

The Prophecy of Micah (8)

—R. Been, Sr.

Chapter 5 (continued)

And it shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots. And I will cut off the cities of thy land, and overthrow all thy strongholds. And I will cut off sorceries out of thy hand and thou shalt have no soothsayers. Thy graven images also will I cut off, and thy statues out of the midst of thee; and thou shalt no more bow down to the work of thy hands. And I will pluck up thine Asherahs out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy cities. And I will execute vengeance in anger and in flay upon the nations, such as they have not heard of (vv. 10-15).

These are the judgments over the mass of apostate Jews and the nations allied with them. All armaments, fortifications, cities, will fall; all sorceries and soothsaying of these modern people will be eradicated; all idolatry will be done away by these judgments. They will take place shortly before and at the Lord's appearing in power and might, and will prepare the way for establishing Christ's kingdom.

Chapter 6

With chapter 5, the prophetic pronouncements of the prophet Micah have come to an end. Chapters 6 and 7 make up the fourth and closing part of this book. They contain the judicial controversy of the Lord with the remnant of Israel. Its purpose is to bring the people to a full spiritual understanding of its redemption. It is as if we hear the questions of the Judge, who would like to pronounce a "not guilty" verdict, and the responses of the accused. The confessions of the accused convince the Judge of their sin and guilt. Even so, the court session ends with the acquittal of the accused, and his complete justification. This would certainly be impossible before human courts. The session has as its purpose to arouse in the conscience first a detesting of its sin, then repentance, restoration, and finally a full awareness of grace. This work will be accomplished under the mighty working of God's Spirit in the heart of the remnant. It will thereby acknowledge the Lord's judgment over it to be just (7:18). Then it will cast itself entirely upon the grace which the nation as a whole had so shamefully failed to appreciate (6:1-5).

Chapters 6-7 show a great resemblance to Isaiah 1. We find the same charges, the same conclusions. The difference, however, is that in the prophecy of Micah, time and again, both parties involved in the controversy are speaking, and that the verdict is an *acquittal*, and not, as in *Isaiah*, a *condemnation*.

The entire course of this process is of great, practical importance. Before the reprimands are uttered, before the facts and the guilt are established, the guilty one declares itself guilty. It judges itself and recognizes that the experienced tribulation is just and deserved. This brings the remnant to the full appreciation of the love and the grace of God who removes sin from His presence forever.

Hear ye now what Jehovah saith: Arise, contend before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear, ye mountains, Jehovah's controversy, and ye, unchanging foundations of the earth; for Jehovah hath a controversy with His people, and He will plead with Israel (vv. 1-2).

Here, the prophet is God's mouthpiece urging the people to hear. The call is quite different from the one heard at the beginning of his prophecy (1:2). There, the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, and all the nations are invited to hear the verdict that would be declared over them by a holy and righteous God. Here, however, the Lord has the remnant, the true Israel, in view, not to judge it, but to cleanse it and to introduce the promised blessings. For this, it was necessary that the remnant listen to what the Lord had to say, for this would be the only remedy bringing them salvation.

The nation *as a whole* is invited to act as accuser in the presence of the "mountains" and the "hills," i.e., the great and small powers, persons in government, judges, etc., who are able to be competent witnesses, capable of discernment. We do not read that the people spoke. When a person is brought in God's presence, he does not speak, but becomes "speechless" (Mt. 22:12).

After this, these witnesses are again called to listen to the charge of the *Lord* and to pronounce their judgment. We find these charges in what follows in the chapter. These witnesses are, as it were, the jury that has to carefully consider the matter according to the earthly norms of justice and reasonableness.

O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against Me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of bondage; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye may know the righteousness of Jehovah (vv. 3-5).

Here, the Lord still calls Israel *His People*, for as a whole it had not yet been set aside. The ten tribes had at the time indeed been set aside, but the two had not yet gone into captivity. Jerusalem still existed and the temple service was still being observed.

What sadness and gentleness are contained in these verses! True, the Lord does have a controversy with His people, but one senses that He seeks only Israel's well-being. What evil has He done to them? With what has He tired them? He had delivered them from the bondage of Egypt. Afterwards He had not left them to themselves in the wilderness, but had met their spiritual and physical needs. He had given *Moses as mediator* between the people and Himself. The blessing of *the priesthood of Aaron* enabled them to stand before Him. *In Miriam prophecy* was seen.

In these verses there is *not even one word referring to the law*. Only later the law was added to show the people what was in their heart. Until then all that came from God's side had been grace and mercy; He had borne them on eagle's wings.

At the end of the wilderness journey it had become all too evident how evil and rebellious the people were. Yet even then, God had changed the curse with which Balak, the King of Moab, wanted Balaam to curse the Lord's people. God had changed that curse into a blessing for the distant future. To these two enemies, the Lord had spoken that He did not behold iniquity in Jacob, and that He delighted in the tents and dwellings of Israel. Yet, He who was only holy and righteous spoke toward the people by the sword of judgment when their idolatry and immorality had reached its summit at Shittim. At Gilgal, too, He had sought to teach the people that they could only enter the promised land by doing away with the evil flesh. All this was, so that they might fear the Lord and walk in His ways, acknowledging that He was fully justified in acting towards them as He had done.

Wherewith shall I come before Jehovah, bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will Jehovah take pleasure in thousands of rams, in ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? (vv. 6-7).

Here, the prophet is the mouthpiece of *the faithful ones among the people*, who will feel how sin has separated them from God. They are aware that the sacrifices brought according to the law cannot please Him in the least. Yet, "Wherewith can we approach the Lord?" *remains a question they are not able to answer*. As yet they do not know this, they just realize that animal sacrifices cannot help. The prophet Isaiah had called these sacrifices vain (Isa. 1:10-15). Even the sacrifice of their firstborn did not profit them. The sacrifice of the firstborn had been instituted by the Lord after the deliverance out of Egypt. That deliverance was based on the blood of the Pascal lamb (Ex. 13:1-2; 11-13).

The firstborn of men and animals among the Israelites was for the Lord. However, those of men had to be redeemed. In their stead an animal could be sacrificed. This sacrifice did not speak of the putting away or of the forgiveness of committed sins, but of *complete consecration, surrender, of the Israelite to the Lord*. Soon the faithful remnant will be aware that not one sacrifice brought by men can remove sins. But it will also come to realize that acceptable sacrifices to God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart (Ps. 51:17).

He hath shown thee, O man, what is good: and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with thy God? (v. 8).

Since the faithful ones among the people cannot themselves give the answer to the question with what they can approach God on high, *the prophet gives them a hint*. He presents them with the holy and righteous demands of God which summarize into this: that a man must do justice, love goodness, and walk humbly with his God. He points to the personal responsibility of every man to take this into account.

In the prophecy of Isaiah, we find the same direction: "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well: seek judgment, gladden the oppressed, do justice to the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isa. 1:16-17).

It is naive to think that, to receive forgiveness of sins, it would have sufficed for an Israelite to bring an animal sacrifice *quite apart from the condition of his own heart and conscience. God never instituted such a merely outward service.* All prophets remonstrate against the bringing of the required sacrifices when a God-pleasing heart condition is lacking. God wants truth in the inward parts. Hence the many expressions, such as: seek the Lord, ask of Him, fear Him, walk before His face, be well-pleasing to Him. Heart and conscience had to *be* in His presence. Appearing before God with sacrifices without a broken and contrite spirit is an abomination to Him.

To be acceptable to God *as far as human responsibility is concerned*, the prophet lists here three things that are required:

1. Do justice. Be occupied with righteous things.
2. Love goodness. This requires a heart condition that loves doing well.
3. Walk humbly with God as Enoch did once.

These three things exclude every pretence. How else could one do such things than through the power of a new, God-given life? In Christ Jesus the believer is enabled to do good works; he *loves to do* them, and walk with God *by faith*. Though the law demands these things, it cannot bring them about in the natural man. As a result, the natural man becomes more and more aware that the judgment over him is righteous. He must acknowledge that he is unable to live up to the demands of God's holiness.

Micah's prophecy deals with the work of God's grace in the hearts of *the future remnant* which will be completely restored. The prophet Isaiah, too, urges the doing away of evil and the doing of good, but there it concerns *the people of Judah as a whole* (Isa. 1:16-17), although there is also some reference to a remnant (Isa. 1:9). The cleansing of sins offered in the prophecy of Isaiah also refers to the entire nation, but there it is rejected by the people.

Jehovah's voice crieth unto the city, and wisdom looketh on Thy name. Hear ye the roan; and who hath appointed it. Are there yet treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure [which is] abominable? Shall I be pure with the unjust balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? For her rich men are full of violence, and her inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth (vv. 9-12).

In chapter 1:1-7 the prophet had directed himself to the people of Samaria and Jerusalem, announcing judgment. Had this warning been heeded? Verses 9-12 of chapter 6 show us that this was not the case. The people, here, are only reminded that the Lord still speaks, cries, to the city (Samaria). An interjection declares that it is profitable to fear the name of the Lord. The rod, the punishment, is already present; the people are admonished to see the hand of the Lord in it, rather than to ascribe it to fate. Would the Lord consider it righteous when treasures that had been obtained through injustice were stashed away in the houses of Samaria? Would He be righteous if He did not judge the use of false weights? The inhabitants of the city spoke lies and dealt in deception. Because of all this, the Lord's judgment fell upon them. In Amos 3:9-10 the prophet Amos had spoken in similar terms.

Therefore also will I make [thee] sick in smiting thee; I will make [thee] desolate because of thy sins. Thou shalt eat, and not be satisfied, and thine emptiness [shall remain] in the midst of thee; and thou shalt take away, and not save; and what thou savest will I give up to the sword. Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and new wine, but shalt not drink wine. For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab; and ye walk in their counsels: that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof a hissing; and ye shall bear the reproach of My people (vv. 13-16).

Already before, the prophet had pronounced judgment to Samaria, the ten, and to Jerusalem, the two tribes (1:1-7). Now it is clearly shown to the ten tribes that all the misery that had befallen them came as judgment from the Lord, as penalty over their sins. Every ascribing of this misery to "chance" — or to what so many today call "bad luck" — is here excluded. It is the Lord who beats them! All efforts to keep going, to bring in some measure of security, are in vain. Their treasures, obtained through godlessness and unrighteousness, would not suffice. What they thought to have secured would be consumed by the sword, by war. Their labour would not profit them because, instead of keeping the statutes of the Lord, they kept those of the godless kings Omri and Ahab. As result they would become the subject of astonishment and mockery.

This entire chapter is a stirring appeal to the conscience. The Lord first speaks of His grace. Heart and conscience are convicted of it that in no way can they answer to God's holiness. The natural man cannot do this. The Lord may show what is pleasing to His will, but man by himself cannot live up to it but only commit unrighteousness. Only the new nature, life from God, can keep the holy precepts of the Lord. That is how it will be with the faithful remnant of Israel in days to come. Through the despair of the tribulation it will begin to realize that the Lord's judgments are righteous. If it would only come to this recognition, however, there still would not be salvation and restoration for the remnant. God will, however, also work repentance and conversion among them, and thereby they will finally know, understand, and enjoy the grace of God.

To be cont'd

Noah (1)

—H. L. Heijkoop

— *Genesis 6:1-21; Hebrews 11:7; 2 Peter 3:3-14*

Singing about being redeemed out of this world and from the judgment soon coming over unbelievers, I thought of these Scripture portions. We expressed the thought found in the first eight verses of Genesis 6. Afterward, from verse 9 on, we find Noah as the righteous one, as a picture of the Lord Jesus. He is also a type of the faithful remnant of the two tribes after the rapture of the Church.

Verse 9 begins a new part in Genesis. It reads: "This is the history of Noah..." indicating the beginning of a genealogy (see also ch. 2:4). In it we see how God looks at the world, and how faith should walk in it if it wishes to escape perishing under God's judgment. Therefore, although the passage speaks from verse 9 onward about Noah as a believer, we nevertheless see in him the way whereby we have been and will be saved. It compares to what is said in 1 Thessalonians 1:10: "Jesus, our Deliverer from the coming wrath"! That remark, too, is said to believers.

We probably have heard that Enoch called his son Methuselah, which means: "When he dies it will come," or also: "The man of the sword." And indeed, in the year Methuselah died, the judgment came, the great Flood. Yet, Methuselah became, as far as we know, the oldest man who ever lived — 969 years. This confirms the words of 2 Peter 3 that God's longsuffering is great. He does not want anyone to perish, but that all come to repentance! When God announced that the judgment would come, He simultaneously indicated the time when it would occur, although in such a way that mankind still did not know how long it would be before it came. God allowed this man at whose death the judgment would come to become the oldest man who ever lived so that in that time of grace as many people as possible could be saved.

Today it is more than 1900 years ago that 2 Peter 3 has been written. It is likely that the apostle was crucified in Rome before the year 70. That means then that he wrote in this letter probably 1930 years ago that God's judgment stood at the door. Still, thanks be to God, the judgment has not yet come. Where would I have been if it had come before I was converted, before I had confessed my sin and guilt before God? So it is for each one of us. Give God that none of our readers delay turning to God with confession of their sins. The judgment can come any moment, and then their time of grace is past.

The first verses describe the condition of mankind in those days. It was not all that long after the fall of Adam and Eve! The Flood came about 1650 years after creation. And here, 120 years before the Flood, God shows how He evaluates the condition of mankind. We should not think that there were only a few people dwelling on earth at the time. In chapter 5 we read that people became about ten times as old as they do nowadays, and that they still had children at a very old age. Mahalaleel was sixty-five when he got a son (5:15), and it does not say that it was his first son. In that chapter only those are called son who are seen by God as chief of the generation, bearing the generation's characteristics. Noah still had his three sons, mentioned by name, when he was over 500 years old. Excavations have shown the earth's atmospheric condition of that time also to be different from today's. Even Siberia had then likely a subtropical climate. Some researchers have come to the conclusion that about 20 billion people must have lived on earth at the time of the Flood. From God's Word I have no idea how correct this figure is.

What we do see in God's Word is what the moral condition of mankind was: "And it came to pass when mankind began to multiply on the earth, and daughters were *born* to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and took themselves wives of all that they chose." (vv. 1-2). From verse 3 it becomes clear how serious this was: "And Jehovah said, My Spirit shall not always plead with Man; for he indeed is flesh; but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years." In Jude:6 and 2 Peter 2:4 we have the explanation of these verses: "And angels who had not kept their own original

state, but had abandoned their own dwelling, he keeps in eternal chains under gloomy darkness, to [the] judgment of [the] great day." Peter, speaking of these angels, immediately refers to the Flood. At that time therefore, a group of angels had broken through the separation between the different types of creatures that God had established in His creation, and had entered into unnatural relations with female persons. For this reason God brought the Flood in answer to this open apostasy from God by these angels and humans who had relationships together. The natural apostasy of creatures by their breaking through the Creator-given separations is among the worst things in the eye of God, perhaps it is the very worst. Satan and his demons are not yet captives. That will only take place at the beginning of the millennium (Rev. 20:1-2). Even then, it will not be forever (Rev. 20:7). These angels mentioned in Genesis 6, however, are already kept for judgment in eternal chains since those days.

For the same reason Exodus 22:19 says: "Every one that lieth with a beast shall certainly be put to death" (a judgment repeated in Lev. 20:15-16; 18:23; Dt. 27:21). Notice the context! verse 18 says: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." And verse 20: "He that sacrificeth to [any] god, save to Jehovah only, shall be devoted to destruction"! The same judgment is pronounced on homosexuality: "Wherefore God gave them up [also] in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, to dishonour their bodies between themselves... to vile lusts; for both their females changed the natural use into that contrary to nature; and in like manner the males... with males working shame" (Rom 1:24-27). In the Old Testament we read for instance: "And thou shalt not lie with mankind as one lieth with a woman: it is an abomination... they shall certainly be put to death; their blood is upon them" (Lev. 18:22; 20:13).

We see the same when it comes to the distinction between men and women. Genesis 2 tells us that the woman was only built by God after Adam had taken his place as head of creation. God had said that she will be a helpmate for Adam. Thereby God gave each their own place in creation. This shows that the cry for equal rights is in essence apostasy from God. Since God wants to see their special places also expressed outwardly, He says: "There shall not be a man's apparel on a woman, neither shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever doeth so is an abomination to Jehovah thy God" (Dt. 22:5).

Of course it is unbelievably not to recognize Jesus as Lord. Conversion and accepting God's Word is an act of obedience! Scripture speaks of the obedience of faith. It is a bending under the judgment of the Lord who says that every man is a lost sinner who must repent (Acts 17:30-31). Here, however, we are concerned with the corruption of creation order, an evil that can only speed God's judgment. Since we see the same in our days, God's judgment will soon come.

Some authors believe that the relationship between the sons of God and the daughters of men refers to marriages between Cain's generation and that of Seth. But there is no indication that this is correct. First of all, in the Old Testament the name "sons of God" is never used for people, but only for angels. Besides in this passage, we find that name also in Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Daniel 3:25. Moreover, verse 4 says that the relations of these angels with the daughters of men resulted in the births of children: "These were the heroes, who of old were men of renown." This is an indication that these relations were unnatural. Then also, the women concerned are here called "daughters of Adam." Adam is not just the name of the first man, but also one of the Hebrew names for mankind. The root of that name is "red," and is perhaps derived from "Adamah" the soil which was likely red. In about 460 places in the Old Testament, the name Adam is used to refer to mankind. In general the word is used in the Old Testament in referring to the human race in contrast with God in heaven or with the animals on earth. Often it is thereby accentuated that it is a descendant of Adam, one of the extended family of men whose body is made of the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7). Thus we see the great contrast: sons of God and daughters of Adam.

I already mentioned that the time in which we live bears the same character as the days of Noah. We may think of spiritism, of demonic influences in so many movements, for instance in some Pentecostal circles. The world, and especially the so-called Christian countries are swamped by it and people allow it in their lives. That is the sure sign that it cannot be long before God's judgment comes over this world, especially over Western Europe and Israel. Soon the devil will be cast upon the earth (Rev. 12:7-12). This is not the case yet, for it will only happen after the true believers have been taken up by the Lord into the Father's house (In. 14:2-3).

Then the devil, the great dragon, will give his throne and great authority to the emperor of Western Europe. In reality he will sit on the throne of the devil doing signs and wonders of falsehood (2 Th. 2:9). His ally, the Antichrist, the king of Israel, will even let fire descend from heaven before men (Rev. 13). Then Satanic power in its fullness will reign over the earth and particularly over the restored Roman Empire (Western Europe) and Israel. Of this, the Lord Jesus says: "Then shall there be great tribulation, such as has not been from [the] beginning of [the] world until now, nor ever shall be; and if those days had not been cut short, no flesh had been saved; but on account of the elect those days shall be cut short" (Mt. 24:21-22).

Here in Genesis we find a prophetic example of this. God says: "My Spirit shall not always plead with Man; for he indeed is flesh; but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years." God establishes the date of the judgment and at His own time He reveals it to His prophets. We don't know whether God did reveal it to Noah or to others. We know it from God's inspired Word. From this Word we also know that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord and that he received a divine revelation regarding the judgment (Heb. 11:7).

God cannot allow that creatures wilfully break His creation order. That is a total rejection of His rights as Creator. Every interference in a God-given order brings disastrous results for the creatures for whom God has given that order. All that He had created was in itself perfectly good and perfectly suited for the well-being of the creatures for whom it was meant. Here we see the results: "In those days there were giants on the earth." We, too, have seen these giants, men of renown, for instance in Hitler and Stalin and their friends, and in their reign of terror we have come to know the demonic powers. "And Jehovah saw that the wickedness of Man was great on the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart only evil continually. And Jehovah repented that He had made Man on the earth, and it grieved Him in His heart"! God, the Creator, must judge the evil.

But the Lord God in connection with His people, has grace for the individual who, in the consciousness of guilt, comes with confession of guilt looking for grace. Noah "found" grace. He must therefore have looked for it. And where did He find it? At the only place where he could find it, in the eyes of the Lord! He had heard the words that the judgment stood at the door and he had believed it. He recognized the righteousness of the Lord's judgment over the condition of men to whom he personally belonged. He also knew that only grace could save him. Thus he turned for it to the Judge who had pronounced the judgment. There he came to know Him as: "our Saviour God, who desires that all men should be saved and come to [the] knowledge of [the] truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

In our days too, God has pronounced judgment. In general, prominent persons in the world fear that, at the most within a few decades, a world-wide catastrophe, perhaps even a total annihilation of mankind, will take place! But the great mass of people say what God's Spirit already foretold in 2 Peter 3:4 that they would say: "Where is the promise of his coming? for from the time the fathers fell asleep all things remain thus from [the] beginning of [the] creation"! But the Holy Spirit adds: "For this is hidden from them through their own wilfulness, that heavens were of old, and an earth, having its subsistence out of water and in water, by the word of God, through which [waters] the then world, deluged with water, perished" (3:5-6).

Doubtless, the people in Noah's days said the same thing. Noah preached to them about the righteousness of God which meant judgment over sin and over the apostasy from Him (2 Pet. 2:5). However, they did not believe it. Isn't it terrible that from all the people who lived on the earth then — whether it were twenty billion or one billion, or even far less — only one family accepted salvation when it was still the time of grace? Only Noah really believed the word of God and acted accordingly. He acknowledged his lost condition and sought grace for forgiveness. He looked up to Him who had spoken those terrible words and found grace in those eyes. So every sinner has found this grace as he believed God's Word and looked up to that terrible Judge: "But without faith [it is] impossible to please [Him]. For he that draws near to God must believe that He is, and [that] He is a rewarder of them who seek Him out" (Heb. 11:6). And Romans 10:17 tells us: "So faith then [is] by a report, but the report by God's Word." Anyone who believes that God is not a liar, and that what He says is true, can only look up to Him who pronounced that terrible judgment, asking Him for grace.

We, then, have heard that the omniscient God saw the condition of humanity and their society. This He made known to him who had found grace in His eyes so that he could preach it to the people. How much more reason is there for God's judgment in our days? The moral condition in the western world is just as corrupt as it was then. Now, however, it is after God's Son, the Creator of heaven and earth, has come to earth in infinite grace to die on the cross for people so that "whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal" (Jn. 3:14-16). This free grace has now been preached for two thousand years. God has revealed Himself to man as the God who is light and love. In Him people have been able to see how they ought to live as creatures of the Creator. They, however, refuse His grace and reject Him, already for two thousand years, mocking Him wherever they can. Can it be otherwise than that the judgment stands at the door? God's Word gives us signs by which we can see this clearly.

We do not know the day when the time of grace will come to an end. Now it is as it was with Enoch. Enoch was taken up after he had pronounced the judgment for three hundred years in the name of his son. He walked on earth with God for three hundred years after he had given his son that meaningful name Methuselah. Then God took him up into heaven. We, too, wait for the moment that the Lord will take us, all God's children, up (Jn. 14:2-3). At that moment the door of grace will be closed for everyone who has by then heard the gospel without accepting it. Yet, today it is still the day of grace! God still calls each sinner!

Noah is certainly not a picture of today's unbelievers. He is a picture of the faithful remnant out of the two tribes of Israel who will be converted and born again after the Assembly is taken up. They will accept the Lord Jesus as King of Israel. Only after His appearing on earth to establish the Millennium will they see that He is Jehovah Himself, the covenant God of Israel. Then they will worship Him (Zech. 12:10; Isa. 53). After our rapture they will repent and confess their sins, as we find it prophetically in so many Psalms (e.g., 32 & 51). They will not have heard and rejected the gospel before the rapture. Only afterwards will the Holy Spirit work repentance in their consciences. In a few years they will then, with unknown zeal, proclaim *the gospel of the kingdom* over the entire world, though at the risk of their lives (Mt. 24:14; Rev. 12:17).

In verse 9 begins the actual history of Noah as a believer. It is remarkable that from this verse on there is only mention of "God," whereas we read in the first 8 verses only of Jehovah. The name "God" (Elohim) is the name whereby God presents Himself as Creator (Gen. 1:1). It draws our attention to the fact that He is the source of all temporal things, thus from all that has been created. "Jehovah" is God in His relationship with His creatures. First of all that is with all men, as we find it in Genesis 2-12. Afterwards it is especially with Israel (See Gen. 9:26-27 and Ex. 3). Because the subject from Genesis 6:9 on is the Flood, God's judgment over the corrupted world, the Holy Spirit uses the name "God." The Creator must judge His creation, but it is not yet the last judgment, although it is a picture of it and a most serious warning. Therefore only one family is saved and of all animals one male and one female (vv. 18-21). However, *Jehovah* charges Noah to take of the *clean* animals seven males and seven females with him into the ark (7:2-3). Chapter 8:20-22 gives us the reason for this. On the basis of the sweet savour (lit. the rest-giving savour), Jehovah could say that He would no more curse the earth as long as it would exist in its present form.

Noah was a righteous, upright man. In 2 Peter 2:5, he is called the preacher of righteousness. Verse 9 says that he walked with God, just as Enoch had done. We are not just preachers of righteousness, although we do not hide God's righteousness. We preach the gospel of grace. In that gospel we do speak of God's righteousness, but foremost of His righteousness in grace! His grace has opened a way wherein He shows righteousness when He forgives a sinner his guilt when this one confesses it before Him, accepting in faith the Lord Jesus and His work on the cross (Rom. 1:16-17; 3:22-26). Genesis 8, however, speaks of a time in which God wants to execute judgment in righteousness over man and animal. In this, Noah has fellowship with God. He walked with God. "Shall two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). We, however, are in connection with "our Saviour God who desires that all men should be saved and come to [the] knowledge of [the] truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-7). Because of this we can only walk with God when our mind is in agreement with God.

To be cont'd

Points to Ponder

Promises are man-made laws binding men.

"Are ye so senseless? having begun in Spirit, are ye going to be made perfect in flesh?" (Gal. 3:3).

Promises are oaths.

"Swear not...by any...oath; but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay, that ye do not fall under judgment" (Jas. 5:12).

Understandest thou what thou readest?

—J. van Dijk

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive [and] remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thes. 4:13-18).

Recently we came across an article by an author who sought to show how mistaken it is for Christians to expect to be taken up before the Lord's return. For this he used the above passage. We wrote the author asking him to exchange thoughts on this passage but no response was received. In this article we want to share with you our thoughts on it.

The passage was written by the apostle Paul because the Thessalonians were concerned about their brothers and sisters who had fallen asleep, who had died. The apostle wanted them to be well informed about matters concerning the future, and today we ought not be ignorant about them either. Ignorance would cause them unnecessary sorrow, and Paul's love for them sought to remove every trace of this. It is sad enough when we miss a loved one, and there is no need to grieve to the same degree as those who are without Christ. We believe in the resurrection. Christ has risen and because of His resurrection there is a resurrection for us.

When the Lord Jesus comes, Paul says in verse 14, He will *bring with* Him those who have slept in Jesus. That statement needs clarification, for if they have died, how is it that they can come with the Lord Jesus at His coming? What will take place? This Paul then begins to explain in verse 15.

What he presents there is not just his own idea. No, the Lord has made it known to him. He can tell them these things, because they are the words of the Lord. There will be Christians who have not died when the Lord comes. Paul writes "we," clearly indicating that he thought it quite possible that the Lord would come during his life-time. Yet, he says, those Christians would not "prevent" or "anticipate" those who have fallen asleep. It is unfortunate that both words used do no longer have the significance today that they had at the time these Bible translations were made. The New King James gives "precede." That is what is meant. The Christians who have not died will not enjoy something earlier than those who will have fallen asleep. That is a basic statement directly from the Lord. It leaves, however, the question how this can be.

Verse 16 gives the answer to that question. The Lord Himself will descend — it does not say come — with an assembling shout, the archangel's voice, the trump of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Here we see then that those who have fallen asleep will first of all be resurrected. Then the Christians still living on earth will be changed in the twinkling of an eye and caught up together with these risen saints (1 Cor. 15:51-52). All will leave this earth. But we read that the Lord was descending? Yes, but we *go to meet* the Lord in the air! (v. 17).

It is clear then that at that instant all believers are moving from the earth towards the descending Lord. What will be the immediate result of this? "Thus we shall be ever *with the Lord.*" *Not, the Lord will be with us,* but the reverse: *we shall be with the Lord* in the Father's house (Jn. 14:2).

Now we go back to verse 14. There we read that God will *bring with* Jesus those who have fallen asleep. We just saw that together with those who had fallen asleep we are *going to meet* the Lord, but in verse 14 those fallen asleep are *brought with* the Lord Jesus. It is impossible that these descriptions refer to the same event. *Coming with* is very clearly distinct from *going to meet*. What is the answer to this?

The answer lies first of all in acknowledging that the *coming with* is an event distinct from the *going to meet*. Many places throughout both the Old and the New Testament speak of the Lord's *coming* to reign on earth. When He comes, all who have believed will *come with Him*, not just those who have not as yet died. To *come with* Him requires that we are first of all with Him. That means that there must first be a *going to* be with Him. This was new, and therefore only the Lord Himself could declare it, — and Paul said that what he now told them was a message directly from the Lord — was that those believers who belong to the Church would be *taken up to be with the Lord* before that time.

This agrees with 1 Corinthians 15 and with the description found in Revelation 19, where we first find the marriage of the Lamb in heaven. After this we read of the Lord's coming in judgment followed by those clothed in fine linen, the material of a bride's dress. Then we find in chapter 20 the reigning for a thousand years during which Satan is bound.

There are many other Scriptures that can only be understood when we understand this portion. For instance, how can there be a *first resurrection* if there is only one (Rev. 20:5-6)? Why to speak of *the resurrection of the just* if there is no distinction (Lk. 14:14)? How can we reign with Christ; using an iron rod, in a day of grace (Rev. 2:26-27; 19:15)? There are many others. Our wish was to show that the passage which some claim speaks of only *one* coming of the Lord, clearly speaks of *two*. The first one occurs when He comes in the air to take His people home; then we will *go to meet Him*. The second occurs when He comes to earth to reign; then we, the living as well as those Christians who have died, will *come with* Him. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Outline for Bible Study (81)

163. PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY. — Acts 12:25-14:28.

Outline

1. Saul and Barnabas sent out Acts 12:24-13:3
2. At Cyprus Acts 13:4-12
3. At Antioch in Pisidia Acts 13:13-52
4. In Iconium (Lystra and Derbe) Acts 14:1-21
5. The return journey Acts 14:21-28

Explanation

1. God's testimony and blessings had always flowed from Jerusalem. Since Jerusalem had rejected Him, God chose Antioch as the place from where the gospel went out to the Gentiles. Paul's missionary journeys began and ended there.

2. The proconsul, Sergius Paulus, looked for truth and peace, which Elymas, the magician, could not give him. Through his sorceries the latter tried to keep the governor from believing. God's judgment struck Elymas, Sergius Paulus listened to the glad tidings. Elymas is a type of the Jews; many Jews who oppose the gospel are like Elymas struck with blindness and lie under the judgment (1 Th. 2:14-16).

3. The apostle preached the Word first to the Jews (Rom. 1:16), then to the Gentiles. Paul showed the Jews how God had loved Israel, guiding and guarding it, and fulfilling His promises by sending Jesus as Saviour. They, however, crucified the Christ, whom God raised. God then offered through Him forgiveness of sins and a righteousness which the law could not give (Rom. 3:24-26,28). The next Sabbath the multitude came to hear the Word of God. Many of them already worshipped the true God in the synagogue as proselytes. They had a great desire for the truth (Acts 13:48). The glorious message of God's rich grace and salvation revealed in Jesus Christ far exceeded anything they ever heard. Paul pronounced God's judgment upon those Jews who were envious of the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). Despite persecution, the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:3-5).

4. In Iconium the apostles were threatened by the opposing Jews (Lk. 2:34). In Lystra the healing of a lame man caused the multitude to think that the gods had come down. They called Barnabas Jupiter, the upper-god, and Paul Mercury because he took the lead in speaking. The apostles, filled with horror over this, taught the people about the true God. However, Jewish enemies stirred up the crowds and stoned Paul. They left him laying for dead outside the gate, but the Lord raised him up (2 Cor. 1:8-11; 1 Tim. 3:11,12). After entering into the city they went to Derbe the next day.

5. Then the apostles re-visited the new assemblies, strengthening and exhorting the disciples (Acts 14:22; 2 Cor. 6:8-10). The apostles, not the assemblies, chose elders — always several — or overseers (episkopos) in each assembly. The Holy Spirit was to lead them without a human form of supervision (Acts 20:17,28; Ti. 1:5,7); there were no overseers over the whole country as man has made today.

Lesson

Neither the apostles, nor the assemblies at Jerusalem or Antioch, but the Holy Spirit sent Barnabas and Saul (Gal. 1:1). This is an important principle also for our time! By the laying on of hands the saints at Antioch declared themselves one with the apostles in their service.

Even today, people seek to know the future through contact with spirits and powers of darkness but reject the Word of God. God *has* forbidden this abomination.

Each assembly was responsible for its own affairs, without a need for instruction from the apostles in Antioch or Jerusalem. Christ is the Head of the Church worldwide, not an overseer man-appointed (Mt 23:8-10); the Holy Spirit is His Vicar on earth (Jn. 14:16-17,20; 15:26). The elders ministered only within a local assembly (Phil. 1:1). Not they, but all the local saints together were to decide whom to receive or to put away from among themselves (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7,12-13; 2 Cor. 2:5-10 where the elders are not mentioned at all).

Outline

1. The Council at Jerusalem Acts 15:1-34
2. The visit to the assemblies in Asia Acts 15:35-16:5
3. The call to Macedonia Acts 16:6-12
4. Lydia and jailor Acts 16:13-40

Explanation

1. Some Jewish believers (especially those from the Pharisees: v. 5) told the Gentile believers that without keeping the law they could not be saved. Paul opposed this teaching, but rather than using his apostolic authority, knowing he was right, he submitted himself. Having received a revelation from the Lord to do so, he travelled to Jerusalem (Gal. 2:2). From there the Gentiles were admonished to abstain from three things:

- a. *from idolatry*, for God alone is worthy of homage and praise, therefore they had to abstain from all pollution of idols.
- b. *from fornication*, for God had instituted marriage in Eden, therefore adultery and fornication conflict with God's order.
- c. *from eating blood and what is strangled*. To Noah God had given the flesh of animals as food. Yet, since the soul of the flesh is in the blood and belongs to God, man must abstain from eating blood and what is strangled.

These three things God required long before the law was given at Sinai, but the Gentiles had become ignorant of them and therefore they were described anew to them.

2. Antioch was again the starting point of the apostle's missionary journey. First they strengthened the young believers. Paul firmly opposed Barnabas concerning Mark, who had turned back during the first journey. Yet, later Mark became a faithful witness of the Lord (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11) and wrote a gospel. The Lord gives Paul and Silas a faithful companion in Timothy. Twice the Holy Spirit did not allow them to announce the Word in Asia Minor (Acts 16:6-7).

3. Upon the vision in Troas, Paul and Silas responded to the calling of the Lord to bring the gospel to Europe. From Acts 16:10 on, Luke, the author of Acts, joined Paul and the brethren; now he uses "we" instead of "they" (vv. 6-10).

4. Philippi, in Macedonia, was a Roman colony, there they remained for a while. First Paul visits the dispersed Jews living there. Being only a few, they had no synagogue, but met at the water's edge. The apostle brought them the gospel. Amongst them was Lydia from Thyatira in Asia Minor, a woman from Gentile descent who sold purple. The Lord opened her heart, and she gladly received the Word of God regarding Jesus' death and salvation through Him. Lydia and the members of her household believed and were baptised. She invited the brethren to stay at her house. Her hospitality is a beautiful revelation of the fruit of the new life! (1 Jn. 3:14; Heb. 13:2).

Satan, as "an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14), wanted to spoil the work through cooperation (2 Cor. 6:14). The evil spirit in the maid servant spoke the truth! God's Word severely condemns this practice (Dt. 18:10-12)! Paul rebuked the work of Satan and, in the name of Jesus Christ, ordered the spirit to come out of her. The Lord Jesus had dealt so with an evil spirit who confessed Him (Mk. 1:24-25; cf. Mk. 16:17). Satan then showed his enmity through the masters of the servant, the magistrates, and the crowd. The apostles were scourged (Mt. 10:16-17), and the jailer put them in the stocks.

The apostles could have easily doubted God's ways. They had come to Europe on account of a vision, but instead of finding an open door they experience serious testings (Isa. 55:8-9). Still, they did not doubt, but received all from the hand of the Lord with thanksgiving. They prayed and sung praise to God in the middle of the night (Ps. 23:5; Phil. 4:4-7). The other prisoners, used to hearing complaining and cursing, heard the prayers and songs of praise. Nothing like it had ever happened before. It must have impressed their hearts and consciences, to find such peace and happiness in the messengers of God. God answered their prayers and songs with His power. An earthquake shook the foundations of the prison, the doors were opened and the bonds of all were loosed (Ps. 46:2-7). Satan's last attack was the attempted suicide of the jailer, who according to Roman law, would pay with his life if any of the prisoners escaped. Paul saved him. His conscience was touched; filled with remorse he fell down before Paul and Silas and asked: "What must I do that I may be saved?" Their suffering without resistance, their prayers and songs, and now Paul's keeping him from committing suicide, touched, through God's grace, the jailer's conscience. Since he saw himself as a lost sinner before God, Paul did not admonish him again to repentance, but to acceptance of the work of salvation. He spoke to him and said: "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved." The jailer believed along with all the members of his household and they were all baptised.

The next morning the magistrates sent their attendants to set the apostles free. Paul's refusal to leave the city without being brought out by the magistrates was not for his own honour, but God's. As servants of God they had been maltreated and scourged without a hearing, which was unlawful under Roman law. The crowd could have easily been left with the mistaken idea that they were criminals and this would have harmed the testimony.

Lesson

The question touched the foundation of Christianity — salvation by grace alone — and threatened the unity of the Church. Law and grace are opposed to each other (Gal. 2:15-20).

How blessed is it to be faithful to the Saviour from one's youth on (2 Tim. 1:5; 2:15; Acts 16:2). Then the Lord can use us to be a blessing to others.

God's Word must be preached by men who walk righteously and blamelessly (1 Th. 2:10). Therefore the magistrates had to testify before all that the apostles had done no evil.

To be cont'd