

Obadiah (4)

—R. Been Sr.

Verses 11-14

In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that strangers carried away captive his substance, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them. But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day of his disaster; neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; nor have opened wide thy mouth in the day of distress. Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity, nor have looked, even thou, on their affliction in the day of their calamity, neither shouldest thou have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity; and thou shouldest not have stood on the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape, nor have delivered up those remaining of him in the day of distress.

The thrice repeated "Thou shouldest not... nor" does not occur in the NASB and some other new translations. It does occur in the KJV and NIV.

There is no objection to apply these verses to the siege and conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. The Lord remembered the violence and the cruelties committed in those days, in which Edom took part. When the captives at the rivers of Babylon called for the Lord's revenge over Edom, they too thought of Edom's participation and expression of joy at the fall and destruction of Jerusalem (Ps. 137:7). The prophet Amos speaks also of Edom's conduct (Amos 1:6,11-12).

Yet, these verses are more properly applied to the future fall of Jerusalem (Ps. 83; Zech. 14:1-2). We think of the word distress in verse 14. The Psalms and Prophets generally use this word when speaking the Great Tribulation in the last days. Even so, verses 11-14 look back at Edom's attitude.

In the past Edom was always out to lay hold of the things that God had expressly denied their patriarch by giving them to Jacob. These things were the fat fields of the earth, kept fruitful by the dew of heaven. Sometimes, God had used Edom as a disciplinary rod for Israel. Because Edom meanwhile had pursued its own goals, Edom itself came under judgment of the Lord.

"Thou shouldest not have..." How stirring is this admonition really. It is as if they express sympathy, right at the time that the judgment would fall on hardened Edom. As if God wants to say, "How gladly would I have spared you, but you do deserve this judgment." We know that the Lord is slow to anger. Even with the worst enemies of His people, He still looked for some possibility to show mercy. Edom, however, had pushed its hatred and mocking to the very limit by giving in to rapacity, and rejoicing over Judah's calamity. It had opened its loud mouth to mock the brother-nation (cf., Ps. 35:21). When Jerusalem was conquered, Edom had plundered to its heart's content. It had sold those who had escaped from the Chaldeans into slavery. Edom should not have done this, but now it was too late.

We find the same sense of undeserved mercy towards Edom in the prophecy of Isaiah, namely in the burden of Dumah, which is another name for Edom (Isa. 21:11-12). In verses 1-10 of Isaiah 21 we read of the command of the Lord to set a watchman on the walls of Jerusalem. This watchman saw in a vision the fall of Babylon, and announced that vision to Judah. Edom, however, somehow came also to know of this announcement to Judah, and mocked with what the Lord had announced. Mockingly they cried to the watchman, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" The watchman answered, "The morning cometh, and also the night." The morning expected by the believing part of Judah would soon come, but also the night for the unbeliever and mocker. "If ye will inquire, inquire," the watchman added. But Edom had not the least notion to ask, it didn't want to listen. Yet, the words still follow, "Return, come." Till the very last, God leaves the door open for repentance.

In the past, Edom should not have allied itself to Babylon, and in a soon coming day, it should not ally itself with the Assyrian and others. These powers had, and will have as goal the ultimate demise of Israel. Edom should have understood that God would never allow this. The fact that God holds Edom accountable shows that Edom was acquainted with God's promises to, and His ways with Israel, though its awareness was only intellectual.

Verse 15

For the day of Jehovah is near upon all the nations: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy recompense shall return upon thine own head.

A time of blessing will come for God's people. This will take place through the destruction of the world government that had been entrusted to the nations. Israel will enter this period of blessing after it has received out of the Lord's hand double for all its sins (Isa. 40:2). Simultaneously a definite, unsparing judgment, will have come over all the nations because they have refused to listen to God.

The distress of Judah and Jerusalem shows that the day of the Lord is near. In all prophecies, the day of the Lord means the day of judgment that will precede the establishment of Christ's realm of peace. The day of the Lord has the same meaning in the New Testament. It is not a period of twenty-four hours, but a short period of undetermined duration of which the Great Tribulation forms a part. This tribulation lasts seven years and is the last of Daniel's seventy year-weeks.

In Obadiah's prophecy Edom is an example of the fall of the nations during the day of the Lord, just as Babylon is in other prophecies. The collapse of the government of the nations makes place for the world-government of Christ — the mountain that covered the whole earth (Dan. 2:35). That day of the Lord will, therefore, not come over Edom alone, but over all the nations. It will be a day of revenge in which it will be done to the nations according to what they have done to God's people. This crushing judgment over Edom is an example of the judgment coming over the other nations (vv. 15-16; Jer. 34:2).

Verse 16

For as ye have drunk upon My holy mountain, so shall all the nations drink continually; yea, they shall drink, and shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been (cf., Jer. 49:12).

These nations had rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem. They forgot, however, that they stood on the Lord's holy mountain and that He will never forsake His promises, despite the disobedience of His people. To God, Zion remained then as ever His holy mountain (Ps. 2:6). There He had anointed His King. That King of glory was ready to display Himself, the gates would lift up their heads and the everlasting doors would lift up to let Him enter (Ps. 24:7). To drink to excess at that place flowed from a complete want of appreciation of God's thoughts. Edom and Babylon had held their drinking-bouts, but God would cause them, and all nations, to drink, swallow down continuously, the cup of His wrath. They would be destroyed, and disappear, as if they had never existed. With this, we should keep in mind that it is here a question of the destruction and disappearance of kingdoms, powers, not of persons.

Verse 17

But upon mount Zion shall there be deliverance, and it shall be holy; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.

Then this mountain, defiled by the nations, but especially by Edom, will no longer be a place of slavery and imprisonment, but of deliverance. Then it will be seen how God can adorn Zion with holiness through a holy nation, even after all the unrighteousness which has been committed there before by Israel and the nations. That holy nation receives its holiness because of the blood of the true Lamb that has been slain there.

Then shall the house of Jacob (i.e., all of Israel, represented by Judah) retake its possessions. This will comprise the enlarged promised land of which the boundaries had been established earlier (Josh. 1:4).

To be cont'd

The Fear Of God (1)

—Dave Hunt

This article from The Berean Call, August 1992; P.O.Box 7019 Bend, Oregon, is used with permission.

Signed by Peter Peters and Vaslij Ryzhuk, leaders in the "Unregistered Union of Churches," a desperate plea has just come out of Russia: "For thirty years we have suffered intense persecution, and now freedom is bringing another great harm to

our churches... [American] evangelists accompanied by rock bands.... We are embarrassed by this image of Christianity... We need spiritual food. Please give us true bread not false cakes. It is true that rock music attracts people to the church, but not to godly living... We urge you... do not bring it to our country. Do not desecrate our teenagers with it. Even the unbelievers recognize it is unholy music and they cannot understand how American Christians can be so much like the world... and [are] disillusioned with Christianity."

Surely these brethren who have suffered so much for Christ have much to teach us. Yes, but — someone suggests — these long-persecuted believers have been isolated so long that they're behind the times. And, of course, music is a matter of taste and not defined in Scripture. "Rock music" is too vague a term. There are different kinds, and who is to judge? So the rationale goes.

We need not enter into such arguments. There are at least two biblical criteria that indict most of the contemporary Christian music scene and much of the Sunday morning worship in evangelical churches as well. These two criteria are:

1. mood: is it befitting the presence of God; and
2. message: is there moral, spiritual and doctrinal content that convicts sinners, edifies the worshippers and exalts our Lord?

Check out your own church next Sunday; and if these criteria are not met, pray about what you should do. Don't succumb to a critical spirit. Try lovingly to bring some understanding to bear. Let your desire be to build up, to instruct and help rather than to condemn and tear down. And be patient. After all, there was perhaps a time when you, too, lacked discernment in these matters.

Let us deal with point 2 first. As I visit churches I am often saddened by the singing and can scarcely bring myself to participate in what passes for "worship." The old hymns, with their profound doctrinal content, have largely been replaced with empty, repetitive choruses. The melodies may be catchy and appealing, but the words are shallow, careless, and sometimes unbiblical. The beat may be stirring and the hand-clapping enthusiastic, but the often trite lyrics lack challenge for the heart and nourishment for the spirit.

Let's take "worship" as an example. It's largely a matter of singing in most churches. Yet, too often the songs are a hindrance rather than a help. Why do we worship our Lord? What would cause us genuinely, from the heart, to worship the Father "in spirit and in TRUTH" (Jn. 4:23)? Ah, there's that word again. Yes, even when it comes to worship, we encounter once more that all-important ingredient, TRUTH. Truth has meaning, doctrinal content; it is not a feeling or emotion (though it does stir emotions), but a conviction that grips heart, soul, spirit — and, yes, *mind*.

To sing repeatedly "worship Him, worship Him" is not enough. Worship is more than formula. It cannot be achieved in the abstract and with an empty head. Something must be going on in the mind, or the heart is not meaningfully stirred. Worship is not a sacrament or ceremony; it arises in the heart from awed recognition of who God is — knowing Him, His infinite love, holiness, power, mercy. Worship is not mindless emotionalism.

The songs we sing can't just set a mood for worship but must give us some reason for worshipping as well. All too many of the modern choruses fail right there. Their appeal is more in their beat and tune than in their lyrics. Yet, words are far more important than melody. There is no worship without understanding: and the deeper the understanding, the deeper the worship.

Right here is where the old hymns shine — in their words and the understanding they bring:

*Son of God, 'twas love that made Thee
Die, our ruined souls to save;
'Twas our sins' vast load that laid Thee,
Lord of life, within the grave.
What a debt of love we owe Thee!*

There's sound doctrinal content that does not just say that we should love Him or that we do love Him, but reminds us why. Consider a well-known Charles Wesley hymn:

*And can it be that I should gain,
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me who caused His pain,
For me who Him to death pursued?*

*Amazing love, how can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!*

Not only the melody, but the words stir the heart — and teach truth that bears repeating and meditating upon. Let's consider one more example:

*By weakness and defeat,
He won the Victor's crown;
Trod all our foes beneath His feet,
By being trodden down.*

*He Satan's power laid low.
Made sin, He sin o'erthrew.
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so;
And death by dying slew!*

Great poetry, great teaching, and so powerfully presented! How tragic when such hymns are exchanged for the shallow, repetitive choruses that have become the mainstay in so many churches!

To be cont'd

Samuel, the Prophet (3)

—Hamilton Smith

The Establishment of the Prophet

The nameless man of God, having rendered his testimony, and pronounced the doom of Eli's house, passes from the narrative. Henceforth the Lord will speak more directly through Samuel who is "established to be a prophet of the Lord" (ch. 3:20).

The opening verses of chapter 3 indicate the low condition of the people of God. Ignorance of the mind of the Lord prevailed, for the word of the Lord was rare; the eyes of the priest were dim, and the lamp of God was going out (vv. 1-3).

Solemn indeed for the people of God as a whole, or for any company of His people, when there is little ministry from the Lord to feed their souls when they themselves lack spiritual discernment, and when the testimony to God amongst them is dying out. Such was the condition of Israel in the days of Eli. However, God is not unmindful of His people whatever their condition. Hence we find the Lord begins to act from Himself in sovereign grace, "to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death." We might have thought that, in such a low condition, the people — or priest on behalf of the people — would have called upon the Lord. It was the Lord, however, who "called Samuel" (vv. 4-10).

This is deeply significant, for in the end of the chapter we read that "Samuel was established to be *a prophet* of the Lord." This emphasized the difference between the priest and the prophet. This office of the priest is to draw near to the Lord on behalf of the people, and thus maintain relations with the Lord. The prophet is one through whom the Lord draws near to the people when relations with the Lord have broken down through the failure of the people. For this reason the prophet comes to the front in a day of ruin.

It is also significant to notice the character of the one that the Lord uses for the prophetic office. He is one who had been devoted to the Lord as a Nazarite (1:11), and who, again and again, is spoken of as the child. He is separated from the evil against which he testifies, devoted to the interests of the Lord, and, like a child, conscious of his own weakness and lack of wisdom. Thus he is dependent upon the Lord and drawing all his resources from the Lord. Such is the one the Lord uses to reach the consciences of His people.

His call becomes the occasion of emphasizing the lack of spiritual discernment on the part of the priest, for not until the Lord had spoken for the third time does Eli discern the voice of the Lord.

The first message of the Lord (vv. 10-14) to Samuel is of intense solemnity. Already Eli had heard the sentence passed upon his house. Now Samuel is prepared for his prophetic office by being definitely told of the judgment coming upon the priest, and the reason of that judgment. All Israel is to be concerned in the judgment that comes upon the priestly family,

for what the Lord was about to do will take place "in Israel," and make both the ears of everyone that hears it tingle. The Lord Himself is about to act. He says, "In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house; when I begin, I will also make an end." Moreover we are explicitly told the reason that leads to the Lord's direct dealings with His people. It is solely because they themselves refuse to deal with existing evils. Very evil things had been done amongst the people of God; yet, the evil in itself did not call forth the governmental dealing of God. No amount of evil would call forth God's government if the evil is dealt with and judged by the people of God. The Lord intervenes in judgment because the evil was known and not dealt with.

Solemn indeed is the condition of the people of God, if evil arises in their midst, whether against the person of Christ, or disobedience to the principles of God's house, or lapses from the path of moral rectitude, and the evil is known and not restrained.

It may indeed be truly said that Eli did raise some protest; that he judged the course of his sons to be evil; but evidently he took no steps to restrain them. So today people may indeed protest that they do not agree with erroneous doctrines, that they regret the course some are taking; but what avail is such feeble protest if no steps are taken to restrain the evil and those who protest associate, as if all were well, with the wrong-doers?

Samuel exhibits a natural and proper shrinking from imparting this solemn word to the aged Eli, and at the same time faithfulness to the Lord in telling "every whit" of the Lord's message. It is ever right for the younger to show respect to the elder, but neither youth nor age are to stand in the way of faithfulness to the Lord (vv. 15-18).

Having answered to the call of the Lord, and faithfully delivered his first message, we learn "the Lord was with him." The solemn word concerning the priest was, "I will perform *against Eli* all things which I have spoken" (v. 12). The Lord was against the priest, He was with the prophet. The Lord being with him, none of his words were allowed to "fall to the ground." Inasmuch as his words did not fall to the ground it is made manifest from Dan to Beersheba that he is "established to be a prophet of the Lord." To him the Lord appeared, and to him the Lord revealed Himself by the word of the Lord.

The Judgment of the People

In chapter 4 we have the solemn record of the complete failure and ruin of God's people. Israel is smitten before the Philistines, the ark is taken, the priests are slain, and the high priest is removed by death. Thus every outward link with God is broken.

The nation enters upon a period of bondage to their enemies which lasts for twenty years (7:2). During this period it is significant that the name of Samuel is not once mentioned. For twenty years the people neglect the man the Lord is with.

The Spirit of God has given us His commentary on this solemn time in Psalm 78:56-64. From this passage we learn that the secret of their low condition, and consequent defeat at the hands of their enemies, is found in their disobedience and idolatry. They "kept not His testimonies." "They provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their graven images." Then follows the solemn statement, "When God heard this, He was wrath and greatly abhorred Israel." From 1 Samuel 2:17 we learn that "man abhorred the offering of the Lord"; now we learn that the Lord abhorred idolatrous Israel.

The low condition of the people of God becomes the occasion for their enemies to acquire power over them. The particular enemy at this juncture was the Philistine within the land. The people of Israel were indeed surrounded by enemies without — the Egyptians, Syrians, and others; but they also had enemies within their borders, and of these the most inveterate were the Philistines. It is the enemy within the circle of God's people that will ever be to the front when the people of God are in a low condition. Opposition from without may be the result of a bright testimony; but in every age corruption from within has always been the result of a low spiritual condition.

Degraded by idolatry, and without reference to the Lord, or the man the Lord is with, Israel attempts, in their own strength, to join battle with their enemies, only to suffer a serious defeat (vv. 1-2). Following upon their defeat they hold a council to enquire "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines?" The elders, who should have known the mind of the Lord, reveal their low spiritual condition by the counsel they give. They say, "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." They could have said much in favour of this counsel. They could appeal to their history and plead that precedent was on their side. Did not the ark lead them to victory in the days of Joshua when the city of Jericho fell before Israel? One thing, however, they forgot, and it was their undoing; they overlooked the majesty and holiness of God that

will not, and cannot, brook iniquity in His people. It is true that in the day of Joshua the ark had led them to victory, but not without the leading of the Captain of the Lord's host. Moreover, the capture of Jericho was preceded by circumcision at Gilgal. The people who used the ark in Joshua's day were a people in whom the flesh was judged, and who were under the leadership of the Captain of the Lord's host. When the condition of God's people is right, the ark of the Lord, speaking of the presence of the Lord, must be a centre of blessing for His people. To invoke the presence of the Lord without the judgment of their condition is to call down the governmental judgment of the Lord.

In any age the opposition that arises from corrupting influences working within the circle of God's people can only be met by first dealing with the low condition amongst the people of God that has given occasion for the existence of the opposition.

Following the advice of their leaders, and without any judgment of their condition, the people send to Shiloh, and bring thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts. We are solemnly reminded that the Lord "dwelleth between the cherubims," and then that "Hophni and Phinehas were there with the ark." The Lord of hosts is there and the sons of Belial are there (2:12), a sure presage of coming judgment, for "what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor. 6:15). The people of God may show themselves indifferent to the glory of Christ and the holiness due to His name, but God will be no party to man's indifference. He cannot deny Himself. He will ever vindicate His own glory even though it involves defeat and disgrace for His people.

The ark is brought into the camp and received "with a great shout, so that the earth rang again." The great shout has a triumphant sound and the appearance of power, but in reality only manifests their lack of faith on the one hand, and their carnal confidence on the other. Faith moves quietly and moral power makes no noise.

However, nature is easily moved by a great shout, and thus the Philistines, when they "heard the noise of the shout," and understood that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp, "were afraid." Their fear was rightly based upon a sense of the true significance of the ark for they said, "God is come into the camp." Such was the terrible effect upon the people of God of having allowed unholiness to be linked with the ark of God, and so hardened were they by sin, that they had become less sensitive to the presence of God than their enemies. They had said of the ark, "When *it* cometh among us, *it* may save us out of the hand of our enemies" (v. 3). When the ark did come into their midst, their enemies rightly said, "God is come" (v. 7).

Under such circumstances the fear of the Philistines is as vain as the shout of Israel. The Philistine need have no fear of the ark when polluted Israel brings it into the camp, as a sanction for their iniquity. The condition of Israel was such that God could not defend them, and, in such circumstances, to fall back on the symbol of His presence was to call down judgment upon themselves. So it came to pass; the people of God are slain, the ark passes into the hands of the enemy and the two sons of Eli are killed. "He delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand. He gave His people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with His inheritance" (Ps. 78:61-62).

The last touching scene in the chapter makes manifest the personal piety of Eli, in spite of his failure to deal with the evil in his sons; and also shows that God had a godly remnant in Israel, represented by the wife of Phinehas, who set the glory of God above the claims of nature.

Israel was in combat with the enemy, Hophni and Phinehas are in the battle; nevertheless the heart of Eli trembled for the ark of God (v. 13). His first thought was the ark. When the news of Israel's defeat reaches the aged priest, he hears in silence of the great slaughter among the people and of the death of his two sons, but at the mention of the taking of the ark of God, he fell back a stricken man.

So with the wife of Phinehas; her first thought was not for her husband, herself, or her child, but for the glory of God. They seek to arouse the dying woman by speaking of the son that is born, "but she answered not, neither did she regard it." She is fully aware that a son has been born, for she gives the child a name, but the name shows that her thoughts centre in the ark of God. Her last words are, "The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken."

The End

The Greatness of our Lord Jesus (4)

—Hugo Bouter

Christ's Greatness As High Priest

Since then we have a great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14; 7:4; 10:21)

The Epistle to the Hebrews offers us a picture of the greatness and the glory of the Lord Jesus, particularly of His eternal and unique priesthood. What a tremendous encouragement it is for us to have such a great High Priest! He is our great High Priest regarding three aspects of life — our sins, our weaknesses and our priestly service in the sanctuary.

1. As far as our sins are concerned, we know that Christ, as a merciful and faithful High Priest, has made propitiation for the sins of His people (Heb. 2:17). This work, accomplished by Him once and for all, secured our eternal redemption. Under the old covenant, the blood of atonement had to be carried into the sanctuary every year (see Lev. 16). In contrast, the work of Christ has been accomplished once for all. In the fullness of time, and in accord with the counsels of God, He accomplished a unique work. Because of this work, Christ is now seated at the right hand of God on high. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit has been sent down to testify to Christ and His finished work. What an assurance it is to know by faith that Christ's sacrifice has perfected us and cleansed us from our sins forever (Heb. 10:1-18)!

2. After His atoning death and His resurrection from the dead, Christ took His seat on the throne, at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. There He is now ministering in the sanctuary, appearing before God for us. Earlier, Aaron carried the names of the sons of Israel on his shoulders and his breast whenever he entered the holy place to appear before God. Now Christ represents us on high and continually intercedes for us. He is not dealing with our *sins* now, but with our *weaknesses*, as the problem of our sins was definitely solved by His work of redemption. By His sacrifice we have been cleansed and sanctified once for all; now the relationship between God as *Creator and Judge* and ourselves as His creatures is fully restored. This is the fundamental side of the matter, which is different from the practical side — the daily relationship between God as *Father* and us as His *children*. The practical enjoyment of this relationship can, alas, be disturbed by sins, and then Christ acts as our *Advocate* with the *Father* (1 John 2:1). His intercession with the Father and His work in our heart and conscience lead to our restoration. This is clearly illustrated in Peter's case in the Gospels. Christ's present task as *High Priest with God* has only to do with the weaknesses, the shortcomings, and the needs of those who have been forever reconciled to God by His sacrifice for sin. Hebrews 4 is very clear about this priestly task of the Lord: "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need" (vv. 15-16). As the pure and holy Son of God, Christ could not sympathize with our sins. Indeed, He came to suffer for our sins. But He does sympathize with our wants and weaknesses as pilgrims who are on their way to the glory that He has already entered. We are threatened by all kinds of dangers. In view of this, the Lord is always ready as our heavenly High Priest to help us in time of need. Since He always lives to make intercession for us, He is able to save us completely. This means: He is fully able to protect and to keep us, and to bring us safely to the destination of our pilgrimage (Heb. 7:25).

3. As our heavenly High Priest, Christ is also engaged with our service and worship as holy priests in God's presence. We are not only *pilgrims* in need of a compassionate High Priest on our pathway through this world, we are also *priests* following the great Priest who enters the sanctuary. We can draw an analogy with the people of Israel in the desert. On the one hand, on their way to the Promised Land, they needed priestly intercession to reach their goal. On the other, they could meet God at the tent of meeting and appear in His presence with the prescribed sacrifices. God's purpose was for the Israelites to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). However, we know that, since the law could not make anything perfect because of man's failure, the way into the holy place itself was closed (Heb. 7:19; 9:8). Only because of Christ's work of redemption, accomplished once for all, man has free access to God in the present dispensation of grace. Having been redeemed by the blood of Christ, we can enter the sanctuary with a clear conscience and follow the steps of our great High Priest. As sons of God, wholly sanctified by the work of Christ and anointed by the Spirit, we are called to enter the holy place and to draw near to God as priests: "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, *let us draw near* with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our body washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:19-22). Christ, the great and chief Priest, is the Head of this family of priests who draw near to God with their sacrifices of praise and the incense of their worship. Once, Aaron, the head of the priestly family, directed the service of the old covenant priests. Now Christ leads and directs us in our service in the house of God.

All these aspects show stark contrasts with the Old Testament dispensation, when weak and mortal men were appointed as high priest. We now deal with better, permanent things. Christ being much greater than all the high priests of the old covenant, the results of His priestly tasks are all richer and more glorious. Some aspects of it we have already mentioned. In Israel, the high priest had to enter the holy of holies to sprinkle the blood of the sin offerings on and before the mercy seat yearly on the day of atonement. Christ, through His own blood, entered the heavenly holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. Before the throne of God His blood testifies to His accomplished work, a work that met all

God's holy demands for all time. Under the old covenant everything was temporary, and atonement was always incomplete.

There is also a big difference regarding the present priestly service of Christ: He Himself entered heaven, where He now always lives to make intercession for us. And praying for us will not exhaust Him, He does not need to be replaced by someone else. Day and night He carries us on His strong shoulders and on His loving breast. Because of His intercession, we will reach our ultimate destination safely. No earthly Canaan is our hope, but a heavenly land. How great is Christ as our heavenly High Priest!

Having linked us with Himself as a people of priests, He grants us free access to God's holy presence even now. There we can serve — e.g., burn 'incense' — and that continually. And since we have *free access* we need not wait, like Zacharias the priest, for our turn to be chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary (cf., Luke 1:8-9). What a privilege to be allowed to abide in the holy place and to enjoy God's glory as revealed in Christ. In the light of the sanctuary we can see all things according to God's thoughts.

Therefore, it is very necessary to reflect on the greatness of Christ as our heavenly High Priest. The Epistle to the Hebrews is really one passionate plea to behold His glory, to consider Him attentively, and to see how great He is in all aspects of His Person and work. He is superior to the angels, to all men: to Moses, to Aaron, to Joshua, even to Abraham. He is the Creator of all things, the Redeemer and Heir of heaven and earth. He is the Son Himself who became Man, and He entered the glory of heaven through the sufferings of death. There He is now seated at God's right hand. With the eye of faith, we see Him, the great Apostle and High Priest of our confession (Heb. 3:1). It is a tremendous encouragement for us to have such a High Priest, and it will stimulate us to persevere in the course that we run as Christians. We rest in the work of redemption fulfilled by Him once for all, and we rely on His help and power in all circumstances of life. Our help is from the sanctuary! It is the Lord in heaven who supports us, our "great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God" (Heb. 4:14). This unique High Priest is exalted far above men and angels at the right hand of God. Therefore, we can draw near with confidence to the throne of grace to offer up our prayers and supplications. ("Since then we have a great High Priest... let us therefore draw near with confidence" — Heb. 4:14-16). Because this sympathizing Priest intercedes for us with God the outcome is sure; His presence and His intercession guarantee an answer fitting to our particular need.

So we have enough reasons to consider His greatness as High Priest. He is much greater than Aaron, whose priesthood was only temporary. Christ is a High Priest according to a totally new order, namely that of Melchizedek. According to this order, He became a High Priest for all eternity in the heavenly sanctuary rather than on earth. Hebrews 7:4 invites us to observe "how great this man (Melchizedek) was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils." This is an indirect appeal to us to observe the One of Whom the king of Salem was merely a type. Let us observe Him who is now seated at the right hand of God, and admire His greatness! Finally, the awareness of having such a great Priest should encourage us to draw near to God as priests with confidence, not only to offer up supplications, but also worship and adoration. "Since... we have a great Priest over the house of God... let us draw near." (Heb. 10:19-22).

To be cont'd

(References in this article are from the NASB)

Outline for Bible Study (66)

133. Jesus Blesses the Children. The Unforgiving Servant. The Rich Young Ruler. — Matthew 18:1-35; 19:13-30. Mark 9:33-37; 10:13-31. Luke 18:15-30.

Outline

1. The Lord blesses the children Lk. 18:15-17
2. Becoming as little children Mt. 18:1-14
3. Lessons about forgiveness Mt 18:15-35
4. The searching young man Mt. 19:16-22
5. Entering the Kingdom Mt 19:23-30

Explanation

1. Because the Lord loved children, the parents brought them to Him so that He might touch them. The great Friend of children invites them twice; first as children (Lk. 18:16) and secondly as sinners (Jn. 6:37). How blessed it is to come to the Saviour in your youth (Prov. 8:17).

2. Though children may not be very important in the eyes of the world, to God they are precious. They are simple, helpless, and feel their dependence. So must a person feel before God to enter the kingdom (Mt. 5:3,5; Lk. 8:16-17).

3. With a forgiving spirit we must always try to regain a sinning brother in the spirit of meekness. If he repents, he should be forgiven (Mt. 18:16; Dt. 19:15). We may only treat him as a heathen or tax-gatherer after all efforts are in vain. What the assembly "binds" or "loosens" is recognized by the Lord in heaven, because the assembly acts in His name. In Spirit the Lord is in the midst of His own when they are gathered to His name with Him as their Head and Lord (v. 20).

We must personally forgive seventy times seven, for grace declines a stipulated term and demands the widest margin. God forgives perfectly and completely upon true repentance, sincere sorrow, and open confession! God does not forgive us, nor give us His peace, if we don't forgive our brother (v. 35).

The parable of the debtor speaks of the attitude of the Jews towards God. They had an enormous debt; they had broken the law, killed prophets and the Son of God. God forgave them when Christ prayed: "Father, forgive them." When Peter and Stephen (Acts 3:12-21;7) preached the kingdom, they again didn't listen, but killed Stephen. They also tried to prevent them from bringing the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6; 1 Th. 2:15-16). Since then, God has delivered them to the tormentors, and they will not escape until they have paid "double for all their sins" (Isa. 66:19).

4. That the young man came to the Lord and knelt down (Mk. 10:17) was no small matter. Yet, his heart was divided, he wanted eternal life, but valued earthly possessions — he loved the world. The Lord revealed this. The question, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (Mk. 10:17) shows two misconceptions. First, if the Lord was only a teacher, He should not be called "good." Secondly, it presupposes that one can find eternal life through works. The law promised life to the man who kept the statutes (Lev. 18:5). Eternal life is more, and is solely an act of God's favor through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23). Therefore the Lord said, "If thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt.19:17). The young man had not kept them, though he said he did. The great commandment is: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God... and thy neighbour as thyself" (Mt. 22:35-39). To show that he did not keep the last part, the Lord said, "Sell what thou hast and give to the poor" (Mt. 19:21). Since he loved his possessions, he went away grieved.

5. The Lord explained that man's salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit. No one can save himself, for all are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:5). Peter asked: "Behold, we have left all things and have followed Thee; what then shall happen to us?" (Mt. 19:27). As all saved persons, the apostles will reign in the kingdom (Mt. 19:28), but theirs will be the highest place, for they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:29-30; Rev. 20:6; 1 Cor. 6:2). Besides the glory in the kingdom, the disciples shall all receive a hundredfold reward and eternal life. "Many first shall be last, and the last first."

Lesson

The assembly must remove wicked persons from their midst (Mt. 18:18; 1 Cor. 5:13). The Holy Spirit and God's Word will give us needed guidance in this when we pray for it. We ought to be imitators of God when it comes to forgiveness, grace, and love (Eph. 4:32; 5:1).

Those Christians who hold a prominent place will not necessarily be the first in the kingdom.

134. The Ten Lepers. The Widow's Mite. The Unjust Judge. —Mark 12:41-44; Luke 17:11-19; 18:1-8, 21:1-4.

Outline

1. The ten lepers Lk. 17:11-19
2. The unjust judge Lk. 18:1-8
3. The widow's mite Lk. 21:1-4

Explanation

1. A leper in Israel was unclean. He had to live outside the community, and when someone approached he had to cry, "unclean, unclean!" (Lev. 13:45,46). When a leper was healed (Lev. 14), the high priest had to carefully examine him. The leper had to bring several offerings which spoke of the perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, among them two clean birds. The priest killed one bird over running water, and, after dipping the living bird into the blood of the killed one, he let it go. This pictured the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus.

The ten lepers knew their uncleanness and called, "Jesus, Master, have compassion on us" (Lk. 17:13). They recognized the Lord only as "Master" (Lk. 24:19). The Lord Jesus helped them, but tested their faith by saying, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." The priests would have had to recognize that the Saviour of the lepers had to be the Messiah. As the lepers were going, they were cleansed according to their faith. Nine of them continued to the priests but did not return to bring honour and thanksgiving to their Saviour.

A Samaritan, however, returned, giving thanks to Jesus, his Saviour. The Lord rejoiced about him, but expressed regret about the ungrateful nine. The nine Jews must also have rejoiced in their healing. Yet, they did not wish to follow Him, and felt no desire to bring thanks and praise to Him. The Samaritan's faithfulness and decision for Jesus must have resulted in a great inner blessing and peace for him. He departed in the liberty of faith and the grace of God which the thankful and faithful heart always finds in Jesus.

2. Judges in Israel were supposed to maintain the law, but they were often without compassion. This judge did not fear God, yet, he finally helped the widow through her persistence.

The widow is an example of the believing remnant (widow: picture of helplessness and poverty) calling to God during the Great Tribulation. God will let them wait for His help to reveal the true state of their heart (cf. Joseph and his brothers). Because the remnant will continue to call and pray, God will help. He loves the faithful in Israel — He will shorten the days of their afflictions (Isa. 54:6-10). In the time of the Anti-Christ's tribulation, those who endure to the end will be saved (Mt. 24:13). The Lord wants to encourage the remnant to be faithful and persistently wait for the help of the Lord.

3. The treasure-chest in the court of the temple was used to collect the temple taxes and voluntary gifts for the maintenance of the temple and the priests and Levites. Before the feast, wealthy Jews brought great gifts. The poor widow brought only two mites (the smallest coin). Yet, she gave more than the rich: she gave all that she had. The Lord sees the attitude of the heart (1 Sam. 16:7; Jer. 17:10, cf. 2 Cor. 8:1,2; 2 Cor. 9:7).

Lesson

Since leprosy is a picture of sin, spreading like a cancer and ultimately bringing death, the details regarding the cleansing of the leper are very important to us.

Some believers resemble the nine. After their conversion they maintain their religious connection with obviously unbelieving and sinful children of the world, instead of freely confessing Jesus, their Saviour, and honouring Him with the other redeemed ones, glorifying and worshipping God (2 Tim. 2:20-23; 3:5; Heb. 13:13-15).

We too, must learn to persevere in prayer (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2). Elsewhere, the Lord tells us to pray in faith (Mt. 21:22). The Lord shows us also that if we want to be heard, we have to remain in Him and bring forth fruit (Jn. 15:16) and that we have to ask the Father in His name (Jn. 16:24).

To be cont'd

Prevailing Peace

*"The Peace of Christ," O precious gift
Of sovereign, matchless, tender love:
Peace which has wondrous power to lift
Our souls from earth to heaven above.*

*Peace in the midst of fear and hate:
Serene and calm tranquillity*

*In Christ, whose love so pure and great
Has conquered every enemy.*

*Peace given to us because He died—
A perfect sacrifice for sin,
And lives, in heaven glorified,
Receiving all who trust in Him.*

*This peace be yours, and ours, dear friend,
Through all the turbulence of time;
Until soon comes our journey's end,
With Christ our Lord, in peace sublime.*

L. M. Grant