

Happiness or Unhappiness in Marriage and Family (3)

—E.W. Bremicker

Parents and children (Eph. 5:29-6:4)

What principles do we follow in our marriages, in our families? The Epistle to the Ephesians sees us as heavenly citizens and as such we should live by heavenly principles the short time we are on earth. The people of this world know other forms of living together, and today we are in great danger of being affected by the spirit of our time. Hasn't a loose partnership become something quite normal? People live together without marriage certificates, and no one thinks anything of it.

Christians who adopt the principles of the world cannot count on God's blessing. In Galatians 6:7-8 we read: "Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatever a man shall sow, that also shall he reap. For he that sows to his own flesh, shall reap corruption from the flesh." Let us not deceive ourselves, the seriousness of these words is directed at us. Who sows oats, cannot harvest wheat. He who lives and sows according to the principles of this world can only harvest evil.

It is always Satan's purpose to destroy the happiness in marriage and family; to achieve this, any means suits him. He loves to overthrow God's order by enticing us to live by worldly principles. Can we take part in this? Do we want to take part in this?

The dangers are doubtless great. Paul writes to the Colossians: "For this reason we also, from the day we heard [of your faith and love], do not cease praying and asking for you, to the end that ye may be filled with the full knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, [so as] to walk worthily of the Lord unto all well-pleasing" (Col. 1:9-10).

Don't we need this prayer for all our marriages and families? When we *are filled* with the will of God, all else will no longer have a place in our hearts. But let us ask ourselves: Do we pray this way for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters? God has specially told us this so that we, too, would learn to pray this way. Do we really know His will for our marriages and families, or do we prefer to live according to our own thoughts? King Saul loved to do what he himself thought to be right, and God had to speak these serious words to him: "Behold, obedience is better than sacrifice, attention than the fat of rams. For rebellion is [as] the sin of divination, And self-will is [as] iniquity and idolatry" (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

Self-will is in God's eye a terrible sin. What do we read in 1 Peter 1:2? "Elect according to [the] foreknowledge of God [the] Father, by sanctification of [the] Spirit, unto [the] obedience and sprinkling of [the] blood of Jesus Christ." Did Peter err in the order? No, first comes obedience and then the sprinkling of blood. That is the divine order, and we see how important obedience is to God. The first thing God brings about in a person is obedience. When God's light fell on Paul on the way to Damascus, his first question was: "What must I do, Lord?" That was obedience. Only later he came to know the value of Christ's blood.

Peter also reminds us that we have become children of obedience (1 Pet. 1:14). Obedience means full surrender of one's own will to God's will. In the book of Judges we saw a nation of a million people who did what was right in their own eyes. We only hear of one couple that inquired about God's will. Manoah and his wife wanted to do what God said. They were obedient and had deep respect for His word. Obedience and respect belong together. They form the basis of a happy marriage and family life.

We all know what Joshua said at the end of his life: "As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah" (Josh. 24:15). Is that merely a nice text hanging in many homes, a beautiful bit of lip service, or is it truly the sincere wish of our hearts? Driving by car through the North-American landscape one sees many beautiful houses that are well maintained. Often, however, right next to them stand old dilapidated ones, outright ruins. The windows are broken; the roof leaks; and everywhere the grass grows wild. Which house does our marriage look like, a house that is cared for, or a deteriorated ruin? Just as a house needs careful attention, so does a marriage, and so does a family. Our families only stay in proper shape *when* they are cared for according to God's principles.

We have already looked at a few of these principles. How is it with the principle of the wife's subjection? How is the condition of the husband's love? How about the seven important principles that the older sisters are to teach the younger

women (Tit. 2:4-5)? And where are the older sisters who, after having truly lived these things, now pass them on by instructing the younger ones? These are all questions we should not avoid.

In Ephesians 5:29 we read: "No one has ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as also the Christ the Assembly." We already saw that this nourishing and cherishing concerns both the spiritual and the material sphere. Here Christ is again set before us as our example. He nourishes and cherishes us day by day, week by week. Just think how He, when we meet together as believers, condescends to be our Centre so that He might bless us.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 we see the apostle Paul in the footsteps of his Master. There he says: "[We] have been gentle in the midst of you, as a nurse would cherish her own children... because ye had become beloved of us." We can very well understand this picture. Who was as "gentle" as Christ? Paul sought to emulate Him. Do we do this as well? Are we gentle towards our wives? Are we not often heartless and without concern? It is essential that we learn from Him day by day.

"Nourishing" means: preparing food and giving it. Perhaps we regularly read the Bible or a devotional calendar at table. That is good, but do we explain what we read? Do we exchange thoughts about it? Do we make the Word meaningful to our children — that Word by which we all must be built up? When our children don't understand anything, the Bible will soon become bothersome to them. Often one hears men who say: "I can't do that, that is not my gift." If that is true of us, can we then really say that we love our Lord, or is it not much more accurate to say that we live at a distance from Him? One who does not live in close communion with Him, cannot love as He loves and cannot nourish as He. At the judgment seat of Christ it will be to our shame, because then Christ cannot give us the reward that He had actually wanted to give us.

In 1 Samuel a total of fourteen households or families is mentioned. Only twice do we read of a well-established house. In 1 Samuel 2:35 it is the house of Zadok, the faithful priest. In chapter 25:28 it is the house of David, the king after God's heart. God wants to give us such well-established houses, houses grounded upon the Rock. He who builds upon sand (i.e., who lives according to his own ideas and principles) will not last.

Do not many of the houses mentioned in 1 Samuel show us such a shattering picture? Just think of the house of Eli, the priest. It could not last because God's principles regarding child rearing were despised. God had to judge that house; Eli and his two sons died on the same day.

"We are members of His body; [we are of his flesh, and of his bones.] Because of this a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be united to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh" (Eph. 5:30-31). We are members of His body, because He died for us. What a glorious picture do we have here: "Christ and His Assembly"! For all eternity we will be most intimately united to Him; yes, we will be a part of Him. In Ephesians 1:22-23 Paul says: "[He] has put all things under His feet, and gave Him [to be] Head over all things to the Assembly, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." This close relationship is now used for husband and wife.

It pleases God when a man leaves his parents to marry a woman. One who marries a woman in the Lord has found a good thing. We must realize, however: the parents must let their children go. Today many marriages suffer because the ties to father and mother are too strong. Parents must learn that now the children form a new, independent entity. There is now another, stronger bond; they should no longer exercise any authority. Nevertheless, a child never ceases to remain a child of its parents; this we need to bear in mind as well.

Here it says: "A man," not "a youngster" and not at all "a child." Marriage requires maturity. Again and again one sees how bonds made too early can lead to great problems. How often have especially young marriages become unhappy or even shameful. Life's experiences give a constant appeal to heed the Word. "He that giveth heed to the Word shall find good; and whoso confideth in Jehovah, happy is he" (Prov. 16:20). God's principle is: First the field in order, and afterwards build the house (Prov. 24:27). A man who marries must be able to nourish wife and family, both materially and spiritually. It is understood that meanwhile husband and wife gladly accept the counsel of their parents, who have much more experience in life.

The husband will cleave to his wife and those two will become "one flesh" During their engagement, which is an important time according to God, they learn to know and to love each other. To become "one flesh," however, is something that only takes place in marriage. Besides, God speaks here of two, and not of three, four, or more. This principle has also significance. Don't we see the terrible consequences of polygamy in Africa? The Old Testament, too, gives examples showing us that to have more wives was not for blessing. Just think of Abraham and Hagar, or of the sad end of Solomon, whose heart turned to idols through his many wives. Only our following divine principles brings us God's blessing.

The report in Genesis 2 shows us how God created Eve. Someone has pointedly said that Eve was not taken out of Adam's foot, because he should not walk over her; she was not made out of his head, for she should not rule over him. Eve was formed out of Adam's side, there where the heart is. The wife should be at the side of the husband, not under him, and not over him. He should love her.

"This mystery is great, but I speak as to Christ, and as to the Assembly. But ye also, every one of you, let each so love his own wife as himself; but as to the wife [I speak] that she may fear the husband" (vv. 32-33). These verses give us a kind of summary. We husbands must love our wives as ourselves. Don't we all love ourselves? Then let us also love our wives and treat them like this. And the wives? The task for the wife is to respect and honour the husband as head. All this we may and must do in the light of the judgment seat of Christ. The Lord will reward it.

With chapter 6 begins the instructions concerning children. Children are a blessing that we may thankfully receive from God's hand, but we should not withdraw ourselves from the responsibility connected with it. "Children, obey your parents in [the] Lord, for this is just. Honour thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest be long-lived on the earth" (vv. 1-3). Today God still makes His Word true and fulfils His promises. At least six times the New Testament mentions the obedience of children; that is how important this matter is to God. Obedience, however, must be taught and practised. It is the task of the parents, and especially of the fathers, to train the children in obedience.

In the Old Testament, God gives us, by means of many family stories, practical, visual instructions. He shows us positive and negative examples. We already saw the sad end of Eli's family. What caused that? Eli's sons did what they liked, and Eli did not prevent them from doing so. We read the serious words: "But they hearkened not to the voice of their father" (1 Sam. 2:25). "For I have declared to him that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he hath known: because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not" (1 Sam. 3:13).

David had learned obedience in the house of his father Jesse. When he was told to go to his brothers, he did not hesitate but went immediately to do his father's will. Repeatedly the obedience of David, both towards God and King Saul, are stressed. He had learned it at home, and it accompanied him during his whole life.

How did things look, however, in his own family? Did David follow the example of his father? Alas, no David had many wives and in total twenty sons. How did he bring them up? Amnon became an adulterer in his father's house. Absalom became a murderer of his brother and a robber of the throne; and Adonijah sought to grab the throne of his father. God's Spirit shows us this sad picture, allowing us a peek behind the screens. We read regarding Adonijah: "His father had not grieved him at any time in saying, Why doest thou so?" (1 Ki. 1:6).

We can, and must, ask ourselves the questions: "What do children learn in our house? Do they learn to be obedient or not?" Obviously, obedience must go hand in hand with love, else it will not work. Children owe their parents obedience as long as they live at home. When the children marry, then they are freed from the obligation to obey. Yet, their whole life children must "honour" their parents, also when these have already died.

"That it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest be long-lived on the earth" (Eph. 6:3). Does not each of us know several examples out of life that verify the truth of these words? Many have harvested the bitter fruits because they did not want to listen to their parents in their youth. God brought an early end to the sinful lives of Eli's sons and of the three sons of David we mentioned before. His judgment must fall on them. 1 Peter 3:12 says, "[The] face of [the] Lord [is] against them that do evil."

"And [ye] fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in [the] discipline and admonition of [the] Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Does God have to say this to us, fathers? Do we really provoke our children to anger? Yes, the great danger facing all fathers is that they provoke their children needlessly. Jonathan was already an adult when his father caused him to become very angry. We read: "And Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger" (1 Sam. 20:34). Are we surprised that Saul, a man after the flesh, acted in this way?

"But bring them up in [the] discipline and admonition of [the] Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Again, the Lord in His authority confronts us. He is not just our Saviour, but He is also our Lord, which means that He has a claim on us. He makes just demands upon us which are only for our own benefit. He wants to be the Lord of our homes and also of our children.

Thus far we have heard much about our homes and families and about the principles that we must follow. Now let us take a quick look at the ten homes in the Gospel of Luke that the Lord Himself has visited. We can learn much of these.

1. Luke 4:38-39. In Simon's house lay the mother-in-law, attacked by a high fever, sick in bed. Fever is a picture of our inward unrest and excitement. Is there such excitement in our homes? The Lord longs to remove it. It is His goal that we serve Him in our homes, just like Simon's mother-in-law did.
2. Luke 5:29-39. Levi did not just invite the Lord to his house, he also prepared a great meal for Him. Don't we have a beautiful example of hospitality in this for us to follow? Hospitality in our homes is also a service for the Lord.
3. Luke 7:36-50. Simon, the Pharisee, had invited the Lord. Yet, the Lord did not receive His rightful place in this house. Simon had not provided water for Him, had not refreshed Him. He had not anointed His feet with oil, refusing to give Him honour. Nor had he given Him a kiss, thereby failing to show love towards Him. Simon had blown the unique chance of his life. How is this in our case? Do we give the Lord what He can expect from us? Does He have the first place in our hearts and our homes?
4. Luke 8:51-56. In the house of Jairus, the Lord left an important charge behind. "He commanded [something] to eat to be given to her." This command is also for us in respect of our children. Do we, in a spiritual way, give them to eat? Do we tell them the Bible stories, and do we familiarize them with the Friend of children?
5. Luke 10:38-42. We are well acquainted with the house of Martha. It was a house that the Lord loved to visit. Let us think back to two important points. First, in this house one sat at the feet of the Lord to listen to Him. Secondly, Martha let herself be corrected by the Lord. Both things should be found with us.
6. Luke 14:1-14. In the ruler of the Pharisee's house the Lord's feelings were deeply wounded, because everyone chose the first place for himself. Do we, too, use our elbows to get ahead and to rise to the top? The host himself had only invited those guests who would invite him in return. He acted out of love for self. Pride and egoism are characteristics that do not honour, but dishonour the Lord. How selfless and humble did He, the Saviour, act, making Himself of no reputation.
7. Luke 19:1-10. Zacchaeus received the Lord Jesus "with joy." Do we do the same? He does not want to be a guest in our house occasionally, but He wants to be the centre of all things, the Lord of our homes.
8. Luke 19:45-46. Here the Lord had to speak the serious words: "My house is a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of robbers." What are we today for His house? Are we a help or a hindrance?
9. Luke 22:7-13. The house where the Lord would celebrate the last passover with His disciples was a house that was available to Him. Are we also prepared to make our house totally available to the Lord?
10. Luke 22:54-62. The house of the high priest, the last house that He entered, was a house that should have received Him. Yet, for Him it was the most terrible house, a house in which He did suffer unmeasurably, a house in which He was treated as an evil doer.

Ten houses — which one resembles ours? God's Word is full of instructions that we can follow if we want to do so. To us the choice! We decide! What character will *our* house bear?

In conclusion let us think for a moment of Samuel, the man of God. His life is in many ways instructive for us. What is the first thing God mentions of him? His service? His prayer? No, the first thing we find is worship (1 Sam. 1:28). As a little boy he was a worshipper of God. Is that the first goal in bringing up our children? True, the children must learn and find a job, but the most important thing is that we bring our children up for God, that they become worshippers. Even a child can thank the Lord for what He has done on Golgotha's cross. Worship was the first thing in Samuel's life, and it was also the last. In his house he had an altar. Worship framed his life, and this was not in the least a result of the way his parents had brought him up.

In Mark 2:1 we read that it became known that the Lord was in the house. How is this with us? Do others notice that the Lord dwells in our homes? Is He truly the Lord there? Then, and then only will we be happy.

The End

Jacob (4)
His Experiences in Relation to the House of God

—H. Bouter Jr.

The second revelation at Bethel

Genesis 35

Finally Jacob reaches Bethel, the place where God dwells and where He will reveal Himself. How much trouble did it cost God to get Jacob this far. Don't we have to acknowledge how much trouble the Holy Spirit has to go through to bring us to this point? How many hindrances have to be conquered before we obey His leadership? Still, He has our well-being at heart; He seeks fellowship with God for us in the power of the Spirit.

How wondrous that the Holy Spirit can lead people on earth to God, to have fellowship with God. That He can cause them to know God's thoughts, yes, thereby, to come to worship Him. We have mainly thought of two great hindrances that wanted to keep us from this. First, there is the flesh within us that is at enmity with God, which cannot have any connection with God. We, therefore, must learn to judge the flesh. That is the lesson of Peniel. Yet, there is more that keeps us from God, although naturally it is connected with the flesh within us. Wrong connections, practices, idols also prevent us from really coming into God's presence. These, too, we must learn to judge at the cross. That is the lesson of Shechem.

Now, however, Jacob has come this far. He arrives at Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. Jacob is not alone at this place. The truth of God's house is not a purely individual matter. God has a dwelling place on earth, the Assembly, which He has purchased by the blood of His own Son. This Assembly consists of many members who are all joined to Christ through true faith. Together they form the house in which God dwells, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Peniel is the place where we are alone with God. Peniel we must battle through by ourselves; it is a personal experience. Bethel, however, is the place where we all, together, are with God. We are there, not to learn what the flesh is, but, together, we are there to learn to know God's thoughts and to bring Him the praise that is due to Him. That is a collective matter.

It is of course true that we cannot be together in God's presence if we have not learned to be there personally. Yet, the apostle John shows clearly that fellowship with God is a collective issue: "That which we have seen and heard we report to you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship [is] indeed with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we to you that your joy may be full" (1 Jn. 1:3-4).

The first thing Jacob does when arriving at Bethel is build an altar. "And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el." Will our being at the place where God wants us to be not always result in our building an altar? It is the first thing Jacob does. Is this also found in our heart, to have a place of worship for God? Is it our desire to worship Him in Spirit and in truth?

While Jacob fled (Gen. 28), he did not build an altar for God. Then it was for Him a terrible thing to meet God. We thought of how Jacob was a picture of someone who places himself under law, of one who only knows God as the God of Sinai (Heb. 12:18-21). Such a person has no altar, nor has he any sacrifices. Such a person does not yet know the value of the Person and work of the Christ.

At Shechem Jacob did have an altar (Gen. 33), but there Jacob himself was the centre. Everything centred around him, it was his altar and it was his God. In Bethel, however, God Himself is at the centre. The place of the altar that he builds here is called: "El Beth-El," which means: "the God of the house of God. Here God is known as the God of His house, as the God who has found a dwelling place here on earth.

It is God's purpose that we come to know Him as such, as the God of His house. No one in that house has rights except He. It is *His* house. He dwells there and He is the Centre. All things must suit His Person. He cannot tolerate it when something there is against Him, contradicting His holy rights.

Yet, this house of God does not need to be a place of terror for a believer. It is a place of rest and of blessing, of fellowship with God. God wants nothing more than to have fellowship with His own. He wants to speak with them about the things that occupy His heart: Christ, the Centre of all His thoughts. Still, God can only do this when His own are in harmony with Him, when the flesh has been judged and the heart is subjected to Him and His rights.

The house of God is a place of worship: "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be constantly praising Thee" (Ps. 84:4). When we see who God is, how He has revealed Himself in Christ, then it can only cause us to praise and thank Him. When we are wholly convinced that God, this infinite God, has revealed Himself fully in Christ and has bent down to

us, insignificant men, to fit us for His glory, then we must praise Him. With wonder we realize how God, because of the work of Christ, has now a house on earth in which He dwells. That house is a spiritual house, the Assembly of the Living God. It all fills our hearts with worship and praise.

Together, believers make up that house, but simultaneously they are the priestly family that honours God in that house (1 Pet. 2:5). They bring spiritual sacrifices to God in connection with Christ, the true altar (Heb. 13:10,15). The subject of their worship service is Christ, His Person, His life, His death, His glorification at God's right hand. In Him, God has revealed Himself and in Him, God is fully glorified. God's eye looks with pleasure on Him and He is also the subject of worship of God's children. The spiritual sacrifices they bring take form from their appreciation of the Person and the work of His beloved Son, according to the way the Holy Spirit works it in their hearts. With those sacrifices they come to God in His house.

God wants to be praised, not only in heaven, but also on earth. In Revelation 5 we see that a priestly service is performed in heaven, but Revelation 1 says that this is the task of the assemblies on earth as well (vv. 4-6). Yet, it is not presented as a task, but as something spontaneous flowing from the presentation of the Person of Christ: "To Him who loves us... to Him be the glory and the might to the ages of ages. Amen."

Therefore, the house of God is not a terrible place for a believer. Yet, it was so for Jacob. The reason for this was his self-occupation. He had no eye for what God had done, but he wanted to build up his own righteousness and to appear before God with that. This is what man always is inclined of doing. He has no eye for the perfection of God's revelation in Christ, but begins to work himself. He forgets that true rest can only be found in connection with the Stone, on which God looks down with pleasure. This Stone alone forms the link between heaven and earth.

In Bethel, however, the efforts of the flesh have no value; a righteousness based on law counts for nothing there. Here in Genesis 35 we see that Jacob places himself no longer under the basis of law. Here he has grown spiritually. He is no longer a child, "in bondage under the principles of the world" (Gal. 4:3). On the contrary! Now he is well aware of his sonship. He appears without fear before God's face and God speaks with him and blesses him. He is no longer fed as a child by the principles of the world, but has reached spiritual maturity.

I believe that verse 8 speaks of this spiritual maturity. Man by nature knows only the law which shows him who he is in himself, a sinful creature (Rom. 7). The yardstick of the believer's new life, however, is Christ. When Christ has been formed in us (Gal. 4:19), we leave the time of childhood behind us. Then we see what we have become for God in Christ and we become aware of the fact that we are sons. For the Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are no longer slaves, but sons. He leads us to worship God as Father.

In verse 8 we read that Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, died and was buried beneath Bethel, under the oak which he called Allon-bachuth, or oak of weeping. This nurse we can compare to a tutor, or teacher, of which the apostle speaks in Galatians 3. Both are a type of the law which had a task of training until the coming of Christ, until His revelation in the fullness of time (Gal. 3:24; 4:4). Today the Son has come and God has poured out the Spirit of His Son in our hearts. Now we are no longer children, or slaves, but sons, who know God as Father.

In Bethel there is no place for the principle of law. When we know God in the fullness of His revelation in Christ, we begin to know that the death of Christ has set us free from the rule of law (Rom. 7:1-6). We are linked to another Man, the risen Christ. He is the yardstick of the new life that the Spirit has worked within us. When He is revealed in us, we automatically fulfil the law (but without using the law as yardstick).

The cross of Christ has made an end to the period of childhood under the law. Of this, the oak of crying beneath Bethel, where the nurse is buried, speaks. True, it is difficult to let go of the principle of law. This we see with the Galatians. In other respects, too, the cross is an "oak of crying." Was there a sorrow like unto His sorrow, when the curse of the law fell upon Him there?

It is as if we stand afar off in this respect. A holy reverence fills our hearts for Him who suffered there. What a wondrous place the cross is! There we learn what the flesh is, what the world is, and the prince of the world. There, too, we learn to know the law in the correct light. The law is only applicable to man in the flesh, and that man finds its end here.

But the cross also brought to light who God is. He has been revealed and glorified in all that He is. The cross also laid the foundation of the Assembly of God, the house of God. That we see here. Bethel is inseparably linked with this place of weeping. We read that immediately after this event, God appears to Jacob, blessing him (v. 9).

God can only reveal Himself in grace and blessing because He Himself has laid the righteous foundation for it on the cross. It is because of the same cross that He has now a house on earth in which He dwells and in which He as such is known. He is the God of Bethel, the God of His house. He can have fellowship with His own, who approach Him in that house. Yet, the basis of all is in the cross.

Twice an oak is mentioned in Genesis 35 (vv. 4 & 8). The first time this tree is a type of the cross as the place of judgment over the world and its idols. The second time it is presented as the place where the law loses its say and the place that forms the basis of Bethel, the house of God. It is because of the accomplished work of Christ that the Holy Spirit has come to build this house, the Assembly, for God.

Now we see how God speaks here freely with Jacob. No longer is there a hindrance for this. Jacob is aware of his sonship. He is a new man and God acknowledges this. God calls him with his new name. From now on Jacob's name is Israel. He has become a warrior of God. No longer does He battle in the power of the flesh, but in the power of the Spirit.

Then God also reveals Himself as God the Almighty! In this connection I like to point to the remarkable parallel with 2 Corinthians 6, where we rediscover the main theme of this chapter. There the apostle speaks about the temple of the living God, which is the house of God, Bethel. Yet, this house is only a reality when cleansing from idols has taken place, just as we saw it in Jacob's case. "What agreement [is there] of God's temple with idols?"

In the same way, sonship only becomes a reality when the idols have been done away: "I will receive you; and I will be to you for a Father, and ye shall be to me for sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." When God has become all for His own, He reveals Himself as the *Almighty*. This Almighty, however, we may know as *Father* in Christ. What grace! He possesses all power in heaven and on earth. Nothing can limit His power. But He is our Father and He blesses us and speaks with us as His sons.

These are the blessings linked with Bethel. There He makes His thoughts known to us. He has purposed us for sonship for Himself and therefore He speaks with us about the mystery of His will. He informs us of all what He has purposed with Himself, of all His counsels of which Christ (the Son) is the Centre (cf. Eph. 1).

Because we are sons, we are also heirs — heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. We possess the Holy Spirit as the earnest of our inheritance. Christ shares, in infinite grace, the inheritance He has obtained by His work with his brethren. Of this He gives us even now the foretaste by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Here God speaks with Jacob about the inheritance He will give him, the promised land. That is in God's heart. He wants to speak with us about the land full of blessing that He has prepared for us in Christ, a land full of heavenly and eternal blessings. He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. With those He wants to acquaint us.

Finally, we see the glorious answer to this revelation of God's grace. Jacob has not only an altar at Bethel, a place of worship, but also a pillar, a testimony. It is a pillar consisting of a stone set on end. We already thought of this the first time. It is the same stone upon which Jacob rested his head. The content of our testimony is Christ, the Stone, after He has first become our resting place.

Here, however, this testimony is more an expression of thankfulness, in answer to God's revelation in grace and blessing. It is accompanied by a drink offering which speaks of thankfulness and joy. Jacob "poured on it a drink-offering, and poured oil on it" (v. 14). Is that not just the right thing to do here, where God has revealed Himself in such infinite grace and love?

These are the glorious things linked to Bethel. What a blessing, to know God in the fullness of His revelation in Christ! To know God as the God of His house, who speaks with His own as with His own sons!

"The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, being enlightened in the eyes of your heart, so that ye should know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the surpassing greatness of His power towards us who believe, according to the working of the might of His strength, in which He wrought in the Christ" (Eph. 1:17-20).

The End

The Prophecy of Micah (4)

—R. Been Sr.

Chapter 2 (Cont'd.)

"In that day shall they take up a proverb concerning you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, [and] say, We are utterly spoiled: he hath changed the portion of my people: how hath he removed it from me! He hath distributed our fields to the rebellious" (v. 4).

The time would come that those who have fallen under the judgment must acknowledge their total ruin. They would have to admit that God had given their possessions, their inheritance, into foreign hands, just as they themselves had in an evil way laid hold of the possession of others. Now, even what they rightfully possessed had been taken from them. Their landmarks had been relocated. The tragedy of it all was that God had not given their land to those who were more righteous than they, but to the *heathen*. The Assyrian, the enemy, would take possession of their inheritance. God had used this *enemy against them*, while they boasted that the Lord would *protect* them against that enemy. How shameful, how humiliating!

"Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast the measuring line upon a lot, in the congregation of Jehovah" (v. 5)

The judgment pronounced over the nation as a whole meant first that the Assyrian would invade their country and they would be exiled. Yet, this was not all. It also meant that when in the last days a remnant out of the nation would be restored, the nation as a whole would not have a share in this blessing.

"Prophesy ye not, they prophesy. If they do not prophesy to these, the ignominy will not depart" (v. 6).

This verse has given many expositors great difficulty. All is simple, however, when one discerns that the words: *"Prophesy not"* are spoken by *"the prophets who deceive My people"* (3:5). These charged the true prophets Isaiah and Micah, their contemporaries, not to prophesy, for the shameful thing that Isaiah and Micah prophesied would not happen. Micah answered, however, "If they (the true prophets) do not prophesy to these (the people), the ignominy will not depart." Their silence would not prevent the shameful collapse.

The true prophet's purpose is to lead the people to repentance by confronting the people with their sins and God's judgment over these. True prophecy is always characterized by mercy, for, although it proclaims judgment, it points simultaneously to the way of escape, namely through repentance. The behaviour of the false prophets, who spoke to please the people, was therefore so bad because through it the way of repentance was neglected with all the consequences of that.

"O thou [that art] named the house of Jacob, Is Jehovah impatient? are these his doings? Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly? But of late my people is risen up as an enemy: ye strip off the mantle with the garment from them that pass by securely, that are averse from war. The women of my people do ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from their young children do ye take away my magnificence for ever" (vv. 7-9).

Thus, the Lord spoke to His people through the prophet to shame it. Could the house of Jacob, all Israel, accuse God of not having been patient with them? Had He not ever again warned Israel through the prophets; had His admonishing voice not been heard even in the wilderness? Had He ever punished too early, or without cause? Had He not rewarded the righteous ones, and been patient towards the deceivers and those who committed violence? Yet, His people had acted hostile to Him. In a surprise attack they had robbed peaceful, unsuspecting people, driving helpless women from home and happiness. Then they had taken possession of these homes — robbing also the children of their inheritance.

"Arise ye, and depart; for this is not the resting-place, because of defilement that bringeth destruction, even a grievous destruction" (v. 10).

After the pronouncements of indignation in verses 7-9, the Lord told His people that they would be taken far from His presence. They would wander far from their land that they had defiled; no longer would it be a place of rest, its end being near.

This is also a serious word for today's believers. The world is an unclean place lying under judgment. Could believers then find rest in it? Don't let them demand their rights. Their inheritance is different, and the Word of the Lord is mighty to give them that inheritance (Acts 20:32).

"If a man walking in wind and falsehood do lie, [saying,] I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink, he shall be the prophet of this people" (v. 11).

In this verse we find the contrast between true and false prophets. The latter dealt in lies, speaking to the liking of the hearers. They excuse the evil, catering to the desires of men, telling them that they would obtain these. As long as the people faithfully performed their religious duties all the rest would take care of itself. Is it any different today?

"I will surely assemble, O Jacob, the whole of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as sheep of Bozrah, as a flock in the midst of their pasture: they shall make great noise by reason of [the multitude of] men" (v. 12)

What a contrast with verse 10 where the sinful nation is *driven out* of the land they have polluted! Here the Lord addresses all of Jacob, to the remnant out of all the tribes of Israel. This remnant will make up the new and restored people of the Lord. The Apostle Paul, too, had this remnant in view when he declared: "So all Israel shall be saved" (Rom 11:26).

This is a precious thought even for believers of today who live in the midst of the ruin of Christendom. God knows this remnant though much is hidden from human eyes within the mass of mere-professors. A few of them, perhaps somewhere just two or three, have returned to what was from the beginning as far as their manner of assembling is concerned. How many true believers who are not acquainted with these assemblies, or who for various reasons cannot muster the spiritual power to leave the systems of men, go sighing their way in loneliness. At the coming of the Lord for His Assembly, however, all true believers will in one moment be gathered into one great, heavenly flock that will "make a great noise by reason of the multitude of men." After that He will gather the great remnant of His earthly people Israel for His glorious earthly kingdom of peace. If even today the glow of restored Israel's earthly glory blinds our eyes, what will the heavenly glory be! Knowing this causes believers today to persevere on the lonely path. The inherent difficulties do not outweigh the glory that will soon be their part.

"One that breaketh through is gone up before them: they have broken forth, and have passed on to the gate, and are gone out by it; and their king passeth on before them, and Jehovah at the head of them" (v. 13).

Today it seems an impossibility that a remnant out of the twelve tribes will shortly form the new and restored nation Israel. It seems just as impossible that the true believers of the Assembly will be gathered into one flock. The waiting is for Him for whom nothing will be impossible, who will remove all obstacles, who will place Himself at the head.

Verses 12-13 become very clear when one discerns that they speak of a remnant out of all Israel. Verse 13 shows in which way and by what miraculous salvation this remnant will be brought to blessing. The Prophet says: *"They...have passed on to the gate."* That "Gate" is Christ, their Shepherd and their King. The Gospel of John, in the part where the Good Shepherd is mentioned (Jn. 10:1-15), gives as it were the explanation of Micah 2:12-13. There too, it says, "When He has put forth all his own, *He goes before them,*" and: "If any one enter in by Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and shall go out and shall find pasture," which means safety, liberty, and care. Christ will be acknowledged by this remnant as their chief Shepherd and king, as the only door (gate) by which to *go out* from an apostate people, and as the only door (gate) by which to *go into* the blessing of the peace of the Millennium. He will give that remnant the strength, the energy, and the ability to *break through*, despite all hindrances Satan has put in the way. Nothing will be able to frustrate this. Yet, for the believers of the Assembly, the blessing is much greater still.

To be cont'd

Outline for Bible Study (77)

155. Pentecost. The Church. — Acts 2.

Outline

1. The joy at Pentecost Acts 2:1-13
2. The Church established Acts 2:14-36
3. The life of the first Christians Acts 2:37-47

Explanation

1. The Holy Spirit was promised by the Father (Acts 1:4) and the Lord Himself (Jn. 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:7,13), and was foretold by John the Baptist (Jn. 1:33). In John 14:26 the Father sends the Spirit, in John 15:26 the Son sends Him, and in John 16:23 the Holy Spirit comes of His own accord. The coming of the Spirit is an answer to the prayer in John 17; it is based on Christ's sacrificial death and glorification.

The Holy Spirit came for the following purposes:

- To teach and to bring into remembrance all the things which the Lord had spoken (Jn. 14:26) — the four gospels.
- To bear witness concerning the Lord (Jn. 15:26) — the Acts.
- To guide into all the truth (Jn. 16:13) — the Epistles, especially those of Paul, which unfold the mystery of the Church.
- To announce what is coming (Jn. 16:13) — Various places: 2 Peter 2; 2 Thessalonians; 2 Timothy; Jude and Revelation.

Pentecost (fiftieth), the feast of weeks (Lev. 23:15-23; Dt. 16:9-12), took place fifty days (7 weeks) after the Passover, at the start of the wheat-harvest. It typifies the ingathering of the Church (the harvest of the first-fruits — Jas. 1:18). All pious, male Israelites had come to Jerusalem (Dt. 16:16). Then the Holy Spirit came down with the sound of a violent blowing (power) and parted tongues, as of fire (judgment), appearing upon each disciple. So the Spirit baptised them into one body, the habitation of God (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:22). They became powerful witnesses of the Lord.

2. Joel 2 really refers to the Kingdom, when the Spirit will descend "on all flesh." Here only the few believers received the Spirit. Since the Spirit had been promised, they ought to take note of what they now saw and heard. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ whom they had rejected, but whom God had made "both Lord and Christ."

Referring to Psalm 16, Peter spoke of the resurrection of which they were witnesses. He urged them to repent, judge their past, and be baptised, confessing their faith in Christ. All who enter the Kingdom through repentance and faith receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. The gospel was for the Jews first, for to them belonged the promise, but it was also for the Gentiles, those "who were afar off" (Eph. 2:13,17).

3. The first Christians persevered in four things: teaching, the apostles' fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42). These are still as important today! They also shared their possessions, not by order (Acts 5:4), but as fruit of the indwelling Spirit. This previewed the situation in the Millennium. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit Christians:

- are united to Christ, their Head, as members of His body (Jn. 14:20; 1 Cor. 12:12).
- can call God Father (Rom. 8:15,16).
- have a Guide leading them through this world to the Lord, as once Eleazar led Rebecca to Isaac (Rom. 8:14; Rev. 22:17).
- have One who opposes the flesh within them (Gal. 5:16,17), and the prince of darkness without.
- know the things which are given us by God (1 Cor. 2:12).
- have One who intercedes for them according to God, while they are still in this fallen creation (Rom. 8:27).
- have assurance that they will be raised (Rom. 8:11; Mt. 25:8,10).

Lesson

The parted tongues indicated that the gospel would be preached to the Jews and all nations.

God creates a true unity by His Spirit. When men's pride tried to form a visual unity by building the tower of Babel, God brought the confusion of tongues!

The Holy Spirit is the seal God gives upon faith in the Son of God (Eph. 1:13; Gal. 3:26; 4:6), the earnest of our eternal inheritance (Eph. 1:14; 2 Cor. 5:5), and the unction (anointing) through which we know all things (1 Jn. 2:27). 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 mentions all three: seal, earnest, and unction. Christians ought not to grieve the Spirit of God through their walk, nor to quench Him in the assembly (Eph. 4:30; 1 Th. 5:19). All children of God have to be filled with the Holy Spirit, they should not give place to the flesh and its lusts, but let the Spirit of God work and submit under His guidance and authority

(Gal. 5:16,18). "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness and self-control"! (Gal. 5:22).

156. The Lame Man. Peter and John Arrested. — Acts 3:1-4:31.

Outline

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| 1. The healing of the paralytic | Acts 3:1-11 |
| 2. Peter's testimony before the people | Acts 3:12-26 |
| 3. Peter and John imprisoned | Acts 4:1-22 |
| 4. The prayer of the believers | Acts 4:23-31 |

Explanation

1. The Lord had said: "Verily, verily, I say to you, he that believes on Me, the works which I do shall he do also, and he shall do greater than these, because I go to the Father" (Jn. 14:11-12). Such works showed that the apostles' testimony was of God and that they were God's ambassadors. The gift to do miracles is no longer present, but the source of power and blessing is still available. The believer can turn to the Lord in prayer and count on being heard (Jn. 14:13-14); but today nobody can say to a cripple or a dead body: "I say to you, rise up!" Such miracles will again take place at the beginning of the Millennium (Heb. 6:5), when all infirmities will be healed (Ps. 103:3; Isa. 35:6).

Thankful, the lame man enjoyed fellowship with God's servants (Acts 3:8-10). The people are amazed about the miracle, but do not repent. Peter points them to God, who has glorified Jesus, whom they had denied and delivered up to death, in who's name the miracle happened.

2. The crucifixion was done in ignorance (1 Cor 2:8). The first invitation to the marriage had been rejected (Mt. 22:1-3); now comes the second grace (Mt. 22:4). Israel, just as all sinners, needs: "repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21). If they would repent, times of refreshing would come, and Jesus would establish the kingdom (Acts 3:19-21). The return of the Lord Jesus depends now on the conversion of the Jews (Zech. 12:10-11; 13:1; 14:8-11).

3. The Sadducees (who deny the resurrection) and the priests silenced the apostles by putting them in prison (Jn. 16:1-3; Lk. 21:12-18). In defence of Peter, the Holy Spirit showed the rulers their position before God: builders who had rejected the corner stone, Christ (Acts 4:11-12, Ps. 118:22-23). Peter tried to win the ignorant people who were led astray by the hardened rulers whom he does not spare. How beautiful is the testimony of the apostles in Acts 4:19-20. We wished that all God's children would speak and act that way!

4. The intimate fellowship between believers and apostles led to a spontaneous prayer meeting. The Spirit visually revealed His power. The place where the believers — who are His habitation — prayed shook. God heard their prayer (cf. vv. 29,31). Though the Spirit's power was revealed in the words and deeds of the apostles, they fully realized their own weaknesses, and expressed it by praying. Therefore God could use them: "My Power is accomplished in weakness." It expressed itself either in the testimony to others, in prayer, in service (miracles, signs), or in the fruits of new life (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32).

Lesson

Initially, God still allowed a link with Jewish worship, and the apostles still went to the temple. Yet, the Church had its own worship (breaking of bread and prayer: Acts 2:46; 4:23- 31). Later they learned to separate themselves: "Therefore let us go forth to Him, without the camp" (Heb. 13:13).

To be cont'd