

Gilgal, the Valley of Achor, and Bochim

—Author unknown

Gilgal, the place of circumcision

The Epistle to the Colossians teaches us that circumcision is "the putting off the body of the flesh." The Christian, as regards his standing, has no flesh. He is in Christ, and as in Christ, he is circumcised; "in whom ye also are circumcised." We have not put off the flesh, that is, the old man: that *has been* done; nor have we to put the flesh to death, for it has been crucified with Christ; but we have to "mortify our members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness," etc., and we have to reckon ourselves "to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now circumcision was one act: it was the putting off the flesh. The circumcised man typified the Christian as regards his standing before God, up to the point of the flesh having been put off. The flesh, or the first Adam nature, has been condemned in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and is gone from the believer, to God and to faith.

But Gilgal was not only the place of circumcision, it was also the place where the camp was habitually; the place where Israel was to be found, where the Angel of the Lord was, so to speak, until He came up, after the failure was established, from Gilgal to Bochim. The camp being there, shows that Israel was never to forget its lesson that the flesh profits nothing. This is the teaching of the camp being there: "always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus."

The true circumcision are those who worship God in the Spirit, and boast in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. This is not standing, but practical.

Now, historically, Israel did not keep the sense of the worthlessness of the flesh. They went from Gilgal to Jericho in the sense that they were nothing and Jehovah everything, and conquered by faith. The effect on the flesh, not reckoned dead, was to elate it, and in the sense of their own strength, they went from Jericho to Ai, to find out their own weakness.

This they might have learned at Gilgal.

Why was the flesh put off if it had wisdom enough to judge, and strength to accomplish? They had forgotten this, and forgotten that they needed God.

There are two things at Ai: first, collective failure, high thoughts of themselves: and second, positive defilement, an accursed thing in their midst.

This latter brought a curse upon them all. So now, a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Jehovah takes up the open act of sin, and not their condition, and declares that He will be with them no more, except they put away the accursed thing from among them.

This is true to His blessed character, who will not always chide, but who cannot be committed to fellowship with sin. True also to the word of the Man with the drawn sword, who, when asked, "Art Thou for us, or for our adversaries?" replied, "Nay, but as Captain of Jehovah's host am I now come." That is, I am not for a party, but for a people having a certain moral character. Israel, stealing and dissembling, had lost the character of Jehovah's host, and lost the Lord as Captain, too.

Then comes the remedy. It is found in the Valley of Achor. There the accursed thing was put away, put out from among them.

The nature of their action in this was not penal, that is, not punishment inflicted on an offender, as a judge punishes a criminal. Their act had the character of self-judgment. It was a company that had sin put to their account, and they must get rid of it. It was not to punish Achan that they acted, but to clear themselves; although surely it did trouble him.

It is the same principle in Assembly discipline now. The object of putting out a wicked person is not to inflict a punishment upon him. The figure Scripture uses is leaven. The lump has to be kept new, suited to Christ, who was sacrificed for us; and

with this object the leaven is purged out. It is a corporate action to maintain a pure corporate condition; not to punish an offender, as a magistrate would do.

So, to spare the sin with a false thought of grace is to spare one's own sin; it is to keep the lump leavened, and so, practically, to keep the Lord out. It would have been so with Israel, had they kept Achan in.

In Assembly discipline there is also care for the salvation of the spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Now for Israel Jehovah was everything, and therefore the sin was judged. And it is to be observed that their bad corporate condition was no hindrance to their judging positive open sin.

The same thing is seen at Corinth. The assembly there was in so bad a condition that the apostle, to spare them, would not go there, although fully owning it to be the table of the Lord. They were schismatic, and puffed up, although the grossest immorality was there. Yet they are not called on to general humiliation, but to the judgment of the wicked person.

Now this is not Gilgal, nor Bochim; it is the Valley of Achor.

Gilgal is the judgment of the nature, so that the fruit does not appear. In Gilgal there is perfect communion with God; for He condemned sin in the flesh when He sent His own Son [to die] for sin. And we at Gilgal recognize the justice of His judgment as against ourselves. But when that has been missed, and the fruit has appeared, we must not, in the first place, deal with the nature — sin, but with the fruit — sins, by confession, and clearing ourselves.

This is true, both individually and corporately. It is not communion with God, but it is the way back to God, when communion has been lost. And it is always the way back; so we find the Valley of Achor, not only in Joshua, but also in Hosea, when, in the latter day, Israel will find it a door of hope (Hos. 2:16).

Bochim is something else: neither Gilgal nor the Valley of Achor.

The Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim. There He recounted His faithful ways with Israel, and His commands to them, which He charged them with disobeying, and stated the then irremediable consequences of their sin. The enemies, who might have been bread to them had they been faithful, were now to be thorns in their sides, and their gods a snare to them. They were confronted with this solemn fact, that they had brought themselves into a condition of trouble, danger, and shame, in which they must abide, because the Lord would not deliver them from it. The Angel of the Lord did not call them to put away evil now. Their opportunity for obedience and victory was past, and lost; they must now suffer, and there was no remedy. A new phase of the nation's history had been entered. They had left Gilgal and had reached Bochim.

While the angel was at Gilgal, the people were on probation. If they had been faithful, they would have been universally victorious. *Now*, the sowing time was past. It had been to the flesh, and the inevitable reaping-time had come. It was not that grace could not display itself in those circumstances, as we see in chapter 3. For if, on the one hand, the enemies were still there, because of the people's failure, God had left the nations "that the generations of Israel might know to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing of it."

And beyond this, grace could finally bring in the Messiah, and put all enemies under His feet.

But at Bochim it was the bitter sense of hopeless failure and chastisement; and, through grace, they bow to it, and weep. They do not attempt to remedy it, as they did once before in a similar case at Kadesh. At Kadesh there had been bitterness, but no brokenness. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

This is what is found here. Hence, although the punishment is not remitted, communion is restored, and they sacrifice to Jehovah there.

"Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be regretted." Bitterness, without brokenness, is the sorrow of the world, that works death.

It is a most serious fact that there are sins committed by believers which have permanent results. Grace restores the soul, as beautifully seen in David's case, but the mark of the sin remains to the end. See also Samson.

The difference between Bochim and the Valley of Achor is that at Bochim there is no positive sin present to be judged. They had disobeyed in the past, and were charged with it now, but they were not then in actual sin, as at Ai. Now they must accept the consequences.

It is the same thing later on under the kings. When failure had come in, and was irretrievable, the word was, "Serve the king of Babylon, and live."

At Bochim the people must judge their sins, and accept the punishment. At the Valley of Achor they must judge their sin, and cease from it. At Gilgal they must judge their nature, so that they may not sin. When the angel has gone to Bochim, there is no hope of restitution until the Messiah comes.

The same is true in the Church.

For us today there is no hope of general recovery. The ruin is established. The house of God had become like a great house. Bochim is our place, speaking generally; and looking for the return of our Lord, which alone can restore us. But this is not all. There is the positive duty of the individual to purge himself from the vessels of dishonour. He cannot leave the house; otherwise, he need not take up its shame as his own. Joshua never separates himself from the nation, though personally innocent. He goes round the wilderness from Kadesh with them.

So we cannot separate from the general profession, and start a new Christianity, and on the other hand, we must not go on in fellowship with evil. The first word to us now is, "Depart from iniquity;" the second, "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

Obedience to these brings us to the Lord's table.

We may ask ourselves whether failure has not again characterized us, as those gathered there? Does not worldliness assert itself among us, and refuse to be put down, as the Canaanites in the Lord's land? How can it be met?

Individuals may, by grace, keep their garments, but weeping would, I believe, be the suited place for all.

Then suppose, as often, alas, happens, a positive sin appears. Are we then to be weeping, or judging the sin? Is it to be Bochim, or the Valley of Achor? To be at Bochim at such a time would be to have fellowship with evil, and to make our general bad condition an excuse for leaving sin unjudged. That is not really Bochim at all. It is saying, practically, "We are delivered to do all these abominations."

It may be observed that, when the saints have to clear themselves from evil, the action is corporate, not individual. They act as one body, in mutual fellowship. The judgment about the evil, and the suitable course to take, may be individual; and this judgment may be pressed upon the saints by the individual. "I have judged already," says the apostle, "concerning him that hath so done this deed." Do *you* put him away from among yourselves. The power of binding and loosing belongs to the two or three gathered unto the Lord's name, not now to any individuals. Even an apostle did not act independently; and although not resident at Corinth, he does not on that account forbear to exercise their consciences. "Being absent in body...I have judged."

On the other hand, should a time come for separation from iniquity, corporate action is of course impossible, and fellowship is not the thought. The action is emphatically individual. "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour."

The End

The Prophecy of Micah (9)

—R. Been, Sr.

Chapter 7

In verses 9-16 of the previous chapter, the focus was Samaria, the ten tribes. In chapter 7:1-6 God's lawsuit continues, but now against Jerusalem and Judah, the two tribes. Its purpose is the *blessing of the remnant* which will make up the new and restored Israel. That remnant will understand — "hear the rod" (6:9) — that it is hopelessly lost. Still, the remnant will be characterised by faith, as well as repentance and conversion. God will secure their redemption.

"Woe is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer-fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage. There is no cluster to eat; there is no early fruit [which] my soul desired" (v. 1).

Here we find the exercises of soul of the future remnant. It has begun to judge itself. Convicted of sin, it will acknowledge the righteousness of the Lord's judgments in the last days. It will bow under God's wrath that will be poured out over the two tribes as a whole. That wrath works acknowledgement, repentance and conversion in the remnant, but in the great mass of the Jews it works resistance, further apostasy from God, and a turning to the idolatry of the antichrist!

After all the good the Lord had done to Israel from the beginning of their national existence until their being set aside, He expected that the people would produce good fruits for Him. He had, however, only found stinking fruits (Isa. 5:1-7). The remnant will come to acknowledge its lack of good fruit. As we mentioned earlier, we find twice a "woe" in Micah's prophecy (2:1; 7:1). The first "woe" corresponds to the six-fold "woe" in Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 5). It refers to those who dream up unrighteousness and do it. The second "woe" corresponds to the seventh of Isaiah (6:5), which he pronounced over himself when he saw the glory and holiness of the Lord of hosts and judged himself. There is only this difference: Micah saw the sinfulness of the people.

"The godly [man] hath perished out of the land, and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood, they hunt every man his brother with a net. Both hands are for evil, to do it well. The prince asketh, and the judge [is there] for a reward; and the great [man] uttereth his soul's greed: and [together] they combine it. The best of them is as a briar; the most upright, [worse] than a thorn-fence. The day of thy watchmen, thy visitation is come; now shall be their perplexity. Believe ye not in a companion, put not confidence in a familiar friend: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: a man's enemies are the men of his own household" (vv. 2-6).

The remnant will soon recognize how far the people of the two tribes have departed from God. There will be nothing left that the faithful remnant can build on. There is no longer any piety that counts with God. The wicked will unfold all their activity to do evil, and they will be all too successful in this. In our days we already see these wicked principles in action. Sin is no longer sin. With utmost care all steps have been taken to perform the evil in perfection. Someone once said, "It is difficult to do good, it is even more difficult to do that good well." The devil, however, will always find hands prepared to do evil well. People join hands to perform the evil. Governments misuse their authority, judges are hirelings, the mighty ones do whatever they want.

In chapter 5:9-14 the prophet Micah had already announced the judgment. Now he says that the day of the watchmen — these are the prophets and others — would be coming. Then would happen what these watchmen had prophesied. That day, however, will also be the day of visitation, of judgment, for the people who had departed from God. That day will be a day full of horror.

The condition among the people of the two tribes will become so bad that one cannot trust anyone anymore. The faithful ones of the remnant will stand alone, without friends, persecuted and betrayed by their own countrymen, even by the members of their own households and family. Their presence will cause the hatred of the apostatised people to flare up. It will flare up just as it did when the Lord Jesus moved among the people (Mt. 10:34-36). As soon as the testimony of God is rejected, even the most natural ties between son and father, daughter and mother are broken, and the hatred of man against God and His testimony is given free reign. That hatred is like a wild stream that breaks through dikes, destroying all in its path. Then love, even natural love, disappears as soon as one departs from God. Satan fills the hearts of men with the trait so peculiarly his: hatred. Speaking of persecution which will burst over the remnant, the Lord Jesus said that the brother will deliver up brother to death, the father his child, and the children will rise up against the parents and kill them (Mk. 13:12).

In the days of the prophet Habakkuk there was *social ruin* among the people of Israel. The fig tree had not blossomed, there was no harvest from the vines and olive trees, the fields failed to produce food. The cattle had disappeared from the stalls. Yet, as far as the prophet himself was concerned, he could in spite of all, leap for joy in the Lord, for God was his portion. In Micah 7:6 *moral ruin* is mentioned. Natural ties are denied. In the midst of such degeneration the faithful remnant will look up to Jehovah and expect their salvation from Him. The Epistle of Jude speaks of *spiritual ruin* through which many have gone in the way of Cain, and given themselves up to the error of Balaam, and perished in the gainsaying of Core (Jude :11). For sake of completeness we point still to *physical ruin*. Despite all, the Christian may enjoy the consolation that the inward, the spiritual man, is renewed from day to day.

"But as for me, I will look unto Jehovah; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me" (v. 7).

This statement of Micah will in the future be uttered by the believers of Israel's remnant. They will have experienced the hatred and persecution of their compatriots, they will have nothing left to trust in, and will come to realize that they can expect nothing else, not even from their own family. Only God remains for them. They will look for Him, expecting Him, and calling upon Him. Then they will experience that God hears them. Their faith clings to God. He is their salvation; He hears them. That gives them joy. This transition from the "woe" in verses 1-6 to the joy in God is most beautiful. When even the best among men is a dry briar on which one wounds himself by touching it, and when the most upright are worse than a thorn-fence, then all confidence in man disappears, but specially then, faith clings to God.

"Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: though I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, Jehovah shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of Jehovah — for I have sinned against Him — until He plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: He will bring me forth to the light; I shall behold His righteousness. And mine enemy shall see [it], and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is Jehovah thy God? Mine eyes shall behold her; now shall she be trodden down, as the mire of the streets" (vv. 8-10).

The enemy is doubtless the city of Jerusalem, it being the centre of the great mass of apostate Jews in the end time, and the source of the persecution of the faithful remnant. This remnant will acknowledge having been co-responsible for the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah. They will bow under the righteous judgments of the Lord. Yet, they are also convinced that this chastening by God will be used for their blessing. They know, too, that a day will come when the Lord will turn His wrath away from them and bring them out of the darkness — caused by their insecurity about the forgiveness of their sins — into the light.

This Jerusalem will say to the persecuted remnant: "Where is Jehovah thy God?" Then, however, God will execute His judgment over this mocking city, and the remnant will see it. The city and its inhabitants will be as the mire of the streets. The prophet Isaiah says the same thing. This judgment over the great mass of the apostate Jews will be executed by the Assyrian as Jehovah's rod of wrath (Isa. 10:6).

"In the day when thy walls shall be built, on that day shall the established limit recede. In that day they shall come to thee from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain. But the land shall be desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings" (vv. 11-13).

In these verses there is also mention of Jerusalem, but now no longer as the centre of the great mass of apostate Jews, but as the Lord's chosen city. That city will be rebuilt after its destruction when the Lord will have established His kingly rule. On that day, at that time, Jerusalem will have boundaries that extend beyond what they have ever been before. Assyria and Egypt will come to Jerusalem as vassal states, it being the centre of all earthly power and authority. The boundaries of Palestine will extend from Assyria to Egypt, and from Egypt to the river Euphrates. Also the prophet Isaiah speaks of this (Isa. 19:23-25).

Before this glorious change will come about, verse 13 leads us back once more to the days in which the land of Palestine will be destroyed under the Lord's judgment over the apostate Jewish nation. (The NIV and the NASB have here wrongly "earth" instead of "land.") From the other predictions of Micah and other prophets, we can derive that the reference here is to the incursion of the prophetic Assyrian, who, after conquering Jerusalem, proceeds into Egypt to subdue that country also. In doing so he destroys Palestine. This is a judgment of the Lord on account of the inhabitants of Palestine, the apostate Jews, for which the Lord uses the Assyrian.

How the faithful remnant will fare during this destruction by the Assyrian — how it will, in the midst of all the misery, put its hope in God — of this, the remaining verses speak.

"Feed Thy people with Thy rod, the flock of Thine inheritance, dwelling alone in the forest, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old. As in the days of thy coming forth out of the land of Egypt, will I show them marvellous things. — The nations shall see, and be ashamed for all their might: they shall lay [their] hand upon [their] mouth, their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick dust like the serpent; like crawling things of the earth, they shall come trembling forth from their close places. They shall turn with fear to Jehovah our God, and shall be afraid because of thee." (vv. 14-17).

While the faithful remnant of the two tribes goes through the persecution, it holds on to the future blessings. During these difficult days it will already enjoy the keeping care of Israel's Shepherd. It also asks for this, while calling itself the flock of His inheritance.

In His prophetic sermon, the Lord Jesus said that, when the remnant would see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place (the temple at Jerusalem), those in Judea should flee to the mountains, namely those of Transjordan (Mt. 24:15-16). Also in the second book of the Psalms (Ps. 42-72) the faithful ones call upon God from the land of the Jordan and the Hermon, from the low mountains (Ps. 42:6).

Some Jewish Christians were still in Jerusalem when the Romans laid siege to that city. It is claimed that, when the Romans interrupted that siege for some unexplainable reason, these Christians, mindful of the words of the Lord Jesus, applied them to themselves. They then fled to the city Pella in Transjordan, where they were all spared.

Micah mentions Bashan and Gilead as the regions to which a part of the remnant will flee. There they will, as in days of old during Israel's history, enjoy the safe-keeping care of the Lord. Their salvation is then very close. Besides the destruction of the armies of the "beast," the restored Roman Empire, and the antichrist, also the power of the prophetic Assyrian will be judged too. Then, afterwards, when the Lord Jesus will have set up His kingdom, the time will come of which it is written: "My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places" (Isa. 32:18).

To be cont'd

Noah (2)

—H. L. Heijkoop

Think about Noah's situation! When the Flood came, he was, as far as we can see, the only true believer! His father and grandfather were probably believers as well, seeing the names they gave to their sons. However, the father died five years before the Flood and the grandfather in the year of the Flood. God saw that "all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth" (v. 12). As a result, Noah walked on earth as the only believer. What a clear type of the future remnant out of the two tribes of Israel the way the Holy Spirit describes them in Revelation 14:1-5. They will have the name of the Lamb and of His Father on their foreheads. This means that their whole life's testimony will bear the stamp of the rejected Saviour and His Father. They will follow the Lamb, wherever it goes! Is not Noah, also in this, a very clear picture of the Lord Jesus?

Then, too, is he not also a picture of our Lord in building the ark? More than once I have heard that Noah's helpers portrayed people who are Christian in name, who are not converted. On the basis of this it was shown that to be a Christian in name does not save anyone. An evangelist finds the gospel everywhere in the Bible, and rightfully so. Yet, that is not said here. It is not even mentioned that his sons helped him. All it says in verse 22 is: "And Noah did it; according to all that God had commanded him, so did he"! In this he is a clear picture of the Lord Jesus in His work of redemption, just as the ark itself is a clear picture of our Saviour. Have not all who are children of God gone through God's judgment in Him without that judgment touching them? We have been crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:5-8; Col. 3:3), and have been raised with Him and placed with Him in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:56).

The condition of this world makes us aware of God's imminent judgment. We read of it in 1 Peter 3. How ought we to feel, and how must our practical life in the world be? We should learn from what God has shown us in Noah. In 2 Peter 3 we read that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. In building the ark, he loudly declared the way of salvation. Yet, his preaching was righteousness. God does not speak of good or glad tidings to men who refuse to repent, or live in open rebellion against Him. To such He present their *sins*, telling them that these will cause His judgment to come. When, however, they believe His Word and realize that they are lost sinners, and come to Him with confession, then He says to them: If you are a sinner, I have good news for you. I have sent My Son for the salvation of sinners. Accept Him as your Saviour. God only says this to them after they have repented! This we see in Noah. He preached God's right as Creator. He pointed to man's responsibility toward God; that man had to give account of his whole life, of all his words, deeds, and thoughts. He also preached that God has "set a day in which He is going to judge the habitable earth in righteousness by [the] Man whom He has appointed, giving the proof [of it] to all [in] having raised Him from among [the] dead (Act 17:30-31). Of course Acts 17 gives the New-Testament form of Noah's message — the form in which we should give it. As far as we know, apart from his wife and children, no one did accept Noah's preaching. How terrible! How lonely Noah must have felt! What a spiritual strength must he have received to remain standing! Not his brothers and sisters and their children (5:30), not his remaining family, yes, not even any descendants from Seth, the father of the lineage of faith — which we

can compare with all who call themselves Christians — believed the message of God preached by Noah. Therefore they perished when the Flood came.

Yes, then they no longer doubted the truth of it; they saw it with their own eyes. But it was too late! When Noah had entered the ark, God closed the door behind him. The time of grace was over. Even if Noah would have wanted to open the door, he could not have done so. When God closes, no one can open! (Rev. 3:7). Then came the Flood in which all perished!

We see the same in Matthew 25:11-12. When the wise virgins had entered, the door was shut. The foolish virgins called afterwards: "Lord, Lord, open to us!" But the answer of the Bridegroom was: "I do not know you."! In verse 41 of that chapter the Lord says to the goats (those who did not accept the gospel of the kingdom): "Go from Me, cursed, into eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

What must it be for the Lord when we, true believers, do not pay attention to what God's Word says about the last days, the last evil days (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-6), while we see with our eyes that we live in these very days? What must it be for Him when we close our eyes to what the Word says our position and attitude ought to be in these circumstances? What if we pay no attention to the judgment that lies at the door? What if we live as if the mockers of 2 Peter 3 are right in saying: "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."? Yes, if we think: "The Lord's coming can be a thousand years away" as I have several times heard from persons who confessed to be true Christians?

What a dishonour to the Lord when we no longer believe His Word. How sad must His heart be when our practical life expresses this. When it is largely, or entirely, directed towards earthly things as if we will always remain here. When He sees that we fail to take into account that shortly all earthly things will be destroyed through the judgment. We do know, don't we, that the most severe judgments in Revelation will come over Western Europe and Israel? How great His sadness when our life is not entirely directed toward our heavenly future, which we will soon enter to be there forever!

Also, what a lack of testimony toward the unbelievers, and toward other believers who have little light about the truths of God's Word. What can they believe of our words, our gospel preaching, when they see that we live just as materialistic as they do and that we just as little believe that the world is completely wicked and its judgment imminent? Before the war, someone speaking about Christians, remarked: "They speak as if the Lord could come any moment, but they build such beautiful, luxurious houses as if they expect that they or their children will have to live there for another 500 years." Did this not show that the testimony toward those outside had practically lost all its power? The least we need to acknowledge is this, that in this way we do not walk with God.

Noah walked with God! He was a righteous, upright man in his generations (v. 9). He spoke the Truth and he did the Truth, the Word of God. His life was a revelation of God. His whole practical life testified of it that he believed the word of God. Just imagine: It had likely never rained before the Flood. Then a man begins to build a huge ship in the midst of Mesopotamia where there is no sea nearby. The building must have taken long in those days. As we said, there is no indication that he had any help. Many believe that it took him 120 years, even though this is not clearly said. Meanwhile he preached. Could he have preached anything but that God's judgment was near, and that he, therefore, was building the ark?

Don't you think that they must have shaken their heads, and said, "That man is crazy. That weird fellow wants to tell us that so much water will fall from the sky that we will all drown! From the beginning water has never fallen from the sky!" That went on some 120 years. There was not one man or woman who believed him. Not his brothers and sisters, not his neighbours, nobody! And Noah, in fellowship with his God, built and preached. Do you think that Noah had time and desire to build a big business; to amass a large capital; that he could and wanted to use much of what became available to him for himself? The ark was about 150 meters long, 25 broad, and 15 high, having three stories. How much material did Noah have to bring for building the ark? How much did it cost him, and where did he get the money? How much time would it have taken to assemble it all? Would he have had much time left to care for his family after building and preaching? The Lord had charged him to build, therefore the Lord must have strengthened him to do the work. The Lord enabled him to provide all the victuals needed for him, his family, and all the animals that would live in the ark during a year and ten days, and even for some time after that. Normally the Lord does not give luxurious things that He will shortly after destroy through judgment.

Would Noah have had the time to occupy himself with all kinds of other matters? I believe that we know the answer very well if we think a little about it. "Noah walked with God"! Don't we believe that God will speak with us when we walk with Him? What occupied God's heart? "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... 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. And Jehovah said, I will destroy Man, whom I have created, from the earth — from man to cattle, to creeping things, and to fowl of the heavens; for I repent that I have made them" (vv.3,5-7).

Wouldn't this, what occupied the heart of God so much, have been the main subject of conversation between God and Noah? What results had this for Noah? It was God's desire, and Noah's no doubt, that many of Noah's family, of all he knew, even of all men, would grasp at the means of salvation that God gave even in these last days. Noah walked with God; this made it impossible that he would not have known and shared God's thoughts. No one can seek God's company and enjoy it without being filled with God's wonderful thoughts and without thinking as God thinks.

Enoch walked also with God, but with him it was still different than with Noah. With him it was a question of discerning the ruin of God's testimony on earth. This was no doubt the main subject shared between God and him. Yet, although he knew that God would judge the hypocrites among the believers (Jude :14-15), he knew also that he would be taken up before the judgment. He knew that he pleased God and he walked with God directly to the house of God.

Charged to do so by God, Noah built the ark large enough that many people could find a place in it. He testified of it by his public work and his preaching. He was a preacher of righteousness, who by the Spirit of Christ in him preached against those who are now in prison, but who then still lived on earth and were disobedient (1 Pet. 3:18-20; 1:10-11). These persons are therefore now in Hades suffering pain (Lk 16:23f). There they have to wait until the judgment before the Great White Throne, where they will be condemned to hell, the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15; Mt. 25:41). That lake has been prepared for the devil and his angels, but also for all who, having chosen to serve the devil rather than God, the Creator, have not repented during their life on earth.

Noah walked with God. He walked the path God walked! God had withdrawn from the human race as a whole, saying, "All *there* is evil! I can no longer have fellowship with them, but only judge them" In our days this is much stronger yet. The whole world is at enmity with God (Rom. 3:19). Friendship with the world is enmity with God (Jam. 4:4). We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the wicked [one] (1 Jn. 5:19). Our Lord Jesus Christ who gave Himself for our sins, so that He should deliver us out of the present evil world, according to the will of our God and Father (Gal. 1:4).

Indeed in Noah's days, the judgment was delayed. One hundred and twenty years before the judgment was executed God made it known to righteous Noah. "But the Lord Jehovah will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). God can no longer have any connections with those who have rejected Him and who have chosen Satan as their prince and god. He can only maintain connections with those who come to Him to find grace to walk their way with Him.

Isn't it remarkable that apart from Enoch only of Noah it can be said that he walked with God? It is for each of us the big question whether or not the Holy Spirit can say this of us — of me. Do we walk with the Lord Jesus? He was here on earth and He was rejected. The world had but a cross and a tomb for Him. Every true believer has gone to Him there where the world has brought Him — the cross and the tomb. In baptism we have officially taken this place on earth with Him! "Are you ignorant that we, as many as have been baptised unto Christ Jesus, have been baptised unto His death? We have been buried therefore with Him by baptism unto death, in order that, even as Christ has been raised up from among [the] dead by the glory of the Father, so *we* also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-4). So we have been united with Him, as far as our position on earth is concerned, with the position that the world has given Him, the crucified One. It is as Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, writes: "The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom [the] world is crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14). The cross stood not just between *hell and him*, but also between the *world and him!* It is impossible that there would be any connection between the Lord Jesus and the world that has rejected and crucified Him. He has only judgment for the world, and waits for the moment the Father referred to when He after His ascension, said: "But as to which of the angels said He ever, Sit at My right hand *until* I put Thine enemies [as] footstool of Thy feet?" (Heb. 1:13). Do we make it a reality in our lives that we have been united to Him in the place that He has in the world now?

In John 17:9 the Lord says expressly to the Father: "I demand concerning them (the disciples); I do not demand concerning the world." The day comes that He will answer the Father's question: "Ask of Me, and I will give Thee nations for an inheritance, and for Thy possession the ends of the earth. Thou shalt break them with a sceptre of iron, as a potter's vessel. Thou shalt dash them in pieces. (Ps. 2:8-9). That means judgment for the world, as also the following verse says: "For neither does the Father judge any one, but has given all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). Today His concern is not with the world. He is in the sanctuary as our Priest, praying there for us, who approach through Him to God (Heb. 7:25; 4:14-16; Rom. 8:34). He is our Advocate with the Father when we have sinned (1 Jn. 2:1). He washes our feet, restoring us into fellowship with the Father and Himself, so that we, like Noah, may walk practically with God (Jn. 13:8).

Noah was a righteous man. What is "right" for a believer? "Ye have been bought with a price: glorify now then God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:20). Sometimes we sing: "Thou art my Lord, through Thy grace I claim to belong to Thee... Thou hast obtained a rightful claim upon us, both upon our soul and body, through Thy blood." Does this not mean that we ask in all things, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"; and that we then do what He tells us to?

Yes, we should make it a practical reality that He is our Lord, not only through our words, but also through our deeds — visible for all. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from among [the] dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9). Alas, how weak are we often in making these things a practical reality! How weak towards the world is my testimony that He is my Lord and that I may not do — yes, do not even want to do — anything else than what He tells me. We may confess this with our words, but how little do others see it in our practical life? Noah, however, was a righteous, upright man in his generations: Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9).

Let us search God's Word, meditating deeply on it, considering what God's position towards the world, man's society, is in our time. The word "*world*" in Galatians 1:4 is not "*kosmos*" as it is in most other places, but "*aion*" which is always linked to time. For this reason several translations have "*age*" here. The significance is *the character of the world at a certain time*. For us, therefore, it is the world in its moral character after the rejection and murder of the Lord Jesus. Now, we have seen that the Lord Jesus does not want anything to do with the world until the time of judgment has come. Until that time His sole purpose is to call people out of that world to repentance (2 Cor. 5:19-21). He says in John 12:31 and 16:11 that Satan is the prince of this world. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 he is called the god of this world (*age*). Could the Lord Jesus, the Creator, still have any fellowship with this world? Impossible! There is no place for God in this world, neither for the Lord Jesus, for it has another god and lord. A walk with God, with the Father and the Son under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can, therefore, only be experienced in connection with an absolute separation from the world. We should give this our serious consideration while continuously praying the last two lines of our hymn: Oh, Lord, grant that I only may abide, and walk forever at thy side!

The End

Outline for Bible Study (82)

165. PAUL AT ATHENS AND CORINTH. — Acts 17-18

Outline

1. The apostles in Thessalonica and Berea Acts 17:1-15
2. Paul at Athens Acts 17:16-34
3. Stay at Corinth and return Acts 18:1-22
4. Apollos Acts 18:24-28

Explanation

1. In Thessalonica, a business city, lived many Jews. When some of these and many proselytes believed the gospel, the Jews were filled with jealousy. They aroused a crowd and accused the apostles of acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar by announcing the coming kingdom of the heavenly King (Messiah). This troubled the magistrates, because it was serious to harbour rebels against Caesar. (Cf. 1 Th. 2:14-16). The Jews in Berea received Paul friendlier, and daily searched the Scriptures. Still, the persecuting Jews of Thessalonica forced Paul to travel on; he went by ship to Athens, while Silas and Timotheus remained in Berea.

2. The capital of Greece, Athens, though under Roman rule, was still the centre of Greek culture, art, knowledge, and pleasure. There, intellectual Romans learned refined manners and Greek wisdom. However, they did not know the Source of true wisdom, the living God. Their city was given up to idolatry. It hurt Paul to see this idolatry. Both in the synagogue and in the market he preached. The Epicureans, like the Sadducees, has as principle: "Let us eat and drink, because tomorrow we die." The Stoics, who pursued virtue, were more like the Pharisees. Both were opposed to the gospel. Earlier the preaching of other gods had been punished with death (Socrates was poisoned). Now less intolerant, they wanted to hear about this foreign God, strictly out of curiosity.

On the hill Areopagus met the tribunal that watched over religion and morals. There Paul preached Christ without deriding the Athenians for their many idols. In their idolatry Paul noticed their search for God. Gentiles did not know that God is the Creator of the world and man, and does not dwell in temples. They deified nature and its forces. Their gods depended on human service. Greeks believed that every nation had its own origin. Paul taught that humanity, descending from one man, formed a unity that God had divided into nations with their own boundaries. God wants all men to know Him, and takes care of them by giving rain and sunshine. Paul reminded the Athenians of what one of their own poets had said. Now, however, the times of ignorance are over, and God enjoins all men that they shall everywhere repent because a day has been set in which God will execute judgment through a resurrected Man. This idea of resurrection they rejected, and the message had little result. A few women and a prominent Greek came to faith in Christ (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

3. Paul alone went on to Corinth, a large centre of commerce and shipping, notorious for its immorality. Timotheus and Silas, came later. He strengthened himself in the Lord and announced the Word of God "in fear and trembling," and God blessed his work. Upon arrival he looked immediately for work as a tent-maker and found Aquila and Priscilla, a believing couple who became a great blessing to Paul and the Lord's work (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19). During Paul's stay of a year and a half many believed. A large assembly was formed. Then Paul sailed to Jerusalem by way of Ephesus, and afterwards returned to Antioch.

4. Apollos was an eloquent man from Alexandria, mighty in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit. He was well educated, and spoke boldly in Ephesus where many Jews lived, yet, he was willing to be taught by simple believers. May the Lord grant all believers such a humble disposition.

Lesson

If Christians would have acted like the Bereans, there would not have been so many wrong teachings.

Sin in its various disguises opposes the gospel: in Philippi greed, in Thessalonica Jewish jealousy, in Athens indifference and man's wisdom.

166. THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY. PAUL AT EPHESUS AND AT TROAS. — Acts 19-20

Outline

1. Paul at Ephesus Acts 18:23; 19:1-41
2. Paul in Greece and Troas Acts 20:1-12
3. His farewell at Miletus Acts 20:13-38

Explanation

1. Paul's third journey also started at Antioch. After visiting the assemblies in Asia, he settled for two years and three months at Ephesus, where he had left Aquila and Priscilla. This centre of commerce was visited by many who must have spoken of the gospel in their home towns. Like the Old-Testament saints, the twelve believing Jews waited for the Messiah. According to John the Baptist (Mt. 3:11), He would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. They did not know that the Messiah had come, and had been crucified and raised, and that, subsequently, the Holy Spirit had been sent. Because of this, they received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands (cf. Eph. 1:3; Acts 10:44). When the Jews hardened their hearts, Paul and those who believed left the synagogue. Paul then preached in the school of Tyrannus. The miracles confirmed that God had sent the apostles and that the Holy Spirit worked through them. When some unbelieving Jews used the name of the Lord Jesus as a magic formula, the evil spirit overpowered them, for the Holy Spirit was not within them (Mt. 12:28-29; 17:17-19; Mk. 16:17). Many made a clear confession of the Lord and broke off all connections with the power of evil. Then the enemy, not willing to give up, stirred up the passions of greed in Demetrius and his colleagues, who pretended to be resisting the gospel on religious grounds. This aroused the wrath of the religious people. God, however, watched over His work and quieted the enemy down.

2. After the tumult, Paul took leave of the disciples; his work in Ephesus had ended. His care for the assemblies in Greece, especially for Corinth with its difficulties, brought him again to Europe. Yet, this time he did not stay long. Beside Corinth, he visited several places, and he longed to go to Rome also (Rom. 15:22). Instead he wrote to Rome from Cencrea, near

Corinth (Rom. 16:1). He decided to first go to Jerusalem to bring the gifts from the Grecian believers for the poor Judean Christians (Rom. 15:25, 28-32). A Jewish plot against his life caused him to go by ship instead of over land through Macedonia. Brethren from Berea, Thessalonica, and Philippi accompanied him as far as Troas. On his way from Ephesus, God had given Paul little time to preach the gospel in Troas, now he stayed seven days (2 Cor. 2:12-13). After breaking of bread, they meditated over God's Word. The well-lit room shows that they did not meet in secret. Eutychus, a young man, overpowered by sleep, fell from a third story window, and was taken up dead. The Lord in His grace allowed Paul to call him back to life.

3. In order not to lose time Paul did not enter Ephesus, but said farewell to its elders at nearby Miletus. Soon his freedom would end; he had announced the whole counsel of God. Now he warned that wolves would arise from among them. The elders had to watch: to take heed to themselves and to all the flock. Foreseeing the coming apostasy Paul did not commend the flock to an overseer but to "God, and to the Word of His grace."

Lesson

The form of the Greek word for "*assembled*" shows that it was custom for the first Christians to meet each first day of the week to remember the Lord in His death and resurrection.

How serious is the message to the assembly in Ephesus in Revelation 2:4-5! Once they had such a high position. Hence the exhortation to all believers: "Watch!" (1 Cor. 16:13; Rev. 3:3).

To be cont'd