

The Greatness of our Lord Jesus (2)

—H. Bouter Jr.

Christ's Greatness as Prophet

A great prophet has arisen among us (Luke 7:16)

During Christ's earthly service as the Servant-Prophet (as Mark in particular presents Him), opinions about Him varied widely. Some rejected Him as prophet. The Pharisees did not accept Him. In their view no prophet could arise out of Galilee (Jn. 7:52). Simon the Pharisee said to himself that if He were a prophet, He would not have allowed a sinful woman to touch Him (Lk. 7:39). Others, however, were more favourable in their verdict and did regard Him as a prophet. The Samaritan woman acknowledged: "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet" (Jn. 4:19). Even large multitudes acknowledged Him to be a prophet, as there had been so many in Old-Testament times (Mt. 16:14; Mk. 6:15; Lk. 9:8).

But Christ is more than just an ordinary prophet. He is a very *special* prophet. Many people acknowledged this, speaking about Him as *the* Prophet, i.e., the prophet whom Moses had already announced in Deuteronomy 18:15. They said: Now this is the long-anticipated prophet ("This is the prophet" Mt. 21:11; "This is of a truth the Prophet," Jn. 6:14; 7:40). John the Baptist was absolutely right in not claiming this honour for himself when people asked him: "Are you the Prophet?" (Jn. 1:21). He was honest and told them that he was not; then he told them of the One who was to come after him and had precedence over him. He himself was just the forerunner, the herald, the one who prepared the way for Him. Christ was more than John, and John effaced himself, saying: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30). Indeed, Christ was *the* Prophet. He surpassed all other prophets, for "He who comes from above *is above* all" (Jn. 3:31). He had descended from heaven *and* spoke of heavenly things, the things that he Himself had heard *and* seen with the Father (Jn. 3:12-13,32).

Christ was superior to Moses, who announced His coming as Prophet: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen; you shall listen to Him" (Dt. 18:15). This verse refers to the Prophet's manhood — He was to be raised up from among the people. Christ partook of flesh and blood; He came from above and He became truly Man. In this humble appearance He addressed Himself to the people, speaking the words that God gave Him to speak. As a Prophet He was unique, for He was the personification of the message of God, the Word incarnate. Previously God had spoken through the prophets, but now He has spoken to us "in Son" (Heb. 1:1). This means that God Himself has spoken to us in the Person of the Son!

Therefore, Christ is an unequaled Prophet. He is the Son Himself, the Creator of all things. Moreover, He is the Saviour who is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:2-3). He is superior to the angels, God's mighty messengers. He is superior to Moses, the man of God who entrusted Israel with the words of God (see Jn. 1:17). Therefore it is good for us to consider Him, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession (Heb. 3:1-6). With the eye of faith we see Him at the right hand of God, crowned with glory and honour. His voice is no longer heard on earth as it was at the time of His sojourn here.

The Lord now speaks from heaven (Heb. 12:25) by means of the Holy Spirit who inspired the apostles and prophets to write the books of the New Testament. Whenever we pick up our Bible, we are sure that we have the complete Word of God before us. In the gospels we have the words that were spoken by Christ here on earth, and that were brought to the disciples' remembrance by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26). The Acts and the Epistles present us with the ongoing testimony of the Spirit, the teaching of "all the truth" (Jn. 16:13), "the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27). As John told us, the Holy Spirit did not speak on His own initiative, but He revealed to us what He heard from the exalted Christ (Jn. 16:13-15). The Spirit, who came down after Christ's glorification, revealed these heavenly things to the instruments whom He wanted to use for the completion of the Word of God. In this way He even showed us things to come (Jn. 16:13). These things are mainly found in Revelation. This book has many links with the prophetic books of the Old Testament, their subject being God's dealings with Israel and the world.

Of course, the Old and the New Testament are linked together in other respects as well. The Old Testament pointed to Christ, and the New gives the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning Him and His work of salvation. However, this falls outside the frame of our subject. What an assurance to have the complete Word of God, and to know God's revelation will guide us to the coming eternity! All this we owe to our great Prophet, the heavenly Man Jesus Christ. He, by His Spirit,

revealed the deep secrets of God's heart, sharing them with us in "spiritual words" (1 Cor. 2:6-16).

Luke 7:16 tells us how Jesus was honoured as a Prophet. This teaches us to honour Him as such; we have every reason to glorify Him as our great Prophet. We should be perfectly aware of His greatness, even more than the people of Nain for whom the raising of a young man was proof of His mission: "And fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and, 'God has visited His people!'" These last words, taken literally, testify that, in Christ, God has come to man. "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14). Christ is truly God. *God* visited His people in the Person of the Son, who is also truly *Man*. This is borne out by the first remark of the people: "A great prophet *has arisen among us*." Christ was begotten by the Spirit of God, born of a woman, born under the Law, for salvation is from the Jews (Lk. 1:35; Gal. 4:4; Jn. 4:22).

So this verse testifies to Christ's greatness as *God and Man*. Being the Son of the living God, He gives life to whom He wishes (Jn. 5:21). The young man who had just been raised from the dead was the living proof of this. Along with the daughter of Jairus (a child) and Lazarus (an adult), this young man is proof of Christ's power over death. And is this not valid — spiritually now — for all those who have heard the voice of the Son of God? He has raised us from the grave of our sins and guilt, and we now walk with Him in newness of life. He has given us eternal life, and we have passed out of death into life (Jn. 5:24-25). How great He is, our Saviour, the Son of God! We became convinced of His greatness, when we personally experienced His power when He delivered us from the cords of death.

Responding to the miracle that had happened, the inhabitants of Nain "glorified God." This will also be our reaction, as we see the quickening power of Christ at work in those who were dead in trespasses and sins.

Christ is truly a great prophet. Both His words and His actions show His unique mission and His power, reaching beyond the grave. With the two walking to Emmaus, we can say that He was a Prophet "mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people" (Lk. 24:19). There is no one like Him, *the* Prophet (cf. Acts 3:22-23; 7:37). "The Law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:17). Therefore, let us thank God for sending His Son, His Prophet, His Spokesman. Worshipping Him, we see the Father's image in Him, full of grace and truth.

To be cont'd

*Jesus My Saviour! Thou art mine,
The Father's gift of Love divine;
All Thou hast done, and all Thou art,
Are now the portion of my heart.*

J. G. Deck

Outline for Bible Study (64)

129. The lost Sheep. The lost Coin. The Prodigal Son. — Luke 15

Outline

1. The lost sheep Lk. 15:3-7
2. The lost coin Lk. 15:8-10
3. The prodigal son Lk. 15:11-32

Explanation

1. In these three parables the Lord shows us God's joy in saving the lost and showing mercy to sinners. As a shepherd the Lord Jesus is looking with great patience for lost sheep, because they are His ("My sheep," v. 6). He is not satisfied with the ninety-nine left; He wants to save the lost one, for He loves it. Lost sheep cannot help themselves. The Lord came to where His sheep was in misery — He even died for it (Jn. 10:11). The Good Shepherd goes after that which is lost until He finds it. Laying it on His shoulders without reproach or punishment, He carries it home, rejoicing. All is *His* work — the searching and the home-bringing (in. 10:27-28). Great is the joy in heaven, now and through all eternity, over every sheep

that is found. The ninety-nine righteous who have no need of repentance represent self-righteous persons such as the Pharisees.

2. In the second parable, a woman looks with a lamp for a lost drachma (a Greek, silver coin worth about a day's wages for a labourer). The money lay in the dust, its shine and luster gone, its image hardly visible. So it is with man, created after God's image. He is a slave of sin, and in Satan's power. God's image is no longer visible. Yet, man is so valuable to God that the Holy Spirit (pictured by the lamp) is seeking carefully to enlighten men. The Spirit uses God's Word to bring new life, but also circumstances (sickness, death of dear ones, a dream) that may touch the heart! Again there is great rejoicing "before (i.e., in the presence of) the angels of God" (v. 10). God Himself rejoices.

3. The son's history is that of man. The enemy made man doubt the love of God. Man's desire for freedom and independence, with Satan's promise of better things, gave Satan the victory and caused the son to fall like Adam. He indulged in the pride of life and the lusts of the flesh and the eyes. The son began to be in want — man suffers physical sicknesses, poverty, and other miseries. Like all sinners, the son first tried to help himself. He ended up tending swine. How defiling for a Jew! Unrecognizable as the once rich son of the father, ragged and poor, he did not even get husks to still his hunger. Who recognizes that man was created in God's image (Eph. 2:3; Ti. 3:3)? With his conscience awakened, he not only *said*: "I will rise," he also *rose*. There was true anguish of soul and conversion.

"But when he was yet a long way off..." reveals the father's heart. The son confessed his guilt but never got to say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." The father only wanted him as son. So God accepts the sinner, full of love and grace, without rebuke. The best garment speaks of the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21; Isa. 61:10), the golden ring of fellowship (1 Jn. 1:3), and the shoes of ability to walk as witness for God (Eph. 6:15). He was made fit for the father's house. The fatted calf speaks of the blessings we have received in Christ. "They began to make merry." Our joy of salvation begins on earth, but full joy comes only in the Father's house when we are with the Lord (1 Th. 4:17).

The self-righteous, elder son speaks of those under law (Ex. 4:22) — they have no joy (Rom. 5:1; 14:17). With hardened heart, he reproached his father, referring to his brother as "this *thy* son." He who thinks himself to be pious and righteous, knows neither his own heart, nor God's love and holiness, and can only be saved with difficulty.

Lesson

These three parables depict the work of the triune God in converting and saving lost men. The first one shows the Lord Jesus, the second the silent activity of the Holy Spirit, and the third the infinite love of God the Father. The third parable also shows an additional truth. The sheep waited impotently for the shepherd, the drachma lay motionless until the woman found it. Does the lost sinner do nothing for his salvation? Yes, he must come to himself and repent.

130. The Unjust Steward. The Reaction of the Pharisees. The Rich Man and Lazarus. — Luke 16.

Outline

1. The unjust steward Lk. 16:1-13
2. The reaction of the Pharisees Lk. 16:14-18
3. The rich man and poor Lazarus Lk. 16:19-31

Explanation

1. Because the steward was unfaithful and dishonest, his lord told him that he could no longer be steward. Since he was not used to labour and too proud to beg, he immediately made friends for the future by reducing their debt. He made sure that they would receive him in their homes. His intelligent action (not his dishonesty) was praised. The lord in v. 8 is not the Lord Jesus.

2. The Pharisees sneered at the Lord's teaching because they loved money. To Jews, earthly goods were proof of God's favour, and poverty of His judgment. The Pharisees gave alms to be seen and to obtain a prominent place in the religious world. One cannot, however, force oneself into the kingdom of God. The law asked love for one's neighbour. Yet they displayed their selfishness by their complete disregard for God's will, even in marriage.

3. The rich man saw neither the need of his neighbours, nor of own his soul. Death took everything, and he did not gain heaven (Ps. 49:14; Mt. 16:26). In contrast, because Cornelius gave alms to the poor, he heard the gospel, believed, and was saved. Neither his prayer nor alms saved him (cf. Acts 10:2; 11:14; Rom. 3:20; Eph. 2:8-9). Poor and sick Lazarus ("God is my help") possessed nothing, but trusted in God, and angels carried him into Abraham's bosom. After a short time of suffering he is comforted for eternity (Phil. 1:21; Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17,18). The rich man died and was buried (with pomp and glory?); the burial of Lazarus is not even mentioned. The rich man awoke in Hades — not hell (as in Mk. 9:43,45,47), but the state of the departed souls before the resurrection. There, unbelievers are in pain, while believers are in Paradise. Though the rich man had never looked up to heaven, now he could see Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. He asked in vain for relief, and wanted Lazarus to go to warn his brothers. Abraham's remark: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, not even if one rise from among the dead will they be persuaded," shows the value of God's Word. This was also the reason why the Lord did not appear to the Jews after His resurrection.

Lesson

On earth we need to prepare for eternity. Man (particularly Israel) is God's steward over the things of this earth. Though after the fall God had announced man's being set aside, man remains temporarily in possession of the goods. If prudent, he will use his possessions for the benefit of others. The lust of money is the root of all evil, but a heart filled with love and faith will compassionately serve others. Greed and a desire for spiritual things do not mix. "If ye have not been faithful in that which is another's (our earthly possessions), who shall give to you your own (the spiritual things)?" (Lk. 16:12). No servant can serve two masters.

To be cont'd

The Prophecy of Obadiah (3)

—R. Been Sr.

Verse 1

The vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah concerning Edom: We have heard a report from Jehovah, and an ambassador is sent among the nations. Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle.

Nothing is said about the person of the prophet Obadiah, nor about the time of his prophecy. Unless there is Scriptural ground to do so, every assumption about this is useless for the nurture and edification of the reader. We have to consider only that which God has revealed. If believers practice this rule, they will be kept from adding their own thoughts to those of Scripture. It will keep them from looking like someone who thinks to add water to a large lake by emptying his can of water into it. Our own thoughts cannot enrich Scripture.

A comparison between the prophecies of Jeremiah and Obadiah proves that both prophesied over Edom toward the end of the kingdom of Judah (Jer. 49:7-22). Jeremiah 49:14 is virtually identical to Obadiah :1. This has caused some to try to establish which of these two prophets has copied the words of the other. The same persons also believe that the Gospel writers have copied each other's material. Here too, we find the spirit of criticism that refuses to accept the full inspiration of God's Word. Their research did therefore come to nothing, and their minds become more and more confused. Believers know that the repetitions in the Bible have a definite purpose; they show us the facts from another perspective.

The prophecy of Jeremiah has a character that we don't find in Obadiah. Jeremiah foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of Judah, and afterwards the judgment over many neighbouring nations. All this would take place in the then foreseeable future through Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 46-49). Besides, Jeremiah speaks about the destruction of the Babylonian Empire itself (Jer. 50). He also showed which power would bring an end to the Babylonian Empire (the Medes and Persians — Jer. 51). Jeremiah speaks therefore about the historical fulfilment of his prophecy. True, in a passing way he points out that in the last days the fate of Moab, Ammon, and Elam would take a turn for the better (Jer. 48:47; 49:6,39). But as far as Edom is concerned, the historical judgment would be executed by Nebuchadnezzar, who would "fly as an eagle, and spread forth his wings against Bozrah" (Jer. 49:22). Edom was allied with Nebuchadnezzar during the siege and taking of Jerusalem, yet it was destroyed by its former ally.

Obadiah completely bypasses the historical fulfilment of the judgment over Edom and speaks solely of Edom's judgment during the last days. Then a coalition of nations, with Edom in the lead, will threaten the territory of Israel. The prophetic

Assyrian, the king of the North, will also join this coalition, but he has some plans of his own (Ps. 83:1-9). It is good to read what Ezekiel has to say about Edom's hatred towards Israel and its desire for its territory (Ezek. 35:10-12). Very quickly, however, the proud arrogance of Edom will arouse a response among its allies. A report of the Lord will accomplish this, for He will make Jerusalem a cup of bewilderment unto all the peoples round about. It will be a burdensome stone that all nations must lift, thereby wounding themselves (Zech. 12:2-3). The allies will send a "messenger among the nations" to coax them to fight against Edom. The most important of these allies who turn against their former ally, Edom, is the Assyrian, the King of the North. Not Edom, but the Assyrian will take control of Jerusalem, be it only for a little while.

Verses 2-6

Behold, I have made thee small among the nations; thou art greatly despised. The pride of thy heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; — he that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith Jehovah. If thieves had come to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen [till] they had enough? If grape-gatherers had come to thee, would they not have left some gleanings? How is Esau searched! his hidden things sought out!

Jeremiah expresses himself in virtually the same words (Jer. 49:15-16; 9-10); but he has the destruction of Edom by Nebuchadnezzar in view. Obadiah, however, thinks of the last days. The destruction will then be so complete and the looting so well organized that nothing is left for Edom despite his relying upon his unconquerable territory.

Verse 7

All the men of thy confederacy have pushed thee to the border; the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee, they have prevailed against thee; [they that eat] thy bread have laid a snare under thee. There is no understanding in him.

When Edom thinks it is about to take possession of Israel's inheritance, its allies will turn against it and drive it back to its own borders. Earlier we have already remarked that Edom's territory was not limited to Mount Seir, but that it also included the land of Idumea. There too, Edom will meet the Western armies of the Roman Empire coming to the aid of the antichrist, the viceroy of the Roman ruler. The Assyrian, the King of the North, is then kept busy with conquering Egypt. The western armies will seek to cut off the Assyrian retreat to Jerusalem. That may be a clever plan, but they will fail to count with the Lord, who will bring all these armies together to destroy them. For this, one should also read Isaiah 34:2-8. This judgment over the armies of the nations will be executed by the Messiah alone (Isa. 63:1-3). The destruction of all these enemy forces is seen here from an Old-Testament point of view. This judgment is needed for the establishment of Christ's kingdom. Also according to the New-Testament prophecy, the kingdom of Christ will be established after the Lord descends from heaven followed by His heavenly hosts (Rev. 19:11-16). The prophecies of the Old and the New Testament fully agree with each other.

Obadiah's prophecies say nothing about the destruction of the western armies, nor about those of the Assyrian. They are solely occupied with Edom that will be thoroughly plundered; its former allies will be like reapers who reap the same field twice and leave not the least behind.

It will therefore become evident that Edom made a planning mistake. It will only result in its own demise because it has laid its hands on the old people of God and the holy city. All the more, since it did so at the moment of restoration, although this was of course hidden from Edom. What good will it do Edom that it has wise men among citizens?

Verses 8-9

Shall I not in that day, saith Jehovah, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau? And thy mighty men, O Tetuan, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one may be cut off from the mount of Esau by slaughter.

One may wonder how this small, insignificant Edom — and it will be this again when it has been nationally restored — could play such a large role in the events of the last days. To make this clearer, we point out that Edom's territory will be the centre where the entire last conflict in these final days will be resolved. There the battle will be fought between the King of the North (Assyria) and the King of the South (Egypt). There the battle will rage between the nations bordering on Israel and Edom for the possession of Jerusalem, and also the battle between the Western armies and the Assyrian. In

short, decisive events of the last days will be concentrated in this territory, and afterwards Christ's kingdom will be established.

Verse 10

Because of violence against thy brother Jacob, shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off forever.

"The pride of thy heart" (v. 3) was the first characteristic of Esau. The second one is the violence, the raging, against his brother Jacob. No matter how guilty Israel has been, that was a matter between the Lord and His people. And Edom was not any better in the least, and allowed itself to be guided by its uncontrolled hatred against its brother nation. The Lord never forgets the promises once given to Israel. Anyone touching His people touches Him. For a while God had to hide His face from Israel, but the hour would come that He would take up the cause of His people in full view of all around.

Among the great mass of unbelieving Jews who have returned to their land, there will be a remnant. Of them the word of the prophet Isaiah will be applicable: "In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and, out of obscurity and out of darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see" (Isa. 29:18).

Then will the revenge, which had been delayed as long as the Lord had put Israel aside, come over Edom, and there will be no forgiveness. Edom will be destroyed *forever*; nothing will remain of Edom as a nation. Its territory will be an everlasting wilderness.

The prophet Ezekiel had very clearly announced this. We read: "I Jehovah have heard all thy reproaches, which thou hast uttered against the mountains of Israel, saying, They are laid desolate, they are given us to devour. And ye have magnified yourselves against Me with your mouth, and have multiplied your words against Me: I have heard [them]. Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: When the whole earth rejoiceth, I will make thee a desolation. As thou didst rejoice at the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolated, so will I do unto thee: thou shalt be a desolation, O mount Seir, and all Edom, the whole of it: and they shall know that I [am] Jehovah" (Ezek. 35:12-15).

Edom had stretched out its audacious hand to a nation that was protected by the Lord Himself. It isn't yet this far in our days. Today God has not yet restored His immediate dealings with Israel.

Edom will, after the judgment executed in the last days, become the dwelling place of all kinds of unclean, dangerous, and evil beasts. Today that is not yet the case with this land, although it is only sparsely inhabited (Isa. 34:9-17).

To be cont'd

Samuel, the Prophet (1)

Hamilton Smith

The Historical Background

Historically the first book of Samuel is the continuation of the book of Judges. There we have the history of a people whose course was ever downward, in spite of occasional revivals. It closes with the solemn statement that, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes." Israel had lost all true sense of God as their King, with the result they ceased to be a united people. They broke up into mere units acting independently of one another, each doing his own will and walking according to the sight of his eyes rather than by faith in God.

Nor is it otherwise with the people of God today. The same cause produces the same result. Failing to hold the Head in heaven, the people of God fail to maintain unity and fellowship among themselves on earth. Fellowship being lost, they drop into mere individualism in which each walks according to his own will independently of others.

In the opening chapters of the first book of Samuel, chapters 1 to 7, we have depicted one of the darkest periods of Israel's history. The downgrade movement of the book of Judges was continued until the condition of the nation was not only evil but desperate. Such was their iniquity that it became impossible for God to continue His outward links with Israel without sanctioning their sin or sully His glory. Thus the people enter that solemn period in their history in which God withdraws the symbol of His presence, and all outward relations with God are ended.

There is, however, another side to this dark picture; for, if we are permitted to see the utter failure of God's people in responsibility, we are also privileged to see the grace of God in sovereignty. If the story probes the depths of man's sin, it carries us also to the height of God's grace. We are thus taught, once again, that where sin abounds, grace does much more abound.

As the story opens, there are not wanting ominous signs of the coming storm; as it proceeds the shadows lengthen and the darkness deepens, but amidst the increasing gloom we learn that truth of that sure word which says, "it shall come to pass when I bring clouds over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud" (Gen. 9:14).

Briefly, then, we may say that the first seven chapters of the first book of Samuel present the total failure of the people of God in responsibility, and the ultimate triumph of the grace of God in sovereignty.

This section of the book may be divided as follows:

1. Chapter 1 to 2:10. The sovereign grace of God working, in spite of nature's weakness and man's failure, for the fulfilment of God's settled purpose to maintain His own glory, and secure His people's blessing, under the reign of Christ as King.
2. Chapter 2:11-36. The failure of God's people in responsibility, through the breakdown of the priest, with warnings of coming judgment.
3. Chapter 3. The climax of evil with the consequent setting aside of the priest, and establishment of the prophet.
4. Chapter 4. The governmental judgment that falls upon the people of God, whereby they come into bondage to their enemies, and the outward sign of God's presence is withdrawn.
5. Chapters 5 and 6. God acting to vindicate His holiness and maintain the majesty of His Name in a day when the people of God have ceased to be a public witness for God.
6. Chapter 7. God in sovereign grace restoring His people, and renewing His relations with them through the prophet.

The Purpose of God (Ch. 1 to 2:10)

In this opening section of the first book of Samuel we have a very blessed anticipation of the word which speaks of "the power of God; who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to [His] own purpose and grace, which [was] given us in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:8-9). In the end of Hannah's song we reach the ultimate purpose of God to establish blessing under Christ as King. In the story of the birth of Samuel we see the grace of God at work to bring about His purpose, in spite of the weakness and failure of man, and hence not according to our works.

We learn, moreover, that grace foresees every crisis that arises among the people of God, and, not only overcomes the crisis, but quietly works to make provision for the crisis before it comes.

The commencement of the story presents a God-fearing Levite with two wives; one fruitful and the other barren. The barren woman mourns her condition before the Lord and is persecuted by the fruitful wife. Elkanah goes up yearly to worship and to sacrifice before the Lord at Shiloh. There we find Hophni and Phinehas, two wicked men, as we know from chapter 2:12, officiating as priests of the Lord. Eli, the high priest with much personal piety, comes before us as an enfeebled old man sitting by a post of the temple (1:9) and mistaking the exercises of a godly soul for the vagaries of a drunken woman (1:13). Sitting where God had provided no seat would indicate a lack of spiritual energy; his mistake in regard to Hannah, a lack of spiritual discernment.

There is thus brought before us the barren wife, the persecuting woman, two worthless men as priests, and a feeble and failing old man as high priest. In such circumstances we are permitted to see the sovereign grace of God passing by the strength of nature in the fruitful woman, working through the weakness of nature in the barren woman, and abounding over the sin of man in the priests. In the son given to Hannah we see the foresight of the grace of God making provision to renew His relations with His people in the day of their coming breakdown.

The three great offices by which relationships between God and man are maintained are those of Priest, Prophet, and King. The priest maintains relations with God by drawing near to God on behalf of the people, and for this, in association with the priest, there must of necessity be the Ark of the Covenant and sacrifice — the ark signifying the presence of

Jehovah, and sacrifice the way of approach. The prophet renews relations with God by appealing to the conscience and heart of the people with a message from God. When the priest fails and the people cease to draw near to God by means of the priesthood, then God, in His sovereign grace, draws near to the people by the prophet. The king maintains relations between the people and God by ruling and leading the people under the authority of God. When the king is established, God no longer rules and leads directly, but acts through the king, and the blessing of the people depends upon the king's personal faithfulness to God.

The first book of Samuel records the failure of the priest, the prophet, and the king of man's choice, making way for the sovereign grace of God to bring man into blessing by establishing His anointed Man — the Christ — as King, of whom David is a type. Thus at last it will be made manifest to the whole universe that all blessing for Israel, and the nations, will depend upon the faithfulness of Christ as King. Man will be blessed, but all the glory of the blessing will rest upon Christ. The glory of Christ is the end of the purpose of God.

Furthermore the story of Hannah not only sets forth the great principles by which God is carrying out His purposes of grace, but it gives rich moral instruction to every tried and sorrowing child of God. How striking the contrast between Hannah unable to eat, and weeping sore in bitterness of soul, as stated in verse 7, and Hannah when she "went her way and did eat and her countenance was no more sad," as recorded in verse 18. How came this difference? Was it change of circumstances or the removal of that which caused the sorrow? Not at all; the circumstances had not altered; she was still the barren woman. The secret of the change is found in the fact that she had poured out her soul before the Lord. The persecution of her adversary, the fretting of spirit, the bitterness of soul — she had poured it all out with weeping before the Lord. Having poured out her sorrow, the word came to her, "Go in peace." Her sorrow is poured out and God's peace is poured in. A striking illustration of the exhortation which bids us "be careful about nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God: and the peace of God, which surpasses every understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

How often we carry our sorrows instead of pouring them out before the One who came into this world of weeping to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. Have we a secret sorrow; have we an adversary that sore provokes (v. 6); anything or anyone that causes our spirits to fret (v. 6); anything that grieves our hearts (v. 8); anything that fills the soul with bitterness, and the eyes with tears (v. 10)? Then let us pour out our souls before the Lord and He will pour in His peace. And a glad heart will make a glad face, as we read, "Her countenance was no more as before." The heart at peace, and filled with the gladness of the Lord, is the heart that worships; thus with Hannah, we read, she "worshipped before Jehovah" (v. 19).

Then having learned that the Lord is able to sustain in the circumstances, and make her a worshipper in spite of them, the mercy of the Lord alters the circumstances by granting her request. She had prayed, "O Jehovah of hosts... remember me" (v. 11); now we read, "Jehovah remembered her" (v. 19). She obtains a son — the man-child she had asked for. The child that she receives from the Lord she gives back to the Lord. "For this boy I prayed; and Jehovah has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. And also I have lent him to Jehovah; all the days that he lives, he is lent to Jehovah" (v. 27).

The gift of the child very naturally calls forth the thanksgiving of Hannah (2:1-10). Hannah had poured out her soul in prayer for a son, and now that her request is granted she does not forget to pour out her heart in praise; for thus she commences this second prayer, "My heart exulteth in Jehovah" (2:1).

Recognizing that all blessing depends on God, she rightly begins by celebrating His glories. God is holy — "There is none holy as Jehovah." God is omnipotent — "There is none beside Thee." God is eternal — "Neither is there any rock like our God." God is omniscient — "Jehovah is a God of knowledge" (vv. 2-3).

Then she celebrates the sovereign grace of God that picks up, for blessing, the weak, the needy, and the unfruitful. Those who have "stumbled," and are "hungry," and "barren." God passes by the wise, the mighty, and the noble, and takes up the base, and the despised of the world, that no flesh should glory in His presence (vv. 4-5).

Moreover, God has His own way of dealing with us to make us conscious of our need. He rolls in death upon the soul in order to make alive. He brings us nigh to the grave that we may learn our utter weakness. He strips us of all that wherein we trust, thus making us poor to make us rich. He brings us low in our thoughts of self, in order to lift us up (vv. 6-7).

Having shown us our nothingness, He unfolds to us His fullness — the purpose of His heart. Not only does He meet our need but He changes our condition — the beggar becomes a prince. Further, He gives us a new position suited to the new condition. From "the dust" and "the dunghill" we pass to "the throne of glory." In all these blessed ways He acts as sovereign. The One to whom the pillars of the earth belong, and who has set the world upon them, can set a poor and needy soul among princes on a throne of glory (v. 8).

Moreover, not only is there a glorious inheritance before the people of God, but they are kept by the power of God for the inheritance. "He keepeth the feet of His saints." In their own power they cannot stand against "the wicked" and "they that strive with Jehovah," for "by strength shall no man prevail." In the Lord's safekeeping they need not fear, for He will silence the wicked and brake in pieces His adversaries (vv. 9-10; 1 Pet. 1:3-5).

Finally, the prayer of Hannah discloses to us the ultimate purpose of God to establish Christ as King and glorify His Anointed. Thus in the revealed purpose of God we are carried on to a glorious time when the people of God will be blest, every enemy destroyed, and the ends of the earth brought under the beneficent sway of Christ as King.

From the closing verse of the book of Judges we learn there was no king in Israel. Now, through the revelation made to a woman, we learn the settled purpose of God's heart to establish His King, and in sovereign grace to call the weak and needy to share the throne of glory with His King.

In the wisdom and perfection of God's ways, this glorious revelation precedes the darkest period in Israel's history. Thus we are assured, before ever the storm bursts, that in the end grace will triumph, for God is sovereign. The storm may come, but truly the bow is in the cloud. Our way may lie through a dark valley, but our faith is sustained by a glimpse of the sunlight that shines on the hills beyond.

To be cont'd

Well Done

*Nothing throughout all the ages
Has been more well and perfectly done
Than the work of our blessed Saviour,
God's infinite glorious Son.*

*His great sacrifice at Calvary
Has so fully atoned for our sin
That every human who ever lived
Could be saved through trusting in Him.*

*Sadly, not all will accept Him,
Though they would be eternally blessed
If they would trust his well-done work,
The foundation of perfect rest.*

*And God finds great joy in believers
Who respond by pleasing His Son,
Who will say to them at His coming —
Which is now very near, "Well done!"*

L. M. Grant

Democracy in the Light of Scripture (1)

—F.B. Hole

Two great ideas prevail in the world, as far as its national, political, and social life is concerned. They are radically different, and upon the surface wholly inconsistent with each other. Yet we suspect that a way may yet be found by which they shall be brought together in some kind of amalgamation. Prophecy confirms this expectation. These two great ideas are the democratic and the imperialistic.

Democracy presents itself as the finished product of the wisdom of the ages. History gives us the long and dismal record of human experiments in the art of government. Profiting by past experience, the democratic idea has been evolved, and now holds the field amongst enlightened nations. It is — to use Abraham Lincoln's famous phrase — "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." In practice it comes to this, that the people are to be governed by a *majority* of the people — for they are never unanimous, and hence the minority must give way — and that majority should rule by its

accredited representatives for the good of *all* the people and not for the majority's interests only. Whether it really does so is of course another thing.

Imperialism has as its watchword: "union is strength." In national life it leads to groups of nations and powerful alliances. In politics it expresses itself in parties to achieve together what they cannot hope to enforce singly. Socially it produces giant trusts, federations of industries, unions and their alliances. It even appears in the religious world in the form of federations of "churches." It is really a reversion to the old idea which animated the post-diluvians in their schemes at Babel (cf. Gen. 11:1-9).

Our present concern is not at all with the political advantages or disadvantages of democracy. We do wish, however, to get the light which the Word of God sheds upon it, thereby discerning its true character, and anticipating the sure end to which time will carry it. First then we must enquire of Scripture as to what God's way for the government of the earth may be. He has of course a mind on the subject. The more clearly we apprehend it, the more shall we be in a position to judge any and every theory that man has proposed.

Adam, as yet unfallen, was placed in the position of sole authority. As God's image or representative he had dominion over the lower ranks of created beings (Gen. 1:26). No thought of authority over other men comes in here. This point was not raised until sin had come in. His authority, such as it was, was absolute, and his responsibility was to God alone.

Sin having invaded creation, a long period elapsed during which there was no further authority delegated to man by God. Hence no man had any authority over his fellow men. That age terminated in the flood.

The first post-diluvian age opened with a further delegation of authority. Noah and his sons were responsible to maintain God's rights in man, especially as regards the sacredness of human life (Gen. 9:5-6). God hereby delegated to certain men authority over men even to the execution of capital punishment. Patriarchal authority was thus established.

Among those who soon thereafter cast off the fear of God, not liking "to have God in their knowledge" (Rom. 1:28), this authority changed its form. It was no longer patriarchal, but fell into the hands of men of prowess and renown, such as Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-10). After the confusion of speech at Babel, nations with their "kings" appear (Gen. 12:15; 14:1-2).

However, those who still feared God adhered to the patriarchal order until God set His hand to deliver Israel from Egypt, and raised up Moses. This marked a new departure. Moses was invested by God with an authority in the midst of Israel far beyond anything that Noah received. True, at first his authority was rejected. The wrongdoer "thrust him away, saying, Who established thee ruler and judge over us?" (Acts 7:27). But we read also, "This Moses, whom they refused, saying, Who made thee ruler and judge? him did God send [to be] a ruler and deliverer with the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush" (v. 35). Moses was indeed "king in Jeshurun" (Dt. 33:5), but it was a kingship of an informal order. Properly speaking, Theocracy was established in Israel with Moses as the spokesman and mediator, and therefore, in that sense king. For centuries all authority administered in Israel was of that order, but the power of it declined; those who wielded it were far inferior in faithfulness and in force. "There arose no prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom Jehovah had known face to face" (Dt. 34:10).

The resultant feebleness led to an outcry for a king like the nations. After the episode of the wilful king of the people's choice, God raised up David and established kingly authority on a proper basis. He was to be ruler over God's people, and executor of judgment on their enemies (2 Sam. 7:8-9). He was also to "feed" Israel, God's inheritance, according to the integrity of his heart; and guide them by the skillfulness of his hands (Ps. 78:71-72). David's authority was absolute, and he was to rule. He was to execute judgment if and as needs be. His rule was to be absolute but wholly beneficent.

With the failure of David's descendants, the glory of it departed. At last God transferred authority into Gentile hands, entrusting it first of all to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:37-38). The great king's dream foreshadowed the changing forms of government. It also showed that, whatever its form, the authority behind government would remain in Gentile hands. It would be so, until the sudden execution of divine wrath on all man's pride and abuse of the entrusted power should be an accomplished fact. Then should appear the kingdom which "shall stand forever" (Dan. 2:44), and that kingdom is to be vested in the Son of man, who will wield absolute dominion for the blessing of men (ch. 7:13). He will be pleased, however, to take up and use in connection with His government the saints "of the Most High" or "of the most high places" (vv. 18, 22), and also a "people" who will possess the kingdom "under the whole heaven" (7:27), i.e., on its earthly side. This people of course is Israel.

To be cont'd

From the Editor's Desk

We are glad to present to you an article from the hand of Hamilton Smith on 1 Samuel 1-7. We believe this portion to be very instructive for our days. The label "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" is so descriptive of our days.

The article on democracy by F. B. Hole may seem to have little in common with the one on 1 Samuel. Yet, there is a link. Today's form of government has resulted from dissatisfaction with the preceding types of rule, not from God's instructions. Today's disrespected politicians can, or will, no longer follow godly principles in an unprincipled society. Instead they have to resort to referendums — the fickle voice of a people lacking unity. Soon the democratic system will fail entirely. People, tired by the lack of direction, still don't recognize the cause — their having no God. This will prepare the way for the people's choice, a strong leader. Just as Israel chose its king in its darkest days, so will mankind soon subject itself to the dictates of the willful man of sin, the antichrist, whom God will take away in His anger (Hos. 13:11).

The Editor