

The Service of our High Priest (1)

—H. L. Heijkoop

In Hebrews 2:17 we read that the Lord Jesus had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in the things relating to God in making propitiation for the sins of the people and so to accomplish the work of redemption. This side of the work of the Lord Jesus we all know. It has to do with the fact that He went to the cross to die there for us. But the passage also speaks of another significance. "He is a merciful and faithful High Priest," who, because He Himself "has suffered, being tempted... is able to help those that are being tempted" (v. 18). It will be clear that this does not refer to the work He did on the cross.

In verse 10 we read: "For it became Him, for whom [are] all things, and by whom [are] all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make perfect the Leader of their salvation through sufferings." Then we read in verses 14 and 15: "Since therefore the children partake of blood and flesh, He also, in like manner, took part in the same, that through death He might annul him who has the might of death, that is, the devil; and might set free all those who through fear of death through the whole of their life were subject to bondage." Yes, it is wondrously glorious that the Lord Jesus went to the cross for us to die there for us. Who can estimate the price that He paid there for our redemption! We will need all eternity to contemplate that price, and to worship Him for it.

Here, however, we find a second thought, a thought that is precious to our hearts. He did not only *die* for us, thereby saving us from going to hell. Here we find the fact that He also became Man and *lived* for us on earth for thirty-three years. He did this so that He could walk with us in the time that we have to spend on earth after our conversion. As the One who accomplished our salvation He had to be perfected through sufferings. Here the issue is not His death on the cross, not our salvation from eternal damnation, but the issue is that He, who has accomplished our salvation, will surely lead us to the end. In Psalm 84:7 the sons of Korah say, "Each one will appear before God in Zion." Then they add, "Jehovah, God of hosts, hear my prayer, give ear, O God of Jacob" (v. 8). Our salvation does not just consist of our being saved from judgment. We will be saved when we will be with Him. Would we, when we look upon ourselves, be so bold as to say that we will ever reach Zion — for us the Father's house? Would we have such courage although we know our sins forgiven? Impossible! How great are the dangers! How great is the power of the world! How great are the temptations of sin! How great is the might and how crafty the tricks of Satan! How could we ever reach the goal without help? What benefit would it have been if the Lord Jesus, after He died on the cross, having finished the work for us there, from then on had left us to ourselves? Would we, if we had to take care of ourselves, reach the goal?

Here we read about a wondrously glorious fact. The Lord Jesus lived for thirty-three years on earth to get acquainted with our circumstances, to become the Completer of our salvation while we are living here on earth. We read, "Wherefore it behoved Him in all things to be made like to His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest" (v. 18). We know that the Lord Jesus was born on earth as a baby and that He lived thirty-three years in a world where He was rejected. That was not needed for the work He would accomplish at the cross. Adam was a real man and yet he was not born as a baby. The Lord Jesus could just as well have come on earth as an adult to finish immediately the work on the cross. It was nevertheless a necessity. First, God wanted to prove with the life of the Lord Jesus on earth that He was perfect, complete. God did not need this proof for Himself, for He could say of Him, "In Him I have found My delight." God wanted it as a testimony on earth. That testimony was given mainly during the three (or three and a half) years of His service, but also before, during the thirty years that the Lord lived on earth. Not much is told of this.

There was a second reason for these years. Out of love for us, He wanted to live through our circumstances. Thereby He would become a faithful and merciful High Priest for us in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Now He can sympathize with us because He knows it all by experience. Who among us has not suffered a great loss, for instance because of the departure of a loved one? We know what comfort a visit can be from someone who knows by experience what feelings fill our heart. Then one feels — words are not needed — this person understands, knows by experience what my circumstances, my feelings are. That is so wondrously beautiful of the Lord Jesus! He lived through all the circumstances into which we as children of God can come. No, the Lord Jesus cannot feel with the godless ones, with those who refuse to repent. With them He cannot sympathize for He has never been a sinner. He can, however, know our feelings when we, believers, have sinned. For He who knew no sin, did bear our sins in His body on the cross. He knows what it means for the divine nature to come into contact with sin. Only on the cross did He bear the wrath of God. That was not necessary in His life. He knows what it means when communion is broken. His was perfect, ours only imperfect.

Thus the Lord has lived through all circumstances into which we can come. He knows them by experience. He has been a baby, a small child, and can therefore understand little children, their difficulties and their needs. Little children have their difficulties too. He has been a boy, a young man, so that He can understand boys, girls, and teen-agers; He knows all their needs. He has become a full-grown man, an adult, so that in all circumstances in which we are He can understand us. Can we imagine one situation that He has not entered into so that He could not sympathize? In John 4 we read that the Lord was tired from the journey. Yes, He was the eternal God, but He became truly Man! It says that He sat down tired at Jacob's well. He can understand our tiredness. Because He was hungry, He sent His disciples out to buy bread. He knows what it is to suffer hunger. He knew it, for once He had not eaten for forty days. He knows what it is to be thirsty. Even on the cross He called out that He was thirsty. He knows what it is to stand at the grave of a friend, to weep at the grave of a loved one. He experienced temptation by Satan. Could there possibly be a temptation coming at us that the Lord did not know by experience? Forty days and nights Satan tempted Him. Finally Satan left Him. We are only told about the last three temptations with which Satan tempted Him during these forty nights and days, the others are not mentioned.

Satan left Him; he had no more weapons. His whole arsenal, all tricks Satan had, he had tried them on the Lord Jesus, so that the Lord Jesus knows them by experience. It is not possible that Satan comes to us with a temptation that the Lord Jesus did not experience, for Satan has first tried these weapons on Him. This means that the Lord Jesus knows exactly what power a child of God needs to remain standing in these temptations. He knows by experience how bad it is when Satan tempts. This is why He says to His disciples: "Pray, that ye enter not into temptation!" The Lord allowed Himself to be tempted. We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and in that to the Romans (ch. 8) that He prays for us. Ever again, He intercedes with God for us, that we might find grace in time of need. This means: So that we will not fall by giving in to the temptation, and thereby do the will of Satan.

Can we really imagine what it must have been for the Lord Jesus? He was the Holy One, the Pure One, the One who knew not sin. When He was about to be born, the angel said to Mary, "That Holy Thing that will be born, will be called Son of God" (Lk. 1:35). He was too holy to see sin. He was entirely separated from sin. Here we read that He was tempted but without sinning. What must it have been for Him to be tempted? For Satan came to Him with all his dirty temptations, using all his weapons, the one after the other, for forty days and nights. Can we imagine what this must have been for Him? Life on earth by itself was already terrible for Him. Just think of it: He was the Son who was in the bosom of the Father from eternity. He was in the Father's house. He was there with God the Father and with God the Holy Spirit. Before the angels were, He was. Heaven was but an echo, the radiancy of His Being. Then He created angels, even before He created the earth. Hundreds of millions of angels awaited His least hint to obey His word and to do what pleased Him. In Isaiah 6 we read how the seraphs cry: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" In John 12:41 we read that at that occasion they saw the Lord Jesus, for "This said Isaiah when he saw His glory and spoke of Him."

Then He came out of those glorious surroundings where all is light and love, where no darkness is found — God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. In 1 Timothy 6 we read that God dwells in an unapproachable light. That is a place where Satan could never enter, not even before his fall, by which he became Satan. The Lord Jesus had been there where all was in complete harmony with Him, in harmony with that which He was within Himself — light and love, *only* light and love. Then He came on this earth. He had to live in this environment of sin, of hate, and of darkness. The Lord Jesus says in John 9:5, "As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." This means that this world was darkness and that He alone was Light, Light in the darkness. However, the darkness was so great, as we read in John 1, that while He shone into the darkness, the darkness did not disappear. Normally when light enters darkness, darkness no longer exists. This darkness was so impenetrable that the Light, when it entered the darkness, did not influence it. There He had to live. He who was Light had to live thirty-three years in that darkness. A moral darkness it was, in which all was entirely in conflict with His own Being. All there was sin, only that which completely contradicted God, only hatred instead of love. In the midst of this lived He who was in heaven the Object of all the Father's love and joy. Only hatred was His portion, and that not just during the three and a half years of His service. In Psalm 109:5 He cries that they rewarded Him hatred for love. Was this not so from the day He came on earth? He came on this earth and there was no room for Him in the inn. A manger out of which the animals eat was all that was prepared for Him. Hardly had He been born when they tried to kill Him. He had to flee to Egypt. Egypt is a picture of the independent world at enmity with God. There He had to go. When He could return, He had to live in Nazareth. "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" That was His life. That is how He lived here. What must that have been for Him! You don't think that the people of Nazareth of that day were any better than the people of today, do you? Would it not have been true of them what God's Word says, "The thought of man's heart is evil from his youth"? In their midst He had to dwell.

No matter how noble Mary and Joseph may have been, they were sinful people, people who did not understand Him. Once He had to ask them, "Did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in My Father's business?" His brothers were children, but sinful children. Even later, when the Lord Jesus was thirty-three years old, they did not believe in Him. In John 7 we read this. From what the Bible tells us, we must conclude that they came to repentance only after the death of the Lord. Also the other people in Nazareth did not believe in Him. We see that they wanted to kill Him — and that in the

town where He grew up! Even as a child, He was perfect, the Pure One, yet, a true child. He who was Himself Wisdom increased in wisdom and favour with God and with men. Also as child, He did not sin, for He had the divine nature. Yes, He Himself was God, that Holy Thing that was born. What a suffering must His whole life have been for the Lord Jesus!

Yet, He lived there all these years. Why? Because He loved us! He did not only want to save us from eternal damnation, but He wanted to go with us on the journey we must make through this wilderness, so that He could strengthen our hearts. Not only that we would receive help from the mercy-seat, but also that He could understand and comfort us in all circumstances. Have we, especially the older ones, not often experienced this? The younger ones may not have had the opportunity for this. Have we not often experienced that He could sympathize and comfort when we sought our refuge with Him in difficult circumstances? Then we saw the love of the Lord Jesus.

He became Man — also to die for us — but He has also lived on earth for thirty-three years to be able to be with us under all circumstances of life. Thus He is with us and walks the way with us. There can be no situation in our lives in which He does not understand our heart's sorrow. He can always have fellowship with us, and He knows what help we need too.

In 1 Corinthians 10 temptations are mentioned in which we can come while here on earth. It says there that these are only temptations that are common to man and that they are never too great (v. 13). Why is a temptation never too great? Because the Lord Jesus knows how great the power of every temptation is. He knows the power of the situation in which find ourselves. By experience He knows this. When Satan approaches me with a certain temptation, it is not the first time he tries to use that weapon. He has first tried it on Christ. Christ knows what power man needs to be able to stand in this temptation. He feels for us, and knows what it means for the divine nature, for He Himself is our life. He also knows what it means to our new nature when Satan approaches us with his sins. Can anything make our hearts more restless, and cause more sorrow in our lives than the struggles of the flesh and the temptations of Satan? What can be worse than the dirty thoughts he seeks to throw at us? Are we not, as children of God, aware that this is the worst? It surely will be a most glorious thing when the Lord comes that we will no longer have (sinful) flesh and that, therefore, there will never rise another sinful thought within us. Never again will we be drawn away from the Lord. We will never again do something that is in conflict with His will and that we hate as well.

Yes, we hate it. The new nature within us hates sin. And yet we sin again and again. The new nature hates the wickedness of Satan. And yet he approaches us with his dirty thoughts. The Lord knows it, and when Satan comes to us with a temptation, He knows what it means to us. He carries it with us. We read in Hebrews 7:25 that He lives to be able to intercede for us with God. This is also what it says here in chapter 2:18: "For, in that Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to help those that are being tempted." Then in chapter 4:15 it says, "For we have not a High Priest not able to sympathize with our infirmities, but tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart" (or: "yet, without sin"). From this we see then that He has been tempted in all things in which we can be tempted. "Let us approach therefore to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace for seasonable help" (Heb. 4:16). This tells us what the High-Priestly service of the Lord entails. It is that we will "find grace for seasonable help." So the Lord Jesus walks the path with us. God has set Him as the One who accomplishes our salvation. And He has been made perfect through suffering to be able to do so.

To be cont'd

The Prophet Jonah (6)

—R. Been, Sr.

Jonah under the gourd.

At the end of the previous chapter, we read that God saw the repentance of the Ninevites and that He repented of the evil which He had said would come over them. So God did not bring about the judgment. Now, in chapter 4 we read that Jonah was very displeased, so much so that he became angry.

Though he prays to Jehovah, his words are really not a prayer but an accusation to God and a self-justification. When, back in his own country, he had received the first command to go to Nineveh had he not said that the Lord would not bring the foretold judgment over the Ninevites if they repented? He knew that Jehovah was a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and of great loving-kindness. He knew God would repent over the evil with which He had threatened the city. That is why Jonah had not obeyed that first commandment, but had fled. Now he asks Jehovah to take his soul away, for under such circumstances he would rather die than live.

How sadly wrong is the attitude shown by this prophet of the Lord. We can hardly believe that we read it correctly; yet, reading it again, that is the case. He dares to raise his voice against God, blaming God for his flight, just like Adam blamed God for giving him a woman who had deceived him. He accuses God, and justifies himself. Though Jonah says nice things about God; his thought seems to be: "*Surely, God's mercy, grace, patience, and loving-kindness should not be shown to Gentiles, to dogs, should they?*"

Ungracious words are spoken by the man who a little earlier, while in great distress, had called to God for mercy, and who, after having been saved, had promised to thank God and pay his vows. This man reveals himself to be *a real Pharisee!*

There is joy in heaven among the angels over *one* sinner on earth who repents. Now here is a servant of the Lord who is dissatisfied and full of anger when an entire city humbly bows itself before God and does works worthy of repentance before the 40-day time of grace is up.

What is the true source of Jonah's anger? His displeasure we will pass over without comment, for it was merely a matter of being hurt personally. One ingredient of his anger was certainly Israel's notion of its being superior. It was true that God had given privileges to this nation as to no other, but He had not done this so that Israel would consider itself high above the other nations — a thing that Israel always has done and still does even now. The idea that God would show grace to Gentiles, and that even to Israel's greatest enemies, was unbearable to Jonah. Thus religious men read the law to God.

Besides this, the prophet's personal honour played a role. His preaching in Nineveh had been a message of judgment and nothing else. Again, it is true that this was in agreement with God's command. Yet, if Jonah had the least notion of the grace shown to him personally, he could have *announced the judgment, so to say, with tears in his eyes*. He, of all, knew so well that God was full of grace and mercy. Later the Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem while announcing judgment over this city.

All forty days Jonah had announced judgment over Nineveh, and now these days are over and nothing happened! How must these uncircumcised be laughing over him! He entirely overlooked the fact that the Ninevites would certainly not do so, for that would not agree with their repenting of the evil. He entirely forgot that Nineveh had already been overthrown, namely from their sins. He had eyes only for the fulfilment of *his* word over the city. That is the principle of Pharisaism, which is always out to be seen, heard, and justified by men. Rather than Jonah jumping for joy over God's mighty work of grace at Nineveh, he is displeased, he is angry that the city is still being spared.

Jonah's attitude causes us to believe that Jonah went to Nineveh at God's second command thinking that God would now certainly judge the city. Even while airing his feelings in "prayer," he does not change his opinion, but goes out of the city to see what will happen to it and whether the judgment is coming.

Yes, this Jonah was quite stubborn; but he is certainly not the only one! Did not Lot go a second time to Sodom? Didn't Hezekiah, after the miracle of the return of the shadow on the sundial, and after the salvation of Jerusalem, proudly show the ambassadors from Babylon his treasures? Didn't Peter again succumb to his fear for man? And we? Are we better? Do not we, even after serious lessons, at times fall back into the same sin?

Under such conditions Jonah asks the Lord to take his soul from him, for *it is better for him to die than to live*. He is rather quick to talk that way, for later he repeats it (v. 8). It is the way of least resistance, the wish of the touchy and the seekers of their own glory.

Scripture does not record an answer from Jonah to the Lord's question: "Doest thou well to be angry?" What does follow is the mention of Jonah's departure from the city. Likely he went to a hill, and made there a booth as protection against the hot sun while awaiting what would become of Nineveh. What hardened, self-righteous, self-love! God has less difficulty with the inhabitants of Nineveh than with Jonah. The former repented at the word of one man, though there was as yet no trace of judgment to be seen, but Jonah remained hardened.

In Jonah's life, God has already prepared a *storm* and a *great fish*. The prophet had understood that language, but apparently he had forgotten it too. Now God prepares a *gourd*. The remarkable thing was that God caused this tree to grow so rapidly and that at the very place where Jonah sat. The Lord wanted to teach him something by means of this tree. It says here that the tree shot up over the head of Jonah so that he could sit in its shadow, delivering him from his trouble. Jonah was very happy with it. His longing to die stemmed only from his displeasure over the way things went with Nineveh. The gourd healed him completely from this longing. He is ever so glad!

How fickle is man! Who says that this was only so with Jonah? Something in our life isn't going as we like. The result? Downheartedness, sadness, touchiness, yes, even anger! The gourds cross our path — earthly blessings. The result? Great

joy! Gone is the downheartedness over something that did not go the way we wanted it to, although no change for the better has come in.

God prepared a gourd to teach Jonah something, and sometimes, too, He places such "gourds" in our lives — earthly blessings. How do we deal with these blessings? How often have these earthly blessings caused the saints' longing sigh for the coming of the Lord to be stilled? Clearly, that longing only arose from displeasure over the circumstances, just as it did in Jonah's case. The gourd revealed what lived in the heart of the prophet.

In this last chapter book of Jonah it becomes so very evident who God is in love and mercy, but also who man is in his self-righteousness and love of self. And this is all the more important, because it is mankind, of all things, who accuses God of being merciless. Of course, the Lord did not allow Himself to be kept from showing mercy to Nineveh. The current of God's grace cannot be hemmed in by men — not then, not now. For today, too, there are "prophets" who like Jonah of old become angry when in their opinion only God's grace is preached.

True, there is a good, a desired anger. The apostle Paul has said, "Be angry and do not sin; let not the sun set upon your wrath, neither give room for the devil" (Eph. 4:27-27). There are things, conditions, persons, over which the believers may rightfully be angry, yes must be angry. The Lord Jesus looked upon the hardened Jews with anger, but at the same time He was distressed over them (Mk. 3:5). Yet, the sun should not set over such anger of believers, for otherwise it could easily become a wrong anger. Spurgeon once said, "Also the holy wrath of men can easily run wild" (quote is retranslated from the Dutch).

There sits Jonah, protected against the scorching sun by the gourd, on a hill at a safe distance from Nineveh waiting for the overthrow of the city. The night is already passed, and still nothing has happened. Yes, something has! At dawn God had prepared a worm that smote the gourd so that it withered. And when the sun rose higher, God prepared a sultry east wind that hastened the work of the worm. Among the millions of worms which we hardly notice, God prepared a special one to teach Jonah a lesson. Of the many easterly winds blowing without us hardly noticing it, this east wind is specially meant for Jonah.

The sun now beats hot on Jonah's head, so that he became faint, and angry. Again he claims that it is better for him to die than to live. That anger, that undignified longing for death, that being influenced by the things of this life, were precisely the things that kept Jonah from understanding the "language" of the withered gourd. The Lord had to help him by speaking to him. For the second time God asks Jonah, "Doest thou well to be angry," now adding the words "for the gourd?" And Jonah in his foolish anger affirms the reasonableness of his anger. Angry people generally don't know what they do or say. Jonah is angry at his Benefactor, his Saviour, who had saved him out of the fish. How "small" had he been in the fish, but how impertinent and thankless is he when he is once more able to move freely.

In the past quite a number of beautiful Bible texts hung in Christian homes. Once a servant of the Lord who visited many homes observed that he hadn't seen anywhere the text: "Does thou well to be angry?" Yet, he believed this would have been an excellent text. One should stand before this text, allowing the question to penetrate deeply. Much misery could be prevented thereby.

We don't want to linger too long at this, but only point to an example. When the apostle was personally attacked, offended, or made suspect — something that happens quite often — he remained silent, or said, "May it not be imputed to them." The result was: no misplaced anger. But when it concerned the honour of the Lord, or the truth of God, then this man became like an angry lion, full of indignation. *Holy wrath!* How we defend *our* opinion, *our* selves! How often do we get angry about wrongs perpetrated *against us!* But when it is a question of the Lord's things, we often remain calmly silent.

God was not seeking to punish Jonah. We read that he was occupied to deliver Jonah from his displeasure. That was the reason for the gourd about which Jonah was so happy. Happy, not because God was so good for him, but *because he was so well off under that tree.* But when God takes this tree away to teach Jonah something, Jonah's anger flares up. Isn't everything against him? Doesn't God allow him even a little coolness? And there in the distance, Nineveh remains shining in the sunlight, entirely unscathed.

Didn't Jonah learn anything yet? Yes, he did! He has learned to be obedient to God's commands. At the first command he had been disobedient and had fled. That he has confessed to God. But he had not "dug deeper" into himself; not asked himself: "What was the origin of my disobedience?" Because he had failed to do so, he went with a heart filled with judgment to Nineveh, glad that he could announce the punishment to this cursed gentile city. When that punishment did not come, he became very angry and wanted to die. Scripture paints a clear picture of Jonah's attitude. God's Word does not cover up the sins of believers.

If Jonah had "dug a little deeper" into himself, he would have discovered in his heart that Israelitish superiority complex, that love of self. Then he would also have seen that he was the last man that could criticize God's gracious doings. But now he was hardened in his self-righteousness: he hardened himself. There is little hope that someone who does this will listen. Everything is seen and judged in a wrong light. Then one forgets what oneself has been, and there is not the least of compassion for others who would perish if God did not intervene in grace.

In Deuteronomy it says that God allowed hunger and thirst to reveal what lived in the heart of Israel. It is very well possible that we believe ourselves to be meek, trusting God. Yet, in such difficult circumstances it becomes evident to ourselves, and perhaps to others also, that we are quite the opposite. We consider ourselves to be pious, but it becomes evident that we are greater lovers of self than of God. The root of this wrong attitude must be seen by us. Not just, for instance, the angry flare up itself, but *the cause: why we become angry*. Not the self-righteousness by itself, but the reason for it.

Jonah did not see this. He had only confessed the disobedient deed. That is why he failed to understand the "language" of the withered gourd. Then the Lord must *speak* with him. Jonah would have liked to spare the gourd, to save it; he had not laboured for that tree. Would then God not spare the great city Nineveh and save it? It was a city in which more than 120,000 little children lived who could not yet distinguish between good and bad, and in which there was so much cattle. The city had proved to be ready to turn from its wickedness, calling to Him for mercy. These things gave joy to God. Wasn't the joy of Jonah over the gourd that gave him refreshment but little in comparison to the joy of the Lord over the works of repentance done in Nineveh?

In this way, Jehovah teaches in meekness and patience His servant. He puts him straight. This was the second time. First in the fish, now under the gourd, below which a despairing Jonah sits because his labour among the heathen has been so greatly blessed. Elijah sat in despair under a tree because his labour among the Israelites had failed. We understand Elijah better than Jonah; but the Lord left neither of them alone.

We don't read anything further about Jonah after the lesson from the Lord. However, this silence of Jonah tells a lot. Now he sees the root of his repulsive attitude. He wants things different than God wants them. That has become clear to him. The words spoken by another self-righteous man can now be applied to Jonah: "Behold, I am nought: what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, and I will not answer; yea twice, but I will proceed no further" (Job 40:4-5). Now he has learned the great lesson that all of Scripture sets before us: It is the joy of God to spare what actually ought to have been judged, because there has been repentance and a turning to Him. He who is more than Jonah preached this when He was here on earth, and He — Jesus, the Saviour of the world — did show it.

When we now ask what the account in Jonah 4 tells us prophetically, the answer is: Jonah is a picture of self-righteous Israel that has always considered itself above the other nations, and that took offence at the grace shown to the Gentiles. But he is also a picture of the faithful remnant that through suffering will be purified from this superiority complex. In a coming day, the new Israel formed out of the remnants of the two and the ten tribes will clearly see that all that it has received has become theirs only on the basis of grace and mercy of Jehovah, who will then be their King and King over the nations. In the future Israel will certainly be the head of the nations, but then this will no longer be a cause to vaunt itself over this.

The End

The Divine Plan Through the Ages

—P. van der Ster

If God did not have a special purpose with Genesis 1, He would not have given such an accurate description of the creation of heaven and earth and their ordering in six days. Then He could have given a simple short remark like those found in other Scriptures (Isa. 45:12; Ps. 146:6). Since we have here such an extensive description God evidently has to tell us something special.

The Bible is first of all given to us so that we may find the way to God in it. But once we know God through the Lord Jesus Christ, He unfolds His plans and thoughts to us, even regarding the distant future (Amos 3:7). In Isaiah 46:10 we read that God declares the end from the beginning, and, therefore, we have here to do with prophecy. God has divided the time between eternity and eternity into several periods or ages. We call these ages *dispensations*.

A dispensation is therefore a time span in which God entrusts something to man in his responsibility. In every dispensation we see a special trait, a difference in the characteristics of God's actions.

Every dispensation ends with judgment over that which man in his responsibility has spoiled. Each begins with the evening, the darkness of that which is spoiled, and then changes into the morning in which God entrusts something new to mankind.

These dispensations we find here portrayed in the days of creation. The characteristics of each day enable us to see where a particular dispensation begins and ends. This is true for past dispensations as well as for those that are future. We can also see in which dispensation we live today.

That there is a considerable time span between verse 1 and verse 2 of Genesis 1 hardly needs mentioning. For the earth did not proceed void and empty from the hand of God (Job 38:4-7). Most likely it did become so through the fall of Satan and his angels. God's entire plan in time is directed to restore all things under one Head (Eph. 1:9-10).

Just as there are six days of creation, so there are six dispensations, each with its own characteristics. The first dispensation must have the marks of the first day. On the first day, God called forth the light. From then on there was light and there was darkness. This we see in the first dispensation which runs from Adam to the Flood. The light we see in Abel, Seth, Enoch, and Noah. The darkness we see in Cain and his descendants. After man had trodden the principles God had given from the beginning under foot, judgment had to come. And so we see the end of the first dispensation.

The second dispensation bears the character of the second day. Although all that God had created was very good, we don't read those words in connection with the second day. And God does not err; He doesn't write one word too many, but neither one word too little. Likely these words are missing because in the second dispensation little good for God was found. This dispensation was characterized by the separation made between waters and waters. Waters in Scripture are a picture of the people, nations, and tongues (Rev. 17:1&15). It is not hard to find the explanation for this in Genesis 10 and 11. The careful reader will see that these chapters do not really follow each other chronologically. First the language was confounded, and afterwards the people departed to their own countries (Gen. 10:31 & 11:8). In this dispensation, then the nations are completely separated from each other just as God separated the waters from each other on the second day.

The third dispensation has two characteristics, just as God spoke twice on the third day. First, the dry land was seen, and secondly, seed-producing herbs began to grow. The dry land — the earth — is in Scripture a picture of order and government. In Revelation 13 we see two beasts. One of these rises out of the sea. Out of the restless sea of the nations will soon rise the emperor of the restored Roman Empire. The other beast comes out of the earth; from the place of order and government. The latter is the Antichrist who will rise out of Israel. Now returning to the third dispensation, we see that in Abraham God calls out a people for His name. Godly order comes in and a form of government upon the earth. But we also see that God promises "the Seed," Christ. And since Israel ends up rejecting the Christ, the end of the Israelitish dispensation occurs at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The mark of the third dispensation is, therefore, the nation and its seed, the seed of Abraham, the seed of David.

In the fourth dispensation we see very special characteristics, which are also seen on the fourth day of creation. God does not occupy Himself with the earth, but with the heavens. The heavens are garnished. Sun, moon, and stars appear. We can see that we live in this dispensation. The first three have passed, the last two are still to come. During this time God occupies Himself only with the Church. The Church is a heavenly people. True, it is still on earth, but both its origin and its future are heavenly. In the sun we see the person of Christ, who has entered heaven and has set Himself at God's right hand. In the moon we have a picture of the Church, who receives all that she has and all that she shall be from Christ. In the stars we see the seed of Abraham in general. Both the Old Testament saints and the Church will have part in the first resurrection and the Lord Jesus Himself will soon bring them into heaven, into the Father's house. Then the heavens will have been garnished, and judgment will come over apostate Christendom. But out of this evening, God will cause a new day to rise. He will again begin to occupy Himself with the earth.

The fifth dispensation and the fifth day again bear the same characteristics. On the fifth day we see life coming in the sea and a higher form of life on earth. After the Church has been taken up, life will arise in the sea of nations. The faithful remnant of Israel will preach the gospel of the kingdom and during the Great Tribulation a large crowd that no one can number will be saved (Rev. 7:9-14). The remnant itself will become more acquainted with the thoughts of God, so that it will be a life from among the dead for Israel. It seems that the birds are a picture of this. Yet, the greater part of the world's population will not recognize what God is working in those days. The eternal gospel will be ignored and also this dispensation will end in judgment, namely the judgment over the nations that Christ Himself will execute (Mt. 25).

During the sixth dispensation the characteristics of the sixth day will be seen. The mark of that day is a still higher form of life on earth; all of creation is put under the reign of Man and His bride. It will be that glorious time of which the prophets have spoken again and again — the Millennium — of which also Revelation 20 speaks. But also this dispensation will end in judgment, but now the last judgment. After Satan has been loosed it becomes evident that even under the blessed reign of the Prince of Peace mankind has not learned anything, but that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually. They again will assemble under Satan's banner and then Christ will execute judgment over both the living and the dead. Satan and all who are judged are then cast into the lake of fire. Then, too, Israel will grow and blossom (Isa. 27:6) and the entire creation will be subject to Man — the last Adam — and His bride, Christ and the Church.

Finally comes the seventh day. This day is not a dispensation, for it is not a time span. It is God's rest. At the fall sin interrupted this rest, but it did not destroy it. In other words, that rest is still there and all believers who are in Christ, have already entered that rest in spirit. There remains a rest for the people of God. The great mark of the seventh day is that we do not read of an evening and morning — it is eternity! The day of God is eternal. It existed before the beginning of all things and will exist when the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and when God will have created new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The End

Outline for Bible Study (73)

147. Gethsemane. Judas Betrays The Lord. The Lord's Arrest. — Matthew 26:30-56; Mark 14:26-52; Luke 22:31-53; John 18:1-12.

Outline

1. Jesus' agony in Gethsemane Mt 26:36-46
2. Judas betrays the Lord Mt 26:47-50
3. Peter's audacity Mt 26:31-35
4. Peter draws his sword Mt 26:51-54
5. The disciples fled Mt 26:55-56

Explanation

1. The Lord and His disciples now cross the brook Kidron, entering the garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives. The three witnesses of His glory will also be the witnesses of His suffering. Now, as then, they sleep. Anticipating the dark hours, the Lord is deeply depressed. Satan wants to overwhelm Him with the fear of death. Jesus watched and prayed; never before had He been exposed to such attacks of darkness and depression. His disciples could not comfort Him (Ps. 69:20). His surrender to the Father in prayer is perfect (Heb. 5:7-8). Then the Lord went full of peace to His disciples, who soon would be tempted by Satan (1 Pet. 5:8).

2. Before the passover Judas had offered to betray the Lord to the chief priests. Accepting the morsel — normally given to the host's best friend — he came under Satan's power. When the Lord told him to go about his business, he went out to do his terrible deed. He knew where the Lord often spent some intimate moments with His disciples. What memories should this place have stirred in Judas' heart! Judas betrays his Master with the sign of love. Rather than rebuke, the Lord's words once more shows divine compassion. The band Judas brought is armed, expecting resistance; but Jesus went voluntarily forward, preventing His disciples from being taken. Two times the Lord asks: "Whom seek ye?" His answer: "I am He," declaring Himself to be Jehovah, causes the soldiers to fall to the ground. He could have fled, but He gave Himself over; it was the hour of darkness. His second answer shows His concern for His disciples. The Good Shepherd giving His life for the sheep (Gal. 1:4).

3. After supper, just before leaving the upper room, the Lord had told His disciples that all would be offended in Him: "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered" (Zech. 13:7). Peter, objecting to the Lord's remark, bragged that he would never be offended. The Lord then indicated how Peter would deny the Lord before dawn. Peter's reply: "Though I should die with Thee..." showed how he trusted his love more than the words of the Lord (Jer. 17:9; 1 Cor. 10:13).

4. In the garden, self-confident Peter first falls asleep, and then, in fleshly zeal, cuts off Malchus' ear. Jesus, however, knowing that all is in the hands of His Father, peacefully allows Himself to be led as a sheep to the slaughter (Isa. 50:6-10).

He, the prisoner, retains His power as Son of God and heals Malchus' ear, rebuking Peter. Why did He not call the angels to His aid? The Scripture had to be fulfilled so that salvation through His death might be accomplished.

5. The Lord appeals to the conscience of the band by pointing to their secretive way of taking Him, a thing they could have done by broad daylight in the temple. Then He surrenders to them, submitting Himself. Satan was allowed to use human beings as his tools to perpetrate every evil against the Son of God; it was the hour of the judgment over sin. The disciples offended by the Lord's meek surrender, are confronted with their own lack of power and flee.

Lesson

How weak is the flesh! Judas was an unregenerated man in whom the flesh had free reign. In Peter we see it active in one who is born again. There too, it produces no good.

148. The Lord Jesus before Annas and Caiaphas. Peter's Denial. Judas' End. — Matthew 26:57-75; 27:3-10; Mark 14:53-72; Luke 22:54-71; John 18:23-27

Outline

1. Jesus before the High Priest Mt 26:57-68
2. Peter's Denial Mt 26:69-75
3. Judas' End Mt. 27:3-10

Explanation

1. A first hearing took place before Annas who had been removed as high priest by the Romans, but who still had great influence (Jn. 18:12-14; 19-24). The Lord answers him, but shows that He does not recognize his authority. When an officer hits Him, He calmly corrects him. At a second hearing before Caiaphas, the whole council were together (The Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish tribunal headed by the high priest, had religious, civil, and criminal jurisdiction). Both hearings held during the night were illegal. They had, however, to prepare for the main hearing which they wanted to be held in the morning (Mt. 27:1; Mk. 15:1; Lk. 22:66-71). The judges should judge righteously (Dt. 16:18-20), but they had unrighteously decided on Jesus' death beforehand (Jn. 12:10; Mt. 26:59). Since they had no true accusation (Ps. 69:4), they resorted to false witnesses, but even their testimony did not agree (Dt. 17:6). Then, under adjuration, the Lord bore witness that He is the Messiah, the Son of God; and that the Jews would not see Him again in meek humbleness, but only as the Son of man appearing in glory to judge this earth (Dan. 7:13,14; Rev. 1:7). His words made His enemies all the more responsible, for they rejected this truth, proving that they were subjects of Satan, the father of the lies (Jn. 8:44-45).

They consider His testimony to be blasphemy, and use it as justification to condemn Him to death (Lev. 24:16). They say: He is a man and makes Himself God, however, the truth was: He is God, who made Himself Man (Phil. 2:5-8). After the adjuring they abused Him (Isa. 50:6,7). The third and only valid hearing is but a repetition of the previous one (Lk. 22:66-71). Here Jesus is formally sentenced to death and then led to Pilate, who had to confirm their judgment.

2. Peter's fall took place in the high priest's palace between the second and third hearing. The cause of Peter's fall was his self-confidence. The flesh is always powerless; but what a grievous experience for Peter! He lies and curses, referring to the Lord as "the man". Yet, the Lord remained faithful and remembered him. In Jesus' eyes Peter saw only love and grace, causing him to realize the seriousness of his deed. Peter's tears were proof of his true repentance and sorrow, but they could not remove his guilt; the Lord had to do that (2 Cor. 7:10a). His pride and self-confidence were broken. After his restoration He became a most blessed tool in the hand of His Lord (Jn. 21).

3. Judas' fall was due to covetousness, for he was a thief (Jn. 12:6; 1 Tim. 6:9,10). Judas is terrified when he sees that Jesus is condemned; he thought that the Lord would again simply walk away. Now he fears the consequences but has no remorse about the deed itself. His despair drives him to suicide (2 Cor. 7:10); it was God's judgment (Acts 1:18).

Though Judas gives a clear testimony of Jesus' innocence, they have no pity. Unscrupulously they had bought the betrayal; in fake piety they refuse to put the blood money into the temple treasury. They instead buy a worthless piece of land,

which the potter had used to extract clay, as a burying ground for strangers. Not just that field, but the whole world has become a "blood field," though the blood of Jesus speaks of better things than that of Abel.

Lesson

Peter's fall was serious, but Judas' end is terrible. The former is a warning to believers, the latter a terrible warning to all who know the grace of God, but fail to know their own weakness. Peter was upright but self-confident, not watchful; Judas was covetous, insincere, and unrepentant, lacking the fear of God. Just as the Lord's eye reached Peter's conscience, causing him to repent, so the Lord still watches over us.

To be cont'd