

**THE FELLOWSHIP TO WHICH ALL CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED (4)**

## CHAPTER 5

*The Priesthood of all Believers.*

In the Old Testament a special class of Israelites was separated for the priesthood, namely Aaron and his sons, in the New Testament *all believers* are priests. The apostle Peter wrote: "Yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). And the apostle John wrote: "Him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in His blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father..." (Rev. 1:5-6).

*The Priesthood is for all believers.*

The gifts, which are only given to a few<sup>1</sup>, are for ministry to *men*. A priest, however, ministers to *God*, and this is the privilege of every Christian.

This priestly service expresses itself in thanksgiving, praise, and worship. The Lord Jesus says, "But [the] hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for also the Father seeks such as His worshippers" (Jn. 4:23).

What an exalted and holy privilege it is to be allowed to approach God the Father in worship! A holy separation from the world and a holiness in our walk and works ought to accompany this privilege.

It is true that every believer who is the least bit acquainted with Scripture knows that all true believers are priests. But especially on this point the greatest confusion has arisen. In nearly all Christian denominations we see that a certain class of people has been set aside to perform the priestly duties. Not that all go as far in this, the ritualists go to the extreme; they even call a certain class of men priests. These "priests" wear ceremonial robes of office about which we find nothing in the New Testament. These "priests" perform a task that they do not allow so-called lay people to perform.

Outside of the so-called main-line churches things don't generally go quite so far. There the "ministers" seldom wear special robes of office, but they are often addressed with "Pastor" which means "Shepherd" and they often bear the title of "Reverend."

What value is there in confessing with the lips the truth that all believers are priests while making it practically impossible for believers to exercise their priesthood? This is what is done by maintaining a special class of clergy that alone is entitled to perform the spiritual tasks that really should be performed by every believer whom God has given a particular gift for it.

*A serious warning.*

We like to add a few serious words about these things, for we believe that they cause great confusion in Christendom and result in much spiritual weakness among believers.

Believers who go to a so-called place of worship where this system of priests (or ministers) prevails are not expected to take an audible part in the service. They rather come to receive what the pastor or minister has to give. They go home without having performed any priestly function, for their priesthood is practically denied them. Is it any wonder that such believers fail to grow in the things of God?

We acknowledge that there are serious, sincere, and gifted men among the Church leaders, men who do their work with a good conscience, and who are used of God for the salvation of unconverted people and for help and support of His

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<sup>1</sup> Please read the Addendum at the end of this article for clarification of this statement

people. But these are, sad to say, rather the exception than the rule. They are linked with a system that strains the truth of God, no matter how they may try to return, mourn about poor conditions, or feel ill at ease about all kinds of wrongs.

### *The parables of the Kingdom of Heaven.*

The parables the Lord told in Matthew 13 about the kingdom of heaven are very instructive, for they prophetically show how the kingdom of heaven would develop from its beginning.

In the parable of *the sower* we see the seed being sown in the world, yet it does not bear fruit everywhere. In the parable of the dandelion among the wheat we notice how the enemy secretly brings in unconverted confessors there where God wants to have only true believers. The end result is a hopeless mixture of good and evil.

### *The parable of the mustard seed*

In this parable we see another one of the enemy's wiles. He persuades professing Christians to seek recognition in the world, to strive for political power, for a place of importance in this world.

Isn't this the goal of the large religious denominations in today's world? Is it any wonder that in such systems many unconverted persons occupy a prominent place, confessors who know nothing of a rejected Christ, who don't understand anything of the significance of the words the Lord spoke twice: "They are not of the world, as I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:14,16). It shows a lack of appreciation for the origin and the power of Christianity. No wonder that many introduce worldly methods and desire to be big in this world.

So we see beautiful church buildings and cathedrals, leaders in beautiful robes, impressive rituals, tremendous sounding titles, a seeking after political power and earthly grandeur. In short: we see a worldly religion in which true believers remain spiritually standing through the mighty power of God's Spirit despite the condition in the church.

### *The parable of the woman and the leaven.*

This parable speaks of a woman who took leaven and hid it in three measures of meal until it was entirely leavened. This parable is a picture of unconverted persons and worldly Christians who are used by Satan to spoil, bit by bit, the pure Biblical doctrine through their wrong teaching. In this we see the Judaistic teachers who were already active in the early days of the Assembly. In the days of Paul there were teachers who taught that the resurrection had already taken place. In the days of John there were gnostic teachers and many antichrists. In our times the number of wrong doctrines has increased alarmingly: many no longer believe in the inspiration of Scripture, many believe in evolution — man would descend from animals, many no longer believe the first chapters of Genesis, many deny the fall, the virgin birth of Christ, and the need for salvation. The resurrection of Christ, His inability to sin, His eternal sonship, all have become a matter of doubt.

### *Many live under false illusions.*

Many religious leaders have become spiritually confused; they think that humanity is ever improving, and expect a time of prosperity and peace through the influence of the church. But Christendom is really on its way to total apostasy from God and the truth, just as it has been foretold in the Bible.

We await the coming of the Lord. Then all true believers will be taken up into glory and all name-Christians, the false confessors, will stay behind on earth to complete the apostasy. Once the true believers are no longer on earth, apostasy and lawlessness will reach its climax. The Spirit of God, which still withholds the evil today, is then no longer on earth; the corruption, now already seen in principle, will then fully flourish (2 Th. 2:6-7).

The development of the kingdom of heaven we saw in the parables of Matthew 13, is partly due to the setting apart of a certain class of persons for the exercise of the priesthood. They who belong to this special class arrogate quite a bit to themselves. They discount the working of God's Holy Spirit in the Assembly "dividing to each in particular according as He pleases" (1 Cor. 12:11). By the traditions of these men this Scripture is ruthlessly set aside, and the working of the Holy Spirit practically restricted to one person.

How is the working of the Holy Spirit curtailed by all of this! Leaders, appointed by men rather than God, and *if* appointed by God then restricted in their task by the ordinations of men! How deplorable is all this. Every Christian placing himself under such a system despises thereby the greatest privilege given him, namely the priesthood of all believers.

*To be cont'd*

**Addendum** — to THE FELLOWSHIP TO WHICH ALL CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED (4)

Clarification is needed as there was an objection raised (after the initial publication of this issue) to the statement below:

*"The gifts, which are only given to a few, is for ministry to men. A priest, however, ministers to God, and this is the privilege of every Christian."*

This paragraph is not sufficiently specific. It seems to permit the thought that not everyone has a gift. Scripture, however, teaches us that *all* members have been placed in the body for a specific purpose, and the Spirit gives the enabling gift, so that the intended task can be performed. "To each the manifestation of the Spirit is given for profit."

We believe the author intended to say that *each particular gift* (helps, evangelist, prophecy, etc.) is only given to a few. One believer has this gift, the other that gift. But with the priesthood it is different; priesthood is the part of *every* believer, we all are priests. It is something we all have in common, and it is a service we have not towards man, but towards God.

It was an ambiguity we overlooked while translating this series of articles, and we are thankful to the reader who drew this to our attention.

**PRIESTLY SERVICE (2)**

—H. L. Heijkoop

*Leviticus 9*

Now let us look at chapter 9. It has a different character. Verses 4 and 6 indicate the purpose of this chapter. Verse 4 ends with: "For to-day Jehovah will appear to you," and verse 6 with: "This is the thing... that ye should do; and the glory of Jehovah shall appear to you."

The service of Aaron is seen here in connection with the future. This is evident from the way in which the service is presented. In chapter 8:3 for instance, there is mention of the entire congregation, and so it is later on. But in chapter 9:1 the elders of Israel are addressed, and in verse 3 the children of Israel. In Chapter 8 Moses had to take the priests, but in chapter 9 the children of Israel had to present the sacrifices. We notice then that Israel is involved in the service. The first verse says, "And it came to pass on the eighth day, [that] Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel." The eighth day speaks of a new beginning, after the completion of that which preceded it. The seven days of chapter 8 formed the first epoch. We saw that it presents our times, the time during which the Assembly is on earth. Chapter 9 has reference to the eighth day, that is the day of the Millennium and the restoration of Israel.

Yet this chapter is also connected with our priestly service. The Lord Jesus speaks of this in John 7, where he speaks on the eighth day of the feast of tabernacles about the streams of living water that will flow from the belly of him who believes (vv. 37-38). The Word says that this has reference to the Holy Spirit whom the believers would receive. The Holy Spirit has come on earth, sent by the glorified Lord, as John 16:7 explicitly says. He has come to show us the glory of the Lord Jesus. But the Lord has also said that this glory will be ours. In 2 Thessalonians 1 we read that the Lord will be glorified in His saints when He comes from heaven, and in Philippians 3:21 that He "shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory, according to the working of [the] power which He has even to subdue all things to Himself"; and in John 17:23 the Lord says that our glory will be so like His that the world will know that the Father has loved us as He has loved Him. Then we will be like Him, conformed to the image of His Son, so that the world cannot help but acknowledge that God has loved us as He has loved the Son. Even now we may lay hold of this future glory, fill our hearts with it, and not just that, we may even help to hasten that day.

From verse 22 onward only Moses and Aaron are mentioned; both are types of the Lord Jesus. Moses is a type of the Lord as the great Teacher, but also as the King of Israel (Dt. 33:5 refers to Him as King in Jeshurun); and Aaron is a type of the Lord as High Priest. We see there how He will be High Priest in the Millennium. God's Word speaks also of it in Hebrews 5.

It tells us that it is the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek who was simultaneously king and priest. Here too we find these two aspects.

In this chapter we read about the sacrifices that will be brought and we see the wonderful fact that the sons of Aaron brought the blood where Aaron had to sprinkle it. In this way we are invited as priests to partake in the work of the Lord Jesus. Of course not in that which He has accomplished on the cross, but in bringing the blood there where He is able to use it. And so we see the connection with what is presented here.

Here Aaron has brought the sacrifice, whereas in chapter 8 it was Moses who did so. After Aaron had performed his service, "Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and came down after the offering of the sin-offering, and the burnt-offering, and the peace-offering" (v. 22).

Don't we find the same when the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven? He had finished the work and stretched out His hands to heaven to bless. Here we see it in connection with the beginning of verse 23: "And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and came out and blessed the people." In this we see the Lord, who having returned to heaven, is now hidden from the people of Israel. It is night. True, God always sees the sacrifice. In chapter 6 it says that the fire of the burnt-offering was never allowed to go out (v.9); the odour of the sacrifice had to ascend to God during the whole night. The Word of God says that the Lord did not die for us alone, but also for the nation of Israel. In John 11:51-52, the high priest prophesied "that Jesus was going to die... not for the nation only, but that He should also gather together into one the children of God who were scattered abroad." And Hebrews 2:17 applies the work on the cross very definitely to the people of Israel. God doesn't forget them, though the people themselves don't know it.

Afterwards they "came out and blessed the people." The Lord will return from heaven, and we with Him. He will return as King and High Priest and bless the people, and then the glory of the Lord will be seen: "and the glory of Jehovah appeared to all the people." Don't we find the same in Zechariah 12:10? "And they shall look on Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for an only [son]." There we have the Millennial glory, all the glory of the Lord Jesus will be revealed. They will see that the Lord Jesus was not only their King, and that they have rejected their King, but that He was also Jehovah Himself, and that He who died at their hands on the cross was the Son of God who had come to save them. God will show that everything is based on the work of the Lord Jesus. This we find in verse 24. But we also find there the result with the people: "And there went out fire from before Jehovah, and consumed on the altar the burnt-offering, and the pieces of fat; and all the people saw it, and they shouted, and fell on their face."

We surely must have noticed that in this last verse only the burnt-offering and the fat are mentioned and not the sin-offering. Yet, earlier the sin-offering was mentioned because the Lord has been the sin-offering for the people, since it is the only basis on which grace could be shown to them. Here however, there is no mention of this, but only of all that God's goodness will give and of the entire revelation of the glory of the Lord Jesus. This is particularly seen in the burnt-offering and the fat, which speak of the glory of Him and of His work. John 1:29 speaks of this: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." And in Colossians 1:19-20 we read that on the basis of His work all things will be reconciled to God, the entire creation, both the heavens and the earth. That is the full result of His work and we will have part in it. Even now we may enjoy it. That which the people will see when the Lord Jesus comes, we see already today, for the Holy Spirit has come to show us all that glory. He does this at the entrance of the tent of meeting, at the place where the Lord is in the midst of His own, where they have come to be with Him. In that place God opens His heart, and there the Holy Spirit can work freely to make all God's thoughts known so that we may see, even today, what will be found in eternity. The Holy Spirit is the power whereby we can enjoy these things. And who is the Centre of it all? *The Lord Jesus*, the Son of *God Himself*, in the glory of His Person and that of His work.

*The End*

## **OUTLINE FOR BIBLE STUDY (37)**

### **77. ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL. THE CALL OF ELISHA. — 1 Kings 18-19**

#### *Outline*

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|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Elijah's Zeal for God | 1 Kings 18:1-2,17-29 |
| 2. The Result            | 1 Kings 18:30-39     |
| 3. The Judgment          | 1 Kings 18:40-46     |

4. The Flight into the Wilderness 1 Kings 19:1-8
5. Elijah at Mount Horeb 1 Kings 19:9-18
6. Call of Elisha 1 Kings 19:19-21

### *Explanation*

1. Elijah showed himself to be an obedient, fearless and submissive servant in bringing Ahab a new message and pointing out his sins to him. His zeal against idolatry proved how he was totally surrendered to Jehovah and that he was confident that God would help him (Ps. 18:29-30).

2. Elijah displayed the unity of the people by building an altar of twelve stones. His prayer was for the glory of God and the salvation of the people. God answered (Ps. 118:21,24) and glorified His name (Isa. 42:8). Although the altar was saturated with water, God's fire consumed not only the offering but everything, including the altar itself and all the water surrounding it.

3. Elijah slew all the prophets of Baal, then God brought rain.

4. Elijah believed that his act had removed every hindrance for Israel to serve God. Then, when he was confronted with a strong enemy, Jezebel, the great adversary of God and His people, his faith failed for he looked upon the circumstances and difficulties, and he fled for his life (1 Ki. 19:3).

5. God dealt comforting and kind with the prophet despite his wrong request (Ps. 103:14; Isa. 51:12). God still had work to do for him, and He encouraged and strengthened him for his new task.

God instructed him to anoint Hazael as king over Syria, Jehu as king over Israel, and Elisha as prophet in his stead. Finally God comforted him by telling him that there were 7,000 in Israel who had remained faithful to God.

### *Lesson*

The difficult circumstances had not brought Israel to repentance, perhaps Jehovah's goodness would reach their hearts (Rom. 2:4).

Baal (the god of fire) was proven to be a powerless idol and his prophets were exposed as liars and deceivers (Ps. 115:4-8).

The destruction of the prophets of Baal was a righteous act without which Israel would not have been delivered from idolatry. One day Christ will judge in a similar manner (Ps. 18:41-43).

Before Ahab, Elijah was a severe judge; before Jehovah, a submissive servant (1 Ki. 18:42). Yet, he became impatient, fainthearted and afraid (Dt. 20:3-4). This shows us that the tool is always weak — in God alone is strength.

At Horeb God taught him that he was only one among the many servants (wind, earthquake, and fire) which God could use to strike down and to utterly destroy, but that He desires to do His Work through tender, quiet love, which heals and restores.

Elijah learned to be humble, and obediently he handed the service over to his successor, Elisha.

The seven thousand, which had not bowed the knees to Baal picture the future remnant in Israel (Rom. 11:2-5).

## **78. THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA, NABOTH, THE DEATH OF AHAB AND JEZEBEL — 1 Kings 20:1-22:40; 2 Kings 9:25-26, 30-37**

### *Outline*

1. War Between Ahab and Ben-Hadad 1 Kings 20
2. Ahab's Sinful Lust 1 Kings 21:1-4
3. Jezebel's Deed of Infamy 1 Kings 21:5-16

*Explanation*

1. In the battle against Ben-Hadad Ahab did not inquire of God, still Jehovah came to his aid (1 Ki. 20:13-15). Since Ahab did not ask for the word of Jehovah, God's judgment came over him.
2. Naboth didn't refuse to sell his vineyard out of stubbornness or greed, but out of respect for God's law, which forbade the children of Israel to sell their inheritance (Num. 36:9; 1 Jn. 5:3). Naboth was a God-fearing man who was obedient to Jehovah, not counting the cost.
3. Ahab acted like a spoiled child. For wicked Jezebel no means was too evil to obtain the vineyard. The unrighteous and wicked behaviour of the elders in Israel shows how far they had departed from Jehovah (Ex. 20:16; Prov. 17:15).
4. Ahab was, both as king and as head of his household, the one who was responsible for all that took place. His acquiescence in everything caused him to be identified as the murderer. Despite his disguise, he fell in the battle. Jezebel too received her righteous judgment (Ps. 64:5-6). Because Ahab humbled himself before God, Judgment over his house was postponed (1 Ki. 21:27-29).

*Lesson*

The deplorable condition of Ahab's heart, becomes evident by his calling Ben-Hadad "my brother" (1 Ki. 20:32).

Only obedience to God's Word gives joy (Jn. 15:9-14).

Jezreel was a very fertile plain at the foot of Mount Carmel.

Naboth is a type of the future, faithful remnant, that holds fast to the testimony. God will avenge their blood (Rev. 6:9,11).  
*To be cont'd*

**THE PROBLEM OF UNANSWERED PRAYER (4)**

—J. Rouw

This time we will look at a few verses in the New Testament. In Luke 8 we find someone who was possessed by demons, but who was healed by the Lord Jesus. But something precedes this. In Luke 8:28 we see an unclean spirit who, when he saw the Lord Jesus, fell down before Him crying with a loud voice, "What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beseech Thee, torment me not." That was a prayer of an unclean spirit, and the Lord Jesus answered that prayer! In the future, the devil and his demons will be tormented in the lake of fire, but here the Lord Jesus doesn't yet do this. "He had commanded the unclean spirit to go out from the man" (Lk. 8:29b). Then verse 31 mentions a great number of demons: "And they besought Him that He would not command them to go away into the bottomless pit." Soon the devil will be cast into the abyss. But these demons preferred not to go there as yet. Since there was a herd of swine grazing on the hill nearby, "they besought Him that He would suffer them to enter into those; and He suffered them." Remarkable!

There is another prayer in this chapter that, though it is not very good, is answered. In verse 37 we read: "And all the multitude of the surrounding country of Gadarenes asked Him to depart from them, for they were possessed with great fear." Isn't that a terrible prayer, to ask "Wouldn't you please go away, Lord Jesus"? Yet, "He, entering into the ship, returned." He went away!

Afterwards we read of the prayer of the man who had been healed. That was a prayer that was *not* answered. That is the one we want to take a closer look at. In verse 35 we read, "They went out to see what had happened, and came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting, clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus. And they were afraid." In verse 38 the man from whom the demons had gone out asked the Lord something. He asked the Lord if he could stay with Him. Now I ask you, was that a good prayer or not? He longed to stay with the Lord Jesus. "Lord Jesus, I have been healed by Thee, Thou art my benefactor, Thou art the Son of God. I am so thankful, may I stay with Thee from

now on?" "But He sent him away, saying, Return to thine house and relate how great things God has done for thee. And he went away through the whole city, publishing how great things Jesus had done for him" (vv. 38-39).

It certainly seemed hard of the Lord Jesus to tell him that he couldn't stay with Him, but that he had to go to his city to tell the people that he had been healed. It may have been a disappointment for that man, but he did so nevertheless. It's always better to be obedient! Do you know the result? Through the preaching of that man many people were converted. That is evident when we compare Matthew 8 and Mark 5, where we find an account of the same events, with Matthew 15 and Mark 7, we will find that a great crowd waited for Him; they all were expecting Him. In this we see the grace of God. The man who had been healed preached there, and when the Lord Jesus eventually returned, the men who had once said, "You better go," were ready to receive Him with open arms. The Lord Jesus treats each one differently, but this man will one day see what a great reward will be his because of his obedience. Now we may not always understand God's ways, but we will do so later.

*To be cont'd*

## **A SEED OF GOD (4)**

—A.E. Bouter

### *God as the "Farmer" and the "Builder."*

Isaiah 28 shows a remarkable link between farming and building. In verse 16 God is the Builder: "Behold, I lay for foundation in Zion a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: he that trusteth shall not make haste" (it is worthwhile to study and meditate on each expression in this wonderful verse). In verses 23-29 we meet God, first as the great Farmer, but also as the great Teacher! The link between these two is expressed in the general conclusion: "He is wonderful in counsel, great in wisdom" (v. 29). Generally God's counsel is linked to His building, whereas His wisdom is more specially evident in the ways by which He achieves His purpose. Of course, I do not suggest that His counsel has nothing to do with His wisdom! These attributes of God are manifested in Christ and, through the Holy Spirit, in His people today (as we have seen in Ps. 126).

Let us look at some examples of this last statement. In Hebrews 11:10 we find God as the Architect and Master Builder of the heavenly city which has foundations. In Matthew 16:18 we meet our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, as the rock and the Builder of His Assembly. In Ephesians 2:18-22 the emphasis is on the Holy Spirit as Builder. From 1 Corinthians 3 we learn that God worked through the apostle Paul, who had laid the foundation. And at the same time Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. A definite link between both themes is made in verse 9: "For we are God's fellow-workmen; ye are God's husbandry, God's building." God starts with a concept, then He brings it about through His ways, and ultimately He will display the building (although He has it now in testimony).

Allow me here a little parenthesis: in 1 Corinthians 3:12 the work of God is shown together with, but also despite, the work of man. On the one hand, as seen in Christ, all Christians are already "gold, silver, precious stones," but on the other hand, today these characteristics are being developed in them (under God's supervision, Christ's care, the Holy Spirit's activities and the spiritual efforts of other Christians). God wants to produce in us in a practical way the characteristics which answer to what we are in Christ, as seen according to the counsel of God from before the foundation of the world! In other words: today God the Father is reproducing His own characteristics in us (gold); God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, is doing the same (silver); and, in God's instruction and disciplinary ways with us, the Holy Spirit is forming us as precious stones to the glory of God. Now we may testify of these things, but soon we will display this in a wondrous way before the eyes of an astonished universe!

### *The Ploughman.*

(1) The ploughman ploughs, but not the whole year long. He does so to prepare the ground. He breaks the ground open; this is a hard, deep and sorrowful process, both for the ploughman and for the ground. It is well known though that the ploughman, when ploughing his land, looks towards the end of his field. So God, as the sovereign and supreme Ploughman, and those He wants to use as ploughmen, look towards the end, the ultimate goal (cf. Lk. 9:62 and 1 Cor. 9:10).

It is also important to understand that in Isaiah 28 God is working according to His sovereignty. In comparing the parable in this chapter with those of the sower in the New Testament, we should notice the different point of view. In the New

Testament, the Lord stresses the responsibility of the hearers, whereas Isaiah speaks of a work accomplished through God's sovereign will despite all possible hindrances from our side. Such a work may already start before our conversion. God may even use the enemies of His people to do the work of ploughing; this we see in Psalm 129:1-3. Or He may use friends, as in Job's history. (See too Hos. 10:11, Jer. 26:18, Mic. 3:12).

By the way, we also have the responsibility to plough, to open the ground of our souls and to dig. Here also it is interesting to notice the link between the husbandman and the builder: the one who would hear and do the Lord's words "is like a man building a house, who dug and went deep, and laid a foundation on the rock" (Lk. 7:48). This would imply true self-judgment, obedience, repentance, and humiliation.

(2) After the ground has been opened (see also Jer. 4:3) the breaking up of the clods follows. This perhaps suggests God's work in us. He takes away every form of self-importance, self-confidence, and makes us submissive. Compare this with what Paul presents to the Corinthians in connection with the message of the cross, or Romans 12:3 and Philippians 2:5f. A "broken and contrite heart" (Isa. 57:15, Mt. 5:3) is necessary to receive the seed (see below).

(3) A third preparation is found in the leveling of the ground. We need balance, the evenness we see so marvelously in our Lord Jesus. Think for example of the fine flour of the meal-offering. In a similar way, when one's ground has become "fine" and smooth, he has become ready to do the will of God (Rom. 12:1-2). "Learn from Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Mt. 11:29).

### *The Sower and His Seed*

The processes we have considered thus far are in a sense negative: to remove, in a real and practical sense, certain features, characteristics, aspects, habits, belonging to the old man. But all is done in view of a very positive goal: the sowing of the seed. We hope to see in a later study that God has one Seed in mind, Christ, the Head of a new generation. Now God wants to reproduce Christ in us (as we have considered earlier), but Christ is so rich and so great, that God in His wisdom would work out different aspects of Christ in different persons, using different circumstances, and different ways. Nevertheless, God works in a definite pattern. He, as the true "Farmer" or "Husbandman," knows how to sow or plant each seed according to its own character. The very fine black cummin is scattered on the ground, whereas the larger seeds are sown in marked rows and plots. Finally, spelt is planted at the borders, perhaps to mark off one person's plot from another's. It all displays the wisdom of God: He knows what, how, and where to sow.

In the different seeds we may see various aspects of Christ. God wants to give us such a deep impression of the beauties of Christ (cf. Gal. 1:15f), that it will have permanent results. His all-various wisdom is seen in the Church (or Assembly), because in it Christ's manifold "characteristics" are reproduced. In this passage the process of reproduction is compared to the work of the husbandman. The seeds mentioned here, as I suggested, present certain aspects of Christ. (1) His attractiveness is seen in the dill, (2) His pleasantness in the cummin. The second group of seeds presents what is basic for food, starting with the noblest kind. These types of seed are suggestive for the beauties and glories of the Eternal Son, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, as seen (3) in Manhood (the wheat), (4) in resurrection (the barley), and (5) in the kingdom, including His future reign (the rye).

I would link the wheat with eternal life and see it in connection with the family of God (the Assembly — see Jn. 12:24,32; 17:2f et al). It speaks of our special relationship with the Son and the Father through the Holy Spirit, and includes especially our present enjoyment of eternal life and our special link with the glorified Son of man in heaven.

Barley would speak in a more general way of His glories in resurrection (see e.g. Ruth 1:22 and Jn. 6:9ff; Rom. 5 and 1 Cor. 15). On that basis, other companies are also linked with Him.

Spelt or rye is mentioned last, as it was the custom to sow it at the border of the field. Thus this would suggest the thought of a rightful place, a space allotted by God. Here we might think of the inheritance, as indicated by God, but we might also think of the kingdom of God, which was introduced and which will be developed in its full sense after the other "mysteries" in connection with the Son of God have been "unveiled." These themes are subjects worthy of further study and meditation.

Now all these things God wants to develop in our lives in a practical way, by giving us the knowledge and enjoyment of Christ as Eternal Life (especially seen in John's writings, but see also "every spiritual blessing," Eph. 1:3); and then by causing us already now to know Him, not only in resurrection (Phil. 3:10), but also in His rights and authority in the kingdom of God.



Since there is great richness and variety in Christ, there is a great variety in the kinds of seed, each sown in its own place and in its own way. In this way God reproduces different aspects of Christ in different believers, using different methods of "sowing," and giving various degrees of apprehension of the beauties of Christ, so that all Christians together may "reproduce" Christ (this thought we find contained in the New-Testament idea of "the new man," Eph. 2:15).

God's wisdom is emphasized in connection with the sowing process. "His God doth instruct him in [his] judgment, he doeth teach him" (Isa. 28:26). This verse also introduces the next subject: reaping and threshing, the last phase in the total process. We understand that the "husbandman" is trained in God's school before God uses him for His field. In this connection we may think of men God has used in the past for sowing: Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, and others. They all were specially trained in God's school. He taught them ("who teacheth as he?" Job 36:22) and prepared them to sow. He also wants to use His children today that they may sow, each in their field, according to their measure and capacity.

#### *Reaping and threshing.*

In Mark 4:26-29 the Lord Jesus compared Himself with a farmer or a husbandman. He was taught by God to cast seed into the ground (to promote God's interests), but as a humble and dependent Man, He was waiting on God for the results. We have already seen that God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6), and so Mark 4:28 says, "The earth bears fruit of itself, first [the] blade, then an ear, then full corn in the ear." Here is the secret of growth (which by itself is a subject worth studying). Notice however: "But when the fruit is produced, immediately he sends the sickle, for the harvest is come" (v. 29). Here it is not God (who had given the increase), but the lowly Servant of God, who gives orders for the harvest (remember that in Ps. 126:6 we found Him identified both with the sowing and with the results of the harvest).

In Isaiah 28 the process of reaping is not described, but it is presupposed, of course. The emphasis is put on a subsequent act in the process, namely the ultimate securing of the fruit. Verse 26 introduces the subject, showing the activity of God's wisdom in a special way. In order to prepare a faithful remnant for Himself, God instructs them in His ways. We find this in the 14 Maschil or Instruction Psalms (Ps. 32,42-45,52-55,74,78,88,89,142) which refer, in general, to a "remnant" which is identified with a rejected Lord (King). We meet them in the book of Daniel (11:33,35; 12:3). In Malachi 3:3 we see how God prepares them. And in Matthew 13:11,35,52 we see the application for our days. Taking these passages as a whole, we may see the link between "suffering" and "instruction." It is God who uses His great wisdom (Isa. 28:29), in order to prepare and instruct a remnant through sufferings, and so secure fruit for Himself in a world where His rights are rejected. The result of these dealings is seen in verses like Revelation 14:4 ("these are they who follow the Lamb wheresoever it goes") and Hebrews 12:7-11. Notice there the expressions "in order to the partaking of His holiness" and "peaceful fruit of righteousness." In this connection, Isaiah 21:10 is a rather remarkable verse: "O my threshing, and the corn (lit. "son" - cf. here Heb. 12:7!) of my floor!" Of course the subject of discipline is a vast one.

#### *God's righteous discriminatory dealings.*

It is important to understand that the great Originator of this plan (for husbandry) is Jehovah of hosts (Isa. 28:29). The first time we meet this name in the Bible is in 1 Samuel 1:3, where, after the official representative of the God of Israel has utterly failed, God is going to maintain His rights by introducing His anointed one. God does not want to lose anything of that which He has worked in a secret, hidden way during the time that His rights and His Anointed One are publicly denied. This is precious fruit to Him, and He wants to have it completely prepared for Himself. God plans and works everything. On the one hand there is His plan, His wonderful counsel (for Israel from the foundation of the world, for the Church from before the foundation of the world — His eternal purpose) which will be realized and seen in public display in the future. On the other hand there are His providential, governmental and disciplinary ways whereby He works out this counsel. Together they will realize a master plan of which we see the three parts in Isaiah 28. The third part of this master plan of divine wisdom, the ultimate securing of the fruit, takes place during most difficult times (see e.g. Mt. 13, Rev. 7, 14). However, God is in perfect control and He orders and carries out everything according to His pleasure, and yet also according to the distinctive character of the fruit that is to be reaped.

#### *His methods and instruments of securing the fruit.*

"Dill is beaten out with a staff, and cummin with a rod" (cf. Ps. 23:4). The beginning of verse 28 might be translated as follows: "Is bread [corn] crushed? No, he will not ever be threshing it". Then we read about a threshing instrument (sledge), a cart-wheel, the wheels of his cart and his horses. All of these are used in one way or another to secure ultimately the fruit; not to destroy it.

As we have seen earlier, God's sovereign work and our responsibility go together (Phil. 2:12f). In itself this is a secret which we cannot understand, but it is a reality. For example: after having called Saul of Tarsus, the Lord showed him how much he would have to suffer for Him (Acts 9:16; Col. 1:24). These sufferings included "a thorn in the flesh," which was very hard on Paul (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Was he "crushed" under this burden of (preventive) discipline or under other forms of God's ways with him (persecution, hardships etc.)? No, the Lord preserved him (Rom. 8:35-39; 1 Cor. 15:30-32; 2 Tim. 4). The latter passage makes it clear that the fruit was brought into the barn. This is, by the way, the thought behind 1 Corinthians 15: In resurrection God is going to secure the things He works in His saints today.

Now we might ask ourselves: did God use the same measure of tribulation (in Latin the word for threshing instrument is quite similar to our word tribulation) and type of discipline for Timothy or Luke? No, they might have been crushed under such a burden. God used other means for them and for us. Our passage makes it clear that this process is limited to a certain time, perfectly sure in God's hand (cf. 1 Pet. 1:6 and Rev. 2:10). We also see that God controls the most minute details of the process, all because of the value we have to Him, and to the end that Christ may be formed in us.

### *The wilderness journey and fruit for God*

Although this is not the place to elaborate on the wilderness journey of Israel as a type for the believer today, we might mention that this journey speaks of God's ways with His people to prepare them for the promised land of His purpose (counsel). The lessons in the wilderness (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-13; Dt. 8:1-7; Heb. 3-4 et al.) are in view of the appreciation of the land. Thus a variety of fruit is being prepared and secured for God (Isa. 41:18-20; 55:13). Again the apostle Paul serves as an example for the believer: in the Epistle to the Philippians we read about his experiences and circumstances here on earth ("the wilderness"), but his heart is "in the land" (Phil. 3) and "the land" is in his heart!

*To be cont'd*

## **CONFERENCE OUTLINE (2)**

### *THAT HE MIGHT BRING US TO GOD*

#### *I. GOD*

- A. Who is God? - Ps. 19
  - 1. Only revelation can tell - Rom. 1:20
  - 2. Where is God? - Ps. 139:7-12; 2 Chr. 2:6; Isa. 57:15
  - 3. Where does God dwell? - 1 Tim. 6:16; Jn. 14:23; 2 Chr. 30:27
- B. God's most important names
  - 1. God (Elohim, Eloah, El) - Gen. 1:1
  - 2. Lord (Adonai, Adon) - Gen. 18:3; Ezek. 2:4
  - 3. LORD (Jahweh or Jehovah, Jehu) - Gen. 2:4; Ex. 6:15; Dt. 6:4
  - 4. Father - Jn. 20:17
- C. God. Triune. Three Persons, One in Essence
  - 1. In Salvation's story
    - a. Creation - Gen. 1:1-3; Ps. 33:6
    - b. The Incarnation - Isa. 48:16-17; Lk. 1:35
    - c. The anointing - Mt. 3:16-17
    - d. The suffering on the cross - Heb. 9:14; 10:10,15
    - e. The resurrection - Rom. 1:3-4; 6:4; 8:11
    - f. The glorification - Jn. 16:14-15
  - 2. In Baptism - Mt. 28:19
  - 3. Oneness in Essence
    - a. Plural Name - Prov. 12:1; Gen. 1:1; Isa. 6:8
    - b. Common names of God and Christ - 1 Tim. 6:15/Rev. 19:16; Isa. 44:6/Rev. 1:18
    - c. Christ called God - Jn. 1:1; Rom 9:5; Ti. 2:13; Heb. 1:8-9; 1 Jn. 5:20
    - d. Old Testament Scriptures applied to Christ - Isa. 6/Jn. 12:41
- D. The revelation of God reveals the things that characterize God
  - 1. Almighty - Gen 17:1
  - 2. Omnipresent - Ps. 139:7-12; Isa. 23:23f; Job 11:7-9
  - 3. Omnipotent - Dan. 4:35; Jer. 27:5-6; Dan. 5:19f
  - 4. Eternal - Dt. 33:27

- 5. Unchangeable - Jas. 1:17; 1 Sam. 15:29; Mal. 3:6
- 6. Omniscient - Ps. 139:1-4
- 7. Infinite - Isa. 66:1-2f
- 8. Invisible - Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:16; Jn. 1:18; 1 Tim. 1:17
- 9. Wisdom - Prov. 8
- 10. Glory - Acts 7:2; Eph. 1:17; 1 Cor. 2:8; 1 Pet. 4:14
- E. In His Word God reveals however also His Essence and Nature
  - 1. God is light - 1 Jn. 1:5
    - a. True - Dt. 32:4
    - b. Righteous - Ps. 11:7
    - c. Holy - Isa. 6:3
  - 2. God is love - 1 Jn. 4:8,16

## *II. Who is man as created by God? - Gen. 1-2*

- A. A creature consisting of soul, spirit, and body; the crown on creation - Gen. 2:7
  - 1. By a material body linked to a material creation - 1 Thess. 5:23; Gen. 3:19; Ps. 103:14)
  - 2. By a soul possessing conscious life, the seat of the "I" - Ps. 22:21; Gen. 46:27; Mt. 10:28; Isa. 53:12; Jn. 19:30; Lk. 1:46
  - 3. Through the spirit he can have connections with God and spiritual beings - 1 Pet. 3:19, 3:18
- B. Man, created according to a predetermined plan
  - 1. In God's Image. The representative of God on earth, therefore head - Gen. 1:26
  - 2. In the likeness of God. Moral similarity and the ability to have fellowship with God - Gen. 5:1-3
- C. Man, a two-oneness, consisting of man and woman 1 Cor. 11:3; Heb. 11:11; Gen. 1:27; 2:18-25; Mt. 19:4,8
  - 1. The Man is head and has an edifying, life-giving task - 1 Cor. 11:3
  - 2. The woman, as help suited to him, has a preserving, life-carrying task - 1 Cor. 11:6,15
- D. Man, though head of creation, is yet a dependent creature. As such he is placed in the garden of Eden - Ps. 8:6

## *III. What is "the fall"?*

- A. What is sin? - 1 Jn. 3:4
- B. Transgression of the only commandment - Gen. 2:17
  - 1. Giving room to doubt - Gen. 3:1
  - 2. Dishonouring God through doubt - Gen. 3:4
  - 3. Twisting His Word, adding and taking away - 2 Pet. 3:16
  - 4. Accepting the lie - 2 Cor. 11:3
  - 5. Seeing, desiring, taking - Gen. 3:6
  - 6. "Knowing" (discerning, paying attention) - 1 Sam. 15:22
- C. The results - Gen. 3:7
  - 1. Shame - Rom. 2:15
  - 2. Fear - Gen. 3:7
  - 3. Voluntary separation from God - Gen. 3:8
  - 4. Removal from the garden - Gen. 3:23-24

## *IV. What is fallen man?*

- A. Loss of glory as head of creation - Rom. 5:6-10
  - 1. Powerless
  - 2. Godless
  - 3. Sinner
  - 4. Enemy of God
- B. An accusing conscience - Rom. 2:14-15
- C. Fallen man is a slave of sin
  - 1. Not able to do any good - Gen. 6:5
  - 2. He can only sin - Rom. 8:7
- D. He is useless to God
  - 1. Dead in trespasses and sins - Eph. 2:1
  - 2. Unable to please God - Rom. 8:8
- E. He is a slave of the devil - Heb. 2:14-15

*To be cont'd*