

**Jacob (1)****His experiences in Relation to the House of God**

—H. Bouter Jr.

God wants to reveal Himself to mankind. He wants to have fellowship with them. God is the God of Bethel, the house of God. There He dwells and reveals Himself to those who belong to Him. They come there to Him to worship Him. For knowing Him and His thoughts and all that He has accomplished leads to worship of Him who has so revealed Himself.

Yet, it often takes long before a believer reaches that place. The journey to Bethel can be a long one. We may even have been in Bethel, but have left that place again to go our own way. We may perhaps do so for a time, but only till God intervenes and brings us back to Bethel, the place where He dwells. That is what we see with Jacob. He comes to that place, but then he leaves it until God eventually brings him back to it. In Jacob we see the degree to which God troubles Himself to cause Jacob to know Him as the God of the house of God. Or, in other words, in Jacob we have the example of the work of God the Holy Spirit in bringing a believer to this point.

*The First Revelation at Bethel (Gen. 28)*

Jacob is fleeing from Esau. Yet, in grace God is occupied with him God makes Himself known to Jacob, encouraging and comforting him with His promises of blessing. In grace God reveals Himself. Jacob himself could not lay the least claim to the rich blessings God promises him.

What is the basis for this revelation of grace? What is the foundation of these blessings? How is it possible that a connection between heaven and earth exists, and that God reveals Himself? The answer to all these questions we find in the stone on which Jacob laid his tired head. It is a type of Christ. In Christ God and man meet each other. Christ is our resting place. Christ is the foundation of God's building, of the house of God. Christ is the basis for the connection between heaven and earth. Christ is the acknowledged centre of all things.

These verses have a deep spiritual, prophetic significance. Christ is the Stone upon which all rests, both now and in days to come. This the Lord affirms: "Verily, verily, I say to you, Henceforth you shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man" (Jn. 1:51). The Lord clearly alludes to it that Jacob's ladder will find its fulfillment in Him. Christ, as Son of man, will have dominion over all things and the angels will acknowledge His dominion. The ladder therefore points to the restoration of all things, when all dominion will be in the hands of Christ as Son of man. Then there will be harmony between heaven and earth, God's *will* will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Heaven and earth will be truly united by that glorious name.

To faith this is already so today; to faith Christ already takes that place. This we see in Ephesians 1: We acknowledge Him as Head over all things; we are united to Him as His body. To faith heaven is open and there is a link with Him who has been taken up into heaven until the time of the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21). Stephen is the clear proof of this: "But being full of the Holy Spirit, having fixed his eyes on heaven, he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, Lo, I behold the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56). That is the position of a believer. The Holy Spirit has joined him to heaven, to the glorified Lord. He belongs to Him who occupies there the place of glory at the right hand of the Father. The Holy Spirit has brought the believer to a place of free access to God: "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen 28:17).

Already on earth the believer has a place of communion with God, a place where he is connected with heaven and where God comes to reveal Himself to him. These are wonderful blessings! The basis for this is clearly not found in anything from man himself, but only in the Stone that is the foundation of the house of God. Christ is the Rock on which this house is built (Mt. 16:18). Since believers have been united with Him, the living Stone, they form together as living stones the house of God (1 Pet. 2:4-6). They have become alive to God through Jesus Christ. He, the Son of the living God, has shared His life with them, a life that has overcome the power of death. Now God can dwell in their midst, calling Himself their God.

This we see here in type with Jacob. He has found a resting place on a stone. Similarly, we as believers have found rest in Christ, the Stone. We sing of this rest: "*On Christ salvation rests secure.*" God Himself has found rest in Him. He looks with

delight on Him, on His Person and on His work, whereby He has been perfectly glorified. And God reveals Himself in Him, His beloved Son. He reveals Himself in Christ to people and He invites them to come to Him and to find rest in Him.

When we find rest in Him there is a link with heaven. Here we see how God reveals Himself in connection with this stone; as it were, a little bit of heaven was seen on earth. It is in God's heart to have fellowship with man on earth. He opens heaven to him and shows him all its treasures. Here Jacob's receiving the promise of the land speaks of all the eternal, heavenly blessings which are our portion in Christ (Eph. 1). God has opened this heavenly land for the believer today.

Sad to say, like Jacob, we do not always know how to value this revelation of God at its true worth. His faith does not reach the height of God's revelation. The result for him was terror and fear: "He was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place!" Jacob, looking at himself, saw that he did not measure up to Him who dwelt at this place. Then he begins to work, obligating himself with vows. This the natural man always does: he puts himself under law in an effort to please God.

Indeed, no one is suited to dwell in God's presence and to have a place in His house. That is only possible if we rest in Christ, when we realize that God Himself has made us fit for His presence. God now looks on us in Christ, and has clothed us with the acceptability of the Beloved (Eph. 1:6). This is the only basis on which we can dwell in His presence and on which we can have fellowship with Him. In ourselves there is nothing that is acceptable to Him.

Jacob puts himself under law. The house of God is not a pleasant place for him; the gate of heaven only strikes him with terror. Practical fellowship with God he delegates to a future day. He will only serve God after God has blessed him and kept him from harm on all his ways. Don't we often talk that way? We are quite willing to promise God that we will serve Him, but then He must first take care of our needs. First He must put this or that in order for us.

We think this way because we don't know the grace of God. Meanwhile, however, the flesh prevents us from serving God. We can only have true fellowship with God after we have learned to judge the flesh and identify ourselves with a Christ who has died. Only after we have learned to expect nothing from ourselves, like Jacob learned at Peniel, are we practically fit to meet the God of the house of God and to dwell in His presence. Then we come to know Him in the fullness of His grace as the great Giver who has given all He could give. Then too, we learn to take possession of the blessings of the land.

At this point in his history, however, Jacob has not reached there yet. He still expects all from himself and he goes his way in his own strength. Yet, we see him performing a special deed of appreciation that has a rich significance for us as well. "Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had made his pillow, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil on the top of it... And this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that Thou wilt give me I will without fail give the tenth to Thee" (vv. 18, 22).

Here, Jacob has not come to the point of building an altar; that we only find in Genesis 35. He has as yet no altar, a place of worship, but a pillar, a testimony, he has setup. Abram built an altar immediately when he came to Bethel, and at that altar he called on the name of the Lord. But Abram was a man of faith, walking on the high place of faith, not doubting God's promises. That is the great difference between Jacob and Abram. Jacob went his way in fleshly strength; through bitter experience he had to learn that the flesh is of no help. Abram walked by faith and faith has an altar, a place where one can call upon the name of the Lord.

Still, this pillar tells us much. First, it is the stone on which Jacob had rested. Our testimony, too, concerns the Person who has become our resting place. The Stone on which we have found rest is now the Sign we have set up as our testimony. In connection with this Stone, God has revealed Himself to us. Now in response we testify of this Stone.

Second, it is a testimony in the power of the Holy Spirit. The oil poured out over it speaks of this. The Spirit has come on earth to glorify Christ. He dwells in the Assembly, in the house of God, to spread the testimony concerning Christ here on earth. We see this in 1 Timothy 3. The testimony issuing from the house of God concerns the Person of Christ. God's revealing Himself in Him characterizes the testimony of the house where God the Holy Spirit has made His dwelling.

This pillar speaks therefore of the testimony that flows from the house of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Its central theme is Christ, in whom God has revealed Himself and through whom all God's plans will be fulfilled. Jacob says of the stone he has set up as testimony: "This stone... shall be God's house." How much more true this is of the Stone God has set up. God dwells in Him bodily (Col. 2:9). Christ spoke of His body as the true dwelling place of God (Jn. 2). With this Stone the Assembly is united so that she too is "a habitation of God." This Stone is the foundation of the Assembly and the great subject of its testimony. What a responsibility!

The significance of this first appearance of God in Bethel, we may perhaps summarize as follows:

- Christ is the Stone on which we rest.
- Christ is the Stone on which God looks down with delight.
- Christ is the point of meeting between God and man.
- Christ is the basis for God's revelation to man.
- Christ is the link between heaven and earth.
- Christ is the acknowledged centre of heaven and earth.
- Christ is the foundation of the house of God, the Assembly.
- Christ is the testimony that emanates from the house of God.

*To be cont'd*

## **The Prophecy of Micah (1)**

—*R. Been Sr.*

### *Introduction*

The door to understanding prophecy only then opens for a believer when the Holy Spirit has given him the key. Actually, this holds true for all of Scripture. Without this key even the most learned among men will never be able to enter into God's thoughts. This shows up when they try to explain God's Word. *The key to the understanding of Scripture is Christ.* Unless one applies each prophecy to Him, to His sufferings, to His glory, His might and majesty, to His appearing as Son of man, it will remain a closed book to the learned and to the unlearned alike (Isa. 29:11-12). This explains too why there are so often differences of opinion, even among Christians, about the explanation of this holy Book.

Prophecy, then, speaks of Christ. Especially the first prophets: Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah present to us the Person of Christ in a remarkable way. And the last prophets, Zechariah and Malachi, saw Him in the reality of His appearing. The full light broke when the last and greatest among the prophets, John the Baptist saw the Lord Jesus coming to him as the Lamb of God, as the Son of God, and the King of Israel.

Although the revelation of Jesus Christ is the central point of prophecy, there are other subjects too. The most important of these is certainly *God's government in this world.* Without the prophetic and historical books of the Old Testament we would be very poorly informed about this. These books show us God's ways in government towards His earthly people Israel and the other nations, both past and present. At every instant God made it known that He is a holy God who cannot bear unrighteousness but judges it. Yet, He calls men and kingdoms to repentance. All prophets present these things as being of prime importance.

Besides this, prophecy does not restrict itself to the past and present; *it also unveils the future.* It is very important that people see that God's ways in the past and the present always have proved to be unchangeable. Herein lies an indication of their unchangeableness in the future. To the degree wickedness in the world increases, God's judgments will become more clearly visible. They will reach their summit in the judgment over apostate Christendom; over the antichrist, the false messiah; over God's earthly people, the Jews; and over all the nations who have resisted the true King, Jesus Christ, and true Israel.

Yet, *the Lord does not judge for judgment's sake.* He wants those who are linked to Him to do good. All prophets teach therefore that these judgments will bring about a true restoration. Thereby a future remnant out of Israel and out of the nations will enter the blessings of the Christ's thousand-year kingdom of peace.

Generally speaking, we can distinguish two groups of old-testament prophets. First, those who were called during times when the normal relationship between God and His people still existed. Second, those who prophesied when this relationship was broken, which was after the two tribes had been carried into Babylonian captivity. The prophets Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah belonged to the first group. In them, for instance in Isaiah, we read that God had rejected His people (ch. 2:6), but the significance of this remark is similar to what Gideon said to the Angel of the Lord: "Now Jehovah has cast us off" (Judg. 6:13). It means: The Lord does no longer go with us in battle but has given us into the hand of our enemies. Actually this was no more than could be expected when Israel, which was by law under a conditional covenant, sinned against the Lord and left Him. Still, even when Israel was for a longer or shorter period given into the power of their enemies, it did not mean a break in the relationship between God and His people. Proof of this is found in Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Micah, and even in Jeremiah, who partly prophesied on the eve of the captivity.

After the carrying away of the two tribes into captivity the judgment of "Lo-ammi" (not My people) announced by Hosea had taken effect. The carrying away of the ten tribes had already done so in part, but strictly speaking, the carrying away of these tribes did not end the relationship between the Lord and His people *as a whole*. The people were still represented by the two tribes, by the kingdom in Judah, and by the presence of the temple in Jerusalem.

However, the relationship between God and His people Israel came to an end when:

- the two tribes had been carried away to Babylon,
- the kingdom of Judah had come to an end,
- Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed, and
- the government on earth had been given to the nations, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar, the golden head of the four world empires.

Yet, this was not forever. Later, in the distant future, God would restore this relationship with a remnant out of the twelve tribes of Israel that then will have humbly repented. This new relationship will be based on His grace through Christ. With that remnant the Lord will make a new covenant, a one-sided covenant. Once the "Lo-ammi" has become a definite fact, God no longer says, "My people." Though, when afterwards this expression is still used, it is always in reference to the people *in a future day* (Ezek. 36:28; 37:23,27; 38:14-16; Zech. 8:8; 13:9).

Beginning with the carrying into captivity of Judah, the service of the second group of prophets — Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, etc. — began.

Israel always had enemies that sought their demise, even during the times in which the Lord still spoke of Israel as My people, recognizing the relationship between Him and Israel. Yet, this relationship was sometimes very weakly or not at all acted upon on the part of the people. Then the Lord often used these enemies as disciplinary rods for Israel. *The greatest enemy was the Assyrian*. Regardless which kings ruled over Assyria, the prophets always presented this realm as a foreshadowing, a type, of the coming Assyrian realm. During the last days that realm will play a very important role. In fact, future Assyria will be a continuation of the historical Assyria which existed during the days of Israel's kings. For this reason such terms as "*the historical Assyrian*" and "*the prophetic Assyrian*" have been used both in writing and in speaking. Under *the historical Assyrian* we understand the Assyrian empire that existed during the reign of the ten- and two-tribe kingdoms of Israel. This realm finally led the first, the ten-tribe kingdom into captivity. Under the prophetic Assyrian we understand the realm that in a future day will appear again on the world-scene, and which will once again be Israel's great enemy. In the prophecies, the ruler over this realm is called the King of the North (Dan. 11).

In the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah, the historical Assyrian plays an important role, yet not the only one. In the days of Jeremiah and other prophets the supremacy of Assyria had already ended. However, *never has the sovereignty over the world been entrusted to the Assyrian*. That realm was plenty powerful, and the kings of Assyria have reigned for nearly nine hundred years. The Babylonian rule, the first world-empire, lasted for only eighty years. However, as long as Israel, the twelve tribes, had not yet been set aside by God, He did not allow Assyria to exist as a gentile world power. This changed, however, once the two tribes had been led away captive by Nebuchadnezzar. Then Babylon, that had first destroyed the power of Assyria, became a world power. *The Kingdoms of Israel did no longer exist then, neither that of the ten, nor that of the two tribes*.

In the time of the end, however, the prophetic Assyrian, the King of the North, will assert himself fiercely. In days past, the Lord used the historical Assyrian as a disciplinary rod for Israel. So He will again use the prophetic Assyrian, now to deal with most of the two tribes of Judah. Under the antichrist's leadership these will have completely fallen away from God into idolatry. During the reign of pious King Hezekiah, the historical Assyrian had not been able to conquer Jerusalem, although the land of Judah had been thoroughly plundered. In the last days, however, God will use the prophetic Assyrian as disciplinary rod for the Jews who have apostatized. Then they will conquer the city. After that the Assyrian will turn against the King of the South, Egypt, to conquer that land as well. While he is so occupied, he hears rumours that the armies of the then restored Roman Empire have left for Israel to assist and deliver their ally, the antichrist, the vice-regent of Israel. This causes the Assyrian to return to Israel, so that all armies will be assembled in Israel. Then the Son of man, appearing with power and great glory, will judge all these armies. Then the problems of the Middle-East, the possession of Israel, the heart of the earth, will be solved for good. Both the army of the King of the North, the prophetic Assyrian, as well as that of the restored Roman Empire, will be destroyed forever by the appearing of the Son of man. After this, the kingdom, the world's government of Christ will be established.

In the prophecy of Micah there is often mention of *the remnant*. Unless one realizes that there will be a remnant out of both the two and the ten tribes of Israel, many prophetic pronouncements will remain unsolved problems. One can hardly have an exaggerated idea of the enormous importance of the remnant in the coming days. All prophets, all psalms, and

many of the conversations of the Lord with His disciples, among which are the sermon on the mount and the prophecy of Matthew 24, refer to this remnant.

Israel in a day to come will be entirely made up of a remnant out of the two and the ten tribes. Therefore, the apostle Paul could say that all Israel — that is to say, out of all tribes — will be saved. They will enter into the blessing of Christ's kingdom (Rom. 11:26). The prophets and psalms, as well as the words of the Lord Jesus refer particularly to the remnant out of the *two* tribes. The ten tribes are not guilty of rejecting the Messiah, but the two are. The ten tribes were not even in Palestine at the time. Only the two tribes have rejected the Messiah, crucifying Him. Therefore Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in A.D. 70, and the Jews were scattered over the whole earth, now for nearly nineteen centuries. *(It is of interest to note that this article was originally written prior to 1970 as this remark shows. Many of the events that have taken place since, were unknown to the author, yet no event has rendered his comments outdated, to the contrary. Just think of Iraq! — The Editor)* The Jews who have in unbelief returned to Palestine will enter into troubles there as never seen before, and as will be seen never again. They will come totally under the influence of the devil, and as their king they will appoint the man of sin, the antichrist, who will cause the greater mass of the Jews to commit the most horrible form of idolatry. As a result of this, two-thirds of the two tribes will, according to the prophet Zechariah, be destroyed by the Lord's judgment.

The remnant from the two tribes, that is then one-third of the whole, will begin to take form when returning to the land. It will consist of the *"wise among the people [who] shall instruct the many"* (Dan. 11:33). These "wise ones" will have the same characteristics as the disciples who followed the Lord before the Church age. Then the Lord called all who heard Him, who accepted Him, children of wisdom (Mt. 11:19). This remnant will remain faithful to God and to the law of Moses, therefore it will be persecuted by the antichrist and their countrymen. This and the judgments that will come down during these days will purify the remnant. Their full conversion will come when they will see Him whom their nation has pierced (Zech. 12:10).

The awakening of this remnant will be accompanied by the remnant's *preaching of the gospel of the kingdom* in all cities and villages of Israel. In doing this they continue the mission of the seventy. This preaching will only end at the Lord's appearing (Lk. 10:1; Mt. 10:23). Their testimony will arouse the wrath and irritation of the antichrist and their countrymen. Therefore, the greater part of the remnant will flee after the antichrist sets up the abomination of desolation in the temple. They will realize that the end is near. They will find shelter with a nation (or nations) outside Israel (Rev. 12:14-16). Among this nation (or these nations), they will also preach the gospel of the kingdom. On the other hand, many of the remnant who have not fled will perish in the persecution. The part of the remnant that has fled will return to Israel. It will see its King and Saviour and humble itself most deeply. It will witness the destruction of all hostile armies, those of the Roman beast, of the antichrist, of the Assyrian; as well as of their own apostate countrymen.

Shortly after the establishment of Christ's kingdom, these faithful Jews will be united with *a remnant from the ten tribes which will be brought back to their country*. The great unbelieving mass of the ten tribes will never return to the country, but the remnant of it will. Both remnants will be united into one nation. With this one nation the Lord will renew a covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). All of them will be believing Israelites, all possessing new life from God. The Lord's temple service will be restored, and a prince out of David's house will reign as vice-regent.

*To be cont'd*

### **Great Questions !**

Do we walk by faith on the high place the revelation of God in Christ presents?

Are we in God's presence?

Do we know Him as the God of the house of God,  
or do we put ourselves under law,  
going our way in the strength of the flesh?

If so, we don't as yet understand anything of the God of Bethel.

*H. Bouter. Jr.*

**149. Jesus Before Pilate And Herod.** — Matthew 27:1,2,11-31; Mark 15:1-20; Luke 23:1-25; John. 18:28-29:16.

*Outline*

1. First hearing by Pilate Jn. 18:28-38.
2. Hearing and mocking by Herod Lk. 23:5-12.
3. Second hearing by Pilate; Barabbas Mt 27:15-25.
4. Jesus scourged and mocked Mt. 27:26-31
5. Pilate's last effort to release Jesus Jn. 19:8-16.

*Explanation*

1. The Jews condemned Jesus to death for blasphemy, because He had said that He was the Son of God, but they were not allowed to crucify one without Pilate's approval. Insisting on outward form, they refused to enter a Gentile's house during the feast of unleavened bread (Ex. 12:19). Yet, they did not shrink from killing the Son of God! Fearing that Pilate would not confirm their verdict of blasphemy, they said: "He perverts the nation, by forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a king." The first was untrue, for He had taught to pay to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's (Mt. 22:21).

When Pilate asked Jesus: "Art Thou the king of the Jews?" the Lord confirms this (1 Tim. 6:13). His kingdom was not of this world. He had come to testify of the truth. Pilate concluded: "I find no fault whatever in Him." When the Jews persist, Pilate seeks a way out by sending Him to Herod.

2. Herod, the unscrupulous murderer of John the Baptist, finally can satisfy his curiosity about the Lord. Because the Lord answered him nothing, Herod showed Him his contempt and scorn. He puts a splendid white robe on Him, normally worn by Roman dignitaries. Thereby he made it look as if the Lord was looking for the Jewish crown. Herod felt honored by Pilate, and from that time on they became friends.

3. Now Pilate is faced again with the Lord. He has a bad conscience on account of his past cruel treatment of the Jews. He fears that his enemies may use the occasion to accuse him before Caesar. In a futile attempt to let Jesus go free, he places Him next to Barabbas (son of the father). What a contrast! The people have a choice between the murderer, the "son of the father," whose father is the devil, and Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father in heaven. Contrary to Pilate's hope, the people, set on by the chief priests and scribes, choose Barabbas. The message of Pilate's wife, not to have anything to do with this righteous Man, stirs his conscience again. Therefore he infers that He cannot righteously condemn Jesus, but the people call out: "His blood be upon us and on our children." They demand His crucifixion.

4. Then Pilate resorts to having Jesus scourged — the bare back beaten with straps, having sharp metal objects at their ends — and mocked by the soldiers as king of the Jews. They put a scarlet cloak on Him, a crown of thorns on His head and a reed as scepter in His hand. Him, whom God will crown with a crown of gold on His head (Ps. 21:3) and for whom all on earth shall bow down (Ps. 72:11) is here crowned with thorns and mockingly worshipped. Then, hoping to arouse their pity, Pilate again presents Jesus to the people with the words: "Behold the Man!" Yet, only one thought prevailed: "Crucify, crucify Him!" To his: "I find no fault in Him," the Jews reply with the original accusation: "He made Himself Son of God!"

5. When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid. Contemplating the quiet submissiveness of the Lord, His silence, His suffering without complaining, His innocence the message of his wife, who had dreamed of Jesus, it all pointed to it that he was dealing with a very special person, who might well be the Son of God. When the people see his hesitancy to condemn Jesus, they shout: "If thou releasest this Man, thou art not a friend to Caesar." This decides the question for Pilate and he delivers Jesus to be crucified with the words: "Behold, your King!" To this the chief priests and the people respond: "We have no king but Caesar."

*Lesson*

Outward religion always blinds and leads to darkness. It is not just without value to have a religion consisting only out of forms, it also drives to fanatic actions as can be seen in so many places in this world.

Since Pilate had no fear of God, he was terrified by men! This will always be the case. If we do not fear God we are very sensitive to what others may say. Conversely, if we fear God we need not fear the thoughts of others.

"His blood be on us and on our children!" This curse rests still on Israel, only when the Lord comes in glory, it shall be taken away (Ps. 51:14). Thorns are a token of the curse which man has brought on earth (Gen. 3:17-18).

**150. The Crucifixion And The Seven Words From The Cross.** — Matthew 27:32-54; Mark 15:21-39; Luke 23:26-47; John 19:17-37.

### *Outline*

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|----|---|-----------------|
| 1. | On the way to Calvary                     | Lk. 23:26-28,31 |
| 2. | The crucifixion                           | Jn. 19:19-24    |
| a. | Father forgive them...                    | Lk 23:34        |
| b. | Woman behold thy son...behold thy mother  | Jn. 19:25-27    |
| c. | Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise   | Lk. 23:39-42    |
| d. | Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani                | Mt. 27:45-46    |
| e. | I thirst                                  | Jn. 19:28,29    |
| f. | It is finished                            | Jn. 19:30       |
| g. | Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit | Lk. 23:46       |
| 3. | The following events                      | Mt. 27:51-54    |

### *Explanation*

1. The way to Calvary has been very painful to the Lord: in the previous night He had no sleep and probably no food, He was scourged, and had to bear the heavy cross. The soldiers forced Simon, a Cyrenian, to bear His cross. Many women, weeping compassionately, followed Him. The Lord announced to them the destruction of Jerusalem and the coming tribulation. At the destruction of Jerusalem two thousand Jews were crucified.

2. Among the Jews the death penalty was executed by stoning; among the Romans by means of crucifixion. This was the most painful and most degrading death. A free Roman was not to be crucified, but to be beheaded. The Holy One, who knew no sin, received a place between two criminals (Isa. 53:12).

a) From the Lord's lips comes no cry, no accusation, no threat (1 Pet. 2:23), only the prayer for His enemies: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Isa. 53:12). Yet, more painful are the mockeries (Ps. 22:6-8): "He trusted upon God; let Him save Him now if He will have Him, He saved others, Himself He cannot save." Pilate meant the title over the cross as scorn for the Jews, yet it testified of the Lord's worthiness, for He was truly the King of the Jews. It announced to the world, why the Jews would be so long without a king.

b) Though suffering, the Lord still shows concern for the ones He loves. In the care for His mother, He is an example for all children (Ex. 20:12). Mary, who was probably widowed, lived from then on in John's house.

c) The word of the thief refreshes the Lord. In repentance he turns to the Lord. All he could still dispose of — his heart and tongue — he gave to the Lord. In faith he acknowledges the crucified One as King of Israel and is saved at the eleventh hour. The Lord's promises assure him of his salvation.

d) The fourth word from the cross expresses the Lord's deepest suffering. Forsaken by God in the three hours of darkness (Ps. 22:1-5; Isa. 53:10), He became a curse in our stead so we could be accepted (Gal. 3:13). He was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21; Ps. 22:14-15; 42:7). Over Him came darkness, judgment; for us the light of grace rose. God loves the sinner, but hates sin. How terrible shall the judgment be for all who have no forgiveness! (2 Cor. 5:11,20).

e) Jesus' suffering has ended, but Psalms 69:21 has still to be fulfilled. The Lord, wanting to drink the cup of suffering in His full conscience, had refused a drink earlier. Now, according to God's counsel, He cries for thirst.

f) The work of redemption having been finished, the Lord cries, "It is finished." God was perfectly glorified (Jn. 17:4).

g) The Lord did not die from exhaustion but laid down His life by delivering up His spirit to the Father (Jn. 10:17-18; Heb. 2:14-15; Col. 1:19-22).

3. The rent veil shows that Jesus' blood has opened the way into God's presence. In the Old Testament God was inside, man outside. Now believers can approach God with a free conscience, God blessedly revealing Himself to them; they are redeemed and reconciled to God (Heb. 9:6-8; 10:19,22).

The earthquake means that the Lord on the basis of His death shall put away the old earth and world and create a new earth and a new heaven.

Many saints arose, because Jesus' death had broken the bonds of death and the power of Satan. The saints "appeared" means that they received a body for that purpose only (cf. Lk. 9:30-31).

Jewish rituals had now ended (Heb. 9:11). The power of death and Satan had been destroyed, a door of salvation has been opened to the Gentiles. The centurion, a Gentile, recognized Jesus as the Son of God (Jn. 10:16; 12:32).

### *Lesson*

The Lord referred to Himself as the green wood and to the Jewish nation as the dry wood, for they were without life from God and, therefore, without fruit and ready for the judgment.

The Lord's thirst was not only physical, He also thirsted for our salvation. After the Lord cried, "It is finished," there was nothing left for man to do about his salvation, the Lord had done it all (Heb. 0:14; Isa. 53:4-5; Rom. 3:24-26). All a person must do is repent and believe that Christ died to pay for his or her sins.

*To be cont'd*

## **The Service of our High Priest (2)**

—H. L. Heijkoop

Travelling a road we do not know, we need a guide who must know the entire route if he is to guide. The Lord Jesus has gone our road before. The ark went a three-day's journey ahead of Israel; it departed ahead of them (Num. 10:33). Since the Lord Jesus has gone before, He can be our Guide on our way. He knows the road intimately, its danger points and what is needed to overcome them, so that we may reach the goal He reached. He is "the Leader and *Completer* of faith" (Heb. 12:2) who set out on our road and walked it to the end. On the road of faith one pays attention to the things that are invisible, like Moses, who saw: "Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). On it, the eye is focused on that which cannot be seen.

How can one find the strength to walk that road? By seeing Him who is invisible. Just think of Rebecca on her way to Isaac (Gen. 24). If she had not thought of Isaac, if her heart had not been set on him, if she had not been sure that she would end up with Isaac to become his wife, what a terrible trip would she have had! She had left her parents and her friends. She had let go of everything, giving it up. She had nothing she could call her own. Even the clothes she wore were not her own, for she wore the clothes the servant had given her. The ornaments she wore were not her own; the servant had also given these to her. Now she travelled through the wilderness. How poor would her life have been had she not firmly believed, and longed for it too, that she was destined for Isaac.

How foolish must a believer's life seem in the eye of an unbeliever! Often you hear: "On Sunday they go two or even three times to church. They sit there, listen to a sermon and for the rest they have nothing. Poor people!" Well, one can understand this, for the outsider does not see what is invisible. They don't see Him! In Hebrews 2:9 we read: "We see Jesus." That alone gives us strength to remain on our feet, to walk the road, and to persevere. "Who, in view of the joy lying before Him, endured the cross, having despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

How difficult it would be for us if we did not know what awaits us when the Lord comes and we will be with Him. Paul says, "If indeed those that are dead are not raised... we are the most miserable of all men" (1 Cor. 15:15,19), for then our journey would not end with the Lord, and we would have nothing! Why should we not enjoy life the way unbelievers do if with death all is over? Why endure persecution and scoffing; why not try to take in all we like? We know, however, that



the Lord Jesus saw the joy before Him. So did Moses, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Why? Because he saw Him, the Lord Jesus! We too see the Lord Jesus with the eye of faith (Heb. 2) and because we know what the end will be, we can be pilgrims. This is the only strength, the only thing that can cause us to persevere until the end: to see Him, and to know that our entire life is focused upon Him, upon His glory. Our heart filled with Him, looking for the day when we will have reached our goal and be with Him in His house, in the Father's house, to see Him as He is, so we can go our way here with perseverance.

Here in Hebrews 7 we also read about Him. He has gone through all the dangers, and knows what we have to endure. He knows all by experience. He went this way so that He might know it all by experience. Now He can also sympathize with us and help us on the way. Isn't this infinite love? Yes, the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross is infinitely great. How will we ever know what price He paid there? And will we ever know what it cost Him to live for 33 years on earth? He did this with the sole purpose to be able to help us and have communion with us during our time on earth! Do we know what He suffered then? Think of how He was tempted for 40 days and how, after He had not eaten for forty days, Satan told Him to make bread out of stones. Would that have been sin? Was He not allowed to make bread out of stones? Couldn't He feed 5000 men with five loaves? He could! He didn't *need* to suffer hunger, for men hunger and thirst as a result of sin. He *wanted* to suffer hunger to know what it is for us to have hunger. He had no sin, and therefore did not need to bear its consequences.

It is also the result of sin that men become tired. Earlier, in Eden that had not been so. Yet, going through Samaria, He became tired. He suffered with us, not just because He came on earth to live in such surroundings, but because He also took voluntarily those things upon Himself, that we in our condition must bear as result of sin. All this, He did because He loved us and wanted to have complete communion with us. We might think: He is God and knows all things. True, yet, how beautiful: He became Man, not just *to die* for us on the cross. Yes, that He could only do by becoming Man, but He also became Man *to have communion* with us, to be able to enter into our feelings, to know what stirs our hearts. He wanted to know what we suffer and what our feelings experience in all circumstances. Therefore He lived 33 years on earth suffering. What a wondrous comfort in all circumstances in our lives! Remember this: He knows by experience what it is.

On November 20, 1942 I was brought into a concentration camp. The next morning we saw a Jew being beaten to death. A believer, who had been brought into the camp when I was, then said to me, "That is how they treated the Lord Jesus. That is how they beat Him!" They scourged Him, yet He endured it. Now He can understand us in all circumstances. How comforting to know then that the Lord Jesus knows what it is and feels with us through experience. This is always true. Standing at a grave it is good to know: The Lord Jesus knows by experience what stirs my heart, for He Himself stood there. When one cries He knows what it is, for He too wept. When one hurts, He knows, for He too suffered pain. He was scourged being crucified. How terrible must the pain have been when the nails pierced His hands and feet. He took it all upon Himself, He endured it all.

Did the Lord have to die like this to do the work of atonement? Perhaps it was so He would understand what pain is and be able to sympathize with us in all our pain. Yes, it is a blessing to know that the Lord went for me to the cross. Yet, how comforting the thought: because He loved me and wanted to feel with me in all circumstances I could possibly enter, He experienced them Himself. Therefore He can understand me and comfort my heart with His sympathy. Besides, He also can help me and take care that the temptation will not be too great, but that I receive grace for help at the right moment. "For, in that Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to help those that are being tempted," and, "Since therefore the children partake of blood and flesh, He also, in like manner, took part in the same," and also that it became Him, "in bringing many sons to glory, to make perfect the Leader of their salvation through sufferings" (Heb. 2:18,14,10).

How this changes our difficulties! We see them from a different perspective! What a change when we received the Lord Jesus as our Saviour! "But we see Jesus, who was made some little inferior to angels on account of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; so that by the grace of God He should taste death for every thing" (v. 9). When we see Him so, don't we long to see even more of Him? We will not only see Him as *the Lamb, standing as slain* (Rev. 4 & 5), but also in the way the faithful remnant will see Him with all the results of His life on earth. When we meet Him there, we will see Him as He is, that is to say: we will see Him in the love that lived in His heart for us when He experienced all these things. Then we will acknowledge this love in His heart. The love that made Him ready to pay the price to make us blessed. He not only wanted to make us happy for all eternity, He also wanted to help us, and make us happy here on earth.

He wants to assure us too that all who believe on Him will also reach the goal. The sons of Korah said, "Each one will appear before God in Zion" (Ps. 84:7). We, who know the Lord Jesus, may say this of ourselves too. We do not have to stare at our weaknesses and utter incompetence to keep ourselves. We must look on Him, saying, "Lord Jesus, Thou *hast* made all things well! Thou Lord Jesus *wilt* make all things well! *Thou* Lord Jesus wilt take care that we will arrive safely! Yes, *Thou* wilt lead us into the Father's house! *Thou* wilt bring us to the place Thou hast prepared for us!

**Stephen**

—Acts 7:55-60

Two facts distinguish Christianity from all that existed before: A Man is glorified in heaven, and God dwells in people on earth.

Once we understand the glory of these two facts, they will greatly influence our hearts and lives. They were unknown before *redemption* was accomplished and the *Redeemer* had taken His place at the right hand of the Majesty on high. For the first time a Man was seen there sitting on the throne.

Initially the enemy seemed to have conquered when the first man was driven from Eden. Yet, the second Man entered triumphantly into heaven and set Himself on the eternal throne of God. From this first fact results the Holy Spirit's indwelling of men. The Old Testament believers knew neither fact. What could Abraham, or any other saints in their days, have known about a glorified Man in heaven? Absolutely nothing! For God, who dwelt among His people in the tabernacle, had not yet revealed Himself in the flesh. No, never had there been a man on God's throne before the Lord Jesus took His place there. Before He was glorified in heaven, the Spirit of God could not come to earth and take up His abode in men. "For the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified" (Jn. 7:39). "For if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go I will send him to you" (Jn. 16:7).

These two verses show these facts to be linked inseparably, and the second to be dependent upon the first. Their strength and influence on believers are seen in Acts 7. Stephen is a shining example of today's believers. Most of the chapter describes the history of Israel, from Abraham's call till the crucifixion of our Saviour. Stephen concludes his discourse with a serious admonition to the consciences of his listeners, who revealed their terrible wickedness and wrath against him: "Hearing these things they were cut to the heart, and gnashed their teeth against him" (v. 54). These men, leaders of the nation, were the shepherds of their religion, a religion at enmity with Christianity. It was a picture of a religion without God and without Christ. In contrast, Stephen displayed a picture of true Christianity. *They* were full of religious wrath; *he* was full of the Holy Spirit. *They* gnashed their teeth; *his* face was like the face of an angel. What contrasts! However, when he, full of the Holy Spirit, fixed his eye on heaven, he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand. And so he testified: "Lo, I behold the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God" (v. 56).

We see the two great facts realized in a man with the same passions we have. Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked unhindered at the glorified Man in heaven. That is the right attitude of the Christian. A Christian should be a person full of the Holy Spirit, looking into heaven with the eye of faith. Paul writes this as a charge to the believers at Colosse (3:1). A Christian who does this is occupied with a glorified Christ. We cannot apply a lower standard, although we, too, fall short in its realization. It is a high standard and we must confess that we seldom reach it, but it is a divine standard, and a heart devoted to God will not be satisfied with a lower one.

It is the Christian's privilege to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to direct his gaze at the glorified Man in heaven. There is no reason why this would be impossible. Redemption has been accomplished; sin put away; grace reigns through righteousness. A Man sits on God's throne and the Holy Spirit has come on earth taking up residence *in each believer personally* as well as in the Assembly. This Holy Spirit is the One who empowers the believer with strength (Eph. 3:16). Doubtless there will be those who are Christians in name only; they will consider these to be foolish considerations or cold theories, but these are *principles* of great practical significance and of strong, far-reaching influence as we saw with Stephen.

The Object on which he had fixed his whole mind had a great effect on Stephen. He finds himself under most terrible circumstances. His enemies attack him like roaring lions; stones thrown at him hit his head and wound him. Death in its fearfulness stares him in the face, but he is in no way controlled by these conditions; he sees only heavenly things. Filled with the Spirit he sees nothing but heaven and the Lord Jesus. Earth rejects him the way they have rejected his Lord, but heaven opens itself to him and, looking into heaven, he catches rays of divine glory and reflects them to those who surround him. Not only was he lifted above all that surrounded him, he was also able to reveal the grace and goodness of the Lord Jesus to his murderers. He is the example of which Paul writes: "We all, looking on the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

In Stephen we see this realized in a marvelous way. The highest expression of heavenly Christianity stands over against the deadly revelation of religious enmity. "They cried out with a loud voice, and held their ears, and rushed upon him with one accord; and having cast him out of the city, they... stoned Stephen, praying, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And kneeling down, he cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (vv. 57-60).

His was true conformity to Christ. Following his Lord's example, Stephen prayed for his murderers. Instead of being occupied with his own suffering, he thinks of others and prays for them. For himself all was in order. His eyes were directed on the glory he was about to enter, and his face reflected it. Through the Holy Spirit's power he had been able to follow his Master in spending the last moments of his life praying for his enemies. After that he had nothing to do but to fall asleep, to close his eyes in face of death and sin and to open them again in the presence of the Lord in a realm of eternal joy.

As Christians we may, full of the Holy Spirit, turn our eyes from self and our circumstances to focus them continuously toward heaven, occupying ourselves with the glorified Man above. As a glorious result we will be changed into the image of Him upon whom we look. It is certainly not sufficient to speak of this glory: we must radiate it. This is how it was with Stephen, and so it must be with us. May our hearts eagerly desire to display the image of our Lord always.