

The Greatness of our Lord Jesus (5)

—Hugo Bouter

Christ's Greatness As Shepherd

The Great Shepherd of the Sheep (Heb. 13:20)

Christ is not only our great *Priest* (cf. Heb. 4:14; 10:21), but also our great *Shepherd*, the Shepherd whom God brought again from the dead. Hebrews 13:20 shows the Lord Jesus' superiority to Moses, the great leader and shepherd of the people of Israel. The epistle to the Hebrews primarily emphasizes Christ's priesthood, contrasting Him with Aaron, yet the difference between Him and Moses is not forgotten.

The subject of Christ's superiority to Aaron and Moses immediately follows the introductory chapters 1 and 2, where Christ is presented in His divinity and manhood respectively. Though He is the Son of God (Heb. 1), He is also the Son of man who entered into the glory of heaven along the path of suffering (Heb. 2). This twofold character is the basis of both His unique, heavenly priesthood (the role of Aaron) and His apostleship, His task as a Messenger and Prophet from God (the role of Moses). Therefore Hebrews 3:1 exhorts us to consider Him as "the Apostle and High Priest of our confession." With the eye of faith we see Him as the true Moses and the true Aaron.

He is greater than Moses, who as God's servant here on earth spoke the word of God (Heb. 3:3-6). He is the Son Himself rather than just a servant; and now He has spoken from heaven (Heb. 12:25). Moses tended the flock of God by giving His people instructions for service and for the journey through the desert (cf. Ex. 3:1, 12; Ps. 77:20). Christ is the Shepherd of a *heavenly* people. He has delivered us from the power of the prince of this world and brought us into the presence of God (as Moses delivered Israel from the hand of Pharaoh and led them to the mountain of God). He gathers His Assembly from Jews and Gentiles alike, tending it as one flock in green pastures. Going before us, He shows us the way by His Word and Spirit, which reveal God's thoughts to us. He leads us all the days of our life so that we may even now enjoy God's presence, and "dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps. 23:6). Soon He will bring us into the glory of heaven which He has obtained for us because He died as the *good* Shepherd.

Hebrews 13:20 reminds us of the passage through the Red Sea. Moses' rising out of its waters illustrates Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, rising from the dead (cf. Isa. 63:11-13). Moses was triumphantly brought up out of the sea. Christ, by the power of God, was brought back out of the 'waters' of death, a death He tasted to grant us life. Moses, having come out of the sea, led a large throng of Israelites who followed him. Similarly, Christ is Leader of a heavenly people who are linked with Him in His resurrection from the dead. Now, being beyond the power of sin and death, they can sing the song of salvation together with Him. Under His guidance we shall safely reach the end of our pilgrimage.

He is the Author and Perfecter of faith (Heb. 12:2), the great Shepherd of the sheep. He brought them, so to speak, out of Egypt, led them through the Red Sea, and now guides them toward the heavenly Canaan. As the *good* Shepherd He laid down His life for the sheep (John 10:10-11); brought up from the dead, He now leads them as the *great* Shepherd. It is also important to note the order of Psalms 22 and 23. First, Psalm 22 shows Christ laying down His life for His own, and receiving God's answer to His deep sufferings in resurrection. Then, Psalm 23 shows Him leading His sheep on their way through the desert.

Hebrews 13:20 does not emphasize Christ's rising in His own power from the dead, but His being raised again by God the Father. God is presented here as the "God of peace." In the New Testament this title is connected with sanctification and victory over the power of evil (cf. Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:8-9; 1 Th. 5:23). In Hebrews 12:14 peace and sanctification are mentioned together. Christ's resurrection from the dead by the God of peace has brought peace and harmony. This peace and holiness can never be disturbed by sin and the power of the evil one. Christ died to sin once for all, solving thereby the problem of sin forever. The life that He now lives, He lives to God in the holiness of heaven and in the presence of the Father by whose glory He was raised from the dead (Rom. 6:4,10).

Christ died to glorify His God and Father, to bring all His excellence to light. The Father's glory, the inner excellence of all the Father is, demanded that Christ be raised from the dead and received into heaven's glory. So here the activity of God the Father is emphasized. It was the God of peace "who *brought up* from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep."

God did so "through the blood of the eternal covenant" — based on the Lamb's blood that met His righteous demands forever. The Shepherd Himself became the Lamb who was slain for our sins to protect us from judgment. This is yet another reminder of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, which too was made possible through the blood of the paschal lamb that protected the Israelites from the destroying angel.

Both the death of the paschal lamb and the passage through the Red Sea speak of Christ's death. The lamb's blood safeguarded Israel against God, the righteous Judge, who demanded the sinner's death. At the Red Sea, however, God acted as the Saviour of His people. He brought to light His salvation by delivering His people and destroying their enemy. Thus, the blood of the paschal lamb was the basis of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and of the bringing up of God's people from the waters of the sea.

So it is with the blood of Christ. On the one hand it safeguards us against the judgment that rightly awaited us. On the other hand it laid the basis for our deliverance from this present evil age and the power of the evil one. The latter aspect is shown in type in the passage through the Red Sea. With Christ, we have been brought up from the waters of death and thereby delivered from the power of the adversary and his empire. Now we walk in newness of life, following Him on the way that He, the great Shepherd of the sheep, shows us.

For the believing Hebrews it was not very easy to walk in Christ's footsteps, for it involved breaking with, and separating from Judaism. From now on, their place was with Christ, "outside the camp" (Heb. 13:13), outside the established religious system which had cast out the Messiah. They were to share with Him a place of reproach and rejection outside the Jewish sheepfold. They were to consecrate themselves to the Christian worship of which Christ is the centre.

In John 10 the Lord had announced that He was going to lead His sheep out of the fold, the fence of Judaism. He had other sheep — the believers from the nations — for which He was also going to lay down His life. These, He was to bring too, so that they would form one flock with one Shepherd (Jn. 10:3-4,16). The Assembly, that Christ is gathering from the Jews and the nations, is one flock led by one Shepherd. All former distinctions have disappeared; they form a new fellowship which recognizes Christ as its only Leader. He gives to His sheep life and abundance, freedom, protection, and green pastures, while leading them on the way to the Promised Land.

It is important to know this great Shepherd very personally: "The Lord is *my* Shepherd" (Ps. 23:1). We know Him as the *one* Shepherd, as the *Good* Shepherd, as the *Great* Shepherd, and also as the *Chief* Shepherd of the flock of God (1 Pet 5:1-4). He involves others to tend the sheep, but all these shepherds are under His authority. Christ is the Chief Shepherd, and when He returns He will reward everyone whose concern has been the well-being of the sheep with the unfading crown of glory.

*My Shepherd is the Lamb,
The living Lord, Who died;
With all things good I ever am
By Him supplied.
He richly feeds my soul
With blessings from above;
And leads me where the rivers roll
Of endless love.*

The End

Outline for Bible Study (67)

135. The Parables of the Pharisee and the Publican, and of the Labourers in the Vineyard. — Luke 18:9-14; Matthew 20:1-16

Outline

1. The self-righteous Pharisee Lk. 18:9-12
2. The repentant tax-gatherer Lk. 18:13-14
3. The call to work in the vineyard Mt. 20:1-7
4. The wages of the laborers Mt. 20:1-16

Explanation

1. Both men prayed. The Pharisee, believing himself to be holy, boldly entered the temple, but he "prayed to himself." His self-reliant prayer started right: "God, I thank Thee..." But then he displayed self-righteousness and blindness by comparing himself with gross sinners without having the least concern about his own guilt. He may not have committed serious sins, but he lacked a sense of God's holiness. He rehearsed his supposed merits, his works, some of which were not required by God at all. God had prescribed one day per year, the day of atonement, to afflict one's soul (Lev. 16:29-31). He tithed all his gain, but knew neither God's love nor judgment (Lk. 11:42). Though he "prayed," he was not justified at all. Scripture says: *'There is not a righteous [man], not even one... by works of law no flesh shall be justified before Him... for all have sinned'* (Rom. 3:10-23).

2. Tax-gatherers were often fraudulent, corrupt officers in Roman service; they therefore had a bad reputation and were despised. This tax-gatherer, however, feeling his guilt and unworthiness before God, stood "far off"; not daring to look up, he smote himself on his breast. He was truly repentant about his sins and longed for forgiveness. In his short prayer he directed himself to God, and, confessing to be a sinner, he called for grace. On these grounds God could justify him (Rom. 3:24-28), and he went home justified.

3. One is saved by grace not by works, but God wants those who are saved to serve Him and be faithful in "good works" (1 Th. 1:9 and Eph. 2:10), and He rewards them for it. For their encouragement, believers may joyfully look forward to their reward (cf. Moses: Heb. 11:26; Paul: 2 Tim. 4:7,8; yes, even the Lord Jesus: Heb. 12:2). Their service is not for the sake of rewards; the Spirit of God and love in their hearts prompts them to it.

4. One cannot demand anything from the Lord. Without a labour contract, the last labourers trusted the generosity of their lord, and he did not let them down. He was gracious to them without in any way wronging the first laborers.

Paul was called much later to serve the Lord than the other apostles. Yet, he received the same wages and a greater degree of grace than those who had worked from the beginning.

Lesson

Upon confession, God forgives all sins to the repentant sinner who approaches Him for mercy. The Pharisee displays the character of those who are excluded from it.

Believers have no right to rewards — it is not a question of deserving (Lk. 17:10), for they were but lost sinners. The Lord gave the gifts and capacities to the believers (1 Cor. 4:7), so He will never become our debtor.

136. Jesus' Last Journey to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus. Zacchaeus. The Ten Pounds. — Matthew 20:17-34. Mark 10:32-52. Luke 18:31-43; 19:1-27.

Outline

1. Jesus foretells His suffering Lk. 18:31-34
2. The blind man received his sight Lk. 18:35-43
3. Zacchaeus Lk. 19:1-10
4. Parable of the ten pounds Lk. 19:11-27

Explanation

1. After Lazarus' resurrection, the Lord no longer walked openly until just before the Passover, for the rulers of the people had decided to kill him (Jn. 11:53-54). On His last trip to Jerusalem to enter it as King the Lord spoke about His suffering and death, as foretold by the prophets (cf. Isa. 53). Near Jericho, the cursed city (Josh. 6:26; 1 Ki. 16:34), He revealed the riches of His free grace to the beggar, Bartimaeus, and the tax-gatherer, Zacchaeus.

2. Poor, blind Bartimaeus begged by the wayside when the Lord approached. When told "the Nazaraean" was passing, he called: "Lord, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me," recognizing the Lord as the Messiah. Told to be silent, he cried the louder. Jesus, moved with compassion, stood still and asked, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" He wanted to see — not help *in* the need, but *out of* the need. In answer to his faith the Lord said, "See!" He saw immediately and, without being asked, followed Jesus, glorifying God.

3. Zacchaeus, "chief tax-gatherer" of Jericho, leased the tax collection rights from the Romans; what he collected more than they required was his profit. God's Son came to seek and save what is lost; Zacchaeus experienced this grace. Though rich, he lacked peace, the greatest riches of all. He longed for forgiveness, redemption. People may have mocked Zacchaeus for climbing the tree, but he did not care. He hoped to observe the Saviour from nearby without being seen by Him. But when the Lord Jesus came near, the Lord looked up at him, and said full of compassion: "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must remain in thy house." What grace! (Isa. 42:3; Lk. 4:18,19). Zacchaeus received Him with joy.

The Jews lacked all sense of guilt and murmured. The Lord's grace caused Zacchaeus to believe in Him, and to find peace. It prompted him to give half of his goods to the poor and to repay fourfold what he had gotten by deception, — far better than the law demanded; illegally acquired goods had to be restored with one fifth part added (Lev. 5:16). Besides this, a ram had to be brought as trespass offering, showing that only a substitute's death could atone for one's sins.

4. Because Zacchaeus' guests believed the kingdom of God to be near, the Lord told the parable of the pounds (or minas — gold coins of high value). It showed that, though the kingdom was still a long way off, each servant had his duty during the master's absence. Upon the master's return all were rewarded according to their labour. The wicked bondman neither knew nor trusted his lord; instead of loving him, he feared him, and accused him of harshness. The citizens, the enemies, not wanting the master as king, sent a message after him (cf. Acts 7:54-60). They fell under the judgment of the king.

Though this parable (a) has much in common with that of the talents (b) (Mt. 25:14-30), there are also many differences:

1. Where it was told: a) in the house of Zacchæus;
b) on the mount of Olives;
2. When it was told: a) before entering into Jerusalem;
b) after the triumphal entry;
3. The trust: a) to each the same;
b) to each according to ability;
4. The amount: a) to each according to profit;
b) to each the same;
5. The type of wages: a) the authority over cities;
b) the joy of their lord;
6. The judgment: a) the pound is taken away from him;
b) cast out into outer darkness.

Lesson

One who turns to the Lord often experiences the resistance of the crowd. Yet, one who truly wants salvation persists and comes to Jesus and finds salvation and peace.

When the Lord asked the young ruler to follow Him, he had not done so (Lk. 18:23), for he relied on his own strength and the law, Bartimaeus on grace and mercy.

The Lord will come to one who truly desires forgiveness. Zacchaeus did not receive peace by his good works, but by his faith, which proved him to be a true Son of Abraham, the Father of believers (Rom. 4:16).

To be cont'd

The Fear of God (2)

—Dave Hunt

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So much for the message. What about mood? Without the right message the mood is meaningless, leaving one with a good "feeling" in the flesh but an emptiness in the spirit. Christian rock fails on both counts. The impudent, irreverent beat and raucous sound overwhelm one's perceptive faculties so that the words, even if they are excellent, can scarcely be heard, much less contemplated. Add to this the pitiful posturing, the contrived aura of glamour, the raw bid for audience adulation. Try to imagine a rock concert in God's presence! Would mere creatures, redeemed by grace, dare to "perform" before the throne of the thrice-holy Lord of the universe, the righteous Judge of men and angels? The mood generated is anything but awed reverence and the fear of God.

One could level the same criticism at most contemporary Christian music. The mood is often reflective of a heedless, we've-got-the-world-by-the-tail spirit, rather than authentic Christian joy. Tunes are designed to arouse emotion without content; and the words are more often self-centred than God-centred. Here the disease becomes extremely serious and could even be fatal. In diagnosing the problem, we must take great care that we follow God's Word.

What's wrong with joyful singing? Nothing. Inspired of the Holy Spirit, David wrote: "In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11). Ah, yes, but what is meant by "joy" and "pleasure"? Surely the psalmist is not referring to the "happy hour" joy of a bar, or to the transitory pleasure found in amusement parks. The joy and pleasure around God's throne are not of this world. And there is one essential ingredient of which we may be certain: the fear of God.

How could fear be the fountain of peace, joy and worship? That question may indicate that we are strangers to God and to His joy! Watch a little Christian television, the strutting performance of some "evangelists" and "healers," the irreverent throwing around of "the anointing" of the Holy Spirit, and listen to the boasting bravado. One has the distinct impression that these "servants of God" know nothing of His fear. Listen to their "tongues" with the repetition of favourite words, their giddy laugh-fests supposedly with the Holy Spirit, weep at the spectacle and ask yourself again, "Where is the fear of God!"

Honesty compels us to point the finger at ourselves as well. An unbiased, heavenly observer watching our lives, sitting in on our "worship services," listening to our conversations, would be compelled to say of most Christians today what the Psalmist said of the ungodly in his time: "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Ps. 36:1, Rom. 3:18). When did you last hear a sermon preached on the fear of God? When did you last attend a church service where the awesome sense of God's holy presence brought weeping and repentance? When did you, or I, in our daily devotions, last fall on our faces before Him in awestruck wonder and worship and godly fear?

Take your concordance and follow "the fear of God" (or of the Lord) through the Bible and receive much-needed instruction. Israel was told to "fear the Lord thy God" (Dt. 6:2) before she was commanded to "love the Lord thy God with all thine heart" (6:5). In a summation of His will for Israel, God declared: "What does the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul" (Dt. 10:12).

That the fear of God, the awesome reverence that comes from knowing Him and being in His presence, is foundational and essential to our relationship with Him and His blessing upon our lives is clear. "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him" (Ps. 103:17). "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him" (Ps. 25:14).

The instruction, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (or knowledge), is found repeatedly (Ps. 111:10, Prov. 1:7; 9:10). Solomon exhorted, "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death" (Prov. 14:27). And again: "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him" (Ps. 33:8).

Such a sense of God's awesome holiness is virtually unknown among Christians! Why is that fear of God, that holy reverence and overwhelming wonder so lacking in our lives and in our churches and in Christian media? How can men be so blind as to treat God as though He were their servant instead of falling on their faces before Him? For many, He's a cosmic bellhop who exists simply to give them what they want. Apparently they don't yet know God!

See John falling as dead at the feet of His resurrected Lord (Rev. 1:17) and the reason for the lack of the fear of God among today's Christians becomes clear. Surely there would be profound reverence, awe and godly fear were we suddenly to find ourselves in God's presence. Obviously, then, the absence of that fear which the Bible extols betrays how far we are from Him and explains the lack of passionate love for our Lord. Let us seek His face (Ps. 27:8; 105:4).

So much that passes for Christianity would be exposed as false were it displayed before the throne of God. The self-ism teaching that Christian psychology has brought into the church is one flagrant example. It is not just ludicrous, but grotesque to imagine anyone being concerned about his "self-identity," his "authentic personhood," his "self-image," or feeling good about himself in the brilliant light of God's presence! All mutterings of "positive self-talk" and concern about "one's significance" are silenced before His throne. Any thought of self-esteem or self-worth would suddenly be revealed in the brilliance of God's glory as an evil from hell — and instantly be consumed by His splendour.

Thomas a Kempis (1379-1471) knew something of that revealing and consuming Presence: "I will speak unto my Lord who am but dust and ashes. If I count myself more, behold Thou standest against me, and my iniquities bear true testimony and I cannot gainsay it. But if I abase myself, and bring myself to nought, and shrink from all self-esteem, and grind myself to dust, which I am, Thy grace will be favourable unto me, and Thy light will be near unto my heart; and all self-esteem, how little soever it be, shall be swallowed up in the depths of my nothingness, and shall perish for ever". Self is our problem.

Do you long to be delivered of self? Spend time in the presence of God! How far are they from God whose only communion with Him is in attempts to get Him to bless their plans! Most Christians are so taken up with themselves and their own ambitions that they are strangers to God and His will for their lives. And yet they remain self-satisfied. What a contradiction! How can it be? God reveals the answer in His Word.

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it? I the Lord search the heart" (Jer. 17:9-10). What a devastating indictment of mankind! What a humbling revelation of the human heart — the heart of each one of us! No encouragement for esteeming self here. The self-ist teachings that "Christian psychology" has brought into the church contradict God's Word, mock His fear, deceive those who are seeking a solution to their ungodly behaviour, and, though sometimes seeming to work for a season, in the end leave one worse off than before.

It is not the traumas or abuse one may have suffered, whether in childhood or later in life, real as those may have been, that make us what we are. It is our hearts which are by our very nature self-centred, self-exalting, yes, evil, as Jesus said: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man" (Mt 15:19-20). Is there any hope?

Repentance and coming to the cross to embrace Christ's death as the crucifixion of self and out of that death to become partakers of His resurrection life — that is the only solution. Anything else is but a rationalization to avoid the cross and salvage something for self, be it esteem, image, worth, significance, authentic personhood, or any of the other slogans that are deceiving millions.

It is not therapy that we need, but God! The answer lies not in looking within but in turning to Him, as Jeremiah confessed: "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (10:23). David knew that God was his only hope, both to diagnose and heal his wicked heart. "Search me, O God," he cried, "and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24). We need to put ourselves entirely in God's hands!

The fear of God, largely missing in today's Christianity, is not just an Old Testament doctrine. Spiritual cleansing and holiness can only be perfected "in the fear of God" (2 Cor 7:1). Even loving Christian fellowship can only be "in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21). This godly fear characterized the early churches: they "were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (Acts 9:31). That fear, that awesome reverence which comes from knowing God, must be restored in each of our lives if we are to be what He desires. May it be so, to His glory!

The End

Pilgrim's Progress

*The path seems long and dreary
And home seems far away,
My foot is sore and weary,
My soul doth long for day.*

*I found no satisfaction
At this world's bitter spring
It brought me no salvation,*

Nor caused my heart to sing.

*This world bath nought to offer
But sorrow, tears and pain;
It mocks the weary traveller
Who tastes its joys in vain.*

*But now I've found in Jesus,
My Object, Life and Strength;
He is to me most precious,
He'll bring me home at length.*

*His love is strong and tender,
His grace will e're suffice,
And He is my Defender
'Gainst Satan's artifice.*

*He lights the way before me,
He guides each step I tread,
He shows the pathway to me
In which His feet have led.*

*He came to earth, the Saviour,
His path alone He trod;
He came to die and suffer
And mark the road to God.*

*He now is with His Father
In glory bright and fair,
Supreme above all other,
He has no rival there.*

*When this life's journey's over
And all its conflict past,
We'll be with Him for ever
In that blest home at last.*

*O, then what joy and gladness
Will fill that blissful scene!
No longer room for sadness,
But rest and peace serene.*

*And, O, the radiation
Of glory, love and light!
We'll there in full salvation,
Behold Him-wondrous Sight!*

*A song of praise and wonder
Our thankful lips shall sing
As we His beauties ponder,
Our glorious, heavenly King!*

*'Til then we tread rejoicing
Our pilgrim way below;
Full hearts and souls are voicing
His praises as we go.*

Obadiah (5)

—R. Been Sr.

Verse 18

And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble; and they shall kindle in them and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau: for Jehovah hath spoken it.

This verse speaks only of the joint action of Judah, the two, and Ephraim, the ten tribes of Israel. Still, it contains an indication that then there will have come an end to the separation between these two parts. The prophet Ezekiel says very expressively that the remnants of the two and the ten tribes will be reunited into one nation, one kingdom (Ezek. 37:15-22).

Edom had despised God; driven by hatred against its brother nation, it had sought to lay hold of the inheritance that God had denied them. Now, Israel will devour Edom so that no one will escape, that is the Lord's decree regarding this ungodly nation. During their long history, that nation has always obstructed God's purpose according to the election of grace.

This judgment, executed by united Israel, is described by the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 11:13-14). All neighbouring nations, Edom in the first place, will fall under it, though not all. Yet, a remnant of Moab and Ammon will be saved, i.e., remain alive, but no one from Edom.

This judgment executed over Edom by Israel should not be confused with the preceding judgment executed by the Lord Himself over the Edom's *territory*. Personally the Lord will destroy the *armies* of the nations, also those of Edom. The prophet Isaiah *announces* this (Isa. 34:1-15). And Isaiah also speaks about its *execution* (Isa. 63:1-4). The prophecy in Revelation concurs with this (Rev. 19:11-16). The judgment that Israel afterwards executes over Edom is actually a completion of the Lord's judgment. He has deemed it right to put this judgment in the hands of His restored people Israel. This judgment brings the existence of Edom to a definite end (Ezek. 25:12-14). This is connected with Israel's repossession of the inheritance to which Edom had stretched out its audacious hand. All declarations that this judgment over Edom would already have taken place under the Maccabees fall flat for the simple fact that then Israel was not restored and did not receive its possessions back.

Verse 19

And [they of] the south shall possess the mount of Esau; for Jehovah hath spoken [it]. And [they of] the lowland the Philistines; yea, they shall possess the field of Ephraim and the field of Samaria; and Benjamin [shall possess] Gilead.

When the calamity came over Judah, Edom took possession of Judah's southern territory. But soon, not only the southern territory, but also the mountain of Esau will become the possession of Judah. No doubt, this mountain will for a time have been a deserted area in remembrance of the judgment executed over Edom (Isa. 34:9-17). Just like the Dead Sea preaches the memories of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The "lowland" seems not only to point to Judah, but also to Benjamin. The prophet Ezekiel says that the land of the Philistines will be assigned to these two tribes at the time the land is divided (Ezek. 47-48). On the other side, Benjamin will stretch beyond the Jordan unto Gilead. Verses 18-19 don't really speak of the division, but show that all nations who have resisted Israel's possessing the entire country no longer exist. Israel will then be a unity including also the tribes on the other side of the Jordan, who in earlier days sometimes hindered the showing forth of this oneness.

Verse 20

And the captives of this host of the children of Israel [shall possess] what belonged to the Canaanites, unto Zarephath; and the captives of Jerusalem, who [were] in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south.

The description of the taking possession of the land is continued in this verse. The boundaries previously ordered by the Lord will then exist. Obadiah points to the spreading forth of the nation.

Verse 21

And saviours shall come up on mount Zion, to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be Jehovah's.

These saviours are the heads of Judah, who will become the judges and lawgivers of the nations. They have Jerusalem as the centre of government and will rule over the mountain of Esau. Obadiah looks at Edom as representing all nations. After the judgment of the nations, government over the then still spared nations will be executed from Jerusalem. The prophet Isaiah says that the law will proceed from Zion and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:3). Christ's kingdom will have a divine character. Ongoing governmental matters will be dealt with by "the prince" from the house of David, we would say by a vice-regent (Ezek. 48:21). "And the kingdom shall be Jehovah's." In that glorious realm of peace of Christ, all will be arranged according to the thoughts of God. Sin will not have disappeared entirely, but will be greatly tempered. Every display of it will be immediately punished. This thousand-year long, glorious bliss will precede the day of God, the day of the new heaven and the new earth, on which righteousness will dwell. The eternal glory of that day will even exceed that of the Millennium.

The End

Jacob, Jacob!

—J. van Dijk

Introduction

Nothing much has changed over the years. Jacob's troubles began when he tried to help God along in securing the promised blessing. Today things are no different from those days long, long ago. Isn't there a message in Jacob's early history that is instructive for the sons of Jacob, but also for us, Christians of today?

The Promise

Isaac entreated Jehovah for his wife, because she was barren; and Jehovah was entreated of him, and Rebecca his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If [it be] so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of Jehovah. And Jehovah said to her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels; and one people shall be stronger than the other people, and the elder shall serve the younger (Gen. 25:21-23).

How beautiful was Rebecca's action: when she had a matter that she did not understand, she went to the Lord about it and asked Him. The Lord did not fail her, but told her the significance of the struggle within her. A mother who trusts the Lord in all things will have a good influence on her children. She will seek His face in all questions of life, and rely on the goodness and ability of the Lord. If she had only continued to trust the Lord, Rebecca might have been able to teach her son to do so too.

Jacob's Actions

And Jacob had cooked a dish; and Esau came from the field, and he was faint. And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with the red — the red thing there, for I am faint... And Jacob said, Sell me now thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am going to die, and of what use can the birthright be to me? And Jacob said, Swear unto me now. And he swore unto him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and the dish of lentils; and he ate and drank, and rose up and went away. Thus Esau despised the birthright (Gen. 25:29-34).

Here is the beginning of Jacob's trouble. He seeks to obtain by base means what God had promised him in grace. Greed lay at the bottom of things, and greed closes the heart for God's things (Mt. 6:11; Lk. 12:15; Heb. 13:5). Jacob could not think of letting his dish of lentils go without getting something in return. Neither could he count on Esau letting go of the birthright just like that, for one who is greedy himself expects another to be greedy as well. So he used a moment of weakness in his brother to "buy" what God had promised him without price.

Rebecca's Advice

And Rebecca spoke to Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak to Esau thy brother, saying, Bring me venison, and prepare me a savory dish, that I may eat, and bless thee before Jehovah, before my death. And now, my son, harken to my voice in that which I command thee. Go, I pray thee, to the flock, and fetch me thence two good kids of the goats. And I will make of them a savory dish for thy father, such as he loves... And he brought it near to him, and he ate. (Gen. 27:6-25).

Rebecca did not do what she did earlier. Had she forgotten to live a life of prayer? Things might have been so different if she only had gone to the Lord to ask Him what should be done under the given circumstances. It seems that her special love for Jacob, had caused her to lose sight of what was acceptable to God. She was not so different from many mothers of our days. When it was a question of catering to her dear Jacob, the end justified the means.

Obviously, the relationship between Isaac and Rebecca was also poor. Instead of discussing the matter with Isaac, she resorted to deceiving her God-given husband. Even in a godly family the relationship with the Lord can seriously deteriorate. Then, as a result, the relationship between husband and wife is liable to suffer as well.

Jacob, greedy man as he was, did not object to his mother's schemes as long as he did not run the risk of discovery before the misdeed was done. The love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Oh, Jacob, Jacob!

The Result

And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went towards Haran. (Gen. 28:10).

Rather than enjoying the blessings in his father's house, Jacob had to flee. The relationship with his mother was broken for good; distance prevented it and death terminated it. His relationship with God was not one of trust and walking by faith; he dreaded the presence of God, His Blessor. He even thought that God needed some encouragement: "If God will... then will Jehovah be my God" (Gen. 28:20-21). Far from the promised blessings Jacob fended for himself in surroundings that, though acting friendly to his face, were hostile to him. He had derived no profit from his attempts to help God.

Another Promise

It shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt take them to heart among all the nations whither Jehovah thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return to Jehovah thy God, and shalt harken to his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy sons, with all thy heart and with all thy soul; that then Jehovah thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will gather thee again from all the peoples whither Jehovah thy God hath scattered thee... And Jehovah thy God will bring thee into the land that thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it (Dt. 30: 1-6).

The God of mercy has promised to again take up the cause of Jacob, His people. He will bring them again into the land, and He will give them a heart that loves God, a heart that will do His will and honour Him. When God does this, He Himself will bring them back to the land that He had promised them. As before, God promised, and He will bring it about. But is Jacob willing to wait for God to act? Is Israel ready to turn to God, crying to Him to show His promised mercy?

Jacob acts Again

As God had said, severe persecution has come over the people Israel. Time and again they have been haunted, and each spell of persecution seems to have outdone the previous one. In his trouble, Jacob has taken note of God's promise to bring them back. Yet, he remains ignorant of the manner in which God would perform it. God would take the initiative and give him a heart that returns to God. Though Israel awaits its promised Messiah, it wants to make itself ready for Him. Instead of speaking the words of Psalms 80 and 85: "Turn us again, O God," they have turned themselves and gone back to the promised land. They seek to establish themselves relying on their own strength. They know not that they will experience the worst holocaust yet. In the land, God is going to deal with them for what they have done to His Son, there God will answer their cry: "His blood be on us and on our children." They will receive double for all their sins (Isa. 40:2).

Oh, if Jacob had only learned from his previous mistakes. If only he would turn to God and seek help from Him who wants to be Israel's Helper (Ps. 54:4). But Jacob still trusts his own schemes and in doing so readies himself for this last and most severe holocaust.

In God's Crucible

There, in his own land, the land of promise taken through his own scheming, Israel will experience the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7). Their coming ruler will claim to be their messiah, but he is the antichrist (Jn. 5:43). He will place himself in the temple to show that he is god and rely on the military strength of Western-Europe (Dan. 11:36; 2 Th. 2:4). All to no avail, for when the Assyrian king attacks, their god-king will flee and become the shepherd who leaves the flock (Zech. 11:17). The Assyrian — Babylon and Nineveh — will finally have a go at the target they have eyed for so long. Edom will eagerly help them. Israel will be crushed so as not to rise again... that is, if it were not for Christ's personal intervention at that critical moment when all seems lost (Zech. 14:1-4).

In the midst of that calamity, a remnant of Jacob will finally cry to God for help, and then God can fulfil His promise and circumcise their heart. They will see whom they have pierced and will wail because of Him (Zech. 12:10). Finally the time of Israel's blessing will begin under the reign of their Messiah, who will govern this world from Zion (Ps. 110:2).

Christian Attitudes

Today many Christians are very sympathetic toward Israel, and ready to help it along. They believe that because God promised the land to Israel, Israel should as much as possible be assisted. They may not approve of all the methods employed by the Israeli government, but, by and large, they favour Israel.

Other Christians, generally those who believe that Israel has no future, do not look so favourably at Israel. They consider that all Israel's blessings and promises are given to the Church, which, in their view, has become the spiritual Israel. What should a Christian's attitude be? Should we not, like Rebecca did at first, learn to know what God's purpose is in this practical situation? It is no secret that we do not agree with those Christians who claim that Israel has no future. Strangely enough, the actions of these Christians towards Israel may be more according to God's mind than ours. Like Rebecca, we are liable through love for Israel to lose sight of God's ways.

God's Ways

If we understand God's Word, we will realize that Jacob is again seeking the blessing without any consideration for God's ways of obtaining it. Because of this, instead of the blessing, Jacob will find the worst hardship yet — the Great Tribulation. Israel's effort to obtain the land brings them there where God's wrath will fall upon them to the uttermost (1 Th. 2:16). It seems hardly a Christian thing to do to help them in going there.

Still, we know that providentially God is allowing many of Jacob's sons to return and establish themselves in the land. There they are, in their own strength and without their God, wrangling their land out of Esau's hand. They will soon reestablish the temple service, but then fall in greater idolatry than ever before (2 Th. 2:4). Their honouring a man as God will bring God's judgment over them. We wonder, are Christians to help Jacob in his schemes to assure that Esau does not get the blessing of possessing the land?

We should pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps. 122:6). But when we pray for peace, we should think first of all of peace with God. We do not want to ask for a condition where many say, "Peace, peace," and there is no peace (Jer. 6:14; 8:11).

Final Thoughts

Do we realize that Jacob is really not so different from any of us? Do we know God's mind regarding Jacob? God has thoughts of peace towards him, and so should we. But we must be aware of God's ways, God's manner of bringing it about. God's path begins with a heart that seeks Him. Perhaps we may be instrumental in bringing that about, for we, too, long for the day of Jacob's blessing. This blessing will have as its foundation Israel's acknowledging its Messiah.

"For ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol have we made an agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves." This is Israel's last attempt at self-help.

And this is God's response: *"Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I lay for foundation in Zion a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that trusteth shall not make haste"* (Isa. 28:15-16). Trust, do not

make haste; do not seek to run ahead of God. Wait on the Lord. Yes, Jacob, wait on the Lord, for He will abundantly bless you once you have acknowledged the rejected Jesus to be your Messiah, your God (Ps. 27:14).

The End