

BIBLE CHARACTERS

Bible Characters by Hugo Bouter
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Hugo Bouter

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GLEANINGS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

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*“Please let me glean
and gather after the reapers’.*

Ruth 2:7

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Preface

The theme of this collection of short, often meditative studies is derived from the book of Ruth. After Naomi returned from Moab to Bethlehem (meaning “the house of bread”), her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth, went to glean ears of grain among the sheaves in the field of Boaz.

These sheaves in the field of Boaz can be seen as a picture of the abundant spiritual food which Christ, the true Boaz, who has power to redeem, has available for us in His Word. In the harvest field of our Lord, His servants, His apostles and prophets have reaped and orderly tied the harvest together into *sheaves*: constructions with each their own structure, namely the separate Bible books (and secondly, also elaborated explanations of them).

The various subjects brought up in this anthology do not, however, refer to complete Bible books, entire sheaves. Rather, they are like *loose ears of grain*, gleaned here and there from among the sheaves that were tied together by the inspired writers of the Bible. Yet, these meditations gleaned from various places in the Word of God can be valuable for any ‘hungry reader’, for all these Bible characters are important examples for our Christian life. So I trust the Lord of the harvest will use these short Bible studies to bless the reader.

London, Spring 2004

1

Enosh, the son of Seth, and his worship

“Then men began to call on the name of the LORD”.

Genesis 4:26

Praising with Christ

It is always very helpful to see when and in what context a certain saying is first mentioned in Scripture, particularly so in Genesis, which in many respects is the ‘book of beginnings’. The expression, “to call on the name of the Lord” first occurs at the close of Genesis 4, after the birth of Enosh, the son of Seth.

In contrast with the offspring of Cain, mentioned earlier in this chapter, who had *gone out* from the presence of the Lord, we find here the family of Seth and perhaps also other descendants of Adam and Eve who desired to *seek* God’s presence.

So here we have the children of God distinguished from the children of this world who tried to manage without God. Cain was the first builder of a city and his descendants were the founders of the first human civilization. However, they had no relationship with God, which was the special feature that marked the offspring of Seth. In the midst of a world without God the children of Seth called on the name of the Lord and honoured Him, knowing that they could not live without Him. They realized that they needed His help from day to day.

God noticed this and had it written down. Here we have the

beginning of regular worship. They started to serve the Lord and to call on His name. This was no individual, but a collective matter: "Then *men* began to call on the name of the Lord".

Abel was the first man to bring an offering that was pleasing in God's eyes and he did so alone (as far as we can gather from the beginning of Genesis 4). But Seth, the one who had come in the place of the deceased Abel, and his offspring did it collectively. In Seth we see a picture of the risen Lord praising the Father together with His own and singing God's praises in the midst of the Church (cf. Gen. 4:25; Ps. 22:22; John 20:17-20; Heb. 2:10-13; 12:24).

The beginning of true worship

When did Seth and his children start doing this? It was after the birth of Enosh, whose name speaks of man's weakness and mortality (cf. Job 7:16; Ps. 8:4; 90:3). They began to call on the name of the Lord in the awareness of their own weakness and helplessness.

They realized that in themselves they were no more than a breath and so they called upon Him who lives for ever, the LORD, the eternal I AM. They acknowledged Him as both the Source and the Sustainer of life. While Cain's offspring was marked by pride and self-glorification (if we may interpret Genesis 4:23-24 this way), the descendants of Seth were marked by humility and self-abasement.

They called on the *name* of the Lord. God's name indicates who He is and what we can know about Him. It reveals His relationship with men:

- (1) The patriarchs knew Him especially as the *Almighty*.
- (2) Israel knew Him as *Yahweh – the great I AM*.
- (3) Believers in the Church period, the dispensation of God's grace, know Him as their *Father* in Christ.
- (4) And in the future dispensation of the Kingdom of peace He will be known and honoured more especially as the *Most High* who possesses heaven and earth.

God is the God of Shem, as we are told in Genesis 9:26, and Shem means “name”. God is the God of those who know His name and who have a relationship with Him. Thus, later on in the history of Israel we find the Angel in whom the name of the LORD was (Ex. 23:20-21) going with God’s people. We also find that God’s name was put on the children of Israel in order to bless them (Num. 6:27).

That name was their refuge: “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe” (Prov. 18:10). This indicates how strong the ties are between God and the people called after His name. This goes for us too, who may now call on God as our *Father* (John 4:23; Rom. 8:15; 1 Pet. 1:17). The Son has declared the Father and the Spirit leads us to worship the Father (Gal. 4:6).

The simplicity of true worship

We do not know exactly how the family of Seth arranged their worship, and called on the name of the Lord. Genesis 4 does not give any details. This indicates that it was done in all simplicity, without ceremony, or in the words of our Lord when He spoke with the Samaritan woman: in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

This would mean that they worshipped with sincere hearts, fully aware of their own smallness and of God’s mercy and truth. It would mean that they worshipped in the power of the Spirit of God, without impressive liturgies.

This is how we as Christians ought to call on the name of the Lord. “Calling on” Him means looking away from ourselves and our weakness and expressing what we have found in Him. It means worshipping Him for all that He has done and for what He is. It implies that we realize His greatness and bow down before Him in adoration.

Perhaps the only thing the family of Seth had was an altar. It was the case later on in the book of Genesis (12:8; 13:4; 26:25). Abraham and Isaac called on the name of the Lord at their altars

and we may assume that Seth did the same. With their sacrifices they drew near to God and offered them on the altar, following the example of Abel, whose offering was pleasing to God. The altar was the centre of worship, the place where man met God in order to worship Him.

This is confirmed by the history of Israel. The altar of burnt offering near to God's sanctuary was the most appropriate place to call on the name of the Lord, for there He chose to make His name abide in the midst of His people (cf. Deut. 12ff.).

True Christian worship

In the New Testament, calling on the name of the Lord is not restricted to a certain geographical place (it is quite remarkable that even in Genesis 4 no such place is mentioned!). Yet we do have an 'altar' in our midst, in the spiritual sense of the word. Our 'altar' is Christ Himself, in whose name we gather and through whom we offer the sacrifice of praise to God (Matt. 18:20; Heb. 13:10,15). Christ is the centre and the basis of our worship. If we have anything to offer up to God – voluntary offerings, sacrifices of thanksgiving – it can be only acceptable to God through Him.

When we as Christians call on the name of the Lord, this should be in agreement with God's full revelation in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We do not call upon God as Yahweh, the eternal I AM, as the children of Israel did. We worship Him as the *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the Father is seeking such that worship Him. This is true Christian worship. And we also call on Christ as our *Lord*, as we find it for example in the first epistle to the Corinthians: "(...) with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2).

Calling on Him as Lord means that we recognize His authority as our Head and are guided by His Spirit, rather than by rules and commandments of men. In times of decline and decay this also implies that "everyone who names the name of

Christ" departs from iniquity (2 Tim. 2:19). We must reject all practice that contradicts the rights of the Lord. If we want to be vessels for honour, sanctified and useful for the Master, both outward and inward separation from evil is necessary. We should pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace together with those who "call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

May these few, yet significant words at the end of Genesis 4 encourage us to call on the name of the Lord in all simplicity and in spirit and truth. Let this be our testimony in a world that does not know God and has turned its back on Him. Let us honour and glorify Him, both personally and collectively, "in the presence of all His people" (Ps. 116:14,18). Let us do so because of all the benefits He has bestowed on us, but most of all, because of all the excellences of His name!

2

Adam and the serious consequences of the Fall

“And he died”.

Genesis 5:5ff.

Death spread to all men

Such is the sad refrain repeated throughout this chapter: “And he died”. Because of his sin man is subject to death, although he received the breath of life from God. Can one think of any greater contrast than that between life and death? Reading the Bible, we find that life did not come into being just by itself or by mere chance, but that it originated with God. There is a divine Maker behind the things we see. He made everything with wisdom and His eternal power and Godhead can be seen both in great and small things, both in the enormous galaxies and in the secrets of the atom.

The Bible tells us that since the creation of the world, God’s invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made (Rom. 1:20). Any intelligent person must conclude that creation was made by the hands of an almighty Creator. The living God is the Source of all life. One word of His was sufficient to call those things which did not exist as though they did. “For He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9). He said, “Let there be light; and there was light” (Gen 1:3).

How then was it possible that death could mar God's beautiful creation? If God is the Source of life, then where does death come from? Or should we perhaps regard death as a natural thing which happens to be part of the cycle of life? Is death a friend rather than an enemy? These are all very important questions and it is necessary to find the right answers to them.

If we consider that death is the very *opposite* of life, it is obvious that God, the Source of life, cannot be the source of death at the same time. Death is something which is completely contrary to God's nature as the Originator of life. This is a fundamental contrast, comparable with that between light and darkness and between good and evil. Those who try to argue away these differences deceive themselves, as they turn away from reality in order to create a make-believe world where life is as meaningless as death.

The Word of God, however, teaches us something different. Death is the domain of God's great adversary, Satan, "who had the power of death" (Heb. 2:14). Because the first man was deceived by his craftiness, death could enter our world: "Through one man sin entered the world and death through sin" (Rom. 5:12). Death, one of the other apostles says, is the last link in the chain of evil that begins with the desires of our sinful hearts (Jas. 1:13-15). And since not only Adam and Eve, but all their descendants were sinners, death spread to all men.

The last Adam, a life-giving spirit

Now Satan does not have the last word, for Someone stronger than he has come. He has bound him and plundered his house. The coming of this mighty Man of valour had been announced by God immediately after man's fall. Someone born of a woman was going to bruise the head of the serpent. Christ was the Seed who was to come and to overcome the devil. But at the same time this meant the end of His life here on earth, for the serpent was to bruise His heel (Gen. 3:15). He is the counterpart of Adam, the divine answer to all the consequences of Adam's sin,

through whom death entered the world. Christ is the *second* Man and the *last* Adam, the Victor over Satan, sin and death (cf Rom. 5 and 1 Cor. 15).

For this reason it is of the utmost importance to notice that the verse from Hebrews 2, already referred to, is written in the past tense! The devil *had* the power of death, but he was dethroned by Christ. He overcame the devil and abolished death and brought life and immortality to light (2 Tim. 1:10). On the island that is called Patmos, John saw Him as the risen Lord: the One who *has* the keys, i.e., the power of Hades and of Death (Rev. 1:18).

Christ rose again the third day, God having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it (Acts 2:24). And as the risen Lord He is the Head of a new generation. He gives eternal life to all those who believe in Him. He has destroyed him who had the power of death and released those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. 2:14-15). Death cannot frighten them anymore. They know Christ as the Resurrection and the Life, and they share His life (John 11:25). Therefore the iron rule "and he died" does not apply to Christians. Even in Genesis 5 this is indicated by the only exception we find there, namely in the life of Enoch who walked with God and was taken away without seeing death (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5).

This is also the Christian's hope, as we wait for God's Son from heaven. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible; and we shall be changed. At His coming the Lord Jesus Christ will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body. The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord, in His Father's house (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51; Phil. 1:23; 3:21; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:15-18).

And when a Christian dies before the Lord's return, he does

not fear death as the last enemy. He considers death as his 'servant', to carry him into Paradise. To be there with Christ is far better than to remain in the flesh (Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:23-24). It is a place of unspeakable joy (2 Cor. 12:4). But it is certain that the Lord Himself will come to call His own, dead or alive and bring them to glory.

The choice of life or death

To this end, however, it is absolutely necessary to hear His voice now and to receive eternal life in Christ. Have you heard His voice? If you hearken to Him, then a new day will dawn for you. This is a reality even now, during this life here on earth. For Christ will be your Light. He will illuminate your way and lead you in the paths of righteousness.

If you are still unconverted, you should realize that you are a child of death, sunk down into a deep spiritual sleep. Or, as the Bible puts it, you are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). You must wake up. Listen to Christ's mighty voice! He once called Lazarus out of the grave and He is the same today. He calls you from the 'grave' of your sins and your guilt. So if you hear His voice, do not resist but rise and go to Him who wants to receive you with open arms. The one who comes to Him He will by no means cast out (John 6:37).

Do not forget that Christ is the Lord of both life and death. If you are not willing to accept Him as your Saviour now, you will meet Him someday as your Judge. All authority has been given to Him and He is ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Pet. 4:5). Those who have been raised with Him to new life have nothing to fear, but those who remain in their spiritual sleep (the sleep of death) He will cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death (Rev. 20:11-15). From then on, the expression "and he died" will be an irrevocable reality as there is no escape from the second death. Therefore, take your refuge with Christ, the Originator and the Giver of life, before it is too late. Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.

3

Enoch, the man who pleased God

“And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him”.

Genesis 5:24

Enoch as a prophet

Enoch's name means “initiated” or “taught one”, and hence also “teacher”. Through walking with God he obtained an insight into God's thoughts and plans and this enabled him to teach others as well and to act as a prophet of God in an evil world. For we are expressly told in the epistle of Jude, that Enoch prophesied, namely about the coming of the Lord to judge all the ungodly (Jude 14,15).

Yes, God reveals His plans to His servants the prophets, as we read in the book of Amos: “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). It is in God's heart to share His thoughts with His own, as we also see in the life of Abraham: “And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?” (Gen. 18:17).

But this requires true knowledge of God and a walk that is pleasing to Him. How can a sinful man, who is estranged from God, be brought into a position where he is, so to speak, close to His heart and is taught about His intimate secrets? This can only be realized by the new birth and the indwelling of the Spirit of

God, which brings man into harmony with God. When we are born of God we know that God hides nothing from His dear children. So we read in First Corinthians 2, that it is by God's indwelling Spirit and the inspired Word, that we know God's intimate thoughts, His plans of love. Just as it is written:

*“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared
For those who love Him” (v. 9).*

This is our present privilege as children of God, while we live in a world that is without God and without hope. Do we know this fellowship, this sweet communion with Him? Do we grow in the knowledge of Him and of His plans and counsels? Let us examine ourselves whether we truly walk with God.

Walking with God before and after the Fall

Walking with God was Adam's privilege in the garden of Eden, but it was forfeited by man's fall. God walked in the garden in the cool of the day, but after the Fall Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God. However, it was at any rate enjoyed by Enoch who was taken up from this scene and also by Noah who was brought safely through the waters of the Flood to reach a new world (Gen. 5:22,24; 6:9). For even after the Fall it remains true that the secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him (Ps. 25:14).

Enoch's rapture from the earth after many years of walking with God is typical of the rapture of the Church, while Noah is a type of the believing remnant of Israel that will have to pass through the 'waters' of the Great Tribulation.

The turning point in Enoch's life seems to have been the birth of his own son: "After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years" (Gen. 5:22). Perhaps he was impressed with God's majesty as the mighty Creator. The goodness and blessing of God which he experienced in his own

family, led him to repentance and a real walk with God. Then he persevered in walking with God during three hundred years – an enormous span of time. Perhaps I may venture to say that there was not a day in all those many years that Enoch left God's side, and refused to walk with Him.

When we grow older and have walked a good many years with the Lord, we tend to turn away from Him and follow our own ways. We find this for example in the life of Solomon, who served strange gods when he grew old. But Enoch clung to the Lord during these three hundred years, until He took him from the earth. Enoch clung to the Lord, like Elisha clung to Elijah and Ruth clung to Naomi. His long life ended in a glorious way in that he was suddenly taken up. We as Christians have the same bright future.

Three aspects of a walk with God

Now I want to look with you at three aspects of Enoch's life, which present three important consequences of a walk with God:

(1) *As to ourselves*, we learn from Enoch that we can walk in happy fellowship with God, in sweet communion with His Son. We as Christians acquire knowledge of God by His own revelation, the Spirit-breathed Word. So we learn to know Him as our God and Father revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. By the Word of God we also acquire knowledge of ourselves, both of our natural condition and of our standing in Christ. We are complete in Christ, in the Beloved.

We also learn God's thoughts about the world in its present condition – under the rule of the prince of this world, as well as in its future condition – under the rule of Christ. And we are taught as to our future portion with Christ, His coming for His own, the rapture of the saints and their introduction into the glory of the Father's house. We also learn about our role in the millennium, when we will rule with Christ over the earth after His appearing in glory and power. To walk with God is a

prerequisite for this; only on this condition can we have an understanding of these matters.

In this way we will be blessed in His presence, while waiting for Christ's return from heaven to take us up and to receive us into glory (1 Thess. 1:9,10; 4:15-18). Yes, we have this blessed hope that we will not see death, but will be taken up, will be translated from this earth, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, to meet the Lord in the air (cf. 1 Cor. 15:22).

In Genesis 5 the end of Enoch's life on earth stands in contrast with all the others, of whom it is repeated over and over again: "And he died". In the same way we as believers will be the great exception in this world, which is still subject to death and corruption. We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall not see death. We shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and thus we shall always be with Him.

In the meantime He will bless us in His presence. While we *walk* with Him through the barren wilderness, we also *stand* as priests in His presence in the sanctuary (Deut. 10:8), and even *recline* like John on Jesus' breast in the upper room (John 13:23).

(2) *As to God*, our walk will please Him. For a walk with Him will be according to His revealed will and His thoughts. In this way God will find His good pleasure in His sons in a practical way (cf. Eph. 1:5). Christ Himself is our perfect Model in this respect, for God was well pleased in Him (Matt. 3:17). In the Septuagint (quoted in Hebrews 11:5) the words that Enoch *walked with God*, are rendered that he *pleased God*. This was his testimony.

Enoch's life contrasted sharply with that of people in the line of Cain, who went out from the presence of the Lord and refused to walk with God (cf. Gen. 4:16,17). A very important feature of such a walk with God is that it is a life of faith, for "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6). We have been justified by faith and so we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1). But then as Christians we should continue to live and walk by faith, for "the just shall live by faith" – not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 10:38).

(3) *As to the world*, we will be faithful witnesses. In the same way as Enoch, we will testify to things to come, to the judgment that is to fall on this world and also on the religious world, nominal Christendom (Jude 14,15). We will warn the world through preaching the Gospel. Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11).

We who live in the end time will prophesy, just like Enoch did long ago in the seventh generation from Adam: "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all". For He is ready to come and to execute judgment on *all*: both on an unbelieving and rebellious world and on apostate Christendom. Then He will introduce true righteousness, peace and happiness on earth.

So let us *walk* with God, while *waiting* for His Son from heaven and *witnessing* for His name in this evil world.

4

Abraham and Isaac in the Mount of the Lord

*“And Abraham called the name of the place,
The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day,
In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided”.*

Genesis 22:14

God’s own provision

God takes care of man. He provides for all our needs, but in particular He provides for the most fundamental need man has known since the fall: the need for a *sacrifice*. Abraham must have understood this when he said to his son, whom he was to offer: “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen. 22:8).

God was the only One who could provide the sacrificial lamb, and it was primarily meant for God Himself: “God will provide *for Himself* the lamb for a burnt offering”. This lamb was, so to speak, God’s own lamb, a figure of Christ as the appointed *Lamb of God*. And the offering of Isaac was a type of Christ’s sacrifice – foreordained by God before the foundation of the world (cf. John 1:29,36; 1 Pet. 1:19-20; Rev. 5:6ff.).

This Lamb provided for all the needs of the sinner who was totally unable to do so himself. But it also met all God’s holy demands. Indeed, by His sacrifice Christ glorified God in a unique way. The lamb that is brought to our attention here in

Genesis 22 was a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD (Gen. 8:21; Lev. 1:9,13,17; Eph. 5:2). No one else but God Himself could provide for the need and from the above-mentioned verse in First Peter it appears that He had provided for it even before He called the world into existence.

How great is our God that He Himself provided the sacrificial lamb! Adam and Eve had a similar experience when they were clothed with garments of skin in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:21). Not man but God was the first One to bring a sacrifice and He clothed the first human couple with the skins of these animals in order to cover their nakedness (and also in a symbolical way their spiritual nakedness, that is, their sinful state before God). Abraham also experienced this when the Lord provided for his needs and directed his eyes toward a substitute for his son (Gen. 22:13).

The glories of God's name

In remembrance of this wonderful provision Abraham called the name of that place, The-LORD-Will-Provide, which is just one word in Hebrew (Jehovah-jireh). Abraham used a compound name of the Lord which indicates that it is one of His glorious attributes to act in this way and to provide Himself the lamb for a burnt offering. This wonderful name of God is the first one of a series of compound names that are revealed in the Old Testament:

- (1) The-LORD-Will-Provide – Jehovah Jireh (Gen. 22:14).
- (2) The-LORD-Who-Heals-You – Jehovah Rophe (Ex. 15:26).
- (3) The-LORD-Is-My-Banner – Jehovah Nissi (Ex. 17:15).
- (4) The-LORD-Who-Sanctifies-You – Jehovah M'Qaddash (Ex. 31:13; Lev. 20:8; 21:8).
- (5) The-LORD-Is-Peace – Jehovah Shalom (Judg. 6:24).
- (6) The-LORD-Of-Hosts – Jehovah Sabaoth (1 Sam. 1:3,11).
- (7) The-LORD-Is-My-Shepherd – Jehovah Raah (Ps. 23:1).
- (8) The-LORD-Our-Righteousness – Jehovah Tsidkenu (Jer. 23:6; 33:16).

- (9) The-LORD-Who-Strikes – Jehovah Nakeh (Ezek. 7:9).
(10) The-LORD-Is-There – Jehovah Shammah (Ezek. 48:35).

The first name shows that God provides for the most essential need of sinful man, the need for a substitute. This is the basis on which God can reveal more of Himself and of the many aspects of His nature. The last name shows Him filling everything with His glorious presence: The-LORD-Is-There. And where He fills everything there is no room for sin any more, for God will be all in all.

The Mount of the LORD

Then we should also pay attention to the *place* where God revealed Himself in this way, where He made Himself known as the One providing the lamb for a burnt offering. He did so in the Mount of the LORD.

This is an important expression (Gen. 22:14). God revealed Himself on this mountain, the place where Abraham found himself on the level of His thoughts, rather than in the plain of Jordan which Lot chose (Gen. 13:10-11). God called Abraham, as it were, into His heavenly presence. The same thing happened to the disciples who received divine teaching from the Lord Jesus on a mountain (Matt. 5:1ff.). And it was also “on the holy mountain” that they saw His glory and were eyewitnesses of His majesty (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16-18).

Moreover, this mountain is described as *the Mount of the LORD*. We find the same expression in the book of Exodus where it is used in connection with God’s revelation on Mount Sinai. In the same way as Moses led the flock of his father-in-law all the way through the desert to Horeb, the mountain of God, he also led the people of Israel through the wilderness to this mountain (Ex. 3:1; 18:5; 24:13).

Mount Sinai was the mountain where God sat enthroned according to the book of Exodus. He desired to reveal Himself to the people He delivered from slavery to be His special

treasure. So we are on holy ground here and, like Moses, have to take off our shoes. Thus the people of Israel, too and most of all the priests, had to sanctify themselves in order to be able to meet God at the foot of the mountain (Ex. 19:10-17).

Yet this expression, the mountain of God, does not only refer to Mount Sinai. It is also used for Mount Zion and for the Temple Mount, after the Ark of the covenant (the visible sign of God's presence) found a resting place there (cf. Ps. 15:1, 24:3; 48:1-2). This is very striking indeed with regard to the Temple Mount, for there is a clear connection between Genesis 22, First Chronicles 21-22 and Second Chronicles 3. Abraham went to the *land* of Moriah to offer his son on one of the mountains of which God would tell him, while king David built his altar of burnt offering on *Mount* Moriah.

This was the place where atonement was made for a sinful people, the place of the altar of burnt offering for Israel – which enabled God to dwell in the midst of His people. Mount Moriah, the place where Abraham sacrificed his son, was the place of the altar of burnt offering for God's people. This mountain therefore points to the place called Calvary, where God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.

And in doing so He laid a just foundation for the future temple in the Spirit, the Church of the living God that was to be built after Christ's resurrection from the dead!

Moses' calling

'Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign. And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. And the water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land'.

Exodus 4:1-9

Three signs

The calling of Moses offers some highly interesting lessons in connection with the subject of preaching. It was accompanied by three signs, which also present to us *three aspects of preaching*. It is good to reflect on this since we live in a time when many a preacher proclaims the Gospel with the help of signs and miracles. This is called 'power-evangelism'. However, these people are unable to perform the signs which Moses did before the unbelievers at Pharaoh's court! And their preaching often also lacks the spiritual lessons which can be learned from these signs!

A Bible-based preaching, on the other hand, (1) puts Christ Himself in the centre, drawing the audience's attention to Him alone, (2) speaks about man's total depravity, and (3) announces the coming judgment. These points are illustrated by the three signs accompanying the calling of Moses, the man of God.

Moses, Moses!

It was with much hesitation that Moses set out to do the work the Lord ordered him to do – to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into freedom. He kept bringing up all kinds of objections and ‘*buts*’.

Obviously, forty years of tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro had thoroughly changed him into a meek and lowly man, now eighty years of age. Forty years before, Moses had adopted a totally different attitude when of his own will he went to visit his brethren. Then he supposed that the Israelites would understand that God had sent him to be their helper and saviour. However, they did not, and pushed him away (Acts 7:23ff).

Now, however, the time had come for God to deliver His people, and so Moses had to return to Egypt. God was faithful to His promises given to the patriarchs. Moses got very clear orders, and all his objections were met with divine answers. He even got the power to perform *signs* before the Israelites in order to convince them of the legitimacy of his calling.

Obviously, as Paul remarked later on (1 Cor. 1:22), even in those times the Jewish people wanted signs. In this respect, they resemble the preachers of our time who strive to perform signs and miracles, although it is quite doubtful whether this is according to God’s will in our days.

Anyway, Moses did have this commandment, and the signs which he performed conveyed a clear message as well. They had a specific *meaning*. And therefore, they are also valuable to us as New Testament believers.

Moses as a type of Christ

Moses, the powerful liberator of the sons of Israel, is not only a beautiful example for our personal life of faith, he is specifically a type of Christ Himself.

The three signs which Moses was allowed to perform, speak

of Christ's power over the three sworn enemies of mankind – Satan, sin and death. When we think of how He overcame these powerful enemies, we get an idea of His majesty and of His heavenly calling as our Saviour and Redeemer.

Then the Lord will become *great* before us, just as Moses was made great in the sight of the Israelites and the Egyptians when he performed these signs (Ex. 11:3).

The rod turned into a serpent

The first sign was the rod which turned into a serpent. God did not demand great things of Moses. He did not ask him a difficult question when He said: "What is that in your hand?" It was just a shepherd's rod. Moses had to give it up and throw it on the ground. Are we ready to give up our means and possibilities for God's service? God is willing to use us, but He can do so only if we dedicate our lives to Him.

In Moses' case he got his rod back and he was able to use it to help God's people and lead them through the desert. Later on, this simple shepherd's rod was even called "the rod of God" (Ex. 17:9). With this rod Moses called up the plagues on the land of Egypt, divided the waters of the Red Sea and cleft the rock at Horeb.

This rod was the symbol of the special authority of Moses, the man of God. Strange enough, though, the rod changed into a serpent as soon as Moses threw it on the ground. What does this mean? It speaks of the consequences of the Fall of man, when Satan seized that which had been entrusted to man, and brought it under his control. Moses was not the only one who had been invested with authority. Man in the person of Adam was given authority to be exercised in the various relationships into which God had placed him. Alas, this was corrupted profoundly by the Fall of the first man, who had himself been enticed by "that serpent of old, called the devil and Satan" (Rev. 12:9).

Fortunately, a *second Man* has come, the Man from heaven,

that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. He overcame Satan and He has been invested with all authority and power in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). God has seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places – far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come (Eph. 1:20-22).

He is the mighty Redeemer of His people, who holds in check even the power of Satan, just as Moses reached out his hand and took the serpent, whereupon it became a rod in his hand. By faith this is a reality for us, a clear ‘sign’, although as yet it is not visible to all that all things have been subjected to Him. But that moment will come soon, as it did for Egypt (see Ex. 7:8-13).

Put your hand in your bosom

But there was yet another problem that had to be solved. The Redeemer was confronted not only with the power of the evil one, but also with the power of sin, of which the second sign speaks which Moses had to perform. He put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. Leprosy is a well-known picture of the corrupting power of sin. But that was not the end of the story; Moses put his hand in his bosom again, and it was restored.

This sign shows us the victory of our Lord over the power of sin. He has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He was made to be sin for us on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21). He Himself is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2). He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. And He can cleanse ‘lepers’, He makes us white as snow.

By nature, we all are ‘lepers’ in the sight of God. The wrong acts which we do with our hands, originate in our sinful hearts. It is not just so that we commit sins, we are sinners. As soon as we recognize this and turn to God in prayer, putting our unclean hands in our bosom, we shall be saved. Cleansing is available for repentant sinners. To us who believe there is

no doubt that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (Luke 5:13,24; 1 John 1:9).

Water changed into blood

Finally, there was still a *third* sign. But this was meant for those who did *not* believe, those who disregarded the first two signs, as is clearly stated here. It was a sign of the judgment that was to follow. The announcement of God's judgment is also part of the preaching of the Gospel, as is confirmed by Paul in his speech to the Greek philosophers on Mars' hill (cf. Acts 17: 30-31).

Moses had to take water from the Nile and pour it on the dry land; then the water changed into blood. This spoke about the judgment which was going to strike the land of Egypt, the judgment of death (Ex. 7:14ff). This judgment will have its counterpart in the plagues which will befall the world in the end times (Rev. 16:3-7). Then the day of grace will be past, and to the unbelievers nothing but the judgment of death will be left.

This last sign testifies to the fact that Christ has power over death and the grave, the power to execute judgment also (John 5:22ff). The Father has committed all judgment to the Son, and He now holds the keys of Hades and of Death (Rev. 1:18). It will be terrible to meet Him not as the Saviour but as the Judge, and to experience for ever that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

6

Moses, the mediator

“So they saw God and they ate and drank”.

Exodus 24:11

A meal in the presence of God

On Mount Sinai God manifested Himself in majesty to His people. He had delivered them from the land of Egypt by His mighty arm and had borne them on eagles' wings to Himself (Ex. 19:4). The appearance of the glory of the LORD was accompanied by thunderings and lightnings, the sound of a trumpet and by smoke and fire (Ex. 19:16-20; 20:18; 24:17). The Israelites could not come near to God. They did not dare to at all, and they had been forbidden to climb the mountain. Trembling with fear, they stood far away at the foot of the mountain (Ex. 19:12ff; 20:18; 24:2).

The people had been delivered and brought to God *in an outward and national sense*, but they could only take a position of nearness to God in a very limited way. Although Second Corinthians 3 teaches us that the ministry of the law had a certain glory, it was nevertheless a ministry of death and condemnation. The people of Israel, who at Mount Sinai placed themselves under the law by committing themselves to doing everything the LORD had commanded, also put themselves under the curse of the law. So we see that under the old covenant man was unable to approach God freely, as the way to

God had not yet been made manifest (Heb. 9:8).

God dwelt in darkness, hidden in the sanctuary. The Father's heart remained unknown until the coming of His Son, who declared the Father in the fullness of His grace, love and truth (John 1:14,18). Only Christ's coming and His finished work on the cross of Calvary could make it possible for man to draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith. Therefore the hour has now come to worship the Father in spirit and truth and to have boldness to enter the Holiest by a new and living way, through the veil (John 4:23,24; Heb. 10:19ff.).

Although it was in God's heart to bless the Israelites and to have them in His presence as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, they were largely unable to take up this position since the people as a whole stood afar off (Ex. 20:18,21).

Some of them could come closer to God than the others, for there was a separate class of priests who drew near to God. But in Exodus 19 even they were not allowed to come up to the LORD on Mount Sinai. An exception was made, however, for Aaron and Moses (Ex. 19:24).

In Exodus 24 we find others who could approach God: seventy of the elders of Israel and also Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron, who were killed later when they offered strange (profane) fire before the LORD (Lev. 10). Together with Moses and Aaron and seventy of the elders of Israel they were allowed to come up to the Lord, in order to ratify the covenant and to have a meal in His presence (Ex. 24:1,9). But according to the instructions given to this company, they had to worship Him from afar (v. 1).

The unique position of the mediator

Moses was really the only one who could draw near to God. He went up into the mountain, accompanied by his assistant Joshua (Ex. 24:13; cf. 32:17). But Moses alone went up higher to meet God and to speak with Him (Ex. 24:2, 12ff.). We even read

that after six days of waiting, Moses went *into* the midst of the cloud in which God dwelt (Ex. 24:18). It is striking that in the New Testament he occupies the same position, for when Jesus was transfigured on the mount, Moses and Elijah also entered the cloud (Luke 9:34).

Moses alone was allowed to come very close to God and to be in His presence. This remained true even after Israel's sin with the golden calf. Whenever Moses entered the tent (or, tabernacle) of meeting he had pitched outside the camp, the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tent. So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Ex. 33:11).

This was also the case later on. The cloud of the divine presence rested upon the tabernacle and as soon as Moses entered it to speak with God, he heard the voice of One speaking to him from above the mercy seat (Num. 7:89; 12:5ff.). Therefore we also have in Moses a beautiful type of our own position as Christians. Through the finished work of the Lord Jesus we have really been brought to God (1 Pet. 3:18). God has called us into His marvellous light and He speaks to us through His Word by the Holy Spirit. We can come before Him as a holy priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5,9). We can reflect the glory of God, which has now been fully revealed "in the face of Jesus Christ", in a greater measure than it could be seen in the shining face of Moses (Ex. 34:29ff.; 2 Cor. 3:12ff.; 4:6).

Three characteristic positions

So Exodus 24 shows us three different levels on which man can be in relationship with God, three distinctive positions:

(1) The people stood at a distance from God, at the foot of the mountain where the covenant was sealed with blood (v. 4ff.). This position is typical of Israel as being under law. As such they were under the curse of the law, i.e. the judgment of death and they came to know God as a consuming fire (v. 17; cf. Heb. 12:29).

(2) A select company of the children of Israel went up to God (v. 9). Having arrived on a somewhat higher level, they saw the God of Israel on His throne (cf. Ezek. 1:26) and had a meal in His presence. This position could only be taken by a chosen company of representatives of the nation, who knew God mainly as the righteous King.

(3) Moses went up to God even higher, together with his servant Joshua. But Moses was the only one to enter the cloud of God's presence on the top of the mountain (vv. 12ff.). So only the mediator of the people obtained more intimate knowledge of God. This third position comes close to our position under grace, although the general contrast of Exodus 24 with our position as Christians is quite obvious. The believer no longer stands at a greater or smaller distance from God, for he has been made near by the blood of Christ. He does not just know Him as God Most High, seated on His throne, but has access to Him as Father and rests in the Father's heart (Eph. 1:3ff.; 2:13ff.; cf. Luke 15:20).

Our worship as Christians

However, the events in this chapter still show some types of our privileges as Christians. In the first place we see that God entered into a relationship with His people. He made His thoughts known to them and made a covenant with them affirmed by blood.

Similarly, we have been brought to God by the death of Christ, by the blood of the new covenant (Luke 22:20). This does not bring us under law, for the blood of Christ is the basis of entirely new relations with God. When we partake of the Lord's Supper (the centre of Christian worship), we are always reminded of this (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Here in Exodus 24 we also see a service taking place at the foot of the mountain around an altar with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. Here burnt offerings and peace offerings were sacrificed to the LORD (vv. 4-5).

The parallel with our worship is clear:

(1) We, too, have an 'altar' which is the centre for all God's people, namely the Person of Christ;

(2) By Him we offer spiritual sacrifices, namely sacrifices of praise to God (Heb. 13:10,15).

The similarity becomes even more obvious in verses 10-11, where we read that the nobles of the children of Israel saw God and ate and drank in His presence. This can surely be linked with the Lord's Supper, as it is our privilege then to draw near to God and to eat and drink in His presence.

It is a great privilege indeed to approach God and to have a meal of mutual fellowship with Him and His people. Just like the elders of Israel, we should draw near with reverence and holy fear. They saw God and yet they lived. They had fellowship with Him in peace and quiet. They ate and drank, presumably of the meat of the peace or fellowship offerings (v. 5) and of the wine of the accompanying drink offerings.

What a beautiful picture this is of the Lord's Supper, when we eat and drink in the presence of our God and Father and our Lord and Saviour! Gathered around the Lord's table we have the symbols of His dying love before us. The bread and the wine remind us of His body and His blood. We think of the preciousness of His Person and His sacrifice. It is a meal of fellowship with an exalted character. We are the guests at a meal prepared by our heavenly Host and He makes Himself known to us "in the breaking of bread" (cf. Luke 24:35). We rest in His presence and worship at His feet.

Is it not a special privilege "to eat bread (...) before God" in this way (Ex. 18:12)? I refer to this verse because it points to a similar situation, where the flesh of peace offerings was eaten in God's presence. During the meal mentioned in Exodus 24 the elders of the people saw the God of Israel. Similarly, in our worship we meet God and see His glory in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God fully revealed in Christ

The elders saw God on His throne. In fact, they did not see much more than the foundation of the throne. For we read that there was under His feet as it were a paved work of (blue) sapphire stone and it was like the very heavens in its clarity (Ex. 24:10). Ezekiel goes much further and describes something of the appearance of the One who was seated on the throne (Ezek. 1:26ff.). In short, the elders of Israel saw God as the God of heaven in its clarity and purity.

This reminds us of the words of the apostle John: "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). The elders of the children of Israel had to do with God in His holiness and righteousness; they knew Him as the righteous Ruler over Israel. Of course, they also proved God's mercy and infinite goodness in His ways with His people, but they did not know His love. The words "God is love" remained hidden from them (1 John 4:8,16). God's love could only be revealed in the Son of His love and His atoning death, but it is our privilege as Christians to know this deep and divine love as it has been fully revealed now in Christ. We have come face to face with the glory of God as it shines in the face, in the Person, of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6).

But Moses could come closer to God than the elders of the people. He went into the midst of the cloud and was allowed to speak with God face to face. As Numbers 12:8 puts it: "I speak with him face to face, even plainly and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the LORD". But in spite of this very privileged position, God remained hidden in the sanctuary and to some extent He was not fully known even to Moses. Although he saw the form (or, similitude) of God, this did not imply full knowledge of God. This is obvious from the well-known passage in Exodus 33, where Moses asked to see God's glory. The divine answer was: "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me and live" (v. 20).

When God's glory passed by, Moses was put in the cleft of the rock and covered with God's own hand. Then he was

allowed to see Him from behind, after He had passed by. God can be known and seen only insofar as He is pleased to reveal Himself.

But we know that He *has* revealed Himself fully in His Son. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, while He passed by the guilty sinner. In Christ He revealed the fullness of His glory, and it is our present privilege to behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled face. We see it exclusively in Christ Jesus, for in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 1:19; 2:9). "But we see Jesus (...) crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2:9). This marks our position and indicates our privilege as Christians. The Lord Jesus came full of grace and truth and in Him we have seen the Father (John 1:18; 14:6ff).

When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we see Him in a special way. We are in His presence and He is in our midst. It is the risen Christ whom we meet on the first day of the week, but He reminds us of His sufferings, just as He showed His pierced hands and His wounded side to His disciples. And we too are glad and rejoice when we see the Lord (John 20:20). Through Him we have access by one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18; 3:12). We have boldness to enter the Holiest and to draw near to God in full assurance of faith (Heb. 10:19,22).

Moses finds a place by God

“Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock”.

Exodus 33:21

A place near God

In our day people seem to have less and less time for one another. Very often children or unborn children are not wanted, young people have trouble finding their place in society and an increasing number of elderly people live in difficult circumstances. We are reminded of the words: “There was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7). Although it should not be like that, even we as believers may show the same wrong attitude and act in a worldly way towards children, young people or elderly people. Therefore we need to ask ourselves whether we really have room in our lives for our fellow believers and to receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God (Rom. 15:7).

Anyway, it is a great blessing to know that God always has a place for us, a place of perfect security and complete safety. This place is to be found by Him, or near Him. There is peace and quiet, protection from dangers and eternal safety, for nothing can harm us in the presence of God. The natural man does not know this place by God, for he has turned his back on Him and has gone out from His presence.

Our eyes must be opened so that we see this place, which is only possible by faith. Therefore God said to Moses: *“Behold, there is a place by Me”* (Ex. 33:21 KJV). The eyes of our spiritual understanding must be enlightened. Then we will realize the great things which God has done for sinners in order to save them and bring them into His presence; and we will take refuge with God Himself (cf. Eph. 1:18; 4:18).

The Rock of ages

It is a wonderful thought that God Himself has prepared this place of security for us. We had no right to it, for we were children of wrath and could not come into God’s holy presence. How did God prepare this place near Himself? He did it by laying a sure foundation in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on Calvary’s cross. This enables us to stand before Him.

Our place near God has been prepared by Christ. This is exactly what we see in type in the second part of this verse: *“(…) and you shall stand on the rock”* (Ex. 33:21b). In the same way as Moses was shown a place on the rock, we have found a sure foundation in Christ, the Rock of ages. He is the Rock that offers solid ground to mortal man, to the children of dust. He is the One upon whom our faith can build, both personally and collectively. For the Church of the living God is built on this chosen Stone. When we come to Him in faith, we receive a new and incorruptible life, ‘the life of the Rock of ages’. And as living stones we are together being built up a spiritual house (Matt. 16:16-18; 21:42; John 1:42; 5:21; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-6).

The rock was the only safe place for Moses, for otherwise he would have been consumed by the glory of God. There is some important teaching in Scripture about God as the Rock. In Deuteronomy 32 Moses repeatedly spoke about God as the Rock of His people: He was the Rock of their salvation, the Rock who begot them and who fathered them (vv. 4,15,18,30,31). This picture is also often used in the Psalms. God was the Rock in whom David trusted and whom he blessed as the God of his

salvation (Ps. 18:2,31,46). In Him he found a safe place in times of trouble: "In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock" (Ps. 27:5). Psalms 31 (vv. 2-3), 40 (v. 2), and 61 (vv. 2-4) also speak about this place of shelter on the rock.

It is evident that all these passages refer to God Himself as the Rock where David found security and safety. The New Testament believer occupies the same place. For as Christians we rest in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our eternal safety is founded on Christ's finished work. And Christ is also the Rock on which the Church is now being built.

In the cleft of the rock

It does not stop at this, however, for Moses was not only given a place *on* the rock but even *in* the rock. God said to Moses: "So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by" (Ex. 33:22). God put Moses in a cleft of the rock and covered him with His own hand. This is a beautiful picture of our position *in Christ*. And it is God Himself who grants us this place in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30-31; 2 Cor. 1:21-22).

As believers we are no longer seen in the first man, Adam. Just like Moses was put in the cleft of the rock, we have been united with Christ. In this way we have found a place of perfect safety before God, a place where we are covered by God's own hand. All of this is God's work ("I will put you in the cleft"). As Paul tells us: "For we are *His* workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:10). It is His free and sovereign grace, as revealed in Christ.

I would also like to point to the fact that the cleft rock not only gave shelter and safety, but also provided God's people with water during their journey through the wilderness (Ex. 17:6; Num. 20:7-11). The Israelites drank of a "spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). A river of water flowed out of the rock to quench their

thirst. This is typical of the streams of living water, the Spirit poured out from on high (Isa. 44:3). Christ is the Rock that was struck with the rod of God's judgment. His sufferings and His atoning death opened up an inexhaustible fountain of blessing to us (John 4:10-14; 7:37-39; Acts. 2:17-18; 1 Cor. 12:13).

A divine dwelling place

So the important lesson of Exodus 33:21 is that there is a place of shelter in God's presence, a place near God. It is a place given by God Himself to this end. The Hebrew word for 'place' in this verse is very common in the Old Testament. In the book of Deuteronomy it is used to designate the place of worship that Israel was to seek in the Promised Land. In this place, which the Lord would choose, the people would come to meet Him and rejoice in His presence. We also have a God-given place of meeting, for it is His desire that we should meet around His beloved Son. Christ is the Centre of our worship and we come to God through Him. So we worship the Father in spirit and truth and we rejoice in His presence.

As Christians we also have the blessed hope that God will grant us a place in His own glory (Rom. 5:2; 1 Thess. 2:12). God has prepared a place for us near Him. He thought of us before the foundation of the world and predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself (Eph. 1:4-6). Christ obtained this place for us by His redemptive work. He is our heavenly Head and our Representative in the glory, for God has made us accepted in the Beloved. This is our present position in Christ, realized by faith.

When we think of the glory that is still to come, we also think of the place which the Lord Jesus has prepared for us in the Father's house. There are many mansions in that heavenly home, as He told His disciples in John 14:2. When He had finished His work on earth He went back to the Father. Thus He opened up the way for us to heaven and He promised us: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and

receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3).

“Here is a place by Me” – how wide is the scope of these words! They speak of our position in Christ before God, a place of perfect security and safety. They also speak of our place in God’s presence here on earth, the dwelling place where He chose to make His name abide. Finally, they refer to our heavenly hope: a place has been prepared for us in the Father’s house, where we shall enjoy eternal rest.

*Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Grace has hid me safe in Thee,
Where the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Are of sin the double cure,
Cleansing from its guilt and pow’r.*

Moses and Miriam

“Please heal her, O God, I pray!”

Numbers 12:13

Miriam’s sin

The account of the journey of the people of Israel from Egypt to Canaan contains many valuable lessons for the Church of God in the present dispensation. We too are a pilgrim people but we are on our way to a better, that is, a heavenly country. We find Israel’s deliverance from Egypt in the book of Exodus, while the book of Numbers describes their journey from Mount Sinai up to and including the conquest of Transjordan.

The book of Numbers particularly speaks about *the failures* of God’s people during their journey through the wilderness. Israel failed to listen to God’s Word, failed to submit to Moses’ authority, failed to take possession of the Promised Land, etc.

In this respect the complaint that God uttered in Numbers 14:22 is particularly striking: “They have put Me to the test now these *ten times*, and have not heeded My voice”. Time and again the grumbling people were punished by God but it all seemed to be of no avail. The people died a miserable death in the desert and therefore it was a *new* generation (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) that entered the land of promise. Man in the flesh, who was tested by the law, could not please God *and had*

to be born again. Every attentive reader of this Bible book must come to this conclusion and no doubt this is one of the important lessons that God wants to teach us here.

In Numbers 12 the spirit of rebellion that dominated the people also seemed to take control of Miriam and Aaron, the sister and brother of Moses the man of God, who had both been used by God and had played an important part in the exodus from Egypt. Apparently Miriam contributed most to this rebellion against Moses, but Aaron was far too willing to listen to her and therefore their confession is put in the plural: "Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly" (v. 11).

What was the reason for Miriam's slander? We read that Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married (v. 1). Is one not allowed to talk about the marriage of one's own brother? Of course this is allowed but what is important is the manner in which you talk about it! Miriam did so in a negative way and thus became guilty of slander. She disapproved of Moses' marriage and thus damaged his position and good name. This can be clearly gathered from the context.

This means that Miriam opposed Moses' course of action and therefore she turned to Aaron for support. Together they then said: "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" (v. 2). "And the LORD heard it", says the next sentence. Let us remember that, when we feel we have to say something about our fellow believers. There is a Witness who hears our conversations, who knows our thoughts and even knows what is at the bottom of our hearts. We cannot hide anything from Him.

So it is not without reason that the apostle James so seriously warns us about the dangers of the tongue, which can be full of "deadly poison". With our tongue we bless God and with it we also curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God (Jas. 3:8-9).

This is a serious evil and when people persist in it it will ultimately lead to their exclusion, for a reviler should be put

away from ourselves as a wicked person (1 Cor. 5:11-13). In First Corinthians 6:10 Paul says that a reviler is among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Such a person is considered to be among "those who are outside". Unfortunately, things can reach this stage when somebody will not keep his tongue under control through the power of the Holy Spirit (this self-control is also a fruit of the Spirit according to Gal. 5:19-22).

Miriam put out of the camp

This is what happened to Miriam as we see in type in this story. She had not hesitated to speak against Moses and therefore she had to be put out of the camp as a leper. In the book of Numbers this is the place of all unclean persons (Num. 5:1-4; the lepers are mentioned first in those verses). It is the same in Leviticus 13 and 14, where we find the laws concerning leprosy and the cleansing of healed lepers. A leper was unclean as long as he had the plague: "(...) and he shall dwell alone; his habitation shall be outside the camp" (Lev. 13:46).*

The remarkable thing is that with Miriam it was apparently a form of leprosy in an advanced stage. The Lord's anger was aroused against Miriam and Aaron and immediately Miriam stood there "leprous, as white as snow" (Num. 12:10). This complete whiteness was, according to Leviticus 13:13, precisely the condition for being pronounced clean again!

This means that Miriam was stricken by God's judgment, yet right away a proof of His grace could be observed – grace that had her *restoration* in mind. She was completely leprous, no doubt about that. She had to be put outside the camp as an unclean person and she had to cry out that she was unclean (Lev. 13:45). But it was not for ever. God wanted to receive her again after she had been shut out of the camp seven days (Num. 12:14).

I think that this period of seven days (which was also common for other cleansing ceremonies, see e.g. Numbers 19) refers to the complete measure of repentance required for a godly

restoration. Similarly, a work of repentance had to take place with the person excluded in Corinth before he could be received again in the midst of the believers (2 Cor. 2:7). Godly sorrow had produced “repentance to salvation not to be regretted” (2 Cor. 7:10), both in his heart and in the hearts of the Corinthians who had first tolerated the wicked person in their midst.

Removing a wicked person from the midst of the believers, shutting a ‘leper’ out of a clean camp, should therefore always take place with the hope of *restoration*. Priestly attention and care are necessary to be able to determine what stage the ‘leprosy’ (which is an image of sin in a manifest form) has reached.

When the leper has been completely stricken with the disease, then the typical lesson is that the person excluded no longer expects anything from himself and recognizes that nothing good dwells in his flesh (cf. Rom. 7:18). In other words, clear signs of repentance can be observed in him. As soon as that has been established the person involved can be restored and brought back to his former place among the believers.

After seven days, Miriam was allowed to re-enter the camp. She was “received again” (Num. 12:14). So this is a striking example of the excommunication of a wicked person, but also of the restoration of the offender. We cannot deal lightly with sin. God wants us to enforce discipline but at the same time, in His grace, He wants to prepare the way for a complete restoration. Miriam had to wait outside the camp for seven days before she could be re-admitted.

But it is very striking to read that the people within the camp also waited for seven days until she had joined them again: “(...) and the people did not journey on till Miriam was brought in again” (Num. 12:15). She waited *outside* and the people waited *inside* until the work of restoration had been accomplished!

And learn from Me

Let us then notice Moses' attitude, which also has much to tell us. No doubt Moses was grieved about the sin of Miriam and Aaron (who as an older brother should have known better but who also played a dubious role in the story of the golden calf). What then was Moses' reaction to this act of rebellion against his authority as the man of God? He kept silent and committed it to Him who judges righteously (1 Pet. 2:23). The only thing that we read here about Moses is that he "was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3).

Moses was not naturally humble. He had learned this humility in the school of God. By nature he was a quick-tempered man. He killed the Egyptian and even in his old age his hot temper flared up again, when in his indignation about the rebellious people he started striking the rock instead of speaking to it (Num. 20).

Here in Numbers 12, however, Moses reminds us of the One who said to His disciples: "(...) and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29). As disciples of Christ, as students who are brought up in His school, we have to react in this way when we have become the object of slander. That is what our *personal* attitude should be, although in such matters there is also a *common* responsibility of the Church according to Scripture.

We even see here that Moses *prayed* for his sister with a view to her restoration. So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying: "Please heal her, O God, I pray!" (Num. 12:13). We see Moses here as a type of Christ. He prayed for His enemies, even for those who stood up against Him and mocked Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). Just like Miriam was restored on the basis of Moses' intercession, so the people of Israel were shown mercy because of Christ's prayer on the cross. In the book of Acts we see how the way of salvation and restoration was shown to Israel (cf. Acts. 3:17).

Prophetic lessons

But there are more prophetic lessons in the story of Numbers 12. Moses is a clear type of Christ as the great Prophet, Apostle and Teacher of His people (Deut. 18:15; John 5:46; Acts 3:22; Heb. 3:1-6).

Well then, if Moses is a type of Christ what does his marriage to a foreign woman have to say to us? The answer is obvious: Christ took a bride from the Gentiles. Moses' Ethiopian wife was a stranger – she did not belong to the people of God. Yet this gentile woman became the bride of Moses. Likewise, the Church, which is now the bride of Christ, is made up mostly of believers from the Gentiles.

We can also see Zipporah as such a type of the Church (and similarly Asenath, the Egyptian wife of Joseph). The grace and love of God that have been revealed in Christ could not be limited to the Jews. The core of the Gospel is that all men are equal before God. They are all sinners but God wants to bestow His grace on all. Jews and Gentiles are alike “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). God has made us alive together with Christ and has created one new man from the two. That is the Church, which is the body and the bride of Christ, the habitation of God in the Spirit.

This grace shown to the Gentiles, however, resulted in a breach with the people of Israel, just like Moses' love for his Gentile bride (temporarily) broke off his ties with Miriam. Christ was rejected by His own, His kinsmen according to the flesh (John 1:11). He had to endure such hostility from sinners against Himself (Heb. 12:3), but He endured it in a patient and gentle way. He acted just like Moses, who resigned himself to the opposition from his relatives and left it in the Lord's hands.

Israel's rejection of the Lord's Servant, however, resulted in the nation being set aside. Similarly, Miriam's rebellion against Moses (who was God's *servant*, Num. 12:7,8) resulted in her being shut out of the camp. Because of their rejection of the Messiah, God has (temporarily) rejected Israel as His people. He has now stretched out His hands towards the nations and

the Lord Jesus is joined with bonds of love to His Gentile bride.

In this matter between Miriam and Moses, God Himself pronounced the verdict. Because of her sin she was put out for a certain period of time. Likewise, Israel has become *Lo-Ammi, Not-My-People* (Hos. 1:9). In the same way as the cloud of God's presence departed from above the tabernacle when He had spoken to Aaron and Miriam (Num. 12:9-10), so God has now withdrawn from His people. The glory of the Lord has left the people of Israel and it will only return at the beginning of the millennium (Ezek. 43). Miriam was shut out of the camp, outside the place of blessing in the presence of God. Similarly, wrath has come upon Israel as a rebellious people and the blessing of God's presence is now found in the midst of the Church.

But there is a glorious and gracious 'until'. Israel's rejection is not final. All Israel will be saved. The story of Numbers 12 did not end with the sad message of Miriam's exclusion but with her *restoration*. God's wrath may have come upon Israel to the uttermost (that is, fully), yet He is gracious and even in His wrath He remembers mercy (1 Thess. 2:16; Hab. 3:2). *He* determines the extent and measure of Israel's suffering, as He also determined the period of 'seven days' of Miriam's exclusion. He will be merciful to Israel and comfort His people when her warfare is ended and her iniquity is pardoned (Isa. 40:1-2).

This serious story thus has a happy ending. As Miriam was received again and was cleansed from her leprosy, so also Israel will be received again as God's people (after the rapture of the Church) and be cleansed from all ungodliness. It was the apostle Paul, who suffered so much opposition from the Jews as he preached the Gospel of God's grace to the nations, who revealed to us the divine mystery of Israel's restoration. He did not desire that we should be ignorant of this mystery, "(...) that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25-27). In this passage we find the gracious 'until', the announcement of a time determined by God in which He will restore the fortunes of His people.

In the same way as the Lord (as the One who heals His people) acted in favour of Miriam and healed her, so He will

save His earthly people in a coming day. And He will save them not only from their enemies that oppress them from outside, but also from their sins that accuse them inwardly. He took away the leprosy from Miriam and likewise He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob and will accept His people. They will be raised spiritually from death to life.

Israel's rejection meant the reconciling of the world, for God stretched out His hands to all mankind and extended the word of reconciliation to both Jews and Gentiles. So what will their acceptance be but *life from the dead* (Rom. 11:15)? Just like Miriam as a cleansed person was received again in the camp, so Israel will be received again by God as a nation that has been raised from its death sleep and has been cleansed from the sickness which branded it "as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed" (Num. 12:12).

Some translations read that Miriam was to be "brought back", or "brought in again" (Num. 12:14). The original meaning of the word seems to be "to gather", or "to collect". That is also the meaning of the word "acceptance" or "receiving" in Romans 11:15. God will gather the people to Himself again, the nation from which He had to hide His face for a certain period of time. He will bring them back to the place of blessing in His presence. That will mean a new beginning, a spiritual revival: life from the dead (cf. Ezek. 37).

Let us meanwhile, as members of the family of God, be on our guard that we do not fall into the same error and rebel against Christ, our great Moses. Resistance against His authority, against His Word and Spirit, are characteristic features of the last days and will inevitably bring about God's judgment (see the epistle of Jude).

*** Note**

Here the camp was the dwelling place of God's people, as recognized by God. He was in their midst as the Holy One and the Just and they were encamped around the sanctuary of God as a holy and righteous people. As soon as the camp was defiled by idolatry, the place of the faithful was, with Moses "outside the camp, far from the camp" (Ex. 33:7). Similarly, after the rejection of the Messiah the place of the Hebrew believers was with their Lord "outside the camp" (Heb. 13:13).

The twelve spies and their mission

“Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land”.

Numbers 13:20

The Fruit of the Promised Land

One of the orders given to the twelve spies was to bring back some of the fruit of the Promised Land so that the Israelites – who were still wandering in the wilderness – could get a foretaste of the blessings the land of Canaan was going to offer them. Was the land going to meet their high hopes? For several years they had been wandering through the desert, but now the moment had come for them to learn a bit more about the land.

Their first introduction to the Promised Land was by no means disappointing as the spies brought back no less than *three* different products. The most important and best known of these was the big bunch of grapes that had to be carried by two of them. From it the Valley of Eshcol derived its name, for Eshcol means ‘cluster of grapes’ (cf. Num. 13:24).

Now the Hebrew word for ‘valley’ in this verse also means ‘brook’, which is quite understandable since valleys often have brooks flowing through them. So in our minds we can form the picture of the spies entering into a valley with a brook running through it, with slopes covered with vines and fruit trees. Had

there been no water in the Valley of Eshcol, they certainly would not have found fruit.

This has a spiritual meaning for us. In Scripture brooks or rivers often symbolize the free activity of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39). Just like agricultural products need water to grow, so spiritual fruit – the “fruit of the Spirit” – cannot grow without the quickening work of the Spirit in the believer (Gal. 5:22; 6:8). This is a vital requirement for a Christian if he wants to enjoy the fruit of the heavenly land which has been reserved for him. He will never have the slightest idea of the blessings of the heavenly Canaan – eternal and spiritual blessings which are his portion in Christ – if he has not been touched by these rivers of living water.

The fruit of the vine

So the first fruit which the spies found in the Valley of Eshcol was the large cluster of grapes, which had to be carried by two of them. Perhaps these two were Joshua and Caleb, who really appreciated the fruit of the land of Canaan.

In Scripture the fruit of the vine is generally used as a symbol of joy (cf. Judg. 9:13; Ps. 104:15; Isa. 24:7). Therefore, the cluster of grapes that was found by the spies tells us about the joy we find in the heavenly Canaan as a result of the quickening work of the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 5:22, joy is mentioned as an important aspect of the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who waters and we can reap this fruit of the Promised Land only by sowing to the Spirit (Gal. 6:8).

John 15 shows us that this heavenly joy is the result of our union with Christ, the true Vine. Knowing the Father and the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit is the source of eternal joy: “And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:3-4).

Notice the connection between fellowship and joy. Our fellowship with the Father and the Son causes a true and perfect

joy which cannot be found anywhere else. Fellowship and joy are inseparable. The Valley of Eshkol was located in the vicinity of Hebron, which means 'fellowship' or 'alliance'. True and perfect *joy* as the primary fruit of the Spirit can only be found in the place of *fellowship* with God, *communion* with the Father and the Son.

Pomegranates and figs

However, the cluster of grapes was not the only piece of fruit found by the spies; they also brought back pomegranates and figs. Perhaps these are referred to in Numbers 20:5, where we find the Israelites lamenting that the barren desert was not "a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink". In other parts of the Old Testament these pieces of fruit are also mentioned in the same breath (Deut. 8:8; Hag. 2:19).

With regard to the meaning of the pomegranate, imitations of pomegranates were made on the hem of the robe of the high priest as well as on the capitals of the two pillars standing on either side of the entrance to the temple (Ex. 28:31-34; 1 Ki. 7:18; 2 Ki. 25:17). In other words, we find this fruit in connection with the sanctuary. It symbolizes the holiness which is appropriate to the house of God. For the high priest the pomegranates – like the bells of gold – were a 'conditio sine qua non' for entering the sanctuary (Ex. 28:35). They point to the holiness which characterizes Christ and enables Him to appear before God as our heavenly High Priest (Heb. 7:26).

Concerning the pomegranates on the pillars of the temple, it seems that they were made as ornaments of the network around the capitals. According to Psalm 93:5, *holiness adorns God's house*. This confirms the thought that the pomegranates refer to the holiness which is required for the presence of God. They relate to practical holiness as the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. the expression "your fruit to holiness" in Romans 6:22).

Now let us look at the figs. One of the first chapters of the

Bible tells us something about the meaning of this third fruit which was brought back by the spies. After having eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve made themselves coverings of fig leaves so as to cover their nakedness (Gen. 3:7). Later God Himself gave them other garments, which were made of the skins of innocent sacrificial animals. The covering of fig leaves symbolizes the garment of man's own good works with which he tries to hide his sinful state from God. It contrasts sharply with the garments of salvation, the robe of righteousness, which we receive freely as a result of the death of the Lamb of God.

The fig tree is also used to symbolize Israel as a nation, clothed with the robe of its own righteousness. On the fig tree that was cursed by Christ, only leaves could be found; there was no fruit. Israel was wrapped in leaves of self-righteousness. Although they had a good confession outwardly, they could not produce abiding fruit of righteousness before God.

Today the fig tree is withered away – wrath has come upon the people – but in the end time this situation will change and the fig tree will be budding again (Matt. 21:19; 24:32; Luke 21:30). Then Israel will no longer seek their own righteousness but *God's* righteousness as revealed in Christ. They will be adorned by the robe of His righteousness and the city of Jerusalem will be called: "The-LORD-Our-Righteousness" (Isa. 61:10; Jer. 33:16). Israel will truly bear fruit, of which it will be said that "your fruit is found in Me" (Hos. 14:8).

While the pomegranates symbolize the fruit of *holiness*, the figs represent the fruit of *righteousness* (cf. Phil. 1:11). Together they show us the characteristics of the new man who was created according to God in "righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Eph. 4:24 JND, NASB). These features are the marks of a new creation, of a heavenly land. The first man was unable to produce these. Even in his state of innocence in the garden of Eden, Adam was not marked by true righteousness and holiness. He was indeed innocent but he did not resist evil and, subsequently, he was defiled by it. He did not act justly and did not remain holy in the presence of evil. True righteousness and

holiness are fruits of a new creation which is based upon Christ's work of salvation.

In the epistle to the Ephesians, which takes us to our Canaan of rest (the heavenly places), we see how this precious fruit has become our portion. In Christ we have been granted a holiness and a righteousness that give us a place in God's holy presence (Eph. 1:3-6). In Ephesians 4 and 5 we find how this can be made visible in our lives, so that the fruit of the Spirit can be seen in a practical way as we have no fellowship with the "unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5:11). Then we shall be sincere and without offence, being filled with the "fruits of righteousness" – which are also called a "peaceable fruit" (Phil. 1:11; Heb. 12:11).

Do we appreciate the fruits of the Promised Land, just like the two spies? Or don't we attach much value to them, just like the majority of the people? They despised the pleasant land because of their unbelief. If we do know and appreciate the fruits of the land, are we satisfied with occasionally tasting them in the wilderness, that is, in the circumstances of our pilgrim life? Or do we enjoy them permanently since we have come to dwell in the land and have taken possession of our heavenly blessings?

Moses and Joshua

“Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit”.

Numbers 27:18

Joshua and Jesus

From his youth, Joshua was the servant of Moses, the great man of God who led Israel out of Egypt and gave the people God’s laws (cf. Ex. 24:13; 33:11; Num. 11:28; Deut. 1:38). His life is a good example of the spiritual growth that is experienced by every young believer who walks with the Lord. Something similar can be seen in the life of Elisha who, while walking with Elijah, was prepared for the task that God had in store for him.

Joshua is also a type of the Lord Jesus Himself, as is evident from their similar names. Jesus is the Greek form of Jeshua, or Joshua. These names express God’s salvation. Joshua means “Yahweh saves”, or “Yahweh is salvation”. And in the New Testament the angel announcing the birth of Jesus linked His name with salvation from sin: “(...) and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

We know that Joshua completed the work of his predecessor. While Moses delivered God’s people from the land of slavery, Joshua led them into the Promised Land. The salvation of the Lord could be seen in the exodus out of Egypt (Ex. 14:13; 15:2), but its *complete* manifestation was only after the conquest

of Canaan. This was the great goal of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Thus Moses and Joshua are a double type of the Lord Jesus Christ, who not only delivers His people from their slavery to sin and Satan, but also brings them into a heavenly land. God has made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ and we have been blessed there with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3; 2:6).

Joshua is a special type of Christ who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, leads His people into this heavenly land, our Canaan of rest (cf. Heb. 3 and 4). He points to Christ as the One who, *in and by the Spirit*, is active now on behalf of His people. But there is also the individual application to ourselves as believers, who ought to be *filled with the Spirit* (Eph. 5:18). We should follow Joshua's example as a Spirit-filled man.

Joshua as a warrior

Let us examine the course of Joshua's life in order to see how he was prepared, step by step, for his great task, and also reflect upon the spiritual lessons for ourselves. The first time his name is mentioned is in Exodus 17:8-16, in the battle against Amalek. Apparently Joshua was a good soldier, for he was charged with waging the battle while Moses made intercession on the top of the hill.

The Israelites had been delivered from Egypt, but this did not mean there were no conflicts left for them in their journey through the wilderness. Similarly, we have been delivered from the power of the prince of this world, but this does not mean that we are left without struggles in our pathway here on earth. The wilderness symbolizes this earthly scene with all its difficulties and worries, pains and struggles. The Lord has left us here to fight for the glory of His name and He is in the glory to make intercession for us. We have to wage the good warfare and endure hardships as good soldiers of Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:3).

In this respect, Joshua is an important example for us. While

Moses stood on the top of the mountain in order to intercede for his soldiers, Joshua was battling down in the valley. Due to Moses' intercession, Joshua gained the victory over Amalek. In the same way, our Lord in heaven supports us in our battles here on earth, in our conflicts with Satan and the flesh. Through Him we are more than conquerors (cf. Rom. 8:34-37). Amalek was a powerful and cunning adversary who attacked the rear ranks of Israel (Num. 24:20; Deut. 25:17-19; 1 Sam. 15:2). This enemy is a type of Satan as the one who knows our weak spots and tries to prevent us from serving the Lord as a redeemed people. We can gain the victory over this mighty adversary only when we receive strength from above.

On the mountain of the Lord

The battle with Amalek was only the beginning of Joshua's career. Later in the book of Exodus we meet him as Moses' servant and companion. In these capacities Joshua had tremendous experiences since he was the only one who was allowed to climb the mountain of God with Moses, while the elders of Israel had to wait for their return (Ex. 24:13-14). In Exodus 32:15ff. we see them coming down from the mountain together, and Exodus 33:11 states that Joshua did not depart from the tabernacle of meeting that Moses had pitched outside the camp.

When we apply these things to ourselves we see that we can have various useful experiences in our walk with the Lord. He not only makes us more than conquerors in our conflicts here on earth, but He also gives us a deeper understanding of God's will and His ways with His people. We should be with Him on the top of the mountain, so to speak and learn about God's thoughts – most of all those concerning His dwelling place in the midst of His people (cf. Ex. 25-31).

He teaches us to discern the true condition of the people of God, and in spite of all our failures He still grants us a place where we can gather together in accordance with His will. The Israelites forgot about Moses and turned their backs on God

and on 'the apostle of their confession'. Similarly, professing Christendom does not take into account the rights of the exalted Christ, the Lord of glory, and has fallen into idolatry (cf. Rev. 2:14,20). Separation from this evil is a necessity: we should go forth to Christ outside the camp (Ex. 33:7; Heb. 13:13). Let us, like Joshua, seek the Lord and not depart from His presence. Then He will teach us and fit us for the task He wants us to accomplish.

The conquest of Canaan

Step by step Joshua was prepared for the great task of leading the people into the Promised Land and being their commander-in-chief in the ensuing conflict. He was a warrior, but he had to learn that there were enemies, not only in the wilderness, but also in the Promised Land. His preparation for the conflict in Canaan started in the book of Numbers. He was one of the spies sent to spy out the land. Similarly, we have to learn that there is not only conflict in our pilgrim lives (in the 'wilderness'), but also that we are engaged in a warfare in the heavenly places (in the 'land').

We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. These evil powers can only be defeated as we take the whole armour of God and use divine weapons (Eph. 6:10-20). Our blessings are of a spiritual nature, in the heavenly places, and they can only be known and enjoyed through the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:3). It is the Spirit's work to make them known to us, connected as they all are with Christ's present position at the right hand of God. Joshua presents a picture of a Spirit-filled believer whose attention is focused on the things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1).

It is not until Numbers 27:18, when the entry into Canaan is before him, that Joshua is described as a man filled with God's Spirit. In the book of Numbers we find several experiences that mark Joshua's spiritual growth toward this point.

In chapter 11 we see how he was zealous for Moses' sake in an unspiritual way and therefore needed correction (Num. 11:24-30). We can compare this with the behaviour of some believers in Corinth, who wanted to make Christ the leader of a certain party (1 Cor. 10:10-13).

In chapter 13, in view of the spying out of Canaan, Joshua's name was changed: "And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua" (Num. 13:16). The name *Hoshea* points in a general sense to the help and salvation of the Lord, whereas the name *Joshua* is more clearly linked with the name of Yahweh Himself. Salvation and redemption can be found only in Yahweh, the great I AM. So by this change of name Joshua's attention was focused on the LORD who would show Israel His full salvation by their entry into Canaan.

The same applies to believers in the present New Testament dispensation – it is no longer I who live, but *Christ* who lives in me. Our attention should not be focused on ourselves, but rather on the great salvation which *God* has accomplished in Christ.

Perhaps we can compare the change of Joshua's name with the transition from Romans 7 to Romans 8, the central issue of which is no longer our own selves, but Christ and the Spirit. Romans 8 shows us a Spirit-filled believer. A Christian is not only born of the Spirit; he is also sealed and anointed with the Spirit. For this reason he should be continually filled with the Spirit and be guided by Him in order to be able to fulfil his God-given task. Joshua is a good example of this.

As we have seen, the change of Joshua's name was related to his spying out the land of Canaan. In doing so he saw the rich blessings connected with it – the fruit of the land. It was a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Full of enthusiasm, he returned with Caleb and the other spies.

But when they showed the Israelites the fruit they had collected, the ten spoke about the great difficulties that the conquest of Canaan would involve. Discouraged by these words the people flatly refused to take possession of it. The only ones who spoke the language of faith were Joshua and Caleb.

They had a different spirit (!) compared with the Israelites who did not believe God's promises and despised the pleasant land (Num. 14:24). For this reason they were spared, while all the others perished in the wilderness. Hebrews 3:19 tells us that the people could not enter in because of unbelief.

Similarly, we are to honour our God by faith, believing the promises of His Word and trusting in His power in our spiritual battles. The spiritual blessings in heavenly places that we possess in Christ can only be enjoyed by faith. And it is in the strength of our faith and under the guidance of the Spirit that we can take possession of our portion in the land. This is shown in the typical teaching of the book of Joshua. Every place that we tread upon is ours (Josh. 1:3). This involves conflict, but time and again God grants the victory so that all the land will be conquered and become ours (Josh. 11:16-23).

The story of the spies shows us that the fruit of the Promised Land can even be enjoyed in the wilderness (Num. 13:26-27). However, God's intention for us is that we should enjoy the blessings of the land continuously because we have taken possession of it and dwell in it. We should move beyond simply enjoying a foretaste of the land!

Every believer who is filled with God's Spirit is capable of this and can enjoy the salvation of the Lord to its full extent. And when, like Joshua, we are "full of the spirit of wisdom" (Deut. 34:9), God will surely use us to lead others into the rich inheritance that has been prepared for God's children.

11

Manoah and his wife

*“Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?
And He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on”.*

Judges 13:18-20

Wonderful events

The birth of Samson was a miracle, because his mother had been barren and had borne no children. But a divine Messenger had come to tell her that she was to give birth to a son who would be a Nazirite to God, that is a person entirely dedicated to the service of the Lord (cf. Num. 6). Moreover, the Angel said that her son would begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines (Judg. 13:5).

In all these respects, Samson, however weak in himself, is a type of our Lord who, (1) in a miraculous way, was born of the virgin Mary; (2) as a Nazirite, was dedicated to God all His lifetime here on earth; and (3) delivered His people from the powers that held them captive.

This parallel is justified by other important events in the life of Samson (of course, the personal shortcomings of this judge should not be considered in this connection). His victory over a roaring lion speaks of Christ's victory over Satan (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8). In the same way as Samson gave his parents of the food that came “out of the eater” – something sweet that came “out of the

strong" – so the Lord shares the glorious results of His work with us (Judg. 14:14). The fact that Samson defeated more enemies in his *death* than in his *life*, is another reference to Christ's triumph on the cross of Calvary (Judg. 16:30).

The wonderful birth of Samson also reminds us of Isaac, who was born of barren Sarah. The Lord Himself said of Isaac's birth: "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' Is anything too hard (lit. "too wonderful") for the LORD?" (Gen. 18:13,14).

Speaking about the miracle of the virgin birth of the Messiah, the very first one of His names as mentioned by the prophet is, "*Wonderful*" (Isa. 9:6). The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Christ partook of flesh and blood for the sake of His brethren. It is an unspeakable mystery and will be a cause of eternal worship. Christ became Man in order to save men, to unite them with Himself and to bring them to glory. How can we ever thank Him for it!

His sacrifice is wonderful

However, it is not only Christ's birth that fills us with wonder, but even more so His sacrifice. He was *born* of the Spirit: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). With a view to His ministry here on earth He was also *anointed* with the Spirit and with power (Acts 10:38). But at the end of His life He *offered Himself* through the eternal Spirit without spot to God (Heb. 9:14). Burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin could not please God, but the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all, did (Heb. 10:5-10).

We are taught another lesson in the story of Manoah and his wife concerning this wonderful sacrifice. A burnt offering and a grain offering were offered to the Lord upon a rock (Judg. 13:19). The grain offering was made of fine flour that was mixed with oil and anointed with oil (Lev. 2). It symbolized the

pure human nature of our Lord, who was born of the Holy Spirit and anointed with His power.

The burnt offering, however, was a *bloody* sacrifice. This clearly speaks of His death to the glory and honour of God the Father. Both offerings were a sweet aroma to the Lord. Both offerings speak of our Saviour: “Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering (i.e., a grain offering) and a sacrifice (i.e., a bloody offering) to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Eph. 5:2).

It is an offering that is unfathomable to man. Christ’s sacrifice for our sins was at the same time a burnt offering that went up to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. While He had to be forsaken by God on the cross as He took our place in judgment, yet He was the One in whom the Father was well pleased. During those dark hours on Calvary’s cross, He reflected God’s wonderful love, justice and holiness.

It is interesting to note that Manoah offered a young goat. This was sometimes a sin offering in the Old Testament, but he offered it to God as “a burnt offering”. And the burnt offering was linked with a grain offering (Judg. 13:16,19). When Christ poured out His soul unto death, this was of infinite value to God. For this holy, humble Man not only glorified God during His life here on earth, but He also desired to glorify Him by His death. What a wonderful Saviour, who not only met our needs, but at the same time satisfied all God’s righteous demands!

His return to heaven is wonderful

Another wonderful thing that is mentioned in these verses is the miracle which was done by the Angel of the Lord (this Messenger was the Old Testament representation of the Lord Jesus Christ; cf. Mal. 3:1). As the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, He ascended in the flame of the fire. Not only was the name of the Angel wonderful, but so was His behaviour: He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on (Judg. 13:18,19). In other words, He acted in

accordance with the wonderful secret of His Person.

This miracle is a sign which teaches us that having offered Himself without spot to God, Christ ascended on high *by virtue of His sacrifice*. He is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high! He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens. Who is able to fathom the wonders of His Person? As a Man, He returned to heaven and was crowned with glory and honour. His glorification in heaven was God's righteous answer to His humiliation here on earth.

When pondering these things the only response that is proper for us is to worship at His feet. Just like Manoah and his wife we shall be deeply moved by what we have seen. We shall kneel down before our Lord to worship Him and pay Him heart-felt homage. It would appear that Manoah did not understand as much of God's gracious intentions as his wife, who had more spiritual insight. What about us? When we behold the miracles of the work and the Person of Christ, do we take the place of intelligent worshippers?

In Psalm 118:22,23 we read about the miracle of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ:

"The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
This was the Lord's doing;
It is *marvelous* in our eyes".

The once rejected Christ, who sacrificed Himself and stooped to the depths of death, has been exalted by God and crowned with glory and honour. He is the Cornerstone in whom we have put our trust. He is the Rock on which the Church is being built as a spiritual house.

This is the great miracle of God's grace which He works in our time. And in keeping with the words of the psalmist, we can only acknowledge that He has done all this according to the wonderful counsels of His will. It is wonderful and marvellous in our eyes. And we are looking forward to the soon-coming day when we shall see Him as He is and shall worship at His feet.

12

Samuel's arrival in Shiloh

"And she brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh".

1 Samuel 1:24

Samuel's parents

The first three chapters of First Samuel show us, how God intervened in a day of decay and deterioration. Prophetically, this time presents us with a picture of the last days before the coming of the Messiah, the King of Israel. This is also the theme of Hannah's song of praise in chapter two. The apostates will be judged, but a poor and small remnant will be lifted up by God's power and the appearance of His anointed King. When David came to power these expectations found their *preliminary* fulfilment – but the *final* realization will only take place in the end time, at Christ's coming.

We may apply the outlines that are sketched here to ourselves as well, because we are living in the last days (2 Tim. 3:1), the days just before the second coming of Christ. Ours is a time of spiritual and moral decay, as in the days of Eli. The service of God is disparaged because people bearing the name of servants and ministers of God behave improperly, just as the sons of Eli did.

Yet, even in bad times, God does not stop working. Here, He raised up a prophet who, at a later stage, was to bring in the

king. God does not let His people down even though they may have strayed far away from Him. God began to speak using a servant who was ready to hear His voice: "Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears" (1 Sam. 3:9). It was the prophet who introduced the king. And today we have the prophetic ministry of God's Word, announcing the coming of our Lord in power and glory.

First of all we can learn from the example of Samuel's parents. They were faithful to the service of God and went to Shiloh yearly to worship the Lord of hosts. In those days the Ark of the covenant, upon which God sat enthroned and with which He had linked His presence, remained in Shiloh (meaning "place of rest"). It was there that God had found a place of rest and dwelt in the midst of His people.

In the day of grace the place where God dwells among His own is not a special geographic location. We worship the Father in spirit and truth. This is realized wherever believers, recognizing the true Centre given to us by God, are gathered together unto the Name of Christ (Matt. 18:20). The Ark of the covenant symbolizes Christ Himself dwelling in the midst of His own by His Spirit and blessing them by His presence.

In spite of the spiritual and moral decay which was found in Shiloh, Samuel's parents never ceased to recognize it as God's dwelling place. The sons of Eli had made a mockery of the priesthood and because of their behaviour the offering of the Lord was abhorred (1 Sam. 2:17). Eli himself was made responsible for this. He was told that judgment upon his house had become inevitable and that Shiloh was going to be set aside as a place of worship (cf. Jer. 7:12).

However, since this had not yet happened it was important to remain faithful and to continue to worship and sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. We find this personal faithfulness in Samuel's parents and also in their son, from the very moment that he was brought to live in Shiloh.

Samuel's dedication

The second thing we would like to consider is the way in which Samuel was dedicated to the service of the Lord. His mother brought her little son into the house of the Lord at Shiloh and lent him to the Lord. When doing so she brought sacrifices to offer to Him: three bulls, one ephah of flour and a skin of wine (1 Sam. 1:24).

This can be applied to us as well, spiritually speaking, for we are dedicated to the service of God *by virtue of Christ's sacrifice*. Just as Samuel appeared before God in Shiloh by virtue of the offerings mentioned above, so we too serve and worship our God in the sanctuary on the basis of the sacrifice of His beloved Son. Whenever we appear before God we do not come with anything of our own but with the sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of our lips. And the object of these spiritual sacrifices is *Christ*.

The bulls mentioned in verse 24 speak of the value of the *sin offering*, as shown in the consecration of the priests in Exodus 29. According to this chapter one young bull was offered as a sin offering. In addition there were two rams, one for the burnt offering and the other for the dedication ceremony itself. Here in the first book of Samuel we also find three sacrificial animals and although no difference is made between them, we do read that Hannah brought her young son to Eli *after having slaughtered one bull*. This would justify the assumption that this was indeed a sin offering. Similarly, we serve God on the basis of Christ's sacrifice for sin. Christ was made to be sin for us, a sacrifice for sin, an offering in which sin was judged and put away from the presence of a holy and righteous God, in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him and be able to draw near to God.

Hannah also offered a meal offering consisting of one ephah of flour. This was an offering without blood and points to Christ's life here on earth which was without spot or blemish. In Scripture the meal or grain offering is always linked with the burnt offering. Having shown His perfection in every trial

during His walk here on earth, Christ offered Himself on Calvary's cross, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. It was an offering without spot; a perfect Person accomplishing a perfect work. So when we approach God as New Testament worshippers and priests it is only by virtue of Christ's finished work. God has made us accepted in the Beloved and we draw near as priests in this new dignity.

Finally, Hannah also offered a drink offering – a skin of wine which was poured out over the other sacrifices. In Scripture, wine is a picture of joy. The drink offering was linked with the burnt offering and the meal offering (cf. Ex. 29; Num. 15). It speaks of dedication to God, even unto death, as being a matter of joy. Hannah gladly gave her young son Samuel to the Lord because He had answered her prayers and had a right to the young life which He had graciously given.

Samuel's spiritual growth

The third point which we would like to consider is Samuel's remarkable spiritual growth after his arrival in Shiloh. He was consecrated to the Lord in the way we have just considered – and this shows that even in a dark day personal dedication to the Lord remains possible. But then the Lord blessed this young servant and began to use him in order to bring about a change in the lives of the people who had departed so far from Him.

“Meanwhile the child Samuel grew before the LORD” (1 Sam. 2:21). Without a doubt this was the secret of his growth: he was in the Lord's presence and so he was blessed in every respect. In chapter 3 verse 3 we see that his resting place was near the Ark of God. This points to a life lived in the presence of the Lord who is the true Centre of the worship of His people. We should find our resting place in Him and in His will. When Barnabas visited the believers in Antioch he was glad, “and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue *with the Lord*” (Acts 11:23). Our service in the sanctuary has to take place in His presence, but we would be

unable to serve Him if we did not find our resting place in Him as well.

“And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favour both with the LORD and men” (1 Sam. 2:26). The wording of this verse reminds us of what is written of the Child Jesus: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men” (Luke 2:52). Like Christ, Samuel was a *prophet* (1 Sam. 3:20). Because he was ready to hear the Lord's voice he was also able to speak to the people on His behalf. Samuel was also the last *judge*, who at the request of the people introduced the kingship (1 Sam. 8 and 9).

Moreover, he acted as a *priest*, since the priesthood of Eli and his sons had failed miserably. In Jeremiah 15 he is put on the same level with Moses as a *mediator* between God and the people. However, the starting point of all these important aspects of his public service was his life in Shiloh in the presence of the God who blessed him and made him a blessing to others.

13

Samuel's work as a judge

"He went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and judged Israel in all those places".

1 Samuel 7:16

Bethel

Every year, Samuel, the last judge and the first prophet of God's people administered justice in a number of places in the land of Israel. In all, there were four of them, of which Bethel here is mentioned first. Bethel (meaning "house of God") was a town of great renown in the history of God's people. It was the place where Abraham the patriarch had set up his tent, and where Jacob had received precious promises from God (cf. Gen. 12, 28 and 35). In the book of Judges, too, Bethel played an important role. Deborah lived between Ramah (Samuel's later residence) and Bethel, and there she dealt with the legal matters of the Israelites (Judg. 4:4-5).

Later on we see that Bethel was the place where the tribes gathered who were going up against Benjamin, to discipline the children of their brother and remove the evil from Israel (Judg. 20-21). Apparently they had taken the Ark of the covenant from Shiloh to Bethel (cf. Judg. 20:18 JND, NASB), in order to consult the Lord about the war with the Benjamites. Here we see how important it is in matters of discipline to come to understand

the will of the Lord and to seek His face. In this respect, the Israelites acted in agreement with God's thoughts, although they still lacked the true spirit of humiliation and failed to offer sacrifices before the Lord. But as soon as these conditions were met, God was with them and gave them the victory.

So Bethel was an important and memorable place when Samuel began his work as a judge there. Discipline had been exercised there before and God had expressed His will concerning difficulties that had emerged. Thus, when Samuel started administering justice in Bethel from year to year, in a sense he continued a tradition.

But there is a lesson here for us as well. Where can one learn the will of God better than *in His own house*? Learning His thoughts about any matter is possible only in His presence and before His face. It is only there that justice can be administered among the saints. Each statement that is made in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, should be consistent with His holy presence. Every judgment which is meted out there should be invested with His authority and who would not recognize it as such? Perhaps someone asks: "Who in our time can appoint himself to judge his brethren?" But Scripture tells us clearly that we need not lack righteous judgment. For in the Church, which is the temple of the living God, there will always be a wise person able to judge in disputes between brethren (1 Cor. 6:1-5).

Gilgal

The second place where Samuel administered justice during his tour of the land was Gilgal, another highly memorable place. From the camp at Gilgal the conquest of the Promised Land had started. In Gilgal (meaning "a rolling away"), the people were circumcised, so that the reproach of Egypt was removed from them. It was also the place of the monument of the twelve stones, reminding the people of the miraculous way in which they had crossed the Jordan (Josh. 4 and 5).

The typical teaching connected with Gilgal reminds us of the fact that we have been crucified with Christ, have passed through the river of death and have been raised with Him. It is there that we were also circumcised and taught to apply the death of Christ to ourselves in a practical sense, so as to put to death our members which are on the earth (Col. 2 and 3).

There we take off everything which is connected with our former life in slavery under sin, our life in the world. So our 'Gilgal' is the place of self-judgment, where the things of the flesh are removed. It is only from this starting point that we can take possession of the 'Promised Land', the realm of heavenly and spiritual blessings, the things which are above.

Therefore, Gilgal is a special place indeed to administer justice. There we see that practical righteousness is possible only where self-interest and prejudice have been put away, so that the saints do not act according to the flesh. Ecclesiastical authority administered 'in Gilgal' should be in keeping with the meaning of this place. There the flesh should be inactive and there should be no room for worldly standards.

Without a doubt, when Samuel chose this place to judge Israel, he remembered its important past. It seems as if he wished to call the people back to the place which had once been the starting point of their happiness and of their blessings.

Mizpah

Mizpah was the third town where Samuel administered justice; not Mizpah in Gilead, on the other side of the river Jordan, but the place of which we read earlier in this chapter (1 Samuel 7), the town situated within the tribal area of Benjamin, not far from Bethel (cf. Judg. 20).

First Samuel 7 also tells us the primary reason why Samuel chose Mizpah as a place to administer justice and it brings to light the special character of his administration of the law. Samuel was not only concerned about legal matters, but he cared to bring the people back into the presence of God.

Mizpah (meaning “watch tower”) is, so to speak, the place of divine revelation, the place where we are brought into God’s light and obtain a clear view of our relationship with God.

First Samuel 7 shows us a number of necessary conditions for spiritual restoration. Mizpah was the place of repentance, the place where God’s people turned to Him from idols. The Israelites acknowledged their miserable state before God (which was symbolized by pouring out water before the face of the Lord; cf. 2 Sam. 14:14 and Lam. 2:19). They confessed their guilt and cried for deliverance from their enemy’s yoke and in doing so they did not trust in their own strength but rather in the efficacy of the burnt offering that was offered to God. God delivers His people for Christ’s sake!

After the people had confessed their sins, we read those remarkable words: “And Samuel *judged* the children of Israel at Mizpah” (7:6). Apparently, the first and foremost aim of Samuel’s administration of justice was to bring the people back into the right relationship with God. This was achieved by bringing their hearts and minds into God’s light and reminding them of all the righteous acts of God (cf. 1 Sam. 12:7). In this way, God was glorified and the people were brought back to Him.

Samuel honoured Him for the deliverance which He had brought about after the Israelites had humbled themselves before Him. The prophet set up a pillar of stone and called its name Ebenezer (meaning “stone of help”), because thus far the Lord had helped them. So it is understandable that he wanted to keep the memory of this divine help alive by returning to Mizpah and judging the people there from year to year.

Ramah

The last town where Samuel judged Israel was Ramah, “for his home was there” (7:17). There he lived and there he devoted himself to the interests of the Israelites. Perhaps he lived in the house of his parents, the home where this God-fearing couple

called upon the Lord until He answered their prayers (1 Sam. 1:19; 2:11). In the same way, in this house Samuel brought all the problems and the needs of the Israelites before God, praying for light and wisdom, understanding and discernment. In this place, too, he expected help from above and judged the people according to divine principles.

Ramah (meaning "height") was a mountain town. Samuel walked on the heights of faith, so to speak, like Abraham – whereas Lot walked by sight and chose the plain of Jordan for his dwelling place. And just like Abraham, Samuel had an altar. He was a worshipper who offered up his daily burnt offerings (to apply it to ourselves, spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ).

This special detail is not mentioned in connection with the three other places which are listed here, at least not in these verses. In Ramah, Samuel built an altar to the Lord, in order to seek Him and please Him. There he thanked God for His patience towards a disobedient people, for all the proofs of His goodness bestowed upon a stubborn nation. Samuel must have understood something of God's plans and purposes for His people, which were to be carried out by the anointed king, of whom he was the forerunner. At his altar, the judge of Israel paid homage to the God of Israel, the God of all grace!

David and his mighty men

“So he became captain over them”.

1 Samuel 22:1-2

The rejected king

After having been anointed by Samuel, David had to wait a long time before he could assume his royal power. In this respect, he is a type of Christ who, in spite of His royal dignity, does not yet wield His power publicly. He is still the rejected One here on earth. The world has cast Him out: it lifted Him up on the cross. His own people rejected Him and did not want Him to be their King. But meanwhile God has exalted Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named (Eph. 1:20-22). He is King of kings and Lord of lords even now, although the public power that is linked with it will only be seen at His second coming (Rev. 19:11-16).

When David had to flee because the time for his reign had not yet come, he became the centre and the captain of a number of faithful followers. Similarly, Christ, although still being rejected by the world, has a company of followers: His disciples who are very closely linked with Him. He is the Centre of His own, whom He has chosen and drawn toward Himself.

This is in a typical way presented here in the life of David in First Samuel 22. His brothers went to him in the cave of Adullam, but then also “everyone who was in distress, every-

one who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him". The first group offers us a picture of those who already know the Lord and realize that He calls them His 'brethren' after His finished work on Calvary's cross (cf. Ps. 22:22; John 20:17). The second group was formed by men who came to David compelled by various needs. They would represent all those who hear the Lord's call and accept His gentle invitation: "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

It is very remarkable in this connection that Matthew's Gospel not only depicts Christ as the rejected King, but also as the Centre of all those who take refuge with Him. For He tells them to come to Him. So He is not without faithful followers and to them He declares the precious name of His Father. At present, He does not maintain His rights with regard to Israel and to the world publicly, but He gathers His own out of Israel and the world. Why does He do so? The grand object in this dispensation is to take out of all the nations a people for His name and to reveal to them the name of His Father. As the Lord announced it Himself: "(...) nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27; cf. John 17:6, 26).

Such is the work of His grace in this present day by the Holy Spirit's action. The Spirit shows us the glories of the Son and gathers us as God's dear children around Christ the Lord. In Matthew 18:20 we are told that Christ is the Centre of His own, who are gathered together in His name. They form a people set apart from the world, a heavenly company of priests who draw near to God and to the Lamb for worship.

His leadership

However, just as David was not only the centre but also the leader and captain of his followers, Christ is not only the Centre but also the Author or Chief Leader of all His own (cf. Heb. 12:2). From the place where we dwell in His presence, we go out into the world for His name's sake. Our being with Him is the

preparation needed for our mission as His ambassadors. We read of the disciples that the Lord called them, (1) to be with Him and (2) that He might send them out to preach (Mark 3:14).

David became their leader, the captain of all those who took refuge with him. Similarly, Christ is not only the Saviour but also the Lord and Master of all those who come to Him in order to find rest for their souls. He has authority over them and wants to lead them in the battle which they have to wage in this world for His name's sake. After His resurrection from the dead, the disciples who had been with Him became mighty men of valour and very brave witnesses, so that even their enemies had to acknowledge that "they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Living in the presence of the Lord had very much changed them and made them fit for battle. The followers of David learned from him and so they changed from down-hearted people into mighty men of valour.

The same thing happens to all those who labour and are heavy laden, when they take refuge with Christ. They are transformed into His image. In their battles with the enemy, they go from strength to strength. Under the leadership of the risen and glorified Lord who vanquished Satan and defeated him with his own sword, they form God's army here on earth. As we fight in His strength we gain victories to the honour and glory of Him who has slain His ten thousands. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Rom. 8:37).

His army

We also read about David's heroes that "they came to him day by day to help him, until it was a great army, like the army of God" (1 Chr. 12:22). They were courageous like lions and were as swift as gazelles on the mountains. They recognized David's authority over them and they helped to make him king (1 Chr. 11:10). They were the first to subject themselves to David's authority, although he did not yet reign over Israel. And they were highly instrumental in making David king over God's people and the surrounding nations. Applying this to ourselves,

it would mean that we belong to the number of Christ's mighty men when we bow to His authority and fight for the honour of His name in the day of His rejection. Although His public reign has not yet materialized, He is able and willing to lead us by His Word and by His Spirit. Do we follow our heavenly Lord?

In First Chronicles 11 David's mighty men and their victories are mentioned in detail. It is striking to see that the battles of David's men are often directed against the Philistines, who are a type of nominal believers. They lived in the Promised Land, but had not entered it in the way God had appointed for His people. Unlike the Israelites, they had not crossed Jordan. Therefore these uncircumcised men are typical of natural men who neither died with Christ, nor are raised with Him.

In First Chronicles 11:12-14 one of the major feats of David's men is mentioned, namely the defence of a field full of barley against the Philistines. Barley speaks of the resurrection life which is the fruit of Christ's death and resurrection (cf. John 6). Nominal Christians do not know this blessing and their claims to it should be challenged by the servants of the Lord. This chapter also offers us a detailed report of an action of three heads of David's mighty men, who broke through the camp of the Philistines in Bethlehem in order to draw water from the well of Bethlehem, which was by the gate. In Scripture, well water speaks of the refreshing and quickening work of the Spirit of God through His Word (cf. John 4 and 7), the enjoyment of which is hampered or rendered impossible by the influence of 'Philistines' – nominal believers, unbelieving theologians. Even in the days of the patriarchs, the Philistines stopped up the wells that Abraham had dug (Gen. 26:15). Therefore, it is a special valiant deed (at least in God's eyes) to overcome these enemies and make the living water available again. Our Lord, great David's greater Son, takes delight in these things.

In First Chronicles 11 and 12, all the heroes of David who recognized him as their captain, are mentioned by name. The same thing goes for those who follow Christ as their Lord in the day of His rejection: "The Lord knows those who are His" (2 Tim. 2:19); their 'heroic deeds' are recorded in heaven!

Elijah and his forty days' journey to Mount Horeb

“So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God”.

1 Kings 19:8

A prophet in distress

Shortly after Elijah had reached a tremendous height in his career as a prophet of the Lord, he got into an awkward situation. In First Kings 18 he was the great victor over the cult of Baal, but here in chapter 19 he seems to be the big loser. His life was in danger, for Jezebel threatened to let him share the fate of the prophets of Baal who had been executed with the sword on Elijah's orders (v. 2).

The prophet got into a deep depression, so that he preferred death to life. He said: “It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!” (v. 4). But that was not God's way with him, for He did not want His faithful servant to die ingloriously. He still wanted to teach him some important lessons. This becomes apparent in verse 4, where Elijah recognized that he was no better than his fathers. Here he learned how insignificant he really was.

At Mount Horeb, God had a few more lessons in store for him. First of all that He was the God of all *grace*, and secondly

that Elijah was not the only true servant of the Lord. There was a faithful remnant. God had reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees had not bowed to Baal. Then, God had another task for him to accomplish, by anointing two kings as well as a prophet as his own successor. And in the end he did not die ingloriously under a broom tree, but was carried up into heaven triumphantly by a chariot of fire with horses of fire!

All this, however, was still future at the time we see Elijah lying helplessly under this broom tree in the wilderness. Nobody could see him there, for he had left his servant in Beersheba (v. 3). He was alone and there was nobody around to help him. Still, there was One who was full of compassion, who looked at him tenderly. It was the One who was called by the very personal name: 'The God of Elijah' (cf. 2 Ki. 2:14). Elijah's help came from above, from the One who had sent him and who would not forsake His servant, even in this pitiful condition.

God knew exactly what Elijah needed in the first place: strength, both physically and mentally. And in His grace, He provided him with the necessary means. Elijah was not admonished for his deep depression. Instead, in a very mild way, God granted His servant what he needed in order to get back on his feet.

Food from heaven

He sent an angel who prepared a meal for Elijah. The prophet was gently woken up and he ate of the food and drank of the water that the angel had put in front of him. This was repeated a second time. Yes, our God provides food and drink, even in the wilderness! He is mighty to "prepare a table in the wilderness" (Ps. 78:19).

Elijah was not the only one who was cared for in this way. God did the same thing for the people of Israel after their deliverance from Egypt. Then He took care of *a whole nation* in the wilderness. Every day He opened the doors of heaven and rained down manna on them to eat. He also quenched their

thirst with the water that came out of the rock that was struck with Moses' rod. These were wonderful ways in which He provided His people abundantly with food and drink.

In much the same way, God takes care of us. He also has prepared a table before us as Christians. The resources of heaven have been put at our disposal. For the world through which we pass, is a *wilderness* to the spiritual eye. We have left this present evil world and we desire a better, that is, a heavenly homeland. So we are pilgrims who are bound for heaven. The Father's house is the end of our pilgrimage. But meanwhile, we need both food and drink which correspond to our new nature. We have been born again, that is, born from above, and therefore we need food from above.

This is graciously given by our heavenly Father, as is seen here in the case of Elijah. God Himself sustains us, by strengthening the new nature that we have received in the new birth. Though there is no suitable food available in the wilderness for the new man, divine resources have been put at our disposal to strengthen us in our earthly course.

The baked cake of which Elijah ate, reminds us of the meal or grain offering (Lev. 2). This is a picture of Christ's perfect life on earth, His complete dedication to God. He is the Man who came down from heaven and it is on Him that we feed spiritually, so that we are strengthened in the inner man and are being conformed to His image.

The water that Elijah drank refers to the refreshing streams of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit was poured out from on high, after Jesus was glorified in heaven. The water flowed from the Rock that had been struck with the rod of judgment and we have all been made to drink of one Spirit (John 7:37-39; 1 Cor. 10:4; 12:13).

But here the water is in a jar, which means that it is still water. This would point to the completed canon of Scripture. The water of the Word of God cleanses us and it quenches our spiritual thirst (Eph. 5:26). In John 6, where Christ presents Himself as the true Manna which came down from heaven, we have the two notions of food and drink in one verse: "He who

comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (v. 35).

It is this food and drink that we need on our journey. Without it, the journey would be too great for us as well. The words of the angel to Elijah can also be applied to the Christian: "Arise and eat, because the journey is *too great* for you" (v. 7). Our wilderness race can only be finished with joy if we are strengthened by heavenly food and drink. What kind of food do we eat on our way to heaven? There are many kinds of food available in this world. We are offered quite a number of different things to feed on. Do we eat the food that *God* gives us? Or do we, like the Israelites, long for the food of Egypt, of this present evil world, the land of slavery (Num. 11:5; 21:5)? This cannot supply our needs as pilgrims to the land of Canaan.

The forty days of the journey

After having eaten from the food that God supplied, Elijah became quite a different man. No longer did he lay down helplessly, but he went on his way, strengthened by that heavenly food. It contained indeed a tremendous force, for Elijah went in the strength of that food no less than "forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God" (v. 8).

The number forty is used here with an obvious reason. In Scripture, it always refers to a testing time, a complete period of trials and temptations. A period of *forty days* can be found:

- (1) in the account of the Flood (Gen. 7:12; 8:6);
- (2) in the story of Moses' stay on the mountain of God (Ex. 24:18; 34:28);
- (3) in the story of the spies who were sent into Canaan (Num. 14:33-34);
- (4) in the account of the battle between David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17:16);
- (5) in the book of Ezekiel as the time during which the prophet had to bear the iniquity of the house of Judah (Ezek. 4:6);

(6) in the book of Jonah as the term after which Nineveh would be overthrown (Jon. 3:4);

(7) and in the Gospel story of the temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4:2).

A period of *forty years* is to be found even more often, for instance as the time of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness (which took forty years according to the number of the days in which they spied out the land of Canaan). Many a king reigned for a period of forty years (Saul, David, Solomon).

Apparently the idea of a complete period of time is prominent in the number forty. It is a fixed time in which God tests a man in order to find out whether he meets his responsibility towards Him. This is also shown by the numbers four and ten, of which forty is made up. Four is the number of creation (think of the four winds of heaven, the four corners of the land), of our walk here on earth and of human failure (think of Numbers, the fourth book of the Pentateuch, which describes Israel's failures in the wilderness). The number ten is pre-eminently the number of responsibility (ten fingers with which man acts, ten commandments which he has to keep). So the number forty speaks of creature responsibility towards the Creator and Lawgiver.

The people of Israel could only finish their long journey through the wilderness because of God's rich provisions on the way. Likewise, Elijah finished his journey of forty days and forty nights in the strength of the food with which God provided him. And as sojourners and pilgrims we, too, can only reach the end by making use of the free gifts which God Himself supplies to His own. Thus, in His grace He meets all our needs.

The end of the journey: the mountain of God

What was the goal of Elijah's journey? It was Horeb, or Mount Sinai, which here in First Kings 19 is referred to as "the mountain of God" (precisely as in the book of Exodus, cf. Ex. 3:1; 18:5). This special name is used because of God's revelation to His people on this very mountain. He had brought Israel *to Himself*

on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:4). Elijah was also going to have an encounter with God on this mountain.

But we can apply these things to ourselves as well. The important end of our journey as pilgrims is to meet our God in His holy mountain and to come into His immediate presence. As Christians we are associated with another mountain, namely Mount Zion, the mountain of God's grace, and also with the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22). We are not under law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14). The Jerusalem *above* is our mother (Gal. 4:26). So we have free access to God, to the throne of grace. We have boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 4:16; 10:19). This is a spiritual reality in the present dispensation of grace, for we draw near in spirit, with full assurance of faith.

But our faith will make room for sight at Christ's coming. Then we shall ascend into the hill of the LORD, renewed in body, soul and spirit, and stand in His holy mountain with all the redeemed. He will come again and receive us to Himself and thus we shall always be with the Lord. This is the ultimate goal of our pilgrimage down here.

When we enter into God's presence, we learn to know ourselves, but we also learn to know our God in His infinite grace. This is seen here in the case of Elijah. He came to see himself in his utter weakness and pettiness: he was just one of a faithful remnant of seven thousand people. But he also got to know God in a completely new way. The God of Mount Sinai, who had revealed Himself as the God of judgment, in lightning and thunder, when giving the law, now appeared to Elijah as *the God of all grace*. For He was not in the strong wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire. He spoke with a still small voice. He brought rest and peace and quiet. He showed His mercy to an unworthy and unfaithful people.

It is remarkable that even Moses, the lawgiver, learned the same lesson on Mount Sinai, after the Israelites had broken the law and had brought themselves under its curse. The law was mixed with grace and in this way Moses came to know this new aspect of God's glory. The God of *light* is also the God of *love*.

In the very place where the law had been given, Moses heard as it were the glad tidings of the Gospel. God was merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. He was essentially the God of grace and He was rich in mercy towards a sinful and stiff-necked people (Ex. 33:14-34:9). In His forbearance He could pass over the sins of His people, looking ahead towards Christ's work of redemption (Rom. 3:25b).

And on the Mount where Jesus was transfigured before His disciples, we see both Moses (who gave the law to Israel) and Elijah (who turned the heart of the people to the law) in the company of our Lord Jesus Christ (who came to fulfil the law). By His sufferings and His shameful death on the cross He bore the curse of the law and proclaimed the full riches of God's mercy for lost sinners. The prophet Elijah may not have grasped this secret very well during his life, but he must have understood it in the light of Christ's glory. For on the Mount of Transfiguration where he appeared together with Moses, they both talked with Jesus and spoke of His decease (that is, His departure or exodus from this world) which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9:30-31).

Here on Mount Horeb, Elijah was told that God Himself would maintain His rights and protect His honour. Elijah was not the only faithful Israelite that was left, there was a remnant according to the election of God's grace (cf. Rom. 11:1-6). It is in God's presence that we learn to know His grace and praise Him for it. And we shall do this in a perfect manner when we shall be with Him throughout all ages, after our pilgrimage – strengthened by the food provided by God Himself – has been completed.

Hezekiah and his going up to the house of the Lord

“On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD”.

2 Kings 20:5

Hezekiah and the house of the Lord

The house of the Lord held an important place in the life of king Hezekiah. He desired to walk in the ways of the Lord, just like his great forefather David. Therefore he wished to live and act as a righteous king on behalf of God, in complete dependence on His word and will. Hezekiah took care of God’s interests and of His house, the holy temple of the Lord. This contrasted sharply with the behaviour of his godless father, Ahaz, who took part of the treasures from the house of the Lord and gave it to the king of Assyria. After this, Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful and even shut up the doors of the temple (2 Chr. 28:21,24).

His god-fearing son, Hezekiah, acted quite differently. In the very first year of his reign, in the first month, Hezekiah rectified this desecration and repaired and opened the doors of the house of the Lord (2 Chr. 29:3). This wonderful beginning of his reign was followed by a complete restoration of the house of the Lord, its worship and everything connected with it. The Passover was celebrated in a unique manner by all Israel and the land was cleansed from idolatry. It was a time of revival, of spiritual restoration and return to God and His service.

Hezekiah was prosperous in all this: “Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and true before the LORD his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered” (2 Chr. 31:20-21).

After that, however, there came a time of testing and trial in Hezekiah’s life. The period of prosperity was followed by a time of severe suffering. There was distress both from the inside and the outside. From the outside, there was the threat of war. The king of Assyria, against whom Hezekiah had rebelled in his period of prosperity (2 Ki. 18:7), marched up against Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. Inside Jerusalem the fear for the downfall of the city was followed by a deadly disease that almost carried Hezekiah off to his grave. In this critical period, Hezekiah’s behaviour with respect to the house of the Lord quickly reached a turning point. Even pious men may fail when they are put to the test! For as soon as Sennacherib had conquered the fortified cities of Judah, Hezekiah – would you believe it – used the treasures of the house of the Lord as some kind of redemption money to prevent the king of Assyria from marching any further (2 Ki. 18:13-16).

In this way, Hezekiah desecrated the house of the Lord that at first he had restored. We do not read in this connection that he asked God for advice, nor that he went up to the house of the Lord to pray. He acted independently and in doing so harmed the interests of God’s house. The negative effects were soon felt. Sennacherib did receive the tribute from Hezekiah but still sent a strong army to Jerusalem – although the main force stayed at Lachish. For the time being, he restricted himself to a sort of psychological warfare by means of his marshal. This troubled king Hezekiah so much that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the Lord (2 Ki. 19:1).

Hezekiah’s prayers

Now that things were at their worst, Hezekiah could not but

seek God's face. Yet we do not read here that he prayed himself; he left that to Isaiah. The king asked the prophet to act as mediator and to lift up his prayer for the remnant that was left. We only read about Hezekiah's praying personally after the envoys of Sennacherib had come once more with a threatening letter. Then he became very much involved in the matter and spoke about the LORD *our* God, whereas in the presence of the prophet he had spoken in a more aloof manner about the LORD *your* God (2 Ki. 19:4,19).

It is moving to read this prayer of Hezekiah. This is the second time that he went into the house of the Lord. He took the letter from the delegation of the king of Assyria and spread it before the Lord. Then he made a striking appeal to the Lord, pleading that God Himself maintain His own honour as being the only true God, in contrast to the vain idols of the nations that were only the work of men's hands. His prayer was heard in a wonderful manner. In response the Angel of the Lord destroyed Sennacherib's army so that the only thing he could do was return 'shamefaced' to his own land (2 Chr. 32:21).

However, this answer to his prayers did not yet end Hezekiah's afflictions. It was in those days that he was struck by a deadly disease. On behalf of God, the prophet Isaiah told him that he would die and not live (2 Ki. 20:1). Once more we read that Hezekiah prayed to the Lord. Thereupon he received this comforting answer through the prophet: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD" (2 Ki. 20:5).

Of the three times that this story is reported in the Bible, it is only in this section that we read the promise that Hezekiah would again go up to the house of the Lord *on the third day*. This time, he would not go up to the temple to pray and to plead for salvation, *but to thank God for the salvation that had been revealed*.

Here we have Hezekiah not as a supplicant but as a worshipper, as he himself puts it in his song of thanksgiving: "The living, the living man, he shall praise You (...) The Lord was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord"

(Isa. 38:19-20). In this respect there is a parallel with Psalm 116, where the sacrifice of praise is offered to the Lord in His temple in order to thank Him for the salvation that had been obtained from the pains of death.

The third day: the resurrection day

As has been said, Hezekiah was allowed to give thanks to the Lord for his recovery *on the third day*. This is certainly no coincidence, since the third day in Scripture is very often connected with life from the dead. It is the day of resurrection. Christ rose again “the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:4).

Christ was raised because of our justification. And His resurrection from the dead is the basis of our salvation from the power of sin and the pains of death. Only on this new ground can we burst out into the song of redemption and offer the sacrifice of praise to our God and Father in His house. To us Christians the house of God here on earth is not a temple of wood and stone, but a spiritual house. It is the Church of the living God, being built up with living stones. In the midst of the redeemed we offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:18-22; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5).

(1) In this figurative sense, the promise to Hezekiah of going up to the house of the Lord is also applicable to us. On the *third day*, that is, on the ground of Christ’s resurrection from the dead, we too pay homage to our God. We come to Him as made alive together with Christ. We enter the Holiest with our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving; as a holy priesthood we dwell in God’s presence. If we approach God in that way, this is really a ‘going up to the house of the Lord’. For our hearts and minds are lifted up to Him, and our songs of praise rise up as sweet-smelling incense before His throne.

(2) In Genesis 1:9-13 we read that on the third day the dry land appeared and the earth began to bring forth fruit. The dry land symbolizes the place of safety from the wrath of God, which can only be reached through death. God Himself has prepared this safe ground for us and there we are kept from the

waters of death, the waters of judgment. We are safe and secure in the risen Christ, and we belong to a new creation. The dry land is also the place of fruit-bearing. We are to bear fruit to God: the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of a new creation. We also offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips (Rom. 6:22; 7:4; Gal. 5:22; 6:8; Heb. 13:15). So we serve God on this new ground, in separation from the world that is passing away.

(3) In the history of Israel, we see that God's people had to leave Egypt and had to go a three days' journey into the wilderness in order to bring Him their sacrifices (Ex. 8:27). Worship is founded on Christ's finished work on Calvary's cross and His resurrection from the dead.

(4) It was also on the third day that God revealed Himself to Israel on Mount Sinai, and then the people were allowed to approach Him there (Ex. 19:11,16,17). The number three speaks of the inner sanctuary and of divine revelation (cf. the book of Leviticus, the third book of the Pentateuch).

(5) On the third day, according to Joshua 1:11, Israel crossed the river Jordan, the river of death, following the Ark which is a type of Christ. In this way they reached the Promised Land, which is a type of the heavenly places.

(6) Many more examples could be cited to illustrate the importance of the third day. Jonah, the prophet, reached the dry land after having been 'in the bonds of death' for three days.

(7) Queen Esther approached the king on the third day and found favour in his sight. So she was saved from condemnation. In short, the third day is the day of resurrection, of reaching a place of safety before God, the place where we can bear fruit to Him.

Divine favour, human unfaithfulness

Unfortunately, Hezekiah showed a lack of fruitfulness. It appears that the fruit of the flesh sprang up again. The author of Chronicles says it very clearly: "But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favour shown him, for his heart was lifted up;

therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem" (2 Chr. 32:25).

If only he would have gone up to the house of the Lord again and again with a song of praise, he might have been kept from this sin! Regrettably, the house of the Lord no longer held such an important place in his life after his recovery. The delegation from Babylon heard nothing and saw nothing of the house of the Lord, but they did see Hezekiah's *own* house (2 Ki. 20:12-17). Hezekiah became arrogant and sought his own honour rather than the honour of the Lord. Because of that, he no longer acted as a grateful worshipper.

This failure reminds us of what the Bible says about king Solomon after he had completed the construction of the temple in *seven* years: "But Solomon took *thirteen* years to build *his own house*" (1 Ki. 7:1). It also reminds us of the words with which the prophet Haggai reproached the remnant that had returned from the Babylonian exile: "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your panelled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" (Hag. 1:4).

Of course there are a lot of good things to say about Hezekiah, about Solomon and also about the remnant of the people of Israel, but we see in all these three cases that their *own* interests took a greater place than those of the house of the Lord. In this way they did not give God His due. In fact they wronged *His* honour and *His* rights.

We will be kept from this danger by imitating the example of our Lord and Saviour, of whom it is written: "The zeal for Your house has eaten Me up" (Ps. 69:9; John 2:17). We will then long for the house of the Lord, in order to thank Him for all His mercies. It will be our desire to dwell in His house for ever. Just like our Lord Himself, we will be found in God's house, because we have to be about our Father's business (Luke 2:46-49). Our life will be characterized by our going up to the house of the Lord, by beholding the beauty of the Lord and by inquiring in His temple (Ps. 27:4).

Jabez and his prayer to the God of Israel

“And Jabez called on the God of Israel”.

1 Chronicles 4:9,10

His origins

Is Jabez just an otherwise unknown person who occurs for some obscure reason in the records of the Chronicles? It would be wrong to think so, for the Spirit of God devotes two important verses to this man – verses which have not lost their value and which make the list of names that we find here very interesting reading material indeed.

Who was this Jabez? He seems to be a descendant of the Kenites who were later incorporated within the tribe of Judah (Judg. 1:16, 4:11; 1 Sam. 15:6; 1 Chr. 2:55). Initially, he did not belong to the people of God. To use Paul’s words in Ephesians 2:12, he was an alien from the commonwealth of Israel and a stranger from the covenants of promise. Yet, through God’s goodness, he received a place within that nation, namely within the tribe of Judah, which means ‘Praise’.

In these verses in First Chronicles 4 we find Jabez’ prayer in which he praised his new-found God. He called on the God of Israel, it says here. This confirms the thought that as a stranger he joined the people of God and took refuge with the God of Israel – just like Rahab and Ruth did in former times.

He realized that he would be safe under the protection of this God, the living and true God and he committed himself fully to Him. His prayer testifies to his very great faith.

His name

The story of Jabez begins with pain and sorrow. The word "pain" is used here twice. His mother had given him the name Jabez (meaning "causing pain"), because she had given birth to him in pain (v. 9b). Jabez prayed that no harm or evil might pain or grieve him (v. 10b).

Although a son born in pain, he was prominent among his brothers. He was more honourable than his brothers (v. 9a). Therefore, Jabez reminds us of Benjamin who was called 'Son of My Sorrow' by Rachel, but 'Son of the Right Hand' by Jacob (Gen. 35:18). Suffering and sorrow are the consequences of man's sin ("in pain you shall bring forth children", Gen. 3:16).

But these sufferings are followed by glory: the glory of God which is to be revealed in all the earth, as well as the glory that is *now* real to faith at God's right hand. This held true for Benjamin, as well as for Jabez. But most of all it is applicable to our Lord Jesus Christ and to us as Christians. The sufferings of the cross were followed by Christ's exaltation to God's right hand in heaven. As believers we are called to partake of Christ's sufferings, since the Spirit of glory rests upon us and we know that one day we will be glorified with Him (1 Pet. 4:13,14).

His prayer

Let us now look in some detail at Jabez' prayer. It comprises five parts:

(1) The first part is: "Oh, that You would bless me indeed". Jabez recognized that the God of Israel, upon whom he called, was the Source of all blessing. Just as James tells us: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (Jas. 1:17).

Jabez, conscious of this, had great faith. And so he prayed

for abundant blessing. No doubt, his faith was not confounded. The same applies to us. Our Lord, in His grace, grants us life and He grants it more abundantly (John 10:10). As Christians we know that we are blessed with *every spiritual blessing* in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

(2) This brings us to the second part. Jabez also prayed for enlargement of his territory. Christ became poor, that we might become rich. In Him, the Man at God's right hand, we have received a heavenly inheritance. We possess a rich domain of spiritual, eternal blessings in the heavenly places, a better home than the land of Canaan. In that sense, all believers are 'landowners', who may hope for enlargement of their territory. A beautiful example of this in the Old Testament is found in Joshua who received the promise: "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given you" (Josh. 1:3). Step by step we should conquer the Promised Land and claim the inheritance that has been given to us in Christ. When He gives us the victory over our enemies we can say with Isaac: "Now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land" (Gen. 26:22).

So Jabez desired to enlarge his territory in the land of Canaan. A similar desire was found in Achsah, Caleb's daughter. She asked for a field and also for springs of water (Josh. 15:18,19; Judg. 1:14,15). And she was given what she had asked for. The same is recorded here of Jabez: "So God granted him what he requested". God is willing to bless us; that is His desire because, in Christ, He looks upon us with favour.

(3) In the third place, Jabez prayed that God's hand would be with him. He did not lean on his own strength and understanding, but relied on God's help and guidance. He wanted to be led by God's hand, since he had put (so to speak) his own hand into God's hand.

Jabez was aware of the miracles of that mighty hand. With "a high hand", Israel had been delivered out of Egypt and brought into the land of Canaan (Ex. 6:1; 14:8 KJV). Could the

arm of the Lord ever be shortened (Num. 11:23)? "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him" (Ezra 8:22). Have we put our hand in God's hand? Do we realize that He is for us and that therefore all hostile powers must retreat? (Rom. 8:31).

(4) "And that You would keep me from evil", is the fourth part of Jabez' prayer. This can be understood in two ways: evil in the sense of sin, or something that is harmful to us, e.g. a disaster. We will not always be kept from harm. To the Israelites, however, earthly prosperity was clear evidence of God's favour. When an Israelite was kept from harm, it was a sign that God's hand was with him.

For us as Christians things are different because our blessings are on another level. They have a more specific spiritual and heavenly character. However, as disciples of Christ we can also say this prayer and ask to be kept from evil and to be delivered from the evil one (cf. Matt. 6:13). If it concerns evil in the sense of sinful acts or deeds we also have our own responsibility to *flee* from evil (cf. Job 1:1).

(5) These remarks can also be applied to the fifth part of the prayer: "(...) that it may not grieve me" (KJV), or "(...) that it may not pain me" (NASB). It is sad when people yield to evil and thus pierce themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:10). The Lord will protect us from this danger, when we walk with Him. However, we live in a creation which is subject to futility, a valley of tears and sorrows, so that (sooner or later) suffering and sorrow will come our way. But when we commit ourselves to Him, the harm will not 'pain' us anymore.

Jabez' prayer, which has so much to say to us today, was answered positively. Verse 10 concludes: "So God granted him what he requested". God hears our prayers. Let us be convinced of that. It is the happy message that resounds in these final words and encourages us to follow Jabez' example!

The linen workers and the potters

“There they dwelt with the king for his work”.

1 Chronicles 4:23

The records of Judah, the royal tribe

Even believers who read the Bible on a daily basis, skip over the genealogies of First Chronicles. They dislike the seemingly dry enumeration of names by the author of this book. But they tend to forget that the lists of names are alternated with several interesting reports and comments.

For instance, in this same chapter we find the important prayer of Jabez (4:10), and the next chapter speaks about the power of prayer in the battle against the Hagarites (5:20). Elsewhere we find valuable statements about the worship of the people and many details of their family life and the history of the tribes.

In chapter 4:21-23 we read about a branch of the sons of Shelah, the son of Judah, who were working as linen workers and potters. We would like to focus on these few verses, because of the spiritual lessons connected with these two trades and also because of the statement that these labourers “dwelt with the king for his work”.

It is also important to notice the main purpose of all these chapters: they focus on David, the man after God’s own heart,

the king who reigned by the grace of God. He is the one who is the central person in the history of First Chronicles. In the accounts, major attention is given to the royal tribe of Judah (Chs. 2-4) and the population of Jerusalem (Ch. 9). The tribe of Levi occupies another important place (Chs. 6 and 9), but this also fits nicely in the framework of the book. King David was a priestly king and he was acting as lawgiver to the Levites. In these aspects, we see David as a type of Christ, the true King and Priest. David not only governed God's people with wisdom, but he also led them in their worship. In the same way Christ leads us in our worship of the Father in spirit and truth. He starts the eternal song of praise in the midst of His own (John 4:23,24; Phil. 3:3; Heb. 2:12; 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:5,6).

Fellow workers of the king

Therefore, it seems a good suggestion to think of king David especially when 'the king' is mentioned in First Chronicles 4:23 (although this verse is also applicable to his successors).

We know from First Chronicles 27:25-31 that David had vast possessions: estates, food supplies, livestock. No doubt, manual workers would have been busy with their work in the royal domains; among their tasks was providing the needed linen and pottery. Most of the older translations render the place-names Netaim and Gederah literally, so that the impression is given that the potters lived near the royal 'plantations' and 'walls' or 'enclosures'. Maybe this also applied to the linen workers mentioned in verse 21.

It is unclear whether verse 23 refers to all of Shelah's descendants or only to those mentioned in verse 22. At least one of them occupied a high position: Saraph ruled in Moab. Do these old stories refer to the time that Moab was tributary to king David? Or do they refer to a previous period? Jewish tradition associates verse 22 with the story of Ruth and Naomi who returned from the country of Moab to Bethlehem. The name of Jashubi-Lehem which occurs here should then be read as a

short sentence: they returned to Lehem, that is, Bethlehem.

Bethlehem, the “house of bread”, was the residence of Boaz and the native city of king David. And Christ Himself, the great Son of David, was born there (Mic. 5:1; Matt. 2:4-6). It is a good thing to return to that town, to be back from abroad and then to stand before the king whom God has chosen. This also holds true for us when we have left the “house of bread”, the place of God’s presence, where we have plenty of food. Then an inner work of the Spirit is needed in order for us to return to Him and rededicate our lives to Him and to the Man in whom He is well pleased.

The linen workers and the potters

Both trades mentioned here obtain a special meaning when taken in the light of the New Testament. The linen workers, makers of fine clothing (byssus), make us think of the preparation of the wedding garment of fine linen for the bride of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7,8). This fine linen, clean and bright, speaks of the righteous acts of the saints, the good works “which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). The wedding garment is currently being woven as we live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age (Tit. 2:12). In this sense, all believers are acting as ‘linen workers’ and it is very important that we are found faithful in the service of ‘the King’, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The trade of the potters shows another aspect of our responsibility, which is of great importance to parents and educators. Like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are we all in God’s hand (Jer. 18:6). God acts with us according to His good pleasure, shaping us for the task to which He has appointed us.

This metaphor is also very common in the New Testament. The believers are vessels of mercy, chosen vessels. God prepared us beforehand for glory (Rom. 9:23). This is our position in Christ. But in everyday life, we should be vessels for honour, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good

work (2 Tim. 2:21). God is continuously shaping us and forming us after His will, until we are vessels which correspond to His thoughts. As the great Modeller He is working in us, in order to transform us into the image of His Son.

Godfearing parents and educators should carefully follow this example. They should form the children entrusted to their care as vessels for honour, useful for the Lord. They can only do so by bringing them up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). His rights should have the first place. We know that this is only possible in great dependence on the Lord, in close fellowship with Him. Ultimately it is His own good work. It is striking, therefore, to read of the potters in First Chronicles 4:23 that they “dwelt there with the king for *his* work”.

Do we continue with the Lord?

This is in fact a principle that applies to all of us. We should be with Him and follow Him wherever He goes. When He appointed the twelve, the first aim was “that they might be *with Him*” (Mark 3:14). The Christians at Antioch received the encouragement “that with purpose of heart they should continue *with the Lord*” (Acts 11:23). Then we are able to do His work, to serve Him to the end and to fulfil our ministry (Col. 4:17; 2 Tim. 4:5).

Of course it is a great privilege to walk close to the Lord, but at the same time it is a great responsibility. He expects us to serve Him faithfully, to recognize His authority over us and to give ourselves completely to the work. To be in the service of ‘the King’, to stand before Him, goes hand in hand with unconditional obedience to do His will.

When we think of David especially as we read about those who “dwelt with the king for his work”, many examples come to mind of people who dwelt with him and stood in his service. The most beautiful example is that of David’s mighty men. In their distress, they gathered to him and knew they were safe with him (1 Sam. 22:1,2,23). After they had joined him,

David became their leader. From that time on, they served him. They shared in his rejection and afterwards in his exaltation. It is the same with us: we are united with a rejected Lord, but at His return we shall share in His glory.

Another striking example is that of Mephibosheth, to whom king David showed the kindness of God. Having brought him to Jerusalem, David allowed him to eat at his table as one of the king's sons. Likewise, by God's mercy, we – though sinners by nature – have been brought into the immediate presence of the great King. We dwell in His house, in His temple, in His city; we sit at the table of the Lord (cf. 2 Sam. 9:11,13). We have received great privileges; we have been showered with blessings. Let us never forget this. Let us dedicate ourselves completely to the service of Him who has redeemed us to God by His blood.

The temple singers and their service

*"(...) to stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD,
and likewise at evening".*

1 Chronicles 23:5,30; 25:1-7

The service of singing

When king David had grown old, he gave instructions to his son Solomon to build the temple and to divide the Levites and to assign them their duties. David is a type of Christ the Lord, as having authority to determine the order in God's house, which is the Church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15). So He acts as a Son and Lord over His own house (Heb. 3:6), and He tells us how we ought to conduct ourselves in His holy temple. He does this by His Word and by His Spirit and the order within the Church bears every mark of it. It is not an order devised by men, but the order of the Spirit in conformity with the instructions of the Word of God (1 Cor. 14:33,40).

This also goes for the work of the 'singers', who are still present today. For Christ Himself is the 'Chief Musician' of His people, and He sings praises to His God and Father in the midst of the congregation (Ps. 22:23; Heb. 2:12). After His resurrection from the dead, God put *a new song* in His mouth: it is the song of triumph over death and of salvation from Satan's power. This song has resounded in our hearts; as the redeemed of the

Lord we join in it with the risen Lord (Ps. 40:3). This new song really is an eternal song of praise to the honour and glory of the Lamb who was slain (Rev. 5:9). As Christians we shall always remember Him in His death on Calvary's cross.

Similarly, the work of the temple singers was, to a certain extent, a permanent duty that was associated with the sacrifices on the altar of burnt offering. The service of singing in the house of the Lord was not introduced in connection with the tabernacle service. It appears to be a new institution introduced by David, "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1). The tabernacle was God's house during the wilderness journey and that journey certainly did not inspire singing.

As far as we know, the people of Israel only sang twice in the wilderness: right at the beginning and almost at the end of their journey from Egypt to Canaan. We find the song of Moses after the Red Sea crossing (Ex. 15), and the song of praise in connection with the wells by which God strengthened His people when they had reached the border of Moab (Num. 21). Israel also danced around the golden calf and sung there, but that song was a disgrace to God.

The time of singing

So it was not in the wilderness, but only in the Promised Land that the time of singing had come, to use the words of the Song of Solomon (2:12). This did not happen immediately after Israel's entry into Canaan, but centuries later in the days of David and Solomon. Then a time of peace and quietness had come that was needed for the establishment of a permanent sanctuary for the LORD and a regular worship to the honour of His name.

The appointment of the singers, for that matter, was associated with finding a final resting place for the Ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's presence. When it was no longer needed to lead the people in battle against the enemies, it found a resting place in the City of David and later in Solomon's

temple. So the rest of the kingdom of peace was a requirement for the temple service and the work of the temple singers (1 Chr. 6:31,32; 15:15-17; 22:6-19; 28:2ff; 2 Chr. 6:41,42; Ps. 132).

A 'time of rest', a 'man of rest' and a 'house of rest' were all needed for the introduction of a regular worship and a permanent song of praise to God's glory and honour. The ministry of the Levitical singers was based on this situation of peace and quietness in the land of Israel. God's good hand was over His people and He looked with favour on them. The Ark of His presence had found its resting place on Mount Zion. God dwelt in the midst of His people and the king after God's own heart reigned by divine grace. For these reasons the Levites could continually sing: "His mercy endures for ever". This chorus was first heard when David brought the Ark to its resting place in Jerusalem, and it was sung again when the Ark was brought into the temple (1 Chr. 16:34,41; 2 Chr. 5:13).

The endless song

Obviously, this has great significance for us too. In the same way as God's mercies for Israel were certain in the person of the anointed king, we are sure of His grace in the One He anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. Our blessed Lord Jesus, the Christ of God, is our perfect Representative and Head. God has exalted Him to be Lord of all. Through Him we are the objects of God's favour. Through Him we have peace with God and we also have access by faith into this grace in which we stand (Rom. 5:1,2). Through Him, we have been delivered from the power of darkness and have been translated into the Kingdom of the Son of His love, the Man after His own heart (Col. 1:13). This is a Kingdom of light and love and also a Kingdom of "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

Shouldn't we then break into a song of praise and thank Him for His endless mercy, His eternal goodness? For us too, the time of rest and of singing has come. We know the Prince

of Peace who has found a resting place in the midst of His people, so we can be thankful and happy. The song that God's mercy endures for ever, is an endless song that resounds in our midst to the glory of the Father and the Son. This song of praise will resound in the Church throughout all ages, world without end.

So we can conclude that now, too, the 'choirs' are lined up in God's 'temple' to sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lord in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 2:17-22; 5:19). In Colossians 3:16, our songs of praise are clearly connected with mutual instruction, teaching and admonition: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace (that is, conscious of grace, *for His mercy endures for ever*) in your hearts to the Lord".

Therefore the singing also contains a *prophetic* element: it contains something that is to the edification of others. Not only is God honoured by it, but our fellow believers are also edified in the faith. It is very interesting to note that it is said of the temple singers in First Chronicles 25 that they *prophesied* (vv. 1,2,3,5). They sang and at the same time they prophesied. Their songs of praise were meant to glorify God, but also to instruct His people.

The hour of revival

I would like to close with a few words on the position of the Levitical singers in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah: the same time in which the author of the Chronicles lived and in which he remembered the former glory under David and Solomon. A remnant had returned to the Promised Land, to the place where the Lord had caused His name to dwell.

By the rivers of Babylon, the singers had hung their harps upon the willows. How could they possibly sing one of the songs of Zion, the Lord's song, in a foreign land? How could they sing there about Zion, about the mountain of God's grace,

about the sanctuary of the one true God and the reign of His king (Ps. 137)? But as soon as they returned to Jerusalem, they resumed their duties. It was a day of revival, of restoration and also of rebuilding: of the altar, the temple and the city wall respectively. When the foundation of the new temple had been laid, we hear the singers sing again. Once again, they sang the chorus that God's mercy endures for ever (Ezra 3:10,11).

The choirs also had a very significant role in celebrating the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. 12:27ff.). Everything took place "according to the command of David and Solomon his son, for in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chiefs of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God" (Neh. 12:45,46).

And so we too, in a time of decay and decline, should return to the institutions God has delivered to His Church from the very beginning through the risen Lord and His apostles. At the restoration of true worship around the Christian altar, that is the Lord's table, the 'singers', the worshippers should also be set in their place to sing the endless song of praise to God in His holy temple.

Ezra at the Water Gate

“Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel”.

Nehemiah 8:1-18

Revival times

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah take us back to a wonderful time of spiritual revival, when a remnant of the people of God returned from the Babylonian captivity to the land which God had promised to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They returned to Jerusalem, the place where the LORD chose to make His Name abide, in order to restore the temple worship and to rebuild the city.

The order in which this was undertaken is very interesting, indeed. From a human point of view it would have been a matter of logic to start from the outside, that is, with the city wall and then to proceed with the restoration of the temple. But they did exactly the opposite: they started from within. They started with the centre of worship and rebuilt the altar on its foundations, then they laid the foundation of the temple, which, thanks to the actions of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, was completed after a long interruption and much opposition.

Finally, in the days of Nehemiah, work on the walls and city gates was started, and Nehemiah saw the success of his efforts when Jerusalem's walls were consecrated with music and singing (Neh. 12).

However, there is yet another important feature of this time of return and revival: a renewed interest in the Word of God. God's Word was granted its due place and its light was put on the lampstand again. In Nehemiah 8 we see a people gathered around the Word and listening attentively to its message. No one was missing; all the people had gathered like one man and during many hours they listened to the law being read. The ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the Law (Neh. 8:3). So the return of the remnant to Jerusalem was at the same time a return to God's Word and will. The people woke up when they heard the trumpet-call of God's Word. In all this Ezra the scribe played an important role (cf. Ezra 7:10). He came to the fore in order to put the Word of God before the Israelites, so that it might get their full attention and be impressed upon their hearts.

It is also important to note the place and the time of gathering of the people to hear the reading of the Word, as these circumstances were in perfect harmony with the purpose of the meeting. It took place on the square in front of the Water Gate, which speaks of the cleansing work of the Word of God (cf. John 15:3; Eph. 5:26). The gate was also the place where justice was administered and oaths were taken. So metaphorically speaking, the people put themselves under the authority of the Word and subjected themselves to the washing of water by the Word.

The Feast of Trumpets

And they gathered in front of the Water Gate on the first day of the seventh month (vv. 1-2), which was an important day in the cycle of annual feasts as it marked the beginning of the final series of feasts after the ingathering of the harvest. On this day

they celebrated the Feast of Trumpets, which was followed by the Day of Atonement on the tenth and the Feast of Tabernacles from the 15th to the 22nd of the same month. According to Leviticus 23:23-24 this first day of the new month was heralded by the blowing of trumpets.

Applying this straight away to ourselves, we may say that the trumpet of the Word was being heard again, causing a spiritual awakening among the remnant of faithful believers, those who have ears to hear what the Spirit has to say to the Church (Rev. 2 and 3). It was the first day of the seventh month – a new beginning followed by increasing light, in a time when God’s ways were nearing their completion (the number seven speaks of perfection).

While in Nehemiah 8 the Day of Atonement is not specifically mentioned, the Feast of Tabernacles is. And this feast was kept seven days by God’s people, in accordance with the commandment which was read to them on the second day (vv. 13-18). This was the last one of the seven feasts of the LORD, an occasion of gratitude and joy because of all the blessings received in the Promised Land, when they also remembered God’s goodness in the past as well as the redemption from Egypt (Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:43; Deut. 16:15).

On this first day of the seventh month the Word of God got a prominent place in the midst of God’s people. A platform of wood was made for Ezra and his assistants, and all the people stood up in reverence when the book of the Law was opened (v. 5). Everyone witnessed this solemn act and then they humbly bowed with their faces to the ground (v. 6). What an impressive sight this must have been!

Such reverence and gratitude for the opening of God’s Word is very meaningful for us as well. In the assistants of Ezra we may see a picture of the various gifts which the Lord has given to the Church: the shepherds and the teachers who explain the Word (vv. 4,7). Ministering the Word of God is true Levitical service. And from the many names listed in these verses we learn that God appreciated the work of everyone of them.

Another point to which I would like to draw our attention is the impact of the Word of God on those who listened. For as a result of what they heard, they became true *doers of the Word*. On the one hand, they humbled themselves because they realized their unfaithfulness, their turning away from God. They mourned and wept, when they heard the words of the Law (v. 9). On the other hand, they rejoiced in the LORD because of what He still granted to the remnant of His people. There was great gladness in obeying the Law, His revealed Word (vv. 10, 12,17). In this respect, this chapter bears a striking resemblance to Ezra 3, where we find both shouting for joy and weeping with a loud voice when the foundation of the new temple was being laid.

Does the Word of God not always have this twofold impact? On the one hand we need to be admonished and on the other hand, to be comforted. On the one hand, we need to humble ourselves, on the other hand, we need to be strengthened and edified in our faith. For the joy of the LORD is our strength (v. 10). God's Word is as sweet as honey in our mouth, but in our hearts it produces bitter regret and godly sorrow (cf. Ezek. 2:8-3:3; Rev. 10:9-10).

The Feast of Tabernacles

The interest in the Word of God was not a temporary thing. One day of Bible study was not enough! The next day, there was another gathering (v. 13), during which they searched the Scriptures and found the instructions concerning the Feast of Tabernacles. They immediately acted in accordance with what they had read and set out to make preparations to keep this feast.

As we have already noted, the Day of Atonement is not mentioned here. But the remnant of Israel did show readiness to humble themselves, as prescribed for that Day (cf. Lev. 23: 27-32), namely on the very first day of the seventh month (v. 9). For Israel, the fulfilment of this great event is as yet a thing of

the future. The great Day of Atonement will come when Christ will return from heaven, when His people will look on Him whom they have pierced and will mourn for Him (Zech. 12:10). After that, the great Feast of Tabernacles will follow: a millennium of gratitude and joy because of all the blessings which God has prepared for His people.

The gathering in front of the Water Gate resulted in the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles both in Jerusalem and in other places. So the trumpet-call to hear God's Word had wonderful results. And it continued to occupy a central place: day by day, from the first day until the last day of the feast, Ezra read from the book of the Law of God (v. 18).

May God grant us this same desire to hear His Word, so that our prayer will be: Let me hear Your Word continually! Physically, we can be in the place after God's mind, separated from the idols of Babylon. We may set up the Lord's Table, and gather to His name alone in the acknowledgement of His authority and of the liberty of the Holy Spirit. We may try to rebuild the house of God and the city of God, the temple of the living God, so that others see what the Church should be like. But will it be to our benefit, if at the same time, we do not have this intense desire to hear the Word of God and to act accordingly? For *that* is what characterizes a true spiritual awakening.

Job's question

"How can a man be righteous before God?"

Job 9:2

Man's problem

Job was a pious man, "who feared God and shunned evil" (1:1). God even said of him that there was none like him on the earth, blameless and upright (1:8). His godliness, however, was no guarantee of prosperity. No, Job got acquainted with the problem of suffering in a very special way. Even the most pious man on earth was not spared suffering! Of course, we immediately have to add here, 'in as far as God allowed it in His wisdom'. God had a special purpose with Job's sufferings. He put him to the test in order for him to get to know himself better, as well as to get to know God better. Job learned to repent in dust and ashes and to bow before God's majesty and sovereignty (ch. 42).

Moreover, and that is the subject on which we would like to meditate now, he was led to utter a number of Gospel truths which have been revealed to us clearly in God's Word. First of all, Job spoke about the fundamental needs of man. Although he is God's creature (10:9-12; 27:3), he belongs to the family of a *fallen* Adam (31:33). He labours under the yoke of sin (7:21; 9:28-31; 10:6). The wrath of God rests upon him (6:4; 9:13; 10:17; 14:13; 16:9). As long as he lives here on earth, his is a fierce battle to wage (7:1). And he is subject to the power of Satan,

death and the grave (Job 1 and 2; 14 and 17).

Is there a solution to man's need and, most of all, to his sin problem, which is the deeper cause of his misery? Job desperately wondered how a man could be righteous before God (9:2). Could an unclean thing ever produce a clean thing (14:4)? For it says: "What is man, that he could be pure? And he who is born of a woman, that he could be righteous?" (15:14). Even the heavens are not pure in the sight of God (15:15).

In chapter 25, Bildad states this problem quite strikingly: "How then can man be righteous before God? Or how can he be pure who is born of a woman? If even the moon does not shine, and the stars are not pure in his sight, how much less man, who is a maggot, and a son of man, who is a worm?" (vv. 4-6).

God's answer

Although it is the New Testament which fully answers these questions (such as the letter to the Romans that deals with the justification of the ungodly), yet there are important hints at the Glad Tidings even in the book of Job.

Job not only understood his hopeless position and the fact that God, the righteous Judge, had to condemn him. He was also aware of the fact that salvation could be realized by the intervention of a mediator between God and men. And this is the second issue we now want to deal with: God's answer to man's hopeless situation, from which he is unable to deliver himself.

In chapter 9:15, Job shows the right condition for man to be saved: "I would beg mercy of my Judge". Our own achievements, our own good works, our piety, none of them can offer the solution to our need. We need to realize that only the Judge who condemns us justly, can provide a way out in His grace, without detracting from His justice. This is exactly what He did when He sent a Mediator who met all His righteous demands, and who also met all the sinner's needs. We know this Mediator: "For there is (...) one Mediator between God and men, the Man

Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Job could already speak about Him. In Job 9, we read about a mediator between God and men for the first time. After Job realized that he was a lost human being who could only hope for the grace of his Judge, he expressed his longing for such a mediator: "Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his hand on us both" (v. 33). If only there were someone who could bridge the distance between mortal man and God, the supreme Judge.

Well, the Gospel tells us about the coming of this Mediator, who bridged the enormous gap, and obtained satisfaction for both parties. He was the only One capable of doing so, since He was both truly God and truly man.

In the book of Job we find a number of titles of this unique Mediator. He is the Surety provided by God Himself (17:3 KJV). He is the Messenger who descended from on high, the Interpreter testifying to the truth (33:23 KJV). And a ransom was found because of His finished work (33:24).

He went into death but rose again, and now He holds the keys of death and of hades. Together with Job we can exclaim, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth" (19:25). He is the Resurrection and the Life, and one day the bodies of the deceased saints will be freed from the power of the grave. It is correct to believe in the resurrection of the body: "That in my flesh I shall see God" (19:26).

Thanks to the work of the Mediator, we have been brought to God even now (1 Pet. 3:18). Christ has reconciled us to God, and we have been translated into His Kingdom. We have been brought into His light, and we have been placed before God as His own children. Perhaps very soon we shall take that place in bodies that will be glorified by Christ's transforming power.

In our flesh we then shall see God, "face to face", as the apostle Paul tells us in First Corinthians 13:12. This is the climax of our blessings, all secured for us by the precious blood of the Mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ. These things are still freely offered to all those who would take refuge with Him.

David's new song of praise

*"He has put a new song in my mouth – praise to our God;
many will see it and fear, and will trust in the LORD".*

Psalm 40:3

A new song

Psalm 40 is one of the most beautiful Messianic Psalms, because it offers a description of Christ's pathway here on earth and the unique value of His death. In this Psalm we have His incarnation (vv. 6-8), but also His testimony among the people of Israel, the great congregation (vv. 9-10). Then we find the sufferings of the cross because of our sins, which He made to be His (vv. 11-17). But the Psalm commences with His resurrection from the dead (vv. 1-5).

The psalmist *begins* with the resurrection, with Christ's deliverance from the pains of death and the new song of freedom which goes with it, and then he looks back at the pathway which led to this glorious result. Christ is the Firstborn from the dead, and together with His own He breaks into a song of triumph, the new song which is going to be heard in all eternity. *Many* will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord (Ps. 40:3).

Though we stand with Him now upon a rock (Ps. 40:2), on resurrection ground, we shall never forget that it was necessary for Him to humble Himself and become obedient to death, even the death of the cross. While we know Him as the Prince of life,

He again and again presents Himself to us as the One who loved us to the end. And we shall see Him and praise Him for ever as the Lamb who was slain and who has washed us from our sins in His blood (Rev. 1:5-6). This is the great theme of the heavenly song, the *new* song (Rev. 5:9), that is characteristic of the *new* dispensation heralded by Christ's resurrection from the dead.

The song is based on sacrifice

The new things, the blessings marking this new dispensation, flow from Christ's sacrifice. He fulfilled all the offerings made under the old covenant. All of the four main sacrifices of the Old Testament are mentioned in Psalm 40:6 (quoted in Hebrews 10:5-8). It *starts* with peace offerings and grain offerings ("Sacrifice and offering You did not desire"). In these so-called meal offerings, the Israelite gave up a part of his food on behalf of the Lord and of the priests.

The peace offering bore indeed the character of a common *meal*, because both the Lord Himself and the priest and the Israelite who brought the offering shared in it. This offering is a picture of Christ's sacrifice as the basis of the peaceful fellowship between God and His people, and also of our mutual fellowship as God's children. Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

The grain offering was a bloodless sacrifice, and therefore it refers to Christ's perfect *life* as a Man here on earth. It speaks of His purity and His devotedness to God. When His life ultimately ended in death, it was the climax of His submission to God's will. The laws of the offerings show that a burnt offering was always accompanied with a grain offering. In the same way Christ's sacrificial death was *founded* on His pure manhood: it was this unique Man who poured out His life into death and in doing so, lent a special value to His death.

In Psalm 40 the burnt offering aspect of Christ's work is given a prominent place. The burnt offering was wholly offered

up to God on the altar, and its sweet aroma went up to Him. This offering was a picture of Christ as the One who offered Himself to God for a sweet-smelling aroma (Eph. 5:2; Heb. 9:14). He came with the express purpose of doing God's will, in order to glorify Him in the place where man by his sin had dishonoured God. To this end He voluntarily offered Himself: "I delight to do Your will, O my God" (Ps. 40:8; Heb. 10:7,9).

This aspect of His work, the burnt offering view, can also be found in the Gospel of John. The commandment of the Father implied for the Lord to lay down His life (John 10:17-18). Thus He fulfilled the Father's will, glorified Him on earth, and finished the work which He had given Him to do (John 13:31; 17:4; 19:30).

While the sin offering aspect of His work is mentioned in Psalm 40 (vv. 6,12), it is dealt with more specifically in Psalm 22. There we see how He bore the load of our sins during those three dark hours when God forsook Him. God had to hide His holy face from the Sinbearer (vv. 1,3). God brought Him to the dust of death after He was made sin for us, and tasted the sinner's death.

In the sacrificial laws God's holy wrath against sin was expressed symbolically by the commandment that the sin offerings of which the blood had been brought into the sanctuary, had to be taken outside the camp to be burned completely. Thus Christ suffered in absolute loneliness, in the fire of divine judgment.

However, Psalm 22 does not only mention Christ's sufferings as inflicted upon Him by God, but also, and in much detail, His sufferings at the hands of men. At the end of verse 21 we have the great turn when, in resurrection, He receives God's answer to His deep humiliation. The second part of this Psalm describes the glorious results of His work: blessings for the Church, for Israel, and for the Gentiles in the coming Kingdom. In the midst of His own, whom He now calls His brethren, Christ is praising the Father. He raises a new song of praise and worship.

The singing Saviour

Here we find the special privileges of the Church, which in the day of Christ's rejection is being gathered from the Jews and the Gentiles (v. 22; cf. John 20:17; Heb. 2:12). And this is what clearly links this Psalm with the new song of Psalm 40. After His resurrection *Christ* sings God's praises in the midst of His brethren, who are called children of God by His work of redemption. He Himself has been saved from the lion's mouth, and He is praising His God and Father who has delivered Him from the pains of death. And we are praising with Him who died for our sins, and was raised because of our justification.

So we can join in His own song of praise and sing together with Him. We are united with the risen Lord and therefore, we are safe from the power of death and the grave. We stand before God on wholly new ground, and sing of the great salvation which He has accomplished – as in the days of old Israel joined in the song of Moses, the man of God, on the shore of the Red Sea.

Christianity deals with *new things*, and the *new* song expresses this in a special way. It stresses the joy and gladness that is related to these new things. These things cause a song of praise in the believer's heart. Should we not thank our God and Father for the wonderful things He has brought about through the work of His Son? When all the sons of God shouted for joy because of the first creation (Job 38:4-7), how then should the *new* creation, of which we are the firstfruits, cause our hearts to overflow with joy and thankfulness!

We live in New Testament times, and we enjoy the blessings of the *new* covenant that was sealed with Christ's blood (1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6). In Christ we are a *new* creation; old things have passed away, all things have become *new* (2 Cor. 5:17; cf. Rev. 21:4-5). We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10). The New Testament also speaks about a *new* kind of man: one *new* man, the *new* man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:9). This *new* man was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness. It shows the image and likeness of

its Creator even more than Adam did. For we are united with the risen Christ who, as the last Adam, is the Head of a *new* generation of men. He has brought about *new* life, life beyond death and the grave, and He shares it with His own by the Spirit. Thus we walk in *newness* of life, and we serve God in the *newness* of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter (Rom. 6:4; 7:6). Our Lord gave us a *new* commandment (John 13:34; 1 John 2:8). We will be given a *new* name (Rev. 2:17; 3:12). The *new* Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God and the Lamb, will also be our dwelling place (Rev. 21:2). The holy city is linked with the *new* heaven and the *new* earth (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1).

David's *new* song of praise was the prelude to these things, which will be seen in their full extent at Christ's return in glory.

The new song in the book of Revelation

In the New Testament the term "a *new* song" is found only in the book of Revelation (ch. 5:9; 14:3). In Revelation 5 we have the song of praise of the twenty-four elders in heaven. They represent, in a symbolical way, the glorified saints in heaven after the rapture of the Church. Their song is not just about their own redemption (cf. Rev. 1:5-6), but rather about the salvation of others by the precious blood of the Lamb. For Christ has redeemed to God by His blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and He will make them kings and priests to our God. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive universal praise!

It will be an eventful time when the judgments mentioned in Revelation 6-18 will come upon the earth, but the Church will surround the throne of the Lamb in heavenly rest, and then fall down before Him and worship Him. The elders worship and sing the new song, confident of the fact that all things will be made new by Him who sits on the throne. The elders in heaven are aware of the fact that God will gather other saints unto Himself even in those turbulent times, a great multitude from Israel and from the nations, saved through the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom. It is good to think not only of our

own interests, but also of those of other families of saints. This is illustrated by the contents of the song of the twenty-four elders (cf. the New Translation).

In Revelation 14 the new song is sung by others, for we read that it is being sung *before* the throne and *before* the elders. It would seem as if the new song, which was first sung by the elders, now meets a response with others. Other saints tune in, very probably, Jewish martyrs and their brethren on earth who have survived the Great Tribulation (cf. Rev. 15:2-3). It is heard both in heaven and on earth. Before the throne it is sung by those who had to pay for their testimony with their lives, and on earth it is taught to their brethren standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion.

This brings us back to our starting point – the new song as we find it in Psalm 40:3 and also in other Psalms (Ps. 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). In the first place, it is the song of praise which will be sung by the remnant of Israel at the outset of the millennium. The appearing of the Messiah will change everything for them and herald a new era of blessing. New things will spring forth, and a new song will be sung to the Lord (Isa. 42:9-10), which will be heard all the way to the ends of the earth.

The coming Kingdom will be marked by righteousness and peace and joy (cf. Rom. 14:17). In a spiritual sense, we can enjoy these things even now. We can joyfully break into the new song of praise, together with the risen Lord. Very soon it will be heard in all the earth, when other saints who belong to the “many” will join in the chorus Christ Himself has begun (Ps. 40:3).

How could we who are so privileged, remain silent? Should we not exalt the greatness of His Person and His work in our songs of praise? It is the Spirit of Christ Himself who bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if we are children of God, we are worshippers too who should worship the Father in spirit and truth. The Father calls us His children, and the Son calls us His brethren. What a privilege! And in the midst of this new family of God the song of praise is raised now to the glory of God and of the Lamb. It will resound through all eternity, and will be echoed in heaven and on earth!

David and Doeg

“But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God”.

Psalm 52:8

Doeg the Edomite

David wrote this Psalm on the occasion of what happened to him when he was on the run from Saul, who wanted to kill him. David bid farewell to his best friend Jonathan, who sadly enough did not follow him in his humiliation and therefore in the end did not share in his royal glory but died a shameful death with Saul.

David went to Nob, to Ahimelech, the priest, as we read in First Samuel 21 and had a short break there. He and his men ate holy bread, the showbread which had been taken from before the LORD and he also obtained a weapon that was kept in the sanctuary, namely the sword of Goliath the Philistine. But on that very day an accomplice of Saul was there, Doeg the Edomite; and David immediately suspected him of betraying him to Saul. This came true and the story ended in a dramatic way when Doeg killed a great number of priests and the city of Nob was completely destroyed.

In Psalm 52, however, David expressed his faith in God. On the one hand he was convinced that God would know how to find Doeg and judge him, but on the other he could rest assured

in spite of all his sufferings that God looked on him with favour. Although he was constantly fleeing, yet he rejoiced in God's presence and knew that he had a sure place in God's house. No enemy could take that privilege from him: he was like a green olive tree in the house of God.

A tree planted in the sanctuary

Elsewhere in the Bible the image of grass in the field is used to indicate man's mortality and the brevity of his life. A tree, however, is marked by strength and permanence; it also offers protection and bears fruit. King Nebuchadnezzar is compared with a very high and strong tree in Daniel 4. The righteous one is like a tree planted by the rivers of water (Ps. 1:3). He who trusts in the Lord is like a tree planted by the water and its leaves are always green (Jer. 17:7,8).

Another passage in the Psalms that resembles the one we are considering is Psalm 92:13-15. There the righteous one is compared to a palm tree and a cedar in Lebanon. But where can we find this tree? It is planted in the house of the LORD and it stays fresh and flourishing because of its connection with the Spring of life!

Here David uses the image of a green *olive tree* in the house of God. It is a picture which is also used after the exile to describe Joshua and Zerubbabel (cf. Zech. 4). They were the two olive trees, the two anointed ones (literally: sons of oil), who stood before the Lord of the whole earth. They supplied the lampstand with the necessary oil and so they kept the light of testimony in God's house burning by the energy of His Spirit.

Oil is a well-known symbol of the work of the Holy Spirit. In Israel kings and priests were anointed with oil and so the believer is anointed with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21; 1 John 2:20). The picture of the olive tree shows that the anointing is not merely an outward matter. The believer *himself* has become, as it were, a spring of oil, for the Spirit dwells in him and uses him as a vessel for the blessing of others. In the same way as

David looked at himself as a *green* olive tree, so the Christian shows real signs of new life and fresh fruit of the Spirit because he is planted by the streams of living water.

Moreover, this green tree is planted *in the sanctuary*, which is remarkable. In the temple of Ezekiel there is a river originating from the sanctuary (Ezek. 47:1-12). God is the Spring of living water for His people, and those who are planted in His presence will certainly bear fruit. As believers we have a sure and lasting place in the sanctuary. We abide in God's immediate presence, rooted and built up in Christ (Eph. 2:11-22; Col. 2:7).

So, there are three aspects to be noted here: the place, the nature and the condition of the tree. It is (1) in God's house, it is (2) an olive tree, and (3) it is fresh and green. It is remarkable that David recognized himself in this picture, for his life was in constant danger because Saul was always after him, as when one hunts a partridge in the mountains. Amidst all the dangers he hid behind the God who knew his wanderings and counted all his tears. The enemy was powerful, but what could he do against God?

The flesh lusts against the Spirit

The opposition between Doeg and David reminds us of the New Testament contrast between the flesh and the Spirit. Whatever the flesh comes up with is *enmity* against God. And those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:1-13). For the flesh lusts against the Spirit (...) these are contrary to one another (Gal. 5:17).

Doeg was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau, who is called a profane person. Just like Esau he hated the man who was to inherit God's blessing, the man after God's heart who was endowed with the Spirit. He was a natural man and being driven by envy and hatred, he followed in the footsteps of his forefather, Esau, who wanted to kill Jacob. It is the same contrast as the one between Ishmael and Isaac: the son who was

born according to the flesh persecuted the son who was born according to the Spirit (Gal. 4:29).

To be carnally minded is *death* (Rom. 8:6). This is sadly illustrated by Doeg sowing death and destruction among the priests of Nob. The works of the flesh, the influences of legality, ritualism and Judaism are fatal to all priestly activity in the house of God, to all forms of worship in spirit and truth. After all, the desires of the flesh can never be in agreement with those of the Spirit.

This does not imply, however, that the flesh always gains the victory in this conflict. It seemed that way when the priests were murdered and only one of them escaped and sought refuge with David. One more worshipper remained, David himself! His proper place was in the sanctuary and he was sure that nobody could take it from him. He *remained* like a green olive tree in the house of God.

Asaph, or 'divine guidance'

"You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron".

Psalm 77:20

How to shepherd the flock

God led His people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. In this way Asaph ended this psalm in which he reflected on all God's mighty deeds in the past and took comfort from this for the present. The conclusion of his reflections was that he could rest in God's faithful care for His people. God led them like a caring Shepherd and He delivered them with His arm. How did He do this? He did it by means of the men whom He had chosen, He led them by the hand of Moses and Aaron. Not only by the hand of Moses, nor just by the hand of Aaron, but by the hands of *both* spiritual leaders.

Moses was the great prophet and teacher of Israel who gave them God's laws. He told them all that the Lord had spoken to him. Aaron was the high priest of the people who mediated between them and God. He would come to God with the sacrifices of the people and offer them to Him, so that they would be pleasing in His sight. And from that wonderful place in God's presence, he would return to the people to bless them in the name of the LORD and to put His name on them (Num. 6:22-27).

Both these types have their fulfilment in Christ, the Author

and Finisher of our faith. He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep. He is both the *Apostle* and *High Priest* of our confession (Heb. 3:1). He is the Apostle, the Teacher sent by God, who revealed the truth of God here on earth. He revealed the Father in words and deeds. And after His resurrection from the dead and His ascension, He continued this revelation by the Spirit that He sent from on high. The Spirit brought to their remembrance all things that the Lord said to them, the truth already revealed to the disciples. Moreover, the Spirit guided them into all truth, so they could write it down in the divine record, the Holy Scriptures (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:10-13).

Christ is also our great High Priest. He has accomplished the great work of redemption on earth once for all. He is now acting as the Minister of the heavenly sanctuary in order to make intercession for His people. He knows our weaknesses. He knows about the temptations that come our way. He understands our cares. Because He went through all these things during His life on earth, He has a perfect knowledge of our circumstances.

Note that Christ's High Priesthood does not concern our *sins*, but our *weaknesses*. He died to sin once for all and bore the sin of many, but His priestly care in heaven concerns the weaknesses and shortcomings of His own. He prays for us so that we will not yield to the temptations that we continually meet on our way. If we fall and sin anyway, He acts on our behalf as the Advocate with the Father to restore our fellowship with the Father (1 John 2:1).

Christ's work as our High Priest therefore concerns the difficulties we meet on our journey through the wilderness, our pilgrimage here on earth till we come to heaven. Christ continually pleads for us at the throne of God, which is no longer a throne of *judgment* for His people, but a throne of grace "so that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). He helps us to reach the end of our journey, because He is able to save us to the uttermost and ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). As to our position in Christ, it is true that by grace *we have been saved* through faith (Eph. 2:8).

But as to our walk on earth, we have not yet reached the end of the journey and need the support that Christ offers us as our great High Priest.

In the same way as God led the people of Israel by the hand of Moses and Aaron, He now leads His heavenly people by the powerful hand of the risen Christ. He is both our great Teacher and our great Priest. We need the teaching of His Word, but we also need His priestly activity in order to walk worthy of our calling. God fills *both* these needs. The Word of God and the High Priesthood of Christ are mentioned *together* in Hebrews 4, because they supplement each other. The Word of God is living and powerful; it judges the deepest thoughts of the human heart. But besides this we also have the comfort of Christ's priestly care to empower us to live according to God's Word.

In this way God leads us, and He leads us *like a flock*. God sees His people in the unity that He has formed; they need each other and He leads them together in green pastures and beside the still waters. Are we a flock of believers who listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd? Do we follow the path which He shows us?

Failure and restoration

God led Israel like a flock by the hand of Moses. Moses was an experienced shepherd, who had been in God's school for forty years as he tended the flock of Jethro his father-in-law. In that second period of his life he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God (Ex. 3:1).

This was repeated in the last forty years of his life, when he led God's people through the wilderness to the mountain of God (Ex. 3:12; 18:5; 19:4-6). God's people stayed there in His presence and listened to His voice. At Mount Sinai, God spoke to the Israelites through Moses, and during the rest of the journey to Canaan He revealed to them His will through the mouth of this faithful servant.

But very soon it became clear that this most important

means was not sufficient to keep the people in the straight and narrow path. Israel immediately failed at Mount Sinai. They disobeyed the divine command and worshipped idols at the foot of the mountain while Moses was still on the mountain to receive God's commandments! *Priestly intercession* was the only means that remained in this serious situation to save the people from wrath. We see this in Exodus 32-34. Moses ascended the mountain again to intercede for the people, and it was only because of this that they found mercy.

The priesthood therefore was the second means which God used to lead His people. In the story at Mount Sinai Moses really took the place of Aaron the priest, because he was incapable of fulfilling the task because of his responsibility in making the golden calf. Here Moses was both lawgiver and priest, uniting the two functions in his own person. This would find its ultimate fulfilment in Christ Himself.

Later on in the history of God's people Aaron did fulfil his priestly duties, although Israel failed again and again and refused to listen to God's voice. Just think of the revolt of Korah, Dathan and Abiram in Numbers 16. Israel would have been consumed if Aaron had not offered incense to stop the plague. It is remarkable that the meaning and the place of Aaron's priesthood are clearly accentuated in Numbers 17 and 18 after this incident.

The priesthood is the necessary *supplement* to the first means which God has given to lead His people. The teachings of the Word are supported and supplemented by the activities of the priesthood. This is necessary to keep God's flock in the straight and narrow path. And this is also an important lesson for those who in our day take care of the flock of God: the elders and shepherds who tend the sheep. They must realize that they cannot act as owners of the flock. It is the flock of God and it should be led to "the mountain of God", which means that it should be brought into *God's presence*. Yet, this is not enough. These shepherds of the flock should also act as *intercessors*, who intercede for them in a priestly way.

God's shepherd care

Now let us go back for a moment to the Psalm written by Asaph, when he pondered on God's ways with His people. He did not understand God's guidance, but there were two things he felt sure of. Firstly, he realized that God's way was *in the sanctuary* (Ps. 77:13). God leads us in keeping with the demands of His own holiness, and therefore it can please Him to lead us along difficult paths. This chastening, however, is for our profit, so that we may be partakers of His holiness (Heb. 12:10).

Secondly, Asaph understood that God's way was *in the sea* and His path in the great waters, so that His footsteps were not known (Ps. 77:19). God's guidance is often in secret and His ways are not always clear. Neither can we call God to account for His deeds, as Job once did. Even through circumstances which threatened His people, God led them to the other side of the sea (where Moses and the Israelites sang God's praises).

Asaph took comfort from this, and we should do the same when we think of God's ways and call upon Him because of the pitiful condition of His Church on earth. God's way is perfect and He still has the necessary means to lead us on. We should ask ourselves the question whether we really wish to be guided as His flock "by the hand of Moses and Aaron", by these two provisions which He has given us: the Word and the priesthood of our glorious Lord. All other resources will fail.

Daniel's life of prayer

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days".

Daniel 6:10

The times of the Gentiles

Daniel was an exile living in Babylon, far away from Jerusalem, the city of the God of his fathers. After Jerusalem had fallen into the hands of the king of Babylonia, Nebuchadnezzar, a significant turn in the history of God's people had taken place. Jerusalem, the chosen city, was no longer the dwelling place of God on earth and the centre of His government. Israel had become Lo-Ammi, that is 'Not-My-People' (Hos. 1:9). God was unable to recognize them any longer as the nation which belonged to Him, and in the midst of which He had exercised His righteous reign.

In the book of Daniel we find God as the *God of heaven*, since He had withdrawn, so the speak, from His throne on earth to His heavenly throne. The governmental power had been put into the hands of a new ruler, Nebuchadnezzar, who wielded absolute authority over men and beasts (Dan. 2:37-38). God had given His own people and city into the hands of this world ruler

(Dan. 1:1-2). This heralded a new era, the “times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24). This era, in which the nations take a prominent place, will last until the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of His Kingdom. At the close of the history of the world powers the God of heaven will set up an eternal Kingdom, the Kingdom of the Son of Man (Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14). Then Israel will be restored as God’s people, and Jerusalem will be the centre of world dominion again.

A line can be drawn from the first ruler, Adam (Gen. 1:28), via David and Solomon who sat on the throne of the Lord in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 29:23), to the true Prince of Peace, Christ, under whose feet everything in heaven and on earth will be subjected (Ps. 8:6; 1 Cor. 15:24-27). Christ’s rule will put an end to the dominion of the nations, who, like Israel, have failed and turned their backs on the living and true God. Christ, the Stone of Daniel 2 and the Son of Man of Daniel 7, is the counterpart of the head of the Gentiles and He will take the place of Nebuchadnezzar, who soon forfeited the moral right to exercise world dominion. When His Kingdom will appear, justice and peace will prevail at last.

Daniel and his friends as examples to us

The book of Daniel is not only significant because it describes the course of world history. In connection with, and often also in contrast to the history of the world powers, it shows the vicissitudes of the remnant of God’s people, which is presented here in the person of Daniel himself and his three friends. The book is so interesting because in this faithful remnant of God’s people we can also see a picture of a Bible believing remnant in the last days of Christendom.

So the book of Daniel contains many actual lessons for ourselves. The time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17). Just as in those days unfaithful Israel had to be put aside, judgment on God’s testimony on earth is looming ahead. We live in perilous times, and God is looking for a remnant which is faithful to His Word, a remnant which is

devoted to the place where God chooses to make His name abide (cf. Rev. 3:8).

Just as Jerusalem, the city of the great King, always played a vital role in Daniel's life, we should cherish the heavenly Jerusalem, that is the Church of the living God, the repository of divine light here on earth (Matt. 5:14; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:9f). Daniel had his windows open toward the city of God. When he prayed – and he did so three times a day – his eyes were directed at the city of his ancestors. His heart was there, in the city where once God had made His name to dwell, the city which now was in ruins.

In Daniel 9 we see that he prayed and made supplications for the holy city, taking into account the prophetic word (v. 2). Therefore he was given insight into the future restoration of the city, as we see in the well-known prophecy of the Seventy Weeks (vv. 24-27). Now this is exactly what our attitude should be towards the Church as the present dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Are we concerned about its well-being? Do its interests affect us? Do we direct our eyes to the Church as it is after God's thoughts, in spite of all our failures which turned so much of its beauty into ruins?

If that is the case, and if we, like Daniel, make supplication for the city and the people of God, God will also grant us a superb view of the future of His city. Then we can direct our eyes to that heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, which will come down from God out of heaven in dazzling beauty. So the prophetic word is made more sure (2 Pet. 1:19). God's plans will not fail, and His counsels concerning the Church – which is so closely linked with Himself and the Son of His love – will be gloriously fulfilled. Faith can count on this, for it has open windows toward the heavenly city.

He who overcomes

Meanwhile, we will strive to be faithful to the Word of God in these dark days before Christ's coming. In the midst of all the decay it will be our desire to belong to the overcomers who hear

what the Spirit says to the churches. We will display the characteristics of a faithful remnant, and try to put into practice the truths concerning the Church as the temple and the city of God, the bride and the body of Christ.

In the book of Daniel we see a man who, in surroundings hostile to God, received an insight into God's thoughts. We too, live as strangers in a world full of idolatry, in the midst of *a Christian Babylon* where the service of God is being mixed with the worship of idols (cf. Dan. 5:3-4). Yet we are privileged to know God's thoughts as to the future of the world and of the Church. In the epistles of the New Testament and in the book of Revelation it is disclosed to us what is going to happen. This knowledge of God's Word, the understanding of His thoughts, will save us from the negative influences of the world around us. It will help us to behave as "those who are wise", and people will then see that the Spirit of God indwells us, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in us (cf. Dan. 5:14; 11:33).

The preservation and the inner enlightenment of the remnant of God's people in an idolatrous world is a major theme of the book of Daniel. The name of the prophet means: "God is my judge". God speaks up for His people and does them justice. He carries them through the difficulties they encounter, and grants them the help of His Spirit.

In chapter 1 we see the firm resolve of Daniel and his friends not to defile themselves with the food and drink of the king, which had been consecrated to idols. God rewarded their faithfulness and blessed them in body and soul. They proved to surpass in wisdom and knowledge all the others at the court.

Chapter 2 describes the empires of the world as a large statue with the image of a man, and Nebuchadnezzar and his empire are represented by the gold head. This impressing statue of world empires with the image of a man shows the powers of this world in their relationship to God and in their responsibility before Him – for man is a responsible creature. God Himself had given Nebuchadnezzar all power, and He was the One to call him to account (2:37-38).

In chapter 3 we see how Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue for himself in order to consolidate his power and to get a firm hold on his subjects from a religious point of view as well. Thus he abused the power God had given him, and he fell prey to idolatry. Turning his back on the true God, he made a god himself for whom all his subjects should kneel down. In chapter 2 Daniel and his companions were saved because God gave the prophet an *insight* into the course of world history; in chapter 3 Daniel's friends were saved from the burning fiery furnace by the *power* of God. Though their decision not to bow down before the image was put to a severe test, yet God helped them and saved them. The Son of God was with them in their trials and He released their chains. "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His presence saved them" (Isa. 63:9).

Chapter 4 deals with Nebuchadnezzar himself, his pride and ensuing madness, but also his ultimate acknowledgement of the Most High. Turning away from God, man becomes like an animal without a rational relationship with God. In this chapter Daniel acts as the king's advisor, calling him to repentance (v. 27).

In chapter 5 the prophet acts more severely – straight away he announces the coming judgment. To be true, in this chapter we find a more serious form of evil than in chapter 4, where we have human pride, human self-exaltation not taking God into account. In chapter 5 God's holy name was being reviled in that the golden and silver vessels from the temple were abused to honour idols (5:2-4).

Chapter 6 depicts the climax of injustice since here all religion was abolished and replaced by the worship of man. A decree was issued that no one else but the king was to be petitioned any more (6:7-8). Daniel, however, persevered in his service of the true God and was found praying and making supplication before his God.

What a big contrast we see between this man of God, who was aware of his total dependence on God, and all the evil around him of natural man who set up an idol for himself (ch. 3), who glorified himself (ch. 4), who mingled the service of the

true God with that of the idols, thus despising and insulting Him (ch. 5), the man of sin who, in the end, publicly took for himself the place of God (ch. 6).

But faithful praying Daniel was delivered from the lions' den, for God honours those who honour Him (1 Sam. 2:30). Let us take this example of Daniel to heart, so that we will be aware of our dependence on God, and our windows toward heaven will remain open in a world which is still marked by injustice and idolatry (as it is described so vividly in the book of Daniel). Very soon all this will culminate in "Babylon the great" and the sphere of influence of the "beast" of Revelation 13 and 17.

Epilogue: All flesh is grass

“All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field (...) The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands for ever”.

Isaiah 40:6-8

The grass withers

The Bible uses the image of grass to illustrate the mortality and corruptibility of man, who was formed by God of *the dust of the ground* (Gen. 2:7; 3:19). It is a picture of the frailty of human life.

The grass withers when the scorching east wind blows over it. The flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows upon it. Similarly, our lives are short, and we return to dust at the time ordained by God (Eccl. 3:20; 12:7). Nothing remains even of the beauty and attractiveness of human life. Isaiah says that it fades like a flower.

The prophet was not the first one to notice this. Job drew the same parallel: “Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away” (Job 14:1,2). And there are more Scriptures that make the same comparison.

The witness of the Psalms

The Psalms contain a clear testimony to this truth. Moses used the picture in Psalm 90, and David in Psalm 103. These psalms also refer to the early chapters of the book of Genesis. Man is mortal, made of dust and returning to dust. Fallen man is consumed by God's wrath.

Moses experienced this when the rebellious people in the wilderness were struck by God's judgments time and again. In the morning they were like grass which grows up, but in the evening it was cut down and withered. They were consumed by God's anger. Yet Moses placed his hope in God's compassion, His mercy, His work, His glory and His beauty, to establish the works of their hands.

This is also the tenor of Psalm 103. David extols God's goodness which surpasses the fragility and corruptibility of mankind: "For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting" (vv. 14-17).

It strikes us that the image of the grass is also used in the preceding Psalm, which speaks about the sufferings of Christ and His exaltation at God's right hand: "My heart is stricken and withered like grass (...) because of your indignation and your wrath; for you have lifted me up and cast me away. My days are like a shadow that lengthens, and I wither away like grass" (Ps. 102:4,10,11).

This Psalm has a clear Messianic meaning, as is confirmed by the epistle to the Hebrews (cf. Heb. 1:10-12 with Ps. 102: 25-27). Our Lord's days on earth were shortened, and He was taken away in the midst of His days. His life was suddenly cut off and He withered away like grass, but this happened because He took our place on Calvary's cross and suffered God's consuming wrath.

The wonderful answer to His humiliation was that He was raised from the dead and given a place of honour at the right

hand of the Majesty on high. He is the same and His years will not fail. The risen Lord is the everlasting Word, the Creator of heaven and earth. He remains eternally the same, and this has important consequences for us too. It results in a better future for us than withering away like grass.

Isaiah 40 tells us plainly that the grass withers, the flower fades, "but the word of our God stands for ever". This is the same contrast we saw in Psalm 102: it is the incorruption of God's abiding word as opposed to man's corruptibility. God's word remains. And it really is Christ Himself, the eternal Word, for He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever (Heb. 13:8).

After all, the prophet Isaiah deals with His first and second advent, and the work of the forerunner, John the Baptist (v. 3). Christ remains for ever, even if His way must go through the valley of death. He is the same, even if He has to take the place of His people in God's consuming judgment. He stands for ever and He feeds His flock like a Shepherd. He is the good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep (v. 11; John 10:11).

New Testament citations

This passage from Isaiah 40 is quoted twice in the New Testament, by James as well as by Peter. James especially applies it to the rich, because the rich man will pass away as a flower of the field. He will suddenly fade away in his pursuits at the Lord's coming, for the Judge is standing at the door (Jas. 1:10,11; 5:9).

Peter reminds us again of the contrast which we have already discussed: the difference between the first man and the second Man, the Lord from heaven. Peter speaks about the new birth, "not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the Word of God which lives and abides for ever". And then he quotes from Isaiah 40: "Because all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

While the natural man withers like grass, and perishes in the day of judgment, there is life and hope for the Christian. He has been born again through the Word of God which lives and endures for ever. He has received eternal life through faith in the Son of God. He has a new nature, not that of the old man which was entirely corrupted and was crucified with Christ, but that of God's living and abiding Word. The believer shows the characteristics of the Source from which he derives his life. He is born of water and the Spirit. God has planted new life in him by His Word and Spirit. Yes, he has received everlasting life from Christ the Word of God, and shall not come into judgment.

The conclusion of all this is that the Christian is no longer characterized by the mortality of the first man, which is so strikingly portrayed by grass that withers. The Christian has become a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Like Peter, he gets his life from the Rock: Christ the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16-18).

We are united with Him, the One who was dead but is alive for evermore. If the Lord tarries, our bodies will return to dust, but they will put on incorruption and immortality and be snatched away from the power of death far from the realm of death and corruption when He comes and takes us to Himself in His own glory. Thus we shall always be with Him.



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