

CHRIST'S HEADSHIP

—J. van Dijk

Its Characters

In Ephesians 1:9-11 we find some of the most profound verses of the Bible. There God reveals to us what was from eternity in His counsels. That we as men are entrusted with such information is in itself a great display of God's grace. When, however, we are told that we share in the inheritance of Christ, we can only become silent.

From these verses we learn that Christ will become Head of all things. This is the end God had in view from the beginning. We realize therefore that God confides to us what is most precious to Himself: The Headship of Christ.

But there is a still greater message in the last two verses of the same chapter. There we read that Christ has been given as "Head over all things to the Assembly, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." The relationship between Christ and the Assembly spoken of here is much greater than that mentioned in the previous verses. It is one thing to be a coheir, quite another to be the bride of the Heir, yet this blessing flows directly from the Assembly's being the body of Christ (Eph. 5:25-28). Her relationship with Christ could not be closer nor more glorious. Since she is His body, He is *her* Head too but this Headship is of a much greater and more intimate nature than the one spoken of in Ephesians 1:9-11. It involves a sharing in His life and nature, for He is our life (Col. 3:4) and we have become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). We would like to consider especially what is involved for us in this latter aspect of Christ's Headship.

Future hope — present Reality

As those who are born again, we may rejoice in God's grace and look toward the day that these things will be seen, first on earth during the Millennium and later in the eternal condition in the new heavens. All the beauty of the Lord will then be seen. Now we like to ask: Does the Assembly as a whole have a responsibility flowing from Christ's Headship?

In Ephesians 3:10-11 we read that "now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies... be made known through the Assembly the all-various wisdom of God, according to the purpose of the ages, which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." God desires that those things that are awaiting future manifestation may be made known to the spirit world today. The Assembly is to be the means of announcing these things. The question is, how is it to announce such great things to the spirit world? By preaching it? No doubt that too! But much more than that by practically acting on the fact that the Lord has, even today (well in advance of those future days), been given to her as Head. So we ask ourselves: In what way can she act so as to show that the Lord Jesus is her Head? Or is the fact that *all believers form the Assembly* all that is needed to display that Christ is its Head? Now to some extent that is so, for it is certainly the first and most essential result of Christ's Headship. But we sincerely believe that this is only the beginning; if we would stop at this point, being satisfied with the relationship Christ has brought about by His work, we would be denying His Headship rather than proclaiming it.

Christ's Name

In Philippians 2 we read that God has granted Christ a name. That name, being above every name, is expressive of the place that is His; it speaks of His Headship. That same name is the gathering center of the Assembly. "For where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mat. 18:20). The Lord does not promise to be in the midst whenever Christians meet. He gives this promise to those who *are* gathered together (not to those who *say* they are gathered together) unto His name. This means that all that takes place while they are so gathered is ordered to do justice to His name, to His Headship. Christ commends those who act in view of what is suited to His name: "Thou hast little power, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name" (Rev. 3:8). How good to note that even those with a little power can meet in a way that does not compromise His name.

Christ's Gifts

Now we need to go back to Ephesians. In the fourth chapter, verse 8, we read that "Having ascended on high, He... has given gifts to men... some apostles, some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints... with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ; until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at [the] full-grown man, at [the] measure of the stature of the fullness of the Christ." Then later (vv. 15-16) we read "The Head, the Christ: from whom the whole body, fitted together, and connected by every joint of supply, according to [the] working in [its] measure of each one part, works for itself the increase of the body to its self-building up in love." We see from these verses that the gifts in the Assembly flow directly from the Head, and that they have been given for the edifying of the body. It is Christ's desire that these gifts are so used, that a full display of Him and His Headship may be seen.

The Gifts in Operation

But now it becomes a matter of how this is to be achieved. Just *having* these gifts and *being aware* of their purpose, is not the same as knowing *how* they are to be utilized. But before we look into this let us digress a little and ask what is the best evidence that someone has a head? One might say, "If he uses it." And this answer comes close to what we are looking for. A head gives direction, and a body that acts apart from the directions given by its head belongs to a very sick person. A healthy body takes its instructions from the head.

This then brings us to the question: Has our Head directed *us* how to exercise these gifts for the building up of His body? We know and profess that God's Word is our only guide. So we know where to look. We find the subject of gifts and edification, building up, addressed in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40. We can safely say that there we have our Lord's instructions dealing with the question: "How shall these gifts be used?"

God's Order

In these verses the Assembly as a whole is addressed. "Whenever ye come together," is the heading under which they are given. Here we find the order described by God for the utilization of the gifts given from the glorified Head. We can see that there is mention neither of one appointed by others for ministry on a regular basis, nor of one appointed for a particular occasion. Either form is obviously a man-made order. In contrast we read of "a revelation to another sitting there." This makes it clear that the Spirit of God is actively engaged during the meeting in revealing to the "gifts" those subjects that are needful at the moment. When the Assembly comes together, it is in recognition of the Headship of Christ when all (those regularly used by the Lord and those seldom used by Him) sit down together in quiet anticipation to see whom their Head will use for the edification of His body. This pattern is ordered by the God of order for the edification of the body of Christ.

Man's Disorder

Now we all know that when men seek to order things where God has given His order, disorder can be the only result. No longer is there the display in this world of a company of men and women who are entirely under the Headship of Christ. They have become a company that seeks to do things as well as they can, applying their own reasoning and wisdom to arrive at a mutual (that is all persons involved, but Christ excepted) agreement as to what is best.

One may say, "This goes too far, many who arrange matters differently, do so prayerfully." We acknowledge this, but it must be observed that while they ask the Lord for guidance to find a pattern suited to Him, they ignore the pattern He has given them. We know that when we ask the Lord in this way, He will not hear us. We must be willing to obediently follow His revealed will and simply accept the God-given order in the Assemblies for edification. Where this is not found, at least one important aspect of "keeping the Head" is missing, although it may still be expressed in other areas of the Christian company. At least in this respect the Lord's commendation "Thou hast not denied My name" can no longer be looked for. He gave instructions in a matter so closely related to His Headship, the utilization of the gifts, and they are not followed; His name is dishonoured.

Inconsistency

We realize that there are companies who *sometimes* meet in this way, but not regularly, when they read in 1 Corinthians 11:26 "As often as ye shall eat this bread...", they are quick to point out that the word "often" is clear indication that we should remember the Lord *often*. We delight in such careful obedience to the Word of God. But consistency in the things

of the Lord is praiseworthy. When it says in our portion, "Whenever ye come together" it simply means: Every time ye come together.

Other Meetings

Is there then no opportunity for a teacher to address the company of believers? There certainly is. The gift is subject to the Head, the Giver of the gift. If one who is dependent upon his Lord realizes that he has to present certain truths, for building up, admonition or consolation, to the members of the body of Christ, he has every right, not to say obligation, to let this be known while calling the saints together for such an occasion. Paul did this in Acts 21 when he called for the Ephesian elders; he instructs Timothy to do so in his second letter to him (ch. 2:2).

Not Denying this Name

But what about the actual practice of it in days of weakness? To give an example: There was a company of Christians that used to meet this way. But there was one brother who always spoke, leaving no time for others, and who, according to the judgment of the hearers, did not bring a message that was directed by the Spirit. Since then they have effectively avoided this type of abuse by appointing speakers who are known to bring Spirit-filled messages. They felt justified in doing so, because (so they said) we live in a time of weakness in which the principle of 1 Corinthians 14 does no longer work.

What has happened here? Has the disorder been done away with? Outwardly it has to some extent. Yet, those who know what God's order is see another disorder in its place. The only real difference is that the disorder which is now an established principle of that meeting, is more palatable to the flesh. It is the type of "order" found throughout most of Christendom.

Was their reasoning sound? It is true that we live in a time of weakness. But, as we saw, it is to those with little strength that the Lord said: "You have not denied My name"; they did justice to His Headship *despite* their weakness. Weakness is never reason to depart from a God-given path. The action this meeting took sidestepped the obligation to meet out proper discipline. "Let the others judge," says the Lord. If there are things to be set straight they must be set straight with gracious love but also with firmness. The contents of the message as well as the propriety with which the particular prophet controls his spirit is subject to this judgment: "spirits of prophets are subject to prophets."

Keeping this Word

Besides, there is a nasty serpent lying in wait in this area. When we say, "This God-given pattern does not work in our days," we speak as Adam did: "The woman Thou hast given me..." We recognize that Adam really blamed God. But what do we when we speak like this? Did God not know the degree of decline that would set in? Did He give us permission to set aside the order He once gave? Well may we ask: "Do we leave God's order because there is decline or is there decline because we give up God's order? In it sits the evil of despising the Word of God. As said, it lies there as a serpent under cover, for those who say such things would be more shocked than any if they realized the full bearing of their words. Sober reflection in the presence of God will certainly bring acknowledgement of the truth of these matters to all who seek to do His will.

1 Timothy 5:17

Why do we hear so little about this subject? We believe the reason for this is both simple and sad. Among those regularly used by the Lord for the edification of His own, there are many who cannot denounce this practice as being contrary to God's Word, for they have followed it for years. It is the sad truth that thereby some of the most eminently able are not in a position to expound these things; they are disabled by their practice. In all fairness to them (for grace seeks to understand how habits have been formed, and humbleness behooves us) it must be observed that this practice has been with us for years, so most of them have grown into it, accepting it as being of God. That is one side. On the other side, however, one might ask: "What about the others?" A fair question, but who will raise such an issue when so many well-known, godly brethren have accepted it for so many years? Who is there that can bring it up in a manner void of contention and yet clearly? We certainly are not sure that we have succeeded on these two points, although both stood before us as vital in dealing with this issue. We have a clear conscience before the Lord that there was no malice in our heart while we wrote these things; we hope and pray that this will be evident to our readers, for admittedly, the subject

matter is one of tender nature. In a certain sense we would have liked to refrain from raising the matter, and we would have thankfully encouraged others had they been called to this task.

Present Needs

There were, however, two reasons that compelled us to write on this subject. One was a letter from a young brother who presented the argument of the assembly that abandoned the God-given pattern. The other reason runs deeper. Among those who claim to be gathered unto the name of the Lord Jesus alone, the practice of sisters not to wear a head covering in public places where the Lord is approached in prayer (weddings, funerals, etc.) has made inroads. Rightfully (although we believe it should have been done sooner), objections were raised when this practice was allowed in some Assembly meetings. Those who wanted to dispense with the head covering claimed that the Word of God is time and culture bound. But to say so, is to make little of God's Word, if not of God Himself. Even we know how to keep instructions meant for only one day out of an instruction sheet meant for continuing guidance. The inference of their claim is that God is less capable than we are; this is most serious. So, quite appropriately, brethren remonstrated against this show of self-will in the Assemblies.

A Godly Symbol

But what has this to do with our subject? This: the head covering worn by the sisters is a *symbolic* expression in recognition of the Headship of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1-16). By wearing such a covering a sister expresses without words, "Just as I show my subjection to my head, my husband, so wishes the Church, the bride, to be subject to her Head." It is a symbolism we are instructed to follow for the sake of the angels (notice once more: the spirit world), that has reference to the Headship of Christ. But why do some have a tendency to dispense with such a valuable symbol? Do they no longer value Christ's Headship as they should? When we asked ourselves this question, we became vividly aware that both this matter of head covering and the practice in the meetings have to do with the Headship of Christ. Hard on its heel followed the question: "What is more serious, to neglect the symbol or to neglect the actual practice that flows from Christ's Headship? Clear as a bell it rang out: *the latter is the more serious issue*. Yet many are prepared to speak in support of the symbol who do not follow God's instructions that give practical substance to the Headship of Christ in today's setting.

What would God have to say about this? It seemed clear to us that it was not right before God to be more concerned about the symbol than about the practice. It may well be that God allowed some to disdain the symbol because in several assemblies the substance had long been set aside. It is a principle with God that when His Word is not obeyed. He will allow other evils to come in (Rom. 1:24,26,28). Clearly, there is not one true believer who would not wholeheartedly confess the Headship of Christ. Yet in the prime area where this Headship should have its effect, it is often neglected. We doubt that this is done knowingly, but rather in ignorance of what really is involved in these practices.

God's Purpose

What we have seen then is this. God's purpose from before the ages of time concerned the Headship of Christ. He has given the Assembly a share in this of which she may be a witness while she is left below. This witness ever speaks of Christ's Headship and finds its expression in the manner in which we conduct ourselves when we are together as Assembly. The present practice in many places does not resemble the God-given order; from this we must conclude that man has been at work, to the dishonour of the Lord. Unless the Assembly awakens to this condition, she is in danger of honouring the symbols of Christ's Headship above the actual practice flowing from it. How sad this would be, seeing the greatness of the grace of God to make us to share in the precious Headship of Christ as His body and bride.

Evaluation

And now, what should we do? "Consider your ways," says the prophet in a day of small things (Ha. 1:6-11). Let us look whether these things are so. Although these thoughts have not been expressed during a time of "whenever ye come together," perhaps we may still apply: "and let the others judge." What is God's will in these things? How does God's Word instruct us? May the Lord be with us and guide us, as He has so faithfully guided His Assembly over the years, giving grace to brethren to acknowledge where failure had come in and restoring what has faltered (Isa. 42:3-4).

OUTLINES FOR BIBLE TEACHING (16)

33. THE TABERNACLE — Exodus 25-27; 30

Outline

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|----|--------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. | The Holy of Holies | Ex. 26 |
| | a. The Ark | Ex. 25:10-22 |
| | b. The Veil | Ex. 26:31-34 |
| 2. | The Holy Place | Ex. 26 |
| | a. The Altar of Incense | Ex. 30:1-10 |
| | b. The Candlestick | Ex. 25:31-40 |
| | c. The Table of Showbread | Ex. 25:23-30 |
| 3. | The Court | Ex. 27:9-18 |
| | a. The Laver | Ex. 30:17-21 |
| | b. The Altar of Burnt-offering | Ex. 27:1-8 |

Explanation

The tabernacle (God's sanctuary in Israel) was a tent, divided into two rooms, and surrounded by an enclosed court.

1. In the back room, the Holy of Holies (the dwelling-place or throne of Jehovah, Ps. 76:2), stood only the ark of the covenant, containing the tables of the law, the golden pot of manna, and Aaron's rod. The ark, made of wood overlaid with gold, was covered by the mercy-seat. This covering, also made of fine gold, had cherubim at each end who faced each other with outstretched wings while bending over the ark. Their faces were turned toward the mercy-seat. An embroidered curtain or veil separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place.

2. In the Holy Place (the place where the priests served, Heb. 9:6) were the golden altar of incense, the table of shewbread with 12 loaves, and the seven-branched golden candlestick.

3. In front of the sanctuary was the court (for the people) with the brazen altar of burnt-offering and the brazen laver. Court and sanctuary together were surrounded by curtains.

Lesson

God desired to dwell among His people, but He can only do this on the basis of the virtues and work of Christ. Therefore every object of the tabernacle speaks of Christ and His ministry. The altar of burnt-offering in the court, where the sin-offering was slaughtered, shows us Christ judged upon the cross, so that we may be forgiven. The 'brazen laver portrays Christ who, by His Word, keeps those who have been reconciled in fellowship with God the Father (Jn. 13:5, 10; 1 Jn. 2: 1). The golden altar of incense shows us Christ; believers can worship God as priests by Him (Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:5). Thus in these three objects we see forgiveness, fellowship, and worship by Christ.

In the table of shewbread we see Christ as the food or the delight of God and His own. In the seven-branched candlestick we may see Him as the bright testimony of God displayed in the manifold (sevenfold) workings of the Holy Spirit in His people.

But specially the ark of the covenant with its mercy-seat is a type of Christ. He is our propitiation (Lev. 16:14; Rom. 3:25; 1 Jn. 2:2), and the revelation of God to us (Ex. 25:22; Num. 7:89; Heb. 3:1). In the latter reference, Christ is called "the Apostle" through whom God has manifested Himself to us and spoken to us.

34. THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES — Exodus 28-29; 39

Outline

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| 1. The Persons | Ex. 28:1; Num. 3:5-6 |
| 2. Their Clothing | Ex. 28:2-39 |
| 3. Their Consecration | Ex. 29:1-35; Num. 3:11-16; 39-51 |
| 4. Their Work | Ex. 28:1; Num. 3:7-9 |

Explanation

1. The family of Aaron was separated to the priesthood; Aaron and the firstborn sons after him were to be high priests, while all other sons would be priests. The Levites, all males of the tribe of Levi, were given to the priests as helpers.

2. The clothing of the priests consisted of

- a. Linen breeches,
- b. A vest of fine linen,
- c. A girdle, and
- d. A high cap or turban.

They could not wear shoes, because their service was done in a holy place.

The high priest wore over his garment a cloak of blue with, hung from its lower hem, little golden bells alternating with blue, purple and scarlet pomegranates. Over this cloak he wore an ephod (an apron-like garment) which only reached to the hips; its colours were white, blue, purple, and scarlet. Upon the ephod hung the small rectangular breastplate of righteousness. It was made of the same material and colours as the ephod, folded double, and left open on each side. In it were the Urim (lights) and the Thummim (perfections). The exact nature of these two objects is unknown to us, but by them the high priest was able to ascertain the will of God (Cf. Num. 27:21; Ezra 2:63). The front of the breastplate was adorned with twelve precious stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes. Upon each shoulder he carried a precious stone set in a golden enclosure, which, with golden chains, held the front and back part of the ephod together. Six names of the tribes of Israel were engraved on each of these two shoulder stones. A thin plate of gold with the inscription "Holiness to Jehovah" was attached with a lace of blue to the turban of the high priest (Ps. 93:5).

3. The high priest and the priests were consecrated together for their service. They had first of all to wash themselves. Then they were dressed in their priestly clothing, after which Aaron was anointed with oil poured over his head. Upon this, a bullock was sacrificed as a sin-offering and a ram as a burnt-offering. After a second ram was slaughtered, its blood was applied to the right ear lobe, the right thumb and the right great toe of Aaron and his sons. This ram of consecration was partly burned upon the altar and the remainder was to be eaten by Aaron and his sons. The Levites were set apart at the time the people were counted. God claimed them as His own in the place of every firstborn in Israel.

4. Once each year the high priest went into the Holy of Holies carrying a golden bowl with blood which he sprinkled on and before the mercy-seat, thereby making atonement (Heb. 9:7; 9:11-14). The high priests and priests were to offer up the sacrifices brought on behalf of themselves and the people and those brought by the people (Heb. 5:1-3). Besides this they had to dress the lamp, to burn incense, and to bless (Ex. 27:21; 30:7-10; Lev. 9:22). The Levites were to be servants for work in the court and outside of the tabernacle. A major task of theirs was to bear the furniture of the tabernacle during the wilderness journey; the priests, however, were to bear the ark.

Lesson

The priests were the mediators between God and the sinful people. Today we have one Mediator, Christ our heavenly High Priest, and believers have as members of a holy priesthood access into the presence of God. No longer is there a need for a separate priestly class.

The fine linen used for the priests' clothing speaks of purity and righteousness. The girdle speaks of service for God. The pomegranates display fruitfulness and the golden bells remind us of the Lord's clear testimony. In the Urim and Thummim we may perhaps see a picture of the Holy Spirit. Gold speaks of righteousness, blue of heavenly origin, purple of the glory of the Lord Jesus as Son of man, and scarlet of His being King of Israel.

The names upon the precious stones, both on the breastplate and upon the shoulders, signify that Christ, the true High Priest, cares for His own in faithful love (upon His breast) and upholds them by His power and strength (upon His shoulders — Heb. 7:25,26). The priests are types of today's believers, at their consecration the oil was sprinkled on them

after the blood had been applied. In contrast, the oil was poured on Aaron, who typifies the Lord, before the blood was applied.

To be contd

JUDE (3)

—H. L. Heijkoop

Verse 2

Mercy to you, and peace, and love be multiplied.

Mercy to you

What is mercy? It has much in common with grace, yet it is not the same. Grace concerns particularly the fountain, God's character. Mercy is connected with the need of him who is the object of mercy. Grace can give me glory, mercy can be great in its abundant supplying my needs.

Consequently, the salutations of those New Testament Epistles which are addressed to an assembly or a group of persons contain nearly always the wish for "grace and peace," whereas in those addressing a single person "mercy" is added (see the two Epistles to Timothy and the Second Epistle of John). In the Epistle to Titus some important manuscripts do not have the word "mercy" but others do. In view of the above pattern, I believe the latter ones to be right on this point. The single person needs mercy in view of his weakness. That is why we find in Hebrews 4:16: "Let us approach therefore with boldness to the throne of *grace*, that we may receive *mercy*, and find *grace* for seasonable help." We in our weaknesses, who are continually tempted besides, are in need of aid and support. Therefore, we must go boldly to the throne of *grace* to obtain mercy. When God sees our great need for support, His heart will be moved to aid us and He will be occupied with us in grace (or favour). Thus, whenever mercy and grace are mentioned together in Scripture, mercy comes first.

It is very striking that mercy is included in this wish here, although the letter is not addressed to a single person. The recipients are no longer addressed as an assembly but as, individuals. In the later Bible books the Assembly is viewed as a judged entity. That is to say, they view the Assembly as a professing assembly on earth, that God judges for being in conflict with His thoughts. And when God's judgment rests upon the Assembly, I cannot look up to it for instruction, support and protection. Its discernment has no longer any value to me. Therefore it says repeatedly in Revelation 2 and 3: "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies." During the time of apostasy in which we live, it is not the voice of the Assembly that is authoritative but only the voice of the Spirit of God.

Thus the Christian testimony takes on an ever increasing personal character. This doesn't mean that finally every believer will stand entirely alone! There will be a collective testimony until the coming of the Lord. Philadelphia will remain until the Assembly is caught up. However, it does not comprise the whole professing church but only a small part of it. Besides it, there are Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea. Philadelphia is not even characteristic for all that is outside of Thyatira and Sardis. But yet, there remains a collective testimony; the Epistle of Jude is one of the proofs of this. Persons have crept in amongst the faithful, this means that the faithful ones must be going on together. But, although they go on together forming a collective testimony, a primarily personal character is retained. Even in Philadelphia it is said to the individual: "He that has an ear," and also the overcomer is addressed in the singular: "Him that overcomes."

Not that the personal testimony must of necessity be weaker in times of decline than in times of growth. Personally, each of us has received that which believers living immediately after the death of the apostles had received. We have a Lord in heaven as the object of our heart. We have God's Word to direct our actions in all circumstances. Yes, we have it more complete and more readily available than they did, for in their time printing had not yet been invented, and only a few manuscripts of the various Bible books were in existence. God the Holy Spirit still lives in every believer just as in the beginning (Eph. 1: 13), and He will guide each of us into all the truth (Jn. 16:13). His power, which is just as limitless as at that time, enables us to remain standing as witnesses, as long as we don't allow obstacles to enter our hearts and lives.

But the circumstances in which we have to render testimony are much more difficult. Even among true believers the heavenly Lord is hardly known; they hardly know Him other than as the Lord who lived on earth, and as the Lord who died on the cross. Who is there today that takes the Word as completely inspired, every letter carrying authority? And where

do we find a proper knowledge of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit? Where do we find it effectuated¹ that He lives in the body of every believer (1 Cor. 6:19) and in the Assembly as a whole (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:22) and that, consequently, He is the only One who may direct and govern as He will: "That ye should not do those things which ye desire"? (Gal. 5:17). Therefore, he wishes us mercy!

peace

We don't find a wish like this anywhere in the Old Testament. Nor do we hear of such a thing during the Lord's life on earth. Only after the Lord had completed His work on the cross and was risen, He said to the disciples: "Peace [be] to you"! (Jn. 20:19,21). First the basis had to be established on the cross of Golgotha. He had to make peace through His blood before there could be any mention of peace for lost and guilty people.

"Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

This is the peace between a holy and righteous God and persons who by nature were sinful and unholy. It is the known position of all true believers, after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

But the Scriptures speak of yet another peace! "I leave peace with you; I give *My* peace to you" (Jn. 14:27). This is the peace which the Lord Jesus enjoyed when He was upon the earth in circumstances similar to those we experience today. He enjoyed an undisturbed peace because there never was any separation between the Father and Himself, and the circumstances could not disturb Him, however painful they were. He walked the path of faith, the path of unlimited obedience and unlimited trust in the Father. The throne of God is not shaken by man's unfaithfulness nor even by his enmity. God rules over all and nothing can happen without His permission. Now, we know that He is our Father and that He loves us. Therefore, if we trust Him completely, the circumstances can neither disturb nor stumble us, and we will enjoy the same peace God enjoys and which the Lord Jesus enjoyed while He was on earth (Phil. 4:7). This is the apostle's wish.

love

Here again it is divine love (*agape*). Yet, I don't think that the love of God to us is meant here. Could God's love to us be multiplied when Scripture says that the Father loves us as He loves the Lord Jesus? (Jn. 17:23). At best the proofs of His love or perhaps the outflow of love, could be multiplied but not the love itself. Since the subject here is love, it must of necessity refer to the divine love in us, which is "shed abroad in our hearts by [the] Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5). "*We* love because *He* has first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19). We have received the divine nature, which is love; therefore every believer loves. But this love can increase and be perfected (1 Jn. 4:12, 17).

In a world which does not know love, and in a Christendom which no longer possesses natural love but only love for pleasure and love for self (2 Tim. 3:2-4), Jude wishes that in the believers the divine love (not natural love) be multiplied. Love to God; love to the brethren; love to the lost! Love to God will cause us to seek only His glory. Love to the brethren will cause us to seek their welfare and to serve them. Love to the lost will cause us to point them to their lost condition and subsequently present them with salvation in Christ. Well, Jude desires that mercy, peace and love² be multiplied to us.

The Greek tense employed indicates that it is not merely a wish for the future, but a wish for a permanent condition.

To be cont'd

THE MINOR PROPHETS (3)

—R. Been Jr.

General Remarks on Prophecy (cont'd.)

¹ *Realized in practice, not in thought and profession only.*

² *Notice the order: First mercy which supplies all our needs in the condition of ruin we are in. Next peace, as a heart's condition flowing from the mercy. And finally love, as the atmosphere of the soul's existence, flowing out to others: upward to God and downward to believers and unbelievers. What a completeness and perfection is found in this short blessing.*

Prophecy and History

The ever-present danger to approach Scripture purely with the intellect is particularly acute when the subject is prophecy. Yet, they who let themselves be guided by their own reasoning must acknowledge that the prophets have foretold historical events before they took place. This fact is for them a stumbling stone. They don't understand that many prophecies refer to the end times. For this reason they ascribe to the prophets a "Messiah character that is more or less evident depending on the period in which the prophets lived." Or they speak of a vague "Providence" or "a staircase achievement," and of "an eventual victory of Christendom over paganism."

With such vague terminology they seek to explain in vague terms the prophets, refusing to acknowledge the wonder of prophecy. For example, the prophet Isaiah spoke some two hundred years in advance of the Persian king Cyrus, mentioning him by name. He portrayed the fall of Babylon, the first world-empire, before it existed as such. When Belshazzar held his great feast with Babel's dignitaries, Isaiah had already spoken of it two hundred years earlier. He mentioned the nations that would cause Babel's fall and the name of the conqueror long before this man was born.

No wonder this has led unbelief to fabricate theories to satisfy those who are led by their human mind and their "scientific logic." They say: How could Isaiah speak of Cyrus and the fall of a world-empire so long in advance, before Cyrus himself was born and Babylon existed? Those critics have no idea of a God who holds the future in His hands, and who informs His prophets of coming events, allowing them to predict them.

Because they did not *want* to believe, rationalistic theologians declared some hundred and fifty years ago that there had been a second Isaiah living after the Babylonian exile. This person supposedly wrote the second part of Isaiah's prophecy, chapters 40-66. They called him: "Deutero-Isaiah."

That there will be an eventual victory of Christendom over paganism and Judaism, as they suggest, is just as far from the truth. God's Word teaches us the very opposite. It shows us that after the Lord Jesus comes to take His Assembly (all true believers) to heaven, *Christianity will be brought to an end*. The remainder of Christendom which will be left on earth will soon totally apostatize from all Christian values, thereby becoming Babylon the Great. It will be an idolatrous system in which human know-how and ability will play a major role. That it originated out of Christianity makes this all the more shameful. As a whole, the Gentile nations will not be converted to Christianity; a remnant of them will turn to God through the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom (which is distinct from the gospel of grace). There will also be a remnant of Israel, out of the ten as well as out of the two tribes.

They who are led by their human mind and their logical thoughts, see in the prophecies *events that have already been fulfilled. For them, history explains prophecy.*

This is a serious mistake. We do not deny that, in contrast to the New Testament prophecies (which only have reference to the end time), many Old Testament prophecies have had a partial fulfillment. But such partial fulfillment is never the final word, never the total fulfillment. To say so, is to give to these prophecies their "own particular interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20). Their fulfillment is not a solitary event in history. When prophecy announced events that are history today, then such past fulfillment was nevertheless not the only purpose for which it was given. It simultaneously points towards similar events in the end time, which will bring complete consummation.

Prophecy and Christ

Every vista opened up in prophecy has *Christ and what is Christ's as its ultimate intent*. It preaches the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:16). The Old Testament prophets testified beforehand of the suffering of Christ and the glory that would come afterward (1 Pet. 1:11). Since the judgments are the heralds of the glory of Christ, they are also foretold in prophecy, for "When the judgments of the Lord are in the earth, the inhabitants thereof learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9).

Generally, the Old Testament prophets began with observing the moral condition of Israel. They made it clear that the ruin of Israel was complete and unavoidable, yet they urgently called to repentance. They announced judgments that would come over the nation in the near and far future, but they also spoke of a restoration in the last days, when the faithful remnant will enter the blessing of the realm of peace under Christ's glorious government. Because Israel failed, it has been temporarily put aside; the world power has been given into the hands of the nations. But the prophets also announced the judgment of the nations, which will come over them when the glorious reign of Christ as King over the whole earth will be established.

The Old Testament prophecy points to the revelation of *Christ's kingdom on earth, and the way whereby it will be established*. There is no mention of God's heavenly counsels regarding the Assembly in prophecy. The Old Testament prophets didn't know anything about this for the Assembly was then a mystery.

For those who believe in Christ it is precious to search the riches of their Lord and Saviour in the Word of God. One should, however, not try to understand *everything* at once. Step by step these riches are revealed to the soul by the Holy Spirit, and one's practical walk plays a great role in this. How could the Spirit teach the riches of Christ to a believer who lives with his heart, and perhaps outwardly, even in the things of this world? If this is a believer's condition, the Holy Spirit has other work to do in his heart.

But otherwise, when a gold digger follows a lode of this precious metal, he collects a little of it at a time. To find much, he must carefully keep his eye on the lode. One day the harvest will be greater than the next, but, little or much, *he ever digs for the same precious metal*. The total value of his discovery is established at the end of the digging.

That is what the believer experiences who devotes himself to the study of the Word of God under the leading of God's Spirit. *By never losing sight of Christ*, he will one by one discover and enjoy the riches of Christ. One may be of greater value than the next, for Christ has a heavenly and an earthly glory. Thus "digging" he will not lose sight of the "lode."

To be cont'd