

The Prophecy of Micah (2)

—R. Been Sr.

Chapter 1

"The word of Jehovah that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, [and] Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem" (v. 1).

The prophet served during the reign of three kings of Judah: Jotham and Ahaz, who each reigned 16 years, and Hezekiah, who reigned 29 years. We do not know if Micah prophesied during the entire reigns of Jotham and Hezekiah, but we may safely assume that his service lasted about half a century.

Jotham did what was right in the sight of the Lord. In this book, however, the characteristics of the reign of Ahaz and Hezekiah come especially to the fore.

Ahaz's reign represents the decline and ruin of Judah. Then, all was corruption, trespass, and apostasy. Ahaz followed the abominable service of Moloch and caused his own son to go through the fire. He replaced the brazen altar of the Lord in the temple court by an altar that he had seen in Damascus. Thus he despised the Lord's service (2 Ki. 16:3,10-15).

When Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the king of the ten-tribe nation, came together against Judah, the Lord, in His mercy towards Judah still wanted to help Ahaz. But Ahaz declined the Lord's help by saying that He did not want to "tempt" the Lord. He trusted the king of Assyria more than God. He robbed the temple to send a gift to the Assyrian.

By contrast, Hezekiah pursued a true reformation throughout Judah. In the name of the Lord, he resisted the rule of Sennacherib, the Assyrian, and thus saved Jerusalem (Isa. 36-39).

About the kings mentioned in verse 1, one could say that Jotham displays *the blessed position of Judah as it was in the past*; Ahaz pictures *the future apostasy during the last days*; and Hezekiah depicts *the restoration of a remnant*. Ahaz, the picture of the terrible apostasy in the end times under the Antichrist, is followed by Hezekiah, representing the faithful remnant in the last days. The feelings of this remnant are so beautifully expressed in Hezekiah's song of praise and thanksgiving (Isa. 38:9-20). When all seems to be lost, the remnant will resist the enemies by trusting only upon God.

These three kings actually portray the whole contents of Micah's prophecy. For, although according to verse 1 the word of the Lord has both Samaria (the ten-tribe nation) and Jerusalem (the two-tribe nation) in view, yet Jerusalem occupies the most important place in this prophecy.

With the attack of the Assyrian the judgment of the Lord had come over the ten tribes and their capital Samaria. It also came over the territory of Judah, but its capital, Jerusalem, was spared. Jerusalem will not be spared, however, from the judgment in the end time. The historic Assyrian had not succeeded in conquering Jerusalem. The Angel of the Lord slew in one night 185,000 men of its armies. In the end time, however, the prophetic Assyrian will conquer Jerusalem and plunder it (Zech. 14:2). Shortly afterwards, however, the city shall be set free and the entire military might of the Assyrian will be eradicated by the appearance of the Son of man.

About a hundred years later, when Jeremiah prophesied against Jerusalem, the words of Micah were still remembered. Then priests and false prophets had laid hold of Jeremiah and wanted to kill him. Throughout the ages the true servants of the Lord have been persecuted, especially by priests and evil leaders, as in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ. God saved Jeremiah by some who reminded the others of the Morasthite Micah of earlier days. He, too, had said that Zion would be ploughed like a field and that Jerusalem would become a ruinous heap. Yet, then no one had laid hold of Micah. Why then would the priests and false prophets now lay hold of Jeremiah? Thus the Lord saved Jeremiah by the memory of what Micah had said a hundred years earlier. After so many years Jerusalem had still not forgotten it. Killing Jeremiah would have inferred a condemnation of king Hezekiah who was generally considered the most faithful of Judah's kings.

"Hear, ye peoples, all of you; hearken, O earth, and all that is therein: and let the Lord Jehovah be witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple! For behold, Jehovah cometh forth out of His place, and will come down, and tread upon the

high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be melted under Him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, as waters poured down a steep place" (vv. 2-4).

These verses show that the judgment is a result of the indignation of the Lord over His people. Although the nations are used as disciplinary rods for Israel, the nations will in turn also be judged. All nations are called to listen; the whole earth with all its people must pay attention. The Lord testified against all nations and this testimony went forth from His holy temple that He had not yet forsaken.

Micah 1:2 has some resemblance to Isaiah 1:2. In this last verse, however, also *the heavens* are called to hear. In Isaiah the subject is the unrighteousness of *Israel*; in Micah *Israel and the nations* are judged. In Isaiah the heavens are called as witness against Israel; in Micah the judgment reaches much further. The supreme Judge will descend from heaven for a terrible, all-encompassing judgment. The "mountains," symbol of all earthly powers, melt before Him. The imagery used here signifies *a future general judgment over Israel and other nations*. Micah does not mention here that remnants of Israel and many nations will be spared.

"For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. Whence is the transgression of Jacob? is it not [from] Samaria? And whence are the high places of Judah? are they not [from] Jerusalem?" (v. 5).

The sins of His people kindled the wrath of God. He punishes them by means of other nations who, however, will be judged not only for their own sins, but also for the way in which they have executed the punishment over Israel.

The term "Jacob" stands for the entire nation of Israel with Judah at its head. The trespass of Israel, the entire nation, did begin in Samaria, the capital of the ten tribes. There the official idol service was introduced. After the rift into ten and two tribes, Judah showed its disapproval, yet it could not say that it had nothing to do with the idolatry found among the ten tribes. God held the entire nation responsible for this sin although the separation — which was in itself also a result of sin — had been officially consummated. As far as the judgment over the idolatry is concerned, God naturally made a distinction. Samaria has been severely punished for it.

The same holds true in our days. All God's children are responsible for the sin and decline within the church. No believer can rightfully distance himself from what has taken place, and still takes place, in the church, God's house on earth today. It is impossible to build again what has been destroyed. Humbling before God is the least that is fitted and necessary.

If Judah would put its hand in its own bosom, would it then prove to be less guilty? The expression: *"the high places of Judah"* is a very clear indication of idolatry. This was all the more serious because Jerusalem was the privileged city, the seat of God's government, the place where the worship service of the Lord was held.

"Therefore will I make Samaria as a heap of the field, as plantings of a vineyard; and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will lay bare the foundations thereof. And all her graven images shall be beaten to pieces, and all her harlot-gifts shall be burned with fire, and all her idols will I make a desolation; for of the hire of a harlot hath she gathered [them], and to a harlot's hire shall they return" (vv. 6-7).

Idolatry is often called adultery. "Harlots' hire" is therefore "idols' wages." The judgment over Samaria is announced first, because it would be executed first. Amos had already foretold this judgment over Samaria (Am. 3:11). Later Micah announces an identical judgment over Judah (3:12; Jer. 26:18).

"For this will I lament, and I will howl; I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the jackals, and mourning like the ostriches. For her wounds are incurable; for it is come even unto Judah, it reacheth unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem" (vv. 8-9).

To the end of verse 7 the prophet is the voice of the Lord to the people, but in verses 8-9 he is the voice of those people who still have a notion of the sins of the nation as a whole and of the terribleness of the coming judgment. Israel as a whole was void of the insight and sorrow found with the believers in their midst who were weighed down under the godlessness and idolatry of Israel.

Isn't it the same in our days? Who considers that God will judge Christendom on account of the unrighteousness that prevails in it? It is according to God's thoughts that at least the believers realize this, just as Micah did. When they humble

themselves over the decay in the church, they will also see that the wickedness of the world has nearly reached its summit and that the judgment of God over it is righteous.

For Israel, the ten-tribe nation, the disasters were deadly and the wounds incurable. For *Judah*, however, the judgment, the plague would *come to a halt in front of the gate of Jerusalem*.

The invasion announced by Micah is that of Sennacherib, king of Assyria. Isaiah mentions the same invasion (Isa. 36-38), although their presentations differ. According to Isaiah, the great attack upon Jerusalem took place *through the territory of the tribe of Benjamin*. Isaiah sums up the cities in Benjamin that were conquered and occupied by the Assyrian (Isa. 10:28-34). The last city he mentions is Nob, where once, upon the command of king Saul, a bloodbath had been created by the Edomite Doeg when he slew there among others 85 priests (1 Sam. 22:6-23). At Nob one could see Jerusalem. The Assyrian laid siege to this city and during this siege spread himself over *all the flat countryside to the southwest of Jerusalem*. Micah mentions the cities in this region. The difference in presentation then between Isaiah and Micah is this: Isaiah paints the advance of the Assyrian *through the territory of Benjamin up to Jerusalem*, whereas Micah speaks only of the conquering of the cities *to the southwest of Jerusalem during the siege of this city*, which was still spared at that time. The military might of Assyria was slain by an angel of the Lord, and the Assyrian returned to his country.

To be cont'd

Jacob (2)

His Experiences in Relation to the House of God

—H. Bouter Jr.

The first call to return (Gen. 31)

For many years Jacob was far from Bethel, the place of God's house, where God revealed Himself to him. It is clear that he did not long to return there. We see here that God takes the initiative and by means of circumstance forces Jacob to return there. With God there was the desire for fellowship with Jacob. What grace!

It is ever the same. We see it already with Adam and Eve after they had departed from God. They hide from God, but He seeks them out. He desires fellowship with mankind and He Himself prepares a righteous basis for it in the sacrifice that He brings. God can have fellowship with mankind on the basis of the sacrifice. From man's side, his recognition of this shows itself when he builds an altar and sacrifices on it.

Here, however, Jacob is not yet this far. He must first go back, back to the place where God made Himself first known to him. God reminds Jacob of that place and what he did there: "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, where thou vowedst a vow to Me. Now arise, depart out of this land, and return to the land of thy kindred" (v. 13). It is not only God's desire to have fellowship with man; He even has a right to it. He has a claim on the praise and worship of His creature. This we see here. God reminds Jacob of what he owes God. God is a jealous God.

Mahanaim (Gen. 32)

Here we see how God in His great grace encourages Jacob on his return journey to Bethel. We read here: "And Jacob went on his way; and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is the camp of God. And he called the name of that place Mahanaim" (vv. 1-2). Are not the angels ministering spirits, sent out for those who will inherit salvation? That is what the apostle says in Hebrews 1. Here we have an example of this.

Another example of it we have in 2 Kings 6. There Elisha prays that God may open the eyes of his servant so that he may see this serving task of the angels. "And he answered, Fear not, for they that are with us are more than they that are with them. And Elisha prayed and said, Jehovah, I pray Thee, open his eyes that he may see. And Jehovah opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (vv. 16-17).

Perhaps we may say that here God opens Jacob's eyes for the presence of the angels. All means are at God's disposal, all angels too, those mighty heroes doing His Word. The wonderful thing of it all is that God uses them to serve His own, to encourage them, to cause them to walk in His ways, to keep them in His presence or to bring them there. It is God's desire

that His children take possession of the land of heavenly blessings already at this time. In that land we find Bethel, the place of God's house, where God reveals Himself to His children. God wants His children to arrive at that place even now.

Peniel

To come there, however, we must be in spiritual conformity to that place. That we see here in Jacob's history. We cannot just like that enter God's presence. We must meet certain requirements. In the first place we must learn to judge our flesh, for that is the significance of Peniel. Secondly, we must be pure in our connections; we must keep ourselves pure from all impurity. This we see in Genesis 35.

Here, Jacob reaches a turning point in his history. Peniel is the place where the old Jacob finds his end and where he begins a new life. Peniel means, "God's face." Jacob came to stand eye to eye with God. He had to learn to lose himself and to begin anew as a dependent child of God. The old must pass away... all things had to become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

We can compare Jacob's struggle with the one we find in Romans 7. There we see someone, who, though having new life, is fighting in his own strength against the sin that dwells within him. Yes, he is a believer; his inner man delights in the law of God (v. 22). Yet, he is not set free from the power of sin. He still has not learned to make himself in faith one with Christ who has died. There is the solution of his entire problem. The death of Christ made before God an end to my old life in the flesh. Sin in the flesh has been judged in His death (Rom. 8:3). Through faith I may say that I have been crucified with Him, I died and was buried with Him (Rom. 6:6,8,4).

That is a thing I can only accept in faith. My experience is in direct conflict with it. This we see in Romans 7. Yet, through all my failed efforts to serve God in my own strength and to improve my flesh, I learn in a practical way that my old man is beyond improvement. Having come to the summit of my inward struggle, I no longer seek help within myself. I do no longer expect anything from myself, but I cry out: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24).

This then is the turning point. Salvation is not far. The answer follows immediately: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:25). Now I have in faith accepted that I am not only saved from my sins, but that through His death I am saved from the power of my old "I." It is still there (v. 26), but it has no longer power over me. I am one with Christ in His death and now I live out of the strength of His resurrection: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and of death" (Rom. 8:2). Now I may walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). I walk according to the Spirit and by the Spirit (Rom. 8). This means a totally new life in the power of the resurrection of Christ.

In picture form we see this with Jacob. He approaches a new day: "As he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he limped upon his thigh" (Gen. 32:31). This way I begin a new life in the light of the risen Lord. Jacob's limp says of it that within myself I was totally without strength and that sin still dwells within me. Yet, sin no longer reigns over me, it is a conquered enemy because it has been destroyed in the death of Christ.

To understand the secret of Jacob's victory, we need also to read what Hosea says about it: "Yea, he wrestled with the Angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto Him: he found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke with us" (Hos. 12:4). Here the victory is directly linked to the fact that he wept and made supplication to Him. Jacob could not conquer in his own strength. To the contrary! God touched him exactly in the seat of his strength, the joint of his thigh. That brings about a total change. The stubborn resistance of Jacob makes room for an intense clamping himself tightly unto God. As a child Jacob hangs on to Him. He cries and pleads. Thereby he conquers and receives the blessing that he could not grasp with all his struggles.

God was occupied with Jacob. He wanted to break his self-will and bring him back from his own ways. Jacob, however, resists to the utmost. Then God makes him completely powerless and that is the turning point. Jacob is conquered and precisely thereby he became the victor. He cries and pleads with God, and so he still comes to victory. So it is with us. We will only be conquerors when we have learned that we ourselves are totally powerless, and that all blessing can only come through Him.

This is what we saw in Romans 7. The turning point is only then reached when we become aware of our total lack of power, our complete inability to do good. Then there is blessing! Then there is salvation! What a bitter cry it is to have to say: "Who will deliver me?" But then, what a glorious response it is to be able to say through God's grace: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord"!

God had to meet a struggling Jacob. He ends his struggles by touching him in the seat of his strength. A crying Jacob, however, God could not (reverently spoken) resist. "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." These were Jacob's words. In response God demands that he say his name — Jacob means "deceiver" — and so acknowledge his own corruption. Then, however, he gets a new name — Israel, prince with God — and begins a new life.

Look at him go, a new man, a new creation! "And He blessed him there." What blessings does God have for someone who has become a new creation in Christ! A fullness of blessing is ours in Christ. Thus blessed by Him, we may go our way as new people, as warriors of God. No longer do we go our way in the strength of the flesh that can only deceive us. To the contrary, we may by the Spirit's power walk in newness of life to the glory of God.

So we see Jacob here in the light of a new day with a new name, as a new creation. But Peniel is not the final destination of Jacob's journey. Peniel is only the beginning. Bethel is the destination of the journey. And Bethel is the place where God will reveal Himself to him. Here we are not that far yet. The Angel cannot yet make His name known to Jacob. That will only happen at Bethel.

To faith, however, Bethel lies not far from Peniel. We read that in Hosea 12. Immediately after He cried and supplicated Him, it says, "He found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke with us." To faith there is no long road to that meeting point with God. Yet, in practice it is often different because, sad to say, we do not walk on the high places of faith. This, too, we see too in the life of Jacob. There were all kinds of hindrances causing him not to go immediately to Bethel, that place of fellowship with God. There God had once revealed Himself to him; and there He would again speak with him. All that time Jacob missed the fellowship with God; and all that time God could not reveal Himself to him. Is that not the saddest part of all?

To be cont'd

Outline for Bible Study (75)

151. The Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus. — Matthew 27:55-28:15; Mark 15:40-16:11; Luke 23:48-24:12; John 19:38-20:18.

Outline

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. The pierced side of Jesus | Jn. 19:31-37 |
| 2. Jesus laid in the tomb | Jn. 19:38-42 |
| 3. The sealing of the tomb | Mt. 27:62-66 |
| 4. The three women look at the tomb | Mt. 28:1-8 |
| 5. Peter and John at the tomb | Jn. 20:1-10 |
| 6. Christ appears to Mary of Magdala | Jn. 20:11-18 |
| 7. The lies of the Jews | Mt. 28:11-15 |

Explanation

1. The bodies were not allowed to be left on the cross during the night; besides the Sabbath approached, hence the Jews' request to Pilate (Dt. 21:22-23). According to God's counsel, the Lord rested in the grave during the Sabbath, because the old creation had found an end in the death of Jesus. The bones of the robbers were broken to hasten their death, but not the Lord's (Ps. 34:20; Ex. 12:46). God would not allow the body of His Son to be mutilated; He watched over it even in the tomb (Isa. 53:9). Since only dead bodies could be taken down, a soldier pierced the Lord's side, fulfilling God's plan.

2. The two counsellors who secretly had been disciples of Jesus now openly took care of Christ's body and, according to God's Word, laid it in the tomb (Isa. 53:9). Myrrh is the aromatic resin from the myrrh tree, also a fragrant wood. The embalming was the last deed of love to the Lord. Jonah's three-day stay in the belly of a fish (Mt. 12:40; Eph. 4:10) was a type of the burial of the Lord Jesus.

3. The chief priests, fearful that the Lord would rise again, asked Pilate to secure the grave. God used their action to exclude every doubt about the victory of the Lord Jesus over death and grave: Truly, He is risen from the dead.

4. Mary of Magdala and the Mary, the mother of James and Joses were present Friday night (Mt. 27:56). After seeing where Jesus was laid they prepared spices, herbs, and ointments before the Sabbath began at six in the evening (Mk. 25:47). On the Sabbath they rested, according to the commandment and continued their work on the day after the Sabbath (Lk. 23:56; Mk. 16:1).

Mary of Magdala loved the Lord so much that she came to the grave when it was still dark. She finds the stone rolled away and runs to Simon Peter (Jn. 20:2). After the sun had risen, the other Mary and Salome came to the sepulchre and saw two angels (Mk. 16:1-2; Lk. 24:4); one sitting on the stone he had rolled away (Mt. 28:2-4). The angels told them the Lord had risen and ordered them to tell this to the disciples and Peter (Mt. 28:5-7; Mk. 16:7). After his fall Peter needed special uplifting, therefore the Lord appeared first to him and later to the other disciples (1 Cor. 15:5).

5. Both Peter and John entered the open tomb; both went home, but only of John we read that he believed. How beautiful would it have been if they had believed the word alone (Mt. 20:19). Everything inside the grave spoke of quietness and rest; clearly there had not been any struggle. Jesus is the Conqueror over death.

6. Mary of Magdala, out of whom the Lord had cast seven demons, had followed the Lord from Galilee to Golgotha. She had always served Him (Lk. 8:2-3). Now she remains at the grave. The Lord responded to her love, and appears to her and she becomes the first one to be acquainted with the glory of the new position of the redeemed (Jn. 20:17).

7. The deception of the Jews shows how hardened their consciences were. They would not have believed even if the Lord had appeared unto them.

Lesson

The water flowing from the pierced side speaks of purity and life (Jn. 3:5; Eph. 5:26-27; 1 Pet. 1:22-23), the blood of redemption (1 Jn. 1:7; Col. 1:19-20).

The Lord Jesus has, as it were, taken the guilt and sin of the redeemed into the grave. The believer is crucified with Christ, our old man is, as it were, laid in the grave. Baptism speaks of this (Rom. 6:4-6; Col. 2:12).

The tomb is empty; Christ is risen from the dead; how meaningful; what grace! Death could not keep Him, because He is the Living-one, the One who has life in Himself. Death could not hold Him in its power as it can us for whom the wages of sin is death (Acts 2:24-25). The resurrection of the Lord is an act of righteousness (Jn. 16:10) done by the glory of the Father (Rom. 6:4).

The resurrection is proof:

- that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Rom. 1:4);
- that God has recognized and confirmed His work (Phil. 2:6-9);
- that the devil is annulled (Heb. 2:14; Jn. 12:31; 16:33);
- that death is annulled (2 Tim. 1:10);
- that the world is under judgment; (Jn. 12:31; 16:11);
- that we have been reconciled and saved for eternity (Rom. 4:25; 5:10; Heb. 9:11-12);
- that our bodies shall be resurrected (1 Cor. 15:21-22; Rom. 8:11; Phil. 3:20-21; 2 Tim. 1-10).

152. On the Road to Emmaus. The First Appearance to the Disciples. — Mark 16:12-18; Luke 24:13-49; John 20:19-31.

Outline

1. On the road to Emmaus Lk. 24:13-35
2. The Lord appears on the first day Lk. 24:36-49
3. The Lord appears on the eighth day Jn. 20:24-29

Explanation

1. During their two-hour walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus, the two talked about the Lord. Though these two loved the Lord, they sorrowed because they had not believed. The Lord, knowing their hearts and wishing to make them happy, asks them so that they will fully reveal their cares to Him (Ps. 139:1-2). They tell Him how bitterly disappointed they were in their hope regarding His being the "Redeemer of Israel." All they had seen and heard had strengthened their faith that He was indeed the coming King, the Messiah. But instead of a throne, He was raised on a shameful cross; He bore a crown, but one of thorns. With His death all their hopes had died. He must have been no more than a "Prophet mighty in deed and word." They tell how grief-stricken women had spread a rumour about His resurrection; Peter and John indeed had found the grave empty, but Him they did not see.

The Lord first reproves their slowness of heart to believe the Word of God. He Himself, too, had often spoken to them about His death and resurrection; besides the Scriptures are full with testimonies concerning:

- The suffering and death of the Christ (Gen. 3:15; ch. 4 — in Abel's sacrifice; Lev. 1-7 — in the sacrifices; Ps. 22, 69; Isa. 53).
- His resurrection (Ps. 16:10).
- His glory (Ps. 2, 8, 45; Isa. 53).

The Lord opened their understanding that they understood the Scriptures. The Lord acted as though He would go farther; but wanted them to express the wish: "Stay with us!"

Their hearts were "burning" on the way as He expounded the Scriptures, but their joy became perfect when the Lord revealed Himself. Full of joy they ran back to Jerusalem, to tell of all they had seen and heard.

2. They find the disciples and those with them behind locked doors, and are met with the joyful message: "The Lord is indeed risen" (Lk. 24:33-34). Suddenly the Lord appears in their midst with the greeting: "Peace be unto you." (Lk. 24:35-36). Though this was the customary greeting, it now was a true message of peace. He had "made peace by the blood of His cross", and could now bring glad tidings of peace (Col. 1:20; Eph. 2:17).

Touchingly the Lord removes their fear and gains their confidence. He shows that He is no spirit but truly Man by showing them the tokens of the nails in His hands, allowing them to touch His real body, and by taking food and eating it before them. The disciples rejoiced greatly. Then He opens their understanding of the Scriptures. His witnesses (Jn. 20:21) must not only testify: "We have seen Him," but also: "It is written of Him." He breathed the resurrection life into them, saying: "Receive [the] Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit as a Person they received on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). Just as in the Garden of Eden God had breathed the breath of life into man, so here the Lord breathed the breath of resurrection life into the disciples, thereby making them a new creation. They now could preach forgiveness of sins and freedom from guilt, just as the High priest was the mouthpiece of God in cases of leprosy.

3. Thomas' absence was a loss for him. So it is today for those who are absent when the Lord is in the midst (Jn. 20:25). Thomas was like so many today, who want to see, have a dream or happy feelings, and then believe that the Lord has finished it all for them at the cross. "Blessed they who have not seen and have believed." The basis of peace is belief in the Word of God. The Lord's great grace and patience towards Thomas leads him to worship: "My Lord and my God!"

Lesson

We, too, should do that more often. It caused Him to join them in grace! Especially in difficulties, when we cannot understand what the Lord is doing, we should make Him the object of our meditation and conversation. Then He will come to us with comfort (Ps. 23:4).

Thomas is a picture of the Jews in the last days who see and then believe in the Saviour, recognizing Him as Jehovah and God (Zech. 12:10).

To be cont'd

Happiness or Unhappiness in Marriage and Family

—E.W.Bremicker

"That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land... as the days of the heavens [which are] above the earth."

Days of the heavens above the earth, this happiness is still available to us in our marriages and families. Our marriages and families can mirror the joy of heaven when we follow what God tells us in His Word. We will look a little closer at this by means of a family history from the Old Testament and a few basic principles out of the New.

Manoah's Family (Judges 13-16)

For the year 1987 the Bureau of Statistics in Wiesbaden pointed out some sad statistical information. In that year 382,600 marriages took place while 129,800 marriages were dissolved. Separation and divorce are the order of the day. One hardly takes notice of it. We have become a nation of murderers and adulterers, and it hardly bothers us anymore.

Yet, the number of recorded divorces presents but the tip of the iceberg. How many marriages are there that still exist on paper, but where the one lives besides the other or even opposite the other. Sad to say, such marriages are also found among believers, and that more often than one thinks. They cannot and do not want to be divorced, but they have nothing more to say to each other.

Still, in marriage and in the family we can experience a special joy. God shows us in His Word that foundation for a marriage, that leads us to having days "as the days of the heavens over the earth." It is up to us to get to know this joy.

God, the Creator, has put natural love in the heart of man and woman. But also this gift of God did man corrupt. In 2 Timothy 3:3 we read that men would be "without natural love." Indeed the "last days" are "difficult days." God wants to put love in our hearts, but we men violate this love. The result is blown-up egoism. Who is then amazed that in the Bundesrepublik there is one divorce for every three marriages?

Manoah and his wife lived in a time comparable to ours. It says in Judges 13:1, "The children of Israel again did evil in the sight of Jehovah." When everyone does what is right in his own eyes, they always do what is evil in the eyes of God.

Already six times before, we read this serious expression in the book of Judges. Every time God had to punish His people, but each time they cried to God, and God also heard. In Judges 13 however, this crying to God was not present. They were in the hands of the Philistines and were content to be so. Is it any different today? People live in wickedness and they even love the evil. They don't want it any different at all; and the ones who suffer under these ungodly lives are the children.

Among the mass of self-willed people God finds a married couple that is happy, upon whom He can look with pleasure. It is Manoah with his wife. Manoah means: "Gift, Resting place." Manoah was a gift from God for his wife and the other way around. Every husband is for his wife a gift from God's hand, and every wife is a gift for her husband. When both see themselves as such, they will live happily with each other.

God had something important to say to them both, and He begins with the weaker partner, with the wife (vv. 3-5). The angel of the Lord appears to her and gives her a wonderful promise. He tells her too how she should conduct herself. The angel's instruction to this woman contains an answer for us to the question what we should do in the midst of the great decline within Christendom. It is quite simple: Separation. God does not at all start by telling what the boy should do and not do, but by giving precise instructions to the woman. These instructions contain two things:

1. She should drink neither wine nor strong drink.
2. She should not eat anything unclean.

Wine and strong drink are here, as in other places, a picture of joy on earth. A believer who seeks to cozy up to the people of this earth cannot lead a happy married life and the children will suffer under this as well. Elsewhere God's Word says, "Wine is a scorner, strong drink is raging" (Prov. 20:1). No wonder that it says of men of the world that they love pleasure more than God (2 Tim. 3:4); with us, however, it should be different. We have fellowship with the Father and with His Son, and therein we may find our joy.

The second instruction, to eat nothing unclean, contains an important lesson for our day too. To eat unclean things means to be occupied with things that are not good. David married a wife who owned idols (1 Sam. 19). Did he know that? Jacob's wife, Rachel, had idols, and he did not know it (Gen. 31). Both wives were in this sense unclean. The results were fatal.

When God tells the wife to eat nothing unclean, it is because He wants to keep her from a particular danger. What are our wives feeding on, on God's Word or on the things of the world? Worldly novels, for instance, can be unclean food. Or worse, do our wives do it secretly like Rachel, without the knowledge of their husbands? Rachel spun her husband a tale. She had to die that same year because her ignorant husband had allowed himself to say to his searching father-in-law (whose idols Rachel had stolen): "With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, he shall not live."

Here is the main cause for the ruin of Christian marriages. We should be open and honest with each other and hide nothing from our partner. The husband is the head of the family according to God's thoughts. Without his leading and without his knowledge nothing should happen.

Instead of eating what is unclean, we all should feed ourselves with what is clean. This food we find in God's Word: "As newborn babes desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the word, that by it ye may grow up to salvation" (1 Pet. 2:2). The character of this desire we see every time a baby is born. In it God gives us practical, visual lessons. Good food means health, growth, and stability — these things we need so much in days of decline.

What does the woman do after the angel has appeared to her? She goes to none but her husband (v. 6). This proves that she trusted him completely. Happy the wives who have husbands whom they trust and with whom they can discuss everything. We can also learn from Manoah. What does he do? He prays to God. He shows that he had a conscious, joyful relationship with God (v. 8). Do we men know this practical prayer fellowship, this communion with God?

Manoah feels his responsibility, and he feels himself one with his wife. He does not say, "The Man of God should come to *me*," but he includes his wife: "Ah Lord! let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto *us*, I pray thee, and teach *us* what *we* shall do" (v. 8). Here we find harmony in marriage regarding the raising of children. Raising children is not the business of one of the parents, but is the shared concern of father and mother. Parents should be of one mind regarding the raising of children and prayerfully seek the needed wisdom.

Isaac and Rebekkah are in this respect a warning example to us. Isaac loved Esau, and Rebekkah loved Jacob. It should not be this way. The disharmony with the parents had serious consequences. They themselves and their children had to reap the fruits of it and a bitter harvest it was.

Another danger, especially for the wives, lies in this, that they love their children more than their husbands. In Titus 2:4 the younger wives are admonished to show love. The order in which it is given is important: first to the men, then to the children. When the order is reversed, then things are not well in the family, and the negative results will become evident. Ten sons of Jacob became deceivers. They maintained this deception for twenty-two years.

Manoah and his wife prove to be willing to obey the word of God, and therein lies the secret of a blessed family life. On the path of disobedience God can only be against us, although we are His children. Paths of disobedience are paths of sin: "The face of Jehovah is against them that do evil" (Ps. 34:26).

God hears Manoah's request and appears for the second time. Upon the question how the boy should behave, the angel of Jehovah repeats what the mother must do. What we parents do is highly important and decisive for the actions of the children. When we as parents go evil ways, can we expect our children to give us joy? Children are keen observers, and draw their conclusions for their own behaviour from what we do and don't do — be it for the good or for the bad. The obedience of the parents towards the Word of God is the prerequisite for God's blessing in the family. It is self-evident that we depend on God's grace, but this grace does not relieve us from the responsibility of being an example by our obedience.

Then Manoah asks for the name of the Angel of the Lord to honour Him (v. 17). In our lives too, the honour of the Lord should always have the first place. The answer of the Angel of the Lord touches the heart: "How is it that thou askest after My name, seeing it is Wonderful?" (v. 18). That causes us to think of Isaiah 9:6 where we read of the Lord Jesus: "And His name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace." He Himself, the Lord, the Wonderful One, stands before Manoah. So it is today. We have Him, this wonderful Lord who takes time for us to help us with our problems, questions, and needs.

After Manoah had brought an offering and the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame into heaven, he recognizes with whom he had to do. He is startled to death, and believes that he must now die (v. 22). Here comes out what a wonderful gift Manoah's wife is. She has the better spiritual insight and helps her husband. God wanted to make a helpmeet for man, and happy each man who has such a helper and values her.

Do we men not experience daily that our wives help us? They can help us in spiritual and material things, but are we also prepared to accept spiritual advice when we recognize that it is from God? It is another question whether we are also thankful for the help of our wives. Do we ever say, "Thank you very much"? Daily we thank God for food, but do we also daily thank our wives who have troubled themselves so much? Sad to say, we often are indifferent and take them for granted. The Epistle to the Colossians encourages us in every chapter to be thankful. Thankful people are happy people who have open eyes for the goodness of God.

Verse 24 records the birth of Samson. Samson means: "Man of the sun." Who is this sun? "Jehovah Elohim is a sun and shield" (Ps. 84:11). He, the Lord, is that sun; in Him we find light and protection for our lives. Besides this, the sun is the symbol of strength: "Let them that love Him be as the rising of the sun in its might" (Judg. 5:31). Never was there a man as saviour from God on earth who was so marked by strength as Samson was. His history proves that remarkably well.

Then God's Spirit stresses: "And the child grew" (v. 24). He grew and became big because he received food according to God's instruction. It was food that was compatible with separation. It is a serious question for all of us: With what do we feed our children? Do we have a word from the Lord Jesus in early morning to feed them, do we feed them in the afternoon and in the evening? What does God say in Deuteronomy 5? "And ye shall teach them [My words] unto your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou goest on the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (v. 19). "And thou shalt impress them [My words] on thy sons, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou goest on the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Dt. 6:7). How do we bring the Word to our children? Do we read at table without explanation? Then it will be indigestible to our children, and they will not get anything out of it. It is always important that we are able to make food for our children out of what we have read. The less spiritual food the children get, the easier they fall prey to the wiles of the devil who seeks to cause them to fall. At least three times a day we should make the Word of God precious to the children. Thousands of children of believing parents grow up in ignorance. In the family we must together learn the Word of God by heart!

Are we surprised that our children go into the world if we have not given them spiritual food? Let us start early to make the person of the Lord Jesus great for them, then they will also not leave Him in later years. The children of Israel had failed to tell their children about the wonders of God. What was the result? Very soon afterwards we read: "And also all that generation were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, which knew not Jehovah, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Judg. 2:10). Should our children belong to this "other generation"?

At times one hears the idea that it is the task of the Sunday School to feed the children spiritually. The Sunday School is certainly good, but it never takes away the responsibility of the parents. We ourselves must feed our children so that they grow in the inner man, so that they become well rooted in Christ. An enormous tree with deep roots endures every storm. It finds its food in the right soil. May God make us and our children into such "trees."

Doubtless it is important to pray for the salvation of our children, but that alone is not sufficient. If we do not give spiritual food, we might as well stop praying. Both parents and children need daily instruction from God's Word.

Let us have a short look at a few details in Samson's life. Verse 25 tells us about a good beginning: "And the Spirit of Jehovah began to move him at Mahaneh-Dan, between Zoreah and Eshtaol." The meaning of these names gives us the explanation. Zoreah means "hornets' nest." God had sent the hornets to the children of Israel to slay the enemies (cf. Ex. 23:28; Josh. 24:12; Dt. 7:20). They had to learn that *power* is from God. Eshtaol means "entreaty," "longing," and reminds us of *dependence*. Mahaneh-Dan is the camp of Dan, or the place of *self-judgment*, that is to say, the place where we apply the cutting edge of God's Word to ourselves. Only on a way where we apply these three basic principles to ourselves can God bless us. That was so with Samson, and it will not be any different with us.

Chapters 14-16 show us a sad, downward development of this man of God. Three women play an ignoble role in his life until he finally ends up in prison.

In chapter 14 Samson goes down to Timnathah and sees there a woman of the Philistines. Timnathah means "prepared portion." Here Samson prepares a first bitter portion for himself. The lust of the eyes aroused in him the desire and led him to despise the advice of his parents. The warning of his father he cast to the wind. In Samson's life the word of Proverbs 30:17 was fulfilled: "The eye that mocketh at a father, and despiseth to obey a mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it."

God's Word warns strongly against a link between believers and unbelievers. The results will always be fatal. Do we warn our children for such a step? Is it for us, parents, a heart's desire that our children do not marry unbelieving partners?

Samson's parents show weakness (v. 5). They finally go down with him to Timnathah. Later we see the father alone in Timnathah (v. 10). Where was the mother? Did she no longer agree and did she now respond with a firm "No" to the wrong path of her son? We don't know. With all the harmony that should characterize our marriages, situations can arise that we must refuse, lest we enter into improper compromises. God's will must always have the first place.

At the beginning of chapter 16 we see Samson with a prostitute. That is how far it can come with a servant of God. We should not underestimate the danger. God says: "Fornicators and adulterers will God judge" (Heb. 13:4). In God's governmental ways, this judgment had to come over Samson.

The third woman in Samson's life was Delilah. Had he not become wise through bitter experience? It came so far that his seven locks lay on the floor (v. 19). The picture of his separation was disrupted — the source of his strength removed. His two eyes were plucked out. Never again did the "man of the sun" see light. And why? Because he went his own way and did not want to listen. Six times we read of him: he went "down." His example serves as a warning to us.

Did we notice, while reading this last portion of Samson's history, how he had to spend the rest of his days as a prisoner? It was in the prison at Gaza. "And the Philistines seized him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of bronze; and he had to grind in the prison-house" (v. 21). His tremendous strength gone, he served, with the little strength left him, his enemies over whom he had had so many victories. In this very city (ch. 16) he had, even after that deep fall into sin, taken the doors of the city's gate and torn out its posts and bars in the middle of the night. Then he had carried them to the top of the mountain that lies opposite Hebron. Why does God remind us here about Hebron, yes, about the mountain top that points towards Hebron? Should Samson not have thought of it that here his forebears once lived in happy and blessed fellowship with their God? What had become of the man of God, the judge of Israel? How had he despised the communion with his God and fallen into the depths of sin!

Although Samson reaped under God's government the results of His deeds, yet, God in His grace did not abandon him. In his death he accomplished his greatest victory (v. 30). Such is our God.

Samson had gone down alive, they brought him back dead. And where was he buried? The end of the story tells us: They "buried him between Zoreah and Eshtaol in the sepulchre of Manoah his father. And he had judged Israel twenty years" (v. 31). His grave was there where once his service began.

The end of the history reminds us of God's power (Zoreah) and of dependency (Eshtaol). Had Samson taken heed to these things, he would have been judge for more than twenty years.

Do we want to subject our life and our family life to God's blessing? Do we want our days to be as "days of heaven over the earth"? Then we should follow the principles contained in God's Word! God wants to see us happy. To us is the choice: Do we want to lead a happy family life, or will we also appear in the statistics column of "Failed Marriages"?

To be cont'd