*Thee to anger before*," the NIV gives this version in footnote; anyhow, the truth remains the same.

Christ's mighty intercession
Alone is her resource;

My gracious High Priest's pleadings,
Who on the cross did bleed,
Bring down God's grace and blessings,
Help in each hour of need.

It is certainly worth noticing that this prayer is no longer exclusively one of Nehemiah but the collective prayer of the people. We read, "We prayed to our God." In times of great need the importance of collective prayer is often seen anew. How much more will the Lord be glorified if we *constantly* seek His presence and not just in days of tribulation. Again this prayer endowed Nehemiah with strength, courage, and spiritual energy. Despite all the discouragement among the people (v. 10), he takes the necessary steps with wisdom and prudence (v. 11-20) while reminding the people of the real balance of power in this fight: "Our God will fight for us" (v. 20).

His Prayer and Personal Service (5:19; 13:14,22,31)

We might be inclined to think that the prayer at the end of chapter five and the similar prayers in chapter thirteen are not on a particularly high spiritual level. On the one hand it is true that the book of Nehemiah is not on the same spiritual level as the book of Ezra, on the other hand we must see that these prayers are typical for Old Testament times. If we keep this in mind we will surely find lessons for ourselves in these prayers.

We have seen in chapter four that an attack of the enemy coming from without the people had to be countered. In chapter five the enemy had succeeded in causing strife among the people. In the first case it was Nehemiah's *energy* that brought the victory, but now it was his *example*. For this he didn't seek the honour of men, but he "had respect to the recompense" (Heb. 11:26).

The teachings of the apostle Paul show clearly that it is our task and duty to fulfill our ministry faithfully and leave the questions of judgment and reward to the Lord. "Let a man so account of us as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Here, further, it is sought in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But for me it is the very smallest matter that I be examined of you or of man's day. Nor do I even examine myself...but He that examines me is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:1-5).

His Prayer for Strength from Above (6:9)

In chapter six the enemy attacks Nehemiah personally in a very cunning and crafty manner. The energy of one man, Nehemiah, had encouraged the whole people. The enemy knew only too well that if he could succeed in making Nehemiah fall and stop him from working, everybody else would stop as well.

Again Nehemiah gains the victory in this temptation. He refuses the tempting offer to leave his place and compromise with the enemy (vv. 2-4). He simply brushes aside the evil report they tried to publish of him by means of an "open letter." Just at the moment of victory, Nehemiah perceives the danger he runs of trusting in himself and the realization that all strength comes from above drives him again to pray: "Now therefore strengthen my hands" (6:9).

We all need this prayer very much, especially if the Lord has given us a ministry among His people. While reading this sixth chapter of Nehemiah, I asked myself, "Do we think in our prayers of those brothers who, because of their public ministry, are a more likely target for Satan's attacks?" It is very easy to criticize them, but it is extremely necessary to pray for them!

His Prayer Concerning Personal Attacks (6:14)

Still the strategies of the enemy haven't come to an end. Now he uses a man from among the people to entice Nehemiah to sin (w. 10-13). Nehemiah simply brings all these personal attacks and accusations to God: "My God, remember Tobijah and Sanballat according to these their works, and also the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets who would have put me in fear" (6:14). He doesn't fight for his own honour but leaves it all in the hands of his God.

Don't we find the same attitude with the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:14? "Alexander the smith did many evil things against me. The Lord will render to him according to his works." Is this our attitude? If it is, we can count on God's promise: "For them that honour Me I will honour" (1 Sam. 2:30).

His Prayer Concerning Defilement (13:29).

In the thirteenth chapter Nehemiah has to deal with those among God's people who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab (v. 23). Some Israelites were — to speak in New Testament terms — "unequally yoked." The results were disastrous! "Their children spoke half in the language of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people" (v. 24). Their children could neither speak nor understand the language of God's people!

I am sure that this speaks very seriously to our conscience as well. Even a grandson of Eliashib, the high priest, was son-in-law to Sanballat, the most avowed enemy of the people. Some might say, "Well, sad as it is, it is only a personal, a family matter." But let us listen to Nehemiah's prayer in this situation: "Remember them, O my God, for they are polluters of the priesthood, and of the covenant of the priest hood, and of the Levites" (v. 29). Obviously he realizes very clearly that the priesthood had been defiled.

May the Lord give us a deeper conviction of the defilement of the priesthood and the dishonour that comes to the Lord as a result of our low spiritual condition. Although Nehemiah's prayer here doesn't go beyond Old-Testament ground, it definitely speaks to our hearts.

The Greatness of our Lord Jesus (1)

—H. Bouter Jr.

Christ's Greatness as King — He will be great (Lk. 1:32)

The angel Gabriel announced the Saviour's birth to the virgin Mary, with the words: "He will be great." It is always good for us to consider the greatness of Christ, because He is absolutely unique. Mary was a favoured woman, since she was the instrument that God had chosen for the birth of the Messiah. Yet her Son was greater than she because He was begotten by the Holy Spirit, and for that reason would be called God's Son (v. 35). Christ was also greater than His forerunner, John the Baptist, of whom it is said in this chapter that he would be great in the sight of the Lord (v. 15). John was a great prophet indeed. The Lord Jesus Himself testified of him that hitherto — i.e., until the coming of the King Himself and His Kingdom — no one had been greater than John (Lk 7:28). But, of course, the greatness of the forerunner was not comparable to the glory of the One whose messenger he was. John frankly admitted this to his disciples. He said that he was nothing more than the friend of the Bridegroom and that he rejoiced in Him. Christ must increase, but he must decrease; for Christ came from above and was above all (Jn. 3:28-31).

Now what constitutes this greatness? What is it that makes Him so unique? Of course, His glory is seen in many aspects, but the angel points to His greatness as Son and King in particular: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end" (v. 32-33). Nobody can be compared to Him because He is the Son of the Most High. In a Dutch hymn this is expressed as follows:

*Lord Jesus, image of the Father
And also Son of God most high,
In Thee we see as in no other
His wondrous love and majesty.*

The words of this hymn point to an aspect of His greatness that had not been revealed in the Old Testament, namely that He is the only-begotten Son of the Father, who has revealed the name of the Father to us (Jn. 1:14-18). However, Christ's glory as the Son of the Most High has to do first of all with His dominion over all things. God Most High is the Creator of heaven and earth, the Supreme Ruler (Gen. 14:18-20; Dt. 32:8; Dan. 4:2-3,17,34). As Son of the Most High, Christ will inherit the dominion over all things. His sonship is related here to His dominion, to His kingship, as indicated in the second part of Gabriel's announcement.

The terminology "Son of the Most High" is found only in the Gospels. In the Epistles we find more intimate references, such as "Son of the Father." This latter one relates more to the nature of the full New-Testament revelation, since the Son has revealed God as Father. Apart from the verse now being discussed (Lk. 1:32), the expression "Son of the Most High" is found only in the story of the healing of the possessed man in Luke 8:28 and Mark 5:7. The demon acknowledged Christ's supreme authority by saying in a loud voice, "What do you have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me." For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. Even during His humiliation here on earth Christ had authority over the demons, and this verse shows that they acknowledged this authority (cf. Acts 16:16-18).

The plural expression "sons of the Most High" occurs only once — in the Gospels. It refers to the disciples: "Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men" (Lk. 6:35). Here emphasis is laid on the care of the Most High for His creatures, even if they have turned away from Him. As sons of God, believers should follow Him in this respect. It goes without saying that Christ's sonship is absolutely unique. Although believers are the many sons whom He will bring to glory, He is the Son. We as creatures shared (*koinoneo*) in flesh and blood, but He partook (*metecho*) of the same (Heb. 2:14).² The Eternal Word became flesh (Jn. 1:14). The Creator Himself entered into His creation. This is the miracle of the incarnation, as described in such a touching and lovely way in Luke's Gospel. God has found His pleasure in men (Lk. 2:14). The clearest proof of God's love and grace towards man is the fact that the Son of God became Man, dwelt and walked among us, and in the end even took our place in the judgment that we had rightly deserved. Christ's path led from the manger to the cross. There we see Him lifted up as the Son of Man so that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

The mystery of the incarnation is explained by the angel announcing Jesus' birth to Mary as follows: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God." Christ is God and Man in one Person. He was born of God in a unique way, and therefore He is the Son of God even in His manhood. He was begotten by the power of the Most High, and so He can be rightly called the Son of the Most High. How great He is! How near has the Most High drawn to us! How deep has He bowed down towards us in His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord!

As we have seen before, Christ's sonship is here particularly related to His kingship. Being the Son of the Most High, He has supreme authority. In this passage the period of the kingdom of peace is referred to as follows: "And the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end." This is not the throne of the Father where Christ is now seated at His right hand in heaven, but the throne that He will establish on earth after His second coming (cf. Rev. 3:21). It is the throne of His glory as Messiah and as the Son of Man (Mt. 25:31). Jerusalem, the City of the Great King, will be the centre of that reign, which will extend to the ends of the earth. He will be honoured as the great Son of David, His forefather according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3). He will be recognized as the true Prince of peace, the One who is greater than Solomon (Mt 12:42), for the Son of David also proves to be none other than the Son of the Most High!

The prophetic perspective of this verse reminds us very much of Old-Testament prophecies, mainly those of Isaiah and Micah. Both referred to the Messiah's divine origin. He will sit on the throne of David: "For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders and His name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace... But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be Ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity" (Isa. 9:6; Mic. 5:2). Then they speak about the greatness of His government, which will be marked by peace and justice: "There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David...He will be great to the ends of the earth. And this One will be our peace" (Isa. 9:7; Mic. 5:4). Both prophets speak first about the greatness of His Person, and then about the greatness of His government. The Messiah is not only Man, but also God; He is the Eternal I AM. Therefore it is appropriate for Him to receive a universal and eternal government in keeping with His dignity. Luke 1:32 ("He will be great") seems to be a literal quote from Micah 5:4. He is greater than David and Solomon, from whom He descended according to the flesh. He is the true King and Priest, the righteous Branch of David (Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8;

² *The New Translation has a helpful footnote at Heb. 2:14. 'There is an intended difference here between the words for 'partake' (Koinoneo) and look part' (metecho) in verse 14. The first, referring to the children, is a common equal sharing of the nature. The second, referring to Christ, means, He took a part in it; and refers always to something outside myself, but which I take, or take a part in. The first word refers to a joint participation in that which belongs to me or to known fellowship. The second is used in Heb. 5:13, 'partakes of milk,' in 1 Cor. 9:10, where the reaper gets a share in the sower's hope, and in 1 Cor. 10:17,21,30, 'partake,' where 'partaking' (metecho) is proof of participation in fellowship (koinonia), v. 16. The word does not say how far the taking share went'*

6:12-13). How great He is! His greatness surpasses that of all other kings. Even the great of the earth will bring Him presents and bow down before Him (see, e.g., Ps. 72).

Some spiritualize this earthly aspect by confounding the present dispensation of grace with Christ's millennial reign. This is wrong. Expressions like "the throne of David" and "the house of Jacob" have a concrete and literal meaning related to the future restoration of Israel. Every explanation of Scripture should take this into account, otherwise these terms are meaningless, and God's promises of blessing to Israel cannot be taken seriously. The throne of David is the throne in Jerusalem, not God's throne in heaven. The house of Jacob is the literal offspring of the patriarch, not the Assembly (which has a heavenly origin rather than an earthly one, for it consists of all who are born from above). If we love Christ's appearing, we shall also rejoice in the earthly aspect of His greatness and glory. He who once was rejected by this world will reign over this world with power. His coming will bring a sabbatical peace to Israel and all the nations; the whole creation will be delivered from its bondage of corruption. The Lord's reign will be visible to all, and the government of Christ will be the consummation of the theocratic reigns of David and Solomon, who sat on the throne of the Lord in Jerusalem (1 Chr. 29:23). The Lord, the great King (Mal. 1:14), will reign in the person of His Son. This One will indeed be great!

The greatness of Christ's kingship causes one to think of the rule of Mordecai at the end of the book of Esther. We read about "the greatness of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him," and that he was "great among the Jews" (Est. 10:2-3). Like Mordecai ruled the then-known world on behalf of king Ahasuerus, so the Son will reign on behalf of God the Father. He will reign until all His enemies have been put under His feet and until death, the last enemy, has been abolished. Then the eternal state will begin, and everything will be in harmony with God, so that God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

Finally, we have to ask ourselves to what extent Christ is great in our hearts. Indeed, He will be great; there is no doubt about that. He will receive the honour that is His due, for the Father will exalt His Son before the whole creation. But the big question that we have to face is whether we are exalting Him now in our lives. This is something which the apostle Paul could say of himself. It was his ardent desire that "Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death" (Phil. 1:20). When Christ is exalted in us, He will be formed in us (Gal. 4:19). His life and His character will be visible in us. This is the practical application of Luke 1:32 to us, Christians: Is the authority of this great King, who will soon fill the world with righteousness and peace, evident in our lives? The Prince of Peace, who will soon proclaim His peace on earth, is able to proclaim it now already in our hearts and our lives by the power of His Spirit.

(Scripture quotations from the NASB.)

To be cont'd

"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised: and His greatness is unsearchable."

(Psalm 145:3)

Magnificent Greatness

*Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised,
Great is the Lord through everlasting days.
Great is His might, His splendid majesty,
Great is His grace, so pure so real, so free.*

*Great is His truth, a rock of solid strength,
Great is His love, of endless breadth and length:
Great is His faithfulness, serene, secure,
Great is His mercy, tender, gentle, pure.*

*Great is His sacrifice, at Calvary once made,
Great is His power in rising from the dead:
Great is His glory, ascended high above,
Great is His work of interceding love.*

*Great is His promise that He soon will come,
Great is His voice which then will call us Home;
Great is His blessing given to His own,
Great is our God — Christ Jesus on the throne!*

L. M. Grant

Outline for Bible Study (63)

127. The Rich Fool. The unfruitful Fig-tree. The Woman with an Infirmary. — Luke 12:16-59; 13:1-7

Outline

1. The poor, rich man Lk. 12:16-21
2. How we should live Lk. 12:22-59
3. All are guilty Lk. 13:1-5
4. The unfruitful fig-tree Lk. 13:6-9
5. The woman, with an infirmity Lk. 13:10-17

Explanation

1. The rich fool always spoke about "I" or "My," but never thanked the "Giver." His thoughts about the future went no further than: resting, eating, drinking, and being merry. What a terrible destiny awaits him. When his life suddenly ended he had to appear before God.

2. The Lord told how believers should live: Trusting in God, seeking His kingdom first. Then many things will be added to them. Those who enter the kingdom can be free from the cares of life, and a glorious future awaits them! (Jn. 14:3). But they must wait for their Lord. A righteous judgment shall be the part of each. This portion closes with the warning: "As thou goest with thine adverse party before the magistrate, strive in the way to be reconciled with him."

3. Disasters or unrighteous judgments do not just come over those who have sinned beyond measure (Jn. 9:2; Acts 28:3-4). The Lord warned: "If you repent not, ye shall all perish in like manner."

4. The fig-tree is a picture of Israel (Hos. 9:10; Mt. 21:18-22; Mk. 11:12-14; 20-23; Lk. 21:29-31). Elsewhere Israel is shown as a vineyard (Isa. 5:1-7; Lk. 20:9-19). The time had come for Israel to bear fruit, but it was bare despite the care it had received. Though its tree rendered the ground useless, it would be given one more chance, but soon Israel would be judged (Acts 28:25-28).

5. The healing on the Sabbath of the woman who, bound by Satan, was bent over demonstrated the hypocrisy of the rulers. They cared for their beast, but not for this poor woman!

Lesson

"Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare...for the love of money is the root of every evil" (1 Tim. 6:9). We should trust in God alone. The Lord told the story of the rich fool to warn those who trust in the things they possess (be it large or small) or in themselves. Let us be rich in God! (cf. Mt. 6:21).

The Lord said: "Thou shalt in no wise come out thence until thou hast paid the very last mite" (Lk. 12:59), in view of our eternal future. A mite was the smallest coin. Take care you have matters settled with God before it is too late!

128. The Royal Wedding Feast. The Dropsical Man. The Great Supper. Discipleship. — Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:7-24.

Outline

1. The royal wedding Mt. 22:1-14
2. The dropsical man Lk. 14:1-6
3. Exhortation to be humble Lk. 14:7-14

4. Parable of the great supper Lk. 14:15-24
5. About following Jesus Christ Lk. 14:25-27

Explanation

1. When the Lord Jesus began His ministry, the kingdom of heaven had drawn nigh (Mt. 3:2). It came in His Person, and is composed of Him and those who believe on Him (Lk. 17:20-21). The first portion of this parable, speaking of the wicked bondmen, does not yet refer to the kingdom of heaven but to the time under the law and the prophets. The second part, however, speaking of the actual feast, does. After the rejection of the Lord Jesus, the kingdom of heaven continued in the form of present day Christendom that is marked by the absence of the Lord.

In His council God has determined to honour His Son in a marriage feast. This feast will take place after the rapture of all the redeemed; the glorified Son of man will be the Bridegroom. Before the cross, the Jews were invited by the Lord and His disciples. They, however, did not accept the invitation but rejected the Lord. Through the death of the Lord Jesus everything was prepared; the work of redemption having been completed, God again invited the Jews through the apostles. The Jews responded to the goodness of God with indifference, contempt, and acts of violence, killing the faithful witnesses. Then God destroyed the murderers and burned their city, Jerusalem, in the year 70 AD. From then on God sent His servants to the nations (into the thoroughfares of the highways). Among the guests are both wicked and good persons (professing Christians and true believers). Only true, born-again believers will partake of the wedding feast. The professors are distinguished from the true believers by their lack of a proper wedding garment — the righteousness of God in Christ (Isa. 61:10). By grace, every repentant sinner receives this through faith in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son. The person who was thrown out into outer darkness (damnation) thought that his own garment (his own righteousness) was good enough; he knew neither his own unworthiness nor the glory and honour of the Son of the King.

2. On the sabbath the Pharisees often dined lavishly. Yet, they displayed a heartless indifference for the poor and the sick. How egoistic and totally contrary to God's character! Again they displayed more concern for their beasts than their needy fellow Israelites. They could not answer the Lord's question without either demonstrating their own insensitivity or justifying the Lord.

3. The Lord rebuked the proud Pharisees who sought the places of honour. He admonished them to be humble and meek, to reach out in love to those who were unable to reward them. If they did, they would receive their recompense at the resurrection of the just.

4. One of the guests changed the serious subject by mentioning how blessed it would be to dine in the millennial kingdom. Like so many, he believed that all Israelites would partake of this meal. The Lord explained that many will be excluded from the kingdom. God had invited Israel and specially the rulers to enjoy the blessings the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, would bring. In Matthew 22:3-4, which depicts Christ as Israel's King, there are several servants: the disciples and apostles. In Luke 14, where it is the supper of the gospel for all, the one Servant is the Holy Spirit who gives the invitation: "Come, for already all things are ready!" Redemption is accomplished, but Israel, who received the first invitation, did not come because of their worldly possessions, their business, and their family affairs. Then the invitation went out to the poor, cripple, and lame (the tax collectors and sinners among the Jews), and finally to the poor on the highways and hedges (the nations outside of Israel, the heathen — Isa. 55:5).

5. The fact that they are Israelites did not secure the Jews a part in the kingdom. Whoever wants to go in, has to leave everything behind and follow Jesus, and share His rejection. Though all natural ties must be given up, in its place one receives salvation, eternal life, yes, the Lord Himself.

Lesson

God gives and invites, beginning with those who are near. Then this was Israel to whom God's word came first. Today those born in Christian families have the privilege to hear God's invitation first. Yet, just as then, birth never assures a position at God's table; new birth is needed. Therefore God's invitation goes out to those afar off. Many may adopt Christian ethics without repenting and confessing their sins. They fail to realize that their own "good deeds" are nothing but filthy rags before God and will therefore be totally unacceptable at His feast. God clothes all who come with repentance with His own righteousness.

To be cont'd

From the Editor's Desk

Not often do we get more than one letter dealing with an article we have published. The article written by me, entitled *The Open Ministry Meeting*, in the June-July 1991 issue proved to be an exception. We have received several comments on that article. Some told us that we could not dictate, others commented that we should allow for Christian liberty.

We will not enter into controversy about this, since we only like to occupy ourselves with the teaching of the Scriptures. We will, however, add a few lines that may be of help in assessing what we have written.

First, a brother wrote that we had not clearly explained what we meant by "open ministry meetings." Let me spell it out in more detail. In open ministry meetings brothers and sisters come together to hear God's Word without having an assigned speaker. They simply wait for the Lord's direction to see whom He will use to address them. The brother(s) — there might be three who will speak — don't know beforehand *whom the Lord* will use. No one knows which subject the Lord will set before the assembly at that particular occasion. Of course the brothers must have studied the Scriptures so that they know them well. Through the opening prayer(s) and hymn(s), given out by one or more brothers, the character of the subject the Spirit wants to use this time becomes clear. From these a brother may realize that the Lord wants to use him to speak on a particular subject in line with the hymn(s) and prayer(s). 1 Corinthians 14 gives an outline of such meetings.

Our article posed three basic points. First, verses 27-33 of 1 Corinthians 14 are instructions. This is evident from the word *let* used in each verse. Second, verse 26 must also be an instruction. It is preceded and followed by instructions, its contents can be read as an instruction, and it ends with a *let*. Third, verse 26 says: "whenever ye come together." In simple English this means: "any time when the assembly comes together" (for the Epistle is written to the assembly).

From these basic points we drew our conclusions. Then we added that, if God has given instructions for the assembly meetings, Christians should not dismiss these lightly, or fail to have meetings of this character altogether. Though the letters were lengthy, none touched on the three basic points.

We like to add that if we have inadvertently misrepresented God's Word, there must be someone who can show us where we erred on the three basic points. After all, we are not beyond failure and may have to reconsider our convictions. However, as long as these three points stand, and so far no one has shown them to be wrong, we can only say this: When God gives instructions for our conduct in assembly meetings, it will be an assembly's loss to ignore them and to do what it considers better or more advantageous. The Assembly, the Church³, is the only place on earth where God's thoughts can be shown. It is the very purpose for which the Assembly is still on earth. This can only be done by assemblies acting according to the pattern shown in God's Word (Eph. 3:10-11). One major characteristic of this, first displayed in the Lord Jesus, is complete dependence upon the Word of God and subjection to the leading of the Holy Spirit, who has been given for this purpose.

The Editor

³ I do not mean one or the other company of Christians that may refer to itself as "the assembly," but the one Assembly, the house of God, of which each local assembly should be a reflection